

# spectra

The Magazine of the National Communication Association

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## **COMMUNICATION'S ROLE IN SOCIAL JUSTICE AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT**



# ABOUT spectra

*Spectra*, the magazine of the National Communication Association (NCA), features articles on topics that are relevant to Communication scholars, teachers, and practitioners. *Spectra* is one means through which NCA works toward accomplishing its mission of advancing Communication as the discipline that studies all forms, modes, media, and consequences of communication through humanistic, social scientific, and aesthetic inquiry.

NCA serves its members by enabling and supporting their professional interests. Dedicated to fostering and promoting free and ethical communication, NCA promotes the widespread appreciation of the importance of communication in public and private life, the application of competent communication to improve the quality of human life and relationships, and the use of knowledge about communication to solve human problems.

The views and opinions expressed in *Spectra* articles are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the National Communication Association.

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**DID YOU KNOW**

In 1964, Speech Association of  
America President J. Jeffery Auer  
testified before a Senate  
Committee to urge the  
establishment of the National  
Endowment for the Arts and the  
National Endowment for the  
Humanities. Let your voice be  
heard in opposition to current  
threats to these critical agencies!

# Putting NCA's Civic Callings into Action:

RESEARCH, TEACHING, AND SERVICE FOR THE COMMON GOOD

By Stephen J. Hartnett, Ph.D.

This first issue of *Spectra* for 2017 builds upon our most recent convention's theme of "Communication's Civic Callings." Hoping to empower a generation of scholars who look beyond the traditional ivory tower for their inspirations, collaborators, and community projects, the theme pointed to the intersections of teaching, research, and service, where we utilize our Communication theories and practices to speak to, learn from, and work alongside practitioners who are tackling the urgent needs of local, national, and international communities. The theme was meant to encourage those colleagues who seek to respond to the desperate needs of communities that are not traditionally represented at the convention or in our scholarship; to link communication to democratic practices by pointing our teaching, research, and service in the direction of justice; and to dedicate our institutional resources to addressing community needs. The articles collected in this issue of *Spectra* extend these ideas in exciting directions.

If anyone doubts the salience of this shift toward engaged Communication scholarship, teaching, and service, let me reflect back for a moment to our recent convention. We all knew it was going to be a different kind of convention when our Opening Session included an impromptu "die-in" that was led by colleagues who were both shocked and scared by the election news that had rolled in the night before.

Yes, it had happened: Donald Trump—the arch racist, misogynist, xenophobe, proud know-nothing, endorser of torture, professed builder of "the wall," documented sexual predator, and gazillionaire vulgarian—was going to be the next President of the United States. To embody their fear and the fear of their students and community allies, participants in the "die-in" sought to illustrate in graphic terms how a Trump victory had left them both feeling injured and anticipating additional injuries to come. Throughout the first day of the convention, this sense of pain was powerful; many NCA members seemed to be in mourning.

But that sense of mourning quickly gave way to anger, and from anger to talk of organizing, and from there the floodgates opened: 5,000+ Communication scholars began to discuss how to rebuild a sense of civic decency, how to build a media culture of evidence and fair debate, how to cherish diversity and inclusion in ways that could fuel a collective sense of justice, how to use words and songs and poems and images and bodies to communicate hope and fear and love, how to talk about our impending environmental catastrophe, how to tackle global terrorism, how to communicate about complicated health care issues and economic models, how to be better teachers and administrators, and so much more.

The convention closed on Saturday night with a truly remarkable event: Bryant Keith Alexander, Lisa Tillman, Shane Morman, and their all-star panel of LGBTQ+



Grassroots collaborations succeed or fail in large part on the strength of their public communication strategies—how we talk about our civic callings in turn shapes them, for communication is constitutive. And so we Communication scholars proceed with the understanding that communication both reflects objective conditions and shapes them.

scholars gathered 150+ attendees at the "One Pulse" event—held to commemorate the victims of the worst hate-crime massacre in United States history and to help us chart new routes to community belonging and generosity—into a circle of hand-holding colleagues, who were asked to send a hand-squeezed pulse of love around the room, thus creating a circle of care, a secular prayer, an improvised example of a community coming together to cherish one another. I was not alone in ending that session weeping, with folks walking around, almost as if stunned, saying things like "remarkable," "what just happened?" "wow," and "we should do that again!" This was Communication as embodied solidarity, as civic calling, as a testament to our collective commitment to an enlightened, inclusive, reason-based, and joyously performative version of democratic life.

The hard work of democracy is done in the trenches: in homeless shelters and soup kitchens and prison libraries, at PTA meetings and city council hearings, behind the microphones of community radio stations and at the keyboards of micro-blogs—in the hundreds of grassroots civics gatherings where our ideals rub up against the realities of daily life. Sometimes, that work means interfacing with official government agencies, and sometimes it means holding your tongue to fight another day; other times, it means marching in the streets with great, throbbing waves of allies all shouting or singing. At still other times, it means

gathering silently in places of sanctuary and refuge. Regardless of your specific political vision, however, and regardless of your preferred forms of civic action, all democratic life hinges on building collaborations. Meeting folks, talking with them, sharing ideas, jointly planning events and programs, working the phones and email and texts, drafting press releases and crafting posters—these are the daily acts of civic engagement that enable democracy to flourish.

As the articles included herein attest, however, those grassroots collaborations succeed or fail in large part on the strength of their public communication strategies—how we talk about our civic callings in turn shapes them, for communication is constitutive. And so we Communication scholars proceed with the understanding that communication both reflects objective conditions and shapes them. For example, words may not feed the homeless, but our communication about homelessness can indeed change our understandings of its underlying conditions, how to respond to our neighbors caught in dire circumstances, and how to build the networks of change agents who are needed to address problems with creativity and compassion. Because we are committed to this theory of communication—as-constitutive—because we believe that communication shapes the world—we cherish the importance of ethical, evidence-based, careful speech that is linked to slow, deliberate, and responsive listening. ■

# Spotlight

## DATA ABOUT THE DISCIPLINE

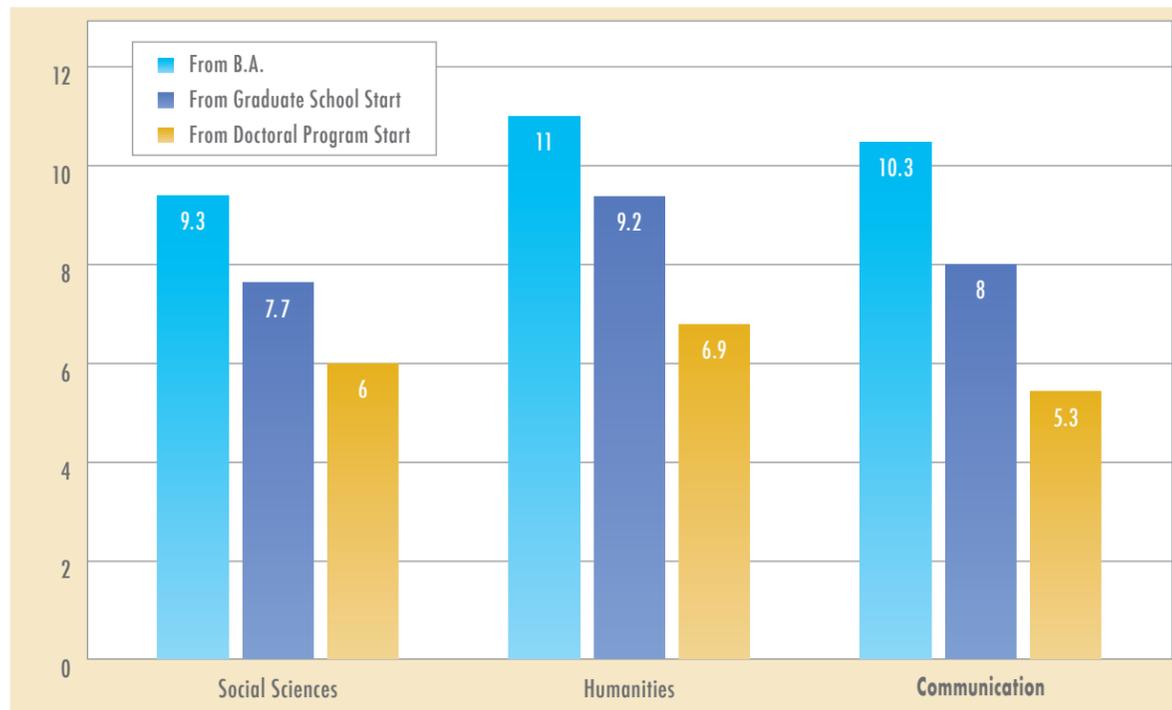
### A Profile of the Communication Doctorate

Each year, the National Communication Association (NCA) generates *A Profile of the Communication Doctorate*, based on data contained in the National Science Foundation's *Survey of Earned Doctorates (SED)*. The 2015 *SED* was released in December 2016, and NCA's new report updates the existing profile of the Communication doctorate in light of the *SED*'s new information.

