Journey from Social Media Visual to Social Justice Movement:
The Meaning & Meme-ing of Black Lives Matter

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Abstract

The issue of police abuse/brutality in conjunction with judicial system practices and verdicts that many within the public sphere feel support the long-held idea within the Black community that such acts only apply in cases where Black people are at the center of the case has been widely publicized and discussed on social media since George Zimmerman was found not guilty of murdering Trayvon Martin in 2013. This theme continues to dominate mainstream and alternative news outlets as well as social media channels, and the discussion is not only propelling discourse among racially and culturally diverse members of the public sphere, but is serving to champion changes in the opinion of the "dominant" public and overall governing policies. As such, this paper endeavors to apply Walter Fisher's narrative paradigm to a Black Lives Matter Internet meme for the purpose of conducting a critical mixed textual analysis of intercultural communication ethics. The findings will debunk the idea held by some scholars that we are currently living in a historical moment that embraces, accepts, and celebrates diversity, and will instead demonstrate that the "goods" and "rights" of the dominant population are still considered to be the standards by which others should adhere. This paper is intended for academics endeavoring to further understand this period of time from a critical standpoint, as well as for members of the public sphere that wish to understand why and/or how an Internet meme can instigate a viral movement that leads to "on-the-ground" action relevant to a particular interest/concern.

Keywords: social justice, Internet memes, personal narrative, cultural epistemology

Introduction

The advent of the Internet has provided the opportunity for people of diverse ethnicities, religions, cultures, and beliefs throughout the privileged world to engage in communicative acts and exchanges regardless of geographic location. As such, virtual communities based on common interests and concerns serve to unite human beings that hold similar ideas about what is right and good". These online forums also serve as an environment for participants to employ the communication ethics practices of engaging in intelligent dialogue, learning, and understanding to comprehend that which is considered to be right and good according to Others. These acts do not mandate agreement as the final outcome of the conversation, but rather that comprehension of the Other's standpoint is acknowledged. The key to effectively practicing communication ethics is conceding that points of view are largely shaped by culture and, therefore, those things that are looked at as shared or divergent "goods" will vary according to the beliefs, attitudes, traditions, and mores of those individuals engaging in the dialogue (Arnett, R., Harden Fritz, J., & Bell, L., 2009). Each person is consequently expected to approach intercultural communication exchanges in a manner that protects and promotes the "goods" of their culture while simultaneously attempting to learn and understand that which is considered right by Others (Arnett, R., Harden Fritz, J., & Bell, L., 2009).

These practices underscore the idea held by scholars such as Walter Fisher (1984), Peter Berger (2009), and Gaytri Chakrovorty Spivak (1985) that we are living in a postmodern historical moment that challenges the suppositions of previous periods of time that all citizens must or should subscribe to the same assumption that there is only one form of reasoning and one possibility of what is right and good.

Aligning with the tenets of this ideology, social media and other digital platforms such as blogs and mainstream news outlet commentary sections have presented an opportunity for marginalized people to have their voices join those of the dominant population so that they now comprise a segment of the privileged public sphere. Although there continues to be a significant gap between Blacks and Whites in terms of overall use of the internet and high speed broadband access at home, smart phones have served to level the digital technology playing field so that young adults, the college educated, and those in higher income households are able to quickly and frequently communicate with others within the virtual realms, regardless of whether those individuals are Black or White (Pew Research Center, 2014). Through the examination of the general demographics for particular technologies, The Pew Research Center (2014) indicates that a full 40% of 18-29 year old Blacks use Twitter compared to 28% of Whites in the same age group that engage the technology. As a result, Twitter has become the portal of choice for young Blacks to express their "rights" and "goods" to other members of the global virtual community. These voices have acted as a catalyst to execute the principles of intercultural communication and the consequential practices of deliberation, learning, and understanding through the online realm known as Black Twitter.

While not a separate entity from Twitter, "the term is used to describe a large network of Black Twitter users and their loosely coordinated interactions, many of which accumulate into trending topics due to the network's size, interconnectedness, and unique activity," (Ramsey, D.X., The Truth About Black Twitter, *The Atlantic*, 2015). The Black Twitter community values its ability to use facetious humor to humiliate individuals and/or organizations that conspicuously or inconspicuously advocate and repeat dominant ideologies and/or social structures that are offensive to marginalized groups. Members find it important to identify the multiple ways

marginalized groups have been, and continue to be, discredited and disgraced as part of the attempt to make it seem as though the only way to successfully navigate within society is to adopt the norms and standards set forth by the dominant group. Participants are always looking to reveal hidden messages or implications within public communicative acts and exchanges such as television commercials and official statements, but have also played a vital role in breaking news in advance of mainstream media outlets and maintaining a specific narrative that differs from that often told by the core media. For example, the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri was first reported through Twitter by eyewitnesses to the event. Local and national stations subsequently picked up on the story due to its "trending topic" status on the social network (Naughton, 2014), but had a very different slant in the way the incident was reported than did Black Twitter because of the community's shared culture, language, and interest in particular issues that can be connected from a frame of reference that is understood by Blacks throughout the diaspora (Ramsey, 2015). In this case, the difference in narrative between Black Twitter users and conventional news mediums is not surprising considering that the Pew Research Center (2012) found that more than three times as many Blacks as Whites said they had very little confidence in their local police to treat the races equally (34% vs. 9%).

While I agree that digital technologies now allow marginalized people to more clearly define and express the Inarticulate aspects of their communities that have led to specific thoughts/opinions/ideologies of what is right and good, I believe that the postmodern era as it is theoretically described by some scholars is a pollyannic idea rather than a concrete societal reality. The optimistic notion that our global society is seeking to gain understanding of the diverse humans that comprise it so that acceptance and celebration of those differences will lead to harmonious co-habitation is deflated by the very existence of social justice movements.

Organizations purposed to address power inequalities such as race, class, nationality, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, and gender would not be necessary in a world that frowned upon homogeny and, moreover, would not continue to be met with resistance and/or outright denial of their foundational principles although intelligent dialogue supported by facts is introduced into the conversational arena. Further, my hypothesis is supported by the refusal of some within the virtual public sphere, as well as physical/real-life contexts, to exercise communication ethics toward those within the Black community that believe police brutality and skewed criminal justice system practices are unfairly aimed at that demographic. If learning and understanding without necessarily agreeing with the position of Others is a key element of our postmodern era, and there is an absence of learning and/or no attempts made to understand the divergent good because it does not align with what is considered to be right based on personal cultural epistemology, then this period of time is not being enacted as it is described by academic text. Additionally, I am of the opinion that when attempts *are* made to understand the right and good of Others, it is only done so because members of the dominant population have offered legitimacy to the narrative.

As such, the purpose of this paper was to conduct a critical mixed textual analysis of an Internet meme related to the Black Lives Matter social justice movement to reveal how intercultural communication ethics encourages racially and culturally diverse members of the public sphere to communicate with each other regarding a specific opinion/thought/ideology that is typically framed as an Inarticulate belief predominantly held by those within the Black community. Moreover, by using a narrative framework, I examined the rhetorical and ironic aspects of the meme to debunk the idea that the postmodern era is a historical moment that embraces, accepts, and celebrates diversity, and instead demonstrated that the "goods" and

"rights" of the dominant population are still considered to be the standards by which others should adhere.

A qualitative analysis of a timely, relevant issue is an important element to understanding the accuracy of the tenets of the postmodern era from the position of a marginalized person. Although it is true that privileged people with digital literacy and an acceptance of the communication ethics approach have the ability to challenge that which has previously been considered right and good, it is quite another thing to suppose that doing so actually means that those raised with dominant/post-colonial ideas about what is right and good will look to understand the viewpoints of Others, or that those "rights" and "goods" can be legitimized without agreement from the dominant population that they are valid points of view (Spivak, 1985) worthy of advocating a social justice movement that means to instigate change in public opinion and public policy.

The proceeding part of this paper is organized in several sections. First, I begin with a review of academic literature pertaining to the definition and principles of the postmodern era; the theory and execution of intercultural communication ethics; an exploration of the theory that humans use rhetoric within art forms as a means to determine behavior; and an examination of the origins and purpose of the contemporary digital Internet memes. I then describe the method used for this study, followed by an analysis of the data that serves as the basis for this inquiry, and conclude with discussion and implications of the analysis.

Literature Review

The literature review first explores the theoretical concept of the academic postmodern era, as well as the concepts of communication ethics literacy that support and encourage the successful execution of the principles of this historical moment; followed by the research

pertaining to the dominate influence of Western ideologies in determining that which should be considered right and good; proceeded by an evaluation of rhetoric within art forms that are often used to persuade others to behave in a specific way relative to communicative acts and exchanges; and concluding with insight into the creation and effectiveness of the digital Internet meme as a means for spreading particular ideas related to a respective culture.

