EXPLORING COMMUNICATION USED BETWEEN

THE MARGINALIZED AND THE HEGEMONIC

A Paper
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of the
North Dakota State University
of Agriculture and Applied Sciences

By

Denise Brown Swain

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS

Major Department:
Communication

November 2010

Fargo, North Dakota

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The Supervisory Committee certifies that this ***disquisition*** complies with North Dakota State University's regulations and meets the accepted standards for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE:

Robert S. Littlefield

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ABSTRACT

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The underclass, the underprivileged, and the impoverished are in an ongoing fight to get their voice heard. To accomplish a vocal position in society, this group must overcome a dismantling by their privileged adversaries. Success is first achieved by exhibiting fierce resilience. Next, it is important for this silenced group to defend and justify their need to be heard.

The intent of this study is to illustrate the communication that exists between marginalized groups and hegemonic groups. Marginalized groups are faced with oppression by hegemonic groups. How the marginalized sustain themselves through communication is the thrust of this study.

The method of observation is through three lenses: rhetorical criticism, ethnography and case study. This portfolio concludes that communication between divergent groups is vital; communication ushers in understanding of other cultures; and communication generates a platform for dialogue.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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SECTION ONE

INTRODUCTION

This master's paper is a portfolio of exemplary papers written during my graduate studies at North Dakota State University. This portfolio examines communication between society's rejected and accepted populations. The papers follow how elites, representing the hegemonic perspective, communicated to those that society rejects. In turn, the papers observe how these individuals and groups that society terms "misfits," representing the marginalized, responded to those with assumed power over them. The papers peer through three lenses to gauge the divergent communication behavior. The three angles are observed from the rhetorical criticism vantage, the ethnography view, and the case study perspective.

In order to provide clarity about how the terms *hegemonic* and *marginalized* are used in this master's paper, the following definitions are offered. The marginalized are characterized as the underclass, those who society oversteps and overlooks. Dutta (2006) described the marginalized as "being at the periphery of a dominant system and that marginalization is embodied in the position of being under, of being silenced, of being without a voice and of being without resources" (n.p.). Balit (2004) utilized the following terms to depict the marginalized: poor, isolated, unemployed or unskilled, illiterate or semi-illiterate with little access to education and training. Further, Balit indicated that the "powerless" marginalized"

suffer from social discrimination and lack recognition of their identities and ways of life" (p. 6).

In contrast, the elites and the hegemonic are considered the dominant standard. Vernon (1998) described hegemonic discourse as an "established concept of 'normality'" (p. 201). Elites, as defined by van Dijk (1995) are:

> Groups in the sociopolitical power structure that develop
>
> fundamental policies, make the most influential decisions, and
>
> control the overall modes of their execution: government,
>
> parliament, directors or boards of state agencies, leading politicians,
>
> corporate owners, directors and managers, and leading academics.
>
> (p.4)

van Dijk (1993) described elite discourse as being, "sustained by an ideological system and by a set of attitudes that legitimate difference and dominance" (p. 192). According to van Dijk, the elite are quick to deny their subtle acts of insensitivity toward 'others.'

Strikingly, hegemonic behavior is so embedded that it is considered normal and acceptable. Essed (1997) suggested that repression of other cultures comes naturally to the hegemonic. Essed reported that, "the dominant group comes to perceive and experience the marginalization and problemization of the Other as 'normal'" (p. 133).

Having defined the marginalized and the hegemonic, it is important to understand their symbiotic role and agenda. First, Pearce & Kivel (n.d.) suggested that the non-marginalized are tacitly comprised of and understood to be a "white,

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heterosexual male" (p. 2). Secondly, Feagin (2006) advanced an ulterior agenda among the hegemonic:

> The white elite, as the leading protector of social hierarchy and white privilege, has dealt with the strong pressures coming from the oppressed for change, by at most, making only those changes that will insure social peace and that will not remove whatever is essential to the persistence of the oppressive system (p. 35).

Thirdly, Clarke, Hall, Jefferson & Roberts (1976) further described the mindset of hegemonic and the impasse faced by the marginalized in resisting them.

> The dominant culture represents itself as *the* culture. It tries to define and contain all other cultures within its inclusive range. *Its* views of the world, unless challenged, will stand as the most natural, all-embracing, universal culture. Other cultural configurations will not only be subordinate to this dominant order, they will enter into a struggle with it, seek to modify, negotiate, resist or even overthrow its reign – its hegemony (p. 12).

Therefore, having established the existence of deep-rooted and systemic oppression, the papers within this portfolio reveal characteristic and consistent patterns within hegemonic and marginalized communication. In particular, those with hegemonic perspectives assume that marginalized individuals and groups have certain characteristics. Particularly, those with hegemonic views are convinced that marginalized individuals and groups ultimately will accept their tactics. The hegemonic perspective holds that the marginalized individuals and groups should

be happy with their status and remain in their *place*. Further, the hegemonic individuals and groups exhibit an air of insensitivity toward the marginalized. Because those holding hegemonic views generalize that the lower class is uneducated, they assess that compliance is inevitable.

Likewise, the marginalized individuals and groups show certain communication consistencies. In particular, those within marginalized groups communicate a level of unexpected intelligence. Further, the marginalized individuals and groups communicate fierce resilience and determination. Lastly, the marginalized are in an incessant state of defense and justification. Each of the three papers exhibit these consistent patterns.

The fact that American society grows increasingly diverse (Takamura, 2002) generates the necessity for the study of hegemonic and marginalized communication. More diversity creates less homogeneity. Therefore, the need for understanding cultural differences will grow. It will be necessary that language become less divisive. A generation of rhetors must emerge to advocate sensitivity and tolerance.

Description of Selected Papers

In the section that follows, each of the manuscripts included in this master's paper portfolio are briefly described. Through this introduction, the theme of my research in communication is identified.

Co-workers with God: How Martin Luther King, Jr. Justifies His Role Through Narrative and Metaphor

The first paper in this portfolio, *Co-workers with God,* utilized rhetorical criticism to exhibit how the poor were forced to defend and justify their right to exist and thrive. The manuscript employed *Letter from Birmingham Jail* (*Letter*) to express the litany of oppressive communication tactics used by the hegemonic against the poor. Specifically, *Letter* observes how eight hierarchal clergymen communicated to the civil rights activists and their spokespeople. In turn, *Letter* considers how the civil rights activists communicate their fight-back logic to the eight hierarchal clergymen. *Co-workers with God* offered three key examples of the hegemonic and marginalized communication divergence. First, it showed how the marginalized resist stagnation. Second, it revealed how the marginalized justify the necessity for change. Third, it examined how the marginalized exhibit resilience.

First, *Co-workers with God* displayed an ongoing war emerging between the haves and the have-nots. The haves pursued stagnation, a condition of minimal development. The have-nots pursued growth and advancement. This stand-off was the thesis within *Letter*. Specifically, I argued that the primary thrust of the text was to counter the delay and hesitation of the civil rights movement advocated by the clergy at-hand and civil rights opponents at-large. The hegemonic assess the marginalized as disrupters. The marginalized see their protest as affecting change. This stagnation-growth warfare was a consistent theme within hegemonic and marginalized communication.

Secondly, *Co-workers with God* profiled how the marginalized must justify themselves. Specifically, the document illustrated how the poor communicate their plight to the privileged. *Co-workers with God* demonstrated how *Letter* escorts the

hegemonic from the upper floors of high society to the lower floors of reality. The hegemonic see the civil rights activities only from a distance; *Letter* brings protest activities to their doorstep and introduces details and facts otherwise unknown to privileged society. I wrote that the narrative method allowed King to tell his side of the story from the front lines. The clergymen saw the activities of civil rights from a distance and from a perspective outside of King's culture. The narrative enabled King to reel the clergymen into his world. King used characters, icons, anecdotes, philosophy, and religious ideology with which the clergymen were familiar.

Thirdly, *Co-workers with God* showed how the marginalized remain resilient in the face of hegemonic advances. The paper argued that the hegemonic label and blame those who do not embrace their ideology. Even though the eight clergymen shared the same general job description as their adversary, Martin Luther King, Jr., they labeled King as an extremist because what he was doing served to build up the oppressed and quash their stagnation. Even though the pastoral occupation is tasked to help the needy, here, the hegemonic clergy reacted with disdain to the idea of outreach ministry.

King addressed the name-calling insult and turned it into a positive, however. Despite being negatively labeled as an extremist, King, in turn, translated extremism as a positive for change. This approach signified that when negative language is directed to the oppressed, it becomes fuel for them to forge forward in a quest for their goal. The language exhibited the resiliency theme that is common among marginalized populations. What the hegemonic mean for evil, the resulting communication is utilized for good.

Digging for Common Ground: An Ethnographer's Encounter with Women in a Homeless Shelter

An ethnographic study of homeless women was the focus of my second paper. My observations helped to define how homeless women communicate and defend their dignity. This study was valuable because it contrasted how the homeless are perceived with how the homeless actually function and thrive. In addition, this ethnography represented practical research into marginalized communication. This ethnographic study presented how the homeless utilize communication to defend, justify, and rise above their plight. *Digging for Common Ground* made four observations. First, it showed how the marginalized justify themselves. Second, it revealed how the marginalized deflect portrayals of unintelligence. Third, it examined how the hegemonic exhibit insensitivity. Lastly, it illustrated how the marginalized display resilience.

First, *Digging for Common Ground* showed that marginalized are forced to justify themselves. Hegemonic society does not take them for face value. Therefore, the marginalized must counter preconceived beliefs about them. It is necessary for them to demonstrate worth. Several questions were asked of the homeless women who participated in the study. One question was: "What do you want people to know about you?" The answer to this question unveiled lessons about the hegemonic as much as it uncovered characteristics about the homeless. One of the homeless women answered a self-profile. She stated, "I'm a loving person. I'm somebody. I'm determined to make my life better. I'm teachable." That particular self-characterization suggested that hegemonic assert a very different view of the

marginalized: The homeless are despicable, the homeless are nobodies, the homeless are unredeemable, and the homeless are hopeless. The responses of women contrasted the hegemonic view with the pursuit of improvement stated in the language of redemption.

Secondly, *Digging for Common Ground* addressed society's portrayal of the marginalized as unintelligent. Through research, it was discovered that this group of marginalized homeless were learned and had intelligence. The communication emerging from the homeless suggested that they have skills, they want to be employed, they have a desire to excel, and they want to reconstruct their lives. I observed that all the women appeared to be educated. Most had excellent reading skills. Despite this reality, hegemonic society depicts the homeless as untouchable and nasty.

Third, *Digging for Common Ground* exhibited the pattern of hegemonic insensitivity. The hegemonic cannot grasp why an individual is not in the workforce. The privileged assume that society as a whole enjoys the ease and simplicity of landing employment. Similarly, the upper class communicates curiosity in how the marginalized become homeless and why they become homeless. Homeless women acknowledged that they are asked, "Why don't you just get a job; you are so young?" and "Why, [are you homeless]?" The carefree hegemonic life is not easily applied to the marginalized life. Therefore, the hegemonic appear to have difficulty grasping the plight of the marginalized.

Lastly, *Digging for Common Ground* affirmed that resilience is the icon of the marginalized. Forward thinking and fierce determination fuel the marginalized.

Thusly, the marginalized address their hegemonic naysayers with confidence and fortitude. The marginalized consistently exhibit a characteristic of determination: "I held my head down but I have to hold my head up. I am picking myself back up." The marginalized homeless recognized the assumptions of the hegemonic and acknowledged their detraction. However, the marginalized communicate both a falling down and a getting back up. Their determination equips them to successfully counter the negative language heaved upon them.

Toxic Trash Transfer: Communicating and Creating Risk

The third paper employed a risk communication case study to analyze the transfer of coal ash waste from a privileged neighborhood to an impoverished neighborhood. Specifically, *Toxic Trash Transfer* illustrated how the environmental leaders utilized language to cloak and misinform vulnerable populations. My research discovered interacting arguments displayed in language which validated that vulnerable groups were actually at risk, despite hegemonic language to the contrary. Most notably, language from the hegemonic government agencies vastly differed from the grassroots advocacy groups. *Toxic Trash Transfer* made three key observations: First, the hegemonic portrayed insensitivity; second, the hegemonic propelled the necessity to embrace their view; and third, the hegemonic advanced the notion that the marginalized remain in their place.

First, *Toxic Trash Transfer* demonstrated hegemonic insensitivity. I concluded that what was missing from the risk communication was acknowledgement of risk or admission of potential risk by the EPA and local officials. Essentially, the safety of the vulnerable was treated with utter disregard.

Despite scientific research to the contrary, governing officials chose to speak generically about any coal ash risk. I noted that leaders failed to thoroughly examine risk and neglected to introduce expert testimony of risk. They failed to deliver accurate and unbiased data to their citizens.

Second, *Toxic Trash Transfer* portrayed hegemonic bullying which insisted that the leadership viewpoint was justified. What I found to be striking was that the EPA justified placing Perry County in harm's way while Roane County was protected. The vulnerable populace–the poor, unemployed, and majority African American community, was placed at a greater risk than the majority White, employed, and economically stable mainstream community. The privileged living in Roane County, Tennessee did not want coal ash in their backyard. The vulnerable living in Perry County, Alabama became an available receptacle. From the hegemonic mindset, it was justifiable to remove the coal ash from Tennessee to Alabama.