#### Highlights from the 2015 *A Profile of the Communication Doctorate*:

- More than 55,000 doctorates were conferred by 432 U.S. universities in 2015; a total of 668 of those (1.2 percent) were in Communication. In 2014, 663 Communication doctorates were conferred in the United States.
- The top five universities producing Communication doctorates in 2015 were the University of Texas (30), the University of Wisconsin (25), the University of Southern California (22), the University of Minnesota (19), and the University of Missouri (19).
- Nearly 62 percent of the 2015 Communication doctoral recipients were female, up from 57.8 percent in 2014. By way of comparison, among the social sciences, 38.6 percent of Political Science doctorates were awarded to females, while 61.9 percent of Sociology doctorates went to females. In the humanities, 44.8 percent of History doctorates were awarded to females and 63.6 percent of doctorates in Foreign Languages went to females.
- The median time to the Communication doctoral degree (from the start of the doctoral program) was 5.3 years; for other social sciences, the time to doctoral degree was 6.0 years, and in the humanities, it was 6.9 years.

Time to Doctorate, in Median Years, 2015



Source: National Science Foundation, National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, Survey of Earned Doctorates, 2015.

## PUBLIC PRESENCE

### NCA Hosts Social Justice Exchange at 102<sup>nd</sup> Annual Convention

Dozens of local Philadelphia advocacy organizations joined attendees at NCA's 102<sup>nd</sup> Annual Convention for the association's first-ever Social Justice Exchange. The opportunity for an informal and open exchange of ideas between scholars and activists was organized by Bryan Crable, Professor and Founding Director of the Waterhouse Family Institute for the

Study of Communication and Society at Villanova University. The event served as an opportunity to further the notion of blending research and action on such important issues as immigration, health care, gender and identity, the environment, race relations, and more.

Over the course of three hours, professors, students, and nonprofit professionals discussed ways to leverage the academy and the community to drive change in 2017 and beyond. Participating organizations included PhillyCAM, Fiorenza's Food for Friends, La Puerta Abierta, the Center for Environmental Transformation, and dozens of others. Nearly 40 organizations participated in the event. Local media covered the session, including *CBS Philly* and *Philly Weekly*. Participants left energized and ready to passionately pursue the convention theme, "Communication's Civic Callings."



## IN OUR JOURNALS

**Danielle R. Leek, "Policy Debate Pedagogy: A Complementary Strategy for Civic and Political Engagement through Service Learning," *Communication Education* 65 (2016): 397-408.**

Leek's article explores the potential for policy debate to complement service learning as a means of civic engagement. As Leek explains, organizations such as the U.S. Department of Education and the Association of American Colleges & Universities are calling for higher education curricula that prepare students for civic engagement. In response, many colleges and universities have created more service-learning opportunities for students. Leek suggests, however, that service learning alone does not adequately prepare students for civic engagement. She explains that service learning helps students to know and engage social conditions through physical engagement with their communities. Policy debate, however, leads students to know and engage these same social conditions while they also learn to apply their knowledge for the purpose of political advocacy. Leek posits that these pedagogies are natural complements for cultivating student learning.

**Matthew Houdek, "Once an Eagle, Always an Eagle?": Symbolic Divestment, Recuperative Critique, and In-house Protests Against the Anti-Gay BSA," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* (2016). 14 (2017): 48-65.**

Houdek's essay explores the actions of a group of Eagle Scouts who protested the Boy Scouts of America's (BSA) anti-LGBTQ policies and heteronormative worldview. As part of their

protests, the Eagle Scouts forfeited their badges, separated from the BSA, and wrote personal online letters to the BSA critiquing the institution's exclusionary practices. By examining the Eagle Scouts' in-house correspondence, Houdek sheds light on the tactics of critique and dissent these former BSA members employed in their protests. This essay calls attention to the correspondence archive as a means of investigating political speech acts and forms of dissent; it provides an understanding of the politics of emotions in protest and social change efforts; it codifies the particular tactics employed by the Eagle Scouts in their in-house protests; and it serves as a case study, detailing the rhetorical mechanisms of intra-institutional change.

**Shuo Zhou and Jeff Niederdeppe, "The Promises and Pitfalls of Personalization in Narratives to Promote Social Change," *Communication Monographs* (2016): DOI: 10.1080/03637751.2016.1246348**

Zhou and Niederdeppe's study tests the effects of personalized and depersonalized narratives on cognitive responses, narrative engagement, and support for obesity prevention policies in an effort to better understand how and when narratives promote societal-level change. The authors found that depersonalized narratives were more effective than personalized stories in promoting targeted social policies. Additionally, findings underline the importance of using narrative features, such as personalization, that match the message goal. Personalized narratives may be useful in influencing personal attitudes and behaviors, whereas depersonalized depictions might be more useful for messages promoting societal-level changes and collective actions.

# NCA 103<sup>RD</sup> ANNUAL CONVENTION

NOVEMBER 16-19, 2017 ■ DALLAS, TEXAS ■ #ourlegacyourrelevance



## OUR LEGACY

## OUR RELEVANCE

AS WE LEAN INTO THE SECOND CENTURY of the National Communication Association, this is a time not only to boldly take stock of where we are, where we have been, and where we want to go next, but also to imagine what impact we want to have on lived communities. So, the theme for the NCA 103<sup>rd</sup> Annual Convention being held in Dallas will be “Our Legacy, Our Relevance.”

Taking place in one of the largest and most diverse cities in the United States, this convention offers the opportunity to interrogate one of the foundational aspects of higher education, which is to prepare students to be effective global citizens. At the convention, we will explore how we—as Communication researchers, teachers, practitioners, and students—meaningfully advance our discipline, while also unpacking the extent to which we translate our work in ways that impact broader publics.



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### AN INTRODUCTION



## COMMUNICATION'S ROLE IN SOCIAL JUSTICE AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Hot on the heels of a controversial presidential election and chaotic start to the new administration, we are witnessing a resurgence of civic activism and social justice movements on college campuses across the country and around the world.

Fittingly, NCA's membership is engaging on the ground and in the classroom, as was evident at our 102<sup>nd</sup> Annual Convention last November, where Communication scholars met with local activists and advocacy organizations to discuss how we can collaborate to utilize our research and teaching in practical ways to serve the needs of the nation on emerging issues surrounding race and ethnicity, gender, immigration, the environment, terrorism, health care, and more.

As Lawrence Frey reminds us in his opening article of this special issue of *Spectra*, the convergence of scholarship and activism is nothing new—it is a “return to the origins of the U.S. educational system and a counterstatement against what contemporary education has become.” This latest round of engaged scholarship and activism is reminiscent of the passionate and powerful student activist movements of the 1960s that shone a spotlight on war, civil rights, and feminism. Within today's Communication discipline, an evolved scholarship/activism is focused on finding solutions to real questions or problems of human communication.

Further exploring how teaching civics and government has transformed (with high and low points) over the years, Sharon Jarvis, Susan Nold, and Kassie Barroquillo note the difference between “civic education” and “government instruction” and share how the Annette Straus Institute for Civic Life at the University of Texas at Austin has developed educational outreach programs to teach students how to take their learning one step further and participate in the civic process. They urge Communication scholars to “reset our sights on the proven instructional methods, purposeful messages, and positive mentors that are vital for a culture of active civic participation.”

The conundrum of how to apply knowledge in practical ways escalates in the college classroom, where

Karsonya Wise Whitehead has been incorporating the #BlackLivesMatter movement as a tool of disruption to encourage deeper levels of engagement among her students. Her approach of applying the lens of black feminist theory, combined with effectively using social media, has prompted her students to conduct more comprehensive research, have broader global conversations, and engage in activism beyond the internet. In short, her method has challenged students to reconsider what it takes to change the way they see the world and how they can create change as individuals.

Suzanne Marie Enck shares her journey of scholarship/activism through a retelling of her personal experiences and connections with gender violence victims. Her journey has led her to fully understand the “potential of [her] role as a Communication scholar/pedagogue/activist to effect change on both the micro and macro levels.” Enck also highlights several feminist rhetoricians and Communication scholar/activists across the country who have taken on projects to improve the lives of women who have been affected by violence.

Finally, Jennifer Samp and Andrew Cohen discuss the importance of attending to moral injury, a generally invisible trauma, in the larger conversation about PTSD and the military experience. Specifically, they write, “Communication scholars can examine both the motivations and messages framing the military experience to better equip future, active, and retired military members to anticipate better the challenges that are associated with their extraordinary commitment to serving the country.”

In this era of new mass media and technology, the Communication discipline is perhaps even more distinctly suited to play a prominent role at the intersection of teaching, research, and service. As our nation and our world continue to tackle pressing societal issues, Communication scholars have an opportunity to contribute to the success of our civic callings with collaboration, creativity, and compassion.

We extend special thanks to NCA President Stephen J. Hartnett, who provided inspiration and guidance for this issue of *Spectra*. We hope you enjoy it and are similarly inspired. ■

# Communication Scholarship, Civic Engagement, and Social Justice Activism

By Lawrence R. Frey, Ph.D.

Engaged scholarship is all the rage! From community-based participatory action research to civic-based service-learning education, scholars from across the academic spectrum have recognized the need for and value of research and teaching that addresses pressing local, national, and global social issues. The Communication discipline is no exception, as evidenced, as just one example, by National Communication Association (NCA) First Vice President Stephen Hartnett's 2016 convention theme "Communication's Civic Callings."

