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Que(er/ry)ing Christianity: Questions, Answers, and More Questions

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Caught at a divide between fundamentalist Judeo-Christian rhetoric and secular queer discourse, queer Christians face difficult obstacles in enacting/ embodying their identity. Bohache (2003) claims that a queer Christology, or developing a queer view of Christianity, is a potentially beneficial way to reconcile this identity gap. To explore this claim, I demonstrate a need to also examine the way in which a queer Christian body enacts a queer and Christian identity by juxtaposing my own narrative as a queer Christian in a religious setting against queer theory. Using Pelias' (1999) guidelines for poetic essay, I weave queer theory throughout my own story as a means to explore how a queering of Christianity can be performed or questioned. Though many may be uncomfortable with a dialogue that leaves nothing but questions, I find that those questions are what keep us revisiting these identity intersections that are constantly in flux and encourages continuing conversations.

Keywords: Queer Theory; Christianity; Christophobia; Identity Gaps; Poetic Essay

I identify as a pansexual who also identifies as queer. I also identify as a Christian. Despite knowing these two things about myself, I do not know if I embody queer Christian. Do I make these identities salient at the same time, or do I tend to compartmentalize the two? When I realized the societal contradiction that these two identities held, I immediately began to search for answers. I discovered the ministry of Bishop Gene Robinson, the first openly gay priest to be ordained by the Episcopal Church. Bishop Robinson was featured in several documentaries that I watched as I grappled with my queer and Christian identities. As I watched his story unfold on the screen, I was struck by a sense of awe and envy for his ability to find a sense of peace in his seemingly-contrary identity positions. So I was ecstatic when I found out that he was coming to speak at a church in my town. Maybe, just maybe, I could finally get the answers I was looking for in my own struggle through his words and queer Christian embodiment.

There were several obstacles from the start. Before the night even came I had difficulty tracking down information for the event. The

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website gave two separate dates and two different venues and every time I tried to call the church, a machine answered. After leaving several messages, I finally received a phone call an hour before his lecture started. My partner had also rolled her ankle (which had been previously injured), and she tripped getting out of the car when we arrived at the church. Watching her wince with pain up each step, I finally said, "We should just go home. You look miserable, which makes me feel miserable for dragging you out here. It's miserably cold. We're miserably tired. Maybe this is all a sign we aren't supposed to be here anyway."

"You know you're supposed to be here."

Yes, I did have the feeling that for some reason we were supposed to be there. But what was that feeling? How did I know I was exactly where I was supposed to be at that moment, even though everything around me told me that I didn't belong?

From here, I could easily begin to debate whether or not the "feeling" I had was a direct connection to my spirit (or even the Holy Spirit), or whether I was having a common *déjà vu* experience that was drawing me to the church that evening. Through this paper, I demonstrate a need to examine the way in which a queer Christian body (body here referring to my actual, physical body) enacts their queer and Christian identities by juxtaposing my own narrative within a religious context with queer theory. Bohache (2003) suggests that it is imperative that Christology be queered, as well as queried, in order to question hetero-patriarchal complexities. My hope is that this piece will add to the conversation by both queering Christianity and asking for more queries on the subject. I envision this project to be similar to Alexander (2003) work - to query queer theory in order to revisit possibilities and limitations of its usage and investigate the absence of certain voices in queer literature. Alexander specifically spoke of the exclusion of voices of color, whereas I am interested in exploring the dearth of Christian voices.¹

To account for the desire to discuss the embodiment of Christian queer identity within the rational/faith divide of the academy, I employ Pelias' (1999) guidelines for a poetic essay. Pelias explains that a poetic essay helps achieve an embodied performance by remaining coherent (intelligible),

¹ I recognize that Christianity is not the only religion that people practice. However, due to its cultural influence in the U.S. in general, and my life in particular, I believe there is ample cause to interrogate its cultural logics. Furthermore, some may argue that queer identified people should leave Christianity to pursue a spiritual life that affirms their identity or abandon religion altogether. (O'Brien's (2004) gives a good summation of both sides). However, as I address in this paper, I believe that queer theory offers methods to rupture Christianity in ways that can affirm LGBTQ identity, and provide a discursive challenge to heterosexist ideologies.

plausible (credible), imaginative (literary), and empathic (respectful of others in the work). This work can also be woven with theoretical concepts as a means to “poeticize the theoretical and locate it in the personal” (Pelias, 1999, p. xii). Perhaps by overlaying my faith grounded questions with rational answers, I can locate a space where the two can coexist. First, I need to elucidate the gravity of the first obstacle proposed in my narrative: my identity crisis.

Identity Gap: Homophobia and Christophobia

Jung and Hecht (2004) studies the gaps between personal and relational layers of identity, as well as how individuals enact personal identity gaps. Specifically, their study focuses on how different layers of one’s identity function together. Often, when discrepancies occur between an individual’s perception of herself and how others view her, a gap-like construct is formed, representing a drive to reduce or avoid the differences in two conflicting identities. Discrepancies stemming from this particular identity gap are associated with feeling a lack of pride or interest, loneliness, and insecurity. These discrepancies can develop as a result of a lack of information about an individual, stereotypes, or other communicative factors (Wadsworth, Hecht, & Jung, 2008).

Many queer individuals are caught in the gap between two seemingly conflicting identities: their religious and queer identity. In the current socio-political climate, it is not uncommon to hear the argument that one cannot be both queer and Christian (Karlsruhe, 2007). Scripture is a common tool used by Biblical literalists to justify this argument, and Leviticus 18:22 is a popular verse used for such debate: “Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; it is an abomination” (New International Version; Ivey, 2012; Karlsruhe, 2007). Due to dominant narratives that echo this message, many queer and Christian individuals forsake their religious identity or their queer identity to prevent the potential stigma of holding both identities.

Typically, when fundamentalist Christian denominations discuss issues concerning homosexuality, they are referring to lesbian and gay individuals within and outside of their congregations. Their rhetoric alludes to sexuality as opposed to gender identity. Jagose (1996) states, “In emphasizing the malleability of gender and sexuality, each has an avowedly constructionist understanding of sexuality” (p. 60). Due to this constructionist approach, I argue that the misunderstandings by traditional Church doctrines, regarding queer bodies and sexuality, have led to any physical body read as non-gender conforming—according to scripture—being the target of rhetorical attacks from fundamentalist groups. As such, I understand that while sex and gender should not be easily conflated, addressing the Church’s construction requires me to address both sex and gender under the same rhetoric; therefore, I choose to utilize the malleability of the term ‘queer’ to act as an oscillation between the two. Here, I use ‘queer’ to refer to those bodies that are non-

normatively defined in their everyday, mundane performance, primarily through disruptions of fundamentalist scripture interpretations. When I use the phrase ‘queer theory,’ I am referring to theoretical frameworks that are meant to describe those particular disruptions in order to engage in a “language of critique and a language of possibility” (Alexander, 2003, p. 352).

Queer individuals that enact their Christian religious identity face what O’Brien (2004) refers to as a “double stigma” in social interactions. In performing her ethnographic study of, O’Brien (2004) participated in five Pride parades from three major cities across the United States. Each parade was as unique as the city that hosted it, with one exception:

In each case, the crowd responds enthusiastically at this display of support and acceptance. The marchers glow in acknowledgement. This is not what surprises me. Rather, it is the contrast in the crowd’s response to another group of marchers: lesbian and gay Christians. In these three very distinct US cities I wandered up and down the streets during each parade, watching as merry crowds fell silent at the appearance of these marchers. Everywhere the response was the same: silence, broken only by an occasional boo. I was stunned. These otherwise very ‘normal’ looking but openly queer men and women were being *booed at their own Pride Parades*. (O’Brien, 2004, p. 180, emphasis added)

Bohache (2003) furthers the findings depicted in O’Brien’s work by claiming that there is a “deep-seated feeling among many gays and lesbians that Jesus Christ is not an option for them,” or a condition he refers to as “christophobia” (p. 12). This christophobia is not only evident in the example provided by O’Brien (2004), but also seen in queer literature/media as well as the “I’m going to hell anyway, so I’m going to have a good time doing it” mentality prevalent in queer youth (Bohache, 2003, p. 13). To Bohache, the fear of eternal damnation and oppressive church experiences lead to queers abandoning Christianity.

