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Encountering Nature, Experiencing Courtly Love, and Romance of the Rose: Generic Standpoints, Interpretive Practices, and Human Interchange in 12th-13th Century French Poetics

Abstract Whereas the fields of poetic expression and pragmatist philosophy may seem some distance apart, a closer examination of the poetics literature from the early Greeks onward provides testimony to the more general viability of the pragmatist analysis of community life, particularly as this has come to be associated with pragmatism's sociological derivative, symbolic interaction.

Following a brief overview of the Greek, Roman, and Christian roots of contemporary fictional representations, attention is given to the ways that pragmatist concerns with human activity were addressed within the context of poetic expression in 12th-13th century France. Whereas the pre-Renaissance texts considered here exhibit pronounced attentiveness to Christian theology, they also build heavily on Latin sources (especially Virgil and Ovid [see Prus 2013a]).

Among the early French poets who address the matters of human knowing and acting in more direct and consequential terms are: Alan de Lille (c. 1120-1203) who wrote *The Complaint of Nature* and *Anticlaudianus*; Andreas Capellanus (text, c. 1185) the author of *The Art of Courtly Love*; and Guillaume de Lorris (c. 1212-1237) and Jean de Meun (c. 1235-1305) who, in sequence, co-authored *The Romance of the Rose*.

Given our interest in the ways in which those in the poetic community helped sustain an analytic focus on human lived experience, particular consideration is given to these early French authors' attentiveness to (1) the relationships, identities, activities, and tactical engagements that people develop around romantic relationships; (2) the sense-making activities of those about whom they write, as well as their own interpretive practices as authors and analysts; (3) the ways in which the people within the communities that they portray knowingly grapple with religious and secular morality (and deviance); and (4) more generic features of human standpoints and relationships.

Clearly, the poets referenced here are not the first to pursue matters of these sorts. However, their materials are important not only for their popular intrigues, creativity, and effectiveness in "moving poetics out of the dark ages" but also for encouraging a broader interest in considerations of the human condition than that defined by philosophy and rhetoric.

Keywords Love; *The Romance of the Rose*; French Poets; Sexuality; Pragmatism; Symbolic Interaction; Philosophy; Sociology; Personification; Collective Events

Although pragmatist philosophy and its sociological derivative, symbolic interaction, are often envisioned as products of 20th century democratic scholarship, the roots of pragmatist thought run much deeper and assume much broader dimensions than is commonly supposed.¹ Using contemporary symbolic interaction (Blumer 1969; Lofland

¹ As I started to appreciate some years ago, on becoming more explicitly aware of the roots of what is now termed "American pragmatist philosophy" (i.e., the study of knowing and acting) in classical Greek and Latin scholarship (Prus 2004; 2012), the "pragmatist analysis of human group life" is an extremely significant feature in the development of Western Social Thought. Attending to texts developed by Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Lucian, and others from the classical Greek and Roman eras, we may better comprehend the relevance of pragmatist social thought for the analyses of morality, deviance, and regulation (Prus 2007a; 2011b); education, knowing, and scholarship (Prus 2006; 2007a; 2007b; 2011a; 2013b; Puddephatt and Prus 2007); rhetoric as persuasive interchange (Prus 2008a; 2010; 2013a); history and ethnography (Prus 2008d; Prus and Burk 2010); poetics and entertainment (Prus 2008b; 2008c; 2009); love and friendship (Prus 2007a; 2009; 2013c; Prus and Camara 2010); and religion (Prus 2011c; 2011d; 2013d).

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1976; Strauss 1993; Prus 1996; 1997; 1999; Prus and Grills 2003) as the major analytical standpoint,² this paper considers the roles that four French pre-16th century Renaissance poets assumed in helping to sustain an analytic pragmatist thrust that may be traced back to the classical scholarship of the early Greeks (c. 700-300 BCE).

Pragmatism is only one of several themes (theology, morality, emotionality, structuralism, fatalism, nationalism) to which early Greek, Roman, Christian, and later Latin-European scholars would attend, amidst wide ranges of natural disasters, human-related disruptions, and intellectual and moral cross-currents. However, because of its attentiveness to the humanly known and enacted world, pragmatism is uniquely important for analytical scholarship of a transcontextual and transhistorical nature.

Pragmatist thought is generally envisioned as falling within the domains of philosophy and (more recently) sociology, but some 12th-13th century poets in France

² Briefly expressed, symbolic interactionist theory may be characterized by the following premises: *Human group life* is (1) *intersubjective* (is contingent on community-based, linguistic interchange); (2) *knowingly problematic* (with respect to "the known" and "the unknown"); (3) *object-oriented* (wherein things constitute the contextual and operational essence of the humanly known environment); (4) *multiperspectival* (as in viewpoints, conceptual frameworks, or notions of reality); (5) *reflective* (minded, purposive, deliberative); (6) *sensory/embodied and (knowingly) materialized* (acknowledging human capacities for stimulation and activity, as well as practical [enacted, embodied] human limitations and fragilities); (7) *activity-based* (as implied in the formulative [engaging] process of people doing things with respect to objects); (8) *negotiable* (whereby people may anticipate, influence, and resist others); (9) *relational* (denoting particular bonds or affiliations); (10) *processual* (as in emergent, ongoing, or temporally developed terms); (11) *realized in instances* (attending to the specific "here and now" occasions in which people "do things"); and (12) *historically enabled* (being mindful of the ways that people build on, use, resist, and reconfigure aspects of the "whatness" that they have inherited from their predecessors and learned through their associates).

notably contributed to an interest in the pragmatist analysis of the human condition that went well beyond that achieved by most European philosophers and rhetoricians. Relatedly, in the ensuing centuries, poets (fictionalized verse, prose, and plays) and other literary analysts have helped focus attention on human agency, action, and interchange in the absence of a more explicit social science (such as symbolic interaction) that dealt with human knowing and acting in more direct and explicit terms.

Historical Flows of Scholarly Thought and Poetic Endeavor

Because poetic endeavors revolve around fictional representations and are generally envisioned as realms of expressive entertainment, there is a tendency to separate poetical endeavor from more focused analysis of the human condition. While one can develop arguments both for and against inclusion of poetic endeavor in the realm of serious scholarship, it can be acknowledged that poetic endeavor encompasses extremely wide ranges of subject matters, as well as religious, instructional, and philosophic emphases.

At a more foundational level, it should be appreciated that poetic text (like those on rhetoric, philosophy, and theology) emerged somewhat concurrently in Greece (c. 700-300 BCE) amidst the development of a highly sophisticated language and a systematic, exceptionally precise phonetic alphabet (c. 800 BCE; see: Bernal 1990).³ The subsequent extensions, con-

tinuities, and disjunctures of written materials very much reflect the flow of Western scholarship, from the early Greeks onward.

However, since the flow of literary expression has been far from even or continuous and reflects wide ranges of community arrangement, and emphases over the centuries, it may be useful to provide a rudimentary overview of this larger set of processes.

