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# Communication & Social Change

*A scholarly journal of the Center for Excellence in Communication Arts  
Clark Atlanta University*

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***Communication and Social Change***

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## **Editor's Introduction**

Since launching the *Communication and Social Change* journal in 2007, the Center for Excellence in Communication Arts at Clark Atlanta University has convened an annual conference of the same title and focus: communication and social change. The articles in this second volume relate to the February 2008 conference theme *Exchanging Teaching Strategies and Professional Practices* and promote dialogue of innovative ways to apply theory to improve teaching and learning.

The articles are as follows: "Engaging Students in College Communication Classes," by Richard Fiordo, discusses how as communication educator's our integrating research theory to professional practice should be cumulative and continuous. In their enlightening research study "Priority Information Needs of African American Graduate Women: A Pilot Study," Bharat Mehra and Cheryl Ann Lambert explore the women's information needs as well as the barriers they face in the learning process. The findings show implications for developing better teaching and learning atmospheres, enhanced campus services and facilities, and overall supportive climates for African American graduate students. W. Keith Tims' "Mask Training in Traditional Acting Classes" offers a unique perspective of integrating a limited, two-week session of mask work into an undergraduate setting while achieving the intended teaching and learning outcomes. "Defending the Inverted Pyramid Style: Advocating an Emphasis on Teaching Traditional Practices in International Journalism Education," by Richard Shafer, Eric Freedman and Stephen Rendahl, examines the benefits of and potential obstacles to the use of the model curricula prepared by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization to improve international journalism education. "Social Change and Acculturation in the Adjustment of New African American Women: A Case Study," by Charles Okigbo, Jennifer Reiersen and Shelly Stowman, presents the results of an action research study of new African American women in the Fargo-Moorhead area of North Dakota and Minnesota that found ambivalent attitudes towards Americanization and Africanness, as well as barriers to successful integration. In "Mass Media, Television, and Children's Socialization: Making Peace with TV," Tatyana Dumova, Richard Fiordo and Stephen Rendahl revisit television's potential function in the positive socialization of young people.

Clark Atlanta University, formed in 1988 by the consolidation of two institutions, Atlanta University (1865) and Clark College (1869), is located in the historic Atlanta University Center which includes Spelman College, Morehouse College, the Interdenominational Theological Center and Morris Brown College. The historic Civil Rights movement is philosophically tied to the continuing missions of these institutions which promote social justice and scholarship that addresses change in local, national and global communities.

*Communication and Social Change* continues this tradition.

Cheryl Renee Gooch  
*Clark Atlanta University*

## Engaging Students in College Communication Classes

Richard Fiordo

*University of North Dakota*

*In this paper, selected communication theories and perspectives are applied as professional teaching strategies in the classroom. The thesis this paper supports is that applying communication theories in class can improve instructional practice. Theory in action becomes the goal. To engage the class through activities is the means proposed. Measurable studies can follow to determine empirical parameters and results. Integrating research theory to professional practice should be cumulative and progressive as well as continuous and ongoing. A communication educator's goal can be to apply communication theories in class for students (at this time in their intellectual development) to accept, reject, or modify. As imaginative symbol-using beings, we communicate in different and new ways from culture to culture, especially in light of emerging communication technologies and a creative genius to generate new ways.*

### Overview

In this exploratory paper, selected communication theories and perspectives are used to demonstrate their utility in engaging diverse students in various communication classes. With learning as the final goal, the selected theories and perspectives are used as strategies to improve teaching. The question asked in this paper is: How can applying theories from the field of communication in class improve instructional practice? The response detailed is that innovatively applied educational communication theories can improve teaching. Theory in action becomes the goal. To activate the class through activities is the means proposed. Experimental and measurable studies can follow to determine empirical parameters and results; quantitative studies would add content to desirable evidence-based instructional choices. The instructor becomes the testing agent, theory the instructor's agency, the classroom the scene, learning the purpose, teaching the act, and respect for all involved in the educational process the proper attitude.

The marriage of research theory to professional practice should be cumulative and progressive as well as continuous and ongoing. The communication educator's goal should be to revive communication theories from textbooks and apply them in class for students, at this time in their intellectual development, to accept, reject, or modify. Where the theory cannot be found, students can and must be taught to blend or invent one. The creative component of human communication theory should never be overlooked (Fiordo, 1990). As imaginative symbol-using beings, we communicate in different and new ways from culture to culture, especially in light of emerging communication technologies and a creative genius to generate ways not before been used.

Since this is a theoretical paper that strives to be useful to college instructors in communication education, a number of theoretical and applied perspectives will be discussed. No perspective can be fully covered, for space will not allow this. Enough though should be said to provide sufficient clarity for communication education instructors to grasp these perspectives

for possible utilization in their classes. The activating theoretical perspectives for educational communication engagement in this paper include: 1) Hall's critical theory as the struggle for hierarchical control, 2) Fiordo's mindful dialectic as a dialogical perspective drawn from Van Eemeren's pragma-dialectic, and 3) Burgoon's deception theory as deliberately bogus manipulations that teach through the "shock" of expectancy violation theory. The activating utilitarian perspectives for educational communication engagement in this paper include the power and limits of: a) learning from communication consequences; b) learning values through money; c) editing interviews with the stars (leaders in a field) as engagement; d) identifying misinformation (regardless of human intention) as cartographic analysis; e) ignorance of laws and facts; f) student consultation as engagement; and, g) incorporating humor into classrooms as an antidote for a tyranny of errors and hazards of that which is taken for granted (for example, Chris Rock or Ron White). These theories and perspectives can be incorporated into the classroom to manage attention, demonstrate theory in action, and improve instruction.

### **Theoretical Perspectives on Engagement**

#### *Critical Theory as Engagement*

According to Hall (1980), *ideology* refers to "images, concepts and premises which provide the frameworks through which we represent, interpret, understand, and 'make sense' of some aspect of social existence" (p.31). Cultural studies focus on how elite groups exercise ideological power and control over subordinate groups (Hall, 1992, 1997); it assumes that culture "pervades and invades all facets of human behavior" and that people are "part of a hierarchical structure of power" (West & Turner, 2003, p. 364). An attempt is made to have the sense of the elite serve as the common sense. Dominance and control constitute the motivation. The goal in using critical theory in the classroom is to develop an approach to criticism that will allow us to be positive after being negative: that is, to create pleasant conditions for communication after removing unpleasant conditions for communication (Travis, 1990, p. 393).

The aspect of critical theory emphasized here is called *hierarchical criticism* (Fiordo, 2007a); it entails the assessment of the hierarchical in human relations. Hierarchical criticism uncovers the underpinnings of power: more specifically, the punitive and beneficial superordination and subordination (along with hegemony and counter-hegemony) in fiction, life, human relations, and communication. It deconstructs the assumptions of hierarchical communication in its multifarious forms. Borrowing from Burke's definition of "man" in *Language as Symbolic Action* (1963), communication critics examine the hierarchical when they seek actual and symbolic equivalents of dominance and dependence in light of communicators and their circumstances.

Those victimized by toxic hierarchies may survive with no ill effects, with limiting effects, with crippling effects; or, they may not survive at all. "Toxicity" refers to whatever is harmful to humans hierarchically related to one another. Just as chemical or biochemical toxins can cause illness in a body, virulent hierarchies can cause illness in others. Hierarchical critics of communication and human relations must examine hierarchies for toxic relations in which one or more people suffer as a result of exposure to a negative hierarchical relationship. Toxic

hierarchies can occur anywhere. Obedience in healthy hierarchies, such as in Zen monasteries, can be challenging; in toxic hierarchies, such as slavery in the US, it can be opposed endlessly until eradicated. Indeed, hierarchies can be beneficial. Da Vinci's subordinates surrendered to the master in order to grow while Hussein had subordinates who surrendered to the dictator in order to survive. While hierarchies need not be depraved in themselves, they can be abused by those without stupendous talent.

The dark, negative, and toxic side of a communication hierarchy has been described (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1998; Cupach & Spitzberg, 1994). That a destructive hierarchical element exists is self-evident in war, crime, abuse, and other forms of suffering and oppression humanity perpetuates upon itself. The dark side of human relations does not exist merely in the camp of an enemy politically and historically defined: for example, Iraqi or Vietnamese soldiers. The dark side of communication can be found anywhere at any time in the camp of the enemy or at home. While many communication scholars analyze only healthy and positive relations, some communication scholars wish to analyze unhealthy and negative relations as well. Negative and positive relations co-occur and influence one another. To expect one without the other is delusional. Hierarchies, healthy and toxic, to be commanded, must be recognized.

Like Karen Horney's (1945) democratic and fascist psychological leanings, dominant and subordinate roles in a hierarchy struggle constantly struggle with obedience in human symbolic interaction and communication (Milgram, 1974). A hierarchical critique assumes these are present and examines the abuses and benefits of power, hegemony, and domination. To surrender to the will of another without compunction is not in itself toxic: for example, bowing before a worthy sensei or kissing the hand of the Pontiff. Mapping objectively and measurably the hierarchical would contribute to determining what is healthy and what toxic. Clearly, we can challenge even those we respect as a way of "keeping everyone honest," as the broadcasters for CNN, "the most trusted name in news," declare. We can certainly examine CNN as well.

Oppressive hierarchies can contaminate communication in all directions and hurt those at all levels in the system. For challenging premises, many have been imprisoned, or worse, due to maintaining scientific truths outrageous at the time to the existing power hierarchy: for example, the fact that the sun, not the earth, is the center of our solar system. Despite outrages against humanity, truth may eventually become supreme, even if the shocking truth must be prefaced with cautions (Fiordo, 2007c, 2003a). Galileo risks being hierarchically silenced even today's world of digital inquiry. Proactive measures must be used to safeguard the results of challenging ideas taken-for-granted. Once we uncover the hierarchical risks, we can work to mollify negative influence and begin to transform toxic into beneficial functions.

### *Dialectic Theory as Engagement*

Led by Van Eemeren, the Dutch school of pragma-dialectics at the University of Amsterdam defines *argumentation* as a "a constellation of statements designed to justify or refute an expressed opinion and calculated in a regimented discussion to convince a rational judge of a particular standpoint in respect of the acceptability or unacceptability of that expressed opinion" (Van Eemeren & Grootendorst (1983). Pragma-dialectics attempts to "establish how debates must be conducted for the critical testing of expressed opinions." Expressing differences thus



becomes a “part of a critical discussion about an expressed opinion,” and a critical discussion entails an interaction between “a protagonist and an antagonist of a particular standpoint in respect of an expressed opinion.” The purpose of the discussion is to determine whether the “protagonist’s standpoint is defensible against the critical reactions of the antagonist.” Arguers attempt to be rational judges of controversial discourse (Van Eemeren & Grootendorst, pp. 177-178).

Dialectic thus involves humans diffusing, escalating, or maintaining verbal clashes, conflicts, disagreements, or contradictions. Conflict is a dramatic and dialogical choice. The more conflict the more drama (Brooks, Pinson, & Wilson, 2006, pp. 309-312). Dialectics applies to mindful and mindless as well as gentle and hurtful methods in everyday disagreements to establish truth, dispute falsehood, reveal concealments, uncover lies, and so on. Dialectical communication strives to be reasonable and practical in balancing harmony and disharmony among communicators; it proactively pursues disagreement in agreement and agreement in disagreement. Dialectical relations can be visualized as agreement or consent on one side and disagreement or dissent in the other. While, arguably, favoring agreement more often than disagreement, dialectics can be understood as a continuum with such polar terms as: Agree-Disagree, Consent-Dissent, Consonance-Dissonance, Point-Counterpoint, Question-Response, Influence-Resistance, Advocacy-Opposition, Acceptance-Rejection, Invitation-Enfoldment, Progress-Regress, Thesis-Antithesis, and Charge-Countercharge (Fiordo, 2007b).

The value of the daily use of dialectics is debatable, for it can function as a double-edged sword for communication; it can be hurtful rather than helpful, can provide far more heat than light, and can be mindless rather than mindful. Mindful is contrasted here with mindless (Langer, 1989) as states of relative awareness ranging from extremely high to zero (DeVito, 2006). Mindfulness would constitute a person with knowledge. Mindlessness would constitute a person in ignorance. We are to at degree mindful on some topics and mindless on others. The dialectical perspective emphasized here is called the *mindful dialectic* and stresses ways that are soft, kind, and gentle yet progressive (Noddings, 1984). The mindful dialectic expects disputants to be good-natured and good-humored – when possible, capable of injecting humor and levity into the gravity of disputes as often as conditions permit. To be mindful when dissenting means being delicate, caring, prudent, and nurturing while being daring, assertive, reasonable, and knowledgeable.

A dialog employing the perspective of the mindful dialectic attempts to replace as much as possible mindless and harsh methods of disagreement with mindful and compassionate methods. The mindful dialectic asks primarily these questions: (1) Would an expressed disagreement be worth the risk? (2) Can an expressed disagreement be acquired without punitive consequences to the parties involved? And, 3) Will the benefit outweigh the cost enough to justify the risk of an expressed disagreement? In the mindful dialectic, depending on circumstances and intentions, arguing can fluctuate from reasonableness to belligerence to accomplish an end, if the situation so demands. The mindful dialectic recognizes that oppressors using power unjustly may need to be addressed in a radically different manner from reasonable people in accountable and democratic contexts. The mindful dialectic is rooted broadly in the ethics of caring about another’s point of view. Communicators using the mindful dialectic remain consid-

erate of one another for the most part; they become inconsiderate and manipulative, however, to serve higher ends, such as survival in POW camps. While the relationship is always considered above the content, deliberation must remain as open to eliciting and expressing disagreement as the parties and circumstances permit.

Overall, the quest of the mindful dialectic is not to dominate (or dominate incidentally at most) another in a conversation, dialog, discussion, or debate; rather, the quest is to, with kind and non-violent communication manners and at a pace suitable to all parties to the interaction, discover meaning and identify knowledge of actions, attitudes, facts, and values. In pursuing the mindful dialectic, it is not necessary to presume that other arguers are fragile. When we respect a person's limits in the mindful dialectic, we also respect that person's powers. If the opponent is strong enough to handle heavy criticism, then we might deliver heavy criticism while honoring that person's potential limits. We challenge one another as much as each can take; the pursuit is good-natured and good-humored. If we must pull a punch, we do so. If the person can take a solid punch, we deliver one. If we can joke about an issue without reducing the dignity of the other, we may do so. Students are challenged to disagree. Cognitive complexity is increased. Students engage in communication suited to the complicated relational environments of today.

#### *Deception Theory and Expectancy Violation Theory as Engagement*

The Mencken rule will apply to our incorporation of deception theory into communication classes. The Mencken rule pertains to the realization that complex problems that appear to have simple solutions are usually wrong (Lockney, 1986, p. 30). The cognitive complexity of constructivists (Delia, O'Keefe, & O'Keefe, 1982), though, is the norm on matters related to violating expectancies via deception, disinformation, misinformation, and information. Notably, ideas related to deception are not new nor are they unique to the field of communication (Broad & Wade, 1982). I will soon propose an NCA subdivision to address an underrepresented communication interest area to be labeled "Deceptive and Criminal Communication."

Deception theory overlaps with expectancy violation theory, when used as learning tools in a classroom, it can serve as a form of "shock teaching." Students can be presented with forms of dissonance that range from mildly to severely disturbing: lying, formerly hidden information, and ambiguous language. They then must determine how to adjust to the shock of information that is discrepant with their cherished views. Students become engaged through the shocking dissonance created by revealing various forms of deception and violating their expectations that the facts and beliefs they hold are valid and solid. An instructor can play a role with the students by pretending to have, perhaps, a strong positive reaction to a conventional topic but in fact have no reaction to it. The falsified reaction violates expectations through a fib. Students become engaged. Similarly, the instructor can play a negative role on the same topic. A student declares she is a stalwart Democrat but later discloses she is a stalwart Republican. The reverse of this would be acceptable also. The phony act can serve as the catalyst.

Burgoon (2007) extends deception beyond "outright lies" to everything from "white lies and hyperbole, to misdirection and evasion, to equivocation and ambiguity, to concealment and omission of relevant information." Although deception includes only "intentional acts, not incidental or accidental ones, and acts directed toward deluding another, not the self (Burgoon,

2005, p. 7), *deception* as defined in this paper is set forth by Buller and Burgoon (1996) and presented concisely by Burgoon (p. 7): namely, “messages and information knowingly and intentionally transmitted to foster false beliefs or conclusions.” Burgoon emphasizes that in the British system of law, we have the required benchmark of an oath to tell “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.” Falsification violates the first phrase of the oath. By “saying less than could be said” or by withholding relevant information (or some of the truth), concealment violates the second phrase of the oath. Equivocation, which represents “all the ways in which people violate requirements to give clear and relevant information,” especially uttering indecipherable half-truths, violates the third phrase of the oath (p. 7).

Burgoon (p. 6) reports that deception has been estimated to be operative in one-fourth to one-third of all conversations. Deception is correlated, furthermore, with a low level of deception detection: perhaps at best around 54% (Burgoon, p. 6). Resting on a cultural truth bias, which carries with it the presumption of truth, deception for most people is difficult for those with a truth bias err toward leniency in judging others. With those trained in deception detection, such as detectives, deception detection remains low due to “false alarms”; that is, they may judge as many as 24% of innocent interviewees as guilty. This is known as the “Othello error.” Thus, experts can be as “inaccurate as lay people” and occasionally more so due to their formal training which may “induce a lie bias or chronic suspicion.” Those with a lie bias or a presumption of deceit err toward severity in judging another. Regardless of the error present, deception might be detected, at best even by experts, around two-thirds of the time (Burgoon, pp. 12-13). To err toward leniency or severity is still to err. Deception to be detected must be respected as an operative possibility, if not a probability of 25% modestly estimated, in human communication.

Disinformation includes deliberately falsifying information (O’Hair, Rubenstein, & Stewart, 2004; O’Hair, Stewart, & Rubenstein, 2007; O’Hair, Cody, & McLaughlin, 1981). Deliberately falsifying information amounts to disinformation (that is, false information or a hoax). Disinformation includes the propagation of intentional hoaxes and falsehoods, an aspect incidentally of deception theory (p. 62). Misinformation and disinformation occur frequently: Enron’s falsified profit-and-loss statements, President Clinton’s early denial of having sexual relations with an intern, the decision of President Bush and Congress to locate through military means weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. The stories are yet to be told convincingly. We have to analyze information and separate the truth from disinformation and misinformation. For example, someone misinformed might report that a 1.5 megawatt windmill tower with three propellers costs 5 million US dollars and powers 400 homes while an accurate and authoritative source might report that such a tower costs 1 million US dollars and powers 1,000 homes. The critique of the information should take falsehood and motive into account: thus, mindless misinformation as well as mindful disinformation.

When we encounter information that is (or appears to be) untrue, do we assume the message is deceit or misinformation? If we assume deceit as a first choice, we are more incriminating and severe and less diplomatic and lenient in our decision to continue to communicate. If we assume misinformation as a first choice, we are more diplomatic and lenient and less incriminating and severe in our decision to continue to communicate. Which assumption we make can be tempered by the circumstances. We do not have to proceed always with an assumption of

deceit as a first choice and misinformation as the default choice; we can circumstantially proceed with an assumption of misinformation as a first choice and deceit as a default choice. We might suspend our judgment about deception, the more severe charge, by assuming misinformation until additional evidence is gathered. Social courtesies and politesse may then be honored (Fiordo, 2007a, 2007b, 2003b).

Therefore, the goal might be to rule out deception as a first choice of allegation or attribution and conclude that misinformation is likely the culprit. The motives for the inaccuracies are thereby assumed to be honorable although incorrect. This choice respects a bias of truth and honesty. However, once a communicator is caught in a blatant and hurtful lie, a motive of deception must now take precedence in judging the message and messenger. This choice respects a bias of suspicion and distrust. There are a number of ways deception theory can be integrated into communication classes since deception occurs in degree within and between cultures and over time. While no communication context may be free of it, some communication contexts are prone to its use and abuse than others. To integrate deception theory into communication classes is to make the learning more relevant, beneficial, and real to students trying to function with optimal results in contemporary society. The ethics of debating both sides of an issue can apply to this exercise since students are asked to learn by taking positions that are not theirs.

### Classroom Exercises

Deception exercises in communication classes can be highly engaging. Although students may participate willingly in deception exercises, their right to request an alternative assignment should be respected and optional assignments provided. Students may embrace a deception exercise as an opportunity to determine their own abilities to detect deception, to deceive, or to determine the susceptibility of an audience to be deceived. Students may be interested, glad, and willing to participate in order to advance their learning in general and to advance their learning in particular about this engaging aspect of the human communication. Because some students might not care to participate in deception exercises (Hopfe & Woodward, 2001; Samovar & Porter, 2004; Friesen, 2000), they should be given alternative assignments.

Detecting deception under the limited conditions of a classroom can be daunting. In actual life, with time and investigation, deception can be discovered despite the victim of deception losing time, money, health, and even life before truth can be sifted from sand. Treating deception in a negative way, instructors can arrange assignment options to advance from those less difficult to more difficult, less problematic to more problematic, or less challenging to more challenging.

### Optional Assignment A

This communication assignment can engage students through a video recording of a public address historically known to involve deception: for example, Former President Clinton's public response of denial to allegations of a sexual relation with an intern or District Attorney Nifong's

explanation for withholding the DNA files of the Duke University students charged with rape. The class can analyze a written transcript the instructor provides. The instructor should know the facts pertaining to the discourse so that he or she can give the class an accurate. A copy of the discourse with false features in bold print might be shown the class and followed by a copy of the speech with the accurate information underlined. The class should analyze itself at the end with respect to its own truth bias or suspicion bias.

#### Optional Assignment B

With their informed consent, engage students by having them present a speech to deceive on a well-known topic. Student speakers participating must promise to debrief the class afterwards. Create alternative assignments for those who might feel uncomfortable participating. One alternative can be to ask a student requesting an alternative assignment to speak honestly and truthfully in order to determine whether the class projects deceit onto their honest and true speech or perceives it as the honest and true discourse the speaker intends it to be. A suitable deceptive public speech would be one on a topic where facts would presumably be known by the audience in that country and region: for example, in the US, that effective 11 December 2007 under 4,000 US troops have been killed in the Iraq War. First, the class expresses what it thinks is deceptive about the discourse; second, the speaker debriefs them. A printed copy of the deceitful features might follow. The audience should analyze itself at the end with respect to its own truth bias or suspicion bias.

#### Optional Assignment C

Engage students from minority or international cultures by asking them to comment on deception in their society or country. If they feel comfortable discussing deception in class, ask them to explain how their reaction to deception. I have no knowledge of a culture, society, or nation where deception is not practiced. While the degree of deception may vary tremendously, the practice presumably exists everywhere with some opposing it, tolerating it, and embracing it. Even where a truth bias prevails, as in the US, violations of it occur ubiquitously and repeatedly. Intercultural comparisons of deception, however, are educationally engaging.

#### Optional Assignment D

This exercise engages students in a theatre game of judgment. After students volunteer for the exercise, they are informed that everything will be made clear in the end but that their trust and cooperation is required at the start. A speaker is asked to say whatever he or she likes. The account need not be true. Based on what the speaker says, the students judge the speaker's character and integrity. Then, the class is read a fabricated history of the speaker. One artificial history may honor and another may vilify the speaker. The fictional account of the speaker, while groundless, is used to demonstrate how information after the fact can alter our comprehension and acceptance of the speaker. The instructor (or another student) reads the class a

fabricated account of their reputable (or disreputable) past. For example, speakers might honestly present their interest in coaching sports for elementary school children. After the presentation, a prosocial or an antisocial fictional account of each speaker's history is read to the class. The prosocial account might be that the speaker is a respected surgeon at a prominent hospital and donates thousands of dollars per year to an educational fund that helps talented children from needy families attend college. The antisocial account might be that the speaker has been recently released from prison for trafficking in drugs and is under investigation by the IRS for tax evasion. The students become engaged in judging the misrepresented speakers, for they may judge themselves ultimately as untrustworthy interpreters.

### **Utilitarian Perspectives on Engagement**

#### *Learning from Communication Consequences as Engagement*

The communication instructor may direct a drama of a sales scenario with the potential of positive and negative consequences that engage learners. Instructors may provide the script with this and other didactic classroom dramas. The drama unfolds with three students. One student plays the role of the salesperson, a second the role of the buyer, and a third the role of the friend of the buyer. The salesperson promises the buyer to replace the current tires with new Michelins after 1,000 miles and after the car has been paid in full if the buyer purchases the car by the next day before noon. The buyer signs for the car the next day before noon and tells a close friend about this deal. The instructor may propose a penalty of \$20 or \$100 should the student buyer be wrong as judged by consequences. The doubting friend arranges to accompany the buyer on the day the tires are requested. After the car is paid for in full and the 1,000 miles have been put on the car, the buyer returns to the seller and requests the four new Michelins. Without hesitation, the salesperson calls a Michelin dealer and orders four tires for the car. The buyer is told the tires can be installed immediately at the seller's expense. After seeing the tires put on and seeing the buyer proud of his business deal, the doubting friend becomes confident of the seller and returns to the car lot to see whether there is a car of interest to him there. The instructor can dramatize the transaction through the symbolic use of toy cars. The instructor may also ask the friend how much he would wager on the seller fulfilling a similar promise again.

