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Note

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Studying Corruption: Reflections on the Methodological, Practical, and Personal Challenges

Abstract There is a growing recognition among scholars that those engaged in qualitative research often face a number of serious methodological and personal challenges. Rather surprisingly, these difficulties receive relatively limited attention within the academic literature. Given the rising role of qualitative methodologies within social science research, the benefits of and the need for honest and practical discussions regarding what researchers should expect when entering fieldwork become increasingly obvious. This article draws on my fieldwork experiences of studying public corruption in the Republic of Moldova, a former Soviet state. I provide reflections on the methodological, practical, and personal challenges of conducting qualitative research on a sensitive issue within a social setting that is not structurally inclined to support projects of such nature. The discussion is primarily focused on the research difficulties that are bound to arise with any attempt to confirm previously suggested propositions within the post-Soviet social matrices. This article and the suggestions made here fall in line with a number of other recent works which have been motivated by the call to share insights and guidance about the challenges, "tricks of the trade," and dangers of fieldwork in remarkable settings.

Keywords Public Corruption; Eastern Europe; Republic of Moldova; Methodology; Challenges of Field Work

In recent years, there has been a significant turn in the nature of research practices embraced within the social sciences. Qualitative methodologies have become a widely accepted and an indispensable part of the interpretative arsenal of a growing number of scholars. Part of this significant transformation has been driven by the realization that within social sciences it is becoming increasingly difficult to justify reaching conclusions within research settings that are divorced from the social context within which the meanings associated with a given issue are constructed. Currently, there is also a much deeper appreciation of the fact that a scholar can rarely construct satisfactory and accessible understandings of a specific topic without an intimate, "face-to-face" encounter with what is being explored.

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The facility with which interpretations from qualitative research find agreement in our consciousness should not raise questions about the rigor that went into their inquiry. Quite the opposite, it should be a testament to the method's ability to maintain readability while remaining decisively thorough. Observations, reflections, and stories without a doubt make for much more ambiguous research tools than measurable and countable units; yet, this ambiguity is also an enabler of unrestricted movement through theoretical space. For those "brave" enough to embrace the "messiness" of qualitative research, the intellectual rewards are often commensurate with the levels of assumed risks and difficulties. The latter, to be sure, are not trivial by any stretch of the imagination. In fact, there has been an increasing recognition that scholars engaged in qualitative research often face a number of practical, theoretical, and ethical challenges (see: Birch and Miller 2000; Dickson-Swift et al. 2006), that can impose significant personal and emotional burdens (Morse and Field 1995; Darlington and Scott 2002; Campbell 2013), but also raise substantial safety risks (Kovats-Bernat 2002; Belousov et al. 2007). Physical dangers are particularly real for researchers dealing with sensitive matters (Johnson and Clarke 2003; Dickson-Swift, Kippen, and Liamputtong 2007). Much of the recent literature on the issue is concentrated on researchers working in public health; those engaged in other fields receive significantly less attention (Dickson-Swift et al. 2007). Within this context, there is a pronounced need for researchers, especially for those operating outside of public health, to share guidance with others who also find themselves routinely operating within remarkable settings and dealing with complex issues. It is specifically in response to this need that this piece was conceptualized and written.

This article shares the methodological insights that were gained during a study of public corruption in the Republic of Moldova. The actual outcomes of the study and their derivative analyses have been published elsewhere (see: Roman 2014a; 2014b; Roman and Miller 2014). This article does not intend to build on those discussions nor does it plan to significantly extend our understandings of corruption *per se*. Its contributions are considerably more focused and can be located within the methodological and practical insights that it offers. By and large, this article makes three important contributions. First, corruption is a very sensitive and difficult social issue to study. It does not lend itself neither easily nor cleanly to qualitative empirical inquiry. The study of corruption provides many opportunities for "things to go wrong." The experience of investigating corruption is in many ways as challenging as the topic itself, and there is a number of ways in which a systematic inquiry into the dynamics of its study can help others and add to the ever developing base of methodological knowledge. A second notable contribution that this article makes lies in the insights that it provides on conducting research within an international setting, specifically that of post-communist countries. The reflections provided here, then, should be of particular interest for researchers who are concerned with examining organizations, institutions, and social change within the space of the former Soviet bloc. Finally, the experiences and understandings shared here were drawn from a replication effort; such studies are, for the most part, rare and difficult to conduct within the context

of qualitative research. This latter fact should assist researchers who are struggling with conceptualizing a replicative type effort within a context that is in meaningful ways different from the setting of the original study.

Beyond this introduction, the narrative of the article is structured within the frame of three major sections. The first section delineates the background of the original study and the experiences that have motivated this writing. The following section discusses the main methodological insights that were drawn from the Moldovan experience. Actual examples from the fieldwork are provided for the purpose of supporting the suggested arguments, but also to spice up the narrative. It is here, also, that each suggestion is discussed within the context of the corresponding body of scholarly literature. As it is customary, a few summarizing remarks and encompassing thoughts conclude the narrative.

The Study and Its Setting: Corruption in the Republic of Moldova

The complexity and the conceptual difficulty associated with studying corruption is well-documented (see: Von Alemann 2004; de Graaf and Huberts 2008). Defining corruption, for instance, has turned out to be an exceptionally thorny task. What corruption "is" depends on "whose" corruption it is and who is describing it. The manner in which we see corruption is in large part a byproduct of our historical milieus and the narratives by which we are unsuspectedly being guided (Haller and Shore 2005). The unstated assumptions behind what corruption "is" are typically the best predictors of the conclusions the researcher eventually reaches or the policy solutions that are ultimately proposed (Anechiarico and Jacobs 1996; Philp 1997; Johnston 2001). Our scholarly objectivity is often corrupted, as it were, by our presuppositions. Understanding the nature of corruption remains a fundamental chore for most of the research in the area. It is a mission to which much of the recent research has been dedicated. Thus far and for the most part, quantitative approaches have been largely ineffective in terms of constructing representative and useful policy solutions; scholars are starting to suggest qualitative research as the more appropriate way of studying corruption (Menzel 2003; Doig 2011).

The research conducted by de Graaf and Huberts (2008) represents one such study. The scholars attempted to provide theoretically unconstrained understandings regarding public corruption in the Netherlands. In order to do so, the researchers employed a multiple case study design built on an explorative and inductive research strategy (Höffling 2002). They focused on a specific setting (Yin 2009) and sought to construct theory through propositions (Harris and Sutton 1986). Without making any assumptions about the nature of corruption, the scholars selected and studied in great depth 10 important Dutch corruption cases. They critically reviewed the 10 criminal files using the frameworks previously employed by Anechiarico and Jacobs (1996), Della Porta and Vannucci (1997), and Höffling (2002). Each examined file contained information such as taped telephone conversations, investigation reports, transcripts of interrogations, and statements from witnesses. In addition to content analysis, the Dutch scholars also conducted 15 interviews with corresponding case detectives and their superiors. These interviews were completed with the purpose of gleaning insights into the personality of the accused administrators and to contextually place their behaviors.

The results of the de Graaf and Huberts' (2008) study were extremely intriguing in a number of ways, not the least being that the suggested propositions, while dictated by context, were, as much as possible, free of theoretical preconceptions. Taken together, the propositions provided a valuable starting point that future research could build on. They did not constrain the researcher to a specific theoretical school nor to any assumptions about human nature. Yet, despite the numerous wonderful implications of the study, its impacts were limited in one significant way. Given that the study focused on context, the resulting propositions were restricted in their transferability to other environments. Would the discovered insights on the nature of public corruption in the Netherlands be useful for understanding public corruption in other countries? Would the suggested propositions be helpful in conceptualizing corruption in social matrices that are less experienced with democratic institutions? Would they provide a valuable framework for understanding corruption in countries where corruption is endemic, such as post-communist states?

The study discussed here was inspired and driven by such questions and considerations, in particular the latter one. Studying public corruption in the Republic of Moldova provided the opportunity to extend on the work of de Graaf and Huberts (2008) by examining their propositions within the context of a significantly different social matrix. Moldova represented a robust test to the propositions suggested by the Dutch scholars. Should their propositions be confirmed within the Moldovan environment, it would significantly add to our understandings of the nature of corruption. Most importantly, however, it would set the grounds for developing a much needed credible theoretical framework that would capture the nature of corruption in both traditionally democratic and newly democratized countries.

In studying Moldovan public corruption, the methodological approach employed by de Graaf and Huberts (2008) was, to the extent that it was possible, replicated. A total of 28 corruption cases were studied in detail following similar analysis frameworks employed by the Dutch scholars. The study, which lasted six months, used multiple data sources such as investigation files, court proceedings, publically available sources, and interviews with 33 knowledgeable informants. Seven informants were former or current anti-corruption agents and they were directly involved in many of the cases that were being examined. This sub-set of research collaborators was particularly helpful in navigating the case files and the procedural makeup of anti-corruption structures. The remaining informants were either business owners, journalists, or public officials. Case and interview data were transcribed, then iteratively reviewed and coded in an effort to construct triangulated profiles of corrupt public officials, their motivation for engaging in corruption, and the triggers of corrupt acts.

Although the research results were exciting in their own right, the methodological insights gained during this experience are, I believe, equally notable and many might find them quite useful. I make this claim mainly because I find that methodologically the study was remarkable in four meaningful ways. First, the study used the propositions developed by other researchers as a reference point. It was initiated with the unambiguous scope of scrutinizing the conclusions reached by others within a different social matrix. In qualitative research, such research designs are rather rare. Second, to a large extent, it adapted the methodological approach from the original study whose conclusions it sought to examine. Third, methodologically, the study combined content analysis with in-depth interviews with knowledgeable informants. The interviews served a number of purposes. They were used as a means of deconstructing the social setting in which corruption was defined. Furthermore, informants also acted as checkers of research interpretations. Given that some of the informants had intimate knowledge on the majority of the cases that were analyzed, they were well positioned to assume leading roles in the construal of the data. Hence, indirectly, some of the informants became active shapers of final interpretations. Finally, while the dangers of fieldwork in Moldova are not necessarily as great as it would be the case for research conducted in Russia or Ukraine, they are nevertheless just as real. The difference in the dangers faced by researchers working in these worlds is one of degree rather than of nature.

Now, with a clear understanding of the methodological details of the study and the motivation for this article, the discussion turns to the actual insights and reflections from the research experience.

Theoretical and Practical Insights

Qualitative research that embraces an interpretative turn is very much exploratory in nature (Liamputtong and Ezzy 2006; Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2006). A great deal of its intellectual quality can be located within the reflexive paradigm that it imposes. Reflexivity, that is, reflection and recursion (Hibbert, Coupland, and MacIntosh 2010), calls for the researcher to recursively deconstruct one's own imagery and those of others in terms of the basic units of interpretation and then to reconstruct it all together with a complete appreciation for the extent of the constraints enforced by the taken-for-granted assumptions (Cunliffe 2002; 2003; 2004; Cunliffe and Jun 2005; Archer 2007). Above all, however, a reflexive turn provides the room for those being "researched" to become engaged participants in knowledge creation (Charmaz 2006; Hardy and Williams 2011) and, if they choose to do so, to assume leading roles in defining research (Hibbert, Coupland, and MacIntosh 2010).

There are certain techniques and "tricks" of the trade that researchers would be advised to embrace regardless of context (Becker 2008). Stories, for instance, appear to be wonderful discovery mechanisms that provide the informants with a roadmap, a security blanket, and an indirect incentive structure to assume ownership of the interpretations created during research (Hummel 1991; Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2006). It is also worthwhile to develop, prior to engaging in fieldwork, an authentic awareness of the depth of the effects that learned theoretical perspectives have on our interpretation angles, and to try to manage these impacts (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Lather 1986). In addition, the importance of being able to tolerate high levels of ambiguity (Patton 2002) and remaining open and ready for research serendipity (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2006) can hardly be overstated. Notwithstanding these broad research norms, in most other cases, however, there is no instructional script. There are no strict sequential steps. The data are almost never "well-behaved." There are no labels that can conveniently dismiss complexity. There are no guarantees. The researcher has as much to learn about oneself as one has to learn about the worlds that one studies. One has to absorb and adapt to the conditions imposed by one's research setting. Every setting, however, is exceptional in its own way. So are the theoretical and practical insights that could be drawn from it. This, nonetheless, does not, I believe, reduce their usefulness.

The Bias of Theoretical Preparation or Why a Bribe Is Not Always a Bribe

One would be hard pressed to underestimate the value of pre-fieldwork theoretical preparation. Indeed, even for the most "theoretically-unobstructed" research enterprises—groundwork is necessary and critical for success. Yet, theoretical homework also comes with the risk of imposing "theoretical blinders." To become convinced in seeing things one way is, as it were, to relinquish the right to see other things (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Lather 1986; Haller and Shore 2005). Scholars have noted that corruption research is particularly vulnerable and often falls victim to trained preconceptions; corruption is often conceptualized as a problem of "the others," who more often than not are located outside of the modern world (Haller and Shore 2005; Roman 2012). Corruption, as some narratives might have it, is the sort of thing that happens to other, "less civilized," people.

When researching corruption, one should remain conscious and reflexively alert to the effects that habitual exposure to what otherwise might seem mundane narratives can have on one's ability to see. It is rarely safe to assume that rigorous training and preparation somehow magically enables us to know what "is" what we study and how these "others" react to it. A careless pre-conceptualization of a concept can be rather damaging to a study because it can easily turn the research into an unrepresentative course. In the Moldovan case, the constricting nature and the theoretical bias that can be imposed by one's previous training and the conceptualizations with which the researcher enters the setting were quickly exposed during two of the early interviews with informants.

Informant: Aren't you forgetting something?
Researcher: What?
I: Moldovans live in Moldova.
R: I am not sure that I am able to follow.
I: Moldovans are not Europeans. The fact that we are located in Europe does not make us Europeans. To be European is a special habit of mind. We are not like the Germans, the French, or the Italians. We think differently. That's the reason why none of the policies that the European Union makes us adopt will ever work. Such policies only work if the citizens have the right

mindset. For such policies to work in Moldova, the country would need to be populated by Europeans. European laws are designed for Europeans not for Moldovans…I think you have been away for so long that you have forgotten what it means to be a Moldovan. As a nation, we still suffer from a post-communist syndrome. It doesn't matter what laws or reforms are adopted, it will not solve corruption. Corruption is in our genes. Laws don't make a system work. People do. To change a system you need to change the people first.

R: Corruption is typically defined as acting or failing to act as a result of receiving personal rewards from interested third parties.
I: That sounds nice. But, what does it really mean?
R: It means that a public administrator is corrupt when he or she does something or doesn't do something because somebody paid him or her, or because he or she might receive certain personal benefits from behaving a certain way or making certain decisions that are beneficial for someone else, a third party.
I: Well, what about rookie economic inspectors who are told to "collect" for their bosses or otherwise will lose their jobs? In the beginning, they don't get anything. They just collect. They have no power. Are they corrupt or not? It's not that simple…you see. You assume that state workers decide on their own whether to take a bribe or not. It is not all the time like that. Sometimes the system makes them do the things that they do. Sometimes they do it for someone else. It is not always clear what corruption is or who is corrupt. Sometimes a bribe is not really a bribe. When you pay a bribe to have the state worker do something that he is required to do by law, but he is not going to do it until you pay him under the table—is that really a bribe? Is that corruption or is that something else? In Europe or America, it's probably easier to say who is corrupt and who isn't. In Moldova, it is different… totally different.

In established democracies, in which public corruption is typically harshly condemned, at least within politically convenient narratives, linking bribing to corruption fits comfortably within most logical and theoretical frameworks. One might even assume that the concept of bribing could serve as an appropriate starting point for preparatory research conceptualizations. Yet, while bribing and corruption often do go hand in hand—there is much of the latter that the former does not capture. Unassumingly linking the two might significantly simplify the research task, nevertheless, it would also deprive the researcher of representative and fundamental understandings of the nature of what was being studied. In fact, every one of the 33 Moldovan informants admitted that they have at one point in time over their careers given or received a bribe. Every single one of them, however, also vehemently refused to label themselves or their actions as corrupt.

The two interview extracts make clear the serious impacts that carrying preconceived theoretical assumptions into the field setting might have on the quality of the research. Even what might otherwise be considered as a basic and inconsequential association, such as the one between bribing and corruption, can be thoroughly unreliable for a given social matrix. Being an "insider," by means of social and ethnical association, does not grant immunity from theoretically blinding preconception. At least within this context, an "insider" has no advantage over an "outsider," as one is just as likely to fall for the conceptual traps set by theoretical blinders.

The scope of qualitative research is to uncover constructions and meanings within the stories as they are told by those populating a given social space, not as they are seen by the researcher. The differences are subtle, but still meaningful. The researchers, especially those operating in spaces such as those of post-communist societies, need to be prepared to realize the faults in the stubbornness of their own theoretical habits and to develop an ability to challenge, as needed, their theoretical predispositions.

Access to Data or Why "Otherwise" Publically Available Data Is Rarely Public or Available

For those of us trained to operate within the frameworks of functional democracies, the concept of "public," specifically of something being "publically available," is sensibly different from the meaning that it carries in other social matrices. Out of practical considerations, researchers will be well-served by a quick realization that in the post-Soviet space, "publically available" does not always mean that something is available to the public. Not everything, in fact very little, that is officially labeled as public information is actually available to the extent that is stated by the officially embraced narrative. Accessing sensitive data or setting within the post-communist worlds is almost impossible without gaining the support of key gatekeepers. Even what otherwise might appear to be uncontroversial information, such as demographic or social statistics, is often difficult to access and can remain out of reach (Belousov et al. 2007).

Data on Moldovan public corruption, which are legislatively mandated as available for public access, like any respectable data, have their gatekeepers. If the researcher fails to recruit a gatekeeper as an informant and does not secure permission for access, data, despite their label as "publically available," will most likely remain inaccessible. Restraining access to data to a select privileged few, regardless of the actual nature of the guarded data, appears to be a trait of many of the post-Soviet societies (Karklins 2005). In these societies, power and access to information hang together. It would be wise for researchers planning to conduct studies in post-communist spaces to relieve themselves of any predeterminations about accessing data sites in a "typical" manner or without recruiting a gatekeeper. Official requests or cold-calling will normally fail to provide the researcher with access. Only powerful people will. Such individuals, however, rarely respond to emails or phone calls from unfamiliar names. One would have to connect with them via a third party or by meeting the gatekeeper in person at a formal event. Access, as it was the case with the Moldovan study, is more likely to be unexpectedly secured at a Christmas party in a conversation over a glass of wine than by a continuous submission of official requests for research.

There are at least two important lessons that should be drawn here. First, the researcher should seldom assume that "public data" are accessible before checking the realities of data access on sites. In this sense, a pre-study visit can be rather beneficial in terms of instilling the researcher with much needed "access realism." This would be particularly useful if the researcher has made a significant financial or

career investment in the project. Second, gatekeepers, more often than not, have an extensive and active agenda. In post-communist countries, it is highly unlikely that access to data will be granted if such an action would not address some point on the gatekeeper's agenda. A trade of favors will be "there" to be made. The researcher should be aware of this condition and should make sure not to force oneself into anything that would later question one's ethical standing. The slope can get very slippery, very quickly.

Accounting for Social Specificities or Why Institutional Labels Do Not Matter

In the post-Soviet space, police and anti-corruption agencies are mechanisms of power. Having been granted a license to force, they are important tools of managing national influence. Judicial courts, too, are power structures maintaining established interests first, and everything else, including upholding the law, second. In countries with systemic corruption, institutions do not function as they were envisioned by their legislative design. Quite the opposite, the institutions entrusted with implementing anti-corruption measures are usually the power brokers who stand to gain the most from a continued endemic corruption. Within the former Soviet bloc, the very institutions that have a formal mission of fighting corruption are the ones making the ranks of the worst offenders (see: Karklins 2005). The following statements by informants, all anti-corruption agents, capture the condition rather vividly.

> The truth is that the economic police [a leading anti-corruption agency] is probably the most corrupt of them all. As an institution, it has no interest in actually fighting corruption. So many agents live off it that there is no interest in doing anything about it. They wouldn't know what to do without it. They have been corrupt for such a long time that it makes perfect sense to them. They don't see any reason why things should be any different. Why do you think that everyone wants to get a job here? It's not like we pay well…People are willing to pay three, four, or even five thousand Euros just to get an inspector job here. They might only be able to keep the job for a year, but in that time, they could make tens of thousands.

> It is hard to argue that what we do is actually fighting corruption. Yes, we do catch a few public officials who might take a bribe from time to time. However, in the entire time I have been here, seven years, we never went after someone big unless it was a political order. The real corruption is untouchable. The only time we get a big fish is when they tussle between each other. Someone gets greedy and decides not to split things with others up top. That's really the only time when we are permitted to go after big names.

> There are numerous blatant instances when owners are being outmuscled out of their businesses by criminal, politically connected networks. Sometimes they will try to make it look legit by paying them a little, other times, they will just buy them a plane ticket and give them two weeks to emigrate. We know about those cases very well. Everybody does. There is nothing we can do. We are not allowed to investigate or interfere. Our boss operates under strict rules. The owners will not get anywhere by going to court either. They know it, so they don't even try it.

Realizing the vastly differing institutional identity of public agencies, the anti-corruption agencies in this case, in societies that suffer from chronic corruption, poses serious methodological challenges. This means that a study's research design cannot rely on institutions to be "well-behaved" or "label conscious." In such instances, the researcher has to account for this condition and adjust one's interpretations accordingly. When studying institutions in established democracies, scholars might assume the liberty of accepting that institutions are, as it were, who they claim to be. This is seldom, if ever, an assumption that can be made when exploring topics within societies with little democratic traditions. There is usually a significant gap between formally upheld institutional narratives and actual institutional practices.

Furthermore, the researcher can no longer take the quality of the data provided by local institutions for granted. The nature of the written data, in particular, becomes a prime suspect for a critical review. In the Moldovan study, for instance, it became clear that there was a common pattern in the nature of prosecuted cases. Unlike the Dutch study, only two cases could have been labeled as "important." In fact, none of the cases was deserving of the qualification of "political or elite corruption," which generally refers to corruption at the highest structural levels. This deeply conflicted with the imagery delineated by the informants. While this represents significant realization in its own right for the purpose of this discussion, there is another matter that is important to note. Specifically, when examining the transferability of propositions developed within social spaces with time-honored institutions to other social matrices in which institutions seriously deviate from their legislative mandates—the researcher should account for the impact that this has on the quality and social biases in the available data. Otherwise, propositions might be erroneously confirmed or disregarded as a result of the nature of the data rather than due to their actual merits. This is no easy task. Yet, in any partially confirmatory research, it is critical that the limitations of data are not what dictates the final interpretations. The researcher should always remain aware that data quality is not immune to social contexts. Like everything else, all data have their stories.

Trust and Familiarity With the Researcher or How to Avoid Empty Stories

In many instances, interviews, qualitative research in general, can be equated with intrusions in the lives of others. While such interventions are usually well-organized and their disturbances are kept to a minimum, it still does not change their nature. During interviews, especially on delicate topics, researchers become, even if temporary, trusted inhabitants of the emotional and social space of their informants (Liamputtong and Ezzy 2006; Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2006). This is what makes qualitative research so effective. This is also what makes this type of research somewhat unique (Dickson-Swift et al. 2007).

In order for the researcher to become entrusted with representative information, one would have to build strong rapports of trust with the informants (Ceglowski 2000; Liamputtong and Ezzy 2006; Dickson-Swift et al. 2007; Minichiello, Aroni, and Hays

2008). Some (Ribbens and Edwards 1998; Stanley and Wise 2002) have even suggested that qualitative research demands the development of relationships of reciprocity in which the researcher attempts to offer participants as much as they are receiving back. In order to become fully engaged in the scope of the research, contributors need to feel that they are not being used nor manipulated. They also need to feel confident that the researcher will recognize and appreciate the true value of their stories. Above all, the researcher needs to remain honest and human (Dickson-Swift et al. 2007). Informants are not likely to share with the researcher their genuine emotions, personal stories nor incriminating actions outside of trust relationships (Rubin and Rubin 2012). Data quality, as a result, is in large part a function of the degree to which the researcher manages to establish, operate, and sustain such rapports. When fully successful, the researcher will benefit from having the informant talk free of fears that he or she will be misunderstood, judged, or betrayed. The researcher will be perceived as an insider, or sympathetic outsider, who can understand and can be trusted. Obviously, such great levels of trust impose great responsibility on the researcher, as many of the stories, especially when revealing acts of corruption, can be quite damaging to one's career.

While in established democracies expertise, professional associations, and publication records can often be sufficient to legitimize the researcher and kick off a trust rapport, even on sensitive issues (see: Enguix 2014), in many post-communist societies, this is rarely the case. In these worlds, individuals habitually demonstrate a trained cynicism and distrust towards any systematized inquiry into any important social issues. Belousov and colleagues (2007) have argued that in locations where corruption and organized crime are pervasive to the extent that they can lead to the notable loss of social order, termed "risk-saturated areas," building and maintaining trust with informants is extremely challenging. Individuals are decidedly unwilling to dedicate their time and even less willing to risk their livelihood for purposes of research. In these environments, networks of associations are critical for purposes of establishing trust. For trivial, non-threatening research topics, trust could conceivably be developed fairly easy even outside direct endorsements from a member of one's immediate networks of association. For sensitive issues, however, this is merely impossible. Trust, professional authority, and neutrality, most of which are typically implicitly assumed in other social matrices, in post-Soviet spaces, have to be continuously negotiated.

In the Moldovan study, all those who accepted to be interviewed were personally familiar with the researcher or have received a positive endorsement from someone they trusted. In all instances when the researcher was not acquainted with the informant before the start of the research, it took a direct contact from another informant to confirm the identity and intentions of the researcher. Without such communication there were only limited chances that the potential research participants would have agreed to participate. In a number of cases, such contacts were interpreted as favor seeking. Initially, informants would accept to participate not for the sake of the research nor because they were contacted by the researcher directly, but as a favor to those endorsing the researcher. To this extent, then, it would be rather unfair to call this approach a network or snowball technique, even though, strictly speaking, the approach did fit the conceptual description of the sampling method. In reality, it would be perhaps more appropriate to describe the approach as a chain-endorsement.

The importance of establishing a trust rapport with the Moldovan informants was even more critical given the amount of "empty stories" that is characteristic for corruption research. In the beginning, a number of informants were keen on distancing themselves from the stories they were telling. They rarely were the protagonists of those stories and their stories rarely deviated from the standard narrative of the "good" citizen. These stories, outside the intriguing motives behind their emptiness, provided very little in terms of authentic or valuable insights. What is of import here, for those undertaking research in similar environments and under comparable conditions, is that the cynicism and apathy of the citizens who inhabit such social systems will make empty stories predominant. Without developing considerable levels of trust, the quality of the interviews will be quite poor. In this sense, it is advisable that the researcher dedicate more time to trust-building than actual interviewing.

Somewhat surprisingly, since domestic institutions are not trusted and are perceived incompetent and corrupt—professionally associating with them might actually be detrimental to the trust-building efforts and overall research. Such associations might in fact increase levels of distrust and lead informants to question the true motives behind the study. Furthermore, own institutional biases could significantly guide informants' stories. Under these circumstances, links with Western institutions are valuable assets. In the Moldovan case, the researcher's affiliation with a respected American university and research center helped significantly with establishing trust. In many ways, for the majority of the informants, associations with Western institutions topped national commonalities as a driving criteria for trust.

> **I:** In all honesty, I wasn't too sure about talking to you in the beginning.
> **R:** Why, if you don't mind me asking?
> **I:** I wasn't sure about what you are really trying to do. I didn't know if you wanted to do research or just used that as an excuse for something else. You never know nowadays. All kinds of things happen all the time.
> **R:** What helped you make up your mind?
> **I:** Well, my pal asked me to talk to you, plus you don't work for any of the national agencies or universities. I figured if you are doing this for an American university, you have to be an authentic researcher. You are not going to lie to me or waste my time. Actually, if you were doing this for any of the Moldovan universities, I probably wouldn't have bothered with you.

Gender and Decor

Gender is another important factor in conditioning trust within the informant-researcher relationships. Numerous scholars have noted one's personal characteristics and demographic associations as a fundamental variable that guides the interactions and trust with informants while in the field and the eventual quality of the procured data (see: Brandes

2008; Li 2008; Mazzei and O'Brien 2009; Enguix 2014). Some have suggested that gender might trump even ethnicity in terms of relevancy for building associations in fieldwork (Stanley and Slattery 2003). The post-Soviet contexts do not significantly deviate from this general expectation. Most of these societies are still heavily male dominated. Elite economic and social positions remain by and large the domain of men and out of the reach of women. "Serious" science, too, is something that "men do," or at least it is still predominantly perceived as such. For the study of corruption in post-communist societies, gender is critical. In these environments, on questions of corruption, male researchers might find it significantly easier to negotiate standing and trust with one's informants. Female researchers would face a harder task in convincing of their expertise and conditioning genuine participation from elite economic and social players. Adams (1999), for instance, noted that, as a female foreign researcher among Uzbekistan elites, she felt like a "pet" researcher adopted by powerful interests. In these male dominated social matrices, female researchers studying corruption will also have to add social biases and preconceptions to the long list of existing research challenges. The following dialogue, notwithstanding the numerous other themes that it carries, is a case in point.

> **R:** I couldn't help noticing that most of the agents [anti-corruption agents] are male. Am I reading too much into it?
>
> **I:** Actually, all of our field agents are men. Women are not made for such type of work.
>
> **R:** What do you mean?
>
> **I:** They just aren't. I don't know how to explain it. Corruption is not really a women's sport. How many female academics do you know that study corruption?
>
> **R:** Well, in fact, a number of them are women.
>
> **I:** Not many, though, right? Nobody around here would take a woman agent or a woman academic studying corruption seriously. It probably works in the West. Here, such things do not hold water.

And, while there is no shortage of research that reviews the impacts of demographic characteristics on the quality of informant-researcher relationships, there is little acknowledgement of the dress code as a significant determinant in creating a trust rapport. For many post-communist societies, which have suffered through decades of economic hardships and uniformization, wardrobe is an expression of economic standing. Labels are social status currency. This should not come as a surprise, especially when dealing with high ranking officials or social elites in economically weak societies. The fact that the "label veneration" can be easily explained away, however, does not make it of lesser significance. Individuals' statuses are often estimated by their wardrobe and their shoes. As amusing as this might come across for a Western researcher, this is by no means trivial. Given that, in many instances, the researcher working in these worlds has only a few minutes to negotiate standing, one's wardrobe can be the difference between a short interview mired with empty stories and the chance to enlist the respondent as an active participant in knowledge creation. When interviewing in post-communist societies, interview wardrobes, like words, are powerful discovery and negotiation mechanisms; hence, should be chosen and balanced with care depending on the research question or the population being explored.

Interview Location

Interviews represent one of the foundational tools for qualitative research (Rubin and Rubin 2012). Interviewing, by its very nature, has a number of advantages. First, control over the flow of the conversation is in large part at the discretion of the researcher. During the course of the interview, the researcher maintains the right to re-envision the research as unexpected dimensions are uncovered. Second, interviews, in particular a string of in-depth ones, provide informants with the ability to become active participants in research. Through their stories, depending on the specifications installed by the researcher, respondents can become integral and consequential parts of the interpretation process; especially when they have extensive and relevant experiences (Charmaz 2006; Hardy and Williams 2011). Additionally, during interviews, informants' statements are just one source of information. Reactions, body language, and tone are as much a source of information as spoken words (Rubin and Rubin 2012). Finally, interviews are somewhat less susceptible to biases inadvertently introduced by researcher's previous academic training as the researcher has the opportunity to check one's own interpretations during subsequent interview sessions. The benefits that come with the flexibility of interviewing cannot be maximized, however, without thorough and rigorous planning (Rubin and Rubin 2012). For that purpose, the selection of the interview location becomes one of the most central considerations. This is particularly true when conducting interviews on sensitive issues. It is important that informants find the interview locations both comfortable and inviting in terms of conversation. Providing informants with the choice of interview location is perhaps among the better ways of ensuring a positive start to the research relationship. Securing a neutral location (e.g., renting office space, access to a classroom after hours) is critical for securing a higher acceptance rate among potential research participants. For some, especially when it comes to problematic issues, interviewing can be almost therapeutic (Birch and Miller 2000; Dickson-Swift et al. 2006), which makes the selection of the location much more fundamental.

In the Moldovan case, only in seven instances the informants preferred to be interviewed at their work places. On nine occasions the respondents expressed preference to be interviewed in the location that was secured by the researcher, while the rest of the informants suggested a third location, which was usually a quiet coffee shop or restaurant. The location of the interviews had a significant effect on the formality of the interaction (at least in the beginning) and the time it took for respondents to "start producing" meaningful insights. Informants, in particular those who were public officials, who were interviewed in their work places were more likely to cautiously place their statements within broad storylines that were derivatives of "correct" political narratives, which, as public servants, they were expected to embrace. They were less likely to provide thick descriptions or to support their perspectives with concrete examples. It was much harder to motivate the informants to assume a genuinely active role as a research participants. These interviews were characterized by high proportions of empty stories. The *ad hoc* locations, on the other hand, appeared to be the most effective in terms of

stimulating results. Informants interviewed in coffee shops or restaurants were much more likely to embrace their roles as active research participants and knowledge producers. They appeared to grant themselves much more freedoms in storytelling and they also seemed to exhibit increased levels of trust. They were also more likely to offer and to agree to be contacted at a later date for member checking.

Emotional Burden

The rights and well-being of research participants have been, for obvious reasons, a central concern for much of qualitative research literature (Lee-Treweek and Linkogle 2000). The lives of those who inform research are highly regarded and no efforts are spared to protect them from any, even indirect, negative effects. The impact that the research has on the safety and welfare of those standing on the other end, the researchers themselves, is usually an afterthought or at the very least pales in comparison (Kinard 1996; Lee-Treweek and Linkogle 2000; Johnson and Clarke 2003; Rager 2005; Belousov et al. 2007; Dickson-Swift et al. 2007; Campbell 2013). Qualitative research, during which the researcher engages in face-to-face intimate contact with sensitive issues, can be quite trying and can impose significant emotional burdens (Darlington and Scott 2002; Gair 2002; Harris 2002; Melrose 2002; Warr 2004). In qualitative research, the researcher is routinely exposed to stories of suffering and social injustice (Morse and Field 1995) that can "break one's heart" (Rager 2005). Given a "tin-opener effect" (Etherington 1996), informants will often reveal some of their most painful experiences, heaviest disappointments, or most guarded secrets. In this sense, the researcher becomes a "secret keeper" (Dickson-Swift et al. 2007) who now carries the confessions of others (Lupton 1998). Training, although useful, can never fully deny that the researcher is a human being first and a scholar second. The two roles, I believe, cannot, nor should they, be clearly separated; hence, the inevitable emotional encumbrance.

Research on public corruption makes no exception. It is an area that will provide ample opportunities to experience unethical behaviors and social injustice at its finest. A case in point is the story on fabricated criminal dossiers shared by one of the informants, an anti-corruption agent.

> **R:** So, if I understand this correctly, you are saying that corruption charges can be fabricated?
>
> **I:** Yes. That's exactly what I am saying. We can manufacture a dossier very easily.
>
> **R:** Why would you do that?
>
> **I:** It's politics. It's about power and power games. Sometimes, someone might try to remove a clean public official from office. If they have nothing on him, the only way to do it is by fabricating stuff. Sometimes they set the guy up, while in other cases, they just get testimonies from a few credible witnesses. And it doesn't have to be elected officials. Business partners do this to each other all the time.
>
> **R:** Have you ever done it?
>
> **I:** Yes. Twice.
>
> **R:** Can you tell me more about it?
>
> **I:** It was something that came from the top. In one case, we were asked to put together a dossier for a party leader and in another case for a mayor from Up North.
>
> **R:** What happened to them?
>
> **I:** One got a few years [in prison], the other one worked out a deal. I think he immigrated to Canada since.

As the dialogue reveals, careers, lives, and families are unsettled with ease and without remorse. In the scheme of things, in a systematically corrupt social matrix, a non-corrupt individual is a nuisance. One, who makes others uncomfortable. One, who needs to be removed. This represents a painful reality of abiding in a social system that has institutionalized corruption. There is limited respect for the law and even lesser value placed on individual rights and dignity. Realizing the depth and the extent of the social injustice imposes great emotional distress on the researcher. With every additional interview the degree of the emotional burden simply rises. The latter is further exacerbated by the realization that there is truly very little that the researcher can do outside of listening and retelling the stories. While one can attempt to embrace a detached perspective, eventually, feelings of anger, disbelief, and helplessness can hardly be avoided; especially for one who might feel as an insider based on national origin.