Whereas a wide assortment of philosophic themes can be found in both classical Greek (c. 700-300 BCE) and Roman (c. 200 BCE-500 CE) scholarship, an attentiveness to the matters of human knowing and acting would recede dramatically as the Greek and Roman empires fell into disarray and the Christians (c. 300 CE-onward) began to assume more of the intellectual mantle and essentially represented scholarship through the European dark ages (c. 500-1000 CE).⁴

⁴ Following the conversion of Constantine, Christianity was recognized as the state approved religion in Rome in 313 CE. Christianity was declared the official religion of Rome in 391 CE. Still, it is to be understood that Christianity (and scholarship) as it subsequently would take shape in West Rome and Roman Catholic (Latin) Europe would be notably different from that evolving in East Rome (the Byzantium Empire) and the Greek Orthodox (and extensions thereof) church.

To put matters more cryptically, the scholarly oriented Roman Catholic theologians in Western Europe would develop religious emphases that were more attentive to pluralist scholarship (philosophy, analytic logic), whereas theologians in East Rome, with its allegiance to the Greek Orthodox church, would remain much more attentive to religious scriptures and sign-based (versus philosophic) evidence.

Ironically, whereas scholars in East Rome had more continuous access to classical Greek texts, they tended to envision these (especially those associated with Aristotle) as pagan materials and philosophy very much stagnated under Byzantium Christianity. Working their way out of the dark ages, the more scholarly oriented Western European theologians not only were attentive to some pagan Latin scholarship but following their exposure to some classical Greek texts (especially materials from Aristotle), as a consequence of the Crusades, stressed the importance of knowing God and religious scriptures through reason (as in dialectic analysis – as opposed to the heavier emphasis on sign-based evidence and scriptural assertions associated with the Byzantium intelligentsia).

Maintained primarily through some scattered pockets of Catholic literacy, the ensuing Latin scholarship was not only severely limited in scope and depth but it also maintained a precarious existence through the dark ages. Still, this notably weakened base would provide the foundations on which 12th and 13th century Latin-European scholars would begin to appreciate the discovery of various early Greek texts (that in the interim had been preserved by scholars working primarily within Islamic, Jewish, and Greek Orthodox religious arenas).

The rediscovery of these early Greek texts (philosophic, scientific, theological, and explicitly fictional writings), in combination with the reengagement of some comparatively neglected Roman texts, would provide the foundations of the 15th-16th century Western European Renaissance.

As well, while the more popular or expressive-artistic European Renaissance would first become notably prominent in Italy (c. 1400), this would not have been possible except for a more enduring, albeit resurgent, interest in scholarship and artistic expression. Reflecting an earlier educational base fostered through the works of Augustine (c. 354-430), Boethius (c. 480-524), Alcuin (c. 732-804) and his patron Charlemagne (c. 742-814), and others, the intellectual renaissance most singularly may be attributed to the more sustained introduction of Aristotelian scholarship into Latin European thought (and theology). The works of Albert the Great (c. 1200-1280) and especially Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225-1274) are particularly consequential in this latter respect.

The pragmatist themes with which we are particularly concerned (via the analytical linkages of speech,

objects, and activity in poetic endeavor) are very much part of this larger set of intellectual and expressive processes. Still, given our more immediate focus on fictionalized representations of the human condition and the implications of these materials for the study of human knowing and acting, it is instructive to go back somewhat further in the history before more directly considering the contributions of 12th-14th century poets to a pragmatist appreciation of the human condition.

Poetic Representations over the Millennia

Although the practices of storytelling and generating fictionalized representation may be almost as old as human speech itself, the roots of contemporary textual Western poetics may be most appropriately linked to Homer's (c. 700 BCE) *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Whereas *Iliad* and *Odyssey* represent enduringly compelling instances of epic or heroic fictionalizations, Homer's characters (humans, superheroes, gods) are presented in dynamic terms, as acting, thinking, strategizing, interacting, and adjustive beings whose pursuits acknowledge wide ranges of human interests, endeavors, weaknesses, and obstacles.

Iliad and *Odyssey* also are presented in ways that foster appreciations of the interlinkages of speech, objects, and activities. Human behavior, as such, is not always wise, but it is represented as purposive and emergent, and subject to community (and theological) concerns with morality, loyalty, courage, and victory, as well as attentive to notions of personal worth and accomplishment.

Although lacking the stature and overall impact of Homer's works, Hesiod's (c. 700 BCE) *Theogony*

or genealogical statement on the emergence of the Greek gods also contributed notably to early Greek poetics. While Homer introduces an assortment of superheroes and gods into his epic or heroic accounts, Hesiod is best known for his mythical anthology of the gods. As with Homer, Hesiod's gods are depicted in anthropomorphic or human-like terms, as knowing, deliberating, acting, and interacting essences.⁵

Greek poetics also were centrally shaped through the works of the tragic playwrights, Aeschylus (c. 525-456 BCE), Sophocles (c. 495-405 BCE), and Euripides (c. 480-406 BCE), as well as the "comedies" of Aristophanes (c. 450-385 BCE) and Menander (c. 344-292 BCE). While these playwrights and their surviving texts represent only a small segment of the theatrical works produced in Greece at the time, these authors (along with Homer and Hesiod) would become major sources of literary inspiration for other poets, not only in Greece but also in Rome and, eventually, the larger Western European theatre.

One finds great variation in the fictional materials developed among the classical Greek authors of record. However, as a set, these authors provide highly articulated, multiple-themed accounts that not only reflect the full range of human capabilities, inclinations, deceptions, emotions, activities, and relation-

ships but that also frequently involve human interchanges with an assortment of gods, fantastic creatures, super-beings, and spirits from the dead. Thus, for instance, even themes that often are touted as uniquely contemporary (e.g., psychological, critical, satirical, and other worldly) can be located as explicit motifs in the classical Greek literature.

As well, those who take the time to read these early Greek texts may be surprised to see how remarkably enduring early Greek plots, characters, and activities are. Readers also may begin to appreciate how comparatively readily these materials may be recast in the garb, technology, and intrigues of "the present day." Such, clearly, was the experience of the Romans (c. 200 BCE-500 CE) and the Western European scholars (c. 1200-1600) who, on discovering various Greek texts, served as conduits for transmitting Greek emphases into much of our current notions of entertainment in literary fiction.⁶

Still, before one draws more direct connections between early Greek poetics and more contemporary renderings, it is important to acknowledge (a) the influence of various Roman (Latin) authors, (b) the comparative disregard of both of scholarly texts and secular poetics during the dark ages (c. 500-1000), and (c) the diversely destructive and censorial, as well as the preservational and enabling practices of differ-

⁵ Despite their apparent popularity among the Greeks generally and subsequent commentators on the classical Greek era, the accounts of the Olympian gods and other representatives of divinity presented by Homer and Hesiod were not so readily accepted by Greek academics. Thus, while Plato (420-348 BCE) and Aristotle (384-322 BCE) give little credence to these notions, Herodotus (485-425 BCE) had earlier explicitly debunked these beliefs as the artful constructions of Homer and Hesiod, and saw these notions as an extension of Egyptian mythology.