Engaged scholarship represents both a return to the origins of the U.S. educational system and a counterstatement against what contemporary education has become. Historically, the mission of many U.S. colleges and universities (e.g., colonial colleges and land-grant universities) included generating knowledge to better their communities. By the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, however, universities had drifted away from that mission, with Cynthia Gibson's 2001 study for the Grantmaker Forum on National & Community Service concluding that higher education's community engagement rhetoric far exceeded its actions and accomplishments.

One reason that shift occurred was because universities (many supported by public funds) became powerful research engines that privileged disciplinary research directed toward other scholars, rather than research that aided communities to confront social problems. The Communication discipline, essentially, followed that path. With its historical roots in rhetoric (considered essential for public political participation), the formal discipline that emerged in the early 1900s was concerned, fundamentally, with communication's civic implications, such as the centrality of public speaking and group communication to democracy. That civic emphasis changed during the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, when Communication scholars concentrated on, among other things, conducting quantitative studies of individuals' communicative behavior (to establish disciplinary legitimacy in other social scientists' eyes); developing communication theories (with scholars, following the etymology of *theory*, from the Greek *theoria*, meaning "contemplation or looking at things," being spectators who look at phenomena without affecting them); and discussing disciplinary "ferments in the field," although there were rhetorical studies of social movements (e.g., civil rights).



A second reason that universities drifted from their civic mission was because, to meet the nation's economic needs following the Industrial Revolution, the U.S. educational system (especially K-12) became, with notable exceptions (e.g., urban research universities), a market-based education with little focus on civic concerns. For example, the National Commission on Excellence in Education's 1983 *Nation at Risk* report lambasted U.S. education for

not generating a competitive international workforce. The report helped spawn the corporate-friendly accountability, standardization, and charter school movements. Communication education was not immune to these movements. David Palmer argued that, in line with market-system training, Communication education, in recent decades, has emphasized two interwoven instructional lines: (a) *professional instruction*, "undergraduate communication




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Engaged (Communication) scholarship, ... represents an important tectonic shift from insular disciplinary research and corporate education to the involvement of researchers, educators, and students with nonacademic communities.

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courses that, essentially, are training seminars for life in the corporate sector” (e.g., professional speaking, business communication, and public relations); and (b) *corporate-supportive instruction*, “standard context-based courses that, although not inherently devised for corporate training, nonetheless, employ the same basic ideology and views of symbolic behavior that are found in professional instruction” (e.g., public speaking, group communication, and organizational communication).

Engaged (Communication) scholarship, thus, represents an important tectonic shift from insular disciplinary research and corporate education to the involvement of researchers, educators, and students with nonacademic communities. In the case of Communication research, that shift has been aided by the rhetorical social movement studies mentioned previously, feminist perspectives of women’s (and men’s) standpoints, qualitative methods’ focus on lived experience, and critical-cultural studies of power and oppression. One especially important contribution has been the development and growth of *applied Communication research*, which Kenneth Cissna defined as providing an answer/solution to a real pragmatic question or problem of human communication, although many applied Communication studies have not been oriented civically but, instead, have focused on individuals and for-profit corporations.

Today, engaged research is woven into the fabric of the Communication discipline, as evidenced by the examples featured in this issue of *Spectra*, which focus on and involve interaction with members of communities that include abused women (Suzanne Enck), Black Lives Matter (Karsonya Wise Whitehead), veterans (Jennifer Samp and Andrew Cohen), and youth (Sharon Jarvis, Susan Nold, and Kassie Barroquillo). Indeed, browsing any Communication journal reveals that engaged research has become relatively mainstream, no longer contested (as it was during debates about theory vs. application) or, worse, viewed with suspicion. Even Donald Ellis, who once claimed that professional Communication education (and, one assumes, applied Communication research) was “theoretically vacuous, without a research base, and, just as an aside, morally degenerate and politically naïve,” admitted later that “applied research is crucial to the professional and intellectual development of communication”; he now conducts engaged Communication research on ethnopolitical conflicts).

Communication education also has become more civically engaged, most notably via service-learning (S-L), which, with its roots in John Dewey’s educational scholarship, provides students with guided academic reflection about community service opportunities (and some S-L opportunities contribute to engaged Communication

research projects). Research consistently has shown that S-L leads students to be more civically responsible (e.g., more committed, presently and in the future, to serving communities) and increases their understanding of Communication subject matter (see the 2007 meta-analysis by Julie Novak, Vern Markey, and Mike Allen).

Mainstreaming engaged Communication research and offering students S-L opportunities are important steps toward fulfilling “Communication’s Civic Callings,” but there is much more to be done. First, the vast majority of engaged Communication research merely describes communities’ communicative practices (sometimes, recommendations are offered for others to put into practice, with, unfortunately, little evidence that application actually occurs). Although describing community issues is absolutely necessary for confronting them, what has been lacking, as I have pointed out before, is a critical mass of Communication researchers using their knowledge (e.g., theories, methods, pedagogies, and other applied practices) to intervene to do something about the community issues and problems that they are investigating, and studying those interventions in a planned, systematic manner—in the same way, for example, that researchers who conceptualized and investigated communication apprehension engaged in and studied interventions to reduce it. Ironically, Communication researchers who

engage communities and their concerns too often take a relatively unengaged observer or participant-observer role, rather than an interventionist role (e.g., similar to the difference between researchers’ roles in ethnography and critical ethnography, respectively).

Second, engaged Communication scholars need to undertake more *translational scholarship*, making research accessible and useful in practice to nonacademic audiences (e.g., the general public and practitioners). There are Communication scholars who translate (their and/or others’) research findings for the general public (e.g., via TEDx Talks; see [www.natcom.org/advocacy-public-engagement/communication-tedx-talks](http://www.natcom.org/advocacy-public-engagement/communication-tedx-talks)) and/or for practitioners (e.g., the CMM Institute for Personal and Social Evolution, where practitioners, such as family therapists, learn to employ coordinated management of meaning theory; see [www.cmmstitute.net](http://www.cmmstitute.net)), although many of those translational efforts are not about civic issues. Moreover, scholars do not appear to be studying their translational efforts as engaged Communication research *per se*, by approaching those endeavors from the start as research and documenting and reporting their practices and effects. Probably most important, the impact of Communication research translational efforts, and of engaged Communication research, generally, is questionable. As just one sign, there is no Communication

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Communication activism...constitutes a strong form of civically engaged scholarship, transforming Communication researchers and teachers into citizen-scholar-activists who are connected to and work with oppressed, marginalized, and under-resourced communities, and with [social justice] groups, to do something about the significant [social justice] issues confronting them.

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The Communication discipline has responded to the call for civically engaged scholarship and is poised to be a leader in civically engaged social justice Communication research and teaching. The Communication discipline should and must be at the forefront of that scholarship.

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scholar (with the possible exception of Kathleen Hall Jamieson) of the stature of Michael Eric Dyson, Neil deGrasse Tyson, or Cornell West (who, I doubt, need explaining), who comment regularly about civic matters on television and other media. Additionally, although *Communication Currents* (NCA's online collection of translational articles for public audiences; [www.natcom.org/communication-currents](http://www.natcom.org/communication-currents)) is valuable, it has nowhere near the readership (estimated at nearly 4 million) or impact that *Psychology Today* does. The relevance, use, and effects of Communication research on society, thus, certainly do not live up to their potential, leading NCA's current First Vice President Ronald Jackson II to create "The NCA Taskforce on a New Center for Communication Excellence." The Taskforce is charged with determining the feasibility of a new national center whose goals would include "producing independent, state-of-the-art, Communication-based, data-informed research reports (about major public issues) that are widely distributed and used by public policy makers...[and] increase visibility of Communication scholarship...in various media."

Third, more civically engaged intervention Communication research certainly needs to be conducted and translated for and attract the attention and affect practices of the general public, media members, and policy makers (among others). Moreover, Communication scholars, of course, choose which civic concerns to address, but some are especially important. In particular, *social justice* (SJ), which refers generally to equitable human rights and resources for those who are oppressed and marginalized, dominates the landscape. Although SJ problems (e.g., the death penalty, genocide, health inequality, homelessness, human trafficking, racism, and sexism, to name but a very few) always are civic issues, not all civic issues are SJ issues, and some may promote social injustice. For example, the popular civic notion that it is better for more rather than

fewer people to vote is not necessarily true from an SJ perspective: It depends on the policies on which people are voting. If, for example, people vote to discriminate against others because they are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (and/or questioning,), it is not better from an SJ perspective that more people vote. Hence, scholars must make arguments regarding whether and how issues that they investigate are SJ problems.

