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Communication and Theater Association of Minnesota

## FROM THE EDITOR



## GENERAL INTEREST



## OPEN EDUCATION RESOURCE (OER) TEXTBOOK REVIEWS

**COMMUNICATION AND THEATER ASSOCIATION OF MINNESOTA JOURNAL**

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## *CTAM JOURNAL* MISSION STATEMENT

The *Communication and Theater Association of Minnesota Journal* (*CTAMJ*) is the scholarly journal of the Communication and Theater Association of Minnesota (CTAM). The journal is an outlet for articles related to issues of discipline-related importance including articles discussing innovative teaching methods. All theoretical and methodological approaches are welcome.

*CTAMJ* encourages contributions from scholars and practitioners, who comprise all segments of the journal's readership, including K-12 educators, graduate school, community college, and college or university groups. The journal welcomes theoretical and applied articles from both the theater and communication disciplines. Capable scholars in the appropriate field will blindly review all general manuscripts.

No work will be accepted or rejected purely on the basis of its methodology or subject. Author sex, race, ethnic background, geographical location, or work affiliation (secondary/college level, department, etc.) of the author(s) are never considered in making editorial judgments. The demands of the disciplines of speech communication and theater are key factors in the editorial judgments made. All editorial decisions attempt to balance these demands with the needs and interests of the journal's readers.

The journal is guided by three key principles:

- *To provide an outlet for the expression of diverse ideas.*
- *To publish high quality scholarship in the disciplines of Speech Communication and Theater.*
- *To meet the journal-related needs of CTAM and its members*.

## EDITORIAL POLICY

Authors should submit an electronic copy of their work as a Word document by e-mail to the editor. A separate, electronic title page should include a 100-125 word abstract of the article, author's name and professional title, job title, the school or institutional affiliation of the author/s, a mailing address, and an e-mail address. Care should be taken that author identification has been removed from the manuscript itself for review purposes. **All manuscripts should be prepared according to current APA or MLA guidelines.**

All articles are read anonymously by at least two associate editors. All author identification markings are removed from the articles and no editor reads the work of a colleague. Associate editors may submit articles to the journal, but their work must go through the process of blind review, just as any other submitter. The journal editor facilitates the process and makes final decisions based on the associate editors' recommendations and comments. If there are any questions about the process, please direct them to the journal editor.

## PERMISSIONS STATEMENT

# FROM THE EDITOR

At our recent conference, I was honored to be recognized as one of six people receiving an award from CTAM to recognize our contributions to the field. I received the Outstanding New College Instructor award. As I sat in the audience listening to the speeches, I thought about all the people who supported each of us award winners to get where we are today. My husband has been a great supporter of me in making sure I have the time to dedicate to academic pursuits, even later into the evening when he would rather see me relax and play a game together. To be an educator, we all have those supporters who give us space to spend long hours dedicated to our work.

Our support systems go well beyond our significant others. In my second year as CTAM editor, I am grateful for all my dedicated colleagues who made this journal happen. Academic journals are a place to share knowledge. For many, our state journal is a place where they can start building their CVs with publications in the field. We have a great team of associate editors who volunteer countless hours reviewing and providing feedback to the authors. All of this effort is done to support their anonymous colleagues to reach publication and share their perspectives with our readers.

The blind review process provides for academic integrity and, also, a space to show our support to those we may never meet. While there are many stories about the dreaded reviewer two, I believe the CTAM Journal is a place of care for those who come to us. The review team takes care to provide rigorous feedback to our authors to help their articles reach their potential. The review process makes the publications stronger and more impactful in their reach.

We are a small journal with great meaning to many people who have connected to this space. Our journal is honored to attract a growing number of authors and readers from outside the state of Minnesota. My goal in becoming editor of the journal was to support other early-career scholars – and I see us meeting that vision. Sometimes we do not always know or appreciate all the people who are supporting our careers and success in the field.

Let us continue to be a welcoming place of support for those who find their way here. I wish the best for all our authors, associate editors, and readers. We are creating a community here. And I hope you appreciate your role in helping others reach their potential in our field.

Best wishes,
Bradley

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

# GENERAL INTEREST ARTICLES

## An Analysis of Communication for Foster Parents: Interpersonal, Small Group, and Public Speaking Skills Necessary for Foster Parenting

**Kaitlyn Randall**
Undergraduate Student
St. Cloud State University
kate.randall@go.stcloudstate.edu

**Abstract**

*Communication is a core aspect of what foster parents do every day. However, communication research focusing on foster parents is limited. Foster parents should understand interpersonal communication, small group communication, and public speaking. Understanding the basic principles of these communication disciplines will help foster parents succeed in their role. Interpersonal communication creates relationships between the foster parent and child through inclusion, control, and affection. Small group communication aspects of group roles, meeting facilitation, and conflict management are used in interactions with caseworkers. The public speaking skills of preparation and practice are used during court proceedings, orientations, and support groups. Providing foster parents with these communicative skills is crucial for successful placement outcomes.*

For foster parents, communication is a vital part of their job. This includes building relationships with their foster child, facilitating communication between their foster child and social workers, and engaging in public speaking such as testifying in court. The state of Minnesota defines a foster care provider as “a person or entity licensed to provide foster care” (State of Minnesota, 2007). This paper will focus on licensed individuals providing foster care and refer to them as foster parents. I have experience with both foster care and communications. My parents fostered and adopted from foster care. As a family, we fostered children and adolescents of all ages. Some we fostered for emergency 72-hour (about 3 days) placements, while others we became an adoptive home for. I observed how my parents created relationships with my foster siblings, worked with social workers, and communicated in various public speaking settings. I have studied communications in college and hope to use my knowledge to help foster parents communicate their best.

This paper was written to complete my communication studies capstone. Its purpose is to demonstrate the foundational principles of interpersonal communication, small group communication, and public speaking in a relevant context. The context chosen was foster parenting. There is limited research on how communication plays a role in foster parents' lives, how it affects placement outcomes, and the interconnectedness between researchers and foster parents (Brewsaugh et al., 2022; L. Nelson, 2014; Nelson & Colaner, 2020). This paper is a literature review hoping to relate relevant communication skills to foster parenting.

I begin by discussing interpersonal relationships and how communication builds healthy relationships by providing inclusion, control, and affection. In small group communication, I will focus on the relationship between foster parents and social workers. This will consist of discussions on understanding group roles, facilitating group communication, and managing conflict. The last section of the paper will cover public speaking. Here I will explore public speaking situations foster parents may find themselves in and tools for presenting.

## Interpersonal Communication

Interpersonal communication is used to create and maintain relationships. Being the most intimate form of communication, it is typically conducted between two people (Gamble & Gamble, 2013). It can be both transactional and relational. In a transactional communication exchange, the communication is focused on the event taking place. Relational communication is conducted to build or maintain relationships. Relationships are important because they provide us with inclusion, control, and affection (Gamble & Gamble, 2013). Interpersonal communication is what allows a foster parent to develop a healthy relationship with their foster child.

**Inclusion**

Building a relationship with a foster child can be a unique challenge. Not only is a foster parent meeting the child for the first time and building a relationship, but the foster parent must include their foster child in their family and parenting style. Parenting style is a factor that affects the health of the parent-child relationships. Parenting style is the way a parent feels towards their child and the emotional climate they create (Chodura et al., 2021). Children in foster care may be unused to the style of parenting their foster parent uses. Researchers for *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review* discuss aspects that allow a foster parent to parent successfully. They define functional parenting as responsive, warm, and having clear boundaries. Functional parenting also includes the foster-care-specific aspect of facilitating a healthy attachment between a foster parent and child (Chodura et al., 2021). This research article promotes the idea that functional foster parenting supports the adaptive development of a foster child. Communication is an important part of any parenting situation but especially foster parenting. Adaptive behaviors a child learns in an abusive situation can be problematic in a non-abusive environment (Chodura et al., 2021). Being able to communicate about these behaviors and include the foster child in setting boundaries gives them a sense of inclusion. Effective foster parenting can be seen as a parenting style that facilitates healthy attachments, communication, and warmth between a foster child and their foster parent.

Establishing a relationship is necessary for effective foster parenting (Chodura et al., 2021). Foster parents must first understand their motivations for fostering children *before* they can develop a healthy relationship with their foster child. In 2003, the journal *Qualitative Social Work* released a study detailing the motivations and success of different foster parents. They discovered that genuinely caring for the foster child was the factor leading to the most success in foster parenting. Participants in the study also reported that the most significant reward of foster parenting is making a difference in a child's life (Buehler et al., 2003). Before a relationship can begin to be established, foster parents must understand their motivations for foster parenting.

**Control**

Relationships are important for three reasons: they provide inclusion, control, and affection (Gamble & Gamble, 2013). Control in a relational sense refers to being valued and respected. In any relationship, people want to feel that they have influence and that their voice matters. When feeling out of control, individuals are likely to act out to gain that attention or become reclusive and limit their participation (Gamble & Gamble, 2013). Foster children are at a higher risk of feeling out of control and displaying behavior problems (Turney & Wildeman, 2016). They are moved from home to home often with little explanation. In some cases, they may not even know why they were removed from their parent's care in the first place. When foster parents utilize the communication skills of listening and disclosing, they can allow their foster child to feel in control and valid within the relationship.

Listening is one of the fundamental principles of communication (Gamble & Gamble, 2013). Listening can be explained as hearing to understand. Understanding a foster child's perspective is important for communication. When a foster child is not listened to, miscommunication and problem behaviors may increase. Researchers for the journal *Child & Family Social Work* discovered that when foster parents and foster children do not understand or agree on the severity level of a behavior problem, the foster placement is more likely to break down (Strijker et al., 2010). This disagreement occurs due to a lack of communication and listening. Communicating with foster children to understand their perspective on their placement and behavior is vital for successful foster parenting. As the researchers discussed, foster children often do not realize how their behavior affects their foster parents (Strijker et al., 2010). Foster parents must listen to their foster children to understand their perspective. Feeling understood will allow a foster child to maintain a sense of control in the relationship.

Listening goes hand in hand with disclosure. Disclosure, also referred to as strategic sharing, is the process of sharing information with someone to intentionally grow the relationship (Gamble & Gamble, 2013). Many times, foster children are not given the necessary information they need to have a sense of control and security. In 2003 *Adoption Quarterly* published a paper titled "The Family Adoption Communication (FAC) Model" (Wrobel et al., 2003). The FAC Model focuses on adoptive families and how they share information with the adopted child about their biological family and adoption history. While the research focuses on adoptive families it can easily be adapted for foster families. The FAC Model focuses on three stages of adoption communication. In phase 1 the adoptive parents initiate the communication and regulate the information. In phase 2 the child is curious about their adoption, and this prompts the parents to respond. In phase 3 the child seeks out information on their own. The article also discusses that development through the three phases is not linear and depends on the child's curiosity, the child's developmental stage, and the adoption's level of openness (Wrobel et al., 2003). The same communication patterns can apply to foster families. Like adopted children, foster children may have varying levels of curiosity, developmental stage, and access to information about their case or birth parents. Foster parents must be able to communicate with their foster children based on the limited information they have and determine what information is developmentally appropriate. Ultimately, this disclosure will allow the foster child to feel in control of their situation and develop a healthy relationship with their foster parent.

**Affection**

The third aspect of relationships is affection. Affection shows foster children that they are loved and cared for. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health* Author Philip Fisher explains that because of past trauma or negative experiences with other parental figures, some foster children may be resistant to displays of affection. Some foster children may struggle to form attachments to their foster parents. However, Fisher goes on to explain that there is hope and that many foster children are resilient (2015). Affection can be shown in many ways, but it is best to gain verbal consent from a foster child before engaging in displays of affection—especially physical displays such as hugs or high fives. Nonverbal communication is one aspect of communication foster parents can use to build or break trust.

Nonverbal communication encompasses everything we use to communicate except for the actual words (Gamble & Gamble, 2013). Nonverbal messages can include hugging someone, how close you stand to someone, your facial expressions, and even the tone of your voice. It is important to understand that nonverbal communication may contradict one's verbal message. This is especially crucial to understand when interacting with children. According to research conducted for *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences,* the responsibility for clear communication falls on the parent. Because 55% of communication is conducted nonverbally, it is important to make sure it is used appropriately. When communicating with their child, parents need to use a calm tone and suitable body language (Runcan et al., 2012). Contradictory nonverbal and verbal messages will confuse any child. The article states it best: "When the parent tells the child that he/she is forgiven and this message is accompanied by a smile, the child understands the message transmitted and believes it much easier than if the message of forgiveness would be accompanied by a frown" (Runcan et al., 2012, p. 905). Fundamentally foster parents must make sure their verbal messages match their nonverbal messages. This will prevent mistrust that develops due to conflicting messages.

Foster parents can adopt a warm and responsive parenting style by communicating with and including their foster child in setting boundaries. They can allow their foster child to develop a sense of control and value by listening to and sharing information with them. Lastly, foster parents can develop a sense of trust with their foster child by using situationally appropriate nonverbal messages. These elements of interpersonal communication come together to minimize disruptive behaviors and create a healthy foster home for the child. However, interpersonal communication is not the only communication exchange foster parents will engage in. Next, we will discuss key skills for communicating in small group settings.

## Small Group Communication

Small group communication reaches a broader audience than interpersonal communication. However, it still relies on relational and task orientated communication. Small group communication is conducted among several people working towards the same goal (Linabary & Castro, 2021). Through the child welfare system, foster parents often communicate in small group settings. They must be familiar with the roles, necessary facilitation, and conflict resolution skills required in small group communication. Being effective in small group communication settings will allow foster parents to maintain relationships with social workers and provide the best possible environment for their foster child.

### Roles within a case

Working relationships with social workers, doctors, and attorneys are based on the case's main goal. In a podcast with MN Adopt, Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist Brandon Jensen expresses that goals are case specific. He explains that understanding the primary goal of the case is the first step to establishing relationships in the foster system. According to Jensen, several people a foster parent might interact with include the foster child's Guardian Ad Litem, school staff, social workers, county workers, therapists, physicians, and biological family (MN Adopt, 2022b). Foster parents can best adapt their communication style when they know who is participating in the group.

***Task Roles***

Foster parents can apply small group communication roles to the people involved in their foster child's case. Task-focused group roles include the task leader, the expeditor, the gatekeeper, the information seeker, the information provider, and the recorder (Linabary & Castro, 2021).

The first three task roles—leader, expeditor, and gatekeeper—help to facilitate group communication (Linabary & Castro, 2021). The task leader will lead the group's effort in accomplishing their task. Social workers can fulfill this role to make sure the child's case goals are being met. The expeditor is responsible for the group making progress toward its goal. This role can be fulfilled by a social worker, Guardian Ad Litem, or foster parent. In this role, a group member helps keep the group on track and makes sure deadlines are met. The gatekeeper regulates the flow of information and makes sure that everyone is listened to. Any member can fulfill this role. A social worker may fill this role as they coordinate with everyone involved with the case. (Linabary & Castro, 2021).

The last three task roles—information seeker, information provider, and recorder—deal with the communication content (Linabary & Castro, 2021). The role of an information seeker can be fulfilled by any group member who collects data on the case. This role may be fulfilled by an attorney working on the case, social workers, or the Guardian Ad Litem. In this role, they actively listen and ask questions to seek out vital information for the case. A foster parent can act as an information provider. Foster parents provide information on their foster child's well-being and behavior. In ideal group communication, everyone shares their information and ideas openly. Lastly, the recorder takes notes on what is discussed in group meetings (Linabary & Castro, 2021). By participating in notetaking, foster parents can make sure they do not miss any important details regarding their foster child's case.

### ***Maintenance Roles***

Foster parents often bridge the gap between professional and personal relationships. Being competent in small group communication settings requires an understanding of maintenance roles alongside task roles. Maintenance roles focus on the relationships between the group's members rather than the group's tasks. Four key maintenance roles are the social-emotional leader, the supporter, the tension releaser, and the harmonizer (Linabary & Castro, 2021). Maintenance roles can be performed by any member of the group.

The first two maintenance roles—social-emotional leader and supporter—provide the group with a sense of social leadership. The social-emotional leader is responsible for balancing the group dynamics and performing multiple maintenance roles. A foster parent may act as a social-emotional leader by providing support for and facilitating communication between their foster child and other case members. The supporter is a role fulfilled by multiple people. In this role, group members provide encouragement and emotional support for each other (Linabary &

Castro, 2021). This could be done in one way by a Guardian Ad Litem providing the foster parent with encouraging words after a difficult court hearing.

The last two maintenance roles—tension releaser and harmonizer—help regulate conflict and group relations. The tension releaser is a group member who can lighten the mood. A foster parent might do this by sharing a positive milestone their foster child reached. While the tension releaser helps the group feel comfortable with each other, the harmonizer helps the group members work with each other. The harmonizer is an impartial group member who helps resolve conflict. A social worker can harmonize by making sure each member of the foster child's case is working together (Linabary & Castro, 2021). Anyone in the group can help fulfill these roles. Maintaining group relations is a fundamental part of facilitating group communication.

**Facilitating meetings with the foster child**

When it comes to facilitating a meeting, preparation is important. Foster parents should contact the parties involved ahead of time to determine what information to have ready for the meeting. Social workers and the Guardian Ad Litem might want information from the foster child's doctor appointment or school evaluation. Foster parents may be required to record information on their foster child's behavior. Therapists or doctors may need medical records or other information. Once the foster parent knows what needs to be prepared, they can plan for when and how to meet. Meetings can vary based on several factors. Meeting locations will depend on whom they are meeting with. Some social workers will need to meet in the child's current home. Meetings with specialists and therapists could be conducted at an office, clinic, or during a home visit. Creating a plan and understanding what needs to be communicated is an important part of the small group communication process (Linabary & Castro, 2021).

How a meeting is conducted is critical to its success. Research published in 2016 by *The British Journal of Social Work* observed 82 social worker interactions with 126 children and adolescents in the UK. The researchers discussed that communication with the social worker consisted of the child, the case, the social worker, and the context. Context is an important part of how communication is facilitated. Context can include using activities such as playing with Legos or coloring to make a meeting more comfortable for the foster child. Older children may be more comfortable meeting with a social worker alone while others prefer to have their foster parents present. The researchers emphasized that flexibility is needed to create contexts in which all parties are comfortable communicating (Winter et al., 2016). Determining an appropriate context and being flexible within it are needed when facilitating communication between a foster child and social worker.

**Conflict**

In any small group setting, conflict can happen. It is important to work through conflict for the sake of the foster child. Conflict can be described as a struggle between two interdependent parties who view their goals as incompatible. Within this definition, there are several types of conflict including perceived conflicts, substance conflicts, value conflicts, process conflicts, and relationship conflicts (Linabary & Castro, 2021). Foster parents commonly run into perceived and process conflicts. Perceived conflicts occur when the parties involved miscommunicate and believe they disagree (Linabary & Castro, 2021). Because foster parents often coordinate with several social workers, miscommunication can occur leading to perceived conflicts. Process conflicts occur when there is a shared goal but disagreement on how to reach the goal (Linabary & Castro, 2021). An example of a process conflict could be between a social worker and a foster parent on setting up a visitation schedule. Even though the goal of visitations is held by both, the process of when and how might be disagreed upon. Learning to resolve conflict and miscommunication is important to maintain healthy relationships and promote the foster child's well-being.

The relationship between foster parents and social workers is often overlooked. However, that relationship is crucial for foster parent retention. A study published in 2016 in the *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal* analyzes the opinions of 1,095 foster parents on their relationship with child welfare workers. The study discusses how a healthy relationship between foster parents and social workers promotes foster parent retention, which will provide placement stability to the foster child. The article states that foster parents' "ability to provide care is impacted directly and indirectly by their interactions with public child welfare agencies and workers" (Geiger et al., 2016, p. 23). A foster parent's ability to care for their foster child is impacted by their relationship with the social worker. Because of this, it is important to use conflict resolution skills to maintain healthy relationships with social workers and other case participants.

Preventing conflict can include emphasizing group goals, facilitating dialogue, and avoiding win-lose situations (Linabary & Castro, 2021). By emphasizing group goals case members can set aside personal feelings and remember that the purpose of the case is the child's well-being. Facilitating dialogue is important to avoid perceived conflict. Openly communicating with different parties clears up confusion and miscommunication. Avoiding win-lose situations keeps relationships healthy by removing competition. It is important to remember that the parties in a child welfare case are not competing. Foster parents, social workers, and birth parents are not competing. The Office on Child Abuse and Neglect, Children's Bureau, explains that there are three nationally held goals for child protection established in The Adoption and Safe Families

Act of 1997. These goals are the child's safety, permanency, and well-being. This Act states that every child deserves to be safe, live in a permanent home (this might be with their birth parent, relatives, or adoptive family), and be provided for (Capacity Building Center for States, 2018). Keeping these central goals in mind can help the members of a child protection case prevent conflict.

Resolving conflict is a collaborative process. Social workers and foster parents must be willing to work together to resolve complications. American scholar John Dewey believes that there are five steps to solving a problem (Linabary & Castro, 2021). Step 1 is defining the problem. When conflict arises determine with it is about. Conflict over visitation schedules might be because the visits happen on a school night when the child is tired. Perhaps the conflict is due to transportation issues. No matter the context, the first step is to define the issue. Step 2 is analyzing the problem. In this step, the reason a problem is occurring is looked at. In Step 3 workable solutions are generated. If transportation is an issue for visitations, various transportation solutions are generated at this stage. Step 4 involves evaluating those solutions; determining which solutions are useful and which are not. Lastly, in step 5 the agreed-upon solution is implemented and assessed. In the example of visitations, a social worker might arrange a ride service to transport the foster child to and from the visitations. Once the solution is implemented it should also be assessed to guarantee it is working. These five steps can help groups work through conflicts that arise.

Working in any team will have its difficulties. Utilizing conflict resolution skills can help foster parents find their way through difficult foster care situations. Positive communication exchanges can be fostered by using facilitation skills such as planning and paying attention to context. Focusing on both the distinct roles involved and the common goals of the team will benefit all the members involved and increase their communication effectiveness. Small groups that consist of various child protection members can face conflict at times, but they can also provide support to the foster parent and the foster child.

## Public Speaking

Public speaking is the final communication discipline this paper will cover. At times foster parents may find themselves communicating through public speaking. Public speaking has been taught for thousands of years and is one of the fundamental aspects of communication. Public speaking is the act of communicating a message publicly to an audience (Schreiber & Hartranft, 2022). Foster parents should be familiar with the many speech purposes, audiences, and presentation techniques involved in public speaking.

### Speaking Purpose

There are three main forms of public speaking. They are informative speaking, persuasive speaking, and special occasion speaking (Schreiber & Hartranft, 2022). When speaking in court, foster parents often engage in informative speaking. Informative speaking is done with the intent to educate or share information with the audience. In other settings, a foster parent might choose to speak persuasively. Persuasive speaking is meant to change the opinions of the audience. Foster parents might use persuasive speaking at foster care orientations or informational seminars. In these settings, foster parents can use persuasive speaking to recruit new foster parents. Lastly, a foster parent may partake in ceremonial speaking at a foster child's adoption or reunification. These three types of speaking will guide what the foster parent speaks about (Schreiber & Hartranft, 2022). Determining their role and purpose allows the foster parent to have confidence as they craft their message.

For any speaking endeavor, a foster parent should understand their role. A common setting foster parents are asked to engage in public speaking is in court. To help foster parents better understand court proceedings and their role in court, MN Adopt (2022a) published a podcast episode titled "Let's Talk – Foster Care 101 – Part 7: Foster Care & Court." This podcast interviews a Minnesotan Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker (LICSW) Kirsten Langerman, who has her master's degree in social work. She explains that foster parents are at court to provide facts, not opinions, about their foster child's care. Her advice for court proceedings includes contacting one's social worker ahead of time to know what information to prepare and to take notes on aspects of one's foster child's care (MN Adopt, 2022a). This helps set the groundwork for the way a foster parent prepares for court. However, if a foster parent is speaking at a foster care support group, their opinion and experiences are what they will be relying on. Determining their role in the speaking event should be a foster parent's first step in determining their purpose

**Audience Analysis**

Audience analysis influences how a foster parent presents their message. Foster parents must be able to analyze who is in their audience and how to adapt their message accordingly. Audience analysis consists of understanding the audience's demographic and adapting the message to fit the audience. The audience is the reason for the speech (Schreiber & Hartranft, 2022). Because of this, analyzing and adapting to the audience is vital for positive communication outcomes.