A challenge in the realm of power politics can serve to teach through communication consequences. Again, the instructors provide the script. In an organization, when people in positions of accountability in an organization promise a favorable, but deliver an unfavorable, outcome, the learners must reconsider their relationship with them. As a classroom exercise, the instructor can have five students play the roles in a hierarchy of manager, assistant managers, and two dockworkers. One assistant manager with the other as a witness promises the dockworkers that their hourly wage will be increased by a dollar if they work three eight-hour shifts over a holiday weekend. They work the shift but get no hourly increase evidenced by their next paycheck. After reminding the assistant managers of the promise, they are told they will get the dollar increase eventually. The dockworkers assert that the holiday weekend was worked as the condition for the increase, but the assistant managers insist they merely meant that sometime in the future the hourly increase would occur. The dockworkers complain to the manager. The

manager checks with the assistant managers. Siding with them, the manager informs the dockworkers that a raise will be granted later. The dockworkers may conclude from their unexpected and unfavorable consequences to leave, file grievances, or simply never comply with a request again while these managers are in charge. High engagement on these exercises flows from usually high identification.

### *Learning Values through Money as Engagement*

Money can symbolize an ideology of dominance or subordination in our society, so it can be a route to student engagement. Values can entail ranked preferences (Morris, 1964). Since money can represent continuous data running from zero dollars to an infinite amount, we can use a scale at the ratio level of measurement (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003, p. 52). What we value can be scaled according to the US dollar. Money can be used to assign value to everything from consumer items and services to beliefs and values. The American vernacular uses such financial metaphors as: "I buy that," "I don't buy that," "I feel like a million dollars," or "She's worth her weight in gold." In a communication class, values can be grasped easily by assigning monetary value to things, ideas, beliefs, practices, or values. Instructors can ask: "How much money is this belief worth to you?"

In an informal poll, university communication students were asked how they felt about dating someone they did not favor. Three-quarters of the class affirmed that money could influence their decision to go on a date. When polled in class, 30 percent asserted that they would date someone undesirable. When presented with the idea of pay for dating someone undesirable, the vote shifted to 70 percent in American currency with a \$100 dollar incentive, 85 percent with a \$500 incentive, and almost a hundred percent with a thousand dollar incentive. Only one would not take the money for the date. For almost all, the date could be bought. The undesirable date was valued at \$100 dollars for some, \$500 for others, and for almost everyone else \$1,000.

Money plays a significant role in our lives due to its real and symbolic (Sandstrom, Martin, & Fine, 2003, p. 37). Although money does not guarantee happiness, it allows people to purchase a variety of lifestyles that might at least reduce unhappiness. Because money talks, when we do not listen, we miss the crucial point ideologically. In a sense, to determine student values in communication classes, money is priceless. While money can buy most consumer products, not even a billionaire can purchase nirvana. With billions, though, most products and services can be bought: a new car, meals at any restaurant, expensive parties, fancy clothes, votes, compliance, and the like. Failing to assess financial motivation renders education incomplete, partial, and false. An enlightened education engages us in assessing value in dollars to what we cherish.

Students in a communication class might deliberate on how much each would pay for an item and then explain or justify why. Is a Gucci bag worth \$700? One might buy it for that price. Another might wait for a half-price sale. A third might only buy it for \$10 in a garage sale. A fourth might not buy it at all because it is seen as unappealing. An exchange over money is engaging. Similar classroom interactions might unfold over college costs, houses, cars, media centers, vacations, popular concerts, and so on. "What is it worth to you in dollars?" guides the negotiation and assignment of value.

### *Editing Interviews with the Stars as Engagement*

A communication teacher can have students interview a “star” (that is, a celebrity or a leader in a field). Students become engaged by interviewing (in person, by phone, or via computer) a star and then reporting the findings of the interview in a computer-assisted oral presentation to the class. Once the findings from the interview are put on a computer screen, they can be projected on a screen. Students like to hear about celebrities they have interviewed. Depending on the availability of the stars, students might try to interview celebrities like: Judge Hatchett, Fredricka Whitfield, or Oprah Winfrey; communication scholars like Joseph DeVito or Sidney Ribeau; journalists like William Gaines or Christine Amanpour; actors like Angela Bassett or Dan Akroyd; or politicians like Barack Obama or Hilary Clinton. Local stars, of course, may be more accessible.

After the students prepare a questionnaire and get Internal Review Board approval, if required, they submit the report in an electronic form for review on a computer-projected screen in class. Principles of clear journalistic writing are reviewed before the editing begins (Brooks, Pinson, Wilson, 2006). The written reports are edited. The instructor can do the editing with or without student contributions. Student feedback can increase engagement in communication and learning. The students see a stronger report emerge from the one submitted. Interviewing stars with editing practice on their reports engages students on multiple levels for learning journalistic communication.

### *Identifying Misinformation as Engagement*

Information may be and, for many, should be the communicative norm in a society that applauds the presumption of truth and functions with honesty and accuracy. O’Hair, Rubenstein, and Stewart (2004) see *information* as valid and verifiable messages, not misinformation or disinformation (p. 62). Speakers with high credibility have a trustworthy grasp of the subject, demonstrate valid reasoning skills, display honesty, are not manipulative, and are “genuinely interested in the welfare of the listeners” (pp. 34-35). Redmond and Vrchota (2007) see being truthful to an audience as delivering content that “is factual or can be verified.” When a source of information can no longer be trusted to be truthful, receivers lose their information source. The map no longer functions as a reliable predictor of the territory. Moreover, the “entire basis for communication becomes irrelevant.” When truthfulness is the norm, communicators do not have to remember what they misrepresented; they only have to remember the honest truth. When we are dishonest, we tote the additional burden of remembering what we said to whom (p. 65).

*Misinformation* refers to “something that is not true” (O’Hair, Rubenstein, & Stewart, 2004, p. 62; O’Hair, Stewart, & Rubenstein, 2007) but is untrue unintentionally (Kline, 2004, pp. 18-19). The communicator simply does not know the truth or falsehood of a statement: for example, someone who believes Savannah is the Capitol of Georgia. Misinformation may also include the lack of validity in a source believed to be valid, outdated information, unsubstantiated information, and unwitting plagiarism. The class becomes engaged in checking how accurate the verbal mapping of the territory is. Whether the communication source is lying or is misinformed, misinformation can serve as an honorific diagnosis since it allows us to treat the



source as incorrect rather than deceitful. Motive is minimized. In identifying misinformation and revealing the truth, students become engaged.

#### *Ignorance of Laws and Facts as Engagement*

In a recent issue of the *Texas Tech Law Review* (2007), a number of lawyers and professors of law addressed the surprising legal premise that ignorance of the law can benefit the justice system and the welfare of the US: that is, citizen ignorance of the law in solving crime is laudatory. Loewy (2007, p. 1077) tells us the Supreme Court “purposely created a jurisprudence designed to allow the police to exploit citizen ignorance.” Thomas (2007, p. 1308) informs us that the Canadian Supreme Court concluded that confessions should be excluded if the police “offer inducements strong enough to produce an unreliable confession.” Taslitz (2007, p. 1383), arguing in profanely plain English, affirms that “bullshit places each individual into a fantasy world rather than a real one” in which those oppressed tend to “suffer bullshit’s indignities,” while society’s elites benefit from the “oppression that bullshit provides.” Students can become engaged in the counterintuitive positions taken by these legal specialists. Convinced through public education and the American educational milieu that knowledge is preferred to ignorance, for students to learn that ignorance is endorsed for a number of police purposes can create enough dissonance to incite learning. The Mencken Rule applies its way into cognitive complexity. What looked simple was not; what was thought to be a solid premise was in fact liquid. The eyes of students open from the jolt of being thrown in very cold water on a warm day. Enlightenment triumphs again once we ask: “Is this law questionable?”

Similarly with facts, we watch Hollywood movies that distort facts as a norm. As fictional and entertainment sources, they have theatrical privileges to do so. In a class though, these false-to-fact features can be analyzed to engage students in revealing the illusions of reality before them. We can ask literally: “What’s wrong with this picture?” With ads and commercials, distortion becomes conspicuous: for example, the GEICO cavemen commercials. Advertising distortion can serve as a stepping stone to the less conspicuous distortions of fact in movies. A movie about the War Between the States might show a battlefield presumably in Georgia. However, the Rocky Mountains may constitute the backdrop. Much of the movie *Fargo* was filmed in rural Minnesota giving the city of Fargo the appearance of a rural town instead of a city in an area encompassing around 200,000 people. A suspense film might show an elevator full of passengers plummeting countless stories to its base with brakes that cause sparking and screeching but do not stop the elevator. In fact, as emotionally disturbing as falling in an elevator would be to me, I hear from engineers that most elevators would fall until a formulated speed is reached and then the brakes would activate stopping the elevator car within perhaps 20 feet or so. In a movie dealing with the work of an assassin, the brakes might be destroyed before the victims get on the elevator. Otherwise, the brakes should work.

#### *Student Consultation as Engagement*

In classes of 20 students or less, the instructor might engage students formally through a face-to-face interpersonal consultation. The consultation would resemble a guidance session. Each student should be prepared to ask questions of clarification and direction pertaining to the course

content, assignments, expectations, and performance optimization. Several class periods should be put aside for this purpose. If each consultation averages 15 minutes, an instructor can schedule five students per 75 minute class over a four-day period, distributed perhaps over the semester or in the middle third of the semester. Four days in a row is workable also.

The consultation begins after students have heard lectures on the subject, read a portion of the readings, and completed a test or assignment. Reflection time may be needed.. Those not engaged in the consultation can use the days for research and writing. If an interview format is unworkable for an instructor, a focus group format is operable. Two days can be used with focus groups since the instructor can have two 45 minute sessions in one day with five members per group. The format deemed most beneficial for the instructor, students, and circumstances should be used. The instructor can use the consultation days for intensive interaction with individual students. Texts from small group communication (Brilhart, Galanes, & Adams, 2001) and interpersonal communication (DeVito, 1996) can be used to construct the consultation method.

### *Humor as Engagement*

If done with care, humor can be used repeatedly to engage students. In politically oppressive learning climates, comedy can serve to alleviate the pressures that marshal against open inquiry and a liberal education. Rather than being polemical and harsh, humor can serve as an ancient form of critical thinking that ends with a laugh. While political correctness restricts humor as a critical tool in the classroom, with prudent planning of critical comedic points, education can succeed without reprisal.

However, some humor would be intolerable in most classrooms today (Sprague & Stuart, 2006, 121). Jokes attacking affirmative action categories of race, religion, age, gender, and so on might work on “Comedy Central” but could be disastrous in a university classroom (Sprague & Stuart, 2008). The reasonable conclusion to draw, however, is that we must use humor tenderly, not abandon it as a tool of communication instruction. Even to critique culturally taken-for-granted follies can be done with humor if intellect weaves itself cleverly with the comedic. Professors might not be able to say what the humorists and comedians say literally, but they can borrow their principles of laughter.

Jokes with educational power, for instance, can be useful. Whether we borrow humor from Abraham Lincoln or modern bureaucrats, we have political and educational potential in some jokes without violating current norms. For example, Lincoln asked: “How many legs does a mule have if you call its tail a leg?” The listener replies, “five.” Lincoln responds: “Calling a tail a “leg” doesn’t make it one.” A semantic, philosophical, and empirical point is made. A bureaucrat asks a job applicant: “How much is 12 times 12?” The applicant replies, “144.” The bureaucrat asks a second, third, and fourth applicant the same question and gets the same response. Then, a fifth applicant is asked and replies: “How much would you like it to be?” The fifth applicant gets the job as several ethical and cultural principles are illustrated with a laugh.

With respect to comedians, Chris Rock uses politically incorrect humor as does Ron White. To borrow this ground literally for humor to make a point in class could court academic disaster. Borrowing principles of criticism implicit in their humor, though, would be workable and probably safe in most academic contexts. For a laugh, comedians may assert what applies

only to themselves *as if* it applies to everyone; at the speed of thunder, they might make an existentially particular statement to an immediate audience followed by a hypothetically universal statement. For example, “We all enjoy dog fights, don’t we? You know just what I mean and see my point, right?” Of course the audience does because of the incongruous perspectives. Hence, since our expectations are violated unpredictably and humorously along with premises that are taken for granted, we smile.

In communication classes that deal with diversity and clashes of opinion, we can borrow this comedic principle to engage our students to learning by laughing. A communication instructor at a college in Atlanta might assert to a class on a controversial issue: “All of us support the Atlanta Braves logo, don’t we? You know just what I mean and see my point, right?” Of course, the complexity of this issue at an Atlanta college might be so outrageously contentious that raising it *as if* we have consensus rather than division might touch on the absurd enough to arouse laughter. Jack Nicholson, playing the President of the USA in a scene involving violence in the sci-fi comedy *Mars Attacks*, cajoles the audience into laughter by asking: “Why can’t we all just get along?” The absurdity again elicits a laugh. Humor can engage our students in their challenge of cultural and intellectual absurdities in a way that dates back at least to Ancient Greek drama.

### Conclusion

Exchanging teaching strategies in communication classes can lead to experimentation, testing, and growth in the classroom. Testing theories through their application and utility in a classroom blends the best ideas with practice to learn what works best with a particular instructor in a particular class. Selected theories and perspectives with pragmatic potential for engaging students were recommended for use in a classroom. While the learning strategies presented were intended to stimulate imaginative options in communication classes, in no way were they exhaustive of the creative possibilities instructors can and should generate.

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## **Priority Information Needs of African American Graduate Women: A Pilot Study**

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*This paper reports the results of a pilot study that assessed the priority information needs of eight African American graduate women studying at the University of Tennessee (UT) in Knoxville. Results from this study provide an understanding of African American graduate women's information needs and barriers they face in their learning process. The research results also have implications for design of an information support system for all minority users to meet their disenfranchised information needs, develop a better teaching and learning atmosphere, create enhanced campus services and facilities, and provide an altogether supportive climate. Participant feedback collected during this research identifies three goals of an information support system for minorities; namely, to improve university-level essentials, develop resources for building student careers, and strengthen their professional and social networks. Owing to limitations of space and to maintain focus, this paper shares preliminary results based on data collected using a quantitative structured questionnaire in conjunction with select data reported during qualitative semi-structured interviews with individual students. The use of both quantitative and qualitative tools for data collection yielded complementary datasets that were significant in providing a holistic understanding about participants' experiences and perspectives.*

### ***Introduction and Research Significance***

A true spirit (intention), the right content ("contained" message/meaning), and a culturally appropriate form ("container") of communication and information (Abels et al., 2003; Cornejo & Silva, 2004) can further a social justice agenda to empower minority populations to meet their goals, expectations, needs, and aspirations (Curran, 1982; Mehra, Albright, & Rioux, 2006; Samek, 2007). The "right" steps for people on society's margins, irrespective of the nature of their disempowerment, includes an equitable acknowledgement of their under-represented voices to "do justice to a diversity of socially defined perspectives while providing a grounding for the evaluation of controversial problems" (Endres, 1996, 24). Thus, the purpose of a right communication-and-information endeavor should be to promote a reflective process that is inclusive of the experiences and perspectives of those we identify as "disenfranchised" (Mehra & Srinivasan, 2007; Young, 1998). Applying such communication-and-information efforts will help to question traditional understandings, scrutinize existing values, practices, ideological frameworks, and processes, and propose progressive social changes that are fair and just in their individual, social, and community-wide impacts (Froomkin, 2003; Habermas, 1993; Kellner, 1989).

This is applicable also for any institutions of higher education in the United States (U. S.) that are struggling to find ways to increase minority student enrollment and retention and diversify their organizations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Clark, 2002; Dumas-Hines, Cochran, & Will-

iams, 2001). There is a tremendous need for concerted and ongoing efforts to increase enrollment and retention of African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans in American colleges and universities since there continues to be alarming disparities between the graduation rates of minority students from these racial/ethnic groups and their White and Asian counterparts (Furr & Elling, 2002; Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003). Providing necessary information and social support services that are relevant to the learner's experience is significant in retaining minority students and insuring higher rates of their graduation (Gary, Kling, & Dodd, 2004; Guiffrida; 2004). However, there need to be greater efforts to implement culturally appropriate retention strategies in regional settings to ensure student success in response to localized campus climates around the country (Astin, 1984; Padilla, Trevino, Gonzalez, Trevino, 1997; Tinto, 1993). Additionally, it is important to find out from the students' point of view what is relevant to them in their learning process (Gonzalez, 2002; Office of Ethnic Minority Affairs, 2000). This is especially pertinent for minority students in graduate education who face lack of integration in their academic programs and university environments as significant barriers towards professional success and graduation (Bass, Tull, Rutledge, Jackson, & Summers, 2003; Chaney, Muraskin, Cahalan, Goodwin, 1998; DeFour & Hirsch, 2002).

This paper fills missing gaps in minority graduate education by reporting the results of a pilot study that assessed the priority information needs of eight African American graduate women studying at the University of Tennessee (UT) in Knoxville. Results from this study provide an initial understanding of African American graduate women's information needs and barriers they face in their learning process. It helps better understand the experiences and perspectives of African American graduate women about what information and support they consider relevant to their learning process, and the role of different environmental factors (e.g., social and academic integration) in their educational and personal development (Mayo, Murguia, & Padilla, 1995). Such a study is significant since it recognizes a contemporary need for greater information about the experiences of minority students in academic institutions. The research is also relevant since it communicates minority students' perspectives on their learning experiences in order to identify directions for social change that emerge from the grass-roots level, instead of being imposed in a top-down fashion. The research results have implications for design of an information support system for all minority users to meet their disenfranchised information needs, develop a better teaching and learning atmosphere, create enhanced campus services and facilities, and provide an altogether supportive climate. Results are especially relevant for administrators, faculty/staff, and others seeking to promote progressive transformation in predominantly-White institutions (such as the UT) that can be perceived as more alienating than the environment in predominantly-minority institutions (Loo & Rolinson, 1986; Steward, Jackson, & Jackson, 1990).

### *Research Methods*

This study addressed the following research question:

- What are the priority information needs of African American graduate women?

The process of assessing and analyzing the priority information needs identified by research participants yielded an initial understanding of the goals, components, and specific



efforts and strategies needed in the design, development, and implementation of an information support system for all minority students to meet their information needs.

Research participants were recruited through institutional contacts at the UT's Black Cultural Center and the Office of Minority Student Affairs, and the Black Graduate and Professional Students Association, through announcements in various electronic mailing lists, and through personal social networks and snowballing (asking initial participants to provide contact to others who may participate in the study).

This research forms part of a larger study that is currently using both quantitative and qualitative tools to examine strategies to improve the learning environment and the information support services for both undergraduate and graduate minority students. Owing to limitations of space and to maintain focus, this paper shares preliminary results based on data collected using a quantitative structured questionnaire (see Appendix 1) in conjunction with select data reported during qualitative semi-structured interviews with individual graduate students (see Appendix 2 for the interview guide that was used). The data were collected in summer 2006. The use of both quantitative and qualitative tools for data collection yielded complementary datasets that were significant in providing a holistic understanding about participants' experiences and perspectives. Incorporating both these datasets in analysis provided a more relevant and deeper outline of what an effective information support system should look like to meet the priority information needs of this disenfranchised population. It is beyond the scope of this paper to report additional aspects about the qualitative research that will be documented in future efforts (e.g., Mehra & Lambert, in preparation).

The structured questionnaire provided participants' responses in relation to their top priority information needs (Priority 1-3). These were compiled and weighted to generate a ranking list based on the importance of priority. Participants' responses helped paint a preliminary picture of what an information support system for minority students should look like in predominantly-White institutions of higher learning in the U. S. The information collected through the structured questionnaire was put together, verified, and further extended based on data that were collected during in-depth interviews. The interviews provided a qualitative and rich understanding about participants' experiences and perspectives during their graduate education at the UT. Responses included feedback about participants' sense-making process, adjustment concerns, and the use of existing (and/or desired) information support services. Select qualitative data is presented in this paper in the form of scenarios or personal stories shared by individual participants that capture their typical experiences. Selection of scenarios is based on patterns revealed in multiple interview transcriptions that were threaded together as a mode of data analysis and representation (Mehra & Bishop, 2007; Mehra, Bishop, Bazzell, & Smith, 2002).

The process of mapping the quantitative dataset of priority information needs and the qualitative data pool of scenarios helped provide deeper understanding of the goals, components, and specific efforts and strategies needed in the design, development, and implementation of an information support system for minority students to meet their priority information needs. This process was enacted by application of grounded theory principles using open, axial, and selective coding to cross-reference the data collected from the quantitative and qualitative tools. It helped generate complementary themes and patterns (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Jobs,

Berman, Carroll, Eastgard, & Knickmeyer, 1996) that provided a detailed picture of the students' information needs and information support services they used (and desired) to navigate their educational process.

### *Participants' Demographic Information*

Understanding the complex learning experiences of African American graduate women in a land-grant university in the southern U. S. required gathering background information about their student status, age, discipline of study, state/region of permanent residency, living arrangement, and other associated demographic variables. A demographic profile of the participants showed that all eight were female between 23-29 years of age. There were four masters' students, three doctoral students, and one doctoral candidate. Four participants were permanent residents of Tennessee, while one participant each was a permanent resident of Alabama, California, Georgia, and North Carolina respectively. In Knoxville, six participants lived off-campus on their own, while two participants lived off-campus with housemates.

The all-female group of participants in this research formed a convenient sampling. Several priority information needs of participants reflected what can be perceived as gender issues and concerns specific for women and girls (e.g., need for social support in coping and its role in professional success in graduate education) (Collins & Onwuegbuzie, 2003; Schwartz, Bower, Rice, & Washington, 2003). It is beyond the scope of this paper to comment on similarities and differences between the perspectives of our research participants and other students (both women and men), since this was a pilot study conducted with a limited pool of participants. Future research will conduct companion studies of other women and men of color to examine if the same needs surface as suggested by our research participants. Carefully structured research methods used in this pilot study will be expanded in later rounds to other universities to test the same phenomena.

All research participants were studying in various units from the social sciences and humanities at the UT. In order to maintain participant confidentiality since there are so few African American graduate women in each unit, additional details about participants' programs of study are not revealed in this paper.

### *Preliminary Results: Priority Information Needs*

Research participants identified their top priority information needs (Priority 1-3) though it is important to indicate that some participants identified multiple information needs in relation to their top three priorities.

For Priority 1 participants reported a range of information needs related to career development, sensitive faculty/staff support, help in the research process, faculty and staff mentoring, financial aid and scholarship information, and minority networking. Some information needs for Priority 2 were related to library services and information technology support, connection to the curriculum, need for social support groups, and specific resources for minority students, in addition to some priorities identified for Priority 1 (e.g., help in research, and sensitive and

open-minded faculty/staff).

Information needs for Priority 3 were related to personal development and growth, connection to campus activities and events, and readily available information on various topics of concern needed on a day-to-day basis, in addition to some priorities listed in Priority 1 and Priority 2 (e.g., financial aid and scholarship information, computer and information technology support, and more effective library resources and online catalogs for searching). Other information needs in addition to the top three priorities were related to international/intercultural involvement and awareness, lack of availability of appropriate cultural-specific resources (e.g., information about minority organizations on campus) and ethnic social activities, research opportunities, and avenues to represent student voices, amongst others.

The following discussion identifies participants' information needs after they were compiled and weighted based on the importance of priority. It also identifies examples of elements and strategies that may be considered significant in an information support system to effectively meet the information needs of African American graduate students and others. The need for culturally appropriate information support services specifically for minority students was the highest ranked priority information need (10 points or 14%) and called for availability of targeted resources, and related information about these resources, to address negative race/gender-based experiences shared by participants (e.g., stereotypes, prejudices, social isolation, and health service disparities, amongst others). Examples included resources (and information about existing resources) that were related to minority programs, organizations, social activities and networking, and events that focused on promoting intercultural and international awareness. The second position in the ranking of participants' priority information need was occupied by three information categories (8 points or 12% each), namely: 1) Need for sensitive faculty/staff/peers who were open-minded and available, flexible, refrained from stereotyping, and provided positive support; 2) Help related to the research process (e.g., specific policies and procedures for conducting research); 3) Lack of readily available information and resources that participants needed on a day-to-day basis (e.g., connections to campus activities and events, and avenues for personal development). The next position in the ranking of participants' priority information needs included three information categories (7 points or 11% each) as follows: 1) Need for career development resources and connections to the curriculum (e.g., relevance of different courses to various career paths and opportunities in different professions); 2) Lack of faculty/student mentoring (e.g., pairing students with faculty members based on common areas of interest); 3) Development of efficient library and information technology services (e.g., technological infrastructures and associated social infrastructures to support IT use). Financial aid and scholarships (6 points or 9%) and social support (5 points or 8%) were other priority information needs that were ranked by participants.

#### *Preliminary Results: Information Support System for Minority Graduates*

This paper presents a preliminary discussion based on pilot results to initiate research in this very important area of inquiry, namely, what may an effective information support system for minority users look like, based on research participants' experiences and perspectives. Future

research will provide additional quantitative and qualitative feedback from African American graduates and other minority students to validate the importance of the presented categories and verify these pilot results.

The process of mapping linkages and intersections between the ranked priority information needs and qualitative interview data shared by research participants helped identify three important goals of an information support system for African American graduate women and other minorities to effectively meet their information needs in universities and colleges in the U. S. These goals included efforts to:

- Improve basic university-level essentials in information support services for minority students;
- Develop resources for building student careers;
- Strengthen minority students' professional and social networks.