When Communication researchers, working with those affected by injustice and with social justice groups, use their communication knowledge to intervene to promote SJ, and study and report that process, they conduct a form of engaged research that Kevin Carragee and I have called "communication activism (for SJ) research" (CAR). When Communication educators offer students opportunities to work with those affected by injustice and with social justice groups, teaching students how to use their communication knowledge to intervene to promote SJ, they conduct a form of engaged teaching that David Palmer and I have called "communication activism pedagogy" (CAP; and when that work is documented and reported, they conduct CAP research). CAP offers both a critical counter-practice to corporate Communication education, and a significant extension of *critical communication pedagogy*, which has focused on increasing students' awareness of power and injustice, but generally has stopped short of offering students opportunities to put into practice that critical awareness and their communication competencies to promote justice.

Communication activism, thus, constitutes a strong form of civically engaged scholarship, transforming Communication researchers and teachers into citizen-scholar-activists who are connected to and work with oppressed, marginalized, and under-resourced communities, and with SJ groups, to do something about the significant SJ issues confronting them. Communication

activism, as Carragee and I have explained, "is a unique form of scholarship that uses the very essence of the discipline—communication theory and practice—to promote the goal of social justice, meaning that activism, fundamentally is a communication process and practice. Whether there are forms of activism that are unique to other disciplines (e.g., political science or sociology) remains to be seen." Although, at this stage, CAR has been explicated more fully than CAP, the formation two years ago and the subsequent substantial growth of NCA's Activism and Social Justice Division (at the end of 2016,

it had 484 members, making it the 12<sup>th</sup> largest of the 44 divisions) bodes well for the future of Communication activism teaching and research scholarship.

In closing, as evidenced by the following articles, the Communication discipline has responded to the call for civically engaged scholarship and is poised to be a leader in civically engaged social justice Communication research and teaching. The Communication discipline should and must be at the forefront of that scholarship. After all, it is through communicative practices that social justice and civic life, more generally, are created and sustained. ■



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# Civic Engagement: SHARING THE RESPONSIBILITY

By Sharon E. Jarvis, Ph.D., Susan T. Nold, J.D., and Kassie Barroquillo, M.A.

**2016** was a complicated year in American politics. Survey data by the Pew Research Center and others reveal that the citizenry was deeply divided and pessimistic. In conversations with pollsters, people voiced uncertainty about their place in the world, dampened trust in government and the press, and the lowest levels of pride in the country since the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The presidential contest featured two of the most strongly disliked major party nominees in the past 10 presidential cycles. Further, news coverage of the campaign was critiqued for focusing on personality over policy, for offering some candidates more attention than others, and for being out of touch with the sentiments contributing to Donald J. Trump's Electoral College victory.

As public voices read meaning into the recent election, many are offering clever assessments about the hijinks of isolated, elite, and national-level actors. At the Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life (ASI), however, we are responding by renewing our commitment to the role that everyday people play in democratic life. ASI was founded in 2000 to create *informed voters and better citizens*. Housed

in the Moody College of Communication at the University of Texas, we regard the fundamental assumptions of our Communication discipline to be central to civic health. Inspired by—and having worked with—organizations such as the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), the Spencer Foundation, and the Institute of Politics at Harvard University, we seek to improve civic engagement by presenting people, particularly young ones, with proven instructional methods, purposeful messages, and positive mentors.

## METHODS OF INSTRUCTION: MORE MOTIVATION, LESS MEMORIZATION

Let's start with schooling. The nation's founders believed that political institutions alone were not strong enough to maintain a constitutional democracy. They knew that a free society must depend on the knowledge, skills, and virtues of its citizens. For this reason, public schools were empowered with a profound civic mission.

Regrettably, the pressures facing the educational process broadly and social studies curriculum specifically have overwhelmed our public schools, preventing the nation's



The Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life was founded in 2000 to create informed voters and better citizens.

youth from getting the civic training they need. ASI's 2007 report, *Civics, not Government: Redirecting Social Studies in the Nation's Schools*, funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and summarizing the trends, finds that as recently as the 1950s, students took courses in "civic problems" and learned practical civic skills such as how to vote in their high school classrooms. As the nation grew increasingly disenchanted with political life during the 1960s and 1970s, such grounded and practical instruction disappeared. It was replaced by curricula that were:

- *scientized*, emphasizing a view of government through the lens of social science, a sense of detachment, and a commitment to objectivity,
- *sanitized*, disinfecting itself through the mass adoption of text books, an aversion to complications presented by the civil rights movement, and the overall inconvenience of political conflict, and
- *nationalized*, shifting focus to federal institutions and processes in Washington, DC.

In many ways, the nation's schools shifted from a focus on civic education to *government* instruction. While

the former trains students for informed and responsible life in their communities, the latter is removed and remote for most students.

Genuine civic instruction is a practical pedagogy that focuses on community problems, distinguishing between democratic and non-democratic systems, and navigating in a culture that prizes freedom. Civic instruction begins with the individual, while government instruction more often begins with distant and abstract concerns. Government courses may be chock-full of information, but information alone is rarely motivating. Forcing teachers to dish out more *scientized*, *sanitized*, and *nationalized* information, and forcing students to engage in greater memorization hardly quickens the civic pulse. The result is that the more public schools have expected students to *know*, the less they actually *do* and *feel*.

Several of our educational outreach programs at ASI were devised to fill this gap. Believe it or not, a primary barrier to youth electoral participation is simply not knowing how to participate. To cast a ballot, young voters must register, find their polling place or request an absentee ballot, and understand what types

UT Votes is a non-partisan University of Texas at Austin student organization that is committed to voter education, registration, and participation.



When voters are ascribed linguistic agency and a meaningful role in an election in a news report, individuals are more interested in voting and do not mention frustration with the media.

of identification materials are required by their state. *UT Votes* is a non-partisan University of Texas at Austin student organization that is committed to voter education, registration, and participation. It organizes and coordinates student-driven Get-Out-the-Vote activities ranging from registration booths, deputization trainings, and campus competitions. In 2016, as reported by the *Daily Texan*, *UT Votes* worked with local officials to register the largest number of voters in Travis County history.

*Speak Up! Speak Out! (SUSO)* is devised to teach young people about their communities and help them discover the many ways they can make a difference. Targeted at middle and high schools, this team-based program invites students to identify community problems, craft innovative solutions, and present their findings to community leaders at the end-of-semester Civics Fair. Winning teams receive funds to use toward the implementation of their solutions. *SUSO* has grown to involve more than 1,000 Texas public school students annually in gaining the skills, knowledge, and dispositions they need to be effective and engaged. By starting early and with a program that is project-based and student-driven, *SUSO* empowers youth to see themselves as agents of influence and change in their community.



**MESSAGES: MORE AGENCY, LESS MARGINALIZATION**

People come to know democracy, and their places in it, through language. Accordingly, word use is central to ASI's research. Our *Campaign Mapping Project (CMP)*, originally founded by Professors Roderick P. Hart and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, features a collection of media, candidate, and citizen texts spanning 18 presidential elections (1948–2016). Book projects analyzing these messages point to how presidential campaign discourse has underappreciated nuances (Hart's *Campaign Talk: Why Elections are Good for Us*), how specific political keywords shape the American mindset (Hart, Jarvis, Smith-Howell, and Jennings' *Political Keywords: Using Language that Uses Us*), how elite news outlets promote—and protect—the Democratic and Republican parties (Jarvis's *Talk of the Party: Political Labels, Symbolic Capital, and American Life*), and how leaders employ tone in strategic ways (Hart, Childers, and Lind's *Political Tone: How Leaders Talk and Why*).

Recent research by Jarvis and Han from the CMP tracks how the key terms of electoral participation (*vote*, *voter*, and *voting*) have been steadily marginalized in print news coverage over time. Specifically, this longitudinal content analysis examined 36,400 instances of these words in 10,307 print news articles published from 1948 to 2016. A macro look at coverage reveals how electoral participation is most newsworthy when it is endangered, how the term *vote* has been portrayed as having more value and greater worth than the term *voter*, and how thin personalization of the *voter* label sidelines voters from the electoral process and isolates them from one another. Examining the data with attention to time illustrates how between the years 1948–1968, and again in the historic 2008 campaign, *voters* were depicted as mobilized by candidates and portrayed as central to determining electoral outcomes. From 1972 to 2000, however, *voters* were cast as pawns of strategic

elites and in campaigns 2004, 2012, and 2016, they were depicted as captives of a flawed electoral system.

Experiments and focus groups show that audiences respond to this coverage. When *voters* are ascribed linguistic agency and a meaningful role in an election in a news report, individuals are more interested in voting and do not mention frustration with the media. In contrast, when political strategists are assigned

linguistic agency, and when electoral outcomes are depicted as predictable, individuals are less interested in participating, more negative about political life, and very angry at the media.

Journalists are not the only ones who talk down to voters. Presidential candidates are increasingly running for office by running against citizen participants. Jarvis and Han's close read of campaign speeches divulges





A central purpose at ASI is to be watchful of how language shapes the civic mindset. Messages signal political roles, responsibilities, and potential.

how politicians once discussed voting as an “honored value” (in the 1950s and 1960s) but more recently have depicted it as a “harmful choice” (1970s–2012). Educators and scholars, too, are also often dismissive of citizen participation. Brunk’s research exposes how college students who were exposed to discussions of “rational choice participation” (in which the limited effects of each individual’s vote on the election’s outcome is emphasized) became more negative toward the institution of elections and expressed how they were unlikely to vote. Brewer and Siegelman find that when researchers are quoted in the news, our statements are often as shallow, strategic, and game-focused as those offered by the political spinners and campaign strategists we critique in our research.

