Iowa Journal of Communication

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Communicating with Our Families: Technology as
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Book, 2022)
Reviewed by Joy L. Daggs

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Kristen L. Majocha, Editor
University of Nebraska at Kearney

Iowa Communication Association Leadership

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This study examines narratives told by employees who experienced involuntary job loss. Results expand on previous narrative research investigating the American Dream master narrative and job loss as related to the neoliberal claim that those who work hard will be successful. The study investigated the master narrative's implications for job loss that if someone loses their job, they must be either flawed or a bad worker. Contributions include a new redeemed-resolved identity construction by individuals who narrated job loss as an opportunity to correct some flaw either in their character or work life and to emerge a better, changed worker. In addition, the study contributes analysis of an additional counterstory type that provides insight into the ways people reconstruct damaged identities throughout their job loss experience. As family, friends, and coworkers of those who lose their jobs, we can contribute to their well-being and facilitate their return to work by affirming their counter narratives, refusing to accept the master narrative, and helping them develop counterstories as needed.

This investigation speaks to the intersection of interpersonal communication (IPC) research and social etiquette literature in constructing an apology over computer mediated communication (CMC). As individuals are engaging more in interpersonal interaction over CMC, apologies are being issued through this communication channel. Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory guided this work as this has the possibility to anticipate the

way language might be interpreted in conversation to achieve the goal they desire (Goldsmith & Normand, 2015). This research found that throughout social etiquette literature, IPC literature, and politeness theory; the five common themes that emerged with suggested features of apologies were: (1) expressing remorse, (2) offering an explanation, (3) acknowledging responsibility, (4) asking for forgiveness, and (5) asking for permission to apologize. A content analysis was conducted on Tweets (n=226) that revealed implications on the frequency and usage of these features within apologies posted on the platform.

        This paper takes a rhetorical autoethnographic approach to understanding the evolution of support and grief in one private online Facebook group, Amy's Army. Initially created as a private channel for one woman to communicate cancer treatment news to her social network, the Amy's Army group evolved into a source of support, developed a specific culture, and cultivated offline relationships. Following Amy's death, the group became a source of grief support, memorialization, and familial support. This paper specifically explores how the group's rhetoric adapted and transitioned after Amy's passing. The author argues that the specific community constituted in Amy's Army served to support the community members' grief during and after the bereavement transition, perhaps at the expense of the dying person.

        The purpose of this feasibility study is to investigate the perspectives of parents of students on the autism spectrum who use high-tech augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) in schools. The study is the first to focus on children on the autism spectrum that receive special education services and use high-tech speech generating devices (SGDs) to communicate. A mixed methods design was chosen for the current study. Parametric and nonparametric statistics were utilized to determine the relationship

between ease of use, ease of learning the AAC technology, device usefulness, and parent satisfaction. Quantitative data analyses revealed a strong positive correlation between ease of use and satisfaction, ease of learning and satisfaction, and usability and satisfaction. Transcripts from semi-structured interviews were manually coded, and three themes emerged: parents do not view themselves as being equal members of the IEP team, they act as self-advocates, and they have difficulty trusting the school team. Results of this feasibility study were used to develop an initial framework for successful implementation of AAC that can be further investigated by speech-language pathologists and multidisciplinary teams to increase parent satisfaction and decrease abandonment of their children's AAC system.

Relationship Crucibles: Why Everyone Should Sail   pg. 119
John Falconer

This study examines external factors that affect personal relationships. The ABC-X paradigm for understanding the effect of stressors on family crises has endured for 70 years. More recent studies have shown that stressors outside relationships can affect interpersonal relationships. The literature is dominated by evidence of stressors creating negative impacts on relationships, but this paper uses sailing to propose the idea of relationship crucibles. Such crucibles are situations that stress relationships but can result in positive impacts.

Communicating with Our Families: Technology   pg. 128
as Continuity, Interruption, and Transformation
(Lexington Book, 2022)
Reviewed by Joy L. Daggs

Families are considered the first agent of socialization and training in communication. Each of the 12 chapters merges new technologies and the role of technology in family life. The authors situate the influence of technology on personal relationships by referencing Turkle, Postman, and McLuhan and interweaving their research with family communication

Welcome from the Editor

Kristen L. Majocha

Welcome to the 54th edition of the Iowa Journal of Communication. We are an award-winning state journal that publishes the highest quality peer-reviewed scholarship on a variety of communication topics. Our journal is a product of the Iowa Communication Association, a professional organization whose purpose is to unite those persons with either an academic or professional interest in all disciplines of Communication and the Performing Arts. Our acceptance rate is 40% with an impact factor of two, which is considered good.

The scholarship in this issue is particularly rigorous and represents breadth in both scope of topics and institutional reach. The reader will appreciate the movement of the qualitative approaches, quantitative approaches, a novel literary approach, and a review of a recent scholarly publication. The authors of this edition collectively represent six different institutions of higher education in six different states including the west, Midwest, and northeast regions of the United States.

The lead article, *"The Working World is a Minefield": Counterstories of Job Loss* by Rachel Collier Murdock, Matthew J. Baker, and Stacy Tye-Williams examines narratives told by employees who have experienced involuntary job loss. This timely topic has far-reaching implications for a post-pandemic world. The next two articles examine human communication through the lens of social media: *Twitter Users' Paradigm and the Etiquette of Constructing an Apology* by Amanda Grace Taylor and Tanja Vierrether, and *Amy's Army: An Evolution of Support and Grief in a Private Facebook Community* by Laura C. Bruns.

Sheri Lake and Melissa Brydon then offer a feasibility study that investigates the perspectives of parents of students on the autism spectrum who use high-tech augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) in schools in the article *Preventing Abandonment of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Devices for Students on the Autism Spectrum: Parent Perspectives for Successful Implementation.* John Falconer offers a novel literary approach to examining external factors that affect personal relationships in *Relationship Crucibles: Why Everyone Should Sail.* Finally, Joy Daggs reviews the recent scholarly publication *Communicating with Our Families: Technology as*

Continuity, Interruption, and Transformation (Lexington Book, 2022).

       As you read through the articles, consider citing the articles in your scholarship. Allow the research on these pages to also spark your imagination on subjects and topics that continue to advance our discipline. By all means, consider submitting your work to the Iowa Journal of Communication. Manuscripts are now being sought for Volume 55.1, open to any topic in communication, and Volume 55.2 special issue entitled "Higher Education in Crisis: Controlling the Message and Managing Stakeholders".

       Submissions may focus on any type of communication. Approaches may be philosophical, theoretical, critical, applied, pedagogical, and empirical in nature. Submissions from all geographic areas are encouraged, and one need not be a member of the Iowa Communication Association to submit. We are particularly interested in unique, non-standard approaches and voices. Also, book reviews on publications that may be useful to communication researchers and teachers are always welcome.

       We are proud to let you know that our published articles are indexed through EBSCO. The deadline for both editions is April 30th, 2023. Email me at majochak@unk.edu for more information. Thank you for your interest in the Iowa Journal of Communication.

Kristen L. Majocha, PhD
Editor

"The Working World is a Minefield": Counterstories of Job Loss

Rachel Collier Murdock, Matthew J. Baker,
and Stacy Tye-Williams

This study examines narratives told by employees who experienced involuntary job loss. Results expand on previous narrative research investigating the American Dream master narrative and job loss as related to the neoliberal claim that those who work hard will be successful. The study investigated the master narrative's implications for job loss that if someone loses their job, they must be either flawed or a bad worker. Contributions include a new redeemed-resolved identity construction by individuals who narrated job loss as an opportunity to correct some flaw in either their character or work life and to emerge a better, changed worker. In addition, the study contributes analysis of an additional counterstory type that provides insight into the ways people reconstruct damaged identities throughout their job loss experience. As family, friends, and coworkers of those who lose their jobs, we can contribute to their well-being and facilitate their return to work by affirming their counter narratives, refusing to accept the master narrative, and helping them develop counterstories as needed.

Introduction

As storytelling beings (Fisher, 1984), humans use narrative to explain all aspects of life, including challenging situations such as job loss. Once someone loses a job, that individual must retell the difficult experience to friends, former colleagues, family members, and potential employers. Narrative research surrounding job loss and unemployment focuses on job loss in specific communities (Gunn, 2011; Hodges, 2013), unemployment in relation to emotion work (Buzzanell & Turner, 2003), support groups (Garrett-Peters, 2009; Gray, Gabriel, & Goregaokar, 2015), work transitions and evaluative discourse (Hallqvist & Hyden, 2013), construction of career identity (Meijers & Lengelle, 2012), and acknowledged master narratives related to job loss and identity (Pederson, 2013).

This study adds to the body of job-loss research by examining how people communicatively grapple with societal perceptions, renegotiate their identities, and counter implications of one prevalent master narrative of work—the American Dream. In

particular, through a qualitative analysis of narratives told by 28 participants who experienced involuntary job loss, this study examines how individuals repair identities as they narrate job loss through the use of counterstories.

Literature Review

While losing a job has always been a difficult experience, economic challenges exacerbate the problem for millions around the world, including those living in the United States. Over the past 15 years, economic uncertainty negatively affected the employment of thousands in the United States. For example, about 9.6 million people lost their jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic through the end of 2020 (Bennet, 2021), and the recession of 2007 to 2010 saw a total of 8.7 million lost jobs (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). While these numbers provide a broad view of the unemployment situation in the United States during difficult economic times, they do not explain the individual challenges that compound due to the lost jobs, which can include grief and depression symptoms such as feeling near panic, feeling scared, feeling unable to experience positive emotions, feeling there was nothing to look forward to, feeling downhearted and blue, feeling worthless, finding doing thigs to be difficult, experiencing confusion about life roles, experiencing a diminished sense of self, and being unable to be enthusiastic about things (Papa & Lancaster, 2015; Papa & Maitoza, 2013).

These challenges can even lead to a disruption in one's identity. Garrett-Peters (2009) observes that because of the importance placed on occupational identity in North American cultures, Americans are dependent on occupational identity to generate positive self-reflections. He notes that "to lose one's job, then, is not only to potentially suffer damage to the self-concept, but also to lose access to the resources with which self-concept was made and held together" (p. 548). This appears to apply equally to situations where individuals lose a job because of their own actions as well as when they lose jobs through downsizing and even voluntarily losing one's job, such as in retirement (Smith & Dougherty, 2012). One reason for this disruption is what Papa and Maitoza (2013) call "multiple, cascading losses" (p. 153). Some of these losses include loss of income, loss of social standing, loss of roles within the family, loss of previously planned events, loss of support structure, and loss of friends and groups connected with the employment. A lost job, therefore, means not only the loss of

employment, but also the loss of many other aspects of life that contribute to one's sense of self.

Another reason for this disruption may be the current neoliberal worldview that dominates society, which compels us to live in constant competition with everyone around us. As Wilson (2018) observes, "To ensure our success and survival, we must play to win" (p. 3), causing us to constantly feel intense personal responsibility for individual success. However, individuals are unable to entirely control their own fates in a global, complex, capitalist society, no matter the amount of personal energy and effort they expend (Wilson, 2018) leading to an impossible catch-22. No one individual can fully control their fate, but the neoliberal world mandates that they do just that. Losing a job is crushing evidence of our personal failure in the competitive world. This failure can lead to shame, where individuals produce and internalize a negative self-concept based on their identity, which in this case is impacted by job loss (Anaf et al., 2013).

Such challenges underscore the need to help people make sense of such a traumatic event like job loss. The following sections will thus review research connected to narrative, master narrative, and counterstories that may influence the way individuals make sense of their job loss.

Master Narratives of Success

Forces that may complicate individuals' ability to shift blame to external factors are existing, commonly accepted, broader cultural discourses about what is and what should be related to success and failure. One such discourse is the master narrative of the American Dream, which outlines the story of success in the United States. Master narratives have been defined as "pre-existent, socio-cultural forms of interpretation" (Bamberg, 2010, p. 287) and as "summaries of shared social understanding" (Nelson, 2001, p. 6). Originating with historian James Truslow Adams (1931), the concept of the "*American dream*" was described as "that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement" (p. 404, emphasis in original). As Pederson (2013) notes, the American Dream invokes the idea that America is a place where anyone with enough hard work can attain a successful life of prosperity to pass on to future generations. For most people, the avenue toward prosperity is working hard and gaining ability and achievement in their chosen

vocation. If one loses a job, then, the interpretive force of the American Dream master narrative may lead some to conclude that the individual did not work hard enough, had little ability, or was in some other way flawed or incompetent. The reality is that hard work and effort do not guarantee that people will avoid a job loss.

This idea is encapsulated in critiques of neoliberalism, such as Tressie McMillan Cottom's (2019) essay "Dying to be Competent." The myth of individual control leads people to believe that self-networking and self-promotion lead to success. Instead, perceptions and seemingly objective technologies lead to layoffs, outsourcing, and downsizing completely out of individual control. For example, one survey found that targets of workplace bullying lose their jobs 54% of the time through firing, being forced out, quitting, and being transferred (Namie, 2017). In situations like this one and in other situations—such as downsizing because of economic downturn—the juxtaposition of broader cultural narratives about work and success and of real lived experiences may create difficulty for those who experience job loss as they try to make sense of and communicate their experiences in light of the implications of the American Dream master narrative.

Unfortunately, such implications can manifest themselves in unproductive ways, resulting in unemployed workers becoming a stigmatized group (Hogg & Abrams, 1988). Goffman (1964), for example, lists unemployment within the stigma type of "blemishes of weak character perceived as weak will" (p. 4). Those who lose their jobs could internalize this stigma as they are looked down upon by those who are employed (Sheeran and Abraham, 1994) and by those who are making employment decisions. For example, during the recession period of 2007 to 2013 and beyond, some potential employers refused to interview unemployed persons (Mui, 2014). A 2014 study by former White House chief economist Alan Krueger confirmed previous data that showed that only 36% of unemployed workers between 2008 and 2013 found a new job within 15 months, and of those who found new jobs, only 11% had full-time, steady jobs (Mui, 2014). Another study found that all else being equal, the longer a person has been unemployed the lower the chances are that they will receive an interview after submitting a résumé (Kroft, Lange, & Notowidigdo, 2013). President Obama recognized this difficulty in January 2014 when he created an initiative where more than 300 employers agreed to seek out and hire workers who had been out of work for an extended period. Although such efforts help,

the social stigma related to job loss persists, and unemployed people may still feel that they are pushed out of full participation in society and are dismissed to the fringes. While there can be the assumption that losing a job during a time of widespread job loss would be less traumatizing, such as either during a financial crisis or a worldwide pandemic, studies show the opposite. In a 2020 study, researchers at the University of Minnesota found that those who lost their jobs due to the COVID-19 pandemic suffered just as many mental health impacts when losing a job during a worldwide employment crisis as they did at other times (Pappas, 2020). Therefore, the reality is that factors completely out of the control of individuals who lose their jobs can lead to unemployment and continuing unemployment, directly contradicting the American Dream narrative of hard work leading to success.

Despite the reality that individuals are unable to control many causes related to their job losses, master narratives still have the power to subjugate and marginalize other discourses (Boje, 2001; Mumby, 1987), a power that is highlighted when one's hard work leads to job loss instead of success. Unfortunately, the stigmas connected to job loss can exist regardless of whether the loss was either a result of incompetence or not. These broader cultural discourses may lead to additional marginalization and silencing among those who may already be struggling emotionally, psychologically, and financially due to the loss of employment (Garrett-Peters, 2009). Therefore, giving voice to stories that counter the master narrative can be important to the well-being of those who experience job loss.

Counterstories

As individuals tell stories, they may contradict and resist master narratives (Smith & Dougherty, 2012; Trethewey, 2001). Nelson (2001) calls such stories "counterstories" (p. 6), defining them as "stor[ies] that contribut[e] to the moral self-definition of [their] teller by undermining a dominant story, undoing and retelling the story in such a way as to invite new interpretations and conclusions" (Nelson, 1995, p. 23). The individuals undermining the dominant story (i.e., master narrative) are called a "subgroup," and the group members "bear the oppressive identity" inflicted by the master narrative (Nelson, 2001, pp. 170–171). In the case of an individual losing a job, the subgroup could include the individual who lost the job, as well as anyone else who bears the consequences

of the loss (e.g., family members, friends, and coworkers). Those who promote the oppressive master narrative are called the "dominant group" (Nelson, 2001, pp. 170–171). Nelson (1995) observes that those who promote such master narratives are those in authority. In the case of job loss then, the dominant group could include managers, human resources representatives, and anyone else involved in the job-termination process.

The type of counterstory told—refusal, repudiation, and contestation—depends on who the audience is. Refusal counterstories are directed to members of the subgroup (p. 170), and the stories deny the identity that the master narrative implies for them. As Nelson (2001) argues, "Subgroup members are conscious of the need to cope with the expectations set by the master narratives, but they refuse to see themselves as the master narratives depict them" (p. 170). Ultimately, refusal narratives seek to help subgroup members "understand who they are" (p. 170). In the context of job loss, an individual who loses a job might tell such stories to family, friends, and former coworkers.

Repudiation counterstories are directed not only to members of the subgroup but also to some members of the dominant group (Nelson, 2001, p. 171). Individuals who tell repudiation counterstories similarly deny the identity implied by the master narrative, but they "use the self-conception that is shaped by a counterstory to try, in limited ways, to shift dominant understandings of who they are" (p. 171). Thus, the aim of repudiation counterstories moves beyond shifting the views of the subgroup and seeks to also shift the perception of some members of the dominant group. In the context of job loss, an individual who loses a job might tell such stories to a former manager, and even the manager's boss.

Contestation counterstories are similarly directed to members of the subgroup and the dominant group, except the resistance is "wholesale," "public," and "systematic" (Nelson, 2001, p. 171). The goal of counterstories that contest is to shift and correct the master narrative responsible for marginalization on a large scale. Nelson (2001) cites the Black Power and LGBTQ+ movements as examples of contestation resistance (p. 171). In the context of job loss, an individual who loses a job might tell such stories for the purpose of organizing labor movements and promoting labor legislation. A counterstory, then, "resists an oppressive identity and attempts to replace it with one that commands respect" (Nelson, 2001, p. 6). Because the American Dream implies that individuals

who lose their jobs may either be flawed or may be bad workers, individuals countering that master narrative would construct identities that deny those implications.

Although counterstories are a powerful tool, their use in the context of narrating job loss has not been adequately studied. In his examination of job loss narratives, Pederson (2013) examined how workers who lost their jobs communicated their identities online through their stories of job loss. He specifically focused on how such workers "position themselves within and against master narratives," specifically the American Dream master narrative (p. 303). Pederson (2013) found that individuals told five types of narratives: victim, redeemed, hopeless, bitter, and entitled and dumbfounded (p. 309). Findings specific to the American Dream master narrative included individuals telling victim narratives that shifted blame for the job loss from the individual to the employer and to the broader economic system (p. 309), individuals telling hopeless narratives who derived their sense of self entirely from their occupational identity (p. 312), individuals telling redeemed narratives that communicated greater opportunity because of the job loss (p. 309), individuals telling bitter narratives that challenged an economic system that is not rewarding them for their education and hard work (p. 313), and individuals telling entitled and dumbfounded narratives who were surprised at their inability to find a job and who shifted the blame to external forces because they were "competent, reliable, and desirable for employment" (p. 314).

Pederson (2013) did not apply the concept of counterstories to his research, but when reading the example narratives Pederson examined, the researchers observed that the participants employed counterstories as they created narratives about their job loss. Because the participants shared these stories publicly online, one might define the counterstories in Pederson's (2013) study as contestation narratives. However, the resistance would likely be considered "piecemeal" and not at the level of resistance that contestation achieves (Nelson, 2001, p. 169–171). Further, although the site that Pederson (2013) gathered his narratives from (experienceproject.com) is no longer online, internet archives indicate that the site's audience for those who shared narratives was "people who get you" (Experience Project, 2016). A TED talk by the founder, Armen Berjikly, reviewing the origins of the site, further indicates that the audience for the narratives was subgroup members who could understand each other and provide support (2013).

Therefore, the narratives Pederson (2013) analyzed would most likely be considered refusal stories according to Nelson's (2001) definitions.

Notably, Nelson's (2001) other types of counterstories, repudiation and contestation, were not reported in Pederson's (2013) study and do not appear to have been analyzed in other job loss literature. The researchers wanted to see if the use of counterstories is common when narrating job losses, particularly in contexts outside of public online forums, and what types of counterstories are typically told by those who lose their jobs. Specifically, the researchers were curious to discover whether all three types of counterstories were evident in the narratives of those who communicatively managed job loss and resisted the American Dream narrative. Additionally, they wanted to determine whether the same themes of narratively constructed identity that Pederson (2013) found would emerge when examining narratives not posted publicly online.

Therefore, to build on and extend Pederson's (2013) research by examining how those who experienced job loss constructed identity through counterstories, this study poses the following research questions:

RQ1: In oral interviews, what identities do those who lost their jobs construct as they counter the American Dream master narrative?

RQ2: As people who lost their jobs counter the American Dream master narrative when orally narrating their job loss, what types of counterstories do they tell?

Method

Twenty-eight participants who involuntarily lost their jobs (i.e., were either fired or laid-off) participated in this study. Because the researchers were interested in the counterstories people told about job loss and how they reimagined personal and professional realities moving forward, they conducted in-depth qualitative interviews where participants were asked to share the story of their experience, including who they communicated with about their job loss, what the nature of their communication was with others, how they coped, and what advice they would give to others who have lost their jobs. Although narrative analysis became the method of choice for this

study because the approach sought to build on previous narrative research (Pederson, 2013), narrative analysis was also selected because narrative connects to self-concept, occupational identity, agency, and circumstance (Ezzy, 2000). According to Riessman (1993), narrative analysis is ideally suited for understanding subjective, personal experiences, such as the often-traumatic experience of job loss.

Recruitment and Participants

To participate, individuals had to be at least 19 years old and have lost a job at some point in their lives. Participants were recruited through social media posts within the researchers' own social networks, through fliers placed on a Midwestern college campus, and through announcements posted on several online employment sites such as the jobs listing on craigslist.org or college alumni discussion boards.