The identified goals are specifically based on the priority information needs, experiences, and perspectives shared by African American graduate women in this research though results are relevant for all minority students. Applications and programs to achieve the three goals require developing various components in an information support system for minority users to become effective in meeting their information needs in predominantly-White institutions. For example, achieving the goal of improving basic university-level essentials for minority students will involve developing components related to minority-specific information support services, readily available information and resources, and library and information technology services. Similarly, building student careers will entail providing opportunities in career development via better student connections to the curriculum, research-related help, faculty/student mentoring, and financial aid and scholarships. Further, to strengthen minority students' professional and social networks will require universities and colleges in the U. S. to nurture sensitive and open-minded faculty/staff/peers as well as provide culturally appropriate social support systems for minority students. Making these components a reality at the UT should include: expansion of existing information support systems; creation of new technological resources and associated social support services; and, the development and implementation of a proactive marketing plan for generating greater awareness of the existing information support resources; amongst other directions of work.

Participant feedback helped recognize that at the broadest level, improving the basic university-level facilities, services, and socio-technical systems to meet the priority information needs of minority graduates should be a top-most item on the agenda of the UT's administration in order to diversify the campus and make it welcoming for all students, staff, and faculty, irrespective of their racial/ethnic origins and backgrounds. The UT's *Ready for the World* plan to "transform the campus into a culture of diversity" and "help students gain the international and intercultural knowledge they need to succeed in today's world" (from the program Web site at URL: <http://www.utk.edu/readyfortheworld/>) began in 2004 as the UT's Quality Enhancement Plan, which was required by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) to improve undergraduate education and further one or more of the following action goals: 1) Improving faculty capacity and engagement in international and intercultural education; 2) Transforming the undergraduate curriculum to enhance international and intercultural content; 3) Bring-

ing the intercultural/international world to the University; 4) Taking the University to the world. Since the final phase of the *Ready for the World* ended in fall 2005 with the UT receiving a highly positive 10-year SACS approval, there is now a need to, first, continue maintaining cross-cultural programs and promoting intercultural awareness on an ongoing basis, and, second, expand strategies from the *Ready for the World* undergraduate initiative, and apply some of its lessons, to minority graduate education as well. This will help the UT achieve excellence and further itself as a flagship research institution by building a diversified body of graduate students and faculty and improving its position among the nation's top public universities. New efforts to recruit and retain minority graduates and support minority graduate leadership through their learning and educational process via making improvements in university-level information support systems that were suggested by research participants (based on their priority information needs) is one direction in this regard. Such efforts should include management of minority information support services that are specifically geared towards graduate students of color and other minorities. These also require developing equitable minority representation in leadership, visible images, professions, research, and everyday experiences, and, international and intercultural services in individual programs. For example, the following participant noted the need for particular events especially for graduate students of color:

“Just like there’s the graduate orientation, if there was similar orientation for minority students, maybe sponsored by the Black Cultural Center, something that is not a one-time thing, maybe like a seminar, maybe [the] first semester of classes it’s every week for four weeks or so, to really tell students ‘you need to manage your time, you need to do this and do this and you need to participate’.”

Another participant discussed the importance of specific workshops and classes for students of color that will help them learn specific communication strategies applicable for them.

“[Minority students need] maybe just a little bit more guidance in how to communicate with teachers and other students effectively. So maybe just more communication—spoken, written, behavior—you know, help with [all forms of] communication. Written communication, verbal communication, just how to interact with people. Not to say some people don’t already know that, but sometimes, just a little extra help with that will go a long way.”

Participants identified minority information support services specifically for graduate students of color as the most important component of campus information support services and called for greater efforts to advertise and market them via on-campus and electronic dissemination modes of information sharing and communication exchange (e.g., Web site development, e-newsletter, mailing lists, class visits, seminars, and workshops). They believed that the creation and expansion of such resources via ongoing feedback and regular needs assessment of minority graduates, and their visible representation and proactive advertising at the larger university level, and in each unit at the program level, will insure development of equitable resources that generate positive experiences for minority graduates.

Additionally, research participants recognized the importance of readily available information and resources that are needed by minority graduates on a day-to-day basis to be developed based on constant and ongoing inquiry into their information needs and learning experi-

ences that varied across different programs. For example, note the following scenarios collected from three participants about the importance of readily available information and resources:

“The thing that UT has to improve is the efficiency of their different resources they have so like, the library, loaner laptops, and, just the different things we have around for convenience, grocery stores, Starbucks, bowling alleys, student centers, all those things.”

“This African American lady, she was the one that was keeping me up on things, and, you know, communicating with me, she’d send out emails, ‘these are the classes you guys need to be taking, these are some steps that need to be done, the paperwork, the forms, the tests you guys need to take to stay in here’.”

“I’d say administration was a key issue, and a barrier. They were a big barrier. A lot of things...we were not given straight answers on, and when we did get a straight answer, it would be, ‘go to someone else,’ or, ‘go here’ and they’d still give us the run-around.”

Three other participants spoke about the need for offering courses on public speaking for minority graduates that will help them build confidence and self-efficacy skills to voice their concerns. Most participants wanted to see university efforts to develop positive student feedback and identify assessment mechanisms (formative and summative) of various day-to-day campus services (e.g., housing, bus service, police and safety, counseling, health and medical centers, technology services, library systems, etc.) in order that students’ suggestions would promote changes in their organization and implementation to better suit the needs and expectations of minority graduates.

Moreover, several participants mentioned the need for library and information technology services to not be geared towards one student body. They shared their own experiences where access and use of various library and information technology services for writing, research, computer and database use, statistical analysis, and other purposes, were tainted by prerogatives and assumptions made by the service providers that disadvantaged students of color based on their race and ethnicity. Participants believed that all students, irrespective of their race, ethnicity, sex, gender, national origins, sexual orientation, age, geography, income, disability, and other discriminating factors, should have equitable opportunities to share their experiences and provide feedback to shape the design, development, usability, and application of such systems and resources to meet their goals and learning objectives.

The goal of most U. S. universities and colleges is to develop professional competencies and skill-sets in their students so that they can grow and learn, excel in their chosen fields, and join the workforce to further their careers and professional development. All research participants wanted more equitable and fair opportunities to avail themselves of various information support systems and services that were provided at the UT to build their professional careers and succeed in life. They perceived that they were being denied various opportunities and access to resources that other students took for granted, to make their learning experiences positive in ways that will lead towards their personal, social, and professional fulfillment. The following scenario reflects one participant’s experience in this regard:

“You came here [because] you would look at a professor’s background, see who has

the same interests, and speak with professors, and then they would determine if they wanted to work with us. Of course, my expectations that I was going to do research, literatures, reviews, all were disappointed and it just came out to be busywork. Like, I was working on the same report for a whole semester...and there were other students who were getting these opportunities to teach and to publish, and they were actually doing research and learning. And I just felt like I wasn't learning anything from my assistantship at all."

Based on their past and present experiences at the UT, most research participants in this study desired important changes to occur in policies, programs, services, interpersonal relationships, and information sharing processes in their academic units. Research participants perceived such changes will enable them to make stronger connections between their programs' scope, boundaries, existing opportunities, and offered courses in each discipline of study, on the one hand, and the avenues of career development, professional tracks, and job opportunities, on the other. Research participants also wanted each program of study at the UT to provide relevant information to its minority graduates that will help them gain deeper understanding of the research processes, procedures, stages, methods, and available tools, to insure their success in program completion and future job prospects. As one participant stated:

"I feel that I'm not connected to the curriculum...I've read the catalogs and different things of that nature, but I'm still finding things out [about] what classes can I take, what class can I take to substitute for this class, what classes would be helpful as far as where my dissertation is going to take me. And there are several options within the curriculum that students can take but they're not aware of them. They're not aware of the opportunities that are there, they're not aware of classes that will help them later on. And so, they're not connected in that way, with the curriculum."

Further, several research participants in this study wanted greater faculty/student mentoring activities that were believed to be too limited in their current levels of availability and satisfaction. Research participants recognized the role of regular formal and informal mentoring in the student's life-cycle in the program to help them track progress during their time in the program. One participant noted:

"I haven't found a lot of help from professors or support from professors within the college at all. Most of the support that I do receive is either from my classmates or a mentor that is also at the university but at another campus who I knew before coming here."

All research participants wanted the UT to take action and address limitations in availability of financial aid and scholarships to minority graduates to support their educational programs and provide them resume-strengthening experiences via various work opportunities. One participant stated:

"Several African and African American students who were admitted to the program were not given funding. And so we were wondering, 'why aren't we getting funding?' Some of us qualify for funding, I mean, we're in the department. And then they would say, 'it's because we don't have any money for funding.' But then, students would come in after us and there would be all of this new funding for them to be, you know, full-time graduate students and be on an assistantship."

In order to achieve professional success most research participants firmly believed that strong professional and social networks were essential to provide career growth, social support, and personal well-being. Research participants identified some situations where they were treated badly, felt marginalized owing to a lack of empathy/consideration and sensitivity, and shared experiences that reflected negative behavior based on internalization of misconceived race/gender-based assumptions by their peers, other students, and the UT faculty/staff and administrators. As one participant observed:

“Sometimes the professors are condescending towards you. There’s a couple that are nice, but most of the times they’re not real helpful. They always have this idea of what you’re going to be like before you come to the program, so they’re just not helpful at all. They pick select students that they want to provide certain opportunities to. And those are the students that get certain teaching research opportunities or extra financial assistance, just, things that every student should be getting when they’re coming in.”

The same participant noted:

“We would sit in class and the professor would direct the discussion to particular students. We were a mixed class: three blacks, three whites, and they would direct discussion towards other students. One of the other students would answer and ask questions, [and the professor would say] ‘those were good questions’, but when we asked, they would question us, you know, ‘you’re not clear in your thinking,’ ‘I don’t understand what you’re saying’.”

Not only was there a stated need for resources and services to address and rectify such behaviors in the future; additionally, research participants felt that a provision of information about existing minority social networks and groups would have helped them overcome their sense of social isolation during those times. The following scenario expressed by one participant highlights the importance of building minority social networks across campus to promote students’ professional careers in graduate education:

“I have a very strong support group in my family. You know, I have been discouraged because things have happened, and I was so isolated, and I don’t have the support that I like as far as the faculty and students in the program are concerned. My advisor, you know, I meet with her every now and then, but she’s very uptight...I just don’t feel like we have a connection, you know what I mean? And so I just, you know, I talk to my Mom, and that’s very good that I have her as support system. It is so difficult without other minority students and no support system, I sometimes used to think ‘I will not be able to make it’.”

## Conclusion

Based on data collected, analyzed, and reported in this research, eight African American graduate women identified major difficulties during their educational process at the UT. In spite of the encountered barriers in their learning process, research participants seemed strong-willed to persevere against odds to complete their graduate education. Their priority information needs ranged from guidance in navigating academic procedures and policies and unfamiliar



ilarity to the research process, to a lack of faculty/staff/peer support and financial aid opportunities. Including scenarios (as quotes) from the participants' interviews provided a personalized "voice" and gave a "face" to the data collected, making the data analysis process more potent and meaningful, thereby, developing greater relevance of the results.

What made the stories of our research participants different from experiences of other graduate students was their experiential and narrative treatment that was shaped by race-and-gender-based overtones. All priority information needs of research participants and their perspectives about their learning experiences were shaped by intersections of race, gender, and class, often revealing affects owing to variables of age, geography, income, education, and other individual factors. Sometimes these intersections were directly revealed and referred to, while at other times, participants alluded to them in passing. For example, as one participated reported:

"Some of the racist things that happen around here probably need to stop. [People have said] 'You're not going to be able to make it' and 'you shouldn't be here in graduate school as a Black female'."

An important point to note is that participants in this study did not conceptualize and distinguish between aspects in their experiences that were shaped by gender and/or race/ethnicity-related issues and those experiences which were common for all graduate students. Hence, this paper focuses only on information needs of minority graduates and does not address whether or not the data collected from our research participants about minority student experiences can be applicable to other graduates. Research participants also recognized that the significance of their experiences were that they were holistic and lived, without a need to always analyze the categorizations in their experiences, and the perceptions of others towards them, solely based on separate gender or race/ethnicity-related considerations. In this way, participants acknowledged intersections in their gender and/or race/ethnicity to shape all their experiences and perspectives, so a need for distinguishing and teasing out dimensions of their lived experiences based on gender or race/ethnicity, according to their separate parameters, were considered irrelevant (Allard, Mehra, & Qayyum, 2007).

A major fact documented in the research was that participants believed they faced experiences with intersections of racialized and sexist nuances, and called for efforts to bring changes so that they did not continue to occur for others in learning situations similar to those that our research participants had experienced. Such participant feedback resonates with theoretical writings on a Black feminist perspective that celebrates experiences and survival of African American women as an important phenomena, without demarcating daily living in terms of mainstream dominant and hegemonic discourses (including those surrounding gender and race/ethnicity) (Giddens, 1984; James & Busia, 1993).

Additionally, several findings in this study corroborated past research on graduate women and minority women's experiences, including those of African American graduate women. For example, gender, personal characteristics, and social support are distinct factors that influence individuals' coping styles during graduate education (Mullis & Chapman, 2000; Piko, 2001), an observation reflected in this study as well. Similarly, factors reported in this paper such as the importance of minority social networks, respect from faculty, need for continued funding, and the role of mentoring by supportive faculty/staff in the professional success of African American

graduate women have also been documented in prior qualitative studies (Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Patton & Harper, 2003). Owing to a limited sampling in this pilot study it is difficult to claim any further meaningful correlations between women's needs in general and the information needs expressed by our research participants, in contrast to needs and behavior of men. Such a comparison can only be addressed by collecting larger datasets in future research that may closely study greater numbers of African American women and men graduates to make any statistically significant observations.

Yet, this study is a significant piece of research with far-reaching implications if applied to a broader population. The pilot study is an important beginning and the topic is certainly significant. The study is relevant in the context of research that shows that "many African American women are lost from higher education as a result of structural, environmental, or sociocultural factors or combinations thereof that preclude educational and career achievements" (Rosales & Person, 2003, p. 53; Valadez, 2000). It presents an overview of the priority information needs of African American graduate women, and based on their perspectives and experiences, provides a preliminary understanding of an information support system for all minority students to improve their learning experiences.

The outline of an information support system for minority graduates in terms of goals, components, strategies of application, and scenarios (to represent under-represented student voices) presents a clearly structured and applicable effort that is easy to conceptualize and implement; additionally, it provides outcome-based and tangible results that emerge as a direct response to students' experiences. The process of design of an information support system with its socio-technical and educational policy dimensions is based on the points of view of African American graduate women about their own learning experiences. It provides opportunities for identifying strategies to further enrollment, recruitment, and retention of all minority women and men.

The use of both quantitative and qualitative tools for data collection is a less practiced occurrence in research and provided benefits of complementary datasets for analysis (Steckler, McLeroy, Goodman, Bird, & McCormick, 1992) that overcame several perceived limitations (e.g., epistemological concerns of a blended research technique). Additionally, use of mixed methods was justified in this study that has elements of action research whose "object is social practice and its transformations, along with the changes that occur in the social institutions and relationships that support it" (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; Mehra, 2006, p. 205). Thus, this research can be placed in an overall qualitative paradigm, within which, the use of a quantitative tool was to introduce the reader, via some quantification, to the participants' worldview and experiences. Hence, though we borrowed heavily from quantitative research language, its use in this research was towards a goal not particularly interested in documenting phenomena solely in terms of numbers, but to present a quantified introduction to the complex and detailed nature of experiences and perspectives of research participants, that went beyond the quantitative into the qualitative. The use of the quantitative tool helped provide this initial quantification that systematically documented the socially constructed world of the research participants, that in turn provided grounds for progressive action to bring university-level changes in future experiences narrated by participants. The blended approach was purely intentional in merging the two pro-

cesses to also better capture the socially constructed worldview of the participants about their learning experiences in a holistic manner. It reflected the nature of this research as closely tied to interpretative inquiry where traditional criteria to evaluate rigor in experimental research—objectivity, reliability, validity, and generalizability—are inappropriate, and allowed us to establish trustworthiness of the study by reporting on credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, measures that were incorporated in the research process via the application of grounded theory principles (Stringer, 1999).

In conclusion, based on preliminary findings reported in this paper, the UT needs to actively provide more fine-tuned information support systems and services for African American graduate women and others from different racial/ethnic groups. Such efforts will help address students' perceived barriers and challenges and meet their needs to improve their learning experiences.

This is not to say that our research participants did not have positive experiences of support in their learning process. However, overall, research participants shared their dissatisfaction with their graduate education based on shortcomings in the information and support sector at the UT. In other words, the few positive feelings toward use of information support services during their learning process that participants identified in this research (e.g., easy access to faculty, convenient length of the program, a variety of subjects offered, etc.) were strongly overshadowed by their negatives in the program and in the UT. Feedback shared by our research participants about their priority information needs and learning experiences call for changes and improvements in existing information support services offered through the university and community. Future research will expand our understanding of the experiences, perspectives, and needs of African American graduate women to others from various racial/ethnic minority populations studying at the UT, and in other U. S. universities and colleges, to develop more responsive and culturally appropriate information support systems to better reflect their needs, wants, goals, and expectations.

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*Appendix 1: Structured Questionnaire*

Instructions: Completion of this form is voluntary. You may choose to complete some, all, or none of the questions. Do not write your name on this form.

1. Identify your sex \_\_\_\_\_
2. In what category does your age fall?  
 22 and under  
 23 – 29  
 30 – 39  
 40 – 49  
 50 and over
3. What is your discipline of study? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What is your student status in the University of Tennessee at Knoxville?  
 Masters student  
 Ph. D. student  
 Ph. D. Candidate (ABD, i.e. all but dissertation)  
 Other (please identify)
5. With what racial/ethnic group(s) do you identify? (please check all that apply)  
 Black or African  
 Asian/ Pacific Islander  
 Latino or Hispanic  
 White or European  
 Native American (tribal affiliation)  
 Middle Eastern  
 South Asian  
 Caucasian  
 Other (please identify)
6. Where do you live in Knoxville?  
 Residence Hall  
 Off-campus on your own  
 Off-Campus with house-mates  
 Off-Campus with family
7. In which state and city do you have permanent residency? \_\_\_\_\_
8. List in the order of importance (1 = most important and 5 = least important) your top five

information needs as an African American graduate student studying at the University of Tennessee.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
  2. \_\_\_\_\_
  3. \_\_\_\_\_
  4. \_\_\_\_\_
  5. \_\_\_\_\_
9. Identify different efforts and improvements that need to be made at UT for increasing recruitment/enrollment and retention of undergraduate and graduate minority students and developing minority student leadership.
1. \_\_\_\_\_
  2. \_\_\_\_\_
  3. \_\_\_\_\_
  4. \_\_\_\_\_
  5. \_\_\_\_\_
10. Additional Comments:  
Thank you very much for your participation!

*Appendix 2: Semi-Structured Interview Guide*

1. [INTRODUCTION] Let us begin with general introductions- tell us a little about yourself (department, year), your interests, and your experiences as an African American graduate student at the University of Tennessee.
2. [DECISION TO JOIN UT] How did you decide to join the University of Tennessee and this particular program? (PROMPT: What made you decide to join UTK?) What have been some key experiences and challenges?)
3. [UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION] Tell us about your experiences during your undergraduate studies. What specific areas could have been improved?
4. [STAGES OF PROGRESS] What have been some stages in your progress in graduate school at UTK? (Prompt: What is your current stage of progress?) For example, what were your experiences when you started in the program at UTK? What are some [kind of] experiences you have had during your progress at UTK?)
5. How did you make sense of your experiences during those stages of progress? What specific areas could be improved? (PROMPTS: What have been some memorable (good or bad) experiences? Advise for others? What have been some significant moment(s) in your graduate experience at UTK? What have been major challenges?)
6. [RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, MINORITY LEADERSHIP] Identify some recruiting strategies to increase undergraduate and graduate minority student enrollment and retention in higher education on the UTK campus.
7. Identify methods to improve the existing learning experiences for minority students via developing a better teaching and learning environment, enhanced campus



- services and facilities, and an altogether supportive climate.
8. How can UTK develop minority leadership in the undergraduate and graduate levels?
  9. [INFORMATION SUPPORT SERVICES] Give examples of information support services you have turned to in order to make sense of your experiences at UTK. (PROMPT: What was the biggest adjustment concern when you joined the UTK? How could that experience been easier? Any other concerns that you have had in terms of your graduate education in the UTK. What kind of support did you find to address those concerns?)
  10. What were specific problems you faced and solutions you found?
  11. Suggest ways of improvements so that other minority graduates in the future do not face the same problems you faced. (PROMPT: How can we improve the information support services on the UTK campus to increase enrollment, retention, and develop minority student leadership?).

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## Mask Training in Traditional Acting Classes

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*The use of masks in performance is uncommon in modern Western theatre; however, masks have value as an actor training tool. Most of the modern literature on using masks to train actors in a College/University setting assumes that the training will be done over a whole semester. Often, this is impossible in a traditional acting curriculum. This paper represents research in attempting to introduce a limited, two-week session of mask work into traditional Acting II classes. The paper outlines the benefits of mask work according to four major modern authors in the field, details the work done and how it was integrated into the Acting II class, the student's reactions to the work, and an analysis of the project. The paper concludes that while the two-week session cannot duplicate the same level of training as a full semester, there are definite benefits to some actors on simply being exposed to the process.*

Most people in America are familiar with the masks of comedy and tragedy as a symbol of the theatre. The two masks, one smiling, one anguished, have their roots in the ancient Greek theatre, where the actors wore masks while they performed. Masks were considered an integral part of the theatrical experience by the Greeks; it would be impossible to consider performance without them. Not so in modern American performance.

The most likely reason for this is the adoption of Stanislavski-style realism as the dominant style of American performance culture. This style, psychologically based and representational in approach, has as its ultimate aim a kind of verisimilitude; the actors are to seem as much like "real" people as possible. The audience is to be deceived into forgetting, on some level, that what they are witnessing is a performance at all. To that end, masks seem counter-intuitive. The mask draws attention to the fact that the actor is performing, and disrupts the verisimilitude.

Nevertheless there is still value in mask work, even when used for training with actors who will not be wearing masks, and these benefits will be outlined below. The essential problem, however, is that most literature which exists about how to use masks for actor training assumes that the mask work will be done long-term. In an academic setting, this translates into a semester-long class focusing just on using masks and doing masked work. This is certainly possible at some institutions with the resources, focus, and desire to give this sort of specialized training to their acting students. However, not all college and university acting programs can afford to do so. Nevertheless, the benefits of mask work are significant enough to warrant use with all acting students on some level, even if extensive, long-term mask work classes are impossible. The question, of course, is how to accomplish this use.

This study attempts to discover how mask work can be reasonably incorporated into traditional acting classes, and the benefits that can be derived from such incorporation. To investigate these issues, mask work was introduced in to two Acting II classes in two semesters. This paper briefly outlines the benefits of working with masks, describes the mask work performed,

the students' responses to it, and finally, an analysis of the project.

Masked work has specific benefits in training actors. In particular, Jacques LeCoq, Sears Eldredge, Libby Appel, and Keith Johnstone have all written modern training texts about masks. While the texts differ in approach, all see masks as a tool of engaging the body and the imagination of the actor in ways that unmasked techniques cannot duplicate. Working with masks frees up an actor's blocks, encourages spontaneity, and seeks a transformative acting process based more on intuition and physicality than intellectual process. I select these authors because their theories and exercises informed my approach to working with masks in class. Much of the language of the exercises themselves, their structure and their goals come from these authors.

One of the most important writers and teachers in mask work is Jacques LeCoq. LeCoq (2002), a noted mime teacher who used masks in his classes and training, wrote, "For me, mime is central to theatre: being able to play at being someone else and summoning illusory presences constitutes the very body of the theatre" (p. 21). The way an actor summons these presences is through the use of the body to create a "universal poetic sense" (p. 46) – paring away all that is physically non-essential to expression. It is not enough that an actor identify psychologically with his character. She must also "play" physically with the character, engaging her body. LeCoq's "poetic" body is one that was immediately expressive in performance. To that end, LeCoq's students worked to find what was essential in the way they moved and gestured and to eliminate everything else. He believed that such poetic bodies had powerful stage presence and could create meaning on levels beyond the surface of the text being performed.

LeCoq adopted masks as part of his training because he believed they were a useful tool for creating this poetic body. It is not enough for an actor to simply put on a mask. A mask must be animated in order for it to be compelling and interesting to watch. By removing the face of the actor—the part of the body that is most often used to express emotion—the actor is forced to use his body in expressive ways. LeCoq was known especially for his use of the "neutral mask." The neutral mask, as its name implies, is a mask which is designed to have no expression at all—or at least, one of profound calm. LeCoq used these masks to train actors to acquire a "neutral body," a body that was, like its face, balanced, calm, and without particular expression. He believed using this mask would help actors eliminate their mannerisms, their unconscious physical habits, their own gestures and tendencies. A neutral body is open, focused, and calm. From this position of neutrality, the body can become anything (LeCoq, 2002, p. 38). Thus, an actor could create a body for his or her character which was devoid of the unconscious excesses that the actor might bring to the performance.

LeCoq also used more traditional character masks with fully-formed faces, though they could be exaggerated or stylized. In their exercises, students tried to find the essential movements required to animate the face of these masks—that is, the series of movements that would make the faces of the masks seem to "come alive." Masks, for LeCoq, were transformative. Putting on a mask required a transformation of the whole body. The masks not only encouraged it, they forced it. Using masks to train actors was a way of giving those actors an expressive body; further, it would gift the actor with an awareness of how to find this expressive body again even in performances without masks.