⁶ Among the Roman (Latin and Roman Greek) authors who would develop poetic materials that had considerable importance for the eventual development of Western European scholarship are Plautus (c. 254-184 BCE), Terence (c. 185-159 BCE), Lucretius (c. 99-55 BCE), Virgil (70-19 BCE), Horace (65-8 BCE), Ovid (43 BCE-18 CE), Plutarch (c. 40-125 CE), and Lucian (c. 120-185 CE). For an interactionist consideration of some works of the Roman poets Horace, Longinus, and Plutarch – who address matters pertaining to the production and reading of poetic materials – see: Prus (2008c).

ent representatives (collective and individual) of the Christian community.

As a consequence of the educational contributions of Alcuin and Charlemagne and various others, Western Europe had been developing a broader and rather exceptional level of Latin Christian scholarship, the likes of which had not been seen for several centuries. The texts considered here are products of this emerging, broader, and intellectual venture.

While the writings of Homer and the Greek playwrights, along with a few texts of Plato and Aristotle had maintained considerable intrigue and continuities among their more immediate Roman successors, these Greek materials eventually would be overshadowed by the Latin texts produced by Roman and Christian authors. Although Roman poetics were built on Greek models, where Greek materials were not copied more extensively, only some of the broader Greek references were retained.

Even more quality of scholarship was lost in Christian quests for religious purity. Still, despite various Christian purges and other setbacks, some secular texts maintained a presence through the dark ages. These included Cicero's (106-43 BCE) *De Inventione*, Virgil's (70-19 BCE) *Aeneid*, Ovid's (43 BCE-18 CE) *Art of Love* and *Metamorphosis*, and Martianus Capella's (c. 380-440 CE) *The Marriage of Philology and Mercury*.

Although poetics and rhetoric may have differing objectives in that poetics is intended to entertain or please audiences, whereas rhetoric is employed more deliberately to influence people's views and

actions, many scholars from the classical Greek era onward have been attentive to the interconnections of these two ventures. Thus, while serving to maintain some conceptual connectedness with the past in the areas of law, politics, and morality, Cicero's *De Inventione* (which also displays an attentiveness to poetical fictions and expressions) was used by 12th-14th century poets both as a subject matter and as a means of presenting materials to readers in more compelling or persuasive terms.

As an engaging epic or heroic account (that incorporated central aspects of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*), Virgil's *Aeneid* had particular relevance for subsequent Latin-European poetics. Ovid's satirical representation of love (*The Art of Love*) also maintained a noteworthy presence through the dark ages, as did his more extensively fictionalized *Metamorphosis*. Indeed, Ovid (Prus 2013a) constitutes a particularly important source of inspiration for the materials addressed in the present paper.

Albeit presented as a fictional account between philosophy and one of the Roman gods, Capella's *The Marriage of Philology and Mercury* also represents an instructional manual on the seven arts (grammar, dialectics, rhetoric, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music). Combined with an assortment of religiously justified texts, these secular works provided a valuable source of continuity in Latin thought and constitute a consequential base for the development of 12th-14th century poetics.

Further, whereas the Christians typically were hostile towards all manners of pagan life-worlds, practices, and expressions, some Christian spokespeople (e.g., Ambrose [c. 337-397], Jerome [c. 347-420], Augustine

[c. 354-430], Boethius [c. 480-524], Gregory the Great [c. 540-604]) more explicitly pursued educational (and expressive) emphases. Thus, despite their “grass roots” images, the primary Christian spokespeople were well-educated (more generally as rhetoricians) individuals. Those who defined the doctrine were not without literary resources or an awareness of the fictionalized (inevitably distorted) nature of their representations of God. Likewise, they were notably attentive to the importance of persuasive communication and education for purposes of proselytizing, dedication, or the study of matters divine.⁷

Pragmatist Motifs in 12th-13th Century French Poetics

In what follows, consideration is given to Alan de Lille’s (c. 1120-1203) *The Complaint of Nature* and *Anticlaudianus*; Andreas Capellanus’ (c. 1150-1200) *The Art of Courtly Love*; and Guillaume de Lorris (c. 1212-1237) and Jean de Meun’s (c. 1235-1305) *The Romance of the Rose*.

Attention also will be given to these authors as reflective entities on their own (i.e., attending to authors as actors, communicators, and interactors). Each text will be briefly outlined and considered mindfully of (1) author viewpoints and interests, (2) depictions of participant qualities, activities, and interchanges, (3) author concerns with their audiences (readers), (4) author attentiveness to critics, and (5) author concerns with the problematics of representation.

⁷ In addition to their own narratives of salvation and portrayals of God (depictions of which many early Christian scholars realized were inevitably imperfect or fictionalized), and the production of homilies and other interpretive religious materials, the early Christians also were active in introducing literary condemnations (“apologetics”) of both pagan life-worlds and any who opposed Christian standpoints.

Although I have tried to represent these authors as authentically as possible, I have not been able to convey the remarkably sophisticated, insightful, and detailed ways in which these texts have been developed. Accordingly, readers are encouraged to examine these works on their own.

The first two authors considered here, Alan de Lille and Andreas Capellanus, emerge as consequential groundbreakers in their 12th century emphases on personification and sensate love, respectively. They appear familiar with (the Roman authors) Cicero, Virgil, Ovid, and Capella, as well as an assortment of Christian sources (notably including Augustine and Boethius). Although they do not claim to be particularly novel in their approaches, their works are technically enabling and serve as valuable reference materials for broader considerations of human relations.

Notably, too, whereas Alan de Lille’s texts lack some of the romantic elements associated with *The Art of Courtly Love* and *The Romance of the Rose*, his attentiveness to personifications, moral conflicts, and human interchange helps set the stage for these other texts. Indeed, while often overlooked, Alan de Lille’s texts represent an important, groundbreaking development in the 12th and 13th century pragmatist analysis of interpersonal relations.

Alan de Lille’s *The Complaint of Nature* and *Anticlaudianus*

Like a number of authors who would follow him, Alan de Lille (also Alain the Great, Alanus de Insulis [c. 1120-1203]) invokes dream motifs as a means of

framing his two texts.⁸ As Sheridan (1989:36) observes, the dream motif or trance offers authors considerable latitude and autonomy in the contents of the text being presented.

Still, of much more relevance for the present paper is Alan’s use of personifications or allegories and the generic standpoints that these literary devices allow authors to achieve.⁹ Thus, while some readers may be entertained by the idea that Reason, Justice, or Greed, for example, might assume roles as living, thinking, acting characters, a more basic sociological insight revolves around people’s capacities to envision these matters in more abstract terms – that particular standpoints, activities, and relationships are not tied to specific people (e.g., with particular physiological qualities or appearances), but have a broader relevance across the community.