Recruitment efforts resulted in 28 participants—15 male and 13 female. Participants ranged in age from 24 to 84 with a mean age of 47 years. Nineteen participants were married, five were either divorced or separated, and four were single. Two participants had earned either doctoral or professional degrees, nine held master's degrees, 14 held bachelor's degrees, two held associate degrees, and one had attended some college. Twenty-six participants self-identified their race/ethnicity as White/Caucasian, one as White/Hispanic, and one as Mixed Ethnic Origin. The jobs that participants held at the time of their job loss reflect a range of occupations encompassing blue-collar positions (restaurant server, construction) and white-collar positions (nursing, educators, marketing managers, and vice presidents and directors of IT and business development). Ten of the participants were unemployed, 3 were employed part-time and looking for full-time work, 12 were employed full-time, and 3 were self-employed. Following IRB protocol, transcripts and results use pseudonyms for all participants, bosses, coworkers, social-support network members, and businesses mentioned in the interviews.

Data Collection

Upon agreeing to participate in the study, participants were first asked to complete a brief demographic questionnaire covering basic information such as gender, age, ethnicity, marital status, occupation at the time of job loss, and current employment status and

were then asked to participate in an interview. The research team developed a semi-structured interview protocol (Corbin & Strauss, 2015), which enabled consistency in questioning across participants while also allowing the researchers to ask relevant follow-up questions as needed. Participants thus had latitude to tell their stories and share their unique experiences and insights. Questions focused primarily on eliciting information about the participant's job-loss story, the reactions of the people they told their story to at the time of the job loss, the participant's experience searching for a job, and the advice the participants would give to those seeking for employment. Researchers conducted interviews over the phone. Interviews ranged in length from 12 minutes to one hour and 45 minutes, with an average length of 54 minutes. There were 28 interviews. Audio recordings were transcribed after each interview was completed, yielding 253 pages of single-spaced text.

The primary question that researchers asked of the participants was to narrate their job-loss experiences—as many as they wished. This question elicited responses related specifically to the job-loss event along with their individual reactions to it, enabling the researchers to answer the research questions.

Data Analysis

Narratives were analyzed to better understand job loss and the lived experience of the participants in this study. Following Gabriel's (2000) view, this understanding focuses less on the "information or facts" related to the job losses and more on the way the participants' narratives "enrich, enhance, and infuse facts with meaning" (p. 135). To analyze the narratives, researchers engaged in narrative thematic analysis informed by Riessman (2008) and following the pattern employed by Pederson (2013) to (1) look for themes, (2) note what similarities and differences existed in the themes, and (3) identify and analyze counterstories as identified by Nelson (2001). To conduct these analyses, researchers focused on the construct and coherence of the narratives, and how well they "hang together," as well as the context of each narrative in a particular time, place, and setting—as Reissman (2008) notes, theorizing from the case rather than categories and themes across cases. In particular, we looked at how each individual saw themself, and how they constructed their identity, as we examined the ways participants shaped and defined their identities through their job loss journeys (Reissman, 2008). The audience for these narratives is also

particularly important particularly when applying Nelson's (2001) counterstories, which happened in the second round of analysis.

In the first stage, researchers identified how participants told narratives about their job losses. A researcher who was not involved in the interviews and literature review was asked to assist in the thematic analysis to corroborate findings. Specifically, researchers sought to code ways participants communicatively counter implications of the master narrative of the American Dream (Pederson, 2013) that job loss is an indicator of a flawed worker and instead use those narratives to develop alternative identities. Researchers then grouped those narratives by theme. After creating groupings and identifying themes in their own analysis, researchers compared those groupings to the themes identified by Pederson (2013) to identify similarities and differences. This analysis enabled us to address the first research question, which asked what identities those who lose their jobs construct as they counter the American Dream master narrative.

In the second round of coding, researchers analyzed the participants' job loss narratives to see if participants did use counterstories to narrate their job losses. While analyzing narratives and identifying counterstories, the researchers developed coding criteria for the three different types of counterstories as defined by Nelson (2001). *Refusal* counterstories used communication in the form of a counterstory told to members of the subgroup, whom we defined as coworkers, friends, and family members who were "bear[ing] the oppressive identity" with the participant (Nelson, 2001, p. 171). *Repudiation* counterstories included communication in the form of a counterstory told beyond the subgroup to include some members of the dominant group, whom we defined as managers, bosses, and others with workplace authority over the participant. *Contestation* counterstories included communication told publicly and systematically to the dominant group at large-scale levels such as organizing labor movements and promoting labor legislation on behalf of the subgroup. The researchers acknowledge that by asking the participants to tell their stories, the researchers became an audience. However, because we did not consider and communicate ourselves as members of either the subgroup or dominant group, we disregarded our status as an audience when coding the counterstories. This analysis enabled us to address the second research question regarding the use of counterstories and the types of counterstories told by those who lose their jobs.

Results and Interpretations

Identities of Job Loss

Regarding RQ1, analysis of the interviews indicated that participants constructed four types of identities in their job-loss narratives: victim, two types of redeemed, and hopeless.

Victim

Participants countered the American Dream's implication that people who lose their jobs are flawed workers by telling stories that cast organizations as flawed instead: disloyal, insensitive, and placing little value on employees. For example, Sara was the vice president of operations at a private software company. A year after matching a more lucrative offer from another company, her boss (also a personal friend) laid her off.

> [I had] enjoyed working there, but after about a year he just couldn't afford to keep me, I guess. So, he laid me off instead, which was really kind of upsetting to me because I had given up this other job, you know; no one can know if I still would have had that job at that point, but I felt kind of like I had made a sacrifice for them. And that there was no, there was no kind of pay-off for that sacrifice. It made me realize that when you work somewhere, your boss—you know they want everyone to be totally loyal to the company and everything, but deep down I knew they're not really loyal to me.

Sara countered the idea that she was laid off because she was a bad employee by crafting a story of "business is business" and the disloyalty companies exhibit marked by the discrepancy between what they say and what they do.

She went on to say, "You know, when you go to company meetings or retreats, and they want to have bonding exercises and things like that. I'll do them, but in my heart, I know we're not really a family. It's nice to be bonded, but if it comes down to it, no one is above being let go from this group."

This blaming of the job loss on the disloyalty of companies enabled Sara to counter perceptions of her identity as a poor worker and instead craft a new story that casts organizations as the ones who wielded corporate strategy as weapons in Sara's struggle to maintain employment.

At the end of her interview, Sara discussed how her job loss affected her self-concept and her ability to construct her identity as a good worker:

> Even though, you know, like I said, I didn't really feel like my self-esteem was badly impacted, but I was kind of embarrassed to tell people that I had lost my job . . . just because it had been a great job that I had really liked before that, and so I had told people how much I liked my job. So then to say, you know, now I lost my job—I didn't want people to think that I had been a bad employee and I had been fired, or, that, you know, it was just kind of a different message than what I had been having about my job and my life.

Sara clearly acknowledged and grappled with the implications of the American Dream as she told how she navigated the effects of her job loss. Her ability to counter the master narrative by constructing a victim identity appears to have helped her maintain her self-concept during that difficult time.

Constructing a similar identity, Jacob, a contractor for a German business, found himself out of work. As Jacob told his story, he said that things were not going well for his company even before he started working there, but the company communicated that their strategy was correct, pinpointing having too many employees as the cause of business woes. The company announced upcoming layoffs, and Jacob could sense that his future was in jeopardy. He soon found himself in a meeting with his director, who told Jacob, "I just want to tell you, that this layoff is not performance based. And, we just, we needed to make this decision for our profitability." The director assured Jacob "several times it was not performance based, and they were willing to offer a letter of recommendation, and whatever else they could do to help . . . in the process of finding [Jacob's] next job." After meeting with an employment attorney who analyzed his original contract and explained German employment laws, Jacob renegotiated his severance agreement with his employer and found himself with an extremely generous severance package. Nonetheless, he was careful about the way he narrated the experience to his friends and family.

> I think within a week or so we had written up an email to send out to family members. And I remember being just a little sensitive about how the story was told. You know, when you get laid off, I just didn't want people to think,

> "Jacob got laid off because he's lazy or not a hard worker," or any other negative attribute that can be associated sometimes with somebody that is laid off. So, I wanted to type it up so that all the details were shared with, you know, our family members, and then we sent it out. [We] wanted to make sure that our close friends and family members knew the whole story.

Jacob carefully wrote out a story to counter notions that he was either a flawed or lazy worker or unsuccessful at his job. He said, "You know, looking back, I don't think most people think this, but I definitely thought that when you lose your job that everyone thinks that you were a bad employee. However, that's really not the case with I would even say the majority of layoffs." Jacob constructed a victim identity as he identified the reasons for his job loss as being out of his control, which ultimately enabled him to counter the implications of the American Dream that he must be a bad worker if he is laid off.

Although Jacob's countering of the master narrative turned out favorably for him, others experienced more emotional struggle. Gary told of his challenges in making sense of his job loss, feeling as if, despite completing all the work his manager asked him to do, his manager was telling a different story than what Gary perceived about what led to his job loss. This disconnect led him to write down his story, eventually sending a letter to his manager's manager.

> I'd worked with the same manager for seven years and he was really up and down. He would always criticize me and my education. He didn't have a college education and he would make off-hand remarks about my education [dual master's degrees] and how it wasn't valuable. He would question me on things but at the same time say things like, "You're a great friend, we've developed a great relationship over the years, and I really trust you." So later when he said, "I never meant to give you the impression that things were going well." That's when I really thought something's going on here, and I need to write it down my way because obviously he is seeing things very differently than I am and he is representing that to his management and his manager. I wrote the letter and sent it to my manager's manager. He just wrote back and basically said, you know, we're taking the manager's story, not yours. I felt like I had to write down my story because I felt like somebody else was telling

somebody a different story. Even before I wrote the letter
and got that response, I felt that someone was telling a story
about me that was different from my perception. Perhaps
that's maybe more accurate than saying somebody had an
agenda against me, but there was obviously a different
representation of me being given than I would give.

Gary's wife also accepted the organization's story of casting Gary as
an unsuccessful worker and questioned whether he had been
personally at fault for his job loss. As Gary described, "Because even
. . . writing the story down she still had a lot of questions like, 'Is this
really what happened? Maybe your perception is distorted; you're
telling it just from your point of view. If you'd been a really great
person and a really great employee, they wouldn't have ever let you
go.'" Gary's identity was impacted, and as a result, he struggled to
reconcile the competing narratives. To do so, he countered the
implication of the American Dream master narrative that he was a
flawed worker by casting himself as the victim of corporate America:

I felt like as long as I kept doing a good job, it really didn't
matter what the politics were or how people really felt about
me. I felt that I'd still be able to keep a job and still be able
to stay employed. I really felt like I had done a good job,
including having completed on time and on budget. The
summer before I was let go, I'd done more projects with a
higher value than I'd ever done before, and they all came in
on budget and on time. So, I really felt undercut. I felt like
management, even though I was doing a good job, still
decided that I wasn't competent. It really did change my
perception [of work]. The working world is a minefield.
You can't just keep your boat afloat; you're actually going
to be torpedoed at some point.

This narrative provided Gary with an alternative to notions that those
who lose their jobs are unsuccessful, poor performers, and flawed
workers, and instead provided a narrative of him navigating the
workplace battlefield, where he could be torpedoed at any moment
despite his best, successful efforts. Job loss thus became something
done to him, something outside his control.

Redeemed
Another group of participants countered the implications of
the American Dream by discovering and emphasizing new
occupational and personal identities. Participants framed job loss as

an opportunity to escape an undesirable job situation and to better themselves. They did so in two ways.

In the first way, individuals described their job losses as something that spurred them on to pursue either another career or opportunity that they'd always wanted to pursue. They countered the notion that either work should be their highest priority or that they should be defined by their job; in this way, a job loss freed participants to pursue a new occupation through additional education and through other means without disrupting their identity or self-concept. They rejected the implication of the American Dream that they are flawed workers because their identity did not hinge upon whether they had a job. We call this identity *redeemed-reinvented*.

In one example, Jillean had worked for a credit company for nearly two decades when the business was bought out by another company. Many workers lost their jobs after the buyout. She expressed how the job loss turned out to be an opportunity for her. "I really am so happy and thankful that I was able to step back and take the opportunity to go back to school and make this change. Because I wanted to do it two other times and didn't." Despite this opportunity, Jillean alluded to a negative perception associated with job loss. As she talked about how her job loss affected her family, she mentioned how her ex-husband was speaking with her children about the subject:

> My ex has made comments about why am I not working, and I've tried explaining, you know, "Hey, look, I am looking for jobs in my new field. No, I'm not beating the pavement, but for now I've got unemployment and I've got my school, and I'm doing as much as I was before; I'm not asking for any more money from you." But he's saying things to our children, and so they're saying things, and that perception is a little rough—the perception my children have because I lost my job.

Despite her ex-husband instilling negative perceptions related to job loss in her children, Jillean countered by taking a heavier course load to reinvent herself through additional education. She emphasized that despite the important role that work plays in her life, work "comes right after family." Her ability to place work as subordinate to other important parts of her life seems to have given her the agency to retool her occupational skills while reshaping perceptions that she is a hard worker.

Toward the end of her interview, Jillean reiterated that a job loss is a great chance to pursue your dreams by saying, "Being let go from your job is an opportunity to look at what you really want to do. And not everybody has the chance to do that, but if you do, take a really good look at it and find that out." Although her job loss was a shock, Jillean chose to look at the situation as an opportunity to reinvent herself by returning to school and finding work in a new industry. This counterstory allowed her to construct positive perceptions of herself to counter the negative narratives of incompetence and lack of success associated with job loss.

Barbara, too, framed job loss as an opportunity. She unexpectedly lost the job she loved as a teacher's assistant and science specialist at a charter school when she told one of her colleagues that she was thinking of quitting the next year. She was upset when she was first let go, but then reframed the job loss. "All of a sudden I have the open wide door of going creatively in a direction that I've dreamed of going, and I've worked at trying to go for quite some time." Although her family had encouraged her to quit her job and move in the direction she really wanted to go, she did not want to make the change until she was given no other option upon being let go by her organization. "I just have never been able to, to put in the focused, disciplined routine into it before," she said. Part of Barbara's ability to move on to her new opportunity may have come from her realization that she was not defined by her job; therefore, if she lost her job, she was not flawed and had not failed. She concluded her narrative by sharing, "So whether or not I lost my job, or whether or not I had a job, that's not my self-worth—it never has been."

These examples indicate that as participants countered implications of the American Dream master narrative, they refused the master narrative by creating stories that framed job loss as a positive event in their lives, one that motivated and enabled them to go in a new direction, pursue new dreams, and take chances they had been unwilling to take before. These stories countered the view that job loss implies a failed and faulty worker because work does not have to define individuals and their priorities and because job loss can enable the development of new and positive identities and a more hopeful view of the work world.

In contrast to *redeemed-reinvented* identities, some participants told their redeemed stories in a second way where they framed their job losses as something that helped them realize and

remedy their mistakes. Participants acknowledged their character flaws but told narratives about how they changed to become better workers. They rejected the implication of the American Dream that they are now flawed workers because their identity is no longer the same. We call this identity *redeemed-resolved*.

For example, Steve was a first-time corporate VP when he lost his job. In describing the job loss, Steve said,

> Well, [my boss] came to me, and three or four weeks before the firing and said, "Look, I appreciate the things you have submitted to me that are innovative ideas for the future of the company, but that isn't your job, and if you don't get the daily work done, I don't think we can keep you." Just before I got fired, he called me in again and said, "Steve, I don't know if you do [understand] because I gave you some pretty strong talk about what needs to change, and you haven't changed at all." And all of a sudden, I woke up to the fact that I have been all of my life-giving lip service to changes I needed to make, and not really settling down and making some substantial changes. And so it ended up that I had to get fired in order to repent and realize, I can't just talk about doing the changes in my life, I had better do them.

Steve later talked about specific changes he implemented as he searched and began a new job. He acknowledged notions that his job loss hinged upon his former personal flaws and was eventually able to use that acceptance as a step to revisions in his work and restoration of his status as a "good" worker.

Similarly, Ann, a bank teller, told a redemption story. She made an error at work that caused her to be fired, but said she was able to learn from this experience so that she could do better in her next job.

> You know, to begin with, being out in the workforce and getting on at the bank, I was so excited to be working, and then all of the sudden not having the income coming in and not having a job, and then all of the sudden getting a job again, and in between jobs has given me perspective to work harder and have more of a work ethic, you know, question things. You know, because like [the problem with the error I made] at the bank that didn't even cross my mind. So, I started thinking about things differently: "Okay, if I was the owner and my employee did this, how would I react?"

Ann told a story of learning from her mistakes and focusing on what either the boss or manager wants and how to make the manager happy. She is now employed full-time in a job she finds rewarding, and said her philosophy now is this: "Don't take anything for granted. . . . I work hard to keep my boss happy, so I don't lose my job." Ann internalized the implication that a lost job suggests a flaw within a worker, but she used her job loss as a vehicle to redeem herself from those implications and thereby moved forward.

These examples indicate that participants countered implications of the American Dream master narrative by framing job loss as a learning experience that helped them become better employees. Participants acknowledged that they had previously failed, but changes made after the job loss enabled them to resolve past faults and to create positive and improved identities.

Hopeless

Individuals who constructed hopeless identities told stories that attempted to counter the implications of the master narrative but were either unable to do so fully or were in other ways unable to move forward. Although these individuals often made efforts to present victim identities and redeemed identities, they communicated a strong connection between their personal and occupational identities and a difficulty in moving forward to new occupational opportunities.

For example, Michelle was hired as a waitress for her first job at age 16, but was given no training for her position:

> I was hired as a waitress in this little café in my hometown, and the quick summary of it is the man was looking for someone who knew how to waitress already, and I did not have the memory for a waitress. I turned around with the tray of food I needed to deliver, and I didn't even have any idea what table to go to. Basically, I was not trained, at all, and he fired me for not being a good waitress.

Michelle initially tried to pick up hints from more experienced servers, but she was eventually let go:

> Well, I don't remember exactly what happened, but he said you have to leave exactly at 3:33, and I knew just from the time that he gave me that that was, that he really wanted me to leave on time, to clock out on time, but then I didn't know what to do when I . . . had the table to wait on, and it was already past 3:33. . . . I didn't feel comfortable talking

> to him about it, asking him about that, so the next time that I
> worked, I worked in the evening, and as we closed up, he
> brought me into his office, I don't remember exactly what
> he said, but he said, "I told you to leave at this time, and you
> didn't, and so here's your last paycheck and you're fired."

In this story, Michelle acknowledged the implications of the
American Dream that the reason for her lost job was herself and her
inability to follow directions. Although she attempted to place some
blame on her boss for not training her, she has faced difficulty
moving forward by placing blame on external factors, reinventing
herself, and resolving the issue thereby redeeming herself.

> Well, what was difficult was thinking that someone would
> hire me, after having lost a job. . . . So, the process itself
> was difficult to get out there again and say, somebody, I
> really can get hired again. . . . You know, I think as I'm
> talking now, anytime I've looked for a job, I always have a
> hard time believing that someone will want to hire me. And
> I'm starting to think that's related to me losing that first job.

Despite her efforts to find another job, she internalized the
implications of the American Dream that either she or her work must
be flawed. She did not see her initial job loss as a complete
misrepresentation of her abilities; instead, she continues to doubt her
marketability and is constrained in moving forward with a positive
outlook of herself and her work.

> Similarly, Clinton, a pro football scout, expressed difficulty
in moving forward. As was true of other participants, he attempted to
counter the notion that either he was a flawed or incompetent worker,
"There's a lot of things and factors where your job can be taken away
from you, and you're, when you're in the front office that there's,
that are completely out of your control. And you could be doing a
great job and lose it, or you can be doing an awful job and keep it."
In this way, he attempted to present himself as a victim of external
forces. He also took advantage of an opportunity to attend school to
earn a master's degree that changed his perspective: "You know,
maybe some of it's age, but also, I think a lot of it is I don't define
myself anymore by my job, and that's huge." In this way, he
attempted to reinvent himself and his identity. However, because he
derived so much of his sense of his identity from occupation, he has
not been fully able to fully move forward. He stated,

> It's tough. Because I have skills, I just don't know how to
> go about using them. And, I want to help people, and I want

> to have fulfillment, and I don't—I need direction on how to get that. . . . I'm truthfully still a little lost, although I'm always appreciative of things. But it would be nice to have, like, a headhunter or someone just grab me and take a few aptitude tests or personality tests and go, "Alright, this is your line of work; interview here, and hopefully they can get you in." And I haven't had any type of services or luck in that regard, as I'm still currently unemployed.

Because Clinton derived so much of his sense of identity from his occupation, he faced difficulty reinventing himself personally and occupationally. Consequently, he was unable to replace his identity with one of forward progress through hard work. He observed, "It's the world mindset, it's like, 'Oh, you lost your job. Suck it up and you'll find another one.' Well, all right. . . . That's not the case." His job loss continues to affect him: "It was very, very tough, and I had a lot of down moments, I wouldn't be lying if I said I don't have a few of them now, still," he said.

Melanie also expressed difficulty in moving forward with hope. She was working for a small company who lost a large client, and she unfortunately bore some of the consequences by losing her job. As she told about her job loss, she shared this about how she was affected:

> In general, it's really difficult for me not to get my identity tied up in what I do professionally. . . . Who I am personally and who I am professionally are very much . . . a similar person. And . . . so . . . this identity of being . . . a hard worker and being perceived as being . . . good at my job, is extraordinarily important to me. . . . As far as . . . the separation of . . . work and personal identity, . . . I still haven't mastered that.

Melanie also pursued additional education but has still not settled into a new career. As she reflected on her job loss, she shared this sentiment: "I just think that it's so easy to feel so hopeless with . . . losing a job."

As these examples indicate, participants who communicated these hopeless stories had difficulty separating who they are from their work. They attempted to counter the implications of the American Dream master narrative that those who lose their jobs are flawed, but they were unsuccessful in replacing the identity dislodged at the time of their job loss with one that allowed them to move forward with hope.

Counterstories of Job Loss

The foregoing discussion of identity construction showcased how individuals denied the implications of the American Dream master narrative. Our additional analysis of these identities as counterstories enabled us to answer RQ2 focused on the types of counterstories that individuals told: refusal, repudiation, and contestation. As the Table indicates, we found no evidence that individuals were telling contestation counterstories, so these results will focus on repudiation and refusal counterstories.

Table: Types of counterstories by constructed identities.

	Refusal	Repudiation	Contestation
Victim	9	8	0
Redeemed-Reinvented	4	0	0
Redeemed-Resolved	3	0	0
Hopeless	4	0	0

Repudiation

Individuals constructed victim identities most frequently and were the only group to tell repudiation counterstories, meaning that they told their counterstories to both members of the subgroup and to some members of the dominant group.