Determining the audience's demographic starts with the context of the speaking event. A foster care orientation audience will be vastly different from a courtroom audience. Audience demographics may include ethnicity, age, gender/sex, income, occupation, religion, and education level. Understanding the demographics will help foster parents tailor their message (Schreiber & Hartranft, 2022). If the speaker knows that a foster care orientation's audience is full of young couples who do not have children, they may adapt their message to focus on parental skills and building relationships with the foster child. However, if the audience has a demographic that leans towards kinship foster care, the speaker might adapt their speech to focus on collaborating with social workers and other aspects of the foster care system. Audiences may have a wide range of demographics. The audience in the courtroom can include anyone involved in the foster child's case (MN Adopt, 2022a). Judges, attorneys, social workers, the Guardian Ad Litem, and birth parents are commonly present during a court session. Understanding who is in the audience is important when developing a speech. By using audience demographics, foster parents can understand whom they are speaking to.

Once a foster parent has analyzed their audience the next step is to adapt their message to the audience. Ancient Greek philosopher and scientist Aristotle developed three rhetorical proofs that can appeal to a broad range of audiences. These lines of argument consist of pathos, emotional appeals; ethos, ethical appeals; and logos, logical appeals (Lunsford et al., 2021). Appeals to emotion, pathos, can generate emotions in an audience. Sharing positive stories of successful foster placements can bring feelings of hope and encouragement to other foster parents. Ethical appeals, ethos, build a sense of trust with an audience. These types of arguments focus on giving the speaker a sense of trustworthiness and credibility. When speaking to an audience that includes birth parents, foster parents can build a sense of trust by listening to the birth parents' concerns and showing that they have the foster child's best interests at heart. Lastly, logical appeals, logos, focus on the facts. These types of arguments focus on the content of the message. In many cases, a foster parent will be asked to speak about their observations and facts of the case without bringing in their personal feelings. When combined, pathos, ethos, and logos create a sound argument that can reach a diverse audience. Understanding their speech purpose and audience allows foster parents to feel confident in their message.

**Presenting**

When giving a speech, not only is the content of the message important but so is the way one presents it. Presenting well will increase a foster parent's credibility and reach. The best way to ensure an effective presentation is to practice. Practicing a presentation ensures that the prepared material is properly conveyed to the audience. Presenting a speech includes the words spoken as well as the nonverbal paralanguage, gestures, eye contact, and visual aids (Schreiber & Hartranft, 2022). Preparing and practicing are two of the key elements to a successful presentation. However, speech anxiety and limited time can affect a speaker's presentation quality. Learning to handle these unique situations will ensure that foster parents can communicate clearly and effectively.

Speaking to court professionals, judges, or birth parents can be stressful. Foster parents may experience speech anxiety. In his article for the *Journal of Education and Educational Development,* Corporate Trainer Farhan Raja (2020) discusses the causes and remedies of speech anxiety. Raja explains that anxiety is a feeling of uneasiness or fear often experienced by public speakers. Some of Raja's recommendations to accommodate speech anxiety include understanding that stress is natural, preparing and practicing the speech, and anticipating audience questions. Foster parents can find comfort in knowing that their stress is normal. If anything, it shows that they want to do well and care about their speech's impact. Practicing is a tested and true way to overcome speech anxiety. Contacting their foster child’s social worker or event coordinator ahead of time to clarify their role can help foster parents feel more confident in preparing their speech. Anticipating audience questions and preparing responses ahead of time will also help foster parents in reducing speech anxiety. Proper preparation allows foster parents to be confident in their message and its delivery.

There will be situations in which a foster parent will not have the opportunity to prepare a speech ahead of time. In court hearings or case planning meetings, foster parents may be asked questions and expected to present at a moment's notice. In this situation, practicing impromptu speaking will ensure that a foster parent communicates clearly. Impromptu speaking is giving a speech with little to no preparation (Schreiber & Hartranft, 2022). Foster parents can practice impromptu speaking by simply picking a topic and presenting it. This can be done by themselves, in front of a mirror, in the car, or virtually anywhere. For most impromptu speeches it is best to keep them simple and direct. A popular technique among public speakers is to find what is most important to say and select three key things they want to communicate. The three key points can be easily memorized or written on a card to keep the speaker on track. Practicing impromptu speeches will give foster parents the confidence to speak in court and meetings with limited preparation.

Foster parents may face many situations in which they are asked to speak publicly. They can become more confident in their public speaking by preparing and practicing beforehand. Determining the purpose of their speech, analyzing the audience, and understanding how to adapt allow foster parents to be confident in their speech's content. Public speaking should be something foster parents can use to speak effectively in court, at orientations, at adoptions, and in a variety of other settings.

## Conclusion

Through interpersonal communication, relationships can be built. Providing a foster child with inclusion, control, and affection lays the groundwork for developing a healthy relationship with them. Building relationships with foster children leads to better placement outcomes (Chodura et al., 2021). Communicating with caseworkers and care team members can be challenging at times. Foster parents can succeed at small group communication by understanding group roles, preparing for meetings and their context, and learning to handle group conflict by using both preventative and resolution strategies. Foster parents can use their public speaking skills to effectively inform or persuade their audience. By understanding their purpose, paying attention to audience demographics, utilizing presentation techniques such as impromptu speaking, and handling speech anxiety, foster parents will become confident public speakers.

Moving forward, research should be conducted on communication between the foster parent and the foster child. It would be useful for researchers to focus on common communication exchanges within the context of foster care. Further research could also be conducted on how home displacement and trauma can affect a foster child's ability to communicate with their foster parent. Foster parents can use communication to parent effectively and promote system relationships. Foster parenting is a journey filled with many challenges and rewards; communicating effectively creates a clear path toward the foster child's well-being.

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# Partisan Selective Exposure on Social Media During the 2020 Presidential Election

**Grayce Lemon**
Graduate Student
Minnesota State University, Mankato
grayce.limpert@mnsu.edu

**Abstract**

*This study examines selective exposure and selective avoidance on social media during the 2020 presidential election. 147 voters participated in the survey conducted using Qualtrics. The purpose of this study was to understand whether selective exposure and avoidance behaviors differed based on voting outcome (Trump or Biden), and to test whether political ideological polarization was reflected in news consumption through social media. Taken together, the results indicate that although both voting bases engaged in selective exposure and avoidance, the propensity was the same between Trump and Biden voters. Additionally, results confirm existing hypotheses that strength of political ideology positively correlates with selective exposure. However, results challenge whether there is a relationship between strength of political ideology and selective avoidance. Taken together, this study contributes to existing literature by providing preliminary evidence that, during the 2020 presidential election, polarization between members of political parties was reflected on social media through both news consumption and disengagement with attitude-incongruent information.*

Political news during election cycles has a profound impact on voting choice and election perceptions (Levendusky, 2015). Political news serves a crucial, democratic function by exposing citizens to a wide range of current issues to keep them informed. However, partisan media, or opinionated media, have the potential to skew individuals' attitudes and beliefs toward particular candidates or ideological viewpoints (Chan & Stone, 2013). Additionally, citizens' reliance on social media for political news raises questions about the prevalence of exposure to solely one-sided political news, or selective exposure (Stroud, 2011; Chan & Stone, 2013). Research confirms that social media is an important factor in elections (see Drew & Weaver, 2006; Hajj Flemings, 2012; (Wicks et al., 2014), few studies have examined selective exposure on social media during elections. To that end, this study examines selective exposure on social media during the 2020 presidential election. The rise in polarization between members of political parties and their increased reliance on social media for political news makes the 2020 election a unique time to examine selective exposure.

Selective exposure occurs when an individual intentionally selects information that confirms his or her beliefs (Stroud, 2011). Partisan selective exposure asserts that a user's political beliefs drive their choice in news selection and avoidance. Communication researchers have confirmed this alignment (Sulfow et al., 2018). Understanding how selective exposure shapes voters' attitudes during elections becomes increasingly important in our current political contexts due to the proliferation of partisan sources and viewpoint polarization (see related arguments by Shehata & Strömbäck, 2021). According to a study by Pew Research Center in 2019, Democrats and Republicans are holding increasingly unfavorable perceptions of members of the opposing party. For example, 55% of Republicans say Democrats are "more immoral" than other Americans, a near 10% increase from 2015. The same report indicates a deeper divide beyond issues of policy with 73% of Democrats and Republicans reporting that they do not only disagree over plans and policies, but they also cannot even agree on basic facts (Pew Research Center, 2019). Although existing research confirms the existence of selective exposure on social media, the research is unclear as to which members of political parties engage in selective exposure more (Wicks et al., 2014).

Another notable reason for studying selective exposure and selective avoidance during the 2020 Presidential Election is due to the shifting media landscape with people's increased reliance on social media for political news. People increasingly consume news through multiple media outlets, and particularly from social media platforms (Newport, 2020). In 2018, Pew Research Center reported that only 18% of persons aged 18-29 received their news from television, while 90% were active on at least one social media site, especially Facebook (Matsa & Bialik, 2020). More notably, nearly two-thirds of adults received at least some of their news from social media websites (Matsa & Bialik, 2020). In addition, reliance on social media during election cycles was at an all-time high amid the 2020 Presidential election cycle. Yet, those who consumed their election-related news solely through social media platforms were less engaged and less knowledgeable (Pew Research Center, 2020).

Social media affords users a plethora of sources to choose from, making selective exposure behaviors even more pronounced (Cinelli et al., 2020). Social media platforms, such as Facebook, usually do not produce original news reports. Instead, these sites function as a pathway to third-party publishers who share and circulate news that represents various political viewpoints (Fletcher & Nielson, 2019). In addition to traditional news sources like CNN and FOX, new hyper-partisan outlets have surfaced online. A unique feature of hyper-partisan media is how they explicitly highlight their political bias rather than appeal to perceptions of objectivity like traditional media (Xu et al., 2020; Wischnewski et al., 2021). The rise in partisan news sources is likely reflective of the extreme polarization between members of competing political parties (Xu et al., 2020). According to their website, The Daily Wire, for instance, promotes a "hard-hitting, irreverent news and commentary site for a new generation of conservatives." In contrast, left wing media such as Vox, Huffington Post, and BuzzFeed news consistently cover issues from a politically progressive point of view (Pew Research Center, 2023).

The high-choice news environment of social media allows users to engage with a variety of different viewpoints, yet research confirms that individuals are not utilizing social media to consume different perspectives (Garrett, 2009; Stroud, 2011; Cinelli et al., 2020; Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2020). Moreover, social media also allows users to disengage with information that is attitude-inconsistent through unfriending and muting, which is called selective avoidance (Rhine, 1967). Selective avoidance among social media users seemed especially prevalent during the 2020 elections with growing rates of intolerance for political opponents. For instance, in 2012 Pew Research Center reported that 18% of individuals on social media sites blocked or unfriended people because of their political views. A subsequent survey conducted in 2016 found that number had risen to 40% of social media users indicating rising rates of selective avoidance. Although research also indicates that selective avoidance behaviors may be more prominent among people who hold strong ideological opinions (Neely, 2021). However, differences in selective avoidance and voting outcome have not yet been tested (Shin & Thorson, 2017).

Partisanship and political news consumption during election cycles remains an essential focus for many political communication scholars, particularly given the hostility that characterized the 2020 presidential election as evident in out-group disdain (Hmielowski et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2022). Many people took to social media to consume news and engage in information sharing and discussions (Pew Research Center, 2020). The prevalence of selective exposure and selective avoidance behaviors may reinforce notions of political intolerance and polarization and may also suggest a relationship between social media use for news consumption and voting outcome.

This research expands on the concepts regarding selective exposure, and avoidance. Studying the 2020 U.S. Presidential election represents an important context for understanding the extent to which polarization was reflected in online engagement. Examining such behaviors among Trump and Biden voters not only furthers the literature on the relationship between media use and partisanship and polarization by looking at the connection between selective exposure and avoidance on voting outcome. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to test the differences in selective exposure, avoidance, and online engagement between Trump and Biden voters on social media during the 2020 election cycle.

## Literature Review

### Partisan Media

In this study, the term partisan *media* refers to a politically biased media organization while partisan *news* refers to the stories these organizations publish. Accusations of media bias are increasing across the political spectrum (Iyengar & Krupenkin, 2018) and indeed, partisan media on both sides is becoming more prominent (Xu et al., 2020).

Literature identifies a few factors that have contributed to the growth of partisan media. One theory is that the partisanship of media organizations reflects the polarization of society. In other words, nowadays there are more people who hold concrete and coherent sets of political beliefs across a diverse political spectrum, creating a larger market for more ideologically slanted news, or partisan news (Levendusky, 2013). The proliferation of these media organizations fosters a diverse media environment where individuals have greater choice over what news to consume. Hyper-partisan media emphasizes the outlet's political view with the intention of attracting like-minded consumers. Social media has contributed to the growth of hyper-partisan media outlets because they are no longer competing with the viewpoint of legacy, or traditional, media outlets such as cable television, radio, and newspaper. However, research underscores the democratic consequence of such ideologically slanted news, such as misinformed voters (Messing & Westwood, 2014). Similarly, Stroud (2011) suggests that there is an inherent relationship between partisan media and polarization with each fueling the other.

More traditional, yet partisan, media such as FOX News and MSNBC tends to choose facts and evidence that highlight a particular stance or angle while leaving out other details. These news organizations still undergo a process of fact-checking and editing. Although these are not technically inaccurate stories, they can certainly be misleading. On social media, the lack of vetting and fact checking altogether allows hyper-partisan media to spread overtly false information (Garrett, 2019).

In addition, there is growing hostility in partisan media about how the “other side” is discussed (Yair & Sulitzeanu-Kenan, 2015). Existing research suggests that talk show hosts on partisan media spend much of their time chastising political opponents, particularly during election cycles. During elections, partisan media tends to stress negative themes and narratives about the opposition. For instance, a study conducted on the 2008 presidential election between Barack Obama and John McCain found that Fox News not only *defended* McCain, they *attacked* Obama and explained why he would not be a good president (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2012). In doing so, FOX reminded their audience who not to vote for, in addition to recommending who to vote for (Levendusky, 2013). Thus, consuming solely partisan news results in viewers only consuming media messages that support their candidate while vilifying their opponent.

## Selective Exposure and Selective Avoidance

### *Partisan Selective Exposure to Political News*

Selective exposure occurs when individuals intentionally select messages that match their pre-existing beliefs (Stroud, 2011; Arceneaux et al., 2012). Partisan selective exposure refers to the desire to seek out information that is consistent with an individual’s existing political beliefs.

Research on cable news channel viewers finds that liberals and conservatives equally tend to seek out sources confirming their political beliefs, and to highly distrust sources challenging them (Stroud, 2008, p. 885; see also Ditto et al., 2018). This results in selective tuning, or "higher levels of knowledge for facts that confirm beliefs and low levels of knowledge that oppose them" (Jerit & Barabas, 2012, p. 662). It is entirely possible that partisan media may convey misinformation and consequently reinforce inaccurate beliefs about candidates and issues. In addition, selective exposure in cable news, e.g., MSNBC for Democrats and FOX for Republicans, leads to unfavorable or distorted views of the opposing political party (Lee et al., 2014; Stone, 2019;). Strong preference based on political predisposition also results in distrust of opposing partisan sources, i.e., FOX for Democrats and MSNBC for Republicans (Lee et al., 2014). Both liberals and conservatives are increasingly skeptical of the traditional news media, however, research indicates that conservatives tend to be more hostile and distrustful of the media (Morris, 2007). Cable news media bias influences users by emphasizing certain aspects of a news story in order to direct people's thought focus (Wolfe & Baumgartner, 2013). Selective exposure research confirms that political news selection is driven in part by political predisposition (Shin & Thorson, 2017). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: There will be a positive relationship between strength of political ideology and selective exposure

*Political Predisposition and News Choice*

Political predisposition is strongly associated with both message processing and policy support (Lee & Kim, 2017). Political messaging frame issues in such a way that trigger principles foundational to a coherent political identity, and which elicit the desired partisan response and policy support. An understanding of the principles of predisposing political affiliation is critical to harnessing partisan media's influence on political perceptions. For example, Democrats view CNN and MSNBC very differently in their portrayals of news, whereas Republicans view them as much more similar in their coverage (Lee et al., 2011). Personal attitudes influence consumers' choice of which stories to read on social media (Sulfow et al., 2018). Individuals report recognizing the influence of their political beliefs on their media selections as well as their interpretations of them. Additionally, people acknowledge that news from social media can intentionally frame certain aspects of a story to appeal to their political in-group, though this recognition appears not to improve their news consumption habits (Tully et al., 2018). Discomfort (cognitive dissonance) arises when users are confronted with attitude-challenging views, but selective exposure enables them to avoid this discomfort by turning to only attitude-consistent sources (Metzger et al., 2015). Research indicates that selective exposure "bolsters the self-concept" of those with entrenched political beliefs (Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2011, p. 103). This reinforcement augments the perception of being "right" on a particular issue, but may lead to more extreme beliefs, and foment dislike for the opposing side (Dvir-Gvirsman et al., 2018). Dislike causes bias and people tend to be biased against things they dislike, political parties included (Martin & Yurukuoglu, 2017). This dislike is driven in part by perceptions that are objectively false and such dislike could be abated if each side would try to understand the other better (Stone, 2019). Dislike also indirectly impacts integrity and empathy perceptions (Druckman & Parkin, 2005).

Understanding political predisposition as a cause for division is foundational for understanding selective exposure and ultimately candidate perception. Gaps in literature suggest further exploration is necessary to understand voting behavior and social media. As such, I propose this research question:

RQ1: Were there differences in selective exposure behaviors between Trump and Biden voters?

There are various types of selective exposure: selection of news or entertainment, messages about different issues; selection of a certain medium; selection of like-minded messages (Stroud, 2011). This study focuses on selective exposure to like-minded political news on social media due to the relevance of political news during the 2020 presidential election.

*Selective Avoidance*

Social media functionalities enable users to engage in selective avoidance, or intentionally avoiding exposure to information that is counter to their political beliefs by hiding posts, unfriending, or muting social media friends, known as selective avoidance (Skoric et al., 2022). People use different social media platforms to fulfill various gratifications. Reddit, for example, is a discussion-based social media platform that allows communities to form around niche interests. Whereas Facebook allows individuals to connect with friends and family, consume news, and engage in discussion-like forums. For the purpose of this study, social media is conceptualized as a site that functions as a pathway to third party news sources and where users are able to build networks of friends whom they can interact with on personalized newsfeeds. Literature on selective avoidance is conflicted as to the frequency selective avoidance occurs on social media. Some studies suggest that selective avoidance is relatively rare, other studies show that strength of ideology can predict selective avoidance (Bode, 2016; Song, 2017; Zhu & Skoric, 2021). Given the heightened polarization in 2020, it is necessary to consider voters' selective avoidance on social media. Against the backdrop of existing literature, I propose the following hypothesis:

H2: Strength of political ideology will positively correlate to selective avoidance

Research has not yet examined the extent to which Trump and Biden voters engaged in selective avoidance on social media during the 2020 presidential election. Therefore, I propose the following research question:

RQ2: Were there differences in selective avoidance behavior between Trump and Biden voters?

## Social Media

### *Uses and Gratifications*

This study is interested in examining online engagement behaviors in the context of social media during the presidential election. As such, it is necessary to provide a framework by exploring the purpose of social media during elections and existing studies on the role of social media during elections. There are many aspects that make social media appealing for news consumption as opposed to traditional news regardless of the type of social media platform. Uses and gratifications theory provides a framework for understanding why people use certain forms of media, such as social media (Thongmak, 2021). Individuals are motivated to use social media for a variety of reasons such as social interaction, information seeking, entertainment, or as a hobby (Whiting & Williams, 2013). Because there are so many forms of mass media competing for the attention of users, research finds that the consumption of political media should increasingly be looked at as a behavioral manifestation of a person's political ideology or party identification (Shao, 2009). Uses and gratification framework has also been deployed to understand why voters use social media for election related content. One reason is due to social media's interactivity, networkability, collaborative possibilities, convenience, and ability to foster engagement (Ruggiero, 2000). To meet gratifications, users are also able to enhance social connectedness, self-expression, sharing problems, sociability, relationship maintenance, and self-actualization (Shao, 2009). There are many different social media platforms each fulfilling different uses and gratifications among its users. For the purpose of this study, social media is conceptualized as any platform that has the functionality to follow or friend other people, distribute news, and engage in commenting or posting on one's own or someone else's posts or pages.

Examining social media use by liberals and conservatives is essential in understanding election outcomes. According to Pew Research Center, liberals tend to get their news from Facebook more often than conservatives, but conservatives are more likely to pay attention to political posts there. Additionally, most Facebook users report seeing political posts that differ from their own views, which is an important factor in understanding the relationship of these posts to selective exposure (Mitchell, 2020).

Even when users do not ignore attitude-inconsistent content, they are less likely to engage with the full story, which can lead to misperceptions (Sulfow et al., 2018). Users from both sides often dismiss news that disagrees with them, choosing to 'walk away' or 'stop reading.' Very few say they seek secondary sources even though they know they should (Tully et al., 2018). Research on partisan selective exposure on social media provides conflicting support for whether or not a particular ideology or party engages in higher degrees of selective exposure. For instance, a study conducted on partisanship and media diet found an asymmetric pattern of selective exposure between conservative and liberals. According to this study, liberal individuals' selective exposure was higher than that of conservatives' selective exposure (Cinelli et al., 2020).

*Social Media During Elections*

The 2016 election between Hilary Clinton and Donald Trump highlighted the importance of social media on election outcomes (Johnson et al., 2020). Although Donald Trump was a clear underdog in the polls leading up to the election, he managed to surpass the expected amounts of votes and be elected president. In 2016, users turned to social media to select information or avoid information about candidates (Shen, 2017). Accordingly, conservatives and liberals maintained separate media environments during the 2016 election with conservatives relying more heavily on Fox News and the Drudge report, Breitbart News, the Daily Caller and Info Wars, while liberals relied heavily on sources such as the Huffington Post, MSNBC, and The Daily Beast. In addition, liberals relied on more traditional media as well such as the New York Times, Washington Post, and CNN (Johnson et al., 2020). Furthermore, political and economic researchers conducted a content analysis finding that Twitter's somewhat liberal bias tended to elevate politically liberal tweets which may have persuaded Twitter users with moderate views to vote against Donald Trump (Peterson et al., 2021). Taken together, the literature suggests that social media is an important medium to study in the contexts of elections. Given the prevalence of social media use during the 2016 election, it is curious whether polarization continued on social media during the 2020 election and whether or not this reflected how polarizing this election was. Wicks et al. (2012) conducted a study examining partisan media selective exposure amidst the 2012 presidential election. Their findings confirm that indeed, partisans differing in political orientation differ in terms of where they obtained information.

In addition, a study conducted in 2006 on voter learning from media found that variables such as strength of political party affiliation and campaign interest were likely predictors of whether someone planned to vote (Drew & Weaver, 2006). Findings also suggested that existing interest predicted the likelihood of seeking out campaign information from traditional forms of media.

## Method

### Procedures

After receiving Institutional Research Board approval, I recruited participants by posting invitations and survey links on social media (Facebook and LinkedIn), and by emailing student email distribution lists in Political Science and Communication departments at a small public university in the Midwest United States. In addition, my survey was posted to a psychology research participant recruitment website at that same university. All participants were required to have voted in the 2020 Presidential election, and to have been active on at least one social media platform during the campaign. I collected and analyzed 147 survey results covering a broad range of demographic attributes, including age, gender, and political affiliation. The 2020 presidential election day was on November 3, 2020. Survey data was collected between March 2, 2021, and April 28, 2021. Because participants took the survey no more than six months after the 2020 presidential election day, reliability issues associated with participant memory recall were mitigated.

To explore how selective exposure on social media influenced candidate perception and voting choice during the 2020 Presidential election, I used a cross-sectional survey design to measure individuals' attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs. Surveys are beneficial for collecting large sample sizes in a short amount of time (Davis & Lachlan, 2017). Additionally, the study uses existing scales from previous research that have been tested for reliability. The survey asked a series of questions regarding aspects of social media use, political orientation, and political perceptions during the 2020 Presidential election. Survey questions and their measurement scales were taken from existing scales used in political communication research studies. The survey was designed to be completed in 20 minutes or less. There are limitations to self-reported surveys including potential bias, relying on participant recall, and potential unintentional behavior, however, there is enough literature to support the validity of self-reported surveys that it remains an appropriate measure for this study.

**Participants**

In total, one hundred and forty-seven respondents participated in this study. Of all the respondents 26.9% were male while 73.1% were female. Out of all participants, 76.92% were predominantly white, 7.69% were black, 5.59% were Asian, and 9.79% reported as others. In addition, 19.15% identified as strongly Democrat, 24.82% identified as leaning Democrat, 28.37% identified as moderate, 17.73% identified as leaning Republican, and 9.93% identified as strongly Republican,14.18% of participants reported being very liberal, 33.33% reported liberal, 28.37% reported conservative, and 4.26% reported very conservative.