Just as some of LeCoq's training used improvisations where the actor engaged with the mask to create a character, many other authors use improvisation as the basis for training actors with masks. Sears Eldredge outlines a series of mask exercises for students in his 1996 book *Mask Improvisation for Actor Training and Performance*. As the title implies, the text approaches mask work without scripts. Instead, the characters and stories that evolve from the training exercises come from the spontaneity of the actors themselves as they engage with the masks they wear. Invariably, these exercises involve the actor focusing on what Eldredge calls "the compelling image" of the masked face (p. 18). Eldredge believes that when the actor attends to the new face she wears in a mirror, that actor will begin to find a new body and voice to accompany that face through spontaneous play, and with it, a new personality, history, and story. The transformative effect the mask has upon the actor begins with the image of the masked face. Thus, there is a link that is stimulated by using the mask: a link between the imagination and the body.

Eldredge's exercises are group oriented. Much like LeCoq's, Eldredge seeks to teach his actors how to create entirely new bodies that are expressive and meaningful. These exercises allow an actor to release her self-awareness, which can interfere with her performances. By committing to the persona in the mask, the actor can begin to surrender her own tendencies and tap into her innate creativity. With this surrender also comes confidence and focus, allowing actors to overcome stage fright. Eldredge believes that these benefits will remain even when the actor performs a non-masked role.

Another text to consider is Libby Appel's 1982 work *Mask Characterization: An Acting Process*. Appel also recognizes that working with masks can stimulate a link between the body and the imagination in the consciousness of the actor. Appel's training, then, is teaching the actor to allow the spontaneity of the movement in the mask work to trigger the imagination uncensored. Her exercises are designed to simultaneously strip away "old personal limitations" and "create new layers of experience" (p. 4). She states that working with masks results in "... stimulating the imagination, putting greater emphasis on physical actions, acting with the whole body, and ridding the actor of self-conscious mannerisms" (p. xii). Like Eldredge, Appel advocates using the mirror to help find the "truthfulness" of who that character is: to animate it properly. In order to animate a mask, Appel's students must understand the expressions of which it is capable. By moving the mask in different directions at different speeds, examining the mask at different angles, and trying different patterns of movement, the student finds the "personality" of the mask. A mask may seem to "come alive" when tilted sharply in one direction. Perhaps a mask seems happy when tilted upwards toward the light and brooding when angled down. Once the personality of the mask is discovered, students then learn to find the body to match that personality.

Appel's exercises, unlike Eldredge, tend to be more personal. She advocates the mask class as a fairly singular experience for the actor as guided by the teacher, with fellow classmates often ignored. Appel's exercises are in many ways more deliberately physical than others. She directs actors into physical situations well outside usual movement patterns and has actors manipulate ordinary objects in unusual ways, often for extensive periods of time.

*When the actor keeps moving, regardless of sore muscles or perspiration, there is no time or inclination to keep up or manipulate physical defenses. He truly gets past thinking. His body will submit to the image and take the risk with the movement, and he will suddenly find himself believing and doing things he has never considered before” (Appel, 1982, p. 25).*

This approach removes the intellectual and habitual and encourages the spontaneous and the imaginary in the actor.

One final work examined here is Keith Johnstone’s 1975 book *Impro*, a seminal work for improvisation. Johnstone has an entire chapter devoted to masked performance, and terms the internal process by which masked characters are made through spontaneity as “possession” or “trance” (p. 156). Thus, Johnstone aligns himself with Eastern ideas of masked performance as the “other” inhabiting the body of the performer for the duration of the performance. Johnstone clarifies that working with a mask is a two-way process, and that a mask dies when it is completely subjected to the will of the performer (p. 172). Johnstone speaks metaphorically, here, but he means that as an actor exerts control over his performance and refuses to play imaginatively with the mask, much of the character presence that might be generated otherwise will fail. Johnstone defines “possession” as a spontaneous engagement of the actor with the mask’s image in a mirror coupled with a commitment to the imagination of the actor in response to the new face. Johnstone tends to overly romanticize this process, and often it seems as if very practical performance concerns, such as narrative structure and audience connection, are glossed over. However, taken as exercises, Johnstone’s instructions are similar to those of Eldredge and Appel in aim: the transformation of the actor and removal of imaginative blocks. This transformation is at the core of the acting process—becoming another. For this reason, mask acting experiences can be eye-opening for students in all training programs.

The mask work was introduced to my Acting II students over four days over two-weeks. I used this format in consecutive semesters with two different Acting II classes at Georgia State University. As part of their grade for the entire class, students were required to keep a journal of class discussions and personal observations. I required the students to include an entry about their experiences working with masks. I had them fill out consent forms, and explained to them that they were free to deny consent for me to use their comments in this research without fear of penalty to their grade. In all cases, their comments would be used anonymously. False initials are used in this study where student comments are cited. This section will describe the exercises used; comments and results of those exercises will be explored in greater detail in the following section.

The two-week mask work portions of the class consisted of four sessions of one hour and fifteen minutes each over two weeks. This is much less time than most of the above texts recommend: a whole semester of three hours classes (or so) is recommended. However, the aim of this project was to attempt to give a meaningful mask training session within the confines of a more traditional acting class.

The four sessions were broken down the following ways: Session 1 was work with neutral masks. Session 2 was a mask-making session where the students created their own char-

acter masks. Sessions 3 and 4 were character mask sessions with the students wearing their own masks.

The first session (working with neutral masks) began with a brief discussion of masks and masking, about our own personal ideas about what masks mean, about whether masks can be expressive or not, and a brief overview of the function of working with masks as a tool for actor training. The neutral masks were then passed out. Because there was no budget for this particular experiment, the neutral masks were simple paper-plate masks created by cutting two small round eye holes, a flap for the nose, and connecting a piece of elastic to the mask to allow it to be worn. These were made in advance.

The neutral mask exercises were an amalgam of exercises taken from LeCoq, Eldredge, and Appel. The exercise took place on the theatre stage, on which I had placed a number of simple objects such as chairs, tables, rehearsal cubes, brooms, step units, music stands, and trash cans. Students were instructed to lay down on the stage on their backs, close their eyes and calm their minds. Students were further instructed that they were not to speak for the duration of the exercise. They were then told to put on their masks to lie still, relax, and to release all their preconceived notions of self and just exist in the present moment.

I had the students then begin to become aware of their bodies in a gradual way, to “rediscover” their bodies and how they worked. The premise was for the students to assume they had never had a body before. Each part I guided them to was the “first time” they had ever experienced that particular part. I sidecoached them never to assume they knew, for example, what a hand was or how it worked, or what it meant to breathe—they had to discover these things while trying to avoid their preconceived notions of function and mechanics.

After ten minutes or so of this basic awareness and exploration exercise, I had them discover “standing up” and then “moving.” I sidecoached them to feel what it was like to use their bodies to move and not assume they “knew” how to move a particular way. I also instructed them, at this point, to be unaware of the other masks around them, that this was simply an exercise for them alone.

Then the masks were instructed to begin to explore their environment without paying much attention to the other masks around them. I had the masks move to the various objects on the stage and explore them. I told them they should not assume they “know” what a particular object’s function is, that this was the first time they had ever seen this particular object. They were encouraged to take their time with each object, to explore with body parts other than their hands, and then move on to a different item when they became disinterested with what they had.

Once the masks had some time to work with the objects and their environment, they were instructed to become more directly aware of the others around them. They were encouraged to watch, approach, inspect, and touch these other beings, discovering them as they had discovered themselves. It was at this stage that the masks began to exhibit the first traces of personality, some being shy and retiring, some being direct and assertive. Because they were exhibiting personality, the masks were not “neutral.” However, neutrality was not an objective at this point of the exercise.

After some time with this last phase of the day’s exercise, I had the students relax and

remove their masks. A discussion followed about their experiences and class concluded for that day.

The second session was a mask-making workshop using simple materials. Using Carole Sivin's book *Maskmaking* (1986), I had the students create a "headband" mask. A headband mask is made from a simple form of papier-mâché and can be constructed in a relatively short amount of time. A handout was given to the students a week before the class detailing the materials they would need to bring to class, all readily available at craft stores. The materials for one headband mask cost under \$5.00, generally speaking.

Using strips of paper from grocery bags and white glue, students were guided in forming a framework over their own faces, then layering more strips of paper over that framework, following the curves of the student's face. Students were instructed to attempt to make the mask follow the contours of their face as closely as possible to ensure the mask fit well and had some shape to it. Students had partners to assist them and also brought mirrors to class to help.

None of the masks were completed by the end of the class, but this was expected. Enough work had been done on the masks for the students to take the project home and complete it over the weekend before the next class. Since the masks were to be speaking masks, unlike the paper-plate masks, the students were instructed to cut away the mask's chin and mouth. I also encouraged the students to paint their masks if they desired, though they should keep the color scheme simple and avoid complicated decoration. Highly decorated masks are often forced into a particularly strong expression, and limit the range of that mask.

The third and fourth day involved exercises using these character masks that the students had created. The third day began with another discussion of mask work, introducing the concept of how a mask can "inhabit" an actor's body. Because this can be a somewhat loaded or scary concept, I guided the discussion in terms of acting technique. The students had already been exposed to some improvisation concepts, so they understood about tapping into spontaneity during improvisation. We discussed how masking was, in many ways, simply a commitment to the spontaneity created by the image of the new face.

We also discussed the concept of "dual consciousness," which was mentioned in the class text, Robert Benedetti's 2003 work *The Actor In You*. Benedetti describes an actor in performance as having two minds at work: one being the character's, the other being the actor's. The actor is withdrawn, hidden, "behind the scenes," but still is in control (pp. 23-24). With dual consciousness, an actor can commit to the personality of the character they are playing without loading that performance with their own personality and mannerisms. At the same time the actor can manage the technical requirements of performance. Mask work was framed as a logical extension of this dual consciousness, where the actor "surrenders" to the character discovered in the mask, lets the mask determine what to say and how to move without direct interference from the actor, yet the actor's consciousness is still there, aware and guiding the experience.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the class brought their character masks to mirrors. We began with an exploration of the mask itself. The aim was to discover how the mask "animates." That is, in what ways can the mask be moved or held (like a puppet) which lend a sense of expression or mood to its features. For instance, a mask might look sad or angry when tilted

downward slightly and then turn thoughtful when tilted upwards.

After having time to find some initial expressiveness, the students were told to close their eyes and put on their masks. As we had done with the neutral mask, they were told to let their body become an empty vessel. They were instructed to let their own faces rise to meet the face of the mask. When they opened their eyes and saw themselves in the mirror that they were to let the image of that new face strike them, affect them, and to let the impulses they might feel run unhindered. Their face should speak to them about this new character's personality and they should commit to allowing that personality to flow out of the face and into their body.

The students then had a few minutes with their new faces. From this point on, instructions were consciously given to the *masks*, not the students, whenever possible. The students will face plenty of their distractions during this process; if the instructors are committed to their transformation, it is easier for them to remain committed as well.

Once the students were "masked" and in character, they began with simple movement exercises, asking the masks to move about the space. The actors were encouraged to rely on the image of their face still in their minds to dictate how they move, how they carry themselves, the quality and tempo of their movements. They were to find a body to suit the face, and to try out simple gestures of different kinds until they found one their mask "liked"—that is, a sound the actor's imagination chose that "fit" the mask.

The actors also began to add sound to the explorations. With instruction, the actors tried out different non-word sounds until they found one their mask "liked." With the stage still set up as it was for the neutral mask work—with simple objects around—the masks were instructed to move freely about the space. They could interact with the objects and each other, and should use their "gesture" and "sound" as a means of communication. In this way, the masks began to find their personalities on a deeper level.

When the masks had had enough time to settle into their new bodies, the class moved on with some exercises taken from LeCoq. These were simple improvised scenes which usually involved the masks waiting for something to happen. For example, four masks were chosen and asked to play a little game while the other masks watched. The first game was that they had been invited to a party at a lavish house. The masks came in one at a time, were shown into the room and left to their own devices. A different exercise saw a group of four masks waiting for a bus which was very late.

The second set of games involved two groups of four. This game was a job interview, with four candidates applying for the same job with the instructor as the interviewer. The masks were permitted to speak in a gibberish language now and were briefly interviewed one at a time. The first group of four was interviewing for a job delivering newspapers. The second group of four was interviewing for the job of king or queen of the world. Each mask would be asked questions like "Why do you want this job?" "What experience do you have?" "How will you get to work each day?" "What did you do before this?" and so on. Occasionally a question to encourage interaction was given, like, "What makes you more qualified for this job than this other person?" To conclude the scene, one mask was selected for the job. This allowed the masks to show their reactions of excitement, rejection, or indifference.



These interviews were particularly interesting in that masks, being brought into low-level competition with each other, exhibited strong “status” choices, either raising their status physically if they were confident or shrinking down and turning away to avoid conflict. The masks continued to interact with each other even as the interview concluded and they departed the stage, with defeat, jealous looks, triumph, or disdain manifest in their bodies. At the conclusion of these exercises there was an unmasked discussion about the students’ experiences, and class ended.

The final day of class began with the actors spending some time with mirrors to find their mask persona again. The stage was set with an assortment of simple costume pieces and hand props: jackets, scarves, hats, handbags, strings of beads, newspapers, umbrellas, stuffed animals, neckties, etc. As Keith Johnstone calls them, they were “things the masks would like”: simple and full of possibilities (p. 164). The first order of business, after the actors had found their mask’s personae again, was to have them explore the props. They were instructed to take their time in looking through the selections and not to get attached to any one thing. After some time exploring the props (and encouraging them to play with the props in unusual ways), the masks were told to select one item to keep, something the mask wanted, something that had meaning for the mask.

The masks were given some time alone with their object to manipulate it, to explore it, to discover its purpose and meaning for the mask. The masks were then asked to sit in a circle in the middle of the stage. This marked the beginning of an “interview” process. Instructing the masks that they could speak in English now, each in turn was asked to stand up and was interviewed by the instructor. The purpose of this was to allow the personality of the mask to come through and to put the actor “on the spot” so that he or she would trust in their spontaneity to provide the answer. Some typical questions were: “Hello, how are you?” “What’s your name?” “That’s a good-looking hat you’re wearing. Where did you get it?” “I like your beads. What do they mean to you?” Sometimes, the actor would “block” as an answer, such as, “I don’t know,” or “They don’t mean anything.” In such cases, the instructor would press gently to get the actor to open up more and trust more in their mask to provide the answers they need. Sometimes even this failed to produce a response, and the interview would skip that question and move on to the next. On the other hand, if the mask offered anything concrete, the instructor would be sure to ask questions to encourage further discussions as far as the mask was willing to go.

For instance, one particular mask stated that the purse she carried was a gift from her mother. The interview then turned to questions about her mother, and the mask told how her mother had died and the purse was all she had left of her. This questioning of the specifics allowed the actor to further engage with her imagination and allow the character of the mask to evolve and emerge spontaneously. On the other hand, one actor in particular blocked on nearly every question put to her, giving one-word answers or refusing to engage with her imagination. In her case, after several fruitless questions, the instructor thanked her and moved on to the next person. The mask experience can be stressful or even frightening for some actors, and this stress should not be compounded by the instructor forcing them to do something they are unwilling to do.

While the interviews were going on, often other masks would be listening and would

react to what was being said. This seemed to occur spontaneously and was gently encouraged when it happened. Occasionally, dialogs or even arguments would break out between the masks. In such cases, the instructor's role was not to deny the reality of the masks, nor to chastise them or stop the behavior; rather, to permit the spontaneous flow while guiding the masks back to the topic at hand.

The interview took the bulk of the class time, so at its conclusion, the actors were instructed to remove their masks. There was a final class discussion about the mask work as a whole, and ended class. For some students, the final interviews were powerful and inspirational for them: they couldn't believe that whole personalities emerged full-fledged from within them without having to "think them up." On the other hand, some students were unable to fully commit to the masked state. This was evidenced by their reluctance in interviews, their passing out of the "masked state" when watching others (they would fidget, touch their masks, revert to their own unconscious behaviors), and reluctance to discuss their experiences with the class. Suggestions of why this lack of commitment occurred are discussed in the next section.

These two weeks were designed to allow the students to experience, albeit briefly, the benefits of mask work: the creation of an expressive and poetic body, a sense of dual consciousness in character creation, a strong release of spontaneity, and a transformative performance experience. The relative success or failure of these aims will be discussed in greater detail below.

Reviewing the students' comments during the in-class discussions revealed much about how the exercises affected them. Admittedly, not every student spoke up during the in-class sessions, and a few of the students did not have complete journals, so their experiences could not be documented in this study. Further, the author acknowledges that the students were writing their journals for a grade, and so it is likely that some may have tweaked their writing style to please the instructor, despite reassurances that a negative opinion of the mask work would not affect their grade.

In general, most students found the experience a positive one. Most students found the exercises to be at least novel. Some had some apprehension going in, but warmed to the experience once they undertook it. A few did not enjoy the experience overall.

Many students commented on the transformational experience of wearing the masks. Some of the students felt the masks truly "took over" during the performance. Here are some select student comments:

I knew immediately who and what the thing was that lived in my mask. And it was not altogether very pleasant... I knew that was who my mask was, but I did not fully appreciate to what extent I could become the character of the mask until the interview... I would open my mouth to answer and words would pour out in a voice I had never heard. I did not have to think, I did not have to act, I just was... I could only sit back and watch as the mask took over. – K.I.  
... During [the initial animation of the character mask], my reluctance towards the idea of wearing a mask slowly faded. I was able to slowly release myself into the idea of the mask and release my self-consciousness. Once I did that my character came to life almost as if on its own. ...Eventually, my

walking pattern changed, my breathing pattern changed, the way I held my body changed, the way I reacted to those around me changed. By releasing my need to control the situation, I allowed the mask to breathe life to a new character. By the second day, the mask character was a complete breathing, walking, talking character. I was transformed yet aware at all times of myself. – N.D.

I never really considered myself a very good character actor, but that's precisely what this mask exercise brought out of me. Not only did the physical characteristics come with ease, but I began to think as my character would. This culminated with the final "interview" exercise. There was no difficulty telling the life story of my mask because it just flowed out of me. I was even surprised at some of the answers that came out... – E.G.

For these students, the masks were a vehicle to total character commitment. By experiencing a kind of dual consciousness, the actors were able to completely transform their own body, personality, and voice to suit the character that they were playing, and yet continue to remain aware of their technical performance requirements. This is an enviable end for any actor, masked or not.

However, not all students experienced this complete transformation. Some never fully connected with their masks or were unable to commit to the characterization. In some cases, it was the masks themselves that seemed to be a problem. For instance:

"When we were told that we had to make masks, I thought "What the hell, I do not want to make masks, this is not art class." Because I am not artistic, I had difficulty making the mask. ... I could not get the mask to conform to my face. It was very flat after I made it. It had no color and looked very bland. The activities we did with the mask were not very interesting to me. We looked in the mirror on the first (day) and tried to find out what the character was. Because there was no substance to the face I had a hard time trying to figure out who this character was. When we did the activities involving no speaking I felt really stupid. I did not understand what I was supposed to be doing. I think it to do with the fact that I had not correctly identified who or what the character was." – M.C.

"I didn't like doing the mask because I didn't feel what we were doing had an objective. The idea of the mask was to become unaware of ourselves and better place ourselves "in the moment." When I spoke to some of my classmates after the exercise, I got similar response to my feelings as opposed to the feelings most of us expressed in the classroom. I think this is an example of why the mask can be helpful; we are not concerned with saving face nor are we concerned with anybody's opinion of who we are. This aspect of mask work I like, but think it would have been more useful with a better fitting mask." – H.C.

Note that H.C., along with a few other actors, was using a borrowed mask from the instructor's collection because she missed the mask-masking workshop day. Thus, the mask she

used did not fit her face very well and may have hindered her ability to find a character in the mask. M.C. and H.C. both point to a specific issue with working with masks: Not all masks animate well, and not all masks are capable of providing a strong character for the actor to identify with. Ultimately, a poor-quality mask is a hindrance to a positive mask experience.

However, there is more to the negative experiences than simply a poor-quality mask. H.C. points out that some students didn't understand what was going on or what the purpose of the exercises were. It is fair to think that if a student doesn't have a positive experience with an exercise that he may not wish to speak up in class or in his journal about it, especially if the more vocal majority of the class has had positive ones. It is also possible that the instructor failed to communicate the function of mask work in a way that all students could understand. Or, perhaps the alien nature of mask work led to "mask apprehension"—a fear of working with masks which can be expressed in trepidation or contempt. Mask apprehension will be discussed in greater detail below, however, simply put, some students will not find mask work worthwhile.

Another theme that occurred in the student comments dealt with issues of self-consciousness or stage fright. Often, students will report that the masks give them a greater sense of security because the gaze of the audience isn't really on them, but on the masks. Some of my students wrote:

"I think the masks allowed us to be more expressive. We were able to release our inhibitions and be vulnerable. I felt less conscious of myself because my face was hidden from public view." – N.E.

"I really enjoyed the mask exercise. I think that it has helped me personally strip away my self-consciousness and my ego. It allowed me to explore a side of myself that I am not at all comfortable with... I think wearing it gave me a chance to be something that I am afraid to be in real life..." – L.I.

"It was awesome. I feel as if working with a mask allowed another layer to emerge. The mask was like a shield from [me] actually being watched!" – B.X.

"It was funny, with the mask I never felt so confident with my acting. For the first time I felt I knew who the character was [that] I created, and truly became that character. It wasn't as much a spiritually awakening experience for me though, but it was, I felt, the first step to understanding, creating, and discovering a character." – A.T.

This feeling of liberation may come from the fact that their faces are obscured. Comfort can also be found in trusting the mask (or the actor's own spontaneity) to provide how to move, how to speak, and what to say. The experience of this freedom may stick with the actor for other performances he or she does without masks, enabling the actor to perform similar transformations with their roles and finding that same sense of confidence.

But powerful experiences can also be scary experiences. By contrast, some students felt *more* vulnerable while performing in masks:

[On the Neutral Masks.] It was very interesting because we all had no expressions and so you couldn't tell how anyone was feeling, but you felt very much

vulnerable. That is the only reason why I didn't like exercise too much. I was hidden, but I couldn't hide. ... You can control a lot of things around you when you place some sort of emotion on for the world to identify you as happy or sad. – S.T.

[On the Neutral Masks] I didn't really get into the mask work until the end. I didn't give it my all because I was, in a way, scared of it... When we were walking around as if we were new creatures, I felt naked. – F.S.

I have to say I felt very out of place during this entire experience... Since I have a problem "speaking up" I tend to rely on facial expressions... to compensate. But with the mask I was stripped of this ability. I felt very foolish and really couldn't let myself "slip into the role. – C.Q.

"The mask created a vulnerability for me that I had not known without the mask. ... I felt that by wearing the mask, I couldn't fully identify my character with the audience because they couldn't see *me*, only the mask. The mask hid my feelings, my emotions and most importantly my objectives. Simply put, the mask hindered my ability to express myself." – L.K.

The recurring theme here seems to be about a difficulty in letting go of the self or the ego, and trusting in the spontaneity of the mask to provide what the actor needs. Frequently, mask experiences are described as "raw" or "draining" by performers, including some of these students. This is because successfully animating a mask, especially in an improvisation setting, requires a total commitment of the actor. The actor must take performance risks and follow character impulses that are often contrary to their own personalities. They are, to use a metaphor, working without a net. The "net" here is the safety of their own habits, mannerisms, and tendencies, all the things actors bring as excess baggage to their performances.

The students also had things to say about how the masks affected their bodies. One of the aims of the mask work was to make the actors utilize their bodies in more expressive, poetic ways. They write:

Our mask created the external character. It allowed us to be born into a new body totally letting go of our natural habits to emerge anew. – B.X.

This was a very useful way of demonstrating how an actor must be aware of his or her entire body, not just the mind and face. It was strange how once you felt the mask on and the main tool one uses for expression was now unavailable, you were somehow reminded of yourself from the neck down. – F.V.

I look at the mask making as a metaphor for performance; or rather, the mask is like the body... The mask takes preparation. Perhaps making the mask that I put on is the same as me creating a different body for the characters I play. – T.Q.

There were fewer comments overall about poetic bodies among the journals, though most of the students did mention in class how the transformation of wearing the mask gave them a new body other than their own. From witnessing the exercises, this author can report that actors who were focused and committed to their mask personae, both in the neutral mask and

character masks, usually had a strong sense of stage presence: their movements were carefully chosen, personal mannerisms were reduced or absent, there was a purposefulness to their bodies. For the duration of the exercises, many of the students were able to experience a bit of LeCoq's "poetic bodies."

The last major theme which ran through the student journals were concerns of apprehension about the mask experience. Masks seem to be viewed as either nefarious and strange or childish and frivolous in American culture. Masking seems to be something children do, but not adults. It is all right for children to dress up and play monsters or superheroes, but the older one gets the more social pressure there is to give up such pursuits. Alternatively, masks are deceitful and dangerous—bank robbers and deranged serial killers wear masks, after all. Certainly, talk about masks "inhabiting" or "possessing" an actor can be cause for alarm. So it is not unusual that the students described their fears, reluctance, or skepticism:

The day we were trying on our mask was scary... When I took off the mask, I was amazed at how I knew "what I did" but it seemed disembodied like a dream. – S.N.

The mask work was probably the most intimidating thing I've done all semester. – F.S.

... I was originally reluctant to participate in the mask exercise viewing it as ridiculous. However, I was quick to change my attitude toward the process once I got fully involved in the method. – N.D.

... the actual acting with the mask on was strange. I can see how acting with a mask would be fun, but the stuff that we did was a little weird to me. – T.X.

Mask apprehension is, in most cases, unavoidable. While there are some students who will find the idea of working with masks fascinating and interesting, far more are likely to be skeptical and uncertain. The idea of "masking" has a great deal of cultural baggage that comes with it. Beginning the class session with a discussion of masks and masking and the role of mask work in actor training may help to diffuse some of the apprehension. However, the instructor should expect many students to have a resistance to the work which may or may not be overcome.

