-<u>"MEET THEM WHERE THEY ARE": SOCIAL MOVEMENT COMMUNICATION
IN A CULTURE OF PERSONAL POLITICS</u>

by

JL Johnson
A Dissertation
Submitted to the
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"Meet Them where They Are": Social Movement Communication in a Culture of Personal Politics

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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my father, Jeffrey L. Johnson, Sr. (1960-2005), who has my eternal love and gratitude for teaching me to give closer attention.

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ABSTRACT

"MEET THEM WHERE THEY ARE": SOCIAL MOVEMENT COMMUNICATION IN A CULTURE OF PERSONAL POLITICS

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This dissertation asks, how do social movement communicators attempt to strike up a societal conversation in a culture of personal politics? A conversation with society is essentially social, yet the current media landscape increasingly demands a personalized style of communication. Drawing from three sources of evidence—a year of fieldwork in a social movement organization, interviews with 15 communication directors for advocacy organizations, and a discourse analysis of New York Times articles on personalization—this dissertation furthers sociology in two specific ways. First, the evidence supports a separation of traditional media advocacy, which has been defined as social movement attempts for journalistic attention, from a movement's communicative work of strategizing for and drawing from sources of attention across a stretched, distracted, and noisy media terrain. Second, this dissertation demonstrates that the media ecosystem is not only a forum for public discussion but a social structure of public

dialogue, producing a schema with which movement communicators form their attempts at reaching a potential audience. This dissertation concludes that the communicative schema of the early 21st century encourages a radically-practical deference to emotion, narrative, identity, and personal biography. This "communicative personalism" promotes cultural conditions that are both enabling and limiting; it opens up a wide range of deep, personal involvements in silos of the civil sphere while closing down other possibilities of translation and dialogue across political enclaves.

1 / THE PUZZLE OF DIGITAL PUBLICITY AND DEMOCRATIC INEFFICACY

Democracies require informed publics. Celebrations of the internet often occur on this ground. Personal computers, smart phones, email, and social media websites are heralded as facilitating democratic participation. People can use digital technologies to communicate facts related to social injustice and coordinate political activity with maximum speed and reach. It's no longer a small world, since the internet seems to promise efficient communication across vast networks.

In this line of thinking, social movement success hinges on innovative political uses of digital technologies. The social movement for community justice and the end of racialized policing and extrajudicial killings of black men includes the digital media symbol of the hashtag in its name, #BlackLivesMatter. In 2012, the progressive social movement for financial reform and the end of runaway wealth disparity, Occupy Wall Street, infused the digitally networked slogan "We are the 99%!" into the American presidential campaign, spurring percentile talk about class inequality. And one major reason the Tea Party, a conservative social movement for small government, ascended as quickly as it did in the wake of the 2008 election of Barrack Obama, America's first black president, was that white, middle-class Americans quickly caught up to the use of internet technologies for protest activities (Skocpol and Williamson 2012). Social movements have made extraordinary publicity in the internet era, moving across vast

time and space with extraordinary speed.

This dissertation examines social movement communicative mobilization (Alexander 2006). By grouping three very different social movements in my introduction, I draw attention to their "communicative fiber", defined as the common cultural pieces they use to attract attention, garner sympathy, and hold together a political audience. This dissertation introduces the idea of "communicative fiber" as the pieces available for forging a specific act of conversation. Such pieces will be considered widely, as forms of discussion or media objects that lie between the intention of messengers and the interpretation of audiences. Specifically anchored in a tradition of symbolic interaction that privileges human agency by emphasizing uses, processes, and interpretation (Blumer 1969), communicative fiber is made up of *processual materials* vital to the defining process that goes into constructing a political communication.

Allow me to clarify and justify communicative fiber. Why fiber? Some sociologists might read this dissertation and wonder if Ann Swidler's (1986) idea of "cultural toolkit" does not accomplish the same intellectual work as communicative fiber. In some ways, emphasizing that social movement communicators select culturally available media styles and objects evokes the very social action implied in Swidler's toolkits. The ideas are related, but toolkit gives us more purchase on thinking about the *specific* cultural tools (un)available for some social endeavor than on the social *process* of using them for some specific *purpose*, broaching the public about a social problem. Communicative fiber also relates to the common idea of institutional strategizing to meet organizational goals and values. The difference in communicative fiber lies in attempting

to think about the flexibility and messiness of piecing together, taking apart, and reassembling the communicative acts necessary for cultural (re)production in a fixed and unfixed, constant and inconstant manner, much like a clothmaker's act of altering and weaving fiber.

By what communicative fiber do movement claims coalesce and mobilize? To where and to whom do these claims mobilize? And in what direction do message recipients then engage in the work of mobilization? What shape does what communicative fiber give to movement communication, and to what democratic or antidemocratic consequences? Consider that Occupy Wall Street's slogan inspired a *New York Times* series on runaway American inequality and other reports on corporate tax evasion. Yet a tension remains here. A movement may succeed communicatively but fail at democratic efficacy—by efficacy I mean achieving democratic goals of civic accountability for which public support is thought to be paramount. For all the information on nefarious economic activity, investigations into Wall Street's role in the 2008 Global Financial Crisis closed without charges, and income inequality actually worsened under its watch (Fry and Taylor 2013; Protess and Ahmed 2012). A similar phenomenon is underway under the watch of Black Lives Matter. While black media and sympathetic leftist media extensively cover the race issues at the center of police brutality, which has induced organizational reflection and training, not one cop has been charged, arraigned, tried, and sentenced for an extrajudicial killing as of Spring 2017. Nowadays, despite the ubiquity and audibility of movement images and claims, publicity does not seem to produce legal reform, a state of affairs that raises questions about

defining movement success.

How might we solve the puzzle of highly audible movement publicity yet outcomes of democratic inefficacy? One clue lies at the convergence of digital media proliferation and media cynicism. This dissertation grapples with the democratic problem of unprecedented media choice alongside distrust in mainstream journalism. Reacting to the Gallup poll finding that a majority of Americans distrust the news (Morales 2012), one writer notes audience fragmentation: "Today, you can incubate in hyper-conservative media land or the super-socialist blogosphere and ignore the middle in a way you couldn't when there were only three TV networks and *blog* was not a word (Thompson 2010)." But while new media is contemporaneous with a highly-fragmented U.S. body politic, precisely how new media segmentation relates to distrust and to what democratic or antidemocratic effects remains unexplained (see chapter four). As movement claims become available in easily accessible ways to the public, it is not clear why digital fragmentation should lead to media skepticism.

Social scientists working on media skepticism have examined how media's restructuring by capitalist principles jeopardizes its critical capacity (Hallin 1990; Prior 2005; Thussu 2007). When it became clear in the late 1970s that large numbers of people watched nightly news on television, attempts to capitalize on public programming pressured journalists to soften their reporting in order to secure ad revenues. Proponents of media deregulation successfully lobbied the Federal Communications Commission to drop its imposition on television to provide a minimum of public affairs programming (Hallin 1990). The resulting "infotainment" blended serious news with local trivia,

making available ubiquitous pieces of communication of celebrity gossip and human-interest stories. For-profit restructuring of media also meant a high number of information sources, a scattering of communicative platforms available to be interpreted and repurposed for any number of intentions, allowing viewers and readers to opt out of journalism altogether, to easily find sources of information agreeing with one's politics, and, crucial to this dissertation's argument, to expand the definition *and use* of what counts as "news" (Prior 2005). There are multiple sources of public distrust in journalists and other experts, but certainly one reason for media cynicism is because so much of it is informed by *varying definitions of objectivity*, packaged as corroborative *niche programming*, and presented as *infotainment*, all while being used for oftentimes contradictory and sometimes irreconcilable ends.

Note that this brief sociology of media's capitalist restructuring predates the now ubiquitous digitization of entertainment and information. Internet enthusiasts and critics alike often celebrate or denigrate online media's influence in arguments that detach the internet from its relation to historical forms of and changes to communication (see chapter four). They also tend to elide questions about *the process* of putting media into everyday practice. A short fiction film called *Epic 2015* (2004) humorously reveals these connections. Though it falls short of the analysis presented in this dissertation, it provides a useful beginning frame to set the terms of discussion that will unfold. *Epic 2015* satirically predicts the fate of media from a trend of digitizing journalism with internet technologies and infotaining niche programming. Media as we know it literally becomes history, the fictional Museum of Media History intones, after Google and Amazon merge

into a digital media conglomerate called Googlezon. In the film, Googlezon replaces traditional media with EPIC, the Evolving Personalized Information Construct. Amazon's consumer-oriented algorithms combine with Google's powerful digital structure to aggregate all media sources, removing facts and statistics from internet content and reformatting them according to each user's online information and activity. EPIC is personalization, a personally tailored newsfeed more relevant to your lifestyle, complete with user-targeted product recommendations streaming on your sidebar.

Personalization enables a deep engagement with public affairs, the very aim of movement communicative mobilization, while simultaneously creating bubbles of individual comfort and preference, buttressed by utopian promises of unprecedented lifestyle choices. After *The New York Times*'s failure to stop "Googlezon's fact-scrubbing robots", everybody is free. A liberated humankind participates in and enjoys "a living and breathing mediascape" on their computers and smartphones. On one hand, the short film highlights the internet's possibility of realizing a democratic utopia. Indeed, the video itself is a testament to the potential of internet's critical capacity, as it has circulated widely on a popular media-sharing website. A niche of savvy readers obtains a breadth of nuanced and deep understanding of social affairs. But the dystopia of digital infotainment is also clear. For most users, personalized digital media is a collection of lifestyle information and superficial trivia- also niche since it is tailored specifically to the interests of their everyday lives, political or not.

It is not clear where movement communication fits in the Googlezon. The final sequence of *Epic 2015* is telling for what it leaves out. After a prediction that citizen

journalism will be reduced to use of smartphones to provide interesting content for Googlezon or to merely document one's everyday life, the final frame of the short film presents a block or two of a major urban center, something like a couple of blocks in New York City. The gridded presentation resembles a digital map as one might see on a global positioning systems application of her cell phone. A blip appears on the grid, representing a citizen journalist. His voice is added, youthfully and informally providing a traffic report for the surrounding city blocks. The frame widens further to reveal more grids of the city. Another blip appears at the periphery of the frame, and then another voice is layered over the first voice, inviting its unknown audience to join her for brunch in her neighborhood. The frame extends further and further, revealing more blips and more voices. They all mix into a cacophony of personalized white noise. The frame's widening finally ceases when all you can see is blank and blue sky. The voices drop out, and one last citizen journalist is heard imploring his audience to just go outside and look up, because the sun is beautiful.

Sociologists recognize there is such thing as a lifeworld that is different from systems that attempt to shape and influence us like the Googlezon (Habermas [1981] 1984), a sphere of human existence where we interact and relate to each other, making decisions together about how we use our time. The impetus of those voices from the Googlezon lies in their lifeworlds. We invite each other to breakfast, or we inform others of a bad traffic jam to avoid. The impetus to broadcast is purely social, requesting camaraderie or offering helpful advice. If we see something wrong, whether bad traffic or social injustice, we feel the need to talk about the problem. The media available to us are

then assembled for figuring out such issues and forming them into a communication with wider audiences. It may seem that the Googlezon merely provides a platform for such discussion, but if we look closely we can see that the Googlezon is also a *media object* available to us, something with which we choose to construct communication, even if we mimic the Googlezon's personalized style in our construction. Social movements likewise use media forms and objects as communicative fiber, the stuff of piecing together specific communicative acts, in a process of broadcasting social problems for as much of society as possible, in the style and with the objects of media available to them. How movements use such communicate fiber so well and yet fail at democratic reform remains unclear.

This dissertation investigates how social movement communicators attempt to strike up a societal conversation about social problems with the communicative fiber available in a culture of media personalization. A conversation with society is essentially social, yet the current media landscape, exemplified well in the Googlezon, demands a particular kind of communication in order for messages to be heard far and wide. Sociologists who study the intersection of media and social movements have traditionally called media a forum for public discussion, but conversations do not simply *take place in* social media. The media ecosystem also produces and encourages personalized *objects and styles* of communication—the very stuff I am calling communicative fiber. My dissertation takes on the media ecosystem as a social structure of public dialogue, a structure that produces a schema with which movement communicators form their attempts at reaching a potential audience. Below, I label such a schema "communicative

personalism", a label made clearer in consideration of a paradox of social movement communication.

A Paradox of Personalized Movement Communication

Judging by the final scene of *Epic 2015*, its creators probably agree with those who criticize internet communication for its potential narcissism and vacuity. The truth is more complicated. Like all mediums in the history of media and democracy, user-controlled internet communications lie somewhere between democratic media utopia and dystopia. *Epic 2015* wrongly excludes the many social movement voices and messages revealed in and by social media. For the ending sequence to be more accurate, chants should be added, "Black lives matter," "Don't tread on me," or "We are the 99%!" This fits the pattern I described above, of social movements garnering attention and some reception thanks to their innovative uses of digital media. Though I do not mean to overemphasize optimism. *Epic 2015* is also startling in its point that personalized media might be a democratic utopia only for a savvy few, those who would be the likely online readers of *The New York Times'* series on runaway inequality or detailed reports of police brutality, while allowing many to opt out—an unfortunately frequent occurrence.

By traversing a niche, cynical, and digital mediascape, recent social movements have left us with a paradox. Their successes in digital infotainment have to do with their messages being quick and catchy. That's partly why they attracted widespread attention, spurring major outlets to produce deeper stories about the need for corporate and police accountability, financial and race reform. But these outlets increasingly serve niche

audiences, and catchy slogans beget counter-catchy-slogans. Competitive sloganeering of "Black Lives Matter" versus "All Lives Matter" does not make reform. A resulting paradox is that a social movement might realize the promise of the internet. It does so by dropping structural critique to be catchy and personally relevant to as many people as possible. But the result often is critical reception only in narrow, personalized circles of the public. I label this the personalized movement paradox.

How do Movement Actors Succeed at Social Communication?

Despite its potential for fragmentation, internet-enabled communication is potentially revolutionary for social movements. But we must be sober about the fact that the advent of digital technologies follows a capitalist restructuring of all media, a restructuring that is blurring the lines between information and entertainment, between truthfulness and falsehoods, and radically proliferating sources of this "post-fact infotainment". A reasonable if pessimistic alternative to media as democratic participation is a reading of digital technology as merely enabling users to organize the bonanza into personalized worlds where truth can be selected, disregarded, or entirely ignored, which can be antithetical to democratic practices that engage differences, consider alternative viewpoints, and achieve some consensus of the common good. A social movement's communicative work then becomes stretched across this dangerous, new frontier of media with few answers about how to democratize information and conversations.

This dissertation project stipulates "communicative work" with intention, to decouple movement communicative mobilization from traditional media advocacy. To explain the difference, it is useful to clarify what "media" means. Though the word "media" is plural, in everyday talk it is often used in the singular to imply a communicative mass, what Todd Gitlin (2002) aptly labeled "the truth of a grammatical error" (7), a ubiquitous and totalizing system of information and entertainment that dominates our lives. In the plural, media are simply intermediaries between senders and receivers of messages. As intermediaries, they can be bodies in face-to-face interaction, newspapers, radios, sitcom actors, or broadcast companies. Simultaneously, then, media are the objects we watch, listen to, or read; they are individuals who make what we read; and they are the institutions that organize and govern media production, distribution, and consumption. Media are various social processes of and between institutions, individuals, and technologies that facilitate communication of messages between senders and receivers. In what follows, I use the word "media" to include the dynamics of and contradictions between the interlocutors and the social institutions at the heart of these *communicative* endeavors.

A tension exists between media as civic participation in public life, like when we read newspaper articles on social media to be informed for a democratic election, and media as personalized consumption in a narrower conception of collective life, like when we invite friends over to watch a movie or sports event. New media optimists argue that digital technologies enlarge and enrich democratic participation by circumventing traditional institutions to connect millions of people around the globe and publicize

violations of democracy at hyper speed. At the same time, quantitative and qualitative evidence shows that this participation might be shrinking into personalized digital spaces (Sunstein 2001; 2009; Pariser 2011; Batorski and Grzywinska 2017). Far from enriching democracy, the communicative fiber that holds together separate worlds, online spaces and living rooms alike, do not support *broad collective bonds* formed around a public opinion based in shared media. Yet movements need media, flawed or not, to move claims and images that symbolize social injustice to as much of a public as possible. How do movements struggle in and succeed at *social* symbolic communication in a culture of *personal* politics and *personalized* media?

This dissertation project explicitly asks how do movement organizations succeed at social communication without conflating communication with digital media use. It is important to ask the question in this way because a movement's communication work is more than gaining influence online. Movement communicative mobilization is also about its struggle in and use of media styles and objects, its assemblage of culturally available communicative fiber to move claims far and wide. To where and to whom do movement claims mobilize? How and in what form? What gives shape to movement communications, and what are their democratic consequences? Rethinking movement media advocacy as movement communication work addresses this line of questioning in two specific ways. Focusing on how a movement's communicative fiber gets woven out of disparate sources helps to avoid the binary of structure/culture by attending to "institutional schemas…the models underpinning sets of routinized practices around a culturally defined purpose" (Polletta 2008; Jepperson 1991) that make media and

movements more or less hostile to each other. I will be specifically examining the fiber of institutional schema central to the civic regime (Eliasoph 2016), the idea that how we talk and practice politics in civil society becomes something of an informal disciplinary institution. Second, focusing on the active process of assembling communicative fiber into a movement's communicative mobilization can bring attention to how a movement draws from and affects cultural fields beyond the internet, especially a culture of personal politics and personalized media.

Communicative Fiber of Movement Communication

Usually, questions about a social movement's success at bringing claims to and attracting sympathizers from a broad audience are posed *specifically* in terms of gaining attention from and thus influencing mass media- not about communication of which mass media is one kind. In other words, critically reading the literature on media and movements engenders a realization that the question of how movement organizations succeed *communicatively* is actually not being asked. Instead, most theoretical and empirical projects at the intersection of movements and media assume that social movements succeed communicatively by the ways they succeed at mass media, specifically in the realm of news media. The implied model is straightforward. Movement actors struggle though often fail to get journalistic attention, though sometimes the struggle results in some publicity that might lead to changes in public opinion. If people outside the movement hear about people struggling to fix a social problem, they might

consider the movement's issue in a new way and galvanize the court of public opinion to empathize with, support, or even join the movement's cause.

Assuming media is a forum for social movements does not account for the communicative effort with culturally-available media styles and objects that explain the process of *how* movement communicators use these materials to get people pay to attention to and discuss movements. A project focused on movement communicative mobilization as work seeks to contextualize the relationship between movements and media as something more complicated than the "master forum" (Ferree et al 2002) of public opinion which hosts public conversation about social problems, often imagined to be the space and occasion for face-to-face talk about politics. Since the public sphere (Habermas [1962] 1991) is the place and practice of critical discussion about the cultural and political issues facing a body politic, it is vital that social movements intervene to shape such places and practices by introducing their claims and perceptual frames in ways that lend discussion to alternate viewpoints and critiques of structural constraint. But given the changes in sources and definitions of media, complications arise for social movement organizations. Confronting and drawing from the attention economy, movement communicators actively assemble communicative fiber. The situation is not that media is simply a master forum of the public sphere. The form of the public sphere changes depending on the kind of media acting in a civil role. A movie can be as significant as news in distributing and making visible disparate goals, claims, and representations of social movement actors and their opponents, though not in explicitly political nor obvious ways. Certainly, internet enthusiasts have such a claim in mind

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about social media. Rather than a forum, the intersection of the public sphere and social movements is *a movement-media accomplishment* to the extent to which popular culture interchangeably exists as both forum and *form* of the public sphere.

Fiber Made Available by Capitalist Media

Critical sociologists in the 1940s Frankfurt School interrogated the mass media's distraction from progressive social movements as a tension between persuasion and manipulation. Reflecting on the world atrocities of World War II, Adorno and Horkheimer investigated why human beings sank into a new kind of barbarism instead of fulfilling enlightenment promises. Progress, they answered, is also regression when "the growth of economic productivity furnishes the conditions for a world of greater justice [while simultaneously allowing] the technical apparatus and the social groups which administer it a disproportionate superiority to the rest of the population" (Horkheimer and Adorno [1944] 1972:xiv). But those who are excluded from a technical and capitalist elite are nonetheless provided increased standards of living and a bevy of media, even if that lifestyle inculcates conformity to capitalism and instills a resistance to collective mobilizations that might provide redress to class inequalities.

Much can be gained from closely reading Horkheimer and Adorno's (1944) "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception." I focus on insights into the structural contradictions of capitalist media that produce constraints and obstacles for movement communicative mobilization, defined as strategies and work for reaching and persuading the public. Horkheimer and Adorno argue that the "culture industry"

administers by demanding *attention* and mimesis to its style, this being the aesthetic of capitalism and thus inherently antiradical:

> [C]aricature of style does not amount to something beyond the genuine style of the past. In the culture industry the notion of genuine style is seen to be the aesthetic equivalent of domination…this imitation finally becomes absolute. Having ceased to be anything but style, it reveals the latter's secret: *obedience to the social hierarchy…by occupying men's senses from the time they leave the factory in the evening to the time they clock in again the next morning with matter that bears the impress of the labor process they themselves have to sustain throughout the day*…And so the culture industry, the most rigid of all styles, proves to be the goal of liberalism, which is reproached for its lack of style (130-131, my emphasis).

The point central to this dissertation is about focus and attention. When the activists in Paul Lichterman's 1996 study of social movement commitment stopped watching television and movies, they were resisting the culture industry's demand on their *individual* time. At the same time, movement activists lamented their inability to obtain wider attention to their groups and activities—an inability shaped by the power and seduction of mass media over *societal* attention. Their challenge was whether and how they could draw public attention away from usual sources of information and entertainment to an unmediated mode of being, centered in movement engagement with discursive and behavioral practices necessary to change the world.

Another structural contradiction arising from the culture industry's monopoly of mass attention forms around how media companies are dependent on advertising sources for value and profit, a problem only exacerbated today by internet media. In this context, movement actors working in media circulate movement claims in a way that must balance the struggle to gain attention against compromises made for publicity. Horkheimer and Adorno were skeptical of mass media's ability to generate thoughtful dialogue, writing that:

> Culture is a paradoxical commodity. So completely is it subject to the law of exchange that it is no longer exchanged…Therefore it amalgamates with advertising. The more meaningless the latter seems to be under a monopoly, the more omnipotent it becomes…everything that does not bear its stamp is economically suspect…By the language (the customer) speaks, *he makes his own contribution to culture as publicity*. The more completely language is lost in the announcement, the more words are debased as substantial vehicles of meaning and become signs devoid of quality…The demythologization of language, taken as an element of the whole process of enlightenment, is a relapse into magic (161-164, my emphasis).

This structural contradiction of the culture industry is particularly condemning of capitalist media's ability to represent oppositional claims and bring them into social discourse. Movement actors are seemingly doomed to the impossible task of moving their core claims into branded messages with full integrity, when mass communication is beholden to the hollow logic of advertising.

Sociologist Todd Gitlin, former president of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), has examined the attempts made by social movements to garner attention in mass media. In *The Whole World is Watching* (1980), Gitlin directly analyzed the power media had over movements (24). Gitlin understood, however, that mass communication operates "through a complex web of social relations and institutional processes" (10), leading him to examine how mass media controls oppositional movements, and yet those movements somehow make publicity through mass media. In a "floodlit society" (13), as Gitlin called a society saturated with televisions and the promise of constant news coverage of political goings-on, the structure of mass media collides with the counter-structure of an opposition movement, such that the movement's claims against a dominant system eventually do force a civil orientation to movement claims—in Gitlin's study, measured by rapid change in public opinion against the Vietnam War.

Edward Herman and his colleague Noam Chomsky (1988) argue that capitalist

media domination of radical groups is systemic. Unlike Gitlin, they more forcefully analyze mass media from the point of view of political economy. They argue that journalism in capitalistic societies, particularly in America, can be as propagandistic as authoritarian state-centered media. Chomsky and Herman identify five structural elements to this propaganda model: 1) media monopolies, 2) advertisement as source of revenue, 3) sourcing from official institutions, 4) "flak", and 5) zealotry to anticommunisum. On this fifth element, Horkheimer and Adorno's insights are particularly instructive. Corporate media are inherently antiradical, questioning as dangerous any media outside of mainstream production or content. Reading Herman and Chomsky beside Gitlin and Horkheimer and Adorno, the contradictions of corporate media explain why SDS had to struggle against media's usual sourcing from state institutions. Even the so-called liberal *New York Times* editors sent journalists back into the field after honest reporting uncovered no communists among SDS (Gitlin 1980:38).

Still, Gitlin revealed that activists could use media to shape messages in support of oppositional causes. Movement actors were and can be agents in media. Television viewers not affiliated with the antiwar movement might have dismissed radicalism, but Americans eventually shared a public opinion against the Vietnam war. On this, Horkheimer and Adorno's theory seems overly totalizing. But it is incontrovertible that what media objects are available to movement actors depends on the institutional framework of media production. A "production process" (Peterson 1976; Crane 1992) or a "political economy of communication" (McChesney 2013) approach to media institutions reveals how capitalist media ownership sets the contours within which media

objects and content mostly remain. As a contrasting example, during the nineteenth century, labor, franchise, and abolition movements were surrounded by independent media structures. Echoing how political groups and movement organizations manage their own digital media in our times today, political parties and local organizations could and did operate their own newspapers, exercising autonomy in selecting the audience, reporting, and framing of their stories (Curran 1977). With the commercialization of the presses at the end of the 1800s, media ownership began concentrating (Schudson 1978). By the mid-20th century, highly concentrated media ownership produced significant structural constraints on media producers. As a very few corporations began stocking their portfolios with media holdings, they acquired separate but related companies within one type of media and across types of media. Amazon provides a contemporary example. It is a smartphone manufacturer and website that also owns the Washington Post, a book publishing company, and an entertainment studio.

Corporate profit based on selling audiences to advertisers creates downward pressure on media workers to produce objects that easily sell, promote the interests of business, and induce in its readers a feeling for and a motivation toward consumption (Baldasty 1992; Baker 1994). The outcome for programming is avoiding controversy and producing lighthearted material. For news reporting, an emphasis on fun and entertainment in approaching public issues emerges. Since a larger audience secures higher ad revenues, competition for a mass audience has more often than not resulted in media homogenization (Entman 1989). One broadcast company's sitcom mimics another studio's show; one news program looks identical to another's nightly reports. Such highly

concentrated commercialized media places even further constraints on *what* media objects are available to movement actors, not just how media messages are shaped.

Criticism of capitalist ownership of media sheds light on what sorts of media become available to social movements. Importantly, McChesney (2013) extends this criticism to digital media. Though celebrated for its initial decentralization, digital ownership is centralizing as the internet is increasingly dominated by a few corporations. Amazon, the example above, is a cell phone manufacturer, an entertainment studio, and a website, while also owning a book publishing company and—straight out of science fiction novels—computerized grocery stores. But such criticism is overly deterministic without careful attention to the media workers and audiences who produce and consume media. At the institutional level, we learn how structural constraints produced by specific types of capitalist media ownership demarcate the boundaries of media production and consumption. Yet in everyday life, movement actors working with cultural producers might have flexibility in content creation, and especially use. The contours of capitalist media are more like the horizons that bound the styles and forms of media products available as communicative fiber, but contours alone do not explain their political uses.

Critiques of capitalist media might consider that today's corporate media distribute representational opportunities for and media about diverse voices and audiences. Such a proliferation has a duplicitous effect of opening pathways for movement actors but simultaneously functioning as a narrowing of options. Since there are so many cable channels, internet websites, and social media platforms, the expansion of the new media landscape's horizons generates a lot of noise that is difficult to parse

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out. The problem of how to cut through the noise by using the very sources of its cacophony implies a politics of audibility that I explore in chapter three, a source of soft power that divides and conquers, enabled by the possibility of many disparate silos of politicized lifestyle enclaves—as I argue in chapter four, each happy and fulfilled with the communicative possibilities and media products available to them. Movement actors need to think culturally about how to traverse across such a landscape, or whether working within a silo and growing it large enough counts as success.

Culture and Direction of Capitalist Media

Among many things, movements are discursive in their attempts to communicate with democratic bystanders, and movement actors work at accomplishing communication. They use the shapes and forms of media available in a capitalist economy to *bring into being* debates and discussions about democratic ideals. While critical sociology of the Frankfurt School variety is correct in its determination of capitalist media's totalitarian tendencies, the analysis risks reifying such tendencies as overly deterministic without attention to how capitalist media are put to ostensibly democratic uses in specific cultural directions.

Beginning in the 1980s, feminist sociologists pushed their colleagues "to make a cultural argument in the sociology of social movements" (Polletta 2008: 78). Historically, scholars of collective behavior studied movements politically or economically, ignoring "a wide range of women's collective action" (Taylor 1999:26). Heeding Judith Stacey and Barrie Thorne's (1985) call to transform sociology by incorporating feminist

strategies and analyses into sociology's theoretical frameworks, feminist scholars have been opening paths into cultural arenas for movement studies, pressing for the inclusion of concepts like emotions, meaning, and collective identity (Rorty 1980; Frye 1983; Whittier 1995; Taylor and Whittier 1995). The work of Verta Taylor (1989; 1996; 1999) has been seminal. Her arguments for the intersection of gender and social movements reveal the importance of culture forms of communication in sustaining collective identity and carrying movements from one historical stage of peak movement activity to another (Taylor 1989). In *Rock-a-by Baby* (1996), Taylor shows that forms of talk in self-help postpartum depression groups create space to critique meanings of motherhood and engage in a kind of identity work that successfully builds networks of activism able to affect medical fields. Her work has been crucial in the development of approaches to social movements that emphasize analysis of social movement in their cultural contexts.

Unduly considered a key figure in this cultural tack, Jeffrey Alexander (2006) has built upon feminist inroads to reconstitute the field of social movements as cultural, conceptualizing social movements discursively as "civil translations" (213) that communicatively push for democratic realization. For example, civil infractions occur against people in different social spheres. Some families reject LGBT children; some workplaces discriminate against people of color; some men sexually assault women. These civil infractions are theoretically accountable to one unifying civil sphere, but only by a moral struggle over whether such infractions deserve societal attention. Symbolic questions culturally structure the civil sphere. Who is a polluted social actor, and who is consecrated? Why? What counts as injustice? In this context, social movements are

critical communicators of why naming and framing specific infractions should be society's concern. In other words, movements are discursive. Movements can draw from popular culture the salient moral codes necessary to convince the mass public that particularistic problems seemingly specific to private individuals are actually universal issues requiring the intervention of civil society actors and institutions.

Cultural sociologists like Alexander extend the work of Jürgen Habermas ([1962] 1991). Habermas famously argued that by the nineteenth century public opinion arose as an authority separate from state and economy. Though he idealized what was essentially an exclusionary practice, there was some evidence that public authority arose from reading newspapers, generating commentary on economic and state actions, and participating in discussions held in salons, pubs, and coffee shops. Habermas argued that bourgeois European men *committed* to reasoned critique and *treated* each other as reasoning equals in these discussions. The places, discourses, and normative judgments associated with critical publicity in the form of debated values and ways to support them constituted a public sphere from which challenges to traditional authority emanated. State and corporate action now had to be justified by appeal to a critical public rationality informed by democratic publicity. To Habermas, there was in the classic public sphere a direct connection between media and a public opinion able to shape state action.

Decades later, feminist philosopher Nancy Fraser (1992) critiqued Habermas for downplaying the exclusivity of the public sphere. A feminist analysis of his work shows that the political institutionalization of public opinion not only excluded property-less men; it systematically oppressed women and minorities as well: "We can no longer

assume that the bourgeois conception of the public sphere was simply an unrealized utopian ideal; it was also a masculinist ideological notion that functioned to legitimate an emergent form of class rule [62]." In "actually existing democracy", people do not treat each other as "reasoning equals" in conversation but instead privilege the perspective of heterosexual young white Protestant men of Anglo descent with a college education, full employment, and recent history of sports participation (Goffman 1963:128). Fraser was right to problematize the exclusivity of the public sphere in this way. Much good work on public sphere inequalities and on the necessity for thinking of multiple publics has proceeded from Fraser's critique and continues to be important, but despite *Structural Transformation*'s 1962 publication date, this work tends to occlude developing projects rooted in the book's second half, on the question of how to connect media to a democratically efficacious public opinion.

According to Habermas, one of the changes to the public sphere was a transformation of the public sphere from culture-debating to culture-consuming. Habermas ([1962] 1991) calls a culture-consuming public sphere a "pseudo-public" (160) in that civic dialogue dissolves into mere consumption. He notes it is "sham-private" (160) because it is free-time spent as mere complement to work-time, a time increasingly encroached upon by for-profit commercial entertainment, with dire effects for the symbolic power of the public sphere. "So called leisure behavior," Habermas says on page 160 about the attachment of mass media consumption to relaxing at home, "once it had become part of the cycle of production and consumption, was already apolitical [in] its incapacity to constitute a world emancipated from the immediate constraints of

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survival needs." Mass media, both fictional and factual, transmogrify the public sphere into a space of mere culture consumption (162).