Of the individuals whose narratives were presented in the previous section, Jacob's victim narrative was coded as repudiation because he worked with an attorney and renegotiated his severance package. Gary's victim narrative was similarly coded as repudiation because he wrote a letter to his manager's manager to refute his manager's reasoning for firing him. Dennis told another victim narrative as he observed that there is little loyalty between employers and employers anymore. His repudiation counterstory emerged as he related working as a geologist in sales and marketing. When his company started accusing him of stealing company information, he pushed back against the dominant narrative that he had done something wrong. He described his situation this way:

> I actually fought it. Because they, you know, they, they were
> accusing me of taking things and stealing company secrets,

> and engineering companies don't have company secrets. . . .
> Since I was in sales and marketing, . . . at night I was
> working out of the house, I'd forward some information for
> my database at home, and I'd work out of the house. And
> when I did that, they accused me of taking information from
> the company. It's pretty typical, our sales and marketing
> people, when they're on the road or when they're home, to
> take their . . . database, the database that they had
> developed, meaning they were, you know, taking a file,
> copying, sending it over to your house and work at the
> house. They accused me of, they said that that was their
> information and I was stealing the information. Which was
> totally ridiculous. But, you know, I probably should have
> fought it a little more than I did, but I was just like, I was
> just glad to get out of that place.

Other than telling his side of the story to his employer, Dennis spoke
only with his wife about the job loss, noting that she provided
"emotional support." The reason he did not volunteer the information
to his friends is that he did not want to "put any burden on people."
Dennis's narrative then was targeted at reshaping the dominant
group's (i.e., his employer's) view of him, as well as the view of a
member of the subgroup, his wife, who bore the burden of the job
loss with him.

Refusal

Not all individuals constructing victim identities told
repudiation counterstories. Some chose only members of the
subgroup as the audience for their stories. Most audiences consisted
of family members, such as spouses, parents, and children, but some
also consisted of coworkers as well. Others might have spoken out to
their employers under different circumstances, but they did not
because they faced constraints. For example, Sara told a victim
narrative (presented in the previous section) where she spoke initially
only with her husband and parents because her former boss was a
family friend, and they had mutual friends. She spoke specifically of
what this constraint meant as she later started letting her network
know she was looking for a new job:

> I didn't want to go into major detail telling everyone that,
> you know, [my former boss] had mismanaged the company,
> or promised me things that he couldn't come through with,
> because he was my friend, and he was still trying to keep his
> company afloat I didn't want to, to badmouth him publicly.

> So that was definitely the hardest part was to tell people, but it would have been a lot easier if I could have said, those jerks let me go.

Sara's desire to not speak badly in public about her boss affected how and with whom Sara felt she could share her counterstory, resulting in her not sharing her story either with her former boss or with others who might convey the story back to her former boss.

Leah, as an additional example, similarly constructed a victim narrative. Although she did share her narrative outside her family with a coworker, she was sensitive to the fact that her story might be retold to her former employer. She described her interaction with her coworker in this way:

> One girl that did the same job that I did – there were basically two of us that were doing pre-assessments, you know, full time, and she was the one that I talked to the most. And she would call me every once in a while and stuff. . . . She was the only person that I told, and I told her, I said, "If anybody else says anything, I'm going to know that you told, because I'm only telling you," you know.

These participants, as well as others in our study who constructed victim narratives and told refusal counterstories, indicated that individuals face constraints when determining who to share their stories with, whether those reasons are to preserve friendships, help friends save face, and prevent retaliation.

All participants who constructed redeemed-reinvented and redeemed-resolved identities told refusal counterstories, meaning that they shared their story with friends, family, and coworkers who shared the burden of the job loss with the participants. However, none of these participants reported sharing their story with the dominant group, meaning that they did not share their story with former managers, bosses, and other workplace figures with authority over them. One reason for this lack of sharing may have been that the participants needed time to develop their counterstories.

For example, Barbara, whose redeemed-reinvented narrative was discussed in the previous section, spoke only with her spouse and siblings about her job loss. She noted that her family and friends had been encouraging her to shift careers, but she had not been able to because of financial constraints in her family. Her job loss corresponded with her husband's getting a better paying job, resulting in Barbara finding the freedom to begin pursuing a new career and reinvent herself professionally.

April told a redeemed-reinvented narrative and, as a former teacher, similarly needed time to grapple with her loss of occupational identity. She said, "Part of leaving is feeling like I'm leaving part of my identity behind, because I've been a teacher for so long." She discussed the process of realizing that she could separate her personal identity from her occupational identity:

> I'm a person in and of myself, and while teaching might be part of who I am, there are lots of other parts to me, and so I'm just kind of working on integrating all of those as opposed to just focusing on, "Oh my God, I'm a teacher without a class!" or "I'm a teacher without students!" You know, there really are a lot of different things going on in my life, and now I get a chance to take a break and kind of focus and heal and see what's next. And maybe what's next is another teaching job, and maybe not. So, it's been a process.

Like Barbara, April's ability to work through her process of reinventing her identity came in part because of discussions she had with her spouse who offered to support them financially. In conversations with her friends, they encouraged her to "take a leap of faith" by rethinking her career. Having a support system among subgroup members seemed to provide April with the space and time she needed to reinvent her identity.

Participants who told redeemed-resolved stories also reported needing time to develop their stories. Steve, whose job-loss story was discussed in the last section, reported talking with his wife who "unfailingly expressed her confidence" in him. Support from his family and his faith enabled him to "focus on the real issues rather than just being depressed." With that support system in place, he began realizing things he needed to change, such as getting things done and focusing better. He observed this about his six months of being out of work:

> That was a long enough period of time, that enough of the things that were close enough to the surface could be addressed so that I did go in to a new job when I finally got it very much more oriented toward getting things done and using my time usefully and well and not getting distracted and so on.

Steve was able to develop his narrative after six months of being out of work and having the time he needed to work on developing himself personally.

Ken constructed a similar redeemed-resolved identity. He knew his first job out of college was not a good fit, as hard as this was to admit. He agreed to leave the firm, then shared the story of his job loss primarily with his wife. He later built a successful career.

> I mean, it was one of those blessing in disguise stories. It took him time to develop his current story of the job loss. "I think now that I'm looking 20-plus years later, I have a different perspective of my sons who are at work. You know, things will happen, and you can get through them. Before that, those things never happened to me. Because I was smarter, faster, all that kind of stuff. But it gives you a broader perspective of things and how to handle those [situations].

Over time, Ken developed the story that allowed him to rebuild his identity of a successful worker.

Unlike those who constructed redeemed-reinvented and redeemed-resolved stories, the passage of time did not enable those who constructed hopeless identities to rebuild their identities and move forward from their job loss. As with all those who told refusal counterstories, they reported sharing their narratives with only those of the subgroup, including family members, friends, and coworkers. However, their stories did not provide the means for moving forward and repairing their identities. Instead, they seemed unable to develop counterstories that reflected victimhood, reinvention, and redemption, but instead were paralyzed by the implications of the American Dream master narrative.

Discussion and Implications

When individuals disclose that they have lost a job, coworkers, friends, and family members often ask for an account of what happened. As individuals narrate their job loss stories, they appear to grapple with a societal perception that their own failings are the reason for the job loss. This reality was commonly shared by the participants in our study and reflects a broader narrative about job loss—that individuals who lose their jobs are either flawed or have failed in some way. This belief is implied by the American Dream narrative that people who work hard are successful; if a person is not successful (and losing a job is clearly a failure, not a success), then they must not work hard, and they must not deserve success. While there may be some employees deserving of termination, other

employees do not deserve termination, and all those who lose their jobs must find ways to move forward.

Victim identity narratives were the most common type of job loss narrative told by participants in this study. This type of narrative allows the worker to see themselves as victims of a dehumanized workplace operating in an impersonal, "business as usual" pattern, and therefore the job loss is not a reflection of the worker's competence and value. Corroborating previous research (Bluestein et al., 2013; Ezzy, 2000) this type of narrative seems to help these workers shift blame from themselves to external factors and by so doing maintain their identities as good workers. Notably, those constructing victim identities were the only participants to tell both refusal counterstories and repudiation counterstories. This finding extends Pederson's (2013) findings, as the individuals in his study created only refusal narratives told to a group of people in a situation similar to their own. In addition to telling such refusal stories to family members, friends, and others sharing the burden of job loss, participants in the present study also told repudiation stories to bosses, coworkers, and others in the dominant group. Constructing a victim identity thus seems to enable people to be the most vocal about their job loss out of all the counterstories presented in the findings. Those who told repudiation counterstories seemed to not only view themselves as a victim, but also view the employers as needing to recognize their responsibility for the job loss.

Sharing this type of narrative with others, however, could be seen as being in conflict with advice from many online sources that tell those who lose their jobs to avoid saying anything negative about and placing blame on past employers and workplaces, particularly in interviews (Auerbach, 2018; Doyle, 2018; Gelber, n.d.; Lutkin, 2019; Richard, n.d.; Scivicque, 2013; Skillings, n.d.; wikiHow Staff, 2019). Indeed, there are many intense emotional responses to job loss that must be managed by the person who lost a job (Buzzanell & Turner, 2003), and research in venting, and allowing emotions to take over thoughts and actions and expressing those emotions in an explosive manner, does suggest that unrestrained vilification of past employers is counterproductive. For many years, researchers have noted that rather than providing a catharsis, venting leads to heightened negative emotions, such as anger and frustration, when experiencing unpleasant situations, including when discussing job loss (Ebbeson et al., 1975).

However, emotion sharing, and discussing emotions with others, particularly those who can relate to our emotions and emotion-causing experiences, has been shown to be beneficial. Generally, people share between 75 and 95 percent of their emotional experiences with at least one person such as either a friend, spouse, or parent (Frijda, 2005). When emotions are shared with the purpose of understanding them, pondering on them, and making sense of them, this kind of disclosure can lead to improved mental health (Tardy, 2000). Further, narratives can help individuals manage those emotions (Hallqvist & Hyden, 2013). Therefore, sharing emotions in the form of empowering counterstories that preserve a person's self-concept by creating an identity as a victim in a dehumanized, impersonal workplace seems to provide a healthy way for workers to process job loss and have a path to move forward with a positive self-concept and self-esteem. Importantly, this study's findings indicate that not all individuals will feel comfortable sharing victim identity narratives with the dominant group because of social and other types of constraints. These constraints may limit the number of repudiation narratives told by those who lose their jobs but giving individuals an opportunity to share their counterstories with members of the subgroup could provide them with the needed emotion sharing.

Analysis of additional identity narratives told by the participants in this study further expanded Pederson's (2013) findings. In addition to confirming Pederson's (2013) victim identities, the findings confirmed *hopeless* identities where individuals told stories about inability to move forward from their job loss because they were unable to extricate their personal identities from their occupational identities. The American Dream master narrative implies that those who lose their jobs are either flawed or are not hard workers. If these individuals are unable to resist that master narrative and move forward, then their job loss could be devastating to their self-concept. Underscoring previous job-loss research about the importance of shifting the blame of a job loss from internal to external reasons (Bluestein et al., 2013; Ezzy, 2000), these individuals may need additional support to understand their job losses and to develop counterstories that acknowledge external reasons and enable them to move forward and to repair their identities. Even if an employee is partly responsible for the job loss, there are likely other external factors that played a role. As Anas et al. (2013) note, human agency must be understood within an individual's whole of life circumstances, including structural and

material constraints, and the personal and interior factors that shape these circumstances (p. 12). Helping these individuals discover those external reasons and not focus solely on possibly internal reasons could help them move forward with hope. Importantly, the skills to develop these narratives are either not inherently present or not present in people, and if they are not present, they can be learned (Meijers & Lengelle, 2012).

This study also expanded Pederson's (2013) study by providing evidence for separating *redeemed* narratives into two distinct categories. The first category of redeemed participants, which could be called *redeemed-reinvented*, use narratives to push back against the implication that they are either flawed or in any way bad workers. This group's narratives frame job loss as an opportunity to try a new career, get future education, and take a new path. In each case, they communicated that their jobs were not their highest priority in life and that their identities did not hinge upon whether they were employed. This group seemed to communicate identities exactly opposite of this study's and Pederson's (2013) hopeless individuals who, according to Pederson, saw themselves as "nothing . . . without a job" (p. 312). This ability to separate personal identity from occupational identity thus seemed to free these individuals to pursue additional education and to take risks in starting new careers and thereby reinvent themselves after their job loss. Their stories counter the implication that losing a job is a negative thing that shows incompetence and instead tell the story of job loss as a stroke of good fortune that allows them to take a path more desirable than the old career path. Importantly, this group seemed to develop their stories over time and with support from their subgroup.

The second category of participants who told redeemed narratives accepted some implications of the American Dream master narrative but characterized their acceptance as a temporary, not permanent, condition. These participants, who could be called *redeemed-resolved*, admitted some fault and failing, but rejected the implication of those failings being a permanent condemnation of themselves as bad workers. Instead, these participants created a redemptive narrative, talking about the job loss as an opportunity to correct some flaw in either their character or work life and to emerge a better, changed worker who was then fit to be successful. Notably, these individuals told only refusal counterstories, meaning that they reported speaking only to friends, family, and others in their situation about the job loss, not to members of the dominant group. Logically,

this finding makes sense because the individuals were confessing their own faults and acknowledging that at one time they may have been flawed in some way. However, unlike hopeless individuals who also told only refusal counterstories, they found a way to resolve their flaws to forge a new identity where the American Dream's implications no longer apply. Like those in the redeemed-reinvented category, this group seemed to develop their stories over time and with support from their subgroup. By expanding Pederson's (2013) identity types to include the redeemed-resolved category, researchers may be able to provide an additional identity construction to help hopeless individuals move on from their job loss.

Notably, the results in this study did not find evidence of Pederson's (2013) *bitter* and *entitled and dumbfounded* narratives. On closer examination of these categories of narratives in Pederson's (2013) study, this is not surprising because these identity narratives seem to have been created as part of narrating the job *search* process instead of narrating the job *loss* process. Specifically, Pederson (2013) noted that those individuals were either bitter or entitled and dumbfounded not only because of an economic system that contributed to their job loss but also because of "not being able to find a job" and because of their "astonishment as they searched for a job and could not secure one" (p. 313). Because individuals often need to narrate their job loss during the job search process (e.g., when asked by an employer about previous employment), the identities constructed in each type of narrative may overlap. However, considering this study and Pederson's (2013) findings, additional research might further investigate how and whether all the identities that participants constructed either correspond or diverge in the job-loss situation and the job-search situation.

This study found that Pederson's (2013) sample of people who posted narratives to an online discussion board composed of people who shared similar experiences with job loss found a more public subgroup to share their refusal counterstories, but still limited their telling, which led the researchers of the present study to consider those narratives as refusal counterstories. The present study found no evidence of participants sharing their job loss narratives in a public setting at the level Nelson (2001) described to consider them contestation counterstories. The fact that job loss narratives are not shared publicly and systematically with the dominant group could be a factor in perpetuating the stigma of job loss. As previously noted, failure to take control of one's life and keep a job fly in the face of

the neoliberal, American Dream master narrative that we can succeed in anything if we just work hard, take responsibility, and be good. Failure to do so often leads to shame, despite the many aspects of life completely outside individual control. For both the person who loses the job and those who surround that person, the lack of job loss narratives implies that the experience is unusual, thereby feeding the perception that job loss must be the result of either flaws or incompetence. When someone's own inner circle questions their worth and competence as an employee, there is difficulty in creating an identity narrative that counters such beliefs. There is still a stigma surrounding job loss, and this study's findings indicate that many participants had to grapple with that stigma, even in conversation with those closest to them.

While the implications of this study are important to understanding how individuals who have lost their job narrate and make sense of their experiences, the study is not without limitations. First, our participants represented a fairly homogenous group. Minorities and other marginalized workers may enrich the counterstories of job loss presented in this article. Returning to McMillan Cottom's work, the promise of being a competent, not a bad, worker in the neoliberal workplace is tied to race and gender as well as employment status (2019). Future research should include more diverse voices in exploring identity and counterstory creation. Second, this study focused on involuntary job loss. With the rise of the gig economy where work often resembles temporary contract work, narratives and counterstories may shift as the employee-organization relationship is loosened. Additionally, workers, often women, "voluntarily" leave employment due to demands for unpaid work such as child and elder care. Future research should examine how significant changes in the nature of work shift narratives and counterstories related to job loss.

Conclusion

This study explored the narratives people tell about losing a job and how they manage the identities constructed in those narratives. While conducting these interviews, we discovered that people's narratives about their job losses largely contradict the implications of the established master narrative of the American Dream. The master narrative indicates that if you work hard you will succeed—and that if you do fail you can work hard to pull yourself up by your bootstraps and move forward—so there is not surprise

then that those who do not succeed and move forward, despite their hard work, feel hopeless and believe they are considered either flawed or to have failed in some way. Our participants found that the master narrative of working hard and being successful was often not the reality. Instead, many who work hard may not be successful, and some may, in fact, even lose their jobs due to circumstances beyond their control.

Clearly, developing narratives, particularly counterstories, can help individuals move forward after a job loss and help them restore their identity. However, current systems are not always effective in this effort. Gray, Gabriel, and Goregaokar (2015) recommended that interventions for employees who will lose their jobs start earlier (prior to the job loss) and last longer, as the impact of job loss on identity, hope, and future lives is deep and lasting. This study augments that recommendation by pointing to a need to problematize the master narrative of hard work leading to success to allow individuals greater agency, time, and space in communicating about their difficult experiences and to repair their damaged identities. By acknowledging counter narratives, helping people develop counter narratives, listening to and validating these narratives, and treating workers who have lost their jobs as desirable workers, we can create spaces where people who experience job loss can focus on finding support and employment rather than creating counterstories to fight against a too-widely embraced master narrative that tells them their worth as human beings is dependent on their employment status. Still, in the current culture, creating counterstories about job loss can serve as an important step toward helping people communicate about and cope with job loss.

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Twitter Users' Paradigm and the Etiquette of Constructing an Apology

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This investigation speaks to the intersection of interpersonal communication (IPC) research and social etiquette literature in constructing an apology over computer mediated communication (CMC). As individuals are engaging more in interpersonal interaction over CMC, apologies are being issued through this communication channel. Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory guided this work as this has the possibility to anticipate the way language might be interpreted in conversation to achieve the goal they desire (Goldsmith & Normand, 2015). This research found that throughout social etiquette literature, IPC literature, and politeness theory; the five common themes that emerged with suggested features of apologies were: (1) expressing remorse, (2) offering an explanation, (3) acknowledging responsibility, (4) asking for forgiveness, and (5) asking for permission to apologize. A content analysis was conducted on Tweets (n=226) that revealed implications on the frequency and usage of these features within apologies posted on the platform.

Introduction

Social etiquette is a concept that outlines verbal and nonverbal codes surrounding a display of consideration for others. The codes of social etiquette should be of interest to interpersonal communication (IPC) scholars as they seek to understand communication in the social world. Social etiquette literature is relevant to individuals in a variety of contexts, including those who travel to a foreign place as they will often look for the etiquette practices of their destination. Another example of how social etiquette literature has proven to be relevant is related to individuals seeking upward social mobility, as knowledge of social etiquette codes has a positive effect on ascending in the social order (Curtin,1985; Hughes, 2014). Communication scholars have studied social etiquette in a variety of different contexts, such as organizational (Sias et al., 2012), intercultural (Yuan, 2012), and cross-cultural (Ladegaard, 2009) communication, therefore providing empirical evidence that social etiquette practices are a part of human communication experiences. The intersection of social etiquette

practices and new media has been considered (Caronia & Caron, 2004; Garner et al., 1998; Knight & Weedon, 2007) and some scholars have termed this crossing as *netiquette* (Sabra, 2017). The *Dictionary of Media and Communication* defines *netiquette* as an "informal set of rules regarding use of the Internet, including the type of language that is appropriate" (Danesi, 2009, p. 211). With the turbulent nature of change to the internet and internet related technologies, social scientific research continues to evolve to understand how individuals are altering language and interacting online. Interactions online do, however, remain informed by ways individuals have understood what appropriate language is in past, online, and offline interactions.

Social etiquette has been alluded to in IPC scholarship in terms of Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory as an extension of Goffman's notions of face and identity. However, politeness (i.e., showing consideration for others) and social etiquette (i.e., social tickets and codes of politeness) are not interchangeable terms. Etiquette focusses more on rules, forms, and expectation according to societal norms, whereas politeness is centered more on the verbal messages around how to abide by those rules (Martine, 1996). The two notions do overlap and are useful in informing one another. As social etiquette codes are historically cultivated and constituted in the mind and behavior of the actor, understanding social etiquette codes is useful as they provide context for the development of *politeness strategies*. These strategies, definitions of politeness theory, and Goffman's notion of face will be discussed further in the theoretical framework portion of this manuscript.

The purpose of this investigation is to explore the features of apologies in Tweets and compare them to features advised in the social etiquette literature and IPC literature. The hypothesizes explain the relationship between apologies on social media and etiquette literature, and Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory in the context of computer mediated communication (CMC). Overall, this work seeks to address the gap in IPC literature that speaks to the codes of politeness strategies in an apology offered over Twitter. The social media platform, Twitter, was chosen for this study due to the immediacy of interaction between end-users. Also, the limitation of characters in a post – or a tweet – to 280 characters implies that account holders need to focus on the quality of the construction of the post instead of the quantity of words in the tweet.

Apologies in Interpersonal Relationships

As individuals offer apologies in their everyday life, they must learn to construct apologies for relationship maintenance. In an interpersonal relationship dyad, when one person is either the cause or perceived cause of hurting the other, an apology is often used to attempt to repair the relationship (Jeter & Brannon, 2018). There are many factors that a person who committed the transgression needs to take into consideration such as the space and context where the mistake took place. For example, if the hurtful event took place in a public setting and around other individuals, does the apology also need to be in a public space with individuals who witnessed the hurtful event? Another consideration is the extent of the transgression. In their study on communicative responses and forgiveness and apology, Bachman, and Guerrero (2006) found that the two top "unforgivable" offences were sexual infidelity and breakups even after an apology was issued. An apology, even a well-constructed one, does not always lead to forgiveness. Individuals might also draw on past experiences of apologies (i.e., when they have been apologies to and when they have given apologies prior) and reflect on what elements were successful for them as they go about navigating how to construct their own apology.