The fear of "losing control" is at the core of mask apprehension. In truth, an actor in a masked state remains in control—in the dual-consciousness Benedetti described above. However, because these mask exercises are imaginative and spontaneous in nature, there is the possibility that the student may *feel* out of control as the masked character emerges without thought, suddenly, and often in a manner which the actor does not expect.

Overall, the students seemed to find the mask experiences at the very least "interesting," in some cases rewarding and occasionally enlightening.

While the exercises may have been well received by the students, the question of how effective they were in giving the benefits of mask technique remains. If mask exercises can be an effective way to train actors even in a traditional acting class setting, there are questions about how effective this implementation of that technique was.

One of the first objectives was to teach the students about using their bodies expres-

sively. There was success with this while the exercises were in progress. Outside of the exercises, though, it is difficult to determine whether they had long-term effects. Simply, there was enough time for these exercises to *train* the students bodies to be poetically expressive. Three days of exercise cannot replicate the effects of a semester-long class of intensive body work. It is significant that there were limited numbers of comments about the awareness of the body outside of the transformative effects of the masks. The students, in general, were more grappling with the other effects of the mask work, such as self-exploration, character commitment, and risk.

Nevertheless, many students felt that they had a *different* body while wearing the mask, if not necessarily a *poetic* one. This, in itself, is valuable. Many beginning actors believe acting is only about the voice. But a performer must engage his body, his mind, *and* his voice to create a fully-realized performance. One of the first steps to teaching an actor to engage his body is to make him aware of it. Without this awareness, the actor may be unaware of the physical mannerisms, gestures, and postures which can creep into a performance. So, while this two-week program would not have the same movement training benefits as a 16-week mask theatre class, putting the actors in touch with their bodies in different ways will expose them to possibilities they may not have been aware of for their physical performances.

Another goal of the two-week mask session was to help students learn to commit completely to a characterization in an attempt to discover the “dual consciousness” of a focused actor. While many actors did experience complete transformations, others did not. This is another example of where the short amount of time spent working with the masks may have kept some actors from learning all they could from the mask process. Some actors will not be able to overcome their apprehension of the masks before the mask work sessions are over.

The best way to overcome mask apprehension is to discuss masking ahead of time and in terms of the traditional acting curriculum of the class. It is very easy to wax mystical about masks, to ascribe shamanistic power to them, or speak about possession and trances while wearing them. While these things may or not be true for some mask cultures, ultimately for some students, this sort of talk will only add to their apprehension or skepticism. Mask acting is, at its best, a more presentational extension of traditional realistic acting technique. In both cases, the actor’s aim is to embody a character and present that character in performance in a way that is effective. In Realism, this usually involves the actor engaging with the author’s text to discover the psychological “truths” of the character they are playing. In masked improvisation, the script is replaced by the image of the mask itself, but the goal is the same. The masked actor attempts spontaneously to discover the “truths” of the character presented by the mask and express them in performance. By explaining the masking process to the students in this way, they may see a logic and purpose to working with masks. This may ease the apprehension or skepticism that was expressed in some of the journal entries above.

However, a complete *technical* analysis of masking can do more harm than good. Many of the students described their transformations as very powerful and memorable. If the process is laid out in dry, procedural terms, the students may not allow their intuitive side to connect with the mask, instead focusing on the mechanics of the process. This could interfere with the spontaneity required to completely animate the mask. The “magic” of mask acting comes from

the actor engaging with her own imagination through her body and the image of the mask. Students should be given time and space to allow this engagement to take place.

This two-week project and the students' responses afterward suggest that even a little mask work has merit for training actors. For those that are considering doing something similar in their own programs, the following suggestions are offered:

- Attendance to all classes is essential. A few students missed particular days, and it was impossible to catch them up. Those that missed the first day had to overcome the newness of the experience while other students were already growing accustomed to getting into their masks. Students who missed the mask-making workshop had to borrow masks from another collection, which often did not fit their faces very well and sometimes interfered with their work.
- Work closely with the students as they create their character masks. Masks that did not fit closely to the student's features had a tendency to "flatten out" and lose much of their expressive potential. Likewise, the more of the student's face the mask can cover, the better. Masks that left large eye holes and the lower face exposed allowed the actor to see him- or herself in the mirror, not the mask. This interfered with creating a persona.
- Guide the students, but try not to challenge, contradict, or scold as they work through their transformations. It is often difficult enough to commit to the mask, being made aware that the student "isn't doing it right" is only going to make them more self-conscious. An instructor should be a facilitator and a guide, but not an arbiter or referee. The instructor must be a calm and stable center in the play space, allowing the actors to feel safe and permitted to play.
- When the masks are inhabited, talk to the mask, not the actor. This is mentioned above, but it is another step which is essential to helping the actors maintain their dual consciousness.
- Finally, do not expect a two-week session to accomplish the extensive training of a semester-long class. Nevertheless, there are significant pedagogical benefits to using masks in traditional acting classes. The strength of the mask technique comes from exposing the students to something new, challenging their own ideas of character creation, forcing them to utilize their bodies in different ways, and opening up their spontaneity. The simple exposure of these things to the devoted acting student may allow them to think about acting differently and move toward building more physically realized, committed characters. As one student wrote:

It was one of the most "real" acting experiences I have ever had, and the metaphor of putting on the "face" of someone else is something I tried to consider in my traditional acting experiences. – F.V.

We tend to think of masks as concealing or hiding the truth. But a mask's expression is fixed: it cannot lie. Working with masks gives a student a chance to engage with the truthfulness of a characterization without their own mannerisms and habits getting in the way. Even if a student only experiences this honesty in characterization for a brief moment, the experience can



help shape his or her acting choices in the future.

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**Defending the Inverted Pyramid Style: Advocating an Emphasis on Teaching Traditional**

## **Practices in International Journalism Education**

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*The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization has prepared model curricula intended to improve international journalism education. While the overall goal is worthy, serious obstacles exist to its implementation in the “developing countries and emerging democracies” if it is promoted as a tool to reshape the education of future professionals. This article discusses those political, economic, legal, and cultural obstacles and suggests that the focus of journalism education under such conditions be development of students’ practical professional skills and an understanding of the widely accepted professional values of fairness, balance, accuracy, and ethics.*

### **Introduction and Statement of the Problem**

Despite decades of accumulated research and investment in educational programs focused on improving and empowering mass media as agents of social change and international development, an international journalism education model that overcomes the obstacles to democratic and effective professionalism in developing countries has yet to be proven universally applicable.

In 2007 the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) introduced the latest large-scale project aimed at improving international journalism education in the form of a 143-page report titled “Model Curricula for Journalism Education for Developing Countries and Emerging Democracies.”<sup>1</sup> It was an ambitious project entailing careful organization and interaction of well-intentioned and thoughtful media scholars from diverse backgrounds and cultures. One overarching goal of the model is to reinforce the principle that journalism should serve as an agent of democracy, even in authoritarian and semi-authoritarian countries. The question of its effectiveness and the potential success of its diffusion worldwide are likely to take a decade or more to ascertain. Certainly the model could not have been adopted and effectively applied in the less than one year since its introduction in Singapore in late July of 2007.

This article is by necessity speculative in suggesting both obvious and subtle obstacles to the model’s wide adoption and applicability. Its primary intent is to identify possible shortcomings or blind spots that the model might present for a large number of countries and for

journalism institutions contemplating its adoption, even in modified forms. The authors hope the study will provide a valuable checklist of anticipated or likely obstacles that will inform decisions about adopting or modifying it.

There is no generally accepted definition of “democratic journalism,” but commonly accepted elements are drawn from the libertarian press model of Siebert et. al in their classic 1956 book, *Four Theories of the Press*. Although the relevance of their Cold War-era categorization may be outdated, as critics argue (Merrill & Nerone, 2002), their model includes identifiable attributes of democratic journalism:

The press is conceived of as a partner in the search for truth....The press is not an instrument of government, but rather a device for presenting evidence and arguments on the basis of which the people can check on government and make up their minds as to policy. Therefore, it is imperative that the press be free from government control and influence...There must be a “free market place” of ideas and information. (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1956, p. 4-5)

Nowhere in the UNESCO (2007) model curricula is there a detailed discussion of anticipated impacts of censorship and other governmental controls on the democratic journalism practices that should result from successful implementation of the new curricula. A great many lesser developed countries do not condone the kind of free marketplace of ideas that the UNESCO model assumes and advocates for. The only clearly stated connection between the UNESCO model and the application of journalism for promotion of democracy is in the report’s forward authored by Abdul Waheed Khan, UNESCO’s assistant director-general for communication and information. Khan makes a somewhat tentative and brief endorsement of the democratic element of the new model, saying that there has been an increasing acknowledgment of journalism’s critical role in promoting democracy, resulting in an urgent demand for well-trained journalists—presumably to apply their skills to promote democracy even under authoritarian regimes. He continues:

Our hope is that journalism schools and individual instructors everywhere will find inspiration and assistance from these curricula. We know that journalism and the educational programmes that enable individuals to practice and upgrade their journalistic skills, are essential tools for the underpinning of key democratic principles that are fundamental to the development of every country. (p. 55)

Although not overtly promoted in the report, Western-style journalism is generally acclaimed as the dominant model for promoting democracy and journalistic independence, despite criticism of its dependency on commercial support and general alliance with capitalistic and free-market economies. At the same time, scholars and professionals advocating for alternative models and theories have attacked the Western model for several decades. Critics cite the concentration of ownership, servitude to business interests, devotion to the sensational and obscure, focus on profits, pandering to political elites, reinforcement of the social and economic status quo, and other common sins of journalistic irresponsibility. Most journalism education programs worldwide emphasize the elements of Western journalism training and conventions.

Brislin (2004), however, warned of the “futility of attempting to fit indigenous values into a procrustean bed of Western economic or political design. Multiple models of citizen-

press-government relations grow legitimately out of indigenous value systems and are endurable within the forces of globalization” (pp. 130-131). Practical problems mesh with cultural, economic, and historical problems, including the fact that most training programs are limited to only a few days or weeks. For example, Morrison (1997), writing about the post-1991 situation in Russia, said: “Much U.S. training is in investigative journalism, reporting techniques, interviewing, and database research, all of which are necessary for sound journalism. However, these classes offer too much in a short period of time, taught to people immersed in a very different journalistic and social tradition” (p. 33). Thus, alternative theories and reporting methods, such as those related to development communication or public journalism, receive little attention (Shafer, 1998).

Democratic journalism trainers, for the most part, convey practical content such as skills related to interviewing; generating story ideas, source identification, and use of quotes. They also teach effective transitions, attribution of information, balance of sources, alternative lead styles, editing techniques, and other skills standard in U.S. media writing and reporting courses and textbooks (Rich, 1998; Itule & Anderson, 1997; Lorenz & Vivian, 1996).

According to Miller (2002), “The notion seems to be that these occupational practices embody qualities like objectivity, facticity, and disinterestedness, that add up to professionalism, which itself contributes to a watchdog relationship to state institutions that, in the end, produces a knowledgeable citizenry able to govern itself” (p. 1). Thus democratic journalism seminars and workshops in Central Asia, for instance, have been primarily concerned with newsgathering and reporting based on the journalistic conventions of U.S. mainstream and commercial newspapers and broadcasters. The U.S. government and American-funded foundations are the largest sponsors of such trainings in Central Asia. Of course, variations of these conventions are found in the presses of other democratic countries, such as England, Canada, Australia, the Philippines, India, and Japan, and in emerging democracies elsewhere in Asia, South America, Europe, and Africa.

The obstacles to adoption of the UNESCO (2007) model may be most difficult to overcome for the least-developed countries with few resources for journalism education. Thus we discuss the advantages of an emphasis on professional skills versus theoretical curriculum content when choices must be made between these two important contributors to quality journalism education. For instance, experienced instructors with advanced or at least adequate professional skills are more likely to be available and affordable in such countries than are mass media academics with the graduate education expected for teaching theory-related courses. Therefore, a major purpose of this article is to highlight some everyday impediments in most developing countries to implementing such a curriculum at the university and college level. It does not address distinctive but related impediments to training professional journalists with work experience. Nor does it delve into another category of debate and disagreement relevant to the UNESCO model: whether journalism education should occur only at the master’s level, after students earn a first degree in arts, sciences, or professional disciplines (Ram, 2007).

## **Background to Designing the UNESCO Model Journalism Curricula**

This study provides an overview of the UNESCO (2007) curriculum, discusses the authors' collective teaching experiences in three developing Asian countries, and argues for more emphasis on teaching well-established professional skills, techniques, and styles—what the authors characterize as a return to the inverted pyramid style (Shafer, 2005)—and the values of newsworthiness, social responsibility, balance, clarity, accuracy, and ethical stature when there is no functional alternative model in place. Of course, the authors do not advocate a literal, unvarying adherence to teaching or using the inverted pyramid style in news writing; instead, it serves as a proxy term for the professional attributes of newsgathering, story organization, and storytelling that convey news and information to readers, listeners, and viewers in a fair, balanced, and accurate manner.

The design and dissemination of the UNESCO (2007) model curricula accurately assumes that no such functional and effective national press model exists in many developing countries. It also assumes that journalism education, as UNESCO advocates it, could improve or contribute to replacing existing but inadequate practices and professionalism wherever such reform is needed to build a stronger press system, to inform citizens, and to advance democracy. The report is cautious in both its advocacy for democratic reform and in asserting the revolutionary potential of truly democratic journalism. The report's authors are undoubtedly aware that the practices of professional journalism that would most likely result from successful implementation of their model would be inherently a tool and a voice for democratic change—whether democratic change is a stated purpose and objective or not. The report is subtle in reinforcing that the model is intended as a tool for democratic change where democracy does not exist or is weak. In discussing what journalism students should learn, it emphasizes critical thinking, and its introduction says of journalism education:

It should give them [journalism students] the knowledge and training to reflect on journalism ethics and best practices of journalism, and on the role of journalism in society, the history of journalism, media law, and the political economy of media (including ownership, organization and competition). It should teach them how to cover political and social issues of particular importance to their own society through courses developed in cooperation with other departments in the college or university. (p. 7)

Deconstruction and careful critique of this statement of objectives reinforces how dynamic,—even revolutionary—resulting practices and professionalism would be in an authoritarian country in the uncertain event the model is adopted and promoted in its universities and other training institutions. The fact is that few authoritarian countries are apt to condone curricula that produce the kind of critical thinking and adversarial journalism likely to emerge from effective programs. Even if journalists obtained this kind of education, how much success would they find in putting their knowledge and skills into practice in countries where the press is tightly controlled, and where democratically adversarial journalism is an inherently dangerous and economically hazardous endeavor?

Nor is the situation improving in much of the world. For example, the U.S.-based nongovernmental organization (NGO) Freedom House reported in 2007 that most of the now-independent former Soviet republics are undergoing new forms of media control, imposing severe limits on independent news media (Walker, 2007). Elsewhere, Freedom House (2007) found

a marked decline in press freedom in 2006 through much of sub-Saharan Africa, especially in the Horn of Africa and East Africa, but did cite noticeable improvements in the legal setting for the press in some of the region's other countries. Another U.S.-based press rights NGO, the Committee to Protect Journalists (2007), tallied sixty-five journalists killed in direct relation to their work in 2007, the largest number since 1994, with thirty-two victims killed in Iraq alone; Somalia was the second-deadliest country (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2007). Nor are journalism students exempt from harassment, intimidation, and abuse. In August 2007, for example, a Sri Lankan journalism student and editor of the student-run magazine, was assassinated, (Freedom House, 2007). In January 2008, an Afghan journalism student who also reported for a local newspaper was sentenced to death for allegedly insulting the prophet Muhammad (Wafa & Gall, 2008).

Work on the UNESCO model curricula began in December 2005 with a gathering of journalism educators in Paris. The organizers' and participants' stated objective was to develop a universal curriculum aimed at accelerating national development and extending democracy. The final document was unveiled with much fanfare at the first World Journalism Education Congress in July 2007. The introduction begins:

As a source of information, analysis and comment on current events, journalism performs a number of functions in modern societies. The basic goal of most journalists, however, is to serve society by informing the public, scrutinizing the way power is exercised, stimulating democratic debate, and in those ways aiding political, economic, social and cultural development. A journalism education should teach students how to identify news and recognize the story in a complex field of fact and opinion, how to conduct journalistic research, and how to write for, illustrate, edit and produce material for various media formats. (p. 6)

The report goes on to say that students worldwide should be provided with the knowledge and training necessary to engage in critical thinking about professional ethics and the role of journalism in society. In addition, they should learn journalism history, media law, and the political economy of the media. It suggests they also receive a broad general education and focus on a specialty field that integrates well with journalism. This more-or-less theoretical training, of course, is to occur in conjunction with teaching the professional skills of newsgathering, analysis, writing, and reporting.

Following the United States Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC) standards (2003), the UNESCO (2007) model curriculum proposes a three-year or four year undergraduate degree program in journalism education combined with arts and sciences courses. "Students should be encouraged to take a concentration in a second discipline to provide a foundation for specialized journalism in that subject and to qualify them for post-graduate study" (ACEJMC, 2003, p. 11).

The UNESCO (2007) model proposes that journalism education be comprised of three axes:

- i. An axis comprising the norms, values, tools, standards, and practices of journalism;
- ii. An axis emphasizing the social, cultural, political, economic, legal and ethical

- aspects of journalism practice both within and outside the national borders;  
and
- iii. An axis comprising knowledge of the world and journalism's intellectual challenges. (p. 7)

Both the three-year and four-year programs include courses on 1) writing skills, 2) logic, evidence, and research, 3) national and international institutions, 4) reporting and writing, 5) media law, 6) broadcast reporting and writing, 7) journalism ethics, 8) multimedia/online journalism and digital developments, 9) media and society, as well as 10) internships to connect theory and practice. The programs propose to develop competencies including 1) professional standards, 2) knowledge of journalism role in society, and 3) general knowledge (UNESCO, 2007, p. 30ff).

In terms of credit hours, these three categories of study should be distributed as: "professional practice, 40%; journalism studies, 10%; arts and science, 50%" (UNESCO, 2007, p. 10). The UNESCO arts and sciences component would constitute less than the ACEJMC's 80/65 rule that requires 60 percent or more of the total coursework outside the journalism curriculum.

The bulk of the report (UNESCO, 2007) presents detailed subject matter for basic and advanced courses and recommends textbooks and supplementary readings, mostly published in the West and many somewhat dated. It includes detailed course outlines, or syllabi, for "Foundations of Journalism: Logic, Evidence, and Research"; "Foundations of Journalism: Writing"; "Foundations of Journalism: National and International Institutions"; "Foundations of Journalism: General Knowledge"; "Reporting and Writing/Tier 1: Basic News and Features"; "Reporting and Writing/Tier 2: In-depth Journalism"; "Reporting and Writing/Tier 3: Specialized Journalism" with separate courses on "Economics and Business," "Arts and Culture," "International and Development," "Politics and Government," and "Science and Health"; "Broadcast Reporting and Writing (Radio and Television)"; "Online/Multimedia Journalism"; "Media Law"; "Journalism Ethics"; and "Media and Society." Some syllabi envision a two-semester course.

Journalism educators from around the world, including Canada, India, the United States, the Philippines, South Africa, United Kingdom, Brazil, Argentina, Nigeria, Denmark, Romania, and Pakistan, developed extensive outlines for most of the proposed courses. The outlines include: 1) detailed descriptions of each course; 2) recommended texts for instructors and students; 3) a week-by-week schedule of classes, and 4) grading and assessment protocols. Most of the courses are based on a fifteen-week schedule. But regardless of the nationality of the curricula designer, most recommended readings are of North American and Western European origin. It is also easy to question the relevance of some suggested course activities, such as showing the U.S. film "All the President's Men" about the journalistic investigation of the Watergate burglary and the subsequent resignation of President Richard Nixon.

### **UNESCO's Projects in Support of the Press in Developing Countries**

UNESCO has a long history of involvement with promotion of an independent press and jour-

nalistic professionalism. In the realm of media development, the organization says:

UNESCO helps to strengthen the capacities of communication institutions, to improve the training of media professionals and to raise awareness among the public in making best use of communication resources.

Particular attention is given to:

- Training for media specialists, particularly women journalists, in developing countries.
- Strengthening news agencies, public service broadcasting and community media in developing countries.
- Assisting media in improving the quality of their local contents by providing training, production and distribution opportunities. Training in media literacy for users, particularly children and youth (UNESCO, 2008).

UNESCO's related projects in the past year alone included: a world summit on media for children in South Africa; support for training a Rwandan media regulatory body; publishing an analysis of Mongolia's media sector; debating whether the press can successfully help integrate immigrant populations; training Palestinian journalists to use the Internet as a reporting tool; helping fund the relaunch of an independent newspaper in Afghanistan; and jointly sponsoring a conference in Morocco for community broadcasters held. UNESCO also emphasizes its International Programme for the Development of Communication, which has financed media development projects around the world for more than twenty years (UNESCO, 2008).

Its press freedom awards have sparked controversy in the recipients' countries. In 2005, for example, the Chinese government refused to allow journalist Cheng Yizhong to accept the UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize at a ceremony in Senegal. The previous year, Cheng was imprisoned for five months for aggressive investigative journalism that angered local officials (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2005).

### **Democratic Journalism Education as a Component for Building Civil Society**

In the post-colonial, post-Cold War era, Western governments and international aid funders have zealously propounded their belief that Western models of democracy and citizen participation can successfully be exported through a combination of military power, economic power, aid, moral suasion, and education programs. These tools have been directed at building independent press and other democratic structures, as well as reforming or replacing authoritarian regimes. On the "democratic journalism" front, their efforts have largely fallen short, despite the expenditure of massive amounts of U.S. dollars, euros, British pounds, and other currencies, and despite an influx of well-meaning, mostly Western journalists and educators, to teach and train working journalists and journalism students in developing countries and to build and sustain free and effective press systems.

Of course, it is difficult to isolate the press as a variable either contributing to or obstructing democratization in any society. It is also difficult to pinpoint the variables that effectively promote the creation and maintenance of a free press in a particular country. For commu-



nication scholars focusing on developing regions, however, the press is assumed to be a primary factor in motivating social change and development. If the press ceased to be deemed a significant factor advancing social change and economic development, their own work and expertise would be devalued.

The importance of the press as an agent of social and economic change, however, seems to be variable. Kartoshkina, Shafer, and Freedman (2007) examined the role of the Ukrainian press as an agent of change after that country's independence, in the run-up to its 2004 Orange Revolution that ousted an authoritarian president, and in the aftermath of that event. In the wider field of development studies, particularly in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, the press's influence appears to diminish as a variable for explaining either development or underdevelopment (Shafer & Freedman, 2007). For example, much of the contemporary literature on democratization in Central Asia focuses on cultural factors—such as ethnic divisions, gender relationships, and nomadic-versus-sedentary societies—that contribute to furthering or hindering democracy. As might be expected, Islam is the “cultural” variable currently receiving much more attention by policymakers and development experts because of its assumed influence on social change and development. However, Connelly-Ahern and Golan (2007) are among the few communication scholars to focus on Islam and mass communication, arguing that religious composition variables should be included as possible measures of international press freedom. They found a significant association between the Christian and Muslim composition of a country's populace and its level of press freedom.

### **Advocating for Traditional Forms of Journalism Education**

Western-funded aid projects focusing on democratic journalism education, including those supported by UNESCO, have generally focused far too much attention on experimental models of journalism practice and impractical press theories. The authors of this article contend that the basics of good journalism can be taught in concentrated seminars and workshops by qualified and experienced itinerant educators and professionals when other resources are unavailable. Some of these basic tenets are: (1) application of news values that are most relevant to the intended audiences; (2) a balance of views and opinions that help readers make up their minds about the issues and events covered in a story; (3) a readable and effective news style that is neither too simple nor too complex; (4) the prominence of accurate and compelling quotations that humanize and legitimize a story; and (5) the inclusion of a variety of reliable, credible, and appropriate news sources that present a diversity of opinions and expertise regarding the story. Much journalism education, however, gives too little attention to these fundamentals.

As Reese and Cohen (2000) point out, cultural factors can obstruct the kind of effective education and training of journalists that the UNESCO (2007) curricula outlines and advocates. Although the UNESCO model acknowledges that cultural barriers exist, no examples are provided. Even in developed Western countries, there is a conflict between the British (a/k/a green eyeshade) tradition of practical on-the-job training or through short-term programs in polytechnic schools, versus the liberal-arts-and-humanities journalism education emphasis pioneered in American universities, beginning with the University of Missouri School of Journalism in 1908.

Nor should the inertia of decades of rigid pedagogy be underestimated. In a 2007 meeting in Tajikistan, for example, journalism faculty, media organizations, and Education Ministry representatives concluded that university programs in that country remained underfunded, retained “old-fashioned teaching methods,” and focused on theory rather than practice. It observed that only of courses in the state-approved journalism curriculum involve modern technology. “With no television or radio stations, or newspapers, the universities have no facilities for students to practice their skills” (Asanova & Pisarejeva, 2007).

Journalists in democratic countries generally share a commitment to professionalism based on shared conventions and traditions. They also tend to advocate for an independent press system and share a belief that journalism plays an important role in the social change and development process. According to Deuze (2004), prominent German scholars, such as Weischenberg, Loeffelholz, and Scholl, who studied international journalists, found that regardless of the political and social milieu they work in, there is general agreement worldwide as to what constitutes news and what constitutes professionalism.