It is impossible to know how extensively 12th and 13th century readers actually envisioned human conduct in more generic, role-enacted terms, but they certainly would have had the opportunity to do so by the ways in which these texts are developed. Minimally, it is apparent that several 12th-14th century authors were fluent in articulating the ways in which these human essences are interconnected

⁸ The practice of textually recounting one’s experiences from a dream or other dream-like vision encountered by the author can be traced back to Plato’s vision of Er (*Republic*) and Cicero (Latin rendition of Plato’s account in the dream of Scipio in *De Re Publica*), but is re-engaged by Martianus Capella (c. 380-440) in *The Marriage of Philology and Mercury* and Boethius (c. 480-524) in *The Consolation of Philosophy*.

⁹ The 12th-13th century personification of deities, activities, and emotions, amongst other objects, is not a particularly novel practice in Western social thought. Minimally, it dates back to classical Greek and Latin poetics, theology, and rhetoric, for instance. Still, the use of these metaphors by the French poets considered here is to be appreciated for the more extended strategic and interactively adjustive qualities portrayed within.

(as in affinities, relationships, loyalties, alliances, and wide ranges of cooperative and conflictual interchange).¹⁰

Apparently well known as both a philosopher and a poet in his own time, Alan de Lille derives notable inspiration from Martianus Capella and Boethius (who also invoke allegories or personifications on a more sustained basis). However, while Boethius encounters Philosophy as a female form and (reflectively) engages her with respect to matters of happiness, knowledge, good and evil, and determinism and free will, Alan de Lille develops his personifications (especially in *Anticlaudianus*) in more multifaceted, interactive terms that more closely approximate those of Capella.^{11,12} Consistent with his theological and philosophical emphases more generally, Alan de Lille appears to follow Boethius’ version of Christianity, which is also heavily fused with Platonist philosophy.

¹⁰ Clearly, not all personifications are equally instructive in pragmatist terms. Thus, for instance, the personification of nature or death, which assigns rationality to matters that take place without recourse to human agency, assumes quite different dimensions than do personifications of more minded matters, such as philosophy, reason, pride, or anger.

¹¹ In addition to Philology, who is personified in her marriage to Mercury (the Roman god who somewhat approximates the Greek messenger god, Hermes), Capella also presents the seven Arts (Grammar, Dialectics, Rhetoric, Arithmetic, Geometry, Astronomy, and Harmony [music]) in allegorical form. Each of the Arts is personified and each, in turn, offers a realm of knowledge as a particular noble and compelling dowry to Philology on behalf of Mercury (see: 1977).

Each of the Arts, in notably eloquent fashion, explains who she is, what her origins are, and the nature (scope and content) of her enabling qualities.

Although set in the form of a marriage ceremony, Capella’s volume also represents an encyclopedia of sorts and appears to have been used as a textbook until the early middle-ages.

¹² For some other texts developed more exclusively around generic standpoints and personifications, see the Greek poet Lucian’s (c. 120-200) “Philosophies for Sale” (Volume II), “The Dead Come to Life or The Fisherman” (Volume III), and “The Double Indictment or Trials by Jury” (Volume III); see: *Lucian* (1913-1967).

The Complaint of Nature

The Complaint of Nature is the earlier of the two books of Alan de Lille considered here.¹³ While in a trance, the poet, who is deeply saddened by the evils and vices of the world, encounters a beautiful but continually changing young woman. The female form eventually introduces herself as Nature. Despite her apparent beauty, charm, and powers, the poet observes that Nature is grief ridden. Nature explains that while all other matters of creation accept the laws of nature, people frequently do not.

Ironically, too, Nature observes, of all creatures, it is people who ought to be most grateful for the qualities that God has bestowed on them through the works of Nature. Nature is distraught by several types of human evil, particularly homosexuality. In part, Nature (like Plato, *Republic* [1997]) blames the poets for their generally negative influences but also observes that Venus, whom Nature had appointed to insure appropriate male-female relationships, has been a source of much evil.

Noting that Venus eventually had become bored with her long-standing responsibilities to insure heterosexual love, Nature tells the author that Venus has contributed further to the demise of heterosexual relations through the birth of an illegitimate son, Sport (Jocus), who subsequently fostered a variety of perversions.

Still, Nature's problems are much more extensive. Thus, Nature observes that while justice has been de-

stroyed, fraud, crime, and decadence are rampant everywhere. Instead of becoming more virtuous, Nature finds that people generally have become more vile.

With some encouragement from the poet-dreamer, Nature discusses several vices (also personified), including Gluttony, Idolatry, Lust, Avarice, Arrogance, Envy, and Flattery. Assuming human characters, each of the vices is seen to adopt particular viewpoints, strategize, act, experience emotions, and selectively relate to others in receptive, cooperative, and oppositionary manners. Although Avarice (or Greed) is identified as a major source of personal, interpersonal, and community-wide troubles, Nature vilifies each of the vices (and their kindred associates), in turn.

After listening to Nature's commentary on evil, the poet asks Nature to help him avoid sins of the sort she has described. In response, Nature encourages moderation in consumption while also instructing the poet to practice generosity, resist pride, and maintain a rightful direction in all matters. At this point, Hymenaeus (Venus' honorable but wronged, and long-suffering spouse) appears. At Nature's request, Hymenaeus seeks assistance for Nature from Genius. Appreciating Nature's desperate plight and concurring with Nature's desire to improve the human condition, Genius says he will come to her aid. With Genius (as in knowledge and insight) entering the scene, the poet awakes.

Anticlaudianus

Written after *The Complaint of Nature*, *Anticlaudianus* (or *The Good and Perfect Man*) focuses on Nature's de-

sire for the creation of a perfect man (as a generic or prototypic aspiration).¹⁴ After expressing dissatisfaction with her human creations to date, Nature calls on the Virtues to help her realize her image of a divinely-enabled man. Following some deliberation between Reason and the other virtues, Prudence (judgment or phronesis) is selected to go to Heaven and ask God to provide a soul for what is to be the New Man.

The seven Liberal Arts cooperate to provide Prudence with a vehicle for the voyage. Later, on route, Theology joins Prudence as her guide. Still, finding that even Theology is inadequate to take her all the way to God, Prudence obtains the assistance of Faith. With Faith's help, Prudence eventually is able to explain her mission to God, to ask God to grant a soul to Nature's New Man.

After Prudence returns to earth, Nature physiologically fashions the New Man from earth, water, air, and fire. Concord, Arithmetic, and Music then connect the mortal body with the divinely-enabled soul. The Virtues and the Liberal Arts provide the essential moral and intellectual qualities for the New Man, while Fortune provides nobility.