On the whole, one simply cannot expect that the study on corruption, human life in general, will not involve emotions. Qualitative research is in many ways an emotionally intensive endeavor. The emotional demands can often prove to be difficult to handle. Outside of being difficult to cope with, such states of mind could also negatively impact the quality of the research. Although with time the researcher could become desensitized and pain and social injustice could become "normal" (see: Morgan and Krone 2001; Campbell 2013), there are no proven techniques that would fully prepare one for the effects of exposure to suffering and social injustice. Consequently, researchers should develop and nurture a realistic appreciation for the emotional demands associated with certain types of research and fieldwork. They should attempt to assess the impacts the research might have on them and their ability to sustain the related emotional burden long-term (Kinard 1996). In qualitative research on difficult social issues, both the researcher's welfare and the quality of one's research often ride on the researcher's ability to manage emotions (Rubin and Rubin 2012).

Physical Dangers

Somewhat surprisingly, there is only a small body of literature that examines the physical dangers of fieldwork. Although most forms and areas of qualitative research entail some level of risk, certain study areas, such as corruption, tend to be characterized by higher degrees of physical dangers. It has been argued that fieldwork has become increasingly dangerous and scholars are often faced with extreme situations that can easily progress into conditions that can lead to physical harm (Kovats-Bernat 2002). The post-Soviet spaces, with their weak administrative structures that easily succumb under the pressures of corruption, appear to be particularly prone to such challenges (see: Belousov et al. 2007; Morgan, Maguire, and Reiner 2012). In these settings, few, if any, of the protagonists of the power game will jeopardize disturbing the existent balance by allowing lucrative corrupt structures to be exposed. Any prospect of being unmasked will be guarded against and if necessary—neutralized.

The physical hazards of qualitative research do not stop with the exit from the setting. Such challenges might linger around for some time. Publicizing the results might become another trigger point for risk. This is particularly true for corruption studies. Such research is characterized by high probabilities of exposing matters that might unsettle certain well-established interests or narratives. While the actual research activity might go by unnoticed, the results, if they are sufficiently powerful to stir public outcry, might raise some challenges for the researcher, especially if one continues to operate in the same environment. One of the informants, a journalist, sounded the following warning during one of the interviews.

> For your own good, you better make sure that you don't publicize too much of your findings, at least not in any of the local papers. They don't play around with this here. Especially if you plan on naming names. They might let you slide on a few things, but if you start talking too much, they will definitely pay your family a visit. The hammer and sickle [traditional Soviet emblems] might not figure on the flag any longer, but that does not mean that they have changed their ways. They still come down hard when they have to do so. The system is as operational as it has ever been. It has simply moved into the shadows. But, it is still there. Working hard. Make no mistake about it.

While not all research in dangerous settings will necessarily lead to dramatic developments or physical threats, in fact very few might, researchers engaged in fieldwork within hazardous zones should still realize that this remains a real possibility. Above all, however, researchers, especially those working alone, should acknowledge that outside of their own instincts they have little formal protection to rely on. In the game of balancing powerful interests, the rights and welfare of a social researcher are not necessarily strong considerations. For a researcher, then, it becomes critical to develop clear and pragmatic risk assessments before entering fieldwork, but also coping strategies, exit tactics, and habits for recognizing and responding to possible danger triggering situations (see: Sluka 1995; Kovats-Bernat 2002; Belousov et al. 2007).

A Few Concluding Remarks

The appeal of qualitative research lies in its ability to provide cursive, occasionally complete understandings of issues that do not easily lend themselves to mass study. Qualitative inquiry perspectives and approaches often charm with their delightful common sense. The latter might even lead some to believe that there is less rigor in qualitative than there is in quantitative studies. This is obviously not the case. On the contrary, qualitative research demands an equal, sometimes even greater, amount of rigorous preparation. One should not be misled by the elegant role played by serendipity and the free-flowing of the unexpected within the narrative of the final product. To some extent, it takes more effort and groundwork to manage the unplanned than to follow a meticulous and predetermined script. Unlike quantitative based inquiries, qualitative research cannot afford the luxury of assuming that concepts can be easily defined and captured through precise measurements. There are also no rules of thumb, nor proxies, nor well-behaved decision trees, nor software, which would confirm significance and bless generalizations.

Within its philosophical foundation, interpretive research is not set on imposing strict theoretical borders on research inquiries. Previous academic endorsements, while valued, are not ultimate determinants of research designs nor irreplaceable judgments of quality. Fieldwork is fluent and involves continuous negotiation of positions and relationships (Goffman 1989). Every research experience is unique in its own way. Yet, there are manifold commonalities among experiences which offer many opportunities for learning and extending general methodological understandings. It is the latter belief that has guided me in the writing of this article. Although some of the suggestions that I have made have already previously been echoed in the literature, others are partly original and that have yet to be formulated within the specific focus chosen here. This is not to say that my insights are somehow more complete or more useful than those of others. The degree of their completeness and usefulness is for the most part a function of the similarities within research contexts. They do not provide any universal magic of applicability and their transferability should be understood within the appropriate levels of methodological realism.

The suggestions provided here follow a similar logic and fall in line with the works of a number of other scholars (see: Johnson and Clarke 2003; Belousov et al. 2007; Dickson-Swift et al. 2007; Campbell 2013; Enguix 2014) who have attempted to delineate the challenges, both technical and psychological, that are faced by researchers engaged in qualitative research. Unlike other discussions, this article focuses specifically on studying public corruption within social matrices that are only starting to experience democratic governance. Both, the article's strengths and its weaknesses, can be located within its focus. On the one hand, there has been very little written about the challenges of fieldwork on public corruption, in this sense, then, this discussion has much to say. On the other hand, researchers who are not interested in the subject matter and might not be particularly inclined to study post-Soviet worlds, might find the representatives of what is discussed here rather limited. If nothing else, then, this article represents an additional documentary of the practical challenges encountered in the fieldwork.

Rather than suggesting avenues for future research, I use this final paragraph to offer a professional warning. We should not forget that as scholars, who engage in qualitative research, we sometimes are privileged to be entrusted with personal and highly sensitive information (Cannon 2005; Rubin and Rubin 2012). It is quite understandable, then, why we would often feel a deep sense of gratitude to our informants (Liamputtong Rice and Ezzy 1999). At the same time, however, we need to realize the emotional burden that we assume when routinely faced with stories of pain and social injustice. Fieldwork entails entering a space of emotions and vulnerability. In certain cases, emotional burdens can easily exceed the limits that we originally predicted and expected. Little can prepare one for the realities of the field. Paradoxically, the difficulty of dealing with emotions might have to do more with us than with our research. Engaging in qualitative research on sensitive issues offers us the possibility

to learn about ourselves. In qualitative face-to-face research, self-exploration and reflexivity are, for the most part, unavoidable. Reflexivity, by its very nature, places the researcher in a position of having to occasionally, sometimes continuously, re-negotiate one's own moral standings, imagery, and even identity. Reflexivity is not only methodologically tough, it can also impose a heavy emotional toll. Furthermore, the attachments we develop, but also the feelings and exposures during our research, can affect our lives in more ways than we could ever imagine before entering our fieldwork (see: Jamieson 2000; Rosenblatt 2001). To this extent, then, out of consideration for our well-being, we always must maintain a healthy appreciation of the degree to which our research can change us and to develop the habit of assuming at least a partially-defensive approach to our engagement in fieldwork. From a literature perspective, there continues to be an obvious need for an extended, fieldwork-based discussion on the ethical, psychological, and physical implications of engaging in qualitative research. Given that qualitative methodologies have become an integral part of research in social sciences, it is only reasonable to expect that our understandings of the risks and challenges associated with them do the same.

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Reflexive Serendipity. Grounded Theory and Serendipity in Disaster Management and Military Research

Abstract Grounded Theory (GT) is a research method that allows the researcher to make discoveries without *a priori* knowledge, and allows *an open mind not an empty head*. The use of this method is also desirable for serendipity to occur in the research process. This article therefore aims to chronologically present how serendipity has grown over time in the use of the GT method in a field of research focusing on highly demanding conditions such as disaster management and military operations. We will discuss a new concept, namely, reflexive serendipity, which encompasses the conditions required for making discoveries in the interview analysis. These may be contextual aspects and the role of the researcher, which includes having an open mind and the necessary perseverance and discipline to be able to succeed with GT and serendipity.

Keywords Grounded Theory; Serendipity; Reflexive Serendipity; Military Sociology; Disaster Management

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Grounded Theory (GT) is a research method originally invented by two sociologists, Glaser and Strauss (1967). GT may be defined as: "the discovery of theory from data systematically obtained from social research" (Glaser and Strauss 1967:2). This method provides researchers with a unique tool for theoretical development and differs from other *qualitative* methods for two major reasons. First, it is "unencumbered by explicit expectations about what the research might find, or by personal beliefs and philosophies" (Pole and Lampard 2002:206), therefore allowing the researcher to make discoveries without *a priori* knowledge and allowing *an open mind not an empty head* (Dey 1999). Regarding the application of GT, Glaser (2014a) had this to say:

> GT helps us to see things as they are, not as we preconceive them to be. Even without a GT, having a GT orientation helps us spot preconception when applied. We do not know how to apply GT until preconceptions are spotted in the participants' behavior and attitude. GT orients us to seeing our behavior and the behavior of others as data; we are able to see these things as they are, not as we wish them to be. Without preconceptions our minds are free to see things as they are so we can apply with trust in a favorable outcome. [p. 48]

The advantages of an "open mind" attitude in the data analysis may have contributed to the growing popularity of the GT method in a variety of social science and behavioral science areas. Locke (2001), for example, points out that the chances are very high that you will find a citation for Glaser and Strauss (1967) in almost any qualitative research article in the domain of management and organization studies.

A second major advantage of this method is that it provides the desirable conditions for unexpected discoveries, that is, serendipity or happy accident. The concept of serendipity was coined in 1754 by the British author, Horace Walpole, in a letter to a good friend, Horace Mann. The inspiration for naming the phenomenon comes from a Persian tale about three princes from Serendip, who, thanks to their sharp minds, made a number of unexpected discoveries, associations, and connections (Bosenman 1988). Horace Walpole drew a parallel with this story and realized he had found a new word to describe the actual phenomenon of making an important but unexpected discovery. Since then, the word has spread and is applied in all kinds of contexts.

However, it was the American sociologist, Robert Merton, who—in his book *Social Theory and Social Structure* (1957)—developed the concept further in a research context. Merton describes serendipity as an unexpected discovery that should be part of the scientific work involved in developing a theory or creating new hypotheses. Bosenman (1988) has compiled a few definitions of serendipity, for example: making providential discoveries by accident, the faculty of finding valuable things not sought for, and an aptitude for making desirable discoveries by accident.

The meaning of serendipity to the research process is the endeavor to be open to new and unforeseen results, that is, to be able to see beyond your line

of enquiry. Intuitive discoveries should nevertheless continue to be studied scientifically in order to be able to confirm results. In medicine, two of the most famous serendipitous discoveries were penicillin and X-rays, but even chocolate chip cookies came about by happy accident (Van Andel 1994). Serendipity is also referred to in behavioral science studies and has even led to paradigm shifts in several research projects, for example, when Human Relations schooling arose out of Scientific Management, on the basis of the altered view of humans as social beings rather than machines that must produce and deliver products (Rosengren and Arvidsson 2002).

In ethnographic studies, Fine and Deegan (1996) differentiate among three kinds of contexts of discovery, which are as follows: 1) *Temporal serendipity*—happening upon a dramatic instance. This involves an ability to find new sources of data—of being *in the right place at the right time* in order to observe some events, crucial for further observation and analysis. 2) *Serendipity relations*—the unplanned building of social networks. Finding proper informants (also experts and informants from a given observed area) and being in good relations with them is extremely important for making discoveries. These relations are often established accidentally. They, themselves, may be worthy of analysis, as a kind of empirical data. 3) *Analytical serendipity*—discovering concepts or theories that produce compelling claims. This is connected to merging qualitative data with already existing theories or forming proposals to modify them. A researcher may then discover some basic metaphor or narrative strategy which allows him/her to conceptualize a problem.

Previous research has also identified a number of individual factors that contribute to the likelihood of serendipity to occur. These include emotional intelligence (Collins and Cooper 2014), sagacity in terms of penetrating intelligence, keen perception and sound judgment (Bosenman 1988; Erdelez 1999), creativity (Ansburg and Hill 2003; Dorfman et al. 2008; Memmert 2009), and openness (Rivoal and Salazar 2013). A connection between creativity and madness has also been suggested (Kyaga et al. 2015).

GT's association with serendipity has been described by a number of researchers over the years. Glaser and Strauss (1967:2) have commented on Merton's concept by defining it as the following: "an unanticipated, anomalous, and strategic finding that gives rise to new hypothesis." The concept is included in the Five "S's" characterized by Glaser, which describe the nature of GT: "the subsequent, sequential, simultaneous, serendipitous, and scheduled nature of Grounded Theory" (Glaser 1998:15). Other researchers who have discussed GT and serendipity in social sciences contexts include Fine and Deegan (1996), Konecki (2008), and Bryant and Charmaz (2007). The latter draw an interesting conclusion: "If it wasn't always apparent that GTM (Grounded Theory method) is all about serendipity, then it certainly is now" (Bryant and Charmaz 2007:23).

An empirical study which particularly focuses on reflections about GT and serendipity is Konecki's (2008), where he describes the phenomenon of serendipity in the research case of the "social world of pet owners." Konecki claims that serendipity in the process of GT is a result of the way researchers code data, prioritize data, and how they determine which are the most important core variables. Konecki says that this takes a long time, which is also a prerequisite for arriving at completely unexpected conclusions. We have not succeeded in finding similar studies in other empirical contexts.

This article focuses explicitly on serendipity and GT in a particular context where no such previous studies were found, namely, a dynamic environment associated with crisis, war, and chaos and in which life and limb are at stake. The purpose is to give a chronological presentation of the growth of serendipity over time in the use of GTM. Particular focus is given to organizational factors in disaster management and military operations.

Demanding Conditions—A Description of Context

The demanding conditions considered here refer to the specific tasks of Swedish emergency response organizations and the Swedish Armed Forces. Demanding situations include crises, war, and armed conflict, as well as extraordinary events, and how society may respond to these kinds of challenges on a national and international level. This article focuses on Swedish situations and the Swedish authorities that had to cope with demanding circumstances in both domestic and international contexts. Specifically, the examples from disaster management used are the tsunami catastrophe in South East Asia (2004), a hostage drama in a Swedish prison (2004), and a major chemical spill at a Swedish Harbor (2005).

Where a military context is discussed, it concerns Swedish defense staff serving on international missions for military observation, peace-keeping, and peace-enforcement purposes. Typical military collaborative tasks highlighted in this study focus on liaison, negotiation, and intelligence gathering, observations and situation outlook reporting. All of these activities are conducted under imminent danger to life and limb (Klep and Winslow 1999; Alvinius 2013).

Method

Methodological Approach for the Research Project

Grounded Theory Method (GTM) has developed since Glaser and Strauss published their book in 1967. Nowadays there are basically three general and different approaches to the GT methodology. Thus, it is no longer possible to write about GT as if it were the single, standardized method. Glaser's classic GTM differs from Strauss and Corbin's (1990) version, and both are dissimilar to Charmaz's (2014) constructivist version. To specify our own stance, we have tried to follow the Glaserian approach to choosing, doing, abstracting, and writing GT and have been inspired by several works by Glaser (1978; 2011; 2014a; 2014b; 2015) in trying to specify our use of GT.

Methodological Approach for This Paper

The methodology adopted for this paper is autoethnography—a relatively recent qualitative approach to research whereby the researchers themselves are

the "subjects" of study (Ellis and Bochner 2003). In this instance, this means a review of a long-term project analyzed using GT and what this methodological approach means to the research process in the long-term. Doing so involved the three of us, as researchers in our distinct projects, considering our observations and experiences in the process of research on leadership in demanding conditions. All three have experience of using GT as a method of analyzing data, which will be described in the next section.

Initial Studies Endeavoring to Use GT

The methodological discussion concerning the connection between GT and serendipity is based on a number of civilian studies in 2005-2007 financed by the former Swedish Rescue Services Agency (now: the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency) and military studies in 2008-2009, sponsored by the Swedish Armed Forces. The civilian studies aimed to increase the understanding of direct and indirect leadership and decision-making by managers and management teams, as well as that exercised within their own organizations and in collaboration with others. The studies sought to inductively answer questions concerning the importance of experience for leadership and decision-making in connection with larger incidents, and also considered the perceived stress involved, both for the individual and within their organization. The military studies concentrated on military leadership during international missions, with special focus on civil-military cooperation. Here, questions concerned experiences of collaborating with different actors and at different organizational levels.

Methods in the Original Studies

Informants

The original studies were all based on qualitative interviews with people in leading positions, who had experience of conducting crisis management efforts and international military missions. According to the guiding principles of generating theory from empirical grounds (GT) which Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Glaser (2011) developed, the selection of authorities and informants in the three initial studies was made so as to achieve as wide a variation of experience as possible.

In all, 71 people were interviewed (10 women, 61 men). The selection can be described as a convenience sample. More specifically, this means that with the help of already selected individuals, we came into contact with others who had leading positions in crises. Although this was initially done within the project in 2005, we switched to theoretical sampling in 2007. According to Morse (2007), convenience sampling in GT and qualitative research is more generally used for two reasons. Firstly, in the beginning of a research project—to identify the scope and major components, and secondly—to locate individuals (crisis managers in this case) who are available and have experienced or observed the researched phenomenon. Thus, in 2007, we switched to theoretical sampling according to Glaser (1978) for the selection of participants (liaison officers) because of the identified needs of the emerging concepts and theory.

For further information on the distribution of informants and organizations, see: Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. Overview of informants from civil disaster management.

Organization	Involvement in rescue operation	Number of informants	Female/ Male	Their position (during the rescue operation)
1. The Swedish Rescue Services Agency	Tsunami	5	1/4	• Director-General • Head of Operational Management • An emergency service function called Focal Point • Two Crisis Managers
2. A local rescue service organization	Sulphur spill Hostage-taking	11	2/9	• Incident Commander • Chief Fire Officer (CFO) • Chief Fire Officer (CFO) on Duty • Overall Incident Commander • Incident Site Officer • Chief of Staff • Full-Suit Fire-Fighter • Information Officer
3. An emergency treatment unit	Sulphur spill	4	1/3	• Chief of Emergency Treatment • Officer on Duty • Incident Site Medical Officer • Emergency Medical Officer
4. Swedish Armed Forces	Tsunami	6	0/6	• Logistics Coordinator • Medical Doctor on Duty • Liaison Officer sent from Operative Unit (OPU) and located at the Swedish Rescue Services Agency • Two Managers for the operational section on duty • Head of the Logistics Department
5. National Board of Health and Welfare	Tsunami	6	2/4	• Director-General • General Manager of Administration • Head of Social Services Department • Head of Crisis Management Department • Two Operative Managers
6. A regional public prosecution office	Hostage-taking	2	1/1	• Two Chief Prosecutors
7. Regional Police Department	Sulphur spill Hostage-taking	11	1/10	• Head of the Police Department in charge of law and order • Three Chiefs of Staff • Two Negotiators • Two Police Incident Officers • Adviser to Strategic Commander • Information Officer • Liaison Officer
8. A prison establishment	Hostage-taking	5	1/4	• Director-General • Three Detective Inspectors • Chief of Security
(N) informants		**50**	**9/41**	

Source: Self-elaboration.

Table 2. Overview of informants from an international military operation.

Organization	Number of informants	Female/ Male	Their position (during the international military operation)
1. Swedish Armed Forces	20	0/20	• Military observers (3 persons) • Liaison officers (11 persons) • Contingent commanders (4 persons) • Military attaché (1 person) • Police officer (1 person)
2. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs	1	1/0	• First Secretary of the Swedish Embassy
(N) informants	**21**	**1/20**	

Source: Self-elaboration.

Initial Analysis—Open and Selective Coding

All interviews were recorded and written out in full before being analyzed, according to a GT approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967). The first step in the analysis work consisted of so-called open coding, which implies identifying significant elements, that is, codes in every individual interview. For example, they could be about certain patterns of thought, feelings, or behavior relating to the subject questions in the interview. At the start of the research process, we began analyzing the transcribed interviews. Here is an example of a quotation:

> I'll be completely honest; it didn't work at all [the staff]. Unfortunately, it left a lot to be desired.

This quotation, together with several others, was coded as *Internal Cooperation Within the Police Force*. Continuing with the constant comparative method, step two in the analysis work consisted of assessing and later identifying codes with similar meanings. In the example above, *Internal Cooperation Within the Police Force* was sorted into the category of *Cooperation*. In the third step, the category *Cooperation* then came under the superior category *The Task of the Internal Arena*. A fourth and final step involved comparisons between superior categories, categories, and codes, resulting in a hypothetical model describing the core variable of the collaboration—a balancing act between the need for structure and the need for freedom of action.

Selective Re-Analysis—The Road to Serendipity

All the interviews were analyzed again, using a more selective approach. By re-analyzing the existing data, our ambition was to qualitatively identify more overall concepts so as to realize the purpose of the investigation and thus contribute to theoretical development and understanding of the phenomenon studied. This leads us to a discussion of the selective coding and the likelihood of arriving at a serendipitous discovery.

The Discovery of the "Link" Concept in Disaster Management and Re-Analysis of the Same Data

The purpose of the first civilian study was to develop a theoretical understanding of leadership during a complex rescue operation following a major disaster (the 2004 tsunami) in a foreign country. The results were published in the *International Journal of Emergency Management* (Alvinius, Danielsson, and Larsson 2010a). The main conclusion from this study was the identification of a core variable: a balancing act between the need for structure and the need for freedom of action. Leaders who strive to create structure at the expense of freedom of action are less inclined to delegate and more likely to wear themselves out. Conversely, those who strive to create great freedom of action bypass many links in the organizational chain, thus "short-circuiting" the organization as a whole. The first serendipitous discovery occurred in this first study when the researchers were analyzing data together and started discussing the concept of individual roles labeled as "links" that arose in one of the interview excerpts.

> Initially, the Swedish Armed Forces had a liaison officer, who knew the military speak and system, placed among the Rescue Services staff. I had discussions with the liaison officer there, and he was familiar with our stuff. What I'm most satisfied with is being able to establish the contacts, so the Rescue Services personnel and the Armed Forces personnel had a common entry point, and that was me. So, I had a lot of discretion and saved the individual administrators a lot of times.

This individual worked for the armed forces, but because of the unexpected tsunami event, was given a collaborative role in another organization. From this case, the researchers concluded that managing contradictory needs for structure and freedom of action becomes easier when link functions and roles arise in the formal hierarchy during an emergency situation. An important conclusion was that boundary spanners or links—liaison functions—and individuals are of great significance when restraining factors, such as geographical distance, scope of disaster, and lack of disaster experience, are present.

This serendipitous discovery led to a selective re-analysis of the existing data with a view to qualitatively identifying and evaluating context-specific and common factors associated with links. Two new concepts arose from the re-analysis, further refining the definition of a link. These results were published in chronological order after the first one in the *International Journal of Organisational Behaviour* (Alvinius, Danielsson, and Larsson 2010b). The aim of that particular study was to gain a deeper understanding of the concept of links within the framework of emergency response agencies during severely demanding operations.

The following definitions and two overarching categories arose: Spontaneous or Planned Links established in connection with accidents and catastrophes that serve as bridges in the collaboration between or within liaising organizations. These links may be horizontal and vertical in terms of the direction of processes (e.g., communication/information/decision-making/liaison).

Vertical links describe the role of acting between various hierarchical levels within an organization or between organizational leaderships at a political level. Horizontal links describe the role of acting between organizations or between individuals at the same level within one and the same organization/authority.

A Planned Link is related to an individual's organizational role and is most often approved and accepted by superiors. Planned Links refer to individuals with collaboration tasks within their responsibility and mandate, such as liaison officers or negotiators. This linking function may have appeared successful in a previous event, which led to the establishment of this kind of link in the organization. Planned Links can be decision-makers who are able to act outside the framework of the organization because they possess organizational acceptance and have a wide experience of managing disasters or unexpected events. Individuals with planned link functions in crisis situations belong to the ordinary chain of command during regular day work and may have a managerial position during ordinary working conditions.

Spontaneous Links appear to arise when required by the extreme situation. This could happen when the areas of responsibility, authority, competences, experiences, and resources fail. Spontaneous Links often emerge in the field and enjoy the immediate trust of people close by, for example, Planned Links. A typical Spontaneous Link could be a volunteer language translator during a disaster. To make the collaboration process possible, Spontaneous Links rapidly need to gain trust, but they also run the risk of being rejected if they are not part of an organization involved. The need for Spontaneous Links disappears once the crisis is over.

What we learned from this study is that links contribute in diverse ways to effective operations by enabling exchange between individuals and groups. When functioning at their best, these links provide the rigid structure of bureaucratically organized emerging-response agencies, with the creativity and flexibility required. In short, the two kinds of links contribute to organizational adaption to environmental conditions.

Taxing conditions can place demands on competent people when support is required in order to fulfill a task. The task, which is not predefined, involves coordination, collaboration, and support, but includes purposes connected to the extreme situation, such as sizing up the situation, sense-making, estimating the allocation of resources and other competencies. In the case of the hostage-taking, it turned out that a church minister was of assistance when the hostage's family needed support:

> I picked someone from the support group and our prison pastor...but we were so lucky because another minister from Mariefred lived on the top floor [in the building where the hostage lived]. He was their neighbor...so those three travelled together—our support person, our prison pastor, and the other minister went and met his [the hostage's] wife and family to inform them.

Because of requirements to publish our work in scientific journals, we have tried to identify theoretical gaps in the literature regarding collaboration and leadership in crisis management. During our collection of published references, we came across an organizational concept, namely, boundary spanners. This concept is similar to our Planned and Spontaneous Links, but our theoretical contribution to the knowledge of boundary spanners is the discovery of the spontaneous parts.

The concept of boundary spanners refers to individuals who are able to provide linkages which do not exist in organizational charts; boundary spanners facilitate the sharing and exchange of information and link their organizations with the external environment (Aldrich and Herker 1977; Webb 1991; Burt 1992; Williams 2002).

Discovering the concepts "planned" and "spontaneous" links and their relation to boundary spanners led us to further theoretical sampling. Little research has been done on planned and spontaneous links *and* boundary spanners in the Swedish civil crisis management and military contexts at that time, so we chose to expand the study by conducting a further 21 interviews with individuals who had acted in some kind of liaison capacity (the main task of planned links and boundary spanners), but only in the military context (in contrast to the crisis management situation mentioned above).

This then became the object of further study in the military context, which revealed how planned links actually manage collaboration and how they treat spontaneous links (because spontaneous links were not part of the organization). We wanted to identify connections between those two types of links. During this analysis, another serendipitous or accidental discovery was made in regard to the link between sociology of emotions and military sociology, focusing emotion strategies on an individual and organizational level, collaboration in the military context, and boundary spanning/linking, leading to the study published in the *International Journal of Work, Organisation, and Emotion* (Alvinius et al. 2014). The purpose of the enquiry was to examine the processes of confidence-building and emotional management tactics among boundary spanners in a multinational, military peace enforcement context. The study shows that boundary spanners strategically utilize a variety of emotional management strategies in order to fulfill the demands laid upon them by their collaborating counterparts in the hostile environment and by their own organization. The original thoughts of how planned links actually manage collaboration and how they treat spontaneous links under stressful conditions led to the discovery of different types of emotional strategies (called smoothness strategies) that planned links use to manage different collaboration actors, including spontaneous links. Three interrelated dimensions of smoothness were identified: cultural, structural, and smoothness in risky situations. By acting "smoothly" an adaption to the dynamic environment can be achieved. Our study shows that boundary spanners utilize emotional management in order to fulfill the demands partly laid upon them. By acting "smoothly" at an individual level, the bureaucratic organization is thus adapted to its dynamic environment (Alvinius et al. 2014).

Cultural smoothness means an ability to handle cultural codes, manners and customs, rituals, et cetera in order to avoid conflicts or tensions. The following quote exemplifies the discovery of the cultural smoothness boundary spanners needed in their international service:

> But also, you could see those who had a knack of adjusting to this, you know, joining in and cheek-kissing right, left, and center, and so on. If you find that difficult, maybe you shouldn't be working as a liaison officer, if you can't take it; you have to be able to loosen up, you have to, you know, when in Rome, do as the Romans, so to speak.

Structural smoothness means an ability to understand and handle structures of power, status, hierarchy, et cetera, as illustrated by the excerpt below:

> If they cancel meetings, it's not right to accept it with a smile and say: "Well, OK, we'll see you next week, if you're busy now." You might have to play up your rank perhaps, appear to be a little offended, slam your fists on the table, or say, this is not acceptable to me—it's completely unacceptable that you won't meet with ISAF.

And finally, smoothness in risky situations implies an ability to appraise the significance of various external demands, which may prompt emotions such as fear, anger, frustration, or shame, et cetera in all collaborative actors.

> He was upset because we closed this restaurant due to the increase in drugs. But, I often thought it worked, I had quite a calming effect on the people I went in and talked to.

Summary of the Process

Original studies of leadership and collaboration in crisis management discovered "links" which, upon selective re-analysis, were further defined as "planned" or "spontaneous." The concept was theoretically developed under the umbrella term "boundary spanner" with our additional contribution of a new dimension labeled "spontaneous." We have done further studies of planned links and their connection to spontaneous links in a military context in which a new discovery was made, that is, that emotion strategies are at work in collaborative tasks characterized by threat and danger to life and limb.

Discussion

The purpose of this paper was to give a chronological presentation of the growth of serendipity over time in the use of GTM. Particular focus was given to organizational factors in disaster management and military operations, such as identification of the concepts "planned" and "spontaneous" links and developing the already existing "boundary spanner" concept. Besides the chronological presentation of the results, a concept developed in anthropology, namely, reflexive serendipity (Rivoal and Salazar 2013), is now introduced in a new context. Here, reflexivity denotes a kind of "interpretation of interpretation" in the research process (Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000). According to Rivoal and Salazar (2013), reflexivity, openness, and serendipity are key characteristics of anthropology. We would argue that the same is also true within sociological, psychological, and other behavioral sciences using GT as a method.

Reflexivity is also defined by Calás and Smircich (1992) as the relationship between "the knowledge" and ways of "doing the knowledge." The discussion in this article is devoted to problematizing the role of the researcher in working with GT and serendipity.

As Glaser himself expresses it in his book, *Basics of Grounded Theory Analysis: Emergence Vs. Forcing* (1992), the sociological analysis should emerge from the empirical material—the material should not be forced out of any particular pre-determined frame of ideas. Approaching the collected data without pre-determined ideas and analyzing them from several perspectives makes this type of discovery possible—it has to take its time. Although critical voices have been raised in response to the popularity of GT and the use of the "discovery" concept (Thomas and James 2006), we have given a chronological description of how obtaining knowledge and producing knowledge through reflexive serendipity can occur.

Context Factors Increasing the Likelihood of Serendipity

The discussion in this section concerns demanding contexts in which the informants are exposed to completely new situations and experiences. Indeed, environmental or contextual factors are said to contribute to noticing and discovering, and there is a wealth of evidence demonstrating that contextual factors, which are in some way unique or stand out, will be noticed (Theeuwes 1994), for example, sudden visual or audible changes in the environment (Egeth and Yantis 1997). It has also been documented that researchers and observers will react to emotionally loaded or meaningful words on the unattended channel (this is commonly known as the *cocktail party effect*) (e.g., Wood and Cowan 1995; Shapiro, Caldwell, and Sorensen 1997). Many of our informants experienced a unique event in crisis management, which led them to reflect on their experiences and thus contributed to new discoveries in the analysis. This is not unusual. As one informant from the tsunami catastrophe expressed it: "So this is possibly a once-in-a-lifetime thing that we hope we can avoid in the future."

Prerequisites for Reflexive Serendipity

The discoveries of "Spontaneous and Planned Links as Boundary Spanners" and "Boundary Spanners' capacity for emotion management" arose true to method, fitting like a glove to GT as a craft. The above-mentioned discoveries were further developed on a foundation of deep knowledge of the field—analytical serendipity as described by Fine and Deegan (1996) in the sense of the researcher being able to conceptualize a problem through deep theoretical knowledge. An existing theory may thus be developed, as it was here.

Our wish, then, is to contribute with the concept of *reflexive serendipity* in this new context, as it takes into account the individual preferences, qualities, and knowledge of the researcher in their work with GT in the analysis. For optimal reflexive serendipity within GT, a great deal is also required of the individual in the role of researcher—namely, a combination of an open mind, interest, commitment, and dedication besides the perseverance and discipline

to make a given analysis clear for publication. If the researcher only has perseverance and discipline, they will not see anything new. Much also depends on the interests and perseverance of the researchers, their willingness to collaborate within a research team, the decisions made in the observation and analysis, as well as in the long, time-consuming research process. This combination has not been emphasized as much in the studies of researcher factors contributing to serendipity that were cited in the introduction.

Strengths and Limitations

The advantage of recycling data in this manner is that it is a way of gaining a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study. A possible disadvantage is that the process is endless. However, reflexive serendipity within GT is characterized by modifiability, which means that (instead of gathering new data) old data are constantly being recycled. This can be an advantage and a disadvantage at the same time.

Another aspect is that circumstances can change to the degree that the entire analysis alters when a number of anomalies enter the equation. Social media are one such anomaly. The conclusions we came to in 2005—before Facebook and similar sites took off—would look different today. For this reason, further study with additional data from the outside world is important for the sake of knowledge, but also for the method.

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Invoking the Specter of Racism: Category Membership as Speaker Topic and Resource

Abstract This paper explores how category membership features in talk where speakers address the issue of racial discrimination. In particular, it examines how category membership gets invoked to furnish speaker entitlement in the course of destabilizing and reworking the category-bound inferences that inform membership attribution. I begin with the analysis of two relatively short extracts of talk in which speakers invoke ethnic and racial group identity as a preliminary to an examination of the paradoxical uses for which category membership is made relevant, moving on to consider an extended episode of *The 700 Club*. In contrast to analytic approaches which seek to reveal the denial of racism in speaker claims that mitigate the pernicious implications of category attribution, I consider how category attribution serves as a speaker resource in efforts to identify and critique racism. This participant work is then considered in relation to ethnomethodology's efforts to re-specify the foundational postulates that inform the investigation of social order production and the place that the examination of participant meaning-making has in the pursuit of that endeavor.

Keywords Category Entitlement; Category Membership; Ethnomethodology; Identity; Membership Categorization Device; Racism; Reflexivity

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Racism remains one of the most contentious and divisive of issues within the public dialogue. While a great deal of scholarly work has been carried out to explore how talk about race has been transformed from direct expressions of denigratory, reductionist formulations of the racial (black) Other to more nuanced and sophisticated portrayals that attend to various mitigating concerns in accounts of racial identity and social exclusion, little work has been done to explore how speakers themselves address the conceptual resources by which racism is rendered accountable in talk where category reductionism is at issue. Investigations of talk involving the *denial of racism* and related work on *new racism* accounts which approach the topic of racism within the context of how speakers provide for the relevance of moral demands for equality on the basis of individual merit and the like stress the mitigating effect that such formulations have in obscuring otherwise direct expressions of racist stereotyping. Speaking to this development in the scholarly treatment of race talk, Condor and colleagues (2006) note:

> In addition to developing innovative methodological procedures, social psychologists have attempted to deal with the phenomenon of prejudice denial by re-conceiving the construct of prejudice. It is now common for social psychologists to treat consciously held and/or explicitly articulated forms of racial, national, or ethnic antipathy as indicative of one type of attitude, and unconscious, implicit, and/or discursively coded forms of antipathy as indicative of another (e.g., Brauer, Wasel, & Niedenthal, 2000; Devine, 1989; Devine, Montheith, Zuwerink, & Elliot, 1991; Kinder & Sears, 1981; Locke, MacLeod, & Walker, 1994; McConahay et al., 1981; Tetlock & Arkes, 2004). Once identified and named as a separate phenomenon, the suppression of prejudiced or stereotyped representations has subsequently come to be treated as a topic of empirical and theoretical concern in its own right (e.g., Bodenhausen & Macrae, 1996; Crandall & Eshleman, 2003; Hausmann & Ryan, 2004; Monteith, Sherman, & Devine, 1998; Moskowitz, Salomon, & Taylor, 2000). [p. 442]

A great deal of the analytic work referred to in the distinction that Condor and colleagues make here is that which is concerned to examine the different formulations of racial identity ascription and category attribution across a wide range of domains, from everyday conversation to mass media representation and governmental policy formulation. A principal assertion of such research is that attribution is covert, being employed to legitimate a particular order of affairs in which powerful and advantaged groups (Whites) benefit from societal arrangements from which other, racially defined groups (primarily Blacks) are routinely excluded. The related "denials of racism" are said to obscure the conceptual underpinnings crucial to speakers' covert work of legitimating social inequality. Research that considers the details of how such denials get deployed in everyday talk is concerned to elucidate the relationship such duplicitous formulations have in reproducing the societal arrangements they are said to obscure.