The Postmodern Era

The postmodern era is highlighted by the continuing trend toward globalization and interconnectedness. It is often described through the use of terms such as pluralism, multiculturalism, difference and diversity because it is a unique juncture in human history that challenges the assumption that there is only one form of reasoning and one understanding of what is right and good (Arnett, R., Harden Fritz, J., & Bell, L., 2009). This historical moment differs from previous periods of time that allowed only the "rights" and "goods" of the dominant population to be publicly perceived as the standards by which Others should derive meaning to make sense of the world. James Scott (1990) utilizes the historical accounts of powerless slaves in the United States to demonstrate that although their descriptions of slaveholders as inferior intellectual, moral, and performing beings was a widespread narrative among that particular group, their beliefs were never acknowledged or discussed in an open forum since they were communicated in private for obvious reasons. On the other hand, general opinions pertaining to the attributes of slaves held by Whites were freely talked about so that the public sphere, comprised solely of dominant group members, consequently accepted those views as the one and only truth regarding that particular "category" of marginalized people.

In the current postmodern era, "Race, ethnicity, gender, language, and so on are among the features which define multicultural societies. Given the demographic forecasts for most

countries, the United States included …it is apparent that issues of multiculturalism will shape public policy in the coming decades. National and international policies that address such issues will need to be informed by new concepts and visions of society and intercultural relationships. However, for such policies to be effective, these concepts and visions must be widely diffused among the populace," (Agada, 1998, p. 77). The appropriate way to educate citizens about multiculturalism in order to diffuse the idea of difference has been the subject of debate from the cultural epistemology perspective because it is essentially a contest between which prevailing and emerging cultural paradigms will be defined as right and good. Agada (1998) explains that dominant paradigms are cultural value systems that are widely adopted within a society, but that individuals within that population may simultaneously subscribe to different paradigms to various degrees. As such, he argues that the multiple paradigm contradictions within a culture require a new value system for interpreting reality to make sense of the world. He goes on to explain that the "melting-pot" model of multicultural societies assumes the superiority of the dominant paradigm in a way that pointlessly mandates subordinate cultures assimilate, and that a worldview emphasizing this viewpoint as an emergent paradigm is in fact an unattainable culture because it discounts diversity in its definition of an "ideal" society as one where difference is "melted" away.

Analyzing divergent literature relevant to the postmodern era is important to offering a critical viewpoint of this historical moment as it relates to the Black Lives Matter Internet meme and the subsequent hypotheses that are the focus of this project because the purported tenets of this current period of time must be thoroughly explained in order to offer a deliberate counter-argument to its principles.

Intercultural Communication Ethics

Communication ethics literacy does not require one to agree with the notions held by the Other (or persuade the Other to change their worldview) so that there is one universal good; but it does require one to endeavor to understand the position of the Other for the purpose of intellectual dialogue that will allow us to harmoniously co-exist in an era of difference (Arnett, Harden Fritz, & Bell, 2009).

Intercultural communication ethics protects and promotes the "goods" of a particular culture that ultimately shape the multiple "truths" of individuals and communities (Arnett, R., Harden Fritz, J., & Bell, L., 2009). An understanding of Others leads to learning and intelligent dialogue that is key to achieving communication ethics literacy in the postmodern era, and begins with the acknowledgement that particular standpoints are largely structured by culture. As such, this tenet of communication ethics begins before any communicative exchange takes place because it predetermines those notions that will be considered shared "goods" and those that will be deemed as differences.

The Inarticulate is an element of intercultural communication and is defined as "goods" that cannot be defined or pinpointed with precision, but that shape and nurture a culture's communicative life and practices (Arnett, R., Harden Fritz, J., & Bell, L., 2009). We experience the Inarticulate when we cannot find words to describe our experiences to others, and it often governs the movement from that knowledge which is gained through published content to genuine and active participation (Arnett, et. al., 2009). The Inarticulate also serves to provide the background for what a particular culture determines to be right and good by presenting a guiding voice for living that speaks loudly to members of the community without the clarity and precision of specific instructions (Arnett, et. al., 2009).

Mark Leeman (2011), Teresa Thompson (2009), Ronald Arnett (2008), and Amy Shuman (2006) all agree that narratives, those stories about the way the world is or should be that act as a guiding voice for people's lives, can act as a stabilizing or destabilizing factor when a true attempt is made to understand and learn from the narratives of Others. Many times the narratives of Others contain an element of the communication ethics concept referred to as the Inarticulate, or that which cannot be described in words so that it is not necessarily understood by people navigating outside of a particular culture. Farzad Sharifian and Maryam Jamarani (2011) study a literal example of the Inarticulate in their research through the exploration of the Persian cultural pragmatic schema of *sharmandegi* (being ashamed). *Sharmandgi* underlies the enactment of several speech acts in Persian that do not translate to Australian English speakers. Members of the culture use *sharmandegi* to express gratitude, offer goods and services, and to apologize. Nevertheless, English speakers not familiar with the culture do not understand its intent so that often communicative exchanges are misinterpreted and do not make logical sense to the ear.

In terms of how intercultural communication is practiced in everyday situations and contexts, Stuart Hall (1981) suggests that "the media construct for us a definition of what race is, what the imagery of race carries, and what the 'problem' of race is understood to be", by unceasingly drawing the imaginary distinctions and relations between subordination and domination, and normalizing racial superiority and inferiority. Further, he asserts that representation of race always has "the absent but imperializing white eye, the unmarked position from which all these observations are made and from which, alone, they make sense," (Hall, 1981, p. 35).

According to Richard Gershon and Tsutomu Kanayama (2002), transnational media management has found that "business strategies and corporate culture of a company are often a

direct reflection of the person (or persons) who were responsible for developing the organization and its business mission" (p. 105). This view makes the argument that the race, ethnicity, and gender composition of the leadership team responsible for the development of a company explicitly determines the cultural epistemology and core values that will be reflected to the general public as part of its operating principles. Therefore, the dominant population specific to the United States will communicate with Others from a viewpoint that espouses the beliefs, attitudes, traditions, and mores of the American White male as the standard by which all should subscribe.

Supporting this line of reasoning, David Machin and Theo Van Leeuwen (2003; 2004) studied 44 international versions of Cosmopolitan to investigate female identity and practice across the globe to see how Western corporations are imposing Western culture and values upon the rest of the world, if at all. These versions included publications local to the United Kingdom, Germany, Spain, Greece, Finland, India, Taiwan, and the Netherlands. Their study of the Hearst Corporation's activities through *Cosmopolitan* has shown that Westernization is not as simple as mere influence. Their 44 versions of *Cosmo* revealed that products aimed at regional markets must adopt elements that are familiar to each particular market, and are, therefore, different in presentation. Machin and Leeuwen (2003) note that "local editorial teams carefully tailor their editions of the magazines to reflect the values, narratives, and culture of their territories" (p. 495).

In addition to the stories covered, Machin and Leeuwen (2003) study images used in the magazine. They find that all versions of *Cosmo* draw on recognizable image types that are produced in-house by Hearst in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Brazil, then shared globally via CD-ROM or image banking sites such as Getty. These images may be supplemented

by locally produced images, but all of the photos have common attributes: unreality, genericity, and "upbeat brightness" while also exuding a glamorous but sanitized and deterritorialized fantasy (p. 496).

Machin and Leeuwen (2004) summarize their findings by noting that, even though the publications have been glocalized to their respective territories, their projected neutrality is packed with ideology. The constants across the 44 versions they examined were the modality of the photography and generic structure of the 'hot tips' problem-solution genre. While these constants appear neutral, they are, in fact, carriers of powerful ideological content. Their findings indicate that "These discourses are presented not as ideological constructs but as practical solutions to common problems, endorsed by expert psychological truths about human nature, and therefore, as transcending cultural difference and as legitimately 'global'" (p.118). Their study shows that glocalization is a deliberate, strategic embedding of Western ideology in foreign markets, and Hearst Corporation affects foreign transformations toward Westernization.

The widespread diffusion of US-based media, advertising, and telecommunications networks reinforces the notion that Western ideologies and cultural norms are superior to those practiced by Others within the global community because of the consumerist messages that are being conveyed serve to promote the validity/greatness of the American economic and political system (Thussu, D.K., 2010, p. 228). The scholar goes on to explain that global flow is the dissemination of information via visual media channels that originate from the global North, with the United States acting as the core source, while contra-flow refers to the transmission of said data by global media industries that are largely considered to be second tier media outlets and marketplaces. Even though Western ideologies are exported to hundreds of countries through powerful and impactful images depicted in television and film products, Harmeet Sawhney

(2007) asks us to consider if the United States will continue in its role as the primary global media resource once the country's economic and political power declines, and refers to statistics reflecting the potential decline of Western dominance on the Internet to presume it is probable that the global news flow of the future is trending toward one that finds the South at the core of information flows.

Hans Ladegaard (2011) and Sharifian & Jamarani (2009) agree that a competent communicator is able to engage and manipulate the social environment to accomplish goals because of an awareness to exhibit behavior that is both expected, and accepted in any given interaction, the caveat being that what is considered effective or appropriate is likely to differ from culture to culture and may not successfully parallel with a predominant group's definition of those attributes.

