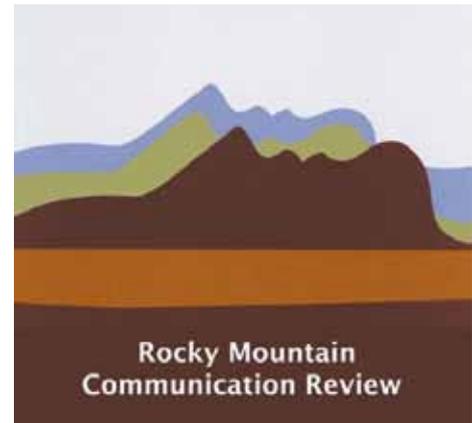




**Productiviteit en Multi-screen
Ergonomie & onderzoek**

Rocky Mountain Communication Review



Volume Two
Issue One
Summer 2004

Articles

- 1-17 Selves, Subjects, and Agents: (Re)Positioning Agency with Self-Identity and Subjectivity
Tracy Marafiotte
- 19-30 Ominous Impunity: Rethinking State Terrorism in Argentina, Twenty Years after the Return of Democracy
Miguel A. Malagrecia
- 31-53 Productivity and Multi-Screen Displays
Janet Colvin
Nancy Tobler
James A. Anderson

Book Review

- 54-60 An Essential Guide for Sound Health Communication Campaign Development: A Review of *Effective Health Risk Messages: A Step-by-Step Guide*
Lindsey Polonec

Graduate Life

- 61-64 Black Coats and Brown Boots
Roberto Avant-Mier
- 65-68 Opportunities and Obligations
Todd Norton

Acknowledgments

Editorial service was provided by Kerith Woodyard, University of Utah; James Cahill, University of California, Irvine; and Yifeng Hu, Pennsylvania State University.

The *Rocky Mountain Communication Review* (ISSN 1542-6394) is published annually by the Department of Communication at the University of Utah, 255 S. Central Campus Drive, Salt Lake City, Utah 84112. Copyright © 2004. All rights reserved.

■ ———
Editor's Note

We are very pleased to introduce this second issue of *RMCR*. In both their approach and subject matter, the articles within reflect the diversity of our field. Tracy Marafiotte works toward providing both a foundation and rationale for a critical exploration of theories of agency, self-identity, and subjectivity in her piece, *Selves, Subjects, and Agents: (Re)Positioning Agency with Self-Identity and Subjectivity*. Miguel Malagrecá, in his article, *Ominous Impunity: Rethinking State Terrorism in Argentina, Twenty Years After the Return to Democracy*, strengthens the relationship between psychology and cultural studies as he examines Symbolic Law as it relates to the politics of Argentina's "disappeared." In *Productivity and Multi-Screen Displays*, Janet Colvin, Nancy Tobler, and James Anderson examine and test the benefits of using multiple screens when multi-tasking on a computer. Lindsey Polonec has contributed *RMCR*'s first book review with her critique of Witte, Meyer, and Martell's (2001) *Effective Health Risk Messages: A Step-by-Step Guide*. Finally, the two student life pieces rounding out this volume approach different aspects of graduate life in very different manners. Roberto Avant-Mier offers a fictionalized account of the professorial job interview process, while Todd Norton contemplates the many aspects of graduate student life that require incorporation into our daily lives.

For our next issue, we are particularly interested in manuscripts that address alternative directions for the communication discipline. As a graduate student journal, we strive to provide an outlet for graduate student work that represents the multitude of our voices, talents, and thoughts as we explore, or perhaps re-explore, shape, or perhaps reshape, the many understandings of communication. However, we will continue to accept articles that represent the diversity of scholarship found within the communication discipline, including manuscripts of any epistemological viewpoint or methodological approach as well as literature reviews, book reviews, and annotated bibliographies.

We thank you for examining the latest edition of *RMCR* and encourage you to support graduate student journals such as *RMCR* in whichever ways you can—be that submitting manuscripts, joining our editorial board, suggesting to your colleagues to do these things, or simply reading and referring to the work published here.

Rebecca DaPra
Editor, *RMCR* 2003-2004

Craig Rich
Editor-Elect, *RMCR* 2003-2004

Selves, Subjects, and Agents: (Re)Positioning Agency with Self-Identity and Subjectivity

Rocky Mountain Communication Review
Volume 2:1, Summer, 2004
Pages 1-17

Tracy Marafiote

Through tracing some major historical influences and current theoretical perspectives of the human person, this article works toward providing both a foundation and rationale for a critical exploration of theories of agency, self-identity, and subjectivity. The first section traces the path of the Cartesian influence on current Western perceptions of the individual person, then reviews literature relevant to theories of self-identity, subjectivity, and agency within social construction, structuration theory, systems theory, and areas of cultural studies. Based upon these views of the human person, the second section examines agency as an under-theorized concept that requires further consideration (with self-identity and subjectivity) as a salient element of the person and theories of human identity in future research.

Most theoretical perspectives of communication respond either directly or indirectly to the question of what constitutes the “individual” (Anderson, 1996). While some articulate a clear, well-defined position as a central tenet, others may infer a perspective through their silence regarding specific theories relating to the singular person and human identity. The focus or emphasis on particular elements of the person, as well as the exclusion or depreciation of others, reveal epistemological and ontological views of the person within these theoretical positions. Of all of these inquiries into human identity and the constitution of human persons, one of the most contested is the concept of agency—the question of the existence and inherence of human volition.

Through tracing some major historical influences, and current theoretical perspectives of the human person, this article works toward its goal of providing a foundation for a critical exploration of theories of agency that also accounts for theories of self-identity¹ and theories of subjectivity. An objective, then, is to create an argument for a move away from viewing

theories of self-identity, subjectivity, and agency as exclusive and competing, and instead seeks ways to encounter them as complementary or embedded concepts, within a comprehensive, interconnected, and holistic view of the human person. In order to identify a context within which to pursue such a perspective, some central historical and current theoretical forms of inquiry are reviewed; these perspectives position (the elements of) the person or individual, and respond to the question of agency in diverse and yet sometimes overlapping ways. In particular, the influence of Cartesianism on current perceptions of persons is first reviewed. Next is a delineation of perspectives of self-identity, subjectivity, and agency within social construction, structuration theory, systems theory, and areas within cultural studies. Each of these theoretical perspectives moves away from a Cartesian view of the individual as internal, rational, and self-motivated, and, more importantly, provides views of persons who act, know, and make choices in relation to other persons and to social, institutional, and historical influences. These forms of inquiry have been important for research within communication, social inter/relations, and human identity, as well as representing both influential and differing epistemological positions. Consequently, contentions are found both within and between these theoretical perspectives concerning the definition and positioning of agency, in and of

Tracy Marafiote is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Communication at the University of Utah, Salt Lake City, UT 84112.

itself, as well as in relation to other views of the person.

Reviewing the Literature: Positioning the Elements of the Person

This section first briefly discusses definitions of the individual and of the three elements of the person: self-identity, subjectivity, and agency. It then traces a portion of the influence of Cartesian thought on current Western perceptions and theoretical positions of the human person, and finally delineates how the above-identified forms of theoretical inquiry position the elements of the human person. These reviews of historical influences and current theoretical perspectives of the human person provide a context for the last section of the article in which agency is framed as a concept requiring more thorough critical inquiry and theorizing.

Smith (1988) argues that *individual* connotes perceptions of the human person as a being who “is undivided and whole, and understood to be the source and agent of conscious action or meaning which is consistent with it” (p. xxxiii). The human person-as-*individual* reifies perceptions of persons as autonomous, complete, and self-motivating, as well as connoting beings who are potentially separate from the external forces which may act upon them. Consequently, this article utilizes the phrase “singular person” to refer to one human person. The term *individual* is related to but, importantly, not synonymous with three terms that are presented as salient elements of the human person. While the person or “individual” may be defined or understood as constituted in various ways, the triad of terms—self-identity, subjectivity, and agency—has been chosen due to its comprehensive nature, and inclusion of three centrally theorized components of human identity (Anderson, 1996; Grossberg, 1996b).

The extent to which theorists and researchers of different backgrounds or epistemologies emphasize or disregard these three concepts either directly or indirectly reveals views of the person as (or not as) an *individual*. First, a focus on the *self* or *identity*

addresses the extent to which there exists a coherent, consistent, and recognizable essence of a person across contexts—a construct that infers an inherent, fundamental nature that remains somewhat stable across external or social contextual influences. Next, the construct of *subjectivity* connotes (a) social and historical position(s) that persons occupy. It is “a position defining the possibility and the source of experience and, by extension, of knowledge” (Grossberg, 1996b, p. 98), and often infers a positioning of a person by external social forces. Finally, agency interjects the critical “question of immanence in human action” (Anderson, 1996, p. 80). This question of the inherence of human volition and motivation of human action are ongoing, complex, and contentious, in particular within epistemologies which reject Cartesian views of an internally motivated self.

In discussions of identity, *self*, *subject*, and *agent* are often used synonymously, in spite of the complex theoretical meanings and implications carried by each term. To avoid confusion or unintended connotations, unless the terms are appropriate to convey a particular meaning, this article uses “human” and/or “person” to refer to those living beings who constitute our society—and who may or may not be individuals, selves, subjects, or agents.

Cartesianism

The Cartesian perspective of a disunified self and internally based reason has, in many ways, been challenged by recent theorists and researchers in Communication and the Humanities. Belief in the mind-body split and internal reason can no longer adequately account for or help explain how individual persons are motivated to act. Whereas Descartes and his followers may have believed in a sense of agency or action motivated by internal rationality, many contemporary theorists believe that action is as much a product of environment and social influence. To better understand contemporary views of the individual and of agency, we turn to Descartes, whose beliefs, historically, have held great influence.

Selves, Subjects, and Agents

In what follows, I describe his notions of self, and its implications for identity and agency.

A major facet of modern identity and current perceptions of the individual is the notion of “inwardness, the sense of ourselves as beings with inner depths, and the connected notion that we are ‘selves’” (Taylor, 1989, p. x). This notion of the self was born two thousand years prior to Descartes, when Plato placed the soul and the body in opposition, declaring that the soul should be ruled by ethics and reason. The process of internalization was advanced by Descartes who granted the mind primacy over the body: placing our thoughts and ideas “within”—in opposition to material objects in the world, which were clearly “without.” A significant element of this turning inward was an emerging sense of individual choices (that reason is not found, but rather made) and of individual identities (Taylor, 1989), both of which lay a groundwork for conceptions of humans as individual agents, having self-motivated, innate agency.

Descartes further posited that the individual was self-sufficient—that God endowed humans (“men”) equally with rationality, and that it was then the individual’s responsibility to use that reason effectively (Descartes 1637/1890; see also Taylor, 1989). This was a rational self-mastery that allowed individuals to extend command not only to external bodily elements, but also to the material environment, and a perception of mastery over external influences. Rather than seeing the social environment as constraining or enabling the individual, the individual became the creator of his or her own environment, with influence flowing from the internal self to the external body and world.

The internally based rationality, reason, and self-mastery of Cartesianism provided for individuals the awareness of their own existence and the ability to consider their own condition and being (Taylor, 1989). This was a critical and necessary step toward a person’s awareness of having or being a self—an internal, coherent, stable essence, recognizable both

to others and to oneself, and available for self-reflection. Partnered with this notion of the self has been the human as an individual, an “undivided whole” (Smith, 1988).

The path of Descartes’ notions of reason, self-mastery, and self-awareness lead to a historic, epistemological site which yielded Essentialist perspectives of the human person as having her or his own essence or nature—the source of one’s actions. This in turn supported Humanist views of persons as unified, coherent, and rational agents who are the authors of their experiences. Consequently, a legacy of Cartesianism has influenced current Western positionings of individual selves as agents—having personal agency. Humans as actors or agents have been seen as having the ability to make choices and act based on internal knowledge, the source for their actions upon the external world.

The outlined elements of Cartesian influences on the evolution of perceptions of the person have contributed to the naturalizing of current, popular notions of persons as individual selves having the ability to think and reason, to create meaning and knowledge, and to choose and act. A Cartesian position—that the individual is responsible for her or his actions—can be understood as attributing a high degree of agency to an individual self. The Cartesian belief in internally based reason and knowledge, and self- (and external-) mastery has, however, been challenged within several current theoretical positions; in particular, social construction, systems theory/cybernetics, and cultural studies. Rather than a view of knowledge and action motivated by internal reason, many contemporary researchers within the above-mentioned theories believe that knowledge and action—and reason itself—are influenced and constrained by social interactions, systems, and structures. In *The Deconstruction of the Self*, Sampson (1989) summarizes the central challenges of each of these theoretical positions to the internalist perspective: social constructionism argues that “selves, persons, psychological traits... are social and historical constructions;” systems theory grants

primacy “to relations rather than individual entities;” and critical theory asserts that “psychology’s subject is a character designed primarily to serve ideological purposes” (p. 2).

Social Construction

One emphasis of social constructionism is the possibility of multiple and shifting realities, as opposed to the existence of a single or true reality. Although these realities may be “individual” in that they are experienced by single persons, they are understood as created within social interactions and constrained by social and contextual contingencies (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Reflecting this belief in multiple possible realities are the differing strands of thought all gathering under the umbrella of social constructionism, or even more broadly, under approaches to the social construction of reality.

I review here two different but influential perspectives in Communication which view reality as created through and within human actions—in particular, focusing on how each positions the construct(s) of (the elements of) the person. These divergent views are articulated by linguistic constructionists Kenneth Gergen and John Shotter (two of the foremost theorists within constructionism), and structuration theorist Anthony Giddens. Together these views provide a kindred understanding of conceptions of the person, specifically, the person in relation to/with social interactions and structures.

Linguistic Constructionism

Kenneth Gergen and John Shotter both work from a strand of constructionism that emphasizes the influence of discourse (or more precisely, discursive activity), referred to as linguistic or semiotic constructionism (Anderson, 1996; Shotter & Gergen, 1989; Potter, 1996). In the preface to *Realities and Relationships: Soundings in Social Construction*, Gergen challenges Cartesian views of self-presenting knowledge, countering, “what we call knowledgeable accounts of the world (including

ourselves) are essentially discursive.... there is no grounding of science or any other knowledge-generating enterprise in other than communities of interlocutors” (1994, pp. *viii-ix*). From this vantage point, everything—knowledge, reason, a sense of self—are to be found in our social (discursive) interactions. From here, the individual is both the site and subject of social, institutional, and other discursive influences: “the world of human existence does not exist independently of human activity, but is a product of that activity” (Shotter, 1993, p. *vii*).

Self-Identity With its focus on discourse and relatedness, linguistic constructionism largely discounts viewing the person as an individual having a self or an identity. “There is no inherent demand,” it argues, “for identity coherence and stability. The constructionist view does not consider identity, for one, as an achievement of mind, but rather, of relationship” (Gergen, 1994, p. 205; see also Gergen, 1989; Gergen & Davis, 1985; McNamee & Gergen, 1999; Shotter, 1993). Identity, then, is not thoroughly rejected, but is viewed as action emanating from the social and historical contexts and interactions within which the human-as-subject finds her- or himself. Here, the self is not the manifestation of some essence of the individual, but is created through one’s social interactions which offer cues as to what actions and behaviors are appropriate and/or expected in given social contexts—one expectation being a somewhat consistent representation of self. In other words, the idea and perceived existence of the coherence of self, of identity, is itself a construct.

Subjectivity Though defining humans as primarily influenced by social interactions and other discursive activities—a standpoint that implies a positioning of a subject by external social forces—neither Gergen nor Shotter explicitly address the concept of subjectivity in detail. Each does, though, deny a fully determined view of the person. With the concept of *intersubjective interdependency*, Gergen (1994) makes an overt effort to mitigate a potential situating of persons as determined subjects who are little more than the passive sums of their interactions. This idea

of intersubjectivity is drawn from theories of Mead, Vygotsky, Goffman, and—among others—Gregory Bateson (one of the first systems theorists), and is offered as a means of “conceptualiz[ing] relationships neither as the interchange of autonomous individuals nor as manifestations of the whole” (p. 216). While slightly differing in the details, Shotter’s (1993) position—his form of distancing from a determined subjectivity—coincides with that of Gergen. Drawing on MacIntyre, he describes what appears to be a compromise: one’s social identity is based upon their subject position(s) such as “Barb and Bud Jones’s daughter,” “a citizen of Darlington, South Carolina,” or “the local court stenographer.” These positions, then, create an identity or sense of self, and consequently become the basis of one’s “social individuality . . . where individuals are known in terms of their relations to others” (p.175).

Agency In light of the above views of linguistic constructionists, it would be surprising to find an endorsement of any type of personal agency. And, this is indeed the case when utilizing the definition of agency provided by Ian Burkitt in (Sheila) McNamee and Gergen’s *Relational Responsibility*: “the figure of a lone individual whose intentions, plans, understanding, and control over actions apparently take place in a world without others” (1999, p. 71). However, as subsequently pointed out in that same text, “the constructed fiction of agency becomes a trope used to dismiss the term” (Lannaman, 1999, p. 86). Instead, McNamee and Gergen offer *relational responsibility* as a different understanding of human agency; one occurring within relational action and discourse. This includes actions that “sustain and enhance forms of interchange out of which meaningful action itself is made possible” (McNamee & Gergen, 1999, p. 18). What is rejected is a form or definition of agency that implies or insists upon the individual-as-agent whose intentions and actions “take place in a world without others.” What is suggested instead is a definition that can instead be understood as a consequence of relationships and collective action.

In comparison to McNamee and Gergen, Shotter (1993) explicitly confronts the idea of humans as choice-making agents. To do so, he outlines Harré’s ideas of personal powers in relation to his own views. His answer is that human thought and knowledge are indeed constructed in socio-historically situated contexts and interactions. Individuals do make choices—choices that are morally influenced “because all our actions (even when acting alone) must be performed with an awareness of how they will be *judged by others*” [original italics] (1993, p. 94). Like Gergen, this suggests the possibility of a form of agency that is understood as occurring within relational contexts.

Linguistic constructionism, then, as represented by Gergen and Shotter, places the person and the elements of the person as occurring, and being created and sustained within social interactions. It rejects any notion of individual or personal self-motivation, positioning human thought, action, and agency exclusively within social inter-relationships. Shotter (1993) identifies this interest as a concern with “how, without a conscious grasp of the processes involved in doing so, in living out different, particular forms of *self–other relationships*, we unknowingly construct different, particular forms of what we might call *person–world relations*” [original italics] (p. 12).

Giddens & Structuration Theory

Writing as a social theorist, Giddens positions structuration theory as concentrating primarily upon ontological concerns such as “reworking conceptions of human being and human doing, social reproduction and social transformation” (1984, p. xx), as well as the “deeply entrenched” division between objectivism and subjectivism. Structuration theory, then, is “based on the premise that this dualism has to be reconceptualized as a duality—the duality of structure” (p. xxi). Within this view, while the person is not independent of social influences or structures, neither

does the social structure exist free of/from human persons. Giddens summarizes this interdependence: “according to the notion of the duality of structure, the structural properties of social systems are both medium and outcome of the practices they recursively organize” (1984, p. 25).

Self-Identity Like the linguistic constructionist view identified above, Giddens and structuration theory problematize the coherence or stability of the self, and the extent to which any such perceived state is, as Gergen put it, an “achievement of the mind.” However, Giddens’ question is not so focused on the existence of (a perception of) coherence and stability, but on the extent to which this state of being is the way that the construct of identity should be conceptualized.

But what exactly is self-identity? Since the self is a somewhat amorphous phenomenon, self-identity cannot refer merely to its persistence over time in the way philosophers might speak of the ‘identity’ of objects or things. The ‘identity’ of the self, in contrast to the self as a generic phenomenon, presumes reflexive awareness. It is what the individual is conscious ‘of’ in the term ‘self-consciousness’. Self-identity, in other words, is not something that is just given, as a result of the continuities of the individual’s action-system, but something that has to be routinely created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual. (1991, p. 52)

Identity, for Giddens, appears to be something internal (“what the individual is conscious ‘of’”) that is created not externally and imposed upon persons, but is formed in the recursive relationship between the person and social (inter)actions of that person.

Subjectivity The goals of structuration theory—to impact conceptions of social reproduction and change while also reconceptualizing the distinction between the person and social structure—make it difficult to distinguish Giddens’ views of subjectivity and agency as clearly distinct concepts. On the one hand, an inflexible endorsement of either agency or subjectivity

often positions theorists in ways that deny the importance and influence of either the human person or social, discursive, and structural interactions. On the other hand, from some views, the embracing of agency necessarily limits subjectivity, and vice versa. It is precisely those extremes—“one is the reductive conception of institutions. . . . The second is the reductive theory of consciousness” (1984, p. 5)—that Giddens seeks to mitigate through the theory of structuration. The decentering of the subject is a foundational element of structuration theory but does not infer an erasure of its significance and influence in studying the person.

Agency For Giddens, this tension between institutions and consciousness, or subjectivity and agency, is a central difficulty for both structuralism and post-structuralism. He argues that the failure to accommodate agency “represents major flaws in structural analysis. For in the notion of agency resides the capacity to restructure the universe, thereby obviating scientific laws depicting this universe” (Giddens & Turner, 1987, p. 6).

Diverging greatly from Gergen and Shotter, Giddens places some value in an internal self as a source of such concepts as intention, evaluating it in comparison to agency. “Agency,” he posits, “concerns events of which an individual is a perpetrator, in the sense that the individual could at any phase in a given sequence of conduct have acted differently” (1984, p. 9). It is precisely this ability to act—and to act differently—that is a central component of Giddens’ theory of structuration.

Giddens and structuration theory seek to stake out a ground somewhere between subject and object, external and internal. He espouses the influence of social, discursive interactions, and conversely, refuses to place the source of thought, knowledge, or the motivation to act fully within or external to the person. It is in the recursive relations between these that he seeks to discover or reveal the person and the social as both/and, rather than either/or.

Systems Theory/Cybernetics

Systems theory, also called cybernetics, is a science of understanding pattern, organization, and what constitutes an organized system (Bateson, 1972; Keeney, 1983). Within this focus on pattern and organization are emphases on recursivity and recognizing “inclusion and participation” (Keeney, 1983, p. 76) in systems. In short, cybernetics considers “the patterned nature of the world: with the connectedness of phenomena and the connections between things” (Rapport & Overing, 2000, p. 102).

In focusing on patterns and connectedness, cybernetics calls for a language that transcends the Western legacy of dualisms, such as Descartes’ mind-body split, and its attendant emphasis on the internally motivated individual (Rapport & Overing, 2000). Like social constructionism, systems theory challenges Cartesian views of the person as an autonomous individual, instead of emphasizing relations. Systems theory, however, moves farther from persons-as-self-directed, positioning human actions as not only occurring *in relation to* others, but as *part of*—as radically *interconnected with* other elements of—a system.

Self-Identity It is tempting—due, for example, to references to elements in a system ‘deciding’, ‘having self-referentiality’, or ‘communicating’—to attribute a certain internalist standpoint to systems theorists: a belief in an autonomous “I.” On the contrary, however, a salient move of systems theory is the attribution of these abilities or characteristics not only to humans (those beings to whom we are accustomed to referring as “thinking” or “acting”), but also to other-than-human systems or elements of a system.