Undoubtedly, this phobia also stems from harms done to queer Christians within the Church. Even the atrocities committed by the Church to non-Christian queers are a warning to queer Christians to stay silent about their queer identity. O’Brien (2004) argues that queer individuals often fall into an identity gap created by the two societal forces of a traditional Judeo-Christian narrative and a more secular queer reaction. How then is it possible to make sense out of this identity conundrum? Johnson (2013) claims that the Church can be “not just a space of condemnation, but also one of celebration and recognition” (p. 212). He further explains that many individuals will compartmentalize their identity when hearing homophobic messages, either by telling themselves the messages do not apply to them or by acknowledging that everyone has their own sin (Johnson, 2008).

Bohache's (2003) extends the idea of compartmentalization of the two identities by positing that within this identity gap, it could be possible to develop an "unapologetic queer Christology," or a Christianity created through a queer lens (p. 16). His work on queer Christology is mainly focused on interpretations of Christ as an example for the queer community; a reclaiming of Christian narratives for application and appropriation in queer lives. This approach not only addresses the homophobia in the Church, but also the christophobia lurking in the identity gap: a potential contribution to the self-hating queer phenomenon.

O'Brien (2004) notes that, "Christians who have acknowledged their homosexuality do not have the luxury of semi-conscious spirituality" (p. 190). In other words, queer Christians have to repeatedly visit the spaces of these dual identities in order to feel fulfilled in both. I, too, have faced this desire to frequently examine my spiritual identity; however, I am also confronted with the problems surrounding my role as a scholar. Although there are departments and areas of study for theology and religion, there is no denying the existence of a rational/faith divide within academia, as well as much of society. This divide, although not explicitly shown in scholarship, is visible in the residuals of scholarship. For instance, while describing a moment of being asked to sing during a Black Church service while visiting home, Johnson (2013) states, "Given my queer consciousness as an openly gay academic, I always oblige the request with some trepidation" (p. 212). This description is meant to draw attention to how the identity of queer is not welcomed into a holy space; yet, the inclusion of "gay *academic*" can also be interpreted as a suggestion that an academic also makes one an outsider in the space. As a student who identifies as religious/spiritual, I am often confronted with this outsider mentality during seminars composed primarily of religious skeptics. As this divide seems to also be an issue in the queer/Christian body, it is important to keep this in mind as I tackle the task of explicating my identity, and subsequently, theorize about the role of identity gaps.

Query #1: Why have I Strayed Away from the Church?

Sitting in the congregation, I began to analyze the interior of the church. It was a beautiful gothic style sanctuary, with high arches decorated with Christian symbols intermingled with geometric designs in blue. The pews were made of a darker wood, lined up to the left and right of the sanctuary. Hanging from the ceiling near the pulpit was a large sign emblazoned with gold lettering. Psalm 23. "The Lord is my Shepherd." The atmosphere was nothing like the mega churches I had been dragged to by friends in the South. My partner, having been raised Catholic, leaned over and remarked at how comfortable she felt here. "It just feels like home. Is this what you're used to?"

“Not at all. When I was younger, we went to dusty backwoods Baptist churches on Easter and Christmas. In college, all my friends went to Evangelical mega churches so I did, too. Large theatre in the round arenas, million dollar light systems, five thousand plus capacity... nothing like this.”

“You seem uncomfortable. What’s up?”

“Nothing. I’m fine. Why? Do I look uncomfortable?”

She paused for a moment, looking directly into my eyes, “Have you been in a church since we’ve been together?”

I hadn’t thought about this, but no, I had not. Why?

The traditional Judeo-Christian foundation is based upon a heteropatriarchal interpretation that is often criticized for its views on gender, race, and class. This dominant Christian ideology has been used to ostracize minority perspectives within the religious community (Karslake, 2007; Ivey, 2012). Historically, the genesis of ‘-ism’s (e.g. sexism, racism, and heterosexism) stems from an absence of minority voices/perspectives, including the heterosexism that produces anti-queer rhetoric (Bohache, 2003; Chavez, 2004; Karslake, 2007). In response to this hegemonic discourse, Bohache (2003) claims he began to theorize about christophobia as it complicates the notion of being in a relationship with a Christ that has been said to hate those that do not comply with a normative gender understanding. A focus on the relationship to Christ as opposed to an institution (the Church) sets christophobia apart from ecclesiophobia, or dislike for the Church, and in many ways can be more difficult to overcome. Ecclesiophobia can be addressed by separating oneself from the Church, or finding a Church that is more in line with a particular way of thinking of the individual. But how can one separate Christ from Christianity? Associating those who have wronged them in the Church with Christ creates a space where individuals (like queer individuals) fear a relationship with someone who has caused them pain. Bohache states christophobia is “as factually bankrupt as homophobia and just as pernicious, for it separates many spiritually focused and religiously gifted individuals from a path that could bring them the fulfillment they have sought and been unable to find elsewhere” (p. 12). In order to reconcile religious identity and gender identity, queer Christians must confront both the homophobic residuals from the dominant Judeo-Christian narrative *and* the deep fear of a relationship with Christ based on their queer identity (Bohache, 2003).

The solution seems too obvious. Of course it would make sense that in order to be a queer Christian, one must not be afraid of either identity. Conquering one phobia is difficult enough: but two? This seems nearly impossible, especially for those who were raised in a more fundamentally

based Christian standpoint. A fear of Christ sounds almost blasphemous, yet in some Christian traditions, a fear of God and His wrath is completely rational and even encouraged. Is there more to a reconciliation of identity than just grappling with the fear of each? There seems to be a social disciplining found within phobia rhetoric. Bishop Robinson addresses this issue by stating that one way in which queer advocates can reach fundamentalist Christians is by stopping the use of the term “homophobia.” Instead, he proposes that the term “heterosexism” be used. The use of “-phobia” makes the problem extremely personal, whereas “-ism” focuses on the social. How, then, can the idea of christophobia be addressed as a social critique as opposed to a personal problem? Is it possible for a christism to exist in the power dynamic of our current social system?

Query #2: Is There an Ideal ‘Queer Christian’?

Soon, the pastor introduced Bishop Gene Robinson, stating the Bishop had spent the past thirty hours traveling due to flooding in Chicago. As Robinson began his lecture, I could not help but be distracted by the elderly gentlemen sitting next to us. “Oh dear Lord. A mouth breather,” I said to myself as I used all my energy to focus on the bishop. “Why do they always have to sit by me?”

The bishop was shorter than I thought he would be, but just as animated as he was in all the interviews I had seen with him. This was impressive to me, considering his lack of sleep and fatigue from travelling. He was humorous, charming, approachable; everything I thought he would embody. As he continued to speak, I started to become physically uncomfortable. It had been years since I had sat in a wooden church pew, and I did not remember them being this rough. I wiggled, turned, and was vaguely aware that I was frustrating those behind me that were trying to watch. “Uh,” I internally groaned. “Do I just not have the body or patience to sit through these things anymore? How does Robinson stay so animated even though he’s been through so much?” My body...my queer body...did not seem to hold a candle to his tenacity that made up a perfect queer Christian.