As a result, they each believe that there must be a concerted effort to effectively practice the tenets of the postmodern era so that understanding and learning will lead to dialogic communication that will more fully make the dominant group aware of inequalities in power structures related to intercultural communication that essentially allow for erroneous representations of marginalized groups while simultaneously reinforcing and repeating their position of cultural superiority.

Because the ideology of the postmodern era specifically acknowledges the co-existence and validity of various epistemologies within our global society, research pertaining to the definition and nuances of intercultural communication is pertinent to comprehending that which must be practiced in order to achieve the level of dialogue, learning, and understanding that should underscore the theory of our current historical moment.

Rhetoric as Equipment for Learning

Kenneth Burke (1970) posits that literature provides readers with "equipment for living" (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011, p. 358) by outlining options for behavior depicted within the narrative that can be exercised to make good decisions relevant to everyday interactions. Burke's view explains that audiences may be self-aware in making connections between the meanings depicted in the book and everyday experiences, or rather, deduces that there exists the possibility of conscious effort by the communicator to find synergy and commonalities between an art form and personal situations (Young, 2000). This theory supports the idea that humans have the ability to shape their interpersonal relationships by making critical behavioral decisions toward others based on what literature and other contemporary forms of art present to their audiences as those actions that should be considered right and good.

Important to the notion that art contributes to the way humans interpret their lives and subsequently affects their treatment of others is the idea of self-other distinction. This concept is rooted in the rhetorical tradition's symbolic-developmental approach and involves the belief that audience members possess a sense of self that engages and interacts with a film as an object unless it provides equipment for living. In the case of the latter, the film is not perceived as a separate entity meant solely for entertainment purposes but is instead taken into the self and plays an active role in altering the self as viewers apply their interpretations and own experience to the context (Young, 2000).

Linking the ideas of "equipment for living" and communication ethics theories is Bakhtin's (1981) theory of dialogics. It aligns well with Burke's hypothesis because it supports the notion that the audience faces a relentless barrage of personal decisions that ultimately affect everyday life and cause a series of consequential actions and reactions by others. The obstacles that an individual faces in daily life are constant, resulting in an endless presence of disorder

(cited in Littlejohn & Foss, 2011, p. 238) that finds humans continually looking for ways to make sense of the world. Bahktin (1981) suggests that the world is in constant flux and, as such, all interactions undertaken to address the continuous change will influence the future. This position provides further alliance with Burke's hypothesis because it explicitly agrees with the supposition put forth that literature poses a set of problems and suggests resolutions to them. Therefore, it gives credence to the opinion that strongly focusing on an audience's struggles and failures adds an additional dimension to the idea that rhetoric can change lives by presuming that personal failures can be corrected, and positive change for the purpose of making better decisions in the future is possible (Young, 2000).

The theories detailed above are critical to explaining the way rhetoric contained within literature and other artistic endeavors may play a vital role in helping individuals select which behavioral/performance options to exercise within real-world contexts that will ultimately be deemed as right and good decisions. It is important to note that these choices may align or diverge from an individual's inherent epistemology based on how closely one identifies with a conflict depicted in the artistic narrative and the subsequent actions that serve to either resolve or further amplify the struggle.

Digital Internet Memes

Filip Bacalu (2014) explains, "A meme is the simplest unit of cultural replication. When one person imitates a behavior of another, a meme replicates itself by being copied from one human mind to another (imitation spreads memes throughout cultures). A tradition is a combination of several smaller memes. In a culture that includes repeated traditions, memes may be encoded and transmitted in significantly compressed form," (pp. 154-155).

The scholar goes on to state that memes are in fact a collection of memories that directly influence mindsets and behaviors because they help one to identify one's self. Nonetheless, he also points out that knowledge and ideas relevant to that identity have the ability to evolve without an individual being aware of the occurrence.

On the other hand, Carsta Simon and William Baum (2011,2012) dispute the idea that memes influence behavior and suggest that they simply exist as abstract concepts that are used to summarize certain incidents. Additionally, they make a clear distinction between the abstract way the word *meme* is used in academic circles and the more tangible links, pictures, audio and/or video files that are associated with the term in everyday language. Although they believe there is an evolutionary quality to memetics that mirrors that of biological processes that may help explain which societal memes are selected for replication, Simon and Baum (2011/2012) are not entirely convinced that cultural practices are duplicated because of them since the abstract terms used to describe a meme are vague and ambiguous definitions that are subject to neurological interpretation.

Limor Shifman (2013) addresses the concept of memes as they pertain to contemporary digital culture. Content, form, and stance are the three tenets from which he evaluates the topic for the purpose of exploring whether memes are useful in digital forums since there is one school of thought that believes they explain everything about a particular topic, while another is of the opinion that they possess no utility since they change absolutely nothing. Although it is essentially impossible to study Internet memes in an empirical sense, there is agreement with Simon and Baum (2011/2012) that it is a vague concept worthy of further study. Even so, Shifman (2013) concludes, "Memes diffuse at the micro level but shape the macro structure of

society; they reproduce by various means of imitation; and they follow the rules of competitive selection," (p. 372).

The contemporary notion of memetics, or the distribution and reinforcement of widely accepted ideas/opinions/ideologies that are an intrinsic part of a particular culture, is embodied by the popularity of modern Internet meme images. Although scholars disagree about whether these visual depictions influence standpoints gained through epistemological teachings about what is right and good to the extent that they cause a distinct point of view to shift or altogether change, there is agreement among researchers that the definition of that which comprises a meme and the attributes that underscore the concept are worthy of further study as a way to formulate a more clear and precise hypothesis. As such, the research questions I sought out to examine are:

> RQ1: How does an Internet meme associated with the Black Lives Matter social justice movement debunk the idea that we are living in a postmodern era as theoretically described?

> RQ2: How does an Internet meme associated with the Black Lives Matter social justice movement demonstrate that the interest and concerns of marginalized people are only considered legitimate when the dominant population agrees with the narrative of the secondary culture?

Methodology

The Narrative Paradigm

Fisher's (1984) framework explains that specific ideas of what is right and good can be espoused through the use of plot-driven stories that find their characters using a particular course of action to underscore and support those principles. They typically offer guidelines that one

subscribing to a distinct set of ideas can live by and promote to Others in a format that humans can generally easily relate to because we all inherently internalize them through culture and experience. He believes that the postmodern era challenges the idea of a "metanarrative", and instead acknowledges and recognizes that there are multiple narratives (and petite narratives that exist within that larger frame) that help shape and define that which is considered right and good. These concepts then help individuals, communities, and/or organizations use the guiding principles of the story to decide which communication actions and/or strategies will be performed and/or enacted for the purpose of finding the common "goods" that the dominant population has not yet recognized as values that it shares with marginalized groups. Further, Fisher's narrative theory calls upon individuals to deliberate those stories and traditions that steer actions so that intelligent dialogue, learning, and understanding can be achieved in a way that allows human beings with diverse ideas about what is right and good to fully understand the origins of their beliefs.

Similarly, Leeman (2011) believes that the nature of narratives allows humans to make sense of disruptions when real-life contexts/situations do not play out as we want or expect. As a result, the scholar posits that the stories we find compelling or most interesting come from those individuals we perceive to be living extraordinary, unusual, or unexpected lives. However, he rationalizes that people who are deemed to be living such an existence are also suffering because the disruptions that comprise their narratives often leave them vulnerable, exposed, and exploitable. Therefore, he supposes that purposefully listening to the stories told by humans that are judged to be fascinating or remarkable will reveal an underlying pain that can possibly be healed simply by allowing them the opportunity to express the grief, sorrow, and/or anguish that inherently underscore their personal narrative.

While Thompson (2009) agrees that the narrative framework is a salient paradigm, she points out that narrative competence is not something at which everyone excels. She hypothesizes that understanding the stories of another requires the listener to possess a degree of empathy, and that the particular attribute of compassion necessary to do so is not an intrinsic trait for all human beings. As a result, the researcher concludes that attempting to understand the "rights" and "goods" of Others requires effort and commitment that may not necessarily lead to a perfect state of comprehension, but certainly allows for a greater depth of knowledge than would be had should there be an absence of a conscious effort to do so.

"If there is a trend today toward personal narrative, or toward the increasing use of the personal to attest to access to diverse realities, it is an insistence on the personal at a moment of dispersion, diaspora, and reterritorialization. Put another way, personal stories and their assumed groundedness in local experience have acquired greater status, precisely at a time when their tellers are traveling out of their locales, away from their origins," (Shuman, A., 2009, p. 148). In this sense, Shuman agrees that stories determine the "rights" and "goods" of an individual and can be shared as a means to find common ground with others in the global village that relate to the general principles of the tale. As such, she theorizes that this phenomenon is only possible because personal narratives are not really personal or else they would not have the connective ability necessary to transcend into discussions of collective memory, public discourse, and the politics of identity. Shuman therefore ponders whether personal narratives are actually human stories that are representative of a collective experience and, if they are, contemplates which individuals have the right to tell them and claim them as their own. She subsequently concludes that because personal narratives are representations of a communal familiarity instead of an exclusive individual experience, that the concepts of empathy and entitlement determine the

possessor of the story and allow some narrators to inappropriately claim particular experiences as their own.