Thusly enabled, the New Man seems well prepared to meet the world with all of its challenges and evils. Adopting a theologically-guided, but scholarly-informed, philosophic position, the New Man seems eminently equipped to deal with the dark, gloom, and evil of the past and to pursue a new, enlightened vision of human life on earth.

¹⁴ This statement is developed from James J. Sheridan's (1973) translation of *Anticlaudianus* or *The Good and Perfect Man*.

However, not everyone is pleased with what has transpired. While Rumor spreads the news of Nature's latest creation, Gloom assembles the Vices and their evil associates to attack Nature's youthful creation. A fierce battle ensues. With Nature, the Virtues, and the Arts on his side, the New Man eventually prevails. Having defeated the evil characters he encounters, the New Man goes on to assume rule of the earth.

Anticlaudianus introduces a number of potential intriguing themes, including Prudence's adventurous journey to Heaven and an encounter with God, as well as a highly engaging battle between the forces of Good and Evil. However, mindful of our emphasis on human knowing and acting, some other matters are somewhat more pertinent.

In developing his text, Alan de Lille not only appears attentive to Horace's analytical statement "On the Art of Poetry"¹⁵ but also explicitly addresses prospective readers and critics in both his preface to *Anticlaudianus* and in concluding his text. While Alan (Preface) appears to welcome thoughtful commentary, he explicitly dismisses certain people as viable judges of his text. Thus, Alan excludes inexperienced individuals, those who insist on the latest elements of modernity, those who are impatient, or those who pretend to be more knowledgeable than those who preceded them. In concluding his volume,

¹⁵ For those who are not familiar with Horace's short analysis of poetic endeavor, it should be appreciated that Horace's statement is the closest classical Latin approximation of Aristotle's *Poetics*. Although Aristotle's *Poetics* (1984) is much more comprehensive and analytically detailed, it appears unknown to 12th-13th century authors. For many pre-Renaissance and later European authors, thus, Horace's "On the art of poetry" constitutes a particularly enabling statement for considering the ways in which knowing and acting is portrayed in fictional representations of the human condition.

Alan states that his goal has not been to rival his predecessors, but instead has tried to follow the classical authors with care. He hopes that he will not be the object of undue spite or slander for his efforts.

In yet more generic, pragmatist terms, Alan de Lille directs explicit attention to reason, learning, deliberation, and judgment as fundamental features of the human condition. Likewise, while attending to morality and vice in central terms, Alan depicts people as active, reflective, and interacting essences. By presenting the forces of Good and Evil in personified terms, Alan also draws people's attention to the more generic features of these matters for human group life. His presentation may be skewed in terms of his more specific, theologically inspired notions of Good and Evil, but in using allegorical figures or personifications, Alan de Lille contributes notably to a fuller appreciation of the generic standpoints that people (as living representations of the New Man) may develop through education in virtues and the arts.

Andreas Capellanus' *The Art of Courtly Love*

It is not known if Andreas Capellanus' *The Art of Courtly Love* (c. 1150-1200) constitutes a comparatively accurate depiction of more broadly practiced extra-marital relations among men and women of the nobility or represents a more idealized form of romantic involvement that intrigued Capellanus' courtly contemporaries.¹⁶ Nevertheless, Capellanus (a Christian brother) who builds astutely on Ovid's *The Art of Love* (1957) not only provides a remarkably focused and articulate statement on erotic love but does so in

¹⁶ I worked with John Jay Parry's (1941) translation of Andreas Capellanus' *The Art of Courtly Love*.

a way that addresses the wider range of generic social processes associated with subcultural life.

Using courtly love as his primary reference point, Andreas (a) defines love as a humanly experienced essence, (b) indicates who the participants may be, (c) describes the nature of the attractions and effects (as in emotional states, inclinations, disruptions) of these involvements, (d) discusses the ways that people may tactically pursue objects of their affection, and (e) articulates an extended assortment of rules (as in practices, cautions, observations, outcomes) pertinent to this phenomenon.

Although acknowledging only limited personal experience in these matters, Andreas Capellanus says that he has been requested to develop this statement by a younger associate, Walter, who has been smitten by love's intrigues. Still, Andreas' works appear particularly indebted to the patronage of Marie, the Countess of Champagne.

While Book III of Andreas' text is an extended denunciation of erotic love (and a caution about the failings of women more generally) as an activity fostering disregard for other worthwhile matters, as well as encouraging involvements in vices of various sorts, Capellanus approaches his primary subject matter (Books I and II) in a more secular, advisory fashion, comparatively unencumbered by theological matters and virtuous concerns.

In spite of his condemnation of erotic love and female love partners in Book III, Andreas' volume represents a valuable source of continuity in the conceptual analysis of love from Plato (*Symposium*, *Lysis* [1997])

to Ovid to subsequent authors. As well, Andreas provides another highly articulated perspective on "the nature of love" amidst an explicit appreciation of love as a tactically engaged (and rhetorically-enabled) realm of human knowing and acting.

Thus, despite the highly unpredictable, clandestine, and romantic-emotional qualities associated with courtly love, Capellanus not only approaches love as something that can be analyzed in meaningful and adjustive process terms but also presents courtly love as a realm of community morality, intrigue, emotional involvement, entertainment, instruction, anticipation, and strategic interchange (as in images, discretion, impression management, deception).

Andreas does not achieve or maintain a consistent interactionist viewpoint, but his depiction of courtly love as a realm of meaningful enterprise and interchange is much more consistent with a pragmatist emphasis than are most of the analyses of interpersonal attraction that one finds in the contemporary (structuralist) social sciences.

Further, Andreas Capellanus not only acknowledges the discrepancies between sensate and religious life-worlds but also explicates the rules of courtly love and the conditions of their application. Thus, Andreas indicates just how extensively particular sensate life-worlds may be articulated as group practices (with their own moralities, justifications, and regulatory practices) within more extended religious communities (i.e., Christianity in this case).

Relatedly, despite Andreas' explicit and extended denouncement of sensate courtly love and his sharp

depreciation of women as objects of love in Book III, the predominant interest in the book for most readers is apt to have been in Books I and II. Thus, whether people practiced the art of courtly love in more direct and sustained terms, did so only in more transitory, voyeuristic, and fanciful terms, or approached the matter more entirely in condemnatory, righteous, and gossipy manners, much recreational consideration and conversation seems likely to have been directed to the ways in which love may be acquired and retained – as well as the rules of love and their possible circumvention.