Whether fictional or factual, that mass media contaminate the public sphere is a wrong idea according to Alexander (2006). If social movements take "pride of place" (7) as civil society's most important institutions for their role in translating problems to the public, then communication processes and media institutions become vital neighbors. On this, Alexander is resolute (229): "In order to succeed, social movements…orient themselves not only to the state but to such communicative institutions as the mass media, which could mobilize persuasion rather than force." Alexander privileges a social movement's claim to represent democratic ideals as a symbolic act that is empowered by and autonomous in an independently existing democratic culture, but it is unclear whether social movements *or media* have pride of place. Social movement actors cannot easily translate institutional problems such as sexism in families or corruption in financial districts into violations of civil society unless media function in ways that cooperate with the movement's goal. Capital's media contours ensure that it doesn't always, which is precisely why movement actors strategize about and work to repurpose media objects to movement ends. This problem is accentuated even as Alexander opens up consideration of how movement actors relate not just to journalistic media, but popular media of all sort. Rather than the social communication of the civil sphere being symbolically autonomous, movement communication is struggle, perhaps even especially so for cultural producers sympathetic to progressive movements but constrained inside capitalist media's contours. By opening up intellectual space to consider movements as projects of

persuasion in and across a variety of popular culture media, however, a considerable flexibility appears across capitalism's media landscape, by the plethora of media existing at many different communicative nodes.

Movement activists know that journalism is flexible, meaning it does not exist as an objective thing waiting to be discovered. Instead, journalists construct news through a range of social processes (Tuchman 1978; Lester 1980; Schudson 1978, 2000; Gitlin 1980). Sociology shows that in journalism, for example, "the organization of news production, the routines of news work, the characteristics or 'news value' of an event itself, and journalists' ability to transform events into meaningful narratives" (Sobiearj 2011:80) better explain what constitutes events and nonevents for print and broadcast reporting. Much of this social construction of media has been institutionalized in the form of journalist beats, but there still remain significant ways that journalists and activists might flexibly work together within these constraints. Since a journalist constantly submits copy on tight deadlines, it would be impractical to begin afresh each day with no leads or directions on what to cover and write. Editors assign beats to their writers, and sociologists have shown how these beats almost always favor official departments and state institutions (Fishman 1980; Tuchman 1978; Gans 1979). This fact means legitimacy is conferred to and solidified for mainstream actors inhabiting state roles and other positions of authority (Bennett 2007; Entman 1989; Fishman 1980; Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993; Gans 1979; Tuchman 1978). In other words, there is no social movement beat. Non-mainstream actors do not enjoy the same assumed legitimacy, facing uphill battles in their attempts to attract media attention and infuse their

viewpoints and claims into media accounts. Yet the daily routine of a journalist as it is motivated and informed by the norms, standards, rewards, and sanctions of her field (Schudson 1978) allows for movement agency. Though the relationship between media and movements is asymmetrical in favor of media (Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993), movement activists are able to generate a very limited publicity by working within the commercial media frames of drama and entertainment (Gitlin 1980; Sobieraj 2011).

Scholarship on the relationship between movements and media clearly demonstrates the range of negotiations between activists and traditional journalists. However, synergistic and "new" media blur the lines between information and entertainment, between journalists and movement actors. Traditional media is no longer in control of means of dissemination. In addition, the proliferation of cable media options alongside the rise of internet technologies and platforms has seriously threatened the chances that critical masses consume the same news and entertainment, causing movement actors to confront a dizzying arena of attention and its cadre of media actors with whom social movement communicators might collaborate. Movement communicators working for the attention of journalists are often working in codes of entertainment that similarly extend to the work done between activists and bloggers, television writers, and film producers—between movement communicators and cultural producers of all types.

Unfortunately, Alexander's attention to the intersection of movements and media insufficiently accounts for the contours of capitalist media as a bounding of an arena of attention between movements and the public sphere, a central concern when considering

the paradox of personalized social movements. Such a consideration problematizes the relationship between personalization and publicity, defined as critical public awareness of movement frames and claims, in a movement's communications work. Additionally, this project takes up other media styles and objects available for movement communicators to assemble as communicative fiber, like film, television, and celebrities that have been little studied as gatekeepers of attention between social movements and the public sphere. Here I wish to note again that movement communication work is fraught with a tension between an ideal public sphere and an actually existing public sphere warped, not contaminated, by capitalist media.

Communicative Fiber of the Civic Regime

I have defined "communicative fiber" as common cultural pieces that movement communicators might use to attract attention, garner sympathy, and hold together a political audience, as media pieces available for forging a specific act of political conversation. Such pieces will now be considered to include forms of thought and discussion that accompany and are encouraged by our media. Defining social movement communicative fiber as the process of connecting media forms and objects, as repurposing and weaving together disparate capitalist media into political messages, I hope to evoke an imagery of a membrane-like swirl of communication. While market actors do attempt some bounding of what media can do in-order-to sell media products to advertisers and the largest possible audience, those contours nonetheless are malleable. Emphasizing malleability, we can avoid some of the absolutism of the Frankfurt School

approach to cultural analysis without losing too much of its warranted criticism of capitalist media. There is a strength to the porousness of capitalist media's communicative boundaries in that they limit *the shape* of modes and content of communication able to survive in a democracy with capitalist televisual media.

Neil Postman (1985), for example, argues the historical cases of the alphabet and the printing press as something more than mere technologies. The alphabet and the printing press were *epistemological* revolutions making a reading culture possible, wherein people fortunate enough to be literate paid more attention and gave more thought to complex discussion. The Lincoln-Douglas debates, which focused on the problem of slavery and philosophical differences over proper size and role of the federal government, reveal some evidence for this about America as a print culture. The debates lasted an entire day, and both Lincoln and Douglas respectfully acknowledged each other's points and brought up objections that might be articulated by the audience. This kind of talk was made possible by the ubiquity of norms of thoughtful discussion and reciprocal listening, in short, made possible by a reading culture which requires patience and adherence to sustained argumentation or elongated narration. Postman demonstrates that a society's dominant medium of communication molds the form and content of its members' thoughts and discussions into the same communicative shape of the predominant medium, meaning we think and talk in our culture's predominant medium.

The cognitive and discursive pieces of communicative fiber available in a televisual society are markedly different. Televised presidential debates are devoid of sustained argumentation, reciprocal listening, and nuanced acknowledgement of and

response to political interlocutors. Political discussion is instead narrowly channeled into television's dominant mode of communication, entertainment. Postman is neither luddite nor dismissive of fun. He loves television for junk amusement. Instead, Postman's concern is how conversations and the political relationships dependent on them become radically altered when political discussion becomes formed by the communicative fiber of their society's dominant medium. In collapsing presidential discussion and junk television, for example, Donald Trump ultimately won an embattled presidential race in 2016. Trump's victory provides some heft to Postman's thesis that the form of talk and thought in an era of television is antithetical to criticalness and complexity.

Yet the thesis of Postman's *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, much like the thesis of *Epic 2015*, does not adequately capture the counterfactual political possibilities inherent in cultural uses of limited communicative fiber borrowed from televisual entertainment. Even as television and internet deeply affect the form and content of political talk, we autonomously experience problems in our lifeworld and articulate them in the forms available to us. The disquieting phenomenon of Trump's campaign is that *his supporters* found in him a speaker finally willing and perfectly able to meld their expectations of televisual entertainment with an articulation of their class and race anxieties—their lifeworld issues—about the rapid expansion of a cosmopolitan globalization and their declining fortunes.

It is Nina Eliasoph's (2016) most recent project to conceptualize such puzzling, and in Trump's case troubling, forms of articulation of social problems in the public sphere. Eliasoph studies the culture of voluntary associations and social movement

associations, and she is interested in placing her work within the theories of social philosopher Michel Foucault. In *History of Sexuality* ([1976] 1990)*,* Foucault argued that a regime of sexuality emerged in late 19th-century Western societies, dictating norms and values of intimate behavior. In contrast, Eliasoph is not talking about sexuality. Eliasoph's idea is that civil society has a disciplinarian regime of values and norms that culturally polices people's behavior and talk in civil society, reigning in the political topics available for debate and curtailing the forms and content of civil dialogue and participation.

Eliasoph notes, for example, that American high school students who form socialist clubs would be reasonably advised by guidance counselors to omit such civil activities from college applications. America's civil regime, instead, recognizes more benign volunteer clubs as the ones appropriate for public life. The predominate values that guide volunteer groups are individualistic, centered in the person's well-being, and ultimately must be practical and outcome-oriented. This precludes other values oriented to long discussions, critical reflection, and imagining political alternatives. Practical values focused on the measurable impact of concrete activity produce specific norms of talk and interrelationships in the civil sphere. The civic regime, then, is enlivened by specific and limited communicative pieces that are actively woven together into "institutional schema" (Polletta 2004; 2008).

Eliasoph further elucidates institutional schema of civil regime by evoking a high school guidance counselor gently censoring a student's political clubs for college applications. From this example, I can imagine how an authority socializing a young

person to her civil regime was also a medium of communication, and while not the same as capitalist media, it seemed similarly shaped by its communicative contours. In this instance, the civil regime's institutional schema is reproduced, at the same time instilling in its subjects, the high-schooler in this instance, the idea of what is appropriate to communicate in public life. Such a communicative schema occurs at the intersection of capitalist media contours and the civil regime. As a medium of communication, face-to-face interaction augments all other forms of media around an individual, surrounding him with the communicative forms and objects that limit what can be spoken, and thus what can be done in civil society.

Some movement actors opt out of media altogether or at least as much as they can (Lichterman 1996). Others discover media niches that deepen movement understanding, work to reveal alternative possibilities of collective identity and discourse, and clarify or invent vocabulary within which to articulate movement-specific claims (Fraser 1992:67; Leland 2016). Still others repurpose popular culture to civic ends (Jenkins 1992). Movement actors stretch and weave such communicative fiber into a specific institutional schema of civil society, reproducing the images and discourses of the broader cultural sources of capitalism's narrow civil regime while attempting to push beyond its limits.

That movement actors can creatively utilize communicative fiber accentuates the flexibility of capitalist media's contours. Movement actors have agency in and with capitalist media. Unfortunately, this agency has tended to be explored in movement-media research solely between movement actors and journalists. A cultural approach to the movement-media relationship and movement communicator's use of communicative

fiber needs to pay more attention to the tensions and flexibility between movement actors and cultural producers of all kinds. This dissertation attends to all available media objects and especially their forms of values and norms of talk and behavior, connecting them to the active process of weaving communicative fiber into the institutional schema of America's civic regime.

Relating the Personal, Personalization, and Personalism

In sociologists' communicative mobilization of the discipline's critical perspectives, they often encourage beginning students to draw from their personal backgrounds to begin developing sociological imagination. Sociologists work with an understanding that people's biographies can serve as the origin of critical thought about how the historical and structural dimensions of everyday life give shape to one's context and conflicts (Mills 1959). The stakes of making such connections between the personal and the structural are high. C. Wright Mills writes about the personal like it is entrapment, noting that personal troubles occur within the insularity of everyday life but are almost always caused by social structural contradictions emanating from somewhere outside one's orbit. Sociological imagination can do more than help us think ourselves out of the merely personal. With sociological imagination, we can link our personal troubles to human values and interrogate social institutions on the grounds of whether or not they support or jeopardize democratic progress.

Today, meeting people on the grounds of their personal biographies fits easily within a logic of niche programming. By tapping into a niche logic, digital technologists

promise seamless experiences of the self and its satisfying of needs and wants. This is something very different from a sociologist's idea of personal. The philosophy of digital technologists, encapsulated in their work toward "frictionless experience" is that media technologies like personal computers, internet-enabled cell phones, and electronic readers (laptops, smartphones, and tablets) enable us to organize the bonanza of genre specific content, deepening and enriching our media experiences in a more convenient, customizable and relevant way. In the digital culture industry and its abutting technology companies like Apple, Facebook, and Netflix, the process of computer-enabled tailoring of goods and services to unique tastes is known as personalization. Unlike Mills' (1959) idea of the personal as "the close-up scenes of job, family, and neighborhood" (1), personalization is economic and specifically algorithmic. Individuals using internet enabled technologies provide innumerable points of data that are digitally harnessed and analyzed by computer code, and the idea of personalization is that companies can utilize algorithms and artificial intelligence to analyze online habits to more efficiently match content to individual desires. Personalization's close-up scene is one person and his or her internet devices meeting individual needs and wants.

Of course, our lived everyday experiences of personalization are more complicated. Personalization has not drained our everyday lives of politics. Many of us harness internet technologies to engage with and become involved in collective action. The problem is such coordinated activity and dialogue may be too insular, failing to reach broad audiences. Instead, practical concerns include the extent to which personalization causes "echo chambers" (Sunstein 2001, 2009) and correlates with polarization. Eli

Pariser (2011) has best articulated the image of personalized internet use as that of humans in "filter bubbles" created by digital companies to algorithmically deliver only that content which matches your online profile. The bubbles might be political echo chambers that exclude dissenting voices or they might be lifestyle bubbles devoid of any engagement with politics. It all depends on a user's unique experience of the internet, the content a user produces, and the signals users send to algorithms, flowing back to them that which is already important or enjoyable to themselves. Personalization creates communicative flows that keep people separated in narrow online circles, but many of those bubbles, despite being personally based, are richly lived political existences.

We have returned full circle to the Googlezon, here considered to include both those outputs and inputs of communication about lifestyle decisions and politics. Pariser's work balances well structural concerns about how computer algorithms shape communication by encompassing questions focused on communicative fiber—how people use digital technologies and what and with whom they want to do with them. An articulation of what people do within internet structure fits well with sociologies of media and culture that examine social movements from the point of view of identity, values and individual agency, as well as an individual level focus of analysis on what people actually do with media.

Pariser himself has been a vibrant member of public life and has successfully utilized internet technologies for advancing democratic causes. Using the internet enabled him to connect with many individuals and organize themselves on the basis of their shared interests and politics through his website MoveOn.org. Using internet

technologies can deepen personal investment in movement causes. This is not unlike the commitments and advances enabled by the activists in sociologist Paul Lichterman**'s** study of movement commitment in highly individualized societies.

Lichterman's (1996) study of social movement commitment, which focuses centrally on the question whether personalization can sustain long-term obligation to the common good and the necessary social change to bring it about, reveals that a culture of personalized politics facilitates committed, long term activism in some ways and limits it in others, enabling individual inspiration and respect for other's projects of personal fulfillment in a way that can unite people with different political backgrounds. Lichterman defines "personalism" as "a highly participatory form of politics featuring individuals self-actualizing as personal agents of social change, both in activist organization and in every facet of everyday life" (3), what I shorten in this dissertation to deference to individual biography. Personalism, then, is an analogue to personalization, though features similar communication bubbles, which creates trouble for groups as they seek to introduce their "alternative way" (87) to other members of their community and often find great difficulty discussing moral controversies in public.

Personalism also produces a set of risks wherein personal experience becomes the basis of authoritative claims. In *Avoiding Politics: How Americans produce apathy in everyday life,* Nina Eliasoph (1998) studied similar cultural denominators for being in public. Unlike Lichterman's subjects, however, Eliasoph found severe limitations to personalism when it came to how activists and non-activists communicated. Advanced movement activists relied on emotional narratives and claims of personal identity and

concern to articulate claims, while non-activists avoided movement talk altogether. Both Lichterman and Eliasoph documented everyday dynamics of political avoidance and invisibility in face-to-face interaction, while revealing pockets of critical reflection on and discussion of public issues among the likeminded.

Eliasoph and Lichterman demonstrate that personalism enables rich circles of empowered movement activists, but both have less to say about the communicative forces that keep silos separate from each other and the public at large. More recently, Eliasoph has begun to study such a complex of social forces as the civic regime, beginning to bring attention to the communicative rules and behavior of the civil sphere. These rules can be seen in any group's media outreaches or even their face-to-face talk. Considering how movement communicators are constrained by and in capitalist media, communication rules are in some relationship to cultural and economic expectations of personalized media. This raises the issue of unspoken scripts and strategies, the latent ways of assembling communication that lie just beneath the surface of the activists in Lichterman and Eliasoph's work. By examining a social movement group's "way of doing things" about communication strategies, we might reveal more about the communicative fiber "circulating through [their] networks, backed up by resources, and employed in the service of organizational agendas" (Polletta 2008:85), meaning the cultural ideas informing commonsense ways about how reaching the public should work. Isolating and identifying that communicative fiber allows us to reveal the "institutional schema" of the civic regime. We might find evidence of the ways that personalization

lends its form to the "rules of thumb" guiding specific types of movement practices of discussion for those trying to strike up a conversation with society.

The Study

This dissertation draws from three sources of evidence—fourteen months of fieldwork in a social movement organization (in this dissertation, social movement organization is shortened to SMO), interviews with 15 communication directors for advocacy organizations, and a loose discourse analysis of *New York Times* articles on personalization.

Before entering the field, I organized two sets of questions contained in the puzzle of how social movements seek social communication with personalizing media. The first set of questions is posed at the level of association. How does a movement organization draw from and become shaped by culturally available communicative fiber? In other words, how do cultural influences affect the shape and target of SMO communicative mobilization? Additionally, a movement organization's communicative structure creates tensions between differently positioned actors in relation to one another in their association, especially in the degree to which movement actors are professional, grassroots, or a mix of both. Scholars of transnational social movements examine similar dynamics globally, as SMOs unequally interact with each other across national boundaries, centralizing veto mechanisms and agenda-setting in Western institutions (Wong 2014). These are important directions; however, this dissertation endeavors to uncover processes within one national context, where a communicative culture shapes

ideas about attention and communication. Also within national contexts, there are daily meetings about the agenda and communication, and some actors will have more *intra-organizational* power to shape processes that spill across national borders in specific ways.

The second set of questions was organized around the everyday execution of communication. How do these workers think and feel about their abilities to mobilize movement claims, and how does this compare to how they actually use communications to do so? To whom must they answer? Who do they imagine is their public, and who not? What are their assumptions about their public? Speaking to the potential problem of personalization, how do they get digital media followers and who exactly are these followers? What other media objects do they use in formal and informal discussion?

Movement communication work occurs between movement organizations and across different institutions. Ideally, such dynamism would be studied in a multi-sited institutional ethnography (Smith 1987, 1989; Marcus 1995). Multi-sited ethnography would allow a researcher to map the subject across and between locales, especially necessary amid fast and free flowing digital communication. In this way, a multi-sited ethnography of how a movement organization does communication would "follow the people", as conceptualized by George Marcus in his formulation of institutional ethnography types, but an organization also has claims and codes in its purview. Though such claims and codes may influence the public from a seemingly "extralocal" position, communication is always done by living, breathing people in some "local" position, anchored in an institution (Smith 1987). Therefore, a multi-sited ethnography of

movement communications also would try to "follow the story" and, to whatever degree their claims oppose others, "follow the conflict". For this project, such attempts at tracing and linking local communicative assemblages and attempts for extralocal discursive influence were anchored by ethnographic fieldwork at one SMO. I set out to do participant-observation, qualitative interviews, and textual analysis to capture the social complexity of "starting a conversation with the public".

I had hoped to volunteer for multiple SMOs during my fieldwork, but early into my first field site, issues arose in building rapport with similar organizations. I was quickly informed that there is too much competition over resources and if I was to spend time with other SMOs I would need to sign legally binding nondisclosure agreements (considered further in Appendix 1). Instead, I gathered much of my data at one social movement organization in the LGBT allies movement. To protect the identity of the group, I call this organization the LGBT Ally Network (LAN), and its main purposes was to build a network of straight allies for progressive change around LGBT issues. LAN is a national organization. Its structure consists of an office in Washington, DC, with fourteen paid employees and 400 grassroots chapters across the United States. The paid staff is overseen by a volunteer-based board of directors, voted annually by its 200,000 official members.

I volunteered to be a communications intern for LAN, spending fourteen months working in their DC office from August 2014 through October 2015. My direct supervisor was LAN's communications director, a middle-aged woman I refer to as Terri. Terri tasked me daily with communication work ranging from editing online

correspondences, editing pamphlets, writing a blog, responding to email, coordinating interviews with grassroots members, making fundraising phone calls, and stuffing mailers. I would produce jottings of my work and my experiences, including perceived dispositions of group members and memorable exchanges. At the urging of the staff, I attended an awards ceremony for corporate and celebrity champions of the LGBT ally cause, where I helped set up a makeshift red carpet, stage celebrities, do event management tasks, and make a last-minute video-recording of the speeches.

I saved and analyzed a preponderance of the text I produced while working for LAN, blogs and "Tweet-chats" are examples. Embedded in and listening to its members, I also drew a map of its use of communicative fiber by focusing on complex contingency in play and identifying who does what work for and related to whom, the pattern of group meetings, and the occasions of dialogue with other like organizations. I informally interviewed all fourteen members of LAN's paid staff through my day-to-day activities, and I would regularly eat lunch with the field officers in their break room or at one of the many surrounding DC restaurants.

In this way, I attempted to ferret out how LAN did its communication work by participant-observation. I observationally drew data on how the group's broad goals and targets got defined and how its communicative goals fit into the work of the association. These participant observation data were supplemented by formal interviews of Terri and two other LAN executive directors. Two interviews took place in or around LAN's offices, but I conducted Terri's interview on the phone because her home office is in Los Angeles, in proximity to the powerbrokers of Hollywood, a strong site of movement

communicative action.

In my sampling, I followed a case-study logic rather than stricter sampling logics familiar to statisticians and quantitative researchers (Yin 2002; Small 2009). Selecting one ethnographic case for studying an SMO's communicative process enabled me to closely search for specific elements of communicative mobilization in a rich, observational fashion. While a partial aim was to establish a foundation for "grounded theory", my goal was to generate interview questions from the communication work I observed daily. I would test questions in informal interviews at LAN's office, over the phone with Terri, and sometimes in email exchanges. Ethnographically generated queries enabled me to generate case-specific interview questions for "sequential interviewing" (Small 2009:24). After exiting the fieldwork, I intentionally sampled issue communicators in different SMOs to verify and further elaborate findings from LAN.

I extended the "sequential interviewing" done in my ethnographic case to formal interview cases with communication directors in a range of SMOs, interviewing for 15 additional cases. I acknowledge that even an "n=30" would have been considered too small for generalized claims, let alone an interview sample half that number. However, following Mario Small's (2009) approach to qualitative research, my aim was for "saturation" of causal or correlative themes to connect the practical work in and with media to an emerging pattern of style that might bring clarity to a shared communicative process across SMOs. At the end of my fieldwork with LAN, I was confident I had heard and seen many of the connections I could identity in such a process. By the 10th interview with non-LAN SMO communicators, an obvious pattern had been confirmed, echoing or

even matching LAN's personalist approach to communication, a discursive approach to potential movement listeners to "meet them where they're at", as well as their assumptions about communicative styles needed to garner attention and hold together an audience. My determination was that 15 interview cases sufficiently augmented my ethnographic case, altogether producing enough saturation for a unifying argument about shared elements of the process of SMO communication mobilization.

The range of SMOs I selected for interview-based qualitative work fell into three specific issue groups: LGBT advancement, food justice and sustainability, and human rights. In one-hour, semi-structured, open-ended interviews, I explored how communication specialists make meaning of their work and the group constraints that act on that work (see Appendix 1 for more on the difficulties researching communicative experts). I examined the assumptions they make about how to use media and their communicative capabilities and limitations, who they imagine to be their public and not, what assumptions they hold about them, and how communicatively effective they feel they are.

My sampling strategy was purposive. Being a straight ally with a gay family member, I had contacts in the movement. I owe a great deal to a friend and mother of a gay man who made the pivotal introduction to Terri in Spring 2014. Terri was LAN's communication director, and throughout my fieldwork she facilitated a snowball sampling of SMO directors for further interviews, though I restricted my choice of SMOs within a contained range. I aimed to interview communication directors in at least two SMOs within one issue. For example, later I introduce Fresh Food Boston, Mobile Farms

on Buses, and Research and Policy for Agricultural Change, which are three separate SMOs in the food justice and sustainability movement. Like in the introduction to this chapter, I sampled three movement types to compare their uses of communicative fiber.

All qualitative research projects endeavor to excavate and analyze the connections between meaning and motivation. My ethnographic approach in this dissertation is no different. In analyzing my observational fieldnotes, I was guided by a method of coding of empirical materials commonly associated with "grounded theory" (Glaser and Strauss 1967).

Finally, I regularly culled *The New York Times* and saved articles about personalization. I restricted myself to stories from the business or arts section, admittedly "on a hit-or-miss basis using principles of selection mysterious to me which, furthermore, changed from year to year and which I could not recover if I wanted to" (Goffman 1974:15). I hoped to bring to bear this "caricature of systematic sampling" (Ibid) to my ethnographic materials by a method loosely resembling Gerald D. Suttles's (2010) approach in *Front Page Economics*. Suttles's method is an extension of Goffman's frame analysis that constructs a shared drama from economic reporting, a world of metaphors that we use to conflate and reify the dizzying nexus of competing economic discourses and institutions. In my case, I sought a shared drama of the mix of competing and divergent definitions of personalization, ranging from the economics of computer personalization to cultural templates of personal experience. Frames are only useful to us as stories, as "verbal templates of these lived experiences that, in turn, are extended to all sorts of other things beyond experience" (Suttles 2010:13). Suttles's idea is that

wordscapes weave together "decorative and identifying elements that suggest a setting rather than just a platform with the essential implements" (13). I add that these elements, when assembled for specific acts of political speech, can be the communicative fiber of our civic regime. In other words, a language-based story puts into place the culturally dominant frames, forms, and objects of media to "a story that has characters, action, the implements they use, and a stage (or wordscape) on which the action takes place" (Suttles 2010:15). I constructed a loose wordscape of personalization to sensitize myself to the broader cultural story informing an emergent style of commonsense practices around media forms and objects, as well as a model for communicative style that shapes how social movements seek dialogue.

Communicative Personalism

I will argue that the proper label for the pattern of communicative fiber that coalesces into the institutional schema of America's civic regime is communicative personalism. In dialogue with Sunstein, Pariser, Eliasoph and Lichterman, I argue that communicative personalism is a concept of governance specific to the civic regime. Communicative personalism is unique to the civic regime, meaning it is the label for the pattern of communicative forces that inform how SMOs do outreach to the public, sometimes resulting in an enforcement of separation between narrow circles of political and nonpolitical Americans. Communicative personalism combines Sunstein and Pariser's concerns about online bubbles and Lichterman and Eliasoph's documentation of similar offline dynamics, wherein movement activists participate in political talk amongst

themselves but not in public, otherwise struggling to communicate across other circles of Americans. Communicative personalism, then, catches at aspects of personalization's influence on SMO communicative mobilization, the communicative flows that keep people separated in online bubbles. Media personalization as the economic force and proliferation of ideologically niche media for personal tastes and lifestyles, promising freedom from social obligations and collective considerations, is only seemingly governed by apolitical free market logics and technological innovations that exist outside of monetized exchange. Knowing that movement activists utilize media goods and technologies to resist predominant uses and definitions of media, it makes sense to think about SMO communicators's contradictory uses of personalized media to reach the public. Communicative personalism also encompasses how personalism enables individual inspiration and biographical projects, personal projects of self-fulfillment. Central to communicative personalism is the common idea in both personalization and personalism: that personal experience is the basis of communicative authority.

Though communicative personalism is a concept of governance, focusing on the everyday work of assembling media into the joint action of communicative mobilization, communicative personalism prioritizes the agency by which movement actors face and oftentimes solve specific problems in an economy of attention, more of which I reveal below in chapter three. By this I mean to argue that communicative personalism is about the interplay between a personalizing media system and individual use of shared elements of communicative personalism, an interplay that deepens much of the public's

participation in civil society while paradoxically fragmenting it into silos of only superficially disparate communication.

In the chapters that follow, this dissertation situates communicative personalism in the sociology of media and the sociology of social movements in two ways. First, it argues for a conceptual separation of media advocacy and communication work. This theoretical separation is necessary to focus on how activists do symbolic communication at multiple levels, from face-to-face conversation to email and social network sites, from staging spectacles for self-publication to negotiations with representatives of the entertainment industry. In sociological literature, media advocacy is defined as specific movement attempts to get news to cover their issues. This dissertation presents evidence that supports separating media advocacy as traditionally understood from communication work that could include posts to social networking sites or negotiations with cultural producers other than journalists. This dissertation highlights how movement workers struggle in the personalizing nature of digital materials yet also operationalize the logic of infotaining media in pursuit of critical, nuanced information for narrow audiences (what one participant likened to pipelining into a deep dive). The stakes of such communication work lie at the intersection of a social movement and the public sphere. Long before our digital era, theorists of the public sphere worried about the preponderance of fragmented media consumption that is less democratic and drifting toward participation in public life that is lifestyle driven.

I argue that SMOs actively constrain themselves in and by the civic regime's institutional schema—which I will unpack as made up of elements of specific

communicative fiber, constituting a radical practicality that both enables and limits discursive engagement in the public sphere. As they inform communicative mobilization, these elements congeal into communicative personalism in a specifically discursive way by deferring to people's personal biographies as the source of communicative authority for engaging social problems and offering an ear to movements attempting to solve them.

The next chapter addresses the personal side of the personalized movement paradox as it is understood by SMO communication directors. The idea of respecting and couching movement communication in people's personal biographies was encapsulated in microprocesses of "meeting people where they are at", a grammatically incorrect phrase that came up daily in my field study and was repeated with some frequency in my interviews. I use the phrase as stand-in for radical practicality, a strict discipline of narrowing movement outreach to problems of attention. Attempts were made to conjure, in emotionally resonant ways, an "anchoring" (Goffman 1974:247-51) that can fix something practical as a proxy of awareness to the movement's work.

The third chapter clarifies personalist approaches to movement communication in terms of the social side of the personalized movement paradox. Movement actors struggle to enact social symbolic communication as a political struggle of audibility (Ochigame and Holston 2016). Working for attention by privileging aspects of people's "personal orbit" (Mills 1959:1) risks fragmentation, a situation that advantages popular cultural forms of presenting information. When I noted that the personalized movement paradox is about claims becoming quick and catchy, it was with an eye to how politics of

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audibility create vulnerabilities for movement communicators to mimic the predominant modes of presenting information in entertaining ways.

In chapter four, I argue that communicative personalism, especially how the Tea Party's communicative work to be seen in this chapter enjoins with lifeworld dynamics, is informed by and further buttresses media worlds that include both fictional and factual sources consumed in "lifestyle enclaves" (Bellah et al 1985). Such a communicative process of political reality-building is grounded more in emotion and Hochschild's (2016) "deep story" than reason and civility. Politicized lifestyle enclaves are buttressed in such a way that sometimes can be positive for civil society (gay marriage legalized, chosen political representatives become senators and president), but they are extremely limited in at least one regard: the societal-ness of a public debate theorized by Habermas to be paramount. Even more dangerous for politicized lifestyle enclaves is that the same emotional connection to and political mobilizations from niche media can be used by opponents of each and every politicized lifestyle enclave for their own narrow purposes. A network of *niche-mediated* publics does not easily cede ground on which to enter reasoned debate, consider counterclaims, and get into civil argument.

This dissertation concludes that the communicative schema of America's early 21st century civic regimes encourages a radically-practical deference to identity and personal biography in a way that promotes cultural conditions that are both enabling and limiting; it opens up a wide range of deep, personal involvements in the civil sphere while closing down other possibilities of translation and dialogue across political silos.

2 / MEET THEM WHERE THEY ARE

I conducted fieldwork at a progressive social movement organization for LGBT advancement, from disenfranchised minority status to higher cultural status and full civil rights, whom I am calling the LGBT Allies Network (LAN). On my first morning at LAN, I moved into the swelling center of Washington, DC, locating LAN's national office mere blocks from the national monuments and the federal executive offices. The main doors to the building were tall and made of glass. LAN's offices were behind another glass door, this one protected by an electronic system. Without a key card or the digital code, I could not enter. I rang the doorbell. Terri emerged from around the corner, the director of communications for LAN. Though her home office is in Los Angeles, Terri happened to be in DC for my first day, greeting and welcoming me to LAN.

Terri guided me around the office, introducing me to Ron, LAN's executive director, and Tina, the vice executive director, and their three field directors. I moved among the smartly dressed, the young and old alike in suits and stylish dresses. The walls were adorned with iconic photos, professionally done, of the LGBT movement—the Stonewall riots, the first Pride Parade in New York City, and photos of the earliest straight allies publicly supporting LGBT rights, communicative elements each contributing to a distinct aesthetic of the movement. One wall featured enlarged public service announcements featuring the visages of well-known celebrities, including Jane

Lynch and Laurence Fishburne, holding medallions stylized in the colors and logo of LAN, captioned, "LAN's Values are America's Values."

Terri introduced me as a sociology graduate student who would be helping her with communications for a semester or two. I met Brian, the operations manager, and Steve, another vice executive director whose focus was information technologies and social media architecture. Steve explained and had me sign an internship contract and assigned me to an official LAN email address. Meanwhile, Brian had set-up a workstation for me.

The physical and social layout of LAN's headquarters, situated firmly within the political dynamics and human capital of the federal city, not only mapped my entry into the field; my entry into the field was a very early reminder that anything I would come to trace of the shaping and mobilizing of communication emanates from a grounded network of people and technologies, located in physical space and actual time. Before I even wrote an official email, I had to be let into the joint and given a computer.

My first day was an introductory foray into the makeup and office culture of LAN, as I assume is the case for all newbies to any organization or group. I would be responsible for writing a blog for LAN called "Focus on the Field". Terri told me that I would need "to get the voice" of LAN before I began writing, handing me pamphlets and other LAN publications to study. Before officially posting anything for LAN, Terri told me I would need to pass a blogging test. Terri reassured me that it would be a process of me writing and her editing to begin to really sound like LAN. The test was meant to

begin socializing me to "the voice of LAN": warm, accepting, and embracing. She made a point to instruct me to avoid controversial words like "homophobic" or "hateful."