Bodies, how we live them as well as how they are disciplined, are as socially constructed as the language we use. Using a Lacanian approach to identity, Salamon (2010) describes the body as being socially constructed through particular procedures:

The body as it exists *for me*, the *corps proper*, only comes to be once the ‘literal body’ assumes meaning through image, posture, and touch. And each of these examples of operations that constitute the body–image, posture, and

touch – are predicated on distance. The externality of both image and touch would appear to be obvious, as would the distance necessary in the operations of identification and projection. (p. 25, original emphasis) Distance, as prescribed here, refers to the space between us and the exemplars of the identities we wish to embody, or the reflections that are seen by standing in front of society’s mirror.

Obtaining that identity, then, would seem as simple as reaching out for that image, utilizing touch and posture, to perform our desired identity. Salamon contends that it may not be that simple. She continues to explain that if the image that we are trying to connect with is an idealized exemplar, the distance will never be overcome due to “it’s location in the visual register” (p. 23). The connection becomes symbolic, possibly even internalized; yet, the individual attempting to embody the image will never be satisfied with their own performance. It is like young children trying to mold their body to fit the plasticity of action figures or dolls; no matter how hard they try to modify themselves, their envisioned goal will never be actualized. To resist this notion of identity “does not result in cultural legibility but, on the contrary, can only come at the price of representation itself” (Salamon, 2010, p. 24). Essentially, if we cannot embody the ideal, we try to convince ourselves that it must not exist; and therefore, stop trying to close the distance with our preferred identity.

Perhaps what bothered me most is that I *wanted* to see the weak points. It is in moments of queer failure that we can see how the performance is constructed, which helps in *our own* construction of performance. Alexander (2003) elucidates the urge to witness the weakness stating, “as much as I appreciate the performative accomplishment of good drag, and the ephemerized instance of the performative act of passing, I sometimes like bad drag better” (p. 351). Ruptures act as an important moment of possibility for individuals seeking to see themselves in the mundane performance of others. Yes, it would seem as though Robinson typifies the ideal queer Christian body, at least in comparison to me. Despite having different yet similar obstacles, Bishop Robinson maintained a level of focus and energy that I could not. Like the first query, the solution to frustration stemming from idealizing a queer Christian seems obvious: do not idolize an individual embodiment. True, Christians are told not to idolize anyone on Earth, but what about the divinity of Jesus as the ideal being? How does a queering of Christianity embodiment account for Christ’s *body*? Is that the preferred identity, and if so, can we say it does not exist like Salamon suggests? In corporeality, individuals often discipline the body at the expense of the mind and spirit. Spirituality, however, can ask that one to ignore normative concerns about the body for the sake of spiritual healing. Is it possible to create an intersection of the two that is mutually inclusive of the values in place for the body and spirit as opposed to exclusive of one or the other?

Query #3: Why is My Body Rejecting the Church?

I once again tried to aim all of my focus on what Bishop Robinson was saying. He began to talk about how to approach discussions about Biblical passages with individuals who choose to use verses to justify their negative positions against queer individuals in debate. He initiated by saying, "Before I even begin these conversations, I always ask what context we are referring to when we are discussing these verses." He then described how he typically defends the acknowledgement of context through an analogy of baseball. "Let's pretend that it's the year 3000, and the game of baseball has long since been forgotten. Historical archeologists have uncovered a book published in the year 2000, in which the author describes a character as being 'out in left field.' For those of us living now, we know exactly what this means. You have a batter stepping up to the plate, so you have a batter that is probably right handed. Chances of him hitting it in left field are pretty slim. So, you have a person standing in left field, out in the middle of nowhere, waiting for something that will probably never come. Now, sure the inhabitants of Earth in the year 3000 will probably know what 'left' is, and they will probably know what a 'field' is...but, but without the contextual knowledge of the game of baseball, it is hard to say that they will know exactly what the author is trying to convey."

The subject of context always forces me to think about what baggage we carry into conversations based on the context we are in currently. We are in an age of Supreme Court rulings that will decide the rights for the LGBTQ. We are in an era of Westboro Baptist Church that celebrates the destruction of cities as God's Will being done on Earth. This last thought sent a wave of paranoia over me. I suddenly had this fear that I had placed myself in a situation in which I could be the target for some of the awful catastrophes motivated by political ideologies that were appearing on the news. My body became physically ill, I started to sweat, and began to exhibit anxious gestures and body posturing. If I had been sitting further in the back or closer to a quick exit access, I would have left my seat. "What is happening to me?" I thought, as I quickly scanned the room looking for others who must have also had this realization. I was nervous, afraid, on the verge of tears...and the scariest part was I did not know why. I could not rationally wrap my head around a logical answer. Noticing my sudden change in demeanor, my partner placed her hand on my knee to comfort me, and my breath began to slow down to match hers. As a non-normative body, I could sense a moment where I was potentially in a place of danger. It felt very intuitive; almost as if

I was some animal being hunted and I could sense the footsteps of the enemy nearby.

The comparison between non-normative bodies and nonhuman animal bodies occurs often in debates about queerness; in fact, there are entire books dedicated to the topic (e.g., Alaimo, 2010; McWhorter, 2010). The question of “what is natural?” leads those inquiring to look at the animal kingdom as a means of answering whether or not queer embodiment is something that exists across species. Historically, sexologists residing in the fields of medicine, psychiatry, and even criminology have characterized homosexual acts as deviant as well, resulting in “popular images of homosexual and transgender people as menacing degenerates who were due no respect, ‘therapies’ that destroyed many people’s health and lives, and public-hygiene policies intended to eliminate or exploit sexual subcultures” (McWhorter, 2010, p. 75). Deviancy is not to be tolerated by a dominant species, and those who are viewed as degenerates (whether for their dark skin, their disabled bodies, or their sexual acts) are viewed as a toxin or hindrance to the advancement of *Homo sapiens*. As such, there has existed an instinctual yearning to purge those who represent this threat from the species altogether. McWhorter posits, these eugenic discourses need to be challenged on both a philosophical as well as political level, as an “evolutionary asset rather than a sterile dead end” (p. 76).

Placed in a situation in which both identities were salient (and potentially combative), it became clear to me that my life was potentially in danger: the paranoia and anxiety I experienced had me absolutely convinced that something awful was going to happen because I was in a lecture about being both queer and Christian. Whether or not this was actually true became irrelevant to my bodily senses; and therefore, by physiological reactions. It was as if my body inherently knew it was given the label “toxic” and therefore “expendable.” This led me to wonder, what does this societal/rhetorical purging do to a queer body?

Query #4: Why am I Hearing So Many Contradictions?

When I was finally able to focus again on the lecture, Bishop Robinson was explaining Christian scripture states that there would be periods of struggle when taking up any cause. “We know this; this isn’t something new. ‘Therefore put on the whole armor of God....take up the cross and follow me.’ We’ve heard this all before.”

Yes, yes I had heard this before. Many times, actually. It was something chanted from the mouths of babes in my youth groups, incorporated in sermons from the large, Baptist fed ministers of my old churches, and sweetly whispered from the loyal elderly women who wished to provide encouraging quips to those who seemed

spiritually challenged. The difference is that when I had previously heard these verses, it was usually to warn us about the “evil homosexuals” who planned to “pervert God’s plan for marriage.” How could the same thing be said during a speech that was supposed to advocate for gay marriage?

Butler (1990) argues that in order to combat issues surrounding gender identity, there needs to be instances in which individuals trouble gender. This inversion, in the ways in which we think about and discuss gender, is done as a means to “stir things up,” making answers not easily attainable by applying normative theory (Bohache, 2003). In queering traditional norms, it is important to explore ways in which to disrupt “fictive foundations,” but it is also imperative to remain self-critical in this exploration (Butler, 1990). Because these foundations permeate most of society, it is quite easy to fall along this normative line of thinking and rationalizing. By doing so, we inherently limit the queer embodiment by using the same argumentation.