The Art of Courtly Love appears to have helped sustain interest in romantic relationships as focal points of popular thought, fictional representations, and some scholarly analyses of love as an aspect of ongoing community life over the following centuries. Still, for those interested in pursuing a comparative analysis of affective relationships, there is much material to be appreciated mindful of subcultural involvements (as in people's perspectives, linguistic fluency, negotiated interchange, and the like; see: Prus 1997)

Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun's *The Romance of the Rose*

While Andreas Capellanus provides an analysis of courtly love amidst an instructional commentary and condemnation of erotic love, *The Romance of the Rose* (hereafter, *The Rose*) is presented more entirely as a love story among the French gentry.¹⁷ Still, in ways that resonate with Alan de Lille, *The Rose* also

¹⁷ I found the translations of both Frederick S. Ellis (1900) and Harry W. Robbins (1962) very helpful for engaging *The Romance of the Rose*. I also was grateful to the materials provided by Maxwell Luria (1982) *A Reader's Guide to the Roman de la Rose*.

is developed as an account of the author's dream and relies heavily on personifications and the interchanges of the characters thusly portrayed.

Like Alan de Lille, Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun present the central characters as developing standpoints, deliberating, acting, suggesting, and engaging in collectively coordinated activity. However, whereas Alan de Lille focuses more directly on the interchanges of Good and Evil as these center around the New Man, Guillaume and Jean developed two interrelated versions of a love story. The authors remain attentive to notions of community morality in *The Rose*, but this assumes a somewhat secondary emphasis to the human (albeit primarily male) quest for sensual, romantic love.

Although *The Romance of the Rose* is presently read as one volume, it consists of two parts, developed sequentially, by two different authors. Thus, while Guillaume de Lorris (c. 1212-1237) developed the original text, it was substantially extended by Jean de Meun (c. 1235-1305). Separated by a period of over 30 years, the authors also pursue somewhat different emphases in developing their sections of *The Rose*. Thus, while Jean de Meun continues *The Rose* in a synthetic flow, his approach also is notably more philosophic and intendedly instructional. Still, Jean has blended the two segments in ways that achieve a viable, exceptionally smooth transition.

Depicting the experiences of the dreamer or lover who inadvertently fell under Love's influence when attending to a particular Rose in a garden, *The Rose* assumes a great many theatrical qualities as an assortment of characters enter the story in the forms

of allegories or personifications. In addition to the Lover (Dreamer), Love, and the Rose (object of desire), other participants include Friend, Reason, Jealousy, Fair-Welcome (Receptivity), Hope, Dangier (Danger; as in obstacles, villainy), Hypocrisy, Evil Tongue, Shame, Fear, Nature, Old Woman, and False Seeming (sympathetic skill).

As the story unfolds, the characters enter, engage the Lover and/or one another, depart, and sometimes re-enter the story. While developing their roles in manners consistent with the characters they represent, the participants portray an intriguing set of *generic viewpoints*. Thus, in contrast to particular individuals, Friend could represent anyone who attempts to act in the Lover's interests, Jealousy could be anyone who wishes to keep the Lover apart from the Rose, while Reason might be anyone (including oneself) who cautions the Lover about the limitations and follies of romantic love, and Foul Mouth could be anyone who sees advantages or takes delight in soiling people's reputations or creating other difficulties for specific individuals.

In addition to acknowledging the wide assortment of others who constitute *the collectively-enacted community* in which the Lover attempts to pursue the Rose, the authors not only depict the varying interests and practices of many of those taking more active roles in the venture but also indicate the ways in which the participants may align themselves with others – both in support of and in opposition to the Lover's activities. Well, there is an appreciation of the ways in which people may engage other matters, such as resistance, fear, and shame, as these enter into the emergent love drama.

Although *The Rose* acquires some additional intrigues as a love story, pragmatist social scientists are apt to appreciate the extended discourses of Reason, Friend, and Nature (on necessity and freedom). Also consequential as a more scholarly matter is Jean de Meun's (second author) explicit attempt to defend their text, *The Romance of the Rose*, against prospective moral and literary critics. This especially includes the deployment and presentation of the various tactically engaged characters (and generic standpoints) that de Lorris and de Meun develop therein.

Much more than a love story, thus, *The Rose* is a consideration of people's (reflective and interpersonal) struggles with love and reason. It is a portrayal of their attempts to deal with sensate and romantic desires amidst conventional moralities and the presence of those who might facilitate, as well as frustrate, their endeavors. *The Romance of the Rose* may have been developed as a vehicle for entertainment and as an instructional manual (on the art of love), as well as an exercise in literary criticism (and satire), but more than that, *The Rose* may be seen as a sociological depiction of community life.

The Rose begins (R:1-7) with with the first author [Guillaume de Lorris] recounting a dream in which he enters the Garden of Mirth.¹⁸ After encountering the companions of Sir Mirth, the Dreamer (also the Lover) is emotionally wounded by the God of Love as the Dreamer sets eyes on one of the Roses in the garden.

¹⁸ The references to the sections of *The Rose* referenced here are developed mindfully of the sections in *The Romance of the Rose* translated by Harry W. Robbins (1962). As will become readily apparent, I have maintained the overall flow of this volume.

With the God of Love now as his companion and master, the Lover not only is instructed in the commandments of love (R:9) but also informed about the agonies of love (R:10), as well as told about remedies for the pains of love (R:11).

While sensing receptivity on the part of the Rose through the person of Fair Welcome (R:12), the Lover also encounters Dangier (obstacles, resistances) and the related noteworthy characters of Evil Tongue, Shame, and Fear (R:13).

Mindful of Lover's hesitations, Reason appears and counsels Lover to forgo loyalties to the God of Love, from which Reason claims only foolishness and misfortune are apt to follow (R:14).

Possessed with desire for the Rose, the Lover dismisses Reason. Lover then encounters Friend who will try to help Lover deal with his predicament (R:15). The ladies Franchise (as in openness, frankness) and Pity subsequently intervene on Lover's behalf, quelling Dangier by justifying Lover's plight, on the one hand, and arousing sympathy, on the other (R:16). With Fair Welcome's receptive assistance, the Lover eventually kisses the Rose, finding himself in totalizing bliss (R:17).

Still, Lover's happiness is sharply punctured by Evil Tongue and Jealousy who, subsequently accompanied by Shame and Fear, soon combine to spoil the romance, disparage Lover, and isolate the Rose (and Fair Welcome) in a seemingly impenetrable castle (R:18-20).

[Encountering the Lover in this state of despair, **Jean de Meun** (the second author) resurrects the love affair.]

Lamenting the deep sense of loss he has suffered at the hands of Jealousy, Evil Tongue, Shame, and Fear, the Lover beckons back to Reason's warnings (R:20).

Sensing the Lover's grief, Reason again appears and encourages the Lover to forego love. Reason directs a sustained verbal attack against sensate ventures of these sorts (R:21), followed by considerations of youth and old age (R:22) and the virtues of higher love in the form of genuine friendship as defined by Cicero (R:23).

Then, following a commentary on the fickle nature of Fortune and the value of true friendship (R:24), Reason defines true happiness in terms of a virtuous life-style (as exemplified by Boethius' *The Consolation of Philosophy* [1962]) in preparation for life in the next world (R:25). After discussing the evils of riches and the importance of justice for the (troubled) human community (R:26), Reason informs the Lover of the many intellectual resources she can provide, followed by some illustrative cases for the lover to contemplate (R:28-32).