**Measurements**

*Political information exposure.* Participants identified the amount of time they accidentally, or intentionally encountered political information on social media. The response to each item used a five-point Likert scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree.

*Selective Exposure.* Participants were asked how often they (i) intentionally searched for information that was positive toward a candidate they supported, (ii) critical of the candidate they opposed, (iii) supported their political views. The responses to each item used a five-point Likert scale: 1= None to 5= Everyday (Heiss et al., 2019).

*Social media use frequency.* Participants were asked to identify how often they visited a social media site (YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or LinkedIn) during the past two weeks based on a five-point Likert scale: 1 = Never to 5 = Very Frequently (Park, 2019).

*General media exposure.* Participants were asked how often they used television, newspapers, radio, the internet, video sharing sites, social networking sites, and blogs for presidential campaign information, using a five-point Likert scale: 1 = Never to 5 = Very Frequently (Stroud, 2011).

*Reliance on social media.* Participants were asked how much they rely on social media for political news and information, on a five-point scale: 1 = Never to 5 = Heavily (Johnson, Kaye & Lee, 2017).

*Selective Avoidance*. Participants were asked whether they had (i) hidden someone's comments or posts on Facebook because they did not agree with their views on the political issues, and (ii) unfriended someone on Facebook because they did not agree with his or her view on the political issues. Responses for both questions were 0 = No, 1 = Yes (Barnidge et al., 2022).

*Social media use for news.* Participants were asked whether they use social media to (i) stay informed, (ii) get news about current events and public affairs, (iii) get news about current events through friends. Each item response rated frequency from 1 = Never, to 5 = Very Frequently (Hollander, 2014).

*Political ideology strength.* Participants identified their political orientation. Measured on a five-point scale: 1 = Very Liberal, 2 = Liberal, 3 = Moderate, 4 = Conservative, 5 = Very Conservative (Bode, 2016).

*Political affiliation.* Measured on a five-point Likert scale: 1 = Strong Democrat to 5 = Strong Republican (Weeks et al., 2019).

*Political engagement.* Participants were asked how often they (i) wrote a comment on political issues, (ii) liked or shared a political issue on social media, (iii) commented on posts and engaged in discussion. (Heiss & Mathes, 2019).

*Polarization.* Participants were asked their favorability toward each of the Republican Party and the Democratic Party. Responses ranged from 1 = Not at All Favorable to 10 = Very Favorable. (Johnson, Kaye & Lee, 2017).

**Data Analysis**

I used independent-samples *t*-tests and Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients to assess the existence of relationships among individuals' attributes of attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs, and the strength of those relationships. These *t*-tests identify statistically significant (unlikely to have occurred by mere chance) differences between two sample means of some non-categorical variable of interest (Davis & Lachlan, 2017). In other words, *t*-tests determine differences between two groups such as Trump and Biden voters. A statistically significant difference means that difference exists in the population from which the samples are drawn. A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient measures whether two interval, or ratio-level, variables vary together in a way not expected by mere chance. A correlation coefficient is an appropriate statistical test for identifying a relationship between selective exposure and political ideology because they are both continuous variables. They may vary together positive, negatively, or not at all.

## Results

Results from the analysis confirm H1, strength of political ideology positively correlated to selective exposure. However, the results did not indicate any relationship between strength of political ideology and selective avoidance, thus, H2 was not confirmed. Results from RQ1 indicate no differences in selective exposure between Trump and Biden voters. Similarly, with RQ2, no differences in selective avoidance were found between Trump and Biden voters. This section explains the results from each statistical test.

**Analysis of H1**

Hypothesis one states that there is a positive relationship between strength of political ideology and selective exposure. Selective exposure was measured by asking participants how frequently they (i) searched for information that was positive toward the candidate they supported, (ii) critical of the candidate they opposed, (iii) supported their political beliefs. To analyze this relationship, correlation coefficients were conducted. The correlation coefficient for strength of ideology and selective exposure identified a positive relationship between the two variables, $r(119)=2.46$, $p>.05$. The strength of ideology (very liberal, very conservative) did positively correlate to selective exposure. Participants who reported being more liberal or conservative engaged in selective exposure behavior more frequently.

**Analysis of H2**

Hypothesis two states that there is a positive relationship between strength of political ideology and selective avoidance on social media. To analyze this relationship, correlation coefficients were conducted. The correlation coefficient for strength of ideology and selective avoidance identified no relationship between the two variables, $r(118)=-.003$, $p>.05$. The strength of ideology (very liberal, very conservative) did not impact whether or not participants hid posts unfavorable to their view or unfriended individuals who posted information that was unfavorable to their views.

**Analysis of RQ1**

The first research questions asked if there were differences in selective exposure between Trump and Biden voters. An independent-samples *t*-test indicated a slight, but not significant group difference in voting based on selective exposure. A slight difference was detected in selective exposure behavior between Trump voters ($M$ = 1.88, $SD$ = 1.25) and Biden voters ($M$ = 2.60, $SD$ = 1.56); $t$ (100) = 2.75, p = <.05 (two-tailed). Trump voters reported seeking out like-minded political information slightly more often than Biden voters.

**Analysis of RQ2**

The second research question asked if there were differences in selective avoidance between Trump and Biden voters. An independent-samples *t*-test indicated no significant differences in selective avoidance between Trump voters and Biden voters. No differences were detected in selective avoidance behaviors between Trump voters ($M$ = 1.48, $SD$ = 0.503) and Biden voters ($M$ = 1.37, $SD$ =489); $t$ (116) = 1.80, p = <.05 (two-tailed).

## Discussion

The goal of this study was to examine selective exposure and selective avoidance behaviors on social media among voters during the 2020 presidential election. The results highlight this study's unique contribution to the literature. First, the data reflects no differences between Trump and Biden voters in seeking out like-minded news sources. Consistent with existing literature (Stroud, 2011), selective exposure on social media did take place during the election yet there were no differences in propensity between Trump and Biden voters which were variables that had not been examined in the literature prior to this study. There is not existing literature to explain the lack of difference between Trump and Biden voters.

Second, the data indicates no differences between Trump and Biden voters in hiding posts that were politically in-congruent or unfriending someone whom they disagreed with politically. In other words, Trump and Biden voters engaged equally in selective exposure or selective avoidance behaviors on social media. This is an important finding because it provides, at minimum, evidence that neither voting base was more hostile toward people whom they disagreed on social media than the other during the 2020 election. Relatedly, contrary to existing literature (Kim et al., 2022), results show no relationship between strength of political ideology and selective avoidance. Specifically, the degree to which some identified as liberal or conservative did not impact whether they hid posts that were politically in-congruent, or unfriended individuals who they disagreed with politically. These findings could potentially represent the growing discomfort individuals have with engaging in political dialogue during presidential elections as a way to avoid cognitive dissonance.

Finally, consistent with existing literature (Stroud, 2011; Peterson et al., 2017), results did indicate a positive relationship between strength of political ideology and selective exposure. Individuals who identified as strongly liberal or strongly conservative sought out politically like-minded posts more often than individuals who identified as slightly liberal or slightly conservative. These findings confirm hypotheses that highly partisan individuals have a lower tolerance for cognitive dissonance and therefore will engage in selective exposure more often to avoid feelings of cognitive dissonance (Levendusky, 2011). The findings here have both theoretical and practical implications.

**Implications**

*Theoretical Implications*

The findings of this study contribute to existing literature on polarization and partisanship by finding that, consistent with Stroud (2011) and Levendusky (2013), such political polarization did translate to social media in the form of selective exposure to political news during the 2020 presidential election. Although the literature has explored this relationship (Peterson et al., 2021), this study's unique contribution is that it examined the extent to which political ideology impacts seeking out like-minded information in the context of the 2020 election. Because exposure to solely like-minded news has been linked to furthering political intolerance and heightening out-group disdain (Metzger et al., 2020), this study offers evidence that social media did in fact fuel polarization during the 2020 election between the two political extremes.

Conversely, no relationship was detected between strength of political ideology and selective avoidance between Trump and Biden voters. In other words, individuals engaged equally in hiding posts or unfriending people who they disagreed with politically regardless of how conservative or liberal they felt. This extends the literature by suggesting this may have been indicative of the general levels of intolerance during the 2020 presidential election in addition to avoiding experiences of cognitive dissonance.

Results show no differences between Trump and Biden voters in selective exposure or selective avoidance on social media. This is significant because of misperceptions that may exist about the online engagement behaviors of members of voting bases on social media. Trump voters, for instance, may have speculated that Biden voters only read like-minded news, or are more intolerant by hiding posts and unfriending people. This study supports the existing literature with no evidence of differences in propensity of such behavior based on voting. In fact, this study confirms that both Democrats and Republicans are more likely to engage with like-minded sources and perceive non-like-minded sources as bias supporting the hypotheses of viewpoint polarization on social media (Cinelli et al., 2020). Additionally, both Trump and Biden voters reported hiding posts or unfriending people with whom they differed politically, confirming speculated levels of intolerance for members of the opposing voting base and exposure to attitude-inconsistent information.

*Practical Implications*

From an applied perspective, social media can play an integral role during election cycles. Campaigns can use social media to engage with and mobilize their voting base. As such, the results of this study serve as useful information for campaigns and politicians to better understand the ways in which their voting base, and opposing voting base, engages with news and political messages on social media.

First, understanding which news sources partisans seek out and avoid, the extent to which partisans engage with attitude-inconsistent messages, and even what platforms certain age groups gravitate towards may allow campaigns to more strategically craft messages targeted at specific audiences depending on their goal.

Additionally, the findings of this study serve as useful information for political media in terms of understanding whether or not individuals pay attention to news sources. Most people reported paying attention to the sources they receive political news from. This not only helps partisan media craft content that appeals to their audience but is also beneficial in providing information on which platforms to focus on developing their presence. For instance, if conservative partisan news media know that conservatives are more active on Instagram, for example, they are able to spend more time and effort building content for that particular platform.

Taken together, this study contributes to discussion of political polarization on social media by presenting preliminary evidence confirming the existence of polarizing behaviors and extends the conversation by illustrating that polarizing behaviors on social media are taking place between both voting bases and on either side of the political spectrum. Additionally, this study challenges Peterson et al. (2021) finding fewer differences in selective exposure behaviors between Democrat (Biden) voters and Republican (Trump) voters. The results of this study, however, do not provide any recommendations for reducing polarization between voting bases aside from seeking out political news from a multiple different types of news sources. This study also provides practical information for campaigns and political media that will assist them in analyzing their audiences to grow their bases.

**Limitations and Areas for Future Research**

These findings are subject to several limitations. First, selective exposure was measured using retrospective self-reported surveys. Currently, literature finds the best way to measure selective exposure is in a lab setting due to the fact that people are not always conscious of their news consumption behaviors (Clay et al., 2013). However, due to constraints of this study, self-reported surveys were appropriate and the literature supports self-reported surveys as a valid measurement even if it is not the ideal condition. Second, relying on retrospective self-reported surveys poses a reliability challenge because participants must recall information about their behaviors from weeks or months prior to their research participation (Clay et al., 2013). Since participants took the survey no more than six months after the election, some of the issues that come with longer term memory recollection were mitigated.

Finally, the relatively small sample size limits the findings' analyzability, robustness, and generalizability. Future research should consider revisiting these hypotheses and research questions in future elections to determine whether behaviors among partisans and voting bases have shifted at all. In addition, future studies should incorporate different measurements for selective exposure, for instance in an eye-tracking lab or holding focus groups to understand deeper levels of perceptions and motivations.

Future studies would also benefit from narrowing the scope of social media to a single platform. Each platform interface differs, and standardizing input data on a single platform would likely improve their accuracy and the accuracy of inferences derived from them. Constraints in this study limited the ability to run ad-hoc analysis to determine which platform users engaged in selective exposure and avoidance on. Future studies should consider testing differences in selective exposure and avoidance across platforms.

**Conclusion**

This study presents findings on the use of social media for news during the 2020 Presidential Election. The results speak to the increasing levels of polarization in society and the ways in which they translate, or do not translate, to online engagement behaviors on social media. In addition, this study highlights the importance of social media during the election cycle and confirms the rise in reliance on social media for political news. As the media landscape shifts and polarization continues to rise it is essential to examine the ways in which the two variables inform each other. Even though the findings suggest that neither Trump or Biden voters engaged in different levels of selective exposure, the data showcases the existence of selective exposure between the two voting bases. As such, exposure to one-sided news may have the potential to shape perceptions about candidates and effectively impact voting outcomes. The results presented here should also make us vigilant of how our social media tendencies affect our own bias and political perception and particularly heighten our attention during future elections.

## Appendix A.
## Survey Questions

What is your age?

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Other

What is your race?

- White
- Black or African American
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- Other

What is your highest level of education?

- High school diploma
- Some college, no degree
- Associates degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Doctorate degree

Please indicate your political affiliation

| | Strong Democrat | Leans Democrat | Moderate | Leans Republican | Strong Republican |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I most closely identify politically as | | • | • | • | • |

Please indicate the strength of your political ideology

| | Very Liberal | Liberal | Moderate | Conservative | Very Conservative |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I most closely identify politically as | • | • | • | • | • |

Please indicate how frequently you used each social media platform in the last two weeks:

| | Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Often | Very frequently |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Facebook | • | • | • | • | • |
| Twitter | • | • | • | • | • |
| Youtube | • | • | • | • | • |
| Instagram | • | • | • | • | • |
| LinkedIn | • | • | • | • | • |

Please select the option that best describes you:

| | Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Often | Very frequently |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I pay attention to which sources I receive political news from | • | • | • | • | • |

| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neither agree nor disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Obtain political information | • | • | • | • | • |
| Follow current political events | • | • | • | • | • |
| Learn about interesting political perspectives | • | • | • | • | • |
| Pass the time | • | • | • | • | • |
| Find entertaining information | • | • | • | • | • |
| Watch entertaining videos/pictures | • | • | • | • | • |
| Stay in contact with other people | • | • | • | • | • |
| Show other people that I care about them | • | • | • | • | • |
| Maintain existing friendship | • | • | • | • | • |
| Express interest my interests to others | • | • | • | • | • |
| Show others what I am doing | • | • | • | • | • |
| To post pictures, videos and updates | • | • | • | • | • |

Please indicate your political affiliation

| | Strong Democrat | Leans Democrat | Moderate | Leans Republican | Strong Republican |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I most closely identify politically as | • | • | • | • | • |

Please indicate the strength of your political ideology

| | Very Liberal | Liberal | Moderate | Conservative | Very Conservative |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I most closely identify politically as | • | • | • | • | • |

Please indicate how frequently you used each social media platform in the last two weeks:

| | Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Often | Very frequently |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Facebook | • | • | • | • | • |
| Twitter | • | • | • | • | • |
| Youtube | • | • | • | • | • |
| Instagram | • | • | • | • | • |
| LinkedIn | • | • | • | • | • |

Please indicate how often you comment on social media related to the following

| | Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Often | Very frequently |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Comment on non-like-minded news | • | • | • | • | • |
| Comment on like-minded news | • | • | • | • | • |
| Share non-like minded news | • | • | • | • | • |
| Share like-minded news | • | • | • | • | • |
| Receive non-like-minded news | • | • | • | • | • |
| Receive like-minded news | • | • | • | • | • |

Please indicate how strongly you agree with each of the following statements:

| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neither agree nor disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Political issues are important to me | • | • | • | • | • |
| I have a lot of knowledge when it comes to politics | • | • | • | • | • |
| I usually do not change my opinions when it comes to politics | • | • | • | • | • |

In the past month how often have you **accidentally** encountered information online that:

| | Never | About once | 2-3 times | Once a week | A few times a week | Everyday |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Was critical of the candidate you **supported** | • | • | • | • | • | • |
| Was favorable towards the candidate you **opposed** | • | • | • | • | • | • |
| Disagreed with your political views | • | • | • | • | • | • |

In the past month how often have you **intentionally** searched for information that

| | None | About once | 2-3 times | Once a week | A few times a week | Everyday |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Was positive toward a candidate you supported | • | • | • | • | • | • |
| Critical of a candidate you opposed | • | • | • | • | • | • |
| Supported your political views | • | • | • | • | • | • |

Please indicate whether or not you have done the following

| | No | Yes |
|---|---|---|
| Hidden someone's comments or posts on social media because you did not agree with their political views | • | • |
| Unfriended someone on social media because you did not agree with their political views | • | • |

Please indicate your level of political engagement on social media during 2020 presidential election.

| | Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Often | Very Frequently |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I posted political related content | • | • | • | • | • |
| I liked or shared a political post | • | • | • | • | • |
| I commented on political posts | • | • | • | • | • |
| I engaged in discussion on | • | • | • | • | • |

Please indicate how often you used each form of media for political information during the 2020 presidential election.

| | Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Often | Very Frequently |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Television | • | • | • | • | • |
| Newspaper | • | • | • | • | • |
| Radio | • | • | • | • | • |
| Internet(non social media websites) | • | • | • | • | • |
| Social media (Facebook, Twitter, Youtube) | • | • | • | • | • |
| Blogs | • | • | • | • | • |

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# Plot Yourself: An Audience Analysis Activity Modified for Online Learning

**Dakota Horn**
Instructor
Bradley University
dhorn@bradley.edu

**Shannon Sandoval**
Instructor in Residence
Bradley University
ssandoval@bradley.edu

**Cameron Horn**
Visiting Professor
Eureka College
chorn@eureka.edu

**Abstract**

*This activity allows students to become visual depictions during audience analysis. The activity can be used in a face-to-face or online delivery, and also used as a post-assessment. The activity uses an interactive Google Sheet to replicate the act of moving around the classroom and provides an active approach to audience analysis. This active approach creates a bonding experience for students to begin exploring audience members' knowledge and interest in topics to examine what it means to analyze an audience.*

*Previous Presentation-2022 National Communication Association Conference*

Audience analysis is an important topic discussed in a variety of classes including public speaking, public relations, and many other communication courses. What the act of audience analysis is and what purpose it serves vary from course to course. There is, however, a need for audience analysis activities that allow students to immerse themselves in the process. Audience analysis allows the communicator to better connect the message to the intended audience. One of the main functions of audience analysis allows for the identification of audience members and helping to connect the communicator with those individuals (Lucas, 2007). But what does exploring the concept of audience analysis look like? Can we find a way to allow students to become data points in the audience analysis process to explore what it looks like? The “plot yourself” activity presented here allows students the opportunity to explore audience analysis elements in a face-to-face classroom or online classroom. Also, it allows for a post-assessment analysis. The activity is an interactive and fun application of audience analysis concepts.

## Activities Consistent Across Modalities

Students want interactive activities and a chance to construct their learning (Chi, 2009). Often when trying to replicate a successful activity for online instruction, it is difficult to accomplish the same instructional quality. Instructors are concerned about the consistency of activities in face-to-face classrooms and then being able to replicate those activities in an online environment (Farmer & West, 2019). It may not be possible to have an effective activity automatically transferred into the online learning environment. The “plot yourself” activity has functions built in to allow it to be used with no technology in the classroom, technology in the classroom, or even to use the activity in an online setting (Martin, 2022). Instructors need to have activities that can easily and seamlessly pivot from one modality to another (Tatum & Broeckelman-Post, 2022). The “plot yourself” activity allows for use in a variety of settings.

## Activity

Regardless of the modality (online/face-to-face) of the activity, students have read an article or chapter on audience analysis or audience adaptation. Students also have a speech topic for the upcoming speech. Students announce their speech topic, and all other students then complete a few steps outlined later in the article. In an informative speech, for example, a student might choose “the evolution of video game music”. That subject prompts students to give immediate audience analysis feedback. The students move around the room or plot themselves on an electronic spectrum outlined in the variations below. The activity is ideally facilitated with 20 students in 50 minutes. The activity is described below in two different iterations. While describing the activity, this article uses an informative speech to explain the activity.

**Face to Face**

The instructor should place large post-it notes on the four walls of the room creating two spectrums depending on the speech or assignment. The spectrums are labeled front to back: “High Knowledge”/ “Low Knowledge”. Side to side: “High Interest”/ “Low Interest”. The words in quotations are what is written on the signs on each wall. It is also ideal to limit the amount of furniture in the room to have an open space to move around.

After the room is set up, instruct each student that they will announce their speech topic. All of the other students will then become “data points” on the visual spectrum. The students will place themselves toward the high-knowledge end of the spectrum if they feel they know a lot about the topic. Simultaneously, they do the same for the second prompt if they are interested or not interested. After all of the students are positioned, and they begin to talk about questions they have for the audience and what suggestions the audience might have for the speaker. As the students stand on their “spot” the speaker can ask them questions and audience members can provide details as to why they moved to this spot. Each topic should take 3-5 minutes to move around and go through the conversation. The first few students take a bit of prompting to generate conversation. But after that, the students generate their conversation naturally. A few questions to generate the conversation include:

For the audience members:

1. Why did you move to that spot?
2. What would make you change your spot?

   For the speaker:

3. What patterns do you see?
4. Where is your target audience?

*The spectrums can change. For example, the persuasive speech one spectrum is agree/disagree.

Repeat the process for each student's topic. At the end of the activity, students will all have visualized how their classmates plot themselves on the two spectrums.

**Online Adaptation**

In the online variation, the act of moving around the room is replicated with a Google sheet that plots the students' position on the grid[1]. In face-to-face classes, students would use their bodies as scatterplot dots and move around the room with right to left being a designated description and front to back being another designation (interest, knowledge, agreement, etc.). The Google sheet does the same thing by having students select a number on one tab and the second tab then plots them. This can be run in a live Zoom meeting or can be filled out during an asynchronous class. The activity is the same as using their bodies in a room but can now be visualized in two simple steps.

Using Google sheets, students would select numbers on a scale from 1-10 for the two prompts. Figure 1 shows tab number one. Each student has their own row. There are two columns to report "scores" for the two spectrums. For example, Student A chose an interest level of 8 and a knowledge of 2. For each area, 10 would be the highest, and 1 would be the lowest. Figure 1 shows the first tab where students select their numbers.

[1] The link allows for copying the plot activity and editing to one's preference.

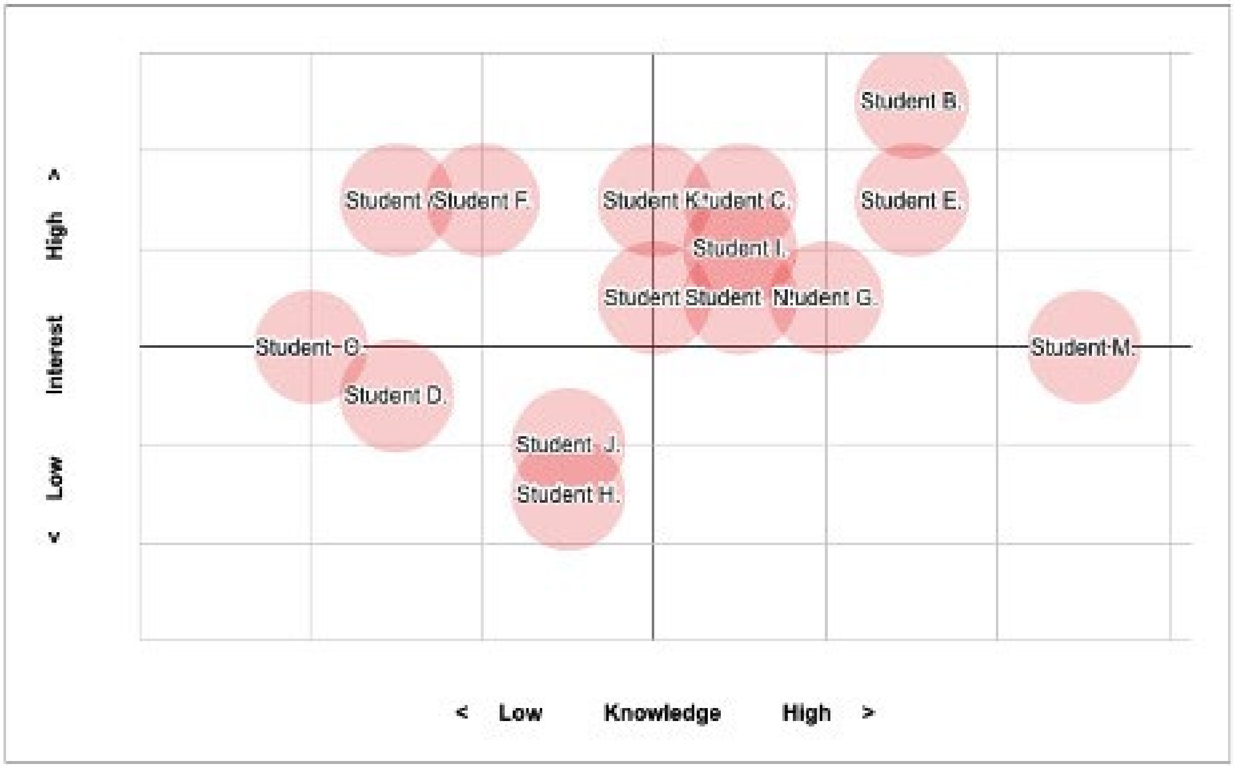
**Figure 1.**

A1 *fx* First

| | A | B | C | D |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | First | Last | Interest | Knowledge |
| 2 | Student | A | 8 | 2 |
| 3 | Student | B | 10 | 8 |
| 4 | Student | C | 8 | 6 |
| 5 | Student | D | 4 | 2 |
| 6 | Student | E | 8 | 8 |
| 7 | Student | F | 8 | 3 |
| 8 | Student | G | 6 | 7 |
| 9 | Student | H | 2 | 4 |
| 10 | Student | I | 7 | 6 |
| 11 | Student | J | 3 | 4 |
| 12 | Student | K | 8 | 5 |
| 13 | Student | L | 6 | 5 |
| 14 | Student | M | 5 | 10 |
| 15 | Student | N | 6 | 6 |
| 16 | Student | O | 5 | 1 |
| 17 | | | | |
| 18 | | | | |
| 19 | | | | |
| 20 | | | | |

After each student selects their numbers, every student is then automatically plotted on a second sheet in the file. This replicates the students moving around the room with one click of a button. Figure 2 depicts a simulated classroom visualization using the data entered by students in figure 1.