However, Weaver (2004) found disagreement among international journalists regarding universal standards and values, citing challenges facing journalism education programs worldwide. They included: (1) increasing recognition and awareness of cultural diversity in society; (2) merging of entertainment and media industries, genres, and formats; (3) convergence of digital media technologies (multimedia); (4) internationalization of media, journalism, and news flow; and (5) lack of resources in developing countries.

It is clear from documenting press controls and censorship in much of the developing world that authoritarian governments generally act to hinder the press in serving as effective agents of democratic reforms and transition toward civil society. Their press systems remain allied to the authoritarian governments they serve. As a result, they inherently fail to advance democratic reform. Perhaps that is why scholars of transitionology and related social change and development disciplines have, for the most part, neglected to factor the impact of the press as a tool in the social change and development process. Thus we can only speculate from our own experience and theorize about how the press might contribute to, or obstruct, such development.

The authors of this study have over thirty-five years of combined experience in international journalism education in more than twenty developing countries and 100 universities. This article briefly discusses some of those experiences in educating journalism students and professionals in three of those countries—the Philippines, Uzbekistan, and China. While all three are in Asia, their histories are dramatically different, and thus they reflect a variety of cultural, social, economic, and historical values, as well as a variety of press systems.

The Philippines, now a democracy, is a former Spanish and U.S. colony, occupied by Japan during World War II, and independent since 1946. Uzbekistan, which remains under authoritarian rule, spent seven decades as a constituent communist-governed republic of the Soviet Union until independence in 1991. China has been under communist rule since 1950, following a twenty-three-year civil war. Freedom House ranks the press system of the Philippines as “partly free” and of the other two countries as “not free” (Freedom House, 2006).

We draw on these teaching and training experiences using a multi-national compara-

tive approach to illustrate anticipated impediments to implementing the UNESCO (2007) curricula. The most universal of these impediments include: (1) lack of access to computers and the Internet; (2) a shortage of current textbooks in a language most journalism students are literate in; (3) authoritarian governments that restrict what is taught at universities, and that regard a democratic press as a direct threat; (4) licensing and censorship of student media; (5) low pay for faculty and corruption in university administrations; (6) antiquated and insufficient library holdings, including a scarcity of books, research and professional journals, magazines and other supplementary academic materials in languages that are widely understood by students; (7) the “brain drain” in some regions as the best journalism professors and students move to such professionally hospitable destinations as Europe, Australia, Japan, and North America; (8) physical dangers, low salaries, and endemic bribery (e.g., “envelope journalism” and conflicts of interest) that make the profession both risky and unrewarding; (9) the peril to faculty and administrators who encourage the kind of critical thinking advocated in the UNESCO report and that might inspire students to engage in dangerous political actions; and (10) the political uncertainty of committing to a curriculum advocating for democracy and press freedom, when the freedom to apply such a curriculum may only be temporary.

Such pervasive conditions in most developing societies are enormous obstacles to effectively implementing even a portion of the UNESCO (2007) model curricula. Students who graduate with the kind of education promoted by UNESCO would more likely be overqualified for low-paid journalism jobs. They would, however, be good candidates for employment in government or business either “flacking” for government or working in public relations or advertising. The kind of well-educated graduates we would expect from programs that follow this model would also be prime candidates for emigration to developed countries, graduate study abroad, or jobs as stringers or staff for foreign news agencies, such as Cable News Network, British Broadcasting Corporation Associated Press, Agence France Press, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and Reuters—rather than settling for unrewarding and professionally constricted jobs with domestic news organizations.

The following three examples derive from the professional experience of the three authors teaching journalism and mass media courses in developing countries over the past decade. They are not presented as either typical or unique experiences in international journalism education. Rather, they serve as a basis to identify and discuss a wider range of anticipated obstacles to the success of the UNESCO curriculum in these three countries and in other countries contemplating adoption of the model.

### ***Case #1: Journalism Education in the Philippines by Richard Shafer***

As a visiting Fulbright professor at a locally prestigious university in the Philippines in the 1990s, one of my assigned courses was an introductory media writing class with about sixty students. The enrollment norm for such a class in the United States, usually taught in a computer lab, is about seventeen students. This smaller size allows the instructor to coach or edit students as they write their stories or other assignments at an individual computer terminal. Even spending a few minutes with each of seventeen students takes up most of the normal class time. It is

also difficult for an instructor to critique, grade, and make effective comments on the assigned work of more than perhaps two sections of classes this size.

My classroom was furnished with long wooden tables and benches. There were a few light bulbs and a blackboard, and the classroom was stifling due to lack of air conditioning. Flooding during the rainy season made the school inaccessible for almost a week of the semester. The students had widely disparate English-language ability, with some fluent and others barely conversational. My chosen solution to teaching sixty students in this introductory media writing course was to concentrate on teaching them how to write quality news and feature leads on the assumption that if journalists can write the first two or three paragraphs of a story, often followed by a well-integrated quote, they are well on the way to producing acceptable newspaper or magazine content. Grading longer assignments and stories would have been difficult or impossible, given that instructors are likely to have multiple courses to teach.

Some journalism programs in the Philippines provided modern classrooms with fifteen to twenty computers, air conditioning, and large-screen projection capability. But such facilities were fairly rare in provincial areas and they remain unavailable to journalism students in many developing countries. Even if a university has high-tech classrooms, it is not uncommon to have frequent electrical “brownouts” that make classroom and lab technologies undependable or even useless. It has also been common for governments or businesses in developed countries to donate used computers, printers, and other technology to universities and colleges in developing countries. In many cases, though, this equipment is obsolete, incompatible with existing electrical wiring or voltage, and generally unreliable. It is also common that: (1) required computer software is unavailable or too expensive; (2) there is a lack of skilled technical or computer support staff to install and maintain equipment; (3) access is limited because computer labs often require heavy security; (4) a shortage of printer paper and ink cartridges often exists; and (5) computers are subject to hacking because “spyware” software is expensive or unavailable, or they are subject to the adverse effects of faulty or pirated software.

Under such conditions, a journalism instructor is probably better off having the students use more traditional and reliable technologies, rather than dealing with the time-consuming and expensive headaches and frustrations of maintaining modern technologies that are more likely to hinder the education process than further it.

### ***Case #2: Journalism Education in Uzbekistan by Eric Freedman***

When I arrived in 2002 as a Fulbright scholar at a university in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, I discovered that the building lacked Internet access, and the campus radio station was not licensed to broadcast beyond the journalism building—even if it had the technical capabilities, which it did not. The few donated personal computers often were broken, locked up, vulnerable to electrical surges from the antiquated power system, or with inadequate memory to run modern software. Students were not allowed to check out books, journals, or other materials from the library, which was often closed because of a staffing shortage. The building’s only photocopier was in my private office. Other inadequate resources—the lack of cameras, computers and software, and video editing equipment, for example, made it extremely difficult to teach visual journal-

ism, design, and broadcast except theoretically. Meanwhile, journalism education was undermined by lingering, well-entrenched Soviet-style pedagogy in which students learned material by rote, rarely received field reporting assignments, and were discouraged from exercising critical—analytical—thinking in ways that would lead them to question, challenge, or debate their instructors.

The structures and procedures of the authoritarian regime impaired the development of reporting skills as well. Public agencies often met in private, without press or public access. Governmental information was treated as proprietary, not public. Ordinary citizens, rank-and-file civil servants, and public officials were afraid to be interviewed by strangers such as students, lest they get in trouble with the authorities. Although the university's Faculty of International Journalism was located only a few miles from the national parliament, Oly Majlis, none of the third-year students in my feature-writing class had ever been in the building, let alone covered a parliamentary hearing, meeting, or debate. It took intervention from the university's vice-rector to get permission to take my class there to tour the building and meet with a deputy.

A third obstacle to building journalistic expertise came in the form of institutional rigidity and aversion to change, also a legacy of seventy years of Soviet rule. When a U.S.-educated Uzbek colleague and I offered to design and teach the country's first introductory course on environmental and science journalism, it took more than two months to secure necessary approvals from the university hierarchy.<sup>1</sup> After I completed my Fulbright tenure, the university discontinued the course.

My Fulbright predecessor at the university ran into similar roadblocks. For example, when he tried to help establish a student newspaper, the university administration told irate journalism students that they could not get a license and were too immature to publish a newspaper of their own. In the administration's view, the only acceptable alternative were sophomoric "wall newspapers" posted in the building but subject to censorship.

### ***Case #3: Journalism Education in China by Stephen Rendahl***

There are good journalism programs at the major universities in China (the University of Beijing, for instance); however, most colleges and universities are still developing facilities and programs for quality education. When I was teaching in China two years ago, classrooms south of the Yangtze River lacked central heat. During the winter students wore coats and gloves in the classroom to keep warm. Dormitories were crowded and often lacked hot water and central bathing facilities. Classes were large and primarily focused on mass lectures rather than using writing laboratory facilities for more individual instruction. Computers were available, and with the increased standard of living, some students were able purchase their own. Despite recent economic growth, major restrictions on press freedom in China remain. The government still censors the press and the Internet even though more "independent" newspapers and magazines earn revenue from advertisements rather than through government expenditures.

The major stumbling block to democratic journalism education as promoted by UNESCO (2007) is the active censorship of journalists by the Chinese government. The UNESCO model

recognizes the “role of journalism in promoting democracy” (p. 4), but how does that come about in an undemocratic country like China? The Reporters without Borders (RWB) China Annual Report (2008) states that “the press is being forced into self-censorship, the Internet is filtered and foreign media very closely watched.” The report also indicates that editors receive lists of banned subjects, there are physical attacks on journalists, and defamation cases are increasing. Greater problems for democratic journalism occur. For instance, Wang Deji was arrested for subverting authority because he criticized the way the Olympics were being developed (RWB, December 2007), and three Tibetan journalists received long sentences “for taking photos and recordings of the demonstrations following the horse festival on 1st August” (RWB, November 2007). There are many other examples of Chinese restrictions on freedom of the press that seemingly remain major obstacles to implementation of UNESCO- style journalism education in China.

### **Adapting to Technological Limitations on Modern Journalism Education**

Obviously the authors of this study are not technological determinists with regard to the widely assumed imperative that students need the latest digital and computer technologies to become skilled reporters and writers, although we very much acknowledge the value of computers and telephones for information-gathering and for accessing expert and knowledgeable sources. Journalists were engaged in high-quality investigative reporting, opinion writing, and feature writing long before the computer was invented. Even in modern Western classrooms with advanced computers, students struggle with leads and quotes well into the second half of a one-term introductory reporting course. Does it matter if the student is writing a news article or opinion piece with a pencil stub on cheap notebook paper, as long as the final product is informative, accurate, well-constructed, and publishable? Of course, a real advantage of the computer is its ability to access the Internet and open a world of alternative sources and information to enrich and enhance local news stories. In some countries, the government blocks foreign and opposition Web sites.

Eighteen or fewer students are considered ideal in a mass media “lab” classroom. The U.S. Accrediting Council in Journalism and Mass Communication recommends fifteen, but mandates no more than twenty students per class per teacher. During a typical class, the instructor gives a writing assignment and then moves around the lab making comments and editing the students’ work on their individual screens. Obviously if computers are unavailable or if electricity is unreliable, critical classroom time is lost lamenting the failure of technology, while both students and instructors are liable to become frustrated and discouraged. One alternative is to focus on the students’ reporting and writing skills and not worry whether an assignment is hand-written or produced on a laser printer.

Another alternative is to reduce the time spent on writing and reporting and to focus instead on theories of mass communication, journalism history, and other abstract curriculum content. Under this approach, instructors primarily lecture on theoretical topics, media ethics, media law, journalism values, or different world models of journalism rather than helping students prepare for the realities and demands of professional practice.

## **Theory, Practice, and Alternative Models of Journalism**

With continued homogenization of journalism education worldwide, the Western schism between journalism practitioners, (green eyeshades) and theoreticians (chi-squareds) has spread internationally. In American universities striving for higher academic status to boost enrollments, the trend has been for journalism and mass communication programs to emphasize the theoretical over the practical. One result is that an institutional focus on research productivity may be contrary to a faculty member's maintenance of journalistic skills and professional competence.

Scholars, primarily in the United States and Europe, have produced books and journal articles propounding alternative models that are heavy on theory and short on practical application, especially in the developing world where media are often tightly controlled, where media economics are shaky, and where journalists are undervalued as measured by compensation, public trust, and social status. Articulating such models may further the proponents' academic careers but make little contribution to the profession of journalism. These models carry names such as "peace journalism," "civic" or "public journalism," "advocacy journalism," "community journalism," and "development journalism."

In the traditional approach used by mainstream U.S. journalism, news stories generally use the dominant inverted pyramid-style lead that strives to answer most of the "who, what, when, where, why, and how" questions. A credible news story is expected to have balance, be reliable, and include diverse sources and strong quotes, as well as attribute information from credible experts, observers and event participants. It should be just long enough to cover the subject, while remaining interesting. Such basic rules, traditions, and conventions are generally lacking in the newer journalism models, which are as hard to define as they are to practice.

Western-style journalism doesn't proclaim itself a champion of national development, social change, or any other goals beyond a fair and accurate presentation of news and information. It strives only to achieve a degree of objectivity. It is ideological in this sense, but can be adapted to local cultural, social, and economic conditions. As Arthur et. al. (2007) write:

Journalists in the Western Liberal democratic paradigm traditionally have been trained to initiate and/or develop existing story ideas, research those ideas, interrogate the often complex material thrown up during the course of that research—including human interviews, data-mining and web-based research—and then present all that in a way that can be understood and acted upon by an identified audience, all within the constraints posed by technology. Journalism product is produced through a quasi-industrial process in which practitioners set agendas, manage the gatekeeping process, identify and interview sources according to those earlier decisions, then manufacture, sell and distribute their news products to the buying/viewing/listening public.

The new models, which are often interventionist in nature, ask the journalist to assume the role of social worker, change agent, micro economist, or community development expert, often with little or no training in these areas.

Development communication, for instance, asserts that the press should be first and

foremost an agent of development. The problem of “development” can take up huge segments of the curricula in programs that adopt it, while detracting from time spent building basic and advanced journalistic skills that can be immediately applied to improving mass media content. Development communication has suffered because of negative political attachments, particularly when repressive governments use it as a guise to shackle the press to maintain power. This was the case with the regime of former President Ferdinand Marcos, who incorporated it into his martial law policies in the 1970s and 1980s in the Philippines (Shafer & Freedman, 2007)

These alternative models are sometimes inserted into the curricula in journalism and mass media programs, giving students an increasing amount of theory at the expense of acquiring and applying basic newsgathering and reporting skills. One risk is that graduates will emerge much better at talking about journalism than at actually doing it.

### **Summary, Conclusions, and Unanswered Questions**

This article has outlined the recent introduction of the UNESCO international model journalism curricula and provided a first critique with regard to some anticipated obstacles to its successful adoption in developing countries. It suggests that one way to mitigate such obstacles is to concentrate on the basics of journalism education when expensive technologies or theoretical and academic expertise are unavailable or in short supply.

Professional journalists in economically advanced Asian countries such as Japan and India tend to adhere to Western news values as universals. They think of their audience as media consumers, and strive to serve them with news and information based on traditional news values, such as timeliness, proximity, impact, novelty, prominence, conflict, and human interest. Thus it is evident that these values can fit at least some non-European, non-North American societies and political systems if there is a will to adopt them and if there are resources to operationalize the underlying theories and approaches into practice. As universities in developing countries worldwide craft, rethink, and revise their journalism and mass media programs, they also should emphasize and reward the kind of basic journalism skills that will best serve the nation’s press, while furthering democracy and an informed public. Such skills are critical to success as both domestic and international journalists. Alternative models should be approached with caution, and not be adopted just because they are new.

Regardless of how a national system is classified, and regardless of whoever or whatever does that classification, college-level journalism education—if there is any—will reinforce and reflect imposed values and constraints, while sometimes operating under the eye, and under the regime’s steel-toed boot. In some systems, including that of the Philippines, institutions are free to develop and teach their own curricula without governmental approval. Other countries such as Uzbekistan and China strictly regulate curricula, including what cannot be taught. It is common in developing countries that all journalism students must take a fixed, rigid regimen of courses dictated by the government; elsewhere students must fulfill a core curriculum determined by their institution and supplemented by a choice of electives.

Still to be resolved is determining where the new UNESCO model curricula may effectively fit into the struggle to create and sustain independent, professional media organs, and



how. One fundamental question is: If UNESCO wants journalism education to reflect universally accepted professional journalism values and practices, why does its report differentiate between “developing countries and emerging democracies” on one hand and developed countries on the other? Another key question: Where will staff, financial, equipment, and technological resources come from to fund implementation of the model curricula—assuming that a government or individual university chooses to adopt it? A third question: How adaptable is UNESCO’s model to accommodate the realities of a developing nation’s political, historic, economic, and cultural situation while furthering its pedagogical and skills-training goals. The search for answers to these fundamental questions does not require wholesale rejection of the UNESCO model curricula, but it does require more than lip service to such realities. It also requires close consultation among journalism educators, on-the-ground professionals and trainers, press rights defenders, and colleagues with experience in a range of developing countries, whether emerging democracies or continuing authoritarian regimes. Finally, it requires creation of indigenous educational and training materials, rather than virtually total reliance on foreign materials, whether or not from the West.

This ambitious curriculum and its sample syllabi would guide a first-rate journalism education in any country and, at least in concept, would provide students with a solid grounding in the “inverted pyramid style” as the authors broadly define it, with the skills necessary for analytical thinking and professional-caliber fact-gathering and reporting, story organization, and writing. Again, that is in concept. However, with the exception of top-tier journalism programs in North America, Europe, and other developed regions, the great deficit in human, economic, and technological resources to support such unrealistic programs make successful adoption of the model unlikely. As a result, there will long remain a dramatic need to provide intensive professional-skills training to working journalists in what UNESCO’s model describes as “developing countries and emerging democracies.”

### **Note**

United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization’s *Model Curricula for Journalism Education for Developing Countries and Emerging Democracies* is available at [http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=25367&URL\\_DO=DO\\_PRINTPAGE&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL_ID=25367&URL_DO=DO_PRINTPAGE&URL_SECTION=201.html).

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## **Social Change and Acculturation in the Adjustment of New African American Women: A Case Study**

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*Ever since a Dutch boat brought 20 black people to Jamestown, Virginia in 1619, African Americans have faced a precarious existence that is inexorably intertwined with the history of the United States. The 21<sup>st</sup> century is witnessing a new and different kind of African peopling of the US in the recent waves of immigrants and refugees from African countries. These new comers have to contend with the usual problems of minority groups adjusting to the expectations of majority groups, in an ever-changing demographic terrain that tasks their skills for successful acculturation, which implies retaining parts of their cultural heritage, while adopting some new values, beliefs, practices, and behaviors. Using models of immigrant and refugee adjustments to social change, this action research study of new African American women in the Fargo-Moorhead area of North Dakota and Minnesota found ambivalent attitudes towards Americanization and Africanness, as well as barriers to successful integration. The final picture that emerges shows that successful social change acculturation is the result of a two-way process that requires adjustments by both new comers and members of their hosting communities. This is leveraged by interpersonal and intercultural communication competence.*

Demographically, African Americans now constitute about 12.4 percent of the population of the US, coming behind Hispanics who now make up about 14.8 percent, and Whites who are 74.0 percent. This reflects a significant change from the past when the country was largely composed of Whites, Blacks and Native Americans. The first US census of 1790 showed that the population was 72 percent white, 18.9 percent African and 1.8 percent American Indian. In the 218 years since that first head count, significant demographic changes have continued unabated. Some of the most obvious demographic developments are in the phenomenal increases in the number of Hispanic peoples, who are now the second largest and the fastest growing subgroup. Their surge has boosted the total population of people of color who today account for 100.7 million of the 302 million population of the US. Four states – California, Hawaii, New Mexico, and Texas – as well as the District of Columbia, now have people of color as the majority (Hussain & Frankel, 2007). The Census Bureau Director, Louis Kincannon, put the picture in perspective by averring that there are more minorities in the US today than the total population of the country in 1910, and the present minority population in the US is larger than the total population of all but 11 countries in the world (Hussain & Frankel, 2007). It is estimated that by

2050, the white population will have become relatively less numerous, dropping from 75 percent to only about 50 percent of the total population (Smith and Edmonston, 1997).

Most of these demographic changes are attributable to the influx of immigrants and refugees. Whereas there were approximately 2.2 million foreign-born persons in the United States in 1850, accounting for 9.7 percent of the population (Smith & Edmonston, 1997), today, immigration accounts for more than 40 percent of the U.S. population growth since 2000 (Hussain & Frankel, 2007). Although the nation's black population has surpassed 40 million, accounting for 13.4 percent of the population, they still lag behind Hispanics, whose population has quadrupled in southern states on account of immigration. These demographic changes portend great significance for social change, acculturation and communication practices, as the landscape for diversity changes.

Although refugees and immigrants are changing the demographic landscape, they go through challenging social change and acculturation experiences. Pipher (2002) found that refugee families try to adjust to their new culture by fighting it, avoiding it, assimilating quickly or tolerating the discomfort and confusion while choosing what to accept or reject. Various acculturation models explain how immigrants assimilate, separate, integrate or feel marginalized (Berry, 1997). Individual differences notwithstanding, "selective acculturation" or the process of picking and choosing what to accept or reject is the most desirable, according to Portes and Rumbaut (2001).

The purpose of this research was to explore how a group of African refugee women in Fargo and Moorhead (North Dakota and Minnesota, respectively) are trying to adjust to the new conditions of starting lives all over again following their relocation to the United States, as many of them navigate naturalization processes. This is a case study that used the experiences of a group to extrapolate, within reasonable conditions, to the wider society, while acknowledging that no two groups can be the same.

As a national trend, the influx of refugees and immigrants does not have a uniform effect in every part of the country, nor are there uniform approaches to acculturation and adaptation. In some areas, it is claimed that refugees and immigrants depress wages, while in others, they are seen as bringing significant economic benefits. In parts of North Dakota and Minnesota, refugees and new immigrants make significant positive contributions and raise the average economic output of their new communities (Slobin, Thompson and Klenow, 2002). Without these new comers, the depopulation of North Dakota would have progressed at a much faster rate, as many small towns continue to decrease in population. Regardless of their individual circumstances, refugees and immigrants have to confront serious social changes relating to adjustments to a new culture, as they negotiate what aspects of their culture to retain and what to adopt from their new communities in the US. For the new groups from Africa, this is part of the historic hardship, which their predecessors had to contend with, from slavery to emancipation, surviving largely through building their communities and making necessary cultural adjustments, and ultimately influencing the larger American culture. As Fragher et al. (2000) observed:

Despite enormous hardship and suffering, African Americans survived by forming new communities in the colonies, rebuilding families, restructuring language, and re

forming culture. African American culture added important components of African knowledge and experience to colonial agriculture, art, music, and cuisine. (p. 101) Today's new African Americans (as recent immigrants or refugees from Africa) are introducing aspects of African culture in contemporary American societies where they live, through a two-way social change acculturation process of give and take. Some have argued that today's new Americans in general are not adapting quickly enough to American culture, and are thereby posing a threat to national cohesion by retaining too much of their original national culture (Huntington, 2004).

### *Social Change Acculturation*

If it is true that immigrants pose the greatest danger to national cohesion in the US, as Huntington (2004) and others have argued, it is largely because unlike the old immigrants from Europe in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, some of the new groups of refugees and immigrants are more impervious to adopting the cultures of their new host communities. Social change by which we mean "that large numbers of persons are engaging in group activities and relationships that are different from those in which they or their parents engaged in some time before" involves modifications in the way "people work, rear a family, educate their children, govern themselves, and seek ultimate meaning in life" (Vago, 1980, p. 8).

Refugees and immigrants have to contend with pressures to adjust to the new realities of their new environments, while at the same time trying to preserve some aspects of their motherlands. They are not expected to throw over board all the norms, cultural products, and symbols of their previous existence, but rather to seek a balance between maintenance and alteration of their social structures. These structures involve important aspects of culture, social actions and conduct, including consequences and manifestations of such behavior embodied in norms, values, and symbols (Moore, 1968).

Irrespective of individual differences that may make some people more easily acclimatized to new changes, adjustment to a new culture is generally more difficult for adults who have had some experience in another culture. Acculturation, that critical "process of change over time that takes place within individuals who have completed ... [a] socialization process in one culture and then come into continuous, prolonged, first-hand contact with a new and unfamiliar culture" (Kim, 1988, pp. 37-38) must be leveraged by effective interpersonal and intercultural communication to yield desirable results and obviate maladjustment.

Acculturation, which implies adaptation to a new culture is evidently expressed in behavioral and attitudinal changes (Christenson, et al., 2006). The amount and quality of first-hand contact and interaction immigrants or newcomers have with people and services in their new environment constitute their acculturation experience (Dumka & Roosa, 1997). The processes of acculturation and adjustment to a new culture are complex and involve personal, social, and community characteristics. Various acculturation models have been developed to explain the processes and determine variations of success in dealing with the issue of how to acculturate. According to Berry (1997), the two major issues are *cultural maintenance* (the importance attached to cultural identity and the striving for their maintenance) and *contact and participation* (the extent of involvement in other cultural groups instead of remaining primarily

among one's cultural group). These two underlying issues yield four acculturation strategies, which are *assimilation* (seeking more interaction with other cultures and not maintaining one's cultural identity), *separation* (placing more value on holding to one's original culture and avoiding interaction with others), *integration* (with concurrent interest in maintaining one's original culture and interacting with others too) and *marginalization* (less interest or possibility for cultural maintenance and having relations with others).