The system, in cybernetics, is likened to the mind—a metaphor applied to any “thinking” system that is complex, self-correcting, and meaning reproducing—or *autopoietic*. In doing so, systems theory challenges and complexifies conventional definitions of the mind as an internal, rational characteristic of an individual human. Instead, it posits that the

interconnection between elements in a system necessarily encompasses a “mental and living process” (Keeney, 1987, p. 109) which cannot take place only internally. Bateson (1972) explains that “*what thinks is the total system* [italics added] which engages in trial and error, which is humans plus environment” (p. 482–483). Consequently, in systems theory, humans do have thought (as do redwood forests and coral reefs) though not as autonomous beings, and not as something internally initiated. Rather, this thought process occurs through their participation/belonging in a system; the human person, then, is only one element within a thinking system.

In its calling into question the acceptance of autonomous thinking beings, cybernetics therefore contests the constructs of self or identity—the singular person as having a coherent, fundamental nature across contexts or within different systems. Responding to the constructs of self or identity, systems theory poses the analogy that striving to identify the behavior or function of one element of a system (i.e., the identity of an individual person) is similar to asking the function of the third letter of every word in the language (Keeney, 1983). Although systems theory acknowledges that the self is typically viewed or experienced as a real and autonomous entity, it argues that the experience of it as real is constructed only in relationship. The person-as-self is mistakenly perceived as separate from the surrounding environment, creating a view of self-and-other that reinforces the construct of an individual identity (Bateson, 1991; Keeney, 1983). This self is, therefore, a “half mythological entity whose apparent subjective reality somehow increases in situations of reflexive awareness” (Bateson, 1991, p. 213).

Subjectivity As suggested above, systems theory sees persons and other elements in a system not as separate entities which interact either as antagonists or as conspirators, but rather understands the relation as a system which is formed by a collection of entities, in the interaction. In positioning the person as one element in a thinking system—the actions of whom both affect and are affected by other elements in the

system—systems theory problematizes common constructions of the person-as-subject. A frequent view of the subject is a being who is a site of social positions and contingencies; a construct that reifies the person as an autonomous or solitary entity in the sense of being separate or distinct from—positioned by or in relation to—her or his environment.

Posing an alternative view, Luhmann explicitly “rejects [the] subject-centered frame of reference” (Knodt, 1995, p. xxvi). For him, this common perspective is “incapable of accounting for the dimension of the social.” He further argues that “as long as communication is understood in terms of, and grounded in, the operations of solitary consciousness, the ‘problem of intersubjectivity’ . . . becomes insoluble, no matter whether one conceives of this consciousness as an empirical entity or a transcendental principle” (p. xxvi).

The cybernetic view of the person-as-element in a system (interconnected) with other elements—as opposed to separate-and-in-relation-to other elements—rejects this distinction that necessarily positions the person/subject as potentially detached from their environment or other elements in a system. “From a systems-theoretical standpoint there is no longer a privileged subject of cognition” (Knodt, 1995, p. xxvii).

Cybernetics, then, reflects a view of the person not as filling multiple subject positions, but as being “at the intersect” of multiple systems. Not only does the person engage with different systems, but “every social situation . . . is also embedded in a larger social institution, and so on, recursively—and . . . all of them are autopoietic” (Maturana and Varela, as cited in Keeney, 1983, p. 87).

Agency Given the definition of agency provided at the beginning of this section (“the inherence of human volition and motivation of human action”), and the foci of systems theory, it is likely already clear that cybernetics does not support a view of humans as autonomous or self-motivated agents.

In systems theory, the person is neither an individual self, a passive site of external influence, nor an originating source of knowledge and action, but is rather one intrinsic element of an interconnected, thinking system. While on the one hand, this view allows that the person (as a part of a system) may enact behaviors that appear consistent with the constructs of self-identity, subjectivity, or agency, on the other hand, it insists that attributing any single source to any such behaviors (knowledge, reason, or action) is mistaken, and relies upon false distinctions. Instead, cybernetics argues for an understanding of pattern, organization, and interconnectedness in defining systems as the sources of all thought, action, and motivation.

An issue that may cause some confusion in terms of the possibility of the person as acting autonomously is the constitution of a system (and whether the single person can constitute a system). Cybernetic systems are not correlated with the size or inclusivity of elements, as there is no necessary size or composition in the definition of a system; rather, “cybernetics simply prescribes seeing events as organized by recursive feedback process” (Keeney, 1983, p. 117). This organization may, then, include the family, the neighborhood, or “a recursive sequence of an individual’s behavior and experience” (p. 117). In other words, the single person can indeed be considered to be a cybernetic system; however, this is not synonymous with positioning persons as autonomous, internally motivated beings. In this way, systems theory joins social constructionism in challenging Cartesian views of the person as an autonomous individual. Next, in the last part of this section, cultural studies—which shares with the previous forms of inquiry a rejection of an internally motivated individual—views the person as positioned and influenced by the intersections of cultural, institutional, historical, and other social contexts.

Cultural Studies

Similar to the challenges within social constructionism, the broad diversity of goals and texts within cultural

studies confronts efforts to identify its view of the nature of the person. Instead of such a reduction this article draws on the works of contemporary scholars across areas of cultural studies², to outline their diverse views of the human person.

Self-Identity During (1993) asserts that “cultural studies has been . . . most interested in how groups with less power practically develop their own readings of, and uses for, cultural products—in fun, in resistance, or to articulate their own identity” (p.7). This inclination toward defining identities within or as collectivities can be seen as related to the repudiation of the grand narratives or traditional notions of the self or identity as a cohesive, originary, or stable essence (Bhabha, 1996; Grossberg, 1996b; Hall, 1993, 1996), and toward a view of the construct of identity as interrelated with social subject positions. It further reflects a turn away from the privileging of the (essential, originary) “individual” and toward an examination of (contingent, shifting) social, cultural, and historical influences and intersections.

Hall asserts that, “identities are thus points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us” (1996, p. 6). In other words, persons do not *have* stable identities so much as they *inhabit* shifting subjectivities that are created and understood socially. A consequence of this complexifying of subject positions is that as categorizations multiply—not only race and gender, but “institutional location, geopolitical locale, sexual orientation” (Bhabha, 1998, p. 1332)—so too do claims to identity.

Each of the three “aspects of individuality” (self, subject, and agent) can be understood as products of a social/cultural “machinery” that creates them as “distinct individuating productions,” and therefore “impose[s] a particular organization and a particular conduct” (Grossberg, 1996b, p. 98). Hall (1996) concurs, asserting that the concept of identity need not be understood as essentialist, but rather as strategic and positional. It is through the inhabitation of these socially created, defined, and reified subject

positions that a sense of self may be established: identity—while shifting and fluid—is a manifestation of persons’ (shifting and fluid) subjectivities that influence cultural practices. Here, the self is simply “the material embodiment of identities” (Grossberg, 1996b, p. 99).

With Grossberg and Hall, Bhabha posits that it is in the articulation of differing, necessarily historicized subject positions that identities are negotiated. A subject constituted as an “effect” of discourse or ideology should not be misunderstood as a “politically passive identity.” Rather, “the position of the human subject is neither Inside (the psyche) nor Outside (in the social). Identity is an intersubjective, performative act that refuses the division of public/private, psyche/social” (Bhabha, 1996, p. 206).

Like these theorists, Foucault also views identities as unstable, insisting upon the discursive construction of the subject. For him, “nothing in man [*sic*]—not even his body—is sufficiently stable to serve as a basis for self-recognition or for understanding other men” (Foucault, cited in Hall, 1997, p. 11). There is, therefore, no unitary individual to be viewed as a self, but only a subject, constructed within constraining social and economic institutions (Richter, 1998).

Subjectivity It is often difficult within cultural studies to distinguish persons’ subjectivities from their selves or identities because, as Anderson (1996) notes, “subjectivity presumes the existence of cultural paradigms of the self” (p. 79). For Grossberg (1996b), subjectivity equates identity with social power and, necessarily, social position. Subjectivities are therefore inescapable: “in so far as everyone experiences the world, subjectivity in some form must be a universal value.” (1996b, p. 98). The assertion that subjectivity is “universal” is an important position as it implies that although a self is not equivalent with an essence, the repercussions of social confluences are essential to the constitution of a person.

In contrast to this view, During (1993) argues at

length that “the French theorists” (he refers to Bourdieu and Foucault) believe that “actual individuals are not ‘subjects’ wholly positioned by the system these fields constitute or the strategies the fields provide” (p.12) but rather continually shift “under the impact of contingent givens (skin colour, physical appearance, and so on) and material events (illness, technological breakdowns, and so on) which are not simply determinants of social or cultural forces” (1993, p. 12).

Interestingly, although these contingencies may not be determined by social forces, neither are they created internally, within the person. While not social or cultural, the forces that influence the person’s subjectivity are nonetheless external to that person. Inasmuch as discourse or language injects itself into person-social relations in which subject positions are constituted, persons’ senses of themselves as selves are based in perceptions of the ability to speak freely—at least internally, or “to themselves” (During, 1993).

Whereas Foucault places his source of the (decentered) subject within discourse, Bourdieu offers the *habitus*, the “principles which generate and organize practices and representations” (1993, p. 32; see also Bourdieu, 1991), to explain the nature of ideology and its positioning of the subject. He asserts, however, that the *habitus* is not produced simply in the obeying of social expectations, but rather functions much as a “self-fulfilling prophecy.” That is, social or cultural norms influence subjects’ perceptions of the possibilities of action to the extent that actions outside of these norms are not considered as options for behavior. This “inclines agents to refuse what is denied and to will the inevitable” (p. 35), inferring a very limited form of agency, which is further constrained by subjectivity.

The circular nature of the subject with its constitutive “source” that is suggested by Bourdieu in the *habitus* is also present in Althusser’s notion of the functioning of ideological state apparatuses. Althusser (1971) proposes the ideological state apparatus (ISA) as

the means through which ideologies are created and perpetuated, and ultimately, through which subjectivities are constructed. It was stated in the beginning of the self-identity subsection that identity is a manifestation of persons’ subjectivities that, in turn, influence cultural practices. This notion of practice is particularly significant for Althusser’s conception of ISA’s and their construction, or interpellation, of the subject. He explains, “the existence of the ideas of [a person’s] belief is material in that his [*sic*] ideas are his material actions inserted into material practices governed by material rituals which are themselves defined by the material ideological apparatus from which derive the ideas of that subject” (Althusser, 1971, p. 169). In this view, subjects’ practices are governed by the apparatus, as well as being creative of the apparatus, in a continuous process. In other words, persons adopt attitudes and practices that are those of the ideological apparatus upon which those attitudes and practices depend.

Agency In the above subsections are hints that persons may, conditionally, act as agents. Indeed, Hall (1996) states that the question of agency is central for further cultural studies inquiry into identity. In suggesting this reconsideration, he makes clear, however, what he is *not* seeking: “I express no desire to return to an unmediated and transparent notion of the subject or identity as the centred author of social practice, or to restore an approach” (1996, p. 2) which places the autonomous individual as the origin of a “transcendental consciousness” (Foucault, cited in Hall, 1996, p. 2). Likewise, Grossberg (1996b) acknowledges that in “classical modern terms,” agency invokes the notions of free will and determined actions—constructs he rejects.

These traditional conceptions of agency provide clear illustration of why many cultural studies theorists do not specifically address the person-as-agent. Considering the predominant views of self-identity and subjectivity as constituted by and within discourses, institutions, and ideologies, it is difficult to reconcile an understanding of the person as an

Selves, Subjects, and Agents

agent with the presumption or implication of internally centered knowledge or motivation. Still, while there are authors who explicitly reject any theory of agency (for example, see Rose, 1996), Grossberg (1996b; see also Hall, 1996) suggests a need to reevaluate such a position within a context of differing understandings of human agency.

Grossberg argues that agency can be both more and different than the essentialist views explained above. Instead, he states that agency must be considered as involving possibilities within socially and historically contingent relations of power. Rather than determinism, agency refers to action and to the character of change. He posits that while invoking questions of intentionality, agency does not necessarily require internal or cognitive answers (Grossberg, 1996b). Agency can be more effectively reconceptualized to recognize different possibilities for action, such as mediations of the processes and practices of power relations and the constructions of different realities. Grossberg understands agency, therefore, as being “how access and investment or participation . . . are distributed within particular structured terrains” (p. 100). Ultimately, he posits that agency is a political problem, as opposed to an epistemological one. This notion of agency both allows and requires consideration of persons’ abilities/possibilities to act in ways that impact power and social/cultural relations.

In pursuing this repositioning of agency, Grossberg (1996a) references Hall’s theory of “no-necessary (non/)correspondence.” In this theory, historically situated relations construct practices that are “inflected” with particular meanings and consequences. These practices occur by and within subjectivities, and in relation to political and cultural structures of domination and resistance (1996a). Hall’s theory, Grossberg argues, offers a “non-essentialist” view of agency in which “social identities are themselves complex fields of multiple and even contradictory struggles” that produces a “fragmented, decentred human agent who is both ‘subject-ed’ by power and capable of acting against those powers”

(1996a, p. 156-157). This view repositions agency as a political issue. In considering agency as a means by which to impact relations of power, it is also reconceptualized as a potentially critical element of persons, as well as of persons’ relations within social and cultural contingencies.

In contrast to Grossberg, Bourdieu’s discussion of agents’ actions does not directly refer to agency. Rather, he addresses it indirectly, discussing how those with cultural capital have the ability to insert themselves into social structures, and therefore influence social agendas (Chaney, 1994). Within Bourdieu’s writings, “while agents orient themselves towards specific interests or goals, their action is only rarely the outcome of a conscious deliberation or calculation in which pros and cons of different strategies are carefully weighed up, their costs and benefits assessed” (Thompson, 1991, p. 16). Here, the influence of the *habitus* comes into play as persons are seen as not “consciously deliberating,” but rather engaging in practices that the *habitus* predisposes them toward. For Bourdieu, then, agency is the ability of the person to act and choose, but the possibilities from among which to do so are determined (purposeful word choice) by and within the immediate social fields and institutions—and the routines and habits constructed within them (Bourdieu, 1993).

Within cultural studies, specific views of (the elements of) the person include differing emphases on the influences of discourse, relations of power and difference, institutions, and/or ideologies (etc.). A fairly common ground within these shifting orientations, however, is an understanding of the centrality of subjectivity or the subject position as created and perpetuated within and by the various influences. Likewise, these theorists all reject the notion of an essential, stable self, instead understanding persons as created, located, and acting within the fluid intersections of social, cultural, and historical contingencies.

Positional Relations & Summary

Theoretical positions of social construction, structuration theory, systems theory/cybernetics, and cultural studies understand the person in terms of the elements of self-identity, subjectivity, and agency. The ways in which each of these theoretical forms of inquiry position the particular aspects of the person emphasize some element(s) of the constitution of the person while limiting or dismissing others. These foci both reveal and construct particular views and understandings of human persons and their interrelations with other persons (singular and collective), and their interactions with(in) social and cultural systems, institutions, and structures. While all three theoretical positions explicitly reject the autonomous, knowing individual posited within Cartesianism, neither do any of them place the person as a subject who is fully determined by external forces (discursive, social, cultural, economic, institutional, etc.). Within and between the ways that these forms of inquiry understand or position the different elements of the person, there are both overlaps and distinctions that provide insight into their views of the human as a self, subject, or agent.

These theoretical perspectives, all of which are central to studies of communication, unanimously challenge notions of the person as a self-governing individual with an internal, coherent, fundamental nature or essence across contexts. Instead, each positions the person as influenced or constituted within interrelations—though the type, framing, and emphasis of the interrelations vary. For example, these interconnections are viewed by Giddens and structuration theory, and within systems theory, as mutual relations, with an emphasis on a necessary reciprocity of influence that shapes perceptions of the person as a self, subject, or agent. By contrast, linguistic constructionism and cultural studies place greater influence on the social, cultural, institutional, and historical contexts or intersections that persons find themselves within, as well as how the transitory

nature of those intersections changes perceptions and practices (of difference and power) within relationships. Such distinctions among and between theoretical positions, however, are neither discrete nor mutually exclusive.

Questions of Agency

The social construction of reality, systems theory/cybernetics, and cultural studies provide distinct views of the framing of and emphasis on the different elements of the person. Still, they share emphases on the influences of external forces, while also acknowledging that persons and their actions are not fully determined by these influences. How these external forces are mediated, and how this relates to the construct of agency is one consideration of this section.

In explaining the relation of the person with(in) the social, each of these forms of inquiry contributes crucial and well-developed theories of social relations and interactions, whether the foci are discursive, systemic, institutional, ideological, or otherwise. As perspectives that provide important ontological and epistemological foundations for many scholars, these theories and explanations are critical influences on both the direction and conclusions of much scholarship. Within some of these theories, detailed delineations of the person as a self who has an identity and/or subjectivity are explored. What is far less developed are considerations or positionings of human agency—in particular, discussions of agency as a significant and viable element of the person who acts within non-deterministic external forces. These elements are most typically approached from a perspective which privileges one or two elements of the triad, as opposed to a more holistic, balanced consideration of the three as intertwined or embedded concepts and influences.

Although overt references to agency are found within both social construction and cultural studies, for the most part these are somewhat tentative propositions offered by only a few scholars, and are tempered by

the outright rejection of agency by others in their fields. In order to legitimate suggested reconceptualizations, these authors explicitly identify and renounce traditional constructions of agency as the autonomous individual-as-agent who: exercises free will and determined actions (Grossberg, 1996b), is “the centred author of social practice” (Hall, 1996, p. 2), is a “transcendental consciousness” (Foucault, cited in Hall, 1996, p. 2), or whose “intentions, plans, understanding, and control over actions apparently take place in a world without others” (Burkitt, 1999, p. 71)

This strategy of dismissing traditional definitions then creates openings for the reconceptualizations offered by McNamee and Gergen, Hall, Grossberg, and to some extent, Giddens and Bourdieu. Still, these proposed approaches to a notion of agency are limited and divergent. Within social constructionism, McNamee and Gergen (1999) suggest an understanding of human agency as occurring within relational action and discourse. Giddens (1984), however, argues that agency is the intention and ability in a situation to act differently, and that a theory of agency should explain the production, reproduction, and changes of structures (Giddens & Turner, 1987). Somewhat related to Giddens’ second point, cultural studies theorists Grossberg (1996a, 1996b) and Hall (1996) advocate a view of agency that addresses transformations of understandings and creations of relations of power. Finally, theorists such as Bourdieu (1993) propose a form of agency that is simply defined as the ability to choose from among determined or limited possibilities of action.

Challenges to theories of agency do not contest that persons perform acts, rather, what is typically questioned is the source or motivation of actions in persons’ specific social-historical contexts. What is resisted are the notions of free will, or the individual as originary source of knowledge. What is needed is a definition of agency (and/or identity) that negotiates the social influence inherent in subjectivity with the actions of single persons inferred in agency. It is this theoretical gap that I seek to explore, posing potential

directions for, and questions to be asked within future explorations of human agency.

Of these tentative explorations into the area of agency, only Giddens, Grossberg, and Hall infer the need for theorizing agency as interrelated with understandings of self-identity and/or subjectivity. In his detailed delineation of structuration theory, Giddens (1984) grounds a discussion of the self in terms of both Freudian concepts of ‘identity’, ‘ego’, and ‘super-ego’, as well as, (at more length) Mead’s notions of the ‘I’ and ‘me’. His argument illustrates the difficulty of separating the constructs of self-identity, subjectivity, and agency; the ‘me’ is the self, and the ‘I’ is the agent, but these occur within social discourse that creates or positions its subjectivity. For Giddens, these ideas merely reinforce his view of the person—and those relevant elements of the person—as being “created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual” (1991, p. 52).

From a cultural studies perspective, both Hall and Grossberg provisionally move toward agency, contextualizing their discussions with(in) understandings of subjectivity, much as theories of self-identity are presented as interconnected with subjectivity. Interestingly, while asserting an alternate understanding of agency, Grossberg appears to retreat to the safety of the generalized, collectivist view of action—a position he previously challenged (1996b, p. 88), avoiding the use of language that would advocate the single human person-as-agent and posing agency as a political problem.

Although incomplete, these movements toward a re-defining of agency begin to rescue the third member of the triad of elements of the person from either the traditional, Cartesian-influenced understandings of agents as self-determined and autonomous beings or from the obscurity of rejection due to these definitions. What follows is a list of six questions related to agency, human identity, and persons’ social relations that are not thoroughly addressed (if at all) within the above (as well as many other) theoretical forms of inquiry. These are also queries that may have existing

parallel counterparts within theories of self-identity and/or subjectivity, and are consequently necessary for a thoughtful, comprehensive, and holistic theory of agency.

The first question—*how can accounts of agency be balanced with theories of the self and of subjectivity to mitigate essentialist views of either free will, a fully inherent and consistent essence, or deterministic social structures*—makes central the previously mentioned necessity of positioning agency not as an exclusive element of the person, but as an embedded concept that is influenced, challenged, balanced, and in continuous negotiation with both self-identity and subjectivity. As Grossberg (1996b) asserts, “in Marx’s terms, the problem of agency is the problem of understanding how people make history in conditions not of their own making” (p. 99).

The second question—*what is the part (“role”) of the singular person in creating, constituting, and influencing the social*—addresses who or what constitutes the social. Views of persons primarily as subjects do not satisfactorily delineate how singular persons, in interaction, constitute the social, which in turn creates influence on other persons. Therefore, a theory of agency will need to address the particular parts (influences, roles) that persons play in constituting the social.

The third question—*how is social change accounted for, provoked, enacted, and manifested in singular persons’ practices*—targets the view that the person is nothing more than the subject of discourse and ideology (Childers & Hentzi, 1995). While many theoretical positions, including those delineated above, offer some broad references to social changes, most do not include an account of the pragmatics of social change, or elaborate a consideration of singular persons’ roles or influence within or upon such changes. A significant challenge for a theory of agency, then, is to examine such complex interrelations of and between the person and the social environment (whether cultures, structures,

institutions, etc.) in ways that help to explicate not only why but how social change occurs.

The fourth question—*as everyone, in some sense, exists as a cultural agent, to what extent can agency be understood as “universal”*—considers the diverse ways agency might be experienced and/or practiced by persons with(in) social, cultural, historical, and political contexts, and encourages expanding traditional definitions of agency. This question is the counterpart of Grossberg’s (1996b) argument that, in some form, subjectivity must be universal as everyone in some sense exists as a subject. To parallel the comprehensive theorizing of subjectivity, delineations of agency will have to address power relations and politics of difference.

The fifth question—*given situations in which differing options for action are all equally sanctioned within a person’s social environment, upon what bases do persons make choices among these options*—identifies the presumption that positioning persons as choosing (an internal action) necessarily entails autonomous, internally motivated, reasoning individuals. On the contrary, this requires an inquiry into how humans can think, choose, and act within processes that are socially influenced, while having the ability to “have” and “use” information or knowledge “individually” (or as singular persons).