After George Zimmerman was found not guilty of murdering Trayvon Martin in July 2013, Alicia Garza made a heartfelt comment on Facebook that ended with the declaration, "Our Lives Matter. Black Lives Matter." Her friend turned the last three words into a hashtag and a viral and on-the-ground social justice movement was born (NPR, June 09, 2015). Garza declared, "Black Lives Matter is an ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise. It is an affirmation of Black folks' contributions to this society, our humanity, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression," (Garza, October 7, 2014).

Using E. Courtney Brown's (2014) extensive use of the narrative paradigm to investigate the role stories and storytellers play in communicating visual messages as my guide, I conducted a mixed textual analysis to examine an Internet meme that includes the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag. The purpose was to thoroughly study the message it intends to communicate, as well as alternate readings, opposing readings, and misreadings that are divergent from its intentional message.

This study used Walter Fisher's (1984) presuppositions of the narrative paradigm structure to explore the foundational basis for the planned meaning of the communication message, as well as the societal implications when other connotations are ascribed to the text through alternate readings, opposing readings, and/or misreadings. Fisher's (1984) premises are: (1) humans are essentially storytellers; (2) the paradigmatic mode of human decision-making and communication is "good reasons" which vary in form among communication situations, genres, and media; (3) the production and practice of good reasons is ruled by matters of history,

biography, culture, and character along with the kinds of forces identified in the Frentz and

Farrell language action paradigm; (4) rationality is determined by the nature of persons as

narrative beings-their inherent awareness of narrative probability, what constitutes a coherent

story, and their constant habit of testing narrative fidelity, whether the stories they experience

ring true with the stories they know to be true in their lives; and (5) the world is a set of stories

which must be chosen among to live the good life in a process of continual reaction.

      To achieve this objective, I first looked at cultural epistemology to find the divergent

"metanarrative" that has been adopted by the dominant and marginalized group relevant to the

Black Lives Matter social justice movement. I then used the Inarticulate aspect of intercultural

communication ethics to examine the way cultural differences make sense of the social justice

movement's premise because of distinctive metanarratives and petite narratives that are unique to

diverse cultures and help establish that which each of the respective groups consider to be right

and good.

      Next, I investigated the role that diverse narratives play in deciding the meaning of the

rhetoric contained within the Internet meme and how/why that meaning determines whether one

adopts the communication as a shared good or is perceived to be contrary to what one believes to

be the "truth" about the world.

      I employed the concept of cultural epistemology tied to Fisher's (1983) narrative

paradigm to examine the Internet meme for verbal and visual rhetorical themes related to

intercultural communication that speak to the idea posited by academics such as Stuart Hall

(1990) that the dominant population continues to wield its structural power to define what the

problems of society are or should be in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, and language in a

historical moment that purportedly accepts, embraces, and celebrates the diversity of Others.

Additionally, I drew on Burke's (1970) idea that art provides "equipment for living" that guides human behavioral actions in conjunction with Bahktin's (1981) theory of dialogics that supports that assertion while further positing that those behaviors are reactions to a world that constantly requires decisions in order to examine the Internet meme for rhetoric that acts as a guiding voice for a specific action based on what the viewer perceives to be right and good.

Data

The Internet meme that served as primary the focus of this inquiry project, and for which two other memes were compared and contrasted, depicts a summarization of the reasons the Black Lives Matter social justice movement is necessary (See Appendix A). A color photograph portrays a balding older White man with glasses standing in between what appear to be file cabinets in an office setting. An official—looking document hangs on one turquoise-colored wall while the other side of the room depicts windows with half-drawn shades situated behind a granite counter that holds a stack of saucers, spoons, a lunch box, and what looks to be a coffee maker. Although he is facing forward and gazing directly at the camera, the bottom half of his face and most of the lower part of his body are not revealed because they are covered by a large brown and white sign held on each side by his left and right hand. Consequently, it is impossible to explicitly determine if he is intending to convey emotion to the viewer using a particular facial expression, but it is feasible to ascertain that he is wearing dark-colored blue jeans and long sleeved button down shirt. The poster he is presenting to the audience appears to have been professionally printed in block letters of different sizes with visual line breaks between the verbiage. It reads:

Line 1: YES, ALL LIVES
Line 2: MATTER
Line 3: BUT WE'RE FOCUSED ON THE
Line 4: BLACK ONES right NOW, OK?

Line 5: BECAUSE IT IS VERY
Line 6: APPARENT
Line 7: THAT OUR JUDICIAL SYSTEM
Line 8: DOESN'T KNOW THAT.
Line 9: PLUS, IF YOU CAN'T SEE WHY WE'RE EXCLAIMING
Line 10: #BLACKLIVESMATTER
Line 11: YOU ARE PART OF THE PROBLEM.

Acting as sources for alternate readings, opposite readings and misreadings that are essential to the critical analysis of the Black Lives Matter Internet meme were two visual memes advocating the respective opinion/ideology/idea that **<u>all</u>** lives matter (See Appendix B) and that **<u>White</u>** lives matter (See Appendix C).

In a depiction of the former, a person is holding a large handwritten sign that completely covers the lower half of their face and body in the same fashion as the man depicted in the Black Lives Internet meme. The individual's gender is unidentifiable because of the sizable poster and, further complicating the visual gender identification process, the person is wearing a toboggan hat that completely covers their hair; and mittens that do not allow the viewer to accurately judge the size of their hands. However, the attire permits one to logically conclude that the color photo was taken outdoors at some point during the fall or winter. The photograph appears to have been taken during the course of a large gathering based on the position of several persons that are visible in the background. It is possible that the person is filming the event because there is a camera located next to the individual's right temple. However, it is not viable for the viewer to determine if the camera is affixed to a headset atop the subject's head, or if what is actually being seen are ear muffs and the camera is being held by someone standing in close proximity. Although the individual is not looking directly at the camera as illustrated in the Black Lives Matter Internet meme, they too are wearing glasses and holding a sign with at least one hand that

expresses a particular point of view, font of different sizes that is handwritten with black marker.

It reads:

Line 1: ALL LIVES MATTER!
Line 2: NOT JUST BLACK LIVES!
Line 3: #ALLLIVESMATTER

Finally, the last data point was a color photograph of a simple piece of white paper with

type-written verbiage in the same font size except for large bold block letters at the top of the

page. The communication is on the windshield of a car as evidenced by the wiper and what

appears to be the bottom half of the vehicle's passenger seat.

Line 1: #WHITE
Line 2: LIVES
Line 3: MATTER
Line 4: OUR LIVES MATTER TOO. THE MEDIA WILL NOT
Line 5: REPORT IT SO WE WILL REMIND YOU: STAND UP FOR
Line 6: THE WHITE RACE
Line 7: AS WE HAVE SEEN IN THE RECENT RIOTS, WE ONLY
Line 8: HAVE EACH OTHER TO COUNT ON. IT IS TIME TO
Line 9: WAKE UP AND REALIZE WHAT IS REALLY GOING
Line 10: ON. WE NEED TO STOP ACCEPTING IT. OUR LIVES
Line 11: MATTER TOO. STOP BEING SILENT. SPEAK OUT. IT
Line 12: IS STILL YOUR right TO DO SO.

Analysis

The Postmodern Era

The Black Lives Matter Internet meme is a distinct example of the shift from previous

historical moments that protected and promoted the notion that members of society should only

hold one idea of what is right and good to the contemporary idea that we are living in an era that

accepts, promotes, and celebrates differences amongst people. Due to the proliferation of the

Internet throughout our global society, world citizens are no longer mandated to establish groups

grounded in mutual concerns and interests according to proximity, but are instead able reach a

wider audience that may strengthen the numbers of an already existing community, or create an entirely new "village" by means of digital communication. As a result, various and diverse opinions/thoughts/ideologies rooted in personal narratives and cultural epistemologies are routinely and frequently expressed so that the hypothesis of the postmodern era that more than one suggestion of what is right and good is acceptable and promoted in today's period of time is soundly proven. Consequently, individuals have a variety of standpoints from which to choose when making the infinite number of problem solving decisions required to navigate everyday life contexts that may either diverge from or align with that which they have always perceived as right and good.