Terri's specific instruction on the voice of LAN was a moment, an embodied moment, of cultural transfer, one of the many ways movement communications are affected by cultural fields beyond digital media. By this I mean to again evoke Eliasoph's idea of the civic regime, a disciplinarian system shaping our types of talk and behavior in civil relationships. Terri was socializing me much like the guidance counselor who tells a high school student what to put in her college application. I would be, for a while, someone who moved claims to somewhere, and the form it would take was being shaped here and now, in this interaction, a small moment of production in the communicative fiber of civic regime.

My first morning demonstrates quotidian moments in their practical spaces and practices that anchor symbolic order. Dorothy Smith's institutional ethnography (1987; 1989) argues sociology and its modes of inquiry needs to connect the practical world to abstract concepts and practices. Her feminist correction to androcentric tendencies to present sociology as merely in the abstract was to always avoid "a view from nowhere", to treat practical life as a legitimate and necessary site of sociological investigation. I loosely follow Smith's tenets to sensitize myself to how the themes and codes that I explore below about how to "meet people where they're at" emerged through the mundane practices and work experiences I undertook, a transposition of LAN's culture that began on my first day. Though my analysis of LAN's communicative fiber, and by extension its contribution to the civic regime's institutional schema, will be presented in

the abstract, those fibers cannot be separated from the everyday (re)construction and operation of abstract scaffoldings, such as writing emails or making phone calls to potential allies, recruiting celebrities, or "talking" to the public about how supporting gay rights is supporting America's values.

Of course, Smith influenced a tradition of feminist ethnography. Some are considered close devotees to her institutional ethnography, while others use Smith's tenets as guiding principles to investigate how the everyday world is socially organized. These orientations provided vital demonstrations, including how the concrete social activities of women (and a few men) to feed their families and care for the elderly are not well connected to the abstract science of market economics (DeVault 1991; Diamond 1992). Other sociological work inspired by Smith have mapped how extralocal, abstract forces coordinate local social organization and activity (Best 2000, 2006; Pugh 2009). It is not new to emphasize that the concrete is connected to the abstract. Instead, I draw from Smith's tradition to carefully connect the locally bound, material ways to the generation of movement symbols. I do this instead of prioritizing what sociologist Jeff Alexander offers as "the strong program" of cultural analysis of social movements, which he has defined as a cultural analysis that emphasizes the independence of symbolic order (Alexander and Smith 2010). Alexander's emphasis on the autonomy of cultural symbols risks bringing us back to overly abstract presentations of analyses, preventing us from being able to map the coordinates of how communication work works, a presentation that Smith might criticize as masculinist. For example, Alexander says:

> Using an organization effectively means something very *different from simply establishing membership rolls, hooking up telephone lines, and raising money* (my

emphasis). It means learning how to translate experiences from the particular to the general, from the mundane to the civil and back again…Insofar as they succeed, social movements strike up a conversation with society and draw their members' attention to a more generalized understanding of their cause. When this happens, the social problem and the group managing it enter firmly into the public life of the civil sphere. (Alexander 2006:231)

Alexander argues that starting conversations with society are "something very different" from a movement's practical matters, and in paper presentations has furthered the suggestion that the symbolic order can be unaffected by the concrete world (Alexander 2016). My fieldwork suggests otherwise. Pressing on such a distinction between the concrete and the abstract renders invisible the practical work of organizing and listening, the bathetic yet vital activity of recreating symbolic orders done by actual people and through a set of mundane activities. Despite Alexander's best attempts to demonstrate that symbolic orders are instantiated concretely, we still lack field studies of the material shaping of communicative symbolism, of the practical mobilizations from institutionalized spaces that *try to* invite others into a dialogue about social problems. What does the attempt and ensuing "conversation" look like? This question guided how I proceeded in the field. I discovered a complex of undertaken tasks by communication directors, but despite a wide range of communication tasks a common pattern held across the spectrum of communicative strategies and goals, a discursive focus of entering and shaping people's personal interpretations, deferring to people's biography to get them interested, the meaning of "meeting them where they are at."

There was a pattern to my introduction (Brian setting up my workstation, Terri beginning to socialize me to the voice of LAN, Steve giving me an email and other markers of legitimacy) that was the foundation for any writing or symbolizing work I

would come to do. Through this structure, evident on my first day, I was coming to know LAN's "institutional schema" (Pollletta 2008; Jepperson 1991): Terri's informal chat at my workstation began to reveal to me "the models underpinning sets of routinized practices around a culturally defined purpose" (Polletta 2008; Jepperson 1991); her talk was transferring to me the expected shape and substance of the discourse and symbols of LAN, as well as practical values that would produce specific norms of discussion and interrelationships in our corner of the civil sphere, enjoining Polletta's (2004; 2008) idea of cultural schema and civil society institutions. This "way of doing things" was the communicative fiber "circulating through [LAN's] networks, backed up by resources, and employed in the service of organizational agendas" (Polletta 2008:85).

Radical practicality—defined by LAN's strict discipline of deferring to the personal biographies and milieus of advocates and potential sympathizers—was the single "rule of thumb" I learned at LAN that trumped all others. The phrase and suggestion to meet potential LGBT allies "where they are" occurred almost daily in my fieldwork, and it was repeated frequently across interviews with change advocates in very different social movements. In other words, the communicative fiber I was getting at LAN was evidence of some broader pattern of communication in the contemporary civic regime. It came to be defined in two ways. First, meeting people where they are had to do with the fact that in lived experiences, people often stake out their own personal terms for listening to and talking about a social movement. Second, we at LAN—and there was some evidence in interviews with other SMOs—would accept those personal terms as the basis of discussion. The work then would be about deferring to personal biography as the

source of communicative authority, carefully approaching how someone might attend to the scope of their attention. Below, I uncover three themes of this two-step definition: "localizing the universal", "honoring and listening", and "accommodating anti-criticalness". Before unpacking those themes, however, I turn to the point that themes of attention are all subsumed by ideas about movement actors meeting them where "they" are, what "they" meant, and a sensitivity to and nonjudgement of the practical concerns of lived experience that bordered on extreme practicality.

Radical Practicality: "I still eat burgers all the time"

Russel is on the other line, talking to me from Boston. Russel is a progressive food activist employed by Fresh Food Boston (FFB), an anti-poverty outfit focused on solving health disparities by producing fresh food communities and enacting local agricultural change. He has taken an hour out of his Friday morning to talk about how he directs communications for FFB.

Conducting a research interview over the phone has its challenges, but Russel was introduced to me by a local activist working for a similar non-profit in Washington, DC. Recruiting communication directors to the study had proved difficult, so I had begun relying on the networks of my interviewees, even if their connections worked in other cities. Both Russel and my local contact operate mobile food operations, two of the estimated 40 in the U.S. (Zepeda and Reznikova 2013:2), and some of my past research has been on these mobile markets (Best and Johnson 2016). Our shared background and mutual acquaintanceship allowed some initial rapport.

Russel's voice is tinny, and it's clear to me that he changes settings during the call, from his office to his car, from his car into a café. Intermittent whooshes of moving vehicles and the muted hisses of baristas releasing steam key me into Russel's movements. He takes most of the call from inside his car, where he toggles between loquaciousness and attentive listening to my dissertation questions. He often repeats my questions to ensure understanding, maybe a function of the difficulties of how phones mediate comprehension across time and space, or likelier that his repertoire for being in a communicative business includes a learned active listening.

It was talking to Russel that offered me one of the bigger clues to how movement groups succeed communicatively, as opposed to how they succeed in media, and especially the *framing* issues of that success. I ask Russel to guide me through the process of managing media for FFB's audiences. He tells me Whole Foods is one of their sponsors, and thus Whole Foods is a potential audience, since they might like to receive some publicity for their underwriting. Russel's comment implies that, because Whole Foods has chosen FFB, he should write communications in a way that demonstrates a common "voice", a style of communication modeled by predetermined social values and beliefs held about how to think about and address a given social problem, that would be resonant and consistent within a larger corporate-led movement. Russel uses "voice" as something like a strategy for including certain kinds of texts and visuals that match the "brand" of their funder. He tells me, "They care more about earthy, country, um, this sort of narrative and visual." Indeed, Whole Foods's emphasis on locally and organically produced meats, fruits, and vegetables often evokes halcyon fields and uncontaminated

soil, while implying that corporations can preserve the earth by meeting customer demand for locally sourced, organic food.

Russel, however, worries about using Whole Foods' voice when he considers that FFB strives to be "culturally relevant, you know, an organization that is committed to sort of *serving communities where they're at*, right?" He explains that FFB's community looks different from the usual crowd at a Whole Foods store. FFB works in economically and agriculturally underserved neighborhoods, where race and class realities contrast starkly with the predominately white and upper-middle class experiences of Whole Food shoppers. To some social critics, misrecognizing the race and class experiences specific to local neighborhoods risks a judgmental style of talk and behavior around food justice and healthy eating behavior, by taking for granted the social structures that support more time, attention, access, and resources for the upper-middle class (Lareau 2011; Koos 2015). Instead, Russel models FFB's style of communication on the "authenticity" of his target demographic, meaning listening to and honoring the practical concerns of their lived experiences. Such a styling of communication is what Russel means by meeting them where they are.

The phrase and idea of "meeting people where they're at" occurred daily at LAN, and it was repeated with some frequency across interviews with change advocates in very different social movements, like the food change movement represented by FFB. Russel's strategy to "meet them where they're at" is partly to distance himself from any perception that FFB has a disingenuous voice, a way of communicating about food that chides people for not being socially- and self-conscious food consumers. When I ask him

to tell me more about what exactly that means, to avoid Whole Foods's symbolism and meet his community's expectations, but also not burn funding bridges, he offers a telling clue about how to enable someone entry into food issues by accommodating them:

> **Russel:** The reality is in a lot of neighborhoods that we go into, that people aren't eating healthy. They are making really bad choices about their nutrition, and that's leading to really high rates of thyroid and health issues. And if we get somebody that comes onto the bus, and is obese, and they might even know that the food they are eating is shitty, that their nutrition isn't good enough, and they are coming to us and saying, I hate fruits and vegetables, like, I don't give a shit. I don't want to eat any of this stuff. We are cool with that … I'll go, I still eat burgers all the time. I still eat shitty food sometimes…it's those sorts of conversations, where if somebody comes on the truck, and then somebody else might come on and there is a different sort of engagement. Maybe they are transitioning away from like, eating McDonalds several times a week to they are trying to juice once a week.

This is a telling clue about the fiber of communicative mobilization for a few reasons. First, Russel's example of face-to-face talk with customers on the food truck punctuates a point he started to make about juggling voices on social media. He similarly talks about juggling styles of communication from person to person, as they enter his food truck. When I entered the field, my expectation was that SMOs focus on one audience, in one voice. Instead, Russel is talking about the need to offer a personal voice to potential sympathizers, puzzlingly *because* of a movement's multiple audiences. The need for communicative flexibility borders on being so radically practical, one considers personal experiences on a person-by-person basis.

Another related direction of analysis suggested in Russel's answer, the one I follow closely below, is toward an understanding of movement communication with fragmented groups of people who are not intimate with the practical activity of a social movement organization, in Russel's case, the everyday practice of eating healthy, sustainably sourced food. Russel focuses on fruits and vegetables to anchor a wider

symbolism of food justice claims and structural causes of community health disparities. Imagine here's Russel, the food activist on the food truck. Enveloping Russel is a floating world of discursive claims about how and why someone should change his diet. These floating claims include broad concerns about food access and justice, discussions of corporate social responsibility, and contentious debates around genetically modified crops. Now enters an overweight man from a community marked by massive capital disinvestment. He sidles up to a bushel of kale. Russel cannot simply move his world over the bushel of kale and assume the man will be at home in it. The point is not that the man is an opponent of food activism or could not exist in Russel's or Whole Food's world, a world that many would dismiss as elitist or regard as rarefied, nor that he could not become fluent in the vocabulary and claims of food change. The problem, instead, is processual. It is how to nonjudgmentally convince the person to take that first small step into a more broadly symbolic and discursive world, to change his heart and mind and seed long-lasting change. Maybe such imagery is trite, but what is powerfully subtle about the scene is the man's aversion to something practical, to the food itself. When I say practical, I mean something immediately mobilized in a way that the communicative transfer becomes both tangible and visceral.

Here it might be acknowledged that although someone might say, "I hate fruits and vegetables," Russell's feeling is that a curiosity and a kernel of desire to change still leads them to enter his food truck. Instead, I can imagine that the declaration "I don't give a shit" is meant to stake out the man's personal terms, letting Russel know a practical relevance even if it falls short of supporting food activism. The significance and

importance of that communicative work is what it means when Russel uses the idiom, "We're cool with that." When movement actors talk about meeting people where they are, they have in mind the problem of entering someone's everyday life on personal terms and beginning the slow process of altering their attention.

In what follows, I am interested to unpack the strategies and goals embedded in Russel's claim to potential sympathizers, "I still eat burgers all the time. I still eat shitty food sometimes." Russel points to the problem of relating to potential sympathizers with lifestyle barriers through what could only be called hyper-practical *communicative microprocesses* of convincing someone, not to join a movement yet or consider what its representatives say about food justice, but to take just one less trip to McDonalds and instead blend up some disliked fruits and vegetables into a more palatable juice form—for many of us from working-class backgrounds, a big jump. I identify three such microprocesses below: 1) localizing the universal, 2) honoring and listening, and 3) accommodating anti-criticalness.

Localizing the Universal

When I first entered the field, my working hypothesis was that, shaped by a political culture of personalized politics, a social movement organization would have narrowly conceived of one major audience. To test my hypothesis, I would ask specific questions during formal interviews about who is, and who is not, the audience for a particular organization. As part of my interview schedule, I asked directly, "Who is your intended audience?" As a check against what they might answer, and to further determine

how narrowly drawn an audience may or may not be, I would follow-up by asking, "Who is not your audience? Do you think there are people you do not seek with your communication?" The most common answer, reflected in Russel's comments above about the different meanings of Whole Foods and his grassroots, was that organizations have multiple audiences, and targeting an audience would depend on a 1) combination of institutional/communicative strategies, 2) audience expectations, and 3) considerations of the goal of any specific piece of communication. For example, audiences ranged from elected officials, to grassroots networks, to funders, as well as everyday folks—the citizens that make up civil society. If a group was the recipient of a government or corporate grant, uploading photos or videos of specific programs or outcomes of a movement event onto social media websites was meant to highlight the concrete work of the organization, as a display of impact, accountability and transparency. In Russel's account of meeting the expectations of those he meets in his target neighborhoods, however, the strategy was to distance from governmental or corporate connections in order to sound authentic, something of a disjuncture that forced him to speak from both sides of the mouth.

In answers to the second question, my follow-up about to whom the group does not intend to communicate, my interviewees rarely drew explicit boundaries between audiences. Instead, it was more common for communication directors to say they hoped to reach "everyone", including funding-influencers, policymakers, stakeholders, and grassroots actors of all stripes. Any movement group might have specific reasons to assume such a wide-ranging audience, and activists will have different ideas of how to

relate their unique issue to the broadest range of people, groups and organizations possible, but in the following exposition of themes that cohere around meeting them where they are, I lean heavily on the organization with which I did fieldwork, LAN. This group had a clearly articulated idea of how the personal relevance of public issues can be made practical for anyone, what I want to call "localizing the universal". Terri's response below illustrates this concept of an open umbrella, open to anyone of any background:

> **JL:** Do you have anyone in mind who you consider isn't your audience? Who is not your audience?
>
> **Terri:** No. And I'll tell you why…Every family has someone in that family that identifies LGBTQ or some combination thereof. So really, whether they are gay or straight, whether they are trans or cisgender, whether they are black, white, brown, yellow, you know, any definition other the sun, whether they are Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Mormon, Sikh, we really, Republicans and Democrats, conservatives and liberals, um, LAN has all of, all facets of the population. So uh, one of the things that I think is great about the way that we outreach is that we never close the door on a conversation. So really anyone who has a friend or a family member who is LGBTQ is a potential audience for us…even people who aren't aware that they know someone is LGBTQ but are in support of equality, so those are the people we would identify as allies, because they aren't necessarily a family member or close friend [to someone] who is LGBTQ. That they are aware of, they probably are, the probably just don't know it, but they're allies to the community. They are also our audience. And I would say that is everybody.

Terri insists on never closing the door on a conversation. Granted, keeping an umbrella so wide open risks losing certain stakeholders, including some in the LGBT community who might consider LAN's centrism insufficient (Fields 2001). Two other points suggested in Terri's answer, however, deserve further consideration. Her seriatim of identity categories is revealing, because distinct racial, religious, and political groups will likely frame social problems in conflicting ways. As Terri began answering my question, I assumed she had begun to give evidence of the kind of thinking and strategizing that goes into catering to a specific audience. It would be easy for Terri to single out a group as more likely to hear LAN's message, for example Democrats over

Republicans, the former likelier than the latter to support LGBT rights. Instead, localizing the universal is the idea that everybody can be reached. That "LAN's values are America's values" is something both universal and anchored in a practical realization that diverse people have diverse interests, and bring with them a range of discussion points and perceptual frames to the dialogue. Below I address this as something different from the usual work of frame alignment (Snow et al. 1986; Benford 1987; 1993; Ryan 1991; Benford and Hunt 1994). Terri intended for LAN to have direct communication with as many people as possible, and this was guided by a determination that despite any social group's particularism, conflicts, and divergent framings from other groups, there is at least a common connection to a practical, and in all likelihood personal, relationship. Claiming LAN can reach "everybody" sets up two sides of our personalization problem. To one side, there are potentially special framing or discussion issues unique to particularistic subsets of social groups, and on the other side there is an idea that unique subsets could be bonded by some common, practically understood relationship, such as wanting to improve a friendship or familial connection to LGBT people. Interestingly, the common cause that may unite these factions is *a point of connection* to the issue, a *personal* relation to or at least an inactivated acquaintanceship to an LGBT person that transcends other affiliations or group membership.

If I pressed on the obvious political differences between progressives and social conservatives, which I did in the interviews, respondents would admit there is difficulty in localizing the universal, in obtaining common ground with "everybody" and linking

them to a shared view of and goals for an inclusive society. For example, Tim of LAN says,

> The people I'm really, that we want to meet where they are, are the people that understand who *we* are (Tim's emphasis), they know the direction that we are moving. And we're willing to say, we're not expecting you to come all the way over here, and all the way over here is our vision. Our vision is ridiculously huge. And I think brilliantly crafted. Our vision is to create a world in which everyone is, in which diversity is celebrated. Celebrated. Not just tolerated. Not even to the law of the land. But it's actually celebrated. We are foolish enough to believe, and we are willing to work hard enough to achieve a world where that's [changing] hearts and minds of everybody…so everyone is a possible target.

Tim discusses a strategy not dissimilar from Russel's, working with anyone at any level of awareness. When Tim says "all the way over here", he evokes the idea of a good society, one that is proud and commemorative of its diversity and inclusion, one wherein everyone's hearts and minds have been changed to not just "tolerate" but celebrate married gay and lesbian couples and LGBT work colleagues in recognition of a shared humanity. For Russel, "all the way over here" is a world of people with healthy and socially-conscious diets, concerned about food justice and corporate social responsibility. But Tim and Russel's practical strategies were realistic, almost radically so. Russel in particualr realized that changing someone's mind and practices occurs in the messy contradictions of lived, personal experience, and privileged that contradictory space ("I still eat burgers all time."). "All the way over here" suggests having to traverse points of incremental change, from a beginning to a predefined civil ending point. Here, Tim adds that in a process of working with people starting from personal experiences and beginning the slow process of reorienting people, you need to cultivate some shared motivation to closing the gap between the practical difficulties and a shared cause.

It should be immediately apparent that the gap between a practical starting point and achievement of universal goals runs the risk of fragmentation. Deferring to people's biographies as a starting point to enter into movement dialogue requires an organizational planning of specialized outreach, which looks like communicative personalism. Despite optimism that personalization can be a powerful way to hook people to the movement, those connections are tenuous. There are many issues for people to care about, and it is not clear how they might be convinced to prioritize one set of social issues over others in a sustained manner. Without "skin in the game", which in the following Tim defines as an emotionally obvious reason to stay with the cause, potential allies drift from issue to issue in a sea of multiple possibilities and requests for considering involvement in other civil engagements:

> **JL:** I've heard the phrase "meet them where they are at" said a lot, so I just want to know how you define that? How would you say you define that?
>
> **Tim:** Well, you know, it's interesting, as I've, we've adopted that phrase. I would say that, we collectively because I certainly don't take credit for it, but we were more intentional about using that phrase when we launched our program that was specifically focusing on engaging those potential allies who don't, maybe don't even have a family member who is LGBTQ but have a friend or a neighbor [who is], and really want to understand more. Their connection to this issue is different. And therefore their, the way that we engage them needs to be different.
> …
> But people, especially for people [without LGBT family], fundamentally my work… engaging straight people differently [than LGBT people], is you're there because you had, I hate to say, skin in the game. But you had some direct connection. And so you might have rejected people, your loved ones, initially, [but] you had that direct connection, and you evolved because you are here today. Um, the piece is…your loved one, right? Or your family member. For those who don't have that, it's like, other issues, right? They can pick up water concerns, or environmental concerns, or child welfare concerns, and put it back on the shelf if there's something else that comes to the fore. We have to look at [our] issue like that. And what is it, what will be compelling to keep it off the shelf and in their hands.

In Tim's definition of how to make the universal locally relevant, he reveals something profound about the perils of reaching everyone when not everyone share the same

motivations or connections to LAN's issues. Tim is revealing the challenge of meeting people where they are amongst a noise of claims: making an issue practically relevant to someone to whom the social problem is not of a clear personal relevance is difficult. Tim is using the phrase "skin in the game" in the way I mean localizing, to have a personal investment that attaches movement members to some stake in the outcome. To have "skin in the game" is to have the issue "localized" for you, to feel like the self is deeply implicated in the success of the movement. Without it, allies would too easily break off.

Reflecting on LAN's organizational planning for what could arguably be called personalist outreach, Tim reveals how communicative fiber become institutional schema. You see this in the way he switched from "I've" to "we've". Tim embodies an institutional voice, just as I came to embody it through learning LAN's style of communication from Terri. Our voice, however, set up a conflict between affective investments and other types of investment from movement members, the former being to us the more powerful bonding of an advocate to the ally movement. Without personalized emotional bonds to the issue, allies might not become and remain committed.

Recall that Eliasoph (1998) talked about how activists felt compelled to couch their movement activities in highly personalized frames of concern, for the futures of their children and the health and stability of their neighborhoods. Whether the activists in Eliasoph's book were committed to a utopian vision of a good society or to the merely personal, there were political "feeling rules", a term sociologist Arlie Hochschild ([1983] 2003; 2016) defines as emotional propensities toward how one should or should not feel about social problems if not all manner of social life (2016:15-6), that guided strategies

around considering that people would only be interested in civil issues for local reasons. At LAN, especially seen in Tim's shift from "We've" to "I've", there was evidence that these feeling rules can bond together communicative fiber that becomes embedded in organizational schema of outreach to the public. Whenever this style of communication was mobilized, it seemed to me that it functioned specifically to get others to consider themselves to be "the right kind of person" for a world of advocacy. Much of this has to do with what sociologists call frame alignment, an issue I turn to next.

Figuring Other's Self into a World of Advocacy

To many sociologists, the communicative microprocess of attempting to convince others to get involved in a movement by localizing universal issues for them might be considered standard frame alignment. Frame alignment process is the dominant approach in movement sociology to understand the communicative problems of subjective experiences and interpretation (Snow et al. 1986; Benford 1987; 1993; Ryan 1991; Benford and Hunt 1994). The communication issues and interpersonal dynamics between movement actors and bystanders are problems of everyday attention and interpretation. Compared to large-scale issues like securing a food regulation at the level of government, face-to-face problems of talking and interpreting are micro-processes.

Instead of assuming a taken-for-granted linearity of experiencing injustice followed by joining a movement, an assumption that ignores the interpretive component needed to connect "linkage of individual and [movement] interpretive orientations, such that some set of individual interests, values and beliefs and SMO activities, goals, and

ideology are congruent and complementary" (Snow et al 1986:464), the term "frame" comes from Erving Goffman (1974) as "schemata of interpretation" (21) that enable people to figure out what's going on around them. Frame alignments in social movements point out for flaks the particulars of why and how what's going on around them should and could be redefined. Frame alignment process is meant to be an umbrella term that captures all the ways that SMOs attempt to intervene in a dynamic process of connecting their interpretation to individual meaning. *Micromobilization* refers to the strategic operationalization of communications to effect such linkages.

Frame alignment process scholars study organizational mobilizations to reach out to people, melding a public relations approach and a political sensitivity to the social psychology of bystanders. One reasonable critique of frame alignment is that there has been inordinate and sometimes disproportionate attention to micromobilizations at the expense of questions of attention and reception. A trilogy of work in a less canonized tradition of frame analysis, produced by Goffman's student, Eviatar Zerubavel, shifts the focus from organizational considerations to a nuanced and balanced consideration of frames and social cognition (Zerubavel 1991; 2006; 2015). Zerubavel's work in frame analysis has been likened to a sociology of cognitive dissonance—the cultural shaping of receptivity, the social organization of relevance, and how people resist mental categories that disrupt and disorganize the perceptual frames that giver structure to their everyday lives. He demonstrates how our moral, political, and cultural lines of attention are socially organized, and I suggest his analysis of *how* we pay attention opens fresh terrain

for thinking about the outcomes and limitations of a movement communication steeped in radical practicality.

Movement actors often are optimistic that they can reach anyone, often because they believe social problems affect everyone personally. In everyone's day-to-day life, there might be some social relationship or object to which someone's attention can be turned, transforming that social relationship or object into a proxy of awareness for a world of advocacy beyond their personal orbit, an "anchoring" (Goffman 1974:247-51) to the movement that exists in the here and now of the person's everyday life. An anchoring could be someone who comes out in a family. An anchoring can also be a service or a fictional character, like Russell delivering food to a poor neighborhood or black characters and plots introduced into a script writer's work. Anchorings center our focus, allowing an interpretation to "*gear into*" (Schutz 1970:318) situated activity. A bride and groom anchor the audience's focus to the meaning of their situation—a wedding, not a football match. What matters to the audience, according to sociologists who specialize in symbolic interaction, is something practical, that they pay attention to the couple and do not attend to the abstract process of interpreting the meaning of the situation. A wedding audience comes to sense the symbolism of love and commitment because the bride and groom interactionally embody it.

When I learned at LAN how to meet people where they are, I was being trained to accommodate and defer to people's personal biographies as something almost radically practical, to establish their stories as the anchoring of our discursive activity. I did this by attending to a straight person's response to a friend or family coming out, using their

focus on how they reacted—supportively, hesitantly or dismissively—as the definition of the situation. By avoiding talk about social movement justice in the abstract, I found it was not terribly difficult to convince people to enter into dialogue with the movement if that meant talking about the right thing to do for themselves, or their friends and family, based on their reactions. To localize the universal, movement actors hope they can help a listener locate themselves in a social relationship or in relation to an object, an LGBT family, friend, or acquaintance or the ubiquitous presence of food, whether a fresh salad or a burger, making the personal terms through which someone might find a social movement relevant to them as practical as possible. Such communicative personalism attempts to *figure* others' selves into a world of advocacy through a more knowable, comfortable anchoring of what is really going on.

Attention, then, is directed to the practical, but even practical attention grows complex. Zerubavel's sociology of attention draws from Goffman to elucidate the many ways that structures of attention create social relationships between figure and background. Zerubavel (2015) explains that "the relation between 'figure' and 'background'…basically represent the relations between the attended and the unattended parts of our phenomenal world" (7). In his work, he demonstrates the relationship between figure and background visually, analogously revealing how social structure shapes attention. Perceptually, while crossing the street at a busy intersection in Manhattan for example, our eyes fix on the pedestrian signal ahead of us, the figure, while the traffic lights for vehicles are in the background. Socially, the relation of figure and background works much the same way in movement communicative mobilization.

By asking someone to simply consider their relationship to a gay brother, or to the kinds of food they eat, movement actors are attempting to get people to mark a practical object as *figure* while relegating to the *background* broader claims and symbols. Zerubavel often notes how political it is to mark that which is in the background. For example, the politics of sexuality are unaccentuated for someone who is heterosexual. Political reasons make us say *gay* men, but we usually refrain from saying "straight" men. *Vegans* get noticed, but we don't usually call meat-eaters "carnivores". As Zerubavel notes, relations between figure and background "represent the things we not only perceptually but also conceptually attend and inattend" (7). Locating some social relationship or object as an anchoring of attention is a precondition of action, to help someone figure their self into activism by noticing, for perhaps the first time, the processes that produce what is marked as political and what politics remain unmarked, the movement symbolism and other forms of collective engagement that remain in the background.

Honoring and Listening

In my fieldwork, honoring and listening were important microprocesses of *figuring* people into LAN's advocacy. Honoring had a sociological operation, something akin to what Mills had in mind by suggesting we take seriously the problem of "personal orbit" (1), the difficulty in recognizing that personal troubles relate to social structures. Honoring was used as an index of reflecting on and sensitizing one's communicative approach to those unfamiliar with a vocabulary of advocacy. Not honoring, which for these movement actors meant using critical language, "shuts down any potential for

change" because it blocks conversation. Instead, concerted effort was made to assume and hope that someone's way of thinking about a social problem, in LAN's case common ideas about LGBT as outside the mainstream, could be changed by kindly approaching a conversation about the issues. LAN had institutionalized a reluctance to use critical language like "homophobia", "bigotry", and even "hate", an avoidance that sometimes bordered on censoring, to "keep lines of communication open". Optimistically, tempering activist language, moving beyond the insularity of movement speak, and privileging patience and civility, LAN sought to support potential sympathizers "on a journey". For LAN, this meant starting a conversation about common sense ways of thinking about sexuality and identity. To honor someone's journey meant to be aware of the forces against activism, meaning commonplace norms of talk and thought that are not obvious in everyday life. It also meant subsuming more critical debate, best articulated in Terri's discussion of "haters":

> **JL:** What do you mean by hater? How would you define hater messaging?
>
> **Terri:** That people who are opposed to equality, people who are not supportive of their kid, people who are not supportive of LGBT, that immediately we [don't] rush and jump and call them haters, or homophobic, or transphobic, *because that language automatically shuts down any potential for change in the other person* (my emphasis)…but my experience has been that our people don't respond as well to it because they're really about supporting people on a journey. And some people's journey's start from a place of full out hatred and negativity…That actually happens. People can go from a really violent, anti-LGBT position, to full-on support and love. We've seen it happen again and again. So imagine if we called that person out as a hater or a bigot. You know? I mean, I'm sure they [heard it] somewhere in their journey. But if we had? *If we hadn't honored where they were* (my emphasis), and tried to bring them fully along, the transformation would never happen.

Admittedly, LAN's reformist approach is possible because there are other SMOs in the movement arena that proffer more critical, activist claims. LAN's approach raises the question of reformist vs. radical action as a tension that shapes communicative strategies

from SMO to SMO. Some organizations, like Act Up for instance, would challenge LAN for being too accommodating because LAN accepted as its "brand" to decidedly "work within the system". Act Up, by contrast, self-publishes anti-homophobic messages, sometimes profanity laced, to their social media sites.

Working in a reformist key meant assuming everyone wants a good society, yet communicative movement toward starting the conversation is imagined to take place at the individual level. This is contra Alexander (2006) saying that movements are civil translations figuring out how to bring to bear an autonomously symbolic democratic culture to a social problem so that it resonates with individuals. And while persuasive, my fieldwork and interviews reveal that the basic elements of "meeting them where they're at" are framed as encompassing a set of individual-level processes. The unit of change in the movement translation I uncovered in my fieldwork is individual and incremental, moved along by microprocesses of "honoring and listening", akin to the rites of respect and distance around individuality that sociologist Erving Goffman analyzed as "deference and demeanor" (Goffman 1956).

We usually think of honoring as awarding prestige and respect, elevating someone or something as elite or exemplary in a special way. But honoring has a counterintuitive meaning in the way some advocates use it, talking about honoring the multiple layers of cognitive schema and affective investment that result an usual individual *opposition* to a social movement and its cause. In the following, Tim evokes "honoring" as validation, meaning collective recognition that people do not naturally think in stigmatizing ways about social issues, that their surrounding environments shape their cognitive structures:

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Tim: Growing up in the South, growing up in a very homogenized environment which was white, uh, it was lower class, it was largely uneducated in terms of the elders…So for example, there were groups that were organized, uh, unofficially, but organized to counter any integration, racial integration into our communities, into our schools. And even as a kid, hearing that and learning about these groups, if I applied the principle of meeting people where they are? I want to clarify that it means meeting people where they are, who at least have an appreciation for the values for which we stand…We are talking about those folks that are willing to learn more. That are willing to face the discomfort they might have about the issues. *Because we're going to validate them. We're not just going to say, oh, okay, well you really need to get over that, because this is 2015. No. Some of the fundamental issues that prevent people from being more understanding and accepting of these issues have to do with their, a lot of things that are a part of their unconscious bias, the way we were raised, our culture, our family, our faith in our religious beliefs* (my emphasis). They fear speaking out because they might say something wrong. So their being an ally is saying nothing at all. That's the part of meeting people where they are in those areas and being willing to say, alright, so I hear why marriage of two guys is a problem for you. Um, and can you, will you walk with me while we talk about what that looks like for my son? For my brother? Um, that's how we meet people where they are.