Third, *Toxic Trash Transfer* advanced the notion that the marginalized remain in their place. Hegemonic communication sought to limit and restrain the vulnerable. The EPA and the TVA excluded Perry County residents from an open discussion prior to the transfer of the potentially hazardous coal ash. It was only after the coal ash had been introduced to Perry County that a public forum was held. I observed that the TVA and the EPA did not involve Perry County residents in a discussion prior to the transfer of the potentially hazardous coal ash. Through an emphasis on landfill infrastructure, the EPA waged a systemic effort to introduce coal ash without public input. Instead of directing language toward the impact of

the coal ash itself, the TVA and the EPA focused their conversation, their literature, and their talking points on the stability of the Arrowhead Landfill, which would house the coal ash.

Rationale

What communication scholars can learn from this collection of papers is that society is becoming increasingly diverse. Therefore, marginalized populations may become the norm while hegemonic populations may become the exception. It will be vital for communication researchers to know how to effectively communicate with diverse populations.

What I think is remarkable about the three essays is that the marginalized were forced to endlessly justify themselves, stating and restating the reasoning for their behavior. It seems that communication offered by the hegemonic incessantly questioned the worth, the value, and the necessity of the marginalized to function and to advance. The hegemonic appeared to either disbelieve that the marginalized actually had problems or the hegemonic embraced the theory that the problems of the marginalized were somehow justified or self-created.

If the intent of the marginalized was growth, then the objective of the hegemonic was stagnation. The communication offered by the hegemonic was purposed to limit and restrain; while the communication advanced by the marginalized was crafted to expand and to escalate. Moreover, the marginalized consistently communicated resilience and relentlessness to the dismay and surprise of the hegemonic.

Preview of Organizational Structure

This master's paper will follow a five part organizational structure. Section One has introduced the themes of the three papers selected for inclusion in this portfolio, along with a brief description of each paper's findings, and a rationale for why the focus of these papers is worthy of study. A copy of each paper will constitute Sections Two, Three, and Four. Section Five will conclude with a reflective summary of lessons I have learned while completing my master's degree in communication at North Dakota State University, as well as future directions I may pursue regarding communication between hegemonic and marginalized populations.

SECTION TWO

CO-WORKERS WITH GOD:

HOW MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. JUSTIFIES HIS ROLE THROUGH

NARRATIVE AND METAPHOR WITHIN

LETTER FROM BIRMINGHAM JAIL

Letter from Birmingham Jail is a discourse in which Martin Luther King, Jr.

builds an argument in opposition to eight other clergymen. Both Martin Luther

King, Jr., and the eight clergymen served the same Divine Being. However, the

opposing sides had a different approach to social justice. King advocated

immediacy and the clergymen promoted gradualism. Advancing the notion that

God justifies his work, King argued with the clergymen that his actions were for the

benefit of the oppressed.

Throughout *Letter*, there are nine primary arguments to address nine key

issues raised by the group of clergymen: 1) the presence of outsiders; 2) the

occurrence of public demonstrations; 3) the need for open negotiations among

races; 4) the untimeliness of protests; 5) the observation of segregationist law; 6)

the need for orderly conduct; 7) the incendiary actions among civil rights leaders; 8)

the extremism among organizers; and 9) the need for commendation. Four of these

arguments will be dealt with in this essay. King's argument of working on behalf of

the oppressed is explicitly tucked into the following four arguments: Outsiders,

untimeliness, incendiary actions, and extremism. Upon these grounds, he supported

his argument on three fronts: His work on behalf of the oppressed is justified; God

is on the side of the oppressed; and God opposes oppressors.

Throughout *Letter*, King spoke to three audiences. His primary audience was his opponents–the eight clergymen. To them he justified why his alliance with God on the matter of social justice superseded theirs. His secondary audience was at-large opposition to the civil rights movement. To them he illustrated what oppression and degradation does to the human soul. His tertiary audience comprised civil rights foot soldiers and civil rights advocates. To them he relayed that he is well aware of their plight and their sacrifice. He encouraged them to continue their fight for justice. A rhetorical criticism of *Letter* begins with these three facts: King faced eight opposing ideologists; King spoke to three audiences; and King erected comparative narratives to justify his logic and injects illustrative metaphors to magnify and prompt social justice efforts.

Letter from Birmingham Jail was significant because it was a confrontation of religious ideology. It was also significant that while King supported his argument with Biblical references, the opposing clergy did not. Surprisingly, their argument was socially and politically rooted; it was driven by their view of what was best for the community. Using the clergyman's letter as a backdrop, this essay examined how King built an argument to counter their views. The essay explored nuances within the text that unlocked the door to King's persuasive power.

This paper embarked to explore language used in *Letter*. First, a context of the document was investigated. Second, the paper examined how narratives were undertaken to speak to the audience – particularly the clergy and the oppressed. Third, the paper delved into King's use of metaphors to draw illustrations for the clergy, the opposers and the civil rights foot soldiers and advocates.

Context

Within *Public Statement by Eight Alabama Clergymen* (1963), eight

Alabama clergymen felt compelled to address the actions of the Birmingham civil

rights movement by composing a paper directed to a key leader within the

movement – Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The religious group was disturbed by the

demonstrations and activities spearheaded by King. Their paper was published in

the *Birmingham News* on April 12, 1963, and was signed by some of "most

prominent religious leaders in the state of Alabama" (Bass, 2002, p. 2). The clergy

included two Methodist bishops, two Episcopal bishops, a Catholic bishop, a

Presbyterian pastor, a Baptist pastor and a Jewish rabbi.

On the day that the clergymen's letter was published, King had been

arrested for violating a mass demonstration law. While incarcerated in the

Birmingham city jail, King reflected on the progress of the movement and read the

published paper written by the white ministers who were dissuading the Negroes

from demonstrating. Composing a lengthy response to the concerns of the eight

clergy, King itemized their issues and offered individualized commentary,

justifying his actions and identifying his objective. King "made clear his

unequivocal stand on civil rights and defined the essence of the movement" (Ebony,

1971, p. 43). Within the text, King directed his response to "my dear fellow

clergymen," and described them as "men of genuinely good will" (King, 1963,

para. 1). King acknowledged that clergy, "criticisms are sincerely set forth," and

described his intent to respond to their statements with, "patient and reasonable

terms" (para. 1). His tone was that of a colleague and fellow laborer.

Initially, after April 16, 1963, the *Letter from Birmingham Jail* circulated as a mimeographed copy. Later, the Quaker-founded group, American Friends Service Committee, printed and circulated 50,000 copies. By May 1963, it had reached the mass media and attention to the work grew exponentially. In June 1963, the document appeared in periodicals such as *The Christian Century, Christianity and Crisis*, the *New York Post,* and *Ebony* magazine (Letter from Birmingham Jail, 2008). In August 1963, it appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly*.

The primary thrust of the text was to counter the delay and hesitation of the civil rights movement advocated by the clergy at-hand and civil rights opponents at-large. King respectfully and laboriously laid out each of the clergy's charges and offered in-depth discussion and attention. King defended his actions and graphically persuaded the clergy to align with his agenda. King argued for immediacy and activism.

For foot soldiers, *Letter* became a legacy. Bass (2002) called it, "the most important written document of the civil rights era" (p. 1). According to Bass, "for a people whose lives evolved around oral tradition, *Letter* served as a tangible account of the long road to freedom" (p. 1). It became everything that the activists stood for. The document "captured the essence of the struggle for racial equality and provided a blistering critique of the gradualist approach to racial justice" (p. 1).

For the opponents, King's work was a deafening touché. According to Patton (2004), *Letter* made the moderates confront more directly the fact that the nature and pace of change had been too slow" (p. 62). It became strikingly clear that "sufficient efforts of moderates in Birmingham to bring about incremental

changes in civil rights were seen as inherently defective" (p. 62). Coupled with the forthcoming visuals of fire hoses and dogs unleashed by segregationist public safety commissioner Bull Connor, "many in the American public as a whole read the *Letter* with new eyes about the racial crisis" (Watson, 2004, p. 18). *Letter* was "King's most powerful indictment of the white churches for their lack of involvement in the black struggle for freedom" (Findley, 1997, p. 33). According to Bass (2002), most of the white clergymen assessed King's rhetoric "cruel and unfair" (p. 149). The ministers spent the balance of their lives quietly defending their convictions. Most of the eight believed King had committed an injustice with a misleading portrait of their individual racial convictions. Regardless, the eight clergy were hemmed. They were being squeezed by the "black activist" and the "belligerent segregationist" (Bass, 2002, p. 150). As a result, in the eyes of critics, their activism was dually not enough and too much. However, for many younger clergy, King's Biblical references spoke volumes. (Findlay, 1997) In a Birmingham jail he offered not only, "a powerful rebuke to the continuing inactivism of most white religious leaders, but also words that could help create, finally, kairos" (p. 34).

As we grasp the conceptual framework of hegemonic communication and marginalized communication and apply their principles to *Letter from Birmingham Jail,* three research questions emerge:

RQ1: How does King argue that he is working for God and simultaneously working on behalf of the oppressed?

RQ2: How does King pit his labors as urgent and the clergy labors as stagnant?

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RQ3: How does this preacher utilize language to enlighten other preachers while justifying his own involvement?

With the *Public Statement by Eight Alabama Clergymen* (1963) serving as a springboard, King proceeded to respond to the clergy. His objective was threefold: justify his presence, legitimize his actions, and argue that he is working for God. King utilized two means to build an argument – narratives and metaphor. The use of narrative established common ground with the clergy and helped them correlate and apply their position to King's posture. While the entirety of *Letter* featured nine narratives, my treatment of this essay focused on four of the narratives: The Outsiders narrative, the Law narrative, the Incite narrative, and the Extremism narrative.

Using Narratives to Argue

Walter Fisher suggested that narratives are charged by good reasons. Fisher (1997) wrote, "The production and use of good reasons are ruled by matters of history, culture and character along with the specific constraints of time and place of presentation" (p. 314). Moreover, Fisher (1999) relayed that stories should be factored in context. He wrote, "The narrative paradigm insists that human communication should be viewed as historical as well as situational, as stories competing with other stories constituted by good reasons . . ." (p. 266). Additionally, stories also take stand and make a statement. Stories enable the auditor to take a side. According to Fisher (1992), "Stories, in my view, are not isolated utterances or gestures, but symbolic actions – words and/or deeds – that have sequence and meaning for those who live, create, or interpret them" (p. 314)

Subsequently, Fisher characterized a narrative by the presence of coherence and fidelity. Coherence is described as whether or not the story hangs together. Fidelity, determines whether the story experienced rings true. Undergirded by good reason, King employed history, current events, cohesiveness and legitimacy to construct a vivid narrative.

The narrative method allowed King to tell his side of the story, from the front lines. The clergymen saw the activities of civil rights from a distance and from a perspective outside of King's culture. The narrative enabled King to reel the clergymen into his world. King used characters, icons, anecdotes, philosophy and religious ideology that the clergymen would be familiar with.

Through narrative, King employed a series of first person accounts to explain his actions and emphasize the religion-centered nature of his work. King thoroughly responded to the nine objections raised by the opposing eight clergymen. For each objection he countered with an account of the Negro life, the civil rights impasse, or a personal experience that demands his involvement. The narratives enlightened the opponents, empowered the advocates, and embraced the oppressed. Specifically, within four of the narratives, King countered the clergy with Biblical references to build his case that God is on the side of the oppressed and he is working with God.

The "Outsiders" Narrative

King opened *Letter* with an illustrative introduction of who he is and why he was in Birmingham. King directly addressed the clergymen's argument that Birmingham is being plagued by outsiders. King first erected his credentials: "My

Dear Fellow Clergymen," established him as a religious leader (King, 1963, para. 1). "President of Southern Christian Leadership Conference" introduced him first as an elected official within the religious community, and second as a man having earned respect from his peers (para. 1).

Having established his credentials, King continued the narrative by defining his role as a preacher. He explained that as a preacher, he was compelled to travel wherever hurting people are. King affirmed, "I am in Birmingham because injustice is here" (para. 3). He introduced Biblical texts and aligned himself with 8th Century prophets and the New Testament's, Apostle Paul. Just like those icons that were driven to uphold the call and message of God, King described himself as, "compelled to carry the gospel of freedom beyond my own hometown" (para. 3).

The Outsiders narrative offered evidence that King and his labors for God were justified. He was credentialed and commissioned. The narrative bears both coherence and fidelity. It was coherent because it made sense that a respected civil rights leader who had a track record of success would be invited to Birmingham, Alabama – a place King referenced as, "probably the most thoroughly segregated city in the United States" (para. 6). It also made sense that a preacher would be attentive to hurting and oppressed people. The text had fidelity because the audience – a group of preachers – had likely experienced calls for congregant assistance. Likewise, preachers would easily relate to the itinerant lifestyle demanded by the occupation and the religious obligation of entering hostile and unwelcomed territory.