Although apologies can have a variety of goals, one of the most profound is the desire for an apology to lead to an expression of forgiveness. One ideal commonly found in IPC scholarship is that forgiveness is important in day-to-day interactions of interpersonal relationships (Merolla, 2017). When one negatively impacts another person, forgiveness plays a crucial role in repairing and re-negotiating the relationship. Just as there is a difference of opinion regarding the notion of forgiveness, the construction of an apology and the role played in an interpersonal relationship has also been debated and analyzed among stakeholders. The goal for many in issuing a sincere apology is to seek forgiveness (Bachman & Guerrero, 2006). For this reason, the art of constructing an apology is important to research by establishing a gateway for forgiveness and maintenance of an interpersonal relationship.

Important content elements in an apology that have been researched by IPC scholars include both nonverbal and verbal elements. This has traditionally been studied in an in-person context that has a richness of communication lacking in a CMC context (Adler et al., 2018). Although there have been some studies on how rich communication is achieved in a digital environment (Balaji &

Chakrabarti, 2010; Rasters et al., 2002) the consensus remains among communication scholars that face-to-face is an inherently richer form of communication than CMC (Ling & Campbell, 2009). As CMC stresses the content in communication interactions, we will turn our focus to how IPC scholars study apologies in the form of linguistics. As previously discussed, offering an apology with certain features can pave the way to mending a relationship and has been proven to have positive outcomes by numerous scholars (Antony & Sheldon, 2019; Edward et. al., 2018; Waldron & Kelley, 2008). One theory that investigates the linguistic structure in social interactions is politeness theory.

Politeness Theory as a Theoretical Framework

Sociologists Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson postulated politeness theory around the late 1980s, however the groundwork for the theory began two decades earlier with Goffman's concept of *face* and public image. Goffman's notion of *face* refers to an individual's self-esteem (Goffman, 1967). Goffman's work toward understanding self-identity through the interplay of social interaction started before that in one of Goffman's most renown works is *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) where he explains "the very structure of the self can be seen in terms of how we arrange for such performances" (p. 252). From this work we can infer that the self-image, or face, is rooted in either actions or presentation in social situations. For this reason, apologies are of particular interest to scholars that explore how identity is performed in communicative acts. There is an inherent importantance that humans manage the way they look in various contexts. This notion has been explored in 20th century context in works such as Cunningham's (2013) edited publication, *Social Networking and Impression Management: Self-Presentation in the Digital Age*. This work offers a focus on how identity is crafted with the utilization of social network platforms. Because the Internet encompasses many ways to communicate (e.g., social media, email, search engines, dynamic forums, blogs, etc.), speaking to online image management and the way one uses language through (CMC) is vital in saving face.

As an extension of Goffman's work, politeness theory considers how individuals use language to save face utilizing "message design and interpretation in relation to social structure (resembling interpretive approaches)" (Goldsmith & Normand, 2015, p. 267). The concept of face is predicated on the understanding that

face is public, social, and self-desired to be saved and maintain. This theory claims that because we encounter and anticipate difficult interactions and face-threatening acts (FTA), we need to negotiate what language to use to achieve one's communicative goals. FTA acknowledges that individuals have two different faces; the positive face (i.e., the desire to be liked and respected by others) and negative face (i.e., the need to be private and independent). Politeness theory claims a set of universal strategies that offer a tool to help design our message according to the social context, such as when one encounters an FTA and find themselves needing to apologize (Brown & Levinson, 1987). On one hand, individuals might consider themselves to be a good friend, however they have behaved in a way that threatens that face. An apology offers a way to reparse that relationship and one's face. Politeness theory offers the following four universal strategies: (1) bald on the record (2) positive politeness, (3) negative politeness, and (4) off the record. With the first strategy, the speaker addresses the FTA with a clear communicative act (i.e., on the record), however makes no attempt for redressive action. That is, the speaker is direct and transparent in their FTA and is prioritizing only efficiency in the interaction. Positive and negative politeness strategies both involve the speaker on the record with redressive action. The difference is that in positive politeness, the speaker is positioning toward the positive face (i.e., self-esteem) and negative politeness is oriented toward the negative face (i.e., self-notions of independence and self-determination) of the person that is being addressed. Negative politeness as a strategy is avoidance-based where there is a desire of the speaker not to impose but also acknowledges the other person's face. The final strategy is seen as the politest of the strategies where the speaker does not do the FTA at all that sometimes involves deception.

Politeness strategy is relevant to the study of apologies as because there is an emphasis on how individuals go about charting communicative interactions. When distinguished through a post-positivist paradigm, politeness theory can even anticipate the way language might be interpreted in conversation to achieve the result they desire. That is, the theory is conceptualized to help participants judge the linguistic features to have the desired effect in a social situation by honoring face and helping to assist in understanding the linguistic aspect of applying civility to FTA contexts (Goldsmith & Normand, 2015). For example, if an individual borrows their friend's car and backs into a telephone pole, they will find themselves in the

position to save face (i.e., I am a good friend and I want my friend to like me, so I will need to fix this). Politeness theory would offer a structure to assess the situation and determine what linguistic structure to use to have the best chance at a positive outcome (i.e., saving face of the transgressor). Offering advice on what elements should be included in an apology has not been limited to communication scholars but has also captured the attention of social etiquette experts.

Social Etiquette Apology Discourse

Not knowing how to conduct oneself in any social situation has caused many individuals anxiety and discomfort as they desire to make a good and authentic impression on those with whom they encounter in various contexts. Individuals commonly find themselves thrust into many social situations, both online and offline, where they must learn to navigate and so they seek advice on how to do so. Customer service situations reveal that apologies that are accommodating with an expression of "I'm sorry" with a notion of corrective action information about going forward are most often used on Twitter (Hooijdonk & Liebrecht, 2021; Lutzky, 2021). However, when considering the context of interpersonal relationships, IPC scholars have written about social etiquette in terms of civility, politeness, expectation violations (e.g., in expectancy violations theory, rituals of social interactions, face threats, and professional communication interactions. There is, however, a lack of direct research from IPC scholars on social etiquette practices. We argue that social etiquette research is critical to include in IPC research as communicative acts rarely exist in a vacuum of time. That is, social etiquette is reactive in nature because this behavior constantly seeks to identify and analyze current norms, trends, and behavior.

Social etiquette has been largely considered a code that allows for the path of civility in any given social context. Tuckerman and Dunnan (1995) define etiquette as, "a 'ticket' or 'card,' and refers to the ancient custom of a monarch setting forth ceremonial rules and regulations to be observed by members of his court" (p. xi). Although etiquette was traditionally established by either a monarch or authority to establish social norms, etiquette shifted around the turn of the twentieth century in western culture to be defined by individuals like Emily Post who based new rules on old rules that have been broken. A significant amount of time between the history

of old etiquette rules and the disruption is necessary to be reflected in etiquette literature. For example, in western social etiquette literature such as *Martine's Handbook of Etiquette and Guide to True Politeness* first published in 1866, Martin observes that ladies should wear a hat and gloves in formal settings. Around the 1960s, women stopped wearing gloves and hats in formal settings, yet even in the edition published in 1996, the instructions still guide women to wear a hat. Social etiquette literature written and updated around the 21st century leaves out this instruction for ladies (e.g., Post, P. 2005, Post, P., Post. A., Post, & Senning, 2011). Studies are inconclusive of the amount of time needed to reflect new rules and instructions and mentions of new communication technology channels in social etiquette literature need development.

Social etiquette literature often acts as self-help documentation that guides the reader to living in "polite society" and civilly in their various communities. Etiquette rules are centered around both verbal and nonverbal communication according to the social context one finds themselves in at the time. As will be discussed later in this literature review, social etiquette experts claim similar output to communication scholars in the intent of achieving goals, such as comfortability in social situations and convergence. By perpetuating social rules in a verity of contexts, individuals can feel confident in understanding what will be expected of them. For example, etiquette is often equated with table manners. While dining is one facet written about in social etiquette books and documents, the scope is much more expansive, and individuals seek advice for many different day-to-day happening. The intersection of scholarly, IPC and social etiquette literature informs our research question:

> **RQ1: Are social etiquette experts, interpersonal communication scholars, and politeness theorists advising on the same features for strategies in an apology?**

As the goal for the outcome of this work is to consider how individuals are communicating apologies in relevant communication channels, we must consider CMC.

Computer-Mediated Communication Consideration

As mentioned, there is literature available from influential social etiquette experts on how to construct an apology by way of in-

person channels and public channels (e.g., notes and letters), however there is not a lot of information on how to construct a public apology through CMC channels. McQuail (2010) writes about the intention of scholars looking at mass communication in that "… our focus on mass communication is not confined to the mass media, but relates to any aspect of that original process, irrespective of the technology and network involved, thus to all types and processes of communication that are extensive, public and technically mediated" (p. 5). This positions media ecologists to take a more inclusive stance when studying communication to contain a broader perspective of processed communication through public form as the goal of mass communication theory is to either guide or predict cause and effect from social scientific research.

  Face-to-face communication is often considered a richer form of communication because both nonverbal and verbal communication cues are displayed. Understanding communication though various mediums has captured media ecologists' interest throughout history as communication technology can defy barriers of time and space. One media ecologist that speaks to this is Peters in his work *Speaking into the air: A history of the idea of communication*. He writes about how letters can communicate with the dead and living. Peters' concept of "dead letters" situates that communication might be taken out of context and/or be oblivious to the intended message. Throughout this work Peters consistently challenges the transactional model of communication where the message is simultaneously transmitted between the sender and receiver. This is evident when looking at and unpacking the following quote: "When we reach out to others, near or far, living or dead, we are only able to read and guess. All our sendings and receivings are potentially dead letters" (Peters, 1999, p. 192). In this quote, Peters is continuing the conversation of the transactional model not accurately describing CMC and drawing on the problem of the hermeneutical approach. Tone and body language are difficult to read through mediated messages because as the receiver in our "dialogue with the dead" over media, we are restricted to interpreting the message as the dead cannot respond. As the receiver, we are restricted to the perspective of trying to interpret what the sender intends the message to be. The paradox is that the sender might be oblivious to the message one is creating, or the receiver is understanding and thus making the communication a 'dead letter'.

The question we then ask is how can we make sure our intended message is the one being received by the intended recipient?

Studying the context of social media is important because for many individuals, this is a major channel of communication. The internet presents challenges to communication because the communication defies space. A person can apologize instantaneously in a long email to their friend who lives in another country. Newhagen and Rafaeli (1996) reasoned that at the beginning of the internet era "in mass communication research we have a tradition of studying uses and gratifications, that is, why people are engaged in this particular mediated communication or another, and what they get from it" (p. 10). Over two decades ago, before social networking sights took form, researchers were starting to question the medium of computerized technology and how individuals were using this channel as opposed to more antiquated channels of communication. The difference between digital natives (i.e., individuals born during the age of digital technology) and digital immigrants (i.e., individuals born prior to the digital technology age) are important to note because the latter are more familiar with non-digital, traditional forms of communication such as letters, face-to-face conversations, and phone calls as a main source of communication (Garcia Garcia, 2012). The more antiquated practices in communication do not always carry over to new technologies, however the cultivation of notions, such as social etiquette and IPC practices throughout history are slow to change.

When looking at letters of apology, McLuhan might term this communication channel as a "hot medium" as they require high participation and engage the senses completely (McLuhan & Lapham, 1994). When one sits down to write a letter, they employ their eyes and hands (i.e., touch) and think directly about that individual and the meaning in their message. The message often starts with a salutation, then the body of the letter, and ends with a signature. An apology on social media might be considered "cooler" as this requires less participation. Seeing a full letter structure on social media is rare because certain platforms have regulations in place to denture long posts. For example, Twitter has a character limit of 280 characters. Twitter users are using the platform as a reporting tool (Vis, 2013). We were interested in using this platform for this study due to the need for users to be both immediate and concise in their apology interactions.

Taking the nature of mediated communication into consideration, the intention of this research considers the linguistic construct of apologies in interpersonal relational maintenance and face-saving goals through CMC. Using the lens of social etiquette is important as the experts claim to have similar guidance for the public with that of communication scholars. The following quote from *The Amy Vanderbilt Complete Book of Etiquette* describes the motivation and outcome some social etiquette experts claim for their writing:

> "… the intention of this book is to help you communicate well with others and to feel confident in social situations... you'll feel a lot more relaxed if you are familiar with the code of behavior for any given occasion; well primed in this respect, you will find yourself concentration on others rather than yourself, and-not the least- you'll be better able to enjoy yourself" (Tuckerman & Dunnan, 1995, p. xii).

IPC scholars also consider verbal and nonverbal communication information is transmitted in order to meet interpersonal and individual goals. This study seeks to understand the interplay between social etiquette literature and CMC on social networking sites through constructing apologies. We understand the nature of CMC is different than that of other contexts due to the lack of social cues available in other channels of communication such as face-to-face (Balaji & Chakrabarti, 2010). Taking this channel of CMC into consideration, this study seeks to better understand the intersection of social etiquette and IPC literature, and apologies over the social media platform, Twitter.

As mentioned in the introduction, Twitter is a unique social media platform in that there is a promotion of immediacy with participation and quality of posts. The 2022 second quarter report from Twitter, Inc. states that there are 237.8 million monetizable daily active users with 82.55% of those users being located outside the United States. The usage was up nearly 17% from the 2021 second quarter report, indicating that Twitter is a growing platform in terms of popularity (Twitter, 2022). Of the users, Statista (2021) reports that over 59.2% are between the ages of 25-49 years old and 33% report having a higher education degree. Since 2021, IPC scholars have focused on the intersection of interactions taking place on Twitter in the context of derogatory talk (McVittie et al., 2021), crisis communication management (Oh et al., 2021), and communication around sustainable fashion (Orminski, et al., 2021);

to name a few. Twitter is a relevant site to explore the drift in linguistic codes deemed appropriate by interlocutors.

Here we argue that the parallels in social etiquette, IPC literature, and politeness theory regarding features of apology, will be consistently used by individuals on social media platforms. This leads us to the following informed hypothesis:

Hypothesis: Apologies on Twitter reflect the same features as suggested in social etiquette literature, interpersonal communication literature, and politeness theory.

A preliminary review of the literature revealed that social etiquette, IPC literature, and PT literature indicated "I'm sorry" should be an utterance in an apology but is not sufficient for either a full or a complex apology. The offer of an explanation puts the transgressor on the record for acknowledging the act and is seen as an important feature. Literature suggested that the transgressor should acknowledge responsibility using *I* statements. Asking for forgiveness was an important feature even though this poses a risk to the face of the person forming the apology.
The benefit of saving the face of the other, outweighs the risk to the face of the transgressor and is stated as a bald-on-the-record acknowledgment of the act.

Whether this standard is upheld in a setting such as Twitter, with limited space and public exposure, was not clear. While the former (i.e., limited space) is a technical challenge, the latter (i.e., public exposure) magnifies any face-threatening act and carries the risk of public humiliation. This might lead to the transgressor being less inclined to provide a more elaborate apology beyond simply saying "I'm sorry." Our next research questions therefore explore how Twitter apologies compare to IPC/PT and social etiquette in terms of providing context. Operationally, we are investigating how many as well as what type of features are being used in Twitter apologies. Although *expression of remorse* is an implicit feature of an apology and therefore often seen as automatically implied, for this study this was only counted if explicitly stated within the tweet (e.g., "I'm very sorry I hope you could forgive me. I was mad I don't control when I get mad. I'm mad when people physically criticize someone I like"). Apologies without an explicit mention of remorse were not counted as such (e.g., "Ohhh I see how you'd understood it

this way... I didn't mean it like that tho, please forgive me if I offended you." Also, "I swear I don't mean anything bad but if I offended anyone then I apologize thanks for not being too aggressive about it ;)").

> **RQ2:** Do Twitter apologies include other features beyond that of expressing remorse?

> **RQ3:** How many of the features found across all three literatures (social etiquette, IPC, and PT) are present in apologies on Twitter?

Method

To answer the first research question, a comprehensive literature review was conducted to cross-reference apology features as discussed by social etiquette authors with elements of apology construction identified in IPC literature, and then more specifically elements within Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. The analysis included five books published by renowned social etiquette experts, eight peer reviewed journal articles written by scholars within the field of interpersonal communication, as well as Brown and Levinson's (1987) original publication on politeness theory. To include sources with a broader reach, specifically in terms of a general, non-academic audience, three popular sources were included. These were openly accessible on the internet, provided a more contemporary approach to etiquette, and were written by well-established practitioners, such as the owner of the *Protocol School of Texas*.

The Appendix provides an overview of the apology features in social etiquette, interpersonal communication literature, and politeness theory. Of the ten features identified in social etiquette, eight were found in IPC literature and five of those were also present in PT. The five common themes that emerged across all fields are: (1) expressing remorse, (2) offering an explanation, (3) acknowledging responsibility, (4) asking for forgiveness, and (5) asking for permission to apologize

To address the hypothesis, RQ2, and RQ3, Netlytics was used to collect 500 tweets from seven randomly selected days in 2021, including the words: ("sorry," OR "apology," OR "apologize"), yielding a total of 3,500 tweets. The raw data was then screened to include only Tweets that fulfill each of the following four

criteria: (1) express an actual apology, (2) include no languages other than English, (3) are not connected to a famous person (i.e., an account with less than 17,000 followers), and (4) are connected to a real-life conversation rather than a fictional one.

The vast majority of Tweets (2,698) did not include an apology but instead offered condolences (e.g., "I am so sorry for your loss."). Furthermore, 104 Tweets were excluded for being part of a threat connected to an account with more than 17,000 followers, 153 Tweets were not part of an interpersonal interaction (e.g., Twitter Fan Fiction), and 319 Tweets did not warrant an actual apology (e.g., "I'm sorry, but this is a stupid idea!"), resulting in a final sample of 226 tweets.

Coding Process and Categories

To identify the type and number of apology features utilized, the Tweets were coded for both number of apology features present and type of apology feature. For tweets with more than one feature, the order was assigned based on chronological order within each tweet. An alternative pattern of organizing features from most- to least prominent was also discussed but deemed inappropriate due to the subjective nature.

The authors each coded the remaining 226 tweets individually to identify the nine apology features and five politeness strategies mentioned above. The initial Cohen's Kappa revealed satisfactory intercoder reliability for type of feature ($\kappa = .93$) and number of features used ($\kappa = 1.0$). In reviewing the discrepancies between the coded items, the authors identified some ambiguities within the codebook. For example, e*mpathizing* was always combined with a*cknowledging responsibility* and/or o*ffering an explanation*. ("I didn't mean it that way, but I see now how this was hurtful, I shouldn't have said that!"). After collapsing the categories into the five politeness strategies, the coders recoded the discrepant cases separately again and reached full agreement.

Results

The hypothesis proposed that apologies on Twitter reflect the same features as suggested in social etiquette literature, interpersonal communication literature, and politeness theory. All 226 tweets included at least one of the features, therefore supporting the hypothesis.

To address RQ2, identifying the number of features used in each tweet was necessary. The highest number of features identified in a single tweet, and the least frequent, was five (n = 2), followed by four (n = 4), three (n = 39), one (n = 68), and two features within one tweet (n = 113). The analysis revealed that although 209 of the 226 Tweets included the feature *expressing remorse*, only 27.8% of these cases were exclusively expressing remorse, while 72.2% included at least one other apology feature. Overall, 74.3% of Tweets (n = 168) included at least one of the other four apology features.

In response to RQ3, all five features are represented within the Twitter data, but with differing frequency. The figure below shows that E*xpressing remorse* was the most frequently used (92.5%), followed by *offering an explanation* (64.2%), *acknowledging responsibility* (19.9%), *asking for forgiveness* (11.9%), and *asking for permission to apologize* (.05%). The data suggests that elements of social etiquette literature reflecting suggestions of apologies are seen as an important template to construct apologies over CMC.

Figure

		Number of features per tweet					Total
		1	2	3	4	5	
	Count	68	113	39	4	2	226
Features	Expressing Remorse	58	106	39	4	2	209
	Offering an Explanation	3	99	37	4	2	145
	Acknowledging Responsibility	2	9	28	4	2	45
	Asking for forgiveness	5	9	9	2	2	27
	Asking for permission to apologize	0	2	5	2	2	11
Total		68	225	118	16	10	**437**

Discussion

Overall, there were several features of apology that were discussed among social etiquette and IPC scholars. Perhaps not

surprisingly, IPC scholars presented a more nuanced approach to linguistics in apology construction and considered contextual elements. There were five common themes that emerged across all fields that were: (1) expressing remorse, (2) offering an explanation, (3) acknowledging responsibility, (4) asking for forgiveness, and (5) asking permission to apologize. As discussed in the literature review, across all fields that were reviewed, expressing remorse such as saying simply "I'm sorry" alone does not qualify as a full apology. The necessity to include features beyond expressing remorse informed our further hypothesis and research question 2 set. Our research also took place on the cite of CMC.

Out of the eight sources analyzed in the social etiquette literature, five mentioned the apology in person and two did not specify a channel of communication for the apology. These were considered in the procedure of this project in answering both research questions. Two sources differentiated apology features between in-person apologies and apologies with a note. The IPC literature reviewed spoke to a more nuanced understanding of the differences in richness of communication on various mediated channels.

As discussed in the literature review portion of this project, the original rules of social etiquette were set by a monarch and continued with the dominant voices in the hegemonic structure of society. These social etiquette rules have changed and morphed with the times. Over the years, numerous people put their form of social etiquette rules in writing. For example, Emily Post put together a comprehensive book on the social etiquette rules around the turn of the 20th century. The invention and utilization of communication technology mediums has resulted in new rules, which often evolved from already existing ones. Some institutions such as *The International School of Protocol* (ISOP) and *The Post Institute* explore rules that are repeatedly broken by society and update them to remain current and applicable to our ever-evolving society. For example, in 2015 the United States Supreme Court ruled to federally legalize same-sex marriages so new social etiquette rules had to be developed around contexts, such as table placement and introductions (French, 1938/2010). Exploring the time taken between a traditional social etiquette rule being broken and the time taken to be updated in social etiquette literature would be interesting.

The value of this study was intended for individuals seeking to construct an online apology. The data suggest that CMC users are using features of apologies that are concurrent with those in social

etiquette literature, IPC literature, and politeness theory. Our analysis also revealed that apologies on Twitter contain features beyond *expressing remorse* (i.e., "I'm sorry") and 74.3% of Tweets included either two or more of the five apology features found across all three literatures. The data could be used in praxis for individuals constructing an apology in an interpersonal communication over CMC to suggest using these features found across disciplines. The apology should also use more features beyond express remorse to meet interpersonal goals.