What is particularly interesting about such efforts to disclose the spurious character of racism denial is that they invoke the very category-relevant designations whose incentivized contrivance they seek to expose in and as a condition of their own intelligibility and efficacy. That is, they employ the very concept of group membership whose categorical formulation is at play in mundane descriptions as a way to render their own critique of reductionist attribution visible in the first place. They reify the very structures whose concocted

nature they seek to explore as a condition of that exploratory effort itself. This is not to find fault with such research for engaging in the same sort of reductionism it seeks to hold others accountable for, but rather to point out that it shares with the talk of those whose formulations it examines a contradictory or paradoxical feature by which critical interrogation necessarily involves the reflexive granting of analytic asylum from the very terms of scrutiny it seeks to develop in respect to its own objects of investigation (Woolgar and Pawluch 1985; Pollner 1987). It is that reflexive feature of critique's formulation with which I will be concerned in this paper. More specifically, I will be concerned with the way that the situated production of critique is reflexively oriented to how it potentially implicates speakers in the moral imperatives it articulates, both as a warrant for and as a demand of the incriminations it designates.

This concern with the reflexive implications of category formulation should be seen in the context of recent scholarly efforts to address the legacy of Harvey Sacks' early work to examine mundane practices of membership categorization (or the use of so-called Membership Categorization Devices [MCDs], see: Special Issue of *Discourse Studies* 14:277-354 [2012]). At issue in these efforts to revisit the significance of that early work is a concern to avoid the sort of reification that characterizes second-order, social psychological modeling of cognitive processes. In other words, if (in social psychology) category attribution and the like are regarded as manifestations of underlying cognitive processes, then the analytic glossing of the situated activity by which such categorization is carried out in everyday conversation runs the risk of similarly reifying such participant work within an idiom that projects its operation onto a set of formal properties. Put differently, reference to mind can be replaced by reference to the structural autonomy of descriptive practices (i.e., as the manifestation of a membership categorization *device*). Talk in which speakers work to make category membership relevant would thus be seen to instantiate the (membership categorization) device's glosses upon that work, rather than the analytic use of those glosses being seen as a heuristic shorthand to reference that work. Where the use of an MCD involves the making relevant of presumptive suppositions concerning the distribution of particular rights, obligations, and/or knowledge within some sort of relational configuration which that device invokes, such formulations can be used to warrant speaker claims of privileged knowledge in virtue of the imputed entitlements invoked with the category reference in question (Sharrock 1974; Heritage and Raymond 2005; Raymond and Heritage 2006; Heritage 2012a; 2012b).[1] Put differently, speakers warrant situated claims owing to the inferential deductions entailed by assertions concerning their own and/or someone else's category membership, including deductions relating to asymmetrical power or distinctions in social status (Jayussi 1984; 1991; Edwards 1991). The potential misunderstanding to be avoided here, however, is that of regarding such speaker efforts as the outward manifestation either of some pre-existing cognitive model or else of some structural properties inherent to language use. Instead, the significance of category reference is ultimately determined in next-turn efforts by which speakers retrospectively furnish the procedural consequentiality of related category terms in and for the circumstances where they are made to operate (Schegloff 1992:109-110; Hutchby and Wooffitt 1998:15). Put differently, categories are invoked for the situated purposes their relevance furnishes to the then-pertinent business of the interaction, and that relevance is occasioned in and through interlocutor efforts to read back into some category term the significance it holds. The analytic danger to be avoided here, however, is not simply that of reification, but also the failure to see how reification is itself a constitutive feature of situated meaning-making. The trick is to regard the activity (of categorization) as immanently realizing the work it furnishes rather than as the manifestation of something that lies beyond the circumstances of its use (Hilbert 2009).

What I want to do in this paper is to explore how these concerns to preclude the analytic reification of category-bound meaning are opened up with an examination of talk in which speakers take up categorization as the topic of their own discussion. In particular, this paper will investigate how speakers work to contest and destabilize the categorical assumptions in virtue of which the racial identity they address as a topic of their own talk is itself formulated. This involves exploring how category entitlement is furnished in particular settings where category inclusion is invoked on the part of speakers who are otherwise implicated as targets of racially reductionist stereotyping. As we shall see, the back-and-forth, referentially self-implicative gesture of addressing category membership also implicates those categories' meanings as resources in the activity in which they are made to feature. In other words, in discussing the significance of particular categories, the very categories whose relevance speakers invoke in the pursuit of that situated work are also made to bear on the undertaking as reflexively related to its own conduct. It is simply not possible to interrogate category formulation without the related discussion having a reflexive bearing upon the circumstances of activity where it takes place. Talk is always caught up in the indexical implications that its uses pose as an inherent feature of its reflexive character. In what follows, I will explore how that occurs in examples of talk surrounding the contentious matter of racial identity, with a view to considering how the potential for category reductionism is taken up as morally problematic. As we shall see, this involves making category membership relevant in particularly creative ways that warrant specific claims relating to racial prejudice, many (but not all) of which involve destabilizing the affordances that category membership might otherwise furnish. Providing speaker entitlement for claims regarding the reprehensible nature of racial reductionism paradoxically involves the variable and selective ratification of category features in order to warrant that entitlement. This becomes particularly evident where those uses themselves involve the effort to destabilize the membership criteria in question. Taken together, these features

[1] For example, one type of MCD referred to as a Standardized Relational (S-R) pair involves the supposition of rights and knowledge as distributed between referents in a pair-part association, typically glossed with dyads like *husband-wife*, *boss-worker*, *teacher-student*, etc. (see: Sacks 1972; 1974; 1992; Schegloff 1991a). Similarly, references to group membership that invoke category-bound features are typically involved in the use of terms like *team*, *family*, etc., or more pertinently (for the topic of racism) in terms that reference national, ethnic, and/or group identity. Stokoe expands these analytic heuristics, distinguishing at least eight such descriptive practices, including category-bound activities, category-tied predicates (relating category-bound characteristics: *mommy* loves *baby*, "Of course I love you; you're my *son*"), duplicative organization (*goalkeeper* and *defender* in a football team), and category-activity puzzles (involving anomalous collocation: *killer nuns*, *male nurse*, *women drivers*). As we shall see in the sections that follow, a major difficulty in the use of these analytic heuristics is with regarding the glosses they furnish as mutually restrictive, given that the range of their descriptive ambit might be made inclusively applicable to singular cases. Another difficulty is in stipulating the sort of relation, if any, that some one term is employed to invoke independently of any explicit reference to its presumably matching term(s) in a relational configuration (Gardner 2012). In what follows, I will examine how these methodological conundrums are addressed with reference not only to interlocutor uptake (Antaki 1998; Widdicombe 1998), but also in view of how referential ambiguity features as a member resource (Edwards 1997:96-100).

demonstrate the ambivalent nature of category warrant: speakers invoke category membership to the extent that it entitles their claims about the accountably reductionist nature of the categories in question, but not to the extent that they can thereby be seen to endorse the formulations whose reductionist portrayal is at issue.

Purposing Racist Exclusion

As a way to begin exploring what all of this involves, let me take as an initial point of departure an example of the way category membership gets invoked to provide the warrant for specific moral claims about the legitimacy of professional activities. The transcript below is a record of talk that took place in a research interview involving two participants (Clark and Les) who work as the CEO and senior administrative assistant (respectively) of a U.S.-based, non-governmental organization dedicated to providing medical relief aid to Palestinian refugees in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The interview from which this extract is taken was carried out as part of a project to investigate the mundane accounting practices with which humanitarian aid operatives make sense of their professional activities in settings of armed conflict (see: McKenzie 2009; 2012). The transcript here begins at a point in the interview where Clark elaborates on the moral and political justifications for providing humanitarian assistance to the target population of Palestinian aid recipients. Drawing an analogy between the Palestinian resistance to Israeli subjugation of the Occupied Territories and the colonial struggle against British rule in the American Revolutionary War (1775-1783), Clark sets out to describe the terms of reference that financial donors in the United States are said to make in conceptualizing the work of the organization he and Les represent. Following this extended turn-at-talk, his colleague Les goes on to corroborate the analogy Clark initially builds by warranting related claims furnished in virtue of his own entitlement as the member of an oppressed minority (interviewer contributions here are indicated with "Int"; the use of pseudonyms and similar devices have been employed in this transcript to ensure the anonymity of the research participants; for a detailed description of transcription conventions employed throughout this paper, see: Appendix).

Extract 1

1	**Clark**	Look (.) what are American values (.) we believe in ↑freedom
2		(0.9) the right for each individual to have protection
3		under:=the rule of ↑la↓:w. (0.6) The right- (.) no: state has the
4		power to: (0.6) °ih-° to usurp the rights: of- (.) of (.) in- the
5		indi↑vi↓dual. In this country here, under occupation, >the
6		individuals have no rights whatsoever<=
7	**Int**	=Mm hm=
8	**Clark**	=a foreign entity (0.6) is controlling (0.2) the daily life (.)
9		of (.) three and a half million people (.) [against] their will
10	**Int**	[Mm hm,]
11		(.)
12		Mm hm
13		(0.3)
14	**Clark**	and our struggle- our historical struggle in the United ↑Sta:tes
15		(0.2) for freedom from colonial rule (0.3) is no less- (0.3) is
16		no different from what the Palestinians are struggling for
17		↑he↓re.
18		(0.5)
19	**Int**	Mm hm mm hm
20		(.)
21	**Clark**	Foreign domi↑na↓tion. (0.4) Everybody can >understand that.
22		Every< A↑merican can understand that.
23		(...) ((*some lines omitted*))
24	**Clark**	ih the most basic issue (0.9) f:reedom from (.) foreign rule (.)
25		foreign tyranny (0.9) is what I'm- (.) I believe in very strongly
26		(.) [and that's] why I'm- one of the reasons I'm here ↑wor↓king
27	**Int**	[Mm]
28		(.)
29		Mm: hm,
30		(0.6)
31		.hh what about you Les
32		(...) ((*some lines omitted*))
33	**Les**	I mean it's the ↑same for me and I- I think that you can tell a
34		lot by (.) °y'know° (0.5) a lot of the people that support (.)
35		Palestine in general (0.3) is that >y'know< being a minority
36		(0.6) a::n:d
37		(1.0)
38		seeing first ha:nd (.) >y'know< (0.3) discrimination and (.)
39		°y'know°
40		(1.0)
41		a history of:
42		(1.0)
43		>y'know< people ha- not having freedom and (0.3) things like
44		that, I mean you can identify with (.) the struggle that (.)
45		>y'know< the people in Palestine go through every day.

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There is, of course, a great deal of interactional work that takes place in this encounter. For present purposes, though, let us focus here on the way that Les provides for his own status as "a minority" (line 35) in order both to corroborate Clark's account, as well as to extend the claims made there in virtue of the detailed specifics that his (Les') own first-person entitlement furnishes. Unlike work in other settings where identity is construed within a set of category distinctions designed to head off the negative inferences that membership in some contrastive group entails (e.g., in a distinction between men-who-hit-women and men-who-do-not, see: Sacks 1992; Edwards 1997:96-100; Stokoe 2010), here, category membership is made to function in a more or less uncomplicated fashion both to warrant assertions about the shared experience that inclusion is said to entail ("discrimination and a history of people not having freedom and things like that," lines 38-44), and to furnish entitlement for the making of related claims ("being a minority and seeing first hand," lines 35-38; "you can identify with the struggle," line 44). Category inclusion thus features here as a way of making the category membership relevant as a way to provide for the speaker's entitlement to corroborate his colleague's prior explanation.

While there is a great deal more that could be said about what takes place in this brief encounter (for a more detailed discussion of which, including especially the way that laughter features in the related talk, see: McKenzie forthcoming), the point here is relatively straightforward: that category membership can be made to work in different ways and to accomplish different purposes depending on how its relevance is provided for in the settings where it is furnished (Edwards 1991; 1997:202-262). At the most elementary level, this involves invoking membership as a warrant for first-person entitlement for the category-bound inferences it entails. As we shall see, the provision for category entitlement becomes quite a bit more complicated in talk where speakers attend to category reductionism as a morally accountable issue. This is especially so where those speakers are potentially implicated in the negative inferences whose category exclusivity they seek to contest.

Identity as a Resource in the Subversion of Category-Restrictive Claims

Where category membership is invoked in ways that are not contested or otherwise treated as problematic in the course of talk's unfolding development, the relevance of category-bound features can, in a fairly unambiguous way, be made to underwrite speaker entitlement for ancillary claims. Thus, in the analysis of Extract 1 above, we saw how Les provides for his category membership in order to corroborate the analogy that his colleague Clark develops in his immediately prior talk. In the same way that the conspicuous provision for first-person experience can be employed to realize the credibility of a storied account (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Geertz 1988), so, too, the provision for category membership can be treated as unequivocally furnishing the warrant for speaker claims.

Furnishing such warrant, however, becomes more complicated the moment the inferential premises that category membership entails are dealt with as ambiguous or morally troublesome. For instance, this can occur where the determinacy of category inclusion is opened up to interrogation, or where the universal relevance of category-bound attributes is undermined for its significance in some particular case. More significantly, this can occur where the ambiguity of a category's use by and for those who invoke its relevance can be made to bear reflexively on the circumstances of that use. Put more generally, the invocation of category membership is potentially troublesome where category reductionism itself gets taken up as speaker business. Precisely because the invocation of category membership involves the making relevant of particular attributes as a warrant for speaker claims, where those claims are made to bear on the legitimacy of category formulation itself, there is an inherent ambiguity to its use. As we shall see in what follows, a particularly interesting feature of the way that category inclusion gets invoked relates to how membership ambivalently furnishes the warrant for resistance to and management of inferences that category inclusion otherwise entails. In other words, category membership can be made relevant in order to furnish a range of negative inferences that the attribution of group identity otherwise insinuates. Paradoxically, such identity can simultaneously be invoked to disrupt the category features it otherwise puts into play. Here, category membership functions in an ambivalent fashion where a speaker's warrant potentially implicates him or her in the selfsame negative inferences whose pertinence he or she otherwise seeks to discredit.

To see what this involves, consider the following segment of a notoriously controversial stand-up comedy routine in which the popular entertainer Chris Rock develops a category distinction with his use of the terms "black people" and "niggas."[2] Of particular interest for my purpose here is the way that Rock's use of these category terms is oriented to disrupting the interpretative parameters that their deployment might otherwise delineate in some other setting. Specifically, Rock's treatment of the offending gloss in his routine both draws upon and plays off on the different ways that category-bound formulations of racial identity furnish multiple and competing understandings distinctive to their situated uses. Thus, the lexical pair relating "black people" and "niggas" works simultaneously both to invoke and to disrupt the category-based identity ascriptions otherwise made available in the relational pair distinction *black-white*.[3] In a paradoxical way, the *black-white* pair is thus made to serve as a vehicle to carry out the work of disassembling the very relational distinction it otherwise puts into play.

To get an idea of the rather complicated work that is involved in all of this, consider the following extract from the transcript of the audio segment of Rock's act that appears on the popular website *YouTube* (Rock n.d.).

[2] I refer to this stand-up routine as notoriously controversial because it has occasioned a great deal of criticism, with many objecting to the potential that Rock's formulations hold for warranting the use of racist stereotypes. Chris Rock himself is reported to have stopped using this particular routine in his act because "some people who were racist thought they had license to say 'nigger,'" see: *Wikipedia* entry "Niggas vs. Black People."

[3] A poignant example of such a conventional operation can be seen in the anecdotal description in the American civil rights activist Malcolm X's (X and Haley 1999) autobiographical account relating how his mentor in the Nation of Islam compares dictionary definitions of the words *black* and *white* (also portrayed in the filmic rendition of that work by the director Spike Lee).

Extract 2

Now we got a lot of things- >°we got° a lot of< racism going on in the world right now, ↑who's more ra↓cist (0.3) ↑BLACK people or white peo↓ple. (1.1) ↑BLACK people. You know why? Cuz we hate black people TOO. (*Audience laughter and applause*) Everything white people don't like about black people, black people <rea::ly don't like about black people>. (*Audience laughter*) There's some shit going on with black people right now. (0.2) There's like a civil ↑war goin' on with black people. And there's ↑two ↓sides. There's black people, (0.2) an' there's niggas. (*Audience laughter*) The niggas have got to go! (*Audience laughter and applause*) Every time black people want to have a good ti↓:me, some ignorant-ass niggas fuck it up. (*Audience laughter and applause*) ↑Can't ↓do ↑shi↓:t! ↑Can't ↓do ↑SHI↓:T without some ignorant-ass niggas fuckin' it up.

(...) ((*some lines omitted*))

↑Da↓:mn °I'm° TIRED of niggas. °I'm° tired tired tired tired tired a' niggas man,]damn[man, you know what the worst thing (is) about niggas? Niggas always want some credit for some shit they 'supposed to do.' (*Audience laughter*) For some shit they just 'supposed to do.' A nigga will brag about some shit a normal man just >does.< A nigga'll say some shit like tsk 'I take care o' my kids.' 'You su↑pposed to ya dumb muthafucka,' (*audience laughter and applause*) whaddya talkin' about. Whaddya talkin' about. What kinda ignorant shit is that. 'I ain' never been to jail.' 'Whaddya want, a coo↑kie?' (*Audience laughter*) 'You're not supposed to go to jail low expectation xx mutherfucker' (*Audience laughter and applause*)

(...) ((*some lines omitted*))

Nigga just ignorant, ↑love bein' ign- ↑singin' about ignorance. I heard some song the other day ((*sings*)) 'It's the first of the mo:::n:th' (*audience laughter*) niggas are singin' welfare carols. (*Audience laughter*) ((*sings*)) 'On the first day of welfare my true love gave to me:, I wish you a merry welfare and a happy food sta:::m:p.' (*Audience laughter and applause*) What the fuck is goin' ↑o:↓:n. What the fuck is goin' on. Now they got some shit they're tryin' to get rid of welfare. They're alway- every time >you see welfare on the news< they always show black people. ↑BLACK people don't give a fuck a↑bout wel↓fare (*audience chortles*) niggas a' shakin' in their boots. (*Audience laughter*) '(Oh) they gonna take our shi:t'

(...) ((*some lines omitted*))

It ai- it ain't all ↑black peo↓ple on welfare, shit. White ↑people on welfare ↓too (*audience chortles*) >(there are) white people on welfare< but we can't give a fuck a↑bout them we just gotta do our ↑own thing °we° can't go 'Oh they fucked up we could be fucked up' that's ignorant.

Let us begin with an analysis of this talk by considering the rhetorical work involved in Chris Rock's elaboration of category relevant details with which he distinguishes "black people" from "niggas." The category distinction itself is chiefly deployed to manage the relevance of demands for accountability specific to activities that are said to characterize the latter group. Thus, in contrast to "black people," it is "niggas" who are said to brag or take credit "for some shit they just supposed to do" (lines 15-21) and who are also said to engage routinely in welfare opportunism (lines 27-35). Here, moral accountability for specific actions is invoked to render the "niggas" versus "black people" distinction available in a way that does not equate the two groups (as might otherwise take place with black-white, racially designated formulations).

Notice also that throughout Rock's routine, no contrastive attention is given to elaborating the features specific to the category "black people." That is, while Rock details the characteristics he attributes to "niggas," he makes no category specific attribution in referring to "black people." Elsewhere, work has been done to show how the formulation of white racial identity involves a sort of negative ontology, so that Whites are contrastively regarded to be what Blacks are not. That is, with the routine use of a black-white relational pair, an asymmetry of description occurs, so that Whites are regarded as definitively devoid of the category-bound features that are said to characterize Blacks (Lipsitz 1995; 2006; Whitehead 2009; but see: Whitehead and Lerner 2009 on ways that whiteness is made explicit). Here, Rock similarly employs this asymmetry in his own descriptions, so that "black people" are implicitly regarded as what "niggas"-are-not (just as Whites are regarded as what Blacks-are-not in a *black-white* pair formulation). What is particularly interesting here is that Rock employs the same kind of descriptive asymmetry entailed in a *black-white* relational pair as a resource to disrupt the sense such a pair otherwise affords.[4] In other words, the very category terms that Rock seeks to disrupt are themselves employed in an anomalous fashion to pursue the objective of undermining their racially

[4] This contrasts with the relatively straightforward way that category-relevant features can be invoked to attend exclusively to their significance for other, non-race attributional purposes, as we saw in the analysis of Extract 1.

reductionist use. Here, Rock's deployment of relational pair terms for their category disruptive purposes implicitly appeals to racially reductionist assumptions for its effectiveness. This involves not only the selective warranting of related claims furnished with his descriptions (i.e., the stereotypes of unwarranted boastfulness and welfare opportunism), but it also invokes the assumption that racism operates uni-directionally since black racism is not said to be aimed at Whites, but rather only at other Blacks ("Who's more racist, black people or white people? Black people. You know why? Because we hate black people too" [lines 2-4]). The semantic transformation is rendered intelligible in virtue of the asymmetrical operation of relational pair attribution that Rock implicitly invokes, with the rhetorical trade off here furnished by the homologous deployment of *black-white* and "niggas"-"black people" pair formulations whose meaning eventually comes to be worked out over the course of the monologue (see: Liberman 2012).[5]

A distinguishing feature of Rock's use of category-bound inferences here is the subversive purpose that they are made to serve, and the humorous effect he achieves by this is related, in no small part, to the status that his own category membership furnishes relative to the variable distinctions that he brings into play. Thus, speaker entitlement accrues to him by dint of his own ambivalent category membership, initially broached in remarks that align with explicitly racist understandings ("Everything white people don't like about black people, black people *really* don't like about black people" [lines 4-6]), as invoking a set of terms informing their subsequent respecification within an alternative relational pair (i.e., from black-white to "niggas"-"black people"). The rhetorical effect here is achieved with the inferential potential in the racist category formulation used to warrant claims about the detailed specifics Rock describes, which simultaneously allows him to respecify the category terms that render them intelligible.[6] In addition, this also allows Rock to disrupt the category-bound inferences that a disparaging formulation of welfare recipiency might otherwise furnish (lines 27-37), and to argue for Black community solidarity and self-sufficiency (lines 39-40). He is able to do this precisely because of the attributes that reductionist category formulations supply as a way to invoke the inferential basis for that deduction. This is especially the case where the indigent status of welfare recipients is made relevant to disrupt the category inferences it otherwise furnishes ("It ain't all black people on welfare, shit. White people on welfare too, there are white people on welfare" [lines 39-40]).

[5] In reference to this clarification of previously undetermined meaning, Liberman (2012:345) notes: "Ethnomethodological inquiries are oriented to how people make a word intelligible, and especially the work of locating a context that can reflexively make the components of an utterance intelligible (Liberman 2011). Garfinkel and Sacks (1970) once described it this way: 'Talk extends and elaborates indefinitely the circumstances it glosses and in this way contributes to its own accountably sensible character. The thing that is said assures to speaking's accountably sensible character its variable fortunes.' These are local skills: people witness the drift of meaning over the course of their conversing, and when they spot opportunities for taming the equivocality of the words, they can seize them. Frequently, their solutions are serendipitous and applied retrospectively." Here, in Chris Rock's stand-up routine, we see that the working out of prior lexical meaning involves not only the semantic operation of words in the context of their solitary use, but also as informed by their relational significance within a set of category-bound attributes.

[6] Elsewhere, I have discussed how that same sort of rhetorical strategy is employed to warrant claims about racism in virtue of the entitlement that speakers work to furnish as victims of racist social contagion (McKenzie 2003:473-477).

To summarize, Chris Rock appropriates reductionist formulations of category membership in order to manage the negative inferences that related category attributions otherwise make available within a reworked relational pair. His own category entitlement functions here not merely in the rather straightforward way that as a member of the African-American community, he is entitled to speak on behalf of his fellow community members ("but we can't give a fuck a↑bout them we just gotta do our ↑own thing" [line 41]), but also in the more subtle fashion by which someone who is potentially implicated in the accountable inferences that category-inclusion entails (within a *black-white* relational pair) is able to warrant the reworked contrastive distinction.

"Is That a Black Thing?": Interrogating Racism on *The 700 Club*

Up to this point in my discussion, I have considered examples of talk in which category-relevant inferences are invoked by speakers for different situated purposes, all of which entail attending, in some fashion or other, to the moral accountability of racial identity attribution. My purpose in examining these examples of talk has been to demonstrate how providing for race-relevant category-bound inferences can feature as a speaker resource to pursue the morally accountable business involved in attending to the critique of racism itself. The particular instances of talk I examined in the previous section were chosen because they realize those purposes in ways that trade off on the potential for category ascription to be employed in a denigratory fashion in order to be effective in disrupting their reductionist potential.

One point to be drawn from all of this is that there is nothing intrinsic to identity ascription that necessitates its situated uses being regarded as morally objectionable. The attribution of category membership is not axiomatically taken in a morally denigratory sense—that is, as unavoidably involving a disparaging evaluative stance. This is because the potential assumptions that category ascriptions are used to invoke *themselves* feature in how those categories' meaning gets worked up in particular settings.[7] Any independently principled objection to category attribution—including attributions that invoke racially reductionist assumptions—cannot therefore be based on the discovery of a *mistaken* application of category terms, since it is only in virtue of those categories' specific uses that their situated purposes are realized. Put differently, the relevant analytic concern in an examination of how category formulations are rendered meaningful *for the participants who deploy them* is not whether the formulation of category-bound features is accurate to concerns formulated in some remote setting, but rather of how the detailed specifics of category membership are formulated in pursuit of the interactional business at hand in the setting under

[7] Thus, we have already seen that just as category formulations can be used for derogatory purposes, conspicuously derogatory formulations can (paradoxically) also be deployed to disrupt such purposes. In Chris Rock's stand-up routine, he treats the terms of reference that invoke a *black-white* category distinction *as* accountable precisely in and through the way it is destabilized. That is, Rock treats the category distinction as intrinsically racist, as morally accountable. However, that treatment itself is specific to the situated purposes he pursues there.

investigation. Any extrinsic assumptions about the relevance or adequacy of a given category formulation that do not reside in the empirical investigation of its uses by speakers are therefore used to furnish the grounds upon which such investigations are founded, in a way that essentially "determine[s] how the results of any inquiry will be permissibly understood" (Hutchinson, Read, and Sharrock 2008:21). Needless to say, pursuing the investigation of talk on the basis of analytic presumptions concerning descriptive adequacy does little to contribute to understanding how category attribution—or, indeed, the resolution of any sort of meaning—is achieved by participants themselves.[8]

Another thing that makes identity ascription particularly interesting is the reflexive dimension of category invocation that furnishes the entitlement attending to a given category use. This, of course, relates to the main theme of this paper in exploring how category membership features as speaker resource. In this section, I want to explore this particular aspect of category use by examining a protracted example of talk in which efforts are made to sequester the morally troublesome potential that identity ascription involves from the affiliative uses that category membership otherwise furnishes. The set of encounters I examine here is taken from an episode of the Christian Broadcasting Network's news and current issues talk show *The 700 Club*, hosted by the television evangelist and sometimes political activist Pat Robertson.[9] The episode in question was aired on November 23, 2011 in a special edition of the program dedicated to celebrating the then approaching Thanksgiving Day holiday (a festival unique to North American countries of British colonial origin). This particular episode of the program occasioned a great deal of opprobrium on entertainment and news websites (like *YouTube* and *The Huffington Post*) in response to a question that the show's host posed to his co-host, Kristi Watts, following their joint presentation and discussion of an edited video clip of segments taken from an interview that Watts had conducted the previous week with the former U.S. Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice. The concern in various circles is with Robertson's motivation for his working up of racial identity in the category attributive terms documented in the following extract (the transcript below is a written record of the encounter in the video clip presented in *The Huffington Post* news story, see: Johnson 2011).

[8] On the other hand, it *does* frequently get employed to furnish the warrant for analytic investigation as a critical undertaking. Here, the proponents of such work seek to provide for the legitimacy of their research endeavors in virtue of the instrumental significance it is assumed to have in effecting therapeutic social intervention (Wetherell 2001). My point here is that analysis need not—indeed, cannot—proceed on these grounds in order to render its findings significant for an investigation of how participants render social order visible to and for one another in the course of their situated doings (Sharrock and Anderson 1986; 1987).

[9] Marion Gordon "Pat" Robertson is one of the most significant figures in the historically recent formation of a fundamentalist evangelical Christian political constituency in the U.S. political arena. As founder and director of the Christian Broadcasting Network (with a daily viewing audience estimated to be one million), president and chancellor of the affiliated Regent University, founder and president of the American Center for Law and Justice, along with other related endeavors, Robertson has been involved in efforts to influence U.S. electoral process and government policy formation since at least the 1960s (see: http://patrobertson.com/Biography/index.asp; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pat_Robertson [Retrieved May 02, 2016]).

Extract 3.1

1	**Watts**	what's that o:ne thing at Thanksgiving you just hafta have.
2		(0.8)
3	**Rice**	It's mac and cheese.
4		(0.2)
5	**Watts**	(*slaps hands together, cocks head back, and raises hands palms*
6		*forward*) (.) Sister that is my dish! [That is the] o:ne thing
7	**Rice**	[Ye(h)s]
8	**Watts**	that [[I can]] ro:ck!=
9	**Rice**	[[Yes]]
10	**Rice**	=But only o:nce::- (0.4) once a year.
11		(*cut to studio*)
12	**Robt**	Good interview (.) Kristi, (.) [congradula]tions=
13	**Watts**	[↑Thank ↓you Pat]
14		=####[[#]] (*#hand claps#*)
15	**Robt**	[[What-]] what is this (.) mac and cheese, is that a black
16		thing?=
17	**Watts**	=tsk *It is a black thing Pa:t, (.)
18		[it is] a bla-* .hh listen and you::: (.) [[guys-]] other
19	**Robt**	[It is-] [[(*clears throat*)]]
20	**Watts**	people:- oth- the world >needs to get on board with macaroni and
21		cheese.< (0.5) *Seriously I just-* (.) ih- o↓kay ↑Christmas (0.2)
22		and Thanksgiving (0.3) we have to have macaroni and ↑cheese and
23		it just- it trips me out that you::=don't
24		(0.3)
25	**Robt**	ah(h) I rea[lly do(h)n't uh(h)]
26	**Watts**	[hhh heh heh huh hah] hah hah hah
27		[[hah hah hah .hh]]
28	**Robt**	[[£I don't and I have]] never£ .hh hah hah

This particular segment of *The 700 Club* episode is described in the related *Huffington Post* story as demonstrating confusion on the part of Pat Robertson ("Robertson appeared confused about macaroni and cheese" [Johnson 2011]). Further in that article, the hyperlinks to news items elsewhere related to the topic of Alzheimer's disease furnish the basis to infer that Robertson's remarks manifest evidence

of the progressive dementia symptomatic of that affliction. The story seems to suggest that Robertson's remarks are accountably racist, if not pathologically precipitated (one can imagine the story's author, upon first seeing *The 700 Club* footage, asking: "Is Robertson crazy?! Doesn't he realize how racist that question sounds?"). What I want to suggest here, however, is that there is something rather different going on in the encounter between Robertson and Watts than a straightforward and simple use of a racist formulation as implied in *The Huffington Post* article. Instead, I want to suggest that just as we saw in the analysis of the Chris Rock routine above, the relevance of racial identity is reflexively being made available in this talk as a way to pursue a different order of business. This is not to say that Robertson does not employ a category formulation, nor that the formulation he actually does employ is immaterial to the attribution of black racial identity. Rather, it is to say that Robertson's question features as part of a more inclusive trajectory that renders that question with a different significance than it might otherwise be taken to have if considered in isolation from the extended conversation of which it is a part. As we shall see, the potential that category attribution holds for reductionist use is a concern that both Robertson and Watts take up in their own talk, and it is in relation to their pursuit of that business that Robertson's "black thing" question has its significance.

We can start to appreciate what this involves by first noting how Watts collaborates with Robertson in his efforts to render noticeable the attributive significance of her own prior remarks (lines 1-10), substantiating the category relevance that he broaches in his "black thing" question with an elaborated description of its detailed specifics (lines 17-24). Here, Watts not only agrees with Robertson that a shared taste for macaroni and cheese is category relevant (lines 17-18), but she goes on to describe the inclusion of the dish as mandatory to the family rituals of holiday dining in order thereby to shore up that claim (lines 21-22). One possible way of approaching this talk might be to regard these exchanges as determined by the asymmetrical power dynamics at play between Robertson and Watts in their respective roles as host and junior co-host (as well as paid employee). That is, Robertson and Watts could be seen as mutually oriented to providing for their respective power positions in and through their responsive uptake to one another's contributions in the ongoing encounter (see: Riggs and Due 2010). A perfunctory analysis here would possibly conclude that Watts is constrained by the protocols of the show's format to collude with Robertson, and that in this way her affiliation is coerced by Robertson's manipulative efforts to elicit her agreement. In other words, Robertson could be seen as essentially compelling Watts to furnish the warrant for a reductionist formulation in virtue of his own dominant power position.

Observing that Robertson and Watts are mutually oriented to the relevance of their respective roles in directing their talk towards the realization of its outcomes, however, is not the same thing as regarding that orientation to be the manifestation of a pre-existing relationship that determines how that interaction proceeds. Indeed, to do the latter would overlook the way in which that relationship is immanently accomplished in and through the situated work that takes place in that setting (Rawls 1989:162-163; McKenzie 2005). By way of comparison, consider how, in courtroom interaction, different parties to the production of witness testimony employ the interactional protocols of the question-and-answer format for their own respective purposes in laying the grounds for diverse and incommensurable judicial outcomes (Atkinson and Drew 1979; Komter 1995; Lynch and Bogen 1996:122-153). The protocols of witness examination and cross-examination do not control the outcome of interrogations, but rather constitute resources that participants deploy in guiding the argumentative trajectories of testimony. Similarly, the fact that Watts, in her role as co-host, collaborates with Robertson in the formulation of "black thing" identity does not mean that she could not have done otherwise, nor even that her doing so could not have been accomplished in a way that successfully manages whatever potential threat might have been posed to their respective roles in the encounter at hand.[10] Rather, what it means is that the significance of "black thing" attribution is emergent in and as the situated uses for which it is purposed by Watts and Robertson as a jointly accomplished undertaking.

Beyond these preliminary observations (to which I will return), I want to consider additional details of the show's entire episode in order to further make sense of the encounter documented in the short extract above. Just as we already noted how speakers invoke category membership as a way of attending to the argumentatively consequential implications of different assumptions in their talk, so too, in what follows, we shall see that Watts similarly invokes racial identity to furnish the inferential basis for an assumption of shared experience in her interview with the former U.S. Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice. Moreover, racial identity is a topic of discussion that gets carried over from the talk in the Watts-Rice interview to the very different setting where Robertson and Watts subsequently discuss that prior encounter.[11] It is against the background of the extended talk in that prior encounter that Robertson's subsequent "black thing" question has the more nuanced significance than its presentation within the isolated context of Extract 3.1 above would otherwise suggest. In that prior encounter, racial identity is an issue that Watts and Rice jointly attend to in the course of their discussion, and it is against the background of Watts' own contribution there that Robertson's subsequent comments derive their significance.

Let me go on, then, to consider the details of talk in the Watts-Rice interview. The encounter represented in Extract 3.2 below was aired in the same episode of *The 700 Club* from which the talk in Extract 3.1 above was taken (though at a sequentially prior point in program's overall presentation). At

[10] As I will go on to show, what is at issue here is related to a distinction that Harvey Sacks (1992 [lecture 11]) makes between speaker sensitivity to the sequential organization of utterance contributions and the formulation of a shared vocabulary of motives relative to which that situated work can be rendered accountable. Addressing this difference, Anne Warfield Rawls (1989:69) notes that: "the more a situation is responsive to 'framing' considerations, the greater the degree of strategic action [is] possible." As we will see, Watts treats the meaning Robertson poses (within the order of her response's sequential placement) as a resource to negotiate the relevance of its precise content in and for the situation at hand.

[11] The point in calling attention to this here is not to make the independent (if otherwise banal) suggestion that where Watts is entitled to do this in her encounter with Rice, then Robertson is entitled to do something similar in his encounter with Watts. Rather, the point is simply to make the preliminary observation that over the course of her more extensive discussion with Rice, Watts invokes shared identity as a part of her own efforts to establish interlocutor affiliation.

various junctures throughout that prior encounter, Watts pursues issues relating to racial identity, both explicitly in questions addressed to Rice, as well as in a separate line of questioning she develops in the closing segment of the interview. The transcript below begins at a point in *The 700 Club* episode immediately following Watts' introduction (to the viewing audience) of the video footage taken from her interview with Rice, and starts here with her initial question to the former Secretary of State.