A central purpose at ASI is to be watchful of how language shapes the civic mindset. Messages signal political roles, responsibilities, and potential. We are mindful in our public events, educational programs, and interactions with students to avoid a clever and detached perspective. Moreover, one of our earliest educational programs, *The American Trustees Project (AT)*, invites high school and college instructors and students to join us in highlighting examples of people’s political agency. AT is a collection of short biographical films of everyday people engaging in extraordinary acts. The films were created to help students see how citizens can be influential in the civic arena, consider what motivates people to change the world, and discover how even young people can become trustees of their own communities. The standards-aligned lesson plans and college course created in association with AT help educators use these materials in their classrooms and provide guidelines for how students can create their own AT videos of people in their communities who are working to effect change. Assessments of these curricula by Jarvis and Han show how AT increases students’ political efficacy, expands their understandings of citizenship, and offers distinct cues on how they can become more involved in their communities.

#### MENTORS: MORE ROLE MODELS, SHARING THE RESPONSIBILITY

Opportunities to model engagement abound. The report *All Together Now: Collaboration and Innovation for Youth Engagement* explains how fostering civic involvement is a *shared responsibility*. It advances a set of tangible recommendations for policymakers, educators, community members, and families, underscoring how all of us can be important influencers in shaping young people’s sense of involvement.

ASI learned early that young people crave exposure to role models and value concrete examples of *transitions to engagement*. The students with whom we work want to see and hear more about other people’s first political memories, initial internships, interview experiences, worst mistakes (and how to avoid them), and tips on counter-intuitive or non-obvious ways to make a difference. Even more importantly, students cite such open conversations as having a transformative influence.

Motivated by student interest in such content, we developed and support interventions that connect young people to mentors. Through the bipartisan **New Politics Forum** program, we host *Campaign Bootcamp* programs to acquaint college students with political operatives who are running local and statewide campaigns in Texas, and our *Careers in Politics* seminars introduce students to professional networks that can open doors to careers in public service. Additionally, we hold events such as our *Civic Life in the Cyber Age* workshops, which connect young people to entrepreneurs contemplating the power and the pitfalls of technology in public life. While each of these programs feature educational content and skills training, participants routinely note the impact of being presented with role models who display bipartisan civility and thank us for exposing them to a variety of paths to engagement.

In the wake of the contentious 2016 election, we need collective civic mentorship more than ever. Presidential

As people who use language, teach students, and interact with others, we must reset our sights on the proven instructional methods, purposeful messages, and positive mentors that are vital for a culture of active civic participation.

campaigns are visible, command international attention, and strongly influence young people’s political attitudes. Individuals who only tune in to politics around national elections can become susceptible to the messages that undermine our aims. As people who use language, teach students, and interact with others, we must reset our sights

on the proven instructional methods, purposeful messages, and positive mentors that are vital for a culture of active civic participation. In doing so, we may spend less time consuming or recirculating elite narratives that sideline people’s place in political life, and spend more time living it, shaping it, and hopefully, telling others about it. ■



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# #BLACKLIVESMATTER IN THE CLASSROOM

## *Creating Spaces of Liberation and Disruption*

By Karsonya Wise Whitehead, Ph.D.



### #BLACKLIVESMATTER AS A TOOL OF DISRUPTION

As a black female college professor at a predominantly white institution, I purposely designed my classroom as a place to openly discuss and deconstruct issues about race, class, and gender. Prior to 2013, I used the civil rights movement as both a lens and a tool of intervention to begin the conversations and to challenge the students to think deeply about these issues and about how the field of Communication (focusing specifically on written text and video) shapes the ways in which we remember and talk about this important time in American history. Although the material challenged the students, they (for the most part) felt comfortable engaging with the broader issues using a long arm of history.

This changed after the launch of the Black Lives Matter movement. My work and stance as a professor moved from being a scholar/researcher to becoming an activist/scholar. I began to engage deeply with these issues, from attending protest meetings to writing Op-Eds for local newspapers, and I began to bring these



issues into my classroom. The level of engagement and personal responsibility among my students changed as well, as these were current, real-world issues that forced them to wrestle with the ideas of white supremacy, white privilege, and police brutality. They had to spend time thinking about whose life mattered and why was it even important to think about and answer this question in a substantial way.

This was challenging, as my students tend to come from predominantly white, middle-class environments, and have come of age under the presidency of Barack Obama. They have been led to believe that America is post-racial and that conversations about diversity are not necessarily about the issues of race. Inserting the issues of Black Lives Matter and my work as an activist/scholar into my classroom served as both an intervention strategy (to force students to have the difficult, real-world conversations) and as a disruption tool (as hashtag memorials and protests shifted and changed on an almost daily basis). My students knew the names of the victims

and their social media-crafted stories, but they did not know the history behind how and why these diverse issues intersected and could be used to explain what they were reading, hearing, tweeting, and posting about every day.

### PUSHING BOUNDARIES

With the ongoing democratization of the news by citizen journalists, the seemingly never-ending cycle of fake news, and the popularity of Twitter and Facebook (and other social media sites) as legitimate sources for news and discussion, there appears to be very little room in this new era of communication to incorporate the research of anyone whose work is not already taught and explored within the curriculum. Given that there is an implied dominant circle of historical privilege—where the voices and stories of those who are male, white, wealthy, heterosexual, able-bodied, cis-gendered, and Christian are positively reported (as they are assumed to be the norm)—Communication professors must redesign their classrooms as active resources that are designed to help students learn



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In this age of Black Lives Matter and increasing resistance to discussions about white supremacy...students benefit from using black feminist theory as a lens, and the new communication tools (i.e., social media and technology) to share information and engage in broader global conversations.

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how to decenter this assumed “norm” and report and positively share the experiences of the “marginalized” other. This is an ongoing challenge, but scholars must be committed to developing aggressive research agendas and media resources that advance liberatory possibilities for non-dominant and marginalized communities, particularly within dominant educational environments and spaces.

This is why I intentionally situate my coursework within the black feminist tradition, drawing heavily upon the foundational work of bell hooks, Audre Lorde, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Patricia Hill Collins, and Angela Davis (to name just a few). In this age of Black Lives Matter and increasing resistance to discussions about white supremacy, I believe that my students benefit from using black feminist theory as a lens, and the new communication tools (i.e., social media and technology) to share information and engage in broader global conversations. Given that the field of Communication is in a constant state of flux, expanding and contracting with every new invention, social media site, or app, students do not have the option to narrowly view the world using only one lens of engagement, or the profligacy to hold on to their work and spend months pondering possible

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My job, quite simply put, is to teach my students that silence is not an option, either in the classroom or in their lives, and to show them how to use the tools of the [Communication] field to challenge it.

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directions and solutions. They must learn quickly how to generate information and scholarship that will impact and change the world, not simply for themselves, but for the unseen faces of people who depend on the unwavering commitment of scholars who take up justice work.

The ongoing work to rescue and reclaim the history and lives of marginalized people and share it broadly and widely is important, and I challenge students to see it as their duty—in the same vein as Kimberlé Crenshaw’s work to say the names of black women and girls who have been victims of police brutality, or my work to share the personal diaries of Emilie Frances Davis—to collect and share the truth about people’s life experiences and challenges. This critical data collection work, completed in the open archives (from the streets to the living room) and then shared in the classrooms, seeks to advance Paulo Freire’s ideas of “conscientization” and “codification” of theories and ideas by opening them up and expanding upon them. (hooks 1994, 14) This, then, is how the work and stories of Black Lives Matter gets collected, shared, and preserved.

At the same time, my students are taught to understand (and respect) that there is a necessary gulf that exists between the researcher and the public to ensure that every story that they find on the internet, unless it has been rigorously researched and tested, does not need to be shared. So, with these multiple streams of knowing in mind and in an effort to bring the conversations about Black Lives Matter and white privilege into the classroom, I worked with my students in my Stereotypes in U.S. Film and Television class and challenged them to think about how communication in the age of social justice could be redefined as a critical

knowledge project. Given that their findings were going to be shared widely on social media, I also challenged them to think deeply about how their work could be offered in a multi-dimensional way, so that any submitted papers or projects would also be laden with hyperlinks where people could find additional resource material. This became the focus of our effort to transform our classroom into a liberatory space of social interactive justice where ideas would be fostered, creativity would be nurtured, all voices would be welcomed, and all experiences would be validated.

Typically, in the beginning of the semester, my students are resistant to this idea of being present and engaged at the highest level in difficult and messy classroom discussions. It was a slow process to get them to change their thinking about the Communication classroom so that they could see the assigned readings as necessary stepping-stones for active engagement and see the classroom discussions as their first steps on a path to becoming engaged scholars. It always happened, just sometimes not as quickly as I would like, particularly because I want them to be free to both intellectually engage with broader issues and actively participate in resistance activities.