Intercultural Communication as Equipment for Living

This specific Internet meme is worthy of analysis because of the juxtaposition of a professional older White man supporting the tenets of an Inarticulate aspect of the Black community as it relates to police treatment and the social justice system. This irony leads the viewer to consciously interpret the benefits of White privilege, or lack thereof, and make the same connections between personal contexts and those of the person in the picture. In other words, if a person from the dominant segment of society advocates for Black Lives Matter, then viewers that might dismiss or otherwise feel no connection with its principles may no longer perceive the issue as an entity separate from themselves and begin to at least deliberate the narrative and philosophy being espoused. Even a minimal effort to understand the narrative and position of Others can lead to learning and intelligent dialogue that does not necessarily result in agreement between the parties. Rather, it contributes to a fresh perspective not previously considered that can eventually lead to an appreciation of the Inarticulate aspects of a culture that may drive genuine participation and an increase of shared goods between diverse groups. In this

sense, the Black Lives Matter Internet meme encourages viewers to deem the visual as a self-guide for making the choice to contemplate their position about the movement and the underlying facts that support it regardless of personal narrative and/or cultural epistemology. It is not outside of the realm of possibility to suppose that the White man depicted in the Black Lives Matter Internet meme may have changed his initial ideas about that which is right and good. The influence of communication ethics and the execution of good intercultural communication practices may have served as a catalyst for him to make the choice to support certain Inarticulate aspects of the Black community because he found shared "goods" within the narratives. No matter the background, his current point of view is spoken through the rhetoric of the sign as well as his unwavering stare and choice to firmly grip the poster in front of his mouth. The verbiage is in capital letters and, according to the norms of digital communication, indicate that he is shouting. Additionally, some words are emphasized with bold font to further drive home the point he is making through the suggestion of voice inflection that would be found in a face-to-face communicative interaction.

Misunderstanding the Inarticulate

Lines one through four of the Black Lives Matter sign are explicitly meant to address those that believe the verbiage of the social justice movement should read "All Lives Matter", and are collectively articulated in a manner that seems to border on sarcasm. There is supposition by some in the public sphere that the philosophy of the organization rests on the premise that Black lives are superior to others. This perception is unambiguously found in the language of the All Lives Matter Internet meme. Based on an interpretation derived from a different personal narrative and cultural epistemology, lines 1 and 2 of the sign found in

Appendix B declares that all lives matter, and not just Black ones, with the same passion expressed by the capitalized letters that are found in the Black Lives Matter Internet meme.

"Yes, all lives matter, but we're focused on the Black ones right now, OK?" immediately and distinctly dismisses the idea that the Black Lives Matter movement is meant to disregard the importance of the lives of people outside of that ethnic group. In fact, it forthrightly ridicules those that presume that the premise of the organization is intended to espouse the idea that Black lives are superior to others. Similarly, lines five through eight are intended to support the reason society should be focused on police treatment and the criminal justice system as they specifically pertain to the Black community rather than centering on all people. "Because it is very apparent that our judicial system doesn't know that," appears to once again contain a hint of mockery thrown at those that do not understand the tenets of the movement given the numerous stories about the topic in mainstream and alternative news outlets. Finally, lines nine through 11are intentionally calculated to act as the guiding voice for a specific action per the principles of the Inarticulate, as well as the concept of art providing equipment for living. "Plus, if you can't see why we're exclaiming #BlackLivesMatter, you are part of the problem," is a direct call for viewers of the Internet meme that do not support or understand this particular justice movement to examine the ways their personal narratives and epistemologies related to Inarticulate aspects of the Black community help establish their divergent viewpoint. Moreover, the verbiage implores that the practice of communication ethics be executed so that, at the very least, the standpoints that have culminated into the formation of the Black Lives Matter organization are understood even in the absence of concurrence.

Opposition to Intercultural Communication and the Inarticulate

The literature implies that people sharing the same cultural epistemology promote and protect the same notions pertaining to what is right and good. The Black Lives Matter sign, and that of the one represented by the opinion/thought/ideology that White lives matter, is proof that the practice of understanding, learning, and intelligent dialogue is not simply relegated to those seeking to protect and promote multiple differences from Others. However, it also applies to those that share numerous goods as a result of being part of the same culture. While meta narratives do exist and serve as a way to collectively define and/or describe an overall culture, petite narratives held by individuals within the group establishes diversity amongst those that identify and operate within the boundaries of a particular group. As such, Inarticulate aspects of a specific culture contribute to individual narratives that act as the "background" story for each member of the group. Therefore, even those that understand the narrative and epistemology from which the point of view originates do not necessarily subscribe to the protection and promotion of something that is deemed right and good by members of the overall community. Because members of a dominant group are often unaware of the benefit of their privilege, there is a tendency to question divergence that is present within the culture. As evidenced by the flyer found in Appendix C, alignment with the personal narrative of marginalized groups is often viewed as the exception to the norm of that culture rather than as an expression of an Inarticulate aspect of the community.

It is interesting to note that of the three Internet memes examined in this analysis, the sign espousing the belief that White lives matter was the only one not represented by a human subject. The fact that anonymity was invoked insinuates the author is aware that this particular opinion does not align with the general opinion/thought/ideology of the public sphere operating within the tenets of the postmodern era. This intimation is further supported by lines seven

through 12 that read, "As we have seen in the recent riots, we only have each other to count on. It is time to wake up and realize what is really going on. We need to stop accepting it. Our lives matter too. Stop being silent. Speak out. It is still your right to do so."

The verbiage does not make clear whether the author is referring to the recent Baltimore "riots" or to those that took place last year in the wake of a grand jury's refusal to indict an officer for the homicide of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. However, neither of those incidents took place outside of what is largely to be considered minority areas within those locations, and a majority of the protestors were non-violent regardless of the preferred narrative chosen by mainstream news mediums that provide biased coverage due to their influence by the dominant-group. As a result, it is difficult to interpret exactly why the author believes there are surreptitious forces at work with the intention to distract White people from a particular goal. A disproportionate amount of individuals holding positions of power to change public opinion and policy share the same narratives and epistemology as the writer. Consequently, they are the very ones that the members of the Black Lives Matter movement are beseeching for change. The flyer also states in lines one through six, "#WhiteLivesMatter. Our lives matter too. The media will not report it so we will remind you: stand up for the white race." Again, it is not easy to ascertain the standpoint of this opinion/thought/ideology because the media is owned by the dominant group and, therefore, always reports stories that are deemed relevant to that particular culture. Additionally, as the power force within our society, it is challenging to think of situations that require the White race to stand up for itself by speaking out and refusing to accept particular conditions. It is logical to conclude that the rhetoric found in this Internet meme assumes the same position as the All Lives Matter Internet meme that the Black Lives Matter social justice movement is an espousal of the idea that Black lives matter than more than those of

any other group and, accordingly, must be thwarted as something to be considered right and good within our society.

Discussion

Jonathan Ferrell was shot 10 times by a Charlotte-Mecklenburg police officer in September 2013. Officer Wes Kerrick was immediately arrested and charged with voluntary manslaughter. However, in August 2015, the "racially diverse" jury comprised of seven White members, three Blacks, and two Latinos failed to come to a decision about Officer Kerrick's guilt (Schuppe, 2015). As a result, initially peaceful protests held by Black Lives Matter members in the Uptown Charlotte, North Carolina area evolved into a few instances of violence as a younger more aggressive crowd of demonstrators began to arrive on the scene (WCNC News, 2015).

This was only the latest location in America to highlight frustrations pertaining to Inarticulate aspects of the Black community related to police treatment and disparities in criminal justice system practices when compared with that of the dominant population. Indicative of the inherent dissimilarities in treatment between the two groups can be found within the statement made by the defense team after the verdict. "It is now time for our city to heal. It is time to put down the protest signs, unball our fists and extend our hands to each other in fellowship. It is time to begin a dialogue of how we all can make ourselves better citizens and live together in harmony," said Kerrick's defense counsel (WCNC News, 2015).

Regardless of personal narrative and/or cultural epistemology that may determine one's perspective of the case, the Kerrick defense explicitly state their belief that a jury may be considered racially diverse even when the dominant population comprises the majority. This example underscores the idea that even in a postmodern era where diversity is supposedly

embraced and accepted, White privilege has become such a taken-for-granted system in our society that the dominant group continues to define and practice that which is generally considered to be the status quo. The metanarrative of the Black community that explains police are not to be trusted because of their tendency to unjustly treat members of that culture is supported by various petite narratives comprised of personal experiences. Therefore, everyone owns the cultural epistemology necessary to practice the principals of intercultural communication through the transfer of memetics. However, this does not necessarily mean that everyone within the community agrees with the right and good being espoused by a sizable portion of the group. It does mean, though, that the postmodern era supports the idea that the dominant population assumes that equality has taken place even when the group outnumbers members of the diverse population. In this sense, Agada's (1998) suggestion that the "melting-pot" model of multicultural societies assumes the superiority of the dominant paradigm in a way that pointlessly mandates subordinate cultures assimilate is accurate. Further, the statement made by counsel reinforces his assertion that a bona fide postmodern historical moment underscored by a "melting pot" society is unattainable because it discounts diversity in its definition of an "ideal" society as one where difference is melted" away. The verbiage explicitly calls for protestors to halt their activities in favor of what the dominate population deems as the proper way to instigate change.

Next, it is an insult to many members of the Black community to have Inarticulate aspects of their culture be met with skepticism as though the outcome of this case proves that there is no reason to protest, call attention to, or pay attention to the rhetoric that is based on their cultural epistemology and personal narratives.