The "Law" Narrative

This narrative introduced the argument of obeying just laws and disobeying unjust laws. Again, King specifically addressed "the legitimate concern" of the clergymen and their "anxiety over [our] willingness to break laws" (para. 12). First, King suggested there were two types of laws: just and unjust laws. Then, he described the difference. Lastly, he cited why some laws must be obeyed and other laws must be broken.

According to King, "A just law is a man-made code that squares with the moral law or the law of God. An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law" (para. 13). Further he described a just law as one that, "uplifts human personality" and an unjust law as one that "degrades" (para. 13). In essence, just laws empower and unjust laws oppress. As an advocate for the oppressed, King argued for civil disobedience. King stated, "Thus it is that I can urge men to obey the 1954 decision of the Supreme Court, for it is morally right; and I can urge them to disobey segregation ordinances, for they are morally wrong" (para. 13).

King argued that the response to laws is not only a legal matter it is also a moral matter. King wrote, "One has not only a legal but a moral responsibility to obey just laws. Conversely, one has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws" (para. 12). King aligned himself with Biblical icons that practiced civil disobedience. He wrote, "It was evidenced sublimely in the refusal of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to obey the laws of Nebuchadnezzar, on the ground that a higher moral law was at stake" (para. 17). King argued that, as a Christian civil rights leader, he can urge the disobedience of laws that are morally wrong. Further, like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and the Christians persecuted in the early

church, oppressed people submit to "a higher moral law" (para. 17). On two fronts, King suggested that God was on the side of the oppressed: just laws square with the law of God and to repel an unjust law is "is in reality expressing the highest respect for law" (para. 16).

King introduced several aspects of fidelity within this Law narrative. The act of civil disobedience among the Biblical characters rings with association among the clergy. Further, King's introduction of the legality of Hitler's action was a harsh dose of reality – what is legal does not equate what is proper. Lastly, King advanced fidelity among his religious audience through his hypothesis that illegal obedience to Christianity within a Communist country is morally right.

The "Incite" Narrative

This narrative introduced the argument that civil rights actions were not purposefully incendiary; instead, civil rights actions served as a prompt for righteousness. King addressed the concern put forth by the clergy: now is not the time. King argued, "Now is the time to make real the promise of democracy" (para. 21). King alluded that resistance to protest is expected and violence is a by-product of resistance. However, the larger issue was, King explained, "The time is always ripe to do right" (para. 21).

King argued that change must be prompted. Change must be ignited. According to King, "Human progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability; it comes through the tireless efforts of men willing to be co-workers with God" (para. 21). Here, King declared that he was a co-worker with God. As a civil rights leader

he had spearheaded protests which defied stagnation. As a co-worker with God, he was elevating "national policy" and fighting for "human dignity" (para. 21).

Within this narrative King unveiled that God opposed the oppressors. King implied that those who refused to support or uplift the oppressed would be rejected by God. King wrote, "We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people" (para. 21). Those who willingly refused to speak out against civil rights horrors were aligned with those who impose civil rights horrors.

The "Extremist" Narrative

This is the lengthiest of the nine narratives and the most candid. King directly addressed the label of "extremist" placed on him by the clergymen. He implied that initially, he interpreted their comment as an affront. He wrote, "At first I was rather disappointed that fellow clergymen would see my nonviolent efforts as those of an extremist" (para. 22). Moreover, within the Extremism narrative, King was blatant and unhindered with his assessment of how clergy [and their constituents] were performing on social matters.

First, King contrasted himself and his efforts with Elijah Muhammad's Muslim movement. While King advocated non-violence, the Muslim movement advocated violence. King wrote, "I am grateful to God that, through the influence of the Negro church, the way of nonviolence became an integral part of our struggle" (para. 23). The key word "our" served as a dividing line between the ideology of King and the ideology of Elijah Muhammad. King further advanced that his ideology has lessened bloodshed. He stated, "If this philosophy had not emerged,

by now many streets of the South would, I am convinced, be flowing with blood" (para. 23). Emphasizing "this philosophy", King reasoned that he advocated nonviolence and nonviolence creates peaceful protest. If, King conjectured, his nonviolent leadership were overthrown, the impending alternative would be "black nationalism" (para. 23). The Black Nationalism would create streets flowing with blood. Essentially, King posited that as a co-worker with God, he was a protector of community calm.

Secondly, King inferred that what was initially received as an insult was actually a vote of confidence. King presented New Testament, Old Testament, and notable religious and political icons who were extremists. King stated that Jesus was an extremist for love, Amos was an extremist for justice, and Paul was an extremist for the Christian Gospel. King advanced the hypothesis: "So the question is not whether we will be extremists, but what kind of extremists we will be" (para. 24). King exposed faults in the clergyman's argument. King inferred that extremism was a valuable asset when it was used to advance, "love, truth, and goodness" (para. 24). He concluded his argument with the hypothesis that "perhaps the South, the nation and the world are in dire need of creative extremists" (para. 24). Undergirded by the actions of Christ Jesus, prophet Amos, and Apostle Paul, King authenticated that he was working on behalf of God.

Within this Extremist narrative, King reasoned that God opposed oppressors. Earlier in the text King queried, "Will we be extremists for the preservation of injustice or for the extension of justice" (para. 24). King answered this question with a description of how the contemporary church oppresses. He

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called the church, "arch defenders of the status quo," "silent sanction," and "ineffectual" (para. 32). He wrote, "But the judgment of God is upon the church as never before. If today's church does not recapture the sacrificial spirit of the early church, it will lose its authenticity"(para. 33). Because the church did not seek to uplift or engage the oppressed, the church was indicted as a purveyor of injustice. King declared that God would oppose these religious oppressors.

King closed the Extremist narrative with the thesis that God was on the side of the oppressed: "We will win our freedom because the sacred heritage of our nation and the eternal will of God are embodied in our echoing demands" (para. 34). King argued that what now seems to be an impasse will eventually subside. It was not God's will, King asserted, for [God's] people to be oppressed and remain oppressed. The sovereign will of God will reign. Earlier in the text King stated that, "oppressed people will not remain oppressed forever" (para. 24). Reiterating that assumption, King was confident that God's side of the battle would win. Citing the "sacred heritage of our nation," King reasoned that America was built upon God-centered principles. King added, "We will reach the goal of freedom in Birmingham, here and all over the nation, because the goal of America is freedom. Abused and scorned though we may be, our destiny is tied up with America's destiny" (para. 34). The "goal of America" alluded to such nationalistic phraseology as, "all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights," found within the Declaration of Independence. King purported that it was only natural and right that the God who created America would be the God who would preserve his statutes within America (para. 34).

Having utilized narratives to address his primary audience of the eight clergymen, King argued why he was doing what he was doing. Essentially, the narratives legitimized King's work. Throughout the document, King also addressed his secondary audience of opposers, and his tertiary audience of civil rights foot soldiers and advocates. To all three of his audiences, King employed metaphors to vividly illustrate the condition of civil rights. Further, King utilized metaphor to impress urgency and immediate action. To each of his audiences, King utilized imagery to immerse his audience in the inescapable reality of civil rights action.

Using Metaphors to Persuade

I. A. Richards (1936) described a metaphor as having the ability to bring differing parties to the table. A metaphor establishes a common ground from which discussion can proceed. Richards wrote, "In the simplest formulation, when we use a metaphor we have two thoughts of different things active together and supported by a single word, or phrase, whose meaning is the resultant of their interaction" (p. 93). Richards described the give-and-take of metaphor. It is used to exchange ideas. Richards depicted the functioning of metaphors as, "a borrowing between and intercourse of thoughts, a transaction between contexts" (p. 94). Richards conveyed that metaphors are effective because the tools of tenor and vehicle construct resemblances. Tenor is defined as, "the underlying idea or principle subject which the vehicle or figure means (p. 96). Vehicle is the expression employed to communicate the idea. Therefore, within the realm of common ground, give-and-take, and constructed resemblances, King employed metaphors to compel his audience to act.

A call to action is a part of many Christian worship services. This action segment is often called "Invitation to Christian Discipleship." The objective is to prompt uncommitted congregants to come forward, thereby aligning with God and the body of believers. Those who accept the invitation go through a series of steps to become a part of the religious group membership. The exercise – generally ignited by the religious leadership or pastor –is an opportunity for the church to grow and build its population.

King had now veritably preached a sermon to his three audiences – the eight clergymen, the opponents of civil rights, as well as the foot soldiers and advocates of civil rights. Having justified his actions as an outsider, having argued that his perceived untimeliness was opportune, having doused the notions that his strategies were inflammatory, and having redirected the label of extremist, King's credentials were established and his veracity was grounded. With the groundwork laid, the preacher extended to his audience an invitation to discipleship. Metaphors were used to enhance the invitation.

To the audience of eight clergymen, King's metaphors invited them to team with him in working with God and uplifting the oppressed. To the audience of civil rights opponents, King's metaphors invited them to view life from the vantage of the downtrodden, the denigrated, and the denied. To the audience of civil rights foot soldiers and civil rights advocates, King used metaphors to first, express comprehension of their plight; and second, to encourage them to continue fighting for their rights. Within each audience, King sought to allow the metaphors to build his army of supporters while enlightening naysayers.

Another method that King used to persuade was the exercise of orientation

metaphors (Lakoff & Johnson, 1997). King was able to metaphorically convey the

struggle of the downtrodden and the privileges of the lofty. Additionally, with the

light-dark family of metaphors (Osborn, 1967), King established persuasive

potency The light-dark technique consistently paints the oppressed in dungeon-like

environments, contrasting to society-at-large who occupy sunlit surroundings.

Metaphors for the Audience of Clergymen

As he preached to the preachers, King illustrated precise actions that the

clergymen could take to better the lives of the oppressed. He wrote, ". . . help men

rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic heights of

understanding and brotherhood" (para. 9). The light-dark metaphor exemplified the

denigrating status of the Negro. Prejudice and racism were pits contrasted with the

elevated mode of acceptance and unity. Tenor was prejudice/racism and vehicle

was dark depths. The other tenor was understanding and brotherhood and vehicle

was majestic heights. The situational metaphors, "depths" and "heights," contrasted

current position with needful opportunity.

King invited the clergymen to become active with him. Using some white

activists as role models, King showed the clergymen how they too could make a

difference. King described how activists ". . . sensed the need for powerful 'action'

antidotes to combat the disease of segregation" (para. 25). Segregation was the

tenor and disease was the vehicle. This metaphor depicted how the clergymen could

have the power to heal and restore the oppressed from rampant social sickness.

King prompted the clergymen to repel stagnation and embrace activism. He used the metaphors *thermometer* and *thermostat* to describe the current and former church, respectively. King wrote, "The church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion; it was a thermostat that transformed the mores of society" (para. 32). King utilized the metaphors thermometer and thermostat, which served as vehicles. The tenor was church. King described the former church as an organized body that set the standard and rejected sway. The church was not a gauge that responded to external forces; instead, the church was the dial that initiated the temperature for the environment.

King encouraged the clergy to clinch the immediacy of social justice. He wrote, "Human progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability" (para. 21). The wheel metaphor suggested that progress was not a Sunday cruise vehicle. Instead, progress was a taxi with a running meter; progress had urgency; progress had a place to go. King added, "Now is the time to lift our national policy from the quicksand of racial injustice to the solid rock of human dignity" (p. 21). This text implied that the national policy that protected the oppressed had been sorely compromised. There was urgency to elevate policy to a secure platform where the oppressed could be treated with dignity. The situational metaphors, "quicksand" and "rock," distinguished society's neglect from national responsibility.

Metaphors for the Audience of Opponents

King sent a clear message to civil rights opponents – we are all in this together. King proclaimed that the opposing sides had more commonalities than differences: "We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single

garment of destiny" (para. 4). He explicitly stated that communities were interrelated. He advanced to two unshakable metaphors: inescapable network of mutuality and single garment of destiny. The tenor was mutuality and destiny. The vehicle was network and garment.

The metaphor, "network," suggested an intertwining and connectivity. "Garment" suggested a fabric that supported the undertone of a "woven" piece of cloth. The reference to "single" indicated that there was oneness in the fabric and both Negro and non-Negro were advancing in the same direction [destiny]. Again the word, "tied," translated to a bundling which prophetically results in a cooperative movement. Further, the metaphor implicated that the oppressed were "interrelated" to higher society, despite their status as shunned citizens.

King spent considerable time detailing the urgency and offering counterpoints to opponents who see no need to pursue civil rights at this time. King wrote, "Perhaps it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say, 'Wait'" (para. 12). King introduced the metaphor, "stinging darts of segregation." The tenor was segregation. The vehicle was dart. He explicitly stated that segregation was a painful experience which the immune society could not comprehend. Therefore, delay was practical for those who had not been impacted.

King offered illustrative concepts foreign to onlookers yet common to Negro citizens. He educated his opponents with striking metaphors: ". . . when you see the vast majority of your twenty million Negro brothers smothering in an airtight cage of poverty in the midst of an affluent society. . ." (para. 12). The

metaphor was "airtight cage of poverty." The tenor was poverty. The vehicle was cage. Here, the situational metaphor, "cage," implied that the condition was inescapable unless someone from the non-oppressed "affluent" society got involved and unlocked the cage.