For example, in investigating the rhetoric of Soulforce, one of the largest organizations geared towards the inclusion of queer individuals in the Christian Church, Chávez (2004) uncovered a breach of queering argumentation. She found that in response to statements made by the Church claiming that homosexuality was unnatural, Soulforce argued that homosexuality was indeed natural, and all LGBT individuals were born that way. She questioned whether or not all queers are born this way (herself included), and determined that this argumentation was problematic. She concluded that by using biological arguments, Soulforce was accepting the “essentialist binary opposition that being gay is either a choice or determined” (p. 258). This is problematic on two levels: (1) It allows the Church to parametricize or take control over how particular issues are defined within the debate, giving them an advantage; and (2) It could potentially lead to misrepresentation of the individuals that Soulforce claims to advocate (Chávez, 2004). These arguments are not to take away from the experiences of queer individuals who believe they were born queer. Just like Christians wrongfully use the ex-gay argument indicative of religious reparative therapy to universalize the performance of sexuality, it is wrong to limit queer experience to being something that everyone performs similarly. This mentality reifies dominant discourses about sexuality, perpetuating normative disciplining of gender stereotypes (Sloop, 2004). Butler (1990) proposes that the solution to this trap of dominant discourse is to acknowledge the contradictions within personal politics, and realize that unity does not necessarily mean solidarity; coalitional construction between queers should be the goal of the movement.

Contextually, the problem of only associating God with the ‘naturalness’ of heterosexuality in these debates may stem from a literalist foundation of Biblical principles as opposed to a more interpretivist concept of the Bible.

A queer read of the Bible would suggest an acknowledgement of context, as language and experience is bound within circumstantial situation surrounding the two. Should body also be contextual? Can these contextually identified bodies be united even if they do not represent solidarity expression?

Query #5: Should I Come Out Again?

During the question and answer period, one man disclosed that he had a daughter who had come out as a lesbian two years earlier. He explained that he and his wife had struggled with this, but have since come to accept their daughter and love her for who she is. “Do you have any advice, Bishop, for parents going through what we went through? What would you say to parents who just found out that their child is gay?”

“Well actually, I think I should first say that children tend to be more comfortable coming out as gay to their parents than coming out as religious to LGBT friends. Yes, it is a hard emotional time for children, but it’s also important for you to take care of yourself. PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) is a great resource, but if that’s not available, make sure that you are also supported with this. It isn’t just the child that is affected, it’s the entire family.”

I had heard about queer people being afraid to ‘come out’ as religious to their friends through interviews with individuals while researching for previous studies. Watching the reactions from members of the audience, I realized that this conundrum was something new to most everyone in the audience. I wanted him to spend more time with this idea, to maybe talk about how he has seen others deal with this issue. I was not happy with that just being a fact to be tossed out and glossed over. Did I need to come out again, this time as Christian?

For those who fall within an identity gap, the risk of ideological clawback is high. Ideological clawback refers to how, in a culture’s yearning to preserve certain norms, society will encourage those who fall outside the realm of expected behavior to adhere to those norms by “clawing them back” (or disciplining them) based upon normative rules (Dow & Wood, 2006; Fiske & Hartley, 1978; Sloop, 2004). It acts as a nucleus, or a gravitational pull centered in a cultural construct that attempts to keep those within the culture orbiting around the dominate narrative. Straying too far away from this narrative (like queer bodies tend to do) will result in a chaotic effect within the culture.

Typically, literature published on this phenomenon demonstrates how mass media utilizes this construct to discipline bodies that fall outside of the

bounds of the gender binary (Dow & Wood, 2006; Sloop, 2004), however, this is not the only use of this concept. Queer Christians face ideological clawback from the hetero-dominant culture, but they also face stigma and prejudice from other queer members (Bohache, 2003; Ivey, 2012; O'Brien, 2004). Discipline at this level is due to an acknowledged vulnerability within the culture because of the push back from heterosexism; and therefore, a desire to protect against that pushback. A binary is still being protected, however, as queer individuals who engage in tactics that ostracize queer Christians are reinforcing a Christian/Non-Christian binary (Christianity is understood here as a non queering Christianity).

When faced with multiple ideological clawbacks that arise when placed in an identity gap, difficulties inevitably erupt. As such, it also becomes problematic to accept representations of queer Christianity when facing one, idealized or not; therefore, how *does* one achieve a relatively stasis embodiment? Is this possible? Could creating a point of contact, such as coming out again as a Christian, produce portrayals of possibility? As it is imperative that a culture needs these portrayals as a means of existence, can cultures form without them?

Que(er/ry)ing the Future

For the future of a queer Christianity, it is important to stay mobilized in providing “subversive confusion” (Butler, 1990, p. 34). In troubling both religion and gender, the articulation of a queer Christian identity “involves transforming a discourse of shame and silence (with the promise of exile) into a narrative of pride and expression” (O'Brien, 2004, p. 194). This embodiment is imperative to excavating the intersection of homophobia and christophobia in two ways: (1) Forcing institutions to continue “creative dialogue with tradition and articulate discursive strategies that enable them to retain significant (often contradictory) aspects of self while maintaining religious commitments” (O'Brien, 2004, p. 192), and (2) Pushing for a development of discourse in which secularized culture and religious/faith based culture can discuss issues. As the homophobia in traditional Judeo-Christian rhetoric is a prevalent problem, much is being done to address the first concern. Bishop Robinson is an example of just one of the many individuals speaking up for a queer narrative with Christian discourse. In addressing christophobia, however, far less attention is being drawn to those who are struggling with their fear of the Church. Part of the reason for the lack of focus could be a lack of dialogue occurring at the rational/faith divide. If two sides of an issue cannot communicate, then disputes will never be resolved. This problem can be addressed on an academic level. As scholars, we need to understand that religion in general, and Christianity in particular, is a large part of many identities, and denying them access into the dusty halls of the academy prevents many individuals from fully actualizing their identity within their work.

By far, the most difficult part of the narrative to share was the moment in which I was irrationally and physiologically reacting to Bishop Robinson's lecture (Query #3), as it demonstrated a vulnerability that is often frowned upon by academics. Frentz (2009) argues that "expressing vulnerable feelings is neither easy to do nor widely accepted in academia even when done well. The canonical conventions of scholarly writing legislate against it" (p. 839). As a result, rhetorically revisiting this part of the narrative and applying theory creates a space in which my embodiment is threatened. Does a rational/faith divide produce effects similar to queer Christians for those whose bodies are labeled "toxic" to scholarly work?

Finally, it is important to continue to query this and other perceptions of identity. As Butler (1990) notes:

This antifoundationalist approach to coalitional politics assumes neither that 'identity' is a premise nor that the shape or meaning of a coalitional assemblage can be known prior to its achievement. Because the articulation of an identity within available cultural terms instates a definition that forecloses in advance the emergence of new identity concepts in and through politically engaged actions, the foundationalist tactic cannot take the transformation or expansion of existing identity concepts as a normative goal. (p. 21)

Trying to solidify an identity or provide a hard definition will lead to more problems than it helps to solve. This is why I do not fully answer all of the questions that arise in this piece; doing so could limit the potential of the identities of those reading it. Questions are not something to fear, avoid, or loathe. As evident in my responses to what I assumed were thoughtful answers to my initial questions, inquiry only perpetuates more inquiry. I have found, however, the act of querying has allowed me to become "more secure in my own identification" (Alexander, 2003, p. 352). It is in the continuation of que(er/ry)ing instances of normative discourse and the production of even more questions that true answers will arise, be challenged, and be revisited.