When Tim tells us that LAN is hoping for listeners with open minds, he contrasts such an audience against Southern conservatives opposed to racial integration, those who sociologist Eviatar Zerubavel (1991) might say have "rigid minds" (33), that is cognitive preferences for sharp categorical distinctions between social groups. While not foreclosing on those with rigid minds, Tim seeks "flexible minds" (Zerubavel 1991:115) open to America's tradition of progress. ("have an appreciation for the values for which we stand"). Pointing to how *social environments* shape beliefs about race, Tim also echoes Zerubavel's argument that moral categories vary with respect to time and place, such that abhorrent "Nazi experiments with Jews…presupposed (and, in turn, promoted) the idea that the mental partition between true Aryans and such 'subhuman' groups was as thick as the one separating person from object" (Zerubavel 1991:66). Tim's definition of meeting the public "where they are", however, implies more than naively "starting the conversation"; Tim strategizes a discursive process ("walk with me") of turning attention back onto cognitive distinctions that presuppose how we construct a shared social reality.

Tim's clarification is about the conversational work done in social movements to help people access the background of their thought, the unspoken assumptions about how they draw lines between straight people and LGBT, to turn their attention to a "social scalpel [that] underlies the way we generate meaningful mental entities" (Zerubavel 1991:61).

In many ways, practices of honoring and listening unfurl in everyday movement struggle to produce "shifts in the location" (Zerubavel 1991:65) of boundaries drawn between social categories. Zerubavel does not cite social movements as causes of changed definitions of race and gender, redefinitions that cause us to rethink how we distinguish women from men or blacks from whites, but movement communicators know that such cognitive shifts did not, and do not, occur naturally. Indeed, Tim implies a multidimensional problem in even beginning the conversation about social problems: 1) cognitive structures that support Zerubavel's "fine lines" distinguish and thus create social order out of social chaos, often operating in our unconscious biases; 2) the "ideological climate" (Zerubavel 1991:66) in which we are raised is pivotal; and 3) there is great fear of speaking out, knowing that stigmatization is likely for those who challenge normal categories of thought. Honoring and listening are meant to anticipate and assuage the likely discomfort from "border disputes" (67), that is, our engagement in reflection and collective discussion of whether lines of exclusion need to be redrawn.

Terri also refers to cognitive socialization as layers that movement communicators must consider and peel back in the work of managing and addressing border disputes:

> **Terri**: Well, it's about, first of all, listening. So listening to people's stories, okay? So it's, my son just came out, but I'm catholic…or I'm Christian, and I believe this is a sin.

And his lifestyle? My deeply, deeply held belief, lifetime belief, is that my son is going to hell. I mean, we have people starting there, okay? So okay, some people would approach that and say, well, you should change religions, or it's close-minded to think that. Or you're wrong. *As opposed to saying, wow, tell me more about that and really peeling back the layers of this person, who their entire life has been told this. You're not born thinking this particular opinion about those things, you learn them over time* (my emphasis). And slowly, as you start to engage in conversation without ramming another opinion down their throat, without saying you need to find another church, you know, I mean, some people can find a way to stay within their faith and support a loved one. Um, slowly a transformation begins. Slooowly, you start to humanize the person that they love. Slooowly you get them to, you know, would you look at this piece of literature, you know, written by someone who's in the same faith as you, has a slightly different take? I'd love to share it with you. Yes? Great. No? That's okay. No problem. You know, that's meeting people where they are.

Terri's "politics of empathy" connect an active strategy of personalization to changing hearts and minds. Terri suggests that such empathetic connections do not require a break from a sense of self, and there is good research supporting her claim. Sociologist Mary Gray (2009) demonstrates that, especially in rural areas of America, such a strategy is vital. Rural LGBT youth activists rely on "the intimacies and embraces of families" (168) as one strategy to "create belonging and visibility in communities where they are not only a distinct minority but also popularly represented as out of place" (4):

> Family can transform queer strangers into local girls and boys, providing much needed "familiar" status…Few stories are more important to the imagining of rural spaces than family. And the reliance on family was much more than romantic symbolism…Families were important to finding a job, securing housing, and financially surviving in stark economic conditions. (Gray 2009:168)

One participant in Gray's study, Mary, risked her "status as a local-in-solidarity" (48) by organizing panels and meetings in rural Kentucky, where she would "keep it peaceful" (48), stick to information about LGBT youth, and increased the visibility of rural families who claimed their LGBT children as family just like anyone else.

Forging personal connections resembling familial bonds depends on strategies of deep listening, following an intensely therapeutic approach to movement building.

Indeed, sociologist Verta Taylor (1996) demonstrated the importance of women going through post-partum depression to utilize a medical and psychological framing in ostensibly self-help groups. Taylor reveals that such a framing enabled discussion to further a gendered critique of mainstream narratives and expectations of motherhood, folding post-partum depression groups into the broader feminist movement. I am adding that such frames and concomitant strategies, vital to confronting and peeling back cognitive socialization, are unsurprising in a broader culture of personalized politics—such a culture produces them as communicative fiber.

Honoring and listening are common elements of LAN's civic fiber, best seen in Tim and Terri's mobilizations of communicative personalism. To them, the slow process of working within the parameters of and excavating cognitive socialization is maximized by a careful attention to individual experiences. There are of course limits to respecting, understanding, and sensitizing one's conversation with non-activists, many openly hostile to change. Yet LAN actors still maintain that they do not discount "the haters". Instead, the limits of honoring people's cognitive socialization, the source of the "fine lines" (Zerubavel 1991) drawn between straight people and LGBT people, shape a willingness to listen and patiently search for an open window into the personal experiences of others, a search for some open-mindedness to question their reactions or ideas, to consider a different opinion, to not remain ideologically committed to a taken-for-granted worldview. The risk of this work is the severe fragmentation of our highly-varied socialization. The process is something of an interactionist intervention into narratives of self, a potentially high-reward strategy since "research in communication…shows

convincingly that stories are better able than other kinds of messages to change people's opinions" (Polletta and Chen 2012:1). There are considerable limitations, however, to accommodating people's personal narratives. Sociologists Francesca Polletta and Pang Ching Bobby Chen (2012) further demonstrate that listeners are likely to edit movement claims to more closely resemble the familiar and fit within existing cognitive schemes. Balancing risk and reward, LAN institutionalized respectful listening to people's stories, to patiently present pieces of communication that might start them on the track of seeing things a different way—a considerable investment of conversational time and emotional energy.

LAN's communicative strategy, like Russel's food talk, starkly contrasts the case found in Sarah Sobieraj's (2011) sociology of activist communication. Communicative personalism, as I am defining it here, is a deferential willingness to defer to individual biography and enter into an open dialogue. Sobieraj, in her study of activist groups protesting the 2004 and 2008 presidential campaigns, found intense communicative *inflexibility*. The groups expected unquestioning political agreement. Sobiearj's counter-case helps contrast LAN's approach and its echoes in different SMO communicative mobilizations. Sobieraj noted that activists preferred not to discuss politics and avoided disagreements, expecting "a more generalized norm of conformity" (45). This conformity was seen in how some activists assumed Sobieraj's politics were the same as the group's beliefs simply because she attended their meetings. In one extraordinary moment, captured on her audio recorder, it became obvious that conversations were not open, that members were tacitly expected to follow unspoken "norms of conformity" to a system of

beliefs and a vocabulary about radical activism. In this instance, Sobiearj was conducting

a formal interview with a leader of an anti-war group when a fellow activist interrupted to

ask about a law that might protect them from police espionage:

> **Rochelle**: I don't know any of the legality of it, but there was a big thing when they admitted that they had been spying on us because previously they had said, "No, if we were doing that, it would be illegal.
>
> **Young Man**: But I know there is a consent decree against some of the things they do, I'm just not sure exactly what the extent of it is. *After they bombed the MOVE cult* (my emphasis), they got an order, which they agreed to, so it's some kind of judicial order that prevents them from—
>
> **Rochelle (cutting him off)**: Are you talking about MOVE? *I don't think it's appropriate to call them a cult* (emphasis in original).
>
> **Young Man:** Well, OK, that [sic] just the way I read them—
>
> **Rochelle**: Well, I mean, yeah, that is the media depiction, but *I think that, especially if you are here working on this kind of thing, you should be a little more aware of things* (emphasis in original).

Sobieraj suggests that some activists are corrected and policed by "[n]orms…in place

regarding what language and interpretations were acceptable" by fellow activists

(Sobieraj 2011:145-6). She raises concerns over a political climate that does not foster

dialogue about commonly held assumptions about the political process of and claims

made by allies and opponents alike. I have found for the advocates in my sample, these

moments of disagreement are imagined to be the best places to defer to interlocutors and

think processually about how to start a conversation about different points of view.

Obviously, a big difference exists between fellow activists *expecting* to be socialized to

the claims of a social movement and an SMO outreach to unexpectant interlocutors. Still,

the logic of honoring and listening is made clearer as a contrast. Instead of Rochelle

admonishing her colleague, Tim would ask the young man to "walk me through" the

reasons he says MOVE is a cult.

Consider further that, in Tina's definition of meeting them where they are, calling an LGBT group a cult would not be a "wrong" thing to say, a sidestep of moral judgment that could be read as radically relative, though not uncommon in postmodern politics, defined as relativistic, multiple competing frames and narratives, none more valid than the others. Tina was the vice executive officer of LAN, and after my direct supervisor Terri, she most often evoked "meet them where they're at":

> **JL**: I have the advantage of spending time here as an intern, and I've heard the phrase, "we seek to meet them where they are at" a bunch. And so, I'm glad that you are bringing it up in this interview. Because I've wanted it defined. So what does it mean for LAN, when we say that we want to meet people where they are?
>
> **Tina**: I think it, I think probably the reason [you're] asking the question is cause it can mean a lot of different things. When we're, when we are speaking to family members, which is really where the core of that philosophy started, it was around that someone who just finds out that a family member is LGBT may or may not be okay with it, [or] maybe that they have always been okay with [LGBT people], but oh god, wait, it's their child. You know, those kind of things. *And none of their reaction is wrong in meeting people where they are* (my emphasis). It's about helping them get to a place of celebration. So there's, there's not a judgment in that meeting people where they are. And then that philosophy is extended to our trainings in the workplace and things like that, that workplace environment may not be there yet, it may not be as inclusive as it should be, but if there's a willingness to kind of go along that journey, then that's where LAN and the approach is. And so that engagement that I talked about with some of those people who, in the quote unquote haters, it's thinking and having kind of the hope that anyone out there can change, and get to a place where they are celebrating diversity and um, being as inclusive as possible.

"Listening" here is a puzzling nonjudgmental confidence—what the feminist philosopher María Lugones (1987) might call moving beyond "arrogant perception", a show of identification that, failing to connect, does not account for the transformative power of acknowledging one's negative perception and insecurity. Obviously, Rochelle listened to her colleague, but she didn't hear him so much as arrogantly perceived him. Tina's insistence, that no reaction, even rejections, to LGBT is wrong because we can get them to celebration, sidesteps the details of how.

Perhaps it can be said, however, that these dynamics, nonjudgmentally hearing and judgmentally listening, represent two sides of one coin. While Rochelle came off as defensive and closed to conversation, the voice I was learning at LAN, Tina's emphasis on listening and honoring, seemed to risk avoidance of a more critical dialogue. It sometimes felt like we were trapping potential allies in reflection of and discussion about their personal biographies. Accommodating people's practical concerns can oftentimes leave less time and space for the critical dialogue Sobieraj advocates for at the end of her book, a request that movement groups have longer, open discussions about beliefs, goals, and values. Though I do not suggest that communicative personalism is a form of the "navel gazing" oft levied at identity movements. Instead, navel gazing took on the function of sensitizing people to the ways *they might* pay attention to their biographies, by grappling with the usual ways most of us pay attention to our lives.

Reverse Attentional Socialization

When movement communicators work to foreground the issue of attention and relevance to examine them anew, for fresh attention and the possible seeding of political awakening, they are attempting a reverse "attentional socialization" (Zerubavel 2015:63) akin to ethnomethodology's breaching experiments whereby interactional rules are broken to excavate how social order is defined, constructed, and maintained in everyday life such that a reality comes to be taken as an objective given. In practical terms, movement actors hope that reverse attentional socialization can undo some of the power of rules of relevance to begin drawing out "the elephant in the room", to borrow from

Zerubavel's book by the same name. A great literary point of data illustrating this process comes from Margret Atwood's (2009) *The Year of the Flood*, a dystopian novel about social movements in an apocalyptic future. Many of Atwood's characters, protagonists and antagonists alike, could see the multiple threats of class inequality and environmental degradation of the planet, yet none dared speak publicly on what they could plainly see. About the inattention to the surrounding evidence of an environmental disaster being actively caused by corporations, Margret Atwood says of her protagonist:

> By the time she reached college the wrongness had moved closer. She remembers the oppressive sensation, like waiting all the time for a heavy stone footfall, then the knock at the door. Everybody knew. Nobody admitted to knowing. If other people began to discuss it, you tuned them out, because what they were saying was both so obvious and so unthinkable.

Atwood's description of the conspiracies of silence around corporate responsibility for human-caused climate change appears at a moment in the novel when an environmentalist utters for the first time something obvious but difficult to talk about. Zerubavel develops attentional socialization as part of the explanation of how social problems can be hidden in plain sight by taken for granted cognitive schema, a continuation of a communicative theme he began in *The Elephant in the Room* (2006). Attentional socialization is just one element in the social structures that make possible denial and silence. There are both broad and specific sources of how our attention is socially patterned through processes of socialization. A climatologist might readily talk about a climate change "both so obvious and so unthinkable", but a television meteorologist's training includes lighthearted banter with her news co-anchors, so that it's likelier that instead of a suggestion that an unusually hot winter day is of concern, she says, "Enjoy it while it lasts!" In this example, reversing the process of attentional

socialization in theory brings attention to the unseen forces against how we pay attention. It is how we are collectively socialized to pay attention that deeply affects our failure to focus on social movements and the problems they name.

A frame analysis of social movement communicative mobilization focused on personal attention heeds Goffman's (1974) warning of the difficulties of communication about attentional socialization:

> [T]o focus on the nature of personal experiencing—with the implication this can have for giving equally serious consideration to all matters that might momentarily concern the individual—is itself a standpoint with marked political implications, and…these are conservative ones. The analysis developed does not catch at the differences between the advantaged and disadvantaged classes and can be said to direct attention away from such matters. I think that is true. I can only suggest that he who would combat false consciousness and awaken people to their true interests has much to do, because the sleep is very deep (13-14).

In the movement literature on social movement framing, Goffman's (1983) intention is removed from the context of his overall program of thought, that the realm of face-to-face interaction is a social domain with its own structure, a structure that is fundamentally communicative and vulnerable to competing tracks of attention. Downplaying Goffman's puzzle about communicatively formed multiple realities, traditional frame alignment scholars do not sufficiently account for that which they claim to account—that generating support for and participation in movements is situated activity with granular problems.

Classic frame alignment resembles public relations campaigns, not necessarily how such campaigns might interact with multivalent sets of meaning at the level of personal experience that struggle for existence and attention. This is a confounding level to analyze, and frame alignment scholars, in dealing with interpretations of injustice, rightly argue that social movement organizations can have variable success at substituting

their frames of grievances for individual frames that resist collective frames. Without attention to *attention* by movement actors, however, frame analysis risks becoming static and instrumental, despite a note that "the everyday world is grounded in the readily documentable observation that both individual and corporate actors often misunderstand or experience considerable doubt and confusion about what it is that is going on and why" (466). The crux of Goffman's (1974) *Frame Analysis* is that personal experience, as a more abstract element of interaction and its structure, is far too vulnerable for consistent frame alignments to be anything but devilish, made disingenuously in bad faith, yet frame alignment theorists nonetheless lay out an optimistic, sometimes mistakenly so, program for SMOs to bring the devil under control.

Communicative personalism, instead, is about framing for attention, a separate though related stage to framing for activation—the stuff of frame alignment process. Thinking of communicative personalism as made up of strategic pieces of framing for attention—what I have been calling communicative fiber—might give us access to some important social psychological phenomena at analytical strata beneath the level of frame.

Consider "attentional socialization" (Zerubavel 2015:63) in some more depth, an idea central to honoring and listening as core elements of communicative personalism. Honoring and listening is about attending to someone's anchoring activity for clues about where and how much a person can unpack cognitive socialization and reflect on the cognitive social learning they have been steeped in. Such "sociomental acts" (Zerubavel 2015:63) work to distinguish what has not been relevant from what can become relevant to a new listener receptive to claims of a social movement. People of different social

backgrounds have a wide range of capabilities for such reflection, since "members of particular attentional communities who *learn* to focus their attention on certain parts of their phenomenal world systematically [ignore] others in accordance with their community's distinctive attentional tradition, conventions, biases and habits" (Zerubavel 2015:63). It takes a lot of work to shortcut attentional socialization. If and once movement actors succeed at helping others locate themselves into a movement's frame by some anchoring activity, there remain struggles around what and how much of the movement's symbolism becomes visible, struggles over the clarification of social forces that have unproblematically been in the background and now require examination.

When social movement actors work to get people to pay attention to the politics of their anchoring activity, they are working against a lifetime of unarticulated rules of relevance. Paying attention or not paying attention to a social relationship or object in a political way "is often the result of some pressure to actively disregard" the potential politics of any given thing in everyday life, "pressure that is usually a product of social norms of attention designed to separate what we conventionally consider 'noteworthy' from what we come to disregard as mere background 'noise'" (Zerubavel 2016:23). Joan Emerson's (1970) situational analysis of how a woman's gynecological appointment with a male doctor becomes sexually neutralized serves as an example of the interactional rules and linguistic activity that are followed—a woman's eyes are fixed on the ceiling; the male doctor uses clinical language—to downplay any misreading of the situation as something other than a medical visit. In accomplishing a successful gynecological exam, potentially political tracks of attention remain actively disattended. Pro-choice activists

might add that any legally mandated discussion of planned parenting that is ignored by the doctor could be a potential politicization of the moment, or raise the question of whether inattention to the gender of the doctor obscures a critical reading of masculine power. Movement activists are always working against such rules of relevance that keep interpretation of social situations "surrounded by mental frames designed to separate what we are socially expected to notice from what we are conventionally supposed to ignore" (Zerubavel 2016:25).

Accommodating Anti-Criticalness

Progressives might read the previously examined excerpt above from Sobiearj's (2011) fieldwork and applaud Rochelle's sharpness and willingness to speak up for radical activism, but that should not foreclose recognition of the social forces against attention to activism. Advocates for critical thought are generally right to encourage tougher reflection on the words we choose to label SMOs, labels often introduced by the public relations wings of powerful mainstream political organizations. Historically, mainstream political frames in American society have stigmatized social movements and delegitimized their claims and activities as both fringe and dangerous. One could interpret this project's materials and analysis as one that insufficiently interrogates interviewees or one that too readily accepts their claims and frames on those grounds. These are movement professionals who are experts at managing communication and perceptions after all, conscious that every word uttered has consequences. Both their approach, and my acceptance of their communicative strategies, could be too clement.

Reformist communicative strategies seem too accommodating, and it's not clear how accommodation of people's usual ways of looking at things leads to a public that debates social problems, which is seen as a precondition for democratic exchange. I would agree, as does Tina, who oversaw field operations at LAN:

> **JL:** So then in that context, what do you think people don't pay attention to?
>
> **Tina (chuckles, then pauses for two beats):** Um…I think this is an unfortunate, is when you're seen as comfort food, or seen as warm and fuzzy, then when you are digging down into more substantive issues, interest wanes. Because it's like, oh but I want them to be my security blanket over here, I don't want to talk ab- (pauses), you know, that kind of thing.
>
> **JL:** Do you have a specific issue in mind? Or something you put up on …
>
> **Tina:** Um, I think it's true on, in wonky, legislative type issues. I think that it drops down kind of deal. So I think that's, you know, when we put things up, you know, when I think about digital media per se. I think that's when we put things up that it drops.

The problem implied here is whether in honoring people's unquestioned cognitive frames, their unexamined relations between a social movement's figure and background, we foreclose critical dialogue about the need for changing beliefs, assumptions, laws about social problems, and especially political action. In communicative work I undertook as a LAN intern, this problem often emerged in everyday collaborations.

The blog I kept for LAN published a short piece once a week, alliteratively named "Focus on the Field Friday", to bring attention to Americans who had joined the network. The pieces were something between a human-interest story and reportage on the actions taken by a newcomer:

> Casey McCoy… proclaimed June 13-19 to be LGBTQ Pride Week after [a Florida] county's commissioners refused to support the proclamation…
>
> Taking matters into her own hands, McCoy took the stage. "I hereby proclaim June 13 through the 19 as LBGTQ Pride Week, in honor of freedom from prejudice and bias in any form, and in recognition and praise of those members of our community who

constantly fight the battle for all citizens regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, race, color, creed, ethnic origin, or religion," announced McCoy.

"Since you are unwilling to make your proclamation, I came here to do it for you and ask you next year please reconsider," said McCoy.

In her speech, McCoy stressed the importance of nurturing an inclusive community for LGBTQ youth, and extended an invitation to the Lakeland community to enjoy County Pride.

McCoy is a proud LAN mom who stands for her gay son, in addition to serving as Vice President of County Pride and working with Lakeland Youth Alliance, which provides a safe space for LGBTQ youth and their allies.

Congratulations to Casey for her inspiring work and standing up for the right thing!

When I began drafting my posts, Terri would edit them for brevity and introduce emotionally positive language, encouraging praises, and just generally more exclamation marks. The exclamation marks were particularly interesting. In the work of online text, enthusiastic punctuation is meant to avoid emotional confusion, to assure that positive affirmation is intended. Using exclamation marks matched the voice of LAN, a voice, as Terri told me on my first day, that needed to be warm, accepting, and embracing. The exclamation marks were instrumentalized as a piece in the toolkit for communicatively mobilizing sympathy, to keep movement activists feeling good about their involvement.

For one post, I reached out to Kevin. Kevin was a founding LAN member. I wanted to record a brief life history and draft from it a blog post about his recent "retirement" from movement organizing. Although words like "homophobia" and "hate crime" arose in our conversation, I kept them out of the first draft of my blog, attempting to follow Terri's guidelines to avoid "hater" language. Kevin had also recalled, in his telling of his history becoming an advocate, using epithets during the 1980s, "dyke" being an egregious example. Those were left out of the draft as well.

During our conversation, Kevin recounted his daughter coming out when she was nineteen. He was open about his regrets over the episode, remembering that she was afraid of him, and that he pestered his daughter about whether she wasn't just confused because she was in college, counseling her that it was unwise to be openly lesbian at such an early age. I wasn't surprised that he told me about his regretful response, since the basic elements of personalizing our communications included honoring and listening. Having learned from LAN, I did my best to listen to what Kevin had thought and said before he reconsidered LGBT issues.

I included in a first draft of the blog Kevin's story of his reaction to his daughter, only to accentuate the changes he had made, how far he had gone to become a LGBT ally and a persistent advocate for progressive change. However, both Kevin and Terri requested that these details be scrubbed. They assured me that I was in the LAN voice, but they thought it better to focus on Kevin's history of practical activity, with a short sentence to how Kevin "needed to take time" to react to his daughter's coming out.

Frame theorists who study social movement messaging might analyze LAN's edits, as well as what is to follow about genetically modified food, as *counterframing*, neutralizing "a person's or group's myths, versions of reality or interpretive framework" (Benford 1987:75; 1993). Oppositional counterframes cause movement activists to reframe their work "to ward off, contain, limit, or reverse potential damage to the movement's previous claims or attributes" (Benford & Hunt 1994), the push-and-pull of counterframes resulting in a "framing contest" (Ryan 1991). However, this approach to neutralizing is specifically about movement opponents, though here I would link back to

the "doors open" approach cited before, strategies for keeping open a "big umbrella". Neutralizing frames are not often analyzed in the context of specific strategies and tasks for generating good publicity that might hook would be sympathizers, as we will see below with Kelly, or even applied across fellow activists as the case between Kevin and his fellow LAN advocates in his short activist biography.

Months after exiting the field and conducting interviews with movement leaders and communicators across a range of progressive causes, I thought of the heavy edits to my blog during a particularly fraught exchange with a food change advocate, Kelly of Research and Policy for Agricultural Change (RPAC). Kelly introduced herself as a "thought leader" for food change. As I explained my project to her, attempted some rapport-building, and began easing into my dissertation questions, she forcefully said she only had twenty minutes. Kelly's answers to my questions were terse. For me, it raised general issues of "interviewing up" with NGO executives with high status in their field (see Appendix 1). For now, I simply bring attention to the similarity between Kelly's editing strategies and those I discovered at LAN. Like downplaying the specifics of any controversy at LAN, Kelly conveyed a harsh example of how not to meet people where they are. I asked about how she might communicate about genetically modified organisms, a controversial issue in industrial agriculture and a divisive issue even among food activists:

> **Kelly (quickly):** We don't post about GMOs.
>
> **JL:** You don't?
>
> **Kelly:** No. *Because that takes all of the oxygen out of the room* (my emphasis). If, you, you know, we write about GMOs, we talk about GMOs, but I rarely post on social media about GMOs, because then you can't have a, a good dialogue.

JL: Yea, so what takes the oxygen out of the room about it?

Kelly: *Because it's very controversial, and there are a lot of uninformed people on both sides who, that's, they hear that word and they completely shut down* (my emphasis). They either get angry or get volatile or can't hear what the other side, or the multiple sides, are saying.

Hot button items like GMOs were intentionally avoided, and we might conceive of this as a soft censuring akin to the kind of scrubbing I was doing at LAN, avoiding slurs and removing Kevin's reaction to his daughter's coming out that might be taken as conferring judgment on would-be sympathizers. Adamantly avoiding social controversies because "there are a lot of uninformed people" seemed to me ironic, given that Kelly would write about GMOs on RPAC's email distribution and do interviews about them in mainstream media. But when it came to mobilizing for a particular kind of publicity that helps potential sympathizers anchor themselves positively into a movement, a different set of tasks than neutralizing, that sort of criticalness was avoided. I wondered if Kelly meant that someone reading *The New York Times* or subscribing to her newsletter would have taken all the incremental steps necessary before grappling with more complex issues. Both Kelly and my supervisors at LAN seemed to police a sensitivity toward growing followers among the uninitiated. Both RPAC and LAN's communicative strategies were focused on moving the conversation toward positive change. Convincing bystanders that there were non-controversial issues to consider was paramount, and so criticalness was more often than not avoided.

Keying Between Accommodation and Criticalness
Avoiding criticalness because "there are a lot of uninformed people on both sides"

risks slipping into the antidemocratic sentiment of the early twentieth century, when collective behavior scholars, rooted in Gustave Le Bon's (1979 [1895]) conservative treatises against the French revolutions, who argued against rapid concessions to public control of government, emphasized involuntary, impulsive and spontaneous crowds that blindly struggled against unarticulated forms of injustice. As the reference point changed to American movements for abolition of slavery, women's suffrage, and Black civil rights, it became commonplace that people's grievances against unfulfilled democratic promises were reasonable, in fact, their articulation was a fundamental democratic obligation. The question, instead, of democratic revolution was how could protestors maximize their time and resources to successfully mobilize projects for justice. Codifying the approach known as resource mobilization, McCarthy and Zald (1977) proffered a weaker assumption about the centrality of interpretation and social psychology in social movement formation, instead focusing on cost and benefit calculations of movement organizations. Criticizing and shifting from antidemocratic assumptions by collective behavior scholars of a public's ability to reflect, discuss, and interpret public issues, mid-20th century social movement scholars safely assumed the rationality of projects for collective government. Therefore, resource mobilization is fundamentally about the strategic and tactical decisions made by actors in movement organizations to secure the greatest amount of participation in and support for their movements. Movement scholars extended resource mobilization to analyses of political processes at the level of state, linking SMO dynamics to extramovement structural concerns. These dimensions of the broader economic and political context liken the political process to a window that

periodically opens and closes.

The problem of how to get people to talk about a social movement at the level of face-to-face interaction, however, cannot be satisfactorily answered within frameworks that only focus on movements as organizations and how they interact with the political process writ large. The emphasis on the professionalization of SMOs and their interaction with state and economic elites elide cultural questions about framing, interpretation, and discussion of inequalities, the problem that Polletta has called "throwing out the baby with the bathwater", the baby in this case being attention to individual and group processes of discussion and interpretation. At the same time, it is important not to reject resource mobilization and political process and fall back on mere assumptions about the social psychology of how individuals form into groups. It is good to think about how everyday people might become versed in movement claims by considering together both individual factors and the institutional level, and adherents to frame alignment processes have greatly advanced our understanding of how to link social psychological factors to the organizational factors of participant mobilization. Indeed, by coining a term for such a link, "frame alignment", Snow et al (1977) and close followers of the model attend to micromobilization tasks and processes like those I am exploring here. Frame alignment process is a grounded theory of the central problem of building support for and participation in social movement organizations and their core activities and campaigns. It corrects the unwarranted assumption of past scholars of social movements that assumed just because commonplace grievances against unfulfilled democratic promises are reasonable, people would automatically join movements. The assumption turned out to be

unwarranted because everyday life is full of complex and competing interpretations, and I will argue with Zerubavel, structures of attention that mediate between awareness and discussion. People experience unjust things all the time and refrain from discussing them.

Honoring and validating are types of keyings, what Goffman called signaling conventions "by which given activity, one already meaningful in terms of some primary framework, is transformed into something patterned on this activity but seen by participants to be something quite else" (Goffman 1974:44). Keying potentially changes not only the activity taking place but radically changes the answer to what is really going on here, from someone who succeeds at eating less fast food to someone who is a food activist. While framing for attention is communicatively important to movements, it risks seeming too much like accommodation or getting stuck in a stage of reflection and discussion. The point is that a micro struggle takes place between shifting taken-for-granted assumptions from the background into the foreground, a struggle that shapes the keying problems between accommodation and criticalness. Every frame separates the *figure* from the *background*, a relegation of our awareness to a main track of attention. Such keying struggles are *attentional battles* (Zerubavel 2015:57), the very decision whether something ought to be considered relevant and therefore attended to is often contested. Goffman shows that keyings can be intentionally manipulated., but accommodating anti-criticalness is an editing strategy to keep communications non-controversial.

Recall that Kevin had been a lifelong organizer and straight LGBT ally and aware of the power of and need to change deeply held perceptual frames that once informed his

use of slurs. He came to be a straight ally thanks to, not in spite of, the fact that LAN accepted it was his journey to continue to avoid controversial language and critical debate. This aspect of communicative fiber was built out of another source of expectations, something about media culture at large, explored in the next chapter. By keying movement talk as personally-relevant conversation, movement communicators necessarily "sidetrack" activism or criticalness as something that is not "what is really going on here".

Conclusion

This chapter has specifically addressed the question of how movement claims mobilize, and in what shape. If I might be allowed to press the metaphor of weaving, the microprocesses I have demonstrated in this chapter pull together the communicative fiber of LAN's institutional schema, serve as social processes of threading together radical practicality. Radical practicality was the rule of thumb at LAN, the analytic meaning of "meet them where they are", and to the degree it arose across interviews with other issue communicators, radically practicality might be a clue to the civic regime's communicative fiber as well. Radical practicality is a strict discipline of deferring to the social environments and narratives of self—in a word, the personal biographies—of potential sympathizers. The assumption guiding radical practicality was that movement communication needed to be shaped by a personal voice to potential sympathizers, puzzlingly *because* of a movement's multiple audiences. Though only one exemplar of radical practicality, when Russel talked about it, he assumed a communicative flexibility

that bordered on being so radically practical, one considers personal experiences on a person-by-person basis. When movement communicators talk about meeting people where they are, they have in mind the problem of entering someone's everyday life on personal terms and beginning the slow process of altering their attention.

Radical practicality is thread together by the microprocesses of localizing the universal, honoring and listening, and accommodating anti-criticalness. Localizing the universal is communicative effort to construct the personal relevance of a public issue by framing for attention within the personal experience of a potential sympathizer. Attempts were made to conjure, in emotionally resonant ways, an "anchoring" (Goffman 1974:247-51) that can fix something practical, a specific relationship, daily object, or usual practice as a proxy of awareness to the movement's work. I argue that frame alignment process scholars sometimes give inordinate attention to micromobilizations at the expense of questions *of* attention and reception. I align with Eviatar Zerubavel to argue that the focus needs to shift from organizational. The major assumption of radically practicality is that deep commitment to and participation in the civil sphere could be connected to everyone's day-to-day life, wherein there might be some social relationship or object to which someone's attention can be turned, transforming that social relationship or object into a proxy of awareness for a world of advocacy beyond their personal orbit. Such an "anchoring" (Goffman 1974:247-51) to the movement exists in the here and now of the person's everyday life.

Locating some social relationship or object as an anchoring of attention is a precondition of action to help someone figure their self into activism by noticing, for

perhaps the first time, the processes that produce what is marked as political and what politics remain unmarked, the movement symbolism and other forms of collective engagement that remain in the background. Honoring and listening constituted another critical microprocess of radical practicality. It threads together a communicative personalism that attempts to figure people into advocacy, to actively work with them on "border disputes" (Zerubavel 1991:67) between the movement's figure and background. Honoring is social validation that people do not naturally think in stigmatizing ways, a recognition that surrounding environments shape cognitive structures. Listening is the most therapeutic aspect of radical practicality, a process of interactional intervention into narratives of self. I argue that such a microprocess of pulling together communicative fiber is contra Alexander (2006) arguing that movements are civil translations figuring out how to bring to bear an autonomously symbolic democratic culture to a social problem so that it resonates with individuals. Forging personal connections resembling familial bonds depend on strategies of deep listening, following an intensely therapeutic approach to movement building shape a willingness to listen and patiently search for an open window into the personal experiences of others, a search for some open-mindedness to question their reactions or ideas, to consider a different opinion, to not remain ideologically committed to a taken-for-granted worldview.