Using the speech given by Kerrick's attorneys as an example, it is interesting to point out that the marginalized group is always called on to be passive and non-violent in the wake of atrocities committed against them. First, it speaks to the idea that the dominant population feels privileged enough to mandate the manner in which frustration and anger should be expressed even though it is the group being protested against. Second, there is a presumption by the dominant group that dialogue with the marginalized group will be satisfactorily diverse and robust within a system that favors the ideas/opinions/ideologies of only one participatory body as the cultural standard for its society. Last, calling for the unballing of fists underscores the stereotype that Blacks are not able to peacefully complain even though most people that choose to protest abide by the diplomacy associated with civil disobedience. However, this is not surprising considering that, although peaceful protestors often outnumber those committing acts of violence, the biased mainstream media chooses to fixate on those deviating from what is considered to be "normal behavior". There is often criticism from core media sources, as well as a significant number of the population that comprises the general sphere as evidenced by the defense statement, that protests involving what is perceived to be physical violence and/or damage to community buildings do not bode well for public opinion or policy changes.

As proven through the research of Stuart Hall (1981), the media constructs that which we define as race, the imagery carried by race, and what the issue of race should be from a place of misunderstanding and privilege that is ultimately regarded as truth by the general sphere. Therefore, it is apparent that the defense team made the statement based on media constructions of what a protest looks like and what the alternative method should be in order to effect the desired change.

Because the language serves to underscore biased media constructions as described by Machin & Leeuwen (2004) by tailoring a communicative act that expresses dominant ideologies to address a local audience, it also provides equipment for living according to Burke's (1970) theory by providing options for protestors to choose from that will purportedly bring about the same result. Yet, it is unlikely that people possessing enough self-awareness through knowledge of the issue to demonstrate in the streets will connect with the talking points of long-spouted rhetoric to believe or perceive a roundtable discussion with members of the dominant population as an option.

On the other hand, the practice of what is considered to be "rioting" is not a concept founded by members of the Black community. The "Founding Fathers" of the United States participated in acts of treason against England as a means to gain independence from the monarchy. Still, an event such as the Boston Tea Party and the war that ensued as a result of actions like it is characterized in textbooks and general rhetoric as a "revolution" rather than as a series of intense "riots". The biased dominant group, and many outside it who protect and promote the same "goods" as it pertains to police and the criminal justice system, fail to realize that physical violence and destruction of property has historically been used in this country to frustrate authority and call attention to specific issues. The divergent narrative between revolutionary heroes and commonplace "thugs" is further amplified because of mainstream media's choice to focus on the deeds surrounding protests rather than listening to the narrative of the Inarticulate aspects of the Black community that underscore the causes of the disturbances.

Conversely, there are numerous examples of Whites using violence and destructive tactics to reinforce their position of authority and feelings of superiority over Others:

- The Atlanta Race Riot of 1906 began when 10,000 White men began gathering, beating, and stabbing Blacks over the alleged assault of four local White women.

- "Black Wall Street" in Tulsa, Oklahoma was looted, bombed from the air, and burned down by White rioters after resistance to a lynch mob angered at a report that a Black man had assaulted a White woman in an elevator.

- The week-long Chicago Race Riot of 1919 started when a young teenager challenging segregation laws was stoned to death in Lake Michigan and the men responsible were not arrested.

- Defense against further attack after the lynching of a Black man in Rosewood, Florida due to an unsubstantiated claim that a White woman had been beaten and possibly raped served as the catalyst for hundreds of White people to hunt Blacks in the countryside and burn most construction in the predominantly Black town.

- White men dressed in uniforms instigated the Washington, D.C. Race Riot of 1919 as they randomly beat Blacks on the street after reports surfaced that a White woman had been raped.

- The Knoxville, Tennessee Race Riot of 1919 broke out when a mob of White men mobilized in response to an accusation that a Black man had murdered a White woman.

- White rioters in New York City burned Black businesses, homes, and any other symbol of Black progression toward political, economic, and social power because of growing fears by the White working class that the emancipation of enslaved Blacks would jeopardize their livelihoods.

- Black men in East St. Louis, Missouri defending themselves from White men shooting into their houses, stores, and a church mistakenly killed two White police officers,

producing a days-long riot that saw Whites targeting and attacking Black neighborhoods and people (Moore, 2013).

It is incredible that the number of cruelties heaped upon the Black community are largely never mentioned by mainstream media as comparison points for occurrences taking place now, and further supports the notion that core media sources are biased in their content and narrative because they are all owned by Whites. This practice supports Laadegard's (2011) point that the standpoints of a marginalized group are not competently communicated because its attributes do not align with that of the dominant group.

The aforementioned incidents resulted in hundreds of deaths and are but a few examples in our nation's history that align with behavior considered by the Status Quo to be unacceptable when applied to recent incidents such as those in Baltimore, Maryland and Ferguson, Missouri. It is additionally interesting to note that trivial topics in our contemporary society that do not involve life and death contexts such as sporting events (Bialik, 2015) and pumpkin festivals (Payne 2014) have resulted in similar "riotous" acts performed by members of the dominant group. However, the e mainstream media reports the occurrence from the standpoint based in cultural epistemology and personal narrative that participants are "unruly" instead of putting them in the same bucket as the "thugs" in Baltimore and Ferguson that are participating in the same acts. Therefore, it is not illogical to conclude that disobedience by diverse groups of people holds a different connotation than when similar actions are committed by members of the dominant population. As a result, the nomenclature used to describe a social justice movement is important because it helps the general public sphere determine that which will be considered shared and divergent "goods".

Consequently, social justice issues based on the idea that power inequalities exist in our society only become part of the global conversation when the dominant group makes a connection with the rhetoric and begins to publicly express its agreement with the narrative and premise of the issue. The validation of an organization occurs when intercultural communication ethics is employed to point out parallels with the interests and concerns of the dominant population so that the Inarticulate narrative of the marginalized group is manifested in the rhetoric and/or actions of Others.

The dialogue spoken of by the attorneys for Officer Kerrick would ultimately be guided and structured according to that which is protected and promoted by Whites because they hold a disproportionate amount of the power required to initiate changes in public opinion and policy. Hence, the establishment of an agenda and any resulting action items will most likely be determined by what is considered to be right and good as they pertain to the cultural epistemology and metanarrative of a specific culture. As such, it appears inevitable that biases would exist in the conversation relative to whether instances of misunderstood or completely opposed elements of the Inarticulate aspects of marginalized groups would be included in the dialogue. For that reason, it is imperative that protestors insist on the execution of communication ethics in order for understanding and learning to take place that may result in the intelligent conversation desired by the lawyer because of divergent "goods" grounded in dissimilar epistemologies and narratives. Simply put, the type of passivity encouraged by the defense statement has not historically instigated change and will not serve to do so in this historical moment. Memetic differences must be called out in order to become part of the conversation so that Whites can begin to learn and understand the standpoint of the marginalized group and adopt it as part of the dialogue. Because biased core media sources focus on stories

that are relevant to the community representing the Status Quo, the Black Lives Matter social

justice movement has been able to achieve mainstream exposure while sustaining and increasing

momentum for the cause because it has received validation from members of the dominant

group. As a result, it is imperative for organizations to connect with the dominant group in order

to establish and maintain the tenets of a particular topic in a way that keeps it front and center in

the minds of what is generally considered to be the public sphere.

For example, the recent events surrounding the removal of the Confederate Flag from the

South Carolina state Capitol grounds further supports the idea that social change is only brought

about when members of the dominant group agree with the foundational principles of a particular

movement. Although the symbol was never the official battle flag of the Confederacy and has

often been referred to as a symbol of pride and heritage by some southerners, including those

that are members of the Black community, a large segment of the latter population perceives it as

a source of pain and oppression. The Ku Klux Klan and other racist terrorist organizations have

for decades implemented the symbol during the course of violent and destructive activities meant

to provoke fear within the Black community as a tactic to mandate compliance with the "rights"

and "goods" that comprise the metanarrative that the dominant group is superior to Others. Yet,

those in power refused to acknowledge or attempt to understand the narrative of the marginalized

group as it pertained to the flag.

As a result, the first state to secede from the Union largely because of the idea that certain

human beings are fit to be enslaved and treated as chattels, deemed the narrative of southern

pride and heritage as the only viewpoint pertinent to the conversation. It is impossible for a flag

associated with a mindset that ultimately led to a treasonous war loss to be defended to some as a

dignified symbol of a southern cultural victory. Nonetheless, the symbol was allowed to fly on

government property as a representation of all citizens of South Carolina despite divergence brought to light through boycotts led by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the National Collegiate Athletic Association (Costa-Roberts, 2015).

Traditional news outlets wising to provide an opposing point of view from the accepted narrative of the flag, as well as alternative digital news channels such as Twitter (specifically Black Twitter) have always presented a diverse understanding of that being promoted and protected by decision-makers as nothing more than an appreciation for the region's history and traditions. The flag has been flown over the statehouse since 1961 for the opening of the Civil War centennial. *Washington Post* columnist Eugene Robinson says, "It was a middle finger directed at the federal government. It was flown there as a symbol of massive resistance to racial desegregation. Period," (Bruzgulis, 2015). Yet, the most passionate arguments offered by the Black community to Others for the purpose of instigating understanding, learning, and intelligent dialogue were not successful to the achievement of either and the flag remained in its place for 44 years.