Continuing to Qu(er/ry)

As my partner and I drove away, I did not feel the sense of wholeness that I had hoped would be there. I was no closer to solving my existential crisis; as a matter of fact, I left with more questions than I originally had when we arrived at the church. I scanned through my notes, thinking maybe I had accidentally written down a last nugget of wisdom and just did not realize it would be so important when I scribbled it down. I kept returning to the verse that Bishop Robinson said he used when he discussed how he saw the Bible as a teaching mechanism. "We follow Christ by using his story as an

experience we can parallel in our own life. So, when someone says to me, “That’s not what the Jesus says about...” whatever, I remind them of what Christ says in the book of John. Unlike the other three gospels that give an account of Jesus’ life, the book of John is much more reflective. In John 16:22, Jesus says, ‘I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear.’ He knew there were things yet to come that the disciples couldn’t comprehend yet, and that they would continue to have questions.”

Fair enough, bishop. Fair enough.

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**Special Issue Introduction:
Coming to Terms in the Muddy Waters of
Qualitative Inquiry in Communication Studies**

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When we were accepted into graduate school, we were presented with opportunities as well as expectations. These opportunities included chances for making a difference in the lives of others, coming to understand the details of our social worlds a little bit better, and becoming different people through the process. These opportunities were imbued with hopes and desires; that is, opportunities imply accepting expectations. These expectations included teaching, seminar reading, research, and various social-networking activities. These expectations can make navigating academia a daunting task—much like wading through the waters of a muddy pond. We have an idea of where we would like to go, but our progress feels murky and can require more effort than anticipated. Worst of all, it often feels as if we are navigating these muddy waters alone without a friend or mentor to guide us.

When we were invited to write an introduction to this Special Issue of *Kaleidoscope* on the nature of qualitative research, we felt apprehension about the prospect of walking into those murky waters again. Even though Lindlof and Taylor (2011) note that the basic function of qualitative research in communication studies is to “study *the performances and practices of human communication*” (p. 4, emphasis in original), we find ourselves caught in a web of opportunities and expectations when we started to write about what constitutes the texture of our research practices. We are presented with an opportunity to define the nature and purpose of qualitative research and accept the expectation that we can capture the complexities that constitute its practice. How do we offer insights into the nature of qualitative inquiry while still respecting the voices of those that have created this space for us?

In this introduction of the Special Issue section, we include three main sections. We first lay out definitions of qualitative research in general and then in the communication field more specifically. Second, we offer two major tenets of qualitative research that we believe constitute the foundation for future scholars to follow in qualitative research. Finally, we conclude this

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essay by offering a preview of the two featured articles in this issue as they serve as apt examples for the understanding of qualitative inquiry we offer.

Qualitative Research (in Communication): Definitions and Tenets

Qualitative research has been discussed widely by scholars within and beyond the communication field. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) offer a generic definition of qualitative research: “Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible” (p. 3). Similarly, opposing the positivist assumptions and quantitative research, Carey (1975) explains that qualitative research is to “seize upon the interpretations people place on existence and to systematize them so they are more readily available to us. . . . [including] studying particular rituals, poems, plays, conversations, songs, dances, theories, and myths . . . ” (p. 190). Within the communication discipline, Lindlof and Taylor (2011) claim that the discipline “has generally institutionalized ‘qualitative research’ as a covering term for scholarship that views the empirical dimensions of symbolic interaction as the raw material for documentation and reflection” (p. 12). Moreover, rather than imposing a given understanding or theory, qualitative communication research attempts “to engage the communication event that centers a study . . . and is responsive to learning and innovations called forth from us, not imposed upon the focal point of the study” (Arnett, 2007, p. 30). It is not our intention to make the list of definitions exhaustive. However, these definitions highlight some of the assumptions of qualitative scholars within our field, which encourages us to build on these explanations as a framework for what we see are two important tenets of qualitative research.

We argue that qualitative inquiry, as a mode of communication research, focuses on communication as *a constitutive process of intersubjective, relational meaning-making*. We believe this understanding of qualitative communication research incorporates the aforementioned definitions and offers greater complexity to notions of performance and practice (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). From our point of view, complexity arises when scholars acknowledge that the performance and practice of research are not isolated, but are both intersubjective and systematically structured. From this starting point, we also contend that our understanding encompasses Littlejohn and Foss’ (2011) notion of inquiry as a “systemic study of experience that leads to understanding, knowledge, and theory” (p. 9) and of humanistic scholarship as an endeavor that seeks “alternative interpretations. . . largely determined by who one is. . . [and] especially well-suited to problems of art, personal experience, and values” (p. 10). Because of the humanistic, intersubjective, and systemic assumptions of these views on qualitative communication research, such approaches are inherently different from quantitative, scientific approaches. Below, we elaborate on the tenets of qualitative communication inquiry as constitutive and intersubjective and relational meaning-making.

Communication as Constitutive

The first tenet we emphasize is that qualitative inquiry in communication studies focuses on communication as a constitutive process. For us, this means that communication is more than representation or a transmission between source and audience. As qualitative researchers, we believe that communication is a process that creates, sustains, and challenges our sense of selves, community, and society (Charland, 1987; Fassett & Warren, 2007; Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). To note that communication is constitutive is to understand communication as a co-emerging act whereby our performances and practices are produced within, and participate in producing, cultural and political structures.

One way we can see how communication constitutes our social realities is to look to everyday mundane communicative practices of graduate school. In our first few semesters of doctoral studies, the traditional rituals and ways of communication stood out among the various things we encountered; such rituals included ice-breakers, conversations in shared offices, happy hours on Friday, and weekends filled with grading and research. The importance of these performances and practices were not overtly explicated to us. However, through those rituals and communication acts, we gradually learned how we ought to best manage our time and why it was important to get to know our colleagues. In other words, these traditional practices lies in the constitutive process that serves to create, sustain, and challenge our understandings of “proper” graduate student performances. Our simultaneous participation in both general and esoteric discourses about succeeding in graduate school not only shaped our own communication behaviors, but also constrained our program for future colleagues and cohorts.

To summarize this tenet, qualitative research in communication studies takes a constitutive view of discursive interactions and iterations. As qualitative researchers, we believe that our communication and social worlds are co-constitutive; they shape and constrain possibilities, and thus, communication can be used to both create and undermine powerful social practices. This is to say that the forms and methods we use to communicate, even about communication, can help us to better understand and articulate the social systems we are a part of while also to aid us when thinking about ways to alter those systems might serve to suppress and dominate alternative forms and methods of communication. Through studying communication as a constitutive process, qualitative communication researchers can attempt to make their social worlds more just places to live.

Communication as Intersubjective and Relational Meaning-making

In addition to the constitutive nature of communication, qualitative communication researchers also focus on “who” and “what” is constituted. Hence, we focus both on the process of communication as well as the subjects

and context of a communication event when we seek to better understand the intersubjective and relational nature of meaning-making. Brummett (1976) argues that all social reality and meaning is intersubjectively experienced and produced. Building on this notion, Cherwitz and Darwin (1995) stress that meaning is best understood as “the confluence of relationships within, between, and among bodies. . . . ‘[B]odies’ include such phenomena as language, objects, rhetors, and auditors” (p. 20). The implication of this tenet is that social meaning has the propensity to constantly change as people relate differently with one another. Thus, qualitative communication researchers concentrate on how communication is used to build, sustain, and challenge the intersubjective performances and practices that constitute our social realities. Valuing these multiple and alternative understandings rather than seeking a unified and quantifiable explanation, qualitative communication research is particularly apt at highlighting processes and meanings of social realities and human communication.