Extract 3.2

1	**Watts**	You are known not just as a woman of poise, not >just a-< as a
2		woman o:f u:h (0.2) ↑brilliance .hh but <u>al</u>so the first. (.)
3		>You're the first< National Se<u>cu</u>rity Advisor <u>fe</u>male- the first
4		(.) bla:ck (0.2) <u>fe</u>male Secretary of Sta:te, but when you are the
5		first you're also the first one to encounter wa::lls and
6		mi:ndsets and ↑obstacles so how did you ↑deal with that. How ↑<u>do:</u>
7		you deal with that
8		(0.4)
9	**Rice**	Well (.) the: <u>first</u> thing is that when you: u:h (0.2) <u>are</u> a first
10		(.) uh (.) you: (.) need to (.) forget that you're the first
11		(0.4)
12	**Watts**	Hm mm[m]
13	**Rice**	[a:]:nd u:h give other people the benefit of the doubt (0.5)
14		so (.) it's all too easy (.) to: (.) look around and think
15		'They're reacting to (it-) (.) because I'm a woman (.) they're
16		reacting that way because I'm black' .hh and uh (.) generally you
17		just (.) end up (0.4) uh driving up your own blood pressure. (.)
18		If you let someone treat you badly, because you're a woman, or
19		because you're (.) black, it's (.) <u>your</u> fault not ↑the↓ir's
20		(0.2)
21	**Watts**	<u>Mm</u>mmmm[mmmm]
22	**Rice**	[you have <u>plent</u>]y (0.2) of uh ammunition (0.4) in your
23		arsenal (0.2) to back someone do:↓wn who's treating you ↑bad↓ly
24		(0.4) so:: u:m I'm not (.) much given to victimhood, (.) u[:m:] I
25	**Watts**	[Mmm]
26	**Rice**	really do think that- my ↑parents taught me .hh that you may not
27		be able to:: uh control your circumstances but you can control
28		your re<u>sponse</u> to your circumstances and if you always keep that
29		in mind (0.4) u:h you'll let (.) people's prejudices be (.) <u>their</u>
30		(.) problem not yours
31		(0.4)
32	**Watts**	<u>You</u> are ↑teachin' ↓me
33		(0.2)
34	**Rice**	uh=hhhhh=[heh heh huh]
35	**Watts**	[I com↑pletely forgot] the next que↓stion (.) cuz I'm
36		sittin' here like 'ih- g-=I gotta get that note i(h)n' heh hah
37		[hah hah] hah
38	**Rice**	[huh huh huh]

The first thing to observe about the talk in this encounter is that the response Rice formulates poses the relevance of racial and gender identity in terms that are reflexively oriented to managing her own accountability for the use of related descriptions, glossing the anticipatory orientation to the pernicious assumptions identity ascription potentially furnishes with the word "victimhood" (lines 14-30). Here, Rice can be seen to work against the possible accusation of expediency that the making-relevant of identity might otherwise occasion, doing so in a way that concurs with the assumptions about racial and gender discrimination furnished in Watts' question (though without invoking their relevance for an account of her own professional success). This poses the issues of racism and sexism in terms that ground an argument for the responsive (rather than anticipatory) management of relevancies that category ascription might otherwise involve.[12]

With regard to the details of talk by which Watts and Rice advance their discussion here, we might also note how Rice's scrutiny of the suppositions informing Watts' question is responded to as potentially disruptive of the shared assumption of a common worldview upon which interactional affiliation is grounded (Liberman 2007; McKenzie 2011). That is, Watts' broaching of racial identity in her question is treated by Rice as contentious (lines 9-30), and this poses troubles to the assumption of reciprocity in perspective on the basis of which their discussion proceeds.[13] Here, Watts identifies as a potential source of disaffiliation the position that Rice develops in her extended explanation, and this poses a source of interactional troubles to which they both attend. This occurs, for instance, in Watts' remark registering surprise at Rice's

[12] Elsewhere, Buttny (2004) examines talk in which black speakers attend to potential accusations that their own formulations of reluctance on the part of Whites to occasion just the sort of anticipatory inclinations that Rice describes here (lines 15-16) themselves realize racist motives on the part of those Whites (see: McKenzie 2011).

[13] In saying this, I do not mean to imply that speakers must agree in their opinions in order to carry on a conversation, but rather refer to the phenomenological principle concerning mutual reciprocity of perspective—i.e., that interlocutors proceed in their joint endeavors on the assumption that they inhabit a common world in relation to which, for example, differences in opinions and the like might be rendered intelligible (Schütz 1967; Garfinkel 1977; Pollner 1987; Schegloff 1991a; Billig 1996).

response (line 32), as well as in subsequent comments reflecting upon her own (Watts') immediately prior reaction (lines 35-36). Note, too, that simultaneously, and *with these same interactional turns*, Watts also works to repair the potential threat to the assumption of shared orientation by invoking a standard relational pair—that of *teacher-student* ("You are teaching me" [line 32]).[14] This attends to the interactional troubles involved in Watts' earlier efforts to invoke racial and gender identity as the basis for mutual affiliation (lines 1-7) in the face of a dissenting opinion on the part of Rice. This occurs precisely where that dissent would otherwise undermine those prior efforts (since it diverges from the suppositions that would make them efficacious). Put differently, Rice's previously stated opposition to making racial and gender identity relevant in interpersonal relations (lines 13-24) potentially undercuts Watts' efforts to establish mutual affiliation on those same grounds. Here, the affiliative outcomes that shared identity otherwise serves work at cross purposes to the joint project that Watts and Rice pursue in carrying out the interview.[15]

In response to Watts' contributions at this juncture, Rice's initial laughter (line 34) can thus be seen as corroborating the affiliation repair work in Watts' immediately prior turn-at-talk (line 32)—even if it does not, strictly speaking, endorse the assumptions of superior knowledgeability proffered there by Watts. Rice's response to Watts here—involving the prefatory particle of dissent, the hearable out-breath, and the light laughter (line 34)—registers the potential threat to speaker affiliation that Watts' immediately prior turn-at-talk identifies. Following on immediately from Rice's contribution here (line 34), the potentially troublesome aspect of Watts' prior contribution (line 32) is itself then delicately managed in Watts' own subsequent, responsive laughter (lines 36-37)—which, in turn, is itself also responsive to the potential ambivalence that Rice's own previous turn (line 34) initially registers. All of these conversational back-and-forths are both complex and mutually precipitous, but with these references to both their own and one another's prior conversational turns, Watts and Rice work together to manage the potentially troublesome consequences posed by Rice's disaffiliation with the assumptions that Watts initially broaches (lines 1-7). Note also that throughout the ensuing talk, Watts continues to invoke the category relational pair (*student-teacher*) that she employed in her prior contribution, thus preserving the collaborative grounds she established there while managing the potentially threatening aspect that it otherwise attends to in her laughter with Rice (which turn on Watts' part Rice then responds to corroboratively with her own affiliative laughter [line 38]). These joint efforts to manage whatever trouble might arise from Watts' initial efforts to establish the basis of affiliation with Rice effectively sustain the collaborative impetus of Watts' prior contribution, while also curtailing its disruptive potential, and effectively moving the collaborative project of the two speakers forward in the face of looming disaffiliation.

[14] As we shall see, this relationship is also invoked by Watts in her subsequent conversation with Robertson about her interaction with Rice, see below: Extract 3.3, lines 69-83.

[15] These joint efforts assemble the talk's characteristics as features constitutive of the sort of encounter that it is (an interview) by furnishing Rice's entitlement to the claims she makes in that setting (see: Schegloff 1991b, 1992; Wowk and Carlin 2004; McKenzie 2005).

The repair work Watts and Rice jointly undertake here establishes the basis for mutual affiliation in the shared task of rendering Rice's contributions instructive (thereby also endowing Watts and Rice with their respective positions as interviewer and interviewee in the encounter). This is not, however, the last of Watts' efforts to align with Rice on the basis of shared identity. In a line of questioning that she poses to Rice at a later point in the same interview, Watts continues to invoke the category relevancies that featured as topic in her opening remarks (Extract 3.2, lines 1-30); and, as we shall see, it is the inferential significance of those efforts that Robertson later addresses with his "black thing" question (Extract 3.1, lines 15-16). More specifically, we shall see that Robertson's own effort to provide for the relevance of racial identity in his "black thing" question is *itself* reflexively oriented to making visible that selfsame potential in Watts' prior talk (with Rice), as a part of his own then-continuing effort to evaluate Watts' interview technique.

To see what this involves, consider the details of Watts' interview with Rice aired on the same episode of *The 700 Club* in the minutes leading up to the encounter documented in Extract 3.1 above (note that the talk there, recorded in lines 46-56 and in lines 105-121 below, is the same as that which appears in the edited version of *The 700 Club* episode presented in the video clip from *The Huffington Post* story cited above).

Extract 3.3

1	**Watts**	We have about five minutes left and I thought I'd have some fun,
2		(0.2) are you [ga:me]
3	**Rice**	[Yes,] I'm ready=
4	**Watts**	=Okay (.) t-=.hh (.) what's your favorite cereal
5		(0.4)
6	**Rice**	Cheerios
7		(0.2)
8	**Watts**	Wh:at is: your favorite (.) sixty- nineteen sixties or
9		nineteen seventies sitcom
10		(0.4)
11	**Rice**	Mary Tyler Moore Show,
12		(0.2)
13	**Watts**	heh heh .hh=What's your=b:iggest pef- (.) pet peeve the thing
14		that drives you batty
15		(0.2)

16 **Rice** That I am s:uch a procrastinator (0.6) [heh heh .hh]
17 **Watts** [heh heh heh] Never woulda
18 thought [[it cuz you came here on time]]
19 **Rice** [[.hh Yeah, what?]] Right heh heh=
20 **Watts** =What is uh *your guilty ↑plea↓sure* (*_falsetto voice_*)
21 (0.8)
22 **Rice** Anything that's a vehicle for salt (0.2) potato
23 [chips pop]corn pre*tzels* (*_flooding out_*)
24 **Watts** [hm(h) hm(h) >↑hm(h) hm(h) hm(h)<]
25 (0.2)
26 Can you cook,
27 (0.2)
28 **Rice** I lo:ve to cook (.) I'm a ↑good ↓cook
29 (.)
30 **Watts** Favorite meal (.) of all time
31 (0.4)
32 **Rice** Fried chicken
33 (.)
34 **Watts** (*leans forward*) Hot sauce or no hot sauce
35 (.)
36 **Rice** Hot sauce.
37 (.)
38 **Watts** ↑Come on (*rises from seat and high-fives Rice*)
39 (.)
40 Craziest thing you've ever done
41 (0.8)
42 **Rice** You think I'd ↑tell you that?=
43 **Watts** =I- heh [heh hah hah hah hah] hah hah hah .hh I(h) thou(h)ght
44 **Rice** [heh heh heh heh heh]
45 **Watts** I(h) wou(h)ld tr(h)y huh huh *I thought I would try* (*_animated,_
46 *ironic voicing*) .hh alright (.) wh-=what's that o:ne thing at
47 Thanksgiving you just hafta have.
48 (0.8)
49 **Rice** It's mac and cheese.
50 (0.2)
51 **Watts** (*slaps hands together, cocks head back, and holds hands up, palms*
52 *forward*) (.) Sister that is my dish! [That is the] o:ne thing
53 **Rice** [Ye(h)s]
54 **Watts** that [[I can]] ro:ck!=
55 **Rice** [[Yes]]
56 =But only o:nce::- (0.4) once a year.
57 (.)
58 **Watts** *Why do you deprive yourself (.) [xx (it)] six days
59 **Rice** [Becau::se::]
60 **Watts** [[a wee:k*]] (*_ironic voicing_*)
61 **Rice** [[it- we::ll]] yes but t- you kno:w (.) you- you have to worry
62 [about *those calorie(h)s* huh heh huh] (*_ironic voicing_*)
63 **Watts** [.hh huh huh heh heh heh hah] hah hah hah [[hah hah]] (*_clasps_*
64 **Rice** [[.hh heh heh]]
65 **Watts** *hands together*) .hh that works thank [you so: much] .hh=
66 **Rice** [(I-/ih-) .hh]
67 =it's a pleasure
68 (*cut to studio*)
69 **Watts** That was so much fun and I have to tell you there's one question
70 that I di:d ask Pat=
71 **Robt** =What's that=
72 **Watts** =I said huh=m >a(h)t the very end of th interview< I said 'Y'know
73 (what)- you are a professor at Stanford (.) um=
74 **Robt** =x=
75 **Watts** =>so< .hh if you were to grade this ↑inter↓view what grade would
76 you give it' .hh a:(h)n- hah hah [huh] huh huh .hh and she goes
77 **Robt** [£Yeah?£]
78 **Watts** 'I would give it an A' I said (.) 'Why not a A plus' hhhh
79 [heh hah hah hah hah hah] .hh and she goes 'cuz you asked me what
80 **Robt** [hah hah hah]
81 **Watts** the craziest thing I've ever ↑do↓:ne' huh
82 [huh hah hah .h]
83 **Robt** [£Yeah.£ huh huh]
84 **Watts** £listen Condoleezzas ((*sic*)) Rice it is£ called No Higher Honor,
85 (*holds up book copy*) it's available wherever books are sold, .hh
86 and I ↑do have to say ↓this ↑seriou↓sly .hh it could look very
87 intimidating and daunting because it's almost eight hundred pages

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88 but (0.3) ↑I:↓: (0.2) l:oved it I think any- any- (.) y'know
89 (0.2) child who wants to [know] about history and foreign
90 **Robt** [x]
91 **Watts** [[po]]licy and what's goin' on in the government .hh >would love
92 **Robt** [[°Yeah°]]
93 **Watts** it,< but at the same ↑ti↓:me .hh just um (.) tsk the normal
94 person who *kinda wants that* (*_ironic voicing_*) 'behind the
95 sce:nes'=
96 **Robt** =Oh yeah=
97 **Watts** =little twist, she te:lls some interesting stories [that we]
98 **Robt** [°Yeah°]
99 **Watts** never ↑he:[[↓ar]]
100 **Robt** [[And]] the name of the book i:s?
101 (.)
102 **Watts** tsk Once again No Higher Honor, (0.2) by (.) *Doctor* (*_ironic_
103 _voicing_*) Condoleezza Rice [.hh] so=
104 **Robt** [Well]
105 =Good interview (.) Kristi, (.) [congradula]tions=
106 **Watts** [↑Thank ↓you Pat]
107 =####[[#]] (_claps hands_)
108 **Robt** [[What-]] what is this (.) mac and cheese, is that a black
109 thing?=
110 **Watts** =tsk *It is a black thing Pa:t, (.)
111 [it is] a bla-* .hh listen and you::: (.) [[guys-]] other
112 **Robt** [It is-] [[(_clears throat_)]]
113 **Watts** people:- oth- the world >needs to get on board with macaroni and
114 cheese<. (0.5) *Seriously I just-* (.) ih- o↓kay ↑Christmas (0.2)
115 and Thanksgiving (0.3) we have to have macaroni and ↑cheese and
116 it just- it trips me out that you::=don't
117 (0.3)
118 **Robt** ah(h) I rea[lly do(h)n't uh(h)]
119 **Watts** [hhh heh heh huh hah] hah hah hah
120 [[hah hah hah .hh]]
121 **Robt** [[£I don't and I have]] never£ .hh [hah hah]
123 **Watts** [Y'know what] the problem is?=
124 **Robt** =What's that=
125 **Watts** =I don't think you've had goo:d macaroni and chee:se. Because we
126 don't do Kra:ft ((_product brand name_)) we don't do the whole
127 little (.) stuff in a bo:x=
128 **Robt** =You don't
129 (0.2)
130 **Watts** we do the goo:d ol' kind that our m- grandmamas (0.2) made
131 (.)
132 **Robt** Well my grandmama didn't £make£ ma(h)c
133 [a(h)nd chee(h)se (.) (ei(h)the(h)r)]
134 **Watts** [Your grandma- huh hah hah]
135 [[.hh hh]]
136 **Robt** [[£Alright.]] What's [next. Go a]head£=
137 **Watts** [£Alright.£]
138 =>This might be the year I make you some Pat<

Let us start here by noting that the entire line of questioning in this latter part of the interview is initiated with Watts' prefatory remarks enlisting Rice in carrying out the ensuing talk in an informal register (lines 1-2). Here, such remarks function to key the affiliative work that a shared engagement in playful, jocular interaction displays on the part of interlocutors (Glenn 1995; 2003:127-141). In addition, the line of questioning that Watts then goes on to develop occasions mutual affiliation on the basis of shared interests and common tastes, the latter of which are reflexively attended to for their significance as just so directed. So, for instance, immediately following the interview question relating to Rice's preference for fried chicken with hot sauce (lines 30-38), Watts rises from her chair to engage Rice in a shared interactional gesture of mutual affiliation (the high five she exchanges with Watts [lines 30-38]). Similarly, in response to Rice's remarks concerning her taste for macaroni and cheese, Watts conspicuously treats Rice's answer as referencing a shared preference ("Sister that is my dish! That is the one thing that I can rock!" [lines 52-54]). Together with the accompanying bodily orientation exhibiting surprise on her part (the head movement and hand gestures referenced in lines 51-52), Watts attends to the affiliative significance of a shared taste for macaroni and cheese in a way that situates her contributions as responsive to Rice's prior turns-at-talk—turns that her own prior questions occasioned.

A particularly interesting feature of this affiliative work here is that it is potentially hearable in race-relevant, category-bound terms (a potential that Robertson later goes on to develop with his "black thing" question). Just as we saw in the analysis of Extract 3.2, this represents a possible source of trouble to the proceedings since it countermands Rice's own previously stated position to steer clear of making racial identity relevant in interaction (lines 9-24). Unlike in

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that prior talk, however, Watts does not set out here to address racial prejudice, but rather to make shared food preference the basis for affiliation between herself and Rice. This is particularly tricky because to the extent that those preferences *can* be seen to invoke category-bound inferences, then they can also be said to invoke racial identity. Here, however, the sequential organization of speaker contributions functions to manage the availability of just such potential (Rawls 1989:162-163; Sacks 1992 [lecture 1:2]). This is because the second-turn, responsive positioning of Rice's various contributions has the effect of implicating her in the very demands for accountability that she might broach were she to object to the race-relevant inferences potentially made available in Watts' line of questioning (see: Hutchby and Wooffitt 1998:15; McKenzie 2005). Put differently, if Rice were to raise the possibility that Watt's line of questioning was race-relevant, then it would be Rice herself who invoked racial identity in just such a way as she had previously argued against doing. Watts' contributions here thus have something of a preemptive character in that pursuing that potential meaning would necessarily implicate Rice in the very moral demands for which such objections might be raised. Watts could simply respond that her questions about food were not in any way related to category membership (that is, to racial identity). The sequential placement of Watts' contributions thus functions to preclude the eventuality of such an inferential trajectory being articulated given that her interlocutor (Rice) would then be implicated in furnishing the race-relevant inferences they would otherwise bode.

Note carefully what is being suggested in all of this. The point here is not that Watts and/or Rice somehow *really* or *genuinely* intend to invoke shared racial identity in the latter part of the interview, and that in the process of so doing, they *surreptitiously* obscure its relevance. Rather, the claim is that the encounter's trajectory is managed in ways that have no regard for the incriminating potential shared category membership might otherwise pose. The inferences relating to what is potentially hearable in category-relevant terms are simply not traversed. This is not the same thing as saying that they are reversed or obscured, since that would imply that conversational work is undertaken to identify and then eliminate some specific set of inferences. Instead, Watts and Rice provide for the relevance of shared taste as the basis for affiliation without pursuing whatever other category-bound significance it could potentially be taken to have. Watts' line of questioning constitutes a resource with which both she and Rice are able to manage the interpretative parameters of their talk by delineating the extent to which particular features of their shared experience are relevant in furnishing the grounds for interlocutor affiliation. That those features *could* be construed as category-bound, and that their relevance is *potentially* available for the formulation of shared racial identity remains irrelevant to their talk (as, of course, are any number of other possibilities).[16]

[16] In a detailed study of debating practices among Buddhist monks of Tibet, Kenneth Liberman (2007:140) addresses this same feature of meaning's unrealized potentiality, relating this to the preference for semantic determinacy within the Western tradition of scholarly inquiry: "According to the philosophical rationality we have known since the Enlightenment, meanings are best when they are made clear, stable, and distinct; however, what is most fecund about meanings may be what they are yet to suggest and which they bear only silently within themselves as their potential. If meanings naturally have some indeterminacy, an indeterminacy that is based in part upon the semiotic relations that signs have with each other, which are always ready to unfold upon something new as the context to which they are applied changes, then a penchant for the clear and distinct may be nothing more than an artifice that places thinking in a straightjacket. According to the Buddhist notion of thatness, a more philosophically instructive course of inquiry would present the flux of a course of thinking just-as-it-is, in its quiddity, without foreclosing it. According to Buddhists, it would be incorrect even to say that resolving a problem would be 'premature,' since the best reason may be one that never reaches maturity." In the talk between Watts and Rice, the potential for mention of their shared tastes to be construed in category-relevant terms is "one that never reaches maturity" in the setting where it occurs, being confined instead to the exclusive provision it furnishes for interlocutor affiliation.

This being the case, then why even mention those possibilities here? That is, if Watts and Rice do not attend to the category-bound significance potentially made available in their talk, then of what significance is it to the analysis of their conversation? The answer to this question is that such relevance gets furnished in subsequent formulations of that talk's significance in the conversation between Watts and Robertson. The category-bound, race-relevant potential of Watts' prior line of questioning (in her interview with Rice) is retrospectively furnished in the subsequent discussion (between herself and Robertson) about that prior encounter (Extract 3.3, lines 69-137). Robertson brings that potential to realization in an explicit formulation of a category-relevant relationship ("What is this mac and cheese, is that a black thing?," lines 108-109). The potential of that category relevance does not pre-exist Robertson's formulation. Instead, that formulation involves the claim of pre-existence as a condition of its intelligibility. As already noted above, Watts goes on to ratify Robertson's formulation in immediate uptake to his question (lines 110-111), corroborating the pair-relational formulation whose category-bound features were not attended to in the prior encounter (lines 111-116). In this way, the potentially troublesome inferences that are undeveloped in the Watts-Rice interview (lines 1-67) are realized in the later setting of the Robertson-Watts appraisal. While this rendering attributes a given significance to that prior talk, it accomplishes its effect precisely in and through efforts to make the meaning distinction between the two settings inconspicuous. In other words, the inferential trajectory made available in Watts' line of questioning is only available as such on reflection (Mehan and Wood 1975:18-19).

One might be tempted here to regard Robertson's "black thing" question (lines 108-109) as disruptive of, if not inimical to, the purposes that Watts and Rice undertake in their own prior talk (lines 1-67). Note, though, that this would involve conflating the somewhat different order of business that Robertson and Watts undertake there (to evaluate Watts' performance in her interview with Rice). Put differently, the business that Robertson and Watts pursue, though carried out with reference to the prior occasion of talk between Watts and Rice, differs from it in having the evaluation of Watts' interview skills as its objective. This distinction is crucial to an appreciation of how the inferential potential in that prior talk is furnished by Robertson for its relevance to the business he and Watts pursue.[17] Against this background, the point for Robertson in elaborating the inferential potential of the descriptions that Watts and Rice employ would not be to warrant the reductionism that it

[17] Note that this evaluative project is also the topic of explicit reference, both as reported by Watts of Rice (lines 69-82), as well as in the prefatory transition with which Robertson steers the direction of conversation from the summary remarks in Watts' contribution towards a more reflexively-oriented discussion (lines 84-106).

might furnish, but to display the significance that Watts' prior line of questioning could otherwise be taken to have. In other words, while Robertson's contribution here *could* be taken as reductionist—and, indeed, is oriented to as such in Watts' subsequent efforts to manage the category exclusive significance of the formulation it broaches—it is the explication of that potential (rather than the warranting of its meaning) that contributes to the overall business of evaluating Watts' performance in the prior encounter. In this sense, the question of whether Robertson *really* or *genuinely* harbors racist motivations is of no more relevance to the work he pursues in his encounter with Watts than is that of whether Watts and Rice *really* or *genuinely* work to obscure the significance of racial identity in their talk about shared tastes.

This point can be difficult to see because it involves differentiating between what the speakers make of their talk in the specific setting of their conversation as it is happening and the business that takes place in subsequent talk where speakers refer to those prior settings. The situated work by Robertson of attending to the potential for meaning to be made of prior talk does not necessarily entail a claim on his part that such potential is what had been realized on those prior occasions. Robertson shows what *could* have been made of Watts' prior talk without necessarily endorsing the view that that is what she had actually intended. Indeed, the critical, evaluative significance of his reflective comments arises precisely in virtue of the distinction between Watts' intentions and the interpretative trajectories potentially made available through her prior line of questioning at issue.

The specific details of how all of this is achieved in the conversation between Watts and Robertson are themselves quite complicated. To begin with, we have already seen that Watts initially corroborates the category formulation broached in Robertson's "black thing" question (line 110). Immediately thereafter, however, she works to close off the category-bound inferences that the related ascription might furnish in a recycling of Robertson's prior turn (Schegloff 1987). Watts thus undercuts the reductionist potential in Robertson's use of the "black thing" ascription through her efforts to argue for the universal (versus category specific) appeal of mac and cheese (lines 113-138). Note also that Watts appeals to Robertson to collaborate with her in those efforts in a variety of ways: with her remarks invoking such universal appeal (lines 111-114), with a display of surprise at the category exclusive terms "black thing" ascription potentially furnishes (line 116), and with her proffering of an alternative account for why Robertson might not share her tastes (lines 123-127). In this way, she acts to confine the relevance of the category formulation in Robertson's question to the same kind of inferential parameters that she and Rice established previously by means of demonstrating her assumption that a taste for macaroni and cheese is not category-exclusive. At stake in their discussion here is the distinction between category applicability and the exclusivity of the description those category terms furnish. Watts does not impeach Robertson's effort as a straightforward case of reductionist stereotyping, but instead works to establish the extent to which its reductionist potential is made relevant by working to undercut its category-exclusive significance.

Note that Watts also draws upon the category-relevance of the "black thing" formulation in order, paradoxically, to warrant her efforts to destabilize its category-exclusive significance (much in the way that Chris Rock does in his stand-up routine). This is particularly subtle work that trades off on the category ascription at issue by employing the entitlement it furnishes to subvert its potentially reductionist conclusions. So, for instance, in remarks about the universal appeal of mac and cheese (lines 111-114), Watts describes a taste for that dish in ambivalent terms, where their potential claimants are unspecified as to their category status ("you guys," "other people," "the world," lines 111-113). Here, Watts employs non-category-specific terms that contrast with the category-relevant formulation potentially invoked in Robertson's question. Note, too, how Watts moves on to address her concerns directly to Robertson in a way that disregards the category terms whose use is otherwise at issue (lines 123-137). Through her deployment of non-category relevant descriptors, she invokes terms of reference that reflexively provide for the intelligibility of racial category ascription as an object of scrutiny, but does so in a way where neither she nor Robertson are necessarily implicated as members. Watts thus manages the rather tricky task of attending to the inferential potential that her own category entitlement furnishes, while at the same time disrupting the very category-bound inferences in which she would otherwise be implicated by so doing. Just as in her prior encounter with Rice, she manages some delicate interactional business here in virtue of the fecund nature of the category-bound inferences under discussion. A significant difference between the two encounters is that where previously Watts manages the interpretative parameters that shared taste potentially holds, in her encounter with Robertson, she provides for that category-relevance in order to entitle her own efforts at undercutting its reductionist implications. The two kinds of work are related, but in mirror opposites arising from the different situated purposes that the provision for category membership realizes in each of the respective encounters.

Now, consider how Robertson resists Watts' efforts at foreclosing the category-reductionist potential of his "black thing" formulation. Robertson claims not to share a taste for macaroni and cheese (lines 118), intensifying that claim with an upgraded assertion (line 121). He also repudiates Watts' suggestion that they share a common family heritage relating to the preparation of the dish (lines 132-133). Robertson's resistance here is formulated in a similar way to the efforts that Watts herself makes (in her talk with Robertson) in that it does not attend to what is otherwise hearable in her talk as furnishing the basis for interlocutor affiliation. Where Watts works to steer the trajectory of meaning away from the reductionist potential in Robertson's question, posing her contributions in category-disruptive ways that block development of the inferences category attribution otherwise furnishes, so, too, Robertson works to impair Watts' efforts by withholding agreement about the shared experience that would ground her claims regarding the universal appeal of macaroni and cheese. By resisting her efforts to recruit him in undermining the reductionist implications of the "black thing" formulation, he displays the

open-ended potential for the affiliative work she undertakes (both here and in her talk with Rice) to be construed along multiple trajectories of meaning. Moreover, he does so in a manner that similarly involves suspending the relevance of category inclusion (within the group that shares a taste for mac and cheese). Category attribution is differentially made to bear on the accountability of category attribution itself; category membership is brought into play where the bringing-into-play of category membership is itself attended to as potentially blameworthy. Here, Robertson's resistance to the disruption of category inclusion is reflexively oriented to furnishing a display of the multivalent potential of group inclusion in a way that Watts' own attempts to invoke shared identity (in her talk with Rice) do not.

Finally, note how all of this talk is conducted in a somewhat playful fashion not unlike what takes place in the latter part of Watts-Rice interview. Robertson and Watts engage in a bit of fatuous banter in which he calls her out on the potentially troublesome aspects furnished in the lines of questioning she poses, with Watts working to manage that potential in the development of her answer to Robertson's "black thing" question. In frustrating Watts' efforts, Robertson demonstrates how the potential meaning of a given formulation remains available for subsequent interpretation, despite the efforts one may make to foreclose that eventuality. Here, such efforts attend to the business of evaluating Watts' prior performance in her interview with Rice (with the upshot being, of course, that Robertson essentially ratifies the arguments developed in Rice's own prior contribution—i.e., it is better to avoid making racial identity relevant altogether). The overall effect is one in which participants attend to the vagaries of category ascription in virtue of the entitlements that their own related category membership furnishes, with reflexive orientations directed towards managing the potential significance of their respective contributions throughout.[18]

Whatever disagreement arises in the encounter here is thus related to the questions of: (1) whether the provision for category attribution is accountable to the meanings that are *potential* in its uses, or (2) whether it is only accountable to the uses for which it is *actually* deployed in some given situation. In resisting Watts' efforts to undermine the category-exclusive meaning of "black thing" identity ascription, Robertson bolsters arguments for the former position by demonstrating that Watts' efforts involve the same strategy to forego the determinacy of meaning which are in effect in her own talk. In contrast, the scope of Watts' efforts here is limited to managing the potential to be seen as endorsing the reductionist potential available with the category invoked by Robertson (in and through her unsuccessful efforts to recruit him in disrupting the category-exclusive attribution of a taste for mac and cheese). Throughout, Robertson and Watts are concerned with the legitimate uses of racial identity ascription, with Robertson working to demonstrate, in and through his invocation of category terms, the potential that category attribution holds for reductionist exclusion, and with Watts working to mitigate the potential for reductionism otherwise available in a non-demonstrative (straightforward, uncomplicated) reading of Robertson's "black thing" formulation. While these different efforts might seem antithetical, they turn out to be complimentary: the two speakers are able to address the relevance of category attribution in a way that demonstrates the open-ended potential it furnishes while simultaneously working to curtail that potential in the immediate setting. That feat is a jointly produced, emergent property of interaction that exceeds the work or intentions (whatever that might mean in this context) of either individual speaker.[19] My own analytic observations about this do not mitigate the demands for accountability that the use of category ascription might otherwise entail, but rather point out how the potential entrapments pertaining to those demands feature as both topic and reflexively available resource in the work that both Robertson and Watts pursue in attending to the business of their talk.

[18] One might also note of this encounter that the potential threat to speaker alignment is managed in a similar fashion to the way that Watts and Rice proceed in their prior talk, namely, with the sharing of laughter (lines 118-121, 132-135; see: Glenn 2003:53-85).

[19] Attention to the disputatious, seemingly inimical stance of interlocutors in dialogue can easily distract from an appreciation of the collaborative nature of their efforts in providing for the rhetorical robustness of their joint undertaking. Addressing this feature of talk in her discussion of Harold Garfinkel's conception of time, Anne Warfield Rawls (2005:174) notes: "Everything—what all speakers say and do—goes into making up what the communication will finally have meant." She goes on to elaborate: "The way Garfinkel handles interpretation sequentially avoids the whole problem of how two people get the same idea. They don't need to. The speaker says something. Then it is up to the hearer/observer to make what they can of it. They construct an action that responds to what they have made of what the other did. The other can tell a good bit from this about how they have understood what they did. Sometimes they even learn something they did not know about what they did" (Rawls 2005:181-182).

Conclusion

The analyses above have explored different examples of talk in which category membership features as both speaker topic and resource. The point of considering how category membership is made relevant in these different settings is to highlight the way that speakers work both to furnish and circumscribe the inferential potential of their descriptive formulations. Whatever meaning is to emerge from interaction—be it racist or anti-racist—is immanent to the encounters where it is made to realize the situated purposes of the participants. Meaning is thus not the inevitable outcome of the various resources participants employ, rather those resources function as a vehicle for the mutually oriented-to projects that speakers pursue on any given occasion, with the success of any resource ultimately being a matter of interlocutor agreement in use (Benwell and Stokoe 2006). This is very much a feature of the reflexive work that speakers undertake to manage the implications of their own situated involvement in the then-present circumstances of their talk.

All of these considerations highlight a crucial distinction between reduction to category terms and the reflexive engagement with category attribution as a participant concern. That is, there is an important analytic distinction to be made between the ascription of category membership and attention to that activity itself as a potentially accountable activity. Taking this distinction seriously means giving analytic attention to the reflexive work that speakers routinely undertake to exceed or suspend the categorical terms of reference in their own and

each others' contributions. In his discussion of national identity, Slavoj Žižek (1993) develops a similar point in remarks about what he refers to as the "Nation-Thing" (italics in original):

> This Nation-Thing is determined by a series of contradictory properties. It appears as "our Thing" (perhaps we could say *cosa nostra*), as something accessible only to us, as something "they," the others, cannot grasp; nonetheless, it is something constantly menaced by "them." It appears as what gives plentitude and vivacity to our life, and yet the only way we can determine it is by resorting to different versions of the same empty tautology. All we can ultimately say about it is that the Thing is "itself," "the real Thing," "what it is really about," etc. If we ask how we can recognize the presence of this Thing, the only consistent answer is that the Thing is present in that elusive entity called "our way of life." All we can do is enumerate disconnected fragments of the way our community organizes its feasts, its rituals of mating, its initiations ceremonies…It would, however, be erroneous simply to reduce the national Thing to the features composing a specific "way of life." The Thing is not directly a collection of these features; there is "something more" in it, something that *is present* in these features, that *appears* through them. Members of a community who partake in a given "way of life" *believe in their Thing*, where this belief has a reflexive structure proper to the intersubjective space: "I believe in the (national) Thing" equals "I believe that others (members of my community) believe in the Thing." The tautological character of the Thing—its semantic void which limits what we can say about the Thing to "It is the real Thing," etc.—is founded precisely in this paradoxical reflexive structure. The national Thing exists as long as members of the community believe in it; it is literally an effect of this belief in itself. [pp. 201-202]

The "reflexive structure" that Žižek mentions here is glossed by Garfinkel (1967) with the term *documentary method of interpretation*, and refers to the way that particulars are related to an organizing category of interpretation, while that organizing category itself is said to be derived from the particulars that it renders intelligible. Žižek himself refers to this relationship by invoking shared cognition (belief). Despite the distinction between this and ethnomethodology's own approach to meaning as an emergent property of interaction, what is of interest in this passage is the noumenal reference that identity is made to have vis-à-vis the phenomenal specifics that are taken to manifest it (i.e., the "disconnected fragments of the way our community organizes its feasts, its rituals of mating, its initiations ceremonies," etc.). Here, what would render a particular formulation reductionist in view of these reflexive structures would be the sense that community is *exclusively and only ever* those specifics—that is, that community members are devoid, in some crucial sense, not of the noumenal character which those specifics are said to manifest, but rather of the capacity to manage the documentary methods in virtue of which their shared identity is formulated. Thus, reductionism is not description within a set of specifics, but the closing of interpretative capabilities within the structure those specifics are said to describe such that community members are taken to lack the reflexive capacity to formulate their own collective identity, and instead are regarded as exclusively that (Thing) which

the semantic exercise of category formulation invokes.[20] What renders the reflexive structuring of identity paradoxical is that its deployment be seen as essentially removed from (or autonomous of) the meaning that its hermeneutic circuit describes. It is the repudiation of that ability for social actors to distinguish between identity and the act of its assertion that thus constitutes reductionism.