Not until Dylann Roof gunned down nine Black parishioners in a church that helped establish and shape the marginalized narrative of the slavery era did members of the dominant population begin to pay attention to divergent ideas/opinions/ideology about the Confederate Flag. Once pictures of Roof proudly displaying a symbol that had been successfully framed according to what Whites considered to be right and good without consideration for conflicting narratives, people of diverse ethnicities and cultures began to ponder alternative meanings of the symbol. Once deliberate dialogue began to take place, the dominant group started to understand and learn the origins and sustenance of the Inarticulate of the Black community that frames police brutality and bias in the justice system as a critical cultural element. In essence, the

rhetoric surrounding the flag changed as the narrative began to shift and common ground was found between the marginalized group and those in power. This is not to say that alternative and opposing points of view were not expressed in equal measure. Rather, it highlights Burke's (1970) hypothesis that literature provides a selection of choices for people to make and the preference will be based on how closely a connection is established with the particular conflict being portrayed and whether the actions of the performers resulted in the desired outcome. In the case of this particular issue, equipment for living was loosely based on either the acceptance of the Black community's Inarticulate point of view, the standpoint that the flag represents pride and heritage, or the apathetic viewpoint that the symbol is neither a positive or negative entity.

However, it is ironic to consider that this particular instance of understanding and learning was prompted only because of a heinous hate crime; and the dialogue from the Black community is no different than it has been for generations. It is feasible that viewers/listeners of core media outlets may have been really hearing the rhetoric of this cultural epistemology for the first time though it has been an oft-repeated foundational element for this community over the course of generations As such, the divergent good served to provide an alternative option for living pertaining to deliberate opinions/thoughts/ideologies relative to a social justice issue. n this sense, it appears that the murder of people in church was the only connect point for some Bible Belt inhabitants to practice intercultural communication ethics for the purpose of learning and understanding the Inarticulate meanings of the Confederate Flag to the Black community.

Even with this supposed social awakening, the biased media still reported the story from a viewpoint rooted in White narrative by referring to Roof as a "young man" rather than as an "alleged murderer". Additionally, his mental health began to be pondered as a possible reason for the crime instead of the Inarticulate element within the Black community that guilt for people

belonging to the group is presumed without need or regard for a potential explanation. Practices such as this emphasize suppositions such as Spivak's (1985) that colonization has had far-reaching effects in that many are unaware of the benefits of White privilege and do not easily perceive or understand its influence or power. For example, tt is difficult for some to imagine a situation where Black fugitives accused of killing nine White people in church during Bible study would be afforded the opportunity to eat Burger King. Although the argument has been made that the officers would have violated the prisoner's rights had they not feed him, the rights of Black captives is a critical petite narrative that contributes to the metanarrative of the group's opinions/thougts/ideology related to police treatment.

As evidenced by the cases of Rodney King and Eric Garner, even demonstrating instances of abuse of authority and unnecessary force through film may fail to condemn the behavior, prosecute those that commit the offense, and/or result in a guilty verdict for those that are charged and tried. The accused only have to reinforce the "strong Black buck" trope to justify the fear for their life and subsequent murderous action. There are dozens of cases that involve the shooting of an unarmed Black man by police (Desmond-Harris, 2013), further acknowledging the social construction that the "strong Black buck" is a dangerous being even without benefit of a weapon and should be feared. Additionally, private citizens have been, knowingly or unknowingly, encouraged to accept this point of view epistemology through the passage of laws such as that of Florida's "Stand Your Ground" that removes the requirement to retreat before using an act of force in self-defense. Although George Zimmerman's legal counsel did not technically argue this law as their official position in the quest to achieve a not guilty verdict for their client, the statute itself speaks volumes because it takes the perception of a

threat into consideration without acknowledging that flight from the situation is a legitimate self-defense option.

The Black Lives Matter Internet meme and social justice movement are a direct result of the outcome of the George Zimmerman case because the verdict reinforced the "big Black buck" stereotype without contemplating the notion that the defendant could have just followed directions and abandoned the scene. Regardless of one's personal stance on the events of that night, the facts involving the genesis of the case are clear. A young Black man wearing a hoodie appeared suspicious to a private citizen who subsequently followed the teenager for several minutes through the twists and turns of a residential neighborhood even after the authorities he had called to report his concerns implored him to remain in his vehicle. At some point, an altercation occurred between Zimmerman and who we now know to be Trayvon Martin, ending in the shooting death of the latter. Persons seeking to reach a deeper understanding of the circumstances surrounding the event may certainly have been asked to ponder the following in order to learn the basis of the Black community's idea/opinion/ideology that the criminal justice system does not perform to work in their favor.

Besides the fact that it took over a month of protests for Zimmerman to be arrested, there are details of the occurrence that clearly outline the benefits of White privilege and the espousal of dominant epistemology throughout society. For example, Zimmerman explained that he immediately described Martin as suspicious because of his attire. However, hooded sweatshirts are a common article of clothing worn by people of all ages and ethnicities, and especially so during inclement weather. Coupled with off-hand comments Zimmerman made during the call that some interpreted as racist language, it is not illogical to believe that the garment had less to do with the judgment than the ethnicity of the person wearing it. In spite of this, Zimmerman

explained that he drew the conclusion that Martin was suspicious because he was a stranger to him and there had been several previous robberies/burglaries on the property. This statement begs one to contemplate whether it should be required that neighbors provide to each other a list of names accompanied by a photo that details possible visitors to their residence.

Also, Zimmerman disobeyed direct orders by the police by leaving his vehicle and trailing Martin throughout the apartment complex. It is unfathomable to some that a citizen would feel compelled to follow someone that has already been deemed as suspicious through the dark during a rain storm. Then again, it is comprehensible that a scared person armed with a loaded fireman and no legal obligation to withdraw from the scene would likely have a sense of empowerment to protect and promote that which he perceives to be right and good. However, the Inarticulate cultural element of this particular marginalized group supports the idea that these same acts performed by someone from the Black community would have been deemed as an inflammatory and instigative decision.

Another point of deliberation centers on the concession between both sides that neither central person knew the other. In a spectacular demonstration of the dominant group's epistemology and collective narrative, Zimmerman sympathizers sharing his "goods" seem to consider it impossible that Martin was afraid in the same manner that Zimmerman claimed to be. He perhaps had even more reason to be frightened since he was being pursued by an unknown person. Once again, the reinforcement of the "big Black buck" stereotype was successfully used to persuade a jury that Zimmerman was the only person that should have felt the need to defend himself that evening. Martin was essentially found to be guilty of causing his own death because of a physical altercation that he had no parts in instigating, but just as much right to the principles of self-defense. The Black community has been pointing out inconsistencies in the

criminal justice system for hundreds of years in a manner that has birthed apathy among members of the dominant population. Nevertheless, the impact of digital channels during the course of the trial particularly highlighted the influence of intercultural communication on cultural epistemologies and metanarratives. A simple hashtag summarized the Inarticulate aspect of the Black community's narrative pertaining to police brutality, citizen brutality, and biases in the criminal justice system. In doing so, the founder of Black Lives Matter was able to connect the group's "goods" of compassion, equality, and fairness with "goods" held by some members of the dominant population in a way that sparked a willingness to listen, understand, and learn by the latter.

The premise of the social justice movement boils down to the idea that what is right and good for Whites does not largely apply to members of the Black community. For instance, the ability to challenge the Status Quo as outlined by the principles of the postmodern era was exercised when Martin confronted Zimmerman about why he was following him. Even so, his supposed power to do so was usurped by the privilege, authority, and power of the dominant metanarrative that young Black men in hoodies are dangerous.

The organization seeks to communicate to Others that the Inarticulate and unique aspects of Black culture are generally not respected. In defense of this argument, supporters offer close readings of this case as examples of a continuing bias toward Black people in our postmodern society. Zimmerman's presumption of Martin's intentions based simply on his attire; his disbelief in the unspoken freedom that Martin had the right to walk through a neighborhood where he was a guest; the idea that the use of deadly force was an appropriate response; and the attempt by the defense to blame the victim as well as depict him as a "thug" by revealing that he smoked marijuana and skipped classes from time to time.

Some members of the general public sphere appear to have responded to the rhetoric of the Black Lives Matter movement because of agreement with the tenets and philosophy of the organization. Playing a role in the dialogue taking place is the Black Lives Matter Internet meme and those memes offering alternate, opposing, and misreadings of the association's guiding principles. Whatever one's take on each visual image, it is undeniable that the respective advocacy of All Lives Matter and White Lives Matter are direct offshoots of the Black Lives Matter hashtag/tag line/organization. The former appears to have been generated by people offended that the movement does not include all lives as part of its rhetoric. The Black Lives Matter Internet meme quickly and summarily dismisses this point of view while succinctly explaining the divergent good of the Black community. Essentially, it is an affront to the marginalized group to espouse the belief that all lives matter when a significant segment of the secondary population is practicing intercultural communication ethics to express the metanarrative and multiple petite narratives that all lives do not matter equally.