Limitations and Future Research

The main limitation of this study is the size of the final sample of apology tweets. The word "sorry" can be used in a variety of different contexts, which lead to many Tweets that were not related to an actual apology. Instead of sampling Twitter data based on key words, searching for hashtags (e.g., #IForgiveYou, #IForgiveYouNot, etc.) and then analyzing the apology the Tweet is referencing would be more useful. A larger sample size would also provide the opportunity to identify apology features beyond those related to Politeness Theory.

By establishing the presence of traditional apology features in CMC and more specifically Twitter, this study explored the potential for further research into parallels between traditional etiquette values and those of new media language. The next step will be to go beyond the literature review and analyze real apologies taken from either a face-to-face or private mediated conversation (e.g., letter, email, text, etc.) and compare the type and frequency of politeness strategies to those used in CMC apologies. The public sphere is a complex space that served as the site of this study. Exploring the effect that "public shaming" has on an individual apologizing might be interesting. Future considerations might inquire whether an individual is more or less likely to apologize if other Twitter users pressure them for an apology. Looking at the feature of the other person's name being used in the apology might also be interesting. For example, on Twitter the users handle is used in replying to another persons' Tweet. That handle is created by the Twitter user and does not necessary contain the name of the person. If this iteration was explored, a different method would need to be utilized to understand if using an individual's name is a necessary feature in apologies being accepted and/or forgiven. Perceptions of

the intended receiver of apologies over Twitter might also provide an interesting future study.

Conclusion

Overall, this study made progress toward substantiating media ecologists' claims that the nature of social media alters communication in comparison to other communication channels (Fox & McEwan, 2020) and exposing gaps in popular literature (i.e., social etiquette literature) that are largely not taking CMC into consideration with the nature of constructing an apology. This research is significant to interpersonal theory and interpersonal communication in praxis as this provides a new way of thinking of Brown and Levenson's (1987) politeness theory. Conceptualizing the etiquette practices of apology features using a framework of interpersonal communication is an important context as individuals seek relational maintenance over CMC. As the trajectory of communication is taking place more and more over CMC, interpersonal scholars considering the traditional features of communication that are sustainable and that are not sustainable are important.

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Appendix

Literature review of apology features as identified in social etiquette, interpersonal communication, and politeness theory literature

Apology features	Social Etiquette	IPC Literature	Politeness Theory[17]
Expressing remorse	"I'm sorry" should be the start[1,5,8] "I'm ashamed of myself"[2] There are no acceptations to "I'm sorry". It is essential[3,4] There are contexts to say "I'm sorry" with no elaboration such as when one is greeving[4]	Saying "sorry" is a basic apology that should be accompanied with other components for IP richness including other expressions of remorse[12, 16] An apologetic statement such as "I'm sorry" should be accompanied to make a more complex apology linked to favor complance[13] Korean people are more likely to apologize with the component of "I am sorry" when asking for a favor to reduce face threat[14] "I'm sorry" is minimal and vague alone. It is important to articulate in an apology from a	"I'm sorry" is a part of a passive voice "I'm sorry" is useful to minimize a FTA in conversational structure (i.e., the benefit out ways the risk)

		partner [15]	
Offering an explanation (reveal intention)/ Negotiate understanding of the transgression	An explanation is required in terms of the reason for the transgression[1, 4, 8] "It was very careless of me"[5] Define the issue in a natural way that acknowledges your position[5] Admit your mistake[6] Be detailed in the explination[7]	Implicit in an apology is the admission of a transgression[11, 16] Develop an understanding of the transgression through talk[10] Identify the offence is important in an apology from a partner [15] Explanation for why the offence occurred is important in an apology from a partner [15]	Give overwhelming reasons in offering an explanation One of the considerations a person takes when deciding on a politeness strategy is the want to communicate the content of a FTA.
Acknowledging responsibility	"I didn't mean it"[2] Specifically acknowledge that you (or someone in your charge) was responsible for the transgression[4] Own your action[6]	Acknowledgements are more effective than denials in short interactions and denials were more effective in longer interactions[9] Castigation of the self[12] Acknowledgment of responsibility and regret for violations are in an apologies linked to favor complance[13] Individuals acknowledge the regretful offence[14] Acknowledged	Admit the impingement

		responsibility is important in an apology from a partner[15]	
Asking for forgiveness	Beg for forgiveness[2] Ask for forgiveness[6, 7]	Request forgiveness[12] Requesting forgiveness is important in an apology from a partner[15]	Beg forgiveness for the other person to cancel the debt A bald-on-record acknowledgement of the transgression can serve as asking for forgiveness
Asking for permission to apologize	First ask permission to apologize and wait for an acknowledgement[7]	"I apologize" is a framework for an apology[15]	Indicate reluctance
Negotiate closure	Agree on the solution[3] Propose a problem-solving session[5] Fix it by proposing how to move forward[6,7]	Rewording of "What can I do/what will it take"[9]	
Offer penance	The formation of the apology should reflect penance[2] Offer compensation if the transgression caused fiscal harm to another[4, 5]	Small offers of penance are just as effective as larger offers[9] Offer assistance/help to the other person[12] Offer a repair[15]	
Promise to not repeat the	Express that your apology means	Promise that the transgression will	

action	that you will not do it again[7]	not reoccur[15]	
Offer another channel of apology	Consider following up with a handwritten note[7]		
Empathize with others position	Articulate each person's position[3] Let them know you realize you have hurt them[7]		

Etiquette Literature
[1] Tuckerman and Dunnan, 1995
[2] Martin, 1996
[3] Post, 2005
[4] Post et al., 2011
[5] Packer, 1997
[6] Gottsman, 2013
[7] McKee, 2020
[8] Schlueter, 2019

IPC Literature
[9] Bottom et al., 2002
[10] Antony & Sheldon, 2019
[11] Chiles & Roloff, 2014
[12] Ebesu Hubbard et al., 2013
[13] Goei et al., 2007
[14] Lee & Park, 2011
[15] Bippus & Yong, 2019
[16] West & Turner, 2010
[17] Brown & Levinson, 1987

Amy's Army: An Evolution of Support and Grief in a Private Facebook Community

Laura C. Bruns

This paper takes a rhetorical autoethnographic approach to understanding the evolution of support and grief in one private online Facebook group, Amy's Army. Initially created as a private channel for one woman to communicate cancer treatment news to her social network, the Amy's Army group evolved into a source of support, developed a specific culture, and cultivated offline relationships. Following Amy's death, the group became a source of grief support, memorialization, and familial support. This paper specifically explores how the group's rhetoric adapted and transitioned after Amy's passing. The author argues that the specific community constituted in Amy's Army served to support the community members' grief during and after the bereavement transition, perhaps at the expense of the dying person.

Introduction

"Hi, I'm Amy! Let's kick it, shall we?" said the woman with fiery red hair. She flashed a broad straight smile, and I followed her through the labyrinthine gym, her spirit a magnetic force that I felt compelled to follow. I had just moved to the area and was auditioning to teach fitness classes at the gym. Amy, a fellow fitness instructor, tasked with watching my teaching audition. Although she did not have to, she kickboxed right alongside me so that I did not feel weird doing my audition alone. Amy had an aptitude for making everyone feel important and included. She launched into everything with genuine enthusiasm and radiated the kind of positive energy that transfers into others through psychic osmosis. You could not help but want to be her best friend.

After I was hired, I noticed that Amy, unsurprisingly, had a massive class following. I jokingly called them "Amy's groupies." Soon, I found myself wanting to be a groupie too. We all wanted to bask in the radiant glow of Amy's encouragement, approval, and determination while sweating profusely. I soon learned of Amy's previous battle with breast cancer and how she had triumphantly beat her cancer. With her sheer determination and superhuman optimism, she was somewhat of a local celebrity for breast cancer awareness,

appearing in interviews and local commercials during the month of October every year.

Three months after I first met Amy, she shared the news that her cancer had returned. As she started treatment, I began subbing her fitness classes more and more. I noticed that many of Amy's class participants wore purple "*Amy's Army*" shirts and wristbands. I had no clue what these items meant and figured this was a "groupie" thing. One month into subbing Amy's classes, Amy invited me to join a secret Facebook group, *Amy's Army*. Quite the social media maven, Amy was prolific on Facebook and Instagram. She was the person who *always* commented on your posts with either a positive affirmation or appropriate reaction gif. Her group invite message to me read:

> Hi, Laura!
>
> I added you to my private "*Amy's Army*" page so that you can get the updates. It bums me to type them over and over... Ya know? So, anyway... A LOT of my friends post on there so if the notifications get annoying I TOTALLY understand if you need to leave. I won't take it personally.
>
> I'll blame Facebook. 😂😂I also wanted to say thank you (again) for all of the subbing you've been doing for me. I am very hopeful that by next session I'll be ready to rock. Or at least able to adult contemporary. 😜

I wanted her to like me back and I desperately wanted to be in that imaginary clique. I immediately navigated to her group page and read her first post in the group from a month before, when she was first re-diagnosed:

> I'm not ready to blast this all over Facebook, but it would seem that my cancer is back. I've created this group as a place to keep friends and family informed and also as a place for you to remind me I am strong, in case I accidentally forget.
>
> What we know right is that my "tumor marker" number is quite elevated and I have fluid around my lung. I will have tests all this week and will also have the fluid removed and biopsies this week. Soon after, we will start a plan of ATTACK.
>
> I've been told repeatedly, by two doctors and a nurse, that I'm otherwise RIDICULOUSLY healthy, and this weighs

heavily in my favor. Please forgive me for you finding out this way. I can't really talk about it right now but I believe in the power of POSITIVE thinking.

Also, I believe in the power of laughter. Jokes are always welcome. Please try to not feel sorry for me, at least on this page. I will kick your ass. (August 29, 2015)

*   *   *

The group was initially a place for Amy to share cancer news. However, over time the group evolved into a source of support and encouragement for group members as well. I saw how over the course of months a whole culture was created. There were inside jokes, memes, and crosstalk. Suddenly, the symbolic purple shirts I saw in the gym made sense. They were a constitutive symbol of membership in *Amy's Army*. More than that, the purple items were a symbol of support and friendship—of belonging in the group.

A reoccurring hashtag within the group emerged, #hmml, which stood for "hand me my lightsaber," a reference to both Amy's cancer fight and her love of the *Star Wars* movie franchise. The hashtag evolved into #hmmf, which stood for "hand me my friends," in reference to the support that *Amy's Army* provided to Amy throughout her cancer journey. The group membership swelled to over 200 people. Friends, family, and community blended seamlessly into it. We became *Amy's Army*.

The group rhetorically evolved into a social community. The group was created with the purpose of lifting Amy's spirit but also came to bring joy to the lives of members. Real-life friendships were formed in the community. Information, updates, and memes were shared. In-groups were formed. Following Amy's peaceful passing at home in March 2018, the *Amy's Army* group persisted, today boasting over 250 members. Members actively post in the community even now that she is gone. This prompts questions: what role is *Amy's Army* serving post-bereavement? What function is created in this new collective identity? Also, how is this new collective identity helping to create meaning, and healing, for the bereaved participants? What has this done for Amy?

Social media support groups for breast cancer have become increasingly popular (Bender, Jimenez-Marroquin & Jadad, 2011). Numerous private online communities like *Amy's Army* likely reside in social media for patients and their families to communicate and

grieve. However, research on how community is rhetorically constructed and functions within private Facebook cancer support groups like *Amy's Army* remains a relatively unexamined area. Examining the discourse of one unique post-bereavement group, such as *Amy's Army*, can provide a better understanding of how discourse can shape collective identity, create meaning making, and provide bereavement and grief support for online community members.

Rhetorical Autoethnography

This paper takes a rhetorical autoethnographic approach to understanding the evolution of support and grief in one private online Facebook group, *Amy's Army*. Autoethnography is a qualitative research approach that allows the author to connect their personal experiences to wider academic, cultural, social, political, and spiritual understandings (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2010). Rhetorical autoethnography (RA), on the other hand, is an attempt to rhetorically analyze personal narrative experiences. In the seminal piece describing rhetorical autoethnography, Lunceford (2015) states: "If rhetorical criticism is rhetoric about rhetoric, then this is also, at heart, a story about another story" (p. 4). Weaving together personal experiences and rhetorical discourse analysis can reveal insights into the narrative creation of ideological force. Lunceford avoids prescriptive rules for RA, but instead outlines four general guidelines for the method:

> 1. Rhetorical autoethnography should draw on theory to help illuminate some aspect of rhetoric, whether in the general sense or as this relates to a particular rhetorical transaction.
> 2. Rhetorical autoethnography should draw on the critic's experiences with the rhetorical transaction in question.
> 3. Rhetorical autoethnography should stay true to the spirit of the rhetorical transaction, even if details are either incorrectly remembered or forgotten—in short, rhetorical autoethnography should be honest.
> 4. Rhetorical autoethnography should be well written and engaging. (p. 17)

Despite claims of objectivity and rationality, rhetorical critics too, are affected by discourse (p. 9). Lunceford maintains that the goal of a rhetorical autoethnography should mirror any other rhetorical criticism—"to help us more fully understand the rhetorical artifact under consideration" (p. 10). In RA, there is less emphasis on the

artifact under examination and greater attention to how the critic experiences, processes, and reacts to the rhetoric of the artifact. To better understand *Amy's Army*, the artifact under examination is the *Amy's Army* Facebook group (posts and messages), contrasted with the author's experiential participation within the group. The author presents the narrative experience of being a member of the group, interpreting how the discourse presented both pre- and post-bereavement.

Few scholars have attempted RA, and RA has not yet found widespread adoption within autoethnography and rhetoric disciplines (Lunceford, 2015; Johnson, 2016). Key & May (2019) used RA to explore the rhetoric of prison education to reduce recidivism. Using autoethnographic glimpses into teaching in a prison, the authors argue that prison education enables the prisoners/students to resist hegemonic masculinity by "trading the tools of hegemonic masculinity for paper, pencils, and textbooks" (p. 14). Interestingly, the authors do not cite Lunceford, but instead, seek to develop their own definition of RA from a participatory critical rhetoric base— observing rhetoric *in situ* (Middleton, Hess, Endres, & Senda-Cook, 2015).

Johnson (2016) used RA to reflect on teaching in Ferguson, Missouri in the aftermath of the death of Michael Brown. Johnson analyzed the conversation as well as the roadside memorials constructed to honor Michael Brown's memory. These memorials, Johnson contends, function to not only remind the viewer that a death has occurred here, but also remind viewers that the deceased belonged to a community. These memorials "proclaim that the community not only remembers the deceased but that the community also loved the person" (p. 269). Similarly, online spaces can be sites of rhetorical remembrance and memory places. This paper aims to understand *Amy's Army* as both an artifact and embodied constitutive space.

Initially created as a private channel for one woman to communicate cancer treatment news to her social network, the *Amy's Army* group evolved into a source of support, developed a specific culture, and cultivated offline relationships. Following Amy's death, the group became a source of grief support, memorialization, and support for the bereaved group members. This rhetorical autoethnography specifically explores how the group's rhetoric adapted and transitioned after Amy's passing. Posts and discourse within the private Facebook group will be examined, spanning from

one week before Amy's death to two years after. Posts from group members are the artifacts, contrasted by the author's narrative of participation. The goal of this research is to explore the process and outcome of constitutive community building in transitions of bereavement and mourning in online spaces. I argue that the community constituted in *Amy's Army* served to support the community members' grief during and after the bereavement transition, albeit sometimes at the expense of supporting Amy. In this type of group, the purpose was not necessarily to persuade and to directly encourage the cancer-fighter, Amy. Rather, group members were able to gain membership to the social support team, allowing them to bond and express their grief and connection to the person with cancer to other members of the social support team. This membership experience and desire to connect to "Superhero Amy" often came at the expense of Amy. I contend that over time these types of groups become less about the dying person and are more for the living, who, post-bereavement, often do not notice this transformation has occurred.

Constitutive Rhetoric and Meaning-Making
Charland (1987) elaborated the theory of constitutive rhetoric to account for the narrative ways that an audience is hailed into existence by the rhetor. Through rhetoric, a collective audience identity is formed. Charland's theory of constitutive rhetoric has two premises: 1. audiences must be called into existence (and not all rhetorics succeed), and 2. embodied subjects must acknowledge and act according to their subject-position (p. 141). In other words, audiences are both created and creating—participating in the construction and reinforcement of their own identity. Additionally, one cannot be "persuaded" to be subjected to identity, rather, "one is 'always already' a subject (p. 141). Within *Amy's Army*, the "army" of friends and family are not persuaded to identify but participate willingly in the creation of the group identity. Their participation in the group calls the group into existence. Amy may have created the group, but the "army" constituted itself.

In addition to creating a sense of group identification, participants in *Amy's Army* created meaning for, and through, the group. Gilles and Neimeyer (2006) proposed the Model of Meaning Reconstruction as a way to account for and explain the ways that participants find meaning following a traumatic loss. Three key processes of the model are sense-making, benefit finding, and

identity change (p. 54). The Model of Meaning Reconstruction is the product of synthesizing a multitude of meaning-making studies to condense them into one encompassing model. The model posits that deaths consistent with our worldviews reinforce those existing schemas, and that provide comfort. On the other hand, deaths that challenge our "assumptive worlds" force us to challenge previously held beliefs and provoke new meaning creation (p. 54). The bereaved create new "post-loss meaning structures" to make sense of the inconsistent events (p. 54). Through the processes of sense-making, benefit finding, and identity change "preloss meaning structures may be reviewed, reevaluated, renewed, and/or rebuilt" (p. 54). For many, dying is for the old. For *Amy's Army*, this was considered unfathomable that an otherwise healthy-looking and vibrant 43-year-old fighter, with a can-do spirit could succumb to cancer. She beat cancer before! She can beat cancer again! Our assumptive worlds were about to be challenged.

<div align="center">*   *   *</div>

Amy's death was jarring for many of the *Amy's Army* group members. Most of us did not know she was *that* sick. She certainly did not look sick! I did not realize how advanced the cancer was until one month before her death. In a picture posted to the group it, Amy posed in a side view, her belly swollen. Her post read:

Hi, my friends!

Below is a picture of my 'fluid baby.' Yes, those are stretch marks on my hip. Jealous?

My liver is being an asshole and I'm retaining fluids like a mother fucker. Other than that, I'm doing really well. We've switched to yet another new drug — I'm waiting now to get my third dose — and the side effects are MUCH more manageable than those of the drug I was on prior to this one. Now if we can just get my liver to cooperate, I'll be the mayor of healthytown.

I promise I'll try to update more. As was pointed out to me today, when I'm in a depression I tend to go "radio silent" but I gots my mood drugs and my medicinal marijuana so I'll be out of this funk in no time (she said, hopefully). An interesting thing is that being around other humans totally

and completely revitalizes me — classic extrovert — so I'm trying to make an effort to be around human adults more often.

The fluid baby has been SERIOUSLY hindering my gym time, and that has made me the saddest of all. I miss teaching and I miss my gym friends.

I'm getting my belly drained tomorrow — I had it drained about ten days ago and they extracted 2.2 liters; the over/under for tomorrow is 5. Hopefully that will help, the liver will get its shit together and I'll be back to rocking it in no time.

I PROMISE I AM NOT PREGNANT.

#HMML #HMMW (March 5, 2018)

The image momentarily took my breath away. Based on my own understanding of end-of-life stages, this was not a good sign. My husband, a physician, looked over my shoulder at the laptop screen. "That's really not good," he said. I asked him if, in his medical opinion, Amy would be okay. "I'm sorry but, medically speaking, I think your friend might have another couple of weeks, maybe a month. You can't live without a liver. And it seems like her cancer is pretty advanced." I could feel my meaning structures splintering under the weight of this armchair prognosis. Still, Amy was smiling in the picture! My husband did not know Amy like I knew Amy— she was going to kick this! She was a warrior queen!

The foundation of my meaning structures collapsed a week later when I saw people in *Amy's Army* posting memorials in rapid succession. Frantically, I messaged another *Amy's Army* friend who worked at the gym. She broke the honest news to me:

> She isn't doing well at all. On her Amy's Army Page, her mom asked people to post pics of themselves with Amy. From what I understand, she's spent the past few days in bed sleeping and hasn't been able to eat or drink much of anything. You don't sound stupid at all, and if it were ANYONE other than Amy fighting liver cancer for 2+ years, then this turn for the worse wouldn't seem so sudden, you know? I think she's been steadily getting worse these past couple of weeks, but this past week in particular, she's

> gotten so weak. Typing through tears, have been crying on
> and off for two days. She's just so damn vibrant and strong
> and hopeful and filled with that crazy energy of hers and
> love and my heart literally feels like it is breaking for her
> and her family (March 26, 2018).

I had just seen Amy last week at the gym. She looked good! We
chatted about how my husband matched to medical residency so we
would be moving to Detroit. She told me that she was from
Roseville, a city close to Detroit. This was a normal, mundane
conversation.

I felt so stupid and out-of-the-loop. Amy was dying and this
reality had been there right in front of me in *Amy's Army*. I just did
not want to see it. My meaning structures did not allow me to see it.
Strong, vibrant breast cancer survivors do not die from cancer. The
Amy's Army community had invested so much time reinforcing
Amy's "warrior" persona, there was no other way to see Amy. Death
was not a possible narrative. Amy was a fighter, a healthy, vegan,
athlete, already-beat-breast-cancer survivor who could do anything!
Als, she could do this all while pounding a case of "Nattie Light,"
never breaking a sweat and getting a hangover. How could someone
who felt so superhuman be so mortal? I felt a deeply unsettling
transience creep across my computer screen.

This is not a narrative without critique. When I first realized
that Amy was going to die, I felt manipulated by a hopeful illusion
perpetuated in the group community. As Segal (2012) cautions,
broader publicly available cultural narratives about breast cancer
problematically characterize and "pink-wash" a positive and hopeful
framing of cancer trajectories. Segal underwent treatment for breast
cancer herself, noting that she "could see from here that the cancer
establishment—its clinical and research and counseling and
fundraising arms—is invested, often invisibly and with the best
intentions, in maintaining the cancer patient as a particular sort of
person: a somewhat docile and self-centered one, her attention
trained on her personal recovery" (p. 299). In reflecting on email
responses to her published op-ed "Cancer Isn't the Best Thing that
Ever Happened to Me," Segal noted:

> "…people experiencing serious illness are not always
> helped by triumphal illness stories—that they believe, in
> fact, that the prevalence and dominance of those stories have
> made it harder for them to share their own experience of
> illness even with those close to them, as expectations are

> high that they will be "fighters," that they will "beat this thing."" (p. 299)

Amy's Army was created with good intentions but perpetuated the narrative of Amy as a "triumphant fighter," which proved problematic for post-bereavement meaning structures. Amy posted a clear signal of her health descent, and yet, we still championed her as if she would recover from this small liver setback.