**Figure 2.**




Just like in the classroom version, the instructor should help initiate a conversation once the students have made their submissions. This has been facilitated in a live Zoom meeting, in the classroom with the visualization projected on the front screen, and using the chat function of an electronic meeting.

### Pre/Post Conversation

Finally, this activity allows for a documented pre/post assessment. Regardless of the modality, record the student's responses on the google sheet. Collect the responses from the Google sheet visualization from the second tab for the pre-conversation. It is important to ensure that you collect the visual information from the pre-conversation activity.

The next step of the activity occurs during the delivery of the speeches. After each student has delivered their speech, the rest of the students revisit the Google sheet where they recorded their previous reactions to the topic. They should then change their answers based on their new reactions to the topic. For instance, in the previous example, Student A listed their response as an “interest” of 8 and a “knowledge” of 2 for that topic. After the student of that topic has delivered their speech, Student A might feel that their interest has remained unchanged, but their knowledge is now greater and so would not change their interest response but change their knowledge response to a 5. Once all speeches are finished, collect the new responses for each student from the Google Sheets. It can be done by saving the file with students' names or taking a screenshot. The logistics can be selected by the instructor.

Pass out the responses from both the pre-and post-conversation to each speaker so they can see how effective their speech was overall. Group the students up with other students based on your objective for the activity. Instructors can pair the students with others that were interested and had large changes, pair them with students that had the opposite reaction intended (their response to the agreement reaction for the persuasive speech went down instead of up), etc. Allow the groups to discuss the reactions, ask questions, and gather in-person rationales for the reactions. This helps the students better understand how they communicate with different individuals and the impact their organization, words, and message might have on others.

**Debrief**

Students request to do this activity because it helps them visualize where their audience stands on speech topics. It helps them interact with those they will be speaking with. It helps answer questions and address concerns they had not considered. More importantly, this activity is functional in every type of course delivery option. The link to the Google sheet can be edited at any time for an asynchronous class. It can be edited simultaneously for a synchronous class. It provides a nice visual immediately for students to see. The activity allows students to narrow down outlines and subsequent content and focus on how much background information they may need to give. It can also help them choose between speech topics if, for example, they receive feedback that the majority of the class already agrees with their persuasive thesis (thus there is nothing to convince them of) or is just not interested in an informative topic as presented.

## Appraisal

Students ask for this activity for all of the speeches in the class because it allows for a very informal prompt to get to know each other a bit better. Students even ask to complete this activity after speeches to see the movement of their peers. Rather than sending out a survey or completely abandoning the audience analysis process altogether, the students become a part of the audience analysis process. They enjoy seeing where their peers stand (literally and figuratively) on the grid. Students often reference the conversation they had with members of the activity. They also begin to think about where a target audience is. They visualize that a target audience could potentially be a group of students grouped in a certain cluster on the grid rather than trying to message the entire audience. Despite our focus on audience, it is not uncommon for students to report that they did not understand the importance of considering your audience in shaping your message until they have had this visualization. Often they will report that they were focused on sharing the information that was most interesting or important to them, but the activity helped them to redefine their scope and prioritize the needs and wants of their audience while also recognizing it will ultimately result in a better performance from them as speakers.

It is also worth adding this activity helps students connect as mutual audience members and members of a learning community together. As they grow more comfortable and get to know each other, the activity also becomes a bit of a bonding experience which of the course helps facilitate future presentations and overall learning.

## Challenges

Just like any activity that involves student participation, certain students will be reluctant to move across the spectrum and share their viewpoints on why they stood where they stood. Students are concerned about insulting the person sharing their topic because if they are "not interested" that could be interpreted poorly. Expectations should be made that not all of us know or are interested in the same topic and that honesty should be utilized to continue the open dialogue and learning process of audience analysis.

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# "Talk to Your Doctor:" A Rhetorical Analysis of Burkean Identification in Direct-to-Consumer Pharmaceutical Advertisements

**Sophia N. Bates**
Undergraduate Student
Penn State University - Schuylkill

**Valerie Lynn Schrader**
Professor of Communication Arts & Sciences
Penn State University - Schuylkill
vls146@psu.edu

## Abstract

*In this article, we use rhetorical criticism as a research method to apply Burkean identification to four direct-to-consumer pharmaceutical television commercials, suggesting that the commercials create a state of consubstantiality with the audience. The identification strategies of common ground, the assumed "we" through the use of the word "you," and dissociation are utilized in these commercials to inspire consumers to initiate a conversation with their doctor about their healthcare needs. Based on the success direct-to-consumer pharmaceutical advertisements have had with inspiring patients to engage in a dialogue with healthcare providers, Burkean identification could have significant implications when used in other areas of health communication studies, particularly in regards to issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Applications of Burkean identification to health campaigns could increase their effectiveness and cause patient-consumers to be more receptive to the messages being presented.*

Direct-to-consumer pharmaceutical advertisements are used by pharmaceutical companies to appeal to potential customers and promote prescription medications to patient-consumers (Ventola, 2011, p. 669). Direct-to-consumer pharmaceutical advertisements are disseminated through the mass media outlets of television, radio, magazines, newspapers, YouTube channels, music applications, and social media (Wang & Kesselheim, 2013, p. 960). Pharmaceutical companies invest a significant amount of time, energy, and money every year marketing their products on mass media platforms with the intent of inspiring patient-consumers to initiate conversations with their healthcare providers about these products (Fahim, Toscani, Barone, Wang, & Gandhi, 2018, p. 114). Within the past several decades, the disclosure requirements that were mandated in direct-to-consumer drug advertising have changed significantly. In 1962, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) was given regulatory authority over direct-to-consumer drug advertisements; the FDA, in turn, created strict guidelines for these advertisements to follow (Fahim et. al, 2018, p. 114). However, these regulations were reconsidered in 1997, and were relaxed when the FDA issued a preliminary guidance document that eased the disclosure requirements (Fahim et. al, 2018, p. 114; Applequist & Ball, 2018, p. 211; Wang & Kesselheim, 2013, p. 960). The revision mandated that pharmaceutical companies include a "major statement" in their advertisements in which the most important risks were presented and which gave patient-consumers additional resources if they wanted to obtain more information about the medication (Fahim et al., 2018, pp. 114-115). While this decrease in regulatory guidelines creates concerns regarding the limited amount of information provided by these advertisements, banning direct-to-consumer pharmaceutical advertising entirely in the United States is highly unlikely because the right for pharmaceutical companies to advertise and market their products on mainstream media platforms is protected under the First Amendment of the Constitution (Wang & Kesselheim, 2013, p. 961).

Because direct-to-consumer pharmaceutical advertising prioritizes the promotion of prescription medications for financial gain above educating the public about healthcare issues (Applequist & Ball, 2018), patient-consumers should be wary of the rhetoric and persuasion tactics used by pharmaceutical companies to convince them that these products are the solution to their healthcare needs. Robert H. Shmerling (2019) of Harvard Health Publishing advises consumers to examine the language and linguistic strategies utilized in direct-to-consumer pharmaceutical advertising and to take into consideration that the primary purpose of these advertisements is to sell a product, not to increase the public's comprehension of a particular healthcare issue (para. 8). Consumers should also be cognizant of the time constraints in video and audio advertisements that limit full disclosure of vital pieces of information about the medication, including the omission of adverse effects, cost, and potential drug interactions with other medications (Ventola, 2011, pp. 673-674).

In this article, we use rhetorical criticism as a research method to apply Kenneth Burke's theoretical construct of identification to four direct-to-consumer pharmaceutical television commercials, suggesting that the commercials create a state of consubstantiality with the audience. The identification strategies of common ground, the assumed "we" through the use of the word "you," and identification through antithesis are utilized in these commercials to create a state of consubstantiality with patient-consumers who may feel inspired to take the initiative to talk to their healthcare providers and become active participants in their journeys to better health. In this study, we examine four pharmaceutical television commercials: Rexulti's "Put on a Brave Face" (2017), Dupixent's "Du-More: Backyards & Rain" (2020), Prolia's "Make or Break Moments: Baseball & Flea Market" (2020), and Trelegy's "Make a Stand" (2020). After reviewing over 100 direct-to-consumer pharmaceutical television commercials that aired from January 2017 to December 2020, we selected these four advertisements because we believe they effectively exhibited identification strategies in unique ways. All four of the commercials examined in this study resulted in financial increases for their respective pharmaceutical companies, suggesting that each advertisement was successful. This selection also includes four prescription medications that have different routes of administration: tablets administered orally, pre-filled injection pens administered by the patient, prescription injections administered subcutaneously by a healthcare professional, and inhalers administered through oral inhalation. We believe that the success of these advertisements was at least partially due to the strategic use of Burkean identification, and we contend that the use of identification could have major implications on health communication studies; for example, by applying Burkean identification to health campaigns, we may be able to increase their effectiveness and cause patient-consumers to be more receptive to the messages being presented.

## Direct-to-Consumer Pharmaceutical Advertisements

Direct-to-consumer pharmaceutical advertisements have been studied in a wide range of contexts across the discipline of health communication. Wood and Cronley (2014) studied changes in consumer reports of communication with healthcare providers regarding medications advertised in direct-to-consumer commercials over a 10-year time frame. They found that consumers in 2012 reported talking less about the name of the drug, how it compared with their current medication, and general information about the drug than they did in 2003. Wood and Cronley also found that fewer participants received the medication in 2012 than in 2003, and that attitudes towards the advertisements were more negative in 2012 than in 2003.

In their 2018 study, Applequist and Ball conducted a content analysis on direct-to-consumer pharmaceutical advertisements to examine how these advertisements utilize the time constraints of television commercials (p. 211). Applequist and Ball (2018) examined several aspects of television commercials, including the factual information presented, the portrayal of the medication, the emotional appeals used, and the lifestyle characteristics depicted in the advertisement. They concluded that pharmaceutical companies prioritize the promotion of drug benefits over educating the public about health issues, potentially conveying distorted information about these issues to the public (pp. 211-215).

Byrne, Niederdeppe, Avery, and Cantor (2013) also used content analysis as a research method in order to study print and television direct-to-consumer pharmaceutical advertisements for cholesterol lowering medication. They examined how these advertisements conveyed messages regarding both the importance of medication and behavior changes. Byrne et al. (2013) looked at print advertisements from 1994 to 2005 and television commercials from 1999 to 2007 and found that these advertisements provided mixed messages regarding the efficacy of diet and exercise on reducing cholesterol. They note that while most advertisements mentioned the efficacy of behavior changes on reducing cholesterol, these claims were often accompanied by competing messages in order to promote the medication.

Defibaugh (2019) examined the rhetorical and linguistic strategies utilized in direct-to-consumer pharmaceutical advertisements to appeal to patient-consumers (p. 1). In her study, Defibaugh (2019) argued that the rhetoric used in these advertisements reinforces what she calls the neoliberal ideology of medicine in the United States by positioning viewers as patient-consumers who are ultimately responsible for managing their own healthcare and taking advantage of the services that are available to them (pp. 1-2). Choi and Lee (2007) analyzed the perception of credibility that consumers have of direct-to-consumer pharmaceutical advertisements on the internet and how this perception influences patient-physician interactions (p. 137). Choi and Lee (2007) argued that the findings of their study "provide insights into how consumers evaluate and use the Web as a source of prescription drug information and how this usage translates into their dialogues with physicians" (p. 147). In his 2011 study, Mackert conducted interviews with advertising professionals who were involved in the creation of direct-to-consumer pharmaceutical advertisements, observing how these professionals' understanding of health literacy varied but noting that they were realistic about the balance between the dual roles of these advertisements in educating consumers about healthcare issues and promoting sales of the product. Klara, Kim, and Ross (2018) conducted a descriptive analysis of direct-to-consumer pharmaceutical advertisements that aired on television in the United States between January 2015 and July 2016 in order to "examine the presence of off-label promotion in broadcast DTC ads and to assess their adherence to FDA guidelines mandating fair balance in presentation of risks and benefits and prohibiting misleading advertising claims" (pp. 651-652). Upon completing their study, Klara et al. (2018) found that the quality of the information presented in direct-to-consumer pharmaceutical advertisements was poor. Furthermore, Klara et al. (2018) stated that these commercials were not compliant with FDA guidelines, and the suggestions of off-label promotions were common in medications prescribed for diabetes (p. 651).

Direct-to-consumer pharmaceutical advertisements have been closely analyzed in the health communication discipline to better understand their effectiveness. Techniques used in direct-to-consumer pharmaceutical advertisements may also be applied to health communication campaigns in order to make these campaigns more effective. It is our hope that this rhetorical analysis will contribute to this body of research by providing insights into how direct-to-consumer pharmaceutical advertisements appeal to audiences using the theoretical construct of Burkean identification as a means of persuading patient-consumers to initiate conversations with healthcare providers about pharmaceutical products.

## Burkean Identification

Kenneth Burke's theoretical construct of identification remains a highly useful concept in contemporary rhetorical theory and criticism. In *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Burke (1969) explains identification in the following terms:

> A is not identical with his colleague, B. But insofar as their interests are joined, A is *identified* with B. Or he may *identify himself* with B even when their interests are not joined, if he assumes that they are, or is persuaded to believe so (p. 20, emphasis Burke's).

Burke (1969) explains that "to identify A with B is to make A 'consubstantial' with B" (p. 21). The goal of identification is to achieve a state of consubstantiality, "an area of overlap between individuals or between an individual and a group [as] a basis for common motives and…as a *product* or *state* of identification that leads an individual to see things from the 'perspective' of a target" (Cheney, 1983, p. 146, emphasis Cheney's). John W. Kirk (1961) argues that identification "functions not only as a *process* whereby separate entities are brought together, but also as a *structure*" (p. 114, emphasis Kirk's).

Burke (1969) writes that "to begin with 'identification' is…to confront the implications of *division*," stating that "identification is affirmed with earnestness precisely because there is division. Identification is compensatory to division. If men were not apart from one another, there would be no need for the rhetorician to proclaim their unity" (p. 22, emphasis Burke's). For Burke (1969), identification is used in rhetoric as a means of achieving persuasion (p. 46). He explains:

> A speaker persuades an audience by the use of stylistic identification; his act of persuasion may be for the purpose of causing the audience to identify itself with the speaker's interests; and the speaker draws on identification of interests to establish rapport between himself and his audience (p. 46).

Burke (1969) argues that the components of "persuasion, identification ('consubstantiality') and communication (the nature of rhetoric as 'address')" are intertwined (p. 46). Dennis G. Day

(1960) states that the "concept of identification as a means of achieving persuasion is based on [Burke's] philosophical conception of 'substance' as an 'act' and the resulting possibilities for 'consubstantiality'" (p. 273). It is the connection between the "substance" and "act" that makes identification an effective strategy when persuasive messages are the goal of the interaction.

In his work on the use of identification in organizational communication contexts, Cheney (1983) discusses three strategies that serve to create identification: common ground, the assumed "we," and dissociation, or what Cheney (1983) refers to as "identification through antithesis" (p. 148). Cheney (1983) defines common ground as an identification strategy in which "the rhetor equates or links [himself/herself/themself] with others in an overt manner" by sharing his/her/their values and goals and offering his/her/their "identity" (Cheney, 1983, p. 148). Cheney (1983) describes the assumed "we" as a subtle yet powerful identification strategy used to draw similarities between parties that may have little in common (p. 154). Identification through antithesis is "the act of uniting against a common 'enemy'" (Cheney, 1983, p. 148), which may be encouraged by the rhetor because "an explicit dissociation from one target implies association with another" (p. 153). In this rhetorical analysis, we suggest that pharmaceutical companies utilize the identification strategies of common ground, the assumed "we" through the use of the word "you," and dissociation in direct-to-consumer pharmaceutical television commercials to appeal to patient-consumers.

## Method

This study utilizes rhetorical criticism as a research method in order to understand and interpret how direct-to-consumer pharmaceutical advertisements may persuade consumers to discuss the advertised medications and the health issues for which these medications may be prescribed with their healthcare provider. Browne (2007) describes rhetorical criticism as "one means through which we expose our structure or reasoning, acknowledge the agency of our interlocutors, and sustain our commitment to the ongoing practice of argument itself" (p. 109). Rhetorical criticism draws meaning from text and involves interpretation and judgment, rather than measurement (Zarefsky, 2006, p. 384). Andrews (1983) argues that a rhetorical critic "seeks to understand what is going on in order to interpret more fully the rhetorical dynamics involved in the production and reception of the message" (p. 6). As McKerrow (1989) notes, "the focus [of rhetorical criticism] is upon the critic's activity as a statement; the critic as inventor [of rhetorical texts] becomes arguer or advocate for the interpretation of collected fragments [of discourse]" (p. 108). Rhetorical critics create logical arguments about a specific text, using evidence within the text to support their arguments. Using rhetorical criticism as a research method, we examine four direct-to-consumer advertisements using Burkean identification as a theoretical lens. Through the application of this theoretical construct, we argue that the identification strategies of common ground, identification through antithesis, and the assumed "we" using the word "you" are utilized in these commercials to create a state of consubstantiality with patient-consumers who may be persuaded to begin conversations with healthcare providers in order to become active participants in their journeys to better health.

## Analysis

In this rhetorical analysis, we examine the following direct-to-consumer pharmaceutical television commercials: Rexulti's "Put on a Brave Face" (2017), Dupixent's "Du-More: Backyards & Rain" (2020), Prolia's "Make or Break Moments: Baseball & Flea Market" (2020), and Trelegy's "Make a Stand" (2020).

### *Rexulti— "Put on a Brave Face" (2017)*

Rexulti is a prescription atypical antipsychotic administered orally ("Highlights of Prescribing Information [Rexulti]," 2020, p. 1). If an antidepressant is not effective in treating a patient's depressive symptoms, the patient's medication regimen can be augmented with an atypical antipsychotic to reduce symptoms (Shelton & Papakostas, 2008, pp. 253-254). Commonly prescribed to supplement the pharmacological treatment for Major Depressive Disorder (MDD), Rexulti augments a patient's medication regimen and helps him/her/them build on the progress the patient has made with his/her/their antidepressant ("Highlights of Prescribing Information [Rexulti]," 2020, p. 1). Through the use of Burkean identification, the 2017 Rexulti commercial depicts the struggles that people with depression may experience as they attempt to mask their depression and "put on a brave face." Bulik (2017) of *Fierce Pharma* reports that Rexulti's sales increased 600% when the "Put on a Brave Face" television advertisement campaign was initially released in 2016. While sales increases could be due to a number of factors, Bulik (2017) suggests that the "Put on a Brave Face" advertisement campaign was a major contributor to Rexulti's sales increase. In fact, the success of this advertisement prompted a revival of this campaign in 2017 (Bulik, 2017).

The 2017 Rexulti commercial begins with a woman at a bridal shower. She is looking away from the camera as a somber piano melody is playing in the background. As someone tries to talk to her, she puts a smiley face cutout over her face. The lights dim as she turns her head away (See Image 1). A voice-over says, "Even when you're taking an antidepressant, you may still be struggling with depression." The scene changes to another woman standing alone in a break room at work when two colleagues approach her. She forces a slight smile and holds a smiley face cutout over her face. The lights dim as she turns her head away, looking off into the distance. The voice-over says, "you try to 'put on a brave face,' but inside, symptoms linger."

The scene changes a third time to a man sitting at a dinner table with his family. As a family member tries to talk with him, he holds the smiley face cutout over his face. The lights dim as he turns his head away.

The voice-over states, “Rexulti, when added to your antidepressant, has been shown to reduce symptoms of depression. It may help you feel better without giving up the progress you may have made with your antidepressant.” The scene transitions to a doctor’s office where the second woman is seen speaking with her healthcare provider. She is holding the smiley face cutout in her hand as her doctor writes out a prescription for Rexulti (See Image 2). The voice-over informs patient-consumers of the risks and adverse effects associated with taking Rexulti, addressing the audience using the singular second-person pronouns “you” and “your,” as the woman is seen back at her workplace smiling and talking with her coworkers. She puts the smiley face cutout in the pocket of her blazer. The man is seen grilling at a family get-together. He tucks his smiley face cutout into his apron. The first woman is seen at a bridal store looking at wedding dresses with her friends. She puts her smiley face cutout in her purse (See Image 3). The commercial ends with a voice-over saying, “Talk to your doctor about adding Rexulti, and feel better about facing the world.”

This commercial depicts three individuals struggling to “put on a brave face” in everyday social situations. Essentially, these individuals are engaging in what Erving Goffman describes as facework. Goffman (1967) defines face as “the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself [herself/themself]…in terms of approved social attributes—albeit an image that others may share, as when a person makes a good showing” for himself/herself/themself (p. 5). The individuals in the commercial hold smiley face cutouts over their faces in an attempt to mask their depression symptoms from the people around them. The lights dim, and their faces turn away as they internalize their depressive thoughts and dissociate from the current moment. Some patient-consumers who watch this commercial may have similar feelings of depression and loneliness and may feel socially obligated to “put on a brave face” to hide their depression symptoms from friends, colleagues, and loved ones. Burke (1969) writes that “two persons may be identified in terms of some principle they share in common, an ‘identification’ that does not deny their distinctions” (p. 21). Patient-consumers who experience the feeling of obligation to mask their depression symptoms may find that they identify with the individuals in the advertisement. As a result of this identification, patient-consumers may develop a state of consubstantiality with the individuals in the commercial as they see the world through the eyes of someone, who, like them, is trying to manage their depression. This consubstantiality may lead to persuasion, as patient-consumers may follow the lead of the individuals in the advertisement and consult their healthcare providers about adding Rexulti to their healthcare treatment plans.

Patient-consumers who experience depression may also identify with the frustration of their antidepressants being ineffective. This commercial uses the common ground technique to illustrate the sense of hopelessness patient-consumers may experience when their depression is seemingly treatment-resistant; this experience may cause them to identify with the individuals depicted in the advertisement who are portrayed as experiencing this same sense of hopelessness. Inspired by the individuals in the commercial who put away their smiley face cutouts and engage in activities with reduced symptoms, patient-consumers may initiate a conversation with their healthcare providers about Rexulti with the hope that they, like the individuals in the advertisement, won’t have to “put on a brave face” anymore.

***Dupixent— "Du-More: Backyards & Rain" (2020)***

Dupixent is a prescription single-dose pre-filled injection pen administered by the patient subcutaneously ("Highlights of Prescribing Information [Dupixent]," 2021, p. 1). Dupixent is prescribed to treat moderate-to-severe atopic dermatitis (eczema), asthma, and chronic rhinosinusitis with nasal polyposis in adults and adolescences 12 years old or older ("Highlights of Prescribing Information [Dupixent]," 2021, p. 1). The 2020 Dupixent commercial portrays three individuals engaging in fun activities, which may cause patient-consumers to admire their carefree nature and want to seek excitement, too. The full year financial report for Regeneron Pharmaceuticals illustrated a global net sales increase of 75% in 2020 from 2019 with Dupixent pulling in $4 billion in sales (Blankenship, 2021; "Regeneron reports fourth quarter and full year 2020 financial and operating results," 2021). These figures suggest that this commercial was successful in persuading patient-consumers to talk with their medical provider about Dupixent. We believe that the commercial's success is at least partially due to its use of Burkean identification.