Accommodating anti-criticalness constitutes a third microprocess related to anchoring non-sympathizers and potential sympathizers into a movement. I have argued that it is active communicative work to emphasize non-controversial issues that results in a soft censuring with the hope of growing followers among the uninitiated. Along with

localizing the universal and honoring and listening, it made up the communicative fiber of LAN specifically, as embodied units of institutional schema best seen in Ronald's slip from "we've" to "I've" in addressing the definition of individual outreach for a movement's cause. Yet I also found traces of them in other interviews. Focused strategies and mobilizations to make social problems personally relevant to anyone, communicative personalism was in a tension with the social side of our problem, the recent outcomes of social movement claims of the Tea Party, #BLM, and Occupy becoming well known across disparate audiences. "Everybody can be reached" was an idea with universal implications, but grounded in the practical realization that diverse people have diverse interests and points of entry into discussion and critical dialogue. Is such a dialogue a precursor, or are the elements of communicative personalism preconditions of critical dialogue? Avoiding overly critical language helped people imagine they could take steps that had some semblance to movement activity, constraining the problem of dialogue to a process of reverse attentional socialization, a process that was about sensitizing to the ways that we might pay attention to our biographies by grappling with the usual ways we do or do not pay attention to the politics of everyday life. To continue pressing the metaphor of weaving, rolling out a blanket of communicative personalism put it into some contradictory relation to "reach" and connecting with "everyone".

3 / THE POLITICS OF AUDIBILITY

It had been true twilight when Ramona and I stepped outside the back door of her basement level apartment in Washington DC. Ramona works for Fighting Disease is Fighting Poverty (FDFP), and graciously hosted me for an interview about her communication endeavors. Halfway through my fieldwork, I began requesting interviews from communication directors in SMOs across a range of social issues to check my observational data from one specific movement group against the accounts of movement communicators working on non-LGBT issues. FDFP is an advocacy organization with the tagline, "The power to end poverty." Through growing public opinion, developing political will, and directing financial resources to combat health disparities that disproportionately affect the poor, FDFP aims to "end extreme poverty by the year 2030", a goal it shares with the World Bank. As a communications manager, Ramona coordinates community stakeholders and generates publicity for FDFP.

When twilight transitioned to night, Ramona lit a citronella candle. Sanguine wisps of grey smoke curl around my audio recorder, placed between us for our interview about Ramona's publicity efforts for antipoverty campaigns. Ramona tells me, "So we have these giant puppets of TB and HIV, they're giant puppets. And they walk around."

I ask her, "Well, like worn by people?"

"Do you want to see it? I think you have to see it, to know what it looks like." Ramona palms her smartphone, swiping her thumb across its screen, tapping it to access a digital folder of photos, and excitedly tells me about the media campaign FDFP orchestrated to raise awareness of the link between tuberculosis and poverty. Bringing up the photos, Ramona gushes, "They are like the best communications thing we've ever done."

When I ask her why, she says emphatically: "Because nothing has gotten us more attention than these like, mascots."

In this chapter, I investigate how the new media landscape and its communicative personalism structure broad assumptions that movement actors make about how to catch public attention. Traces of the communicative fiber I uncovered at LAN could be found in the talk of issue communicators across the movement arena. I wondered if the communicative personalism I had begun documenting was special to LAN, and especially its resolution in popular cultural appeals, like the PSA campaign posters I saw of Jane Lynch and Laurence Fishburne, two high profile celebrities. I had heard at grassroots meetings suggestions that, among many strategies, potential adherents to LAN begin with television watching. I began wondering about a dialectic of media as totalizing whole and media as personal use. What was the relationship between the media landscape and a movement's communicative mobilization for public consideration? There were assumptions made by movement actors, not just at LAN but across my interviews, about attention, best seen in talk about reach and amplification, which I conceptualize as wide public engagement and raising a movement message to a height of awareness.

Underlying assumptions they held were drawn from and resembled a media culture that mixes information and entertainment, shaping a certain aspect of the work movement actors do to realize communicative mobilization, one focused on mobilizing celebrities.

In "Filtering Dissent: Social Media and Land Struggles in Brazil", anthropologists Rodrigo Ochigame and James Holston (2016) usefully argue that computer filters are increasingly powerful determinants of attention to public discourse, and the computer code behind the filters often work against relatively unknown movement actors. As they argue, "An algorithm that controls what information rises to the top and what gets suppressed is a kind of gatekeeper that manages the flow of data (85)." Despite ubiquitous celebrations of the internet's potential to democratize public opinion, the "implications for euphoric predictions about political mobilization in a new information age—exemplified by talk of 'Facebook revolutions' in the Arab world—have yet to be explored (85)." In their investigation, Ochigame and Holston focus on the combination of digital and *social* structures against, and the strategies available to, an SMO's pursuit of online attention.

Ochigame and Holston (2016) demonstrate that filter logics create a politics of audibility. By politics of audibility, they mean the suppression or non-circulation of social movement messages in online communications. Politics of audibility shape the chances of movements being heard and set into motion strategies to mobilize a type of communication that can rise to the top of online filters. They use the case study of how Brazilian land activists in the SMO Aty Guasu ("the great assembly") circumvented algorithmic obstacles by turning their profiles into advertisements for their movement, an

anchoring I analyzed above as a biographical proxy for movement awareness, by changing their personal names on Facebook to "Guarani-Kaiowá". The Guarani-Kaiowá are the indigenous Brazilians being displaced by private and public land grabs, and by changing their names, land activists raised consciousness of the social problem, making the issue relatively well-known in their social networks. With a specific strategy to game the politics of audibility, Aty Guasu activists made their SMO very popular for a short amount of time, before Facebook banned their naming practice, ostensibly enforcing its "real name" policy.

Asking what are the consequences of movement actors trafficking in *popularity* to manage political speech, Ochigame and Holston demonstrate how social media is governed by a bevy of elements: private corporations, computer scientists, computer codes, and especially user preferences. They focus on how popularity functions to silence vital kinds of political speech, if those speech acts are too serious, cognitively dissonant, or a direct threat to others's lifestyles. The pressure on movement actors to be popular and unthreatening works as "a kind of 'implicit censorship' … (106)." A politics of audibility, then, is about the ability of social movement communications to circulate. In today's filtering logics, movements face a considerable amount of suppression simply through a non-circulation of their chances of being heard. Key to a politics of audibility is its determining of specific types of practices for generating publicity.

I lean heavily on the idea of the politics of audibility with more attention to the assumptions and outcomes of work done *offline* to mobilize online, and elsewhere. Ochigame and Holston rightly note that TV and print coverage often censor "the range of

views available" (96), but it's puzzling to me that despite their focus on American digital corporations, they do not address the broader culture of personalization that informs the cultural practices behind both television and computer development, programming, and reception, a cultural history I lay out in the next chapter. I am unconvinced by Ochigame and Holston's dismissal of personalization, which they claim "is neither necessary nor sufficient to limit the suppression of diverse viewpoints" (96). I am especially interested here to articulate how media cultures shape the assumptions and practices made by some movement actors about what gets attention, cataloguing their strategies that can increase chances of being heard, and examining how that is shaped by a logic of popularity. Popularity might seem the opposite of personalization, but in the US context there is a safe assumption that despite notions of unique individuality, popular culture continues to dominate mass attention, especially seen in music culture (Hanrahan 2016). In fact, algorithms of personalization paradoxically create highly visible content by how many clicks they get. Below I will make the case that some of the movement strategies to popularize SMO claims by placing them in fun, imagistic, and relatively safe forms in the politics of audibility is shaped by the ubiquity of popular cultural forms of information packaged entertainingly.

Above, the ethnographic scene with Ramona nicely exemplifies a common answer about what would break through to potential sympathizers in a new media era. The communication directors I interviewed lamented a society full of fractured sources of information, constant flows of images, and dwindling reservoirs of attention. Tim from

LAN shows this best, though he was clear his opinion that smart phones are "dumb platforms" was not that of the organization at large:

> What's most on the forefront for me, and for all of us in the organization, is, indeed, their digital, their digital platforms, right? So I'm sitting here with my cell phone, my smart phone, and my tablet, I just left my office where my desktop was, and then what's, and then all those platforms, and the platforms that people are accessing information, younger and younger, and more and more people are accessing a wide range of them. And I think this, the dumbest platform is the smart phone. The dumbest, because the information has to be so concise.

Like Tim, other movement actors soberly confronted practical realities shaped by the ubiquity of mobile communications, yet remained hopeful about harnessing self-publishing tools and the unprecedented technologies and resources for controlling their messages and campaigns for people's awareness. The pressing issue is what to do about getting attention.

The irony of viruses "going viral" in Ramona's account of the publicity made with FDFP's giant puppets of HIV and tuberculosis is not simply the performative and digital-circulatory potential of giant colorful puppets in the shape of diseases that interests me here. My observations and experiences at LAN were the backdrop of how I heard Ramona, and it wasn't hard for me to imagine the everyday practices at FDFP planning for publicity with the puppets. Ramona explains:

> **Ramona:** So [the puppets] first rolled out at AIDS 2012 and then we used them again at AIDS 2014 in Australia, and that's when we did the #DeadlyDuo campaign, which was basically just people taking photos with them and tweeting them with the hashtag Deadly Duo. *Because TB is the leading killer of people with HIV, but nobody in the HIV community ever talks about TB* (my emphasis), so it's a way of getting people to acknowledge that TB and HIV always go together. And then they tweet about it and share it.
>
> **JL:** Whose idea was it to put those puppets together?
>
> **Ramona:** It was my coworker Mel. And we all thought she was insane. Totally insane. We were like, you want to do what? She was like, if we just got people in giant costumes, and if they just walked around, everyone would see them. And we were like, (skeptically) what?

JL: Why?

Ramona: I don't know, I just couldn't picture it. I didn't get it. And Mandy's one of those people who always brainstorms all the ideas. I was just like, oh, I don't know. Then my boss was like, if you say you can do this, I see something in this. We will give you money to do this.

Something deeper can be seen in how antipoverty advocates listen to each other and remain open to their ideas. Assumptions about attention are subterranean, flowing just beneath the surface of a movement organization's practices. FDFP actors imagined that most discussions among anti-poverty activists, not to mention the public at large, ignore a core claim to which FDFP would attend ("Nobody in the HIV community ever talks about TB"). One hidden assumption about awareness is that connecting poverty to tuberculosis might grow empathy and increase the likelihood that antipoverty efforts would focus on eradicating a specific disease that affects poorer communities. These are serious and complicated issues. But Ramona's story also reveals an unspoken assumption that starting a conversation about the interrelationships between poverty, tuberculosis, and HIV is neither easy nor fun, so the unseen power of an image of tall colorful puppets of the HIV and TB viruses lies in their accessibility. Accompanied by the slogan "Deadly Duo," the puppets quickly and entertainingly advance FDFP's core claim that HIV and TB are correlated. At first blush the idea of two roving puppets is silly. However, something else operates beneath the surface of success stories about attention. Though seemingly contrary to the seriousness of the issue of poverty, the puppets make bare the more serious issues of movement expectations and assumptions of how people want to see and hear.

Infotainment and Public Attention

Media cultures do not figure in Ochigame and Holston's idea of a politics of audibility, but the evolution from basic television to cable television was one of many cultural phenomena enabling the ubiquity of personal computers, a precondition for a politics of audibility. Such a proliferation has a duplicitous effect of opening pathways for movement actors but simultaneously functioning as a narrowing of modes of and strategies for attention. Since there are so many cable channels, internet websites, and social media platforms, the expansion of the new media ecosytem's horizons generates a lot of noise that is difficult to parse out. Online media constitute just one point in a broader media landscape. Cable television and the internet have in common not only a logic of choice amid a plethora of options, but to many critics they share a style of blending information with entertainment, known as "infotainment". Such a social history has its origins in the 1980s, when free-market journalism began creating a situation where "most of the public watches nothing but the softest form of 'infotainement'" (Hallin 1990), continuing through today, when social struggles over the political economy of the internet (Dahlberg 2011) include proliferation of entertainment websites "that borrow the aura of news" (Hallin 1990), augmenting the cable news fracas.

In fact, the sensibilities of choice and expectations of finding online content that matches personal desire were conditioned by a media culture predating the internet, especially during the ascendency and cultural dominance of cable television (see chapter four). Beginning in the 1970s, media's restructuring either responded to or exacerbated a cultural trend based in the assumption that people seek personal satisfaction in their everyday lives, by seeking out only that information or entertainment that they wanted.

When it became clear that large numbers of people watched nightly news on television, attempts to capitalize public programming pressured journalists to soften their reporting in order to maximize revenues from advertising firms, affecting how a movement-media relationship shaped televisual expectations of infotainment—wild spectacles with colorful images and attention grabbing displays. For movement actors before the internet era, infotainment had a direct influence on how activists thought about getting public attention.

It should be no surprise, then, when Tori, a food activists for DC Fresh Food (DCFF), an outfit modeled much like Russel's mobile market program, evokes infotainment structure in her talk about the changing media landscape from news to cable, and on to mobile internet:

> **Tori:** People are going to spend three or four seconds, scrolling through, and if you want them to stop, that image has to be simple, and it has to immediately share something … I grew up in traditional journalism, and it's a very different relationship that the users of digital media have … in print stories, the most important one here, the least important one here, a great picture here, and so that it's above the fold and then you can see it and someone will want to buy it … And you just don't have that anymore.

In Tori's answer, there is an implied understanding of the fast, immediate and kinetic structure of digital media and their implications for her strategies for reach. Tori had worked as a journalist before moving into advocacy, and she was able to juxtapose old and new media structure. Later in her answer, Tori places internet media in historical context, linking it to cable television and its "millions of channels". Tori's lament is no mere nostalgia. It places digital media in a historical context that links cable media and digital media and points to both as structural elements of a new media landscape that shapes her work.

In answering what audiences would pay attention to, all of my respondents were in agreement with Tori, making astute observations of an overall structure to digital infotainment: exponential ("exploded to the nth degree"), hyper ("scrolling" for "three-to-four seconds"), imagistic, and immediate. Interviewees called the internet "exponential" to contrast their difficulties against a romanticized media past, when only a few basic channels broadcast the news, to yearn even for cable news and its hundreds of channels, because to them the sources of online attention seemed to grow alarmingly high on a daily basis. Exponentialism relates to speed, shaping an assumption that someone would only look at a piece of communication for fractions of a minute. Since time was of the essence, hooks needed to be arresting and effective at the *very* moment someone was looking at it.

Some of these elements echo a structure of older movement-media relationships (topicality and potentially controversial) and perceptions of what holds public attention (local angles, concise, factoids), reminding us to join a chorus of sociologists asking what's so "new" about new media (See table 1).

The newness of these findings vis-à-vis literature on social movements and media would rightly be questioned – so what assumptions about attention are structured to be imagistic, attractive and terse? That is not new. Sociology of news reveals much of the same about capitalistic television news programs, and literature on the movement-media relationship shows that movement actors have been savvy to media structure and expectations since the mid-twentieth century, working to meet those expectations for a chance at attracting media attention to their movement's issues and claims (Baker 1994;

Bennett 2007; Entman 1989; Fishman 1980; Gans 1979; Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993; Gitlin 1978, 1980; Lester 1980; Schudson 1978, 2000; Sobieraj 2011; Tuchman 1978). It is no surprise that is being reflected here.

Table 1 Infotainment Structures Assumptions About Attention

What garners attention

Local angles	Concise & digestible/palatable	Topicality
A video	Something short	Attractive/interesting
"Comfort food": digestible sound bites, immediately gratifying	"Steady intellectual diet of Cheetos": superficial, noninformative	Potentially controversial
Pretty farm pictures	A factoid or a funny	More visual, less verbiage
Something visual that pops	Pictures of children	Fear factor
Shared values	A cool graphic	Interactional & conversational

What resists attention

Not visual	Wordy	Serious
Equal rights talk/legal issues	Isn't timely	Unemotional
Isn't colloquial	"Wonky" difficult things	

What I emphasize is how in the past, activists copied media expectations of and assumptions about audience attention *because journalists were gatekeepers* of the technologies, distribution channels, and cultural practices of communication. It was a source of frustration to activists that journalists relied on established institutional channels, the journalist "beat", by sourcing from a police department's communications office, rather than regularly reporting on social movement activity. To non-mainstream actors, civil society would be better with a "social movement beat". With the right digital tools, resources and planning, SMO actors have realized they might today make the beat themselves.

I only mean to emphasize that with digital tools to cover their choice issues and claims, movement actors begin to think organizationally about how to do communicative mobilization. They begin assuming for themselves some of the role of news media actors. Take LAN for example, where I conducted fieldwork. Like many organizational actors aware of the changed media landscape, including our own American Sociological Association, where I served on the digital media and public engagement task force from 2014-2015, the staff of LAN is in the process of updating digital technologies, social media profiles and messaging strategies with the expectation of ubiquitous mobile digital platforms. While LAN's executive director Ronald might personally think "the dumbest platform is the smart phone" because "the information has to be so concise", LAN as an institution developed the diametric position. LAN engaged in a six-figure investment to revamp their communicative capacities to cater to mobile platforms, because—as I argue in this dissertation—despite some structural limits to mobile technologies, digital technology and social media represent a potentially revolutionary force that can deepen engagement with a social movement organization, provide full and nuanced context and information, and garner attention in a way that advances a movement's visibility, or audibility in the language of this chapter.

Further, expectations of ubiquitous mobile digital platforms, distribution points in the structure of infotainment, shape specific communicative strategies movement actors make when they go about considering the attention of their audiences and how to capture it:

> **Mike:** I mean, each platform is very, very different, it's just a feature of social media, I think that's why various platforms exist in the first place, is to get genetically branded …

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So you know um, Twitter is an audience whose attention is um, a hundred forty characters at a time, it's a constant stream of information of looking for the most up to date news and information … Facebook is a place of content, especially video and graphics. A lot of visual stuff happening. Tumbler is a platform that has younger audiences … Younger audiences are typically more supportive of LGBT people … words like queer for instance are a lot more prevalent among younger generations than older generations. And so we have to keep all of those various audiences … that platform caters to in mind when communicating through those platforms. I'm exhausted just talking about it (chuckles).

The collapsing of Twitter and audience—the platform is the audience replaces the saying "the medium is the message"—is some evidence that social media fractures the public conversation because social media platforms are themselves segmented (with Bourdieu, social media as fractured and fracturing). It is suggestive of a need for SMO actors to think about how to shape communication very specifically, from mass marketing to segmental marketing, and uniquely for each piece "to get genetically branded". All of which suggests some evidence of how the platforms of personalization relate to how movement actors discover for themselves the problems of reader expectations and attention, problems familiar to any newsroom.

This newer work of communicative mobilization occurs because movement actors may not need news media exclusively to cover them, meaning movement sympathizers can no longer lament that news media do not cover their issues. Movement actors have the tools and do make available loads of video revealing injustice, researched information, watchdog reports, policy suggestions and calls to action. Movement workers struggle in the personalizing nature of digital materials by operationalizing the logic of infotaining media in pursuit of critical, nuanced information for narrow audiences (what Ronald below likens to "pipelining into a deep dive"). If they can only focus enough

attention (what Ronald means by "pipelining"), the issues are covered well. These strategies and tools enable a "deeper dive" for potential sympathizers:

> **Ronald:** I can sleep at night knowing that when you put it all together, we're telling a truth, or a set of truths, that are real. That, so some of them, in the same way that we're using, um, Facebook, Instagram, and some other performances to focus on certain issues, and certain people that won't ever go to our website. We have to target our messaging, it's not to say that, that's the only thing that is, that is real. It's to say this is, it's a pipeline. And our hope is that we have enough information and content there that they don't have to, but maybe they will want to do a deeper dive. And we have other resources for the deeper dive.

There is much to analyze in this. Ronald invokes the terms "a set of truths" and "pipeline" and "deeper dive" to indicate two things uneasily reconcilable. Consider that, amidst President Trump's anxious bruhaha over comparisons of his inauguration crowd to President Obama's record crowds in 2008, Trump's communications director, Kellyanne Conway, infamously used the phrase "alternative facts" to argue against photographic evidence and insist falsely that Trump's audience was larger than Obama's. Journalists became irate by the utter falsehood of such a claim in the face of mounting evidence otherwise, but I heard in Conway's appeal echoes of Ronald saying LAN tried to inform allies of "a set of truths" about LGBT issues. The phrase seems to suggest that there is no one truth. Conway and Ronald further echo each other's point about the potential manipulation of facts and the difficulty in facing criticism.

In our interview, Ronald was concerned that breaking up LAN's claims into itty pieces for online dissemination would be unjust to a nuanced discussion of LGBT inequality. Later in our discussion, he would tell me about a 1990s biopic that heavily edited the character of a young gay man, whom he knew to be more complex, a drug user who self-medicated a depression caused by his family's rejection. The movie's message,

instead, focused on his mom, who after her son's suicide became an LGBT ally. Compared to Conway, who seemed to intentionally broker in untruth, Ronald was musing about the effects of inaccurate information on public discussion about the complex realities around social problems, yet also emphasized that if you put all of LAN's communications together, there is nuance and complexion—an ultimately true story of the connections among the full range of issues facing the LGBT community. A "deeper dive" symbolizes what we saw in the Googlezon—the ability for the internet to deliver a rich and nuanced account of news and information, an awesome opportunity for anyone to become immersed in and learn more deeply and fully about a social movement. To Ronald, the movie functioned like any piece of social media communication. It might present some misinformation, but smaller pieces, inevitably specious in their narrowness, were necessary points of a delivery system. Though any decontextualized bit of information might be presented as an "alternative fact", Conway's noxious phrase for presenting unwarranted claims, like television audiences replace inauguration attendees, Ronald is committed to a singular truth, even if broken up into pieces of movement information that are laid out as bread crumbs to a movement. Each could function as a "pipeline" across the vast media ecosystem, that is, each piece generates a way to deliver potential allies to the movement's fuller communications.

Theoretically, SMO actors can also circumvent journalistic institutions and their norms of reportage by staging attention-grabbing spectacles for self-publication, much in the way Trump monopolized media cycles with outlandish social media posts. Consider this example. In October 2016, I was walking to my DC apartment on an unusually

balmy day when traffic began to snarl on 14th Street. A circle of Black Lives Matter protestors had blocked the U Street intersection, and I noticed that at least two camera operators with professional equipment were included in the contingency. The disruption drew out municipal workers from their buses, as well as a sizable police presence, all were being self-recorded by BLM's camera crew and onlookers with video recorders included in their smartphones. I saw no journalists, but the protestors would not need to return home, wait, and watch to see if they received local news coverage. They put it on social media themselves.

In executing this potentially revolutionary communicative mobilization, however, SMO actors continue to share well-known assumptions and strategies found in older social movements about how to vie for coverage. However, new media create possibilities of fusing the pugilism of a protest event with a mere online graphic, made more controversial by the social media comments. During my fieldwork at LAN, for example, my supervisor Terri shared with me an online spectacle of a playfully controversial photo of a left-handed gay man that received extraordinary attention:

> I posted, it's a very simple image. Um, and the caption on it is, "Being gay is like being left-handed. Some people are. Some people aren't. We don't know why. And it's all okay." That was generally the theme … that's like, a very light-hearted theme, and it's making a comparison. *This thing*, people were so, like some people were, that's awesome! And then we had the people like saying, are you saying that I'm gay because I'm left-handed? Literally. It was so complicated, so controversial, I was shocked. I had to monitor, I still have to monitor that thread because people are so abusive and awful on it … I think our opposition (pauses for a beat), tends to be less progressive, oh … this is going to make me sound so awful, I'm glad you're not going to use my name on this thing … somewhat less educated, more conservative, and tend to, or sometimes miss the nuance of the message. So they've clearly missed the nuance of what the suggestion was here. Which was essentially, some people are gay, and some people aren't. And it really doesn't matter. You know, kind of like when people are left-handed? Some people aren't.

In this example, Terri is laying out the underlying logic that leads Ramona to call her puppets "the best communication things we ever did": a quick piece of imagistic online media that nonetheless courts controversy and nuance. Though a small piece of LAN's constant outpouring of communication, the image conveyed its core claim that LGBT people are normal human beings, albeit with different, naturally occurring genders and sexualities. As Ramona's puppets did, the photo and caption achieved inordinate attention. This publicity work at getting attention takes place in offline spaces (more on that below), for example staging and recording puppets to source graphics (themselves needing to be designed) that attract intensive social media attention. Though Terri's photo and Ramona's puppets pale in imagined comparison to the attention possible with celebrity partners.

Mobilizing Celebrities

Toward the end of my fieldwork at LAN, I was invited to assist Terri at an awards ceremony for celebrity champions of LGBT ally causes, where I helped set up a makeshift red carpet, stage celebrities, do event management tasks, and make a last-minute video-recording of the speeches. I took jottings in between work tasks, and from these jottings generated the following fieldnote on LAN's interaction with celebrity champions:

Ahead of me, an Asian man, maybe in his twenties, points a black camera toward the president of an elite hotel corporation in a black tuxedo, beaming a practiced high-wattage smile beside an older woman with curly white hair and a blue and purple blouse.

They stand on red carpet as camera flashes ephemerally illuminate brightly colored logos printed on the white canvas above them. The cursive red of "Johnson & Johnson" reads just off of the president's right shoulder. A maroon square with the yellow lettering of "Wells Fargo" is fixed on the screen to the left of the older woman's arm. Above their heads is LAN's magenta and butter yellow logo. Beside it says, "The Let's Get Equality Gala." The red carpet and photoshoot are featured experiences for corporate executives and celebrities who are attending the awards and fundraising gala for LAN's Let's Get Equality campaign.

I motion for Peter to follow the red velvet rope and take his turn on the runway. Peter is the vice president of a major accounting corporation whom I was tasked to accompany as a VIP, bringing him from the hotel lobby of the New York Marriot Marquis to the gala reception and ensuring his entrance by red carpet and photoshoot. The red carpet runs about fifty meters, starting at the white screen and paralleling the room. Raul and Elliot, two full-time employees at LAN, are smoothing out and tamping down the end of the red carpet.

Ronald, LAN's executive director, hovers beside the cameraman until VIPs have had an opportunity to be photographed before stepping forward, smiling brightly, and shaking hands. I have come to understand that Ronald sees as part of his job the need to maintain a semblance of intimacy with LAN's corporate partners, thanking them for being here. Now Ronald is subtly guiding Peter by the arm to face the cameraman again for a photo with Ronald and his movement organization's logo. After the photo, Ronald's

assistant cups his ear. Ronald nods, politely excuses himself to Peter, and briskly marches toward the gold-colored escalators to the hotel lobby.

In a landscape of actively constructed digital media, a land full of movement actors with self-publication tools and flattened space between them and the public, forming communications in fun and entertaining ways is not enough. The seeming boundlessness and limitlessness of digital media intoxicate and intimidate with the realization of a newer kind of obstacle. How does one get heard without journalists as necessary gatekeepers? We saw above how politics of audibility shape solutions to this problem, and the usefulness of Ramona's puppets related to their elected affinity with expectations that difficult information be delivered in the form of infotainment.

In my fieldwork at LAN and across interviews with movement communicators across progressive issues, the desire for and work at obtaining "celebrity champions" was another potential solution to cut through the noise and reach as many people as possible. Getting celebrity allies was only a small piece of the puzzle, and I want to be clear that it did not dominate communications work. But it came up enough and with enough enthusiasm that it seemed to function in an important way that speaks to the politics of audibility caused by a fractured media landscape. For example, I asked Ramona's colleague Brenna, the social media director for FDFP, about whether she ever partnered with media other than journalists:

> **JL**: TV or movie [**Brenna**: TV…?], do you work with TV or movie people?
>
> **Brenna**: No, oh my goodness, what we wouldn't give to have TV or movie people be interested! We actually have had a couple of…

> **JL**: Now would you have said that if I hadn't asked the question, or is that something you talk about internally [**Brenna**: I think it's], what you wouldn't give….?
>
> **Brenna**: I mean, I say that, because I'm interested in that, I don't know if… I mean, no. I think anyone in communications will say that. They would say like, of course. If we publicize on whatever medium you want, like give it to me. That kind of exposure's amazing. Um, but I think we're a ways off from that. We have incredible relationships with some kind of quasi-celebrities and some real celebrities. But we're not quite to the point of being ready to ask something like that, how to get them really involved and to be champions.

Getting celebrities to be "champions for change" is part of a communication director's work for attention, and by extension a part of movement communicative mobilization in a politics of audibility. Ochigame and Holston (2016) argue that well-funded organizations are advantaged over smaller groups, especially grassroots groups, trying to make progressive change, with the resources to pay for social media sites to feature their work or attract (and compensate) the kind of celebrity partnerships that disproportionately garner attention online. It might be that the groups I accessed, located in DC, were a unique subset of movement groups in the overall arena, with some amount of resources to resemble corporations (Dauvergne and LeBaron 2014). Those resources variably supported a range of tasks for communications directors trying to develop celebrity champions.

Brenna further reflects in the craftsmanship of getting celebrities, noting that her organization is "not to the point of being ready to ask something like that, how to get them really involved and to be champions". Tori of FOB "certainly tried to get" Michelle Obama, Oprah Winfrey and Gwyneth Paltrow, because "they amplify your voice", "that increases your reach", "you never know who's going to get a nibble from something

that's out there". In the next section, I address the broader shape and goals of a movement communicative mobilization's "reach and amplification". Ramona of FDFP "assembled proposals" for Whoopi Goldberg "with a menu of options of ways she could engage with us, from like the very small to the very big". Even work for celebrity partners was informed by the communicative personalism of "meet them where they're at"; Ramona and FDFP were eager to put Whoopi Goldberg at ease, would accept whatever a celebrity was willing to give.

Below, I will detail how that work is concerted effort at some remove from celebrity partners—planning ahead of time, trafficking in unspoken assumptions, and securing legal agreements. But for now, I return to the Let's Get Equality gala, because cultural imaging also has to do with subtle gestures to move celebrities into place, a deft massaging of the face-to-face order to produce the kinds of cultural images I saw on my first day at LAN, the posters of celebrity-champions smiling beneath LAN's logo.

Ronald returns with Jill Soloway, an Emmy-nominated Hollywood writer and director. She wrote and directed a television show about how she and her family experienced her father's coming out as transgender. It was purchased and digitally distributed by Amazon, and tonight LAN is awarding her for being a celebrity ally, for transforming her personal life into the honest portrayals of LGBT struggle and acceptance featured on her show. Jill is wearing black sequin pants over black clogs, flanked by Ronald, slightly shorter in a black suit and tie. Ronald motions to the cameraman, and they have their photo taken.

I catch Ronald say to Jill Soloway, "Jill, I want to introduce you to Betty." It's only now that I realize Ellen DeGeneres' mom is at the gala! Betty DeGeneres was the older woman with curly white hair in a blue and purple blouse. Jill is pleased to meet her, and Ronald goes on to warmly relay how much support Betty has lent over the years, and how pivotal she has been to the LGBT ally movement. Jill and Betty chat, while Ronald, with his right arm gently at Jill's elbow, subtly motions to the Asian cameraman. Standing before the white screen at a different angle, the cursive red of "Johnson & Johnson" now reads off of their left shoulders. From here you can see the purple shadow-lettering brand logo of the accounting corporation on their right, "KPMG". Above Megan and Betty's heads are LAN's gold and magenta logo, still complemented in matching yellow and green, "The Let's Get Equality Gala."

Here a reader may hesitate at the focus on celebrities, wondering about its significance. There is a growing subfield on the sociology of celebrity (Turner 2010), and, closer to my analysis, workers and thinkers in the international development field have begun to note and document the presence of celebrity advocacy in world affairs. Anthropologist Dan Brockington (2014) best acknowledges, and answers, the potential resistance to celebrity studies:

> The study of celebrity is not a shallow or trivial exercise. Critics may bemoan the intellectual content of much celebrity news, but that does not make it off-limits to the academe – quite the opposite. If it is vacuous, then we need to explain its popularity and success. Rubbish may be rubbish, but the study of rubbish is scholarship (88).

Brockington goes on to demonstrate a "charity-celebrity-corporate complex" (90), arguing that such a complex is produced by an interaction between development organizations and celebrity industries. He documents the day-to-day work of issue

liaisons, whom I am calling issue communicators, showing how specific practices are made available to produce and construct celebrity advocacy. I draw some from his work here, though my scope goes beyond the political economy of celebrity advocates.

Further, sociology of celebrity endeavors to answer why individuals invest their time, energy, and resources into "the celebrity system" (Breese 2010:340). The scholarship offers three major explanations. The first is Marxist. Western capitalism empties individual life of any consistent meaning, leaving behind a hollow alienation that is filled by celebrities as commodities with which we vicariously live (Morin 2005 [1972]; Rojek 2001). The second answer is psychological. In highly transitory and mobile societies, we have less in common with our family and neighbors than with mass mediated stories and characters and the celebrities who play them. Social psychologists call these anonymously intimate connections "para-social interactions" (Rojek 2001:52; Turner 2004:23-4). Lastly, celebrities function quasi-religiously as symbols of our shared bonds across a vast distribution of labor (Alexander 2008; 2010; Breese 2010). The third answer, more clearly sociological, is the one I tack to closely, emphasizing what classic sociologist Émile Durkheim ([1912] 1995) showed to be the connection between totems and collective morality.

Cultural sociologists of celebrity argue that "celebrities are, in fact, among the most powerful icons of our times. Whether we characterize these times as modern or primitive, totem-like material symbols continue to structure our culture and economy today" (Alexander 2010:324). However, less attention is given to how the forces on our most collective attention, those that build up the power of celebrity, are encouraged,

enabled, and sometimes demanded even as mass media decline. They shed less insight into the inputs, processes, pressures, and consequences—especially, of course, the consequences of (and to) attention—that might better explain the production and *use* of celebrity, though here I don't mean use in either of the ways intended by Marxists or social psychologists. Allow me to explain.