Segal identified six themes pervasive in emails to her, most sent from cancer patients, cancer-professionals, and people who agreed with her op-ed:

> (1) The perceived requirement to be positive and pink-minded can be a burden on the ill person;
> (2) Having cancer is misrepresented when represented as an enriching, ennobling experience;
> (3) People affected by cancer would rather have the difficulty of their experience acknowledged than be congratulated preemptively for their strength;
> (4) To congratulate the person living with cancer for strength and ability is also to assign responsibility for health and illness to that person;
> (5) Friends and family members often need reassurance that everything is okay (when everything is not), placing a burden of care on the ill person him/herself;
> (6) Expectations of particular kinds of cancer stories act as constraints on the speakable, and there is little space to tell, and hear, the truth about the experience of illness.

The need for meaning, Segal maintains, is what drives the adoption of such problematic cancer narratives.

In my own quest to produce meaning, had I, as an *Amy's Army* group member imposed dominant cancer narratives on Amy? Alternatively, had Amy imposed them herself—like a master magician who maintains the illusion for the audience? Segal suggests that:

> …the impulse to meaning produces an impulse to personal narration that may itself be problematic—because when we reach for narrative, we may find certain conventional structures too readily available, and then the whole process of figuring out if there is something to be learned from illness experience is short-circuited by the salience of those structures. (p. 308)

Segal sees the solution as "an interpretation of survivorship grounded not in positive identity transformation but rather in acquisition of knowledge" (p. 309). We do not need to find and develop deep meaning structures, and a happy ending. We simply need to understand that cancer happens. Positive rhetorical narratives about cancer persist because we find the reality of cancer, illness, and death intolerable. For group members such as myself, to think Amy would not get better—because how would we be *Amy's Army* without Amy? – was intolerable.

Amy's Army was committed to this dominant cultural cancer narrative because *Amy* was also committed to it. Amy's group posts were always upbeat and optimistic. Her own discourse is what motivated, drove, and mobilized a homegrown support group. Amy created space in the group to speak about the reality of her illness while also maintaining hope for her recovery. Maybe she did this as a final act of kindness, to spare our feelings. However, this dominant cultural cancer narrative is also what made her death so hard to process.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

Hours before Amy died, and in the days following, *Amy's Army* went from a virtual space of support, meme-sharing, and news-sharing to a place of stories and memorials. Starting at noon on March 26, 2018, pictures and posts flooded *Amy's Army*. People sharing pictures of themselves with Amy, messages of thanks, stories about Amy, and positive messages for Amy. For example, one group member posted:

> Amy you are ALWAYS the one to stay positive and strong no matter what life throws at you.... you are the most inspirational person I know and we all have your back no matter what... we (your entire large, loud, obnoxious Italian family) are here for you for anything!!!! I LOVE you Beotch!!!! (March 26, 2018)

Many of the shared photos captured the essence of Amy's spirit.

One group member posted a picture of Amy, always the outgoing cheerleader, bullhorn in hand, with her baby daughter strapped to her chest. The post read:

> One of my faves. Always one of the loudest and proudest voices to support her friends. #amysarmy #wetterauerwarriors #hmmf (March 26, 2018)

I also felt moved to post. Though admittedly, in the two years that I knew Amy, I only had one picture of us together. This was on my 30th birthday and she and her husband were photobombing me in the background of the picture. This may be the only picture I have of us together, but this is the most essence-of-Amy image I could ever hope for.

> My post read:
> When I moved to Peoria three years ago, I had no friends. Like, I literally had none. To my horror, my family also decided to throw me a surprise 30th birthday. Mind you, I had no Peoria friends. But yet, here comes Amy with her adorable smile, amazing energy, and photo bombing-self to my party! Amy volunteered to be my first Peoria friend. I can honestly say that I have never met anyone quite like you, Amy. You are the life of the party. You are friend that everyone wants. And the friend that everyone needs ❤️ (March 26, 2018)

Looking at the array of photos, I imagined that we were cheering her on in her final hours. *Amy's Army* had assumed the role that Amy always served for us in our lives—the optimistic cheerleader. Of course, I now see that these posts were less for Amy and more for the army's healing and processing. We were reassuring ourselves that Amy was okay, even as she was dying.

The next day, March 27 at 3:46pm, Amy's husband posted a picture of Amy's Harry Potter "Always" tattoo with the words:

> It is done. Amy passed this afternoon quickly, comfortably, and peacefully in our bed with loved ones by her side.
> Thank you all for your love and support. RIP, mama. I love you. Always. (March 27, 2018)

*   *   *

In the days and months following Amy's death, *Amy's Army* became a space of memorialization. With each photo shared, a collective memory was built. Gestures were created in Amy's honor. One group member created a breast cancer memorial fund. Another group member posted a video of themselves lighting a paper lantern with #HMMF to remember Amy.

Still another Army member confessed to taking a run on a beautiful day in tribute to Amy:

> I didn't run in an "organized" event today, but after the rain cleared out I took a run, with Amy and everyone that walked/ran/volunteered in Amy's Army in mind.
> Yes Amy, "I am a runner." (May 12, 2018)

The images are important to note—many group members posted selfies doing these things.

Amy documented her life with social media photos as if every mundane moment of the day was a story worth telling and an achievement worth celebrating. Amy was also known to be a professional selfie photographer. She was a master at getting the proper angle and lighting and could magically cram 25 people into a one-armed selfie. *Amy's Army* members were continuing the art of the selfie, documenting as Amy did.

In the months following Amy's passing, some referenced the "tribe" of networked friends that she had built. One group member posted a picture of her new tattoo—the words "find your tribe" wrapped around her bicep. She wrote in her post:

> All: I present the motto that has brought us all together. #findyourtribe #lovethemhard
>
> In the words of [name redacted]: Now we have to find our own fucking friends.
>
> However, I'm pretty happy w the tribe that Amy assembled. #apb #always 💜 (June 29, 2018)

Another group member shared a quote about surrounding yourself with people of value. They added the caption:

> This!!! It's like it was written for Amy and her tribe. I'm so lucky to be apart of this amazing tribe. I love Amy and all of you amazeballs people that are apart [sic] of her tribe! (June 2, 2018)

The posted pictures and gestures functioned to not only pay tribute, but also to help solidify group members' individual connections to Amy and to give constitutive force to the group. We continued the tasks started by Amy and in this way, she can live forever.

* * *

Today marks two years since Amy's passing. Last night, Amy's mother posted in the group: "Tomorrow marks two whole years without her. Please help me through this by posting your favorite picture of her!" 54 comments flooded the post, including

pictures of Amy from different life stages, memories. Pictures of Amy smiling, Amy embracing a friend, Amy dancing (as she was always doing!), Amy at parties and events, Amy being generally silly. In every photo, Amy is the feature—everyone else recedes into the background. She was a literal and visual force to be reckoned with. Comments within the post indicated collective ownership, collective friendship. One commenter wrote: "Thank you for allowing me to share y*our* daughter!" While everyone had a unique, individualized relationship with Amy, the bereaved comments on the post allowed for a collective sense of grief. She was *our* friend, Amy. This equitable communication is not surprising. Döveling (2017) found that in online bereavement platforms, the bereaved "compare themselves and their experiences with others online in a horizontal, nonjudgmental way" (p. 52). Peer bereavement support in groups such as *Amy's Army* can create a "virtual shelter," a safe emotional space, providing relief to the bereaved (p. 54). In *Amy's Army* participants grieve horizontally, mutually.

A few years later, *Amy's Army* is still a thriving virtual shelter. In a study of online memorial pages for dead adolescents, Williams and Merton (2009) found that the number of posts on the memorial page decreased every month following the individual's death—from 80 posts in the month following the person's death to 10 or fewer posts a month, a year after the death. While the number of posts has dropped off since her death two years ago, *Amy's Army* still draws a few posts a month. Around Amy's birthday, death anniversary, and other special times of year, posting frequency increases. However, *Amy's Army* is more than a memorial page. Memories do abound in the posts, but group members share other Amy-related things as well. The group still shares comics, memes, funny images, and cultural artifacts that Amy would have found amusing if she were alive—things that Amy would have posted, liked, loved, shared. Natural light beer, Kid Rock's music (or music in general), an intense workout, accomplishing a marathon, dirty jokes, a brand of wine that Amy liked, crazy fitness videos, Star Wars and Harry Potter items. These things extend beyond Amy— they represent the group member's connection to Amy. These elements are visual thread uniting us in virtual bereavement. Some members post pictures of themselves wearing their *Amy's Army* bracelets and shirts, in a cool location, perhaps doing a cool sport, as if Amy is there with them in spirit. Sometimes there's either a grief-related quote or inspirational saying like, "Thinking of you all and

wishing you joy today." Even without Amy, members bond over these artifacts, quotes, and images—all part of the constitutive group and the collective memory construction of Amy.

We all bond over the fact that Amy friended *us*. That is to say, Amy, extrovert extraordinaire, chose us as a connection. Over and over again, posts and comments reveal a similar origin story to friendship—Amy imposed her love and friendship on us all. This is not only a testament to how outgoing Amy was, but also reinforces our specialness as a group. *Amy chose us.* Jasinski (2001) asserts that a traditional narrative functions to "solve problems, urge a thesis, or promote action," whereas constitutive rhetoric "refers to the way in which a narrative relates or positions itself with respect to a culture's social world (its customs, traditions, values, shared beliefs, roles, institutions, memories, and language that become a type of "second" nature to the members of that culture) (p. 398). These two kinds of narratives are not exclusionary, but rather, create a continuum of affirmation and subversion (p. 398). On the one end, narratives affirm cultural norms/elements, and on the other, subvert cultural norms/elements. The ideology constituted through *Amy's Army* post-death stories work to reaffirm both Amy's existence and our connection to her. These stories also subvert the idea that she is gone. This is a way of communicating that she is still our friend and still very much alive in our memory and daily actions.

A unique feature to the group, beyond memorial, is the way that the group connects with and follows Amy's family. Though Amy is gone, we remain voyeurs of her life. Amy's husband occasionally posts a photo, and in rare cases, either a request for help or guidance. A family friend, who watches Amy's young daughter, posts pictures and stories of the girl's school, growth, quirks, and milestones. Amy was a notorious social media over sharer and picture poster. The group has seemingly taken up the torch in sharing things that Amy would have shared. Amy's teenage son even recently started posting to the group for the first time. On the anniversary of her passing, he shared a favorite picture of his mom and how much he loved and missed her. In the photo Amy sits in the driver's seat of her van, smiling next to her dog, Indy, who is leaning over the center console:

> Here's my favorite picture of my mom. She always wanted to be in my selfies but I remember taking this just to take a picture of Indy but of course Amy just had to photobomb!

😄 Man, I miss and love you so so much mom. (March 26, 2020)

In this way, the group is a space that invites us in as family, sharing visually and emotionally in grief and remembrance. Amy was an over-sharer on social media, but I often feel like we are overstepping her family's privacy.

*   *   *

This rhetorical autoethnography sought to understand how one private support group evolved over time and constituted a community. Lunceford (2015) advises about rhetorical autoethnography:

> It is not merely a story that we tell, but rather a story that we tell in order to help others understand some specific experience. We do this by looking into ourselves and connecting this experience with what we already know through research. Sometimes our experience will add to that body of research by providing confirmation, and other times it will challenge conventional wisdom. Other times it will illustrate gaps in our understanding. But there is a good reason why we use stories: they engage the emotions as well as the intellect (Lunceford, 2015, p. 14).

In this story, one extraordinary woman built a Facebook group to share news with her vast network of friends and family. That group evolved into a cancer support group that allowed members to bond. After her death, these group member bonds became a source of healing and support. Amy rhetorically built a self-sustaining *online grief family* that continues to have lasting impact beyond her life. The rhetoric that Amy cultivated constituted a powerful and cohesive group. We are virtually bound in our grief, though admittedly, at the expense of Amy. The group started innocently and with the best of intentions but came to be more about the group members' own grief and personal connection to Amy than this was about supporting Amy. This perpetuated a cancer-fighter narrative that impacted meaning structures and made her death difficult to process.

Cancer patients can find meaning in Amy's story. Connecting and networking friends through a private social media group can potentially prepare friends and family to confront hard realities and negative outcomes by connecting them to one another. The group can be a place of long-term healing and support for friends and family and serves as ongoing inspiration for group members.

However, it can also be a source of exploitation by the living, who use the space for their own meaning-making needs. *Amy's Army* became more about the army's healing. We all loved Amy, but I wonder how much our rhetoric perpetuated the illusion that she would beat her cancer again, making grief more challenging. I wonder if the rhetoric of the group helped the army more than Amy and her family.

   Rhetorical autoethnography may be an outlet for scholars to understand and reflect on discourses of healing, such as in grief and death contexts. This method merits further development and implementation and can facilitate a better understanding of the ways that scholars themselves participate in discourse creation and perpetuity. I encourage other rhetorical scholars to question their meaning structures about death, which compound rhetorically.

   This process forced me to confront my own desire to find meaning beyond loss. Is meaning necessary for healing? I resurfaced years-old messages and posts that reopened deep wounds. Writing this essay amid a worldwide pandemic, in a haze of anxiety, where death is an ever-present specter, I just could not emotionally revisit the *Amy's Army* posts some days. Some days, I could only manage a few minutes of research before bursting into tears. Pulling up old messages from Amy was a cleave to the heart. Amy represented everything I aim to be in life—happy, vivacious, beautiful, funny, sassy, and sweary. Re-visiting her posts forced me to confront my own mortality. No one—not even our idols—is immortal. Also, death often does not have meaning.

   In telling this story, I also had to assess which parts rang true—and which parts were about more than just *my* story with Amy. Frolic (2011) reminds that autoethnography is "an ethical practice promoting greater transparency in the production of knowledge and more robust exploration of the agency of the researcher/author (including the influences of lived experiences, and social and political contexts on the choices made in the conduct of research)" (p. 376). In the pursuit of this research, I made the ethical decision to not reveal my research intent to the group. As such, except for Amy, I have omitted group members' names. I did not want to disturb the group dynamic and risk losing my membership in the group. I did ask Amy's husband for permission to research in the group. His simple response was:

Please do this project.
Call me anytime before, during, or after it.
How can I help?

One limitation to this rhetorical autoethnographic approach is that I did not directly ask the other participants what their group experiences were like. I also did not ask Amy's family what role the group served for them, or how they experienced the group.

I wrote as a rhetoric-experiencing audience member. A strictly qualitative and rhetorical approach may have produced very different insights. Group members may utilize the group for different reasons and draw different benefits from being a member. If autoethnography is based in the experience of self, then every group member experiences the group rhetoric differently. Lunceford (2015) describes how, in rhetorical ethnography, "the audience occupies center stage because that audience is the critic" (p. 15). In the future, a rhetorical analysis of group member rhetoric could yield insight into post-death group identity management. However, for now, the group remains undisturbed.

*   *   *

Amy's funeral was unlike any funeral I had seen: an extravagant afternoon affair at a funeral home with food, music, and an open bar. The event was standing-room-only-packed. I decided to wear black, though, upon entering the room, I felt silly for doing so. People were dressed in all kinds, colors, and formality of attire. Some faces I recognized as people from the *Amy's Army* group, whom I'd never met in person. The thing I remember most are the pictures. Pictures outnumbered flowers. There were slideshows of images, photo books, photo albums, and framed images. Images overflowed, plastered, coated, and circulated the funeral home visiting room. Social media had come to life. Amy was everywhere—not just in the images but also in the army of people packed in the funeral home rooms. This party—yes, definitely a party—was so very Amy.

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Preventing Abandonment of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Devices for Students on the Autism Spectrum: Parent Perspectives for Successful Implementation

Sheri Lake and Melissa Brydon

The purpose of this feasibility study is to investigate the perspectives of parents of students on the autism spectrum who use high-tech augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) in schools. The study is the first to focus on children on the autism spectrum that receive special education services and use high-tech speech generating devices (SGDs) to communicate. A mixed methods design was chosen for the current study. Parametric and nonparametric statistics were utilized to determine the relationship between ease of use, ease of learning the AAC technology, device usefulness, and parent satisfaction. Quantitative data analyses revealed a strong positive correlation between ease of use and satisfaction, ease of learning and satisfaction, and usability and satisfaction. Transcripts from semi-structured interviews were manually coded, and three themes emerged: parents do not view themselves as being equal members of the IEP team, they act as self-advocates, and they have difficulty trusting the school team. Results of this feasibility study were used to develop an initial framework for successful implementation of AAC that can be further investigated by speech-language pathologists and multidisciplinary teams to increase parent satisfaction and decrease abandonment of their children's AAC system.

Introduction

Current estimates indicate that one in 44 children in the United States are on the autism spectrum. The diagnostic criteria for autism spectrum disorder (ASD) includes persistent deficits in social communication that negatively impact children's ability to engage in reciprocal communication and form meaningful relationships (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], n. d.). Further, some children on the autism spectrum exhibit significant difficulties with functional communication, making the use of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) a necessary consideration. Over two million Americans use AAC due to either a significant expressive speech-language delay or disorder (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association [ASHA], n. d.). AAC is a type of

assistive technology for communication that includes all the means that individuals use to express thoughts and feelings without speaking, including gestures, facial expressions, some forms of sign language, and writing (ASHA, n. d.). Speech generating devices (SGDs) are a type of high-tech AAC. They use computer-based programs to generate a spoken message using words, phrases, and sentences (ASHA, n. d.). While the number of children on the autism spectrum using AAC is not clear when reviewing statistical data, they may exhibit expressive speech-language delays and deficits that necessitate the use of AAC.

There is a significant gap in the literature that focuses on how children and communication partners learn to use SGDs as a mutually understood method of exchanging ideas. Communication consists of a sender of information, a message, and a receiver of the message. ASHA states that "When individuals communicate effectively, they are able to express needs, wants, feelings, and preferences that others can understand." (n. d.). How people who use SGDs learn to effectively communicate in a way that others can understand is not represented in the literature to date. In addition, little is known about how adults learn to communicate with children when acquiring competency in AAC. Given that most of children's communication occurs at school and in the home, better understanding how teachers, parents, and children learn to communicate with SGDs is important. In order to frame the understanding of how functional communication is acquired by the community of AAC users, considering the complexity of communication, how functional communication is addressed in schools, and the competencies that AAC users and their communication partners need in order to effectively communicate are necessary.

Complexity of Communication

Recent studies explore factors that contribute to families' ability to communicate with their children on the autism spectrum. One factor that influences communication is family stress. The diagnosis of ASD causes stress for parents, and families with children on the autism spectrum experience tension that impacts their communication with their children (Herna, Sarwoprasodjo, Hubeis, & Puspitawati, 2020). One factor that has been identified as having the potential to decrease family stress is family communication (Cheatham & Fernando, 2022). Effective communication among

family members contributes to family resilience, leading to reduced stress and increased collaboration as families navigate through their children's diagnosis of ASD (Cheatham & Fernando, 2022). When exploring family communication, considering idiosyncratic family dynamics that promote various forms of communication is important. Parents report that communication is more than the skill of their children expressing wants and needs. For families, communication is connected to their emotions as they cope with their children's future strengths and limitations. Communication is connected to emotion, and parent perspectives about AAC are linked to sources of family support (Doak, 2021).

Sources of family support vary based on family dynamics and community and are embedded in the International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health (ICF). According to the ICF, treatment should be functional and person-centered (World Health Organization [WHO], 2001), and AAC research and practice is encompassed in the ICF framework (ASHA, n. d.). One of the purposes of person-centered treatment is to ensure that families and individuals have a voice in their therapeutic relationships, including identifying sources of support relating to effective communication. (ASHA, n. d.).

AAC in Communities

Decisions about using AAC may occur when a child begins school, which is an important early community for most children. A multidisciplinary team, such as a group of school staff that works together to make educational recommendations for students with disabilities, is tasked with making decisions about appropriate and functional communication modalities for students on the autism spectrum. Assistive technology devices and services are a special consideration for every student with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) (Klang, Rowland, Fried-Oken, Steiner, Granlund, & Adolfsson, 2016). An IEP team for a student with complex communication needs may include a SLP, classroom teacher, special education teacher, other related service providers such as occupational therapists and physical therapists, either a parent or guardian, and a local education agency representative who is knowledgeable about special education law and local resources (Yell, 2019). Research has shown that families of children who use AAC have not historically been involved in the decision-making process as members of IEP teams (Parette, 2000). Due to this lack of

involvement, barriers to communication in the school community may also extend to other social groups. As a result, the children's communication needs at home and in their neighborhoods may be ignored. Further, parents feel that they lack the training needed to communicate effectively with their children using AAC devices. Relatedly, recent research has shown that in-person training and support is not typically provided to parents, so they instead utilize online social support, including social media, for AAC use (Herna et al., 2020). The lack of parent inclusion and training leads to frustration and device abandonment, which perpetuates communication barriers between children and their communities (Parette, 2000).

Operational Competence

One way to avoid frustration and device abandonment is to ensure adequate training of children's communication partners. However, there is no current research that addresses abandonment of high-tech AAC related to usability of devices. Therefore, the relationship between ease of use, learning how to use a device, and parent satisfaction is unclear. Tablet-based systems with high-tech AAC applications are the most prevalent devices used by about half of children using AAC (Calculator, 2014). Because of this trend, considering operational competence, which relates to the effective use, maintenance, and implementation of AAC, is important (Beukelman & Light, 2020). Studies that focused on tablet-based applications for AAC have not considered operational competency of SGDs for families of children on the autism spectrum (Calculator, 2014). This study is the first to explore active involvement and inclusion of parents with children on the autism spectrum as they relate to selection of high-tech AAC in school, which is a crucial step in advancing research in best practices for students on the autism spectrum.

Family-Centered Practice

Family-centered practice addresses families' needs and guides professionals in involving family members during assessment and treatment of children who use high-tech SGDs. Given that much of children's communication occurs with their families, family-centered practice is an essential consideration for professionals who work with children on the autism spectrum. Parents and siblings often lack strategies to effectively communicate with their family

member who uses a SGD. This places a burden on parents to focus on the child with the communication difficulty while excluding other children in the family (Murray Law, 2020). Family-centered practice attempts to solve this communication gap by actively including families in the treatment of children with communication deficits.