The commercial begins at an outdoor party where a man is being spun around in circles before he hits a piñata with a stick. As the piñata breaks open and candy and confetti fill the air, a voice-over states, "here's to the doers—to all the people who realize they can 'du more' with less asthma. Thanks to Dupixent" (See Image 4). As a voice-over lists which medical diagnoses Dupixent is commonly prescribed for, the scene transitions to another man in his backyard watching his kids slide down a backyard waterslide. He smiles, tosses the hose aside, and decides to join in on the fun by sliding down with them (See Image 5). The scene changes to a woman standing under a pavilion waiting for the rain to stop, as a voice-over states the risks and adverse effects of taking Dupixent, addressing patient-consumers through the use of the second person pronouns "you" and "your." The woman smiles and decides to make a break for it as she braces herself and runs out to her car carrying her purse over her head in the rain (See Image 6). The commercial concludes with a voice-over stating, "Talk to your asthma specialist about Dupixent."

This 2020 commercial portrays three individuals who, with the help of the advertised medication, can now live their everyday lives with reduced limitations from their asthma. At the climax of the excitement—breaking open the piñata, sliding down the hill, and jumping off of the sidewalk—the camera angle moves 180 degrees in slow motion around the individuals in order to depict their feelings of liberation from the condition that once restricted their engagement in everyday activities. Patient-consumers watching this commercial on their television screens at home may identify with the carefree nature of the individuals in the advertisement who engage in light-hearted activities that they may have enjoyed as a child. Common ground may be established because the patient-consumer, like the individuals in the commercial, may seek excitement and want to engage in fun activities. People may also identify with the individuals in the commercial who, with the help Dupixent, are able to liberate themselves from the limitations that asthma has on their lives. A state of consubstantiality may be created as patient-consumers envision their lives without the limitations of asthma. This consubstantiality may persuade patient-consumers to reach out to their doctors about Dupixent so that they can engage in the fun activities they used to enjoy and "du more with less asthma."

***Prolia— "Make or Break Moments: Baseball & Flea Market" (2020)***

Prolia is a prescription injection administered subcutaneously by a healthcare professional every six months ("Highlights of Prescribing Information [Prolia]," 2020, p. 1). Prolia is prescribed to treat a wide array of medical conditions including postmenopausal osteoporosis in women with high risk for fracture and glucocorticoid-induced osteoporosis ("Highlights of Prescribing Information [Prolia]," 2020, p. 1). Prolia is also used to increase bone mass in men with osteoporosis and as a treatment for bone loss in men receiving androgen deprivation therapy for prostate cancer as well as in women receiving adjuvant aromatase inhibitor therapy for breast cancer ("Highlights of Prescribing Information [Prolia]," 2020, p. 1). Amgen's full year 2020 financial report revealed a 3% increase in sales for Prolia ("Amgen Reports Fourth Quarter and Full Year 2020 Financial Results," 2021). Amgen speculated that sales were lower than expected in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the six-month dosing regimen of Prolia, which lowers the number of repeated patient-consumers in a given year ("Amgen Reports Fourth Quarter and Full Year 2020 Financial Results," 2021). Despite these limitations, a 3% increase suggests that the commercial was at least somewhat successful, though perhaps not as successful as the other three advertisements studied in this article. Through the use of identification, this commercial appeals to patient-consumers who may identify with the women in the advertisement, particularly if these patient-consumers can recall a similar situation in their own lives when a little mishap could have led to a close call with their health.

At the beginning of the 2020 commercial for Prolia, a woman is seen at a kids' baseball game walking from a concession stand with a drink in one hand and a hotdog in the other. She is approaching her seat when she is nearly knocked over by a boy as he attempts to catch a pop-up. Before there is a collision, the screen freezes, and the woman is seen wincing as she braces herself for impending impact. A voice-over poses the following question: "If you have postmenopausal osteoporosis and a high risk for fracture, now might not be the best time to ask yourself, 'are my bones strong?'" The scene changes to a flea market where two women are posing for a picture. As they take a step back for the picture, one woman almost falls over a box of vinyl records, but the other woman catches her before she trips backwards. A voice-over states, “Life’s full of make or break moments. That’s why it’s so important to help reduce your risk of fracture with Prolia.” The voice-over informs patient-consumers of the risks associated with taking Prolia, addressing the audience using “you” and “your” pronouns. The women continue enjoying their afternoon, barely avoiding other little mishaps along the way. The commercial ends by posing a question to the audience: “Are *you* ready? Ask your doctor about Prolia” (See Image 7).

This commercial depicts the unpredictability of everyday life and how small accidents can lead to serious consequences for those at high risk for fracture. Patient-consumers who are clumsy, accident-prone, or consider themselves unlucky may identify with the two women in this advertisement because small mishaps could lead to medical issues if proper precautions are not taken. Patient-consumers who have postmenopausal osteoporosis may connect with the women in this advertisement because they may see themselves potentially being in a situation where a little accident could lead to a fracture. This consubstantiality may lead to persuasion, causing some patient-consumers to ask their healthcare provider about Prolia.

This commercial also depicts the identification strategy of dissociation, or what Cheney (1983) refers to as “identification through antithesis” (p. 148). Cheney (1983) describes “identification through antithesis” as “the act of uniting against a common ‘enemy’” (p. 148). Patient-consumers watching this television commercial may label a bone fracture or an accident that may lead to a fracture as a “common enemy” and unite against this antagonist by asking their doctor about Prolia. This consubstantiality formed by the creation of a common enemy may persuade patient-consumers to initiate a conversation with their providers about this medication, who may, in turn, prescribe Prolia as a preventative treatment for osteoporosis, thus helping the patient-consumers fight against the common enemy—bone fractures. As a result of the achieved consubstantiality and identification through antithesis, patient-consumers with postmenopausal osteoporosis and a high risk for fracture may seek medical treatment to prevent serious injuries that can occur from life's little mishaps.

***Trelegy— "Make a Stand" (2020)***

Trelegy is a prescription inhaler administered through oral inhalation ("Highlights of Prescribing Information [Trelegy]," 2020, p. 1). Trelegy is a maintenance treatment for patients with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), and it is also used to treat asthma in patients 18 years or older ("Highlights of Prescribing Information [Trelegy]," 2020, p. 1). Bratulic (2021) reports that the Trelegy Ellipta generated $344 million in sales in 2020, a 28% increase from 2019. This suggests that this commercial was indeed successful, resulting in a sales increase of its product for its company. We contend that Burkean identification played a role in the success of this Trelegy commercial. This 2020 Trelegy commercial targets patient-consumers with COPD who may identify with the woman in the commercial as she treats the health condition that she decides will no longer limit her ability to participate in the activities she enjoys.

This 2020 commercial depicts a woman sitting in her living room watching a television commercial for Trelegy. The song "Feeling Good" is played overhead as she turns off her television and takes a deep breath and listens to the song's lyrics: "Birds flying high/ You know how I feel/ Breeze driftin' on by/ You know how I feel/ It's a new dawn/ It's a new day/ And I'm feeling good." She cuts a hospital bracelet off of her wrist with a pair of scissors, and as it falls, a pamphlet that reads "COPD and Your Lungs" is seen on her coffee table (See Image 8). She stands up from the couch, tosses a pack of cigarettes on the coffee table, and walks away as a voice-over says, “if you’ve been taking COPD sitting down, it’s time to make a stand. Start a new day with Trelegy.” She walks around her house and collects a few items, including an ashtray, as the voice-over states that Trelegy works to improve lung function, helps prevent future COPD flare ups, and makes breathing easier. As she packs up her car and takes items to a flea market to sell, the voice-over informs the audience of the risks and adverse effects of taking Trelegy, addressing the patient-consumers using “you” and “your.” The commercial concludes with the voice-over stating, “Ask your doctor about once-daily Trelegy and save at trelegy.com.”

When the woman cuts the hospital bracelet off her wrist and tosses her cigarettes on the coffee table, she is “taking a stand” against her condition. Patient-consumers may identify with the woman in the commercial who is tired of the limitations her condition is putting on her life. They may see their frustrations portrayed in an individual who also suffers from COPD, and, as a result of the developed consubstantiality, they may reach out to their healthcare providers about Trelegy. This commercial uses identification to persuade patient-consumers to initiate a conversation with their healthcare provider about this medication with the hope that the provider will prescribe Trelegy, thus generating sales for GSK pharmaceuticals.

Like the Prolia advertisement, this commercial utilizes “identification through antithesis” as an identification strategy (Cheney, 1983, p. 148). Though it can be argued that all four of these advertisements identify the common enemy as the medical condition that is putting limitations on those living with the disease, this commercial in particular emphasizes “taking a stand” against COPD. The phrase “taking a stand” enables this advertisement to specifically label COPD as the enemy that is restricting the woman’s life; if one is “taking a stand,” he/she/they is doing so against an adversary. This differs from other phrases in other direct-to-consumer pharmaceutical advertisements, which emphasize common ground more than identification through antithesis.

Mary Specker Stone (1997) writes that in the era of managed healthcare, "patients are increasingly being viewed as agents in the management of their own chronic diseases" (p. 201). This shift of agency in healthcare is creating tension between the growing trend of greater patient agency and "the constraints of biomedical text conventions concerning doctor and patient roles" by challenging the agency of the healthcare professional whose goal is to treat, cure, and manage the pathophysiology of the disease itself (Stone, 1997, pp. 201-203). By identifying COPD as the common enemy, this commercial implies that the chronic medical condition of COPD is something that can be managed with proper care and compliance. This commercial suggests that with the help of Trelegy, patient-consumers can become active agents of their own healthcare. The achieved state of consubstantiality that patient-consumers may feel with the woman in the commercial may inspire them to initiate a conversation with their healthcare provider about Trelegy as an ally in their fight against COPD.

## Conclusion

This rhetorical analysis examined four direct-to-consumer pharmaceutical advertisements through the lens of Burkean identification. Through the application of this theoretical construct, we argue that the identification strategies of common ground, identification through antithesis, and the assumed "we" are utilized in these commercials to create a state of consubstantiality with patient-consumers who may feel inspired to talk with their healthcare providers and become active participants in their journeys to better health. Though we found that all four commercials utilize the common ground technique and "identification through antithesis" (Cheney, 1983, p. 148) strategies, we note that the Trelegy commercial in particular relies heavily on “identification through antithesis” to persuade patient-consumers to talk to their healthcare providers about the medication in order to combat the “common enemy” of COPD.

In this study, we found that the strategy of the assumed “we” was also used in all four commercials, but in a unique way. While the words “we” and “our,” which are frequently used to create Burkean identification (Cheney, 1983), were not used in the advertisements, all four advertisements use the singular second-person pronouns “you” and “your” in voice-overs, encouraging patient-consumers to “talk to *your* doctor.” In order to comply with FDA disclosure requirements, each commercial examined in this rhetorical analysis includes a “major statement” in which the voice-over informs the audience of the potential risks and adverse effects of taking the medication advertised; these statements address patient-consumers directly using the second-person pronouns “you” and “your.” We believe that the use of these second-person pronouns is a variation of the assumed “we,” replacing the implicit “we” that would reference both the individual in the advertisement and the patient-consumer with the word "you" to imply the same connection. This functions in the same way that the word "we" might be used in a speech to achieve consubstantiality between a speaker and the audience. Cheney (1983) notes that the “assumed ‘we’ is both a subtle and powerful identification strategy” that can be utilized to create or acknowledge a commonality between people and unify them based on their similarities (p. 154). We suggest that the word “you,” functioning as the assumed “we,” may be used to create consubstantiality in health communication contexts, such as in the pharmaceutical advertisements examined here. The use of the singular second-person pronoun as the assumed “we” could potentially be used in other health communication contexts, such as health communication campaigns and public service announcements regarding health issues in order to connect with patient-consumers and persuade them to communicate about their health and public health concerns.

The use of identification strategies in direct-to-consumer pharmaceutical advertisements may provide insight on how to address challenges in health communication moving forward, particularly in regards to communication about COVID-19. The COVID-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc across the globe with more than 695 million cases and 6.9 million deaths worldwide since its initial surge in March 2020 ("COVID-19 Coronavirus Pandemic," 2023). Though scientists have established ways to prevent the spread of this global pandemic, such as wearing a mask, social distancing, and getting the COVID vaccine, many people have disregarded scientific expertise for a variety of personal reasons. Furthermore, getting the COVID vaccine has become a politicized issue in the United States rather than a remedy to stop the spread of COVID-19. Refusal to comply with the CDC recommendations to wear masks and get the COVID vaccine has exacerbated the effects of this pandemic, prolonged the length of the pandemic, and worsened the outcomes. We suggest that the use of identification strategies could increase the effectiveness of health communication campaigns and convince people to get their COVID vaccine and wear a mask when in crowded public indoor spaces. Greater emphasis on the assumed "we" may persuade people to follow CDC recommendations. Positioning COVID-19 as the common enemy through dissociation or creating ways in which people can identify and engage with the message being presented may be an effective means of convincing people to wear a mask and socially distance themselves in public.

Like all studies, this rhetorical analysis has limitations. This study is limited to the analysis of four direct-to-consumer pharmaceutical advertisements in the form of television commercials. Future research may analyze direct-to-consumer pharmaceutical advertisements disseminated through other mass media outlets such as radio, magazines, and internet advertisements. Future research opportunities may also explore the use of the word “you” as an assumed “we” persuasive tactic in other health communication contexts. Furthermore, future research may include surveys, interviews, or focus groups in addition to rhetorical analysis in order to better understand how patient-consumers connect with and are persuaded by direct-to-consumer pharmaceutical advertisements.

This project used rhetorical analysis as a research method to examine direct-to-consumer pharmaceutical television commercials through the lens of Burkean identification. We argue that through the use of the common ground technique, identification through antithesis, and the assumed “we” through the word “you,” direct-to-consumer pharmaceutical advertisements create a state of consubstantiality with patient-consumers who, upon watching the television commercial, may feel inspired to reach out to their healthcare professionals and initiate dialogues that will put them on the right path in their journeys to better health. Inspiring patient-consumers to take the initiative and become active agents in their healthcare decisions provides implications for health communication studies in terms of combating challenges related to healthcare, especially as we continue to persevere through the COVID-19 pandemic.

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## Appendix

### Image 1


### Image 2

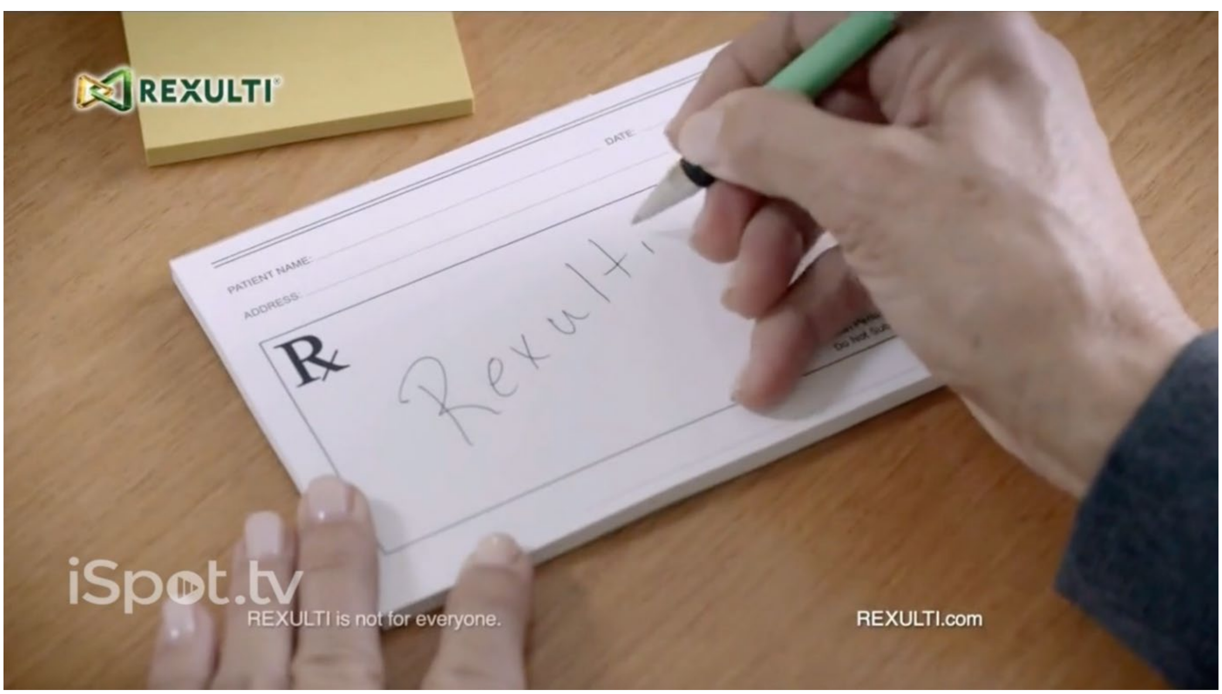


**Image 3**

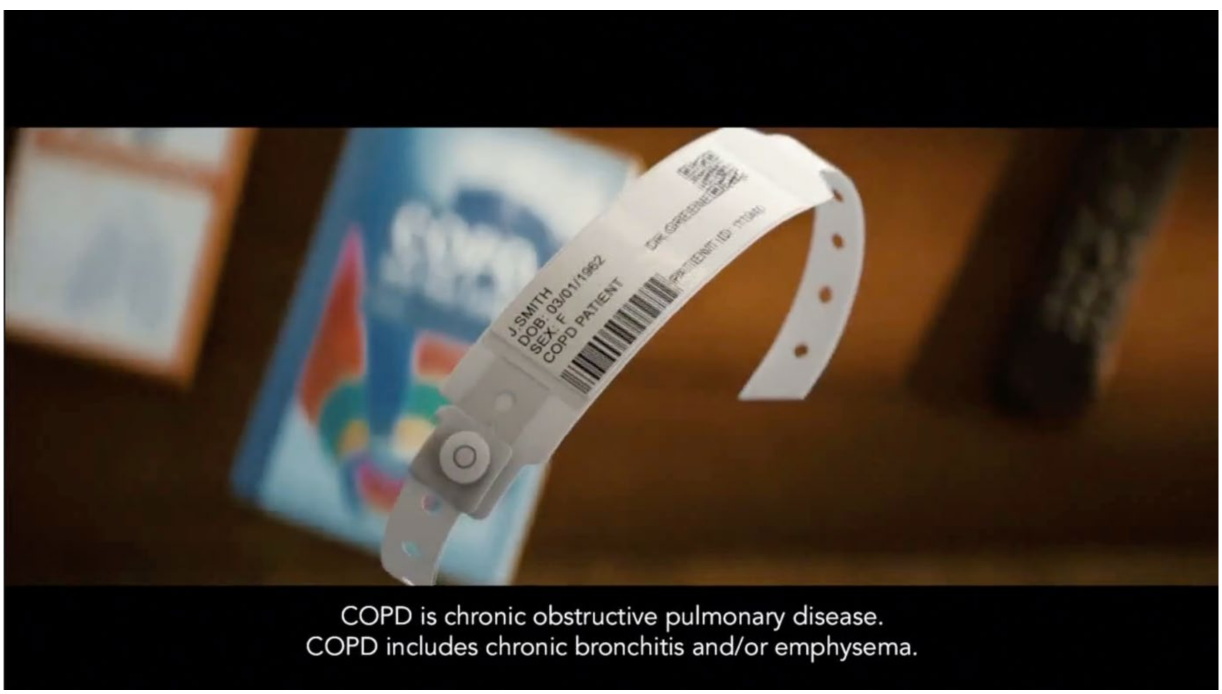

**Image 4**

**Image 5**


**Image 6**

**Image 7**

**Image 8**



# The Use and Importance of Gaming and Roleplay in Identity Negotiation

**Sam Weigel**
Independent Scholar

**Justin Rudnick**
Associate Professor
Minnesota State University, Mankato
Justin.rudnick@mnsu.edu

## Abstract

*This paper presents roleplaying games as a safe and effective venue for self-expression that can help to mitigate the effect of societal pressures when exploring identity. Interviews with 11 participants from the roleplaying game community demonstrate how roleplay can help facilitate the creation of safe spaces and foster creativity and inclusivity. A thematic analysis revealed roleplaying games contribute to the creation of safe spaces, opportunities for self-expression and individual agency, and steps towards greater self-actualization. This study builds upon existing research into identity adaptation theory, queer theory, symbolic convergence theory, organizational communication theory, and the performance of identity.*

Games have been used for decades as a venue for exploration of complex ideas and stories both by their developers and players. "Video games" commonly refer to interactive activity controlled via electronic input, often including a multiplayer or communal component, whereas tabletop or "traditional" games tend to forego any kind of digital component and are played using pen and paper, or completely in the players' minds. While there is an increasingly prevalent interest in the field of game studies and how it relates to communication, this essay highlights several specific areas of interest regarding communication within and around gaming and roleplay. Numerous studies exist regarding the stories and rituals around video games and the individuals who perform them (see Banks & Martey, 2018; Delwiche & Henderson, 2013). Research also has begun to explore the collaborative interaction within games and how these interactions shape the way individuals interact in the real world (Flueggen et al., 2018; Gee et al., 2017). Of particular interest is the scholarly attention given to the genesis of both personal identity and culture through roleplay enabled by both traditional and video games (Harvey, 2017).

In this paper, we explore new research generated through interviews with 11 members of the roleplay community. We investigate the potential of roleplaying games to offer players opportunities to experiment with or perform new or emerging identities. These interviews help to demonstrate how roleplay can be leveraged as a tool for the exploration of identity, and the creation of safe spaces for the performance of new and existing identities.

**Ritual and Collaboration**

The connection between ritual and collaboration is a good starting point for this discussion. Gee et al. (2017) explained "any routine can become a ritual if it takes on a symbolic meaning" (p. 477). The social nature of gaming and the specific emphasis on prosocial interaction even within violent games (Passmore & Holder, 2014) serves as a platform to create shared rituals between gamers and between observers of games.

While the playing of games can be a shared ritual activity, so too can the observation of games played by others, regardless of the subject matter of the game itself. Twitch.tv is a social media platform developed to provide opportunities for exactly this type of interaction. A Twitch channel run by an individual gamer can reach thousands of individuals at a time around the globe, and allows for multiple channels of communication simultaneously. Johnson and Woodcock (2019) noted a Twitch channel can include:

> …a webcam that displays the player's face (and therefore emotions and expressions), a chat box to interact with viewers, pop-up notifications of donations or 'subscriptions'

> (when viewers agree to give monthly financial support to the streamer), animations or pictures, hyperlinks to their presences on other social media sites. (p. 337)

These interactions often become rituals as users regularly appear to view and participate in streams as a way of checking in with their favorite streamers, or when they make a point to renew their subscription along with a comment encouraging the streamer.

Such types of shared experiences can lead to the formation of identities through ritual activity. Ritual is seen as an important element of family and community bonding, and rituals that exist within spaces created through gaming can emphasize social interaction and the performance of identity, even when not all parties are actively engaged in the game. Harvey (2017) recounted a memory of a collaborative performance between himself and his father, facilitated by video games:

> Operating my computer, situated in the fug of a family living room in which my disabled father chain-smoked cigarettes, was a live performance. The computer couldn't remember, meaning we had to. Together these were such issues that I lobbied my parents for the next generation of the same computer, replete with 64K and a disc drive, knowing this would open up a vast array of new gaming opportunities, while also allowing me to save my own creativity. The recall of this itself lingers, as one of my most powerful memories of my late father. (p. 13)

Harvey's discussion of the interaction between himself, a gamer, and his father, an observer, is a significant representation of how he identified with his father. The ritual of gaming and observation served to help define and grow their relationship and create a shared social space where Harvey and his father were both granted agency to perform individual identity.

In the same way, the interactions between gamers are an important factor in constituting identity within the gaming space. Delwiche and Henderson (2013) outlined how older gamers in particular were more focused on social dimensions of games than on things like in-game achievements or combat. These social dimensions spread outside of games through the conversations and interactions that surround them. Most games occur within a social context (Passmore & Holder, 2014) and massively multiplayer online games in particular "have evolved into places for people to meet up, find romantic partners and maintain relationships" (Huynh et al., 2013, p. 1).

The existence of a wide array of collectible gaming peripherals such as controllers, headsets, and other related media generate important social spaces where individuals can come together through a shared interest in ritual activity. In a study on the collecting of obscure game peripherals, Mora-Cantallops and Bergillos (2018) linked this act of collecting to identity in the same way. Just as antique car collectors gather and connect via their shared interests and the ritual act of collecting, so too can collectors of gaming related artifacts.