In examining the talk between Watts and Robertson, I considered how Watts resists such reductionism *both* in asserting the identity that the structuring of phenomenal specifics to noumenal character achieves (the "black thing" that a shared taste for mac and cheese is said to manifest) *and* in her efforts to disrupt the exclusivity of category relevance that those specifics describe. Thus, she paradoxically ratifies the formulation that Robertson initially offers, while also displaying her reflexive capability in disassembling the meaning that it furnishes. For his part, Robertson's resistance to that display is oriented to highlighting the reductionist potential that the documentary formulation of identity represents. This is somewhat analogous to the work that Watts herself undertakes since the subversive orientation of her reflexive efforts to disassemble the semantic structuring of identity necessitates the same sort of externalization from the parameters which that identity describes in order to be effective. In other words, Watts appeals here to the same capacity on the part of Robertson that she herself works to display as a condition of that very display's effectiveness. Her demonstration of the capacity to exceed the terms of reference in the descriptive formulation cedes the same capacity on Robertson's part as a condition of its effectiveness. Such mutual reciprocity requires that Robertson's situated resistance to Watts' efforts itself be regarded as reflexively oriented to displaying the same capacity to disassemble meaning on her part.[21] Again, this sort of work on the part of these speakers arises precisely as a result of the reflexivity pervasive to interaction.

Relating this again to Žižek's remarks above, one could say that reductionism is what takes place when there is a failure to recognize the reflexive capacity of some interlocutor(s). My analysis here is dependent upon the recognition of that same capacity for an appreciation of what speakers are doing when they deploy identity attributions in the pursuit of their own business. As we have seen, that business is complex and paradoxical in the way it simultaneously deploys the very resources whose use it seeks to interrogate as a condition of its own efficacy. This is not to say that such uses are self-refuting. Rather, it is to point out that they are furnished by virtue of the reflexivity that is pervasive to social interaction. Put conversely, such paradox appears as contradictory only on the assumption that the situated uses to which

[20] This is what Garfinkel (1967:67) refers to in remarks concerning the analytic portrayal of the social actor as a "judgmental dope, of a cultural or psychological kind." Mikhail Bakhtin (1984) also addresses this reductionist potential in his discussion of *dialogism* (see related discussion in: Clark and Holquist 1984; Holquist 1990; Morson and Emerson 1990; McKenzie and van Teeffelen 1993).

[21] Such paradoxical work also features in Chris Rock's stand-up routine where he displays the capacity to deploy the category assumptions afforded by the related attributions while simultaneously disrupting their meaning.

categorizing formulations (or generalizations imposed on the details that are said to manifest some underlying pattern) necessarily fall within are the domain of their own terms of reference. Reflexivity necessitates a cut or disjunction between pattern and its particulars that is *constitutive* of the sense by which social action is rendered intelligible (Žižek 2003; 2009). It is that disjunction that makes possible the documentary method by which instance and pattern are related to furnish the accountability that renders social order witnessable by its members.

This point holds significant implications for the analysis of how racism features in talk—implications that speak to the assumptions often brought to bear in efforts to analyze the denial of racism (van Dijk 1992; Augoustinos and Every 2007; 2010), as well as the constructive (or reifying) assumptions that inform a cognitivist approach to racism in talk (see quotation from Condor et al. 2006:442 in the introduction above). Specifically, where racism research invokes suppressed societal and/or cognitive-perceptual structures in the production of its findings, such efforts stipulate an order of affairs in relation to which members' methods of documentary interpretation are evaluated for their descriptive adequacy (see: McKenzie 2011). That is, speaker formulations are judged for how they measure up against the assumptions that researchers bring to bear concerning what the *real* or *genuine* order of affairs being described consists in. What such research fails to consider is the significance that reflexivity has in the production of social order as a situated accomplishment of members' own documentary practices.

This failure relates to a matter of longstanding sociological concern regarding the fundamental question of social order production (Hilbert 1992; 1995; Garfinkel 2002). Central to ethnomethodology's contribution in addressing that concern is its stance of analytic indifference to the truth conditions of the documentary formulations by which members routinely stipulate some transcendent or overarching pattern to render their explanations with the sense they are made to have (Lynch 1993:190). Reference to (racist) social institutions and/or underlying cognitive structures here feature as member resources, and ethnomethodology's principled refusal either to endorse or oppose the meanings they furnish has its rationale in an understanding of social order as immanently accomplished in members' own documentary practices (Sharrock and Anderson 1986).[22] The question for such an analysis is thus not that of whether or to what extent speaker formulations are racist in nature, but of what it might mean to broach such a question in the first place: how are assumptions about what either does or does not constitute racism made available by social actors themselves in the conduct of their affairs, as realized in the specific circumstances under analysis? Such meaning is immanent to the circumstances where the immortality of social order that social actors invoke is carried out.

Speaking to this point, Richard Hilbert (1992:80-81) notes that "ethnomethodologists recommended suspending belief in the very existence of society as an orderly phenomenon and examining instead the artful practices whereby people make order appear familiar and obvious on an ongoing basis." Further in the same discussion, Hilbert (1992) explains the stance of such an approach vis-à-vis the questions of social order that speakers take up as a concern animating their own mundane analytic formulations:

> Social structure conceived and experienced by societal members, as recognizable because of its repetitive, patterned, standardized quality, simply does not exist for empirical science. No two restaurants are identical, for example, nor are any two events or behavioral displays occurring within a restaurant empirically identical. The structure can be experienced and recognized only "from within" by members of the presumed order. This is to say that they make it happen, they make it be seen that way, through mobilization of common-sense assumptions and categories for classifying this or that as instances of presumed underlying structure. Through these kinds of practices members can see at a glance what is happening in a restaurant as typical restaurant behavior, as something they have witnessed before, as something they "were already" familiar with prior to its occurrence. Even the simple casting of the setting as "after all, a restaurant" may be sufficient work for constituting recognizable stability. [p. 110]

Here, the point is that sense-making (in which some event or activity is regarded as a manifestation of some autonomous and transcendent noumenal order) involves the assertion, negotiation, and situated agreement by participants of what some case is or is not an instance of. That negotiation and agreement involve discursive work by which speakers attend reflexively to the significance of their contributions in realizing the purposes for which they are deployed. I have attempted to touch upon some of the complicated features by which such work is undertaken, and a particularly interesting aspect of that work is how category-furnished assumptions about racial identity are invoked to underwrite efforts at rendering the use of racial category formulations morally objectionable. Conversely, if we were to approach talk by simply assuming that the invocation of racial identity constitutes a censurable instance of racism, or that the reductionist uses of same constitute morally objectionable activities, then we would not be in a position to analyze the work that someone like Chris Rock does to subvert racial category attribution, or the work that speakers like Robertson and Watts do to implicate one another in the inferences they seek to make accountable in their respective formulations. More significantly, such an approach would preclude the possibility that the remaking of documentary formulations features as a part of members' own documentary practices. My purpose here has been to explore how such reworking is integral to the efforts that participants undertake in the conduct of their own situated business.

[22] Don Zimmerman and Lawrence Wiedner (1970:288-289 as cited in Hilbert 1992:112) describe the principled grounds of such indifference for respecifying sociology's fundamental question: "The first step is to suspend the assumption that social conduct is rule governed, or based in and mounted from shared meanings or systems of symbols shared in common. The second step is to observe that regular, coherent, connected patterns of social life are *described* and *explained* in just such terms, or close relatives of them, by laymen and professional sociologists alike. The third step is to treat the appearances of described and explained patterns of orderly social activities as *appearances* produced, for example, by and through such procedures as analyzing an event as an instance of compliance (or noncompliance) with a rule. To take these three 'steps' is to leave the problem of order altogether as the analyst's problem." Note that this programmatic approach to the investigation of meaning-making is one that also eschews a perceptual-cognitive model of thinking (Edwards and Potter 1992; Edwards 1997; Coulter 1999; 2008; Lynch 2006; Coulter and Sharrock 2007).

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Appendix: Transcription Conventions

The transcription of talk that appears above is based on the well-known set of conventions initially developed by Gail Jefferson (1985; see also: Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974), and extended by John Du Bois (1991) and his colleagues (Du Bois et al. 1993). Included among these conventions in the extracts above are the following:

full stop indicates completion intonation	It's mac and cheese.
comma indicates continuing intonation	mac and cheese,
question mark indicates rising intonation	You know why?
exclamation mark indicates exclamatory intonation	Sister that is my dish!
underlining indicates additional stress	can control <u>your</u> response
prolongation of sound indicated with colon	so:: u:m
false starts indicated with a dash followed by a single space	oth- the world
talk delivered with an increase in speed indicated with inward pointing arrows	>needs to get on board with macaroni and cheese<
talk delivered with a decrease in speed indicated with outward pointing arrows	black people <rea::ly don't like about black people>
up and down arrows precede marked rise or fall in intonation	And there's ↑two ↓sides
all caps indicate increase in volume	↑BLACK people or white peo↓ple.
quotation as a presentational feature indicated with single quote	For some shit they just 'supposed to do'
equal sign indicates no space between two speaker turns at talk or in single speaker articulation	**Clark** political values= **Int** =Mm hm trips me out that you::=don't
untimed pause indicated by a full stop enclosed in parentheses	need (.) to forget
timed pause in talk indicated to tenth of a second	benefit of the doubt (0.5) so
speaker overlap indicated with square brackets (or double square brackets to disambiguate between contingent lines)	**Watts** [That is the] o:ne thing **Rice** [Ye(h)s] **Watts** that [[I can]] ro:ck! **Rice** [[Yes]]
voiceless articulation (whisper) indicated with raised diacritic	°I'm° tired tired tired tired
talk spoken between clenched teeth surrounded by inward square brackets	]damn[man
animated delivery of talk indicated	*It <u>is</u> a black thing Pa:t,*
details of delivery or related sound indicated with accompanying gloss	##### (*#claps hands#*) pre*tzels* (**flooding out**)
audible in-breath of varying length	.hh .hhh
audible out-breath of varying length	hh hhhh
inaudible speech indicated with "x" for each syllable of such talk	low expectation xx
uncertain transcription indicated in single parentheses	worst thing (is) about
description of articulatory details or gesture italicized in single parentheses	(*clears throat*) (*leans forward*)
editorial comment italicized within double parentheses	we don't do Kra:ft ((*product brand name*))
syllables of laughter indicating degrees of openness	heh hah
out-breath co-articulated with laughter	hhheh
interpolated particles of aspiration inserted into words, indicated with (h)	ma(h)c a(h)nd chee(h)se
smiley voice over stretch of talk, indicated with £	£I don't and I have <u>ne</u>ver£

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The Inclusion of Women's Boxing in the Olympic Games: A Qualitative Content Analysis of Gender and Power in Boxing

Abstract This article utilizes Foucault's theoretical perspective of modern power and constructivist perspectives of gender to examine relations of power and gender in boxing. The aim of this paper is to explore how and in what ways constructions of gender are linked to relations of power in international amateur boxing. Further, what implications the interplay between gender and power might have for female boxers. In order to identify relations of power between men and women in boxing, a series of online texts depicting the process of including women's boxing in the Olympic Games (2009-2012) is analyzed and discussed. To investigate what implications these gendered power relations might have for female boxers today, AIBA's recent provisional suspension of the Norwegian Boxing Federation is examined. A content analysis strategy was chosen as my analytical approach (Titscher et al. 2000), where the data material consisted of 67 online texts of which 23 were analyzed in-depth. The analysis of the material illustrates how an attempt to implement feminine outfits for female boxers in the Olympic Games was used as a gender-marking strategy in international boxing. This is further related to power by arguing that AIBA's need to distinguish female boxers from male boxers was an attempt to make the women adhere to traditional norms of femininity (Hovden 2000; van Ingen and Kovacs 2012). Furthermore, the analysis of the material indicates that men's boxing is valued as superior to women's boxing and that these gendered power relations in boxing manifest themselves through their effects on women's boxing.

Keywords Boxing; Gender; Power; Foucault; Olympic Games

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Boxing has traditionally been a male dominated sport with strong historical links to traditional norms of masculinity. Boxing can be described as rituals of masculinity, where competitors try to impose their domination on another (Gems 2014). As a consequence, it has proven to be very resistant to female involvement and participation (Sugden 1996). In recent years, international amateur boxing, with the International Boxing Association (AIBA) as its governing body, has undergone significant changes, especially in regard to female participation and acceptance. Perhaps the most substantial change in relation to this topic is the inclusion of women's boxing in the London 2012 Olympic Games (Norges Bokseforbund 2009; AIBA 2012).

Before the Olympic Games in London 2012, boxing was the only summer sport without female discipline (Mennesson 2000). In spite of this, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) was reluctant to add it to the Games in 2012. With the admittance of women's boxing in the Olympic Games in London, three different weight categories were included, mainly 51 kilograms, 60 kilograms, and 75 kilograms (Norges Bokseforbund 2009). By AIBA's competition rules, female boxers normally compete in ten different weight categories, ranging from 45 kilograms to 81+ kilograms (AIBA 2014a). For male boxers, ten weight categories are included in the Olympic Games. In this respect, boxing is different from most other Olympic disciplines, whereas the marginalization of women's boxing is evident through IOC's decision to omit seven weight categories for women. Prior to the Olympic Games in London 2012, AIBA estimated that there were more than 500,000 licensed female boxers worldwide. Women's boxing today is practiced in more than 120 countries and on five continents (AIBA 2014b). With the recognition of women's boxing as an Olympic discipline, the number of licensed female boxers is likely to increase further in the coming years.

This article examines how and in what ways constructions of gender are linked to relations of power in international amateur boxing. Through analyzing a sample of online texts, I will explore how gendered relations of power in boxing are visible in its effects. To investigate this, I will look at online texts depicting the process of the inclusion of women's boxing in the Olympic Games, which is a recent and significant event in international boxing that is likely to provide insight into dominant discourses regarding gendered relations of power in boxing. Furthermore, I will discuss some of the implications these power relations might have for women in boxing. To investigate some of these consequences, I will explore the recent provisional suspension of the Norwegian Boxing Federation (NBF) from international boxing (AIBA 2014c; Norges Bokseforbund 2014). The analysis in this paper is based on texts written by, and posted on, (1) AIBA's own website, (2) the NBF's website, texts from (3) Norwegian newspapers, (4) international newspapers, (5) open letters from IOC, and (6) online petitions and discussion forums. The selection of texts is described in further detail under "Methods."

Previous Research: Gender and Boxing

In this section, I will present a concise outline of central findings from research on the topic of boxing and gender. My intension here is to establish the research field in which I aim to make a contribution.

Worldwide, boxing has been regarded as a site created by and for men. Historically, it is a sport which has excluded and marginalized the participation of women (Wacquant 1995; Sugden 1996; Lafferty and McKay 2004). Both Sugden (1996) and Gems (2014) describe how boxing is a site of masculinity:

> In general sports are male dominated and this to some extent is related to the historical links between sport and militarism and warfare, themselves male dominated theatres. Boxing more than most other sports resembles its ancient, martial progenitor and has proven to be very resistant to female involvement. [Sugden 1996:192]

> Boxing has historically served as a ritual of masculinity. The practice of the sport, no matter how inept, served as proof of one's courage and virility. Aggression and violence, pain and injury, even the possibility of death were accepted risks. Boxing was and is war, an individual combat in which competitors try to impose their domination on another. Such intentions hold true whether they take place in street fights or within the regulated confines of the ring. [Gems 2014:17]

Oats (1980) noted that when women engage in boxing, they challenge traditional norms of femininity by displaying aggression and power, qualities that traditionally are attributed to men and masculinity. Until recently, boxing was seen (and may still be seen by some) as a sport suitable for men only (Wacquant 1992; 1995; 2005; Boyle, Millington, and Vertinsky 2006; Dortants and Knoppers 2012). In his study, Wacquant (1992) described the culture and norms in American boxing gyms as being essentially masculine, places where women often were (and in some cases still are) viewed as intruders. Mennesson (2000) underlined that boxing epitomizes a site where women can revel in masculine skills and capacities, and stressed that the contribution female boxers make to this sport is the redefinition of boxing as an exclusively masculine practice.

Women have been included in international boxing since 1994. In recent studies, scholars such as Dortants and Knoppers (2012), van Ingen and Kovacs (2012), and Lafferty and McKay (2004) have illustrated how female boxers still experience discrimination on the basis of gender. Men have, to a large degree, monopolized power in international boxing. In sports organizations such as national boxing Federations and license committees, men are over-represented. The same tendencies can be found in regards to media coverage in boxing, coaching positions, referees, and administrative positions (Hargreaves 1994; Halbert 1997; De Garis 2000). In other words, women are systematically under-represented in these vital power positions within boxing.

As outlined here, previous and recent research on gender and boxing emphasize how gender is portrayed as a power relation in boxing. My ambition in this paper is not to map gendered relations of power in boxing as a whole, but rather to analyze a sample of online texts depicting the process of including women's boxing in the Olympic Games—in order to examine how gender and power are expressed and constructed in boxing. In this study, I have chosen Foucault's perspective on modern power and some main components of the gender order that shape masculine sports, such as boxing, football, and ice hockey, as my theoretical lenses (Hovden 2000; Hjelseth and Hovden 2014).

Theoretical Framework

In this part, I will provide a short description of my theoretical framework for the analysis of the material. My theoretical framing contains a conceptualization of gender in sporting contexts, as well as a Foucauldian approach to understanding modern power.

Discourse and Modern Power

Discourses connect the exercise of power with knowledge and produce truths, and are, in this paper, defined as institutionalized social practice which shapes relationships, power, and knowledge (Foucault 2000; Hjelseth and Hovden 2014). Foucault views power as relational. Therefore, power exists when exercised within relationships between individuals (Foucault 2000). In this perspective, power is anyone (and everywhere) who is able to exercise it (Foucault 1978). Hence, the question is not necessarily who has power, but rather how it is exercised in relations between groups of people (Cole, Giardina, and Andrews 2004; Markula and Silk 2011). In this sense, one could argue that modern power is only visible in its effects. Utilizing a Foucauldian viewpoint of modern power, I am able to examine how and in what ways power is exercised between men and women in boxing. In other words, how gender is related to power in sport. From this perspective it is possible to analyze how power in boxing is visible through its effects on male and female boxers. Studying modern power through Foucault's theoretical lens can in this sense contribute to an exploration of dominant systems of power relations in international boxing. However, this understanding of power does not provide any clear or specific comprehension of what it actually means to expose (and resist) dominant systems of power relations in society. By this I mean that while this particular theoretical framing of modern power enables me to explore gendered relations in boxing, it does not, however, necessarily provide insight into how to promote change in these relations for increased gender equality in boxing and other sports.

Constructs of Gender in Sport

Feminist scholars (e.g., Haavind 1994; Moi 1998; Hovden 2000; 2005; Norman 2010a; 2010b; Pfister 2013) accentuate that the prevalent understanding of gender in the context of sport is based on a two-sex model. This implies that the constructions of gender are entrenched in the interpretations of sexed bodies (Hjelseth and Hovden 2014). In this way, gender is often constructed through dichotomous differences between masculinity and femininity (Theberge 1993; Connell 1995; Mennesson 2000). Thus, within sports, masculinity and femininity are often expressed as antagonistic qualities, which describes differences between the two sexes. This construction of gender entails that masculinity is seen as relational to femininity in sports. Hence, masculinity is defined as that which is not

feminine (Connell 1995). Aggression, strength, confidence, rationality, independence, and dominance are often depicted as traditional masculine characteristics, while emotionality, passivity, submissive, insecurity, and caring are features used to describe femininity (Johnson 2005; Coakley and Pike 2009). As a consequence of this stereotypical view on gender, sporting activities are themselves often gendered. This results in some sports being categorized as suitable for men (e.g., masculine), while other sports are linked to women (e.g., femininity). Boxing, football, rugby, and ice hockey are examples of sports which typically are described as being masculine and "sports for men," while dance, cheerleading, and gymnastics are typically linked to femininity and women.

Within the understanding of masculinity as contradictory to femininity, a double meaning often occurs, where masculinity also represents the normal and gender neutral (Haavind 1994: Bourdieu 2000; de Beauvoir 2000). Accordingly, women and men's behavior, competence, and capacities are related to their sexed bodies, which often leads to a naturalization and internalization of this biology-rooted understanding of gender. In other words, the differences between men and women are interpreted and conceived as a result of biological differences rather than arbitrary cultural and social constructions (Bourdieu 2000). Both Bourdieu (2000) and de Beauvoir (2000) critique this dichotomic understanding of gender and underline how the social construction of gender almost always includes a relationship of power. In sports, this prevailing construction of gender often results in conclusions where masculinity and sport for men are rated as superior to femininity and women's sport.

Using a qualitative research design, I have chosen a content analysis approach as my preferred method of analysis.

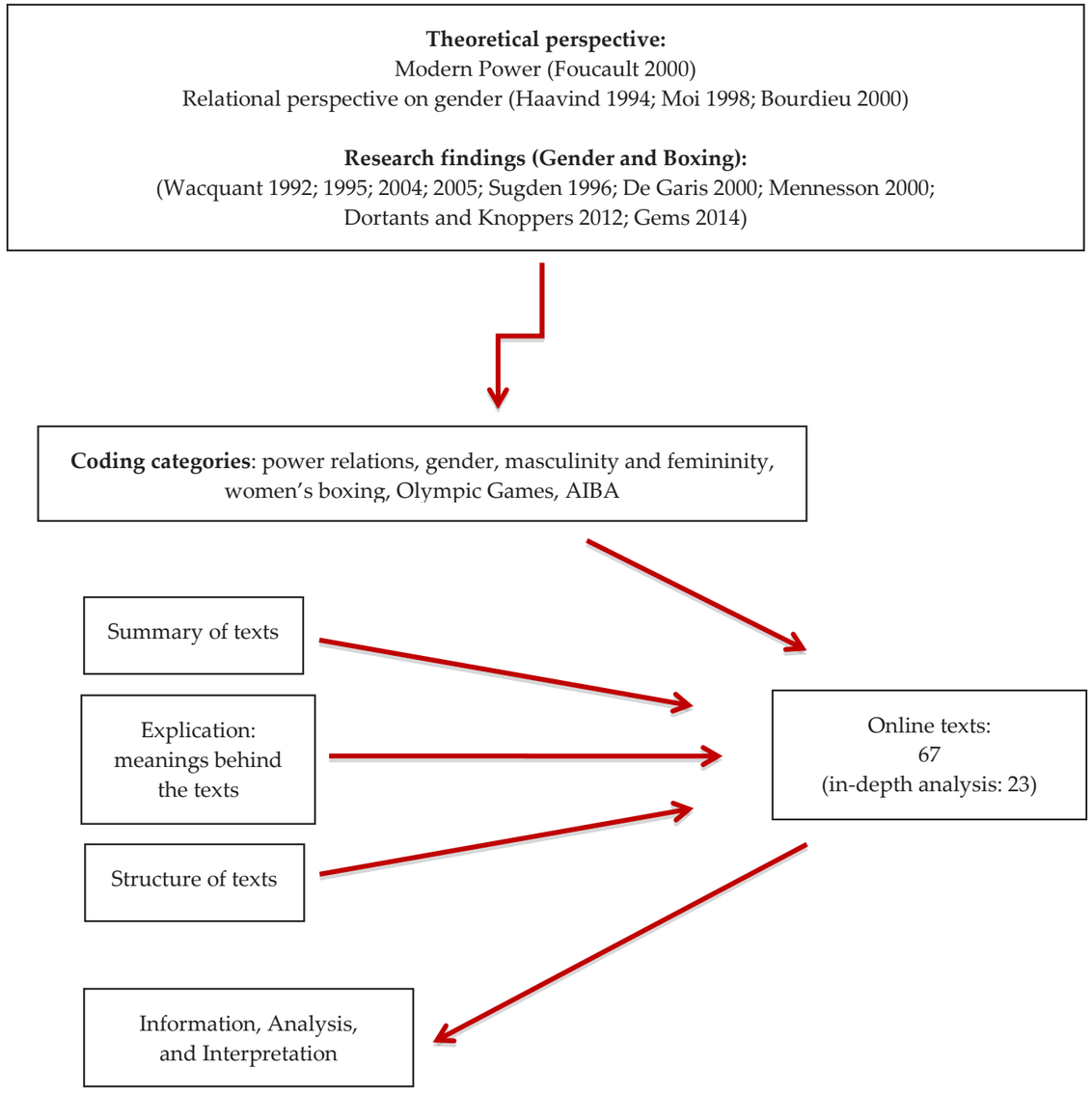
Methodology

In this part of the paper, I will firstly describe my analytic approach: a qualitative content analysis. Thereafter, I inform about my sample of online texts and the strategic selection criteria used to construct the data material.

Content Analysis

The analytical approach I used to analyze the data material was a content analysis approach (Hsieh and Shannon 2005; Elo and Kyngäs 2008). Content analysis involves an investigation of underlying themes in the texts subjected to analysis. Bryman (2004:392) argues that qualitative content analysis is "the most prevalent approach to the qualitative analysis of documents." Content analysis is a widely used method of research and includes many different approaches. This paper is based on a directed approach, where the analysis starts with theory and relevant research findings as a guide for the initial codes of the material (Hsieh and Shannon 2005). By using a Foucauldian viewpoint of modern power, as well as a relational perspective on gender, the analysis resulted in an investigation and interpretation of some prevalent gendered relations of power in amateur boxing. My analytical process using this approach is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. The analytical process of the study.



Source: Derived from Kohlbacher (2006).

Using this strategy, I started my analytical process by investigating and identifying some central concepts within the material. Here, the theoretical lenses and research findings acted as a guide in the coding and categorization of the material. While structuring the material, I summarized some central themes and topics within the sample of texts. After identifying some main concepts in the material, my aim was to explore

how and in what ways these concepts could be linked together and how they were connected to power and gender (Foucault 2000; Markula and Silk 2011).

Sample and Data Material

In order to obtain insight and information about gender and power relations in international boxing, I looked for enunciations: places where my object of analysis was likely to be discussed (Markula and Silk 2011). From this strategy a sample of online texts from the official AIBA website, the official website of the NBF, national Norwegian newspapers, international newspapers, open letters from IOC, and texts from online petitions and discussion forums were chosen as my data material. 67 different texts were chosen strategically for their themes. The sampling strategy was to choose texts discussing the process of including women's boxing in the Olympic Games, as well as the provisional suspension of the NBF. This resulted in a sample of online texts published between 2009 (when AIBA first announced the inclusion of women's boxing in the 2012 Olympic Games) and 2014. The texts were retrieved during August-November of 2014.

After reading and examining the material, 23 of the 67 texts were chosen for in-depth analysis. These 23 texts were chosen as being thematically representative for the sample. Further, these texts were interpreted as illustrating prevalent and reoccurring discourses, topics, and arguments regarding current gendered power relations. Some reoccurring topics within the sample included texts which discussed: (1) the inclusion of women's boxing in the London 2012 Olympic Games, (2) women's boxing in the Rio 2016 Olympic Games, (3) the provisional suspension of the NBF, and (4) women's dress codes in Olympic boxing.

In the process of identifying and investigating relevant online texts, some specific keywords were used, mainly: "London 2012," "women's boxing," "women," "Olympic Games," "Rio 2016," "Suspension," "AIBA," "IOC," and "Norwegian Boxing Federation."

The Inclusion of Women's Boxing in the Olympic Games

Here, I will examine how and in what ways gender is linked with relations of power during the process of including women's boxing in the Olympic Games (2009-2012). By analyzing how gendered power relations are expressed among central agents and organizations like AIBA, IOC, and NBF, I will argue that the political process of including women's boxing in the Olympic Games demonstrates some prevailing constructs of gender and gendered relations of power within international boxing. The use of quotations from the data material will illustrate key arguments within these discourses. These quotations are part of larger online texts within the study's sample.

In 2009, AIBA announced that IOC had accepted their proposal to include women's boxing in the London 2012 Olympic Games (Norges Bokseforbund 2009). With this announcement, AIBA stated that getting women's boxing into the Olympic Games had been one of the organization's top priorities since 2006. One of AIBA's key arguments for the inclusion of women's boxing in the Olympic Games was not derived from a standpoint of gender equality, but rather concerning the image of boxing as a sport. One of the members of AIBA's women's commission gave voice to this argument:

> Having women's boxing at Olympics would help improve the overall image of the sport. If women come in, people will feel the sport is more common, not so dangerous, and that would be a very good thing for the image of boxing. [Lynch 2008]

The arguments conveyed in this statement can be interpreted as an example of prevailing the relational understanding of masculinity and femininity in sport (Hovden 2000; Lafferty and McKay 2004; Pfister 2013). Here, women's boxing is expressed as being connected to capacities and characteristics understood as relational to a biology-rooted understanding of gender. By claiming that the inclusion of women in Olympic boxing will change the overall image of the sport internationally, women's boxing is othered from men's boxing, which here represents the normal and gender neutral (de Beauvoir 2000). The inclusion of female boxers is seen as something which will normalize the image of boxing to become "less dangerous." In other words, as a result of their sexed bodies, or of biological differences, female boxers are expected to be essentially different from male boxers. In this way, men's boxing is viewed as representing traditional and hegemonic masculine qualities such as aggressiveness, dangerousness, strength, and toughness (Connell 1995; Johnson 2005), while the key argument for the inclusion of women's boxing in the Olympic Games seems to be made from the standpoint that female boxers have some embodied, naturalized, and essentially different (feminine) qualities. Hence, these "feminine qualities" are thought to change the prevailing image of boxing as a primal, residual, and dangerous sport. Using Foucault's (1978; 2000) relational perspective on modern power, the dominant discourses concerning women's boxing in the process of including women in Olympic boxing also imply some gendered power relations between men and women in international amateur boxing.

Women in Skirts: A Gender-Marking Strategy in Boxing?

The material demonstrates that prior to the London 2012 Olympic Games a main concern and topic of discussion within both AIBA and IOC was the competition outfits of female boxers. More specifically, the topic of discussion was whether female boxers should be allowed to wear shorts while boxing.

In this discourse, AIBA's main argument was that if female boxers did not wear skirts, spectators would not be able to distinguish between male and female boxers in the ring. The material demonstrates several similar arguments from AIBA and different national boxing Federations. The two main topics reasoned in the material of online texts within the discourse of competition outfits for female boxers were: 1) If female boxers wore skirts, it would be easier for the spectators to determine the gender of the athletes and 2) Skirts would make female boxers look elegant. These types of arguments prevailed in the study's material, and are here interpreted as examples of how masculinity and femininity are viewed

as two mutually excluding categories in accordance with the two-sex model (Connell 1995; Moi 1998). When women engage in competitive boxing, they are, in many ways, disproving the understanding of gender, masculinity, and femininity, as dichotomous differences rooted in the sexed bodies of men and women. The attempt to force female boxers to compete in skirts can be analyzed as a pursuit to make sure that female boxers are still in accordance with views on traditional femininity. From a perspective of gender equality in sport, I wish to raise the question of why there should be a need for spectators to distinguish between male and female boxers in the ring. Why was this topic of importance to AIBA and IOC in the period of 2009 to 2012? Why should women look elegant when engaging in boxing? A sport which is normally not connected with elegance (Gems 2014).

Many national boxing Federations, such as Poland, supported AIBA's proposal for female boxers' uniforms. The material exhibits how one of the national coaches in the Polish boxing federation voiced their opinion on outfits for female boxers:

> By wearing skirts, in my opinion, it gives a good impression, a womanly impression…Wearing shorts is not a good way for female boxers to dress. [Creighton 2011]

Here, it is important to take into account that women's possibilities for participation in sport vary greatly according to culture, religion, and country of residence (Pfister 2010). Historically, boxing has been considered as a highly masculine sport (Wacquant 2004; van Ingen and Kovacs 2012), and in many cultures and countries, participation in sport, and particularly in boxing, is still strongly linked with men and masculinity. Keeping this in mind, I find it is surprising that this debate on women's competition outfits in boxing, which I here consider as a gender-marking strategy, was a prevailing discussion within large international boxing organizations.

Counter-Discourse? The Right to Be Called Boxers, Not Female Boxers

The data material implies that during the discussion on women's outfits in 2011 and 2012 some counter-discourses surfaced. Among these, an online petition on change.org, where more than 45,000 individuals signed, petitioning AIBA to reverse its recommendation that female boxers should be required to wear skirts during the London 2012 Olympic Games. National boxing Federations worldwide appeared to be divided over AIBA's new proposition concerning female boxers' outfits. The online texts analyzed here suggest that several renowned coaches and athletes from different nations voiced their disagreement with AIBA on the proposed outfits for female boxers. One of the texts depicts how Britain's head coach argued that women competing in the Olympic Games had earned their right to be treated equally with male boxers:

> They are boxers and they want to wear a normal boxing kit. They have earned the right to be boxers and they want to go as boxers, not female boxers. [Creighton 2011]

Although this quotation from the material clearly is a statement for increased gender equality in boxing, it could also be said to convey gendered power relations in international boxing. As Foucault (2000) states, power can only exist when exercised in relations between people. Stating that female boxers at high international sporting level have earned the right to be treated as "boxers," and not simply be branded as "female boxers" is here interpreted as an example of the status of superiority that men and men's boxing have in relation to women and women's boxing internationally (Bourdieu 2000; de Beauvoir 2000).

Several female boxers expressed their concern with AIBA's proposition regarding outfits for women. In one of the texts, a female boxer voiced her concern:

> If female boxers are forced to wear feminine apparel, then this will create more problems in gyms. [Rawi 2012]

As shown by scholars such as Lafferty and McKay (2004) and Wacquant (1992; 1995; 2004; 2005), sexism and discrimination have previously been, and still are, a widespread problem in boxing gyms. By attempting to mark female boxers as feminine through the use of some special outfits, AIBA could contribute to further discrimination against female boxers on a global scale. Discrimination of women in boxing exemplifies how power relations between men and women in boxing are visible in its effects (Foucault 2000; Cole, Giardina, and Andrews 2004). AIBA's proposition for a uniform worn only by female boxers can here be understood as an attempt to ensure that female boxers remain feminine in a hyper-masculine sporting environment. AIBA is not, however, the first sport organization to attempt to ensure that female athletes wear outfits that reinforce traditional gender norms and notions. In volleyball, FIVB introduced regulations requiring women to wear smaller uniforms for both indoor and beach volleyball on the basis that this would increase popularity in fans and sponsors (van Ingen and Kovacs 2012; von der Lippe 2013). These two events in volleyball and boxing are similar in regard to how gender is understood and socially constructed. Both cases imply that sports clothing, used as a gender-marking strategy, can contribute to distinguish male and female athletes to serve an external goal (e.g., increased income through sponsors or for the sake of fans and spectators).

A text from the study's material contains an official announcement from AIBA, which stated that: *due to massive pressure from the general public, female boxers would be able to choose between wearing a skirt or shorts in the ring.* National boxing Federations can, however, still require their female athletes to wear skirts in competitions. This has, among other nations, been practiced by Poland and Romania.

Women's Boxing in the Rio 2016 Olympic Games

Before the Olympic Games in 2012, AIBA announced that the organization worked towards increasing the number of weight categories for women's boxing in the Rio 2016 Olympic Games. The request to increase the number of women's weight categories, and thereby the number of female participants, was denied by IOC, meaning that during the Rio 2016 Olympic Games only 36 female boxers will be able to participate (12 in each weight category). This is a relatively small number of athletes compared to the men's ten weight categories, which will include 250 boxers. As a response to why IOC would not

increase the number of women's weight categories, IOC shortly stated:

> The IOC Executive Board decided that to control the size and cost of the Olympic Games, any changes requested by the International Federations for the 2016 Olympic Games should, in principle, not result in a higher number of athletes or increased number of medals. [AIBA 2013]

This decision by IOC meant that in order for there to be more weight categories for women's boxing in Rio 2016, AIBA would have to reduce the number of weight categories for men's boxing. The sample of texts in this study indicates that the possibility of reducing the number of men's weight categories in order to increase the number of female boxers and thereby promote gender equality in international boxing was not a topic of discussion within AIBA or IOC. In accordance with Foucault's (1978; 2000) perspective on modern power, this is interpreted as an example of how the relation of power between men and women is visibly exercised in international boxing (Cole, Giardina, and Andrews 2004). One of the texts in the material contains a comment on this topic from a prominent Norwegian boxer:

> My impression was that IOC wanted to increase the number of weight categories for Rio 2016. But, the men in power positions do not care about women's boxing, it's men's boxing they are interested in. [Verdens Gang 2013; trans. from Norwegian—ABT]

This quote from the material illustrates how men's monopoly on power positions in international boxing affects women's boxing. These findings are in accordance with the results from previous studies on gender and power in boxing (e.g., Halbert 1997; De Garis 2000). Furthermore, it demonstrates how women's boxing is seen as relational to men's boxing, and devalued as "less important" (Bourdieu 2000; de Beauvoir 2000).