Consider how Yale sociologist Elizabeth Breese (2010:337) argues, "Celebrities are commodities to be sure, but previous scholars have largely failed to explore the ways in which celebrities are also symbols. Celebrities are a locus of meaning-making in the contemporary USA." She demonstrates, drawing from the case of Jamie Lyn Spears spurring a national conversation about teen pregnancy, that celebrities "are also symbols by which we narrate, negotiate, and interpret our collective experience and establish moral boundaries" (352). However, as an adherent to the "strong program" in cultural sociology, Breese's puzzle of how Spears's teen pregnancy got non-fans to talk gets resolved by assuming that social drams unfold *autonomously*, instead of in a mix of unmediated lifeworld concerns, interactional constructions of mediated situations, and the consequences of a particular social structure of attention to the public sphere.

Celebrity, after all, *is* mediated attention, as we intuit from the saying that celebrities are famous for being well-known. And this attention is always strategic. As difficult as it may be for many of us to empathize with celebrities, they are people who are used instrumentally. C. Wright Mills (1956:91) rightly argued, if a bit harshly, "The professional celebrities of the mass media are without power of any stable sort and are in fact ephemeral figures among those we celebrate." These "highly paid employees of

organizational specializing in public entertainment…are manufactured by the mass media, notably those in the entertainment business, which derives its income largely from promoting and selling 'star' identities" (Collins 2004:266, 279). We should not then be surprised, though we often envy their fortunes and are suspicious of their gossip, when celebrities join or are recruited into activism. Movement communicators and celebrities alike wish to lend their disproportionate attentional status to social issues, knowing full well that they "are the only human beings today who can serve as sacred objects, emblems of the collective consciousness of any considerable part of society" (Collins 2004:280). Only on the surface are activists and celebrities strange bedfellows. Each deeply aware of the role of celebrity in the political economy of attention, and especially its structuring of public dialogue, they are actually natural allies.

Though some might deride the notion of celebrities as "champions for change", leveraging celebrity visibility in a new media landscape has been successful for both Occupy (Tom Morello of the rock group Rage Against the Machine) and Black Lives Matter (the filmmaker Quinten Tarantino, academic and popular author Cornel West, among many others). For example, the NBA became a crucial site of movement visibility for BLM in large part because Lebron James—needless to say, one of the most recognized celebrities on the planet—has been one of BLM's most outspoken supporters. He has organized boycotts of mandatory warm-up suits, leading teammates in shows of solidarity with BLM. After Travon Martin's murder, for example, James and the Miami Heat wore black hoodies like the one worn by Martin on the night he was killed by a white vigilante. Arguably, Colin Kaepernick, the quarterback of the San Francisco 49ers,

singlehandedly infused the 2016 presidential campaign coverage with BLM topics, as well as reactionary anger at celebrity activism.

We are overwhelmed daily with millions of bits of infotainment, yet celebrities still garner a disproportionate amount of attention to their online presence. They leverage offline popularity into very high numbers of online followers and overwhelmingly dominate digital media. For movement communicators, this reality is revealed in language like "amplify" and "reach", a language analyzed in the next section. But generating celebrity-based publicity takes careful, and oftentimes mysterious work, and it is highly unpredictable, as Ramona reveals:

> **JL**: What was that like? How did you, how do you follow up with a celebrity?
>
> **Ramona**: Yea, that's a great question. We really have like, no internal knowledge of how to do that. Huge organizations like the One campaign, they just know how to do that sort of stuff. Um, we wrote a proposal for her, of like, a menu of options of ways she could engage with us, from the very small to the very big. There were a couple challenges. One was that Whoopi Goldberg does not like to fly. Apparently she takes trains everywhere. So that was one thing. But eventually it just got kyboshed because she, when we dug into it more, she had said and done a lot of pro-smoking things. (Lowers voice) And the Consortium for Global Peace was really against it.

I am not suggesting that these communication actors are solely focused on leveraging celebrities for mere attention. These actors see "honoring someone who is famous" as media advocacy. They are staging opportunities for visuals and issue-specific statements to potentially reach "literally billions of potential readers and viewers". Again, these elements are part of their communicative fiber, revealed in the language they use about their work and goals. In my internship, Terri prepped me to prepare for communicative mobilization by checking what press celebrities "will do and won't do" and "having an approved photo, or an approved bio, getting a quote from them about

getting the award". Tellingly, it is especially vital to gain permission to use these materials online.

The work of mobilizing celebrities involves actively constructing mediatized situations for digital circulation in ways that amplify traditional protest activity. This is demonstrated in the following excerpt, but some background is needed first. A few weeks before LAN's Let's Get Equality gala, Indiana had passed a law called the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. The law's intent was to provide a legal defense for individuals who felt their religious practices were being overly burdened by secular culture. Critics argued that the law would offer exemptions to small business owners from participating in federally legalized same-sex marriages, a thinly veiled legal discrimination of LGBT people. If an Indianan gay couple sought to contract a bakery for their wedding, for example, the owners could potentially refuse on religious grounds. There were widely covered protests of the law in Indianapolis, and one had been organized by an LAN activist. In his acceptance speech at the gala, Peter, the CEO we met above, aligned himself, and by extension his company, with the protesters speaking out against the law. Terri had asked me to record Peter's speech, and we had serendipitously captured the moment and made it available on social media. Terri was ecstatic:

> **Terri (excited):** So a LAN ally in Indiana, when a religious freedom act was passed and it was, you know, pretty much anyone could discriminate against LGBT people anytime they wanted? She put out a call on Facebook and prepared for a rally of a hundred people, and three-thousand people showed up at their statehouse! And then you know, to have the CEO of a major hospitality corporation talk about it from the stage for our annual awards! After she did that and the CEO referenced her? And I think at the time Peter didn't know she was an LAN advocate, it wasn't until after that he found that out. That was a major moment! And I don't think people realize just how big that was. You know, a major corporation with a Mormon owner. It was a big deal.

Who gets to be a celebrity is interesting here. LAN felt a corporate CEO was someone famous because of his potential to amplify and reach (see below) as well as for the impact of an unlikely ally. What made Peter's moment a "big deal" was not apparent to me at first. Peter worked for a corporation owned by a Mormon, and Mormonism is often publicly aligned with social conservatism. But LAN awarded the hotel chain for institutionalizing pro-LGBT policies, a practice that starkly contrasted the spirit of Indiana's religious freedom law. While Terri says, "Peter didn't know she was an LAN advocate," she had made certain that we were aware of the potential on-stage statement against Indiana's laws. She put me in position to record his speech, and later we augmented video and photos from LAN's Indiana protest with memes featuring the CEO and his quote about the "stupidity of excluding LGBT customers".

Traditional movement activists might be uncomfortable with the coziness between a corporation and a national movement organization, but for my purposes the puzzle is about the successfulness of a communicative mobilization that seemed to create celebrity status for a non-celebrity. Terri had insisted that I carefully videotape the acceptance speech, peppering her insistences with mentions that it could be a very big deal. At the same awards gala, Jill Solloway was honored for her activism, and she generously referenced LAN's work in her speech. It all seemed too neat. When I asked Mary about the staging of celebrity awards and whether we put words in awardees' mouths, she had this to say about "talking points":

> **Mary:** We will give more of a background of what we are and who we are, and the points that we are trying to hit in the show flow, and see what they'll do to work it in. I think, just going over the convention for example, our keynote speaker was Michelangelo Signorile … I spoke to him a few times about what our goals were for the convention, what messages we wanted to hit. But I didn't have like, veto approval or you know. He

told me then what his speech was going to be about, and he actually kind of heard everything I said. I think that if we had gotten to a place where he said this is going to be all about this, I would have an oh crap moment … but it doesn't seem to work that way.

JL: And what do you mean oh crap, like, oh …

Mary: Like if I had said, these are the ten things that I thought we wanted to hit on. And he was like, I am going to spend forty-five minutes talking about this. And it's not on any of those things, it would have been the disconnect moment. Or you know, you never know when someone (guffaws), what was her name? We honored (this celebrity) once. And she got up the whole time, and we had spoken about our mission, she got up the whole time and spoke about her own charity organization. She was at our awards banquet and she was plugging another group. Like, sometimes you just don't have control.

Staging mediatized situations took direction, strategizing, event-planning, setting up the red carpet, subtle gestures like Ronald positioning celebrities close to his organization's logo, and preparing visuals and videos for posting to social media. Despite Terri's feeling that Peter's moment was serendipitous, it seemed to me a logical product of sustained labor. Mary is here revealing another dimension to communicative work, one that grapples with the obvious fact that you could do everything in your control to put into place the right elements for celebrity publicity, but the one thing you do not control is what celebrities say in public.

Control here isn't about scripting everything awardees might say. Instead, there are casualized semi-formal conversations about the SMO's values and goals, and the continuity of messages becomes contingent on the vagaries of situational action. Listening matters—there is an expected communicative reciprocity ("he kind of heard everything I said"), and I would later learn that expectation was not totally innocent. Awardees were compensated for travel, accommodation, and other perks, and it was unspoken that the exchange was for lending their status to the event and its publicity. At LAN, we could count on a mix of financial incentive and listening strategies of celebrity

champions so that we might potentially generate publicity with the statements they make. Our expectations were grounded in control of our own communication and the fact that we were exchanging an award (not to mention travel and accommodations) for a staging opportunity for publicity. It does not always guarantee compliance. A "disconnect moment" would be enervating because so many subtle and overt resources go into such moments, and it could all be undone in minutes if someone fails to be on message or if cameras fail to capture pro-movement cultural imaging. Such high risks and disproportionate lack of control does not seem to justify these communicative efforts. There is something more to these mobilizations, since it does sometimes produce effective social media that might reach the millions of followers—meaningful in the age of quantification—of a corporation or an actress.

Reach and Amplification

Verna and I sit in an empty French bakery in Southeast DC. Verna doubles as the executive director and communications director of Farms on Buses (FoB), a DC non-profit that utilizes mobile markets for enacting local food change. Enveloped by scents of croissants, baguettes, and cupcakes, Verna tells me how, before entering the non-profit sector, she worked as a journalist for twenty years. About media partnerships, she says, "I would love to have celebrities. Like, Tom Colicchio can take something, take an issue and make it into a huge thing because he has like, five-hundred thousand followers. We certainly tried to get Oprah. We certainly tried to get the First Lady (Michelle Obama).

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We've tried to get Gwyneth Paltrow. Having that is just, is just gold because they amplify your voice."

"But so far," Verna concludes, "we haven't had any big celebrities. Who's that guy with the hair? Oh, Guy Ferrari. If he did something with us, it would be great."

When we first sat down, Verna had lamented the nonfactual, gossipy, and celebrity-driven era of digital media—what above I show to be the influence of infotainment and the sometimes-necessary work mobilizing celebrities. I comment here, "That's interesting, because you were in traditional journalism, and it sounded like you lament what's happening now with digital media. You called it Cheetos, right?

Verna agrees, "Mmhm."

I continue, "Intellectual Cheetos. And yet you say if Guy Ferrari did something with Farms on Buses it would be fantastic?"

Verna says, "Yea, there are two sides. There's one, as a human and as a former journalist, I'm sad that the quality in general has declined. It's not so much that the quality has declined, it's just that there is so much bad stuff out there now. It used to be that there were three or four places you could go, and there still are those three or four places, but there's also like five hundred crappy places that are pulling eyeballs away. So I think that's a detriment. The other problem we have…" Verna cuts herself off as her smartphone lights up, a digital prompt appearing on her screen, her eyeballs pulled away. She holds up a finger to me. Later, when I transcribe our interview, I will count three full beats before she looks up. I recount this to demonstrate how normal such abrupt

distractions have become, and its appearance in my research evinced to me that very fragmentation of attention through which Verna tried to reach the public.

After three beats, Verna continues seamlessly, "…the other problem that you have is that there are no editors, there are no fact checkers. When I was at the Associated Press, I covered the CIA and their intel. When I would write a story, I would get challenged on every single sentence by my desk, right? And there's nobody doing that (anymore). Thy don't even sit on it for an hour, so you have a lot of stuff that's going out that's unfactual and based on first reports. It's ridiculous."

I ask, "Yet you still find celebrity partners to be effective?"

Verna says, "Well, it's effective at reaching people. At getting to people so they know who you are and that you exist, which is the first battle. Then that's effective, right?"

The break in our discussion, coupled with the felt reality of the fractured collective conversation, the "five-hundred crappy places that are pulling eyeballs away", and the sense of decline of quality information, "there is so much bad stuff out there now", lays out well the stretched, distracted, noisy, difficult terrain of getting attention. In this terrain, "reach" and "amplify" mean something specific that resonates with themes I am addressing as a politics of audibility. Not all interview participants talked explicitly about "reach" and "amplification," but some certainly did, while others implied such a landscape. It's this landscape against which digital infotainment structures assumptions made about public attention, which I addressed above. And it makes celebrities a

conflicted and contradictory, a simultaneous social location and object to be mobilized for improving one's chances of getting attention.

The themes of "reach" and "amplification" are especially recurrent in how personalization, alongside infotainment, co-structures the work of movement communicative mobilization. I would ask interview participants to tell me who they thought their audience *was*, expecting they would talk about one or two niches. Far from it. Instead, it was common for movement actors to list many groups, ranging from the specific communities impacted by their social issues of interest to policymakers, journalists, funders, and the public at large. However, though not exactly personalization, respondents would talk about the need to *tailor* messages depending on to whom they wanted to communicate, the means through which they communicate, and the audience structure by platform. But that set up a conflict specifically about *reach*, which meant something other than carefully crafting a piece of communications for one audience or another.

For example, consider how Jeremy of Fresh Food Boston (FFB) talks about an "intimate story" approach that an organization might make clearer within a niche audience:

> **Jeremy:** Obviously, I think that digital media allows you to cast a really wide net in terms of your audience. And it allows you to just reach a very diverse audience. So we obviously are engaging across a broad range of communities. We are able to engage with policy makers, we're able to with funders, we're able to engage with individuals that have the resources to address the issues we think are problematic. Like I said, we are doing a lot of work on the ground. What we do is very intimate in all of our neighborhoods. We can take a lot of those intimate stories, we can take that narrative from the ground, and then use digital media to bring that narrative to influencers, to policy makers, to the people with resources, that are in a position to meaningfully shape the disparity. And we can *prove* that there are disparities too. So all at one time, we can take these really powerful narratives, and put them online. We can put them out there, and get them in font of people. So if there's a definite narrative out there that poor people

don't want to eat healthy, digital media is a really, really powerful way to say, well you know, that's not really the case. And here's why. And I think that gives us a chance to change the narrative. So I think, for all those reasons, a lot of the plights that are made in the face of food justice that allow us to amplify the good stuff that I think is happening or can happen, or where there's not enough of it happening. It allows us to just make that message more powerful.

Jeremy told me elsewhere that poor communities and communities of color are skeptical of farmer's markets, and especially Whole Foods. Jeremy and his colleagues are comfortable aligning with poorer communities against an upper-class that is oftentimes morally judgmental and sometimes pretentious about food. But Whole Foods is simultaneously a funder of some of FFB's programs and a powerful ally in their food activities; Jeremy sees Whole Foods as an important stakeholder that can really "shape the disparities" in food deserts, urban spaces that are economically disinvested with few grocery stores and even fewer nutrient-rich fruits and vegetables. But Jeremy could use social media to show his grassroots groups talking and behaving against the stereotype that poor people and black people don't like to eat healthy, and even further support a class- and race-based critique of the corporate culture around food issues, emblematic in the Whole Foods situation. Such a story can be fully told on FFB's self-publishing platforms. But FFB's social media also means connections to powerful groups and audiences unfamiliar with a critical discourse about class and food. So "reach" is more about how to spread stories across disparate audiences to change narratives and create investments, within a politics of audibility that in this case is also shaped by power and the politics of funding. Allow me to explain.

The point of how funding shapes communications requires developing. Corporations figure in Ochigame and Holston's (2016) argument as powerbrokers of data

gatekeepers because they enjoy mainstream status and can afford the resources to regularly rise to the top of online filters. Jeremy, like Russel in the previous chapter, notes that a company like Whole Foods also has the material resources to help combat health inequalities and eradicate food deserts. Whether amplifying the "good news" from those intimate moments in poorer and blacker neighborhoods is a censoring of class and race critiques of unequal distribution of money and food (it is) or a publicizing of antiracist examples that belie stereotypes about food behaviors (it's also that), reach is about how to get text and images to traverse across impersonal audiences, how to bring something of a superficial attention to the movement's issue that allows any audience to decode the message into their language. An intimate portrayal of an underclass black kid defying stereotypes looks to corporate representatives at Whole Foods like money well spent, constructing an image of Whole Foods as socially responsible. Everyone gets to feel good, and Whole Foods might give again.

Reach also means attempts to establish a connection to something bigger, from the personal to the broader public conversation. This can be macro-oriented in the sense Jeremy meant above ("We are able to engage with…individuals who have the resources to address the issues"), or it can be about the delivering the voice of niche groups to a broader audience. An example is in the following. Breanna deals centrally with digital media outreach at Ramona's organization (FDFP), introduced to us at the beginning of the chapter. In the following, "reach" is both about bridging across disparate groups and garnering public attention for a narrow group, its "day in the sun" so to speak:

> **Brenna:** So we've already tapped into a community that already cares about tuberculosis, which is a pretty obscure topic to be interested in. Not many organization are working on

tuberculosis, but yesterday the WHO (World Health Organization) released a report that tuberculosis and HIV are both ranking among the top killers (in poor communities). And we're like, no, they are not among the top killers. TB is a bigger killer, than HIV/AIDS. That is the fact that you need to walk away with. So Laura made a Venn diagram that shows this much bigger tuberculosis circle and a much smaller HIV/AIDS circle for the number of deaths (which circulated widely on FDFP's online channels). Since we were the only ones saying that, it's the same information, it's the same data, it's the same fact, and we were coming out strongly saying something different? I think that played really well. We have kind of curated this audience over time of all the people who care about tuberculosis, who are following (our online channels), that played really well. Then they are very engaged and it has a wider reach.

Compared to Jeremy's intimate moment of race and food, here Brenna's focused issue to their narrower group is that tuberculosis should get more attention because it is a higher cause of death in poor communities than HIV/AIDS. Brenna is talking about how her advocacy organization can link up their more narrowly "curated audience", the term Brenna uses for a narrow group of activists *from* and *to whom* FDFP communication directors *source* and *feed* antipoverty media, to global groups like the World Health Organization. What's interesting here is how she says the Venn diagram visual "plays well", because it seems that while she is talking about bridging her issue to a global organization, with all the publicity it might garner, "wider reach" also relates to the narrower, personal experience of those in FDFP's curated audience, who would feel good that their claim is getting attention and influencing the conversation on poverty and disease.

Listening to Brenna talk about amplifying FDFP's narrower, curated message through the channels of a much larger organization reminded me of the similar attention strategies utilized by an activist working in a much different environment. Penelope is the communications director for African Human Rights Watch (AHRW), a transnational NGO that spans from the US to a northern African nation-state deeply affected by war

and human rights abuses. AHRW equips African citizen-journalists with high-definition video cameras enabled with global positioning system (GPS) technologies to document war crimes and civilian causalities in a verifiable and court-admissible way. AHRW's founder won an award for his work, and at the awards ceremony, he formed a good relationship with Ann Curry, something of a celebrity journalist who works for NBC. Ms. Curry and her producer asked them to put together a show for the network.

Penelope relayed a sociological process of reach and amplification, revealing how politics of audibility and communicative personalism interact to obscure AHRW's legalistic frame. AHRW is a fascinating case in my dissertation, because the group's mission is almost journalistic, except unlike a newsroom that makes decisions about if and when to cover human rights abuses in any particular country, AHRW maintains sustained documentation of state violence against noncombatants, regularly writing nuanced, complex reports and publishing to their social media vivid and captivating documentaries. NBC wanted a show just about AHRW's founder:

> **Penelope:** It's not what we want to focus on because we are most proud of our reporters who are [from the country] and living through the conflict, and they basically, you know, are doing exceptional work and risking their lives to do it, to tell their stories. But that's not as easy as a sell, honestly. For Western media. Because they know that their audience is more interested in a fellow American. Fine. That's fine. So it's actually going to be narrated by him [**JL**: The founder?], yea, when I was there, I like filmed him (laughing), doing the introductions. We control everything from there on out, we just have to make sure that they like what we're giving them. So we wrote the storyboard, we just have to tell it through this lens of like, he introduces it, but then it's ours to make it about what we want.

When Penelope and her colleagues decided to partner with NBC, an attentional struggle ensued, one I suggest that pitted two similar yet diverging ideas of communicative personalism. NBC producers wanted their documentary to focus on AHRW's founder, a Sudanese-American who became a civil society leader. Penelope lamented, "You know,

like a lot of western media want, they like to focus on our founder. Even though that's so trite." Penelope prefers AHRW to stick as tightly as it can to the coverage of human rights abuses, and especially the role of their activists and citizen journalists in harm's way. Penelope did not necessarily oppose the choice of a personalist lens; she just found its focus misplaced. Centering the personal experiences of AHRW activists seemed a better choice because attention could be brought slightly closer to AHRW's core issue, systematic human rights abuse.

It wasn't only the conflict over different shades of personalist frames that vexed Penelope. Penelope was also frustrated by television's glacial pace in contrast to AHRW's ability to self-publish:

> These producers take forever. This is a conversation we started having twelve months ago. That's one thing we've learned, it's kind of, you can have a big impact, like we did something with PBS Newshour and ABC. And both of those took several months to come together. And so, that's the tradeoff between if we're just coming out with our own work on our own channels, we're not reaching as many people. But we're getting to tell more nuanced stories, more frequent stories. If we do these partnerships we reach more people, but it's sort of a more diluted, I don't know, what's the word I'm looking for, it's not surface, but yea, like the top lines of the story instead of the details.

The year-long conversation between AHRW and NBC points to the extraordinary amount of emotional and communicative effort to persist at convincing a television company to accept AHRW's desired frames and direction of the project. The assumption held by Penelope was that compromise could be worth it for reach, but like above in Ronald's talk about pipelines, "reach" establishes only lines on the surface that still need to be connected to the otherwise nuanced and complex understanding and appreciation gained by AHRW workers. This is not unlike Jeremy and Russel from FFB struggling to be authentic about food issues "on the ground". Penelope's account should also remind us of

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what Ronald said about pipelining into a "deeper dive". Without traditional gatekeepers, activists are confronting problems of attention that become resolved in ways that are somehow mimetic of mass media: the personal, celebrity-obsessed, infotainment style, somehow hoping that "the top lines of the story" somewhere get even one person to more fully and "frequently" explore the "more nuanced" material produced and self-published—the "deeper dive" cited above by Ronald and here implied by Ramona as beneath the surface.

Reach is effortful. The metaphor is unique to our media landscape, one wherein an assumption that mass media reaches a broad public is no longer tenable against the preponderance of media options. When Ramona, Jeremy, Brenna, and Penelope talk about *reach*, they are talking about leveraging popular forms and figures of attention to hopefully reinforce their messages across multiple, disparate audiences. Mike of the LGBT Anti-Defamation League (LAL) highlights the peculiar definition of success reaching bits of multiple audiences, which he defines as "impressions":

> Every outlet has a potential reach, right? So an impression is the number of potential viewers you could be reaching through that outlet. Let's just say that the average viewership of Good Morning America, and this is just off the top of my head…let's say it's you know, seven million people on their average day. So they calculate that as the potential of reaching seven million people, if you're talked about in Good Morning America. So when you add them all up, for instance, when LAL's media awards were covered by hundreds and hundreds of outlets, when you add up the potential reach of all those various outlets, and of course, there could be overlap, so I could be watching Good Morning America and also read The LA Times, but you add all of those up for your potential audience reach, and that's called the media impressions.

Compromises made by Penelope of AHRW are made to move coverage of a social problem out of a niche group, what Brenna called FDFP's "curated audience", and traverse it across a fractured landscape through "media impressions". The hope is that, presented in the right way, a movement message will grab someone and bring them to a

SMO's online materials, where many movement communication workers are satisfied full information resides. To take a bit of that information and bring it to multiple audiences is amplification, that is, to increase the volume of "media impressions", "the number of potential viewers you could be reaching". While Penelope was less confident about AHRW's tradeoff between breadth and depth, Mike was confident that there's extraordinary value in reaching "billions", telling me LADL's "media awards last year earned four-point-eight billion media impressions…billions of potential readers and viewers about why supporting equality is important and what it's like to be LGBT, which helps move acceptance forward." Movement communicators like Mike have reoriented themselves to the many paths toward a desired end, seeing the work as definitively incremental.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analyzed communicative personalism in terms of the social side of the personalized movement paradox. Movement actors struggle to enact social symbolic communication as a political struggle of audibility (Ochigame and Holston 2016). The filtering logic of online platforms suggests a vertical gatekeeper mediating which information rises and which remains hidden below. When *issue communicators* discuss getting attention across niche audiences as "amplifying" their messages, they have in mind this metaphor of verticality. Focusing on the assumptions and outcomes of offline communicative mobilizations reveals a complementary set of gatekeeping practices about "reach", evoking a metaphor of horizontality. Assuming everyone can be

reached raises the problem of how to locate where every person resides as nodes in the communicative landscape. It creates vulnerabilities, and into the cracks slip safe assumptions about how popular culture continues to dominate public attention, seen in talk about and work of movement strategies to popularize SMO claims by placing them in fun, imagistic, and relatively safe popular cultural forms of information packaged entertainingly.

I am emphasizing that without journalist gatekeepers, there remains a mimesis of expectations of and assumptions about audience attention when journalists *were* gatekeepers of the technologies, distribution channels, and cultural practices of communications. To non-mainstream actors, the lament always has been that civil society would be better with a "social movement beat", and today SMO actors have realized they might today make the beat themselves. However, they quickly confront expectations of ubiquitous mobile digital platforms, shaping specific communicative strategies movement actors make when they go about considering the attention of their audiences and how to capture it. A politics of audibility creates a particular struggle within the personalizing nature of digital materials. By operationalizing a logic of infotainment, movement issue communicators assume the solution is to pursue critical, nuanced information for narrow audiences (the deeper dive, another metaphor for communicative personalism) by catching attention and training it onto SMO self-publications (the meaning of pipelining). Terri's cartoon of a gay man likening sexuality to left-handedness and Ramona's puppets of HIV and TB are ecstatically recollected not just because they are quick pieces of imagistic online media. Rather, it is astonishing to these

issue communicators that controversy and nuance got some traction across a stretched, distracted, noisy, difficult terrain of getting attention. Assumptions about the media landscape shaping what audiences would pay attention to—exponential, hyper, imagistic, and immediate—do not seem to enable a complex message to get into public dialogue, yet the cartoon and the puppets, while meeting expectations of infotainment, seemed to do just that.

I have argued that a new media landscape and its communicative personalism structure broad assumptions that movement actors make about how to capture, but not hold, public attention. Wondering about communicative personalism's resolution in popular cultural appeals, like the PSA campaign posters I saw of Jane Lynch and Laurence Fishburne on my first day at LAN, I found that mobilizing celebrities further mixes entertainment and activism, shaping a certain aspect of the work movement actors do to realize communicative mobilization. Staging mediatized situations with celebrities was discursive and interactional work, a mix of event-planning and crafting the interaction order, best seen in Ronald positioning celebrities close to LAN's logo, and preparing visuals and videos for posting to social media. The work of mobilizing celebrities involves a language of optics and a toolkit for constructing mediatized situations for digital circulation in ways that amplify traditional protest activity, but like the inability to control what celebrities say in public, it was not clear who was in control of the broader issue of the conversation struck with society. What kind of media world, or worlds, were we feeding, and to what democratic or antidemocratic consequences? It is to these matters I turn next.

4 / NICHE LEGITIMACY

On Monday, February 6, 2017, President Trump falsely lamented to military personnel at the Central Command of Special Operations that "the very dishonest press" fails to sufficiently cover the perpetration of fatal attacks on civilian populations by networks of nonstate actors, that journalists "have their reasons" for allegedly downplaying the threat and frequency of such terrorist attacks (Davis 2017). The invocation of the word "reasons" within the full context of the speech, Trump's usual exercise of imagining and discursively constructing a world wherein the United States is imperiled by networks of Muslim fanatics. He implies that mainstream media's reasons are not about objective reportage, giving a negative judgement of the logic that informs their reporting. What goes unnoticed are the alternative sources of news and styles of rhetoric that allow for such a seemingly baseless evaluation, the unspoken sites of information that make Trump's claims assumedly more legitimate. Julie Davis (2017), reporting for *The New York Times*, provides a revealing clue about those potential sources of Trump's talk: "The theory that the news media is trying to whitewash terrorist attacks to protect Islam or Muslim migrants has been pushed by serval right-wing news organizations, including the conspiracy-filled site Infowars, whose founder, Alex Jones, is an ally of Mr. Trump's." Although Davis presents the influence of Alex Jones and his website at some remove from President Trump's speech, there is good reason to believe

that Trump is directly informed by Jones's fringe skepticism of mainstream media, as well as a shared network of alternate "news". After all, Trump's closest advisor, Steve Bannon, cofounded Breitbart as an alternative to the "liberal" press, calling Breitbart a legitimate platform for a neofascist movement that adds its voice to a niche of websites and media including Infowars, Breitbart, and the Drudge Report.

Obtaining direct evidence of Trump's sources of information proves difficult—by many accounts he relies solely on television—but we should take seriously the combination of Trump's purported consumption of cable news and the likely influence of an online network of alternate "news". Much has been made lately of how political blocs of Americans are culturally separated from each other "in their own worlds", and this anxious talk has implied that our communicative separation is unique to being online. Trump's episode at Central Command, however, coupled with his known obsession over cable news, reveals more difficult connections between the online and the offline.

How much simpler it would be to interrogate Trump's reliance on and manipulation of cable television. We are also witnessing presidential speeches informed by dubious online material, with real consequence. Trump, his allies, and his passionate followers are more than disinformed, and they do not simply reside in online bubbles. They are undergirded by a communicative world that includes websites purporting to be factual like Breitbart, a world buttressed by documentaries like Jones's *Inside Job*, the film that originated the conspiracy that Al-Qaeda's 2001 attack on the World Trade Center was perpetrated by the U.S. government. This world informs official statements made in the highest corridors of military power and gets amplified on cable television.

The very name of Jones's media outfit, *Inforwars*, suggests a weaponized niche media with no regard to the boundaries between objective reportage and propaganda, let alone truth and falsehood. Trump's infusing of a network of right-wing alternate media into presidential discourse lends credence to this toxic world of disinformation and emotion— Jones infamously raises his voice to screaming decibels and proudly wears his vituperative personality on his sleeve, raising tough questions about legitimacy and efficacy in a new media ecosystem. How did Breitbart become *The New York Times* of the right, pushing the *NYT* so far to the left by comparison?

Those whose politics are progressive, or those simply worried about the existential consequences of an American presidency informed by doubtful sources of information, might sympathize with Cathy Guisewite, the cartoonist of the comic strip *Cathy*. The day before Trump's speech to Central Command, Guisewite editorialized about her concern for her daughter's future and the precariousness of gender progress in the Trump era, recounting how she conceived of her newspaper comic strip during feminism's second wave (1960s-1980s), when cultural issues about women's liberation and their struggle for economic independence abounded, though were also sidelined. The cartoon character Cathy was inspired by the television character played by Mary Tyler Moore, a character struggling with the practical problems of women's freedom, especially those gendered contradictions experienced by women in deciding how to dress for work and when to choose their battles over labor privileges and increased wages. Having difficulty arising from bed one morning to work on an upcoming collection of

essays, and anxious about how to connect feminism's past to her daughter's future, Cathy decides to "stage a women's march in my living room":

> And so I hold this up: the beaming face of Mary Tyler Moore on the cover of a DVD set of "The Mary Tyler Moore Show." Mary just left us, at the age of 80, four days after the Women's March on Washington. I want my daughter to know the connection…I hold the DVD set high. "You need to see this right now, honey, when so much of what's been won for women feels threatened. You need to see what one, sometimes quivery, voice did to move millions. How minds and doors got opened by someone who found a way to gently, graciously shift things just enough so that people could imagine a different future. You need to know that every single one of us has the power to question everything. (Guisewite 2017)

The editorial ends with Guisewite putting an affectionate arm around her daughter for a media binge, posing questions about legitimacy and efficacy parallel to those problems seen in Trump's communicative world. Cathy and her daughter are inhabiting a media world of cartoon and television characters, adding to the universe of cable news and websites another world that helps Cathy drag her depressed self from bed. Such a world is a hybrid of lifestyle and social movements. It makes possible and realistic a media solution to her political problems: use non-journalistic sources of information to fictionally connect for her daughter the feminist struggles of the past, the gender precariousness of the present, and the possibilities of imagining a better future.

The diametric episodes of Cathy and Trump serve as further illumination of why a culture of personalized media requires a separation of movement media advocacy and movement communicative work, noting that a rapid expansion of who counts as media partners accompanies the recent shift of power dynamics and changed strategies among SMOs, media, and a fractured American public. In many ways, Trump was the celebrity of the Tea Party, a reality television star who became a highly visible champion of the Tea Party's cause to delegitimize the first African-American President, Barrack Obama.