**The Performance and Exploration of Identity**

Often our real-world identities cross over into gaming and gaming-adjacent spaces. Many gamers come to closely identify with characters or character traits exhibited in games. Further, games which allow for character customization and creation provide a blank canvas for any kind of self-expression the player desires. In these ways, video games give their players a greater freedom to create idealized versions of themselves, and to explore identities they may not be comfortable expressing in "real" spaces. For example, a male player with gender dysphoria may be more comfortable playing a game using a female avatar. While the exploration of identity may be financially or socially taxing outside of games, within them a simple selection offers an opportunity to experiment with a different identity. As a result, the different ways in which we play games can be expressions of our individuality. Even if the in-game goals of players may be similar (Flueggen et al., 2018), the ways in which we achieve the goals and explore spaces are not. Navarro-Remesal (2018) explained, in some cases, in-game identities are formed based on our real-world identities long before "play" even begins. In this way, games in which the player customizes their avatar allow for the performance of specific genders, sex, and body identities.

This freedom of identity expression has significance beyond just the in-game context. In fact, "individuals are highly motivated to make important aspects of their online identity a 'social reality' and achieved this by migrating their in-game identities into real life" (Huynh et al., 2013, p. 8). These identity performances create new meaningful cultures specific to the games and gaming communities within which they are first explored. "They allow individuals to be themselves and find groups that accept them the way they are" (Flueggen et al., 2018, p. 8). Through these self-representations, players find new ways of relating to the games and to each other (Gonzalo-Iglesia et al., 2018, p. 156).

Games like Dungeons and Dragons, which encourage players to create identities from scratch, with few prompts or guidelines, take this a step further. Players are free in this space to create any character or identity that seems interesting and are afforded opportunities to interact within the game world in a variety of ways unique to pen-and-paper gaming. In many instances, gamers are encouraged by their fellow players to adopt voices, mannerisms, and perspectives not their own and these affectations provide a unique glimpse into a life they may otherwise have limited exposure to. In this way tabletop gaming provides a versatile platform for the exploration of identity.

**Linguistic Convergence and Intertextuality**

Even when games are not constitutive of new identities, they are platforms for the formation of communities based on already existing cultures and identities. Within these communities we see formation of new language and cultural norms (Banks & Martey, 2018). These new linguistic concepts are shared among members of relevant groups and soon become normalized parts of video game-connected and adjacent cultures. An example is the nicknames given to the original Xbox controller due to its large size: "Fatty," and later: "the Duke" (Kocurek, 2018). This terminology is exposed to gamers and retail workers in electronics stores, family or friends of gamers, etc. These new semantic tools give individuals and groups new ways of communicating specific to the communities to which they belong and allow interaction with the world in unique ways. They also give game players the ability to spread their culture to non-natives.

In other situations, players find ways to create group identities by creating labels for themselves. A group of players in Dungeons and Dragons may refer to themselves, both in and out of game, as an "adventuring party," or by their roles within that party. Players who have nurturing personalities outside of game may choose to adopt roles like "healer," "cleric," or "druid," to reflect their interest in supporting others. However, the roles chosen by players may also exist in contrast to their personalities, and a player may choose to play a "villainous" role, out of sheer curiosity or as an outlet to explore concepts difficult to explore in the real world. No matter the role played, these experiences push players to ask questions about themselves and the world around them, and force them to adapt linguistic tendencies to accurately communicate choices made in game.

While the language used by players within games may often be abstract, the language used by games to communicate has a lot in common with other forms of media. Often games, in a similar way to films, music, etc., will make "intertextual references by naming well-known people and stories in the source culture" (Pettini, 2015, p. 281). In this way, games communicate to a wide audience and have an influence beyond just the individuals interacting with them directly. The use of cultural touchstones in gaming rely on and enhance their meanings by connecting them to new networks of stories and consumers.

**Problem Statement and Research Questions**

Though the academic language surrounding video games points to them as a significant venue for cultural growth and performance of individual identity, there is little research into specific individuals' actualization of gaming-borne identities in the real world, or the connection between identities and the ritual activity of group roleplay and gaming. In particular, roleplay provides a safe venue for the exploration of gender and sexual identities, among others, however few case studies show individuals who have had such experiences. Therefore, a need exists to address whether roleplaying games actually are a viable platform for the negotiation and exploration of individual or group identities. Further, we seek out stories from individuals who successfully translate identities explored and developed through roleplay into the real world, and determine what factors allowed them to do so successfully. Further research into this topic, and the mainstream acceptance of roleplaying games as a viable method of identity exploration can help create safer spaces for marginalized individuals and groups to perform their identities and begin to live their in-game experiences in the real world. To that end, we posed the following research questions to guide this inquiry:

RQ1: How do roleplaying games provide a viable platform for the negotiation and exploration of identity?

RQ2: How do role-players translate their in-game identities into the real world?

## Methods

### Participants

We engaged in in-depth semi-structured interviews. Qualitative interviewing was an appropriate approach for this project because it allows participants to "provide accounts – or rationales, explanations, and justifications for their actions and opinions" (Tracy, 2013, p. 132). Following IRB-approved protocols, participants were recruited through a call shared on the first author's personal Twitter account. Participants were sourced via an open call on twitter for individuals from the roleplay community willing to talk about their roleplaying experiences. A total of 11 members of the roleplaying and gaming communities agreed to be interviewed for the study. Participants were asked to share demographic identifications, and they represented a range of gender and sexual identities, including: cisgender, transgender, and non-binary persons; heterosexual, gay, and asexual participants. Participants were primarily in their 20s, though some participants had been playing roleplaying games for up to 30 years. Interviewees agreed to share their experiences with the understanding that the information is confidential.

### Procedures

Participants were provided with an informed consent form and an invitation to complete an interview. Interviews were conducted remotely via Zoom or, when Zoom was not a possibility, through an equivalent teleconferencing platform. Interviews followed a semi-formal schedule which consisted of 25 questions regarding the interviewees' experiences with roleplay and their own analyses of their personal identities (e.g., "have you tried to perform an identity outside of the roleplaying community after having explored it through roleplay?"; "talk about a time when you've felt free to do something in this community that you would have been afraid to attempt outside of it"), and lasted between 60-90 minutes. All interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed using Zoom's automated live transcription services when possible. For interviews not conducted through Zoom, Google Documents' voice to text service was utilized to generate transcripts.

**Data Analysis**

After interview transcription, interpretive themes were identified based on two primary criteria: (1) repetition, and (2) emphasis. Following Owen's (1984) suggestions, repetition was observed when a key word, phrase, or concept was discussed by multiple participants across multiple interviews. For example, in response to questions about whether this community contains "safe spaces," participants consistently responded affirmatively, and tended to identify a space as "safe" by addressing their level of "comfort," their "familiarity," or the "lack of social pressure." Emphasis—or what Owen refers to as "forcefulness" (p. 275)—was determined through the identification of shifts in vocal inflection, volume, expressed interest, and how willing participants were to discuss specific concepts. Attention was also paid to the amount of time spent answering each question, with note being made when a question was answered hurriedly or with little embellishment. Possible themes were first recorded by hand live during interviews, using strategies of initial coding as outlined by Charmaz (2006). Following the initial coding cycle, we engaged in focused coding to "synthesize and explain larger segments of data" and generate themes to best explain the experiences of participants (Charmaz, 2006, p. 57).

Bearing these criteria in mind, this study specifically identifies and addresses four broadly applicable themes: (1) the creation of safe spaces, (2) self-expression and individual agency, (3) self-actualization, and (4) recontextualization of trauma. These themes allow us to understand the commonalities in experience from one participant to the next and highlight several theoretically significant trends within the roleplay community. They allow us to see the benefits taking part in this community can offer to its members.

## Findings

### Creation of Safe Spaces

A safe space is broadly defined, for the purposes of this study, as a physical or non-physical "space" wherein the participants experience little social pressure from others and enjoy the agency to act without fear of discrimination or retaliation. It is important to include the concept of non-physical safe spaces in this definition, as often roleplay will happen asynchronously via online mediums such as skype, zoom, message boards etc. While most participants had a roleplay background in Dungeons and Dragons, there was also discussion of roleplay through other pen-and-paper-based systems, through video games, through live action roleplay, and through independent writing and storytelling. We note the "safety" of a particular space may be measured differently by different individuals. Interpretations of safety may be based solely on the criteria defined here, or by different parameters entirely due to the personal experiences of the role-players questioned.

Creation of safe spaces was discussed by participants as involving the curation of who is allowed into a space. One participant, Aelx, who shared they had negative experiences with sexual assault as a feature in a past roleplay setting, discussed their method of curation by not allowing cissexual men into some groups due to a pattern of similar bad experiences:

> …and playing tabletop I have had the complete opposite [experience] where we refuse to have sexual assault in our games. We even have a rule with my current team where we

> don't allow cis men into the group just on principle of every last one of us has had really bad experiences playing with cis men.

Safe spaces require rules regarding what types of topics can be explored, with emphasis placed on avoiding "triggers" and exploration of concepts that may carry significant traumatic weight for those involved. Triggers may be related to roleplay but are typically associated with "real-world" experiences that many members of the roleplay community turn to roleplay to temporarily seek refuge from. For example, Cosmic explained:

> … in our groups, we have a tab that we list everybody's triggers and then when me and the other DM are writing stuff for the next week, we have to consult the trigger list. We're like, ok, we're not hitting any of these, or if we are we have to change it, or we have to consult the person and be like, under this context would this be ok? If they say "yes" we approach it as carefully as possible, but within [only] that context.

In the appropriate contexts, careful navigation of topics can be helpful for individuals who have past traumas associated with them, however the foundation for this type of discussion is the establishment of a safe place from which to explore.

While for some individuals this safety requires the filtering of certain individuals or topics, for others the location where roleplay is performed is an important part of a feeling of comfortability within a space. Many role-players take their experiences online because face-to-face interactions can be less comfortable than in-person meetups. Individuals who experience even mild levels of social anxiety or introversion have found opportunities to interact with others through roleplay in a context more accommodating to their individual needs. For example, Dom explained:

> [The] online community allows me to actually just be myself and not really be afraid of expressing myself, or showing people what I'm all about, or sharing with people.

Some participants even expressed that they were afforded financial safety through membership in this community, making a living out of their work creating art for other role-players to utilize in their games and stories. This type of security unsurprisingly goes a long way towards encouraging others to engage in the community. Ultimately the security, be it social, financial, or otherwise, that is available through roleplay, is a foundation for the facilitation of self-expression and the freedom to act.

**Self-Expression and Individual Agency**

While some participants said they enjoy some level of agency and control over their lives in "real-world" settings, many shared obstacles like social pressure or financial restrictions prevent them from finding ways to fully express themselves. This freedom of self-expression is an important component of individual agency and control and is the reason many of our participants turn to roleplay. For example, Mitch explained:

> … I identify as a male, I am bisexual. I… in the community and space itself, and myself as an individual I've found that I can explore myself. Right? I can be more myself in [a way] that society won't allow. That you feel like you can't . . . I think the key to roleplaying is you kind of explore the book before you have to be a part of it.

This participant's testimony highlights how even those from privileged backgrounds, in this instance being a white male, may sometimes experience pushback when exploring specific co-identities in certain social settings. While some aspects of their identity may be explored freely, others are more taxing to perform openly. The expectations placed upon us to act in certain ways based on our outward appearance can be a significant deterrence against healthy self-expression.

Roleplay, for this individual in particular, is a way to escape societal pressure and push the boundaries of their identity and ability to express themselves.

In contrast, other participants admitted to experiencing very little privilege outside of the roleplay community and rely on roleplay as the primary outlet to explore their various personal identities. Specifically, participants who identified as members of particularly marginalized communities such as the trans community, and neurodivergent persons admitted having experienced greater societal pushback against the performance of these identities in "real-world" settings. The power dynamics between individuals of different backgrounds can discourage openness of communication. Even between well-meaning individuals, tacit and subconscious biases impact the ability to communicate and freely perform identity. Some participants preferred to play only with members of similar levels of social privilege in an attempt to maintain a neutral power dynamic through roleplaying groups.

Many participants stated they don't feel as though they are understood outside of the roleplay community and their ability to express themselves is limited. Such limitations contrast their experiences within the gaming community, which is comprised of individuals with similar interests and life experiences who are, as Sebs explained, "more aware and understanding." They shared how the linguistic tools utilized broadly within the community helped find ways of accurately expressing themselves:

> … people seem to be just so much more aware and understanding because my identity, I very much came to understand it from being in this community. There's a podcast called "Bitches and Liches" and they would ask people (their listeners) what to call them because they obviously didn't want to be called "bitches" and they said folx with the "x"

> and it was the first time I had ever seen it, and I don't know what it was about it specifically but it really rang true to me, and really seemed to make sense.

Until joining this community, some members lacked these tools and may have found it difficult to express themselves in ways that fully reflect their own complex perceptions of self. These tools influence both the way members perceive each other, and how members perform in response to these perceptions. Even on a very basic level this is the case, with minor details like the names given to characters, and the traits attributed to them, enabling a deeper understanding of the real-world identities that inform role-players actions in game. For example, Cosmic explained:

> … It is a lot easier to sort of be myself in the roleplaying community because again, with touching on dissociative identity disorder I already kind of go through phases of different personalities in the first place. It's easier for them to understand, maybe they can't quantify what's happening, but they understand me and it's a lot easier to be like, I just got out of a session where I had to play Vixen for like six hours because we were doing a huge boss fight. So uhh, I'm feeling pretty Vic today and they're like "gotcha!" Like it's cool, it's not something I have to sit there and over-explain and feel embarrassed about. It's something that they on some level understand and they're not going to make me feel like a freak over it.

Formation of linguistic artifacts is, for many, the first steps towards translating identities and concepts explored in-game into the real world.

**Self-Actualization**

Many role-players are highly motivated to find ways of translating their in-game identities to the real-world, and vice versa. Given the relative ease of exploring a new identity in roleplay settings, participants used roleplaying as a sort of "proving ground" for the expression of real-world identities. For example, Cosmic discussed their inclination towards roleplaying characters with transformative abilities, who could shift between being a man or a woman:

> … I have had two instances where I have had characters who can shapeshift freely. Vixen had the ability to instantly switch his gender presentation, with my group I got to experiment with him going fully cis man, he had an alternate identity like a disguise, we called him Captain Scott.

This tendency towards characters with transformative abilities was shared by multiple participants. The ability to control one's physical presentation and influence others' perceptions seems to be of great importance to many members of this community. These experiences, when validated by others within the gaming community, can act as a launching point towards more effective real-world navigation of issues like gender dysphoria, or reconciling physical or mental traits others may not understand or even desire.

Minty referred to roleplay as a "lightbulb moment" regarding their own experiences with feeling out of place in their own body. Tieflings, a "monstrous" race of horned, colorful, demon-like humanoids, are often feared and misunderstood according to official Dungeons and Dragons lore. For this reason, some gamers who feel ostracized outside of game come to closely identify with Tiefling characters. Attempting to reconcile these feelings of rejection with one's own sense of self-worth can be difficult, and several participants expressed that playing these types of marginalized characters helped them to come to terms with aspects of their own identity and realities. As Minty explained,

> … My characters are reflections and elements of myself. . . . [by] being true to yourself but being true to the character, in spite of all the things sort of going on around you, I

> think that I've kind of gained some confidence, having tried some of these stronger or more convicted people.

Other players reported being able to express their identities in new ways through gaming, and subsequently feeling empowered to embrace their identity outside of the gaming context. Several participants shared stories of players coming out at their tables or beginning to come to terms with their sexual and gender identities in meaningful ways as a result of their explorations of these identities. Even participants who admitted to feeling comfortable performing identity in the real world acknowledged roleplay still provides ample opportunity for growth. For example, Sovereign explained:

> … I think the roleplay community just allows you to be ugly and it's definitely given my chaos it's much need breathing space. Like, on this platform I've probably spoken more about issues and morality and philosophy and psychology than on any others, and not just in terms of characters but also about sexuality, spirituality, and personal traumas. I think that emotional awareness and intelligence is definitely a skill that is honed within that environment.

They continued to say "I acknowledge the many people that I am, and the many people that I have been, and continue to grow and learn from that." For many individuals, the type of growth enabled by roleplay is not limited to simply personal identity, and manifests as the adoption of new skills, new perceptions, and new ways of thinking.

**Recontextualizing Trauma**

The final theme identified through the analysis of these interviews involves how individuals who live with memories of trauma or experience trauma actively use roleplay as a way to understand their individual traumas and find healthy ways of processing. The types of trauma discussed by participants in this study included emotional or physical abuse, acceptance by friends or family members, feelings of rejection, feelings of fear and confusion, or feelings of regret. Most participants agreed their traumas occasionally influenced the characters they choose to create and roleplay, and how those characters interact with the imagined worlds they inhabit. While some players use this opportunity to work through issues holding them back in real life, others find ways to escape their trauma by creating a world where the issues they face in the real world don't exist.

In some instances, these traumas cannot be addressed directly, however their long-term effects can be managed. For example, Sebs shared that because of past traumas they became harsh and impatient. Roleplay provided them with a platform to see the consequences of their actions, and work through multiple approaches to problem solving and interacting with others in a safe environment:

> … I've learned that I used to be kind of an almost bully of a person. It was dealing with a lot of trauma, dealing with PTSD and neglectful parents, all kinds of stuff kind of turned me into an asshole. Through roleplaying I've definitely learned that I do have the capacity to be more patient and forgiving than I thought I did. And that I have the ability to make people feel emotions which, as an artist, was really important to me. Um, I learned that I just have a certain capacity for kindness and understanding that I didn't think I was ever going to have, that I thought I was always going to be lonely for.

Many participants shared similar stories of learning to grow past trauma and utilize roleplay as a coping mechanism, but also just to deal with the issues happening in the world around them. For example, Sigma explained: "If we feel weird about something going on in the world, we'll always explore it our games, through characters or NPCs." Issues relating to world events and politics are translated into the game space and dealt with in ways that most individuals would lack the resources to carry out in real life.

Such interactions give role-players perspective, and new ways of understanding these issues as a result of being able to work through them via roleplay. Players have power in their games they don't otherwise possess, the power to be whoever they want to be, to change the world, and to change themselves. As Sigma explained:

> … How do I take the human that I am, and shape it into something new? We are not one thing or another, we are just as fluid as the characters we create, we are in constant flux and change, and that's a very comforting thought for me.

These experiences can be helpful in providing role-players with tools to proactively deal with real-life obstacles and traumas. In particular, children seem receptive to learning through roleplay. Another participant shared a story about playing a game of Dungeons and Dragons with a 5-year-old, expressing that the child wanted to kill another players pet goat, which made that character sad. This experience was used to demonstrate that there are consequences to our actions through an experience most children are unlikely to have in the real world, and in a safe place to do so.

**Summary**

Examination of the stories and experiences shared above illustrates that roleplay provides a valuable opportunity to explore identity in a safe environment free of consequences. By engaging in roleplay individuals are able to push past boundaries that would otherwise be socially or financially taxing to breach, and to learn and grow as individuals. Further, we've seen examples of role-players translating their identities into real-world spaces with a high level of efficacy. Roleplay facilitates the initial exploration of identity and can help individuals to determine who they wish to be in the real world and functions as a safety net of sorts, while attempting to express identity in real-world settings. The roleplay community provides a safe space, a place to explore potential obstacles and reassess methods of identity performance outside of games.

## Discussion

The initial focus of this study was to determine whether roleplaying games could be used as a platform to enhance the way we analyze the self, and how we explore and express identity. While reviewing prior research into this topic, it became apparent that while much information existed regarding the ways in which individuals interact with one another within gaming and roleplay contexts, there has been little discussion of how these games enable us to form new identities and manifest them in the real world. In particular, very little research existed regarding the exploration of how marginalized individuals can create spaces in the roleplay community where they have greater agency to perform and develop individual identity.

The new research conducted during the course of this project highlights how the societal expectations related to complex concepts like sex and gender can deter individuals from freely expressing themselves, and how roleplay can help to reduce the restrictions placed on marginalized individuals attempting to form and explore their own individual identities. This is significant as it shows how roleplay can provide everyone with the tools to more effectively understand one another, and help provide safe spaces to expand and challenge our understanding of who we are as individuals.

### Implications

The main practical implication is simply how roleplaying games make us better communicators. Through roleplay we take part in experiences we would be highly unlikely to take part in otherwise. We can leave the world of the "real" for a brief while and take a long walk in someone else's shoes. Whether those shoes belong to a human, an orc, or an elf, this experience has the power to teach us something about ourselves and the world around us. Through these shared experiences, we come to develop a shared understanding of each other, and our shared reality, and we develop empathy by exploring perspectives and experiences not our own, and in the end are brought closer together. Interaction Adaptation Theory outlines the ways in which we influence each other through our communication practices, and the way two individuals may begin to behave similarly, mirroring each other's linguistic and social tendencies over time (Littlejohn et al., 2017, p. 71). Another useful approach is Symbolic Convergence Theory, which shows how "individuals in groups come to a shared reality through communication" (Littlejohn et al., 2017, p. 201), and how language evolves and develops based on its varied use. This type of linguistic convergence can foster group cohesion and give us new ways of understanding one another; it can help individuals to feel connected to both a community and to other individuals within a community.

In accordance with these ideas, this study showed examples of how traits attributed to a role-player's characters could come to be used as a way of understanding how they were feeling and why they were feeling a certain way. The expression "I'm feeling pretty Vic today" would mean nothing to any random person outside of the very small roleplaying group in which it originated. However, to the individuals within that group, this linguistic artifact carries significant weight, and can be used as a substitution for what might otherwise be much more complicated conversation. This ease of communication is specifically made possible through roleplay because within that context we are given greater freedom to explore what "feeling pretty Vic" could potentially mean.

The opportunities for identity performance offered by roleplaying games are important for many reasons. For one, roleplaying helps foster a feeling of safety and closeness between individuals who may have very little else in common and allows for the expression of complex feelings in a simplified or less socially demanding way than other options. In short, a shared language creates shortcuts and backdoors for the communication of complex topics. Over time, and as these linguistic tendencies occur more frequently, they can come to take on ritual significance. As noted earlier, "any routine can become a ritual if it takes on a symbolic meaning" (Gee et al., 2017, p. 477), and the exclusivity of these rituals further strengthens the bonds between the individuals who partake in them.

The second practical implication is how roleplay can be therapeutic. Roleplay has been shown to be an effective way to work through past traumas, and to allow us to reframe the world we live in by experiencing it through new perspectives. Many participants said they had grown as individuals as a direct result of engaging in roleplay, and they found ways to understand and analyze their past traumas. Individuals with PTSD, who have experienced neglect, or who have been through difficult relationships can find ways to explore issues and work through projections of their real-life experiences in roleplay settings. These settings are helpful because they allow for this type of exploration in a safe and consequence free environment.

Some individuals use roleplay as a way of confronting trauma, whereas others utilize roleplay as a form of escapism. One of the primary benefits of roleplay is you have the power to be whoever you want, whenever and wherever you want. One participant of this study shared how they prefer to create worlds where real-life issues like race and gender politics simply aren't a concern. In their idealized universes obstacles like how to reconcile individual differences based around these concepts have been overcome, and its inhabitants enjoy a level of freedom and security that may not be available in our own world. In this way, role-players find ways of relieving the emotional strain that may accompany addressing these issues and can choose to confront them in contexts that empower them to develop solutions that they may not otherwise have the ability to employ. Through this type of roleplay, individuals develop tools for dealing with, or avoiding, real-world issues.

This implication is particularly important to individuals who experience greater levels of societal pressure and prejudice in real-world settings, however, it is significant for role-players from all walks of life. Just as roleplay gives us a canvas on which to project our own experiences, it also gives us a lens through which to better understand the experiences of others. We are encouraged, through roleplay, to collaborate and help each other understand and overcome obstacles we may not face in our own lives, that those we roleplay with may be much more accustomed to.

**Future Research**

Future research into how group identity interacts with individual identity could be useful for understanding how individuals navigate roleplay spaces. While roleplay can be used to analyze ourselves, how does it affect our ability to analyze the groups to whom we attach ourselves? The roleplay and gaming communities are vast and are made up of many smaller more specific communities. Researching the interaction between individuals with differing interests and backgrounds within the gaming and roleplay communities could give us additional tools to analyze reasons why communication sometimes breaks down in roleplay scenarios.

Further, finding ways to measure the efficacy of the translation of identity into the real world is a valuable tool for individuals seeking to explore and develop their own identities. We currently lack the tools to explain and compare different methods of identity translation. Is roleplay in a large-group setting more effective than roleplay in small groups or one-on-one settings? How do solo roleplaying games impact our ability to explore identity when we have no one to challenge our assumptions or actions?