Finally, the sixth question—*given a viable theory of human agency—as well as understandings of the self and subjectivity—to what extent are singular persons accountable for “their” actions*—specifies the concept of humans as agents having agency, as a social and ethical dilemma and not an epistemological or ontological problem. While this may not appear to be a question that is necessarily in the domain of communication scholars, it is the counterpart of assertions that human interactions and practices are ultimately constructed by, and are the responsibility of, a singular person’s encompassing social environment³. Considerations of agency (or of identity in general) may never definitively answer such questions, but should nonetheless acknowledge,

and be prepared to respond to, potential implications of positing human agency, in particular, to avoid (even inadvertent) reification of the “the individual” as sovereign actor.

Conclusion

Considering the nature of the person and/or human identity requires accounting for the intertwined and embedded concepts of self-identity, subjectivity, and agency. The six proposed questions highlight the epistemological and ontological difficulties posed by discounting any one element of this triad, specifically as delineated here, the under-theorized concept of agency.

It is neither a goal nor within the scope of this article to attempt to provide responses to these questions (though they will most certainly be the foci of future research). Rather, through outlining a historical and theoretical context for current views of and approaches to the person and human identity within some central theories of communication, this essay has sought to create both a sound foundation and a rationale for further critical exploration and pursuit of theories of agency. Specifically, one goal has been to pose an argument for a turn away from viewing theories of self-identity, subjectivity and agency as somewhat exclusive or competing, and instead to move toward a more inclusive, comprehensive, and holistic view of the human person and the study of human identity. Through highlighting the gaps within existing theories, this objective has been further supported through the posing of these critical questions for consideration in future scholarship regarding theories of agency and human identity. These questions help form both a rationale and direction for a theory of agency as one significant element (in relation with the self-identity and subjectivity) of the person, and as a viable and salient concept for scholars and theorists of human communication, inter/relations, and identity.

Notes

1. Further, self and identity are paired here as interrelated and synonymous terms (and one element of the triad), referencing an inherent, coherent, and consistent essence of a person that is recognizable both to oneself and to others. This pairing connotes the focused perspective defined here and the meaning that is desired for this article, while identity (by itself) may also infer a broader area of academic study (referred to in this article as “human identity”). (See also the discussion of “self-identity” based on Giddens’ work in this essay.)

2. These scholars include Louis Althusser, Homi Bhabha, Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault, Lawrence Grossberg, and Stuart Hall.

3. Gergen (1994), for example, poses such an argument in *Realities and Relationships: Soundings in Social Construction*.

References

- Althusser, L. (1971). *Lenin and philosophy, and other essays* (B. Brewster, Trans.). New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Anderson, J. A. (1996). *Communication theory: Epistemological foundations*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Bateson, G. (1972). *Steps to an ecology of mind*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Bateson, G. (1991). *A sacred unity: Further steps to an ecology of mind* (R. E. Donaldson, Ed.). New York: HarperCollins.
- Berger, P. L. & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. New York: Doubleday.

- Bhabha, H. K. (1996). Unpacking my library... again. In I. Chambers & L. Curti (Eds.), *The post-colonial question: Common skies, divided horizons* (pp. 199-211). New York: Routledge.
- Bhabha, H. K. (1998). Locations of culture. In D. H. Richter (Ed.), *The critical tradition: Classic texts and contemporary trends* (2nd ed.) (pp. 1331-1344). Boston: Bedford.
- Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and symbolic power* (J. B. Thompson, Ed.) (G. Raymond & M. Adamson, Trans.). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1993). *The field of cultural production: Essays on art and literature* (R. Johnson, Ed.). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Burkitt, I. (1999). Relational moves and generative dances. In S. McNamee & K. J. Gergen (Eds.), *Relational responsibility: Resources for sustainable dialogue* (pp. 71-79). London: Sage.
- Chaney, D. (1994). *The cultural turn: Scene-setting essays on contemporary cultural history*. New York: Routledge.
- Childers, J. & Hentzi, G. (Eds.). (1995). *The Columbia dictionary of modern literary and cultural criticism*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Descartes, R. (1637/1890). *Discourse on the method of rightly conducting the reason and seeking truth in the sciences* (J. Veitch, Trans.). New York: Tudor.
- During, S. (Ed.). (1993). *The cultural studies reader*. New York: Routledge.
- Gergen, K. J. (1989). Warranting voice and the elaboration of the self. In J. Shotter & K. J. Gergen (Eds.), *Texts of identity* (pp. 70-81). London: Sage.
- Gergen, K. J. (1994). *Realities and relationships: Soundings in social construction*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Gergen, K. J. & Davis, K. E. (1985). *The social construction of the person*. New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Giddens, A. (1984). *The constitution of society: Outline of the theory of structuration*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and self-identity: Self and society in the late modern age*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Giddens, A. & Turner, J. H. (Eds.). (1987). *Social theory today*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Grossberg, L. (1996a). History, politics and postmodernism: Stuart Hall and cultural studies. In D. Morley & K. Chen (Eds.), *Stuart Hall: Critical dialogues in cultural studies* (pp. 151-173). New York: Routledge.
- Grossberg, L. (1996b). Identity and cultural studies – Is that all there is? In S. Hall & P. du Gay (Eds.), *Questions of cultural identity* (pp. 87-107). London: Sage.
- Hall, S. (1993). Minimal selves. In A. Gray & J. McGuigan (Eds.), *Studying culture: An introductory reader* (pp. 134-138). New York: Routledge.
- Hall, S. (1996). Introduction: Who needs ‘identity’? In S. Hall & P. du Gay (Eds.), *Questions of cultural identity* (pp. 1-17). London: Sage.
- Hall, S. (Ed.). (1997). *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Keeney, B. P. (1983). *Aesthetics of change*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Knodt, E. M. (1995). Foreword. In N. Luhmann,

Selves, Subjects, and Agents

Social systems (J. Bednarz, Jr., Trans., with D. Baecker). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Lannaman, J. W. (1999). On being relational in an accountable way: The questions of agency and power. In S. McNamee & K. J. Gergen (Eds.), *Relational responsibility: Resources for sustainable dialogue* (pp. 81-91). London: Sage.

McNamee, S., Gergen, K. J. (Eds.). (1999). *Relational responsibility: Resources for sustainable dialogue*. London: Sage.

Potter, J. (1996). *Representing reality: Discourse, rhetoric, and social construction*. London: Sage.

Rapport, N. & Overing, J. (2000). *Social and cultural anthropology: The key concepts*. New York: Routledge.

Richter, D. H. (Ed.). (1998). *The critical tradition: Classic texts and contemporary trends* (2nd ed.). Boston: Bedford Books.

Rose, N. (1996). Identity, genealogy, history. In S. Hall & P. du Gay (Eds.), *Questions of cultural identity* (pp. 128-150). London: Sage.

Sampson, E. E. (1989). The deconstruction of self. In J. Shotter & K. J. Gergen (Eds.), *Texts of identity* (pp. 1-19). London: Sage.

Shotter, J. (1993). *Cultural politics of everyday life: Social constructionism, rhetoric and knowing of the third kind*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Shotter, J. & Gergen, K. (Eds.). (1989). *Texts of identity*. London: Sage.

Smith, P. (1988). *Discerning the subject* (Vol. 55). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Taylor, C. (1989). *Sources of the self: The making*

of modern identity. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Thompson, J. B. (1991). Editor's introduction. In P. Bourdieu (G. Raymond & M. Adamson, Trans.), *Language and symbolic power* (pp. 1-34). New York: Columbia University Press.

The Center for Communication and Community

The Center is dedicated to returning the benefits of all forms of communication scholarship to the traditionally disenfranchised members of our community—the abused, the addicted, the homeless, and the working poor—in ways of their choosing.

The Center and its activities are accessible to all.

Contact: James Anderson Ph. D.
Director and Professor
james.anderson@utah.edu

Ominous Impunity: Rethinking State Terrorism in Argentina, Twenty Years After the Return of Democracy

Rocky Mountain Communication Review
Volume 2:1, Summer, 2004
Pages 19-30

Miguel A. Malagrecia

During the last Argentinean dictatorship (1973-1983), thirty thousand people were tortured and made 'disappeared' by the Dictatorial State. For decades, commanders of the Argentinean Military Forces denied responsibility for these cases, either by pretending that the people were still alive, that they had left the country, or by acknowledging only a few cases of torture while justifying them as "excesses." In 2003, the national commemorations for the twentieth anniversary of the return of democracy in Argentina coincided with a series of kidnappings (which extend to the present) and juridical debates that echoed those events. The essay is centered on the tension between European countries' (France, Italy and Spain, in particular) petition for extradition of these repressors and the Argentinean Supreme Court's decision, which continued to protect the repressor's impunity. By articulating Lacanian theory and political philosophy, the author examines the notion of "impunity," including its significance as it pertains to Symbolic Law and its consequences for subjectivity, and culture. I suggest that instead of defining the Symbolic Law as a fixed mediation, it should be considered a permanent work of inscription. This inscription can aid in understanding subjective positions regarding social trauma. With this in mind, the author focuses on the psychoanalytic notion of act as impersonal and political, and hence essential for understanding the petition of justice in the Argentinean case

If, as James Carey (1989) maintains, "communication is a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, and transformed," and if "our minds and lives are shaped by our total experience [of] communication," (p. 15) then communication scholars should care about the symbolic conditions that support, frame, and constitute culture and subjectivity. This claim implies adopting an ethical as well as a political position regarding cultural events that compromise subjectivity. For this reason, communication is understood here as a complex phenomenon in which individual subjects, political agencies, and social institutions conform to a totality. In this view, psychoanalytic theory can be of help in communication studies. Indeed, Lacanian psychoanalytic theory has been

employed several times in communication studies, and particularly in cultural studies; I believe that these frameworks are in dialogue with one another and might be utilized in a collaborative effort. To mention one example, cultural studies has benefited from the Lacanian interpretation of the unconscious as being like a language, central in the analysis of culture and subjectivity (Hall, 1996).

At the same time, cultural studies, and in particular feminist cultural studies, have helped de-totalize psychoanalytic discourse by critiquing the assumption of a universal subject and the idealization of phallic-centered models of subjectivity and sexuality (Barker, 2004). Lacanian psychoanalysis has been deployed in feminist communication studies by incorporating psychoanalytic theory as a ground from which to theorize aspects of the normative structure of gender and race, or the contradictory dynamics between femininity and feminism (Kristeva, 1980; McRobbie,

Miguel Malagrecia is a doctoral candidate in the Institute of Communications Research at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Urbana, IL 61801.

1996; Mitchell, 1984); identity performativity (Butler, 1997); and ideologies of nationalism (Bhabha, 1993; Spivak, 2001), among many other examples. In addition, the Lacanian conceptualization of a Symbolic order has revitalized critical theory's understanding of subjection to the State already present in Freudian skepticism towards the ideal of progress (Freud, 1930/1989) and in Horkheimer and Adorno's (1947) critique of the Enlightenment's cultural formations (Held, 1980). Finally, Lacan's reading of Marx's plus-value as *plus-de-jour* inspired some of the most provocative thoughts about psychoanalysis, popular culture, and Marxism in the works of Frederick Jameson (2001) and Slavoj Žižek (1999, 2001).

In light of this background, this essay applies Lacanian theory to perform a critical reading of a particular cultural event, that of the 2003 Argentinean commemoration of the return of democracy. Incorporating Lacanian theory is useful in this context because it can provide cultural studies with a framework to interpret institutional and subjective positions regarding the Symbolic Law (and its manifestations in cultural norms) as the ones that are at stake in the Argentinean case. Indeed, these positions comprise multiple levels of subjectivity articulated and usually conflicting with each other. Such complexity became apparent during the Argentinean commemorations of 2003, the events that followed, and their repercussions in the media.

In 2003, together with the occasional public celebrations for the anniversary of the return of democracy, there was also despair and fright. These feelings were triggered by an increasing wave of kidnappings and political corruption that echoed those of the last dictatorship. In the months that followed, some repressors within the former Argentinean military dictatorship (1976-1983) explicitly admitted for the first time before TV cameras that the missing people were assassinated clandestinely¹. This information was provided by Generals Diaz Bessone, Albano Harguindeguy, and Reinaldo Bignone in a

series of interviews conducted by French reporter Marie-Monique Robin. The interviews, also directed by Robin, are now part of a documentary released in Spanish under the title *Escuadrones de la muerte. La Escuela Francesa* (aka, The Squadrons of Death, the French School), and were presented in France and twelve other European countries on September 1, 2003.

For decades, commanders of the Argentinean Military Forces had denied responsibility for the cases of torture and the "disappearance" of people, either by pretending that the people were still alive and had secretly left the country, or by acknowledging only a few cases of torture while justifying them as an "excess" of authority on their own behalf. The video revealed that the disappearance of people followed a systematic plan to secretly assassinate victims of political persecution and to make their bodies disappear, thereby preventing families and friends from mourning. International repercussions for this tape followed immediately².

When the documentary was first released, newspapers in New York, Rome, and Madrid displayed headlines about the tension between the Argentinean and French, Italian and Spanish European Supreme Courts regarding the extradition of Argentinean repressors, all members of the military government during the last dictatorship. The impunity of these repressors was evident after the Argentinean court denied their extradition, which had been petitioned by European nations on the basis of dozens of legal cases presented about citizens who were kidnapped, tortured, and killed in Argentina during the period 1976-1983. For years, the presentation of these cases could not progress because the Argentinean Supreme Court did not accept petitions for extradition, and discontinued domestic trials. The Argentinean juridical apparatus seemed to protect and promote several mechanisms that ensured the impunity still enjoyed by the repressors. Some of these mechanisms were legal instruments passed by the latest democratic governments: the Ley de Punto Final (Full Stop Law), which stopped the presentation

of cases; the Ley de Obediencia Debida (Law of Due Obedience), which exculpated the repressors; and the Indult, which exonerated them from any trial.

Currently, there is a paradoxical situation regarding these instruments. When the petition of extradition became more legally viable, even some of the legislators that had passed the above-mentioned laws appeared to be in favor of judging the repressors in Argentina. However, these laws remain valid until the Supreme Court sanctions the petition of nullity passed by the Congress. It is precisely because this decision has been strategically postponed that the repressors enjoy freedom from prosecution, since they can neither be extradited nor judged in Argentina.

This essay explores the effect of impunity in Argentina as a particular position regarding the Symbolic that disavows interdiction by pretending to *incarnate* the Law³. In the following section, I show the ways the disavowal of interdiction by the Court created the conditions for facilitating the return of the repressed. I explore what this return means conceptually for Lacanian psychoanalysis, and in the work of Nietzsche. Next, I conjecture that the Lacanian notion of the *act* is the most powerful category of analysis within this framework to resist and reverse impunity. What I am trying to do in this case is to bring a concept emanated from the clinical practice of psychoanalysis into dialogue with cultural studies.

Finally, I examine the limits and effects of the disavowal of the Law in the Argentinean case, and pose a question regarding the possibility of reversing the atrocities carried out by the dictatorial State in Argentina. What is important to notice in this conjuncture, however, is that the impunity of the repressors, guaranteed by the Supreme Court, opposes the work of the Symbolic, which is characterized by uncertainty and flexibility. I would also like to here qualify this opposition to the Symbolic as *ominous* following the classical use that Fernando Ulloa (1986) proposed for this term. The word *ominous* refers to what rests beyond the work of speech, what cannot be symbolized because it has

not been sanctioned (signified by the Symbolic order), thus reappearing in the social space in diverse morbid forms.

A Return Void of Consistency

In aphorism 341 of *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche presents the doctrine of the eternal return by asking a question concerning what he calls the greatest weight of all—the question that matters the most within the contemplation of the eternal return—“Do you want this once more and innumerable times more?” (Nietzsche, 1881/1982, p. 102). In this question, there is more than the need to confront one’s own past in order to become a creator of the future; instead, Nietzsche suggests the more radical notion that the experience of suffering performs a reflexive operation through which a decision beyond the constraints of moral reasoning can arise. The subject that emerges from suffering is a result of the movement of questioning subjection. In this light, the doctrine of the eternal return opens the possibility for considering an ethical position regarding the past—what it was—that questions subjection and interrogates the conditions that inform reality. The subject invoked by Nietzsche can answer the aphorism’s question with the expression from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Nietzsche, 1881/1982): thus I willed it.

This enunciation suggests that a subject position of resistance can emerge from a will to contest normative cultural conventions; and hence it would imply a will to resist the repetition of past sufferings. I want to suggest that this subject position is the subject of ethics, one that is beyond morality. An ethical position of this kind might imply a form of de-subjectification or exclusion from the order of moral values (I will go back to this point later, when commenting on Antigone’s act). Such exclusion has been explored by Judith Butler (1997), who, commenting on Nietzsche’s (1881/1982) *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, asserts that “[t]o claim that the subject exceeds either/ or is not to claim that it lives in some free zone of its own making. Exceeding is not escaping, and the

subject exceeds precisely that to which it is bound” (Butler, 1997, p. 17). Butler seems to suggest here that there are two forms of subjectivity at play, one tied to constraining moral values, and one that emerges from a movement of exclusion from those values. This second form of subjectivity might coincide with the subject of ethics (that is, of subjective responsibility) predicated by Lacanian psychoanalysis. In this sense, Nietzsche and Lacan help differentiate morality from ethics. Morality would refer to the social conventions individuals are subjected to, while ethics would refer to the powers of subjectivity once it has transcended those conventions. For this reason, Lacan and Nietzsche are closely related in that both differentiate a realm of particular norms that govern individualities and a realm of ethics where the subject is responsible for its desire. Moreover, Nietzsche does not give any essence or content to the eternal return. Because of this, the principal concern in the ‘doctrine’ of the eternal return is not the return itself, but the attitude regarding the return, and how such a position is produced.

In the Nietzschean preoccupation of the return and in his concerns about an attitude towards the return, there is implied a conception of agency without individuality. But, what is agency without the individual? An agency that is neither centered on the individual nor guided by moral conventions is de-subjected from the order of things. It becomes what psychoanalysis identifies as the subject of an *act*.⁴ Only an act—defined as a form of agency that is not personal—can interrupt a repetition (or return) that lacks consistency and transform it into something new. The act, then, interrupts repetition.

Act, Law, Impunity

The Argentinean Supreme Court decision to protect the repressors of the last dictatorship illustrates the psychoanalytic notion of disavowal of the Symbolic Law. As I am using it here, the notion of disavowal implies a twofold psychological attitude toward the Symbolic Law. The term disavowal (in German

Verleugnung), was introduced by Freud in different texts to explain a curious clinical observation: when confronted with a female genitalia, certain boys deny the lack of a penis and, instead, they assert they can see one. Similarly, the Argentinian Supreme Court adopted a twofold position regarding the crimes perpetrated by the repressors—and yet inverse to the Freudian account. In this case, the Court acknowledges the crimes, but it never does completely sanction them or their perpetrators. What matters the most about this oxymoron is that it raises the question as to what extent can subjects resist, contest, or challenge such disavowal. In other words, can these crimes be reversed? To what extent can subjectivity resist the institutionalization of horror as promoted by the Argentinian Supreme Court?

The position of the Argentinian juridical apparatus toward the repressors is one that has guaranteed their freedom from punishment. The Symbolic Law is the operator of cultural mediation, translated into social norms. Although the norms cannot express the vastness of the Symbolic, they can reflect them. Law—expressed at the level of language—also structures the psychical life of each individual subject. There is, therefore, a logical articulation, although not a linear determination, between the order of norms (culture) and the structure of psychical life (subjectivity). As a consequence, it could be argued that the disavowal of the Symbolic Law in the case of the Argentinian juridical apparatus, expressed in the refusal to penalize the repressors, constitutes a case of what psychoanalytic theory calls the return of the repressed. This return appeared most evidently last year, and continues through the present, in the increasing number of kidnappings, oblations, and cases of torture—in some of which, allegedly, participated members of the Federal Police Bureau, and in the unscrupulous declarations ex-repressors made to the mass media⁵.

In Lacanian psychoanalysis, the Symbolic Law functions through interdiction (Lacan, 1953/2001) and is refracted and inscribed in norms particular to each culture. The effect of writing the Law subjects

nature to language. In this sense, Law is violent: it separates and orders while creating culture. However, for the very same reason that Law structures, that is, for the violence of its function, its effects can also be chaotic. In other words, the effects of the inscription of the Law cannot be anticipated because they are a matter of conjecture. One aspect of the inscription of the Law is, therefore, always erratic, transitory, and more importantly, it opens subjectivity—individual and social—to the encounter of the Symbolic. In this sense, Law and the Symbolic cannot be separated; together they are, as Giorgio Agamben, (1993) puts it, a *forma-di-vita*, that is inextricably political (p. 108).

Human subjectivity is not *prescribed*, but *inscribed* into the Symbolic. This inscription opens subjectivity to the potency of the political that Agamben suggests. The Law of the Symbolic can operate only as refracted in particular forms (Fariña, 1999)—the norms of culture. Law does not operate in a vacuum, but instead on the material supports offered by cultural codes. However, because particulars (norms) can never encode the Universal completely, the refraction of the Symbolic in codes is always erratic and incomplete. There is no system that encodes the Universal completely, a reason for which the Symbolic always represents a surplus regarding the particulars. Law, then, is not something given from the beginning and for always, but something *always being* inscribed, and necessarily re-coded. The Universal is that which exceeds the work of the particulars (Lewkowicz, 1998), demanding a permanent Symbolic testimony, a witnessing on the part of the subjects. The Symbolic is not a given datum for the human experience; it is, on the contrary, the result of a constant re-working of the inscription of the Law.

On the other hand, there is the notion of the act. An act is a moment when subjectivity detaches from the set of the particulars. Act relates to an attitude that is excluded from the realm of norms, conventions, and morality. In the moment of the act, the subject is alone in a decision that compromises an encounter with a radical impersonal dimension. What psychoanalysis

calls the *act* is a movement from the Symbolic coordinates that frame human experience to a limit-zone where the subject becomes, for a moment, de-subjected. This limit-zone of de-subjection can be called *radical Alterity*. The subject of the act (e.g., Antigone) is excluded from the community normalized by Symbolic regulations (•iek, 2001). The notions of *act*, and of *the Symbolic* can be thought of as crucial articulators to consider the case of Argentina. In this scenario, a social institution failed to articulate the Symbolic by protecting the impunity of the repressors, hence imposing its own dictates in a particularistic way. The Argentinian Supreme Court appeared to oppose the Law it was supposed to represent.

Exclusion

To what extent is a subject able to exclude itself from the order to which it is subjected? How can the psychoanalytic notion of act be helpful in this regard? The subject of the act neither responds to what Lacan calls the *other* (the neighbor), nor to the *Other* (the set of norms regulating the Symbolic interchanges among human beings). Drawing from Greek tragedy, the reaction of Antigone to her sister Ismene when she wants to participate in the burial of their brother is the sign of an exclusion of the first type of other; the reaction to the norms of Creon is the sign of an exclusion of the second type. There are then two exclusions at play in the act: de-subjectification from the Symbolic order (the order of the *Other*) and, at the same time, de-subjection from the order of the community (the order of the particulars or *others*).