The Lover becomes impatient with Reason, indicating that he prefers riches to Socrates and remains single-mindedly focused on his quest for the Rose. Exercising great prudence, Reason insists that she is only concerned with the Lover's best interests and encourages him to attend to Plato's *Timaeus* and to the field of philosophy. The Lover again dismisses Reason, saying that he will be a fool of his own accord and has desire only for the Rose (R:33).

Still feeling despondent, Lover encounters Friend. After reassuring Lover that Fair Welcome's receptivity is most consequential in his quest for the

Rose, Friend cautions Lover about Evil Tongue at some length. Friend emphasizes the advantages of maintaining congenial relations with troublesome people no matter how despicable they may be (R:34), Friend offers further advice on securing the Rose's affection. He tells Lover not to be overtly concerned about securing his lady's love but rather to act with bravado, to assume a willingness to risk her scorn. Still, Friend also encourages Lover to be attentive to the Rose's moods, and to adjust accordingly. Friend advises Lover not to fear Shame and Dangier, but to deal with them strategically.

More importantly, though, Friend instructs Lover to be particularly mindful of Fair Welcome (as in variable notions, styles, areas, and depths of receptivity). Friend tells Lover to adjust his style so that he will appear to be what the Rose wants him to be. Thus, Lover's goal will be secured through deception, impression management, and ingratiation (R:35).

Lover resents Friend's advice, saying that he cannot treat the Rose in this insincere fashion, that such deception would be an act of treachery. Moreover, Lover insists on forcefully disposing of Evil Tongue. In the ensuing interchange, Friend again cautions Lover about the risks of attacking Evil Tongue, and points out Lover's vulnerability to the slippery evasions of Evil Tongue (R:36).

Friend also addresses the tactic of attracting love by extensive gifting, as may be practiced by the rich. Friend cautions the Lover that those with limited funds can soon spend themselves into poverty. In doing so, poverty-stricken lovers (as with Friend himself) will find themselves in more desperate

circumstances yet, and can expect to be deserted by their (materialistic) object of affection (R:37).

After expounding on the disastrous pains of poverty (R:36), Friend instructs Lover on the importance of gifting. Where money is not plentiful, Friend suggests that Lover be resourceful in the items given, noting as well that gifts may overcome the effects of gossip and other negative dispositions. Poetry, however, is generally not worth the effort and offers little hope against those with wealth (R:39).

In the ensuing dialogue, Friend also compares the current era with the golden past (R:40) and provides an extended dialogue on jealousy. Friend discusses the dilemmas and counterproductive practices of the jealous husband (R:41-45), and then (R:46) considers the broader decline in human happiness (attributable to envy, anger, avarice, slander).

Friend then instructs Lover on the artful practice of love. In addition to exercising caution and diplomacy, Friend stresses the importance of the Lover attending to ingratiation, blaming others for one's own indiscretions, and praising his beloved (irrespective of her actual qualities). These things, especially tolerance and flattery, Friend says, will engender loyalty (R:47).

Reaffirming his resolve in pursuing the Rose, the Lover seeks out Fair Welcome. Lover also hopes to obtain some assistance from Wealth but is abruptly refused and told that he should listen to Reason.

Still, Lover remains mindful of Friend's advice regarding the importance of maintaining congenial

relations with Evil Tongue and other difficult characters (R:48). At this point, the God of Love re-enters the scene and promises to aid Lover. Observing that the Lover is intent on avoiding villainy while exercising civil decorum, pleasantries, and congeniality, as well as modesty, happiness, and generosity, the God of Love notes that Lover is attentive to the precepts of love (R:49).

In a scene reminiscent of Alan de Lille's *Anticlaudianus* and Nature's attempt to help the New Man, the God of Love begins to assemble his forces to help the (deserving) Lover. These include Idleness, Nobility of Heart, Generosity, Pity, Fond Delight, Gladness, and Beauty, as well as Forced Abstinence and False Seeming (i.e., deception) (R:50).

Attending to the collective nature of their venture, Love's barons work out a strategy for disposing of the enemies of love (Evil Tongue, Shame, Fear, and the Old Woman [guardian]). Venus (the mother of the God of Love) also appears to aid the Lover who Wealth has treated so poorly (R:51).

The God of Love also enlists the services of False Seeming, who specializes in deceit. Following an extended discussion of the hypocrisy of many of those who pretend to be servants of God (R:52-55), False Seeming and Forced Abstinence prevail on Evil Tongue to make a confession to God about Evil Tongue's own activities, the purpose of which is to ensure Evil Tongue's silence.

After disposing of Evil Tongue's capacity for malicious speech, False Seeming and Constrained Abstinence accompanied by Courtesy and Generosity approach the

Old Woman (who controls access to the Rose). Once she is assured that Evil Tongue no longer represents a direct threat to her, the Old Woman is much more receptive to the benefits of Generosity and can be more sympathetic to the Lover's predicament and desires. Still, the Old Woman intends to instruct Fair Welcome on the ways of love and life. Thus, after telling Fair Welcome about her own experiences in these matters (R:59), the Old Woman proceeds to provide her theory of love (R:60), complete with observations, generalizations, strategies, cautions, and misadventures (R:61).

After putting these matters in historical context, the Old Woman tells Fair Welcome how women can gain men's love. Her instructions are explicit, detailed, and strategically calculating (R:62). She follows this with a story of the Roman gods, before concluding her statement on life and love (R:63-64).

Fair Welcome thanks the Old Woman for her advice and agrees to accept the Lover (R:65). However, even though the Lover gains access to the castle of Jealousy, he is rudely confronted with Dangier, Fear, and Shame. Fair Welcome is imprisoned and the Lover is thrown out by the enemies of love (R:67).

[In the midst of this account, the author, Jean de Meun, apologizes for his text. He says he will attempt to defend himself against evil-minded people. He asks that his text be viewed in instructional rather than malicious terms and that his criticisms of religion are directed towards hypocrites rather than sincerely devout Christians (R:70).]

Recognizing Lover's plight, the forces of the God of Love resume the attack, only to be forcefully re-

pelled by Dangier, Shame, and Fear (R:1-73). Lover is forced to accept a general truce (R:74).

However, when Venus, the mother of Love, intervenes. A new assault is begun and the treaty broken (R:75-76).

Nature also becomes involved in the conflict. While acknowledging her unpleasant role in bringing about death, Nature also plays an essential role in procreation and is relieved to see Venus enter the scene (R:77).

Then, following an extended denouncement of women by Genius (Nature's chaplain), Nature is encouraged to make a confession to Genius. Nature's confession is quite lengthy, covering God's creation, the celestial bodies, a philosophic consideration of predestination and free will (R:82), the weather, illusions and dreams, premonitions, and nobility (as in virtue vs. birth [R:86]), and the disregard of Nature's laws by man (especially the law of procreation [R:88]). Nature then asks for Genius' help in encouraging the God of Love (R:89).