Similar to these four strategies of acculturation, are Pipher's (2002) explanations of four reactions refugee families have to a new culture. These are:

- 1) fight it because it is threatening,
- 2) avoid it because it's overwhelming,
- 3) assimilate quickly by making American choices, and
- 4) tolerate discomfort and confusion while slowly making choices about what to accept and reject. (p. 77).

A study by Portes and Rumbaut (2001) found that this last reaction, which they termed "selective acculturation," is the most desirable. It is similar to integration, where refugees and immigrants seek both cultural maintenance and involvement with their new society. The main characteristics are proactive decision choices on what aspects of the new culture to accept or reject. This type of reaction is highly associated with effective interpersonal and intercultural communication, and also linked with fluent bilingualism, less parent-child conflict, higher self-esteem, higher educational and occupational expectations, and achievement. These reflect a high level of successful adjustment and biculturalism. In documenting the benefits of bicultural families, they found that the best pattern was one in which the family chose what to accept and reject in American culture. The decision of what and how much to adapt is at the root of acculturation processes for refugees and immigrants.

In essence, acculturation models provide a useful prism for exploring the experiences of immigrants and refugees, as they navigate their adjustment in their new environments. The ability to retain desired characteristics from one's own culture while adopting or adapting to chosen characteristics of the dominant culture begets the least amount of stress and identity conflict. In spite of varying points of view, much of the literature shows that successful social change and acculturation are associated with effective interpersonal and intercultural communication. Many immigrants and refugees who enter the U.S. each year have to contend with challenging situations of adjustment to their host communities, while selecting parts of their ethnic cultures to retain. The process is often slow, reversible, and rife with frustration and painful experiences. It is more challenging when the new families include people of different generations who have attained different levels of education. There are many problems, therefore, inherent in such an involved, challenging, and intricate social change process.

### **The Statement of the Problem**

The process of adjusting to American culture is challenging to every refugee and immigrant, who has to balance adaptation to the new societies' values with some modicum of retention of his or her ethnic values. The end product is a new individual who is an amalgam of both cultures.



The problem presents itself in the necessary de-emphasis on some aspects of one's original culture. Referring to the practice among Africans in the US, Millman (1997, p. 209) framed the problem as cultural suicide in these terms: "Every immigrant is committing cultural suicide, but from his (sic) demise a new African American will be born." Although government and non-profit resettlement agencies have various programs designed to make integration smoother and less stressful, many of these fall short because they adopt mostly top-down communication approaches. They represent the refugees and immigrants as hapless and needy people without any ideas of how they could contribute to leveraging social change and acculturation.

To address the social change and acculturation problems of new African American women in the Fargo-Moorhead area, this action research project was designed to focus on these three critical research questions:

**RQ1:** What are the women's perceived barriers to successful integration in their new communities?

**RQ2:** What do these women regard as successful integration?

**RQ3:** What lessons do these results portend for the national integration project as the country becomes ever more diverse?

### **Method**

This is primarily an action research study, which embodied three distinct techniques of participatory action research, community action research, and action inquiry. The participants, who are all African women refugees at different stages of naturalizing as American citizens, worked collaboratively as co-researchers in the tradition of action research to offer solutions and also engage in implementing the solutions. Action research is an important method for developing practical solutions because it allows participants to engage in the identification of real life issues and opportunities for resolving them collaboratively. As Hopkins (1993) notes, action research is an informal, qualitative, formative, subjective, interpretive, reflective and experiential model of inquiry in which all individuals involved in the study are knowing and contributing participants. Action research provides a framework for qualitative investigations where issues of concern can be examined with the intent of providing solutions.

In order to look at the process of acculturation, the African women were needed as active participants to assess their own situations, explore new ideas together, and share feedback on possible solutions. Lewin described action research "as a way of generating knowledge about a social system while, at the same time, attempting to change it" (Lewin, 1945, as quoted in Hart & Bond, 1995, p.13). For these women, action research was an appropriate tool to elicit information from them while at the same time involving them in offering solutions to the problems as active community change agents rather than passive respondents or observers. Further, many scholars note that the use of action research is helpful in times of social transformation and improvement - particularly in times of change and misunderstanding for people who are at the fringes of society (Bargal, 2006; Dick, 2006; Reason & Bradbury, 2006).

This project was implemented in three separate phases. The first phase, implemented

in spring 2006, utilized participatory action research (Borda, 2006; Swantz, Ndedya, & Masaiganah, 2006). Phase two took place in fall 2006, and used community action research (Senge & Scharmer, 2006). Phase three, which was implemented in spring 2007, employed action inquiry (Torbert, 2006). Each preceding phase contributed knowledge that was used in the subsequent action research activities such as interviews, discussions, and analyses among the women participants.

*Phase One: Spring 2006. Participatory Action Research.*

Phase one utilized participatory action research (PAR) to engage 12 African American women from Egypt, Kenya, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Somalia, and Sudan who had been living in the US between two and 10 years. The women were brought together to develop an understanding of their level of acculturation. This phase was a necessary step in order to identify acculturation issues the women were experiencing. As Wadsworth (1998) notes, PAR is research which involves “relevant parties in actively examining together current action (which they experience as problematic) in order to change and improve it” (p. 15).

The women were selected with help from community leaders who served as liaisons between the research team and the women. A cultural agent, who had worked with both the research team and the women, was able to help coordinate focus groups in a neutral venue, the conference room at a local hospital. The women were encouraged to be outspoken and active participants as researchers and problem solvers during the focus group discussion. This allowed the participants to serve as both the subject and the object combining both experience and academic knowledge. Combining these strategies is a crucial part of participatory action research that eliminates dominance and encourages respect among participants and researchers (Borda, 2006).

The focus group resulted in discussion regarding the participants’ personal experiences and current acculturation problems. The women revealed in their answers that adapting to their new environments produced considerable stress and tension. Once specific stressors were identified, the discussion turned to possible solutions – particularly in dealing with acculturation and adjustment problems. These possible solutions provided the foundation for the second phase of research.

*Phase Two: Fall 2006. Community Action Research.*

The second phase used a community action research approach, which embeds “change oriented projects within a larger community of practitioners, consultants, and researchers” (Senge & Scharmer, 2006, p. 195). Community action research strives to produce practical knowledge useful to people in the every conduct of their lives (Reason & Bradbury, 2006). The data collected in the first phase resulted in the identification of several training session subjects that the women believed would assist in overcoming reported barriers to successful acculturation. The five sessions, (conducted between August and December, 2006) attracted a total of 40 different participants recruited by the original cultural agent. The participants were recruited with the expectation that they could benefit from the training, and, in-turn, convey the information back to their respective communities. Trainers were specialists in medicine, counseling, teaching,

consulting and social service professions. Although a few of the trainers were white, most were African American men and women, specifically selected to increase the credibility of the research project in the minds of the participants (Littlefield & Thweatt, 2004).

The training sessions also included community organizations such as refugee resettlement agencies, cultural diversity networks, government agencies, health organizations, and local universities. Representatives of these organizations were encouraged to participate in problem identification and solution building. The group used diaries, reports, group discussions, and individual narratives to engage in the training curriculum. Women participants, trainers, and other community stakeholders engaged in this phase were able to exchange intelligence on various tools for successful acculturation.

These exchanges allowed for an active and engaging sense of problem solving, which according to Senge and Scharmer (2006) facilitate action research aspects of identifying problems found within organizations. Instead of focusing on technical and immediate solutions, the exchanges directed attention to long-term adaptive solutions, more appropriate in dealing with societal issues. This phase emphasized that the challenge of acculturation demands adaptive solutions, which often require a shift in people's values, attitudes, and behaviors (Heifetz 1994). The community action research approach of phase two set the stage for the third phase, where action inquiry was the main method.

#### *Phase Three: Spring 2007. Action Inquiry.*

Building on the positive outcome of the training sessions, the third phase of the project focused on action inquiry. Action inquiry is described by Torbert (2004) as a leadership practice that helps individuals and groups to become more capable of self-transformation. This, in turn, allows more creativity, awareness, and more sustainable solutions. Thus, a group of 16 African women, considered as core participants (determined by their previous commitment and engagement), were selected to engage in a day-long consultative research session, using the typical methods of first, second and third person inquiry (Torbert 2006). Three trained action researchers conducted the session, taking extensive field notes and taping the discussions for specific views and solutions. Action inquiry, as explained by Torbert (2006), is based on three categories: first person as self-reflective action; second person through talking and listening with others; and third person, which "presupposes first- and second- person research/practice capacity on the part of leadership" (pp. 209-213). The participants were able to successfully engage as both subjects and researchers through the use of first, second, and third person inquiries.

Additionally, a case study looking at successful integration of immigrants was presented during the session. The use of a case study was intentional because it allowed the researchers to present a story of community acculturation programs deemed successful. The use of case study allows an investigation of contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin, 1984).

The case study was conducted on a small community of 1,800 residents in northern Minnesota about 45 miles outside of Fargo. The town, Pelican Rapids, has seen the successful integration of approximately 700 refugees and immigrants since 1990. This success is largely based on well-orchestrated programs of inclusion, celebration of cultures and diversity, and

active community involvement (Stowman, 2006). The case study provided an overview of these programs through illustrative photographs, artifacts, interviews, and project reports to show the women how successful integration was achieved in Pelican Rapids. The case study demonstrated how the refugees and immigrants of Pelican Rapids were their own best counselors and consultants in the integration process. This presentation spurred enthusiasm and excitement from the women who began discussing their own power to contribute to successful acculturation.

After the workshop was completed, the three researchers engaged in conversation deep-listening interviews with the women. Deep listening is an action research method that is recommended for discovering and nurturing change initiatives (Senge and Scharmer, 2006). The researchers used this to probe for further concerns the women had regarding acculturation. The technique allowed the women to focus on their own experiences and expand their ideas. The sessions proved to be co-learning experiences where both the women and the researchers freely envisioned future relationships that could be developed on an ongoing basis. The use of action research throughout this study helped the women and researchers recognize their own ability to gather information and create change for the betterment of their acculturation experiences.

## Results

Adjustment to a new world and a new culture has proven difficult for many of the women involved with this study. The women identified barriers to and alternative views of successful integration. From these results and the women's insight, we learn lessons related to fostering a more supportive and successful environment for the now turbulent and overwhelmed national integration project. Findings resulting from the action research methods employed in this project are organized according to the three research questions.

### *Background: Phase One and Two Results*

Phase one uncovered six dialectical tensions that the women felt in their adjustment process: autonomy-connectedness, past-present cultural influences, reality-idealism, certainty-uncertainty, independence-dependence, and openness-closedness (Semlak, Pearson, Amundson, & Kudak, 2006). The major challenges they isolated were: mental health and depression, financial and business concerns, the US educational system, loss of Africanness and living the American dream, and racism and leadership issues. These results were not surprising given the extreme stress of relocation and the drastically different systems they faced on arrival in the U.S. As explained in the methods section, these initial findings were then used to develop five group-learning workshops that catered to the specific concerns identified by the women. These workshops afforded the women an opportunity to network, meet new friends, and learn ways to address identified concerns. Following the completion of the training sessions, the women were engaged in a final session of de-briefing, deep listening, and preparation for further action, which was phase three. Additional research questions helped uncover continued barriers to successful integration, which were reported to be largely physical and psychological.

**RQ1:** *What are the women's perceived barriers to successful integration in their new communities?*

*Physical or material barriers.* Throughout the three phases of this study, the women identified physical (material) barriers to successful integration. For instance, transportation, language, and education, critical aspects of daily life, were generally difficult for the women to navigate. Deficiencies in one of these areas often perpetuated deficiencies in the others. That is, if the English language is not well known, using public transportation or enrolling in classes feels impossible. Lack of money often prohibited finding or using transportation and enrolling in classes. One participant explained, "You can't get involved in things if you don't have a car. Everything depends on transportation." Physical barriers to integration can complicate interpersonal relationships, or lead to psychological issues, as the women become more and more isolated from the community around them.

*Interpersonal barriers (relationships and mental).* Ability to speak and understand American English was reportedly high in the scale of barriers, and had implications for successful participation in community, business, and educational opportunities. Without the opportunity or means to engage with others or participate in educational opportunities, these women felt their lives stagnate. As one participant noted, "language is the key to moving my life ahead, language is number one, and education comes next." These women perceived that language barriers held them back and even fueled tension with their neighbors. Without language education, conversational skills and community involvement suffered and the women became more secluded. Seclusion and isolation predisposed some women to mental health and depression issues, which were evident from the focus group discussions of phase one. Moreover, language barriers and isolation left the women vulnerable to misperceptions and discrimination by the dominant community.

Overall, many participants expressed concern that education generally depended on language skills and transportation, which were two areas of deficiency for these women. In America, they noted, education is vital for financial security, desirable employment, and the opportunity to thrive. Lack of language skills, transportation, and education were associated with emotional and interpersonal barriers to healthy integration.

**RQ2:** *What do these women regard as successful integration?*

For these women, successful integration included a sense of control of their own lives and feelings of inclusion. The women regarded successful integration as having a comfortable life, feeling welcome in their communities, and getting necessary support to take advantage of opportunities in education and business. "To me it would be going to school and having a good education and having a better future," one of the women said. Many of the women said they would like to see a better appreciation of their African culture by their host communities. Their responses showed that successful integration was given different interpretations that involved adjustments to the new values of their new societies, without outright rejection of their African values. Although personal goals differed, having the ability to live and interact within the community appeared to be a common theme of what these women defined as successful integration. For many of them, this involved opportunities to be active members of their new communities.

Ideals of successful integration and acculturation, however, were often thwarted by frustration with programs and blatant discrimination. Some programs and services meant to assist transition actually isolated the women and their families. For instance, there were some school programs that separated immigrant and refugee children from their American counterparts, and thus promoted segregation. One woman explained that some organizations “put refugees in the corner” separate from the others. Another woman described how refugee and immigrant children were not invited into existing “American” Girl Scout troops and therefore had to form their own “refugee” troop.

Some of the women felt helpless in the face of open discrimination, while others were more proactive in challenging discriminatory practices. Many identified opportunities to promote more successful integration and inter-cultural experiences. They did not only have a vision for what successful integration could be, but also ideas about how to achieve it. They identified the need for open invitations, mixing of cultures, and open condemnation of discrimination. Some women pointed out the need to build relationships across boundaries in order to counter-act bias and prejudice. They reported that the initial cold reception from their host communities sometimes thawed surprisingly quickly when they got to know each other better. These women recognized the need to bridge gaps between their cultures and the mainstream culture and to find friendships and connections with members of their host communities. In this way they hoped to lessen discrimination, facilitate a level of comfort for all groups, and thereby leverage successful integration. One participant craved deeper and more genuine involvement that went beyond the surface instead of the usual fascination with African fashion and African food.

These women affirmed that much of the stresses associated with making new lives in their new strange environments could be offset by successful integration and adjustment. Getting involved, integrating different cultural groups, and creating relationships were appreciated as crucial to supporting the transition. These women were cognizant of the integral roles of organizations (especially religious groups) and service agencies as facilitators and foundation builders of the integration process.

***RQ3: What lessons do these results portend for the national integration project as the country becomes ever more diverse?***

The lessons from these women’s experiences, as limited as they are, portend great significance for the national integration project. Specifically, three lessons emerged: 1) the need to educate not only new Americans, but also long-time Americans (parents and children); 2) the need for easily accessible support services; and 3) the need to cultivate robust relationships with long-time community members. Each of these lessons correlates with the bi-directional influence of cultures, a key feature of successful acculturation.

*The need to educate new and long-time Americans.* The Pelican Rapids case study reinforced the need for a two-way model of education. Biculturation appears possible if both long-time citizens and new Americans are willing to learn and work together. After watching the video at the third phase, on how Pelican Rapids was working to integrate, celebrate, and share diverse cultures, the women were convinced and determined to replicate the successful experience they saw. It takes a welcoming host community and an incoming new group of immigrants

and new Americans ready to make proactive choices in adjusting to their new society, in the manner that Berry (1997) called *integration*, and Portes and Rumbaut (2001) referred to as *selective acculturation*. Strategic diversity education and programming are vital instruments in promoting integration and successful acculturation nationwide. Many of the participants in this study were optimistic about successfully integrating and becoming fully functional members of their communities. They were however mindful of the hard work required of both new comers and old-timers. As the country becomes ever more diverse, there is great need for widespread diversity education, in and out of school, to create a warmer social and more welcoming climate.

*The need for easily accessible support services.* As the women in this study recognized, numerous programs and organizations exist to assist immigrants and refugees adjustment to new circumstances. However, these women were very critical of some of the organizations, which they accused of negligence, opportunism, and lack of genuine interest in refugees. Organizations, support programs, and services agencies should involve users in defining and refining their processes for making their services easily accessible. Refugees and immigrants often have to contend with bureaucratic red tape and asinine requirements to access services that they need to settle down in their new locations. Churches and after-school programs are key resources for new Americans. Such programs should promote easy and unfettered access to their services. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. The English language program (ESL) provides an adequate starting point for language education, but currently suffers in the paucity of opportunities for new comers to interact with native English speakers, and supplemental courses through a university. Beyond the inadequacy of language instruction, training opportunities in entrepreneurial development are few and far between, leading to most new comers being employees, with the attendant risks of job insecurity. One of the greatest promises of emigration to the US is the kind of opportunity that produced an Andrew Carnegie, a Scottish immigrant who became a successful entrepreneur.

*The need for robust relationships.* As the women in this study reported, there is great value in strong relationships. Implementing or finding mentors, joining religious or other social groups, and connecting with relatives can be significant tools for overcoming barriers and facilitating successful integration. Support networks and strong relationships provide outlets for rides, carpools, education, and language practice, as well as personal support and encouragement. The national integration project, which must be of interest to all Americans both new and old, must be built on a strong foundation for cross-culture and same-culture relationships between new Americans and long-time citizens. Such relationships will facilitate cultural education for both groups and more successful integration of new Americans.

### **Conclusions**

This case study of new African American women shows that social change is a slow, adaptive process that does not lend itself to easy technical solutions. It is leveraged by intercultural competence and open-mindedness in dealing with people from different cultural backgrounds. It also requires adjustments by both new comers and members of their hosting communities. New-comers are wont to react in various ways, some of which are antithetical to successful acculturation. The goals of integration and biculturalism are best addressed through social exchange and

interaction mechanisms that promote mutual acceptance and understanding. The United States is the world leader in attracting people from every region, many of whom aim to naturalize as American citizens. As the country becomes ever more diverse and multiracial, it is imperative to encourage strategic programs of social change and acculturation management. Biculturalism does not develop intuitively, and the spirit of accommodating differences in others must be nurtured deliberately through formal education in schools, work site training in social relations, and purposive involvement of the media, as change agents and conduits for adult learning.

In many American cities, the work of integrating refugees and new immigrants is often left to the few social service agencies that operate in these areas. Successful integration will be much easier to achieve if the work of these organizations is complemented by communal involvement from formal and informal groups, all working in concert to leverage the process of selective adaptation of both new comers and host communities. This is the best inoculation against segregation and discrimination, which are two of the major constraints to successful integration. These require gradual and adaptive changes in people's values, attitudes, and practices based on their convictions, rather than coercive force by the state. Cross-cultural differences are undeniable and cannot be wished away, nor should they. The promise of America is the strength in diversity, which is based on trust in the humanness of every citizen.

Although many of the women have experienced discrimination and other difficulties in their processes of adjusting to their communities, the final picture they painted was one of optimism, mindful that the history of the US is one of waves of immigrants, many of who excelled in their chosen fields, despite all the odds they had to contend with initially. Successful integration then required carefully addressing the challenge of accepting and rejecting certain aspects of their old and new cultures. This challenge is still the same today. In this age of the new information technologies, the challenge is moderated by the availability of new communication tools, which may not be very common with the refugees and new immigrants, and so will pale in importance to interpersonal communication.

The African American women, who became co-researchers in this project, provided a clear picture of their expectation for the further exploration of their integration process, which is a blueprint for further study. Consonant with the tenets of action research, which achieves its purpose best in studying vulnerable groups in a longitudinal manner, future courses for this project should follow these women as they adjust to the American way of life. The use of such other action research methods as diary keeping, self reports, narrative techniques, and creative arts will elicit valuable information on the women's long journey of adaptive adjustments. Future phases of this project will involve members of these women's families so as to more realistically capture the holistic experiences at group (not just individual) levels.

The United States, as the world's greatest haven for immigrants, must also be a leader in understanding the social change and acculturation processes attendant on new comers adjusting to their new environment. European countries such as Britain, Canada, France, and Germany are fast becoming more diverse too, and looking to learn how far the US can serve as a model because of its long history and its considerable success in forging a melting pot of diverse sub-cultures. The American experience with refugees and new citizens has the potential to become a universal model if it is successful. Its success will depend on the willingness and capac-



ity of both new comers and old timers to exemplify cross-cultural competence in managing the social change processes involved in successfully adjusting to their new social situations.

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## **Mass Media, Television, and Children's Socialization: Making Peace with TV**

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*In this paper, a conceptual framework is developed for analyzing one of the basic but comparatively overlooked functions of communication—the positive socialization of young people. Our question is: can television effectively promote prosocial values to children and adolescents? Various socialization theories are assessed from the standpoint of their usefulness in the study of prosocial TV programming. The authors contend that as a viable alternative to the prevalence of controversial TV messages, the choice of prosocial programs should be available. Given the rapid growth of electronic media and amplified content delivery possibilities associated with the migration to digital format, television's preventive impact and prosocial constructive potential should be re-examined and empirically tested.*

### **Introduction**

In 1961, Newton Minow, the Chairman of the U.S. Federal Communications Commission, summarized the state of television programming in America as a “vast wasteland” (Minow & LaMay, 1995, p. 188). Alarmed with the amount of violence on television, he addressed American broadcasters with the question: “Is there no room on television to teach, to inform, to uplift?” Forty years later, Minow concluded, “it has only gotten worse” (Minow, 2003, p. 425). As the number of TV channels delivered in terrestrial, cable, and satellite formats nears a thousand, controversial content becomes widely accessible to children. School shootings in the U.S. have drawn scholarly attention to the issues of socialization of younger generations of Americans and the role mass media play in the process.

In April 2007, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) concluded a three-year investigation of the impact of violent television programming on children. Although it failed to clearly define what constitutes “excessively violent programming that is harmful to children” (FCC, 2007, p. 3), the FCC recommended that the United States Congress considered developing regulatory measures to curb televised violence. In his statement, the FCC Commissioner Michael J. Copps emphasized an epidemic nature of TV violence and characterized the situation as “extraordinary and alarming” (p. 27). Echoing Minow’s “vast wasteland” speech, it signaled that Congress might once again take a well-trodden regulatory path. However, this road ends at the First Amendment stop sign; therefore, it might be beneficial to consider other options.

To date, media studies have focused predominantly on the negative effects of electronic media, such as the development of aggressive and antisocial behaviors (Pecora, Murray, & Wartella, 2007; Wimmer & Dominick, 2003) and the reinforcement of ethnic, occupational, age, gender, and sex-role stereotypes (Berry & Asamen, 2001; Brown, Steele, & Walsh-Childers, 2002; Signorielli, 2001; Strasburger & Wilson, 2003). Five decades of scholarly investigations have made scientists conclude that televised representations of violence may affect viewers' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors to a certain degree (Murray, 2007). Results of one longitudinal study, for example, indicate that young people who watch more than one hour of TV daily are more likely to be involved in aggressive acts in their late teen years and early twenties (Bushman & Huesmann, 2001; Johnson, Cohen, Smailes, Kasen, & Brook, 2002). However, evidence accumulated for more than 50 years of TV violence effects research has not established a causal relationship between media violence and social behavior (Millwood Hargrave & Livingstone, 2006). In contrast, significantly less effort has been devoted to studying prosocial TV effects (Mares & Woodard, 2001; Paik, 1995; Pecora, Murray & Wartella, 2007; Rosenkoetter, 2001).

In the 1960s, social scientists questioned the nature of children's socialization in a modern industrialized society: specifically, whether it should be guided and to what extent (Clausen, 1968; Lippitt, 1968). Clausen indicated that socialization could be regarded as a "mode of planned change" (p. 15) with different agents involved in the implementation of social change. These issues brought about a range of other pertinent questions that remain largely unanswered, for example, how much initiative should be left to the various socializing agents? Where is the red line between good intentions and social engineering? Overall, these concerns reflect the issue of "how a society aspiring to democracy may balance the right to persuade with the right of the public to free choice" (Sproule, 1997, p. 271). Communication scholars responded by studying the role of mass media in the process of socializing youth (e.g., Rosengren, 2000; Van Evra, 2004).

Based on the analysis of the pertinent literature and the authors' own research (Dumova, 2007; Dumova & Fiordo, 2007), the current paper applies a socialization approach to the problem of television violence. One aim of this conceptual paper is to examine the relationship between mass media, television, and children's socialization. In broad terms, can we develop a framework for understanding the positive socializing function of communication as it relates to children's television primarily and adolescent's television secondarily? Rather than focusing on the development of new limitations and restrictions, the authors advocate the need for empowering parents and children with an array of viewing choices, including prosocial TV programming. Another aim of this paper is to respond to the following question: can television programming effectively promote prosocial values to children and adolescents? The article delineates various socialization theories from the standpoint of their usefulness in the study of prosocial television programs for children and adolescents that aim to foster positive societal values and stimulate socially desired behaviors.

Prosocial TV programs are those specifically designed to promote traditional (defined by parents, extended family, school, neighborhood, and local community) societal values and to advance positive (caring, sharing, helping, and cooperation) behaviors for children and adolescents. The paper examines the socializing function of mass media and the role of television as an

agent of youth socialization. The authors conclude by suggesting a framework for utilizing the constructive role television can play in the positive socialization of children and adolescents.