As qualitative communication researchers, we seek out the moments when these multiple and alternative understandings encounter each other. Through our practices of relating through research, we develop intersubjective relationships with countless fellow graduate students, conference attendees, faculty members, and so on, that serve to produce, sustain, and challenge the academic identities we wish to craft and the academy in which we wish to participate. Understanding communication as intersubjective and relational meaning-making enables us to embrace the murkiness of the academy and find agency in the choices we make amidst the otherwise cloudy surroundings. Locating intersubjective and relational meanings between ourselves, others, and the systems we participate in, qualitative communication research helps us to explain our constantly changing social worlds more holistically and from multiple perspectives. Through these explanations, we hope to have shown why qualitative inquiry in communication studies focuses on communication as a constitutive process of intersubjective and relational meaning-making and why qualitative communication researchers ought to continue focusing on such processes, in the hope of creating a more holistically understanding of the building blocks of social reality.

Special Issue on Methods of Qualitative Inquiry

This Special Issue on methods of qualitative inquiry features two unique approaches to qualitative research in communication studies. The first article challenges the concept of aesthetics in performance studies. Building on presence and absence within aesthetic discourses as a method of performance criticism, Mapes (2014) introduces the concept of supplemental aesthetics. Adapting Derrida’s notion of supplement, Mapes (2014) acknowledges the constitutive notions of supplemental aesthetics by encouraging “a dialectic understanding of aesthetics: we make meaning by the simultaneous experience

of reading what is present *and* what is absent on stage” (p. 79). What is more, supplemental aesthetics also methodologically advances performance criticism by embracing an intersubjective and relational understanding of performance “as it forces recognition of the unoriginality of ideas, asking a performer to be held accountable for the traces or supplements draw on and from in a performance” (p. 81). The second article pushes the Bakhtinian perspective of carnivalesque into the arena of organizational communication. Pointing to the constitutive nature of such a perspective, Kolodziej-Smith (2014) writes, “The Bakhtinian concept of carnival integrates these two approaches, Goffman’s descriptions of social interactions between people and Burkean interpretation of their discourse” (p. 87). The carnivalesque perspective, posited by Bakhtin and extended by Kolodziej-Smith (2014), points us toward understanding how organizational communication also can be understood through a constitutive and relational worldview. Together, these articles exemplify the value of understanding communication as a constitutive process of intersubjective and relational meaning-making for qualitative research in communication studies due to its focus on the subjects and practices that build, sustain, and challenge previous understandings about these particular theoretical systems.

In conclusion, we have explicated the general definitions of qualitative research and then delved into the two major tenets of how we understand such inquiry in communication studies. Communication as a constitutive process and intersubjective and relational meaning-making are two tenets that have guided our ways when navigating the qualitative communication research. In two of the subsequent essays in this Special Issue, Mapes (2014) and Kolodziej-Smith (2014) both echo our tenets of qualitative inquiry in communication studies and provide great examples of such tenets. The waters of qualitative inquiry might just always be murky and difficult to navigate, especially as they ebb and flow with the changes offered by researchers, new and old; however, it is because those waters are changed through our actions that we must continue accepting new and challenging opportunities. In doing so, we accept the expectations that our changes open new and hopefully more just ways of moving through these complex social systems for ourselves and future graduate students alike.

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Supplemental Aesthetics: Techniques in Live Performance

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In this essay, I make a bid for the incorporation of the Derridian supplement into aesthetic discourses as a means of understanding and evaluating live performance. I call this move “supplemental aesthetics,” which, in the end, expands the vocabulary of absence and presence. I contend that a method of supplemental aesthetics adapts Derridian vocabulary to account for the intertextual and multisensory experience of live performance, asking practitioners and scholars to account for both the present and absent aspects of staged production. Supplemental aesthetics encourages a dialectic understanding of aesthetics: we make meaning by the simultaneous experience of reading what is present and what is absent on stage.

Keywords: Presence; Aesthetics; Derrida; Performance Methods; Criticism

The terms presence and absence have recently surfaced as important theoretical considerations in performance (Kilgard 15, Machon 25). In fact, the National Communication Association’s 100th anniversary foregrounds presence in the 2014 theme, “the Presence of Our Past(s)” (Blair para. 1), demonstrating the current trend in communication scholarship to theorize questions of presence. In this essay, I make a bid to incorporate Derrida’s notion of the supplement into aesthetic discourses as a means of understanding and evaluating live performance. I call this move “supplemental aesthetics,” which, in the end, expands the vocabulary of presence and absence. I contend that a method of supplemental aesthetics adapts a Derridian vocabulary to account for the intertextual and multisensory experience of live performance by asking practitioners and scholars to account for both the present and absent aspects of staged production. Rather than methods that privilege descriptions of what was merely seen, I encourage a dialectical understanding of aesthetics: we make meaning by the simultaneous experience of reading what is present *and* what is absent on stage. Such a method encourages a language for performers and performance critics alike to examine the happenings of conspicuous performance and challenges practitioners to reflexively examine not only what to place on stage—what is present—but also a recognition that absence—what is lost—is also meaningful. I begin

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with a summary and explanation of Derrida's notion of supplement and finish by articulating what a method of supplemental aesthetics looks like and accomplishes.

Jacques Derrida articulates the supplement in his work *Of Grammatology*. As a post-structural theorist, Derrida approaches texts with suspicion; questioning what knowledge the writer/reader presumes to be present and mapping how the text is informed by other texts (i.e., intertextuality). No text exists in a vacuum. Such post-structural underpinnings define the supplement. The supplement, an idea he traces to Rousseau, works both as an *addition to* and *substitution for*. As an addition to, "the supplement adds itself, it is a surplus, a plentitude enriching another plentitude, the fullest measure of presence" (Derrida 146). At the same time, it functions as a substitution for, or as he describes, "the supplement supplements. It only adds to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself in-the-place-of; if it fills, it is as if one fills a void" (146). Thus the supplement—both addition and substitution—exists/is located between presence and absence. To substitute is to stand in for, to represent or point to an absence. Substitution mandates the original is not present. An addition, then, brings something into presence, at times, an excessive presence.

The supplement inherently rests on the presence of an original as to "stand in" for or "add to" presupposes there is an original to be supplemented. For Rousseau, such an origin exists within Nature. Rousseau's example of an original ideal is speech. Rousseau describes speech as the most natural form of expression of thought. Writing supplements speech. "[Writing] is the addition of a technique, a sort of artificial and artful ruse to make speech present when it is actually absent" (Derrida 145). Rousseau finds this supplement a dangerous one and prefers the more natural presence of speech. Trifonas explains, "Rousseau thus rejected the supplementarity of writing as a dangerous and ineffective supplement to a more immediate and, therefore, natural or truthful form of expression, speech" (245). As this quotation suggests, Rousseau was interested in finding the natural, the original, and pure presence of a thing itself (in this case, through speech). Thus, given that any supplement detracts from that origin and is only a ghostly fragment of the origin, the supplement should be rejected.

Derrida, however, rejects the existence of an origin. To assume an origin is to assume some sort of absolute truth or central location of knowledge. Thus, although a supplement may exist, it does not supplement an original, as the original is only a supplement to something else. He argues, "One can no longer see disease in substitution when one sees that the substitute is substituted for a substitute" (315). Speech, or linguistically based communication, does not constitute a natural or original idea as language was and is influenced by multiple untraceable ideas.

Given his frame, performance as a system or structure exists via the compilation of multiple supplements, constantly evolving; maintaining

some traditions while shifting and modernizing as well. The supplement, in one basic sense, adds methodologically to broader theatrical conventions as it forces recognition of the unoriginality of ideas, asking a performer to be held accountable for the traces or supplements drawn on (and from) in a performance. Questions, however, remain: does this mean the supplement is everything and, if so, what is its use? Admittedly, all language is a supplement to speech. If a supplement fills an absence via addition, all language is a supplement as it attempts to mediate and represent truth or reality, however futile an attempt. This realization, however, does not preclude the use of the supplement, particularly as a method within live performance criticism.