In the next part of the paper, I will explore how the relations of power between men and women in boxing, as demonstrated in the previous part of the paper through the analysis of the process of including women's boxing in the Olympic Games, can have significant implications for female boxers internationally. Here, I will use the case of AIBA's recent provisional suspension of the NBF as a case (AIBA 2014c; Norges Bokseforbund 2014).

AIBA's Recent Changes in Technical Rules: The Case of the Provisional Suspension of the NBF

During 2013 AIBA changed several of its technical rules, meaning they changed the conditions of how international boxing competitions are practiced and carried out. One of the larger and more momentous revisions of the technical rules was related to the head guard. With the incorporation of the new rules, male boxers over the age of 19 would compete without a head guard (AIBA 2014a). AIBA's medical commission ruled that—based on the results of a recent study (Bianco et al. 2012)—they found that the head guard offered little protection from injuries. In this specific study, Bianco and colleagues (2012) reviewed results from close to 30,000 bouts in amateur boxing during the last 59 years. One of the central findings in this study was that there is little evidence demonstrating that boxing head guards reduce the impact of force to the boxer's head (Bianco et al. 2012):

> It is not clear if removing head guards would make any difference…It will be important to monitor this change, not only to see if the number of KO and RSCH increases, but also to see if the number of RSCI increases due to cuts. [p. 4]

From these conclusions it is unclear whether the head guard provides any protection for boxers. The analysis of the material implies that based on these results AIBA reasoned that the removal of the head guard for "Elite Men" (male boxers over the age of 19) would result in a decreased number of concussions in boxing (O'Neill 2013).

For Norway and the NBF, this particular change in technical rules had significant consequences and implications. Boxing competitions without head guards were in direct conflict with Norwegian law. In other words, in 2014, it was illegal to compete in boxing without a head guard in Norway. The NBF was left with two choices: 1) defy Norwegian law, risking that athletes and coaches be prosecuted with the maximum penalty of 3 years in prison, or 2) breach AIBA's new rules and risk being suspended from international boxing (Norges Bokseforbund 2013). The board of directors in the NBF has chosen the second option, and held the 2014 National Championship in accordance with Norwegian law, with head guards for male boxers. As a result, AIBA suspended the NBF in March 2014:

> In accordance with Art. 17 of the International Boxing Association (AIBA) Statutes, the AIBA Executive Committee decided on March 26, 2014 to provisionally suspend the Norwegian Boxing Federation due to a serious breach of Art. 6 of the AIBA Statues and Rule 22 of the AOB Competition Rules at the National Championships held from March 6-8, 2014 in Tønsberg. [AIBA 2014c]

Consequences and Implications for Norwegian Female Boxers

Paradoxically, the analysis of the material suggests that the suspension had perhaps the most critical impact on Norwegian female boxers, who had not breached any of AIBA's technical rules during the National Championship in March 2014. One of the implications of the suspension was that Norwegian female boxers were no longer able to compete internationally. Several of the texts in the material suggest that as a boxing nation, Norway had in recent years more success internationally in women's boxing than in men's boxing (Kitel 2003; Norges Bokseforbund 2009; Bryhn 2013).

Seeing how women's boxing in Norway suffered significant drawbacks as a result of the breach of AIBA's technical rules made by male boxers, it arguably illustrates and highlights how the relationship between men and women in boxing also is a relationship of power (Bourdieu 2000; de Beauvoir 2000; Foucault 2000). In October 2014, the provisional suspension of the NBF was lifted by AIBA. I find it surprising that there appears to have been no open discussion or problematizing regarding the apparent gender inequality the suspension caused for Norwegian female boxers. This issue is, in this paper, construed as an indication of how modern power in sport often is gendered and visible in its effects

on female athletes, in this case—female boxers (Foucault 2000; Cole, Giardina, and Andrews 2004).

Concluding Remarks

My aim in this paper has been to investigate what visible constructs of gender and gendered power relations in international boxing have surfaced during the process of the inclusion of women's boxing in the Olympic Games. Further, to explore how the relationship between gender and power can affect female boxers, using the provisional suspension of the NBF as an example. The analysis of the material shows how and in what ways gender and power relations are intertwined in boxing by underlining inequality between men and women in regard to their participation in Olympic boxing.

The effects of these gendered power relations in international boxing show how women's boxing is devalued in comparison to men's boxing. These power relations are visible both in the discourse surrounding the process of including women's boxing in the Olympic Games and within the case of the provisional suspension of the NBF. The findings of this study suggest that dominant discourses concerning women's boxing seem to be closely linked to the exercise of power, where men represent the dominant group exercising power in relation to women and women's boxing (Bourdieu 2000; Foucault 2000).

A relevant issue to raise here is how online discourses are linked to political practices. Do the discourses in the sample of online texts influence the policy of boxing and women's boxing? And to what extent are these online discourses influenced by official and authorized discourses on boxing? The majority of the texts in my sample was retrieved from the official website of AIBA and the NBF. Although some of the texts were retrieved from online media and discussion groups, primarily linked to national newspapers, it is likely that texts from AIBA and the NBF do represent authorized discourses on boxing.

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Pain *Is* the Club: Identity and Membership in the Natural Childbirth Community

Abstract Based upon interview data collected from 50 respondents, this study examines how expectant mothers navigate the divide between natural and non-natural childbirth when faced with the dilemma of using chemical pain management. The vast majority of participants in this study had strong intentions of delivering without any type of chemical pain management, but when faced with intense physical pain and/or coaxing from medical authorities, made the decision to use an epidural. Respondent accounts illustrate that the decision to use an epidural effectively removed them from membership in the "natural childbirth club." In order to better understand this process of group inclusion/exclusion, I draw upon the symbolic interaction frameworks of George Herbert Mead (1934) and Norbert Wiley (1995), paying special attention to their theories of the self. This study concludes that the decision to use chemical pain management in the childbirth process is often done so at the expense of changes in identity with respect to the Generalized Other of the "natural childbirth" community.

Keywords United States; Natural Childbirth; Medicalization; Epidurals; Pitocin; Gender; Club Membership

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Although a variety of social contexts influence childbirth decisions (Fox and Worts 1999; Miller and Shriver 2012), it is well established that childbirth in contemporary Western society is situated within the milieu of medical social control (Oakley 1980). Of particular note is Western medicine's advocacy for drug-induced pain management. Focusing upon how childbirth contexts impact individual identity (Levesque-Lopman 1983; Zadoroznyj 1999), this paper addresses women's unexpected decisions to use chemical pain management in the childbirth process. Below I examine how mothers who used such pain management defined their birth experience as "non-natural" vis-à-vis mothers who delivered their children "naturally," that is, without any chemical pain relief. The "natural/non-natural" dichotomy in childbirth is an extension of childbirth narratives that interrogate the increasing presence of Western medicine in the birthing process. Given the prevalence of this dichotomy in defining the birth experience, it is important to examine the literature addressing both the medicalization and de-medicalization of childbirth.

Childbirth and Pain Management

Childbirth in Western societies is commonly overseen by medical experts yet is still entrenched in many facets of "folk medicine," making childbirth a socially negotiated process (Rothman 1978) between expectant mother, the world of lay wisdom, and the medical establishment. These social negotiations lead to a wide variety of approaches to childbirth (Nelson 1983), falling somewhere upon the "non-medical-medical" continuum. In cases of uncomplicated childbirth, the decision to adopt medically invasive approaches usually involves pain relief. A major theme in accounts of the childbirth process (Norr et al. 1977; Barnes 2011), decisions about pain management depend greatly upon an expectant mother's social network (Sargent and Stark 1989; Dillaway and Brubaker 2006). As childbirth connotes fear of pain and the unknown for expectant mothers (Fisher, Hauck, and Fenwick 2006), pain relief through chemical means has proven to be a crucial part of conventional medicine's hegemony in childbirth practices (Guillemin and Holmstrom 1986; Davis-Floyd 1994; Stockill 2007). For many women, the experience of childbirth is often characterized by the ability to navigate within a brief timeframe the implications of such interventions (Akrich and Pasveer 2004).

One intervention that has attained prominence in American society is spinal anesthesia, commonly known as an "epidural." According to the Centers for Disease Control, approximately two-thirds (61%) of American women who had singleton, vaginally delivered babies received an epidural in 2008 (Osterman and Martin 2011). The wide use of epidurals is a touchstone of modern obstetrics (Arney and Neill 1982), and often serves as the medical intervention that distinguishes "natural" from "non-natural" childbirth.

De-Medicalization and Natural Childbirth

Countering the hegemony of Western practices which seek to medicalize childbirth, or place it within the province of modern medicine and treat childbirth more like an illness than a natural phenomenon, natural childbirth narratives de-medicalize the childbirth process (Nash and Nash 1979; Monto 1997; Brubaker and Dillaway 2009). Embracing a natural childbirth approach involves a willful reappropriation of the birthing process from the dominance of the Western medical model. Although the term "natural" is socially constructed, and by definition, subjective (Westfall and Benoit 2004; Mansfield 2008), it generally denotes childbirth as a process with no chemical pain management. Natural childbirth is also said to be more readily achieved through social support (Morton 2003) and many healthcare organizations adopt flexible approaches to the birthing process, including those that are

non-medical or "naturalistic" (for an example of this, see: Walsh 2006).

De-medicalizing childbirth narratives partially stems from expectant mothers who fear medical intervention (Christiaens, Van de Velde, and Bracke 2011) and embrace social support to achieve a natural delivery of their children. The re-emergence of midwifery, for example, in the childbirth process (even in medical settings, like hospitals), demonstrates an embrace of a de-medicalized approach (Weitz and Sullivan 1986; Allen 2001; Walsh and Kitzinger 2007; Fowler 2009). The combined fear of medical intervention and the expressed need for social support from "birthing experts" like midwives can be seen in the steady increase in "home birthing," indicating a rising skepticism towards strictly medical approaches (Wheeler 1980; Moore 2011).

Given the context of this rising skepticism, this study will examine how expectant mothers navigate this divide between natural and non-natural childbirth when faced with the dilemma of using chemical pain management, usually in the form of an epidural. The majority of participants in this study had strong intentions of delivering without any type of chemical pain management, but when faced with intense physical pain and/or coaxing from medical authorities, made the decision to use an epidural. Respondent accounts illustrate that the decision to use an epidural effectively removed them from membership in the "natural childbirth club." In order to better understand this process of group inclusion/exclusion, I draw upon the symbolic interaction frameworks of George Herbert Mead (1934) and Norbert Wiley (1995), paying special attention to their theories of the self.

Methods and Data

Data for this study were collected from 50 respondents initially recruited through an informal stay-at-home mom's club located in a metropolitan area in the Pacific Northwest. Additional respondents were recruited through "snowball sampling" (Biernacki and Waldorf 1981; Marshall 1996) in which the sample size grew as respondents referred me to potential participants. The respondent profile was mostly comprised of white women, between the ages of 26 and 49. Approximately half of the 50 respondents described themselves as strictly "stay-at-home" moms, whereas the remaining participants had employment outside the home. Several respondents who defined themselves as stay-at-home parents offered a caveat that their employment status was due to their children being quite young at the time of the interview.

Subsequent to pre-testing, I simplified my instrument to an eight question, open-ended interview schedule, which served as a general guide for data collection (see: Appendix). After each participant read and signed my university IRB-approved consent form, I began the interview. Interviews were audio recorded and took on a conversational tone, typifying the principle of dialogue between researcher and participant (see: Fontana and Frey 2000). Each interview took, on average, sixty minutes to complete, which translated to roughly fifty hours of recordings that were later transcribed to provide the raw data for analysis. To avoid "waivering calibrations" (Webb at al. 1966:22) in data collection, I carefully read each interview transcript and followed up with respondents regarding statements that were unclear or inaudible during the transcription process.

Once interviews were transcribed and clarifications made with respondents, I applied a grounded theory coding scheme (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Glaser 1978; Strauss and Corbin 1990) to the data set. I began by indiscriminately reading each interview transcript while writing and audio recording analytical notes based upon my preliminary findings. This culminated with an open coding (Glaser 1978:55) scheme to identify some of the salient themes in the raw data. These codes were applied to the interview transcripts, which were then categorized for the most prevalent themes in the data set. I then began selective coding (Glaser 1978:61), in which I placed specific analytical focus upon the most emergent themes in the data set. As my analysis of the raw data became more precise, I focused upon two interconnected themes which form the backbone of this paper. The first concerns the extent to which the definition of natural childbirth constitutes a form of de-medicalization of the childbirth process. The second theme focuses upon the experience of pain in the childbirth process as a rite of passage into the community of women who delivered children naturally. Although these two themes do not constitute a "theory unto themselves" in the classic sense of grounded theory, I feel that this approach in coding the qualitative data provided important clarity for the application of the symbolic interaction theories of George Herbert Mead (1934) and Norbert Wiley (1995). Stated differently, I use the analytical approaches in grounded theory to distill major themes from the data and expand upon an already established body of theory.

Findings and Analysis

Data analysis revealed two interrelated themes. The first concerns a strong de-medicalizing sentiment and a concomitant subscription to natural childbirth. The second concerns the specific role that pain and pain management play in distinguishing between natural and non-natural childbirth. Both of these types of accounts shape the knowledge, expectations, and practices of childbirth and provide a backdrop to the experiences of most women in this study. It is important to situate the themes from the data within a broader body of theory in sociology. Two theorists that are indispensable in this conversation are George Herbert Mead (1934) and Norbert Wiley (1995).

A major departure from Freudian understandings of personality that postulate identity as a result of innate processes, Mead's *Mind, Self, and Society* (1934), emphasizes identity as a reciprocating symbolic process between the self and greater social environment. For Mead (1934), the role of language is crucial in shaping who we are and typified by his concept of the "I" (the creative, spontaneous part of self) and the "Me" (the socially conscious part of self). As foundational concepts in symbolic interaction, the "I" denotes social dynamism and individual creativity, whereas the "Me" illustrates social stability. The "Me" is the linguistic manifestation of the "Generalized Other," or greater community

by which an individual evaluates his/her social role. According to Mead, the relationship between I and Me is a constantly evolving social process. Importantly, the Generalized Other within the context of this study denotes the greater community of women who have avoided invasive medical intervention in the delivery of their children and collectively identify as having birthed their children naturally.

Norbert Wiley's *The Semiotic Self* (1995) extends Mead's conversation in a very important way by adding the concept of the "You" to the process of self. According to Wiley (1995), the process of self is not dialogical in the sense that "I" and "Me" have an ongoing, insulated, symbolic relationship, but is instead "trialogical." In the sense that the "Me" is socially conscious, it is also socially reflective, temporally situated in past social experiences. As the source of creativity and social change, the "I" represents the present self. Finally, the "You" demonstrates a projected future self. The trialogue is a three-way conversation, in which the I (present self) and the You (future self) converse with each other about the Me (past self). My application of Wiley's work is particularly relevant when I discuss how medical agents often appropriate the discourse of the natural childbirth community in an effort to console women who chose chemical pain management despite their initial intentions to avoid such medical intervention.

The De-Medicalizing Self

Participants in this study overwhelmingly agreed that a natural delivery was optimal (even for the mothers in the sample who never seriously considered natural childbirth), but also prepared for the necessity of medical intervention in the event of complications. Such sentiment demonstrates how the availability of information to expectant mothers has shifted cultural perceptions of childbirth. Indeed, the medicalization of childbirth has given rise to concomitant alternative discourses supporting the practice of natural childbirth. Such alternative viewpoints presented in books such as *Birthing From Within* (England and Horowitz 1998) and the documentary film *The Business of Being Born* (Epstein [director] 2008) assert themselves vis-à-vis the perceived insensitivity and physiological harm caused by unnecessary medical intervention in the childbirth process. Wont to offer theories on the way babies should be born, these sources of information and those who espouse their benefits shape a cultural narrative of the childbirth experience and form the landscape of childbirth expectations.

For mothers who defined themselves as having delivered children naturally, information from these sources galvanized them against the medical establishment. As one respondent who had a home birth states:

> I definitely prepared by reading a lot, learning about other birth experiences, and I think really being committed to the self-belief that I can do this because millions of women have done it, and the desire to be strong and to feel proud of myself and strong that I did it…we [she and her partner] did attend a workshop that was based upon this book that I read, called *Birthing From Within*, where…there are pain management techniques that are…based in sort of a mind over matter type of idea. [Respondent #6]

Based upon the knowledge she gained from studying proper techniques for natural childbirth, she discusses the need to separate oneself from a medical environment:

> …at the hospital it's common for them to kind of push the epidural, they want you to have the epidural because they want you in the bed and they want you just to relax and not be screaming, so that's a common thing, so when you have a lot of pressure from the outside, "Maybe it's time for that epidural now, sweetie," and you're in a lot of pain and it's getting really bad, sometimes it's easy to just, "Okay, fine, give it to me," and you can kind of give in to that pressure and because, like I said, the pain can be so intense that it'd be hard to say "No" when it's right there, somebody's got it right in front of you, "I can give you this magic injection and everything will go away," and right in the moment I think that…[it] is hard to resist. [Respondent #6]

The above illustrates the belief that administering an epidural is not only for pain relief, but also for compliance and the maintenance of a calm hospital atmosphere. Reflecting a common facet of the natural birth narrative, several participants in the study explain how their reticence to deliver at a hospital is not based upon aesthetic reasons, but rather because of the cascading effect of medical intervention:

> …hospitals are for sick people and hospitals are riddled with interventions and then one intervention leads to another intervention...They usually want the easy way out which can get you the results quick. And I really didn't want people to tell me what to do…being stuck in a…hospital. [Respondent #13]

Another respondent describes this cascading effect with respect to the increased probability of a cesarean section:

> …my birth plan was really detailed and I think my biggest fear about giving birth was this image of the big bad hospital taking over…I was like no episiotomy, no this. I took a sample of one of natural books I was reading and basically…there's just a lot of talk about. The Cascade Effect: you do one intervention and then you have like ten follow, you know?…I think my biggest fear was that they were going to take power out of hands, and I was going to end up with a cesarean, because I hear that one in four births [it is actually one in three, approximately 32%—author's note] in America are cesarean. So I was determined that it was going to be natural. [Respondent #19]

Due to extenuating circumstances, a few respondents who were educated in the natural childbirth process and wished to deliver at home were unable to do so because of insurance reasons. One respondent who delivered without any medications or surgical procedure describes her consumption of information, and the compromise she made between her desire for home birth and the necessity of a hospital setting:

> …I read lots and lots of books and talked to lots of people. In that process, I decided that, and I knew enough about myself, that environment was really important…Originally, I had wanted a home birth. I wanted to do a water birth, but that wasn't an option through my insurance, so I decided to have a hospital birth, but found a nurse midwife that would deliver

> in a hospital. So I felt like that was kind of my compromise. I could still have a more of a holistic natural birth process, but in a hospital setting. [Respondent #42]

In order to protect herself against possible pressure to take medication in the hospital environment, she describes the completion of her birth plan once labor begun:

> Then I remember that I went into labor…I started to feel…this intense nesting feeling because the car seat still hadn't been installed and my birth plan hadn't been written. I told [partner's name], I said, "Okay, you have to go out to the car and install the car seat right now. I'm going to the coffee shop and I'm going to finish writing the birth plan and print it out. I want everything ready to go." [Respondent #42]

The perceived correctness of natural childbirth is partially based upon the belief that invasive medical intervention in the childbirth process poses increased risk to both mother and child. The use of an epidural (often through lidocaine injected into the spinal column), or other forms of intravenous pain management (Stadol, Demerol, and so forth) are seen as potentially toxic, even if the specific effects of such drugs are not explicitly understood. For example, in defining natural childbirth, one respondent states:

> It meant that I did not want to use any drugs because of how they affect the baby. And actually, mostly—mostly because it starts nursing off badly. And I really felt that nursing was going to be a real important part of that, and if babies don't latch on immediately because they are lethargic or—that's a strong word, but, you know, not as alert as they may be…it can start nursing off on a bad step. So that was my big concern. [Respondent #19]

The above accounts illustrate that the childbirth process, which is almost entirely medicalized in Western society, is characterized by a tremendous power asymmetry between medical experts that oversee childbirth and the mother-to-be under their care. Hence, the push towards de-medicalization is as much a decision about the health of mother and child as it is an expression of the desire to connect to a Generalized Other that has reclaimed a significant portion of the childbirth process from Western medicine. This Generalized Other is an internalized composite of texts, documentaries, and the directly conveyed experiences of family and friends. The presence of this Generalized Other runs directly counter to the asymmetry in power between modern medicine and the natural childbirth community, manifested in a variety of ways—through official clothing, credentials, medical jargon, and so forth—but perhaps what is most significant is the way that experts articulate medically necessary interventions.

A Self That Embraces Pain

In addition to the perceived risks of physiological harm through medical intervention, the data indicate that the ethic surrounding natural childbirth is cultivated by social relationships. Several respondents spoke about friends, parents, or other family members who had delivered their children naturally, never used chemical pain management, and articulated a "magical" experience with the process. Without question, most respondents felt a degree of social pressure to share in this experience. Medical intervention, in this sense, first, symbolizes social exclusion from those who had never experienced such intervention in their own deliveries and, second, one's inability to withstand physical pain.

Most women in this sample equated natural childbirth with eschewing chemical pain management. However, the definition of natural childbirth does not exclude all types of medical intervention in all cases. For example, some respondents argue that Pitocin—a drug used to intensify contractions and speed up the labor process—can be administered and still allow a "natural" birth. This brings up important questions about the ontology of natural childbirth and connection to the Generalized Other of those who are a bona fide part of the natural childbirth community. For example, what specific components of the birth experience (irrespective of medical intervention) are necessary conditions to define it as natural and therefore, maintain the desired identification with this Generalized Other? As the data point out, the use of medical interventions that intensify pain does not necessarily serve to prevent identification with the natural childbirth community.

The below excerpt from a respondent who went through thirty hours of labor before finally taking an epidural sheds some light on this question. In this conversation, she describes how the experience of physical pain, perhaps more than a lack of medical intervention, allows one to have membership in the natural childbirth "club":

> **Interviewer:** Talk a little bit about that club.
> **Respondent #28:** I think it is a little bit of a club because, well, [friend's name], she had the same, completely naturally with no drugs at all…And it's so intense that I think you have to have experienced it to really relate with somebody else who's done it. Because I can relate with the labor pains, but I certainly can't relate with the actual delivery part of it.

Our conversation then turns to her aunt who did not have an epidural, but used Pitocin for all three of her deliveries:

> **I:** Have you had any…conversations with people where even though it wasn't explicitly stated you're not a member of the club, where you felt as though you weren't…given full membership?
> **R #28:** …Well, actually, yeah, probably my aunt. My aunt…is kind of like my mom. She was there [at the birth] and…for all three of her babies, she had had Pitocin...
> **I:** …So you can use Pitocin and still be in that club?
> **R #28:** Right. Yeah…I think…the pain *is* the club part.
> **I:** What does that mean?...let's talk a little bit about why that pain would give someone membership.
> **R #28:** I think because it is so intense…I dated a guy who was an Army Ranger…And the rangers have to go through ranger school, which is like this intense, you know, sleep deprivation and like just grueling, I don't know how long that was, but it separates them from the regular Army like having gone through that kind of exhaustion and those sorts of things. I think as a short experience, they feel morally because of that, that they've done that. And, I guess that's maybe what I can compare it to.

> **I:** …in this sense, we can say the Pitocin actually adds to the pain?
> **R #28:** Yeah…But, they didn't tell me that before they started me on the Pitocin, but everyone who has had it said, "Oh, yeah, the labor is a lot worse with the Pitocin, at least the contractions part of it."

Another respondent who identified as delivering her son naturally offers a similar viewpoint, describing her use of Pitocin in the delivery of her son—a decision that did not exclude her from membership in the natural childbirth club:

> …I was terrified about having Pitocin because I heard: "Oh, if you have Pitocin, then you're guaranteed you'll have to have the epidural, you know, Pitocin is so painful." Twenty hours…into it nothing was progressing because my uterus was exhausted and they were like, "We'd like to give you a little Pitocin," and I was just terrified, but my older sister was right there and convinced me that a little bit would be okay because she had Pitocin, and I agreed, and I'm really thankful 'cause they did, they just gave me a little bit. It was just a kick-start. [Respondent #19]

For many respondents, to be included or excluded from the club defines, in part, the importance of the childbirth experience. Although the interview accounts illustrate that having a healthy baby trumps all other outcomes, it is clear that in many cases succumbing to medical intervention produces feelings of failure and social isolation. Describing the delivery of her children (in which she used an epidural) vis-à-vis the experience of her relatives, one respondent explains:

> **R #1:** Well, I'll admit with the epidural I felt a little bit like I was cheating because it was so virtually pain free, and so I was surprised by that. I expected there still to be a fair amount of pain once I chose the epidural, and so, I mean, I felt like I was barely participating in the delivery of both babies. Like I was there and trying to follow directions on what I should be doing, but honestly just felt like, "Am I doing it?"
> **I:** It's interesting that you would use the word "cheating"…
> **R #1:** Yes…my mom didn't have an epidural for any of her babies [respondent's mother had 10 children—author's note], so I just felt like I wasn't fully experiencing what I should be as part of bringing a child into the world should include all of these certain bullet points…It just seemed like, a lot of the people that I respect, most who became moms before I did, including my mom, aunties, and just other older women in my life. It just seemed like they all had this similar experience and maybe…it just seemed like maybe I was skipping a step.

The above explains the experience of natural childbirth along generational lines. "Skipping a step" denotes a generation gap and a detachment from the Generalized Other of the natural childbirth community. Further, this respondent, like others in the sample, describes her epidural experience as one that separates her from the essence of the birth experience—"barely participating" in her words. This theme repeatedly emerges from the data. Because an epidural numbs the body from the waist down, therefore removing a significant amount, if not all, of the pain of childbirth, it is the Rubicon which precludes "club" membership.

In other instances, exclusion from the club occurs as a result of succumbing to clinician pressure. The below excerpt further articulates this sense of disappointment and separation in the face of unexpectedly intense pain and a physician who continuously badgered her to take an epidural. Ultimately conceding to having the epidural, she explains her feelings afterwards:

> **I:** Can you describe a little bit of…your feelings when you had made the decision to…follow what the doctor had suggested?
> **R #3:** Complete disappointment, in myself, not understanding why I couldn't do it. Not realizing that it maybe had nothing to do with me physically, or it had everything to do with me physically, and nothing to do with me as a person *per se*. I had good intentions, blah, blah, blah, but for whatever reason physically, I couldn't do it. But, it was still a big let-down. I still wish I could have had that experience…I have seen natural childbirths and just wanted to have that feeling.

Membership in the club is certainly not free. As these and other examples from the data illustrate, respondents describe the childbirth process as an extraordinary confrontation with physical pain. Indeed, several respondents (either through having gone through childbirth previously or using other sources of information) explain childbirth as the most painful experience a person can ever encounter. Yet, in reflection upon their childbirth experience, most women in this sample described themselves as "up to the task" prior to the point of labor:

> I guess because, again in looking back at it, I think it was that I had always thought of myself as a strong woman, always been very athletic, always been very independent, I'm goal-oriented and I usually achieve those goals, so to have had a goal for natural childbirth and to not achieve that I felt like a failure. It also felt like I was weak, I couldn't do it. There are certain friends in our community that are very much into just more natural ways of doing things…I was fearful of their perception of me and my inability to do that without drugs. [Respondent #15]

The above excerpt illustrates how the feeling of failure correlates with belief in self efficacy. As this respondent explains, natural childbirth is a goal not only for personal achievement, but also to fit in better with her community.

Continuing with this theme, respondents almost uniformly discussed how the decision to take or not take an epidural was based upon the perceived limitations of their own bodies. If a mother-to-be can withstand the pain of childbirth, she will deliver naturally, but if the pain proves to be too great, she may opt to use an epidural. Sometimes the blinding and unexpected intensity of labor pain is simply too great a burden. One respondent who was steadfast in her expectations for a natural delivery, but chose to use an epidural at the onset of heavy labor articulated the experience this way:

> Oh, it just felt like somebody was just tearing your insides out. I mean, it was just ripping on things, you know your sensitivity of your body, just each part, just really hurt. [Respondent #43]

Given the vulnerability of women in the childbirth process, and the intense desire for the delivery of

a healthy baby above all other outcomes, respondents' accounts repeatedly illustrate how a woman determined to deliver a baby naturally "gives in" to the wishes of medical practitioners.

Take the following statement from a respondent who was particularly adamant about delivering her child without the use of any medication:

> …I think that *really* [read: without drugs] giving birth can be a great touchstone for a woman's experience. [respondent #19]

This clear expression of belief that childbirth can be a defining moment for a woman's identity leads with the "I" or present self. The "I" sees the social benefit of the "pain club," or the Generalized Other, and wants membership in it. It is also known that this conviction is influenced by other social factors—in this case, family members who delivered children without medication. Hence, as with any definitive "I" statement, there is the spectre of "Me," illustrating the symbolic internalization of the Generalized Other. Given the conviction of this respondent, her support from family members who had delivered children naturally, and the absence of any medical emergency, it would not be unreasonable to expect that this respondent would deliver her child without medication and achieve that "great touchstone." However, her account continues:

> …I had asked them deliberately not to ask me if I wanted any drugs...I was asked eleven times if I wanted drugs during that period of time. Crazy. I mean, that's a lot. And it just—it tears away at your self confidence and your ability to deal with this. [Respondent #19]

Ultimately, and likely as a result of succumbing to this pressure, this respondent did use an epidural approximately an hour-and-a-half before delivering her child. Although the baby was in no distress, the constant offering of pain relief through medication ultimately wore down her conviction about delivering naturally:

> …she kept saying…you're not a bad mom if you do this. It was really just somebody pushing constantly about it. [Respondent #19]

Natural Childbirth Identity and the Consolation Prize

The previous excerpt is an example of how medical experts adopt the role of the Generalized Other and anticipate what a mother-to-be would think of herself should she use the epidural. In Wiley's (1995) terms, they anticipate the "You" of this respondent. In assuming that this respondent would see herself as a bad mother, medical practitioners attempt to establish themselves as credible members of the Generalized Other.

The mode of entry into the realm of credibility, and hence, a part of the Generalized Other that can effectively anticipate the "You" is largely contingent upon the legitimacy of Western medicine. As several respondents point out, many of their anxieties surrounding the childbirth process are already anticipated by the medical staff caring for these mothers-to-be.

Following the fact that there is no canonized definition of natural childbirth, a small number of respondents who used an epidural explained how they experienced enough physical pain and exhaustion to warrant at least partial membership in the natural childbirth club. A respondent who delivered twins explains how she had a natural delivery because her labor was so protracted that her epidural had effectively worn off:

> …also for the second delivery I also had an epidural. I was in hard labor just right off the bat. There was no lead up, too, it was just all of a sudden hard back labor hit. So I was in pain several hours before we actually even went into the hospital. So then they had to stop, they tried to stop my labor. That was several days worth of being in the hospital. So they gave me the epidural so that I would be comfortable for those couple days. Turns out when I actually gave birth to the twins I'd had the epidural for a day and a half and it was taking in some places, but not in the place where it really could have done the most work. That I definitely feel that one was, even though I had an epidural, the twins were a natural birth because I can tell night and day between the two different births. The twins were much, much smaller than my first. I kind of feel like I've had both worlds, even though technically I had an epidural the second time around. [Respondent #18]

Another respondent reflects upon two contradictory interpretations from the nursing staff, where one nurse states that the delivery was not natural, whereas the other, in understanding that the epidural had worn off hours before the actual birth, offers an interpretation that allows inclusion into the natural childbirth club:

> The doctor got straight to work on sewing up the large tears inside and out. When she left, she mentioned that she wouldn't be in this business if every birth was that intense. The nurse who was helping with the clean up heard me say, "Well, I wasn't able to deliver naturally after all." I felt like a failure, but with the trauma of the birth and how close we were to having an emergency c-section, I was relieved to have a healthy baby. I knew that my friends who had delivered with no drugs would be asking if I had opted for an epidural. The fact of the matter was that I never had more doses of the epidural drugs and it had worn off hours before the actual birth. The nurse rubbed my arm and said, "Actually, honey, you had your natural birth!" [Respondent #50]

It is important to note that the validation of a natural delivery is generally provided by medical practitioners. As respondents in my sample repeatedly state, they have made their expectations of natural childbirth apparent to medical staff that oversees the delivery of their children, such a redefinition of the childbirth situation is offered as a type of consolation. There is, without doubt, significant asymmetry here, not only with respect to physical control over the body, but also with respect to the way that medical practitioners leverage medical discourses. This is not to imply that medical practitioners automatically assume that expectant mothers who are set on natural childbirth are going to feel a sense of despair and separation should their natural childbirth expectations not pan out, but rather, this asymmetry is a clear indication of the socialization of medical practitioners. After all, that which is a defining life experience for an expectant mother is "all in a day's work" for a medical practitioner. Such a stark contrast between the subjective experience of expectant mothers and the professional obligations of those

who work in Western medicine illustrates, in part, why expectant mothers experience such a tremendous amount of pressure to embrace medical interventions when they enter a hospital setting.

Given this analysis, let me return to a previous excerpt (recall Respondent #19's "touchstone" comment), and add hypothetical text that illustrates the social pressure experienced in the hospital:

> …I think that naturally giving birth can be a great touchstone for a woman's experience, *but will this be possible for me*?

This addendum to the above statement illustrates a tearing away of self-confidence, and the erosion of belief in one's ability to deal with the pain of childbirth. The "Me" component of this statement included here illustrates the presence of a new Generalized Other influencing this reflective part of self. As the achievement of an ideal, natural delivery symbolizes a cherished entrance into the natural childbirth club, and the waning possibility of natural delivery has dramatic implications for self-concept. The italicized part of this hypothetical question pits an expectant mother against her own limits of pain endurance. The experience of pain without chemical intervention is a gatekeeper evidenced by reflection upon the Generalized Other. In this sense, the Generalized Other includes people who are a part of the natural childbirth club, but as medical intervention intensifies, the Generalized Other may also include medical practitioners who offer an "easier, softer way" to deliver children. Operating in this capacity, medical practitioners manipulate the "You" in an emotionally favorable way.

Conclusion

I hope that the accounts presented in the study offer some insight into the social psychological processes of inclusion in, or exclusion from, the natural childbirth club. As many of these accounts illustrate, natural childbirth, although an ideal situation for most expectant mothers in this sample, is a process that requires significant social navigation. For instance, mothers who are determined to deliver naturally repeatedly express the need for a willful "push-back" against medical social actors who offer the promise of pain relief, and a more "medically safe" childbirth experience. Further, despite being armed with the knowledge that medical practitioners will likely pressure expectant mothers into medical interventions such as the use of Pitocin, epidurals, and so forth, many respondents in this sample explain that such social pressures, when coupled with the unexpected turmoil of childbirth, are often too daunting a barrier into the natural childbirth club. In these cases, exclusion from this club may be a troubling part of a mother's birth story.

This stark dichotomy between expectant mothers and the medical establishment does not tell all of the story when it comes to membership into the natural childbirth club. For women who experienced unanticipated pain, and opted for an epidural, respondents' accounts demonstrate a mutually understood exclusion from the natural childbirth club. However, for women who used an epidural that had worn off prior to delivery, delivered vaginally, and with significant pain, the accounts demonstrate the flexibility of membership. The same also goes for the use of Pitocin which, as at least one respondent mentions, intensifies the pain of delivery and therefore still allows natural childbirth club membership. In this sense, medical intervention is a necessary, but not sufficient condition to exclude one from the natural childbirth club.

Although it is clear that the childbirth stories in this sample which involve the use of an epidural exclude a respondent from membership in the natural childbirth club, there remains a significant amount of flexibility to the standards of club membership. Anticipating the emotional impact of succumbing to medical interventions such as epidurals, medical practitioners, who may know very little about the biography of an expectant mother, may mitigate the gatekeeping that excludes mothers who use such medical intervention. This leads to some very interesting questions for further research: Is the anticipation of a mother's expectations on behalf of medical practitioners a natural outcropping of the professional medical environment? Or, is this part of a discursive strategy that solidifies the hegemony of modern medicine in the childbirth process? Future research that focuses upon the way that medical actors anticipate and respond to the social network of expectant mothers may shed some light upon these important questions.