## Conclusion

This study, and the work that has come before, are clear and resounding testaments to the value of roleplay as a method of self-expression, and to the importance of developing new ways to understand and navigate the world we live in. This new research shows how roleplay gives us ways to protect one another through our actions, and our linguistic choices. The discussion of "triggering" concepts, and how roleplaying spaces are curated through the identification of both taboo topics, and potentially dangerous individuals, is a great example of the ways in which roleplay makes us more caring and empathetic individuals.

In this way, gaming and roleplay allow us to connect and grow, and safely push the boundaries of our shared reality. Through roleplay we can overcome our greatest obstacles, whether by swinging a mighty greatsword as an imposing orc barbarian, by burning them to the ground as a mysterious and skilled elven sorcerer, or by beguiling them with the sweet songs and honeyed words of a Tiefling bard. Roleplay shows us ways to view the world and to solve its problems. Words like orc, elf, and Tiefling mean nothing if we don't use them as a foundation to build better, more inclusive spaces to explore what it means to be human, and how we can enable each other to do so.

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# OPEN EDUCATION RESOURCE TEXTBOOK REVIEWS

## Review of *Advanced Public Speaking*

**Karla Jennings**
Georgia Southern University
kjennings@georgiasouthern.edu

Meade, Lynn (n.d.). Advanced Public Speaking. Creative Commons. University of Arkansas. https://uark.pressbooks.pub/speaking/

*Advanced Public Speaking* by Lynn Meade was created in response to student feedback and frustration with how frequently traditional textbooks become outdated. Meade used handouts and video examples that were originally developed as supplements to course materials as the basis for the new text that covers much more ground than a traditional text. An initiative at Meade's institution (University of Arkansas) to make content accessible and affordable for students led to selection of the OER format. *Advanced Public Speaking* is currently available as a website (https://uark.pressbooks.pub/speaking/) and downloadable as an EPUB, digital PDF, print PDF, and MOBI using the Pressbooks online book-publishing platform.

The richness and breath of Meade's resources, all in one comprehensive website, is the strength of *Advanced Public Speaking*. This text consists of 62 chapters broken down into six major sections that cover basic course concepts such as delivery methods, nervousness, and organization patterns while also including instruction on more nuanced skills such as speaking with a microphone, data visualization, and professional speechwriting. There are countless current speech examples included via hyperlinks, everything from TED Talks to speeches given at Toastmasters International competitions and more.

The first section – Writing a Speech (Chapters 1 – 14) – covers basic concepts such as the purpose of public speaking, brainstorming, and audience engagement. It is a "how to" guide that takes students step by step through the process of speech creation: the opening, the closing, organizational patterns, citing sources, and transitions. Meade adds to the basics with chapters on the power of story (Chapter 6) and ceremonial speaking (Chapter 11). The chapter about feedback (Chapter 7), notes in the title that "Giving and Receiving Feedback: It is harder than you think." There are three professional speechwriting chapters (Chapters 12, 13, and 14) which cover word choice in depth with explanations and examples that are clear and engaging. In Chapter 12 "Using Colorful Language in Your Speech," Meade offers numerous examples of alliteration, parallel construction, tricolon, personification, and other figurative language techniques. President Obama's eulogy for John Lewis is offered as an example in the section "A Recipe for a Powerful Antithesis." Meade quotes Obama's words, "Not from turning on each other, but by turning towards one another" to illustrate the two necessary ingredients for antithesis: "statements that are opposites" and "statements that are evenly balanced." In Chapter 13, Meade explores the idea of theme in Ronald Reagan's speech following the Space Shuttle Challenger disaster, recalling the way the President used the theme of exploration with such words as "pioneer, daring, and brave" as he memorialized the astronauts. In Chapter 14, Angelina Jolie's 2009 address on World Refugee Day is identified as a strong speech that uses vividness to make it distinctive. Meade suggests making a list of all the vivid and sensory words in Jolie's speech and then categorizing them based on the sense they activate.

The second section – Presenting a Speech (Chapters 15 – 22) – starts by addressing communication apprehension and provides brain and body hacks that include practical exercises in cognitive restructuring, stress relief, and deep breathing. One chapter (Chapter 17) specifically addresses eye contact, movement, and gestures, following up bad advice ("Imagine the audience naked") with better advice to achieve effectiveness in these three key areas. A chapter on the voice (Chapter 19) provides instruction in vocal warm-up, articulation, and projection. This section also includes content on topics that are not commonly addressed in a basic public speaking textbook. Chapter 20 takes a deep dive into speaking online and teaches students what is needed when speaking to a camera, such as lighting, framing, and – most importantly – eye contact. Chapter 21 provides instruction on each type of speech delivery, including memory techniques and how to present with a group. Last in this section, Chapter 22 focuses on how to speak effectively using a manuscript. Meade says, "It is harder to speak with a manuscript than it is to give a speech with brief notes and it requires considerable more practice to get it right." To help students "get it right," Meade shows how to arrange the words on the page and how many words per line work best.

The third section (Chapters 23 – 25) covers presentation aids in depth. Meade starts by discussing the ins and outs of using props when speaking (Chapter 24). This is followed by a chapter called "Don't Ruin a Great Presentation with Terrible Slides" (Chapter 25), which includes numerous examples of ineffective and effective slides. The final chapter of this section is devoted to charts and statistics (Chapter 26), citing the popular and hilarious TED Talk by Tim Urban *Inside the mind of a master procrastinator* as one of many examples.

In the section titled simply "Speeches" (Chapters 26 – 35), Meade uses the freedom of the OER format to provide instruction on 10 different types of speeches. While Meade does include instruction covering the typical informative (Chapter 35) and persuasive (Chapter 26) speeches, eight other speech types are also included, everything from the toast (Chapter 29) to the eulogy (Chapter 32). Meade covers the career speech (Chapter 27) – useful for preparing for an interview – and the elevator and career fair pitch (Chapter 28) particularly well, again with many examples.

The fifth and final section of the *Advanced Public Speaking* that is written for students covers specific considerations when speaking, like using appropriate and non-offensive language (Chapter 36) and an overview of rhetorical history (Chapter 37). Meade's explanations of logical fallacies (Chapter 38) are supplemented with video examples from politicians such as Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin and even a clip from *The Simpsons*. The final chapter in the section is about persuasion and provides summaries and examples of persuasive theories such as the Elaboration Likelihood Model and Social Judgment Theory, ending with a thorough discussion of ethics in persuasion.

Included at the end of *Advanced Public Speaking* is a collection of classroom activities and additional resources for instructors. Meade developed the "Student Engagement: Tips for Teachers" chapter (Chapter 40) as a training resource for new teaching assistants. Other chapters offer resources for teaching specific topics as well as activities that can be used as icebreakers and practice speeches (Chapter 49). Meade's resources in this section are mostly speech examples from sources such as movie speeches (Chapter 41), spoken word poetry (Chapter 46), and storytelling (Chapter 53). This section in particular is a work in progress. Meade invites contributions from readers at the end of every chapter, and additional contributions from instructors will continue to make the resources in this section stronger.

With *Advanced Public Speaking*, Meade desired to share a vast collection of knowledge and resources. The intention was not that an instructor would use every chapter but that instructors of public speaking could pick and choose which resources were most useful for teaching their particular course. Because *Advanced Public Speaking* is an OER, Meade was able to include more topics and examples than a traditional text.

Meade also wanted to provide a resource that would be useful for those outside of the communication discipline. For instance, when instructors are asked for assistance in writing a eulogy or preparing slides for a presentation, individual chapters can be easily referenced, providing tools for those who may not be familiar with formats as well as best practices. *Advanced Public Speaking* would be strengthened by the addition of more examples using speakers of color and a chapter that discusses inclusiveness in the public speaking context. A chapter about writing a speech for someone else, capturing another's "voice" in writing a speech, would also be useful. The ethics of ghostwriting speeches and the long history of the use of professional speechwriters would follow nicely as well, with interviews from professional speechwriters.

As a text that can be changed and updated easily, *Advanced Public Speaking* will remain current long past a traditional text that is outdated by the time it survives the publishing process. Meade's use of feedback from readers will ensure its accuracy and the accuracy of the hundreds of weblinks provided. While new texts for the basic public speaking course are published each year, this is currently the only advanced text available as an open educational resource (OER). *Advanced Public Speaking* covers the basics of public speaking and goes well beyond, making it a valuable resource for an advanced class.

# Review of *A Guide to Good Reasoning: Cultivating Intellectual Virtues*

**Scott Andrews**
Assistant Professor of Communication Studies
Colorado Mesa University
ssandrews@coloradomesa.edu

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*A mature society understands that at the heart of democracy is argument.* Salman Rushdie (2012)

*He who establishes his argument by noise and command shows that his reason is weak.* Michele de Montaigne (1588)

Taken together, the epigrams above suggest our democracy is weak and immature, that the noise and command we hear so often in today's polarized political climate happened because somewhere along the way we lost the capacity to reason. David C. Wilson's (2020) *A Guide to Good Reasoning: Cultivating Intellectual Virtues* steps into the breach to save democracy by equipping its readers with a "unified system of explicating and evaluating arguments of all sorts" (p. xiii). Students will appreciate that this Open Educational Resource (OER) is freely accessible, both during the course and in the future. Those best served by this textbook would be those in semester- or year-long courses in argumentation and debate or in advanced public speaking, perhaps even informal logic, but the subject matter goes well beyond the skills of argumentation developed in basic public speaking classes. Wilson promises practicality by "[l]ooking most closely at arguments as they are found in the language of daily life," the kind of reasoning "designed to persuade" (p. 9). An ideally useful textbook should offer hands-on features like examples, guidelines, and exercises, and Wilson's does. But today's future-focused students demand efficient training, and here is a tome of just under 400 pages. We live in a world today of uncontrolled inflation and unpredictable world events, where steadily rising costs foment an increased questioning of the value of higher education. Therefore, it is imperative that faculty play their part in removing access-barriers to vital skills like argumentation. Some universities are mission-driven to keep costs low for students, and OERs like Wilson's are an optimal way to deliver both student equity and self-preservation.

According to Wilson, what distinguishes his treatment of argumentation from similar texts is an emphasis on the "intellectual virtues" of intellectual honesty, critical reflection, and empirical inquiry. He also promises the inclusion of topics not found in other treatments, including judgmental heuristics and conversational relevance. Symbolic logic and truth tables are not here, since, Wilson argues, the former "belongs in a different course," and the latter "do not reliably describe language as we ordinarily use it" (p. 1). And fallacies, often reserved for one chapter toward the end of argumentation textbooks, appear gradually throughout the book as they become relevant. All these differences sound like pedagogically valuable choices, but the proof of the pudding, of course, is in the eating.

The 16-chapter book comprises six parts, each chapter following the same basic arrangement: well-wrought epigrams, a list of chapter topics, bold-font terms throughout the content, and three kinds of call-out boxes: Chapter Summaries, Guidelines for students to "use," "look for," "cultivate," "be wary of," "consider," "count," "don't count," or "identify", and Exercises that range from the mundane ("You've broken out in hives," "Jesus loves me, this I know") to the erudite. Throughout the body of each chapter, Wilson incorporates hundreds of carefully curated example arguments, rich quotations from novelists, NASA, professors, scientists, the *Los Angeles Times*, Diderot, the Bible, Napoleon, crime statistics, *Forbes*, Woody Allen, an astronaut, Charlie Parker, Mark Twain, Gerald Ford, a musicologist, an NFL Hall of Fame Coach, David Hume, Mary Shelly, NBA star Charles Barkley, and Otter from *Animal*

*House*, to cite only a few. These real-world examples are undoubtedly the best feature of the book, and they alone make this text an excellent supplementary workbook for in-class lessons on argument forms.

Part 1, “Reasoning and Arguments,” spans two chapters and makes the case that good reasoning entails good arguments, which are true, logical, conversationally relevant, and clear (p. 8). Chapter 2 brings forward the building blocks of arguments—premises, statements, conclusions, and inference indicators—as found in simple arguments, complex arguments, and enthymemes. Beyond learning terms like these, developing skills in good reasoning depends upon and fosters what Wilson calls the “intellectual virtues” of critical reflection, empirical inquiry, and intellectual honesty. Unfortunately, he returns to these virtues only once in the book.

Part 2, “Clarifying Arguments,” comprises the next four chapters, a sometimes-laborious training in taming the variety of ordinary language arguments into one clear structure that can then be more loyally and charitably evaluated. After illustrating the “Standard Clarifying Format” in Chapter 3, the chapters which follow dig deeper into the process of clarifying arguments by *streamlining* (paraphrasing only with declarative statements, eliminating unnecessary words, and neutralizing slanted language), *specifying* (eliminating ambiguity and avoiding excessive generality, vagueness, or emptiness), and *structuring* (placing the names, predicates, constants, and variables of an argument in the proper form, namely

If *P,* then *Q*.
Not *Q*.
∴*Not P*.)

Wilson uses this form for the remainder of the book, a move that seems to betray his intention to simplify argumentation from the rigor of symbolic logic toward ordinary language.

In Part 3, “Evaluating Arguments,” Wilson introduces another “Standard Format” for evaluating arguments by the criteria of Truth, Logic, Soundness, and Conversational Relevance. The growing formality continues when Wilson abandons his style of occasionally introducing fallacies in favor of a standalone chapter on fallacies. He distinguishes argument-based and motive-based fallacies, before advising students, “it is best to skip the unhelpful step of accusing a premise of committing a fallacy. Instead, go straight to the explanation of why you believe it to be false” (p. 193). Here he appears to undercut the need to even understand fallacies.

Part 4, “Evaluating the Truth of Premises,” takes up one chapter, “How to Think about Truth,” and includes discussions on objectivity and truth, probability and evidence, self-evidence, and experiential evidence. The chapter is thorough, covering two laws of truth, two kinds of probability, and two types of non-inferential evidence (self-evidence and experiential evidence), along with evaluative questions to ask of each kind of evidence. It is, as Wilson himself puts it, a short course on “applied epistemology” (p. 1).

Part 5 addresses “Evaluating Deductive Arguments,” and here Wilson introduces a distinction between two types of argument—deductive, wherein “the premises are intended to guarantee, or make certain, the conclusion,” and inductive, whose “premises are intended merely to count toward, or make probable, the conclusion” (p. 200). This distinction between certain and probable conclusions parts company from the Aristotelian distinction of movements between the general and the particular, and Wilson promptly dismisses that tradition as “common but mistaken,” whereas his own fresh take “aims to provide the best mix of accuracy, practicability, and common usage” (p. 201). Following that is a discussion of what counts as deductive validity and how to counter that with validity counterexamples, before turning to an explication of the variety of deductive forms.

Part 6, finally, follows this same structure for the field of inductive arguments—definition, variations, and tests for truth or, in this case, probabilistic measures of "strength." Wilson portrays induction as the weaker of the two forms, with lower standards for logical success, but more of them, as inductive conclusions must not only—as in deductive arguments—"fit the premises," or take the correct form, but also satisfy the Total Evidence Condition, or "fit the total available evidence" (p. 282). The last four chapters of the book unpack how to structure inductive arguments in the correct forms and a consideration of the special characteristics of each of the four most common forms of inductive arguments.

After so much weighty content, Wilson abruptly ends with a one-page epilogue, returning to the intellectual virtues of critical reflection, empirical inquiry, and intellectual honesty, the last of which will always guide the others. Unfortunately, these virtues are only tacitly cultivated throughout the book. Going forward, students are still advised to incorporate their new understanding of good reasoning into their lives by "consistently car[ing] about the quality of arguments" (p. 381).

As with any book, flaws exist. For one, the non-indented "1.1.2" format makes it difficult to keep track of the embedded sub-structures of each chapter. More importantly, scholars of communication might understand, but still be troubled by, Wilson's Ramus-like dismissal of rhetoric as counter to the aims of logic or his Platonic judgment of opinion as counter to knowledge. In his view, rhetoric at its best can help the cause of truth, but only when "it is used to make good arguments easy to accept on their own merits" (p. 59). At its worst, the goals of persuasion and truth are utterly incompatible, the former undermining the latter's clarity. A case in point is his discussion of arguments from analogy, of which he cautions, "Analogies are often used merely for rhetorical effect," a feat of language only achieved by "exploit[ing] our dependence on the vividness shortcut," and "tak[ing] advantage of our dependence on the similarity shortcut" that makes us "especially susceptible" to their use (p. 325).

For sure, Plato and Ramus are part of our rhetorical inheritance and options for the teaching and learning of argumentation. It is not clear, however, that divorcing logic from rhetoric and opinion from truth (in the desire for a perfect language) serves Wilson's interest in practical argument and ordinary language use. Similarly, it seems impractical that he comes down decidedly against any relativistic notion of truth, arguing "Truth has to do with whether a belief fits with the world. It is not relative to the believer. . . . Evidence, however, is relative to the believer" (p. 194). Even the appearance of relative truth in an argument should be taken as an ambiguity that needs to be eliminated before evaluating the argument's truth. In the end, it is not clear that his emphasis on objectivity benefits his goal of "equip[ping] you with the tools for handling arguments that you are likely to encounter in your own experience" (p. 267).

All told, while instructors will appreciate Wilson's depth and breadth, exhaustive might become exhausting to students working through 400 increasingly complex pages. As to the reading level, here again a strength becomes a weakness. As the book proceeds, what begins as a thoughtful but simple treatment ends up overthought and too thorough. What begins with "a clear and inviting style…written for college freshmen" (p. 1) ends up sounding almost as opaque as other textbooks on logic. And with only three pictures, the book is almost entirely text-based, offering only one modality of understanding (leaving out, for example, visual learners).

It is hard to imagine any caliber of student covering one chapter of this book per week in a single semester course. Instead, instructors and students might, for the sake of time, pass over certain chapters or sections without regretting an exorbitant cost, or again, use the book as a supplementary casebook of examples. To be fair, argumentation is a vast and verbal subject, so a single new book can hardly be expected to revolutionize the field. Notwithstanding its acute limitations, because Wilson's text largely delivers on his promise of application, his is a fresh, free take on an ancient subject as much as a welcome munition to the arsenal of democracy.

# Review of *Intercultural Communication for the Community College (Second Edition)*

**Christina-Marie Magalona**
Assistant Professor of Communication
Massachusetts Bay Community College
cmagalona@massbay.edu

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It is with timely relevance that open educational resource (OER) materials are reviewed and discussed in relation to the topic of intercultural communication, the ongoing rise of textbook costs, and practices of (post-)pandemic pedagogies that keep some classes online. Karen Krumrey authors the textbook, *Intercultural Communication for the Community College (Second Edition)*, a revised text by the same name originally published in May 2019. Given the improvements made in accessibility, and in its organization, I would recommend the use of this textbook for an introductory intercultural communication course. This review focuses on three specific aspects of the textbook: (1) an overview of the textbook content and its organization with commentary regarding how it lends itself to organizational ease, (2) shifts in textbook accessibility, and (3) criticisms and recommendations regarding the implementation of *Intercultural Communication for the Community College (Second Edition)* in the college classroom.

The original overview of the textbook published on OER Commons lists that the textbook content is “divided into three general areas: foundations, elements, and contexts” (2019). Whereby, the *foundations* cover “basic principles associated with communication studies and culture,” the *elements* cover “the basics into self, identities, verbal, and nonverbal process[es], and *contexts* that apply ideas into the realms of "media, business, and education" (2019). Despite this OER description, these three helpful subheadings are not as clearly defined in the organization of the textbook. Rather, twelve chapters are listed in indistinguishable sub-categories that correspond to the three general areas mentioned in the description. The foundation is set with chapter 1 laying the *foundation* by defining intercultural communication & the imperatives for studying the topic; and chapter 2 explicitly defining the concept of culture. The *elements* of intercultural communication are laid out via chapter 3 covering the topic of self and identity; chapter 4 and 5 covering verbal and nonverbal communication; and chapter 6 addressing conflict. Finally, the *contexts* section of the textbook applies intercultural communication theories and sets the expectation for the emergence of intercultural contexts in relationships, popular culture/social media, tourism, business, education, and healthcare – each covered in their own chapters. The layout of a textbook with 12 chapters is logistically useful for institutions with a typical 15-16 week semester, where one chapter can be assigned per week with room for an introductory week, presentation weeks, and exam weeks.

It is necessary to contextualize this review in a (post-)pandemic present where higher education can no longer ignore the symptoms of the digital divide. As institutions have been called to respect privacy in online learning and consider whether, "policies mandating that people show their faces during class [...] are strictly necessary," colleges have made enduring shifts to student-paced, asynchronous classes (McKenzie, 2021, p. 25). The 12-chapter layout lends itself to being the ideal companion OER textbook for affordable, fully online teaching modalities. Students using this textbook in a self-paced, online classroom, may find that the division of chapters creates the structure to *expect* to engage with a full chapter of reading per week. The difference in organization aids in curricular design, best streamlining class content with the timelines of the semester, and aids students in development of study-skills to anticipate reading-loads.

The (post-)pandemic era made more urgent the anticipation of the "needs of diverse learners" (McKenzie, 2021, p. 25). A new feature of the second edition is the option to download the book as an EPUB, PDF, Pressbooks XML, and Common Cartridge. The prior edition was uniquely designed to be an online textbook. The updated option to download the text is an accessibility feature for students requiring hardcopies, or other downloadable forms of the textbook, needed for assistive technology compatibility.

Finally, I critique the relevance of the textbook and its gaps in critical depth. Specifically, as an *online,* open educational resource, instructors in higher education must consider how, "analogies drawn between the printing press and the internet are apt in highlighting how increased publication of viewpoints widens the possibilities for social identification" (Pfister & Soliz, 2011, n.p.). Said otherwise, in using an *online* resource, educators must consider the way that information, content, and topics can dis/connect students from cultural contexts, conflict, and the politics of identification. It would be remiss not to mention and compare this textbook under review to one of the most downloaded OER intercultural communication textbooks by Shannon Ahrndt released in 2020. Ahrndt's (2020) textbook includes a timely letter to students acknowledging the urgency of studying intercultural communication topics in a moment coinciding with the height of the BLM movement, changes in accessibility to reproductive rights, and increasing class disparities spurred on by the global pandemic. Instead, Krumrey's (2022) introduction in this textbook includes her own epiphanic experiences in identity and intercultural communication set in 1987. Such a dated moment lends itself to criticism regarding the textbook's overall currency and relevance. However, this introduction can otherwise serve as an opportunity for educators to begin a conversation of the enduring need for topics in intercultural communication to be studied and understood in the past, present, and future. As an introductory text, sufficient intercultural theories are presented with room for discussion on related current events. These theories can be easily maneuvered via the addition of examples provided by the classroom's facilitator.

With the consideration of the organization of intercultural communication ideas covered, changes in textbook accessibility, and careful consideration of the role that introductory online textbooks play in education, I recommend that community college instructors consider Krumrey's (2022) updated version of *Intercultural Communication for the Community College* textbook.

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# Review of *Language and Culture in Context: A Primer on Intercultural Communication*

**Maria Subert**
Lecturer
California Polytechnic State University
subert.ma@gmail.com

Godwin-Jones, R. (2020). *Language and culture in context: A primer on intercultural communication*. Virginia Commonwealth University. https://open.umn.edu/opentextbooks/textbooks/978

The considerable value of zero-cost Open Education Resources (OER) and textbooks is that it democratizes higher education: OER make course materials available for students who struggle to buy textbooks and for life-time learners who study outside an institutional setting. However, unlike textbooks by established publishers, not all OERs are peer-reviewed, so the quality of the resource is variable.

The discipline of communication is fortunate to have many open-source textbooks. After a 30-minute Google search, I found 10 free-access textbooks on Public Speaking, three in introductory-level communication, four in media and mass communication, at least one in technical communication, crisis communication, communication theory, interpersonal communication, group and organizational communication, and public relations. I found two intercultural communication textbooks, *Intercultural Communication* by Shannon Ahrndt (2020), and *Language and Culture in Context: A Primer on Intercultural Communication* by Robert Godwin-Jones (2020).

I focus on Godwin-Jones's (2020) *Language and Culture in Context: A Primer on Intercultural Communication*. The book has many strengths and a few weaknesses. I discuss accessibility and readability, its scope, topics covered in its seven chapters, and provide an overview of the strengths and weaknesses.

The interface shows a well-designed book. Readers can choose among pdf, MS Word, or EPub formats to read or download the text. Each chapter includes an online tutorial with a video introduction of the learning objectives and the author's cultural blog (*Dr. GJ's Culture Blog*). The chapters end with "information literacy" (applying the topics to the online environment), key concepts, and a list of books, online resources, references and credits.