### **Mass Media as an Agent of Socialization**

The concept of socialization is central to a number of social sciences and is approached by scholars from a variety of angles. It is viewed as one of the basic functions of communication that affects nearly every kind of behavior (Crain, 2000) and continues throughout life (Bugental & Goodnow, 1998). The communication perspective on socialization explores the interaction between individuals and the mass media as well as other sources of socialization (Huston & Wright, 1996; Rosengren, 2000; Rushton, 1980; Van Evra, 2004).

#### *Socializing Function of Mass Media*

Early communication theorists considered the transmission of social heritage from one generation to another an important (mass) communication function (Lasswell, 1948; Schramm, 1973) which increases social cohesion, aids integration of society, reduces social anomie, and maintains cultural cohesiveness (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1948; Wright, 1960). Contemporary communication scholars defined socialization as a complex dynamic process of transferring society's ideas and culture across generations and indicated that it involves a number of socializing agents (Rosengren, 2000; Van Evra, 2004). Specifically, the process deals with the transmission of shared social and cultural experiences and values to youth, reinforcement of accepted societal norms, and preservation of social order, harmony, and stability (O'Keefe & Reid-Nash, 1988).

In the 1960s, Bandura (1969) predicted that further advances in communication technologies will lead to a situation where parents, teachers, and other socialization agents would lose their position as the primary role models for youth to the mass media. In today's information age, saturated with electronic media, family, church, and school are no longer the main sources of knowledge about society. Given the diminishing role of the traditional positive influences and the growing accessibility in the mass media of images distorted for entertainment purposes, Rushton (1980) stated that we are facing the problem of "undersocialization" (p. 198).

Communication scientists (Meyrowitz, 1985) noted that with the advent of new computer-based communication and information technologies, children are socialized into adult roles earlier than any previous generation. If print media offered carefully crafted steps of socialization for children, electronic media blurred the boundaries between various socialization stages by making the same information available to children, adolescents, and adults. Meyrowitz hypothesized the homogenization of socialization stages and provocatively declared "the end of childhood" (p. 226). Even though this idea gained momentum (e.g., Buckingham, 2000), most observers agreed that childhood as a social category exists and should be preserved (Handel, 2006; Davies, 2001).

Travis and Violato (2001) claimed that to understand the socialization experience of youth, it is necessary to analyze the popular culture that forms their socialization background. In the for-profit mass media environment of the U.S., refined technologies of communication can combine with artful layout and style to "vulgarize everything for commercial ends" (p. 157). The sophistication of mass media in a consumer society creates artificial needs that saturate the

society. In spite of promoting individuality, spontaneity, and creativity, mass media homogenize the general viewing population in their opinions, beliefs, values, ideas, and behavior. Mass media content in general may contribute to a generation of young people who feel “jaded, world weary and hopeless”—that is, old before their time (p. 171). A prosocial approach to mass mediated programming may allow young people to face problems of an older age when they are older, yet develop in the meantime in a manner suitable to their age.

### *Television and Children's Socialization*

Television viewing remains a major activity for many young people. An American child between 8 and 18 years of age spends over three hours a day in front of a TV screen (Roberts, Foehr, & Rideout, 2005). School-age children spend 1,023 hours per year watching TV, and only 900 of those hours at school (Real Vision, 2004). Thus, television retains its position as the primary channel for communicating with children and adolescents.

In 1980, Rushton argued that the “family is an increasingly ineffective socializer of children; the television system is socializing them in an increasingly antisocial direction; and the educational system is not socializing them at all” (p. 198). Other social scientists counter-argued that the socializing impact of television is subject to modification by other agents and that it can be reinforced or supplemented by conventional agents such as parents (Comstock, 1982). Critical theorists, in turn, specifically warned that the medium of television has the potential to usurp the socializing function of the family by inculcating the values of consumerism (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1972). Gerbner (2001) asserted that “the new symbiotic relationship of state and television” has replaced the “historic nexus of state and church” (p. 132).

Today, young generations are confronted with significantly greater opportunities, challenges, and decisions to make than at any time in history (Firestone, 2003). It is not accidental that one national survey reported that 76% of interviewed parents believed that they experienced more difficulties in raising children than their parents had (Farkas, Johnson, & Duffett, 2002, p. 12). Nearly three quarters were concerned about the impact of negative images in the media (p. 9). The majority (90%) agreed that coarse language and adult content increasingly proliferated on the TV screen (p. 14). On the other hand, only 22% of respondents considered the option of eliminating television viewing completely. Parents predominantly (82%) thought that television could convey positive messages and lessons to their children (p. 15). Yet, television’s role as an imparter of prosocial values still has to be defined.

With the help of family, young viewers can critically select prosocial TV programs based on interests, values, and philosophical worldviews: for example, entertainment, informational, and educational shows. The authors suggest that prosocial television programming would have a loyal narrowcast, rather than broadcast, audience. In the contemporary American society, where a distinction between right and wrong is often blurred when it even exists, there is no consensus about common prosocial standards.

### **Theoretical Perspectives on Social: Can TV Play a Constructive Role?**

The theoretical underpinning for the present paper is derived primarily from two perspectives

on socialization: cognitive-developmental and social cognitive.

### *Cognitive-Developmental Perspective*

Piaget offered perhaps the most insightful and effective understanding of children's growth in cognitive-developmental stages. As to Piaget (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958), cognitive progress occurs gradually in a sequence of four different phases: sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational. Contemporary cognitive-developmental perspective recognizes that the socializing impact of television depends on a range of factors such as psychological and physiological maturation, learning, and experience. Developmental differences between various age groups are considered critical among those factors (Strasburger & Wilson, 2003).

Most social scientists acknowledge that the essence of adolescence as a stage of human development lies in the transition from childhood to adulthood (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Erikson, 1968; Kohlberg, 1969; Piaget, 1997; Vygotsky, 1978). If adolescence starts with puberty and lasts until children are able to assume adult social roles, early adolescence is a period when multiple developmental transformations happen in a very short time: namely, changes in "physical, hormonal, familial, relational, and educational processes" (Fabes, Carlo, Kupanoff, & Laible, 1999, p. 5). Advances in information and communication technologies along with the shaping of a knowledge-based type of economy have placed new demands on the labor force (Cortada, 1998; Mortimer & Larson, 2002). The new demands have pushed the upper age limit of adolescence into the late twenties. The economic and social changes have also been accompanied by physiological changes. If puberty started at the age of fifteen during Rousseau's time, it begins in contemporary industrialized societies at twelve (Schickedanz, Schickedanz, Forsyth, & Forsyth, 2001).

Both developmental and educational psychologists emphasize that it is during adolescence that socialization is most critical (Bugental & Goodnow, 1998). Adolescence, especially in its early stages, is an important time in children's physical, cognitive, moral, and social growth. In accordance with Piaget's findings, it is the time of the acquisition of social knowledge and the development of both short-term and sustained social behaviors. Therefore, it is vital to address potential problems in children's social development before they may arise. Producing developmentally appropriate TV programs can assist children and adolescents with constructive socialization into adult roles and may ultimately help them become productive members of society.

### *Social Cognitive Perspective*

According to the social cognitive theory of mass communication (Bandura, 2002), children acquire social skills by observing other people's behavior and imitating it. A child learns social skills by consciously or unconsciously modeling parents, peers, teachers, and other socializing agents. Modeling refers to the process of observing the actions of other people and subsequently imitating observed behavior. Modeling can be direct (live), and indirect (television portrayals), or synthesized (combination of both). The effectiveness of modeling behavior is associated with a person's willingness to act in accordance with the chosen model, characteristics of the model, personal characteristics of the viewer, observer-model similarity, social set-



ting, and reinforcement of acquired behavior. Knowledge gained through vicarious (i.e., indirect) reinforcement may serve as a predictor of whether the child will adopt modeled behavior.

From the social learning viewpoint, age is not critical but rather indicative of the social stages of development: preschoolers, school children, and adolescents. Indeed, observational learning is vital for child development at any age and varies depending on the level of individual's psychological and physiological development. Rather than focusing on developmental changes, the theory concentrates on explaining how the change occurs the acquisition of new behaviors and actions.

Social cognitive theory of mass communication places special emphasis on the role of electronic media in people's direct and vicarious observational experiences. The theory maintains that symbolic modeling is central to understanding the effects of mass media: "through symbols, people give meaning, form, and continuity to the experiences they have" (Bandura, 1994, p. 62). Social learning may occur at community and society-wide levels of environments created by modern communication technologies such as telecommunications (Bandura, 2002). Hence, by observing positive attitudes and behaviors depicted in televised stories, children are likely to make socially desirable choices that will serve as guidelines for their future "thought, affect, and action" (p. 121).

#### *New Conceptual Models of Socialization*

Unlike theories within the cognitive-developmental paradigm, social cognitive theory has been used to explain the short-term effects of television (Van Evra, 2004). A new conceptual model (Rosengren, 2000), originated as a result of a series of a quarter-century longitudinal quantitative and qualitative research on media use by minors. The model utilized a systems approach and viewed socialization as dependent on a range of socializing factors: namely, social and demographic background (i.e., environment), family, peers, school, and mass media. Rosengren (2000) pointed at eight large groups of agents whose influence is critical in communicating ideals, values, and culture to young generations in contemporary society: family, peers, work, religious groups, school, law agencies, social organizations, and general and specialized media of communication. Children's overall values, attitudes, social relations, habits, and activities were viewed as directly related to the results of the interplay between the socializing factors.

Van Evra (2004) formulated another integrative model of socialization based on an extensive review of communication and psychological research. This model provided a comprehensive conceptualization of the socializing influence of mass media, including TV, and integrated various theoretical perspectives such as social learning, cultivation, information processing, and uses and gratifications. Van Evra (2004) emphasized four major determinants of the influence of television on children's socialization: developmental differences, socioeconomic level, race, and gender. The model aimed to explicate the way young viewers use the medium of television, perceive televised reality, and the amount of time they spend with TV. The complex interaction of four determinants outlined by Van Evra helps predict the outcomes of socialization ranging from minimum to maximum effects.

A number of studies generated evidence that there is a positive relationship between

adolescents' prosocial orientations and personality characteristics, such as moral reasoning and academic achievement. In a meta-analysis of empirical evidence on the individual processes that contribute to children's progression to adolescence and adulthood, Fabes, Carlo, Kupanoff, and Laible (1999) concluded that early adolescents are more likely to be engaged in prosocial behavior than younger children. This conclusion supports Piaget's (1965) proposition that prosocial and moral behaviors in children increase with age. Between the ages of ten and twelve, most children usually "overcome the limitations of concrete operational thinking and begin to understand others' and societal perspectives" (Fabes et al., 1999, p. 10).

A longitudinal study of the impact of "prosocialness" (cooperativeness, helpfulness, sharing, consoling) found a strong positive correlation between prosocial behavioral patterns and academic achievement of 294 children in Italy (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Pastorelli, Bandura, & Zimbardo, 2000). Earlier cross-sectional analyses of American youth (Wentzel, 1993) and Japanese children (Lewis, 1995) yielded similar results. Other researchers found that when young people lack positive influences from the family, church, and school, prosocial TV programming might become an effective socializing agent (Hattemer & Showers, 1995). However, more studies need to be conducted to examine the strength of the relationship between prosocial orientations of youth, personality characteristics, and prosocial messages in mass media.

While cognitive-developmental research concentrates on psychological factors of growth, several innovative approaches create a more comprehensive and balanced account of successful socialization into adulthood in the context of social networks and strong functional communities (Silbereisen & Todt, 1994). Novel conceptual foundations such as developmental assets, asset-building communities, and the youth charter approach, build upon knowledge accumulated by social sciences and educational practitioners and provide a sound foundation for using mass media as an agent of positive socialization (Benson, 2003; Benson & Pittman, 2001; Damon & Gregory, 2003). Recent analyses of the effects of community and family involvement in schools on child and adolescent development and learning demonstrate the benefits of collaboration among various socializing agents (Epstein, 2001; Gonzales-Mena, 2002) and suggest a promising direction for further inquiry.

In partnership with local communities and schools, community-oriented and locally produced TV programs can assist young people in making better decisions and choices that they will be facing in their adult lives. The authors do not necessarily propose to broadcast social values to mass audiences. Instead, it might be beneficial to narrowcast prosocial programs for selected youth segments at the community level. By watching prosocial portrayals provided in TV programs, young people in communities around the world may learn socially desirable behaviors, such as cooperation, kindness, generosity, sharing, and caring.

### **Prosocial TV Framework: Making Peace with TV**

It has been argued that the overall negative effects of media violence are increasing (Bushman & Anderson, 2001). Despite the existing variety of television programming types including entertainment, informational, and educational programs, as well as various combinations of those (e.g., edutainment, infotainment), there is no genre of American television that would purposely contribute to youth's positive socialization.

*Prosocial TV Research*

Can a TV programming genre be created to counterbalance the unintended adverse impact of mass entertainment? Before answering this question, it may be beneficial to survey the field of prosocial television research. Investigations of television's prosocial effects in the U.S. began in the 1970s with a large-scale social scientific research program that explored the relationship between symbolic violence on television and children's attitudes and behaviors. Although criticized for a behavioral theoretical standpoint (Rowland, 1983), the U.S. Surgeon General's Report *Television and growing up* (Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee, 1972) and a sequence of research studies conducted in the 1970s (Collins & Getz, 1976; Friedrich & Stein, 1973; Liebert & Poulos, 1976; Rubinstein, Liebert, Neale, & Poulos, 1974; Stein, Friedrich, & Vondracek, 1972) were imperative in understanding the potential of TV for positive socialization. Reviewing the outcomes, Comstock, Chaffee, Katzman, McCombs, and Roberts (1978) affirmed that television "should be considered a major agent of socialization, although its influence is often indirect and contingent on interpersonal relations and other factors" (p.14).

Evaluation of TV's constructive role continued through the 1990s. Research evidence supported a hypothesis that television functioned as a powerful source of socialization along with other sources of influence such as parents, family, school, church, peers and community (Christenson & Roberts, 1983; Greenberg, 1980; Himmelweit, 1980; Rushton, 1982; Wartella, 1994, 1996). After testing the concept of prosocial effects in laboratory and field experiments, a positive relationship between prosocial content and subsequent behavioral outcomes was identified (Eron & Huesmann, 1986; Johnston & Ettema, 1982). Results partially confirmed the hypothesis that by viewing TV programs, children could learn not only specific types of behavior—prosocial and antisocial—but also ideas and attitudes that could guide their behavior throughout life. Several meta-analyses demonstrated that the overall impact of prosocial content exceeded that of antisocial (Hearold, 1986; Mares, 1996; Paik, 1995).

While prosocial behavior can be understood as voluntary behavior contributing to the well-being of others (Dovidio, Piliavin, Schroeder, & Penner, 2006; Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998), altruism can be viewed as a group of reciprocal behaviors based on an empathy that includes helping, sharing (Smith et al., 2006), cooperation, generosity, and kindness (Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989). In the communication field, the term "prosocial" is applied not only to altruistic or helping behavior as in psychology, but also to a broad variety of socially valued behaviors and to media content depicting mainstream societal norms and rules.

Rushton (1995) identified four types of prosocial TV content that proved to be effective by laboratory and naturalistic experiments: programs altruistic in nature, demonstrating friendly behavior, self-control, and coping with fears. The category of altruistic behavior involved generosity, helping, and cooperation; self-control behaviors included adhering to rules, resisting temptation, and delay of gratification. Lovelace and Huston (1983) proposed a number of effective strategies for presenting prosocial messages to children: prosocial portrayal, dramatized conflict, and prosocial conflict resolution. With Fisch (2004) noting that the examination of prosocial TV effects focused predominantly on preschool children, more research is needed to determine the impact of prosocial TV programming on the social behavior of adolescent

viewers.

Despite encouraging results from experimental studies conducted since the 1970s on the effects of prosocial TV and attempts to establish “an applied science of prosocial television” (Johnston & Ettema, 1986, p. 149), a general profile of children’s prosocial television programming has not been completed. Johnston and Ettema (1986) produced a synthesis of scholarly research of prosocial TV and proposed a conceptual definition. They defined prosocial TV as “television that models socially valued behaviors, responses, attitudes, or beliefs” (p. 143). Prosocial TV effects research has set the stage for successful practical implementation of the idea of prosocial television as a TV genre in its own right. Other helpful suggestions can be found if one takes a careful look at the history of children’s television in America, especially, at programs such as *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood* and *Barney & Friends* that were specifically constructed to convey positive images and messages.

### *Prosocial TV Programming*

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood* was the only program on national television that had “as its prime concern the emotional and social growth of the child” (Stein, Friedrich, & Vondracek, 1972, p. 276). *Mister Rogers’* began in 1968 on WQED-TV, Pittsburgh and had been in production until 2000. It started as a low-budget local show but quickly turned into one of the prime staples of public television in the U.S. The show was designed for early and middle childhood viewers and was specifically “devoted to examining values, feelings and fears” (Brown, p. 277). The programs encompassed a full range of themes related to children’s socialization, including “rejection, physical handicaps, going to the dentist, disappointment, death” (p. 277).

Launched in 1969, *Sesame Street*, in addition to teaching preschool children how to read and count, also aimed to develop viewers’ positive social skills and attitudes such as cooperation, taking another person’s point of view, and cultural awareness (Cook et al., 1975; Lesser & Schneider, 2001; Mielke, 2001; Truglio, Lovelace, Seguí, & Scheiner, 2001). Building upon the success of *Sesame Street*, a whole generation of programs targeted at school-aged children developed in the 1970s within various noncommercial broadcasting outlets: *Electric Company*, *Square One TV*, *Schoolhouse Rock*, *In the News*, *Freestyle*, *Zoom*, *Big Blue Marble*, *Villa Allegre*, *Infinity Factory*, *Vegetable Soup*, *ThinkAbout* and *Inside/Out*. Integrating many prosocial features, these shows aimed primarily to complement, extend, or supplement traditional classroom curriculum (Fisch, 2004). The success of *Sesame Street* determined the overall orientation of children’s TV towards merging educational content with entertainment (Fisch, 1998; Palmer & Fisch, 2001), and the success of *Sesame Street* made “edutainment” synonymous with prosocial programming (Luke, 1990).

The early 1990s were marked with the tremendous success of another television series for preschool children—*Barney & Friends*, developed by Connecticut Public Broadcasting. Through creative plots, music, songs, and dances, the *Barney* show highlighted the themes of family, friends, and neighborhood and explicitly emphasized caring, sharing, helping, and positive interaction (Singer & Singer, 1998).

Socially positive content may be included in programming with minority characters,

such as the Hispanic characters in *Dora the Explorer* (aired since 2000) or *Go, Diego, Go!* (since 2005). These animated TV programs promote minority characters as well as teach cultural diversity in order to enhance the lives of both Hispanic and non-Hispanic young viewers (Artze, 2000; Bortree, 2006; Fernandez, 2005; Popp, 2006; Sigler, 2003).

Yet, despite the existence of high-quality TV programs for preschool and elementary school-aged children that incorporate prosocial themes and messages, there is a shortage of such programs for early and late adolescents. In contrast to well-established shows with prosocial messages, such as *Mr. Rogers'* and *Barney*, the production of new programs is “caught between the industry’s perceived responsibility to provide safe and educational programming, and the network’s status as a for-profit entry” (Mitroff & Stephenson, 2007, p. 26).

Contemporary media researchers view prosocial television broadly as any positive content conveyed by TV programs (Calvert & Kotler, 2003; Fisch, 2004; Wicks, 2001) and, more specifically, as one that is designed to produce socially positive outcomes and encourage positive social change (Harris, 1999, 2004). And only a few argue that prosocial television be distinguished from entertainment and educational programming (Calvert, 1999).

The authors acknowledge the view that society bears responsibility for the content available to young viewers on TV screens (Lemish, 2007). Prosocial programming specifically designed to teach children right from wrong should serve as a counterbalance to television’s negative influences; such programming should be available to children, parents, and families worldwide. Lessons learned from the Children’s Television Workshop model of producing educational programming—namely, sequencing, reinforcement, involvement of viewers, high production standards, and integrating formative and summative research (Fisch & Truglio, 2001)—can be applied to the creation of prosocial TV as a genre of its own.

#### *Why We Need Prosocial TV for Children and Adolescents*

As Bandura (2002) emphasized, transmission of cultural, moral, and social practices in society would be impossible without the benefits of observational learning. To be specific, television may function as a significant and perhaps one of the most powerful contributors to children’s overall socializing experiences. Electronic media perform an ever-increasing role in this process by expanding the scope of human experiences on the basis of symbolic representations of society and human relationships. The authors of this paper maintain that socialization of youth should be guided proactively. It is important to keep such long-established and highly regarded socializing agents as parents, family, school, and community involved in this process. Community-based prosocial TV could be instrumental in bringing traditional socializing agents together. Local public television stations, community access cable channels, and school-based TV productions can function as prosocial TV hubs that effectively contribute to young people’s general socialization.

Examples of locally-produced prosocial television programs exist. *The Friday Zone*, a weekly children’s show produced by WTIU in Bloomington (Indiana) “aims to excite children about their community and the world around them.”<sup>2</sup> Featuring various activities, local guests, and community events, this award-winning program has been successful in stimulating young viewers’ interest in their local communities. Another local broadcast, *News Six* (WBGU in Bowling

Green, Ohio)<sup>3</sup>, covers school news, community traditions, local landmarks and people. *News Six* has stayed on the air for over thirty years and is one of the longest running locally produced and distributed television broadcasts for children in the U.S. Most recently, *The Biscuit Brothers* (KLRU in Austin, Texas)<sup>4</sup> has focused on community values and personal qualities through music education and critical thinking activities.

The context of prosocial portrayals underlies the effectiveness of modeling outcomes. Scholars have indicated that TV effects are embedded in the specific contexts of local communities (Lemish, 2007). Televised images of parents, classmates, school teachers, neighbors, and community members that are familiar and easily recognizable by youth can all become potential sources of internalized socialization. Researchers should focus on specific characteristics of positive role models presented in TV programs and see them as sources of modeling influences.

### Conclusion

There is high agreement among social scientists that socialization constitutes a major function of communication and that society needs to assist the younger generation in becoming productive and contributing members.

As the process of communicating societal norms of right and wrong to young members of a pluralistic democratic society, socialization should be considered prosocial by definition. Based on the propositions of the social cognitive theory of mass communication, enriched by insights of developmental and educational theorists, one can view prosocial behavior as a function of prosocial messages conveyed by televised representations of social reality. As an instrument of socialization, prosocial TV might contribute to children's well-being and might be used by society to its best advantage. Recent developments in video production and the transition of television to the digital format create an opportunity to consider prosocial television as a genre of TV programming designed to promote socially trusted behaviors and assist in the socialization of youth. The authors argue that television can successfully promote prosocial behavior to children and adolescents in society

If it is not likely that one can broadcast prosocial values on American national television, one can likely narrowcast prosocial programming targeted at different ages at the community level. Digital TV provides local communities with the opportunity to offer prosocial programming and promote healthy social behaviors due to its increased channel capacity and technological innovations. In partnership with families, local communities, and schools, prosocial TV programs can contribute to curtailing delinquency, social transgression, and ethnic stereotyping among youth. Prosocial programming has the potential of maintaining America's best democratic traditions and values and diminishing long-standing negative values such as racial and ethnic discrimination.

The authors assert that prosocial programs can appeal to established societal values that satisfy a range of children's needs. The authors neither advance nor prescribe a pre-ordained or sanitized notion of prosocial behavior, for they are both open to social change and remain supportive of freedom of expression in broadcasting. As the Federal Communications Commis-

sion (2004, 2006, 2007) updates children's programming rules for digital TV broadcasters in the U.S., it is critical to determine the directions for digital TV's future development. Television retains the untapped capacity to deliver programming specifically crafted to help children and adolescents become beneficial members of their communities and society at large.

Television's constructive potential to reinforce esteemed societal standards of behavior should be re-examined and empirically tested. Based on the knowledge of a dynamic interplay between symbolic modeling, developmental factors, socializing agents, social networks, and communities, research on the positive socializing function of television should be carried out proactively with its recommendations evaluated by a community of scholars and the community at large. The authors maintain that communication scholars should shift their focus towards exploring ways of developing prosocial television programming: a shift that can perform a vital service in a pluralistic society.

## Notes

1. <http://advancing.indiana.edu/enrichment/fzone.shtml>
2. <http://www.nwoet.org/newsix/>
3. <http://www.biscuitbrothers.com/>

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*Communication and Social Change* is devoted to advancing knowledge and understanding of the historical and contemporary role of media and communication arts in fostering social change. The journal seeks manuscripts that address the role of media and communication in local, national and global movements, campaigns and development efforts; the social-cultural impact of new media; emerging and alternative communication art forms; and innovative perspectives on ethics, social responsibility and public policy as they relate to communication and social change. The journal also will consider topical essays that are clearly argued and well supported.

Research articles and essays must be written according to APA style (5th ed.). The maximum length for all articles is 25 pages, plus a 200-word abstract and a brief (25-word) biography of the author. All submissions must include author's current position/affiliation, e-mail address, physical mailing address and telephone and fax numbers.

Manuscripts submitted must be typed double-spaced and in three (3) hard copies, or by e-mail in Microsoft Word. All articles will be assessed by selected members of the journal's editorial advisory board or by other specialists. The final decision on whether to accept a submitted paper will be the editor's. The journal assumes copyright of all manuscripts accepted for publication.

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