Metaphors for the Audience of Civil Rights Foot Soldiers and Advocates

King offered his army of supporters a glimpse of future times and some statements of prophecy. He unveiled his vision for the civil rights movement. He discussed his enlightenment of the days ahead:

> One day the South will know that when these disinherited children
>
> of God sat down at lunch counters, they were in reality standing up
>
> for what is best in the American dream and for the most sacred
>
> values in our Judaeo Christian heritage, thereby bringing our nation
>
> back to those great wells of democracy which were dug deep by the
>
> founding fathers in their formulation of the Constitution and the
>
> Declaration of Independence. (para. 36)

King introduced the metaphor, "great wells of democracy." The tenor was democracy. The vehicle was well. King prophesized that one day it would be revealed that the protestors and demonstrators were simply dipping their cup into a well that was erected by the architects of the Constitution. King stated that the band of civil rights marchers were simply engaging their pursuit of happiness and embracing their unalienable rights. Explicitly, he encouraged them to continue to both, "[stand] up for what is best in the American dream," and to stand for a religious heritage described as "sacred values."

The metaphors helped foot soldiers stay focused on their mission. He empowered them and compelled them. King told his constituents that social conditions demanded the necessity to protest. King wrote, "There comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over, and men are no longer willing to be plunged into the abyss of despair" (para. 12). King introduced more metaphors: the cup of endurance and the abyss of despair. The vehicle was cup and abyss. The tenor was endurance and despair.

"Abyss" was used both as a situational metaphor and a light-dark metaphor. Abyss gave the image that Negros were pressed downward and stifled. While King showed that he was fully aware of their subjugation, he compelled them to dispel complacency. The cup of endurance illustrated patience and tolerance. The abyss of despair represented what had to be [willingly] tolerated. Both the toleration and the despair must end. Action [protests and demonstrations] instead must become the order of the day.

King inserted illustrations to embrace the proponents of civil rights. He used language and scenarios they could relate to. King stated, " . . . weary Negro men and women decided to rise from the dark dungeons of complacency to the bright hills of creative protest" (para. 30). The metaphors were dungeons of complacency to the bright hills of creative protest. Tenor was complacency and protest. The vehicle was dark dungeon and bright hills. The light-dark metaphor was employed to contrast where the oppressed are with where they seek to be.

The civil rights movement must forge forward because after 340 years of waiting for "constitutional and God given rights," the patience deadline has long

expired (para. 12). Further, after centuries of delay, the growing twenty million

Negroes have overspent their time within a bottomless hole of disappointment and

ill-fated drudgery (King, 1963). King effectively empowered foot soldiers and their

supporters to keep marching in the fight for freedom.

Having utilized metaphors to paint an up-close picture of life for oppressed

Negroes, King argued for immediate action. The clergy were to get involved, the

opposers were to comprehend, and the foot soldiers were to get active. The

language and the imagery within *Letter* offered abundant avenues for research and

exposition.

Implications

Letter from Birmingham Jail enabled King veritably to justify his position

as a civil rights worker, legitimize his presence as a preacher, and demonstrate his

ordination by God to work on behalf of God's people. The narrative enabled King

to establish common ground and offer a view of civil rights from his lens. The

metaphors offered King's audience provocative imagery which contrasted with

their world.

Letter from Birmingham Jail remains a goldmine for rhetorical critics. The

text is rich and replete with opportunity to examine nuances. Future research could

examine the language used to describe the oppressed. There are opportunities to

explore language from the light-dark and situational vantage. Future research could

probe the indictment language that lambasted the "white moderate" church and its

constituents (para. 19). There are also opportunities to explore status quo language

and implications of gradualism. Future research could build on a study of the iconic

characters and historical references used within the narratives. In addition, there are opportunities to understand how antiquity impacted the postmodern era.

The weighty seven-thousand word text of *Letter* is fervent when it is placed against the backdrop of the *Public Statement by Eight Alabama Clergymen.* Particularly, it is significant that while King supported his argument with Biblical references, the opposing clergy did not. The essential "presence" of God within King's text and the perceived "absence" of God within the clergymen's criticisms further alludes that King was a valid and stalwart servant of humanity.

Letter from Birmingham Jail erected the notion that the marginalized, the downtrodden, and the disregarded have voice; and with their faint, hushed voices, the marginalized can effect change and redirect history. When the eight clergymen penned their document, it was unbeknownst to them that their work would springboard one of the most critical discourses of social justice. *Letter from Birmingham Jail* set in motion a comprehension of oppression and a disdain for suffering. King successfully argued that social justice is vital; despite the leadership, the place, or the time.

SECTION THREE

DIGGING FOR COMMON GROUND:

AN ETHNOGRAPHER'S ENCOUNTER WITH WOMEN IN A

HOMELESS SHELTER

What makes us the same? Names? Geography? Gender? Similar experiences? Shared interests? Commonality is the biggest lesson that I gleaned from this ethnographic exercise. Through the study of intercultural communication, I learned that we have more commonalities than differences. The core of intercultural communication is the quest for common ground.

For me, finding common ground comes easily. I consider it inspiring to hear what those outside of my immediate circle have to say. For example, I found more in common with the women at Refuge Hope Place (RHP) than differences. Obviously, we were all women. We, or many of us, loved the Bible. We enjoyed Bible stories, many of us were familiar with them, and we had observations and opinions about them. Because I teach Sunday School, I am in front of Bible students quite often. The women at RHP were just as curious and opinionated as some of my Sunday School students. Both groups are interactive. Both groups have Bible knowledge, can apply Bible truths to their lives, and have a testimony of how Bible truths and the Gospel impacted their journeys. For me, it was not what is different about the women of RHP, it was about what is the same.

This research study pulled homeless women to the forefront. It offered a snapshot of their lives at the homeless shelter and enabled them to voice their challenges as they faced life without a traditional home. In addition, the research

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project created a platform for women to describe themselves. Further, the research built a ramp for women to unveil the thoughts and language of those who do not understand their state of being. Lastly, the study displayed the tools used by homeless women to preempt negative opinions and forces.

Literature Review

Voluminous research exists on the umbrella topic of homelessness. Contrary to society's notions, homelessness is not centered around the crazy, the illiterate and the lazy. (Blau, 1992; Glasser & Bridgman, 1999; Wright, 2009). Further, the subtopic of homeless women generates significant study as well, particularly in the area of health care. Homeless women comprise an increasingly large at-risk populace. (Hatton, Kleffel, Bennett, & Gaffrey, 2001; Rosengard, Chambers, Tulsky, Long, & Chesney, 2001; Lewis, Andersen, & Gelberg, 2003; Schanzer, Dominguez, Shrout & Caton, 2007). Through these research studies, homeless women speak out on their plight.

Several research projects collected data through participant observation and ethnographic methodology. Four ethnographic studies are particularly noteworthy. As a soup kitchen and shelter volunteer, Liebow (1993) unveiled how, "women remained human in the face of inhuman conditions" (p. 1). Drury (2008) conducted an ethnography study that depicted the experiences of homeless people in the "transition from street life into community housing" (p. 91). Luhrmann (2008) conducted an ethnographic research project to study why homeless women who were psychiatrically ill elected to refuse assistance. Bridgman (2003) presented a

firsthand account of the perspectives of homeless women who occupied streets, shelters, and drop-in housing.

Other studies offered insight and sundry perspectives of homeless women in general, and sheltered women in particular. Stainbrook and Hornik (2006) examined the lives and demands of women with children in the of homeless shelter environment. McDonald, Dergan, and Cleghorn (2007) revealed that senior-aged women, who found themselves homeless for the first time, had a set of challenges unlike the long-term homeless population. Hill (1991) closely observed homelessness among adult women, specifically detailing their visions of home life and their treasured possessions amid homelessness. Casey, Goudie, and Reeve (2007) studied the geography of homeless women and how they negotiated, managed, and occupy public space.

An exploration of the homeless has a tendency to evoke certain negative assumptions. Knecht and Martinez (2009) indicated that within society "the homeless are seen as work averse, filthy, and worthy of our contempt" (p. 521). A smelly odor, an ungroomed appearance, an unstable personality and an air of danger are typical generalizations which stimulate rejection (Phelan, Link, Moore & Stueve, 1997; Sev'er, 2002; Knecht & Martinez, 2009).

What research unveils is that society's portrayal of homelessness is divergent from real homeless people. Homelessness has a face; it is not merely a concept or a characterization. This research study seeks to explore the voice of homeless women living in a homeless shelter. Particularly, the research pursues the message(s) that homeless women desire to communicate.

As we grasp the theoretical framework surrounding homeless women and the challenges they incur, two research questions emerge:

RQ1: What self-portrayal do homeless women want to communicate to people that they encounter?

RQ2: How do homeless women address negative language received from the non-homeless?

Methodology

The methodology utilized in this study was participant observation and focus group discussions. The population study focused on resident women at a homeless shelter. The participant observation consisted of five hours of fieldwork over a five week period of time. The environment was the family room inside the women's building.

As an African American female, I approached the women of RHP with openness and sincerity. I was never fearful or apprehensive. To embark on a quest to become received, I sought to blend in, to stimulate interaction and to pursue familiarity. Appearance played a major role in blending. I purposely wore plain shirts, plain flat shoes and simple slacks or skirts. I felt that is was imperative to avoid exhibiting privilege.

Secondly, it was important to give the women reason to get involved in the weekly hour-long sessions. After a five-minute review and a fifteen minute lesson, the balance of the time was open floor discussion along with question and answer. It was important for the women to have a voice and an input opportunity. Further, each woman was assigned a particular outcast Biblical character to study and report

on in subsequent weeks. This "Bible Lady" assignment gave the women control and initiative to lead a discussion. Thirdly, I actively sought to memorize names and address each woman individually by her name. This exercise sought to demonstrate sincerity, sensitivity and individual value.

Demographics

Between 16 and 20 women participated in the weekly meetings, with virtually the same women involved throughout the study. If a woman missed a meeting, she likely reappeared in a subsequent week. The group appeared to range in age from early 20s to late 60s. The majority of women appeared to be middle-aged. Roughly 25% of the women were African-American.

Venue

Weekly sessions were held in the family room inside the Women and Childrens Safe House, a designated place for women within the RHP. The meeting place was comfortable and casual. It was a large room equipped with cabinets, a sink, several dining tables, several sofas, and coffee tables.

Engagement

My task, assigned by women's director, Carol Simpson, was to teach an hour-long weekly Bible study session. I elected the topic, *Women of the Bible*, because I knew it was something women could relate to. As a thrust each week, I introduced perhaps little-talked-about, marginalized, and ostracized Bible women whose situations were similar in nature to women at the shelter. The discussion ranged from why these Bible women were marginalized to how these Bible women overcame harsh conditions to how women in general can learn from their

experiences. After a period of assessment, the women increasingly established common ground with the researcher. Body language grew ever warmer as weeks progressed.

Collecting data

The group of women was observed for five weeks. Field notes were taken during the first four weeks, with personal reflections on what the women said and how they behaved during the Bible classes. On week five, the floor opened for a roundtable discussion on homeless issues. This particular class session lasted longer than the normal one hour. I purposely waited until I had five encounters with the women before I raised any questions in order for them to feel as comfortable with me as possible. I dressed in denim jeans and a white shirt with a plain black vest and low heeled boots. I purposely sat on the sofa with the women and had eye contact with nearly everyone in the room. Women were asked the following questions:

1. What do you want people to know about you?

2. What do people say when they learn you are homeless?

3. How do you deal with what people say?

Privacy was maintained throughout the study. Resident women's names, staff names and location names used in this study have been changed

Having thrust the three research questions, I offered women a chance to speak aloud within the group, privately after the session, or by telephone after the session. In this group setting, there were 19 women present. Eight elected to

participate openly. Among the eight, five spoke aloud, one spoke privately, and two produced written responses.

Results

The study revealed that alcohol and drug addiction was a signpost on the highway to homelessness. Among the eight women who declared statements, seven reported alcohol or drug addiction. Regardless of their past, all women spoke confidently and with conviction. Passion and determination echoed through their chords. The women could not escape the presence or absence of family, despite their residence at the shelter. Family members past and present were entwined in their conversation. Overall, women view themselves in a positive light and deflected naysayers.

Self-Reflection

Stigma and stereotype is an ongoing hurdle for the homeless. Phelan et al. (1997) posited that generalizations are rooted in the visibility of homelessness in public spaces, their alleged disruptive personality portrayal and their difficulty in negotiating grooming and cleaning facilities. Sev'er (2002) indicated that "different stereotypes nevertheless form a unified image of social undesirableness. Personified by demeaning images, the homeless become homogenized, categorized, and often feared" (p. 308).