In the Argentinian case, what is most salient is the exclusion from the order of the *Other*; because the institutions that should have represented the Symbolic Law failed to do so. However, considering the political and cultural consequences of impunity, and the wish to reverse them, makes one wonder to what extent exclusion from the order of the community (the order of others) is also a prerequisite for the *act*. Should the *act* be considered as the result of individual practice or as the consequence of communal

performance? Probably, it is at this juncture that the Lacanian distinction between the individual and the subject is most appropriate. For Lacan, the subject of the act does not coincide with the individual person. The individual corresponds to the agency of the Ego, an instance of stabilized imaginary identifications, defense mechanisms and reactive formations. Such agency does not hold subjective responsibility for the ego in the place of guilt, nor of responsibility (in so far as the Ego is subjected to the imperatives of the moral law and cultural norms).

Contrarily, Lacan locates responsibility in the subject: the subject *responds* for its position; it is responsible for its desire. At the level of the subject, therefore, the act appears tied to the community, for there is no subject without Alterity. In other words, although the act is played in exclusion *from* the order of the community, it is not *without* the others, who are present in so far as the subject is an effect of language and discourse.

A similar standpoint can be found in Nietzsche's concern for the act: for Nietzsche, the act excludes the subject from the order of conventions, yet it ties the subject to his/her own desire ("thus I willed it.") Exclusion implies a form of subjectivity without a subject; a form of ethics without the conventions of morality; in other words, an attitude without agency—in Lacanian terms, a form of subjectivity that does not coincide with individuality.

Agamben emphasizes that the human being is the only living form for which 'happiness' can be realized in political action only—in the political dimension of act. I believe that Agamben's use of the term happiness (in Italian *felicità*) refers to a form of agency tied to the Symbolic, a living form that exists and participates in the political act of de-subjectification from any order of determinants, and that, in doing so, expands the Symbolic. As it was suggested before, this would be the subject of ethics, distinct from the subject of morals. In Nietzsche's conceptualization, this subject is not *a priori*, but emerges *a posteriori*, through an experience of exclusion that comprises suffering and

through which it becomes the subject of the will.

Curiously, a similar form of subjectivity *a posteriori* appears conceptualized by Freud in *Totem and Taboo* (1912/1939). In this case, Freud analyzes the effect of a sanction as a movement that is effective *a posteriori*. In addition, although he does not address the problem of suffering in that essay, he does consider the role of the Symbolic Law in subjectivity and culture. I believe that the theses included in *Totem and Taboo* can help in thinking of impunity as a position beyond Law, and so, this essay will turn now to examine the structural function of Law and the disavowal of Law in impunity.

Impunity and Irreversibility

The realm of culture is founded, according to the Freudian myth of *Totem and Taboo*, on a fundamental prohibition that sets limits to the otherwise excessive character of the drive. As Lacan (1948) says regarding aggressiveness, the myth of *Totem and Taboo* demonstrates that the prohibition of incest and the crime of parricide are in the origins of the human condition. It is remarkable that in the Freudian text *Totem and Taboo*, prohibition falls backward upon the 'brothers of the primitive horde' (such is the term Freud uses to describe a mythical group of individuals at the beginnings of culture) as an excess in relation to what they expected, hence becoming a triple foundational act (Salomone, 2001) that operates in a reflexive manner: foundation of the subject; foundation of society; foundation of culture. By this prohibition, Law becomes represented by someone or something (as opposed to *be incarnated by one*), in the form of a peculiar signifier that names the subject in Symbolic terms.

By regulating our relationships with neighbors (the non-capitalized *other* mentioned above), the Law sets a limit to human aggressiveness; hence Law establishes the symbolic conditions for human sociability. By regulating sexual enjoyment, on the other hand, Law establishes culture in the form of an interdiction of at least one discretionary element that

becomes then a forbidden object. These considerations are pivotal in the case under examination, for the prohibition of a sexual object, and more importantly, the prohibition of Real enjoyment as it is conceptualized in Lacanian theory (Lacan, 1973) is the articulator of Symbolic interdiction that supports culture. Interdiction of Real sexual enjoyment marks, in Lacanian theory, the passage from the animal world into the cultural world. In other words, interdiction means that for the human being, *not all* is possible; there is a constitutive lack or impossibility that results from the effect of the Symbolic Law. In this sense, sexuality, language and culture are inextricably interwoven by interdiction (Apollon, Bergeron and Cantin, 2002; see also FN 3).

Revealing the Symbolic

What is remarkable about the interdiction in the case of the Freudian account of the primitive horde is the paradoxical movement falling backward (or *a posteriori*) on the agents of the original parricide, a movement that surprises for its efficacy: by killing the Primitive Father (distinguishable by his embodiment of the Law), the brothers in the primitive horde sanction a position as impossible—were someone to occupy that position, the Law would be *incarnated in one* again, his enjoyment and privileges re-established, hence motivating a mechanical repetition of the assassination.

By killing the Primitive Father, the brothers of the horde discovered with surprise that a Symbolic position is more effective than the pure incarnation of the Law. In other words, they discovered that Law, when represented, falls back upon each of the individuals and upon the whole group. Thus the inscription of the Law is both a violent act and yet also a pacifying or organizing act. It is violent because it structures the psychical life of the subject by setting boundaries that divide what it was from what it is ('what it was' being sanctioned as such after the act of inscription of the Law). At the same time, the inscription of the Law situates the subject within the Symbolic. For this reason, this inscription is pacifying.

Law regulates the relationships between the subject and the different instances of Alterity (one of each is the Real).

What the brothers of the primitive horde discovered by killing the Primitive Father is that whomever occupies that position reenacts the figure of the Primitive (Tyrannical) Father, but precisely because this is a reenactment anticipated in the domains of the Symbolic (the brothers could from that moment on anticipate the effect of someone occupying such position), then it is the position that designates the function in the structure. The position designates *a* Father, no longer *the* Primitive Father. The Symbolic Father holds a privileged place in the structure and functions to continuously re-inscribe the Symbolic Law. Furthermore, the foundational act needs to repeat itself to guarantee its Symbolic validity of interdiction. This characterizes the work of excess in the Symbolic (universal) regarding the norms of culture (particulars).

In contrast, in the case of impunity, there is a peculiar tension between the Argentinian juridical apparatus and the Symbolic Law that appears to be the negative of interdiction, a relationship to Law that rejects its weight of interdiction. This particular relation to Law is best exemplified in the figure of Creon in *Antigone*, and so it can be interpreted in light of the Argentinian case. Creon, who had become head of the Theban army, prohibited the burial of Polynices who died attacking the city, seeking to reclaim his rights to the Theban throne. Creon's edict served as a warning and also as a threat directed to those who dared to challenge state power. From this time forward, Antigone's heroic deed of burying her dead brother's body in defiance of the city laws has been interpreted as a symbol of an ethical act.

The protests about the fate of the 'desaparecidos' (also referred to as the 'missing') in Latin America (and not only in Argentina) are both a denunciation and a possible way to move forward, to process the tragedy of those who were kidnapped, tortured, and made to disappear. The figure of the 'desaparecidos'

is a corollary of the disappearance of those who murdered them, whose responsibility was exculpated under the notion of ‘orders.’ The clearest expression of this logic is the so-called Law of Due Obedience that freed thousands of soldiers who committed aberrant acts by displacing responsibility onto those higher up in the military hierarchy. The recent annulment of this Law in Argentina, together with other long-delayed democratic measures, should be taken not as an end point but as a point of departure for advocating the politics of the act. In effect, it is a wager toward the future: the restitution of responsibility and memory as a strategy against the ominous⁶.

This wager presents us with a conundrum: if responsibility could be restituted by means of legal sanctions, would this restitution suture the wounds in culture? Would it reconstitute the altered Symbolic legacy? Would the subjects in mourning find in these norms the complete resolution of suffering of the conditions for the elaboration of the loss? Can an operation in the dimension of norms (particulars) suture a rupture in the dimension of the Symbolic?

Trauma, Sanctions, Community

The psychoanalytic meta-psychology of trauma, defined as an excess of energy invading the psychical apparatus, can be of help here. Any factor that takes the structure by surprise is traumatic, the sudden eruption of a quantum of energy that as a consequence cannot find proper elaboration. Social traumas are situations characterized by discontinuity, fracture and the impossibility of elaboration. Trauma is reversible, it is believed, given the necessary mediations; the normal functioning of the structure (altered in trauma) can be reestablished. A point of fixation in the structure produced by the sudden eruption of a traumatic factor, trauma can be thought of as the inability to mobilize signifiers, a fixation of the Symbolic elements that compose the structure. Signifiers, characterized in Lacanian psychoanalysis as elements that combine to produce signification, become crystallized, fixed. The corollary of this fixation is that the work of

Symbolic inscription, which was characterized earlier as a continuous effort, becomes paralyzed. It is the whole Symbolic order which is affected by trauma. Applied to the Argentinian case, this framework serves to show how impunity—lack of legal sanctions and lack of legal restitution of the repressor’s responsibility—contributes to prolonging the effect of trauma. As long as the legal system does not provide the necessary mediations, trauma will return in ominous forms as a symptom of that fixation in the Symbolic structure. Impunity, therefore, affects not only the families and direct victims of the dictatorship, but the whole Symbolic order at the level of the community. The consequences of the crimes exert significant adverse impacts on the present conditions of communal existence.

Whether or not legal sanctions (the effect of norms and mediations) can restore the Symbolic to a status previous to its affection by trauma can be considered in two ways. First, norms can restore Symbolic functions by promoting social elaboration and justice. That process is why it is crucial to insist on these sanctions for, if not, the crimes of the dictatorship are still effective in the present. No sanction means no elaboration. Second, however, legal sanctions can only act to partially heal the wound, and can neither re-establish a time prior to the injury itself nor completely remove the scar. Although the process of (social and psychical) mourning can be positively affected by the work of norms restituting the responsibility for the crimes, there is no complete reversion to the original, untraumatized stage. What can be accomplished, on the other hand, is not unimportant. By advocating justice, the relation of the legal system to the Symbolic Law may be re-elaborated. By advocating the legal attribution of responsibility, subjects can become politically involved in a practice of freedom that is reflexive and impersonal. Here, the notion of *act* proves its value. If trauma interrupts the Symbolic order, the notion of act, inversely, appears as facilitating a new bond with the Symbolic. Because the act is a phenomenon not constrained by morality or conventions, it may have the ability to transcend the norms that prolong

impunity.

Final Remarks

The two main theoretical articulations of this essay—a Lacanian reading of the Symbolic Law and my interpretation of Nietzsche's doctrine of the eternal return—inform my understanding of social injustices in Argentina. They are used here as *theoretical* narratives that might contribute to thinking critically about social institutions, their impact upon subjectivity, and the practices that can mitigate circumstances of extreme social oppression. This oppression is characterized here as ominous impunity: a mechanism through which a juridical formation like the Supreme Court helps perpetuate social violence. As a form of resistance against this mechanism, I consider and explore the notion of *act* articulating Nietzsche's philosophy and Lacan's psychoanalytic theory. They both provide a critical understanding of subjectivity that exceeds individuality; for both authors, the subject is neither the psychological individual nor the self. There is no need to validate one more time the contributions of these two authors, whose works have influenced so much past and current critical cultural and communication studies. What might be advisable at the present conjuncture of these fields, however, is to seek new, original articulations that help articulate theory and social practices by placing them at one and the same level of importance. *Theory* neither antecedes nor stands above the politics of resistance created by the cultural subject. Instead, it might contribute to the examination of everyday settings, to highlight the interstices of struggle that survive the most troubled politico-cultural contexts, and hence, bringing hope for a brighter future. In the case of Argentina, hope might rest in the possibility of mourning the victims of the last dictatorship. Critical theory in communication studies, I believe, has the ethical responsibility to show the path into that direction.

In this regard, Lacanian psychoanalysis, usually associated with clinical work or literary studies rather than with political practice, asserts that the process

of mourning can never be circumscribed to the private domain, or explained only in terms of individual psychical mechanisms for several reasons: first, because the subject mourns a loved object (person or abstraction) whose attachments were socially shared or constructed with/by others; and second, and most important, because that object itself belongs to the realm of culture, that is, it was Symbolically inscribed in culture. This means that although the libidinal attachment to the object on the part of the subject is completely singular (and not 'personal'), the object held a position in the Symbolic network which is now in lack. The realization of the lack of the object on the part of the subject is not without the realization of the lack of the object in the Symbolic network. To that end, social institutions give testimony to the loss of the object. The Symbolic is thus represented in this case in the Universal existence of funerary rites, which act as the communal support of the subject that mourns.

In the case of the families of the victims of the last dictatorship in Argentina, at least two steps of mourning find insurmountable obstacles. First, the bodies of the *desparecidos* have not been found: they remain a missing link in the Symbolic. Second, there has not been institutional sanction (acknowledgment) of the particular character of these losses on the part of Justice, for those who participated in the massive torture and execution have enjoyed for years the privilege of impunity, which has been guaranteed by 'norms.' Third, Justice itself demonstrates a position regarding Law that can be characterized as a disavowal of interdiction. Under these circumstances, mourning, which is normally a collective, public phenomenon, has remained a private affair, which is a contradiction by definition.

The communal character of funerary rites, on the other hand, is stressed by Lacan (Gutierrez, 1999). Lacan proposes that the mechanism of mourning mobilizes the signifiers following a psychical operation inversed to that of foreclosure, in which a signifier is rejected from the Symbolic, thereby returning from the Real. In the case of mourning, something lacks in the Real

(the lost object) and re-organizes, activating the whole set of signifiers (the whole Symbolic order). The work of the signifier makes it possible to re-signify the loss. Second, Lacan emphasizes that the whole community supports the mourning, reflecting on the value of funerary rites in his examination of the tragedies of Hamlet and Antigone: when the community (represented by the Other of culture, its norms and rites) is deprived from participation in these rites, then, as in the case of Hamlet, the spectral ghost of the dead returns from the Real.

It is in this light that Nietzsche's conception of the eternal return can be articulated with psychoanalysis. The doctrine of the eternal return signals the necessity of embracing what it was, but only to the extent that it advocates a subjective attitude towards what it can be. That attitude is tragic in that it asks the subject to transcend the dramatic character of life, hence morality and social conventions. In the question posed by Nietzsche—'do you want this over and over,' the subject is confronted not only with the possibility of making a decision regarding what it was, but more importantly, regarding what it wishes to become. And even if 'what it was' is not transformed by any personal decision, Nietzsche rejects the fatality and pure facticity of the past.

In emphasizing the possibility of generating an attitude toward 'what it was' that goes beyond morality and resentment, Nietzsche's understanding of the eternal return is pivotal to considering the psychoanalytic notion of act as an ethical and always political positioning of the subject regarding, in the case under examination, impunity. The notion of the act can be read in conjunction with the attitude advocated by Nietzsche. Following the above considerations, the prosecution of justice of the repressors in Argentina can neither be based on personal wishes nor on a moral basis, but on an attitude that emerges and finds its productivity in an ethical dimension: that of the relationship between subjectivity (individual and communal) and the Symbolic Law. Considering once more Nietzsche's question of the greatest weight, because lack of justice enables past horrors to be

repeated, the only response to the question 'do you want this over and over' is: "not ever again."

Notes

This study was partly supported by the Fulbright Commission and the Institute of International Education. I want to acknowledge Ellen Moore and my reviewers for their useful insights on this paper and assistance in the preparation of this manuscript. A portion of this article was presented in an earlier version in the Seminar "Reading Nietzsche & Freud: Subjectivity, Ideals, and Practices of Freedom," coordinated by Melissa Orlie at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign. This essay is dedicated to Juan Jorge Fariña.

1. In reference to the recent declarations of Bessone and Bignone on *Le Monde Diplomatique*: "How can you get information [from a detainee] if you do not push him, if you do not torture him? . . . Do you believe that we could have executed 7000 people? You know the fuss the Pope made with Franco just because he executed three, just three. The whole world falls on us. You can't execute 7000 people . . . And then what about if we wanted to put them in jail? It already happened here. A constitutional government came and freed them." (General Diaz Bessone, retrieved November 30th from http://www.psi.uba.ar/academica/carrerasdegrado/psicologia/informacion_adicional/obligatorias/etica/index.htm). And: "This was a copy [of the French battles]: intelligence, grid of territory divided into zones. The difference was that Algeria was a colony and ours was in our own country." (General Reinaldo Bignone, retrieved November 30th from http://www.psi.uba.ar/academica/carrerasdegrado/psicologia/informacion_adicional/obligatorias/etica/index.htm).

2. See international newspaper articles that appeared between September 1 and 15, 2003. Among others: *Noord Hollands Dagblad* (Holland); *Diario Co-Latino* (El Salvador); *La Demajagua*,

Provincia de Granma (Cuba); De Indymedia (Italy); Katholiek Nederland (Holland); El Comercio (Peru); The Sydney Morning Herald (Australia); Web Islam (online Islamic newspaper); Planet (Holland); The Advertiser (Australia); Le Monde (France); BBC Mundo.com (Great Britain); Diario de Jerez (Spain). For more information contact the Department of Ethics and Human Rights, University of Buenos Aires, Argentina http://www.psi.uba.ar/academica/carrerasdegrado/psicologia/informacion_adicional/obligatorias/etica/index.htm.

3. Throughout this essay, I capitalize the word Law to refer to the Symbolic operation that marks the entrance of the human being into the cultural world. This Law should be differentiated from the laws (norms) of each culture, which are always partial and incomplete reflections of the Symbolic Law. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, the Symbolic Law is introduced at the psychical level by means of the parental function (what Lacan calls Nom-du-Père), which limits Real enjoyment and inscribes the human subject in the realm of language (Apollon, Bergeron, & Cantin, 2002; Fink, 1997; Lacan, 1960). Nobody can be the Law for the reason that all subjects are traversed by Law and inscribed in culture by Law. The parental function is only a representative of the Law, but not the Law itself. The Law represented by this function, is therefore different from the moral law, whose principles are situated by Freud at the level of the Super Ego. When we consider cases like the one under analysis here, what is at stake is a social agent or institution that instead of functioning as a reflection or representative of the Symbolic, pretends to be the Law.

4. To refer to the Lacanian psychoanalytic term 'acte,' I prefer to use the English word act instead of the usual translation action, for action implies an idea of an individuality that my analytic framework rejects.

5. In reference to the recent wave of kidnapped individuals; the disappearance of people; the obliteration of organs; the case of people tortured by parallel police corps; and the declarations of repressors like

Musa Azar.

6. This last paragraph contains ideas that were elaborated upon as part of a larger research project within the team of Psychology, Ethics and Human Rights directed by Professor Juan Fariña at the University of Buenos Aires, Argentina.

References

Agamben, G., Badiou A., de Carolis, M., & Zanardi, M., (1993). *Politica*. Naples, Italy: Cronopio.

Apollon, W., Bergeron, D., & Cantin, L. (2002). *After Lacan. Clinical practice and the subject of the unconscious*. New York: State University of New York.

Barker, C. (2004). *Cultural studies. Theory and practice* (2nd Ed.). London: Sage Publications.

Bhabha, H. (2001). The commitment to theory. In L. Finke (Ed.) *Theory and criticism. The Norton Anthology* (pp. 2379-2397). New York: Norton.

Butler, J. (1997). *Excitable speech. A politics of the performative*. New York: Routledge.

Butler, J. (1997). *The psychic life of power*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Carey, J. (1989). A Cultural Approach to Communication. In *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society* (pp. 13-36). Boston: Unwin Hyman.

Fariña J. J. (1999). *Ética: Un Horizonte en Quiebra*. Buenos Aires, Argentina: Eudeba.

Fink, B. (1997). *A clinical introduction to Lacanian psychoanalysis. Theory and practice*. Boston, MA: Harvard University Press.

Ominous Impunity

- Freud, S. (1912/1989). *Totem and taboo*. New York: Norton.
- Freud, S. (1930/1989). *Civilization and its discontents*. New York: Norton.
- Gutierrez, C. (1999). Antígona y los ritos funerarios. In J. J. Fariña (Ed.) *Ética: un horizonte en quiebra* (pp. 95-116). Buenos Aires, Argentina: Eudeba.
- Hall, S. (1996). The question of cultural identity. In S. Hall, D. Held, & K. Thompson (Eds.), *Modernity* (pp. 595-634). Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers.
- Held, D. (1980). *Introduction to critical theory: Horkheimer to Habermas*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Horkheimer, M., & Adorno T. W. (1947). *Dialectic of enlightenment*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Jameson, F. (2001). The political unconscious: Narrative as a socially symbolic act. In L. Finke (Ed.) *Theory and criticism. The Norton anthology* (pp. 1937-1941). New York: Norton.
- Kristeva, J. (1980): Place names. In L. Roudiez (Ed. & Trans.), *Desire in language*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Lacan, J. (1948). Aggressiveness in psychoanalysis. In B. Fink (Trans.) *Écrits: a selection* (pp. 10-30). New York: Norton.
- Lacan, J. (1953/2001). The function and field of speech and language in psychoanalysis. In B. Fink (Trans.) *Écrits: a selection* (pp. 12-106). New York: Norton.
- Lacan, J. (1960/2000). Subversion of the subject and dialect of desire in the Freudian unconscious. In B. Fink (Trans.) *Écrits: a selection* (pp. 281-312). New York: Norton.
- Lacan, J. (1973). *The seminar XX (Encore): On feminine sexuality, the limits of love and knowledge* (J-A. Miller, Ed.; D. Porter, Trans.). New York: Norton.
- Lewkowicz, I. (1998). Particular, universal, singular. In J. J. Fariña (Ed.) *Ética: un horizonte en quiebra* (pp. 59-66). Buenos Aires, Argentina: Eudeba.
- Mitchell, J. (1984). The question of femininity and the theory of psychoanalysis. In S. Saguro (Ed.) *Psychoanalysis and woman, a reader* (pp.128-141). New York: New York University Press.
- McRobbie, A., (1996). More!: New sexualities in girl's and women's magazines. In J. Curran et al. (Eds.), *Cultural studies and communications* (pp.165-189). New York: Arnold.
- Nietzsche, F. (1881/1982). Excerpts from 'The Gay Science' and 'Thus Spoke Zarathustra'. In W. Kaufmann, (Ed. and Trans.) *The portable Nietzsche* (pp. 93-102). New York: Penguin.
- Spivak, G. (2001). Can the subaltern speak? In L. Finke (Ed.) *Theory and criticism. The Norton Anthology* (pp. 2197-2207). New York: Norton.
- Salomone, G. (2001). El padre en función: paternidad, fantasía y mito. In J. J Fariña, & C. Gutierrez (Ed.) *La encrucijada de la filiación* (pp. 75-96). Buenos Aires, Argentina: Lumen Humanitas.
- Ulloa, F. (1986). La ética del analista ante lo siniestro. *Territorios, 2, s/p*. Buenos Aires: Movimiento Solidario de Salud Mental.
- i•ek, S. (1999). *The ticklish subject: The absent centre of political ontology*. New York: Verso.
- i•ek, S. (2001). *Did somebody say totalitarianism?* New York: Verso.

Productivity and Multi-Screen Computer Displays

Rocky Mountain Communication Review
Volume 2:1, Summer, 2004
Pages 31-53

Janet Colvin
Nancy Tobler
James A. Anderson

One hundred eight university and non university personnel participated in a comparison of single monitor, multi-monitor and multi-monitor with Hydravision display configurations. Respondents edited slide shows, spreadsheets and text documents in a simulation of office work, using each of the display arrays. Performance measures, including task time, editing time, number of edits completed, and number of errors made and usability measures evaluating effectiveness, comfort, learning ease, time to productivity, quickness of recovery from mistakes, ease of task tracking, ability to maintain task focus and ease of movement among sources were combined into an overall evaluation of productivity. Multi-screens scored significantly higher on every measure.