The title, *Language and Culture*, reveals the scope in which intercultural communication (IC) is discussed: Pairing culture and language invites more discussion on ethnic culture and social functioning and less on areas connected to language in a more subtle way (such as power, globalism, and gender). Although some faculty might see this as a weakness, it makes the textbook useful for other fields such as ESL, introductory linguistics, cultural studies, and general communication and capstone courses, where the focus is less on the interaction and the negotiation of meaning among people from different groups and backgrounds and more on communicative tools and principles.

The text is organized into seven chapters: (1) Broadening Horizons, (2) Building Identities, (3) Using Language, (4) Conversing and Relating, (5) Communicating Nonverbally, (6) Contextualizing Intercultural Communication, and (7) Encountering Other Cultures. Each chapter is divided into two major parts (I and II), along with two subtitles that discuss five or six sub-subtopics; the structure makes the material easy to restructure or skip parts. Breaking the text into several distinct levels also means that the chapters are long (26-28 pages of text and 31- 33 pages with additional material), information heavy, and provide more than enough material for courses of 11 weeks (of quarters) or 15 weeks (of semesters). In the next section, I analyze the chapters and discuss the depth and breadth of the content.

The first chapter, "Broadening Horizons," introduces intercultural communication by explaining the definition of IC, its need, the central role of culture, culture's complexity, and communication as a human necessity. Some western-centric overtones appear in the text. For example, Godwin-Jones writes, "While many in developed countries enjoy international travel, increasing prosperity, and safe communities, those in other parts of the world continue to experience severe deprivations (food, water, housing), mass unemployment, and violent communities" (Godwin-Jones, 2020, Ch1, pp. 2-3). As inequality in the western countries reached extremes in the 2020s, we do not need to hold to the old western/developed-non-western/underdeveloped dichotomy to contrast prosperity and safety with poverty and unsafety; these have arrived in our own backyard.

The Godwin-Jones takes a critical stance regarding globalization, acknowledging it "is by no means, as often portrayed, a benign process, benefiting humanity universally" (Godwin-Jones, 2020, p. 2). However, the disadvantages of globalization are not discussed with the same depth as the advantages, so cultural globalization/cultural imperialism are explained on the surface by unifying ideals, standardization, and homogenization that transcend geographical boundaries. The statement culture is a "slippery concept" needs clarification from a wider and more critical perspective (p. 5). This superficial discussion visits cosmopolitanism, defined as a "[m]oral view of the individual as having an allegiances and personal responsibility to the world" (p. 26), leaving out a crucial aspect of cosmopolitanism, viz., that it affects attachments to nation and local communities and their shared cultures. Finally, Godwin-Jones argues, because it is difficult to deal with the increasingly complex world, many people go on "disbelieving scientific evidence" (p. 8). This statement overlooks why and how science is socially, culturally and ideologically constructed.

The first chapter continues under a second subtitle, "Cultures under Study and in the Media," which discusses IC as an academic discipline and cultural dimensions from Hall and Hofstede (individualism/collectivism, power distance, polychronic/monochronic time, and avoidance of uncertainty). This would be a good place to list cultural dimensions and taxologies we find scattered in various chapters. Essentialism and reductionism are presented as the "dangers" of cultural taxonomies, which would be a good introduction to explain why social sciences need generalizations, how these differ from stereotypes, and the positive meaning of strategic essentialism.

As a conscious step to avoid western centrism, Godwin-Jones suggests "Western approaches to intercultural communication need to be supplemented—and in some cases, corrected—through the different life experiences, backgrounds, and perspectives offered by non-Western scholars" (Godwin-Jones, 2020, p. 10). Godwin-Jones suggests an anthropocosmic perspective as a grounding for Chinese and global ethical theory; indigenous perspectives; and insights from African scholars be included in IC. Although anthropocosmic perspective (that emphasizes the unity of self, community, and cosmos based on Confucian principles) is discussed in Ch1, other perspectives are not discussed (p. 12). Since indigenous American decolonizing rhetoric and Afrocentric and African worldview scholars are available, this remains a reminder what is largely missing from the textbook.

The first chapter ends with ethical considerations (digital divide, social justice, and othering); countering the media echo chamber (algorithms, citizen journalism, solutions journalism); information literacy (search engine optimization, netiquette, culture-of-use) and defining active listening. As this overview demonstrates, there is a little about many things in this chapter.

Based on the first chapter's title, "Broadening Horizons," we might expect that the latest global developments that show a "dividing" horizon line in the global infosphere (and global power) remain undiscussed. This might be a vestige of the text age and an increasingly fast-changing world but also a lack of a critical perspective.

The second chapter, "Building Identities," discusses how identities are built, including cultural identity (microcultures, endogamy- exogamy, co-culture), integration and marginalization (assimilation, pluralism, marginalization, hegemony, ethnic homogeneity, American symbolic ethnicity), social identity (involuntary, such as age, race, family, and voluntary, such as club, church, or political party), worldviews and religions (with additional value orientations). The section avoids more recent examples of intercultural communication and ideology, instead referring to Gramsci's idea of cultural hegemony, and Said's Orientalism to prove the general notion that culture itself is a form of ideology.

The author talks about ideology and its constraints, western superiority, colonialism and subjugation, racism, prejudice, intolerance, stereotypes, micro-aggressions, "model" minorities, and ethnocentrism (Ch2, pp. 14-15). It is not clear why these are discussed in the "identity" section and not a "culture" section. Although these additions make the text usable for other than IC courses, they also neglect many conventional identity concepts discussed in other textbooks.

The second part of the second chapter presents, "Judging and Treating Others Fairly." This section includes categorization and stereotyping; addressing prejudice and intolerance; food and culture; and online identities. The author explains muted group theory, communication theory of identity, contact theory, and critical reflectivity. In my opinion, however, critical reflexivity would be better placed in IC methods.

The third chapter is titled "Using Language," the central topic of the whole book, and one might wonder why the author starts discussing this in the third chapter and not earlier. Godwin-Jones breaks down the first subtopic, language and culture, into further sub-topics such as language helps us process the world around us, language reflects culture, sociolinguistics as a field to study language in use, world languages, and bilingualism and multilingualism.

In the second part of this chapter, the author discusses language learning: approaches to language learning, understanding the nature of language, learning a second language, English as a world language, and language learning and technology. It is not clear why second language learning is discussed in such a large extent in an IC textbook, but this is another example of how the material is broad enough for use in other than IC courses.

The fourth chapter requires the users select preferred parts and drop others since the chapter is wide-ranging and overloaded with information. The author discusses "Conversing and Relating," and the first sub-topic, communication in practice consists of sections about language and relationships, communication styles, communication contexts, communication accommodation, and uncertainty management.

The second part, "Language in Society," includes sources of miscommunication, culturally embedded language use, gender and communication, communication in personal relationships, romancing across cultures, and communicating and relating online. Instead of discussing in the first chapter's taxonomies, the author explains low context-high context communication styles here; this adds to the weaknesses. The chapter ends with a discussion of communication accommodation theory, uncertainty reduction theory, anxiety/uncertainty management theory, social penetration theory, miscommunication, conversation analysis, cultural schemas and scripts, and gender and language.

Moving to the fifth chapter, “Communicating Nonverbally,” we find a thorough discussion about nonverbal communication such as body language—including the nature of nonverbal communication, gestures across cultures, the universality of facial expressions, personal space, and physically interacting with others.

The second section, “Nonverbal Messaging,” continues with paralanguage, managing conversations (signals), and physical appearance and dress. Nonverbal expectancy violation theory, music (another form of nonverbal communication), and semiotics and the internet are interesting topics rarely discussed in other IC textbooks.

In the sixth chapter, Godwin-Jones continues with “Contextualizing Intercultural Communication.” The first part is about “Environmental Contexts,” in which the author discusses the impact of the environment on conversations, built environments and communication patterns, privacy across cultures, cultural spaces, car and driving behavior in a cultural context, and time orientation. This section informs the reader about the cultural communication of Wal-Mart, which affects why the store is successful or not in different parts of the world. The impact of the environment on conversations—including the design of built environments—are more topics that make the text useful for a variety of fields (such as social work, education, business, nursing, and psychology). The text also applies well to rarely discussed concepts like semi-fixed featured, fixed-featured, and informal spaces (p. 5). Interestingly, privacy and monochronic and polychronic time are considered “environmental contexts.”

The second part of this chapter is titled "Professional and Institutional Contexts." This includes business and organizational contexts, equity and ethics, names, communicative genres, translation and interpretation, education, and professional discourse and privacy in the online environment. This section ends with discussing equity and ethics, the importance of names, communicative genres.

Finally, the seventh chapter is titled "Encountering Other Cultures," including "Communicating across Cultures" examining personal encounters, conflicts and language, conflict resolution, the concept of face, cultural schemas, and mediated encounters. The author refers back to the "Cultura project"—originated at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the pioneering institution for OER—calling attention to the various cultural or political associations of particular words. Related theories are face negotiation theory and intercultural conflict style inventory. The first part of the chapter closes with cultural schemas and discourses.

The second part covers "Moving Among Cultures," that is, experiencing a different culture, cross-cultural adaptation, refugees, culture shock, study abroad, achieving intercultural competence, and reflective writing. The author clarifies the meaning of immigrants, refugees, asylum-seekers, economic refugees, sojourners, compatriots, and the expatriate community, concepts which acquire more importance with the recent epidemic of mass migrations. It would be timely to add *migration en masse*, since mass migration, in this form, is itself a complex communication phenomenon and creates new problems for IC. As a good example of the many pragmatic uses of this textbook, Godwin-Jones recommends students document their intercultural learning experiences outside of class by using the Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters project developed by the Council of Europe as a shared portfolio (p. 25). However, it also makes the already lengthy chapter even longer.

In conclusion, Godwin-Jones' *Language and Culture in Context: A Primer on Intercultural Communication* has many strengths and some weaknesses. As discussed, one of its greatest values may be that it is free. Another major strength—not the least important—is that its content is quite interesting. The text has an accessible interface with options, and the text flows well. The intended scope discussing language and culture has a limit, since language is only one element of culture. Disregarding this limit, the author takes a broad angle, uses a variety of lenses, and a wide range of topics (almost too many), in which the author includes various perspectives. The author did good work regarding modularity: Well-separated subtopics in each chapter can be reshuffled or excerpted easily—the same is true for several sub-subtopics. The material can also be expanded using video resources and online links. The text is accessible for readers with various abilities. The photos show diversity. The material is easily understood. It uses field-specific language, but the author explains the concepts. The strength of the textbook is also in its multiple useful theories.

However, we need to be aware of the weaknesses—which are not absolute and might vary based on users—before we assign this text. The textbook's versatility—the fact that it is not exclusively an Intercultural Communication textbook—should be a weakness for some because it shows that the author doesn't have a specific audience in mind, or envisions a very broad audience. As an introductory IC textbook, it works well with careful selection, requiring planning ahead. However, it is not broad and deep enough for more advanced level IC courses.

The organization of the topics is clear but not always logical; a separate "culture" chapter is missing. This could include things now missing from culture—such as culture (and language) of globalism, neo-colonialism, ideologies like nationalism, liberalism/neoliberalism, and power. Also, the sidebars do not always help clarity; many lack important context. I find the vocabulary listed are too many, and the explanations often are poor. Topics are not specific enough, they are often scattered throughout the text, and many times lack a depth. Missing are deep structures of culture, atheism, spirituality, more about religions, and a clear list of cultural dimensions and taxologies.

Many data are old. Major challenges like global universalist language and ambiguous words (democracy, liberty, help) stripped from cultural meaning are not discussed. "Culture" is analyzed in post-structuralist frame—something that is out there, can be observed, analyzed, and built theory about it—not something that is socially constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed every day in front of our eyes. The standpoint is sometimes western-centric.

The author focuses on lecturing, not asking or discussing key questions that would require critical and analytical thinking. This textbook is less likely to prepare students to do critical analysis on their own. I am also unsure whether it offers enough tools to recognize how recent cultures are born and develop among us, like LGBTQ+, gender, trans, childrens' rights, youth liberation and climate-action culture.

There is some inconsistency in organization: the two sub-titles in the Table of Contents that mark the two major sections (sub-topics) in each chapter are missing in the text. In the absence of these, we can find the topics based on the sub-sub-titles only. Finally, the book design might not be satisfying for users with high expectation regarding aesthetics, but this is not too much of a price to pay for free access.

Ultimately, Godwin-Jones' *Language and Culture in Context: A Primer on Intercultural Communication*, was designed to be a primary (introductory) source for IC with a focus on language and culture. These goals are achieved. Therefore, the textbook is more than enough to teach IC. However, teaching faculty need to spend time with the text to learn how to make the best use out of it. From a reader's perspective, the book is an excellent source from which to learn IC concepts, theories, or gain IC competencies without paying for an expensive textbook. The text is versatile to use for many other courses, and provides useful information also for those who want to know more about the field outside of educational institutions.

# Review of *OpenStax college success*

**Claudia Chiang-Lopez**
Faculty
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
chianglo@unlv.nevada.edu

Baldwin, A., August, L., Bennett, J., Mathues, S., Monroe, S., O'Leary, MJ, Pearson, A., Troesh, J., Watts, M. (2020). OpenStax College Success. OpenStax. https://openstax.org/details/books/college-success

Textbook costs remain prohibitive for students, leading many students to delay their purchasing until financial aid has been disbursed, sharing or pirating their books, or, in 43% of cases, foregoing the book (Florida Virtual Campus, 2012). Other students rely on older versions of their textbooks, whether they purchased them or rent them from the library on an intermittent basis. This creates a gap between how the class is planned to be taught and how it is actually experienced by students (Buczynski, 2008). Students who do not purchase their course textbook are more likely to withdraw from their courses, and are less likely to do well in them (Florida Virtual Campus, 2012). This can lead to increased time to degree completion. Open Educational Resources (OER) are one possible solution to this problem. OERs can be defined as "teaching, learning and research resources that reside in the public domain or have been released under an intellectual property license that permits their free use or re-purposing by others" (Atkins, Brown, & Hammond, 2007, p. 4). Thanks to being free, using an OER can increase student access to textbooks.

The *College Success* textbook is an OER focused on guiding first year students through their freshman year that I have used in my own first year seminar courses for a year. The book was co-authored by Amy Baldwin, Lisa August, James Bennett, Sabrina Mathues, Susan Monroe, MJ O'Leary, Ann Pearson, Joshua Troesh, and Margit Watts. Published by OpenStax in 2020 and updated as recently as January 2022, it is part of the OpenStax College Initiative at Rice University. The nonprofit has received funding from various foundations, including the Laura and John Arnold Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (Watson, Domizi, & Clouser, 2017), in order to create free and open textbooks. The OpenStax books are peer-reviewed, and licensed under a Creative Commons License 4.0 International (Watson, Domizi, & Clouser, 2017).

The book opens with an introduction to college and its culture, as well as how the book might be helpful to students. It then turns, for the first 6 chapters, to cover topics that are helpful for new students, like time management, learning strategies, the hidden curriculum, goal-setting, academic planning, reading, studying and notetaking skills. The following chapters are called Thinking (covering critical thinking as well as creative thinking), Communicating (looking at technology, and conflict resolution), and Understanding Civility and Cultural Competence. While the book focuses on freshmen, those sections could be useful for courses in Interpersonal Communication or Speech courses. Appendix A, which gives information on conducting and presenting research could also be helpful for those courses. The last chapters focus on student's overall wellbeing and cover financial literacy, self-care, and career planning.

One of its strengths is that it encourages students to self-reflect at multiple points in each chapter. Chapters open with a short survey for students, based on the chapter they will be reading and prompting them to think about their own current knowledge on the topic. At the end of the chapter, the questions are revisited, so that students have an opportunity to think about how their thoughts or feelings have changed as a result of the reading. The chapter objectives are outlined after the opening survey, followed by content which includes questions, activities, links to websites to explore the subject further, hypotheticals, and charts to illustrate concepts. Most *College Success* chapters also include active learning writing activities that ask students to consider how the different topics are applicable to their lives. Instructors could assign these as homework or use them for in-class activities (like warm-ups or to inspire small group discussions). In addition to all of this, the chapters include an "estimated completion time" counter. This might be helpful for students who could otherwise feel overwhelmed by the length of the chapters.

Students have the option to view the book online, download it, print the book themselves, or order a print copy of the textbook from the publisher (at this time, it would cost around $30) or their school bookstore. Students might prefer this as there are some things lost with some online-only version of an open source textbook, including the ability to highlight and annotate the book. The book itself can be used without an account, but these features are available for students who make a free account through their website. In addition to this, they include a reading, studying, and notetaking guide for students, which could be especially helpful for new college students.

The book also has features that are helpful to instructors. Unlike many OER textbooks, the *College Success* book also includes instructor ancillaries like lecture slides, lesson plans, a resource manual, and a test bank. Research has found that students prefer that their instructors add links to specific chapters or sections into their institution's learning management system (LMS) (Baker, Thierstein, Fletcher, Kaur, & Emmons, 2009). This is easily done with the *College Success* textbook. As an instructor, I have found it immensely helpful to have the ability to link to specific passages within our LMS for each weekly module. In my experience, it helps students access information quickly and efficiently. Other instructors would likely also enjoy being able to insert the readings into a module along with pages outlining the objectives for the module, links to supplemental material, and quizzes.

Still, there are areas of improvement for the textbook. Some content areas seem a little sparse, in particular the research appendix, which does not cover how to conduct research online or how to consider source credibility, something that is particularly important for students who may have never learned how to think critically about media. The lack of a term glossary seems a glaring oversight, especially as some educational terms and concepts might be unfamiliar to students from marginalized groups, like first-generation students.

Overall, the textbook has many strengths. I believe it is especially useful when supplemented with information on university resources that students might not be familiar with. The *Goal Setting* and *Career Planning* chapters, for example, provide an opportunity for instructors to talk to students about their academic success centers or career centers. This customizability and the variety of topics covered make it a book I feel comfortable recommending.

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# Review of *Storytelling on Screen: An Online Playback Theatre Archive and Guidebook*

**Lucas Skjaret**
M.F.A. Theatre Directing Candidate
Baylor University
lucas_skjaret1@baylor.edu

Rosin, Jordan, Heidi Winters Vogel, and Sammy Lebron. *Storytelling on Screen: An Online Playback Theatre Archive and Guidebook*, 2021. https://vtechworks.lib.vt.edu/handle/10919/104420.

Many audience members go to the theatre to escape. They pay for their ticket, struggle to find parking, and hope that the bathroom line isn't too long, all in their pursuit to experience life outside of their own, to exist in a liminal space. But what if the audience themselves are the bedrock for the evening's entertainment? *Storytelling on Screen: An Online Playback Theatre Archive and Guidebook* is a supplementary guidebook that details how the authors, and practitioners of Playback Theatre, shifted their process for online creation during the COVID-19 pandemic. Written by Jordan Rosin, Heidi Winters Vogel, and Sammy Lebron, *Storytelling on Screen* chronicles their experiences with Playback Theatre's aesthetic and dramaturgy. The book details how the COVID-19 Pandemic shifted their creation process and concludes with a step-by-step guide in creating your own Playback Theatre experience digitally. This "how-to-manual" is ideal for both anyone desiring to broaden their understanding of Applied Theatre and those wanting to expand their artistic toolbelt in theatrical storytelling beyond the paradigm of audience and performer.

For those unaware, Playback Theatre is a type of community-centered storytelling. It has its roots in improvisational storytelling and was developed in the United States back in 1975 by Jonathan Fox and Jo Salas. By 2018, there were over 64 companies globally that specialized in this type of performance.[2] It centers on the audience (referred to as "Tellers") who provide narratives taken from their own lived experiences. Actors then perform those stories back to the audience through improv, guided by a lead actor (or "Conductor"). This style of storytelling utilizes mimesis for the audience as the performers tailor their experience to those who share the space. It is a theatrical experience that fully embraces F.O.M.O; you were either there or you weren't. It is often used in a range of Applied Theatre contexts, such as therapeutic aid after a natural disaster, working with refugees, or strengthening police-to-community relations. They build upon the idea that good will come when there is true and equal listening to one another. Some practitioners use other known Applied Theatre methodologies, such as Theatre of the Oppressed, in conjunction with Playback Theatre. Salas and Fox, along with their daughter Hannah Fox, have been the primary writers of this performance style. At the end of the *Storytelling*, they provide a robust Reference page and Further Reading List for those interested in exploring more on its history and scholarship.

The book is structured around three distinct chapters. Its ternary structure consists of an Introduction to the Project, The Archive, and The Guidebook. The first section is what you expect from the name; a detailed account of how these three theatre-makers came together by creating Playback Theatre. They elaborate on how the COVID-19 Pandemic altered Playback Theatre given its original need of having people share the same space to create. Like theatre across the nation, they too turned to 'Zoom Theatre' as their medium of expression by creating a new, completely digital, and international theatre called Playback for People. The Archive section is the shortest of the three as it provides links along with a timecoded breakdown of three

[2] Jordan Rosin, Heidi Winters Vogel, and Sammy Lebron, *Storytelling on Screen: An Online Playback Theatre Archive and Guidebook*, 2021, 11, https://vtechworks.lib.vt.edu/handle/10919/104420.

separate Playback Theatre events, all recorded on Zoom and shared online. This section is basically one list of URL links, sending the reader to YouTube where these productions are documented. Lastly, the Guidebook goes through the various components and techniques one can use to make Playback Theatre with internal links to the Archive as well as the YouTube videos which showcase the specific building blocks. The authors also made sure to provide further reading and documentation on the theorist or practitioner who created each technique/component. I appreciate the care these authors took in documenting and crediting their sources; it grounds this form of theatre into a larger theatrical community.

The authors' emphasis on Zoom Theatre combined with the mechanics of production gave this publication an identity crisis. Is it a diary documenting how the Pandemic altered its modus operandi, or is it a user manual for an abecedarian? The title suggests this is written for one familiar with Playback Theatre, thus being more suggestions to other Playback Theatre artists, but the Guidebook chapter provides introductory information that seasoned Playback'ers would know. This split focus forced me as a reader to reverse engineer the style to understand what it was and then what it became during the Pandemic.

The book's greatest strength is its brevity. It is a short 55-page document written with word economy in mind. However, its privileging of simplicity causes a lack of clarity. There was more than one moment in which I had to go back and re-read various sections to follow the writers' train of thought; I struggled to connect the context to its application. The guidebook as well is intricately tied to the external URL links woven throughout. While we often glibly say that theatre needs to be experienced rather than read, *Storytelling On Screen* affirms that adage completely. To fully engage with the theory and practice, one needs to follow along with the videos whilst reading the last chapter. This in turn makes the slim, 55-page document become a larger, more intensive and interactive study of Playback Theatre. While this is not necessarily a point of criticism on the book, it does require the reader to engage both with the written word and the World Wide Web; to print out the document and share it with a colleague would be only providing a rather than a complete codex.

The difficulty of approaching *Story Telling on Screen* is its lack of a broader context of Playback Theatre. The Foreword is labeled as a Forward when it is so much more. Written by Jo Salas, it explains Playback Theatre and passionately details its various concepts (Conductor, Audience/Tellers, Actors, Musicians, and the need for a Ritual as its base) in a far more artistic way than the Guidebook chapter. While the Guidebook section should be more mechanical (and it is), without reading the Foreword I can see an interested individual being lost on what Playback Theatre is from an artistic perspective. I would have liked them to include a chapter earlier on that provides an in-depth explanation of Playback Theatre. Only about halfway through the document does one read more concrete information on Playback Theatre and its origins. While Salas was able to provide that context in the Foreword, it was often positioned around their thoughts on the Pandemic, Zoom Theatre, and the challenges it presented for them. A reader is left wanting more from the section on Playback Theatre's history, dramaturgy, and artistry; I would have appreciated an Introduction with robust context or an earlier stand-alone chapter that outlines these core principles and history. This would have allowed a first-timer to approach the digital aspect as an informed reader, rather than relying solely on a general understanding from the Foreword (if even read.)

Theatre has shifted and evolved to take on the various styles, aesthetics, and functions of its place in time. As the world was forever changed by the COVID-19 Pandemic, so should our artistry change in response. *Storytelling on Screen: An Online Playback Theatre Archive and*

*Guidebook* documents how the authors pivoted their creation process during the Pandemic; in a sense, they document the ways in which they moved to a digital performance venue. A slim book that ties directly to archived performances of their work in action, it offers a chronicle of both their actual creation process along with how they shifted to accommodate for online playing spaces. *Storytelling on Screen*, however, did lack context on Playback Theatre; at times the book felt lost in who it was for as it provided beginner mechanics but little context into this unique form of theatre creation. A fellow Playback Theatre professional or someone just beginning their work in the form? Despite this, however, Rosin, Vogel, and Lebron wrote a very clear and concise chronicle of their work within the new, digital frontier. Any practitioner interested in the evergreen field of Applied Theatre would benefit from this book for their own creative endeavors.