However, the self-portrayal of the homeless women at RHP refuted what that society generalizes. Homeless women see themselves as viable, loving, and hopeful. The question -- *What do you want people to know about you* -- elicited several responses. Lima expressed, "I'm a loving person. I'm somebody. I'm

determined to make my life better. I'm teachable." Adele admitted, "I never thought I'd find myself in a homeless shelter." Rockette confidently declared, "I'm a 53 year old delivered drug addict. I want them to know that I do not rob, kill, or steal." Reba affirmed, "I'm nice. I'm playful. I'm mischievous. Because of drugs and alcohol, I'm selfish. I came here when I was sick and tired of living that street and drug life." Struggling with brokenness and devastation, Latea wept as she acknowledged, "This is very hard for me; I lived out of my car for months." Feet grounded in spirituality, Ponta avowed, "I am a caring, compassionate person. I enjoy helping others. I am a new creature in Christ." Self description for the impoverished is a double edged sword, according to Rimstead (1997), "The act of self-representation for working-class and poor subject often is, paradoxically, shameful as well as defiant in that it so often is accompanied by the shame of being made visible and of admitting powerlessness" (p. 249).

What People are Saying

While women bear the weight of their own status in life, they also contended with what others were saying about them. Their fight for dignity was rooted in knowing who they were and discovering healthy ways to rise above any attempts to pull them backwards. Women were asked: *What do people say when they learn you are homeless?* Reba admitted that people ask, "Why don't you just get a job; you are so young?" Reba's reply was that, "It is just not that easy. Just because you apply [for a job] does not mean you will get a job." Adele confessed, "people don't [detect] we are homeless when we are away from the shelter." Only people at the service agencies really know their status. Adele added, "The

volunteers who come to the shelter are nice." Nym expressed that people wondered, "Why, [are you homeless]?" Ponta acknowledged that her family members were, "very pleased to hear that I was taking Biblical classes and learning to fill the void with Christ and not drugs."

Deflecting Naysayers

Homeless women had a character of resiliency. Their coping methods were fierce and strong. These women reflected a determination that cannot be shaken, despite the harsh looks and upturned noses cast upon them. Luhrmann (2008) illustrated resiliency as, "women perceive themselves to be on their own and able to rely on few others for protection" (p. 17). Women were asked: *How do you deal with what people say?* Lima chimed, "You gotta do what you gotta do. I held my head down but I have to hold my head up. I am picking myself back up." Both Rockette and Adele agreed that they were less of a threat as homeless women than they were as non-homeless users. "Then, I would do anything to get what I needed," added Adele. Luhrmann explained this code of the street. In order to survive, "women adopt an interaction style in which they act aggressively" (p. 17).

Nym, Savannah, and Reba, echoed, "I don't care what people think." Reba explained that her mission of recovery exceeded what anyone thought about her or her status. She emphasized, "I am here to get myself together and get myself back on the right road." Nym added, "You cannot judge me." However, regardless of a hard exterior, the women still hurt. Both Adele and Latea battled embarrassment. Adele stated she did not tell anyone her status, at first. Through tears, Latea stated, "The hardest thing was telling my son where I was. I'm very embarrassed to tell

people I am at a homeless shelter." Roschelle and Kaufman (2004) described how, "individuals engage in covering when they attempt to minimize the prominence of their spoiled identity" (p. 35).

Factoring in Family

Six of the eight who responded to questions mentioned family. Reba and Rockette admitted family neglect and loss of children. Ponta and Rockette described broken family connections that were presently being reconstructed. Ponta asserted that her children had a hard time grasping her status but other family members were thankful she was putting her life back together. Referencing her pre-homeless life, she revealed, "My kids don't understand why I just could not stop using."

In previous group settings, women referenced their family members. Willa discussed her out-of-state son and ailing mother. Savannah had her mom bring her a winter coat. Ortega referenced her father. Stella referenced getting custody of her children. Latea commented on her late husband and her brother, "who didn't have a pot to piss in or a window to throw it out of." Referencing family impact on the homeless, Liebow (1993) revealed that the "homeless women are mainly from working-class and lower-class families that can no longer support them or from families whose members can no longer live together as husband and wife or parent and child" (p. 112).

Nonexempt Notations and Camaraderie.

Nym and Adele made specific references to the volatility of non-homelessness. Nym concluded, "Even the smartest, educated, wealthiest person can

end up here. It is not all about drugs and alcohol that can cause you to end up here. I have a home, car, job waiting for me. I came here to put God first." Adele confessed, "I had a good job. Homelessness can happen to anybody." Reverend Earla Lockhart, former RHP board member, assessed that, "most of us are about two or three paychecks away from homelessness" (Lockhart, 2008, personal communication). If homelessness is a dark reality, then the benefits of shelter life is glimmer of light. Savannah and Adele agreed that life at RHP had its advantages: "In tough times, you find comfort and encouragement – like with the women here," cited Savannah. Adele added, "When you have a good foundation – like RHP -- you can become a responsible member of society. Now I'm trying to get on my feet."

Overriding Stereotypes

The societal depiction of homelessness and my personal encounter with the women of RHP is divergent. I observed an environment of cheerfulness, cleanness, intelligence and positive social interaction. Within a field experiment, Knecht & Martinez (2009) discovered that when individuals engage in in-group/out-group contact, the previously existing stigma and stereotype begins to dismantle. Knecht & Martinez observed that first-hand involvement with the homeless resulted in a respect and compassion for the lifestyle.

All the women appeared to be educated. Most had excellent reading skills. Adele once complimented me on the blazer I was wearing: "I always wore blazers to the office," she chimed. On another occasion, Adele referenced previous work in an office: "When I was at work on the computer, I'd always listen to Moody Radio

through the internet." One of the readers, Willa, expressed herself well and with enthusiasm. The women exhibited good comprehension skills. Week to week, they recalled and recounted our previous lessons and applied the current lesson thesis to their lives. They were polite and orderly. They were gracious and appreciative.

During class time, the women seemed to be cordial with each other. I did not detect cattiness. There were three women who were highly vocal – quick to volunteer and answer questions. There were five women who were moderately vocal, consistently contributing a comment during class time. Each lady displayed good social interaction skills. They each interacted, gave eye contact, and appeared to be listening to the instructor. When called upon, most elected to read a passage and all participated in answering thought questions. With the exception of one woman who had foot surgery, they did not exhibit signs of impaired physical health.

Unuttered Realities

During week three, at the end of class, we had sentence prayer. Through the prayers, the women exposed the situations they were dealing with, revealing their hidden trauma. It was the week before Thanksgiving and the women were asked to complete the sentence, "I thank God for . . . "

The prayer acknowledgments were varied:

- I thank God I'm still alive.

- I thank God I 'm sober.

- I thank God I'm off drugs.

- I thank God I got custody of my kids.

- I thank God I got reunited with my daughter.

- I thank God for my new sisters & family here

- I thank God I got out of that bad situation and God brought me here.

- I thank God for my family here and ask God to reconnect me to my outside family.

This litany of realities supported Liebow's (1993) observation of the grueling, dangerous, life-threatening, and harsh lifestyle endured by homeless women. Through the prayers, I heard the acts rejection and excision that family members had placed upon certain women of RHP . I heard the gratefulness for the security blanket that RHP offered. Despite being cut-off and cut-out, women of RHP were forging ahead.

The Researcher as the Other

I experienced Othering when I first entered the family room of the RHP. I felt strange looks. I wrongly assumed that because I was an African American female, the other African American females would immediately connect with me. Initially, I sat beside an African American woman hoping to bond. She stared in the opposite direction and appeared withdrawn.

It is unknown why the African American women were initially cold. Despite my attempt to blend, I could not escape my exterior reality of privilege. Although the African American women and I shared an appearance, there was a wall that indicated "have" on one side and "have not" on the other. This initial reaction from the African American women was quite different from the white women who, from the onset, engaged me in conversation and were talkative.

Despite the coldness from the African American women, my approach remained unswerving. I did not favor or gravitate toward any particular individual. It was my belief that the progression of time and the sincerity of my approach would dismantle the wall. I was confident that they would soon embrace my genuine interest in their lives.

Subsequently, the third week proved to be groundbreaking for me. I could feel invisible walls crumbling. It was in this week that I felt a melting of the ice and a magnetic force that pulled us all closer. The African American women became more receptive. And in general, the entire group embraced me. I felt more smiles, received more nods, and detected more direct looks in the eye. When four different women engaged me during week three, I felt a connection building and I felt warmth, further establishing common ground.

Accountability

Three women expressed accountability to me. Sarah came in late to class and later apologized. She stated that she had to go to the front to pick up a coat that her mother had brought for her. Ponta apologized to me because she had to step out in the middle of class. She stated that her daughter had brought her newborn granddaughter to see her at the shelter. She was elated because two months ago she and her daughter were not on speaking terms. She was very grateful to see and speak with her daughter. Halle apologized to me because she repeatedly fell asleep during our class. She admitted that she really wanted to listen but sleep overcame her. I was amazed that each of these women felt some responsibility toward me. I

was honored that I mattered enough for them to explain to me why they had to do what they did.

Common Ground

Common ground was established on several fronts. During week one, when I became the Other, Adele engaged me. We realized that both of us were from Georgia and had moved to Alabama. The conversation grew and she remained one of my most vocal students. That same day, I noticed that Ortega and I carried the same Bible. We realized that both of us had acquired it as a gift from the same source. She revealed that she had recently worshiped at and received Christ at my place of worship. She acknowledged that her father – a preacher -- was associated with my pastor.

In week three Halle engaged me. She initiated a close up look at my new hairdo. I inquired if she was a hairstylist and she acknowledged that she never got her cosmetology license. That same day, Willa and I discussed her recent foot surgery. I mentioned my own broken toe event. She told a story about her ailing mother to which I easily related. Ponta engaged me with the story of her daughter. Athena engaged me with a hand drawing. It was the week prior to Thanksgiving and she presented a cornucopia illustration bearing the greeting: *To Mrs. Denise and Family. From the ladies of Refuge Hope Place. Happy Thanksgiving 2008.* Further, on week five, I approached Sham to ask for assistance. I said, "Your name is Sham, right?" She looked at me in amazement that I had remembered her name from the week prior. She said, "My middle name is Denise so that is how I remember you." I retorted, "See, now we have common ground."

Confessions of a First-Time Ethnographer

One of the hardest things for me was absorbing everything the women told me. I felt ill-equipped to remember everything they said to me. They were pouring their souls and I had no means to capture everything. IRB required that I give them my telephone number in the event they wanted to reach me. I learned, however, that they did not have telephone time so this means of private conversation was moot. One woman asked if she wanted me to complete the sheet and return it next week. I encouraged her to speak to me during or after class. Hindsight tells me that I should have offered the option of submitting question answers in writing.

Two women took the initiative to write their responses. However, the downside of the written account is that the researcher could not hear passion in the voice or see the conviction in the eye. The five women who verbalized their thoughts in the open group had ample time to talk. Each of them chimed in more than once. However, for those women who elected not to contribute to the testimony time, the lengthy session could have been boring or excessive. Should I have dismissed class to anyone who elected not to participate? Would I have lost the mood of the moment? I am certain that the women believed that I was genuinely interested in them. Through the narratives, there was an undertone of regret and an overtone of triumph and accomplishment. I was a witness to lifestyle evolution. I saw emotional and mental transfiguration firsthand.

Implications

This study produced evidence that divergent groups can be drawn together through dialogue. It also confirmed that when time was invested and when outreach

was sincere, communication barriers could be broken. Having shared what the women wanted to communicate about themselves, the follow-up question would be: *What would you say to other people?* Pointedly, future studies could explore what homeless women want to communicate to the non-homeless, to other homeless women, to their families, to their children and to their service providers. Future study could also investigate aspects of homelessness which homeless women feel need to be addressed and brought to the forefront.

Another approach would consider their perspectives after completing the resident program: *What impact did RHP have on your life?* Specifically, it would be worthwhile to reveal what homeless women gained and gleaned from shelter life. It would be beneficial to know what message they would send to women first entering the shelter.

Comprehending the impact of culture and lifestyle demands that communication exist between the haves and the have-nots. Adele made it clear, "People react [negatively to us] because they don't understand, they are fearful, or they have a preconceived notion of homelessness." The key word here is *understand*. The key concept is discovering commonality. It is not how we are different; instead it is about how we are all the same. This concept became clear when Halle approached me about my hair. Hair instantly became common ground. She was a hair stylist. I had a unique and fresh hairstyle. She felt comfortable approaching me, woman-to-woman. Similarly, Willa and I connected as we chatted openly about toe surgery, ailing parents, and high heeled shoes.

Intercultural communication demands that we dig for common ground. Despite differences, there are commonalities to be unearthed. At RHP, within the Women and Children's Safe House, we are all women: wives, mothers, sisters, aunts, daughters, nieces. We have all struggled. We have all been hurt. We have all experienced disappointment and sadness. We have all been devastated by some life-altering event. Our sameness becomes the tie that binds.

Despite their social status, the women at RHP exhibited a new attitude. They appeared to be focused on what the future would hold not past circumstance. They were not bound by dirty looks and frowns. Instead their focus was spiritual and not temporal. If the homeless stereotype is dirty, directionless, and demented, these women largely escape the profile. They were fiercely determined, marching on the road to a reconstructed life.