Family centered practice includes respecting family preferences, teaching families the skills needed to facilitate language and communication development and recognizing that the needs of families change over time (ASHA, n. d.). Parette, Brotherson, and Huer (2000) asked parents of AAC users about their experiences relating to decision-making in the AAC process and found that families expressed a desire for the school to provide training for themselves and for extended family. Such training includes not only how to transport and maintain the device, but also device options related to technology support, warranties, and funding. In addition to training, Mandak and Light (2018) found that parents would like to become connected to other families with children who use AAC.

These connections are seen to be helpful in assisting parents to build a network to share information, to engage socially, and to share their experiences relating to their children using high-tech AAC. Finally, parents want information about community and organizational resources to assist in navigating the services available for their children (Mandak & Light, 2018). When services are family-centered, implementation is consistent across settings and communication partners, AAC systems are easier for the child to use, vocabulary is able to grow as language develops, communication partners are adequately trained and perceive benefits to using AAC, and children demonstrate motivation to communicate. Hence, by using a family centered model, AAC is likely to be a successful mode of communication (Donato, Spencer, & Arthur-Kelly, 2018).

SLPs' Role in Family Centered Practice

Speech-language pathologists (SLPs) are communication experts who are trained to acknowledge the important role that families play as decision makers (ASHA, n. d.). Over 90 percent of SLPs working in educational settings work with children on the autism spectrum, making up about 25 percent of their total caseloads (ASHA, n. d.). Therefore, studying families' views of factors that influence successful implementation of AAC is important from the lens of their roles on school-based teams. Because of the increased prevalence of ASD, the unique social-communicative deficits of

children on the autism spectrum, and the availability of less expensive AAC options such as tablet-based AAC applications, focusing on the unique factors that impact children on the autism spectrum and their families within the context of a school team is important.

The purpose of the present feasibility study was to investigate the perspectives of parents of students on the autism spectrum who use high-tech AAC in educational settings. This study provided initial insight into this population by investigating the following research questions:

RQI: What is the relationship between parent perspectives as members of an IEP team and abandonment of speech generating devices for their children on the autism spectrum?

RQ2: How do ease of use, ease of learning, and usability of high-tech AAC relate to parent satisfaction with their children's speech generating devices?

Research Design

A mixed method design that included quantitative as well as qualitative methods of analysis was chosen for the present study. Recent research has not addressed parent perspectives surrounding abandonment of AAC with children on the autism spectrum; therefore, qualitative data were needed to explore themes relating to the needs of this population. Second, due to the limited number of published studies, comparing qualitative themes with quantitative data relating to parent satisfaction was justified to integrate data and establish triangulation. This research design allowed for conceptualization and expansion of the breadth of data related to parent perspectives on abandonment of AAC and testing for relationships between satisfaction and other factors (Johnson, 2014).

A structured plan, including approval from an Institutional Review Board, informed consent, the right to withdraw from the study without penalty at any time, and participant confidentiality, was followed to ensure that ethical considerations were addressed in order to protect the participants in this study.

Participants

Participants were parents from Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Utah, and Florida. Purposeful sampling, choosing participants that fit the current research questions and goals, was used for the quantitative portion of the study (Tracy, 2013). More specifically, to take part in the study, participants were required to have a child with a diagnosis of autism assigned by a licensed medical professional, and their child must have abandoned, or ceased to use despite the ability to assist functional communication, a high-tech AAC device that was recommended by an IEP team. Parents who served as participants for the quantitative portion of the study had children who were between five and 21 years of age and attended either a public school or approved private school funded by the child's local district. Additional snowball sampling was attempted for the qualitative portion of the study, as the population of interest was difficult to access due to travel restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

A recruitment flier was posted on several AAC social media groups and was sent to directors of all statewide intermediate units requesting dissemination to members of their local task forces. In addition, the recruitment flier was posted to three special interest group online communities of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA). Finally, a recruitment flier was sent to four parent support groups in Pennsylvania. The recruitment flier included a link to the questionnaire where participants provided informed consent to participate in the study. Following completion of the questionnaire, participants were asked to contact the researcher via email if they were interested in participating in an interview. Semi-structured interviews were conducted via Zoom, which allowed the researcher to clarify questions and responses as well as probe for more in-depth responses throughout the interview. These respondent interviews included parents who spoke about their own experiences relating to using SGDs with their children.

Instruments

The online survey for the current study was accessed through a hyperlink attached to the recruitment brochure. The survey included demographic questions relating to the child's gender assigned at birth, educational placement, and grade level as well as the parent's income, race, level of education, and relationship to the child. All demographic questions were relevant to analyzing the generalizability of findings.

The survey that was utilized to measure parent satisfaction with their child's AAC device was adapted from the USE Questionnaire (Table 1). This seven-point Likert rating scale requires participants to rate their agreement with questions relating to usefulness, ease of use, ease of learning, and satisfaction of technology (Lund, 2001). The USE Questionnaire was chosen for the study because of the ability to subjectively measure the usability of a product (Gao, Kortum, & Oswald, 2018). The USE Questionnaire was found to be a valid and reliable metric for evaluating the usefulness of Microsoft Word and Amazon.com (Gao et al., 2018). In addition, the USE Questionnaire was employed to study the usability of an elliptical trainer for individuals with disabilities (Burnfield, Shu, Buster, Taylor, & Nelson, 2011). The USE Questionnaire was also used in previous studies that explored the usability of a smartphone application to prevent anxiety (Stoll, Pina, Gary, & Amresh, 2017). Most recently, the USE Questionnaire was used to explore the factors related to use and non-use of AAC systems (Moorcroft, Scarinci, & Meyer, 2019). Given that this has been established in published literature across various technologies, the USE Questionnaire was determined to be appropriate for the current study.

The semi-structured interview questions were adapted from published studies that investigated variables that increased AAC use as well as those that served as barriers to AAC use (i.e., Fish, 2008; Romano & Yu Shon Chun, 2018). Fish (2018) piloted interview questions relating to experiences on an IEP team with a member of a parent support group. Romano and Yu Shon Chun (2018) conducted pilot testing in their investigation of parent and SLP perceptions of barriers and facilitators to effective use of AAC. Given that the semi-structured interview questions were based on questions from these two studies, pilot testing was not deemed to be necessary for the current study. Questions adapted from these two studies related to the children's language skills, communication abilities at home, school, and community, current IEP goals, the families' role in selecting their children's AAC, and preferred aspects of their children's SGD.

Procedures

Lund's (2001) USE Questionnaire was converted to an online Qualtrics® [XM] survey so that the questionnaire could be accessed via hyperlink. A demographics questionnaire was added so that participants could answer all questions in the same document.

Participants selected responses to questions on a 7-point Likert scale. Responses were assigned a numerical score ranging from 1 through 7 as *very strongly disagree* (1) *strongly disagree* (2), *disagree* (3), *neither agree nor disagree* (4), *agree* (5), *strongly agree* (6), or *very strongly agree* (7). No direct contact with the participants was made in the quantitative phase of the current study.

The semi-structured interview was conducted in real time via Zoom. Time to build rapport and trust was spent prior to the interview through informal introductions and inviting participants to ask questions prior to beginning the interview. The participants were given the opportunity to ask follow-up questions and request clarification of questions throughout the interview. The researcher answered all follow-up questions.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using SAS software. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze participants' demographic information, and frequency distributions were used to summarize the demographic data. In addition, Pearson's R correlation coefficient was used to study the relationship between satisfaction, ease of use, ease of learning, and usefulness of high-tech AAC. P-values were used to determine if there was a significant difference between the mean scores of various variable pairings within the USE questionnaire (Johnson, 2014). Because of the small sample size, a nonparametric test was also used. Nonparametric statistics do not assume that the data distributions are normally distributed (Johnson, 2014). The Spearman Rank Correlation was calculated to measure the strength and direction of the relationship between various pairings within the USE questionnaire.

Qualitative data were analyzed in several steps. First, interviews were recorded on Zoom and manually transcribed. Transcriptions were checked for accuracy by reviewing responses with participants after each interview was transcribed. This type of member checking also ensured trustworthiness, or credibility, of the responses (Tracy, 2013). During the member checking process, two of the three participants indicated that no changes were needed and confirmed the transcriptions accurately represented their responses. One participant indicated that changes needed to be made to accurately reflect the names and locations of her child's private service providers. The changes were made to the transcription and verified with the participant to ensure accuracy. The transcriptions

were organized by source, which allowed the researcher to pair the transcribed interviews with quantitative demographic data for each participant (Tracy, 2013).

Primary-cycle coding was performed manually and used to examine the keywords and phrases that appeared in the transcribed data (Tracy, 2013). This first-level coding was used to describe "what" existed in the data (Tracy, 2013). Codes were labeled and color-coded in the margins of the text. Redundant codes were combined to allow for second cycle coding of the data into themes. Second-cycle coding was conducted to organize and summarize codes into concepts. Hierarchical codes, or codes that conceptualize data by grouping smaller codes together, were created from the data that were analyzed during second-cycle coding (Tracy, 2013). Negative case analysis was used during second cycle coding to identify data that did not support the hypothesis that lack of parent participation leads to abandonment of high-tech AAC to ensure credibility of qualitative data (Tracy, 2013).

Data integration was conducted by planning, analyzing, and interpreting data in the study. Qualitative and quantitative questions were chosen so that the information obtained in parallel provided a range of data used in the analysis and interpretation phases of the study. During data analysis, quantitative data were extracted from the USE questionnaire, and qualitative data were organized into themes. Following quantitative and qualitative data analysis, the findings were integrated in a side-by-side comparison. Second level themes from qualitative analysis were compared to Spearman Rank Correlations, p-scores, and Pearson's R. The data were presented in visual displays in order to gain a more complete picture of the findings. Convergence and complementarity of data as well as discrepancies in qualitative and quantitative measures were noted. Convergence and complementarity were discussed as ways that qualitative and quantitative data agreed. Discrepancies were either explained, further investigated, or offered as a topic for future inquiry.

Results

The participants for the quantitative portion of this study consisted of seven parents of children with a diagnosis of ASD and enrolled in public schools throughout the United States. The participants were all recruited from AAC social media groups. All participants reported that their children were educated in self-contained classrooms. The majority of the participants' children

(71%) were white and male (86%). Four participants reported a yearly income between $50,000 and $79,999, three participants reported an income of over $90,000 per year, and all participants had at least an associate degree.

Three participants volunteered to participate in the qualitative portion of the study. One participant was from Florida, one lived in New Jersey, and one resided in Pennsylvania. A summary of the characteristics of the qualitative participants' children is reported in Table 2.

Data Analysis for Question One

The first research question examining the relationship between parental perspectives as members of an IEP team and abandonment of speech generating devices for their child on the autism spectrum was addressed through qualitative data analysis. During qualitative analysis, common words and phrases were identified. This descriptive first level coding described what was present in the data. Second level coding analyzed why participants responded to the questions. Despite a small sample size, negative case analysis was used to look for data that did not appear to support the emerging themes. Three themes that emerged related to this research question include the following: parents do not view themselves as being equal members of IEP teams, they act as self-advocates, and parents have difficulty trusting the school team.

Subthemes that related to inequality in IEP teams included parents feeling that they were not actively involved in decision-making, often leaving decisions about their children's communication modality up to the school team. One participant expressed, "I didn't have a role. I was just the mom." Another stated, "There's a saying about crossing the T's and dotting the I's and that's what the IEP meeting is about. So, it's just a paper that has to be signed and if you don't agree with it, tough noogies and you move on." Parents also expressed dissatisfaction with communication that they received from the school, reporting that the frequency and content of information about their children's communication at school were insufficient. One participant indicated that school to home communication "is very negligible. It's not collaborative." Another parent stated, "We haven't met with the speech therapist this year, and it's already April." Additionally, parent three indicated that she gets a weekly note home that is "a two-sentence blurb about [my child's] progress. Finally, parents did not feel that they received

adequate training regarding use of their children's speech generating devices. One parent went further to say "…no one really knows how to use it. I don't feel like the school does the training that they need to. But it's not really discussed at IEP meetings." Another parent indicated that the IEP "says I'm supposed to get parent training, and they do one parent inservice and check off the box that they did parent training."

Qualitative data analysis revealed several sub themes related to parents acting as self-advocates. This included the need to find their own training resources, the need to hire private practitioners outside of school, and the need to network with other families of AAC users. In reference to finding their own training resources, one parent "followed groups on Facebook. I definitely recommend looking at what resources are out there for you." Another parent agreed, saying "There are just so many resources out there, especially with YouTube and ASHA. I listen to a lot of podcasts." Parent three recommended that other parents "make sure to understand that you have a voice, and you can put in the work and do your own research to find what's best for your child and not just accept what [the school] offers."

Finally, parents expressed their difficulty in trusting recommendations made by school teams. They expressed that they know their children best, including their children's learning styles and future communication needs. One participant stated that "It was hard for my child to make any progress [with the school's selected device]. It just didn't fit [my child's] learning style." Another participant indicated that they did not feel like "[the school] really understood. [He] has to learn how to communicate and to be educated at the same time. It's really hard." In addition, parents desired control of the speech generating devices, indicating that families should be permitted to bring the SGD home and program the device with vocabulary needed for communication at home. One parent went further and stated that "I would recommend not just accepting a device that stays at the school," while another parent stated that she was explicitly asked not to modify the child's device at home. This parent stated "They actually kind of asked us…don't make any changes without talking to the speech therapist. I didn't stick to that."

All participants reported abandoning AAC systems. In addition, all described complex experiences of working with more than one speech-language pathologist as well as private practitioners

and actively seeking therapy and treatment for their child. While all participants expressed similar experiences that led to abandonment of a communication system, each journey was unique. One participant moved her family to a school district where her child's needs would likely be supported. Her child's device was abandoned at the request of the school district when the child began to develop verbal language. Nevertheless, the participant expressed apprehension about this decision because of the child potentially needing the device to augment communication in the future, stating, "I'm not sure that I wouldn't want to introduce AAC at another point…where he might have a backup method of getting himself heard." Participant two independently purchased an SGD after being dissatisfied with a system that the school recommended. The participant then hired a private SLP to work with her child to facilitate use of the communication at home. She stated., "I trusted the school, and you can't do that." The third participant abandoned low-tech AAC in favor of a high-tech option at the recommendation of a private clinic. She stated, "I'm seriously ten years down the road and there are so many issues." Due to reported challenges in IEP meetings, lack of trust for school personnel, and assuming roles of self-advocates, two participants in this study abandoned devices in favor of self-selected high-tech AAC options for their children.

A negative case analysis revealed a difference in the perspective of participant one. The participant expressed agreement with the IEP team in discontinuing a high-tech AAC because the child developed verbal language. This participant expressed a level of trust for school personnel that the other participants in the study did not report, stating, "I just kind of listen to what everyone recommended. They're the professionals."

Data Analysis for Question Two

The second research question investigated the relationship between ease of use, ease of learning, and usability of high-tech AAC and parent satisfaction with their child's speech generating device. The aim was to study the qualities of the device itself to identify those that lead to satisfaction with the high-tech AAC device. Results of the USE Questionnaire were analyzed using parametric statistics to assess group means, and nonparametric statistics to assess group medians (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). Although parametric tests typically have more statistical power, nonparametric analyses were conducted in the current study due to small sample size and the

potential for outliers (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). Table 3 reports summary statistics for the data.

Spearman rank-order correlations were calculated, and the associated correlation tests were conducted in order to determine relationships between usefulness satisfaction, usefulness and ease of use, and usefulness and ease of learning. Results indicated a strong positive correlation showing a strong linear correlation between usefulness versus satisfaction with $r_s(7) = .99$, p = .0002. The p-value indicates the correlation is significantly different from 0. There was also a strong positive correlation between ease of use versus usefulness with $r_s(7) = .83$, p = .022. The p-value indicates that this correlation significantly differs from 0. Finally, the correlation between ease of learning and usefulness was also strong and positive, indicating a strong linear correlation between ease of learning versus satisfaction with $r_s(7) = .93$, p = .022. The p-value indicates the correlation significantly differs from 0.

Pearson correlations were calculated, and their respective hypothesis tests were conducted in order to determine relationships between usefulness and satisfaction, usefulness and ease of use, and usefulness and ease of learning. Results indicated that there was a strong positive linear correlation between usefulness versus satisfaction $r(7) = .94$, p = .0013. The p-value indicates that this correlation is significantly different from 0. These results correspond to the nonparametric analysis. There was also a strong positive correlation indicating a strong linear correlation between ease of use versus satisfaction $r(7) = .92$, p = .003. The p-value indicates that this correlation is significantly different from 0. These results do not disagree with the nonparametric results. Finally, there was a strong positive correlation indicating a strong linear correlation between ease of learning vs. satisfaction $r(7) = .83$, p = .02. The p-value indicates that this correlation is significantly different from 0. While this varies slightly from the nonparametric analysis, the results do not disagree. These data are presented in Table 4.

Qualitative and Quantitative Integration

Qualitative data confirmed that ease of use, ease of learning, and usability related to overall satisfaction with the device. When asked what they liked about their children's current high-tech AAC devices, participant 2 stated, "It is so easy to use. So easy to set up. So easy to make changes on the fly…I think that anyone regardless of their background with AAC can use it." Participant 1 stated that

their child is "proud of himself when he hits the right button…the nice thing about (the device) is that you can model from a companion device." This participant expressed that modeling from a second device allowed her child to successfully express his wants and needs. Participant 3 indicated that their child was able to "learn a new communication skill very quickly…it was really a confidence booster."

Discussion

This feasibility study is the first to examine the relationship between parent perspectives of students on the autism spectrum and abandonment of high-tech AAC in educational settings. Existing research on abandonment of speech generating devices focuses on children with a range of developmental and acquired disorders that lead to reliance on AAC as a primary mode of communication. Therefore, the current study provides an important foundation to begin to discern if there are any factors unique to ASD that IEP teams can consider when making educational decisions for students that use high-tech AAC.

Kurth, Love, and Pirtle (2020) studied issues leading to parent satisfaction with their child's education and reported that parent involvement is crucial. This finding was supported by the results of the current study as all three participants expressed that they want input into educational decisions that are made for their children. Kurth et al. (2020) also found that parents felt the need to fight for services, and that this process could last for years. The current study found that parents felt the need to self-advocate. One parent in the current study expressed frustration that the problems had been going on for such a long time that they were unsure if resolve them was too late. The participant stated, "It's just so overwhelming and so consuming, and I don't know if it's fixable."

The current study provides a framework for further research that may help IEP team members build positive and trusting relationships that lead to better outcomes for students on the autism spectrum that are high-tech AAC users. Results from qualitative analysis suggest that schools should provide an opportunity for parents to have input in the communication devices that are selected for their children. Participants in the current study indicated that they know their children best, including their children's learning styles and future communication needs. In addition, IEP teams should strongly consider providing speech generating devices that can be

sent home and programmed with vocabulary that facilitates communication at home. One participant expressed that their child's current speech-generating device is easy to use. Another participant said that their child gains confidence when using his device. The third participant expressed that their child learned how to use his high-tech AAC device very quickly. The child being able to access an effective mode of communication in all environments is important.

Successful Implementation Framework

An initial framework for successful implementation was created because of this study (see Appendix A). This framework provides school teams and parents with the opportunity to question the selection, training, and usefulness of the recommended SGD. The checklist (Appeneix) encourages multidisciplinary teams to complete a comprehensive evaluation that considers more than one SGD that is functional across communicative settings and contexts. This also promotes family involvement from the start of services, supporting a collaborative relationship between the school and families. Multidisciplinary teams are invited to provide important information that relates to usefulness and operational competency including warranty, technical support, length of the device's charge, symbol system used, district policies, connection to community resources, and training. Families are asked similar questions to ensure agreement about the assessment and training process. Using an annotated version of the USE Questionnaire and rating each response using a binary yes/no format, families also can rate the usability, ease of use, and ease of learning of the SGD. While future research is needed to measure the effectiveness of the proposed framework, this provides a starting point for teams to facilitate parent involvement and decrease abandonment of children's SGDs that are necessary for functional communication in school and at home.

Limitations

Small Sample Size and Lack of Randomization

The small sample size was a limitation of the current study. An exhaustive effort was made to recruit participants throughout a northwestern state. In addition, national social media and special interest group posts yielded few participants. Surveying and interviewing a larger sample would give more credibility to the results. Purposeful sampling was used for this study, as the aim was

to study a specific demographic. Snowball sampling was attempted but did not yield any additional participants. Random assignment was not utilized in the current study.

Timing

The study was conducted during the peak of COVID-19. The global pandemic placed travel restrictions on the researcher, which made field-based research an impossibility. For example, conducting focus group interviews at parent group meetings for AAC users was prohibited due to restrictions on in-person meetings. In addition, two of the three participants of the interview reported that their children were still receiving instruction at home at the time of the interview. Their frustration with virtual learning may have resulted in negative perceptions of their children's educational progress and may have affected the results of the interview.

Internal Validity

One threat to internal validity was the interview questions. Questions were obtained and adapted from previous studies. Although they were piloted in previous studies, they were modified to fit the current study. The questionnaire was previously piloted for parents and SLPs when speaking about facilitators and barriers to effective AAC use and by a parent focus group speaking about experiences on an IEP team. A second pilot study was not conducted for this study as recruitment for the pilot study was not likely to yield adequate participants during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Future Research

Future research is needed in the field of AAC in general. As an extension of the current feasibility study, future research should investigate parent perspectives that lead to abandonment of speech generating devices in different regions of the United States and across underrepresented groups. A larger sample size is needed, as is a need to continue to conduct research in this area that includes families of color, families from diverse backgrounds, and perspectives of fathers and other caregivers. Investigating preservice programs in special education and speech-language pathology to determine the extent that students entering the field have been taught to engage in family-centered practice is also important. Finally, future research should investigate the effectiveness of the framework developed in the current study.

Conclusion

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the perspectives of parents of students on the autism spectrum who use high-tech AAC in educational settings. Results showed that parents may abandon their children's SGD when they feel that they are not equal members of their children's teams, when they feel that they have to self-advocate, and when they do not trust the professionals who work with their children. In addition, parents are satisfied with their children's high-tech AAC when the devices are easy to use and easy to learn.

The current study indicates parent preferences relating to their children's SGDs. First, parents want to play an active role in choosing the high-tech AAC for their children, and they indicated that training in how to best communicate with their children using AAC is needed. In addition, parents suggested that the SGD should be controlled by families so that their children can effectively communicate at home and in the community. Because of the complexity involved in IEP teams' decision making about AAC use, several strategies are recommended within the framework presented in this study. SLPs, teachers, and school administrators should involve families in weighing options for the selection of AAC devices and applications. IEP teams must consider the individual characteristics of SGDs that lead to parent satisfaction with the device.