As processor speed and memory capacity have increased and become less expensive, the office has found that it can support more open applications and that multi-tasking could be a reality, not just a term. One problem remaining has been the management of the computer desktop. Even with increased monitor size, the single screen presents fundamental problems with window placement, stacking and tracking windows, multiple applications on the task bar, and the like (Delefino, 1993; Grudin, 2003). These problems have limited the increases in productivity theoretically made possible with increased processor speed and memory capacity.

Multi-Screen Solution

Solutions to this problem have been available since the advent of the Windows 98 operating system that allows the PC platform to support multi-monitor displays. Initially, multi-screen configurations found use in computer gaming but has found little interest

or recognition in the business or academic community. Part of the reason for that lack of interest has been the absence of evidence of value (Binder, 2001; Lindsley, 1996; St. John, Harris, & Osga, 1997). This study addresses that absence by comparing multi- and single-screen configurations across performance and usability measures.

Multi-Screen Configurations

The multi-screen display configuration can range from a fully integrated set of liquid crystal displays to a simple, physical arrangement of two or more CRT monitors (Bohannon, 2003; Dyson, 2002; Vellotti, 2001). Each screen or monitor in a multi-screen display is connected to the same computer through its own display port and is treated by the operating system both as a unified, bounded space and as a connected or extended desktop. For example, an application will maximize to the boundaries of its "home" single screen but can also be "windowed" across all screens (a number theoretically unlimited but usually 2-5). Multi-screens configurations allow the user to place different windows on different screens or to spread a single application across all available screens (Brown & Ruf, 1989).

Multi-Screen Management Software

Multi-screen management software adds another

Janet Colvin and Nancy Tobler are doctoral candidates and James A. Anderson is Professor and Director of Graduate Studies in the Department of Communication at the University of Utah, Salt Lake City, UT 84112..

potential set of efficiencies (Randall, 1999). Multi-screen management software allows the user to instantly transport application windows to different screens, maximize applications across all displays, open child windows (e.g., multiple spreadsheets or tool and property sub-menus) on different displays, and to switch between virtual desktops (e.g., from a text editing set up to a graphics design set up).

Productivity and Multi-screen Displays

Productivity testing involves the reproduction of an ordinary work site, plausible and recognizable work tasks, and reasonable conditions of work (Sherry & Wilson, 1996; Stolovich & Keeps, 1992). Productivity testing then is a combination of performance testing and usability testing (Baurua, Kriebel, & Mukhopadhyay, 1991; Jorgenson & Stiroh, 1999). In performance testing, automated tools collect facts about what the users *actually did* and *how long it took* them to do it. In usability testing, a sample group is asked to perform a set of tasks and *subjectively rate the ease of use* of a piece of hardware or software. Because usability without increased performance or increased performance without adequate usability will not sustain overall increases in productivity, authentic measures of productivity must involve both (Brynjolfsson & Yang, 1996).

Comparing Single and Multi-Screens over Performance and Usability

Overview

In order to test the productivity of multi-screen configurations, an experimental comparison was devised using three blocks of simulated office tasks. Each block contained a text editing task (TXT), a spreadsheet editing task (SST) and a slide presentation editing task (PPT). Each task within the block was designed to use six windows of information: Two windows concerned the administrative, data collection, and simulation management of the experiment per se and four

windows were components of the task. A seventh window provided navigational information that governed the entire session and contained the hyperlinks for the various files required.

Each of the 108 respondents completed one different block in each of three configurations: single screen (SS), multi-screen (MS), and multi-screen assisted by multi-screen management software (HV)¹. The order of tasks was the same in each block: text, spreadsheet and slide. An equal number of respondents (36 per block x configuration combinations) completed each block to control for possible task by configuration differences. Screen configurations and tasks were used as “within subjects” factors in the analysis.

Strong order effects were to be expected as respondents learned how the task was to be performed. To control for these effects, an equal number of respondents (12 per each of the 9 block x configuration x order combinations) started the task set with a different configuration in the first position. Table 1 presents the rotation of tasks and configurations. This procedure was repeated for each of the task sets. Order effects were, therefore, balanced across all configurations. In this manner, each respondent completed all 9 tasks in blocks of three and experienced all three screen configurations addressing them in one of three orders.

Finally, to get some sense of an “optimal” number of monitors, the multi-screen configuration was further divided into one with two monitors and one with three monitors. Half of the respondent pool (54) worked the tasks in a 2-monitor setup and half in a 3-monitor setup. This “monitor condition” was used as a “between-subject” factor in the analysis.

Tasks

All three tasks were based on the same scenario: A destination text, spreadsheet, or slide presentation had been previously prepared and sent out for review or error correction. The copy edits and corrections

Multi-Screen Displays

Table 1

Order			First			Second			Third	
			Task			Task			Task	
Start	#Rs	Text	Spread	Slide	Text	Spread	Slide	Text	Spread	Slide
Single	12	GS	CR	MDY	SR	CS	WP	HV	PR	MDK
Single	12	HV	PR	MDK	GS	CR	MDY	SR	CS	WP
Single	12	SR	CS	WP	HV	PR	MDK	GS	CR	MDY
Multi	12	GS	CR	MDY	SR	CS	WP	HV	PR	MDK
Multi	12	HV	PR	MDK	GS	CR	MDY	SR	CS	WP
Multi	12	SR	CS	WP	HV	PR	MDK	GS	CR	MDY
HV	12	GS	CR	MDY	SR	CS	WP	HV	PR	MDK
HV	12	HV	PR	MDK	GS	CR	MDY	SR	CS	WP
HV	12	SR	CS	WP	HV	PR	MDK	GS	CR	MDY

Text tasks: Graduate studies, Screen Report, Hydravision

Spreadsheet tasks: Candidate Rankings, Products by Region, Customer Survey

Slide Tasks: Multi-Desk, Multi- Display, Window Placement

Table 1: Starting rotation of tasks and configurations.

had been returned to the respondent whose job was now to make the changes on the destination file.

Text Tasks

The text files were prepared using Microsoft Word[®] with “track changes” enabled. The task files consisted of the destination document on which all changes were to be made and two source documents (called Mulcahy Edit and Tobler Edit) from which the

changes were to be drawn. Each of the source documents had between 8 and 10 edits to be completed, including a requirement to open a graphics file and to copy and paste a graphic. (A full report of this study is available at <http://www.necmitsubishi.com/solutions/SolutionDetail.cfm?solution=293&Document=1138>). The three texts were well populated with position markers such as paragraphing, headings, and graphics to assist the respondent in tracking locations

from one document to another.

Spreadsheet Tasks

The spreadsheet files were prepared using Microsoft Excel[®] and Microsoft Word[®]. Each spreadsheet was designed to cover approximately one and a half screens (an average of 33 rows by 25 columns). Each of the data sets had summary information that was dynamically linked to a bar chart. Corrections were provided to the respondents in the form of a “Corrections Memo” simulating an e-mail addressed to them. Sixteen corrections were listed for the respondent to enter. After the corrections were made, the respondent was to copy the bar chart and paste it into a designated location in a “Final Report.” The Final Report was accessed by a hyperlink on the instructions page.

Slide Tasks

The slide files were prepared using Microsoft PowerPoint[®]. PowerPoint has a rather limited editing handling protocol (as compared with most word processing). Edits were identified in comments and placed in the source documents in color-coded type. Each slide task had between 11 and 17 edits, including navigating to a graphics page, selecting a logo, and pasting the graphic into a new slide.

Data Collection

Data were collected in six ways: a paper and pencil intake questionnaire, automated time reports and automated usability questionnaire, stop watch measurements, task observations, and open-ended, end-of-testing questions. A description of each follows:

Intake Questionnaire

A single page intake questionnaire asked respondents to record their experience levels with computers, with the various applications used in the study, and with multiple screens. It also queried job experience and

hours of work.

Time Report and Usability Questionnaire

An Excel spreadsheet was devised to collect the respondent’s ID number, the time spent reading instructions, the total time spent on the task, and the responses to each of 8 usability questions. The usability questionnaire recorded the respondents self reports on their effectiveness, comfort, ease of learning, productivity, mistake recovery, task tracking, task focus, and ease of movement across sources (adapted from Lewis, 1995; Davis, 1989).

Stop Watch Measurements

Stop watch timing was initiated at the start of the actual editing task. Each task had its own marker events for the start and completion of editing. An observer/facilitator (O/F), seated next to the respondent, started the watch on the initiation event and stopped it on the completion event. The time values were recorded on the task observation sheet in minutes and seconds.

Task Observations

As an observer (facilitation practices are described under “Protocol”), the O/F was responsible for stop watch data, recording the correct completion of each edit, recording any missed edits and errors in editing or changes otherwise introduced into the source documents, recording any comments about the task or the screen configuration, and any unusual practices in the editing task that appeared worthy of notice.

Post-Session Questions

At the completion of all the tasks, the O/F asked four questions: “Focusing on single screen versus multiple screens, what did you think about that difference?” “Focusing on multiple screens with Hydravision and multiple screens without Hydravision, what did you think about that difference?” “Focusing on the tasks and the different

Multi-Screen Displays

screen configurations, did any task seem easier or harder in a given screen configuration?” “Focusing on the experiment itself, was there anything that bothered you or that we should do differently?” A summary of the respondent’s answers was recorded on the task observation sheet.

Protocol

Sampling

Using a combination of advertisements and snowball sampling, 108 respondents were drawn from students, staff, and faculty from the university and individuals from the larger community as well. The sample was equally divided between the 2-monitor and 3-monitor conditions.

Testing Procedures

Upon arrival, the respondent was given a short description of the study and the intake questionnaire to complete. The respondent was then shown one of three 5-minute training videos, SS, MS, or HV depending on the initial configuration of the task. The training video demonstrated a set of editing procedures appropriate to each task in the block and to the specific screen configuration.

At the conclusion of the video, the O/F described the screen configuration that was in use, the tasks to be done, and the role the O/F would play in the process. When all questions were answered, the respondent was asked to navigate to the first time stamp screen to begin the block session. When the respondent initiated the editing task, the stopwatch was started. Respondents were given 5 minutes to complete the task, although time was added to allow the completion of an edit in progress. The O/F recorded each edit as it was made. Errors and missed edits were also recorded. At the conclusion of the task, the stopwatch was stopped, the time recorded, and the respondent immediately directed back to the time stamp. The respondent then checked the task “Done Box,” completed the usability questionnaire,

and posted the file. This procedure was repeated for each configuration. At the conclusion of all three task blocks, post-session questions were asked and answers recorded. Each session took approximately 90 minutes. Respondents were paid \$20 for their time.

Project activities were under the supervision of a project ethicist whose responsibility was to ensure that all procedures were followed by the O/F and other project staff. The project ethicist made random visitations and observed entire sessions. Her final report noted no violations.

Facilities

Testing was done in the University of Utah, Department of Communication interaction laboratory. This testing facility has the look and feel of a living room (albeit one with a large one-way mirror and video cameras in the corners) with couches, easy chairs and a large television set. Two work tables were added for each of the testing stations.

Each testing station was configured with a new PC computer with a clean install of Windows XP and Microsoft Office Suite. The computers were based on the Intel Pentium 4 chip running at 1.8 GHz, with 512MB DDR SDRAM, a 40 GB, 7200rpm Ultra ATA hard drive, standard keyboard, and two button wheel mouse. Monitors were NEC Mitsubishi Multisync LCD 1855NX, an 18 inch liquid crystal display. Display boards were ATI Radeon 9000 AGP with two monitor ports and ATI Radeon 7000 PCI with a single port. One station had two monitors arranged in a slight V with the right hand monitor having the taskbar; the other had three monitors in a triptych arrangement with the task bar on the center monitor.

Performance Measures

Basic Variables and Their Definitions

Five variables used to test performance were

collected automatically or through direct observation. The variables, their definitions and method of collection are reported below:

Task Time: One of two basic time units. Task Time is the lapsed time from the respondent's checking of the task "Start" Box on the Time Stamp to the Respondent's checking of the "Done" box on the Time Stamp. Task Time includes set up time and edit time plus any time spent in meeting project requirements (navigating to and from the Time Stamp, for example). Task Time was an automated data collection.

Edit Time: The other basic time unit. Edit Time is the stopwatch recorded time from the first editing marker event to the last editing marker event. It represents the amount of time actually on task and has no other time component. The time was recorded by the O/F assigned to the respondent.

Number of Correct Edits: The number of correctly executed edits as observed and recorded by the O/F. Each of these edits were listed for each task on the task observation sheets. The O/F checked off each edit as it was completed or recorded an error or a miss as described below.

Number of Errors: The O/F recorded an error when the edit called for was completed incorrectly. An error was defined as any event that would have to be "found" and "corrected" by another editing process.

Number of Missed Edits: The O/F recorded a missed edit when the respondent skipped a complete edit (partial edits were considered errors).

Derived Variables and Their Definitions

Five performance variables were derived through calculations using the basic variables as factors. Those variables and their definitions are:

Proportion of Edits Completed: The number of

correct edits divided by the total number of edits required by the task.

Accuracy: The number of correct edits minus the number of errors and missed edits. Accuracy is a performance cost measure. Inaccurate editing increases costs as the task has to be redone. The greater the inaccuracy, the less confidence can be given to the original work and the more care required in the re-editing.

Proportion of Accurate Edits: The accuracy coefficient (number of correct edits minus the number of errors and missed edits) divided by the number of edits required.

Time per Edit: Edit time divided by the number of correct edits. This measure can be used to project the time required for larger tasks.

Time per Accurate Edit: Edit time divided by the accuracy coefficient (number of correct edits minus the number of errors and missed edits).

Questionnaires

Two questionnaire instruments were used in this study: an intake questionnaire that queried respondents on their computer, application, and multi-screen experience and a usability questionnaire administered after every task performance. An open-ended interview based on four questions followed the testing session.

Intake Questionnaire

The intake questionnaire was a paper and pencil device composed of 6 sections: *Computer Expertise:* A four point scale ranging from zero (None) to 3 (Advanced). *Application Expertise:* A four point scale ranging from zero (None) to 3 (Advanced). *Block Expertise:* The average of the three Application Expertise measures divided into three roughly equal groups. Cut points were (1) less than 1.67, (2) equal to 1.67, and (3) 2.00 or greater.

Multi-Screen Displays

Corrections were made for anomalous cases (described in the Performance by Expertise section). *Time Spent on Text, Spreadsheet, and Slide Applications*: In hours per week from zero to ten. *Level of Application Use*: A three point scale from one (Personal) to three (Professional). *Multi-screen Experience*: A “yes” “no” item followed by the number of monitors used (1-6). *Current Job Situation*: Number of hours per week on the job and job title. Data were hand entered with double entry verification.

Usability Questionnaire

Each task performance was immediately followed by a usability questionnaire that was part of the time stamp file. The questionnaire used a 10-point slider to register the self-reported position between the poles of Strongly Disagree and Strongly Agree. As reported above, the items recorded the respondents’ self reports on their effectiveness, comfort, ease of learning, productivity, mistake recovery, task tracking, task focus, and ease of movement across sources. Data were recorded by the same procedures used in collecting the time data and directly entered into the data base.

Interviews

Respondents were asked to compare single and multi-screens, multi-screens with software and

without, task difficulty in different configurations, and to comment on the protocol itself. A summary of each response was recorded by the O/F and entered verbatim into the data file.

Analysis and Results: Performance Data

Statistical Design: Task Variables

In each of the 12 basic and derived variables, data were reorganized from their original task-specific entry into a task-type centered entry that distributed both order of performance and specific task in balanced numbers throughout the data. Each task-type data set had an equal number of the three tasks and three orders.

All respondents did all task-types in all screen configurations (a different version of the task type was used in each configuration). All performance variables are, therefore, “within subjects” or “repeated measures” variables. This design controlled for inter-subject differences. The two “within” variables in this design, then, were task types (*Tasks*) and configurations (*Screens*). The task types were *Slide*, *Spreadsheet*, and *Text*. The three configurations were single screen (*SS*) multi-screen (*MS*) and multi-screen with *Hydravision* (*HV*). The testing condition of a two-monitor or three-monitor station was a “between subjects” or “independent groups” factor in the design. Half of the respondents went through the protocol in each of these *conditions*. Figure 1

Figure 1

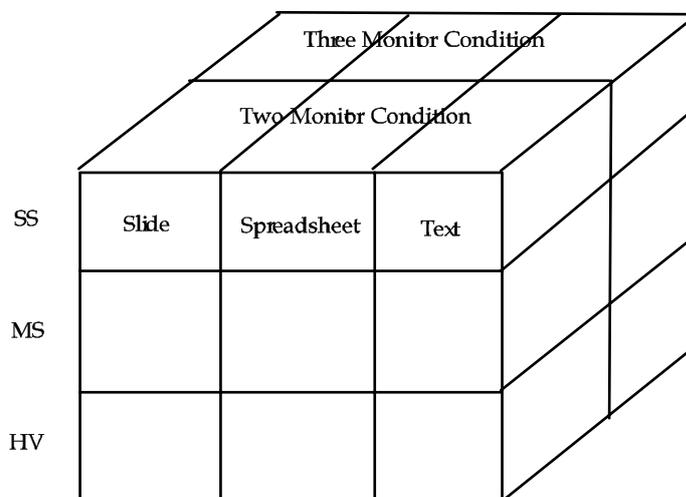


Figure 1: Statistical design for each performance variable, tasks by screens by conditions.

diagrams the design.

Each task variable was analyzed using this classic “Type III” design using the General Linear Model as formulated in SPSS. An Alpha of .05 was set as the decision criterion for significance.

Performance Results

The restricted space of this venue allows us to present the results for only four of the 12 variables—Edit Time, Number of Correct Edits, Accuracy, and Time per Edit. There is a great deal of redundancy in the

12 variable set; these four variables were selected because they show the greatest amount of unique information. Each report starts with tests of significance in the three-factor (tasks by screens by conditions), each of the two-factor (screens by tasks, screens by conditions, tasks by conditions) and main effects (screens, tasks, and conditions). A table of the means, standard deviations, and confidence intervals by cell is then presented followed by tables of means and standard deviations for each significant condition. The reader is reminded that significant interactions at one level confound the analysis of the next lower level (three-factor confounds two-factor

Table 2

Factors	F-Test	Degrees of Freedom	Significance
Screens by Tasks by Condition	2.732	4, 424	.029
Screens by Condition	.013	2, 212	.987
Tasks by Condition	.643	2, 212	.527
Screens by Task	9.915	4, 424	.000
Screens	21.254	2, 212	.000
Tasks	200.681	2, 212	.000
Conditions	.026	1, 106	.872

Table 2: Analysis of variance results for Edit Time.

confounds main effects). The results will be discussed only to the lowest non-confounded level.

Edit Time

The Edit Time variable measured the time lapsed between the first task marker event and the last task marker event. It can be considered as on-task time. Table 2 presents the analysis of variance results. The ANOVA indicates a three-way interaction between screens, tasks, and conditions. Two-way interaction effects were checked. The screens by task F-test

indicates an interaction effect. These findings demonstrate that tasks (slides, spreadsheet, and text) are not consistent over time. Table 3 presents the means, standard deviations, and confidence intervals for tasks and screens by condition for the edit time variable. Table 4 presents a comparison of the SS means with the MS means for the two-monitor conditions. Table 5 presents a comparison of the SS means with HV means for the two- and three-monitor conditions. Significant differences are noted in these latter tables.

Table 3

Monitors	Screens	Tasks	Mean	Standard Error	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Two Monitors	Single	Slide	275.444	6.165	263.221	287.668
		Spreadsheet	243.037	7.326	228.512	257.562
		Text	297.481	3.724	290.099	304.864

Multi-Screen Displays

Table 3 (Continued)

Two Monitors	Multi-screen	Slide	266.796	6.148	254.608	278.984
		Spreadsheet	213.056	7.721	197.747	228.364
		Text	279.759	6.467	266.937	292.581
	Hydravision	Slide	261.611	7.112	247.511	275.712
		Spreadsheet	217.648	7.361	203.054	232.243
		Text	280.352	5.006	270.426	290.277
Three Monitors	Single	Slide	272.833	6.165	260.610	285.057
		Spreadsheet	253.389	7.326	238.864	267.914
		Text	293.648	3.724	286.265	301.031
	Multi-screen	Slide	275.148	6.148	262.960	287.336
		Spreadsheet	209.296	7.721	193.988	224.605
		Text	279.074	6.467	266.252	291.896
	Hydravision	Slide	270.889	7.112	256.788	284.989
		Spreadsheet	204.389	7.361	189.794	218.983
		Text	285.389	5.006	275.463	295.315

Table 3: Conditions by screen configurations by tasks means, standard errors, and confidence intervals for Edit Time.

Table 4

	Task	Single Mean	Multi Mean	Difference	Percent Change	Significant
Two Monitors	Slide	275.444	266.796	8.648	3	No
	Spreadsheet	243.037	213.056	29.981	12	Yes
	Text	297.481	279.759	17.722	6	Yes
Three Monitors	Slide	272.833	275.148	-2.315	-1	No
	Spreadsheet	253.389	209.296	44.093	17	Yes
	Text	293.648	279.074	14.574	5	Yes

Table 4: Comparison of SS screen Edit Time means with MS Edit Time means, difference, percent of change, and significance for each monitor condition.

Table 5

	Task	Single Mean	Hydravision	Difference	Percent Change	Significant
Two Monitors	Slide	275.444	261.611	13.833	5	No
	Spreadsheet	243.037	217.648	25.389	10	Yes
	Text	297.481	280.352	17.129	6	Yes
Three Monitors	Slide	272.833	270.889	1.944	1	No
	Spreadsheet	253.389	204.389	49.00	20	Yes
	Text	293.648	285.389	8.259	3	Yes

Table 5: Comparison of SS screen Edit Time means with HV Edit Time means, difference, percent of change, and significance for each monitor condition.

The significant three-factor interaction requires analysis at the cell level. Eleven of the 12 comparisons between single screen and multi-screen configurations showed reductions in editing time. These differences were significant in eight of these comparisons. Only the slide task failed to show significant or consistent reductions with the three-monitor MS condition showing a reversal. The spreadsheet tasks showed the largest reductions of time across both monitor conditions. Slide and text editing was done more quickly in the two-monitor condition; spreadsheet editing was faster in the three-monitor condition. None of the differences were significant, although nearly so in the spreadsheet task.

Number of Edits

The “Number of Edits” variable gave a count of the number of edits correctly entered by the respondent. This measure is a typical measure of productivity (number of units produced). Table 6 presents the analysis of variance results.

The results in Table 6 indicate that the differences

among screen configurations changed over tasks. The lack of a significant three-factor interaction or any of the two-factor interactions involving the condition of two or three monitors signals that the configuration means and the task means remained consistent over the monitor conditions. Although no interaction involving condition was significant, Table 7 presents the cell means and the single screen multi-screen comparisons and Tables 8 and 9 present the comparisons of single screen to multi-screen and single screen to Hydravision to keep the data record consistent for the reader. Tables 10 through 12 present the break down of the significant screens by task interaction.