SECTION FOUR

TOXIC TRASH TRANSFER:

COMMUNICATING AND CREATING RISK

Protection can be defined as being kept from harm. It can also be described as being surrounded in security. Community, state, and federal entities are implicit sources of protection. Community leaders are elected to represent their citizens and make decisions which protect the locality. State government is created to assure the safety of its constituents within a designated geographic area, and federal government is tasked with ensuring safety and security within national borders. On the environmental front, the mission of Alabama's Department of Environmental Management (ADEM) is to "protect and improve the quality of Alabama's environment and the health of all its citizens" (ADEM, 2010). On a national level, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) declares that its goal is to "protect human health and to safeguard the natural environment" (EPA, 2010). Therefore, with a premise based on protection and a public demanding a safe place, citizens rely on government entities to advance a healthy environment. Lupton (2005) posited that, "Because members of the general public do not have access to sufficient information to assess environmental risks, they must rely upon intermediaries such as scientists, government officials, environmental campaigners and the news media to inform them" (p. 426). This public reliance on government for health and environmental protection became questionable during events surrounding a December 2008 coal ash spill involving the Tennessee Valley Authority, Tennessee residents and ultimately, Alabama residents.

The Case

The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) is a federal corporation, a public

power company and a regional development agency. The TVA operates dams and

power plants in Tennessee, Mississippi, Kentucky, Alabama, Georgia, North

Carolina, and Virginia. Specifically, within Roane County, Tennessee, the TVA

operates a coal-burning power plant in the area of Kingston. This electricity

generating facility is known as the TVA Kingston Fossil Fuel Plant (TVA

Kingston). TVA Kingston also houses a by-product of the coal, which is coal ash,

also known as fly ash. The coal ash is the left-over substance from the burned coal,

According to the EPA (2009a) coal ash is, "composed of the materials that are left

over after the coal is burned, including fine sand (called silica), unburned carbon

and various metals such as arsenic, cadmium, chromium, copper, lead, mercury,

nickel, selenium and zinc" (p. 1).

TVA Kingston disposes its coal ash into a retention pond. Three days before

Christmas of 2008, the retention wall at TVA Kingston failed. As a result, 5.4

million cubic yards of coal ash spewed across 300 acres and into Roane County's

Emory River. Immediately, questions about the potential hazards of coal ash began

to circulate. (See Table 1).

Two months after the coal ash spill, the TVA issued a request for a proposal

to identify off-site disposal options. Three feasible options were selected from the

25 disposal options presented. Two of these options suggested disposal of the coal

ash within 350 miles of Roane County, Tennessee: Perry County, Alabama and

Taylor County, Georgia. Both sites were accessible by rail, had Black populations

exceeding 40%, poverty levels exceeding 25%, and both had unemployment levels

exceeding 12% (U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009; U. S. Census Bureau, 2008).

During the week of May 4, 2009, the TVA began a test of coal ash transportation by rail to its proposed sites. On May 10, media reports began announcing that Perry County, Alabama was one of two sites where the TVA would send coal ash waste from Roane County, Tennessee.

Theoretical Underpinnings

Risk communication is visionary; it sees a likely problem and it addresses ways to disengage from any negative event. Risk communication is targeted; it knows the audience likely to be impacted and it uses pointed messages that grasp and ignite its hearers. Risk communication steers its audience away from the path of a crisis. Education and mitigation are the ultimate goals of risk communication. Sellnow, Ulmer, Seeger and Littlefield (2009) determined that, "The ultimate purpose of risk communication is to avoid crises. By recognizing the uncertainty of risk situations, we are better able to determine the wisest and safest course of action" (p. 4).

Risk communication is a building block of the environmental justice movement. Like environmental justice, risk communication seeks to, "influence behavior and policies so that a crisis situation can be averted" (Sellnow et al., 2009, p. 4). Environmental justice emphasizes that certain populations are susceptible to environmental degradation. Risk, coupled with vulnerability, demands extraordinary attention.

Table 1. Coal Ash Transfer Timeline

12/22/2008	At TVA Kingston Fossil Fuel Plant, a retainer wall collapses, resulting in 5.4 million cubic yards of coal ash spilling across 300 acres and into the Emory River.
2/23/2009	TVA issues a request for proposal to identify off-site disposal options.
Week of 5/4/2009	TVA begins a test of coal ash transportation by rail to its proposed sites.
5/10/2009	Media reports begin announcing that Perry County, Alabama is one of two sites where TVA would send coal ash waste from Roane County, Tennessee.
June 2009	TVA publishes a "Guidelines for Health" report targeted for residents surrounding the TVA Kingston plant. The two-page report addresses health issues for the Tennessee residents.
Week of 6/15/2009	TVA executives meet with Perry County elected officials to discuss use of the Arrowhead Landfill for coal ash disposal. Via TVA and Arrowhead Landfill, it was agreed that Perry County would receive $1.05 for each ton of coal ash, The Arrowhead Landfill would create 50 jobs and the county seat of Marion, Alabama, would receive $25.00 per 1000 gallons of leachate. The TVA report indicates that the officials did not express concerns about the coal ash and their attention was directed at revenue and jobs.
6/24/2009	In Perry County, Alabama, EPA conducts a poorly publicized public meeting held to address the involvement of the community with coal ash.
6/29/2009	TVA submits its disposal options plan to EPA, identifying Perry County's Arrowhead Landfill as the preferred disposal location
6/29/2009	The media and environmentalists immediately broach the issue of environmental justice.
Week of 6/29/2009	The first trains leave Roane County, Tennessee for Arrowhead Landfill in Perry County, Alabama.
7/2/2009	EPA issues a press release announcing its approval to move coal ash from Tennessee to Alabama.
9/10/2009	EPA issues a press release announcing a 9/16 meeting.
9/16/2009	EPA hosts a public forum. Representatives from EPA, TVA, the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM), Perry County Commission and Arrowhead Landfill field questions.
11/20/2009	Environmentalist attorney, David Ludder issues litigation purporting that Arrowhead Landfill, does not have a permit from the ADEM to discharge leachate pollutants through the Marion, Alabama wastewater plant and into a tributary of the Cahaba River, Rice Creek.
12/7/2009	Attorney David Ludder files petition on behalf of Perry County citizens who are experiencing respiratory problems. Ludder states the Arrowhead Landfill violated state air and water quality laws and asks the EPA to stop the shipments of coal ash to Perry County.
12/9/2009	U.S. House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment hears testimony from Alabama Environmental Council, Perry County Commission and TVA
12/11/2009	EPA orders a temporary stop to coal ash leachate disposal at Marion Wastewater plant; coal ash pollution was ending up in Perry County's Cahaba River tributary.
1/26/2010	Owners of Arrowhead Landfill file bankruptcy. While move halts impending lawsuits, shipments to the landfill continue.
2/5/2010	A wastewater processing company in Mobile, Alabama -- Liquid Environmental Solutions -- stops accepting shipments of leachate from the Arrowhead Landfill.

Vulnerable Populations

Vulnerable populations are comprised of the poor, the culturally isolated, and community members of lower socioeconomic status. Vulnerable populations are those who lack the power to fight the size and system of government agencies. Vulnerable populations are unconnected or non-networked citizens whose voices are often silenced or ignored. Satterfield, Mertz, and Slovic (2006) described vulnerability as, "a generalized feeling of enhanced susceptibility to harm" (p. 116). Bullard, Mohai, Saha, and Wright (2007) asserted that these compromised communities are cornered into submission because of their preexisting impoverished condition. Bullard et al. indicated that the reason the communities are vulnerable is, "because they are perceived as weak and passive citizens who will not fight back against the poisoning of their neighborhoods in fear that it may jeopardize jobs and economic survival" (p. 9).

The vulnerability of these citizens makes them likely candidates for environmental degradation. Without a voice, without an advocate, and without supportive government, these communities are faced with blatant disenfranchisement. Brulle and Pellow (2006) reported that, "Toxic facilities tend to be located in particularly vulnerable communities . . . These communities were being systematically selected for the location of noxious facilities" (p. 3.5). Sandman (2008) advanced that noxious and toxic facilities predictably appear in these vulnerable communities while Mohai and Sahi (2007) surmised that the presence or absence of hazardous waste treatment disposal and storage facilities within a community is largely attributable to the amount of political clout within the

community. Ultimately, those of low socioeconomic status and power lack the wherewithal to fend off big government and big business.

Race appears to be a recurring variable in the description of vulnerability. African Americans are routinely impacted by environmental degradation (Bullard, 2001; Jones and Rainey, 2006; Sorenson, 2006). Specific to the EPA, Bullard's (2001) research revealed that, "three out of four of the off-site, commercial hazardous waste landfills in [EPA] Region 4 [which comprises eight states in the south] were located in predominantly African American communities," although African Americans made up only 20% of the region's population (p. 160).

This concentration of environmental degradation among vulnerable populations creates a direct link to environmental health risk. If the vulnerable are more likely to have environmental threats, then it follows that these citizens are at risk for compromised health. Jones and Rainey (2006) assessed that, "This disproportionate and unequal distribution of environmental hazards exposes them to greater health risks" (p. 478). Brulle and Pellow (2006) concluded that, "Across a wide variety of environmental components, including proximity to hazardous waste sites, exposures to air and water pollution . . . communities composed of people of lower [socioeconomic status] and people of color were consistently exposed to higher levels of environmental risk" (p. 3.4).

How do these at-risk, vulnerable populations galvanize themselves? Where do these communities turn to fight their battles against impending harm? Bullard (2008) stated that, "millions of Americans learned the hard way that waiting for the government to respond to environmental threats endangers their health and the

welfare of their communities" (p. 251). Bullard et al. (2007) in the *Toxic Wastes and Race at Twenty Report* referenced two decades of cases in which governing bodies knowingly allowed vulnerable families near toxic sites to be exposed to and consume harmful toxins without any risk communication. This governmental failure to communicate risk to the public has spawned the environmental justice movement. Bullard (2001) described the framework within which environmental justice operates: Environmental justice "adopts a public health model of prevention (elimination of the threat before harm occurs) as the preferred strategy" (p.154). Bullard continued by emphasizing that, "Impacted communities should not have to wait until causation or conclusive 'proof' is established before preventive action is taken" (p.154). Pastor, Bullard, Boyce, Fothergill, Morello-Frosch and Wright (2006) determined that systemic discriminatory responses surrounding Hurricane Katrina validated the realities of environmental injustice. Pastor et al. concluded that "Katrina opened a window on a dark side of America—the economic and environmental vulnerability of low-income people and communities of color" (p.25).

As we grasp the conceptual framework of vulnerable populations and the surrounding risks that these populations incur, three research questions emerge:

RQ1: What risk management strategies did elected Perry County officials exercise to protect Perry County residents from the impending risk of coal ash waste?

RQ2: How did the TVA and the EPA communicate the risks associated with receiving coal ash from Roane County, Tennessee to the disposal sites?

RQ3: How were different publics involved in the decisions by governing bodies and officials to introduce coal ash into their communities?

Method

The case study examined media reports surrounding the transfer of coal ash from Roane County, Tennessee to Perry County, Alabama. Media examination focused on the time period during and following the coal ash transfer decision– May 2009 to February 2010. A plethora of media communication was considered. Traditional media included press releases, newspaper reports, television, and radio broadcasts. New media included the online arms of local media, in addition to environmentalist blogs, and environmentalist websites. One objective was to observe the details, narrative, and research that emerged from non-mainstream media. Another objective was to distinguish the language ushered to the vulnerable with what they were actually experiencing.

Sources were analyzed by investigating risks and hazards that were being withheld from the vulnerable population. The research sought out the interacting arguments displayed in language that validated the vulnerable were actually at risk, despite hegemonic language to the contrary. A striking difference in both the content and tone of the risk and crisis messages surrounding the coal ash transfer existed between government and grassroots organizations.

Three interacting arguments supported how government language to the vulnerable population differed from grassroots language in their risk communication messages. The first interacting argument was the concept that what the EPA called non-hazardous was actually non-regulated. The second interacting argument observed what the elected officials advanced as fiscally healthy for the community, may have been physically hazardous. The third interacting argument noted the emphasis that governing bodies placed on the efficiency of coal ash processing contrasted with the minimal attention placed on coal ash risk.

It was important to dissect messages from both the TVA and the EPA as these organizations represented what agencies were communicating about risk to the vulnerable populations. It also was important to explore independent scientific research documents to determine how research merged or contrasted with the EPA and the TVA language. Next, it was critical to explore non-mainstream language appearing on environmentalist websites and blogs. To observe language from varying vantages enabled a more holistic picture of how the vulnerable populations were approached and what they were told.

Results

This analysis discussed three approaches to risk communication. The focus was on the content of the risk messages to vulnerable populations and the control of risk language. Specifically, coal ash as a hazard, landfill and its leachate as a hazard, and the justification implemented in preempting risk language were the interacting arguments presented by the media, government, and grassroots

organizations surrounding the coal ash transfer from Roane County, Tennessee to Perry County, Alabama.

It is indisputable that there was risk surrounding the coal ash. Current and past research studies indicated toxins were present (Bergeson, 2009; Hvistendahl, 2007; Lucas 2009). What was missing from the risk communication was acknowledgement of risk or admission of potential risk by the EPA and local officials. The governing bodies and the elected officials elected to disregard the experts, and instead, placed focus on the innocence of coal ash and the benefits it would bring.