Further, because understanding how a child communicates across settings is necessary for professionals, collaboration with families is crucial. This collaboration should include attempts to observe the child's communication either directly or indirectly outside the school setting. Schools should also become a resource for ongoing parent training and community support so that families and children feel connected and backed by their IEP teams. Finally, effective strategies for successful use of AAC during home and community routines should be explicitly addressed with families, as generalization of AAC use is an important consideration in transition planning for students. AAC use at home may also decrease family stress by increasing in-person training and sources of communication support. Through active engagement and collaboration, the communication outcomes for children on the autism spectrum who rely on high-tech AAC can be improved.

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Appendix

AAC Evaluation and Implementation Checklist

To be completed by school teams:

	Yes	No
A multi-disciplinary evaluation was conducted.		
More than one speech generating device was considered.		
The child's communication was observed at home or in the community. (This can be conducted in-person or via video recording).		
At least two devices were reviewed with the child's family.		
The child's family was provided an opportunity to share their opinion about the strengths and limitations of the recommended speech generating device(s).		
The child's family was provided with information regarding the device including:		
1. Warranty		
2. Length of time that the device remains charged		
3. Technology support by the manufacturer or app developer		
4. Symbol system used by the app or device		
5. The district's policy about transporting the device between school and home		
6. Training options and opportunities provided by the school district		
7. Community resources for AAC users		
The family was provided a demonstration of how to effectively communicate with their child while using the device and opportunity to practice with the speech-language pathologist.		

Appendix   Continued

To be completed by parents:

	Yes	No
My child's communication was observed at home or in the community. (This can be conducted in-person or via video recording).		
At least two devices were reviewed with my family.		
I was provided an opportunity to share my opinion about the strengths and limitations of the recommended speech generating devices(s).		
1. The device made communication easier for my child.		
2. The device meets the communication needs of my child.		
3. It is easy for my child to use.		
4. It is user-friendly.		
5. It is easy for my child to learn to use.		
6. My child learns to use it quickly.		
7. I feel like my child needs to have it.		
8. It works the way that I want it to work for my child.		
I was provided with information regarding the device including:		
1. Warranty		
2. Length of time that the device remains charged		
3. Technology support by the manufacturer or app developer		
4. Symbol system used by the app or device		
5. The district's policy about transporting the device between school and home		
6. Community resources for AAC users		
I was provided a demonstration of how to effectively communicate with my child while using the device and opportunity to practice with the SLP.		

Table 1

Items in the Use Questionnaire with Labels in Current Study

Label	Content
Usefulness	It helps my child communicate effectively.
Usefulness	It is useful.
Usefulness	It gives my child more control over activities in his/her life.
Usefulness	It makes communication easier.
Usefulness	It saves time when I use it.
Usefulness	It meets my needs.
Usefulness	It does everything that I expected it to do.
EOU	It is easy for my child to use.
EOU	It is user-friendly.
EOU	It requires the fewest steps possible for my child to communicate effectively.
EOU	Using it is effortless.
EOU	My child can use it without written instructions.
EOU	I do not notice any inconsistencies when my child uses it.
EOU	My child recovers from mistakes quickly and easily when using it.
EOU	My child uses it successfully every time.
EOL	My child learns to use it quickly.
EOL	My child easily remembers how to use it from day to day.
EOL	It is easy for my child to learn to use.
EOL	My child quickly becomes skillful with it.
Satis	I am satisfied with it.
Satis	I would recommend it to a friend.
Satis	It is fun for my child to use.
Satis	It works the way that my child wants it to work.
Satis	It is wonderful.
Satis	It is pleasant to use.
Satis	I feel like my child needs to have it.

Note. Labels were not used on the actual participant survey. EOU = Ease of Use, EOL = Ease of Learning, Satis = Satisfaction

Table 2

Qualitative demographic information

Gender	Age	Device Type	Duration of device use
Male	15	Proloquo2Go on iPad	10 years
Male	8	Proloquo2Go on iPad	3 years
Male	6	None	2 years

Table 3

Summary Statistics

Variable	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum	N
Usefulness	5.48	.75	4.29	6.71	7
EOU	5.12	1.13	3.42	6.57	7
EOL	5.64	1.31	3.0	7.0	7
Satis	5.63	.83	4.57	6.86	7

Note. EOU = Ease of Use, EOL = Ease of Learning, Satis = Satisfaction

Table 4 *Analysis of Correlation*

Variable	Correlation	*p*-value
Satisfaction v. Usefulness	$r = .95$	.0013
	$r_s = .97$	.0002
Ease of Use Usefulness	$r = .92$	.0030
	$r_s = .83$	.0216
Ease of Learning Usefulness	$r = .83$	.0220
	$r_s = .94$	.0200

Relationship Crucibles: Why Everyone Should Sail

John Falconer

This study examines external factors that affect personal relationships. The ABC-X paradigm for understanding the effect of stressors on family crises has endured for 70 years. More recent studies have shown that stressors outside relationships can affect interpersonal relationships. The literature is dominated by evidence of stressors creating negative impacts on relationships, but this paper uses sailing to propose the idea of relationship crucibles. Such crucibles are situations that stress relationships but can result in positive impacts.

Introduction

Interpersonal relationships exist in environments that impact those relationships. In 1949, Reuben Hill published *Families Under Stress* (Hill, 1949), which considered how families responded to stressors such as The Great Depression and World War II. This led to the development of the ABC-X model of analysis, where A is a stressor, B is the resources available to the family, C represents the family's perception of the stressor, and X is the resulting crisis (Rosino, 2016). The family crisis experience is affected by the ABC factors.

Whereas the situations above directly impact the relationship—from losing a home to losing a family member—Stress Spillover expands the model by considering how factors external to the relationship affect the relationship (Buck and Neff, 2012). For example, an issue with a colleague at work could affect one of the partners in the relationship, who brings that stress home in a way that affects their spouse. Stress can diminish capacity for self-regulation of negative comments and other actions that harm the relationship.

Berscheid foreshadowed this vector in T*he Greening of Relationship Science* (1999), where she argued that relationship scholars cannot look only at the attributes of the individuals in a relationship to understand that relationship, but that the environmental context is essential.

> Some fragile relationships survive forever because they never encounter a relationship-toxic environment and some very strong relationships dissolve—not because they were not close or committed or loving—but because fate…put their relationship in harm's way (Berscheid, 1999, p. 265, as quoted in Buck and Neff, 2012).

The two stressor events in Hill's work—economic downturn and war—are both long-term, unrelenting forces. That is, they become "the new normal." If we consider two partners in an interpersonal relationship, negative relationship impacts from the environment might as likely be termination of the relationship as adaptation to it.

While there is some agreement among scholars that the relationship's context can impact the relationship, there is a pattern of presuming those impacts are negative. Berscheid's metaphor is a good example:

> …environment models of stability suggest that our predictions might be enhanced if we adopted the perspective of civil engineers who typically calculate a structure's durability relative to the environmental forces it can withstand without disintegrating. (Berscheid, 1999, p. 265)

That is, the relationship will endure if environmental influences do no not weaken it. However, what about the opposite? Can environmental influences strengthen a relationship?

Some recent contributions to the literature have made the argument that some forms of stress can strengthen relationships (Neff and Broady, 2011). In some cases, exposure to stress can create a resilience to future stressful situations. This may be from inoculation (Meichenbaum, 1985), or by developing the self-control necessary to avoid negative behaviors (Neff and Broady, 2011). However, these works do not discuss building specific relationship skills such as communication, coping, and trust that may strengthen a relationship.

Paradigm of the Relationship Crucible

Consider a situation where pressure is put on a relationship, but for a fixed and limited period. Rather than open-ended situations like war, there may be situations where participants can see an end. This may change the perspective from "can we continue like this?" to "can we survive to the end of this?" The distinction is important, as the ABC-X model underscores that the C factor, perception of the event, is powerful in defining the stressor. As participants view situations more or less negatively, their responses change.

There may be environments that stress elements of a relationship, but rather than weakening the relationship as in Berscheid's metaphor, they strengthen the relationship as exercise strengthens the body through adaptation. Among others, these affected relationship elements include trust, self-confidence, communication, coping, and roles.

The stressor may need to be delineated in either time or location to give the partners a "finish line." If the partners know that the stressor will dissipate at a specific point, they may be more able to make efforts that are relationship promoting rather than harming. A second factor may be goal setting, where the partners can work together to accomplish something specific. Finally, the activity may need to be repeated, so the partners have cause to consider what happened in the past so they can develop adaptations to improve their functioning in the future.

We posit that small boat sailing is a relationship crucible. With a crew of two to four people, everyone on board has at least some responsibility for a successful excursion. There are frequent—and sometimes considerable—threats to the vessel and occupants that create periods of stress. The boat becomes an environment that stresses the individuals on board, but the exposure is limited to the time on the boat. Once the boat is docked, the threats disappear, and an opportunity is created to strengthen elements of the relationship prior to the next excursion.

Relationship skills—the resources available to the participants—include understanding one's role on the boat, trusting the other people involved, communicating clearly, and having self-confidence. This manuscript will next describe some aspects of sailing, what the threats are that can make sailing stressful, and some examples of danger and examples of relationship adaptations in the author's experience that have spilled over to affect an interpersonal relationship.

On Sailing

All boats pose some operating and safety challenges that are not familiar to automobile operators. First, a boat cannot stop and remain still like a car. Wind and current move a boat, and even when motion is desired the direction cannot be controlled like steering a car. A helmsman may be trying to steer into a slip, but while they are going forward the current may be pushing the boat left and the wind may be rotating the vessel. A simple internet search will reveal hundreds of

examples of the stress associated with docking a boat. Second, a mechanical breakdown can be a serious event. Boaters cannot get out and walk if their vessel fails them. Accidents can easily put people in the water, which carries a risk of death. Further, without marked traffic lanes, boat movements are not organized and thus every crew member must be alert for vessels on crossing courses.

Sailboats have additional challenges. Maneuvers demand planning and coordination within the crew, not only to be effective but to avoid problems. Consider a boat pointed at 3 o'clock on a watch face, with wind coming from 12 o'clock. While the wind is creating the lift that moves the boat forward, the wind is also pushing the boat over. This creates the heel—leaning—that is often seen in a sailboat. Sailboats are designed with "righting moment," which is the force trying to stand the boat up straight. A good example of righting moment is a weighted keel: as the boat leans more to one side, the weight underwater is raised upwards in the opposite direction and tries to return to the position straight under the hull. On a small sailboat, the people on board are an important part of the righting moment. Sitting on the high side of the boat, their weight is pushing the boat upright while the pressure on the sail is pushing the boat over. This is a normal state of affairs, but a gust or change in direction can put the wind out of tune with the sails, and the boat heels more. The crew must be ready to respond to the wind and other environmental factors at any given moment.

Because the dependence on wind makes sailboats more difficult to maneuver than powerboats, navigation rules provide that sailboats (generally) have a right of way over powerboats. This restricted ability to navigate also means that sailboats have to plan their courses and anticipate problems. Not only can they not maneuver as easily, but sailboats also cannot really stop. Maneuvering requires communication and coordination among the crew. Lapses can have serious consequences.

The author and his wife—John and Tracy—began sailing some ten years ago. John had limited sailing experience, and Tracy had only powerboating experience. Interestingly, this gave John undue confidence, and Tracy considerable trepidation.

On their first sail, John quickly put Tracy at the helm because that is how he was taught to sail. She was nervous, as her prior powerboating experience had conditioned her to want the boat to be flat on the water. In this state of tension, the boat was hit by a big gust and heeled over to 20 degrees or more. Tracy panicked,

thinking that they were going over, and did not know what to do. This terrified her so much that for several minutes afterwards she was not able to communicate verbally. John took the helm and they recovered, but the event fostered a fear in Tracy, and more than a year passed before she would take the helm again. She assigned herself to managing the foresail.

Tracy's mantra was "tell me what to do and I will do it. I trust you." Whether or not this was good judgement early in their sailing experience, that trust allowed them to continue. Tracy took important roles but did not want responsibility for the well-being of the boat and crew. They sailed a lot together and got coordinated enough to sail away from and into the dock (including working around oblivious powerboats). But every time they went out, there was tension as Tracy feared capsizing and John was realizing how undeveloped his sailing skills really were.

Another incident brought home the reality of the threat of danger. John and his daughter were sailing in a good breeze one Sunday afternoon without Tracy. A feature of their first boat was that the vessel could plane on the water. Boats either have displacement hulls or planing hulls. A displacement hull stays on top of the water because the hull floats; the hull displaces a volume of water equaling the weight of the vessel. A planing hull can sit on top of the water with the moving water pressure holding up the hull. Picture a powerboat skimming along the top of the water.

Most sailboats are the displacement style. This limits their speed because the hull cannot get on top of the bow wave. However, John and Tracy's first boat, a 17-foot O'Day Daysailer, could plane in the right conditions. This would let the boat exceed the normal "speed limit," which can be very exciting. John and his daughter were doing this on that fateful Sunday, and the wind and waves were getting to be a bit much. They prepared to tack—a turning maneuver—but had two problems. The foresail did not move to the correct position, and John, a sizeable fraction of the righting moment, also did not move in time. The boat capsized. The crew had been properly trained to exit on the high side of the boat so as not to get caught under the sail, but John went in on the low side. The two reconnected, and eventually a good Samaritan pulled them to shore.

While capsizing is not uncommon on smaller boats, people have lost their lives this way because they either get caught under the sails in the water, or they get hit by part of the boat and lose consciousness. Sailing, turns out, is as dangerous as alpine skiing:

There are 1.19 deaths per million person sailing days (Ryan, Nathanson, Baird, and Wheelhouse, 2016). Preparation, communication, and teamwork are essential to minimize risk.

In these and other experiences, John and Tracy learned several things about boating together. They learned about working together. These are detailed in the next section.

Adaptations

With decades of relationship history, John and Tracy had certain habits of interaction. However, the stresses of sailing forced reconsideration of their roles, communication, and coordination. The shared goal of safety led to some purposeful adaptations.

Experience and reading about boating taught John and Tracy that each vessel needs to have one person who is unquestionably in charge. In fact, this is entrenched in maritime law. This focuses responsibility and authority and avoids indecision. (For a full discussion of this, the reader might consult *The Seaman's Friend: A Treatise on Practical Seamanship by Henry Dana, Jr*.) In their personal relationship, however, John and Tracy tended more toward equality and collaboration, so this was an adjustment to put that aside when on the boat.

Being "in-charge" does not equate to an authoritarian system. In the U.S. Coast Guard *Boat Crew Seamanship Manual*, a clear explanation is provided that a skipper must not only listen to crew input but must also solicit input when appropriate. An environment that does not encourage input can result in an information barrier that threatens ship and crew well-being. For example, when a crew member points out an approaching boat, John says "Thank you." He does not say "I saw it" because that undermines the contribution of the crew, implying they did not do anything meaningful. This could give pause to crew pointing out obstacles in the future. "Thank you" acknowledges the contribution without assessing value. This has translated into John and Tracy's non-boating communication because obviously that the same theory would apply when either driving a car or doing any other activity. The spotter is intending to help, and they should be encouraged and not marginalized.

Because of the need to coordinate actions, John has learned to talk through plans before activity begins. If you've moved enough furniture, you know there are people who intuitively understand the plan (rotate this way, you go first, etc.), and people who do not.

While the consequences of misunderstanding in moving furniture may be putting down a sofa to talk, on a boat they can be more serious. Thus, John and Tracy discuss the big plan, and then each person's specific tasks. The more people know, the better they are able to contribute to an effort.

The act of communicating itself—talking—took a little adaptation. When two people are at opposite ends of a 26-foot boat, the speaker really needs to look at the other person for the voice to carry. Confirming what you have heard also helps. If the person at the front of the vessel says, "put the motor in forward," the person at the helm should repeat "shifting to forward." This is a bit of a redundancy, but this assures the speaker that they have been heard. On a related note, John and Tracy have adopted the aviation concept of a "sterile cockpit." When a situation is either complicated or dangerous, a sterile cockpit limits conversation to the work at hand and does not allow discussion of work issues, home life, and other topics unrelated to what is happening on the boat. This helps everyone concentrate on the situation at hand.

Finally, just as Tracy expressed trust in John at the helm, he learned to trust Tracy in her role. As Tracy learned the skills for managing the foresail, steering the boat, and tying dock lines, John stopped coaching her actions so she could perform tasks with some freedom and confidence. Trust helps both people do their part better.

Summary

John and Tracy made specific changes in how they communicate on the boat, such as discussing plans, supporting each other's actions (expressing trust and thinking about the impact of various responses), and increasing communication to reduce misunderstanding. As their sailing skills improved, they felt an increased sense of accomplishment as a team.

Veteran sailors reading this may not recall the uncertainty they felt as they began sailing, but trepidation is not uncommon in new sailors. Having responsibility for the safety of people and equipment is a serious matter, and not much time is needed to realize that there are potential problems all around. John and Tracy took sailing as an adventure and a challenge, and both wanted to get better at sailing (as a team) so they worked hard on the goal. This goal may have made them amenable to change, to acknowledging and addressing errors, and to suspending individual priorities for

collective priorities. The result was that they learned the sport together and got better together.

The notion of the relationship crucible depends on the people in the relationship experiencing stress (recall that stress depends to a significant degree on how individuals perceive the situation). John and Tracy were well aware of the dangers associated with sailing, but they also felt agency in their ability to manage the boat and mitigate the dangers (the source of the stress). Through learning and practice, they were able to increase their boating skills and reduce the stress. But the relationship crucible is not about boating; the crucible is about the interpersonal relationship. Some of the learning and adaptation must be about the people, and not just the situation. Stress spillover must be turned on its head. We saw this as John and Tracy learned to appreciate each other's roles in everyday situations, became better communicators, collaborated to accomplish goals, and learned to cope with stressful situations.

Sailing is but one example. There are likely other situations that cause positive changes in a relationship. The paradigm proposed here is that the concept of a relationship as a structure that must endure the elements is not complete. A relationship is a living thing and can grow either weaker or stronger. If the environment leads the participants to make changes to improve their interaction, certainly that can spill over to the broader relationship.

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Communicating with Our Families: Technology as Continuity, Interruption, and Transformation McGinley, M. R. Burk, J. K. & Ward, J. S. (Eds.) (Lexington Book, 2022)
Price: $105 hardcover, $45 ebook.

<div align="center">Review by Joy L. Daggs</div>

Introduction

Families are considered the first agent of socialization and training in communication (McGinley, Burk, & Ward, 2022) *Communicating with our families: Technology as continuity, interruption, and transformation* examines the impact of communication technology on various aspects of family life. Each of the 12 chapters merges new technologies and the role of technology in family life. The authors situate the influence of technology on personal relationships with by referencing Turkle, Postman, and McLuhan and interweaving their research with family communication.

The book is particularly aimed at Family Communication scholars, but the book has application beyond the field of Family Communication. Each chapter's author grounds the content in Communication theory while tying that theory to family life in a thought provoking and practically applicable way. Scholars and students can see themselves and their daily lives in the content of the chapters. The writing styles of the chapters are academic, but easily accessible to undergraduate student. The text offers a variety of examples of communication scholarship such as autoethnography, textual analysis, theoretical essays, and social scientific studies to ignite conversations and propel scholarship in new directions. Individual chapters could easily be used to compliment course content in Interpersonal Communication. Introduction to Communication, Intercultural Communication, and Social Media courses.

Content of the Book

The book's 12 chapters are divided into 3 sections, indicated by the title of the book. First, the book examines how technology plays a role in continuing family life, in some cases even moving family communication forward using technology such as video games (Chapter 3). The continuity section also examines how

technology such as Zoom was used to maintain family connections through the pandemic (Chapter 1). There is also an exploration of technology engagement using short stories to provide a framework for technology and family communication (Chapter 2). The final two chapters of the section explore how technology is used in health information seeking (Chapter 4) and connecting conversations about ethics to the movie *SpiderMan: Into the Spiderverse* (Chapter 5).

Interruption is the second section of the book, and three chapters here examine how technology disrupts traditional family communication patterns. Chapter 6 compares traditional critiques of television taking away from children's attention and explores the new issue that television (in the form of a cellular phone) follows us everywhere, so the possibility of disruption is constant and not confined to a room in the home. Media's ability to assist with familial socialization is the focus on Chapter 7 while Chapter 8 examines new mothers' social media use as a form of support for the transition to motherhood.

The final section focuses on transformation and examines adoption (Chapter 9) exploring the use of genetic testing to find birth families. Chapter 10 challenges communication scholars to explore the challenges of family communication with an incarcerated family member. The final two chapters explore parent-teen communication with alcohol education (Chapter 11) and social media and privacy management (Chapter 12).

Highlights of the Book

"Smartphones and the Internet were universally adopted so rapidly that little thought and contemplation of the effects of integrating these technologies into virtually all aspects of human existence was able to take place." (Wachs, 2022, p. 129). Wachs encapsulated the need for this book in this quote to begin chapter 7. The technology theme permeates all chapters in the book as suggested by the title, but accompanying technology is the realization that while parents are supposed to lead and socialize the children in the family, we are all navigating a world we never imagined, together. Marinchak & Stewart-Harris (2022) argue that parents showing children the "right" way to navigate a world of technology when they have little more experience than their children is difficult. The literature about the family's role in socialization and teaching is foregrounded in the text, juxtaposed against the new world of

technology and the challenges that are posed for the family. Exploring the intersection of these areas is illuminating.

The book not only presents the challenges of technology and the family, but the opportunities that technology gives. In the first chapter, the emergence of videoconferencing as a way to maintain family connection when we could not do so in person shows how technology can improve family communication. The opportunity for improvement is echoed later when the use of videoconferencing software is presented as a way for children with an incarcerated family member can improve family communication. The adoption chapter explores the use of genetic testing to create relationships with birth parents. Even the chapters that explore the challenges of technology encourage families to use the challenges to foster communication and navigate challenges together.

Overall Evaluation

I found this text fascinating. I am not a Family Communication scholar, but I saw my own experiences as a person navigating this new technology described in the text. I found the exploration of family communication and technology fascinating and an enjoyable read. The theoretical framework is clearly developed and has application across multiple contexts. Communication scholars can find a variety of uses for the content of this text. While this could not be a standalone textbook for a Family Communication course, the book is an excellent source for supplemental readings. I think this book would be an excellent addition to any college and university library and any communication scholar's personal library.

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