In Tables 10 through 12, multi-screen configurations show a consistent increase in the number of edits completed over single screen. This advantage is significant in five of the six comparisons. In the lone non-significant condition, the MS mean is .02 below the upper bound limit of the SS confidence interval and is matched with a significant difference in the HV multi-screen condition. It is likely that the multi-

Table 6

Factors	F-Test	Degrees of Freedom	Significance
Screens by Tasks by Condition	1.330	4, 424	.258
Screens by Condition	.192	2, 212	.826
Tasks by Condition	.390	2, 212	.678
Screens by Task	4.796	4, 424	.001
Screens	25.541	2, 212	.000
Tasks	585.306	2, 212	.000
Conditions	.287	1, 106	.594

Table 6: Analysis of variance results for Number of Edits.

Table 7

Monitors	Screens	Tasks	Mean	Standard Error	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Two Monitors	Single	Slide	10.741	.446	9.856	11.626
		Spreadsheet	17.148	.395	16.365	17.932
		Text	11.389	.464	10.469	12.309

Multi-Screen Displays

Table 7 (Continued)

Two Monitors	Multi-screen	Slide	11.852	.492	10.877	12.827
		Spreadsheet	17.630	.285	17.064	18.195
		Text	13.500	.442	12.623	14.377
	Hydravision	Slide	11.741	.435	10.878	12.603
		Spreadsheet	17.722	.353	17.022	18.422
		Text	14.037	.384	13.277	14.798
Three Monitors	Single	Slide	11.037	.446	10.152	11.922
		Spreadsheet	16.852	.395	16.068	17.635
		Text	11.796	.464	10.876	12.717
	Multi-screen	Slide	11.130	.492	10.154	12.105
		Spreadsheet	18.278	.285	17.712	18.843
		Text	13.852	.442	12.975	14.729
	Hydravision	Slide	12.259	.435	11.397	13.122
		Spreadsheet	17.944	.353	17.244	18.644
		Text	14.352	.384	13.591	15.112

Table 7: Conditions by screen configurations by tasks means and standard errors for Number of Edits.

Table 8

	Task	Single Mean	Multi Mean	Difference	Percent Change
Two Monitors	Slide	10.741	11.852	1.111	10
	Spreadsheet	17.148	17.630	0.482	2
	Text	11.389	13.500	2.111	18
Three Monitors	Slide	11.037	11.130	0.093	1
	Spreadsheet	16.852	18.278	1.426	8
	Text	11.796	13.852	2.056	17

Table 8: Comparison of SS screen Number of Edits means with MS Number of Edits means, difference, percent of change for each monitor condition.

Table 9

	Task	Single Mean	Hydravision	Difference	Percent Change
Two Monitors	Slide	10.741	11.741	1.00	9
	Spreadsheet	17.148	17.722	0.574	3
	Text	11.389	14.037	2.648	23
Three Monitors	Slide	11.037	12.259	1.222	11
	Spreadsheet	16.852	17.944	1.092	6
	Text	11.796	14.352	2.556	21

Table 9: Comparison of SS screen Number of Edits means with HV Number of Edits means, difference, percent of change for each monitor condition.

Table 10

Configuration	Tasks	Mean	Standard Error	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Single	Slide	10.889	.316	10.263	11.515
	Spreadsheet	17.000	.279	16.446	17.554
	Text	11.593	.328	10.942	12.243
Multi-screen	Slide	11.491	.348	10.801	12.180
	Spreadsheet	17.954	.202	17.554	18.353
	Text	13.676	.313	13.056	14.296
Hydravision	Slide	12.000	.308	11.390	12.610
	Spreadsheet	17.833	.250	17.338	18.328
	Text	14.194	.271	13.657	14.732

Table 10: Screen configurations by tasks means, standard errors, and confidence intervals for Number of Edits.

Table 11

Task	Single Mean	Multi-screen	Difference	Percent Change	Significance
Slide	10.889	11.491	0.602	6	No ($\alpha = .15$)
Spreadsheet	17.00	17.954	0.954	6	Yes
Text	11.593	13.676	2.083	18	Yes

Table 11: Comparison of SS screen Number of Edits means with MS Number of Edits means, difference, percent of change, and significance.

Table 12

Task	Single Mean	Hydravision	Difference	Percent Change	Significance
Slide	10.889	12	1.111	10	Yes
Spreadsheet	17.00	17.833	0.833	5	Yes
Text	11.593	14.194	2.601	22	Yes

Table 12: Comparison of SS screen Number of Edits means with HV Number of Edits means, difference, percent of change, and significance.

screen advantage in this case is being masked by sample conditions. In looking at screen by task effects, the limited experience of slide editing minimizes the overall effect.

Accuracy

Accuracy is a constructed variable based on the

number of completed edits minus the number of error and the number of misses. The rationale for this measure is that missed work and incorrect work requires more time and money to correct than simple unfinished work. While an analysis of edits and errors indicated an advantage for multi-screen configurations, it is possible that the location of these

Multi-Screen Displays

measures may result in a different outcome. That possibility suggests that should the same advantage appear in Accuracy, it is a confirmation rather than a replication. Table 13 presents the analysis of variance results.

The three-factor interaction and the two-factor interactions involving the number of monitors were not significant, but the two-factor screens by task interaction was. Table 14 presents the means, standard errors, and confidence intervals for the cell values; Table 15 presents a comparison of SS and MS means; Table 16 presents a comparison of SS and HV means, all for the data record.

Because the three-factor interaction was not significant and the two-factor screens by task interaction was, the data are best analyzed by collapsing monitor conditions and looking at the screens means by task. Table 17 presents that

information. Inspection of Table 17 shows that multi-screen configurations resulted in higher accuracy scores that were significantly higher in all but the SS to MS slide task comparison ($\alpha = .125$). In addition, the HV text scores were significantly higher than the MS text score, although the other two comparisons were not significant and their direction mixed.

Time per Completed Edit

Time per Completed Edit is the editing time divided by the number of completed edits. It represents the flow of work over time and can be used to craft estimates of work completion over jobs of varying length. Table 18 presents the analysis of variance results for Time per Completed Edit. None of the multi-factor interactions involving Condition were significant. The two-factor Screens by Tasks interaction was significant, pointing to a differential effect of screen configurations across tasks. Tables

Table 13

Factors	F-Test	Degrees of Freedom	Significance
Screens by Tasks by Condition	2.065	4, 424	.085
Screens by Condition	.026	2, 212	.974
Tasks by Condition	3.028	2, 212	.697
Screens by Task	3.850	4, 424	.004
Screens	22.610	2, 212	.000
Tasks	357.961	2, 212	.000
Conditions	.410	1, 106	.523

Table 13: Analysis of variance results for Accuracy.

Table 14

Monitors	Screens	Tasks	Mean	Standard Error	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Two Monitors	Single	Slide	10.130	.483	9.173	11.087
		Spreadsheet	16.315	.528	15.269	17.361
		Text	10.500	.502	9.506	11.494
	Multi-screen	Slide	11.315	.514	10.296	12.333
		Spreadsheet	16.630	.498	15.643	17.617
		Text	12.796	.497	11.810	13.782

Table 14 (Continued)

Two Monitors	Hydravision	Slide	11.222	.479	10.199	12.097
		Spreadsheet	16.926	.511	15.913	17.939
		Text	13.778	.430	12.925	14.631
Three Monitors	Single	Slide	10.481	.483	9.525	11.438
		Spreadsheet	15.815	.528	14.769	16.861
		Text	11.259	.502	10.265	12.254
	Multi-screen	Slide	10.574	.514	9.555	11.593
		Spreadsheet	17.815	.498	16.828	18.802
		Text	13.222	.497	12.236	14.208
	Hydravision	Slide	11.704	.479	10.754	12.653
		Spreadsheet	17.333	.511	16.321	18.346
		Text	13.796	.430	12.943	14.650

Table 14: Conditions by screens by tasks means, standard errors, and confidence intervals for Accuracy.

Table 15

	Task	Single Mean	Multi Mean	Difference	Percent Change
Two Monitors	Slide	10.130	11.315	1.185	12
	Spreadsheet	16.315	16.630	0.315	2
	Text	10.500	12.796	2.296	22
Three Monitors	Slide	10.481	10.574	0.093	1
	Spreadsheet	15.815	17.815	2.000	13
	Text	11.259	13.222	1.963	17

Table 15: Comparison of SS screen Accuracy means with MS Accuracy means, difference, and percent of change.

Table 16

	Task	Single Mean	Hydravision	Difference	Percent Change
Two Monitors	Slide	10.130	11.222	1.092	11
	Spreadsheet	16.315	16.926	0.611	4
	Text	10.500	13.778	3.278	31
Three Monitors	Slide	10.481	11.704	1.223	12
	Spreadsheet	15.815	17.333	1.518	10
	Text	11.259	13.796	2.537	22

Table 16: Comparison of SS screen Accuracy means with HV Accuracy means, difference, and percent of change.

Table 17

Configuration	Tasks	Mean	Standard Error	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Single	Slide	10.306	.341	9.629	10.982
	Spreadsheet	16.065	.373	15.325	16.805
	Text	10.880	.355	10.177	11.583
Multi-screen	Slide	10.944	.363	10.224	11.665
	Spreadsheet	17.222	.352	16.524	17.920
	Text	13.009	.352	12.312	13.707
Hydravison	Slide	11.491	.328	10.841	12.141
	Spreadsheet	17.130	.361	16.413	17.846
	Text	13.787	.304	13.184	14.390

Table 17: Means, standard errors, and confidence intervals for SS, MS, and HV configurations by tasks over Accuracy.

19 through 21 provide the cell means comparisons that contribute to the data record. Table 22 presents the screen configuration means for each task in order to investigate the significant Screens by Task interaction.

The data in Table 22 shows a consistent advantage for multi-screen configurations across all tasks in terms of shorter average time per edit. These differences are significant for all but the SS to MS comparison for the slide task ($\alpha = .37$). There are no significant differences between MS and HV means, although

the pattern of HV being more effective in slide and text tasks is repeated. In terms of absolute values, multi-screen configurations (MS and HV combined) result in a savings of 2.2 seconds per slide edit, 3.2 seconds per spreadsheet edit and 6.7 seconds per text edit.

Analysis and Results: Usability Data

Analysis

Data from the usability questionnaires that were collected at the end of every task performance

Table 18

Factors	F-Test	Degrees of Freedom	Significance
Screens by Tasks by Condition	1.322	4, 424	.261
Screens by Condition	.701	2, 212	.497
Tasks by Condition	.488	2, 212	.615
Screens by Task	5.742	4, 424	.000
Screens	23.452	2, 212	.000
Tasks	282.492	2, 212	.000
Conditions	.006	1, 106	.940

Table 18: Means, standard errors, and confidence intervals for SS, MS, and HV configurations by tasks over Time per Completed Edit.

Table 19

Monitors	Screens	Tasks	Mean	Standard Error	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Two Monitors	Single	Slide	28.167	1.644	24.908	31.426
		Spreadsheet	15.120	.886	13.363	16.878
		Text	28.739	1.523	25.719	31.759
	Multi-screen	Slide	25.299	1.742	21.846	28.752
		Spreadsheet	12.525	.680	11.177	13.873
		Text	22.479	1.352	19.799	25.158
	Hydravision	Slide	25.223	1.533	22.183	28.262
		Spreadsheet	12.911	.777	11.370	14.453
		Text	21.371	.926	19.535	23.207
Three Monitors	Single	Slide	28.081	1.644	24.823	31.340
		Spreadsheet	16.023	.886	14.265	17.780
		Text	28.360	1.523	25.340	31.380
	Multi-screen	Slide	28.667	1.742	25.214	32.119
		Spreadsheet	11.913	.680	10.564	13.261
		Text	22.425	1.352	19.745	25.105
	Hydravision	Slide	24.223	1.533	21.183	27.262
		Spreadsheet	12.044	.777	10.502	13.585
		Text	20.925	.926	19.089	22.761

Table 19: Conditions by screen configurations by tasks means, standard errors, and confidence intervals for Time per Completed Edit.

Table 20

	Task	Single Mean	Multi Mean	Difference	Percent Change
Two Monitors	Slide	28.167	25.299	2.868	10
	Spreadsheet	15.120	12.525	2.595	17
	Text	28.739	22.479	6.26	22
Three Monitors	Slide	28.081	28.667	-0.586	-2
	Spreadsheet	16.023	11.913	4.11	26
	Text	28.360	22.425	5.935	21

Table 20: Comparison of SS screen Time per Completed Edit means with MS Time per Completed Edit means, difference, and percent of change.

Table 21

	Task	Single Mean	Hydravision	Difference	Percent Change
Two Monitors	Slide	28.167	25.223	2.944	10
	Spreadsheet	15.120	12.911	2.209	15
	Text	28.739	21.371	7.368	26

Multi-Screen Displays

Table 21 (Continued)

Three Monitors	Slide	28.081	24.223	3.858	14
	Spreadsheet	16.023	12.044	3.979	25
	Text	28.360	20.925	7.435	26

Table 21: Comparison of SS screen Time per Completed Edit means with HV Time per Completed Edit means, difference, and percent of change.

Table 22

Configuration	Tasks	Mean	Standard Error	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Single	Slide	28.124	1.162	25.820	30.428
	Spreadsheet	15.572	.627	14.329	16.814
	Text	28.549	1.077	26.414	30.685
Multi-screen	Slide	26.983	1.232	24.541	29.425
	Spreadsheet	12.219	.481	11.266	13.172
	Text	22.452	.956	20.557	24.347
Hydravison	Slide	24.723	1.084	22.573	26.872
	Spreadsheet	12.478	.550	11.388	13.567
	Text	21.148	.655	19.850	22.446

Table 22: Time per Completed Edit means, standard errors, and confidence intervals for each screen configuration by task.

(9 questionnaires per respondent) were analyzed in a tasks by screens repeated measures design that examined differences across tasks and screens for each of effectiveness, comfort, ease of learning, productivity, mistake recovery, task tracking, task focus, and ease of movement across sources.

In order to determine if respondent perceptions of usability differed across screens and task types, a comparison of the three screen configurations and three task types was conducted separately for each of the eight items. Figure 2 presents the design as replicated across each item. This design allows the analysis of the relationship between screen configuration and task on each of the respondents' judgments of usability. Based on our initial suppositions, it was hypothesized that multi-screen configurations would score higher on each item than the single screen. Two monitor and three monitor

multi-screen configurations were used to further strengthen the potential understanding of multi-screen effects. The comparison of multi-screens with and without screen management software was considered exploratory and no hypotheses were developed.

Results

As hypothesized, multi-screen configurations scored significantly higher in usability than the single screen on every measure in every task. HV means were generally not significantly different from MS means on all measures but varied in direction of difference across tasks. Table 23 presents the means for each item across each screen configuration.

Differences in items showed the effect of screen configurations. In single screen, task tracking was significantly lower than any other item and ease of learning was significantly higher than any other. In

Figure 2

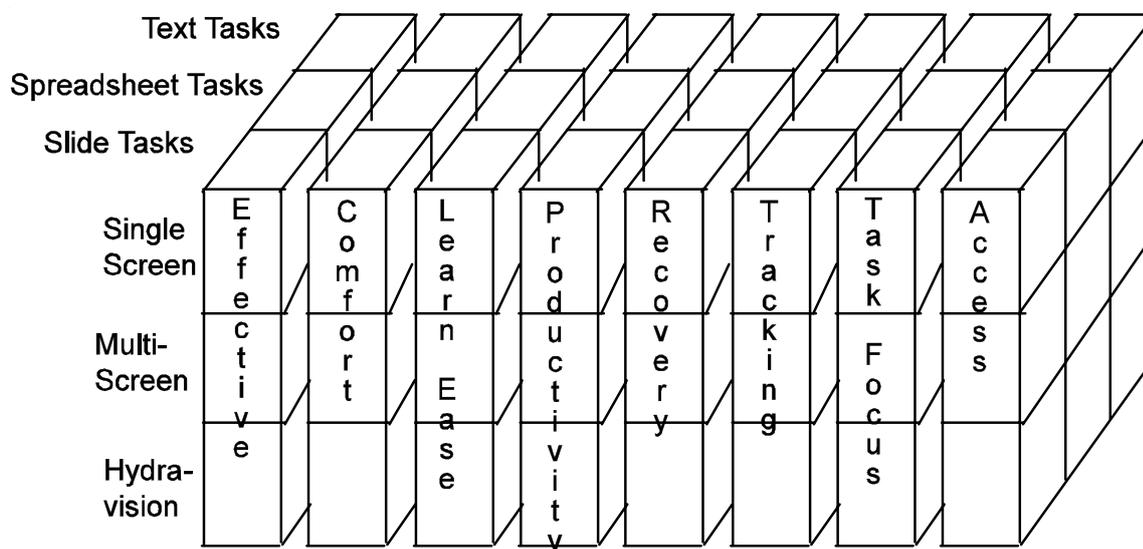


Figure 2: Analysis of Variance design for screens by task type for each item.

multi-screen, task tracking was also significantly lower than any other item, while accessibility was the highest, significantly higher than all but ease of learning. Hydravision means showed task tracking as significantly lower than all other items and accessibility as highest. Accessibility was significantly higher than mistake recovery, productivity, and comfort as well as task tracking.

Table 23 can also be used to calculate the changes in respondent judgments concerning screen configuration usability by using the single screen score and the average of the two multi-screen scores. In this analysis, multi-screens are seen as 29 percent more effective, 24 percent more comfortable, 17 percent easier to learn, 32 percent quicker to productivity, 19 percent easier for mistake recovery, 45 percent easier to track tasks, 28 percent better for task focus, and 38 percent easier for moving among sources.

Discussion: Performance

This section first considers the central question of the effectiveness of multiple screens, briefly looks at the differences among tasks, the differences between conditions, then considers the interaction between screens and tasks, and finally examines the

circumstances under which particular screen configurations should be adopted.

Screens

The effect of screen configurations is quite clear. Respondents were able to get on task quicker, do the work faster, and get more of the work done with fewer errors in multi-screen configurations than with a single screen. The gains are solid: 6 percent quicker to task, 7 percent faster on task, 10 percent more production, 16 percent faster in production, 33 percent fewer errors, and 18 percent faster in errorless production. Equally impressive is that these gains were achieved by turning on an extra monitor or two and providing five minutes of training.

The value added by the screen management tool, Hydravision is subtle. It did not reach significance, but it was consistent and showed its greatest strength in controlling errors. Very little of the features of this software were used in this study, because of the nature of the tasks and measurements involved.

Tasks

Without question, the most difficult task for most

Multi-Screen Displays

Table 23

Item	Screens	Means	Standard Error	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Effective	Single	6.419	.174	6.074	6.763
	Multi-screen	8.309	.147	8.018	8.600
	Hydravision	8.203	.156	7.894	8.513
Comfortable	Single	6.549	.177	6.198	6.900
	Multi-screen	8.216	.149	7.921	8.511
	Hydravision	8.008	.168	7.676	8.340
Learning Ease	Single	7.182	.166	6.852	7.511
	Multi-screen	8.385	.130	8.126	8.643
	Hydravision	8.388	.139	8.112	8.663
Productivity	Single	6.230	.182	5.869	6.591
	Multi-screen	8.247	.143	7.964	8.530
	Hydravision	8.157	.171	7.818	8.495
Mistake Recovery	Single	6.813	.163	6.490	7.136
	Multi-screen	8.096	.134	7.831	8.361
	Hydravision	8.081	.152	7.779	8.382
Task Tracking	Single	5.311	.218	4.878	5.743
	Multi-screen	7.724	.202	7.323	8.124
	Hydravision	7.717	.221	7.279	8.156
Task Focus	Single	6.432	.195	6.046	6.818
	Multi-screen	8.211	.147	7.920	8.502
	Hydravision	8.299	.145	8.012	8.587
Accessibility of Sources	Single	6.193	.203	5.791	6.594
	Multi-screen	8.612	.129	8.357	8.868
	Hydravision	8.481	.153	8.178	8.783

Table 23: Means, standard errors, and confidence intervals for Usability items by screens.

respondents was the slide editing task. Respondents reported the least experience with the application (mean of 1.25 on a scale of 0-3). These self-reports were confirmed in actual observations. A common failing was the inability to recognize substantial content differences among slides that had common backgrounds. Further, interview responses indicated that respondents were frustrated by the awkwardness

of the application's editing protocols. When the slide task was removed from analysis, the efficiencies of time to task and time through task rose from 6 and 7 percent to 9 and 10 percent respectively.

The spreadsheet task for its part showed the shortest times to completion. Respondents reported slightly more experience with the spreadsheet application

($M = 1.40$) than with the slide application. Observational notes show that respondents benefited from the spreadsheet application's ease of editing. When errors were made, they were generally entries in the wrong cell. Most commonly an entire row of entries were shifted up or down, accounting for the relatively large number of total errors in the individual edits.

The text task showed the fewest errors but also the lowest proportion of completed edits. Respondents indicated substantial experience with the application ($M = 2.22$), but few had experience with editing across screens (most work from paper corrections to a screen). Observations indicate that the visual task of locating place from one screen to another was the key difficulty.

Conditions

Conditions represent whether a respondent completed the study using two monitors or three monitors. Interestingly, the study was designed to "naturally" fit a three-monitor display, but the three-monitor condition consistently showed no advantage over the two-monitor condition. Anecdotally, multi-screen users consider the three-monitor display to be optimum, but it did not show here. Observations and comments from interviews suggest that the size of the monitor interacts with the optimal number of screens. Drawing on the comments of one respondent, a highly experienced graphics editor, the 18-inch monitors were too large for a three screen display as one could not keep the entire display within the field of vision. It may be very useful to advance this study with one that uses a three 15-inch monitor configuration.

Screens by Task

The lesson learned in the screen by task interaction is that there appears to be an optimum level of experience with a task that maximizes the immediate

effect of the adoption of multi-screens. Too little as in the slide task, and the inexperience is an overburden on the multi-screen effect. Too much, as in the text task, and the productive methods of single screen editing prove a worthier competitor to reduce the size of the effect. Both of these conditions are functions of the testing protocol. Respondents given the regular experience of editing slide presentations would eliminate many of their difficulties, and respondents given the regular experience in multi-screen editing would return the competition to a level field.

The greatest proportion of our respondents (95 %) work only in single screen whether at home, at school, or in the office. As multi-screens were more effective than single screen across all tasks on measures of both time and production, it is clear that there is little learning curve in the adoption of multi-screen configurations. The short run benefits of converting to a multi-screen set up should be immediate and the long term gains substantial.

Performance Considerations for Adoption of Multi-screens

This study was designed to simulate office tasks that involve the application of multiple sources of information to a final product. It was, therefore, specifically designed to be responsive to the characteristics of multi-screen displays. The evidence it generated and the recommendations provided here presume similar circumstances—work that involves the integration of multiple sources. In those circumstances, the evidence speaks clearly and convincingly that multi-screen configurations are preferable and make good economic sense.