Coal Ash as a Hazard

The dismissal of coal ash as a hazard began with the EPA. First, coal ash is not regulated (Earthjustice, 2009; Sohn, 2009). Consequently, the EPA does not classify coal ash as hazardous (Haden, 2009; McKinney, 2009; Morton, 2009; MSNBC, 2009; Reeves, 2009). The EPA repeatedly stated that the coal ash contained 14 metals, including arsenic and lead, but that the metals were low in concentration (EPA, 2009a). Therefore, if coal ash is not regulated and if coal ash is not classified as hazardous, then it can correctly fall within guidelines for a non-hazardous material. However, the lack of regulations is not congruent with a lack of risk. The alleged protective posture of the EPA contradicted the messages of traditional science and grassroots organizations.

Scientific evidence repeatedly clarifies that coal ash presents risk. Lucas (2009) reported that, "Our findings emphasize the fact that although you may stop the emission of toxic elements from coal-fired power plants into the air, they remain

in the fly ash that gets stored in power plants' containment ponds, and may still end up in the environment" (n.p.). Hvistendahl (2007) detailed that, "The waste produced by coal plants is actually more radioactive than that generated by their nuclear counterparts" (n.p.).

Ultimately, the EPA placed vulnerable lives at risk. If the coal ash warranted the dredging of Roane County's Emory River, then why was it being moved to Perry County, potentially placing the pristine Cahaba River at risk? (Haden, 2009). The urgency that prompted the removal of coal ash from Tennessee was contrasted with urgency to transfer the coal ash in Alabama. Sartain (2009) queried, "Why would you need to clean up a spilled anything if it wasn't hazardous?" (n.p.).

Landfill and Leachate as a Hazard

If the EPA does not regulate coal ash, and if coal ash is not classified as hazardous and it falls within guidelines, then where will this unregulated and non-hazardous substance be transferred? The TVA proposed and the EPA approved the transfer of the Roane County, Tennessee coal ash to Perry County, Alabama. The resting place for the coal ash would be the Arrowhead Landfill. Promoted as, "the Cadillac of landfills," Arrowhead allegedly exceeded standards (Grayson, 2009, n.p.). However, like the coal ash, lax rules weaken landfill standards. Environmental Integrity Project (2009) asserted that, "There are no federal rules setting standards for the safe disposal of ash or limiting the discharge of toxic leachate into our waterways" (n.p.). Hvistendahl (2007) confirmed that, "Fly ash is also disposed of in landfills and abandoned mines and quarries, posing a potential risk to people living around those areas" (n.p.).

One consequence of landfills is landfill juice, called leachate; it is the liquid

substance that drains from the landfill. Whatever toxins exist in the landfill will be

emitted into the leachate. The Arrowhead Landfill has been documented as

responsible for leaking harmful leachate (Environmental Integrity Project, 2009;

Landon, 2009). The Environmental Integrity Project (2009) investigated landfill

leachate:

> These ash disposal sites also leak their toxic cargo into
>
> groundwater, or discharge it directly into rivers, creeks and
>
> lakes as runoff or through permitted outfalls. Until the EPA
>
> takes action, there are no federal rules setting standards for the
>
> safe disposal of ash, or limiting the discharge of toxic ash
>
> leachate into our waterways. (n.p.)

Landon (2009) attested that, "It has been documented that this [Arrowhead] landfill

is currently pumping the landfill leachate (landfill juice) into the ditches

surrounding the landfill and right next to the homes of local residents. These

residents have been told that the coal fly ash is safe" (n.p.).

Passive local officials, inattentive state officials, and slow-regulating EPA

officials place lives at risk by greenlighting hazardous landfills and permitting

harmful leachate. Perry County residents were cheated out of protection. They were

not given complete information. They were subjected to harm.

General Acknowledgements of Risk

The EPA was thorough in justifying the transfer of coal ash to Alabama.

First, in its Frequently Asked Questions flyer and throughout published media

reports, the EPA indicated the primary objective of the introduction of coal ash to Perry County, Alabama. EPA (2009a) stressed, "A primary cleanup objective at TVA's Kingston site is to protect human health and the environment by removing the coal ash from the Emory River . . . to prevent potential flooding and prevent the ash from moving downstream and impacting other areas of the river" (p. 1).

What is striking is that the EPA justifies placing Perry County in harm's way while Roane County is protected. The vulnerable populace – the poor, unemployed, and majority African American community-- is placed at a greater risk than the majority White, employed, and economically stable mainstream community. The demographic dichotomy between Roane County, Tennessee, and Perry County, Alabama, is vast: Roane County's black population is 2.8% compared to Perry County's 67.9%, poverty levels are 15.5% compared to 31.7%, and unemployment levels are 9.9% compared to 19.6% (U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009; U. S. Census Bureau, 2008).

This affront to socioeconomic health builds the premise for the environmental justice movement. Bifurcation is evidenced when the EPA places a hierarchy on communities. The health of one community supersedes the health risk of another community. Lazarus and Tai (1999) contended that the "EPA's past failure to account for aggregation of risks and cumulative impacts has caused EPA's existing standards to fail to protect human health and the environment in certain communities" (p. 642). Lazarus and Tai continued to stress that, "The core expression of environmental justice is that EPA should take into account the racial

and/or socioeconomic makeup of the community most likely to be affected by the environmental risks of a proposed activity" (p.620).

Conclusions

The speed, the language and the concealment exercised by governing officials is indicative of poor risk management. Within two weeks of the TVA meeting with Perry County officials, trains full of coal ash began arriving from Tennessee to Alabama. The language fed to constituents was replete with assurances of safety and deficient in matters of risk. The concealment – big government cloaking vulnerable community – is verifiable in the haste to transfer the coal ash and the haste to initiate transfer without adequate public involvement.

Failures Among Local Leaders

Local leaders put on the cloak of scientists and attempted to assure their constituents that their assessment of what was best for the community superseded scientific and environmental experts. Subsequently, local leaders failed to advance risk management strategies and communication. Regurgitating TVA and EPA talking points, local leaders self-promoted themselves as experts.

County commissioners misled the residents of Perry County by suggesting that their approval and knowledge of the coal ash somehow overruled what scientific findings showed. The commissioners were eager for a community buy-in to their economic agenda: making money from the coal ash. As a result, the commissioners made statements that were primarily less-than-accurate. Hendricks (2009) quoted Commissioner Fairest Cureton, "I think people often make too much of a big deal out of things. This is no different than the ashes you have in your fire

place," (n.p.). Brooks (2009) quoted the commissioner at the September public forum: "I believe the coal ash project poses no real threat to you or anybody else. I drink the same water you drink" (n.p.).

Speaking at the congressional hearing in December 2009, Commissioner Albert Turner asserted his expertise before the subcommittee chairperson Bernice Johnson: "Environmentalists may say the coal ash in the landfill is toxic, but they do not know the truth" and he added, "It's not toxicity. Those kinds of words do scare people that aren't as educated on this issue as I am" (Bhambhani, 2009, n.p.).

Constituents were able to attest that they were being failed by their elected leaders. Calculating long-term impact and not short term gain, the constituents spoke against the commissioner's shortsightedness. One resident complained, "Money ain't worth everything . . . . In the long run, they [leaders] ain't looking about what this could do to the community if something goes wrong" (Dewan, 2009, n.p.). Gordon (2009) reported another resident's feelings: "We were done wrong in the first place . . . The County Commission gave host-government approval for a landfill which didn't nobody want" (n.p.).

The commissioner's efforts to draw an economic windfall blinded their purpose to represent and reflect the desires of the citizens. The focus turned away from environmental safety toward economic security. Ultimately, local leaders failed their constituents by placing more emphasis on money than lives. Instead of pursing protection of their vulnerable population, the Perry County Commissioners pitted themselves against residents. Residents sought out safety and long-term physical health while commissioners sought out short-term fiscal health. More

importantly, leaders failed to thoroughly examine risk and neglected to introduce

expert testimony of risk. They failed to deliver accurate and unbiased data to their

citizens.

Failures of TVA and EPA

First, the EPA did not recognize Perry County as an environmental justice

community. It is the responsibility of federal agencies to be attentive to events

which compromise vulnerable communities. According to Executive Order 12898

(Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and

Low-Income Populations), the EPA had the responsibility to identify and address

"disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of its

programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income

populations" (Council on Environmental Quality, 1997, p. 1).

Second, the TVA and the EPA did not involve Perry County residents in a

discussion prior to the transfer of the potentially hazardous coal ash. Through an

emphasis on landfill infrastructure, the EPA waged a systemic effort to introduce

coal ash without public input. The TVA and the EPA focused their conversation,

their literature, and their talking points on the stability of the Arrowhead Landfill.

Sellnow et al. (2009) concluded that, "For risk communication to reach the

objectives of dialogue, conflict resolution and consensus building, government

agencies and organizations must take into account the lay public's fears and

frustrations, as well as any relevant technical information" (p. 8).

Ultimately all of the leaders involved – the EPA, the TVA, and local

officials -- failed their constituents. Focus was primarily placed on the

infrastructure, the method, and the windfall. Leaders took on what they felt was best for the community instead of reflecting and amplifying the voice of the community. Bullard (2009) suggested that leaders are more concerned with politics than the benefit of the community. Referencing a history of poor decision making, Bullard noted that, "Many of the bad Region 4 EPA waste facility permitting and disposal decisions flow directly from backroom deals and compromises made with state and local government officials, often at the expense of African Americans and other people of color communities" (n.p.).

(Minor) Successes

The EPA succeeded on a limited basis. It offered press releases and it did initiate a public meeting. Specifically, the EPA issued three press releases between July 2009 and December 2009; each document placed emphasis on the safety and security on the Arrowhead landfill. While the EPA held two public meetings on the coal ash matter, only one was effectively publicized. Most importantly, while the EPA did produce a Frequently Asked Questions flyer, the document did not account for risks, hazards or toxins surrounding the coal ash.

Lessons Learned

In November 2009, the EPA halted the disposal of leachate from Arrowhead Landfill to Marion Wastewater Plant. Public outcry and litigation ignited an investigation which unveiled that Marion Wastewater did not meet the criteria to contain coal ash. The stoppage of leachate to Marion prompted Arrowhead to initiate a contract with a wastewater plant in Mobile, Alabama to receive leachate. After a few weeks, the Mobile, Alabama transfer stopped. It is inferred here that

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environmentalist pushback and local resident outrage was a springboard to a decision to protect the water supply. Perhaps the EPA learned that attempts to cloak stakeholders will eventually be overrun.

Implications

Best practices serve as templates for efficient behavior. In the realm of risk communication, best practices signal proficient methods for mitigating a crisis. Through best practices, the risk becomes clear. Utilizing best practices, risk communicators "are more likely to achieve desired outcomes" (Sellnow et al., 2009, p. 10). An examination of the coal ash transfer reviews three appropriate best practices. From this purview, it becomes evident how risk could more efficiently have been communicated about and ultimately, mitigated.

Account for the Uncertainty Inherent in Risk

The element missing from the transfer of coal ash from Roane County, Tennessee to Perry County, Alabama, was the inherent uncertainty that the coal ash could hold environmental or health risk. While the matters of urgency, health, and environment were pressing concerns in Tennessee, language circulating from the EPA and the TVA categorized these as non-issues in Alabama. The EPA and the TVA focused attention on the ideal infrastructure of Arrowhead Landfill, not on the risk of toxins contained in the transferred coal ash. The EPA and local officials emphasized employment benefits stemming from the transfer, not the ramifications of smelly, airborne coal ash infiltrating air and water.

As early as June 2009, environmental advocates fought to introduce uncertainty into the coal ash equation. "It's unverified, depending on which sources

you go to, what the level of toxicity is," said Michael Churchman, executive director of the Alabama Environmental Council (Reeves, 2009, n.p.). Sartain (2009) advanced that there were many "ifs" that might possibly turn south. Scientific research reports concluded that some measure of risk existed in the disposal of the coal ash (Hvistendahl, 2007; Lucas, 2009). Further, the urgency of removing coal ash from Roane County, Tennessee, implied that hazards were at hand. In the EPA's own Frequently Asked Questions, it justified that the reason to move the ash from Roane County because, "The ash poses a significant ecological risk by smothering aquatic life" (EPA, 2009a, p.1).

During the September 16, 2009 public forum, the EPA representative issued an overly reassuring statement which denied any uncertainty surrounding the coal ash, "There are no risks to human health and to the environment from this material itself" (McKinney, 2009, n.p.). Sandman (1986) emphasized, "Where fear and distrust coexist, as they do in hazardous waste facility siting, reassuring statements are typically seen as facile and self-serving. Better to acknowledge that the risk is genuine and its extent uncertain" (n.p.). According to Sellnow et al. (2009), "Risk messages function most efficiently when they avoid overly-certain predictions" (p. 23).

Involve the Public in Dialogue About Risk

The TVA spent the month of June 2009 drafting disposal plan options. The TVA submitted the chosen plan on June 29 to the EPA. The plan indicated that Perry County's Arrowhead Landfill was selected as the preferred disposal location. On June 24, three business days prior to the disposal options plan submission, the

EPA and the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM) and local governing bodies hosted a "hastily-assembled and barely-advertised" public forum in Perry County (Clark, 2009, n.p.). Clark described stakeholders as being "systematically shut out of the landfill debate" and the meeting illustrated that "this plan has been decided on and the deal all but sealed without one iota of public input" (n.p.).