On a final note, it is important to add that, although this research sheds light upon some important questions, the study also has limitations, primarily in the profile and size of the sample itself. As the bulk of women who participated in the study were white and largely middle-class, it would be inappropriate to extrapolate these findings beyond the nuances of the sample. This is a great place, I believe, to encourage further research in this area, perhaps through the cultivation of larger and more diverse respondent samples.

Appendix: Interview Schedule

1. Can you generally describe for me some of your experiences in the prenatal and delivery phases of your pregnancy?

2. Overall, can you describe the role that medical practitioners played in your prenatal care, as well as the delivery of your baby?

3. Can you describe for me any point during the prenatal and delivery process where you felt that medical practitioners were overbearing, or discounted your opinions? Any specific examples?

4. Can you describe for me any point during the prenatal and delivery process where you felt that medical practitioners were accommodating and clearly listening to your individual needs? Any specific examples?

5. Can you describe for me some of the moments leading up to the birth of your child? For example, what specific changes had occurred that led you to believe that the moment to deliver the baby had arrived?

6. (Relating to Question #5) Can you describe for me how the people around you responded to these particular changes? For example, your birth partner, family, friends, physician, or other significant people?

7. Could you describe for me any moments through the delivery process in which the expectations you had of the experience of delivering your child were different from what was actually happening during the delivery? In other words, did you experience a disconnect between what you expected to experience versus what you actually experienced?

8. Did you take any medications prior to and during the delivery process? If so, can you describe some of the circumstances that led to your taking of the medications?

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In Search of Popularity: Non-Conforming Reputations of Hispanic Adolescent Graffiti Writers

Abstract Although the literature on graffiti writers continues to expand, there is a paucity of studies on Hispanic adolescent writers in the U.S., especially with a focus on assimilation. Using the qualitative analyses of in-depth interviews with Hispanic adolescent writers, this study attempts to fill in the gaps in our understanding of whether and how ethnologies of writers differ with respect to their family-, school-, and peer-related experiences. A key feature of the study is comparison of two crews (groups) of Hispanic adolescent writers who differ with respect to their immigrant generational status. Above all, this paper seeks an understanding of the purpose behind the graffiti-writing behavior. The findings of this study underscore the importance of boundary-testing, status- and risk-seeking in the lives of adolescent writers who, through the engagement in graffiti-writing, attempt to establish a non-conforming reputation among one's peers.

Keywords Hispanic Graffiti Writers; Adolescence; Establishing Reputation; Assimilation; Immigrant Generational Status

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Adolescence is characterized by an increasing role of peers and a burgeoning sense of self (Coleman 1961; Kreager 2007; McElhaney, Antonishak, and Allen 2008). The former often manifests itself through questioning the conventional normative system imposed by the adults (Coleman 1961; Kreager 2007; Carroll et al. 2009). The desire to establish a status among one's peers, which is prevalent in the lives of most adolescents, is often accompanied by engagement in risk-taking, boundary-testing, and rule-breaking activities (France 2000; Kreager 2007; Carroll et al. 2009). While many young people undoubtedly engage in risk-taking activities during their teen years, they largely remain productively involved in the mainstream youth culture. Only a few become estranged from the mainstream. These youths are subjects of the present study.

The focus of this project is on a particular risk-taking activity—graffiti-writing. The study is based on ethnographical fieldwork the author carried out with two groups of Hispanic adolescent graffiti writers in Hidalgo County, one of the southernmost counties of Texas located on the U.S.-Mexico border. In-depth qualitative interviews with adolescents/young adults were analyzed using NVivo software. The current article attempts to bridge the lacunae in the existing research on graffiti writers by: (1) focusing on adolescence as a transitional period associated with increased self-awareness, identity development, and rebelliousness; (2) investigating the Hispanic adolescent writers' lives in the context of different socialization domains—family, school, and peer influences; and (3) examining the importance of immigrant generational status as an underlying factor of involvement in graffiti-writing as a high-risk activity. The study incorporates valuable insights from research on delinquency and assimilation of Hispanic adolescents (Buriel, Calzada, and Vasquez 1982; Sommers, Fagan, and Baskin 1993; Vega et al. 1993; McQueen, Getz, and Bray 2003), as well as more current literature on adolescent graffiti writers (Taylor, Houghton, and Bednall 2010; Valle and Weiss 2010; Taylor 2012; Taylor, Marais, and Cottman 2012). In this study, gender and ethnicity are controlled because all participants are male and Hispanic. Important themes that emerged from the qualitative analysis of participants' interviews include isolation, boredom, despise of the adults controlling their lives, bullying, student fights, and others.

Theoretical Background

Two literatures inform the current study. The first is on adolescent delinquency and assimilation.[1] There are a few studies that have been dedicated to the assimilation effects on delinquency of Hispanic youth in the United States: Mexican-American (Buriel et al. 1982; Samaniego and Gonzales 1999; McQueen et al. 2003), Puerto Rican (Sommers et al. 1993), and Cuban-American (Vega et al. 1993) adolescents. All this research does not focus on graffiti-writing as a specific type of delinquent behavior, is based on the analyses of quantitative data, and, for the most part, has been published two decades ago. Of more direct relevance to this study is an article of Buriel and colleagues (1982) with which I share a common focus on Mexican-Americans. The argument advanced by Buriel and colleagues (1982) is that embeddedness in traditional Mexican-American culture and the psychological advantages associated with it discourage juvenile delinquency. The findings generally confirm to the authors' expectations and show that the higher generations of Mexican-Americans are more prone to juvenile delinquency than the more recent generations of their co-ethnics. A noteworthy methodological feature of Buriel and colleagues' (1982) research, a feature shared with the present study,

[1] Adolescent delinquency is typically defined as activities that place youth at risk for adjudication, that is, violating the juvenile code (Haynie 2001). Most studies examined below use a general rather than offense-specific measure of delinquency.

is the use of generational status as the measure of assimilation. It is important to note that this methodological innovation allows placing Buriel and colleagues (1982) within a larger paradigm of classical assimilation research (e.g., Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Bean and Stevens 2003).

Similar methodological approaches have been advanced by studies rooted in segmented assimilation theory, perhaps the dominant theoretical development in the field of immigrant incorporation today (Zhou 1997; Hirschman 2001; Portes and Rumbaut 2001). In brief, the theory contends for divergent pathways of assimilation that is largely dependent on the context of reception—the way the established residents of the host society perceive and categorize immigrants. The context of reception, whether positive or negative, may result in, respectively, either upward or downward mobility for various immigrant groups. Empirical studies stemming from segmented assimilation theory and conducted on Hispanic immigrant groups confirm that the downward assimilation is likely for Mexican-Americans and Puerto Ricans (Tienda 1989; Aponte 1991; Massey 1993). Perhaps, one of the most visible characteristics of downward assimilation that some scholars point to is a pattern of ethnic enclaves of concentrated poverty in which many underprivileged Hispanic children are raised (Massey 1993). In the absence of middle-class models to follow, in fragile family environments, young people in the neighborhoods of concentrated poverty often become marginalized and alienated (Cuciti and James 1990; Massey 1993). These circumstances have given rise to a collective oppositional culture, a frame of reference that aggressively rejects mainstream behaviors and undermines academic achievement (Small and Newman 2001). Locales where oppositional culture thrives provide a breeding ground for self-consciously dissident and rebellious youths. These types of locales are where graffiti-writing typically proliferates (Martinez 1997; Taylor 2012).[2]

Overall, a brief survey of the extant literature concerned with assimilation and adolescent delinquency suggests that there is a link between immigrant generation and delinquency. Regardless of the outcomes, whether measured in terms of school performance, aspirations, or behavior, the first generation of Hispanic immigrants usually do better academically, health-wise, et cetera than higher generation immigrants owing to the protective character of ethnic cultural norms infused in them by their families and communities (Hirschman 2001; Portes and Rumbaut 2001). However, the protective nature of traditional culture becomes eroded with time: the longer the U.S. residence, the worse the outcomes (Bui and Thongniramol 2005).

As mentioned above, prior research on Hispanic adolescent antisocial behavior is represented almost exclusively by quantitative studies. The present project departs significantly from this tradition in several respects. First of all, in as much as I would like to place this study within the quantitative tradition, I could not avail myself of any national or regional survey data on adolescent graffiti writers in the U.S. Although there exists a number of national databases on adolescent delinquents, none of them specifically focused on graffiti writers. Moreover, despite the fact that graffiti-writing is a criminal offence under the law of Texas (as well as in the rest of the U.S.), according to prior studies, many graffiti writers escape being caught by the police, and thus do not face criminal charges (Lachmann 1988; Ferrell 1995). It is not surprising therefore that graffiti writers are an under-surveyed population and the vast majority of prior studies of graffiti writers, both adult and adolescent ones, are qualitative.

A body of qualitative research on graffiti writers, beginning with Lachmann (1988) and still expanding, suggests that graffiti-writing is a collective enterprise: the majority of graffiti writers work in "crews," teams of like-minded peers. As Valle and Weiss (2010:134) put it, "On crews, graffiti artists prepare paintings in a joint manner, pool money for the necessary paint, comment collectively on their experiences after painting, and interact in broad emotional sociality at parties." In addition, graffiti writers "identify their peers as an audience" (Lachmann 1988:241). Therefore, a second literature which has attracted less research so far, but proved to be germane to the questions discussed here is on the role of peers and peer groups in graffiti-writing.

Although the literature on the subject of peer groups and adolescent antisocial behavior is abundant, only a few studies focused on adolescent graffiti writers and their friendship associations. In this respect, the most relevant research has been published only recently. Of special interest to the current project are studies by Taylor and her colleagues (Taylor et al. 2010; Taylor 2012; Taylor et al. 2012). All aforementioned studies specifically investigate reasons why some adolescents are attracted to the world of graffiti-writing. In order to determine the reasons behind graffiti-writing behavior, Taylor (2012) conducted qualitative analyses of media reports and Internet sources. She found that the majority of adolescent graffiti writers are addicted to risk and that they specifically set goals to attain a non-conforming social identity.[3] It is precisely because of this addiction to a risky pleasure, the author contended, recidivist "graffers" need to be treated by mental health professionals.[4] Taylor ended her paper with calling to the attention of mental health professionals to recidivist graffiti writers and implications for future research. The findings of Taylor and colleagues (2012) reiterated the argument put forward by Taylor (2012) that graffiti-writing is often an obsessive activity. Using the data provided by Western Australian Police, the authors found that the majority of writers in the police database were recidivist offenders involved in multiple crimes.

The book by Taylor and colleagues (2010) differs from the two aforementioned studies in several respects. Firstly, the authors' focus is on adolescent risk-taking as such and not specifically on graffiti-writing.

[2] It should be noted here that the setting of the current study is Hidalgo County, Texas. It is located in the Rio Grande Valley, which is not only one of the fastest growing regions in the U.S. but also one of the poorest. The region frequently leads the nation in unemployment and poverty and ranks near the bottom nationally in per capita income (Bishaw 2011; Su et al. 2011). The region's population is predominantly Hispanic. More than 90% of local residents are Mexican-Americans (Su et al. 2011).

[3] Similar findings are reported by Othen-Price (2006) who observes that many adolescent writers are obsessed with adrenaline rush. Othen-Prices' study is, however, deeply rooted in psychoanalysis and no references are made by the author to social science paradigms.

[4] The concepts "graffer" and "tagger" are used in the present study interchangeably. This is due to two reasons: (1) subjects themselves used these terms interchangeably in their narratives, and (2) all writers I interviewed were engaged only in "tagging"; in other words, there were no "muralists" in my sample (for more on the difference between "taggers" and "muralists," see: Lachmann 1988).

The researchers compared two groups of adolescent risk-takers—"graffers" and skate-borders. Secondly, because the authors took a broad view of risk-taking and non-conforming behaviors among adolescents, a distinct theoretical model was used to guide qualitative analyses. Reputation enhancing goals theory was claimed by the authors as the theoretical basis of their study. Reputation enhancing goals theory is a recent theoretical development by Carroll and colleagues (see: Carroll et al. 2009 for details). In essence, reputation enhancing goals theory integrates elements of better-known reputation enhancement (Emler, Reicher, and Ross 1987; Emler and Reicher 1995) and goal-setting theories (Locke and Latham 1984; Locke and Latham 1990). Briefly, reputation enhancement theory posits that individuals choose a self-image and promote it before an audience of their peers, while goal-setting theory claims that conscious goals regulate human behavior. When applied to adolescent antisocial behaviors, the integrated reputation enhancing goals theory presumes that adolescents who do not fit into the mainstream culture deliberately opt for antisocial activities in order to pursue a non-conforming reputation. To gain visibility among their peers, adolescents communicate their social identities through deliberate, observable behavior (Carroll et al. 2013). Furthermore, to acquire and maintain a deviant (oppositional) identity requires an audience, and without the social support of a peer group a delinquent (or non-delinquent) reputation is hard to sustain (Emler et al. 1987; Carroll et al. 2009). The feedback received from the audience assists adolescents in maintaining their deviant identity within a relatively stable community of peers who share common interests (Carroll et al. 2009; Carroll et al. 2013).

Until now, there have been relatively few serious attempts in the social sciences to empirically test premises of reputation enhancing goals theory (one of them is the aforementioned study by Taylor et al. [2010]). In addition, there are no known studies that look specifically at immigrant generational status as a differentiating variable related to the experiences of Hispanic graffiti writers. The present article intends to provide empirical evidence with regard to reputation enhancement goals theory's relevance to the study of adolescent graffiti writers. This study is also an attempt to incorporate the effect of immigrant generational status in the investigation of reasons why some Hispanic adolescents become involved (and maintain their involvement) in antisocial types of activities, such as graffiti-writing.

Method

The interview sample was compiled with the assistance of high school counselors working with "problem" adolescents in two high schools in McAllen-Edinburg-Mission Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) of Hidalgo County, Texas, and by participants recruiting other participants (subjects were encouraged to refer other graffiti writers to the author). As a result of the recruitment process, 11 adolescents who were self-identified as "the former graffiti artists" accepted the invitation to participate in the study. All my respondents were born in the United States, but also were male, 18-20 years of age, and Hispanic. Consequently, by having a rather uniform sample of adolescents, the current study controls for gender, age, ethnicity, and nativity status. All participants referred themselves as "prolific," "bombing tag," but "retired" writers. Two adolescents asked that their interviews not be audio taped. Nine interviews were audio taped and analyzed for the present study. All subjects are referred to with pseudonyms in this article.

At the time of the interview, all but two participants had graduated from high school. Out of these nine participants, 5 attended one high school in the aforementioned MSA and 4 attended the other. Accordingly, I identified two groups (crews) of "graffers" on the basis of their mutual acquaintances/collaborations, as well as the high schools they attended: crew 1 (consisting of 5 members) and crew 2 (consisting of 4 members). Members of both crew 1 and crew 2 communicated almost exclusively among themselves in English. However, Spanish was the exclusive language spoken in homes of crew 1, while the primary language spoken in homes of crew 2 was English. As it became known to the author of this article after the interviews had been completed, parents of crew 1 members' were all born in Mexico or Central America, while parents of crew 2 members' were all native-born. Essentially, the difference between crew 1 and crew 2 can be conceptualized as the difference between second generation and third generation immigrants. Following Hirschman (2001) and Portes and Rumbaut (2001), I define the second generation as the U.S.-born children of foreign-born parents and the third generation as those who themselves and whose parents were born in the U.S. The former category (also often referred to as the "third-plus generation") is commonly considered native population.

Prior to the interviews, permission to conduct the research had been obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Texas Pan-American. Interview questions were developed by the author and endorsed by the IRB. It has to be noted that 7 participants were older than 18 years of age at the time of the interview and 2 were younger. Prior to the interview, the author/interviewer contacted future participants by phone, described the purpose of the study, and answered participants' questions. Per the author/interviewer's suggestion, future participants who were minors at the time of the interview asked their parent(s) if they would allow them to participate in the study. After consent from parents of minors and adult participants had been acquired, the researcher/interviewer called participants to schedule an interview. A mutually convenient time for the interview was arranged. Interviews were conducted in an academic setting rather than at the participants' homes, under the assumption that participants would thus be more open to talk about their family.

Prior to the commencement of the interview, written consent forms from participants and, in the case of minors, from their parents were obtained and requirements of participation had been outlined. In this regard, participants had been given the opportunity to withdraw from the study without prejudice. All participants were also informed prior to the start of the interviews that if they did not feel comfortable in answering a particular question, then they could opt to pass to the next.

The study reported here is based on in-depth interviews and, as such, has analysis constraints attributable to the qualitative nature of the data. This includes subjective interpretations of events. This

subjectivity is often pointed out as a disadvantage of qualitative approaches (Vanderstoep and Johnson 2008; Russell and Ryan 2009). Given the purpose of the study to obtain rich qualitative data, the semi-structured interview format was used. The interviews acquired minimal-to-moderate structure by the use of a question guide containing only open-ended questions. This flexible format allowed for follow-up questions based on the participants' unplanned responses. Each interview started with a general conversation about the participant's family life and proceeded to other questions pertaining to school environment and peer groups. Responders were encouraged to discuss and reflect upon their experiences in their own words. The interviews were structured in the way that respondents were encouraged to reconstruct their past through the lens of their lives present and even imagined future. Participants were not restricted to answering the interview questions in any particular order. Thus, participants were given considerable liberty to pursue themes that were not covered in the interviewer's question list.

The grounded theory method was used in the analysis of the interview data. According to the founders of grounded theory, Glaser and Strauss (1967:45), it involves "the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges." In essence, it is an inductive methodology which allows building up a theory derived from the data while keeping "theoretical sensitivity" in focus (Glaser 1992; Charmaz 2006).[5] Grounded theory involves the use of an intensive and iterative process that simultaneously involves data collection, coding, and theory building (Czarniawska 2004). Several strategies derived from the grounded theory methodology (Strauss and Corbin 1990), including open coding, category/theme generation, and exploring patterns across categories, were employed in this study.

Following this tradition, study findings were generated in a process where initial intuitive "hunches" became hypotheses, which were continuously tested, refined, and revised (or discarded completely) in light of more data collected, and which eventually began to form themes (Charmaz 2006). In practical terms, the main purpose of my use of grounded theory was to develop a dense description of themes. This was achieved through open coding, or breaking down each participant's responses into categories (a.k.a. nodes) that represented meaningful themes (Strauss and Corbin 1990).[6] The purpose of creating categories is to provide a means of describing the phenomenon, to increase understanding, and to generate knowledge (Russell and Ryan 2009). The coding of text, more exactly, the assignment of categoring to the text, was not based on a preconceived theoretical model. The categories were assigned to a piece of text in the process of reading it and examining its structure. These categories were then refined and merged, eventually leading to a list of themes. The aim of grouping categories was to merge those that are similar into broader themes (Schreier 2012). The final list of themes included three items: family, school, and peers.

[5] By "theoretical sensitivity" Glaser (1992) meant the ability of a researcher to abstract from the pre-conceived theoretical constructs, while constantly developing the insight into the research situation.

[6] Out of three types of coding—open coding, axial coding, and selective coding—I chose the latter because it allows for greater flexibility in interpretation of results. Open coding means that notes and headings are written in the text while reading it. The written material is read through again, and as many headings as necessary are written down in the margins to describe all aspects of the content (Hsieh and Shannon 2005).

Results

Respondents primarily shared experiences involving their family, school, and peers. Therefore, the themes that emerged from the interview analysis are presented below under three themes—family, school, and peers. They are accompanied by quotations from the interviews and relevant references to previous research.

Family

All but two respondents (both from crew 1: Eddy and Homer) were raised either in incomplete (single-parent) or guardian (headed by relatives other than parents) families. Two of my interviewees were raised by guardians—aunts and uncles. "I was raised by my great aunt," said Fernando (crew 1), and later added: "I was adopted within our family." Mike (crew 2) narrated, "My aunt [Name] raised me from the age of five because my mom, her younger sister, had a drug addiction." The fact that my respondents were predominantly brought up in non-traditional families does not presuppose that they received less parental attention, supervision, care, et cetera. Nevertheless, the literature suggests that delinquents often come from homes that are dysfunctional through divorce, separation, desertion, and death of one or both parents (McQueen et al. 2003).

It is also worth mentioning that family, including parents and siblings, constitutes the main informal and most enduring support group (Sommers et al. 1993). Unfortunately, I found that my respondents often lacked familial social support, especially as a buffer for stress in school. As it will be shown below, some of my respondents were bullied in school, and their parents/guardians exhibited minimal, if any, involvement in their child's life. The majority of my interviewees encountered indifference to their problems by their parents or guardians. There were also instances when interviewees reported being misunderstood and mistreated by their parents/guardians. Here is an exemplary quote: "My aunt never understands me. She's extremely one-sided… She only believes what she thinks is right and my uncle agrees with her all the time. They are quite a pair, you know…" (Mike, crew 2).

Moreover, as the stories conveyed by my interviewees show, they often struggled through the family conflict:

> My mom and her boyfriend both messed up my life—we used to quarrel a lot...When I was about ten, my mom met this guy and started going to his house every night and would be home maybe once a week. Then she moved him in…And she liked to please him. She never started eating until he'd come home from work…She never started eating until he'd started to eat. Sometimes she used to stand behind his chair while he was eating. After the meal, she always cleaned up after him. And then she washed the

dishes…He started to complain about me, no matter what I do…And then my mom started lecturing me and yelling at me…And I talked back, of course. [Carlos, crew 2]

I hate my mom's boyfriend. They have been going out since I was eight...When they started out I thought he would be nicer to me. I was wrong. My mom does everything that he says…She never does anything without him… [Nat, crew 2]

My sister hates me because I don't do things that she likes. She's a control freak. She'd go through my things when I wasn't in my room…Nobody in my family treated me so badly…And if something bothers her, she takes things out on other people…When she broke up with her boyfriend, she made a scene…embarrassed me in front of my friends. [Victor, crew 1]

My parents had been fighting for years. I was nine when it [parents' divorce] happened. I remember that day. They both called me into the room to say that they are getting divorced…I didn't want to see them or talk to them for a long time...The divorce was so nasty…It was a mess like my dad's parents tried to hurt my mom... [Jake, crew 1]

There is also evidence that "graffers" were brought up in families that received little education: "My father didn't go to high school and my mother had to drop out of school when she was in eighth grade," recalled Homer (crew 1). I also found that most of my respondents came from financially strained families: "My mom never went to college, but she works hard. She works two jobs, but she doesn't make enough money for the family of four. She can't buy me things I need, and when she does, I'll have to pay her back. I've just started working to help her…" (Eddy, crew 1); "My mom doesn't work. Her boyfriend is working his *** off every day at a hard job, though. He pays the rent, and the bills, and buys us things…" (Jake, crew 1).

My findings generally agree with the prior research indicating that children who grow up in incomplete families or in homes with considerable conflict are at the greatest risk of becoming delinquent (Flewelling and Bauman 1990; Sommers et al. 1993; Demuth and Brown 2004). An increasing number of studies suggests that the presence or absence of a parent may affect adolescent outcomes (e.g., Griffin et al. 2000; Demuth and Brown 2004). Further, adolescents from non-traditional (i.e., single-parent and non-parent/guardian) families are more likely to engage in risky and antisocial behaviors than adolescents from two-parent nuclear families (Flewelling and Bauman 1990). Similarly, adolescent delinquency has been linked to such factors as social support and socio-economic status (Barnes and Farrell 1992). Delinquents often come from homes with little social support and/or with low socio-economic status (Barnes and Farrell 1992; Griffin et al. 2000).

School

The first emergent theme in the interviews is the commonality of experiences of all writers in school. All the interviewees felt that the they were "bored" in school and they did not "belong." They were not part of a larger high school culture, suffered from the absence of like-minded peers in school, and often felt that they dropped out from the daily routine. Many agreed that the social life was bad, and a number complained about the academic atmosphere. The prevailing attitude towards the school can be exemplified by the following quote: "School was not going well at all. I got into fights. And a few other things have happened…I couldn't take anymore and I started cutting. [I] flunked a term because I've been missing school. The school sucked…I started… pretty much explore and hang out with friends and have a good time" (Carlos, crew 2).

Although all "graffers" indeed did not belong to the mainstream "crowd" in their respective schools, some of my interviewees managed to do well academically while being actively involved in graffiti-writing: "I wasn't a very good student, but I was a 'C' student all the time. I had a solid 'C'…I started cutting school in year ten to do what I like to do [graffiti]. I liked hanging with good guys [the crew]. I was cutting school and still ended year ten as a 'C' student" (Fernando, crew 1). Generally, it was more common for crew 1 members than crew 2 members to stress that, despite their interest in graffiti, they managed not only to finish high school, but also to sustain an acceptable level of academic achievement. Because of his frequent involvement in fights and constant absenteeism, one crew 2 member was suspended in year nine and had to repeat a year: "Repeating the year in any case sucks—it's boring to do the same stuff all over again" (Carlos, crew 2).

In fact, there was a combination of "push" factors that alienated my respondents from school or, at least, blemished their positive experiences at school. There is a crew of teacher-related "push" factors which refer to the way teachers treat students, teachers' apathy, or their lack of attention to students' problems. The analysis of the interview data suggests that in both high schools that my interviewed attended, students were not treated with empathetic attention by teachers. The following comments are given below to exemplify perceptions of teachers' attitudes by my interviewees: "Teachers don't love the students. Some are just outright rude" (Nat, crew 2); "There were lots of tension…kids picking on each other and teachers don't care" (Mike, crew 2); "Classes are too large, teachers and administrators just don't care" (Homer, crew 1).

Another important factor is bullying. Bullying adds to the feeling of oppression by the system of formal authority at school which, in the eyes of my interviewees, appears to look "more like a prison" (Joe, crew 2) run by insensitive correctional officers (teachers and administrators) in complicity with oppressive inmates (bullies). Here are some quotes relevant to this issue:

I was always teased and picked on by other kids because I was quiet and shy…There was that mean guy [Name]. He would pick at me on the bus. It takes over an hour to get from school on this crowded filthy bus. He would even chase me home because he lived in my neighborhood. [Eddy, crew 1]

Too much bullying. One kid in PE class was a big bully. He hit my friend in the mouth so hard…made him bleed. [Joe, crew 2]

There was this guy [Name] who called me names. He had a big mouth...Yeah, that's what you call "verbal abuse." I was fed up with him. One day I grabbed

> him by the collars of his shirt, picked him up, and slammed him up against the wall. I went to fight him after school...It was a good fight. [Carlos, crew 2]

There is yet another "push" factor that determined my interviewees' disinterest in school—boredom. As Victor (crew 1) put it, "I was struggling to stay awake in school. It was so boring. It's easy, but it's boring. Teachers keep you in class until the end, I went to sleep in there…So by the end of the day I just wanted to get out and do what I want to do with my friends." Eddy (crew 1) commented: "School wasn't too bad, but I got bored easily…Science teacher was so boring. It feels like as if we're stuck learning the same thing over and over again. And he's just difficult to approach… I don't like asking questions because I don't want to look stupid."

More generally, writers from crew 1 (second-generation immigrants) not only had more positive experiences in school than did crew 2 writers (the natives), but also tended to be more successful in terms of academic achievements. The differences in school-related experiences between crews 1 and 2 are likely to be accounted by the fact that the two crews went to two different schools. Both schools were large suburban high schools with ethnically homogeneous student population (more than 95% Hispanic). However, according to the U.S. News school ranking (The U.S. News 2013), the schools that crew 1 and 2 originated from differ with respect to student-to-teacher ratio. The high school which members of crew 1 went to was newer and had a lower student-to-teacher ratio than the one which crew 2 members attended. Moreover, it is possible that the school that crew 2 members attended had a high teacher turnover (the author was not granted access to the statistical data to prove it, though). According to two of my respondents, crew 2 members, "teachers come and go" (Nat) in his school, and "every year I had a new teacher" (Joe). Prior research confirms that high teacher turnover is draining school districts of precious dollars that could be used to improve teaching quality and student learning (Ingersoll 2001). I also found differences in the perceptions of safety at school among crews 1 and 2. Crew 2 members explicitly told that their school had a reputation for fights breaking out, while crew 1 members were much likely to report fights at school, whether they were personally involved in them or not. Prior research shows that school safety depends on the school's tolerance policy towards certain behaviors (Horner et al. 2009). Studies also suggest that student concerns about safety at school have a significant impact on their learning (Horner et al. 2009; Fan, Williams, and Corkin 2011).

This study's findings are in line with prior research on delinquent adolescents (Lachmann 1988; Haynie 2001; Taylor 2012; Carroll et al. 2013), and, in the context of graffiti-writing experiences, with the results of a study conducted by Taylor and colleagues (2010). Subject boredom and teacher disinterest were identified by Taylor and colleagues (2010) as the most important school-related "push" factors that urged "graffers" to seek out the company of like-minded schoolmates. Taylor and colleagues also identified a growing attraction towards the company of non-conforming peers as one of the most powerful themes associated with engagement in risk-taking activities. This is not surprising since, in addition to encountering the formal authority system of the school, youths in schools are exposed to the pressure of peer groups (e.g., Martinez 1997; Smith and Brain 2000; Othen-Price 2006; Kreager 2007). I further investigate this theme in the subsequent subsection.

Peers

According to prior research, the main mechanism through which young people start participating in graffiti is via exposure to the world of graffiti, that is, by observing graffiti and the process of painting graffiti (Ferrell 1995; Valle and Weiss 2010; Taylor 2012). This observation is generally consistent with social learning theory (Akers 1985), according to which the adoption of delinquent behavior occurs through the observation and later through imitation of peers' delinquent behavior. The qualitative analysis of my interview data suggests, however, that this was not the primary route to graffiti subculture for my respondents. In the majority of cases, it was the involvement with the company of "graffer" schoolmates that determined my respondents' graffiti-writing career. As one of my interviewees pointed out, "I got cool friends. They did it, so I did it…" (Nat, crew 2). The question that immediately arises is: What kind of social forces made my respondents seek out the company of "cool" friends? As it has been noted before, an increasing emotional distance from parents and other family members and dissatisfaction with school were significant motivators for seeking out the company of like-minded peers. Bored by the tedium of their daily school routines and misunderstood by their parents/guardians, my participants started a process of drifting away from their families and school while simultaneously ingratiating themselves into the company of friends they perceived to be "cool."

A related question that can be posed here is how my participants found themselves in the company of "graffers" and not just "cool" friends. Before answering this crucial question, it should be noted that adolescents, usually, do not have much control in selecting their friends (Haynie 2001; Steinberg 2002). Indeed, as my analysis of the interview data indicates, my respondents joined a "graffer" crew via the help of a sponsor/instigator who, in the majority of cases, was the most experienced "graffer" in the crew. The fact that my interviewees found only limited opportunities to join a crew made the crew a particularly important source of influence on their behavior. Moreover, the analysis of the interview data consistently points to the pattern of active recruitment of apprentices by a more experienced "graffer." All of my participants found their mentors from among schoolmates two to four years older than they. As such, the graffiti initiation process was a result of an individual friendship between a novice and a mentor.

The first meeting between a novice and a mentor usually occurred in unstructured contexts, such as "at lunch time" (Eddy, crew 1), "on the way from school" (Joe, crew 2), "in the hallway" (Mike, crew 2), or "in the cafeteria" (Homer, crew 1). Normally, graffiti topic was not brought up during the first meeting. Firstly, the instigator usually assessed a novice's special interests, qualities as a potential "graffer," and a degree of social openness. Then, on reaching a satisfactory conclusion, the instigator would start building closer ties with the nov-

ice. Only after the amicable and jovial rapport with a novice had been established, the instigator revealed his interest in graffiti by directly striking up a conversation about it. Immediately after that, the instigator would show examples of his graffiti work to a prospective "graffer." The typical reaction to the instigator's work was positive: "He made me jump out of my comfort zone…" (Victor, crew 1); "[Mentor's work] stands out from the crowd and keeps me interested" (Fernando, crew 1); "He has his own unique style" (Lupe, crew 2).[7]

One of the reasons writers give for producing graffiti is to earn fame/popularity ("I just wanted my name to be known" [Mike, crew 2]), but to do this they require an audience. Thus, the novice first becomes an audience for his mentor and then he comes to believe that there will be an audience for his own work. Below are typical quotes that relate to the association/friendship forming experiences of the study's participants:

> We were hooked up through a mutual friend...Then [the instigator] showed me his work and introduced me to the crew. Everyone of them had a tag…I thought it was cool. The stuff they were doing looked awesome. I wanted to do the same or even better so I started doing it. [Homer, crew 1]

> I was chilling with some guys. [Name] talked to me and asked if I'm interested [in graffiti]. So, he and [Name] invited me to "tag" with them…[Name] does graffiti and rap. The stuff he does…Wow! You've got to respect his style. He speaks dirty, he dresses dirty, he thinks dirty. He IS dirty. Ha, ha! He sure doesn't like girls, but they like him…I thought I want to be with these guys, do the stuff they do. The stuff they do sticks out. It's fun, stupid, but fun. [Nat, crew 2]

The former quote is also suggestive of the fact that some adolescents form associations with "popular" peers because of the strive for recognition, both among their conforming and non-conforming peers.

The graffiti careers of my participants did not last long. According to Carlos (crew 2), "One can become a king in a year or so. There is no room to grow." Fernando (crew 1) further explained: "I have other things on my mind…I've got a girlfriend and spend most of my time with her now." My finding is consistent with what had been suggested by Lachmann (1988) more than 20 years ago—the average span of a typical writer is about 2 years and almost all "taggers" give up producing graffiti by their late teens. Possibly because of the short career duration of the writers I interviewed, I could not corroborate the argument advanced by Taylor (2012) that sustained involvement in graffiti-writing becomes addictive.

According to my participants, they had retired from their careers as "taggers" by the time of the interview. However, all of them started their careers as "toys" whose job was to serve an apprenticeship in the crew they were recruited into. Their job might included not only learning under more experienced writers, but also undertaking less desirable tasks, such as standing watch for the police. "All people start as 'toys' and work their way up," comments Carlos (crew 2). The analysis of the interview provides evidence of a status hierarchy in both crews, the hierarchy which is common to all adolescent peer groups (Lachmann 1988; Haynie 2001). The top position that gains the most respect is that of "king." Although the exact formula of earning title of "king" is unknown, the title usually goes to the most experienced "tagger." "King" is an honorary title. The "king" is not worried about maintaining his status within a crew, he "actually helps everybody grow" (Homer, crew 1). In order to work one's way up the career ladder, that is, to gain status and recognition among other crew members, a less experienced "graffer" needs to prove himself to be worthy of his companions' trust. The most common way to do it is to engage in more risky "tagging," for example, "hitting" (covering) a moving train ("catching a rolling train" [Nat, crew 2]) or "hitting" a traffic signal on a busy street. "I loved getting rushes," comments Carlos (crew 2). The risk writers take when they tag, and the speed and efficiency with which they create their pieces reward them with a recognition status and the highly-prized "graffer" reputation. In time, their peers' recognition of their daring exploits provides less experienced "graffers" with a higher status within their crew. The importance of finding a position within their "crew" suggests that young writers are susceptible to peer influence during early years of their careers, including behavioral constraints that may pull them towards more risk-taking behaviors.

The desire for some adolescents to continue their careers in graffiti-writing is partly motivated by social support that their "graffer" friends provide. Indeed, a crew serves a number of important psychological functions. Graffiti crews provide an opportunity to gain peer respect and a sense of security. A sense of belonging, non-conforming self-identity, and self-worth are some positive consequences associated with crew membership. "They look out for you," recalled Eddy (crew 1); "We stick to each other at all times. We like going places, getting at girls" (Mike, crew 2). Homer (crew 1) explained further: "When I'm around my real friends, I can really come out and talk about real feelings…Because, on a crew, you can tell something that really means something to you..." An important theme in the interviews was the writers' ability to trust and rely on their "graffer" friends to a higher degree that they were able to do with their families: "I trust guys [the crew] more than anybody. My family doesn't understand me, but they do. They understand where I'm coming from…They are like brothers to me," indicated Victor (crew 1). This finding is in line with prior research that peer groups are the most important sources of intimacy for today's adolescents, and they have now taken on a number of the functions previously assumed by families (Steinberg 2002).

In sum, the analysis of the interview data is consistent with the current body of literature pertaining to the influence of peer groups on behavior of non-conforming/delinquent youths (Haynie 2001; McElhaney et al. 2008; Taylor et al. 2010). In line with prior research (Lachmann 1988), I found that more experienced "graffers" (mentors) actively recruit other non-conforming adolescents as new crew members. By establishing a relationship of trust with a mentor, who shows his own work and that of other "graffers" known to him, a novice becomes interested in the world of graffiti. After developing an interest in graffiti

[7] It has to be mentioned here that none of the participants had taken drawing lessons in school or elsewhere. Yet, it is imperative to point out that, in the absence of any academic training in graphic arts, these adolescents found the way to manifest their frustrated creative talents in an extreme fashion of graffiti.

under the influence of mentors, new crew members build their friendship networks through gaining recognition status among other crew members. The friendship bonds that form in "graffer" crews not only meet their identity establishment needs, but also provide them with social support they seek.