But not all work involves multiple sources of information. The question can be raised as to what proportion needs to be multi-sourced to justify the expense of adding that additional display port and monitor. The simplest way to answer that question is to extrapolate from the time per edit measure. The

evidence suggests a 16 percent savings in time for the same level of production. Over a year's time, one would save \$3,840 in labor costs at a \$12 per hour clerical wage. Costs for upgrading computers vary by platform, region, and industry. Done at the authors' location with PCs, the upgrade would cost approximately \$800 (adding a \$75 PCI display card, a \$600 LCD monitor, and the installation labor).

The break even point is approximately 21 percent of the work. If more than 21 percent of the work involves the use of multiple sources of information, upgrading to multiple screens is cost effective. The reader is also reminded that the break even point will be lower (less than 20%) with a less experienced (rather than diversely experienced) work force and even lower (less than 17%) with a highly experienced work force.

Discussion: Usability

Usability results showed the consistency of a mantra: Multi-screens either with or without management software are reported as significantly more usable than single screens on measures of effectiveness, comfort, learning ease, time to productivity, mistake recovery, task tracking, task focus, and ease of source movement. Slide tasks were considered the most difficult; spreadsheet tasks the easiest. Further, the least proficient respondents moved immediately to the level of the most proficient in their evaluations. They were not intimidated by the introduction of multi-screen displays. The open-ended interview data confirmed the positive response to multi-monitor displays. Those data showed overwhelmingly more positive comments for multi-screen and for Hydravision than for single screen and indicated that both multi-screen and Hydravision would be more useable and more likely associated with positive affect. Unlike many technological improvements, the adoption of multi-screen configurations should be a positive experience for the workforce and highly preferred over single screen arrangements. It not only increases productivity; the work is also judged as easier to do.

Summary and Conclusions

This study compared single screen computer display configurations with multi-screen displays without screen management software and with multi-screen displays with screen management software—ATI's Hydravision. The comparisons were made using three types of ordinary office editing tasks in slide, spreadsheet, and text applications.

Multi-screens fared significantly better than single screen on time and number performance measures. Respondents got on task quicker, did the work faster, and got more of the work done with fewer errors in multi-screen configurations than with a single screen. They were 6 percent quicker to task, 7 percent faster on task, generated 10 percent more production, were 16 percent faster in production, had 33 percent fewer errors, and were 18 percent faster in errorless production. These gains are achieved by turning on a monitor and five minutes of training. Nonetheless, some care must be taken in extrapolating these gains over three 5-minute tasks to time saved and production increases achieved over a 40 hour work week. Such gains depend on the nature of the work and the amount of time spent on task and on multi-screen tasks. There is a utility in replicating this study using the tasks integrated into a continuous work period rather than as separate episodes as done here.

Respondents considered multi-screen configurations significantly more useful than single screen on every usability measure. Multi-screens were seen as 29 percent more effective for tasks, 24 percent more comfortable to use in tasks, 17 percent easier to learn, 32 percent faster to productive work, 19 percent easier for recovery from mistakes, 45 percent easier for task tracking, 28 percent easier in task focus, and 38 percent easier to move around sources of information. These increases were immediate post-test gains. As always, long-term gains may be different.

There were no significant differences between two-

monitor and three-monitor multi-screen configurations. There was some evidence, however, of a relationship between optimum monitor size and the optimum number of monitors. The gains provided by an additional monitor in a three-monitor array can apparently be offset if the monitors are too large, forcing the user to physically track across the screens with head movement. It is recommended that a three-monitor array with 15 to 17-inch monitors be tested. Testing should also investigate portrait and landscape orientations within the array.

Given the overwhelming consistency of both the performance and usability measures, multiple monitor configurations are recommended for use in any situation where multiple screens of information are an ordinary part of the work. There will be measurable gains in productivity, and the work will be judged as easier to do. In addition, because the gains are strong, multiple monitors are also recommended as cost effective where multi-screen tasks represent as little as 15 percent of the work for the highly competent, 17 percent for entry level competence, and 21 percent for the general work force.

The contemporary status of computer displays is poised on a moment of convergence as operating systems can now handle multiple monitors with some routine; display boards with multiple ports are readily available and inexpensive; and LCD monitors with reduced foot print, space, and energy requirements, as well as cost are now becoming the standard. This study demonstrates that multiple monitor arrays should also be a standard of the workplace.

Notes

This research was initiated by Don Lindsay, Chief Investigator, Lindsay Research & Consulting, Inc. and sponsored by ATI Technologies Inc. in collaboration with Neil Rennert, Marketing Research Manager, and Richard Mulcahy, Senior Product Marketing Manager, and by NEC/Mitsubishi in collaboration

with Christopher Connery, Director of Marketing. James Anderson was the Principal Investigator.

1. Hydravision, ATI's screen management software, was used, hence the HV acronym.

References

Barua, A., Kriebel, C. & Mukhopadhyay, T. (1991). *Information Technology and Business Value: An Analytic and Empirical Investigation*, Austin, TX: University of Texas Working Paper, (May).

Binder, C. (2001). Measurement: A few important ideas. *International Society for Performance Improvement. Performance Improvement Journal*. 40(3), 20-28.

Bohannon, W.K. (2003). Double vision. *Emedia Magazine*, 16(5), 22-28.

Brown, R.M., & Ruf, B. (1989). Applying software design principles to accounting software: A direct manipulation approach. *Journal of Information Systems*, 4(1), 41-55.

Brynjolfsson, E., & Yang, S. (1996). Information technology and productivity: A review of the literature. *Advances in Computers*, 43, 179-214.

Davis, F.D. (1989). Perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and user acceptance of information technology. *MIS Quarterly*, 13(3), 319-340.

Delfino, E. (1993). Windows and multitasking. *Database Magazine*, 16(6), 87-91.

Dyson, P. (2002). New technology sparks innovation in displays. *Seybold Report Analyzing Publishing Technologies*, 2(12), 11-14.

Gerlach, J.H., & Kuo, F. (1991). Understanding human-computer interaction for information systems

design. *MIS Quarterly*, 15(4), 527-549.

Grudin, J. (2003). *Primary tasks and peripheral awareness: A field study of multiple monitor use*. Redman, WA: Microsoft Research.

Jorgenson, D.W., & Stiroh, K.J. (1999). Information technology and growth. *American Economic Review*, 89(2), 109-116.

Lewis, J.R. (1995). IBM computer usability satisfaction questionnaires: Psychometric evaluation and instructions for use. *International Journal of Human-Computer Interaction*, 7(1), 57-58.

Lindsley, O.R. (1997). Performance is easy to monitor and hard to measure. In Kaufman, R., Thiagarajan, S., & MacGillis, P. (Eds.), *The Guidebook for Performance Improvement: Working with Individuals and Organizations* (pp. 519-559). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer.

Randall, N. (1999). Multiple monitors. *PC Magazine*, 18(16), 189.

St. John, M., Harris, W. C., & Osga, G. (1997). Designing for multi-tasking environments: Multiple monitors vs. multiple windows. *Proceedings of the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society* (pp. 1313-1317). Santa Monica, CA: The Society.

Sherry, L., & Wilson, B. (1996). Supporting human performance across disciplines: A converging of roles and tools. *Performance Improvement Quarterly*, 9(4), 19-36.

Stolovich H.D., & Keeps, E.J. (1992). What is human performance technology? In H.D. Stolovich and E.J. Keeps (Eds.) *Handbook of Human Performance Technology* (pp. 3-13). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Vellotti, J.P. (2001). XP. *PC Magazine*, 20(9), 120.

Book Review

Rocky Mountain Communication Review
Volume 2:1, Summer, 2004
Pages 54-60

Witte, K., Meyer, G., & Martell, D. (2001). Effective health risk messages: A step-by-step guide. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

An Essential Guide for Sound Health Communication Campaign Development

Lindsey Polonec

Sound development and implementation of health risk messages are critical to the success of communication campaigns aimed at modifying adverse health behaviors. With years of theoretically rich literature focusing on risky behaviors and related negative health outcomes, Kim Witte, Gary Meyer, and Dennis Martell successfully bridge the gap between previous academic research and future health campaign efforts in their text *Effective Health Risk Messages: A Step-by-Step Guide* (2001). Designed to incorporate theory into a practical, hands-on framework for composing, executing, and evaluating a successful health risk campaign, Witte et al. have developed a tool that should be readily available for reference in the library of academics, practitioners, and students alike.

For use in a classroom setting and/or in a more professional environment including practitioner/client counsel, Witte, Meyer, and Martell's text can accommodate a range of experiences and professions as reflected in the diversity of the authors' occupations and professional interests, even while under the common rubric of health communication. Witte is a professor in the Department of Communication at Michigan State University with a research interest in effective health risk message design with respect to diverse cultures, Meyer is an assistant professor in the Department of Communication Studies at Marquette University focusing on health promotion and disease prevention, and Martell is a health educator and current Director of the Center for Sexual Health Promotion at Michigan State University. The combination of such highly trained professionals produces a level of proficiency that greatly augments the credibility of the text.

As evidenced in the table of contents, the authors take care to structure their ten-chapter text in an efficient manner to easily orient newcomers to the craft of health risk message design. Adopting somewhat of a funneled macro to micro approach, the authors first present the reader with a basic foundation for understanding health risk messages and the role of theory in chapter one. The text then gradually moves into a discussion of various theoretical perspectives focusing on fear appeal theories emphasizing the Extended Parallel Process Model. Beginning with a dialogue on effective formative research techniques, a step-by-step guide to develop, implement, and evaluate an effective health risk campaign serves as the content for the final chapters of the text. In order to cater to a diverse audience, the authors have developed a ten-page appendix that provides a more detailed perspective on current fear appeal research, which supplements the content of the chapters. The placement of these documents in the appendix strengthens the text by providing a valuable resource at the conclusion, while

Lindsey Polonec is a masters candidate in the College of Communications at the Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA 16870

An Essential Guide

not disrupting the flow of information presented in the chapters. Chapter ten involves a series of twenty-seven worksheets designed for student or professional client use and to reinforce the material presented throughout the guidebook. Complete with various public service announcements containing effective health risk messages, the worksheets not only allow for enjoyable reading, but simultaneously aid in applying the knowledge learned.

The first chapter of the text adopts a broad framework with a basic discussion of health risk messages, communication designed to promote behavior change and a healthy status, the notion of theory which provides an explanation for trends and patterns, and the components of a fear appeal, persuasive messages in which fear is induced in order to achieve a recommended behavior modification. While this chapter provides a clear foundation with engaging illustrations off which to base the discussion, the authors are a bit too focused on fear appeals in general. For instance, the placement of the fear appeal discussion directly following the opening section on health risk messages implies that all health messages are composed of a fear appeal. At the outset of the text, Witte et al. writes, “the fear appeal, commonly known as the ‘scare tactic,’ is the most common persuasive message used in health campaigns” (p. 2). While it is briefly acknowledged that fear appeals are not the only type of persuasive health message utilized in campaigns, the authors miss the opportunity to supplement this statement with a brief discussion of other spheres of social influence. For instance, when discussing fear appeals in advertisements, the authors forgo an ideal opportunity to transition into how such messages are cognitively and affectively processed. Moreover, the notion of establishing and increasing one’s attitude accessibility in order for the message to elicit attention and undergo central processing is absent from the discussion. Unfortunately, the novice student and/or practitioner inadvertently suffers from the rather narrow focus adopted by the authors. While the authors should be commended for supplementing the text with an appendix outlining suggested readings for those that are interested in further pursuit of fear appeal research, the authors neglect to even briefly reference the voluminous current fear appeal literature until the third chapter. The authors also delay addressing the widespread controversy over the use and effectiveness of fear appeals in campaign development until the third chapter as well. These discussions would have been better served in the first chapter when fear appeals were initially introduced to the reader.

Providing an overview of three primary fear appeal theories, the second chapter addresses key health risk message concepts that are integrated into the theories of the Fear-as-Acquired Drive Model, the Parallel Process Model, and the Protection Motivation Theory. One prominent strength of this chapter is the manner in which the authors perpetuate their original framework by examining fear appeal theories from their inception and providing the reader with a foundation. Yet, while the authors write with clarity and engagement, they fail to incorporate various social influence elements that would enhance the effectiveness of the chapter and provide a broader scope for the reader. For instance, the Parallel Process Model discussion opens with a subtle acknowledgment that messages are processed both cognitively and affectively. While the authors should be commended for asserting this reality, the language is much too implicit and neglects to directly acknowledge cognitive and affective processes as founding principles of social influence that guides the role of theoretical frameworks. Consequently, this affirmation should be introduced to the reader at the very outset of the text as previously suggested and reinforced throughout its duration. Despite this prominent shortcoming, the chapter does close with the introduction of four concepts: severity of threat, susceptibility of threat, response efficacy, and self-efficacy. This discussion is presented in a concise and clear manner that effectively bases future textual content.

Strategically extending the previous discourse on fear appeal theories, chapter three is dedicated to synthesizing

the theoretical perspectives initiated at the forefront of the text into a discussion of the Extended Parallel Process Model (EPPM). Developed by Witte, the EPPM is presented in a clear fashion that successfully orients the reader with the basic underpinnings of the theory. Furthermore, the diagram outlining the processes in EPPM provides an effective visual that nicely complements the context of the chapter. Another superb attribute is the note at the conclusion of the chapter referencing further EPPM literature. While this provides an immediate resource that is easily accessible for the reader, the section could benefit from more references on this particular theory beyond one citation. On a similar note, the authors fail to extend a pertinent discussion of the EPPM in another section of the chapter as well. Whereas the authors recognize the potential development of psychological defense strategies following the delivery of a rather threat intensive fear appeal to a recipient that maintains a low perceived self-efficacy, the discussion falls a bit short. Witte et al. state, “when reactance occurs, individuals often say the risk message or the source of the risk message is trying to manipulate them” (p. 26).

Given this statement, the authors create a perfect stepping-stone on which to base a needed discussion of reactance theories. Yet, this discussion is not provided. Nonetheless, it would behoove the text for the authors to insert a discussion of how defensive processing can result from perceiving a message as a threat to one’s freedom. Just as it is critical to examine methods of persuasion, it is also imperative to discuss and be aware of counterpersuasive efforts of resistance and reactance. Along these same lines, it might be appropriate to discuss the inoculation construct, which is another theory that concentrates on resistance to attitude change. In this construct, low perceived self-efficacy coupled with an attack on one’s belief system challenges the recipient’s existing attitudes, thus producing a threat. The desire to protect one’s attitudes via refutational preemption elicits resistance to the intended message. Addition of this material would greatly enrich the authors’ existing discussion of the EPPM by connecting it to other common theoretical perspectives utilized within the health communication realm .

The fourth chapter serves as the final review of new theoretical perspectives from the social influence realm. More specifically, this chapter discusses Janz and Becker’s Health Belief Model, Fishbein and Ajzen’s Theory of Reasoned Action, Albert Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory, Petty and Cacioppo’s Elaboration Likelihood Model, and Prochaska’s Stages of Change Model. This chapter serves a pivotal role in that it provides the reader with somewhat of a supplemental literature review in accordance with previously mentioned theories and concepts. The opening lines of the chapter read, “Many other theoretical approaches to health behavior change exist. .

The discussion on the Health Belief Model and the Theory of Reasoned Action are especially effective not only in terms of clarity and content, but because both models contain a succinct, yet vital, review of their participation in previous health campaign initiatives. Such references augment not only the credibility of the theory under immediate discussion but also the proficiency of the authors as skilled researchers and scholars. Throughout the discourse involving the Theory of Reasoned Action, the authors are quick to relay the founding premise of the theory. However, they forgo an ideal opportunity to extend this discussion and incorporate the Theory of Planned Behavior. Within this theory, one of the basic principles that is entwined in its foundation and guides its application concerns the primary concept of perceived behavioral control, or volitional control. It is recommended that the authors complement the initial discussion of the Theory of Reasoned Action with a dialogue on the Theory of Planned Behavior as this theory is a cornerstone that is often referred to in outside literature. Despite this absence, the authors effectively seize the opportunity to reference a similar concept, the Heuristic-Systematic Model (HSM), in the midst of the discussion. This reference is essential because of the

seeming overlap in the content of the theories with respect to ELM central and peripheral processing and HSM systematic and heuristic processing. Accordingly, acknowledging the similar content in the two theories broadens the scope of persuasion theory for the reader.

Following the review of various social influence theories, the fifth chapter is dedicated to the union of theory and method such that theoretical perspectives and steps necessary to conduct an effective health risk campaign are combined and applied. In showing how health risk messages are developed, the chapter emphasizes the necessity of undertaking a formative research process so as to devise messages that accurately reflect the interests of the target audience. The chapter is structured in an efficient, comprehensible manner such that the authors introduce the guiding framework for the chapter, the Persuasive Health Message (PHM) model, at the outset and apply its contents throughout. An integration of three dominant persuasion theories, the Theory of Reasoned Action, the Elaboration Likelihood Model, and the Extended Parallel Process Model, the PHM framework is presented as a foundation that could guide one's future research endeavors. Thus, the PHM provides a user-friendly road map detailing three distinct steps to follow in order to gather complete formative research. Such exploration into one's target audience prior to the campaign launch will ideally enable sound development of effective health risk messaging. One strength of this chapter, and for the majority of the text for that matter, is its ability to convey rather complex information in a clear, applicable fashion. This is accomplished not only through concise language but, in this particular case, via supplementary, application-based resources such as the series of worksheets integrated in the core of the chapter. The authors strategically incorporate the PHM framework into the content of the worksheets with the notion that these practice sheets will aid in determining salient beliefs held by the target audience. These results will, in turn, guide future interventions.

The following section of the text, chapter six, is dedicated to extending chapter five's discussion on formative research by introducing an alternative method for particular use in the field—termed the Risk Behavior Diagnosis Scale (RBD). Again drawing from theory previously discussed in the beginning of the text, the authors discuss this 12-item survey in terms of its theoretical foundation within the Extended Parallel Process Model. This chapter provides a nice addendum to the previous chapter's discussion especially given the RBD's realistic application to fieldwork. This chapter also includes a sample template of the RBD scale which is quite helpful to not only systematically reinforce the material, but to provide instant accessibility for the health practitioner and/or the engaged student.

Dedicated to practical application of knowledge provided in the text thus far, chapter seven is devoted to extending the previous chapter's discussion of the RBD by presenting four authentic student cases of individuals who obtained HIV testing and counseling at Michigan State University's campus health center. The authors outline the students' counseling session using the RBD scale as the tool of choice to assess if the clients are in the fear or danger control state and, upon this decision, proceed with the appropriate intervention encouraging condom usage. The four cases not only further reinforce the material presented in the text, but also depict the HIV/AIDS counselors as credible sources and, to some extent, positive role models capable of delivering the message recommending condom usage. This serves as an important fact as perceived credibility has been shown to influence receipt of the message and the decision to modify one's behavior in compliance with the recommended action. Moreover, the detailed transcripts of the conversations held in all four cases in the text clearly depict the elevated response efficacy and self-efficacy produced by the clients post-counseling sessions. Thus, along with the application of the RBD scale, the counselor plays a critical role in increasing the clients' response efficacy of engaging in condom usage and, ultimately, modifying their behavior. However, the text lacks a key discussion of message source consideration despite the potential for such seamless integration in

the chapter. Nonetheless, the authors effectively apply the knowledge presented in the first half of the text in a clear, engaging, and unique fashion. Accordingly, the sample risk and background assessment provides a useful source for readers particularly interested in pursuing a career in health counseling.

Chapter eight, on the other hand, strays a bit from the previous chapter's discussion as it is devoted to issues in data collection with an emphasis on formative, process, and outcome evaluations. Overall, the clear, logical structure of the chapter orients the reader to the subject matter at hand with ease. Nevertheless, there are a few blatant shortcomings within this portion of the text that deserve mention. First of all, the authors employ a rather cursory discussion of formative evaluation as a mere single paragraph is devoted to this critical process that guides the remainder of the communication campaign. Moreover, while the preproduction/postproduction research discussion also in this paragraph is engaging and especially informative, the limited amount of text produces a quasi boomerang effect by minimizing the importance of including this type of data collection in health risk campaigns.

Second, the authors neglect to supplement the discussion on formative evaluation with an acknowledgment of the role of the environment, both social and structural, as a presiding social influence process within the realm of health risk campaigns. Another area of concern within this section is when the authors mention the use of the target audience in the formative evaluation process. In this instance, they fail to address the critical notion of audience segmentation in response to a particular health behavior so as to determine similar traits among the target audience in order to strategically tailor campaign messages.

Finally, the authors employ a data collection methods section near the close of the chapter that focuses on how to select the appropriate form of information gathering under various circumstances. The authors continue by asserting that focus groups are especially appropriate to utilize when in the postproduction formative evaluation stage of a campaign. While this is to be commended, they do not offer a data collection method that would be most appropriate for the preproduction research stage. Outside of this particular instance, the authors effectively discuss data collection methods and supplement the text with two tables outlining types of evaluations as well as methods of data collection. These tables serve as great visual references for the novice researcher and/or practitioner that is uncertain as to which method of data collecting to employ under a set of various constraints.

Succeeding the discussion on data collection, chapter nine centers upon fundamental analysis techniques. More specifically, the chapter is divided into procedural analyses of qualitative and quantitative data. As seen throughout the text, the authors provide a clear introduction to what can be perceived as an overwhelmingly complex process. On numerous occasions this is achieved through supplementary tables that succinctly summarize the critical points in the text. While the authors take care to acknowledge the reality that is consistent with quantitative analysis directing funding for projects, the discussion concerning qualitative techniques falls a bit short. For instance, following the quantitative funding statement there is no discussion as to when qualitative analysis would reign more beneficial than the former. Accordingly, in the descriptive discussion of qualitative analysis, the authors emphasize the practice of focus groups and neglect to give mention to other inherently qualitative forms such as textual analysis. Nonetheless, the discussion on qualitative analysis is succinct and informative.

Correspondingly, the dialogue on quantitative technique is also logical and instructive in nature. At the outset of the discussion, the authors broach the subject of quantitative analysis via illustrated examples. This method is rather advantageous by, again, providing a visual representation that deconstructs the seeming complexity in

An Essential Guide

quantitative techniques. Despite the positive attributes of this portion of the chapter, there is one shortcoming that guides the discussion. While the authors explicably state that it is beyond the scope of the text to offer more than a rudimentary review of data analysis techniques, the discussion implies that the prescriptions provided serve as the solitary methods available to effectively analyze data quantitatively when that is clearly not the case. Perhaps a brief examination of outside, predominantly utilized methods such as the chi-square test would behoove this portion of the chapter by providing a comprehensive literature review of the available techniques. Nonetheless, the authors provide a solid framework from which to successfully analyze data.

The final chapter of the text, chapter ten, is devoted to channel considerations. Along with this issue, the chapter provides cursory statements touting the utilization of effective formative research and the careful selection of suitable sources. With respect to channel considerations, however, the authors are quick to mention that numerous campaign activities are often disseminated through a potpourri of mediated, as well as interpersonal, channels. Yet, the authors neglect to extend this claim to include the notion that each modality has its own set of parameters that, in effect, lend themselves to differing levels of cognitive and affective processing. Nonetheless, they continue by providing an effective disclaimer that “there is not one universal channel to guarantee highly acclaimed dissemination of a campaign message.”