This is what I believe that Communication teaching looks like in the age of Black Lives Matter; providing active and vibrant spaces that enable our students to push boundaries, change assumptions, welcome and challenge all ideas and voices, and research all new points of information. My job, quite simply put, is to teach my students that silence is not an option, either in the classroom or in their lives, and to show them how to use the tools of the field to challenge it. (Lorde, 2007, 110–113)



#### REIMAGINING “STEREOTYPES”

This pedagogical shift in my classroom (from having my students discuss the civil rights movement to having them actively engage in the Black Lives Matter social movement) began in spring 2015 after the launch of the *Ferguson in Baltimore* protest. From classroom walkouts to die-ins on the quad, every day was a day when something politically exciting was happening on campus. I was constantly amazed at the level of critical engagement and attention that my students gave to local and national stories. It was this level of engagement that really forced me to bring Black Lives Matter into my classroom. My students did not want to discuss Communication as a field of history and theory; instead, they wanted to use it as a tool to advance their issues, to research and share the truth, and to be actively engaged at all times. As one student noted, “I am on Twitter and Facebook all of the time. Why not use it as a space to challenge white supremacy?”

I also wanted them to use the classroom to contemplate public issues and be contemplative about their personal struggles, to be both in the moment and critical of the moment, so I decided to combine my Metacognitive Reflections on race, class, and gender with the Jesuit idea of contemplation as defined by Walter Burghardt. He argued that contemplation required a “long, loving look at the real.” In my class, the “real” was Black Lives Matter and how students understood what was happening in the world. (Burghardt, 2008, 89–98). I offered students a wide range of writing and reflection activities, from writing in online

journals to completing weekly think tanks (where they researched a specific issue and wrote a white paper about it). They presented mini-lectures, wrote biweekly “Talking Points” papers, watched video clips, and wrote Op-Eds, all while planning and participating in protest marches and teach-ins. At the beginning of the semester, they also created a poster where they routinely added the names of the victims of police brutality and then spent some time researching and sharing their stories. They then read this list out loud on the last day of class.

I actually thought that they were learning and teaching one another about social justice, and that they were actively confronting their own prejudices. In so many ways, I was both right and wrong. As the days turned into weeks and then into months, I slowly realized how disconnected my teaching was from their life experiences and their activist work. They were participating in my classes and in social justice activities and sometimes saying everything they thought I wanted to hear, but the work was not translating into personal action. During each semester, there were at least four recurring incidences that demonstrated the disconnects among my teaching, their activist work, and their lives: hearing the “I am not a racist” statement more than once a week, usually followed by a heavily veiled racist statement; having students challenge my grades and assignments because they thought that I only wanted to them to say what I taught them rather than what they had learned; hearing students address me as “Mrs.” rather than as “Dr.,” which is the title they automatically extended to

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The Communication classroom should be a place where students are taught how to engage with hard topics and how to be involved in the messy work of helping to change our world. It is the ideal environment, as we are not bound by traditional teaching practices.

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all of the male and white professors; and receiving class evaluations that evaluated me as a person (I was too mean or I did not smile enough or I seemed angry) rather than as an instructor. Even though my students were actively involved in studying the issues of race, class, and gender, these recurring issues served as evidence that the real work to change the way we see the world is not just an academic process; it is a lifelong, personal commitment to challenge ourselves to grow (a “long loving look at the real”).

#### CONTINUING THE HARD WORK

At the end of each semester, when I measure what I think my students have learned versus what I have taught, I realize that my work with my students, though it is

difficult and there are some disconnects that happen, must continue to focus on confronting crucial social justice issues. The road to change is long and hard, but it is one that students can at least start while they are enrolled in my classroom. I believe that the Communication classroom should be a place where students are taught how to engage with hard topics and how to be involved in the messy work of helping to change our world. It is the ideal environment, as we are not bound by traditional teaching practices. We are free to reimagine the classroom as a liberated, nonsexist, *nonmisogynistic*, anti-racist, anti-classist space that has no boundaries or borders, and we are free to challenge our students to see it the same way. (Whitehead, 2016, x-xi) ■



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# COMMUNICATION SCHOLAR/ACTIVISTS **RESISTING GENDER VIOLENCE:** WE ARE ALSO NOT ALONE

By Suzanne Marie Enck, Ph.D.

In January of 2009, I interviewed for the position I now hold in the Department of Communication Studies at the University of North Texas (UNT). The department was actively seeking a “feminist rhetorician” and as part of my interview, I taught a sample lesson plan to an introductory research class that was filled with students new to the major. Hoping to demonstrate not just my knowledge of rhetoric, but also my commitment to feminist activism, I taught a lesson based on Rachel Hall’s provocative *Hypatia* article, “‘It Can Happen to You’: Rape Prevention in the Age of Risk Management.” At the time, Hall offered groundbreaking insights about the nature of campus sexual assault prevention efforts, highlighting the problematic emphasis on primarily white “women’s safety” and sexual vulnerability rather than challenging men’s presumably natural proclivity toward sexual violence.

When the class ended, a young woman approached me, eyes brimming with tears, and revealed that she had been

raped. She spoke about how Hall’s article and my lesson had helped her recognize the cycles of self-blame and social stigmatization that she faced. She had never told anyone else about her assault and asked earnestly what she should do next. I had given the class a handout with local resources listed, and I urged her to follow up with one of the organizations on the list. What I most ardently wanted to impart upon her was the message that she was not alone. But soon I would leave campus, and I feared that she would, in fact, be alone with this freshly re-activated trauma.

When I returned to campus as a faculty member in the fall of 2009, I ran into this student almost immediately. She reflected on my interview and our brief conversation afterward. She eagerly informed me that she had left that lecture hall and walked immediately to the campus counseling service. Impassioned and determined, she now planned to invest her future energies in sexual assault prevention and advocacy.



Prior to my interaction with this student, I had zealously volunteered with domestic violence shelters and rape crisis hotlines over the years; I had taught service learning-based courses aimed at shifting attitudes about gendered violence; and I was enveloped in researching rhetorical frameworks of violence against women. However, I had never quite appreciated the potential of my role as a Communication scholar/pedagogue/activist to effect change on both the micro and macro levels. For me, this interaction came to represent the vibrant potential for our research, pedagogy, and outreach to collectively invigorate social change regarding gender violence. When asked to contribute to this issue of *Spectra* and reflect on what Communication scholar-activists are doing with regard to “women’s issues,” I was thrilled to have the opportunity to highlight some of the incredible work taking place by colleagues who model the difficult balancing act of researching, teaching, and providing outreach on topics that are relevant to improving women’s lives.

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Our discipline is ripe with opportunities to intervene in the cycles of violence that harm countless women and girls.

Because our discipline is blessed with a bounty of interdisciplinary methodological perspectives, some of us use these foundations to talk to individuals and couples, to gather heartbreaking and healing stories, and to use that time meaningfully so as not to exploit our interviewees.

To be sure, Communication scholar-activists have been intervening on behalf of “women’s issues” from a variety of vantages for decades. Historically, this scholarship and activism has included an ongoing interest in issues such as ensuring the protection of women who are employed by the academy, supporting the suffrage and the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) movements, working to criminalize workplace harassment, making abortion legal and accessible, and raising awareness about how we (de)value the role of mothering in U.S. public culture. And today, I am encouraged by the growing investment of Communication scholar-activists, especially in the complicated and complicating intersections of gender, race, class, sexuality, and ability as they relate to improving the lives of women. For many, including myself, this investment entails an ongoing and deep attentiveness to the operation of gender violence as a mainstay of our socio-political landscape. Our discipline is ripe with opportunities to intervene in the cycles of violence that harm countless women and girls.

During the 2016 National Communication Association (NCA) Annual Convention in Philadelphia, I had the honor of co-coordinating a workshop titled “Imagining Alternatives to Gender Violence: Working Collaboratively as Activists, Scholars, and Teachers with Community Anti-Violence Practitioners.” Drawing together Communication scholar-activists, as well as area activists working in various Philadelphia anti-violence programs (Project SAFE, Lutheran Settlement House, and Women in Transition), we queried how Communication scholars and students might more robustly center communication issues related to gender violence, and how we can evolve in our synergy with local community members who are doing this sort of work “on the ground.”

In discussing how academics and local community activists can work together more productively, I do not mean to suggest a firm bifurcation between academics

and activists—indeed, most of the Communication academics who took part in this workshop have varying levels of experience in significant activist outreach efforts. Similarly, most of the local outreach personnel who participated in our workshop are actively pursuing a graduate degree (primarily in the field of Public Health) and understand their roles in community organizing as being linked directly to research and knowledge production. Notably, in our conversations, it became abundantly clear that many of us shared a good deal of common ground in both community initiatives and research about sexual abuse and intimate partner violence.

Communication scholarship about gender violence is generated from a diverse array of methodological starting points, including rhetorical and media studies, interpersonal and organizational communication, critical legal studies, intercultural perspectives, and performance studies. For example, Professor Kate Lockwood Harris (University of Missouri at Columbia) challenges us to be cognizant of organizational contexts when studying sexual violence. Harris is a scholar-activist who has also served the National Center for Campus Public Safety in its development of a trauma-informed training program for people who adjudicate and investigate sexual assault reports on U.S. campuses. Her research and outreach are strongly informed by her training as an Organizational Communication scholar. Harris encourages scholars and administrators alike to more robustly interrogate power as it circulates through intersections of privilege, especially at the more macro level of campus organizational culture. Attending to the interplay of whiteness and heteronormativity that so strongly roots many U.S. universities and their accompanying organizational logics, Harris argues convincingly for others to follow suit by disambiguating the role of race, sexuality, and gender in perpetuating localized rape cultures.