While a minor celebrity, Cathy has something in common with the right-wing's chosen hero. Both Cathy and Trump embody niche forms of connection to political issues, in that both episodes are niche-mediated, whether or not those communicative forms are fictionally or factually based. The cartoonist and the reality star simultaneously populate and transform narrative-centric media worlds, building with them politically legitimate communicative structures of what I will suggest resemble public spheres.

Our current situation is one where illegitimate claims, buttressed by fictional and factual media, have legitimate consequences. Mechanisms exist to elevate one disinformed public's opinion to the highest corridors of democratic power. Another public regroups by informing itself with fictional media. Acceptability is granted in both episodes, and instead of reason, those opinions and strategies that *feel* right, or "feels-as-if" in Hochschild's terrific turn of phrase, offer some power to produce an effect or desired result, in one case direct presidential power over reality, in the other, the possibility of imaging a political future where equality and civility are not threatened ideals.

The case being made in this dissertation is that communicative personalism promotes cultural conditions that are both enabling and limiting. Our media ecosystem is very far from a situation where a body politic shares a stock of familiar sources of information and even commonly known media reports. Instead, the media ecosystem is likelier to enable niche-mediated bubbles of a mix of information and entertainment that generate niche-specific symbols. Conversations informed by and produced in such bubbles can become reified and durable, and perhaps function as semblances of public

spheres by the criteria of legitimacy and a very limited efficacy, a point I explore more fully below. The problem is that these very same cultural dynamics influence a range of movement actors, from neofascists to feminists, any of whom might foment mediated enclaves in the whole political range, from progressive to reactionary publics, bonded together by personal identity, biography and emotion. Personal separation from and mediated resistance to engaging others whose political views differ from theirs can harden enclaves into silos, threatening the vital dialogic practice of "civil outward-facing", greeting disagreeing interlocutors with civility. The niches of our media ecosystem become not only forums for a narrow public's discussion but a social structure that shapes its *form* of public dialogue. The situation requires special attention to all those inputs into and bonding of personally built communicative worlds that open up deep, personal involvements in bubbles of the civil sphere while closing down possibilities of criticalness, translation, and dialogue.

First, I want to discuss the antecedents to the current media moment, which is defined by not only its sometimes hostile, sometimes ambiguous treatment of truth, but by its dizzying combination of internet and cable news options. There are many structural elements that make possible personalized communicative worlds. To understand how we arrived at this moment, it's important to trace the shifts in media culture that produced structural antecedents to the kinds of communicative problems (and solutions) that face us today. It's important to historically situate the current media moment to avoid the fallacy of treating communicative problems of a "post-fact society" as unique to the amount of time we spend online. I argue against tech determinist readings of

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personalization to posit a "politicized lifestyle enclave" as the grounds on which our current political separatism has become seemingly intractable.

From there, I turn to the work of public sphere sociologists looking specifically at what they say about the connections between media culture, practices of discussion, and personal attention and leisure time. I argue with Fraser that the public sphere is better theorized as a network of subaltern publics, and I show that a network of publics implies a critique of mass media. A network of publics needs a network of niche media. These media must be independent media of all sort, factual and fictional, relevant to each public's needs and wants. Habermas's concern was media that is personalized is simply consumed. The power in Fraser's idea of the value of independent media lies in the feminist mantra that the personal can become political with the help of non-mainstream distribution networks and spaces to develop counterclaims and narratives against predominant mainstream claims and social values. Bringing Habermas's concern with mere consumption together with Fraser's ideas helps us draw a tense symbolic line between private consumption of and public value of media at politicized lifestyle enclave.

Finally, the communicative worlds made possible by online websites, cable television outlets, and situational comedies can be mobilized toward political ends. Over time, communicative worlds are seen to be responsive to lifeworld issues in a personally mediated fashion, making them resilient to collapse and challenges. Personally communicative worlds appear seemingly objective to political blocs such that disinformation seems legitimate; narrative and (non)fact meld together to operate something like legitimate media for public spheres. Understanding how such

communicative worlds become emotionally and narratively binding helps us tell the fuller communicative story, aided by what Arlie Hochschild (2016) calls the "deep story," of the media worlds undergirding the proliferation of a network of personalized public spheres.

Social Antecedents to Communicative Personalism

In 2001, Harvard lawyer and social theorist Cass Sunstein set the terms for the discussion about whether Americans are in different worlds, arguing that the internet drastically changed the number, quality, and type of sources of entertainment and information available to a body politic. Making it possible for users to curate websites and consume only that content familiar and pleasurable to themselves risked eliminating unanticipated encounters with people of different perspectives. Such shared experiences are critical for democracy. When users tailor the internet into a "daily me", Sunstein's phrase for a customized mix of information and opinions, democracy becomes endangered. If democratic citizens received only news and entertainment tailored to their own interests, then it would be difficult for a critical mass to have widely shared experiences, whether watching the same nightly newscast, reading the same newspaper, or contemporaneously receiving a political report. Narrow online experiences jeopardize the existence of a common culture necessary for democracy's survival, instead enabling what Sunstein called "deliberative enclaves" (2001) that become "echo chambers" (Batorski and Grzywinska 2017; Sunstein 2009).

Sunstein argues that personal *uses* of the internet spur political cultures of fragmentation, populating the media landscape with echo chambers and leading to a balkanization that is democratically unsustainable. Eli Pariser (2011) extends Sunstein's concerns to the choices made and technologies developed by digital corporations, specifically the algorithms created by major social networking sites and companies to specialize in computer searches and advertising. Quoting Mark Zuckerberg, Pariser zeroes in on the dangers to democratic attention when companies assume that "a squirrel dying in your front yard is more relevant" than genocides on other continents. Pariser questions the culture of Silicon Valley, its assumptions about individuals, and the codes they create that have given rise to a soft censorship of information and viewpoints outside the echo chamber. In place of Sunstein's "daily me" is a "filter bubble" for each individual. The filters augment online behavior, as Sunstein worried, but Pariser's analysis goes beyond personal choices to interrogate digital corporation's social responsibility for an (dis)information culture.

The terms of Pariser and Sunstein's concerns about personalization are economic. Both treat the narrowing of information as a math problem special to the architecture of the internet, the combination of software and hardware that seduce people to craft a "daily me" or tempt corporations to correspondingly respond with "filter bubbles". Sunstein wonders about the demand side of internet use, consumer activity, and whether "free markets" are the best foundation for communication policy. Pariser suggests that computer companies replacing traditional newspapers should take civic responsibility and write algorithms that are democratically responsible, delivering different viewpoints and

important notices on public affairs, and some companies have noticed. Google's sister company, Jigsaw, develops software to make the internet safer. Perspective is an example, a program that algorithmically flags online comments "perceived as 'toxic' to a discussion". However, neither Pariser nor Sunstein is right to frame the problem as special to computers, and defining and discussing personalization as an economic phenomenon obscures rather than illuminates the social preconditions of personalization, which I explain below.

Sunstein was closer to the mark when he implied that *how* users organize themselves into a "daily me" was bad for democracy, since cultural systems of meaning always guide individual behavior (Goffman 1959:34-5; Swidler 1986). In fact, the sensibilities of choice and expectations of matching online content to personal desire were conditioned by a media culture predating the internet, especially during the ascendency and cultural dominance of cable television (1980s-1990s). Beginning in the 1970s, media's restructuring either responded to or exacerbated a cultural trend based in the assumption that people seek personal satisfaction in their everyday lives, by seeking out only that information or entertainment that they wanted. When it became clear that large numbers of people watched nightly news on television, attempts to capitalize public programming pressured journalists to soften their reporting to secure and maximize revenues from advertising firms and institute "regimes of convergence news making" emphasizing "flexible accumulation", "downsized staffs", and "new demands that workers become skilled at multitasking with new technologies" (Klinenberg 2005), a state of affairs supporting sociologist Martin Marger's (1993) claim that mass media has

joined the power elite. Meanwhile, proponents of media deregulation successfully lobbied the Federal Communications Commission to drop its imposition on television, resulting in the collapse of the Fairness Doctrine to provide a minimum of public affairs programming (Hallin 1990). Much like Sunstein and Pariser, social scientists working to understand media changes have argued media's restructuring by market principles jeopardized the critical capacity of a communication infrastructure to deliver public affairs reports (Hallin 1990; Prior 2005; Thussu 2007). The capitalist restructuring of media by for-profit principles introduced the kind of media practices one would expect before a personalized online era: a high number of cable channels, allowing viewers the ability to opt out of journalism altogether or easily find sources of information agreeing with one's already formed tastes or politics.

This cultural trend extended to how individuals and corporations think about and utilize the internet. Many of today's innovative creators of online content grew up on cable media, bringing its cultural style to bear on writing and fashioning visual content online. For the politically active, like those right-wing activists studied by Theda Skocpol, Vanessa Williams, and Arlie Hochschild, cable news television remains a daily staple, merely augmenting conservative websites and their days-long consumption of Fox News (Hochschild 2016:126-8; Skocpol and Williams 2012:125). The puzzle of world-building personalized communicative niches, however, cannot be solved by merely connecting the structure of internet consumption and the proliferation of cable news. We also need to place sensibilities and expectations of matching content to lifestyle in a sociological context, a point I turn to next.

Lifestyle Enclave as Ontology of Cable and Internet Media Ecosystem

While media was restructuring in the 1980s into a cable ecosystem, Robert Bellah and a team of sociologists—Richard Madsen, William Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven Tipton—were traveling the United States to update the work of a classic French social thinker, Alexis de Tocqueville. When Alexis de Tocqueville ([1835/1840] 2003) toured America in the 1800s to determine why American democracy advanced more quickly than French democracy, he was impressed by the young republic's mores motivating ordinary Americans to participate in public life. Elites did not dominate politics like in France, but de Tocqueville noticed that this source of strength—America's anti-elitist individualism—could also endanger American democracy by transforming into what he called "tyranny of the majority" (292). He feared that Americans would eventually abdicate their public responsibilities, shift from a nation of joiners to a nation of private individuals becoming narrowly focused on their lifestyles, marked by little commitment to a larger society and becoming distrustful of the reality of things beyond themselves.

A century after de Tocqueville's writings, Bellah et al. (1985) reexamined what de Tocqueville called America's "habits of the heart", those mores that govern the relationship between self and democracy. They were worried that de Tocqueville was right and that individualism had become a "public sickness" (Bellah et al, 1985:vii). They labeled the cause of this sickness a "managerial-therapeutic ethos" that urged "a strenuous effort to make of our particular segment of life *a small world of its own*" (50, my emphasis). Curiously, Bellah et al. did not call this personalization, but they

discovered its basis, ontologically, in the idea of radical individualism, the belief in a deep and isolated self in which all other relations become defined (84). Holding onto the self as the only knowable thing in society leads to projects of identity-realization and self-fulfillment. This sort of individualism fails to integrate others on social terms, enjoining the therapeutic culture of the feminist and antiwar movements of the 1960s (Illouz 2007) and helping to produce cultural fragmentation. But how could a culture of separation hold together at all? Without explicitly saying so, Bellah et al answered that television loosely unites Americans by *personalized* media by propagating 1) dreams of personal success, 2) portrayals of vivid personal feelings, and 3) symbols of personal consumerism as the good life (279-281). An individualist culture that enables a cable and online media ecosystem has its basis in Bellah et al's "lifestyle enclaves" (335), a social unit that contains all three elements of individualistic media. A lifestyle enclave contrasts community. Instead, individuals "express their identity through shared patterns of appearance, consumption, and leisure activities" (335) to distinguish themselves from other lifestyles, and as I argue below, from other political blocs.

The enclave is a lifestyle because it links closely to consumption and leisure (spending your nights surfing the web, joining friends at a beer garden to play Dungeons and Dragons, or watching Mary Tyler Moore with one's daughter), and the lifestyle is an enclave because it is exclusionary, not open to those who do not "share some feature of private life" (335), like craft beer and nerdy board games or sitcoms of female empowerment. Lifestyle enclaves are fragmented in two additional ways: ostensibly entered for self-maximization, lifestyle enclaves involve only one dimension of a

person's life, the part of individual life that is about leisure and consumption. Yet these segments are nonetheless social because they are shared with people of like tastes and styles. Importantly, difference is tolerated but not encountered—people in other lifestyle enclaves are by definition irrelevant if not invisible.

Lifestyle enclaves, then, fit America's type of public participation in that they are social forms of individualist togetherness, enacted in private spaces like consciousness raising groups at home, semi-public places like karaoke leagues in bars, or public spaces like runner's clubs in national parks. These are the upper limits of collective participation in an atomized society. According to Bellah et al (1985), members are not interdependent, not cooperative, and not mobilized politically—but this is not true today. Second wave feminism powerfully intervened in a scholarship of collective behavior to reveal how social movements grow out of the private sphere (Taylor 1999). By raising the claim, "the personal is political", new ground was broken on what counted as the basis of mobilizing for justice and especially opening up areas of social life that had been deemed to be outside of political consideration (private spaces of consumption; private spaces of intimate life). The focus on personal identity was a necessary gendered expansion of sociology's central idea of the sociological imagination, that people's biographies can serve as the origin of critical thought about how the historical and structural dimensions of everyday life give shape to one's context and conflicts (Mills 1959). And Trump, his allies, and especially his Tea Party supporters—as do those who oppose them—meet the criteria of lifestyle enclave and develop within them a personally-shaped politics.

The Public Sphere as a Network of Politicized Lifestyle Enclaves

Accounting for the social antecedents to the internet and the continuing influence of lifestyle enclaves and cable news culture is needed to understand the kinds of communicative worlds enveloping both Trump and Cathy. Though surely not the complete picture, I find scholarship on media change, once grounded ontologically in the idea of lifestyle enclaves, to be a compelling social index of our current smorgasbord of fragmented media. The question is how and by what terms do we account for potential political uses of media in lifestyle enclaves. Are these politicized lifestyle enclaves meeting the communicative criterion of legitimacy of public spheres?

The social theorist Nancy Fraser (2007) asks us to "locate normative standards and emancipatory political possibilities" (1) of the public sphere within practical and specific historical moments, yet her work often leaves aside a close examination of the relationship between media and dialogue. For example, in her lucid essay on the possibilities and limitations of *transnational* collective opinion, Fraser inadvertently reveals problematic assumptions about a *national* communications infrastructure, assumptions that national media are adequate and effective at encouraging and hosting public dialogue. Fraser argues in the essay that within geographical parameters, print and broadcast media are mostly sufficient to coalesce a public opinion, but a global public sphere is endangered by "niche media… and dubious amalgams like talk radio and 'infotainment'" (8). Fraser continues:

> Granted, we see some new opportunities for critical public opinion formation. But these
> go along with the disaggregation and complexification of communicative flows. Given a
> field divided between corporate global media, restricted niche media and decentered

Internet networks, how could critical public opinion possibly be generated on a large scale and mobilized as a political force? Given, too, the absence of even the sort of formal equality associated with common citizenship, how could those who comprise transnational media audiences deliberate together as peers? How, once again, can public opinion be normatively legitimate or politically efficacious under current conditions?

She poses these questions vis-à-vis the complexity of bringing together a *globe* of interlocutors to argue, debate and form a *global* public opinion, with sufficient awareness of everyone's viewpoints and sources of information. In our political times, however, it is clear that the problem was never solved within national borders, where how to enter into dialogue from competing and diverging sets of norms remains unclear.

The question of what type of organization of media best informs democratic public opinion is often subsumed by attention to the distinction between private and public. For example, at the conclusion of Fraser's (1992) seminal essay "Rethinking the Public Sphere", she distinguishes the economy from the state as a constructed symbolic boundary between private and public that demarcates as out of bounds many potentially public issues around the ownership of property and the fraught contention that markets do social good. Below I focus on how Habermas conflated personalized media with private consumption, merely implying an uncertain distinction between personally- and publicly-relevant media. Certainly, media can be organized privately as for-profit and publicly as state-based both into dubious propaganda at worse or democratically irrelevant at best. Key questions would need to be posed around the culturally structured uses and limits of historically specific forms of communication structures, the reception of media styles and objects, and whatever political mobilizations they might be based in.

Above, my presentation of a cultural system including cable and internet media, anchored ontologically in lifestyle enclaves was one way to present America's

"historically unfolding constellation" (Fraser 2007:1) of communicative mores and technologies. Neither Habermas nor Fraser would see much promise for a thriving public sphere in that media ecosystem. To them, the translation of collective dialogue into democratic power is only possible to the extent that public opinion is normatively legitimate and political efficacious. For public opinion to be morally binding, all affected in a democracy should be included in a national conversation, and collective opinion must "discredit views that cannot withstand critical scrutiny" (Fraser 2007:3). By definition, conversations restricted to bubbles do not include everyone. Consider further the juxtaposition of Trump and Cathy from this chapter's introduction. In Trump's episode at Central Command of Special Operations, discredited views were presidential, let alone exempt from critical standards. Further, for public opinion to be effective, there must be mechanisms by which a legitimate collective opinion holds accountable the actions and representatives of government, so that the state acts in accordance with the will of the citizenry. If we return to Cathy one more time, her binge session with her daughter, while achieving laudable political ends of learning the social history of feminism and imagining a political future, does not meet the administrative criteria felt to be vital to the power of public opinion.

By watching *The Mary Tyler Show* and reading online blogs, however, individuals of some groups take characters and symbols to represent and connect their normative concerns in a way that turns lifestyle enclaves into politics, a personal solution to what Habermas (1975) called a "legitimation crisis", a placement of trust in a

consumerist process that they cannot bring themselves to extend to administrative institutions.

Elsewhere in Fraser's essay, following Habermas, she treats what I am calling politicized lifestyle enclaves as a separate, *apolitical* issue of the necessity of a reading culture, a public that learns a range of collective images from popular culture, as merely a *precondition* for the emergence of a public sphere. In Habermas' presentation, by switching two lenses the private consumption of media becomes public: 1) the object of private consumption from art and theatre to journalistic reporting of public affairs and 2) the direction of private consumption from personal leisure to "outward-facing", the use of journalistic letters to join a public debate that begins to develop a political opinion by which a public holds the state accountable. By consuming journalism with the intent to join others in Habermas' beloved salons and coffee houses, the public "awakens" to the potential of its discursive power.

Habermas' theoretical move is to treat cultural discussion and journalistic discussion separately rather than coterminous. In fact, a major tenant of Jeff Alexander's (2006) argument against the public sphere is that Habermas was wrong to consider private literary societies to be *precursors* to a public sphere, when to Alexander such mediated groups revealed the symbolic work necessary to an always-already public sphere (2006:581ff19). I think Alexander's disagreement is overly literalist. True, Habermas does not focus on the symbolic representations of democratic inclusion and exclusion in fictional media. But Habermas's presentation of the relationship between media and culture-debating oscillates between private media users as perceiving their

public power ("The public that read and debated [art and literature] read and debated about itself [1991 (1962):43]") and public media users as exercising a critical capacity invaluable to debating both culture and politics (1991 [1962]:36-37). The point is that whether reading newspapers or comic strips, reading blogs or viewing videos on social media websites, what's important is the type of public subjectivity awakened and granted cultural legitimacy by a critical number of private media users. A group that one might call his lifestyle enclave includes a sense of itself as a potential force ready to put non-journalistic media claims and symbols to political use.

Instead of focusing on and clarifying the distinction between private media and public media as it relates to democratic public opinion, sociologists of the public sphere have focused on the socio-historical recovery or criticism of the bourgeois ideal of a public sphere as the face-to-face togetherness of private people in a public place, using such embodied togetherness as the model for media as a forum, as a space for collective engagement in practice of critical discussion about issues of common concern (Habermas [1962] 1991: 27). Sociologists interested in this line of thinking have benefited from Nancy Fraser's critique and expansion of the concepts of the public sphere and communicative ethics. By showing that the public sphere historically excluded women, racial minorities and working-class white men, Fraser's reappropriation of Habermas's concept of equal discussion rightly argued against the feasibility of bracketing social inequalities in face-to-face talk in societies with class hierarchies and patriarchal systems. She also challenged the value of a single unitary public sphere, arguing instead for the idea of a network of subaltern publics to contest dominant social classes and their

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predominant definitions and framings of what sort of issues qualify as public concern. A network of separate publics is more historically accurate, and reflects the condition of the public sphere today—imagine Trump and his ilk, as well as Cathy and her followers, being separated yet facing each other with competing political claims.

I argue too few sociological projects have grown out of Habermas' argument that media was transformed through the course of the 20th century in ways that gravely jeopardized how we conceive of the kind of media organization necessary for public opinion to influence democracy. One of Habermas's core claims is that there was a great transformation of the place and practice of critical discussion of public issues, both in terms of the face-to-face togetherness in physical space and in terms of *the symbolic efficacy of media*. Personalization was at the heart of what Habermas called the social-structural transformation of the public sphere, yet it seldom is noted by sociologists of movement-media relationships who rarely extend the latter half of the book to today's multiple media realities.

Indeed, the force of Habermas's chapter on the structural changes to the public sphere, eponymous with the title of his book, is that Habermas mostly agreed with his mentors at the Frankfurt School, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, that capitalist media eviscerate the critical capacity of the public sphere. Especially seen in the section entitled "From Culture-Debating to Culture-Consuming", Habermas' idea of how the public sphere was transformed by media is a more nuanced historical and empirical retelling of Horkheimer and Adorno's culture industry thesis, defined in the introduction. It's this latter half of Habermas's book on the public sphere that interests me, especially

with regards to questions about whether communicative personalism and its political effects might hold together politicized lifestyle enclaves that seek political power (and what kind?) out of their media consumption. Additionally, Fraser's close reading of Habermas includes an implied criticism of the focus on and valuing of mass media that is worth excavating and making explicit vis-à-vis Habermas's arguments that focus on the structural transformation of media and how that transformation relates to the personalization of the public sphere. Habermas's concern was media that is personalized is simply consumed. The power in Fraser's idea of the value of independent media lies in the feminist mantra that the personal can become political with the help of non-mainstream distribution networks and spaces to develop counterclaims and narratives against predominant mainstream claims and social values. Bringing Habermas's concern with mere consumption together with Fraser's ideas helps us complicate the symbolic line between private consumption of and public value of media.

The Public Sphere and Personalized Media

Habermas defined media to be personal if it was consumed in private and did not serve as the basis for public discussion, arguing that personal media are antithetical to the public sphere. Personalized media tend to discourage sociability in collective spaces outside of one's private life, a point similar to Sunstein and Pariser's concerns about not having shared common experience. The terms of using media for personal pleasure tend to be in and of themselves mere consumption—that is, not to inform one's self of different viewpoints or familiarize oneself with other's social symbols or literature. As

Habermas says (156), "The family now evolved even more into a consumer of income and leisure time, into the recipient of publicly guaranteed compensations and support services. Private autonomy was maintained…in functions of consumption." People spent less of their free time outside of the home, less time in those salons and coffee shops to debate the political matters of the day, and more of their time gathering around film screens or televisions to relax and recharge for work. Using media is not inherently dangerous to the public sphere if the goal is to generate discussion and engage cultural criticism with others. Merely consuming media, instead, severs this social tie. To Habermas, personalized media always sever social ties.

Of special concern to Habermas was a transformation of the public sphere from culture-debating to culture-consuming. Habermas calls a culture-consuming public sphere a "pseudo-public" (160) since rational-critical debate dissolved into mere consumption. He notes it is "sham-private" (160) because it is free-time spent as mere complement to work-time, a time increasingly encroached upon by commercial entertainment, with dire effects for the symbolic power of the classic public sphere. "So called leisure behavior," Habermas says about the attachment of mass media consumption to survival functions, "once it had become part of the cycle of production and consumption, was already apolitical [in] its incapacity to constitute a world emancipated from the immediate constraints of survival needs (160)." Habermas believed that mass media, both fictional and factual, "transmogrify the public sphere into a space of mere culture consumption" (162).

One specific threat to the foundations of the public sphere stemmed from the *shrinking of the private sphere* into its smallest and most personally relevant elements, what Mills would later call "private orbits" and what Bellah et al. called "lifestyle enclaves." Habermas uses the word "personal" (159) to imply that personalization relates to non-committal use of media, by which he means the disposing of both the media object and the intent to be "outward-facing". He laments that for information to become publicly relevant it must instead fit the idea of humans as *personalized*: "[P]ublicly relevant developments and decisions are garbed in private dress and through personalization distorted to the point of unrecognizability (159)." Publicly relevant information becomes warped by personalization, distorting public criticalness by framing such publicity as emotional human interest ("sentimentalizing"; "human biographies").

Publicity framed as personal interest to a "pseudo-public", however, includes public relevance as so many kernels able to be used to build up media worlds that resemble public spheres. The key lies in how to switch from private consumption to a different "outward-facing" orientation. On this point, critical theory asks us to strike a tricky balance. On one hand, we must empirically account for the historical conditions of private media consumption—such as the increasing availability of different media channels, and their shifts of form and content, seen in the social antecedents to communicative personalism—while remaining sensitive to normative concerns about how to transform media into publicly relevant moments of democratic public opinion formation. The preceding chapters attempted to demonstrate the use of styles and object of the personalized media ecosystem to emotionally anchor movement messaging in

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practical relationships, to enable mobilization out of lifestyle enclaves and into social movements. Attentional struggles over the figure and background of thinking about social problems mirror attentional struggles over the private and public relevance of people's media consumption. Critically examining the use of personalized media styles and objects points to the daily attempts to construct public significance out of personally relevant media. Such assemblages attempt to grow politicized lifestyle enclaves out of "pseudo-publics" to garner a public opinion that resembles the legitimacy of a "real" public sphere, to both democratic and antidemocratic ends.

For evidence of the power of politicized lifestyle enclaves, consider how Nancy Fraser (1992) critiques Habermas's unified conceptualization of the public sphere, pointing out that structural inequalities between social groups, like women's continuing subordination to men, make equal conversation impossible. In an unequal capitalist society with a single public sphere and a homogenous mass media, marginalized groups "would have no venues in which to undertake communicative processes that were not, as it were, under the supervision of a dominant group" (66). Fortunately, there historically have been communicative processes by which private issues become questions for public concern within subaltern publics, parallel discursive arenas to a mainstream mass public. The subaltern public offers the image of an underground space and practice of counter-critical discussion and formation of marginalized issues and identities, a necessary and vital "voluntary enclaving". Fraser's main examples of subaltern publics are feminist groups, though she notes that any marginalized groups in a place and practice of critical discussion countering mainstream discourses would count as subaltern publics. In this

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vital democratic activity, niche media have empirically been of political importance, an issue I turn to next.

From Politicized Lifestyle Enclaves to Public Silos

Fraser does more than point out the improbability of a single public sphere. She argues for the democratic value of *multiple* publics. She clarifies (65), "I contend that, in stratified societies, arrangements that accommodate contestation among a plurality of competing publics better promote the ideal of participatory parity than does a single, comprehensive, overarching public." Fraser posits the concept of "subaltern counterpublics" (67), preferring an examination of what makes possible or what discourages discussions between inter-publics. Theoretically, niche media could help sustain a feminist "arena for public discourse" (57):

> Perhaps the most striking example is the late-twentieth century U.S. feminist subaltern counterpublic, with its variegated array of journals, bookstores, publishing companies, film and video distribution networks, lecture series, research centers, academic programs, conferences, conventions, festivals, and local meeting places. In this public sphere, feminist women have invented new terms for describing social reality, including 'sexism,' 'the double shift,' 'sexual harassment,' and 'marital, date, and acquaintance rape.' Armed with such language, we have recast our needs and identities, thereby reducing, although not eliminating, the extent of our disadvantage in official public spheres (Fraser 1990:67).

Media in the form of academic journals, novels, films, and documentaries play a subtle yet paramount role in Fraser's argument. It is worth remembering that Fraser is challenging the value of a unified public sphere, and here she implies that a distribution network of alternative media helps support a separate arena for public discourse, an arena for subaltern publics to voluntarily enclave themselves to work out how to speak back to power.

Fraser is always working against the assumption that the presence of unconnected publics signals fragmentation, that voluntary enclaves are necessarily apolitical. This is the assumption that guides Sunstein and Pariser's concerns about personalization, that separate arenas for public discourse are echo-chambers that ensconce us in private consumption or surround us with only the likeminded. But here Fraser is pointing to something much more complicated. While it might be said that members of feminist groups are consumers of independent media, Fraser clearly has in mind a non-consumerist reading of how these movement groups used media to work out counter-discourses to mainstream narratives, a necessary precondition to political mobilization.

While today we might say that these media cater to a niche audience, or that these media were of limited importance because they were only personally relevant to feminist groups, Fraser does not use the words "niche" or "personalized". She resists thinking of communicative worlds as enclaves because simply assuming their separateness would not account for the social processes by which communicative worlds become invisible to other social groups, nor for how second-wave feminist groups gave rise to third-wavers, how they *nested* publics that made possible the 2017 Women's March on Washington. Fraser faces this problem by arguing that subaltern publics, buttressed and made lively by personally relevant media, are "involuntarily enclav*ed*" (Fraser 1990:67, emphasis in original) when they attempt to move out of their private media consumption to speak in public. This is a vital point, that such "outward-facing" consumers of private media might be enclaved *against their will* yet remain politically productive (Sedgewick 2008; Seidman 2002; hooks 2015). Consider for instance bell hooks' (1994) claim of resistance

from the margins and Steven Seidman's recognition of the productivity of the closet. As Fraser (1990:67) says, "In my view, the concept of a counterpublic militates in the long run against separatism because it assumes an orientation that is *publicist* (emphasis in the original)." She continues on this publicist theme, meaning the fact that politicized lifestyle enclaves are outward-facing:

> Habermas captures well this aspect of the meaning of publicity when he notes that however limited a public may be in its empirical manifestation at any given time, its members understand themselves as part of a potentially wider public, that indeterminate, empirically counterfactual body we call "the public-at-large."

So far, so good. When Trump, Alex Jones and Steve Bannon huddle over their websites and cable channels, they orient themselves to something beyond their bubble, aim to grow their circle of influence. Cathy and her daughter reconnoiter from their living room a wider world where political progress is endangered, wondering how to move forward, how best to secure democratic gains of the past. Politicized lifestyle enclaves, if we understand them as niche spaces to recollect, reflect, and think of what to say, are not separatist because of the wish to exit them and move into the world and beyond it. It's elsewhere that we need to explain the forces of involuntary enclaving that make dialogue seem impossible. We must further account for cultural forces that make niche media open up deep, personal involvements in a politicization of lifestyle enclaves while closing down possibilities of criticalness, translation, and dialogue. Part of the process of involuntary enclaving includes a blurring of factual and fictional media, seen even in Fraser's list of feminist media that toggles between newspapers and films, and the recent appearance of a politics based in Hochschild's (2016) "deep story". In the feelings, discourses and strategies that grow in and out of enclaves with an outward-facing to other

social groups, giving politicized lifestyle enclaves a warped sense of legitimacy, such a process turns enclaves into silos.

Serendipitously, sociologist Arlie Hochschild spent five years studying groups of right-wing activists in Louisiana, social movement activity that culminated in the election of Trump. At the center of Hochschild's analysis is a "deep story", a fact-less narrative that is shared by and motivates activists to engage in an emotionally- and normatively-based politics. Deep stories are "feels-as-if" tales by which people are guided in how they engage others, stories they use to evaluate what they ought to do and how they ought to feel. Hochschild (2017:686) explains the fundamental role of deep stories in politics by saying, "[D]isputes about politics…are at bottom contests between different deep stories…[they] describe the mechanism by which social forces structure political appeal." Deep stories are personally-held narratives, but they are not asocial. Instead, they are models of feeling rules that guide the form and effect of viewing and interacting with other social groups.

I re-present Hochschild's deep story at length to note the function of the queue in the far-right's deep story, the direction of the activists's eyes and the social categories of people on whom the eyes fix. Hochschild evokes the imagery of Americans waiting in line to symbolize social processes of working hard, receiving deserved rewards, and moving forward to realizing the American dream. Central to Hochschild's metaphor of the queue is that requirement of the public sphere, to be outward-facing, though in a way constrained by the behavioral and emotional rules of one's deep story. Hochschild writes:

> You are standing in a long line leading up a hill, as in a pilgrimage, patient but weary.
> You are in the middle of this line, along with others who are also white, older, Christian,

native-born, and predominantly male, some with college degrees, some not. At the crest of the hill is the American Dream, the goal of everyone waiting in line, a standard of living higher than that your parents enjoyed. Many behind you in line are people of color—poor, young and old, mainly without college degrees. You wish them well, but your attention is trained on those ahead of you. And now you notice the line isn't moving. In fact, is it moving backward?

You've suffered. You've had marriage problems, and you are helping out a troubled sibling and an ill co-worker. Your church has seen you through hard times. You've shown strong character, and the American Dream is a badge of moral honor, as you see it, for that.

But look! Some people are coming from behind and cutting in line ahead of you! As they cut in, you are being moved back. How can they just do that? You're following the rules. They aren't. Who are they? They are black. They are brown. They are career-driven women, helped by Affirmative Action programs.

The liberal government wants you to believe they have a right to cut ahead. You've heard stories of oppressed blacks, dominated women, weary immigrants, closeted gays, desperate Syrian refugees. But at some point, you say to yourself, we have to build a wall against more sympathy. You feel like a refugee yourself.

You're a compassionate person. But now you've been asked to extend your sympathy to all the people who have cut in line ahead of you. And who's supervising the line? It's a black man whose middle name is Hussein. He's waving the line cutters on. He's on their side. He's their president, not yours. What's more, all the many things the federal government does to help them don't help you. Should the government really help anyone? Beyond that, from ahead in line, you hear people calling you insulting names: "Crazy redneck!" "White trash!" "Ignorant southern Bible-thumper!" You don't recognize yourself in how others see you. You are a stranger in your own land. Who recognizes this?