Identification of a supplement highlights what is absent or what the supplement stands in for, is a substitute for. Because the supplement works to recapture its lost origin (Singer 40), to think through “the supplement, of supplementarity and substitution, inevitably leads to a rethinking of what we might formerly have supposed was the non-supplementary” (Royle 62), even if the supplement stand in for another supplement. By identifying the supplement within performance, it becomes possible to analyze what about the/a supplement (i.e., a given performance choice) presumes to be absent and/or present; the act of “pointing to” the supplemental can be significant in terms of contextualizing meaning for the show. Because “there is no experience consisting of pure presence but only a chain of differential marks” (Derrida qtd. in Royle 69), I argue it is useful to determine where the chain of differential marks comes from or leads to in a performance. If the presence of a supplement inherently points to an absence, how is that absence made present, if at all?

Although Derrida’s supplement exists most clearly in relation to language, I argue the supplement exists in important aesthetic ways. Machon defines aesthetics “as the subjective creation, experience and criticism of artistic practice” (14). Although general, I argue aesthetics constitutes the experience of live performance holistically. When placed in relation to the supplement, there are two major contributions I will articulate here. First, the supplement forces us to ask difficult questions in relation to language. Language in live performance functions aesthetically. Machon argues how “the ‘language’ of the performing body alongside the visceral impact of any other sensual element of the performance work is experienced by the audience through the traces of this language in our own flesh” (6). I argue that supplemental aesthetics asks audience members, practitioners, and performance critics to explore questions such as whose language is represented? What absent explanations hinder or affect accessible witnesses of language for the audience?

Second, supplemental aesthetics contributes to non-linguistic factors present on stage: objects, props, and the performing body. When props or objects are used, practitioners must negotiate what function to bring forth. In

other words, do you use the object for its intended use? Do you re-imagine its function? Thus, as an audience, we have to negotiate the prop's present uses and deployments on stage in light of our own conceptual understanding of its absent semiotic history. Although such supplemental meaning making may be inevitable, as a method, supplemental aesthetics questions the object's use within the contextual situation of the show. It allows questions, such as what historical legacy is connected to the object? Is the object used in conjunction and compliance with such historical legacy? Does the performer assume the audience shares this history? If not, how is the object re-imagined? Does adding new or re-imagined functions transcend the historical traces of its "intended" use?

Performance scholar Kilgard reminds me, "Bodies are constitutive elements in performance that may be read in multiple ways"(7). Thus, when casting individuals within performance or acting as performance critics, supplemental aesthetics creates a language for understanding how the physicality of bodies have traces that performers and directors bring present while other aspects may remain hidden or less visible. Bodies are not neutral. Gender, sexuality, ability, and race are read through the audience even if such elements are not explicitly staged in overt ways and as performance scholars we must remember that "audience members are always making meaning" (Kilgard 15). Although the ability to account for, know, and explain all ways such meanings are made exists is an impossible task, supplemental aesthetics, as a method, creates a vocabulary for performers and critics to read bodies in two specific ways. First, supplemental aesthetics asks performers and/or directors to take seriously the historical relevance of what bodies are cast in a given performance and in what particular roles. For example, racial differentials matter on stage, particularly in the context of what content is present within the staged portions of the show and script. Second, for critics, supplemental aesthetics allows the language to say, "From my positionality, the presence of all able-bodied performers mean..." or "Dynamics arose between two performers of different races that were not addressed in the script itself that mattered because..." I argue understanding the body—as itself a supplement—means asking, how does the physicality of this particular body create additions to the script? What new meanings might those additions make? These are questions I find necessary within live performance and, in particular, cast performances where content may be written before individuals are cast in certain roles.

A method of supplemental aesthetics functions dually for the performer/director and performance critics. Expanding methodological vocabularies for performers and critics alike encourages new and creative assessments of how presence and absence functions in performance. I foresee supplemental aesthetics filling such a language gap in current performance work. Pulling from Derridian post-structural work, I argue that supplemental aesthetics embodies the slippage that occurs between language in, and audiencing

of, a performance. Given that live performance creates conditions for complex resonances that are evoked (Kilgard 8), I contend supplemental aesthetics encourages differing interpretations; however, the supplement as vocabulary aids the critic and performer in putting into words what was made present, what pulled their attention, how absence affects or how objects were pulled forward, and other similar lines of thought. Machon reminds me that immediate witnessing of a live performance creates a “presentness” (25), drawing the audience into the ephemeral experience of the performance. Supplemental aesthetics aids in making sense of such inherent presentness and, similarly, how absence aids in understanding or discussing the content of performance. Finally, I encourage new explorations that utilize the vocabulary of supplemental aesthetics in audiencing practices of more mundane and everyday performances. Although the vocabulary I expand here focuses specifically on live performance, non-conspicuous and everyday performances also summon traces of presence and absence for the listener(s); thus, I hope such interactions are further theorized through supplemental aesthetics.

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Bakhtin and the Carnavalesque: Calling for a Balanced Analysis within Organizational Communication Studies

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Bakhtin's perspective and concepts have generated great interest in American and Western European academic circles in recent years. This review describes Bakhtin's concept of carnivalesque and how it has been utilized in organizational communication research. The synopsis of the carnival application in organizational communication scholarship shows, however, very limited usage of a Burkean approach to Bakhtinian theory. In this paper, I call for a more balanced application of Bakhtinian carnival concept in the organizational communication field by including both Goffman's and Burke's frameworks to analyze organizational communication.

Keywords: Carnival, Theatre, Bakhtin, Burke, Goffman

Scholars from disciplines such as anthropology, linguistics, psychology, literary studies, and social theory have uncovered and applied Mikhail Bakhtin's perspectives and concepts in their works. In the past 20 years, communication scholars, particularly in interpersonal communication (e.g. Baxter & Montgomery, 1996), and more recently in organizational communication, have utilized his framework in their research (e.g. Beyes & Steyaert, 2006; Boje, & Rhodes, 2006). His concepts represent "a timely arrival at the scene of transition from modern to postmodern perspectives in the organizational field." (Belova, King & Sliwa, 2008, p. 494), and offer exciting possibilities for critical-qualitative analyses in communication studies. However, organizational communication scholars seem to be lagging behind their interpersonal communication colleagues, who have been exploring Bakhtin's concepts for nearly twenty years. There are some relatively underutilized Bakhtinian concepts that might be of interest for critical organizational communication scholars. In this essay, I will explore the concept of the carnivalesque from Goffmanesque and Burkean perspectives as a medium for criticizing organizational power. I argue that the primary benefit of this approach is to create a space for those from the margins within corporate spaces to find, create, and/or use their voice. In

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order to achieve this goal, I first explicate Bakhtin's notion of the carnival before then showing some of the ways that organizational communication scholars can take up this term in their own scholarship.

The Carnival

Tracing the term "carnival" through history, Clark and Holquist (1984) argue that the carnival played a very important role in the life of European people during the Middle Ages. In large cities, carnivals could last an average of three months each year. As described by Clark and Holquist (1984) in a literal sense,

At carnival time, the unique sense of time and space causes the individual to feel he is a part of the collectivity, at which point he ceases to be himself. It is at this point through costume and mask, an individual exchanges bodies and is renewed. (p. 302)

Normally dominant constraints and hierarchies were temporarily lifted during the carnival. During this time of feasting, music, dance and street performances, all people, paupers and upper class members interacted (and sometimes played) together. Social class distance was temporarily nonexistent, the poor could make fun of rich, and the rich could dance with poor. Laughter, irony, sarcasm, and criticism of social rules and barriers were encouraged.