Because our discipline is blessed with a bounty of interdisciplinary methodological perspectives, some of us use these foundations to talk to individuals and couples, to gather heartbreaking and healing stories, and to use that time meaningfully so as not to exploit our interviewees. Professor Adrienne Kunkel (University of Kansas) has collected the stories of victims of intimate partner violence to study the qualitative commonalities and departures found amongst multiple stories of abuse. By locating her research in the micro level of individual families, she listens to her subjects with a sense of radical empathy, seeking moments of identification, and determining how to best advocate for victims who seek freedom from damaging relationships. Similarly, after several years of volunteering in the Dallas County Jail as part of a women’s empowerment program called Resolana, I began collecting life history interviews with women I had come to know (36 in all). Their narratives were resoundingly similar in explaining how and why they remained in abusive relationships: They had not seen healthy models of intimacy; they did not feel worthy of owning and protecting their own bodies; they

felt no one would listen to them or care—they felt alone. In handling these narratives, which are only just beginning to find their way into publication outlets, I feel a tremendous sense of responsibility to authentically translate their messages, their experiences, and their desire to be heard.

At the nexus of research and outreach for Communication scholars is perhaps most poignantly our role as pedagogues. For example, Professor Karen Mitchell (University of Northern Iowa) served as the founding director of a campus troupe of actors called SAVE (Students Against a Violent Environment). With the help of several Department of Justice grants, Mitchell has used her Performance Studies expertise to facilitate community forum theatre workshops that address relationship violence, and she has extensively engaged her students in learning through embodied performances about the dynamics of gender violence.

The question of how to enact a feminist ethos of care when teaching students who have been or will be victimized by gender violence is a subject that continues to cause trepidation amongst even the most seasoned teachers






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We surely have much work to do. For example, there is the ever-present need to address this “women’s issue” by reaching beyond a narrow focus on women-identified individuals.

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in our field. To be sure, incorporating readings and lesson plans related to gender violence in the classroom can be fraught. Just as many of our students have been victims of and/or witnesses to gender violence, so too have many of our colleagues. I had the honor of participating in multiple programs at the 2016 NCA Annual Convention with Logan Rae, a master’s student at Syracuse University, whose passion for creating meaningful change through her place in the discipline is palpable and, quite frankly, inspirational. In a 2016 article published in *First Amendment Studies*, Rae vulnerably positions herself as a scholar-pedagogue-activist who relies on her own past experience as a rape victim and advocates for distinguishing between causing discomfort in our students and reactivating past traumas. Ultimately, Rae argues convincingly that we have a responsibility to recognize that if we do *not* feel traumatized by a reading, in-class activity, or other assignment related to gender violence, we are experiencing an *ablest privilege* that many of our students and colleagues may not share. Viewed through the lens of *disability access*, Rae suggests that best pedagogical practices ought to provide fair warnings to students about potentially re-traumatizing content as a means of building more empathic feminist communities in our classrooms.

In an effort to reach beyond classroom contexts and traditional publication outlets, many Communication scholars actively apply their training to outreach initiatives aimed at providing both immediate and long-term respite in the area of gender violence. Extraordinarily, Professor

Rachel Griffin (University of Utah) has delivered well over 100 anti-sexual violence keynotes and workshops on campuses and at conferences nationally and internationally, including speaking engagements with state coalitions against sexual violence in North Carolina, Oregon, Texas, Maryland, California, Illinois, and Washington. Significantly, Griffin’s outreach has taken her to multiple Canadian provinces, where she has found great interest in creating a culture of change, accountability, and affirmative sexual consent. Griffin actively seeks opportunities to use her intercultural communication training and her investment in diversity in higher education to engage audiences in difficult and vulnerable discussions aimed at “facilitating compassion and social consciousness.”

While some Communication scholars use their research expertise and insights to facilitate volunteering in their communities with established anti-violence shelters and programs, others intervene by seeking and securing grants aimed at improving initiatives at the local, state, and national levels. Some of us serve on campus-wide task forces and are actively being trained in (as well as critiquing) the latest Title IX anti-violence programs, such as the Green Dot initiative (which focuses on bystander mobilization and persuasive message building). Still others work ardently to collect narratives of victims (and perpetrators) of violence, hoping to facilitate learning through storytelling and healing through listening.

We surely have much work to do. For example, there is the ever-present need to address this “women’s issue”

by reaching beyond a narrow focus on women-identified individuals. This point became relevant in a number of different conversations during the NCA “Imagining Alternatives” workshop, conversations that recognized, for example, the importance of studying non-heteronormative cycles of intimate partner violence and reaching out to LGBTQ individuals and communities to build more informed, empowering coalitional networks of support. In other moments of conversation, we wrangled with the demand to acknowledge that women too can perpetrate violence (against both men and women). Additionally, we recognized that we cannot hope to end men’s violence against women if more men are not joining this work to challenge other men, to confront toxic masculinity as it harms men and women alike, and to see this “women’s issue” as one that requires more men’s participation as scholar-pedagogue-activists.

In total, NCA’s 2016 Annual Convention included 70 individual papers and presentations on topics related to

sexual assault and intimate partner violence. As I continue to immerse myself in the Communication discipline 20+ years after starting my own master’s degree, and as I invest myself in the mission to understand and resist the normalization of gender violence, I can attest to an increasingly substantial verve pulsing through our network of Communication colleagues. Some have been doing this work for many, many decades, while others are just at the beginning of their journey in this work. But this cycle of research, teaching, and outreach continues, and we all have opportunities to step into the stream of resistance. That brave, terrified student I met during my interview at UNT in 2009 is now a colleague in my home department; having since earned her master’s degree in Communication, she is now actively working to challenge rape culture through her teaching, advising, research, and activism. And, notably, she is not alone. The question is: Where will you invest your energies in this social momentum to resist gender violence? ■



**SUZANNE MARIE ENCK** is an Associate Professor of Feminist Rhetoric in Communication Studies at the University of North Texas. She has volunteered for 20+ years with domestic violence shelters, rape counseling centers, and campus sexual violence prevention initiatives. She has published about gender violence in *Communication & Critical/Cultural Studies* and *Communication, Culture & Critique*. She has volunteered with the Dallas County Jail women’s empowerment group, Resolana, where she conducted grant-supported life history interviews with incarcerated women. The first phase of this research was published in *Text and Performance Quarterly*. In 2016, she won NCA’s Critical/Cultural Studies Division’s Scholar-Activist award.

# COMMUNICATING ABOUT MORAL INJURY

By Jennifer A. Samp, Ph.D., and Andrew I. Cohen, Ph.D.



Clinicians, clergy, and scholars pay increasing attention to the enduring impacts of military service on armed forces members and their families. Important work has targeted the physical and mental health problems associated with the experience of combat. Clinical models, for example, deepened appreciation of combat's aftermath by adding the concept of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) to therapeutic and community conversations about military experience. Recent Communication research provides some important insights about the dynamics of reintegration. However, there is still much to learn about the post-deployment experiences and needs of military personnel and their families. Dominant clinical models do not fully capture certain forms of combat trauma and how individuals communicate about their experiences.

## MORAL INJURY: AN EMERGING CONCEPT OF COMMUNICATION INQUIRY

Scholars now bring the notion of “moral injury” to discourse about combat trauma. Moral injury does not fit into the mold of PTSD, but the concept is gaining increasing traction as an analytic tool for understanding the challenges members of the armed forces face. Moral injury is the disorientation a person experiences when she or he witnesses or is complicit in some injustice. Moral injury manifests itself in incapacitating guilt or



shame, but lacks the distinctive hyperarousal of PTSD. The concept of moral injury is relatively new, but the phenomenon is not. There is evidence of it among the works of ancient writers such as Homer, Euripides, and Sophocles, as well as in the sacred texts of many monotheistic religions. Soldiers' diaries and letters from the Civil War and World War II show debilitating struggles with incapacitating shame. We can read these texts to see how moral injuries disable people as moral beings. They lose confidence in themselves and their abilities to navigate a world whose normative frameworks are shattered.

Working with an interdisciplinary research team, Communication scholars can bring the concept of moral injury to discussions about the significance of armed combat. There is little public recognition of this distinct form of invisible trauma, but it represents another human cost of combat. Many issues of justice thus arise when considering moral injury. Among them is who owes what to whom when addressing the incapacitating wrongful harms that moral injuries represent. Another is how best to structure the discourse about combat trauma so that scholars, clinicians, clergy, and warriors and their communities can properly acknowledge and respond to the damage and demands of service in the armed forces. Communication scholars are uniquely positioned to contribute to such research, given our interdisciplinary focus and our mission of both scholarly and community engagement.

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Our research focuses on the interpersonal dimensions of military service and its aftermath, especially insofar as service asks, if not demands, of warriors that they revise or abandon their central moral commitments.