Conclusion

I embed my discussion of the results of this study in two bodies of literature that seem particularly relevant. First, research that links delinquency and assimilation of Hispanic adolescents suggests that the more recent generations of Hispanic youths are less likely to engage in risky and non-conforming behaviors than their native counterparts, due to being more connected to their families and communities (Buriel et al. 1982). Second, a number of recent studies on adolescent graffiti writers note close behavioral similarity between adolescent writers and suggest that adolescents are attracted to graffiti as a way of proving their bravery and contempt for authority (Othen-Price 2006; Taylor 2012). Within this line of research, studies stemming from reputation enhancing goals theory contend that graffiti-writing provides an ideal means for adolescents to establish a non-conforming status and image among the peer group (Taylor et al. 2010; Carroll et. 2013). Drawing from these two literatures, I examined the pathways to the subculture of graffiti undertaken by two crews (groups) of Hispanic adolescent (ex-)writers in Hidalgo County, TX. The crews differed with respect to immigrant generational status: parents of adolescents from crew 1 were all immigrants from Mexico and Central America, while crew 2 consisted of native-born children of native-born parents. In essence, the difference between crew 1 and crew 2 is operationalized as the difference between second- and third-generations of immigrant youths.

The qualitative analysis did not reveal differences in the narratives of adolescents from crew 1 and from crew 2 concerning their family life. Put differently, my findings could not support the long-standing argument that, owing to the protective character of ethnic cultural norms infused in them by their families, the more recent generation of Hispanic adolescents (which is identified as crew 1) is less likely to exhibit antisocial behaviors than the higher generation (identified as crew 2) (e.g., Buriel et al. 1982; Vega et al. 1993). In fact, there were more commonalities than differences in the way adolescents perceived to be treated by other family members. With a few exceptions, all my interviewees were raised either by single mothers or by other family members. In addition to the fact that young men often did not have a suitable adult male role model in the family, they received very little, if any, guidance and social support from other family members. Moreover, family life of many of my interviewees was permeated by conflict. There was also a sense of lack of cohesion in the families of adolescents I interviewed. It is important to note that, according to prior research, adolescents who see their families as more cohesive may feel less distressed in response to difficulties in school and elsewhere (Griffin et al. 2000; Dornbusch et al. 2001; McQueen et al. 2003). Additionally, it has long been suggested that adolescents tightly bonded to family are less likely to engage in delinquent acts (Dornbusch et al. 2001; Gonzales et al. 2006).

Further, there were perceived differences between crew 1 and crew 2 members in the way they experienced school life. Although the themes of isolation, boredom, and despise of the adults controlling their school lives (teachers and administrators) were present in all respondents' narratives, writers that joined crew 1 tended to be less acrimonious about their school life than their "graffer" counterparts from crew 2. Generally, the theme of bullying and student fights was prominent in the narratives of crew 2 members rather than in the accounts produced by "graffers" of crew 1. Literature suggests that the absence of family protective effects produces sensitivity to interpersonal conflicts (Griffin et al. 2000; Demuth and Brown 2004). Ostensibly, this argument is not sufficient to explain the differences between crews 1 and 2 in their perceptions of school atmosphere because of the relative homogeneity of family conditions for all participants. The most likely explanation of the varying perceptions of hostile atmosphere at school relates to school "quality." Crew 1 consisted of adolescents who attended the same high school in McAllen-Edinburg-Mission MSA. Adolescent graffers—crew 2 members—were also students of one high school in the same MSA, but in a different school district. The two high schools in which two "graffer" crews were based differed with respect to location, student-to-teacher ratio, and, possibly, teacher turnover. It is also possible (but there is no direct evidence in the interview data) that the school that crew 1 attended had a less tolerant policy towards certain behaviors, such as bullying, than the school that housed crew 2.

More similarities than differences have been noted in the friendship formation patterns between crews 1 and 2. Simple but true that spatial proximity affects the opportunity for prospective and active "graffers" to become acquainted. The fact that the crews were formed in schools lends support to the argument that writers tend to meet potential friends within their school. I also noted the pattern of active recruitment of novices by more experienced "graffers." The common pattern was that an instigator (prospective mentor) befriends novices younger than himself as an audience for his work. The mentor gains satisfaction and respect with novices who, in the process of observing the mentor's work, learn that there might be an audience for their own graffiti. Thus, involvement in graffiti is a prime example of the acquisition of social visibility through the presence of a regular audience that provides feedback, a finding that scholars have consistently observed in prior research (e.g., Emler et al. 1987; Othen-Price 2006; Taylor 2012; Carroll et al. 2013). Once adolescents make their choice to enter the world of graffiti, they transit a pathway towards establishing a reputation among their "graffer" friends. I found a certain behavioral similarity among graffiti writers, which suggests that "graffer" friends mutually influence one another through the reinforcement of their subculture values. In order to gain a higher status among peers, writers indulge in a range of risk-taking behaviors, such as writing graffiti on a moving train or on a traffic signal situated on a busy intersection. The highly visible and public nature of these behaviors communicates their intention of achieving status among other writers, as well as popularity among more conforming peers. This finding is generally in line with reputation enhancing goals theory (Carroll et. 2009; Carroll et. 2013). Finally, I found that other crew members are the most important sources of intimacy for adolescent writers and they have taken on a number of the functions not provided by their families (e.g., social support, etc.).

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The Office as a Mixing Pot and Playground. An Ethnographic Study at a Creative Workplace

Abstract This paper aims to contribute to knowledge of the factors which inform the grouping of creative workers in particular places. It is based on a case study of Aragón, a region of Spain, and draws on a period of nine months of ethnographic work among a particular group of creative workers. The main hypothesis is that there are visual components in the work environment that are stimulating for workers and there is a number of creative flows in these workspaces. I have selected one office that is occupied by two different groups of creative professionals: web designers and programmers. The research concludes that there is evidence that a shared set of cultural values, ideas about work organization, and a hybrid work-life balance are significant to the location choices of creative workers. The research is relevant as a contribution to knowledge about how creative places work.

Keywords Creative Flows; Workspaces; Digital Era; Hybridization; Ethnography

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Creativity is not a new research topic. When Csikszentmihályi (1998) considered the purpose of studying creativity, he concluded that there were two main reasons why examining the lives of creative individuals and the contexts of their achievements is useful. Firstly, the results of creativity enrich culture and, secondly, this enrichment indirectly improves the quality of our lives. However, Florida (2002) points out that there is a number of difficulties in analyzing these creative contexts, for example, that creative work is often intensely subversive because it disrupts thinking patterns and existing life. For this reason, it is even more interesting to approach the analysis of a creative environment through concepts related to imaginary and cultural values.

In order to grasp the *magma* generated in the creative process, the researcher must experience it and feel it *in situ*. The ethnographic technique allows us to dive into the space of creation and the processes that are generated. Researching into the imaginary process violates the established order because this type of research goes beyond the generated words that appear in a discourse. Our interest in including an analysis of the imaginary[1] is because we want to understand the different systems that are generated beyond the purely functional. These institutions cannot be understood if they are located outside social life as a whole, or if they are treated as a simply functional system, an integrated set of arrangements subject to the satisfaction of the needs of society (Castoriadis 1983).

The idea behind using this technique is to go beyond what the researcher is able to visualize. Ethnography is useful in this respect that it shows the researcher that the world we see every day is nothing more than a description (Castaneda 2009). Researchers have to see, not merely look, and go in search of these imaginary situations that are generated in the environment. When Garfinkel (2006:21) was developing his concept of ethnomethodology, he stated that it sought to "treat practical activities and circumstances and practical sociological reasoning as topics of empirical study." According to the same author, ethnomethodological studies focus on the most common activities and want to learn from them as the phenomena that they are in their own right. Garfinkel also considers ethnomethodological studies to be reflective in that their nature is embodied in explanatory practices, by which he means practices which it is possible to observe, see, and relate. These can be practices conducted in a particular setting that are subject to the various skills and know-how of the people located in that setting. According to Latour (2005:4), observed actions can be read and interpreted as though they were a story that is narrating a transformation. Goldthorpe (2010) argues that any form of local causality that is shaped within hypothetical social processes should be capable of demonstration through an ethnographic study if that study is well positioned and well directed by the researcher.

One of the characteristics of ethnographies is that they are developed in natural, "unforced" situations. They involve participant observation and conducting interviews as conversations. Goldthorpe (2010) reports how the purpose of these techniques is to reach a better understanding of those meanings experienced by people in their context. Although ethnography does not observe the totality of possible realities, Goldthorpe argues that ethnographies are considered to be a descriptive basis for generalization because the number of cases can be considered representative of the population in which they are included. The importance of an

[1] The relationships that exist between the symbolic and the imaginary arise as a result of reflections on the same facts, since the imaginary has to use the symbolic both to express itself and to exist. To understand the influence of the imagination on the symbolic, Castoriadis (1983) argues that symbolism has the ability to link the two terms. This ability is constant, so that it simultaneously represents both terms.

ethnographic representation can be understood in the sense that these techniques focus on cases that bring strategic advantages for research, cases that tend to be of, for example, a deviant, outstanding, or critical nature, or which "minimize or maximize certain crucial contrasts" (Goldthorpe 2010:58, 59). The greatest difficulty in the study of the processes generated in a working group is to control all the variables that are relevant in the interaction (Sawyer 2011). The most important thing is to observe these interactions in the real setting in which they take place, as it is the natural origin of the conversations and actions that take place in the native environment.

One of the aims of this ethnography is to discover whether there are common traits in creative workers. Csikszentmihályi (1998) has previously observed certain traits in creative people, including their genetic predisposition for, their interest in, and their access to a given field. Another aim is to observe how creativity develops in a group of individuals. Numerous theories have also emerged which are interested in new bonds of solidarity that are arising through the development of collective action, as opposed to the approaches of the autonomous social order.

Main Characteristics of the Office

This ethnography was undertaken from October 2012 to July 2013. The main focus of my study was observation-based, this being the best source of information for the analysis. I also used netnography (observing web use), through different social networks like Facebook and Twitter. This technique allowed me to uncover other details about the workers whom I was unable to observe in the actual places visited.

Most of the professionals in the workplace selected for my study were web designers or programmers. The workers were twelve people in total; eleven men and one woman. Other people also appeared occasionally, such as young people on internships, cleaning staff, et cetera. All the people working in the office were between 25 and 35 years old. The office has been running since 2009, showing the high entrepreneurial spirit that exists there.

There are many differences between the working cultures of designers and programmers. The function of designers is to design, create, organize, plan, implement, and change websites. Designers have knowledge about navigability and have to engage different media, including audiovisuals, texts, pictures, and online links. Bruce (2009) responded to the question about how designers think and work by arguing that design is about doing things conscientiously. Design functions by comparing different alternatives and trying to find the best solution. In reality, designers work with projects which present unknown concepts, normally visual material. This implies a kind of subjectivity, ambiguity, instinct, and intuition. Bruce (2009:41) suggests that, "visual imagination is a crucial aspect for design because it allows mental imagery to build those things that we have never experienced." Programmers, on the other hand, although they are often completely ignorant about design, set up the models and elaborate the necessary backgrounds so that the designers can work in the virtual world. Programmers work with the following simple and basic code: a blank screen full of letters and words. Their function is to generate the instructions which the hardware has to execute, that is, they create the source codes of a computer program so that it is able to perform a specific task.

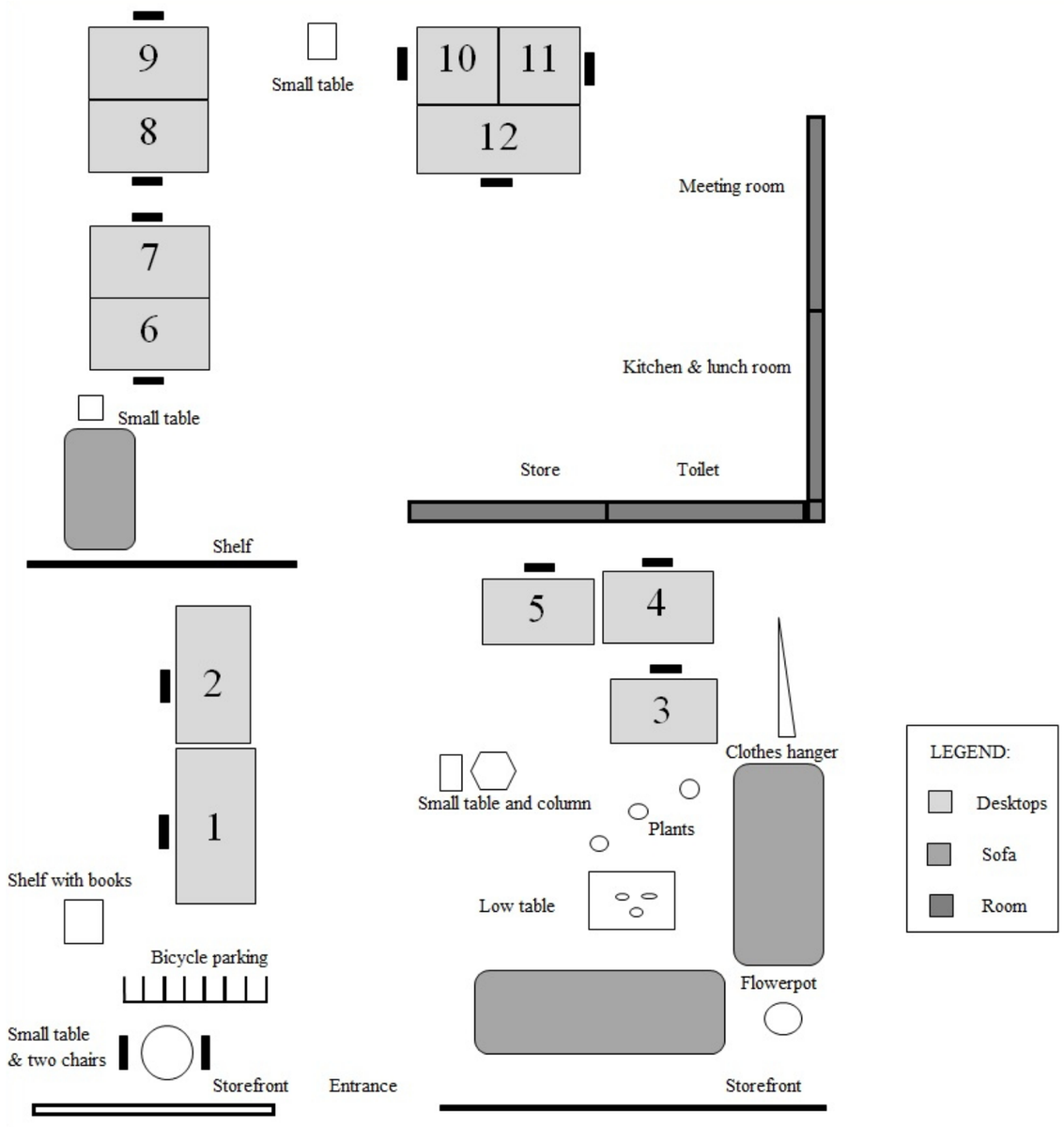
The workers have their own language because they use specific terms to talk about their activity (keywords, definitions, etc.), as well as trivial topics. So, they have two languages: professional language and informal language.[2] The art of interpreting and understanding each other is related to the hermeneutic conception of Gadamer (1999). Hence, the workers use the three elements that Gadamer spoke of: understanding, interpretation, and application. The communicative capacity is triple: auditory, visual, and gestural. So, the workers combine different communicational typologies, including auditory and corporal expression abilities. According to Joas (2005), both verbal and corporal language are contained in expression and the latter can include elements such as postural behavior, movements, and face gestures.

The office considered in this study presents a different format compared to a traditional business because it consists of professionals who represent two different enterprises sharing the same room in order to achieve common goals. The workplace is similar to a cooperative, but in a postmodern style. In addition, the office has its own idiosyncrasy because it is shared between two main companies and freelancers, as well as a number of people working on a project basis. The office is "U"-shaped and divided into two "rooms" with no intervening door. The "rooms" have no actual physical separation and each "room" is occupied by one of the two companies that share this space. The first group of workers is situated close to the entrance door and the second further inside the office. Towards the back of the office there are also some common spaces, a storage area, bathroom, a small kitchen, and a meeting room.

The workers develop their work in a large market with local, provincial, regional, national, and transnational intensities. This transnational and geographic spaciousness is the result of the idiosyncratic nature of their work, in that they do not have to be physically present at these places to be working. The Internet reaches across the planet so their action capacity is amplified. To complete this initial presentation, it is important to reflect on what is happening at this moment in terms of certain work, labor, and social concepts. Essentially, this type of job did not exist before the Digital Era. The creation and development of the Internet has meant, in turn, the creation and development of new types of work. The Internet tool has had an enormous impact on business and institutional organizations, enhancing the communication process, access to information, external development, et cetera.

[2] Gadamer (1999:457) argues that language is the expression of finiteness because it is present in "constant training and development as the maximum expression of the experience of the world." According to Castoriadis (1997), language is necessary for reasoning. This means that the multiplicity of existential contexts makes sense through the conversations and the different languages used by everybody. The transmission of power in both cases is wide because their contributions are straightforward.

Figure 1. Distribution of the workplace.



Source: Self-elaboration.

The best thing about this new online generation, as Clark (2003) says, is that we can all take advantage of the knowledge generated collectively and implicitly on websites. The computer is a fundamental part in the development of their professional tasks. According to Bruce (2009), designers use computers to capture ideas and the workers share their ideas with colleagues from their design and production teams. The software they use is sophisticated and is a tool that designers need to do their work. The concepts they generate can be modified, stored, and reproduced online. So, the workers can create prototypes and models from their computer systems. As they can work at home, this results in greater conciliation between their personal and professional lives. However, one of the negative aspects of advances in computer science could be an excessive dependency on such technologies, an addiction created by the massive use of the virtual network among organizations and professionals.

After this brief introduction, it is important to explain the key aspects that I will use in the analysis that follows. I consider that these aspects suitably explain the imagery and cultural values of these creative workers. I will analyze this ethnography through the principal ideas of fusion and play. Fusion was observed in this study on numerous occasions in the workplace and with respect to numerous concepts: fusions between their personal and professional life, between work and game, and between other ideas related to language, the cyborg concept, et cetera. The second element I consider is play, and more specifically—a play which integrates humor and fun at work. I have focused on play because it is a repetitive and substantial aspect which consolidates the idiosyncrasy of these creative workers. In addition, play is connected with the disconnection of time and space.

Does Creative Work Mean Fusion?

The main observation of this paper is that the workers mix many different spheres of their lives. In other words, by conducting private affairs at work, they fuse many of the spheres that are usually separated in social science. The definition of fusion in this paper is the combination of different elements and situations into one sphere. For this reason, the best concept that could be used to describe this element is that of heterogeneity. The most frequently observed fusions during the period were: listening to music at work, discussing leisure activities at work, eating and resting in the office during working hours, discussion of private lives at work, flexibility of working hours, the sharing of personal opinions at work, and a variety of other daily habits.

The creative workers that were observed during the research behave like partners and colleagues, even though they may belong to different companies which on occasions can be in direct competition. The workers know each other and share the workplace, so this behavior is a risk, but also an opportunity.[3] There are many benefits from these collaborations and the main condition for the exchange is that there must be a "perfect intercommunication" which offers the best knowledge for

[3] In human nature, the concept of risk plays a role, either directly or indirectly, in many behaviors and decisions. In this regard, Knight (1933) argues that if we knew the probabilities, we would not take risks.

each person involved in such an exchange (Knight 1933:86). The fusion between private life and work life extends to personal hygiene and eating; workers can eat and clean themselves at the workplace. For example, they leave their toothbrushes in the bathroom and receive personal correspondence at their work address. After all, they spend much more time during the day at work than at home or elsewhere. They also reward themselves with little pleasures at work, such as cold beer. It is normal to listen to music in the subjects' work environment, where background music is everywhere, and the workers freely speak about their music tastes while at work. They also constantly interact with each other in talking about their intergroup and intragroup work problems. According to Amabile (1990), this feedback cycle affects creative results positively and motivates people to work by fostering camaraderie.

Continuing with the observation of fusion, mutual help and fellowship are both present at this workplace. The workers have close relationships and are committed to each other. Their relationships go far beyond normal relationships between colleagues, in which genuine friendship is not a requirement. There are many situations in which they request the help of a partner or in which one member offers advice without being asked. Fellowship is extended even between different companies, with workers from each of the different companies helping each other in different tasks. When some colleagues need to ask for help or advice at work, these workers do so openly. In relation to this, Florida (2002) believes that creativity is an inevitable social process and that interdependence between colleagues and assistants in a creative industry is to be expected.

For some of the workers, this is not their only job—one works part-time as a DJ, another is a graphic designer in a different company, and another is also a web designer. This is related to the entrepreneurial spirit of the workers. On one occasion, the part-time DJ commented to his colleagues how he was thinking about a web design he was working on while playing music in a nightclub the night before. When eating together in the dining area, one worker commented how a song he had heard at a concert had provided him with inspiration for a web design he was working on. Koestler (1989:35) has described such occurrences as *bisociation*, and argues that it is a basic device in creativity. He defines it as "the perceiving of a situation or idea…in two self-consistent, but habitually incompatible frames of reference" (Koestler 1989:35). This term is used with the intention of distinguishing between routine skills (one plane of thinking) and creative acts (more than one plane of thinking). The first plane is used in the workplace when just one person is working on a project, and the second plane is used when several people are working together in a team. They can reach the *eureka* moment in different contexts, not just in the workplace; for example, when they are eating, watching a film, dancing in a nightclub, playing music, et cetera. Despite the time that they spend at work, the workers are aware of the world around them. They connect their work lives with their personal lives, even centering their personal lives on their work lives, using certain mechanisms (such as their websites, social media, etc.) to interconnect the two. Thus, these two vital aspects coexist in parallel, even though the workers spend most of their time at the office.

Another fusion that has been observed is between leisure and work. This was apparent when the workers were talking about their personal lives, free time, tastes, and concerns, and making jokes in the office. This means that they know each others' tastes, and so are able to mix their working and personal lives because they know each other well on a personal level. During working hours, the workers plan activities to do together after work. The result of this fusion between leisure and work is that the different ideas and strengths of each worker can be drawn on to the benefit of the job at hand. On one occasion, for example, a group was trying to come up with names for servers. One of the designers who was a football fanatic demonstrated this fusion of leisure and work by proposing the use of the names of football players (in the end, the programmer pointed out that this could as well complicate matters in the future, and the idea was rejected).

A new fusion was found between work and the worker's identity. This fusion goes beyond the workplace because it is connected to other groups, and other people and urban tribes in the city. According to McLuhan (2001), this natural tendency to expand one's connections to the surrounding communities has the goal of strengthening the intensity in all functions. The network allows ideas to be exchanged. McLuhan explains that new inventions are built on earlier work and the division of previous action into stages, arguing that exchanges inside a city maximize citizen action inside the city. Regarding the fusion concept, the bidirectional union between city and creative workers is connected to the idea of hybridization. According to McLuhan (2001), certain intensities and hybrid energies appear unexpectedly in the metropolis, which arise as the result of the exchange between diverse functions and knowledge. The manner that they act and perceive the world is similar in both cases, so this *habitus* (Bourdieu 1984) defines a social environment in which they share their lifestyles and similar thought structures. As an example, I can cite in my study the extensive interest on the part of these creative workers in the world of bicycling, as seen in their Facebook profiles, and in the fact that many of them come to work with this mode of transport and some are friends of a bicycle designer/remodeler (alternative movements). A distinctively ecological trait can be observed here, something also revealed in other situations that were observed. On more than one occasion a light bulb left on by a colleague in another room was switched off and conversations were held about the environmental benefits of one type of light source over another. Sport and football in particular form part of the masculine identity of the male workers. Through commenting frequently about matches and results and discussing the merits or otherwise of one team or another, they do so with good humor and respect for other opinions and never exaggerate its importance.

The idea of fusion appears again, but in this case, in connection to innate and acquired skills which create the ideal worker profile and which are essential to enable such teams to work well. The innate abilities are operative, adaptive, listening, and pro-active skills and the acquired skills include teamwork, knowledge of how to do one's job, and the idea of expertise. The workers have their own way of understanding and interpreting each other. This observation is in keeping with Gadamer's definition

of hermeneutics (1999), which, he argues, is the process by which one understands things and which, he explains, consists of three elements: understanding, interpretation, and application. Interpretation of what the other says is one of the main characteristics of these creative workers. They have their own vocabulary and terminology and use it to discuss a particular subject and to share the many aspects of their work. However, they do not always share their problems in order to receive advice; sometimes they just seek to get something off their chest, or to share their feelings with others. This type of brief catharsis at work seems to relieve the workers of some of their stress. In general, they do not constantly speak to each other, but they do tell each other interesting stories or give their opinions about something that they have seen on a website or elsewhere.

The Importance of Building Ideas Through Language Fusion

Language and communication between the workers are important in the development of their work. These skills serve as immaterial work tools. The value of dialogue has been known for many centuries and many authors have written about it. Gadamer (1999) comments about a document called *Cratylus* (Κρατυλος) which refers to dialogue and was written by Plato in 360 BCE. In it, he explored the semantic problem in language philosophy. As Gadamer says, two linguistic categories which appear in this document reflect the reinvention of language based on the magnification of expression:

1. Professional language, which is based on technical words and full sentences. They do not necessarily use formal language, but rather more technical language which can only be understood by people who understand the subject and the technical expressions.

2. Informal language, which is more colloquial and which the workers use when they are not speaking about their work. This informal language uses short sentences and expressions which enable the workers to communicate more easily and quickly.

Communication is multidimensional because ideas are translated orally to the workers. They also communicate virtually, using the Internet, computers, telephones, mobile phones, and emails. It is important to be sensitive to the dynamics that influence the acceptance of the idea (Rickards 1988), as well as the capture of the idea. The way that the workers get their work done is through reasoning rather than through authority. Face-to-face dialogue between two or more people enables each party to influence each other and allows for the creation of a common background between interlocutors (Tsoukas 2009).

On occasions, the workers in my study were observed to carry out spontaneous brainstorming, without any prior scheduling. The modern origin of this technique is attributed to Osborn who popularized it in his book *Applied Imagination* in the mid-twentieth century. However, this technique is in reality far older, with a kind of brainstorming being practiced over three thousand years ago in Asia (Rickards 1988). Rubenson and Runco (1995) analyzed teams and workgroups that use brainstorming and observed that almost all organizations applied this type of reasoning to resolve problems. They recognized that there are implicit pressures on organizations that are opposed to brainstorming. These pressures tend to maximize the risk associated with using an original thought and the stigma of being different. The value of diversity and heterogeneity is that the opinion of every worker is considered and respected. Several studies, such as those of Sawyer (2011), have shown that groups are better than individuals at selecting good ideas. There are different versions of brainstorming, but all who use this tool report that it brings great benefits (Rickards 1988). This means that brainstorming is not only beneficial for a company because it enables unrelated solutions to be found, but also because the workers enjoy it, and so the brainstorming activity itself becomes an individual benefit. Csikszentmihályi (1990) reported similar results in his research on artists. Accordingly, many creative individuals say that the formulation of a problem is more important than its solution. Csikszentmihályi adds that real progress in science and art tends to appear when people ask about new questions, or when people look at old problems from a new perspective. This happens in this office where brainstorming is part of everyday conversations. Similarly, Sternberg (2006:90) points out that, "to be creative one must first decide to generate new ideas, analyze these ideas, and sell the ideas to others." In the same way, these actions help to create new ideas in an informal and unexpected way.

One feature of interest for this paper was the ability observed on the part of the workers to do multiple tasks at the same time. All of the workers showed adeptness at multitasking, but on various occasions one or more of the workers got their co-workers to come up with solutions by asking them questions without giving their own views. These kinds of "leaders" were using a kind of impromptu brainstorming in order to get their co-workers to think of creative solutions to their problems. This problem-solving is almost a game for the workers, because they are having fun using these techniques, and is yet another example of the fusion that was observed between work and fun.

The Digital Era: Between the Physical and Virtual World

The computer is the cornerstone of the work that is done in the office and it seems an extension of the worker's body, creating a man-machine fusion, or cyborg. McLuhan (2001) believes that any invention or technology is an extension or a self-amputation of our physical body. This extension entails the creation of new relationships or a new equilibrium between the different organs of the body. In daily life, we use different electronic machines (clocks, computers, telephones, etc.) that combine with the functioning of our brains. As highlighted by Clark (2003), our brains are like cyborgs whose activity is combined with complex technological machinery. The result of this addition is that the brain develops a greater capacity. McLuhan (2001) says that technology leads to an increase in the direct demands of our own world. Technology can seem like parts of our own bodies and can feel like extensions of us. The workers in my study use the computer when working on their projects and to communicate. They also share their time with their computer, eating breakfast or lunch at their desk. The computer

is part of their privacy because they do not separate certain personal activities of the screen. To think about the complexity of action which goes beyond the physically perceivable, we can use the third principle of Morin (1998), the *hologramatic* principle, which relates the difference between the observed and the observable.

Although the workers seem sometimes to concentrate only on their own tasks, working on their computers, they are nevertheless alert to external stimuli. The Internet is a tool on which the workers are very dependent, but which at the same time makes them more broadminded, adaptable, and flexible, enabling them to react to changing situations. This explains why they are not very bothered or distracted by the presence of an external observer; because they are constantly exposed to novelties and they react quickly to change. According to Clark (2003:153), the Internet has developed into the global information network through an "anarchic mass" series of individual efforts. He says that the main drawback of the Internet is that there is no central index or any effective method of finding the things that you need. This problem is compounded by the magnitude of the Internet and by the fact that some of its content has been created randomly. In addition, he argues that hyperlinks are a potent tool to access large bodies of information bases which are created collectively. Returning to the workers' relationship with the Internet, creative workers in the study at hand have a fluid communication and share each others' discoveries, whether these are discount coupons or news items or cultural events. This allows them to grow personally and professionally because they are sharing things on many levels (professionally, socially, etc.). They are benefitting from what Granovetter (2000) has called "the strength of weak ties." The weak ties at this workplace are created through sharing information. The information that they share every day can be useful in developing solutions and making discoveries. Hence, they all employ their ingenuity and creativity in the development of their projects and the use they make of their free time.

The Disappearance of Time Conscientiousness

One of the most interesting aspects of the workers is their timetable or their work pattern. One way to summarize their working hours is that when someone is working, they give themselves over completely to their work. Castoriadis (1997) says that space is derived from time, even though traditional platonic ontology argues the opposite. Castoriadis' theory implies that space is a necessary condition when creating something. However, once the forms are created, they do not require time. There is a wide range in the type of timetable used at the workplace because the workers do not have the same schedule. Interestingly, those who do not have a specific timetable tend to spend more hours at work. According to Florida (2002), flexible timetables are a response to changing social needs. Although it may seem that the workers do not have free time, they enjoy their tasks and are happy to work many hours. Other traits of creative individuals include openness and sensitivity, which can generate a wide variety of emotions and feelings; a lot of pleasure, but also suffering and pain. The union of pain (tiredness because they spend many hours at work) and pleasure (satisfaction because they enjoy their tasks) is another fusion that I have found at the workplace. These double feelings are a trait that was found by Csikszentmihályi (1998) in creative people, who argues that most creative people have a great passion for their work, although they can be objective about it.

Despite losing the notion of time, they are aware of the concept of time and save their projects with date and time. The explanation for this, as given by Florida (2002), is that creative work cannot be controlled by managing the amount of time and creativity cannot be activated or deactivated in pre-established moments. This is so because creativity is a fusion between work and play and because it is impossible to know how long the creative workers will need to spend on a given project. The creative workers in my study do not follow a constant pace of work; their working hours depend on the needs of their projects. They come and go when they want, and if they finish their tasks early, they leave work early. They are also free to decide their own work pattern and how to spend their time depending on their clients' demands. Their ability to make decisions concerning their working hours is greater than that of an aligned worker. It is important to highlight the different conceptions regarding alignment and autonomy. On the one hand, Castoriadis (1983) argues that autonomy is the main goal of a revolutionary process. He cites Freud because he identified the problem of autonomy in the relationship between the subject and another/others from a psychoanalytic point of view. In relation to alignment as a social phenomenon, Castoriadis (1983) notes that the conditions required for alignment to take place go beyond the individual unconscious and the intersubjective relationship that happens in the social world. On the other hand, Florida (2002) says with respect to employment that people have decided to sacrifice work security in order to have greater autonomy. He also adds that creative workers have various interests and personalities, and participate in various creative activities.

The workers in my study confront problems with an entirely positive attitude. They have great responsibility and help people who do not have specialist knowledge or who have not mastered a particular field completely. In relation to creative expression, Epstein and Phan (2012:278, 279) identified four basic competencies: capturing, challenging, broadening, and surrounding. These core competencies allow people to control their creative process and, as a consequence, their creative output increases. According to De Bono (1970), a perception is perceived when one realizes the difference between what one has and what one wants to have. De Bono went on to explain that three types of problem exist. The first can be defined as a problem for which, in order to find a solution, one needs new information or needs to know the best way to handle it. The second type of problem does not require new information, but requires a certain predisposition (restructuring of vision) to acquire the information. The third type of problem refers to the block caused by adaptation to improve, so the challenge is to realize that there is a problem and the aspects that it might be possible to define and enhance. The first type of problem is solved by vertical thinking, which is selective, unidirectional, analytical, and sequential, et cetera. The last two types of problem require lateral thinking for their resolution, which is generative and does

not focus solely on the right order, but seeks to create new directions, is provocative, et cetera.

Conclusions

Throughout this ethnography situations were observed which reveal the dynamics of a creative group at work. These include, among others, the way of constructing ideas through the fusion of language, the disconnection of time, and the weight that the virtual exercises have on the workers' creative processes. The common themes that unite these realities are the ideas of heterogeneity and hybridization. During the research, the main theme that appeared was the fusion between work and other areas of life, including basic needs, play, leisure, personal life, use of time and the city where the workers live. The main observations are that a casual pace exists in the workers' daily life, in the sense that they do not have a regular working schedule. This disconnection between time and place extends to their other activities, such as eating. They have no fixed meal times, but rather eat around their working hours, and postpone their lunch depending on the progress of their tasks. Meetings between team members about their projects are informal and they speak without a set schedule.

They are decisive and try to respond to the problem straightaway. Similarly, they listen to each other and discuss possible alternatives. This is in keeping with Gadamer's (1999) hermeneutic perception because these workers use the three characteristic elements in the hermeneutical process, namely, understanding, interpretation, and application. Another feature is the speed with which they handle different data and information and their ability to change easily from one topic to another. This also indicates that mental flexibility is an innate characteristic of these workers. Similarly, they have a great capacity for adaptation; as soon as a meeting is concluded, they have a coffee and return to work. The speed at which they adjust is remarkable and they do not seem to need to take time to switch to another activity. This speed is apparent in how they communicate, through the transfer of ideas and information, and in how they keep themselves up-to-date through the Internet, enabling them to stay constantly informed about the world outside. It is even apparent in their daily vitality, as these creative workers are constantly thinking about and planning activities, both professionally and personally.

These creative workers have greater freedom than the typical alienated worker. They have fun at work and are always joking and laughing. They share different experiences and anecdotes of their personal life with each other. They behave like a group of friends who are playing together, in contrast to the traditional serious nature of a workplace. In addition, they openly share their ideological views on issues, despite having opposing views. They also speak about their ideas aloud while working on the Internet and take decisions through informal consensus. They often say the first thing that comes into their head, even if these thoughts have nothing to do with the tasks that their colleagues are doing. In this regard, Sawyer (2011:247) concludes that people prefer to work in groups with diverse flows. For this reason, companies try to create work environments where workers have to improvise, enabling them to attract and retain the most creative professionals.

Different personal skills in the professional profiles are valued. There are two main skills, innate abilities and acquired skills. The union of these two competencies is the best way to work in these types of multidisciplinary working teams. The two groups in this study share information without hesitation, even though they could be rivals. This type of behavior, as well as the common area for dialogue, is beneficial for everybody. Communication is multidisciplinary between designers and programmers and intergroup communication is fluid. The productivity level of each person is different depending on the time of the day.

This research is relevant because it includes the idea of the hybrid and mixing. These are concepts that have not been researched much in social science. This research breaks with binomial ideas of inside-out, public-private, personal-professional, work-play, et cetera, and explores fusion as a main characteristic of creativity and a hallmark in professional organizations. This article also provides another way to understand the creative potential through the union of diverse situations and through the connection of social realities that have always been separated.

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