Additionally, White Lives Matter appears to be a non-movement. White lives have always mattered and will continue to do so for as long as they hold positions of power, thereby maintaining status as the dominant group. However, the memetics expressed through the visual meme are an indication that some members of the culture believe that the doctrine of our supposed postmodern society has somehow resulted in a loss of power by the dominant group. The very fact that they are still the primary power force suggests that this opinion/thought/ideology is false. More importantly, the meme is intentionally vague about its premise in order to leave it open to interpretive agreement by those that share the same idea about what should be protected and promoted as right and good. As such, any instance where a member of the group experienced a personal or professional disappointment could fall under the

umbrella of those things the author believes should be a course of action to prevent further disillusionment with the country from occurring. However, it is difficult for diverse groups to understand and/or learn intercultural communication practices when dialogue involves this particular epistemology because it is not based on facts.

The Black Lives Internet meme is a powerful example of visual rhetoric because it appeals to "goods" shared by the marginalized and dominant group; explains the premise of the organization and a firm rebuttal against those that oppose its philosophy; presents the idea that diversity within the organization is encouraged; and uses the human subject to validate its legitimacy. On the other hand, the respective All Lives Matter and White Lives Matter Internet memes are poor responses to a social justice issue the Black community has been highlighting for decades. Now that the topic has gotten the traction that the marginalized group believes it deserves, alternate and opposing groups have formed that fundamentally disbelieve in the notion that the Black community is either deserving of, or is not being completely truthful about the metanarrative and petite narratives being espoused.

Conclusion

It is important to note that the purpose of this textual analysis was not to dismiss or dismantle the idea that intelligent dialogue, understanding, and learning are completely absent from this postmodern era. As evidenced by the Black Lives Internet meme, a growing number of culturally and racially diverse participants that comprise the Black Lives Matter organization underscore the notion that communication ethics is being practiced in a way that Others outside the Black community are sharing the "goods" of that culture. Instead, this inquiry was first meant to support the argument that we are not living in a postmodern era as theoretically described.

It is disappointing to note that the Inarticulate aspects of the Black community that have served as the baseline for the many social justice movements over the centuries are only considered when members of the dominant group validate the cause. A truly postmodern historical moment would not require movements at all because the powerful general sphere would be completely accepting of the era's philosophy regarding communication ethics. There certainly would not exist alternate and opposing views to what a diverse culture is espousing as an Inarticulate aspect of *its* community. Therefore, it is apparent that we are not living in an authentic postmodern era. Be that as it may, a marginalized group of people called attention to a particular topic that adversely affects them for generations to no avail; but almost immediate change in public opinion and policy occurred once members of the dominant culture confirmed the issue as authentic.

As such, the second objective of this project to confirm my hypothesis that members of the dominant group must agree and validate a social justice movement for it to be effective has been met. The Black Lives Matter Internet meme would have had a completely different connotation had an older Black man been the human subject in the visual. Taking this into consideration, this paper is intended for academics endeavoring to further understand this period of time from a critical standpoint, as well as for members of the public sphere that wish to understand why and/or how an Internet meme can instigate a viral movement that leads to "on-the-ground" action relevant to a particular interest/concern.

It was challenging to find research related to the effects/influence of digital Internet memes. Further studies should be conducted to further clarify the definition and core principles that comprise the concept of memetics and, similarly, the influence and/or effectiveness of digital Internet memes on instigating the practices of learning, understanding, and intelligent

dialogue inherent in intercultural communication. Delving into this topic will prove relevant to a better understanding of cultural epistemology and/or personal narratives. Deep examinations will more clearly establish whether the idea of communicating memetic aspects of a particular group to a diverse audience can genuinely be achieved due to the abstract nature of the various and wide-ranging attributes that may be considered a defining characteristic of "culture". Additionally, further research will play a vital role to widening the field of critical standpoint theories, helping bolster, diminish, or equalize hypotheses that favor either inherent or learned behavior as a reason for particular ideas/opinions/ideologies.

Perhaps the most interesting limitation I found during the course of this inquiry was the lack of academic information available pertaining to the Inarticulate. This does not seem highly irregularly in the sense that this particular idea as theoretically described refers to a communication concept where cultural elements specific to a distinct group cannot necessarily be explained to people outside the group. As such, it was difficult at times to support potential arguments related to certain standpoints and narratives that I would have liked to include for deliberation. There are Inarticulate factors that I inherently know as a member of several marginalized groups to be true, but the parameters of the research did not provide a basis for proof of the opinions in order to make them academically valid.

In any event, the communicative act of "meme-ing" involves an understanding of a specific memetic idea associated with the rhetoric being relayed through the art form. Although cultural epistemologies may not have changed due to the Black Lives Matter meme, it is reasonable to conclude by the number of diverse participants in the Black Lives Matter movement that some connection was made between the viewer and the rhetoric of the photograph. For some, the narrative of "on-the-ground" action became an ultimate guiding voice

to share the good that civil disobedience related to the Inarticulate aspect of the Black

community related to police brutality and the bias in the criminal justice system is a right and

good decision for those interested in truly living by the principles of our current historical

moment.

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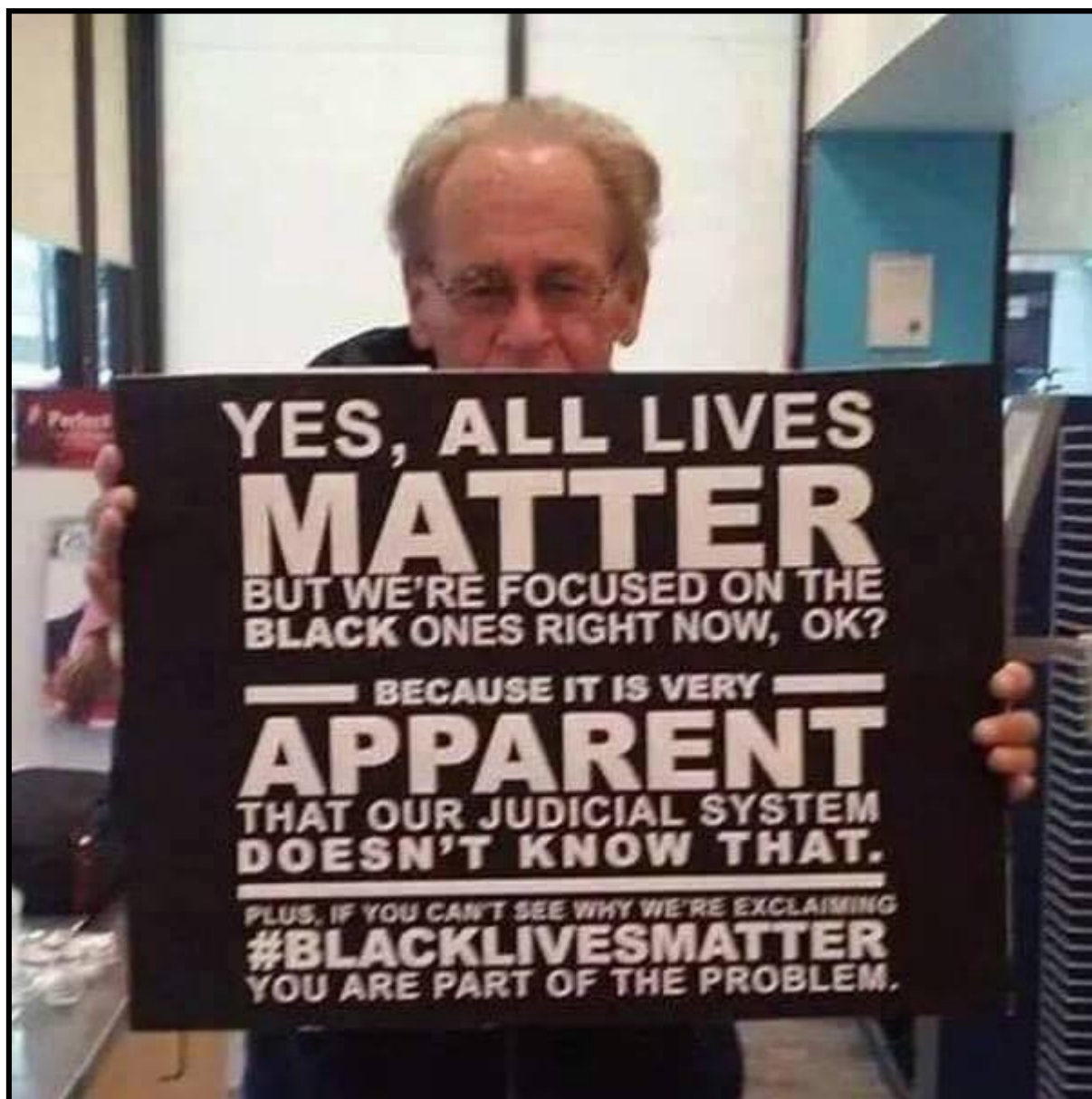
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Appendix A

Appendix B

Appendix C