Hochschild's idea of a deep story is that, if we remove facts and political judgment, we can better understand the normative force of not only Tea Party social movement actors, but most political actors and even beyond to those who sympathize with them. The idea of an emotionally-based political fable contributes to the idea of politicized lifestyle enclaves the particular ways that narratives bound our connections to public life. Hochschild is building on a "style of mind" thesis (Hofstadter 1996) that suggests we Americans participate in a personal politics that gravitate defensively toward the like-minded. Voters and politicians in a paranoid style desire to fight social conflicts until their bitter and absolute ends, but since such fights are unworkable in a democracy,

the paranoid feeling about other undeserving social groups constantly resets in an inconclusive situation. Social activism done in this vein turns around a struggle for *recognition* of a group's personal feelings—social class anxieties and especially its concomitant status discontent tied to racial resentment fueled the emergence of Trump and his supporters (Tesler 2016; McElwee and McDaniel 2017)—highlighting the ways that Americans more often than not vote for their perceived moral interests if not their economic ones (Honneth 1995). Lastly, a deep story threads together "metaphors we live by" (Lakoff 1980), a discursive weaving of politics as thinly veiled metaphors for the type of family we lived in as children—a process I have been analyzing as communicative fiber. Those who lean right have Zerubavelian "rigid minds", preferring "strict father" metaphors and valuing rigid hierarchies that can help them provide some order to chaotically occurring moral universes. Zerubavel might analyze those leaning left as "flexible minds" who prefer frameworks of politics modeled on nurturing and accommodating parents. Hochschild sees promise in this direction, especially the metaphorical thinking we apply to our politics, but what's missing is to account for the role of emotion and niche media in the normative story individuals tell themselves about their politics and apply to a candidate, whether Clinton, Trump or more abstract ideas of gay rights, food justice, or small government.

Trump ignored democratic norms of civility, partisan restraint and standards of civic responsibility during his campaign (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2016). His words and actions have been criticized as predatory, sexist, xenophobic and fundamentally antidemocratic. Yet sixty-two million Americans voted for him. Hochschild's answer to

the problem of Trump's social support is that he intuitively sensed and placed himself into a deep story that existed before him, becoming "the *personal messenger* of his followers" (Hochschild 2017:687, emphasis in original), someone finally willing and perfectly able to meld their expectations of televisual entertainment with an articulation of their class and race anxieties. For example, many of Trump's supporters were Evangelical Christians who believe in the Rapture, the second coming of Jesus Christ and a sudden and abrupt end of the world. Trump's character in media intrigued them as someone who could sort out the "winners and losers", Hochschild argues, thinly veiled code for those chosen to ascend to heaven. Hochschild does a content analysis of Trump's reality television shows, where, after contestants are "fired", they are sent "down" to the lobby, while the winners are sent "up". With such an emphasis on cultural style, recognition of a political bloc's grievances, metaphor, and storytelling, we should not be surprised when niche media buttress deep stories, that Hochschild argues that niche media primed Trump's success:

> From the 1970s on, there has been a growing popular Rapture culture, promoted through the nation's 250 Christian television stations and 1,600 Christian radio stations. Inspired by a 1972 film, *A Thief in the Night*, and three sequels seen by an estimated 300 million people, Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins wrote sixteen best-selling novels, the *Left Behind* series, which have sold over 65 million copies. There have followed Rapture-oriented children's books, a video game, audio books, graphic novels and more films, the latest featuring Nicholas Cage in 2014. Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia, where Donald Trump spoke before 11,000 people, feature a website GodTube.com, on which 500 Rapture videos appear. In one, a minister, open Bible in hand, predicts that the Rapture could come next week…today…any t… In a flash, he and most of his congregation vanish. In another video, a disbelieving mother ridicules her pious son, who is suddenly raptured up to Heaven, leaving her to face her terrible mistake. In yet another, a young man from a Christian dirt track racing organization ("Race to the Rapture") talks of assembling his all-aluminum V8 racing car in order to spread word of the Rapture. (Hochschild 2016:687)

Hochschild's argument resounds with Fraser's tacit alignment of movements and niche media, revealing the emotional interconnections locking in members of a politicized

lifestyle enclave. It is not unlike how media primed the success of gay rights (Gamson 1998; Sender 2005), and it fits, though awkwardly, the theory of Alexander's (2006) *Civil Sphere*. Gains in representation and uses of media symbolism from and in communicative institutions directly affect regulative institutions of law and political office, whether the success of gay marriage or the ascendancy of a group's chosen leader to the presidency. I say awkwardly because, contra Alexander's thesis that these democratic consequences are gains in mass solidarity, the influence of niche media, not mass media, drives the movement, augmenting a *cynical* outward-facing to a symbolic insularity.

Perhaps such insularity is necessary for publics to have respite and a place to develop meaning and a separate moral vocabulary—indeed, this is the force of Fraser's claim for the necessity of voluntary enclaving—but neither Fraser nor Hochschild examine the possibility that niche media, in their undergirding of many politicized lifestyle enclaves, contribute to a broader cultural process of political balkanization. For her part, Fraser sees enclaving as a problem of structural inequality where privileged groups rely on their social status to resist being contested. That is certainly true. I only add that privileged actors may even consider themselves to paradoxically constitute a minority group, which is possible only in the sense that high-status individuals also live in niche-mediated enclaves, practice a politics driven by a "deep story", have a relativistic view of other publics and their surrounding media, and are unable to consider critically the feasibility of competing claims on regulative institutions. Such relativism is only superficial, of course. As we see in the symbolic cynicism of Tea Partiers "waiting in line", when material and symbolic resources are at stake, the gaze can morph into

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scorched-earth political warfare, the likes of which were practiced by Trump. I emphasize that the deep story and niche media are simultaneously reflecting and creating each other. In combination, they enable niche politics that are not only, albeit limitedly, efficacious but normatively acceptable to the narrow circles that subscribe to them, meeting in a warped way some of the criteria of the public sphere.

Conclusion: Story Public as Metaphor for Politicized Lifestyle Enclave

In the preceding, I summarized Pariser's and Sunstein's concerns about the political economy of the internet, their worries that echo chambers and filter bubbles endanger a common culture necessary for democracy. I argued that neither was entirely right to argue personalization as economic. Cultural systems of meaning always guide the individual behaviors of digital corporation actors and computer users alike. (Goffman 1959:34-5; Swidler 1986). The ascendancy and dominance of cable television culture conditioned the sensibilities and expectations of matching online content to personal desire.

Simply connecting the structure of internet consumption to its historical antecedents, however, is insufficient. For this reason, I sought to demonstrate how the idea of lifestyle enclave ontologizes a personalized media culture of fragmented pieces of cable and internet. Bellah et al. (1985) show that lifestyle enclaves are the upper limits of collective participation in an atomized society, but it has not proven true that lifestyle enclaves are always apolitical. Trump's Tea Party supporters, and many of those who oppose them, meet the criteria of "express(ing) their identity through shared patterns of

appearance, consumption"—especially, I argue, fictional media consumption—"and leisure activities" (Bellah et al 1985:335). Such groups can develop within lifestyle enclaves a personally-shaped politics, a politicization of lifestyle enclaves.

Politicized lifestyle enclaves meet some of the communicative criteria of the public sphere. Whether reading newspapers or comic strips, reading blogs or watching videos on social media websites, a type of group subjectivity is awakened and granted cultural legitimacy by a critical number—an awakening of the lifestyle enclave as a potential force. By watching *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* or Alex Jones's documentaries, individuals of some groups use characters and symbols to represent and connect their normative concerns in a way that broadcasts themselves politically. These narrow circles function in a network of separate publics, as Fraser theorizes, and they draw communicative fiber from privately consumed media to construct public relevance out of personally relevant media.

The deep story especially locks together politicized lifestyle enclaves, and along with niche media can be a cultural force that enables personal involvement in silos of the civil sphere, while closing down possibilities of translation and dialogue. Feeling rules inform our political discussions and interactions with other social groups. Feeling rules shape the form of our "outward-facing", a criterion of the public sphere, in a constrained manner. Though we might ideally face outward with civility, a cynical other-orientation is nonetheless meant to influence public opinion, to make it symbolize the ways we talk and feel in our silos. The deep story and niche media, co-structuring each other, enable

niche communicative worlds that, while only resembling the public sphere, can meet some of its criteria of legitimacy.

The consequences of legitimacy granted to such communicative worlds relate to the blurring of factual and fictional media. Hochschild's study of conservative activists reveals that many conservatives share with liberals a concern over the fate of the environment, and when corporations cause disasters like oil spills, conservatives desire accountability and become active in political processes to demand and achieve it. However, as I have demonstrated in this chapter, the assemblage of deep story, cable news infotainment, and fictional sources of reflection warps the interpretation of public issues and redirects their outward-facing toward liberals, communities of color, and governmental institutions charged with regulating polluting industries.

To make sense of such puzzling outcomes of how narrow public opinion affects a certain way of civil engagement, we need to go beyond understanding the feeling rules of political blocs. I suggest "story publics" as the proper metaphor for a network of politicized lifestyle enclaves grounded in "deep stories". In finance, a "story stock" refers to a company that befuddles investors into valuing the stock higher than is warranted. A story stock is impervious to traditional valuation measures, like price-to-earnings ratios or price-to-sales outcomes, because their stories are simply too good *not* to be true. Tesla is an example. Despite losing $773 million in 2016, while Ford and General Motors operated profitably, Tesla's shares surged past $300 the week of April 1, 2017, outpacing Ford and nearly equaling GM. According to Elon Musk, Tesla's founder, investors know today's risk is worthwhile for the story to tell: "a utopian future of safe, reliable,

powerful, self-driving electric vehicles powered by solar-fed batteries that are easy on the environment" (Stewart 2017). Whether such a future is fictional or factual is indeterminable, and beside the point. Tenuous efficacy is achieved on narrative power alone.

The chapter argues, then, that movement communicative work, especially the Tea Party's communicative work seen in this chapter, in conjunction with lifeworld dynamics, feed into, support, and buttress media worlds that include both fictional and factual sources of reality-building, each grounded more in emotion and Hochschild's "deep story" than reason and civility. The network of politicized lifestyle enclaves functions like story publics that are buttressed in a way that can be positive for civil society (gay marriage legalized, chosen political representatives become senators and president), but they are extremely limited in at least one regard—a public debate envisioned to be critical and societal by Habermas. We saw above that specific microproceesses of the civic regime's communicative fiber, especially those that accommodate anti-criticalness for a radically practical mobilization, result in few critical discussions of the boundaries between liberals, centrists, and conservatives or debates about genuine political liberation. The accomplishment of gay marriage, for example, is a logical outcome of a network of politicized lifestyle enclaves. A personally-based political mobilization for a law that privatizes homosexuality *forecloses* critical and collective discussion of gay sex in the public sphere, as anthropologist Roger Lancaster (Lancaster 2004) would rightly lament.

Even more dangerous for politicized lifestyle enclaves, I suggest, is that the very same emotionally connected and niche-mediated political mobilization can be used by opponents of each silo. A network of niche-mediated publics does not easily cede ground on which truth to recognize, on how to enter reasoned debate, consider counterclaims, and get into civil argument. Instead, by conflating two sets of binaries—voluntary and involuntary enclaving, and fictional and factual media—in a process of mediating and politicizing the personal, the network seems to extend each politicized lifestyle enclave only to harden their edges. Story publics become silos when they are insecurely rigid cocoons against any world antithetical to their preferred media and personally held identities, beliefs, and politics, which can only seem to be existential threats. A network of niche-mediated politicized lifestyle enclaves creates hard and fast divides without much clarification on whose public opinion is true, let alone how to debate it.

5 / THE PROMISE AND PERILS OF COMMUNICATIVE PERSONALISM

The recent communicative success of many social movements has left us with a personalized movement paradox. Their successes in digital infotainment had to do with their messages being quick and catchy. Terri's cartoon of a gay man likening sexuality to left-handedness and Ramona's puppets of HIV and TB are ecstatically recollected not just because they are quick pieces of imagistic online media. Rather, it is astonishing to these issue communicators that controversy and nuance got some traction across a stretched, distracted, noisy attention terrain. Their successful communicative mobilizations parallel the simplicity and power of the Tea Party's "Don't tread on me" or Occupy's "We are the 99%". That's partly why they attracted widespread attention, and major outlets even produced deeper stories about the need for government accountability and financial reform. A social movement loses its message of structural critique in order to be catchy and personally relevant to as many people as possible. The resulting paradox is such reach and amplification leads to critical reception in and growth of politicized lifestyle enclaves. Such enclaves are bound by the institutional schema of the early 21st century's civic regime, a regime that encourages a radically-practical deference to identity and personal biography in a way that promotes cultural conditions that are both enabling and limiting; it opens up a wide range of deep, personal involvements in what I will conclude below are "story publics" of the civil sphere while closing down other

possibilities of translation and dialogue across political enclaves. Allow me to summarize the elements of this claim and make clearer how communicative personalism is enabling and limiting.

When movement actors talk about meeting people where they are, they have in mind the microprocesses involved in entering someone's everyday life on personal terms and beginning the slow process of altering their attention. Radical practicality is thread together by microprocesses of localizing the universal, honoring and listening, and accommodating anti-criticalness. Localizing the universal is communicative effort to construct the personal relevance of a public issue by framing for attention with the personal experience of a potential sympathizer. In the case studies presented here, attempts were made to conjure, in emotionally resonant ways, an "anchoring" (Goffman 1974:247-51) that can fix something practical, a specific relationship, daily object, or usual practice as a proxy of awareness to the movement's work. The major assumption is that deep commitment to and participation in the civil sphere could be connected to everyone's day-to-day life, wherein there might be some social relationship or object to which someone's attention can be turned, transforming that social relationship or object into a proxy of awareness for a world of advocacy beyond their personal orbit, an "anchoring" (Goffman 1974:247-51) to the movement that exists in the here and now of the person's everyday life.

Locating some social relationship or object as an anchoring of attention is a precondition of action. Anchorings help someone figure their self into activism by noticing, for perhaps the first time, the processes that produce what is marked as political

and what politics remain unmarked. Movement symbolism and other forms of collective engagement are framed out and left in the background. Honoring and listening constituted another critical microprocess of radical practicality. It threads together a communicative personalism that attempts to figure people into advocacy, to actively work with them on "border disputes" (Zerubavel 1991:67) between the movement's figure and background. Forging personal connections resembling familial bonds depend on strategies of deep listening, following an intensely therapeutic approach to movement building shape a willingness to listen and patiently search for an open window into the personal experiences of others, a search for some open-mindedness to question their reactions or ideas, to consider a different opinion, to not remain ideologically committed to a taken-for-granted worldview.

Accommodating anti-criticalness constitutes a third microprocess related to anchoring non-sympathizers and potential sympathizers into a movement. I have argued that it is active communicative work to emphasize non-controversial issues that results in a soft censuring with the hope of growing followers among the uninitiated. Along with localizing the universal and honoring and listening, accommodating anti-criticalness made up the communicative fiber of LAN specifically, as embodied units of institutional schema best seen in Ronald's slip from "we've" to "I've" in addressing the definition of individual outreach for a movement's cause. Yet I also found traces of them in other interviews. Focused strategies and mobilizations to make social problems personally relevant to anyone, communicative personalism did not contradict but was in tension with the social side of our problem, the recent outcomes of social movement claims of the Tea

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Party, #BLM, and Occupy becoming well known across disparate audiences. "Everybody can be reached" was an idea with universal implications, but grounded in the practical realization that diverse people have diverse interests and points of entry into discussion and critical dialogue. Is such a dialogue a precursor, or are the elements of communicative personalism preconditions of critical dialogue? Avoiding overly critical language helped people imagine they could take steps that had some semblance to movement activity, constraining the problem of dialogue to a process of reverse attentional socialization, a process that was about sensitizing to the ways that we might pay attention to our biographies by grappling with the usual ways we do or do not pay attention to the politics of everyday life. While accommodating people's practical concerns can oftentimes leave less time and space for critical dialogue, the broader point is that the civic regime, at least glimpsed in these communicative fiber, discourages longer, open discussions about democratic beliefs, goals, and values and how they correspond to the movement's symbolism, or in my terms playing with, discussing, and reimagining the social relation between movement figure and background, its activities and symbols.

Communicative personalism only seemingly contradicts the social side of the personalized movement paradox. Working for attention by privileging aspects of people's "personal orbit" (Mills 1959:1) risks fragmentation, a situation that advantages popular cultural forms of presenting information, such as packing it as entertaining or getting celebrity champions to peddle movement. Movement actors struggle to enact social symbolic communication as a political struggle of audibility (Ochigame and Holston

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2016). The filtering logic of online platforms suggests a vertical gatekeeper mediating which information rises and which remains hidden below. When *issue communicators* discuss getting attention across niche audiences as "amplifying" their messages, they have in mind this metaphor of verticality. Focusing on the assumptions and outcomes of offline communicative mobilizations reveals a complementary set of gatekeeping practices about "reach", evoking a metaphor of horizontality. Assuming everyone can be reached raises the problem of how to locate where every person resides as nodes in the communicative landscape. Assumptions about reach and amplification create vulnerabilities, and between every person as a node in the communicative landscape slip safe assumptions about how popular culture continues to dominate public attention, seen in talk about and work of movement strategies to popularize SMO claims by placing them in fun, imagistic, and relatively safe popular cultural forms of information packaged entertainingly.

A politics of audibility creates a particular struggle within the personalizing nature of digital materials. A new media landscape and its communicative personalism structure broad assumptions that movement actors make about how to capture, but not hold, public attention. Wondering about communicative personalism's resolution in popular cultural appeals, like the PSA campaign posters I saw of Jane Lynch and Laurence Fishburne on my first day at LAN, I found that mobilizing celebrities further mixes entertainment and activism, shaping a certain aspect of the work movement actors do to realize communicative mobilization. Staging mediatized situations with celebrities was discursive and interactional work, a mix of event-planning and crafting the

interaction order, best seen in Ronald positioning celebrities close to LAN's logo, and preparing visuals and videos for posting to social media. The work of mobilizing celebrities involves a language of optics and a toolkit for constructing mediatized situations for digital circulation in ways that amplify traditional protest activity. Movement issue communicators assume the solution to the problem of audibility is to pursue critical, nuanced information for narrow audiences (the deeper dive, another metaphor for communicative personalism) by folding such information into visually succinct, powerful images and statements. Operationalizing infotainment can catch attention, transform that attention, and train it onto SMO self-publications (the meaning of pipelining).

Politicized lifestyle enclaves meet some of the communicative criteria of the public sphere. These narrow circles function in a network of publics, as Fraser theorizes, and they draw communicative fiber from personalized media to construct political spheres buttressed by alternate media. Hochschild's concept of the "deep story" especially locks individuals together into personalized worlds. Niche media can be cultural forces that serve as inputs into and bonds of communicative worlds that open up deep, personal involvement in bubbles of the civil sphere, while closing down possibilities of translation and dialogue across world. Deep stories include feeling rules that guide how individuals interact with political interlocutors of other social groups, as well as narrative codes for how we look at them, the characters and morals we feel they are and have. The deep story and niche media, deeply enmeshed, enable niche

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communicative worlds that, while resembling the public sphere, can only limitedly meet some of its criteria.

Politicized lifestyle enclaves sometimes can be positive for civil society (gay marriage legalized, chosen political representatives become senators and president), but they are extremely limited in at least one regard—a public debate envisioned to be societal by Habermas among different democratic stakeholders. Even more dangerous for Politicized lifestyle enclaves is that the same affective connection, mediatized world-building, and political mobilizations based in a story can be used by opponents in ways that contain silos. A network of niche-mediated publics does not easily cede ground on which to enter reasoned debate, consider counterclaims, and get into civil argument. Instead, the network seems to extend each bubble only to harden the edges. Politicized lifestyle enclaves become silos when they are rigid cocoons against any world antithetical to personally held identities, beliefs, and politics, which can only seem to be existential threats. A network of niche-mediated public spheres creates hard and fast divides without much clarification on how to talk to each other.

White Noise and Its Story Publics

In 1985, Don DeLillo's novel *White Noise* won the US National Book Award for Fiction for helping to introduce, and especially for exemplifying, postmodernism in literature. His satire of the relationships among television, academia, and the foundations of truth and knowledge presaged much of our current political and communicative situation, a culture of multitudes of grievances and media outlets to broadcast them,

swimming amongst and against uncertain criteria by which to evaluate right and wrong, truth from falsehood. In a move of subtle genius, DeLillo interpolates his protagonist Jack's dialogue with fragments of media, adding their voices, clips and sentences to spoken exchanges between characters, as if the bits and bursts from pages and screens in American households constitute an intimate part of everyday conversation. The ubiquity of media fragments leads Jack's son Heinrich to believe less in his senses than the information he receives from radio and TV, while positing through the novel that truth becomes arbitrary, relative, and ultimately unknowable in such a situation. DeLillo makes this clearer in the second part of the novel, when a human-made toxic disaster infects Jack. Through all the white noise of competing claims and uncertainty in truth, it seems impossible to figure out the causes of the disaster, assign political responsibility, or even afterward provide to Jack a clear prognosis of whether he will die from it.

Sociologist Eviatar Zerubavel's *Elephant in the Room* resembles *White Noise* in its description and explanation of how silence about truth is produced by so much sound. Like DeLillo, Zerubavel laments the attentional obstacles to social problems like human-caused toxic events—the 2010 BP oil spill is an example—that should be so obvious to anyone willing to really look. Zerubavel is not a movements sociologist, but his sociology of attention is of clear importance to interactionist approaches to understanding the problems surrounding how to transform private issues into collectively defined and mobilized claims for change. Zerubavel's materials echo the work of Fraser, data on the extreme difficulties of domestic violence victims or survivors, and their families, to attend to and discuss, not to mention frame, gender violence as a broader political issue.

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The key difference between Zerubavel and DeLillo lies in their treatment of media. On media, Zerubavel says the mass media does not control our minds. Media do not tell us what to think; its power lies in its ability to tell us *what to think about*, often trivial. DeLillo develops comedy and satire from this point, trafficking in the bizarre, consumerist, and often nonsensical topics and claims that media make us consider before moving on to the next disposable tidbit. However, beneath the demands on and divergent flows of attention, there remain concerns about our fates as human beings. Such concerns vacillate between the overly personal and the potentially collective. In the days leading to the airborne toxic disaster, Jack and his wife speak openly of their fear of death, and in the last part of the novel, an experimental medicine to cure humans of thinking about their mortality comes to Jack's attention by way of a snippet from the white noise, a small advertisement in a celebrity and lifestyle gossip magazine. The novel's conclusion, in fact the structure of its narrative, implies the argument I am making in this dissertation: issues arise in the lifeworld, dearly held worries, fears, and hopes that make sense within one's biography as it is lived within one's personal orbit and anchored by a deep story; lifeworld issues become exacerbated by something bigger than us as individuals, some collective event like the toxic disaster; and we do our best to connect and discuss the two points, the individual and the collective, through and in use of media and its perceptual frames available to us. DeLillo's choice to make that mediated moment an ad from a trashy magazine is black comedy. This dissertation argues that a small piece in a wider, stretched, distracted ecosystem of media can nonetheless drive political social movement.

Searching for an experimental drug for one's fear of death is decidedly an attempt at personal salvation for an individual trouble. If you swap out the narrower concern over one's mortality for an issue in Zerubavel's writing about social problems, whether they be gender-caused domestic abuse, environmental disasters, or democratic corruption, then the answer I am offering in this dissertation is clearer. Somehow, out of all the political silencing caused by white noise, invitations to social movements can be extended and collective action can be pressed. Yet these claims seem to grow infinitesimally narrower as they traverse through the contours of capitalist media. In the introduction to this dissertation, I aligned with Postman to argue that democratic conversation is molded in and by the predominant modes of communication available in society. I went onto argue that some movement actors form their communicative mobilization infotainingly, nonetheless introducing some bits of nuance into public dialogue. In the Lincoln and Douglas case, the predominant medium was a reading culture. In the contemporary case, discourse is shaped in the mediated form of sound bite and imagistic itty.

A communicative mobilization shaped in communicative personalism leaves pieces of messaging across the shallowest area of an ocean of media, what marine biologists call the swash zone, a zone where most beach-goers swim. Some readers will lament the shallowness of a thin, stretched, noisy, distracted media landscape. The swash zone is meant to symbolize the way some movement communicators talk about making their messaging quick and catchy, to travel far and wide on the surface level of personalized media with so many different points and gaps between reaching so many people, to try to get them emotionally and personally hooked to the movement's message.

In DeLillo's novel, personal experience was affected and transformed by such a social structure of fractured media, a situation that augments Zerubavel's revelation that other everyday patterns of inattention elsewhere block such transformations. Laying out mediated bits across the swash zone can become meaningful through a particular anchoring in someone's life, one that invites them to consider collective action. Yet at the same time those mediated bits constitute a risky communicative mobilization. They more readily succeed for groups biographically disposed to receive a particular movement's messages, an effective strategy for inviting centrists to consider a movement's claims, though less effective at reaching more ideological camps.

Beneath the swash zone might be any number of oceanic sinkholes, like the Giant Blue Hole in Belize or Thor's Well off Oregon's coast, symbolizing what it means for some communication directors to talk about a deep dive, where they feel movement information is more complex, nuanced, and sufficient to transform engagement into informed political mobilization. Traditionally, sociologists have assumed such informing of public opinion was paramount to institutional accountability, whether government or corporate institutions. To get these institutions to change, issue communicators often work for "groundswells" or "tidal waves" of public opinion. The image of producing "tidal wave" of opinion, however, insufficiently makes visible the communicative successes across disparate audiences that resonate deeply within politicized lifestyle enclaves yet fail to connect across political blocs of Americans enough to readily translate into institutional change. Instead, amplified publicity of personalist action

gushes out of lifestyle enclaves like so many social geysers that fail to connect to one another into a wave of steady, critical public opinion.

Finally, I have demonstrated that emotional connection, mediatized world-building, and political mobilization can be used by opponents of each and every politicized lifestyle enclave. A network of niche-mediated publics assigns to each a deep story for their corner of civil society without much by way of cultural guidelines on how to reason together, how to enter into civil discussion of competing political claims on institutional arrangements. Story publics, the proper metaphor for politicized lifestyle enclaves, instead conflate factual and fictional media while transforming public issues into personalization, both politically and in communicatively. Emotionally and narratively bound to their movement's communication and vision, grounded in and supported by both fact and fiction, story publics face outward to the broader society, limitedly legitimate and farcically efficacious. With little understanding of how or maybe lacking willingness to translate deep stories for competing publics, or enter into open-ended dialogue of our collective future, politicized lifestyle enclaves seek to achieve their vision alone, even if it sometimes means a scorched-earth political communication in the process.

APPENDIX 1: GUARDED PARTICIPANTS

This dissertation draws from a research training in a mix of critical ethnographic approaches I first encountered under the tutelage of Dr. Mark Jacobs and expanded under Dr. Amy Best as a participant in *The Gender Research Project*, a three-year, multi-method assessment study of gender issues at George Mason University. In a team of researchers, I practiced feminist approaches to qualitative sociology in a study of how gender and Facebook affected university dating, feminist approaches to which I committed in the course of an MA thesis project, becoming my set of commitments brought to systematic social research. As a heterosexual, light-skinned biracial man, I endeavor to minimize harm to research subjects by reflection on and honesty about my identity, privilege and power as both a researcher and someone who represents dominant social statuses. Such an endeavor weds me to a process of deferring to the expertise of interviewees, working to build rapport, instill trust and demonstrate reciprocity.

Early in the dissertation study, it became difficult to remain committed to a feminist approach to studying professional SMOs, especially well-compensated communication directors. During an early interview with a communication director for a local and organic food advocacy group, I was asked to "stop apologizing" for asking my questions, told that it was "getting annoying" to do the interview because we "had agreed to a timeframe" and seemed to be off topic. Her reaction during the interview was

disconcerting, especially because I was certain that I was not explicitly apologizing, a fact confirmed when I listened to the audio recording at home.

Her reaction, however, was not unique. After some difficulty to recruit movement communicators to the study, I extended my snowball-sampling to cities outside of DC, conducting three interviews over the telephone. Remaining committed to reciprocity and rapport-building, I assumed two phone calls would be necessary: one to introduce myself, attempt to develop some trust, request an interview, and then allow some time for a potential respondent to consider. This quickly went out the window. During my first phone call with another food advocate, I was told "the interview has to be today" because of the value of her time. Additionally, I was also told in no uncertain terms "forty-five minutes is too long" and that she would only take questions for about twenty-five minutes.

I began considering that, although workers for movement groups are not exactly in the mainstream, these paid professionals were *resembling* elites, since they were not actually elites in C. Wright Mills's (1956) formulation of the top of economic and state hierarchies or representing mainstream statuses or issues (Hertz and Imber 1993; Cochrane 1998; Smith 2006). My reconsideration seemed validated when folks at LAN became guarded when I expressed an idea to study three SMOs within the LGBT-allies movement, informing me that I would need to sign non-disclosure forms and overall treating the institution as a "guarded organization" (Monahan and Fisher 2014). I imagined respondents to be "guarded participants" and attempted to adjust the approach to the qualitative study. Difficulty became apparent, however, by evidence of the variable
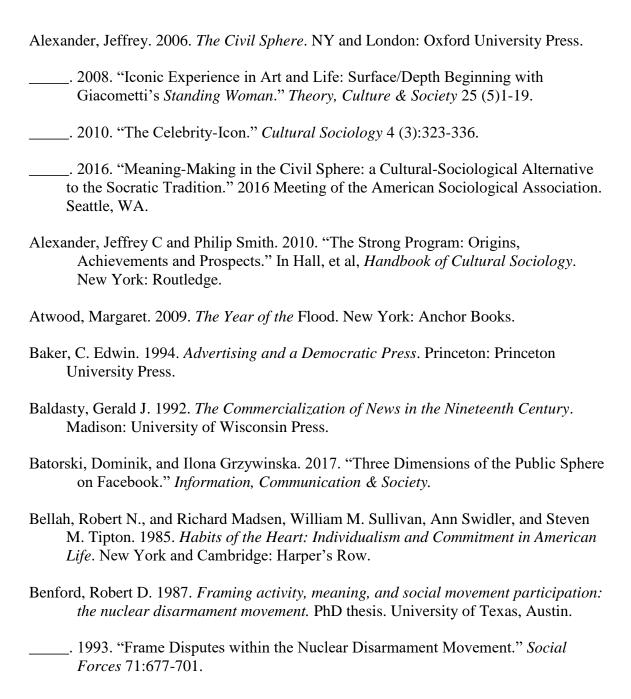
reactions to my blend of reflectiveness on issues of power as the researcher and my personal identity with a more aggressive presentation of self as expert. If I took too much time for rapport building or posed my questions too modestly, respondents would brusquely assure me they would be happy to indulge my interests when they had more time. If I quickened my pitch, posed questions in no uncertain terms, and intimated that the information was needed immediately, respondents become guarded. Being deferential elicited dismissiveness, but being too straightforward elicited defensiveness, best seen in responses like "bartering information is like giving away gold in our hand" and "information is our value". The seesaw of reaction itself provided tremendous insight into the bifurcated nature of movement communication, and I began to see that alternating between dismissiveness and defensiveness was one strategy available to paid communicators to control information.

All to say that some qualification is necessary for claims made in this dissertation. Not only were my respondents resembling elites, they were also experts in the role of communication, in crafting the image and "brand" of their movement activities. Remaining committed to feminist practices of research in such an arena risked cooptation. For example, one responded admitted to helping me network with SMO workers because of a positive program evaluation produced by Dr. Amy L. Best and myself as a research assistant. LAN workers came to trust me in two regards: as a result of my commitments to trust- and rapport building, but also by my status as a straight brother of a gay man, a natural ally much like those LAN sought to cultivate. In fact, during my time at LAN, I learned that the council of executive directors voted against

access for a team of Canadian sexuality researchers because they were too unfamiliar. They relayed in an email that the "brand is gold" and can only be trusted in a known person's hand "like Jeff".

Another example of control came up when I interviewed an activist who started Movement Media, a boutique communications firm for left-wing movements, for *The Sociologist* early in the project (Johnson 2014). My hope was our introduction and collaboration might lead to his participating in the study. After publication, however, he became steadily unavailable before ceasing to respond to my text messages altogether. To be clear, before, during, and at publication, lines of communication were open such that we were calling, texting, and emailing each other, but communication stopped almost immediately after the interview was published in a sociology magazine and delivered to him. It was not improbable to me that my research interests were being unintentionally subsumed by his need to be in control of publicity, as part of the production of movement communication itself. Combined with the limited resources non-profits compete for, and the broader issues of institutional existence and survival that would be jeopardized in any number of ways if negative information circulated, these instances of guardedness around sharing information inevitably shaped what could be discovered in this dissertation, and how. Movement communicators walk a tightrope between the risk of both bad publicity and no publicity, each outcome potentially risking alienation of funding organizations. Logically, the interview became a site of information control, though such a state of affairs allows some insight into the stakes at the edges of communicative boundaries.

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BIOGRAPHY

JL Johnson was born into the working class in Patuxent River, Maryland, in 1983. He came to think, for him, the key to joining the middle class would be teaching high school math. After being graduated by Shippensburg University, something of a public teacher's college in Pennsylvania, with a Bachelor of Science in Mathematics in 2006, he realized, for him, the American Dream itself ought to be rethought. He moved to Virginia to be closer to his extended family. He earned some money tutoring math for student-athletes at George Mason University, so that he might there pursue a Master of Arts in Sociology, which he earned in 2010. He decided that he was meant to be a sociologist. This dissertation is the outcome of that quest.