With this in mind, the authors provide a comprehensive table that examines numerous activities including message channel selection in the “No More Excuses for Alcohol Misuses” campaign. This visual example aids in synthesizing much of the information in the text, thus providing clarity for the reader. While the table serves as a primary attribute of the chapter, the following discussion on message sources warrants some mention.

Essentially, the authors provide the reader with a rather dense discussion on the qualities of an appropriate message source. While the points are valid and essential to consider when choosing a message source, the dialogue is not entirely comprehensive. Moreover, the authors forgo an opportunity to enhance their discussion with other documented methods of persuasive appeal such as physical attractiveness of the source. This particular channel is often quite persuasive and, therefore, routinely used.

Accordingly, in the section on message accessibility, the authors fail to buttress the discussion with the role of increased attitude accessibility in guiding central processing of the message. In a similar vein, the notions of individual motivation and involvement are lacking from the discussion. For instance, in one example, the authors report a domestic violence prevention message that is placed in women’s changing rooms to reach the female target audience. The authors write, “the placement of these messages in women’s changing rooms makes it accessible only to women . . . and furthermore, gives them the time and privacy needed to process the information and perhaps even write down a telephone number or address” (p. 129). In this instance, the authors fail to address the existing degree of motivation and personal involvement that will or will not propel a woman to consume the message and process it in a peripheral or central manner. Someone who is not highly involved in the issue of domestic violence and does not see the topic as a salient priority will most likely process the message peripherally and give little, if any, thought to writing down any contact information. Unfortunately, this critical aspect of social influence remains an oversight in this chapter.

Nonetheless, the authors conclude with an effective examination of three specific channel considerations: print, audiovisual, and live presentations. Within this segment the authors present the methods of dissemination in a concise and engaging manner. However, they fail to acknowledge similar elements in the vast body of literature on channel selection such as the role of emotion in visual advertisements, the frequency of ads, as

well as their serial position. Constructs such as the aforementioned elements are rather imperative to incorporate in the discussion as they embody critical levels of persuasive appeal that are often manifested in campaigns. While such inclusions are of a rather complex nature, a brief reference would satisfy an eager reader without causing confusion.

Overall, this functional text offers pragmatic guidelines that can be utilized in a variety of contexts such as classroom activities and professional counsel. For students with an interest in health risk message design and novice practitioners in need of a theoretically grounded, step-by-step guide tracing the developmental stages of a sound health risk campaign, Witte et al. produce a text that should be an essential companion throughout the duration of one's studies and campaign lifespan.

This Graduate Student Life: Commentary and Community

Rocky Mountain Communication Review
Volume 2:1, Summer, 2004
Pages 61-68

In Black Coats and Brown Boots, Roberto Avant-Mier tackles the issues of professional insecurities and of the footing gained in family roots. Todd Norton then weighs the Opportunities and Obligations of graduate life and considers the difficulties of achieving any semblance of balance between them.

Black Coats and Brown Boots

Roberto Avant-Mier

They kept asking him for his coat. “May I take your coat?”

“No, I’m fine. Thank you,” he replied.

It never occurred to him that it might be an issue until he started to feel that they kept asking him for it at every turn. “Can I take your coat for ya?” someone asked.

“No, thank you,” he replied smiling.

It wasn’t any big deal, he thought. It was just a silly wool coat. Why did everyone keep asking him for it?

Couldn’t they see he was dressed up for the interview?

With every gesture of politeness, he grew more and more uncomfortable.

“Would you like me to take your coat for you?” another woman asked.

“Uh... hmm. No, thank you. Hmm. I’m fine, thanks.”

He was there for a job interview, an assistant professor gig at a university in Boston. He couldn’t believe he had been invited for the interview in the first place or that he had any realistic shot at the job. But he had done his homework. He took the advice of his present university professors, committee members, and mentors. He did what they told him: Know your stuff, do your homework on that department, find out about the university, do research on the cost of living, figure out what the current faculty are doing in terms of research, know where they stand, have an idea of what they’re looking for and where they’re going, and be prepared for any question. He thought he had done all that.

The last thing he thought might be an issue for this job interview was an article of clothing. They teach you about the importance of dress, presentation, and non-verbal communication in freshman speech 101 classes.

Roberto Avant-Mier is the immediate past editor of RMCR. Todd Norton is a research fellow. Both are Ph.D. candidates in the Department of Communication at the University of Utah, Salt Lake City, UT 84112.

He knew all that; that was easy stuff. He had taught those things himself to undergraduate students. At the Ph.D. level, he thought those worries were over. Besides . . . he was wearing a tie. And he never wears a tie. Nobody in his family ever wears a tie really, except for weddings or something special. And it was a new tie. It was a nice one. It was hip almost.

His black coat was a classic, black wool, sports coat, like the kind he saw professors wearing around campus at the university where he was in grad school. He and some grad student friends had joked around about how it was the classic professor look – the black sports coat, the black turtleneck sweater, the pipe. That was the professor look, but he didn't take it that far. Going that far as a wanna-be-assistant-professor would be going too far. He knew that. He wasn't really going to dress like that for a job interview. So he thought that by going with the black wool coat by itself, he was dressing it down.

The best part about his black sports coat was how he got it in the first place. Since he arrived at his new place and entered the Ph.D. program, he had been wearing an old-looking, striped, grayish wool coat that he had bought at a second-hand store. He had started wearing it to teach class, to make a better presentation. It was a bit of a stretch for him, but it wasn't that bad. He only wore it on teaching days anyway, and when he wore it with jeans he could pull it off as not so fancy. Eventually, he noticed how old and ugly it was compared to others, so he stopped wearing it so much. And then when he and his grad student friends started joking about the "classic professor look," he decided he wanted one of those solid black, wool, sport coats. Of course, every time he saw one at a store they were priced at a couple hundred bucks at least, so he figured he would get one some day when he could really afford it – maybe someday when he was a professor. So he stopped wearing sport coats to class for a while.

Then one day he came across a yard sale. He was driving to the store to buy diapers on a Saturday morning, when he noticed the yard sale and stopped to look for vinyl LPs, or whatever else that might pop up by chance. And there it was. It was hanging on a tree branch, with a bunch of other old things. He almost ignored it, because he never really looked for clothes at yard sales, and his body type wasn't a real common one anyway. He was medium-sized, not tall but not short. For his chest and shoulders, he always seemed to have shorter arms than what was for sale at stores for his body size. In other words, shirts and jackets that fit him up top, were always an inch or two too long at the wrist. But this day, he was in luck. The black sports coat fit perfectly. It was perfect across his back. It looked good from the front, he thought. And by some miracle, it was the perfect length at the wrist. He took that as a sign the he should buy it. When the couple in the driveway said "ten bucks," he offered five and they took it.

He brought it home to show his wife, and she agreed that it looked good on him. It was in great shape, almost new, and it was as if the jacket had been professionally tailored for him specifically. She washed it a couple of times by hand and then carefully by machine, and they even took it to the cleaners after that, so that it would be really clean for when he wore it to work. And it was his "professor" jacket for the next few years in grad school. He wore it with comfort, with confidence, with pride almost. The greatest part about it, he thought, was that he could dress it up by donning a tie or dress it down by leaving out the tie and wearing a collared shirt. It was a no-brainer to wear his black sports coat for this job interview. He would even throw on a sweet new tie, and he was sure he would be looking his best.

"As you can see, Roberto, it's a little colder here in Boston than what you're probably used to in Texas," the department chair said, as he removed his ski jacket that covered a fashionable suit and tie combination

This Graduate Student Life

underneath. “This is what we call, classic New England weather,” he said as he hung his jacket on a coat rack. “Can I take your coat?”

But without his black sports coat, he would only be wearing the white dress shirt and the new blue tie. It would be as if he had never brought the coat to the interview in the first place.

“Um, no. Thank you. I’m fine.”

It happened again when he went to meet the Dean, although this time it was only with the Dean’s secretary, not anybody that would be judging him on his appearance, he thought. But that was the one that made him really think about it. He began to realize that several people had thought his black sport coat was some kind of over coat, or winter jacket perhaps. To him, the black sports coat was the suit substitute. With his black coat and tie, he thought he didn’t have to worry about not having a nice suit for job interviews. Nevertheless, in spite of growing more and more self-conscious about his black coat, the job interview went really well. Other than all the people wanting to take his coat, the whole three days had gone well and he felt good about leaving Boston.

He remembered what one of his professors had told him back in Utah, “You win either way.” “Even if they don’t offer you the job, you’ve got interviewing experience, and you’re talking the talk. It’s a good thing for you to go through this. If you have more interviews, you’ll get more confident with each one. It’s a good experience for you no matter what.”

He went back to his hotel room to unwind and await his flight back to Utah the next day; he couldn’t wait to get out of the “suit” and get rid of the rope around his neck. He put on a wool sweater and his favorite brown leather boots to walk around the city. It was cold, rainy, and snowy all at the same time, but his leather boots were waterproofed and he thought it might be the last chance that he would ever have to walk around Boston. So he did. He walked around some, rode the subways, and took the red line to Harvard Square. As he walked around Harvard Square, he wondered if he would ever be there again. If the job didn’t come through, like it probably wouldn’t, he would only get to Boston again if he were paying for the flight himself, on a vacation someday perhaps. As he thought more about this, his walk around through snow, ice, statues, plaques and old buildings made him feel out of place. He began to wonder what he was doing there in the first place.

Here was a guy in his early thirties, who found college and graduate school after a five-year stint with the U.S. Marines. College was never on the horizon for him in his youth. He never imagined he could go to college, let alone go to graduate school. It’s a common story; he was the first in his immediate family and extended family to go to college. His own father dropped out of school in eighth grade, his mother in high school, and his step-father and sisters had high school degrees, but even high school was a big deal for many in his family. His family had lived in housing projects in Texas when he was a baby, and when he was about three or four-years-old they moved up and out into a nearby working-class neighborhood. Many people from the neighborhood dropped out of high school, and only a handful ever attended any college classes.

And here he was nearing his graduation from a doctoral program, and interviewing for a job in Boston. Here he was trying to pass himself off as a college professor – at a university in Boston! On the flight back home, his thoughts about the black coat continued. He concluded that he didn’t belong in Boston anyway. He didn’t even know how to dress up like them, so how was he going to pull off the part of a university professor?

As it ended up, he was offered the position in Boston. Even so, it wasn't necessarily a glory tale for him. When his graduation ceremony rolled around a couple of months later, his Mom and step-Dad made the trip from Texas. They wanted to see their son graduate with a Ph.D. He told them that he hadn't defended his dissertation yet and still had some work to do, but they didn't get it. Their son was getting a Ph.D., and they were almost in tears. After the ceremony, he handed his parents the soft-cushion document holder that they handed him during the ceremony. His step-father couldn't understand why the new Ph.D. diploma wasn't already in there. Even after he explained it to his step-Dad, he remained puzzled about it.

When they called out his name at the graduation ceremony, it was followed by the customary announcement of his doctoral dissertation director, the title of his dissertation and his new position as an assistant professor. His step-father said later that he almost cried when he heard them call his son's name and announced his new job in Boston.

"You know son, you're gonna make more money than me in your first year in this job, than I've ever made in all my years of working."

His mother added, "I never imagined my son would be getting his Ph.D."

They said it proudly, as if their son had finally made it. They both continued to smile about the prospects for their son, his wife, and the future of their grandchild. Yet, there were things that his parents didn't really get that day. They had no idea that the rags-to-riches story isn't that glorious after all.

He's still working on the dissertation and full of anxiety about finishing in time for his new job in September. And although he'll be earning more money than his dad ever made in one year, he will be making payments for years to come in order to pay off his student loans, credit card bills, and hospital bills. Money will be tight for the first few years, and the SUV-colored promises of middle-class life won't be setting him up in any fancy digs just yet. But he doesn't mind at all. He never wanted to be rich anyway. He's just happy that he, his wife and their child are finally going to have health insurance.

As they were leaving the graduation ceremony, his Dad looked down at his son's shoes and said, "Son, I can't believe you wore those shoes! This is your Ph.D. graduation and you wore them shoes? Geez, son. People are gonna think we can't afford any better shoes than that. Why didn't you get you some good shoes to wear today?"

What Dad didn't know was that his son wore his steel-toe, brown leather boots for him. They may not have been shiny and fancy, but they were his boots. Those brown leather boots were not only his favorite shoes, but they represented his hard-working parents, his family, where he came from, and working class life. He purposely didn't wear nicer shoes to the graduation because he thought his brown boots were a better signifier for his roots. While Dad was proud of the fact that his son will be making more money than he ever did, his son never wasted any thoughts on those prospects. As proud as they were of him that day, he was just as proud of them.

Black coats, brown work boots, and pride in the working-class . . . that's this grad student's life.

Opportunities and Obligations

Todd Norton

Like many of my colleagues, I had many jobs before entering graduate school. I worked in factories for nine years, managed and owned a disc jockey business for eight years, and was employed in a number of part-time positions throughout my undergraduate years. Although often very busy, none of these experiences prepared me for the hectic schedule of my doctoral program.

There are many great opportunities in graduate school, almost too many. Project ideas arise almost weekly while at the same time obligatory readings for course work continue to pile high on my desk. In addition to these opportunities, I am surrounded by interesting people from different places with different cultural and educational backgrounds.

In this essay of student life I explore the struggle to maintain balance among all these opportunities and obligations. Few people I know would define the graduate experience through balance. In fact it is not the static experience of balance but the ongoing (impossible) attempt to maintain balance I find most salient. Specifically, I believe balance oscillates among two broad aspects including professional development, and individual obligations, the latter of which splits into two interrelated areas of individual and personal concerns. The logic of my essay is as follows. I first discuss professional development and individual obligations with an eye toward the balancing aspects of these areas. I then offer some suggestions as to how we might better balance multiple opportunities and obligations in graduate school.

Allow me a couple of qualifiers before I begin. First, we might divide the experience of balance in graduate school into any number of issues. I do not intend this essay to represent every aspect of graduate life, only a brief enumeration of the broad experience I have seen. Second, as this is my essay I can only present my experience and my understanding of others' experiences, although I hope (and believe) many colleagues would agree with these general concerns. In short, my aim is not to establish (capital T) Truth, rather it is to illuminate those less appealing and less frequently discussed aspects of the choice to live a graduate student life for a given number of years. As a third qualifier, I should mention that I wrote this with a Ph.D. graduate student in mind but attempted to keep the conversation adequately general to be applicable to students in a variety of programs.

It is not possible to over-emphasize the professional development which occurs in graduate school. As students we make decisions which significantly impact our careers. The struggle here, though, is not simply about more or less development (a relatively easy choice). This is a battle over which kind of development and how much within each type. Simply stated, there is only so much time in any day, week, semester, or program. In the abstract (and notably at the start of a program) graduate school seems like it will last forever (at least too long!). When we get right down to the daily experience, days quickly turn into weeks, turn into semesters, turn into "Am I really a third year?"

When we start graduate school it seems we have all the time in the world. At some point as we progress

through the program, we stop keeping track of how many semesters we have been in the program and reorient to how little time we have left. We cannot do everything and need to choose between options within significant time constraints. Within this general orientation, there are at least three significant issues in tension with each other including competency, publication, and teaching.

First, professional demands on a graduate student bear heavily upon identity. Broadly speaking, this identity includes both topical areas of competency (environmental, interpersonal, organizational, public relations, rhetorical analysis, small-group communication, among many others), meta-theoretical levels of orientation (critical, critical-interpretive, interpretive, post-positivist) and methodological approaches within each of these. The problem, as a previous professor of mine would put it: “the more someone knows, the more they know how little they know.” We can go into a reading and citation frenzy in graduate school as every area intersects in some, more or less, meaningful way with every other area. Drawing boundaries (I find) to adequately define a broad academic competency yet speaking to enough depth within these competencies is difficult, perhaps impossible!

Second, publication emphasis is of significant concern and there are different paths to follow on this issue. Some of my colleagues emphasize editing for journals. Others focus on filling their vitae with convention papers and still others apply considerable energy into getting just a few articles published in one of the discipline’s scholarly journals. It is difficult to say as a general rule which of these choices, or combination of them, is best for everyone; but these choices do matter, and matter differently depending on one’s chosen direction after their doctorate degree.

Third, we also experience a tension developing adequate breadth and depth in teaching experience. Is it better to teach a few classes several times or spread teaching experience around to multiple areas? These concerns are often made more complex by the difference between the graduate student’s interests/desires and what a particular program needs from that student. For example, several of my colleagues will likely not teach a course in their main competency area before they complete their doctorate degree. As a result of department teaching needs, these people spend from 2 – 4 semesters teaching courses having nothing to do with their competency areas and never actually teach a course in their area.

So where is the balance in all of this? There is no easy balance between all of these issues. Consider this likely scenario. A graduate student is offered a full-time research position on a substantial, long-term project. Great, right? This is a “yes, but” issue. In gaining this experience the student is also decreasing their teaching experience. So, they might consider doing both but they are then giving less attention to course work. This decrease in attention will likely decrease their competency in necessary areas and undoubtedly increase the time it takes later in the program to prepare for competency exams.

In a sense, then, there is no real balance between these professional development options. Balance here is defined by its lacking; it is primarily a struggle to emphasize what is currently lacking, which immediately creates yet another lacking to compensate. But these development issues are made more complex by individual obligations and personal life. I consider these two issues together because they are so closely related to one another, yet also differ in focus.

First, individual obligations include all the issues needing attention and, as such, distract from professional concerns. Even though the vast majority of our time in graduate school is focused on professional issues, we

This Graduate Student Life

still have to pay our bills, get the car fixed, clean the apartment, shovel the driveway, etc. Many graduate students, it seems, simply lack time to deal with many of these issues and doing so distracts from other important concerns. Yet these, sooner or later, demand our attention. To offer a personal example: in April this year, I returned home from a night class about 9:30 PM only to find my dog (Abby) quite ill. We were in the emergency room until 2:00 AM, and I departed with orders from the veterinarian to watch Abby as closely as possible. But, I had to administer a test the next morning at 8:00 AM, which presented me with a difficult choice between opposing obligations. I decided to leave Abby alone for a few hours while I delivered the test. Does that mean I am not a responsible pet owner? This situation is not unlike those many graduate students face. Crises arise and situations in our lives do not stop because we are in a graduate program. But focusing our attention and time on these issues distracts from the development in other areas.

In a somewhat related yet different area, we also need to remain accountable to our emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being. These are often last on the priority list for graduate students but they are no less important. Of these, my own interests includes trying (and I emphasize trying) to maintain a regular workout schedule and time away from writing. A completely related issue is evident in our struggle to maintain personal relationships. For example, my family and many of my friends now live several states away from me. I find it difficult to spend time with friends and colleagues in my program because there are always projects on my desk (and always projects on their desks, too). It is difficult to keep these social needs on our list of priorities, but it is also necessary to do so in order to maintain some semblance of sanity.

All of the above issues are necessary components to a healthy graduate life. But they also demand our time and attention and given the impossibility of doing them all to the utmost, they are necessarily in competition. In my own life, I find it difficult to meet all of these as best as possible on a daily basis. I want to spend more time preparing my competencies, reading for class, working on teaching issues; but equally important to me are individual concerns like paying bills and staying physically and mentally fit. If our lives get too out of balance in one direction, it seems like all the other concerns rupture. I find this frustrating, but also exciting because there are so many opportunities available. Thus the question is not either one or the other regarding our obligations, but one of balance among these opportunities. To this end, I believe we could do a better job managing our time by collaborating on projects and structuring our lives.

Graduate students are amazingly busy with the many opportunities and obligations facing them daily. Graduate school, I believe, seems like it should take a long time to complete when in reality we have a lot to do in a short amount of time. As such, in my experience we could get more out of our time in our respective programs if we dedicated a little time collaborating on projects.

Graduate students, it seems to me, resist collaborating, even when this time spent is often in our best collective interest. Take a literature review of power as an example. The literature within this area is substantial to say the least. It is nearly impossible for any single person to cover all of this literature in a fairly short period of time, not to mention related concepts of domination, resistance, hegemony, manipulation, coercion, and consent. It becomes manageable, though, if multiple students collaborate, everyone covering particular areas and bringing those small reviews together within a larger literature review.

Some I talk to suggest that graduate students resist collaborating because of an underlying competition within academics (faculty, is it really any different on the other side?). I believe this explanation is only partially true. Another explanation lies in the difficulty balancing those multiple issues I previously discussed. From this view

we become overly focused on the immediate needs of course work and spend too little time collectively examining how this work folds into larger projects. If we took a bit more time in the immediate collaborating with others regarding their focus, we could lighten the individual load yet still accomplish significant progress together.

As a second and somewhat related suggestion, I believe we need stricter time management practices. If we know we have to read fifty articles and five books for a paper due in six weeks, we need to structure our time so the material is read far enough in advance to give us time to think and write. This may seem a simple suggestion yet I find most people do not share my appreciation for structuring time—many seem to prefer all night writing fests the day before papers are due. Again this is also an issue of balance such that strict time calculation adds, rather than distracts, from other personal issues. In short, we need to treat graduate school like a job; one that we punch-in and punch-out at predetermined times of the day (and occasionally pull some overtime).

I have explored, albeit briefly, multiple issues of pressure and the difficulty balancing these aspects of graduate life. My hope was not to provide definitive answers but, rather, to suggest openly what everyone around seems to be feeling. Stated simply, graduate life is sometimes not that appealing. But my point here goes beyond graduate education to higher education institutions generally. I believe many of the points I made here apply equally, although in different forms, to the careers many of us are looking forward to— life as a professor.

In our struggle to balance multiple selves and multiple demands there is a considerable risk of falling into the “as soon as” fallacy: as soon as I complete comprehensive finals; as soon as I finish this term; as soon as I get this paper done; as soon as I get my Ph. D. and get on the market; as soon as I get another article published, and on it goes. What if there is no place to which we arrive where “it’s all good”? What if this really is “as good as it gets”? What I am working toward here is a need to reframe our experience. What we might attempt to do is flip the system on its head and examine not the scarcity but the abundance (I am admittedly leaning on neo-Marxist and conflict literature here).

This is not to suggest that we do not live stressful lifestyles because we do. I will try to get at what I mean by sharing something my undergraduate professor/mentor suggested I remember in graduate school: “All you really need to do is read books and write papers.” It sounds overly simple perhaps, and it does not reflect the sheer mass involved in reading and writing. But, looked at this way, it reminds me that while my time is filled with obligations, these are also opportunities, opportunities which constitute a life of privilege.

THE UTAH DIFFERENCE

There is a place in the west where graduate study is known for its innovation, freedom, and support—a place where students are thoroughly involved in all facets of becoming communication scholars.

This place is *Utah!*

To learn more about The **Utah** Difference
call or write:

James A. Anderson
Director of Graduate Studies
Department of Communication
University of Utah
Salt Lake City, Utah 84112
(801) 581-6888



Meer informatie?

Health2Work Nederland
Zwetsloot 5E
9231 DW Surhuisterveen
Nederland

Algemeen telefoonnummer
E-mail
Website

+31 (0)88 240 00 60
info@health2work.nl
www.health2work.nl

Health2Work België
Kerkstraat 108
9050 Gentbrugge
België

Algemeen telefoonnummer
E-mail
Website

03 808 43 99
info@health2work.be
www.health2work.be