Literary critics, particularly Bakhtin (1984), utilize these ideas to argue that carnivals were not only festivities, but were also the only time when powerless members of the society could interact as equals with the powerful. The term carnival became prominent in literary criticism after the publication of Bakhtin's *Rabelais and his World* in 1965, now considered a classic study of the Renaissance. In this book, Bakhtin conducted an analysis of the Renaissance social system along with its discursive practices based on literary work of the 16th century author Rabelais (e.g. *Gargantua and Pantagruel*). According to Bakhtin (1984), Rabelais' greatest inspiration came from the folk humor of the Middle Ages that manifested in the social practice of carnival. As a result, Bakhtin identified the carnival as a social institution and grotesque realism with its irony and parody as a literary mode. Clark and Holquist (1984) state that, for Bakhtin (1981), the carnival could be understood:

Not (merely a) spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people. While carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it. During carnival time life is subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom. (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 7)

Stallybrass and White (1986) point out that by the late 19th century the middle class had, both culturally and legally, rejected the carnival tradition. Although

the carnival was no longer practiced, it reemerged in the form of popular culture. In this sense then, the meaning of carnival has transformed from its literal sense of play and festivities on the streets to the more metaphorical sense used by contemporary individuals.

The Carnival in Organizational Communication Scholarship

The anti-authoritarian aspects of the carnival have been used in critical postmodern perspectives of organizational life (Boje, Luhman, & Cunliffe, 2003). Everyone can participate in the carnival, and by using the language of irony, can criticize dominant power structures. Boje, Luhman and Cunliffe (2003) indicate that “the field of organization studies uses ‘theatre’ as a metaphor for organization life in two particular ways: first, ‘organizing-is-like-theatre,’ and second, the more literal ‘organizing-is-theatre’” (p. 7). Organizational communication scholars use these two approaches to portray dominant corporate structures. The first approach, emerging from sociology in general and the writings of Goffman (1959, 1974) in particular, uses the theatrical metaphor to study social processes in organization, whereby the employees are like actors who perform various roles (Morgan, 1980). The second approach draws from philosophy, literary criticism, and Burkean traditions. Burke believed that social action and organizing is literally dramatic and theatrical. What differentiates Goffman from Burke is that the former uses theatrical metaphors to explain social processes in organization (e.g., framing, scripting, staging, and performing), while the latter focuses on language analysis and discursive practices, which shape meaning (Boje et. al., 2003). The Bakhtinian concept of carnival integrates these two approaches, Goffman’s descriptions of social interactions between people and Burkean interpretation of their discourse. According to Boje, Luhman, and Cunliffe (2003):

Carnival is a theatrics of rant and madness seeking to repair felt separation and alienation. It is a call for release from corporate power, a cry of distress and repression mixed with laughter and humorous exhibition meant to jolt state and corporate power into awareness of the psychic cage of work and consumptive life (p. 8).

Currently, the majority of organizational communication studies that have utilized a Goffmanesque approach to Bakhtinian theory have a limited view (e.g. Beyes & Steyaert, 2006; Boje & Rhodes, 2006; Rhodes, 2001). Organizations are described from Goffman’s perspective of “organizing-is-like-theatre,” that is, as stages in theatre with actors who are performing their roles in their interactions with others (i.e., by acting or costuming). There are powerful kings and queens (managers and supervisors) and clowns (critics of the status quo). The emphasis in this type of analysis is on social structure and power dominance shown through the position one occupies on the social ladder, not through the analysis of discourses among characters.

Perhaps one of the best examples of a Goffmanesque approach to the Bakhtinian carnival concept is presented in the study of *The Simpsons* (Rhodes, 2001). Through the lenses of cultural perspective, the researcher examines how organizational life is represented in this popular cartoon series. Rhodes (2001) claims that “the carnivalesque spirit is alive and well in *The Simpsons* and that it provides a wealth of knowledge about contemporary understandings of work–knowledge whose laughter and parody provide the opportunity for a compelling critique of modern organizations”(p. 375). What Rhodes (2001) means by the carnivalesque spirit is the way characters are presented in the cartoon, not the way they talk. The star of the show, Homer Simpson, is presented as a bumbling, doughnut-eating, and beer drinking buffoon—a clown role from Goffman’s perspective, who constantly makes a parody of his employer, Montgomery C. Burns (a king role), the owner of the Springfield Nuclear Power Plant (SNPP), and Yale graduate. As Rhodes (2001) claims, animation/cartoon is an ideal medium for the representation of grotesque realism because it draws attentions to “such bodily functions through, for example, the town drunk, Barney’s belching; Homer’s overeating and obesity; or Bart, Homer’s son, ‘mooning’” (Rhodes, 2001, p. 378). Rhodes’ emphasis on the importance of social positions, roles and presentation of the bodies shows the author’s reliance on a Goffmanesque understanding of Bakhtin’s concept of carnival. Goffman’s approach, and Rhodes in the above study, is very metaphoric, graphic and symbolic, and focuses on analyzing visual rather than verbal messages.

Unlike Goffman’s approach to Bakhtinian carnival, a Burkean understanding of theory focuses on analysis of verbal messages and discourses between actors/ characters. This perspective calls for a closer look at the verbal script used by organizational actors. Scholars using this approach focus on dialogue, instead of only analyzing the appearances of actors/characters and their bodily functions. There are many dialogues in *The Simpsons* between Burns and Homer that are full of irony and sarcasm.

Burns: We don’t have to be adversaries, Homer. We both want a fair union contract.

Homer’s brain: Why is Mr. Burns being so nice to me?

Burns: And if you scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours.

Homer’s brain: Oh my god! He is coming on to me!

Burns: After all, negotiations make strange bedfellows.

(Burns chuckles and winks at Homer.)

(Homer’s brain screams.)

Homer: Sorry, Mr. Burns, but I don’t go in for these backdoor

shenanigans. Sure, I'm flattered, maybe even a little curious, but the answer is no! (Cited in Richmond & Coffman, 1997, p. 110)

By adding a Burkean approach to the analysis of the carnival, critical scholars might be able to discover a more complex language of power and oppression in organizational studies. As the above dialogue shows, Homer and Mr. Burns still retain their clown/king roles (respectively); however, the exchange also features Homer's over-the-top aversion to Mr. Burns' "proposition." His reaction reveals a deep-seated heterosexism—an all-to-common trope in U.S. media (see Fejes & Petrich, 1993). Although Homer may be viewed as a figure that is diametrically opposed to Mr. Burns in terms of power, he is also the instigator of symbolic violence on LGB individuals by showing same-sex relationships as abnormal and undesirable. A Burkean approach to Bakhtinian theory shows how carnival language, not only bodily performances important to Goffman, contributes to unmasking/reinforcing systems of oppression. In other words, adding a Burkean approach can help organizational scholars create a more nuanced approach to power dynamics by going beyond the dichotomy of powerful/powerless.

The Bakhtinian concept of the carnival has been utilized in two ways, Goffmanesque and Burkean approaches, however, based on the review of studies in organizational communication field it has only received attention in one—Goffmanesque. This short synopsis attempted to show how a Goffmanesque understanding of organizational life might be enhanced by adding a Burkean lens to Bakhtinian theory. It does not mean that a purely Goffmanesque type of reading is "wrong" but rather that is limited. By adding Burkean type of analysis critical scholars should be able to provide a more holistic analysis of the system of dominance in society.

Conclusion

The Bakhtinian concept of carnivalesque has recently been adapted to critical and cultural approaches, transformational leadership, change communication, and discourse analyses in organizational communication. Although the concept has gained increasing prominence in organization communication scholarship, the majority of work in this area relies on a Goffmanesque approach to Bakhtin's work. In this paper, I have offered that by adding Burkean analysis to this traditional approach, organizational scholars can expand their focus beyond the powerless/powerful dichotomy. This "balanced approach" to Bakhtinian analysis can help create a more nuanced view of power by showing how communicative exchanges within organizations draw upon and perpetuate discourses beyond the immediate context (e.g., worker-supervisor communication). Ultimately, I hope that scholars take up this balanced approach in order to account for the visual and textual components of organizational communication.

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