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Communication scholars can examine both the motivations and messages framing the military experience to better equip future, active, and retired military members to anticipate better the challenges that are associated with their extraordinary commitment to serving their country.

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### HISTORY OF THE PROJECT

Scholars sometimes wonder how they might make a difference with their research. (Philosophers call this “getting up out of the armchair.”) The story behind our project might show one sort of path. In 2015, William D. Adams, Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), spoke at an NCA-sponsored meeting about his office’s initiatives in funding work on military themes and NEH’s interest in interdisciplinary research. Samp alerted Cohen, with whom she had previously collaborated on two Arthur W. Page Center grants to study the moral implications of public apologies. Cohen directs an ethics center. He had recently assembled an interdisciplinary public panel discussion on what civilians owe veterans of their armed forces. We met with panelists to explore the possibility of collaborating on a research project. Panelists emphatically agreed on the importance of the concept of moral injury, but also agreed that there was room to grow recognition of its significance among civilians, scholars, and military communities. We submitted and were awarded an NEH Collaborative Research Grant to study moral injury. The grant funds our research team’s efforts to draw on the lived experiences of post-deployment warriors. This will help us deepen scholarly, clinical, and especially public appreciation of the moral demands and opportunities of moral injury.

Ours is a project where Ph.D.s collaborate with active and veteran members of the armed forces to study an issue that is impacting military service personnel and their communities. Among our team is Richard Williams, who works for the U.S. Vietnam War Commemoration Office for the Office of the Secretary of Defense, and previously served as Political Advisor to Air Combat Command for the U.S. Air Force and to the Commander for NATO Air Southern Europe, Izmir, Turkey. During the Gulf War, he was deployed to Eastern Turkey in support of the Iraq invasion. He is a retired Air Force officer with experience

in intelligence, nuclear control procedures, management, and air traffic control. Another team member is Rich Glickstein, LCSW, CAADC, Behavioral Health Counselor with SHARE Military Initiative at Shepherd Center, Atlanta, GA. Glickstein is a former navy cryptologist and veteran of three Persian Gulf deployments, including the first Gulf War in 1991. He has provided substance abuse and combat trauma psychotherapy to service members and veterans in South Carolina and Georgia after his military service. Also on the team are Kathryn McClymond, Professor of Religious Studies at Georgia State University, and Brittany K. Brown, a Communication Studies M.A. graduate who currently works with a military and veterans charity service organization empowering injured veterans and their families. Army Lieutenant Colonel Josh Brooks, Ph.D., serves as an advisor to the team. He is a career Army officer and philanthropist. Brooks currently serves as a senior organizational leader (battalion commander) of 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Army Reserves Career Division, a 137 Soldier organization with eight subordinate organizations, headquartered at Fort Jackson, South Carolina.

This team now collaborates on studying moral injury among active and veteran members of the armed forces.

### THE MORAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MORAL INJURY

There is a long tradition that considers the ethics of waging war. This moral theorizing considers how the state ought to deploy lethal force. Our research focuses on the interpersonal dimensions of military service and its aftermath, especially insofar as service asks, if not demands, of warriors that they revise or abandon their central moral commitments.

Moral injury presents distinct moral problems. The problems are evident in the dysfunction the morally injured suffer, as well as the collateral costs their suffering imposes on families and their communities. These costs are functions of, and exacerbated by, problems of social justice.

People certainly have robust and reasonable disagreements about the best conception of social justice. Speaking generally, however, among social justice themes is how best to assign the benefits and burdens of citizenship. There are clear issues of social justice in and around moral injury. First and foremost, the burdens of moral injury might fall disproportionately and arbitrarily on certain demographics. Because of long-standing problems of distributive justice, persons with certain backgrounds might be overrepresented in the armed forces because they have faced diminished alternative opportunities for education and a career. Entrenched poverty, inadequate access to education, and historically constricted social and political capital may make military service more appealing than it otherwise would be. This is an issue of social justice because of the background conditions that frame choices to enlist.

Second, many reasonable understandings of social justice will hold that the state should solicit consent from those it governs and those whom it enlists to serve in its name. Recruits may deepen their opportunities for authentic consent if they better appreciate the costs and demands of military service. This is one of the areas where Communication scholars can examine both the motivations and messages framing the military experience to better equip future, active, and retired military members to anticipate better the challenges that are associated with their extraordinary commitment to serving their country. Studies of the many discourses about service and its aftermath can enhance opportunities for meaningful consent. Our research team’s project and dissemination plans will capture the unique voices and experiences of military members in order to enrich scholarly and lay understandings of the many faces of combat trauma.

Our research promotes understanding of the phenomenon of moral injury. We sponsor a series of semi-structured focus groups that are guided by leaders

who have experienced military combat. The focus groups offer insight into veterans’ experiences of moral injury. Their reports inform theorizing about the concept and moral significance of moral injury. Exploring the moral contours of warriors’ suffering illuminates whether and how moral injury is a misfortune or an injustice—especially in light of the reports of those who are intimately familiar with related experiences. Participants are also guided to discuss and assess appropriate responses to the damage of moral injury, such as apologies, forgiveness, and other practices of moral repair. As such, these focus groups capture real-life data in a social environment. Another advantage of our focus groups is that such facilitated conversations evince aspects of moral injury and its normative dimensions that would not emerge from individual interviews. Also, recent scholarship notes that service members may view a focus group as protective and confidential, resulting in greater disclosure among a group of individuals with similar experiences, and a greater opportunity for soliciting warriors’ authentic voices.

The project team will transcribe and study the results to provide enhanced interpretive frameworks for understanding the normative and conceptual dimensions of moral injury. Our findings will inform a later follow-up survey. Drawing on scholarship from Communication Studies that assesses messages and disclosures, as well as humanistic studies that bring empirical findings to bear in practical and applied ethics, the research team will disseminate its findings to scholars and lay audiences. Among our dissemination plans as the research proceeds are social media outlets (Facebook: **Operation Moral Injury**; Twitter: **@OperMoralInjury**) to provide resources for participants and other stakeholders. Later, we will host an interdisciplinary conference on moral injury and present our findings at sites throughout the Southeast and in publicly available podcasts.

We believe our research is one small example of how scholars can apply their analytic and conceptual tools to the challenges members of our communities face.

**OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPACT FROM COLLABORATIVE COMMUNICATION RESEARCH**

We introduce our work in this forum because we believe it will change the terms of conversation about the military. In just the way that adding “PTSD” improved discourse about the military in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, fostering awareness of “moral injury” will do the same in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This applies to many phenomena about which humanists and social scientists can partner with experts in the community. To be sure, moral injury is not restricted to the military. But, we start there.

On the one hand, administrators, politicians, and members of the public sometimes ask how the work we do as scholars is relevant. Academic research is notorious for seeming obvious, or worse yet, idle. On the other hand, lay observers get nervous

when scholars mention social justice alongside their scholarship. It may seem as if the scholars are on an ideological crusade, which might exceed their mission by marginalizing reasonable dissent.

We believe our research is one small example of how scholars can apply their analytic and conceptual tools to the challenges members of our communities face. Our research can bring about concrete improvements from the standpoint of social justice. For one thing, before people can address a problem, they need to know what it is. Scholars can help them figure that out. Moreover, scholars can contribute to the conversation that is part of the moral progress we all seek, regardless of our differences. If people are better adjusted as moral beings, regardless of their particular commitments, that seems to be an improvement we can all endorse. ■



**JENNIFER A. SAMP** is a Professor of Communication at the University of Georgia (UGA). Using survey, real-time, and laboratory-based observational methods, Samp conducts research on how and why individuals do not always respond the same way when managing relational problems and conflicts with close friends, romantic partners, and family members. Samp is a Fellow of the UGA Owens Institute for Behavioral Research, a Faculty Affiliate of the UGA Center for Risk Communication, and a Faculty Affiliate of the Emory University Center for Injury Control. She is an active NCA member and currently serves as a member of the association’s Research Board.



**ANDREW I. COHEN** is an Associate Professor of Philosophy and Director of Jean Beer Blumenfeld Center for Ethics at Georgia State University. His research focuses on themes in ethics, practical ethics, and social/political philosophy. He has published on themes in Hobbesian political theory, rights theory, and contractarian political morality. His current research focuses on reparations and apologies, the moral standing of nonhuman animals, and global justice.

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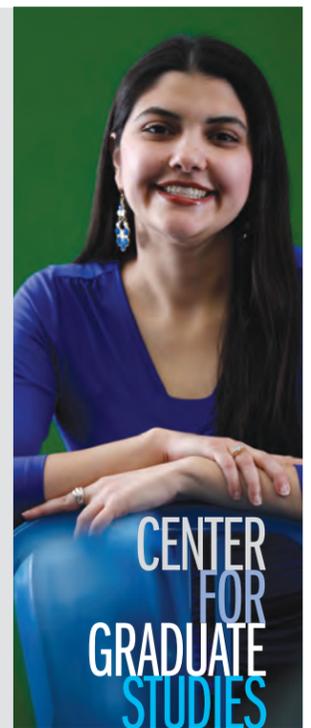
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