It is notable that the meeting prior to the arrival of coal ash was preceded by no EPA press release. The failure to issue a press release that would be distributed to local media is indicative that the EPA, the ADEM, and local officials did not want to incur disruptions to their impending plan. Once the coal ash had begun arriving and all deals had been sealed, the EPA scheduled a public forum for September 16—a full twelve weeks after the June 24 meeting. This public forum was announced via an EPA press release dated September 10 and received subsequent media attention. On September 16, over 100 Perry County residents packed in to a standing-room-only town hall.

Prior to the EPA press release on September 10, there was a press release on July 2 which indicated EPA approval of the TVA plans to dispose coal ash in Perry County. This press release was issued three business days after the TVA submission of the disposal options plan. The press release noted that, "Prior to approving the Arrowhead Landfill as the disposal site for the coal ash, EPA visited the landfill and met with local leaders and members of the surrounding community to review the disposal plan and answer questions" (EPA, 2009b, n.p.). This statement is less than accurate because while the EPA invested much time with elected officials, the

"community" cannot be represented by a sparse crowd at an ill-advertised, weakly-attended meeting that was held on June 24. Tapp (2010) concluded that, "Public meetings to inform the citizens have been limited" (n.p.). Grayson (2009) asserted that, "Residents of Perry County had no say in the decision made in July making the Arrowhead Landfill near Uniontown the future home of about 3 million tons of coal ash" (n.p.).

The method used by local officials and the TVA represents the *decide-announce-defend model* whereby the decision was made prior to the public involvement. Smith (2009) stressed that the EPA involvement was not stakeholder-beneficial. He quoted EPA representative Franklin Hill in the June 24 public meeting as saying, "I'm not here asking, quite frankly, for approval" (Smith, 2009, n.p.). Sandman (1986) described public participation as, "the moral right of the citizenry" (n.p.).

Public dialogue dismantles outrage. Conversely, the lack of public dialogue ignited stakeholders in a chorus of distrust and anger. McKinney (2009) quoted a Perry County resident at the September 16 public forum: "They're lying. I think they're lying. I think it's harmful. And this is something we don't want. And I don't think they should shove it down our throat" (n.p.). Sandman (1986) argued that government organizations have a pattern of excluding dialogue from matters that impact the public, "A fatal flaw in most governmental public participation is that it is grafted onto a planning procedure that is essentially complete without public input" (n.p.). Where risk exists, information should flow freely and dialogue must be engaging. Where risk exists, vulnerable populations should be defended.

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Present risk messages with honesty

The TVA and the EPA hedged around risk issues by focusing on superior infrastructure of the Arrowhead Landfill and its adherence to existing criteria and guidelines. Because the EPA has no coal ash regulations, EPA statements are based on guidelines that currently exist (Southern Environmental Law Center, n.d.; Sturgis 2009). Ultimately, the EPA did not address the risk of the coal ash, instead the EPA assured stakeholders that what they did both met and exceeded the existing criteria. This method was not honest; stakeholders were not receiving accurate information about the risk of the coal ash.

In its self-issued, Frequently Asked Questions flyer, the EPA (2009a) queried, "Does radiation from the coal ash pose a risk to workers or the community?" (p. 4). The EPA response placed a focus on existing guidelines, "Radiation levels in the coal ash were compared to EPA and Alabama criteria . . . and the analysis showed the material meets all federal and state criteria for disposal at the Arrowhead Landfill" (EPA, 2009a, p.4). Further, EPA representative Franklin Hill emphasized in the September 16 public forum that, "It's [coal ash] considered a solid waste, not a toxic waste" (Grayson, 2009, n.p.). Hill was actually arguing that according to existing federal guidelines, coal ash is categorized as "solid waste"; but its classification does not remove its potential hazards or toxins. Stugis (2009) confirmed that, "Coal ash is not currently regulated as hazardous waste but classed instead as ordinary industrial waste, which means it can be legally accepted by the landfills in Georgia and Alabama. But that does not mean it isn't potentially dangerous" (n.p.).

Fingers pointed to the TVA and the EPA for their less-than-honest method of communicating risk: "TVA has repeatedly attempted to hide the potential toxicity of the coal ash . . . If it wasn't for EIP [Environmental Integrity Project] bringing the data and facts forward, the public would never learn the truth from TVA" (Environmental Integrity Project, 2009, n.p.). Beneath the umbrella of existing criteria and non-existent guidelines, stakeholders faced a windfall of misinformation. Wilson (2009) surmised that the travesty, "is that the government that was supposed to protect the people, once again, is not doing it" (n.p.).

On another front, the TVA and the EPA consistently stressed the import and efficiency of the Arrowhead Landfill. The landfill met and exceeded regulations. While potentially an accurate assessment, the efficiency does not override the inherent risk of the toxins that are placed within the landfill. The EPA representative Franklin Hill aggressively defended the Arrowhead Landfill at the September16 public meeting, "This is a state-of-the-art facility. In fact it's the Cadillac of Class 1 sub-title D landfills" (Grayson, 2009, n.p.). Once again, however, the focus was not on the risks of the coal ash, but the system, the infrastructure, and the legalese.

Sandman (2010) suggested that organizations often tease stakeholders by utilizing word play within risk communication documents or briefings. Even though information is being ushered, it is done in a way that is masked and disguised. To introduce some risk details while simultaneously withholding others is manufacturing fantasy. Risk communication must be clear and uncompromised.

The fact that risk messages for the Perry County community differed from the Roane County community indicated that the approach to risk and the importance of risk differed. Risk for the elite population carried a greater weight that risk for the vulnerable population. Sorenson (2006) noted that such inequalities, "indicate that those environmental protections that do exist on the books are not equally enforced" (n.p.).

It is essential for risk communicators to assure that the vulnerable receive a platform to supply input and to engage in dialogue. Most importantly, all populations – regardless of socioeconomic status – must receive risk messages whenever and wherever hazards may exist. Likewise, all populations are entitled to risk language that is uncompromised. To be enfranchised is to be protected. More so, to be informed is to be empowered.

SECTION FIVE

LESSONS LEARNED

The lessons gleaned from North Dakota State University are vast. The present and future learning opportunities within the Department of Communication are innumerable. This section indicates what the Masters of Arts degree has done, the takeaways from my coursework, my reaction to the online program and how I foresee future research opportunities.

The Master of Arts program

This three-year journey in pursuit of the Masters of Arts degree in speech communication is rich in experience and exploration. The trek has afforded profound thinking and deep investigation opportunities. First, the pursuit introduced me to varied facets of communication: communication theory, rhetorical theory, rhetorical criticism, and intercultural communication; along with risk and crisis communication. Each of these dimensions offer abundant opportunities for research. Each facet sparked a previously-unknown desire for knowledge within the discipline.

Second, the masters program ignited an attention to communication within marginalized populations. Perhaps it was the required bibliographic essay within communication theory that prompted me to delve into the work of independent scholar Jacqueline Bacon. Within that exercise, I learned that Bacon's thrust was the exploration of how enslaved and subjugated persons in the 19th century utilized communication to generate voice within an environment that stifled them. This introduction to Bacon's work sparked my research interest into the marginalized. I

am energized by methods, means, and circumstances that grant voice to the otherwise silenced.

Thirdly, the masters program has credentialed me to teach speech communication at the college level. I am ready to inspire students with the knowledge that I have gained at North Dakota State University. The discipline is timeless and necessary; I anticipate extending challenging learning opportunities to 21st century students while simultaneously gleaning from their perspectives.

The Lessons Learned

The learning platforms within the graduate program of North Dakota State University's communication department are rich and diverse. There are numerous courses to stimulate interest and outlook. Online courses regularly evolve and class scheduling is adequate. Specifically, the ten courses in which I enrolled were rigorous and provocative. Six courses were particularly piercing. Communication Theory immersed me in concepts and approaches long held by noted scholars. Rhetorical criticism introduced me to the method and procedure of thorough and indepth text and content analysis. Intercultural Communication afforded me the chance to learn from and explore the Other. Likewise, it helped me to pursue ethnography as a research method. Web Studies granted an opportunity to explore the internet as a communication tool. Risk Communication and Crisis Communication both introduced me to the case study as a research method. From risk and crisis, I learned the critical nature that communication plays when unplanned and hazardous events occur.

Reaction to the Online Masters Program

The overall structure of the online masters program is beneficial to students pursuing advanced learning. The courses are well-paced while integrating structure and flexibility. The courses build research skill and offer ample opportunity for students to explain, justify, and present viewpoints. The tests and assignments are rigorous and thought-provoking

Since my initial matriculation in 2007, the program has improved significantly. An instructor feedback program has been introduced to offer response and critique to student assignments. Grades are posted to Blackboard throughout the semester to enable students to monitor progress. Students are encouraged to interact and exchange ideas through Blackboard assignment postings. A designated individual is assigned to field student questions and offer prompt responses to student concerns. Overall, the 2010 online masters program is more interactive, more student-friendly and more organized.

Pursuing Future Research

The opportunities for continued research are plentiful. Expounding on marginalized communication, three agendas are forecast. First, there are many documents surrounding the plight of the marginalized which are in need of rhetorical investigation and analysis. One example would be sharecropper Fannie Lou Hamer's testimony before the Credentials Committee at the 1964 Democratic National Convention. Another example would be President Lyndon Johnson's 1965 speech to Congress advocating voting rights for all Americans. Similarly, there are more events affecting vulnerable populations calling for a case study. In particular, there is an environmental racism case surrounding Dickson, Tennessee residents.

From two decades of inadequate risk communication, some Dickson, Tennessee residents have experienced devastating health declines stemming from their property's proximity to a landfill. These incidents and others like them offer fertile ground for research.

Secondly, my passion for narratives can generate exploration into the voice of the marginalized. The stories and experiences of the vulnerable groups spark a need to archive, collate, and quantify their experiences. Perhaps bringing marginalized cultures to the forefront will produce greater understanding and acceptance of the Other.

Ultimately, future research would unveil opportunities to improve communication between differing groups. As more cultures enter society, the more diverse our environment becomes. Therefore, it is imperative to gain skill, teach skill and implement skill in dialoguing with cultural, societal and economic divergences.

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PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION OF HOMELESS WOMEN

PURPOSE: TO HEAR WHAT HOMELESS WOMEN HAVE TO SAY

CONSENT FORM

Denise Swain is a student trying to learn more about homeless women

- Denise believes you have value and worth
- Denise believes you have a story to tell
- Denise would like to ask three questions
- Participating is completely up to you
- She will keep your information private and confidential
- She will not ask you any personal information
- The risks are zero to minimal because you do not have to give your name or release any personal information
- You have the right to tell her only what you want her to know
- You have the right to change your mind and decide not to participate

Three Questions

1. what do you want people to know about you
2. how do people react when they learn you live in a homeless shelter
3. what is your response to people who fear you or avoid you

I agree to answer three questions asked by Denise Swain

Who is supervising Denise? How may I reach them?

Denise's advisor is: Robert Littlefield, North Dakota State University, (701) 231-7705
A review board is monitoring Denise: Institutional Review Board, Dakota State University, (701) 231-8908
You can contact Denise directly at 256-564-5623

November 14, 2008

Dr. Robert Littlefield
Department of Communication
321 Minard Hall

IRB Expedited Review of: **"Participant Observation of Homeless Women"**, Protocol #HS09067
Co-investigator(s) and research team: **Denise Brown Swain**

Research site(s): **Downtown Rescue Mission, Huntsville, Alabama**

The protocol referenced above was reviewed under the expedited review process (category # 7) on **11/6/08**, and the IRB voted for: ☐ approval   ☒ approval, contingent on minor modifications. These modifications have now been accepted. IRB approval is based on the original submission, with revised: protocol (received 11/13/08), and permission letter (received 11/14/08).

<div align="center">

Approval expires: <u>11/5/2009</u>   Continuing Review Report Due: <u>10/1/2009</u>

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Please note your responsibilities in this research:

- o All changes to the protocol require approval from the IRB prior to implementation, unless the change is necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazard to participants. Submit proposed changes using the *Protocol Amendment Request Form*.
- o All research-related injuries, adverse events, or other unanticipated problems involving risks to participants or others must be reported in writing to the IRB Office within 72 hours of knowledge of the occurrence. All significant new findings that may affect risks to participation should be reported in writing to subjects and the IRB.
- o If the project will continue beyond the approval period, a continuing review report must be submitted by the due date indicated above in order to allow time for IRB review and approval prior to the expiration date. The IRB Office will typically send a reminder letter approximately one month before the report due date; however, timely submission of the report is your responsibility. Should IRB approval for the project lapse, recruitment of subjects and data collection must stop.
- o When the project is complete, a final project report is required so that IRB records can be inactivated. Federal regulations require that IRB records on a protocol be retained for three years following project completion. Both the continuing review report and the final report should be submitted according to instructions on the *Continuing Review/Completion Report Form*.
- o Research records may be subject to a random or directed audit at any time to verify compliance with IRB regulations.

Thank you for cooperating with NDSU IRB policies, and best wishes for a successful study.

Sincerely,

Teryl Grosz, MS, CIP
IRB Director

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