After revealing Nature's sympathy towards the Lover to Cupid, Genius (R:90-95) embarks on a sermon wherein he stresses the importance of human procreation, amidst a virtuous, religious life-style. He also emphasizes the desirable and enduring qualities of Heaven as opposed to the dangers of the flesh and the related follies of the Garden of Mirth.

When Genius has finished his sermon and departs from the scene, Venus begins a highly concerted assault on the castle of Jealousy. Making all of the roses in the garden available for the plucking, Venus

diffuses Jealousy's focus and, likewise, neutralizes Shame and Fear (R:95-96).

Recounting the story of Pygmalion and his total enchantment with the feminine marble form he had generated, the poet addresses the collectively-enabled nature of love. Thus, once Venus strategically had prepared the way, Courtesy, Pity, and Openness urged Fair Welcome to receive the Lover – the effect of which was even more compelling than that experienced by Pygmalion (R:98). Making his way into the ivory tower, the formerly frustrated but now grateful Lover obtains the Rose (R:99-100). Then, with the morning on its way, the poet awakes from his dream.

Conclusion

As should be apparent from the preceding discussion, the French poets considered here merit much closer attention on the part of social scientists than can be given in the present statement. Still, before addressing their contributions in more singular terms, it is important to establish their (pragmatist) attentiveness to human knowing and acting. Thus, rather than view their texts as isolated instances of literature, the works of these early French poets attest to a more generic appreciation of human lived experience.

In considering whether these texts may represent genuine contributions to the social science enterprise it is necessary to establish some criteria of viability. To this end, one may ask how these texts compare with 20th and 21st century symbolic interactionist thought and research with respect to (1) baseline premises, (2) conceptual attentiveness to gener-

ic social processes, (3) methodological practices, and (4) analytical emphases.

It may seem inappropriate to expect that the works of these pre-Renaissance poets would closely match these criteria. However, their utility as instructional sources within the interactionist paradigm is contingent on these affinities. Thus, it is important to know where and in what ways these materials are consistent with the interactionist enterprise.

First, neither Alan de Lille, Andreas Capellanus, nor Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun articulate *the premises* pertaining to human knowing and acting in ways that approximate the texts developed by Mead (1934), Blumer (1969), Lofland (1976), Strauss (1993), and Prus (1996; 1997), for instance. Nevertheless, these 12th-13th century poets are attentive to broader pragmatist notions of multiple viewpoints, linguistically-achieved meanings, reflectivity, activity, influence and resistance, relationships, and process.

Moreover, while astutely addressing the viewpoints and activities of the most central participants in love's ventures, these French poets are notably mindful of amorous relationships as more extensive, collectively articulated events – as matters best understood within the context of ongoing interactional community life.

The French poets considered here may have been notably constrained by the religious contexts in which they lived and wrote, but once readers approach these texts in more neutral (atheological) ways, it becomes apparent that these poets engage human group life in terms that are notably pluralist

and pragmatist in emphases. This includes a particular attentiveness to people's struggles with affection, sexuality, and morality. These authors may encourage theological and secular morality (i.e., broader societal and more particular group-based virtues) at times but they also are mindful of people's personal intrigues, dilemmas, activities, and interchanges.

When one turns to a more explicit elaboration of the basic or generic *conceptual themes* that characterize interactionism more generally (e.g., Blumer 1969; Prus 1996; 1997), somewhat similar conclusions may be drawn. Thus, when one considers the matters of acquiring perspectives, achieving identity, developing relationship, doing activity, making commitments, achieving linguistic fluency, expressing emotionality, and forming and coordinating associations, one finds that the French poets are quite attentive to these basic features of human group life.

These sorts of emphases on the enacted features of human group life are perhaps more evident in Andreas Capellanus' *The Art of Courtly Love* and Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun's *The Romance of the Rose*, but Alan de Lille's *The Complaint of Nature* and *Anticlaudianus* also attest to matters of this sort.

Not unexpectedly, the French poets fare much more poorly when assessed on the *methodological criterion* of symbolic interactionism. Whereas the poets clearly work with reference points pertinent to their own time and place – as they consider the experiences of their contemporaries, as well as provide some exceptionally detailed analytic accounts of human

knowing and acting – they do not offer data of more directly situated and sustained sorts.

Further, although these authors are highly astute observers in many respects, they present their materials in more distinctively entertaining ways. Thus, many readers may lose sight of the sociological representativeness of their observations. This is not to dismiss the value of these generic representations of human lived experiences, but to suggest that readers be mindful of these limitations.

However, before we judge the French poets too harshly on this methodological criterion, it might be appreciated that it has not been until the last century that social scientists have become more attentive to the importance of pursuing ethnographic research in more sustained terms.¹⁹

Moreover, a great many social scientists (researchers and theorists) still give little importance to the matter of attending to people's lived experiences in more direct methodological and conceptual-analytic terms. In this sense, the 12th and 13th century French poets considered here seem much more mindful of the actualities of human interchange than are a great many of those in sociology and psychology who presently claim status as "social scientists."

This brings us to the fourth criterion. What is the nature of *analysis* that the 12th-13th century French

¹⁹ For more extended critiques of the positivist tradition, with its emphasis on factors and variables rather than an attentiveness to human knowing and acting, see Blumer (1969), Prus (1996; 1999), Prus and Grills (2003), Grills and Prus (2008).

authors present in the texts featured here? Are their materials largely expressive and playful or does this literature have consequential transsituational and/or transhistorical analytic relevance? Relatedly, do these statements offer any sustained frames for examining human knowing and acting beyond some more situated sociological insights? More minimally, do the materials contained in these texts provide resources for more sustained comparative analysis?

While it might be appreciated that none of these poets achieve the highly analytical scope and depth that one finds in the broader philosophic works of Plato, Aristotle, or (their own 13th century contemporary) Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), the French poets considered here all have attended to people's encounters with morality (i.e., engaging community notions of good and evil) and theology (defining and attending to divinity), as well as matters (albeit less evenly) of knowledge (as wisdom, philosophy, scholarship), love (romantic, sexual, and friendship), identities and reputations, and influence work.

Clearly, none of these authors has developed a more comprehensive philosophy of human relations. Still, as is particularly evident in Capellanus' *The Art of Courtly Love* and de Lorris and de Meun's *The Romance of the Rose*, these authors provide insightful and comparatively sustained analyses of interpersonal relations. More generally, the poets considered here are very capable analysts. They have not embarked on a more explicit and systematic comparative and abstract analyses of a sort characterizing interactionist agendas (Blumer 1969; Lofland 1976; Strauss 1993; Prus 1996; 1997; Prus

and Grills 2003), but the work of these French poets is notably sophisticated in related ways.

As well, because these poets deal with matters of human relations, identities, influence work, morality, and religion in fairly explicit and detailed ways, contemporary social scientists would likely find it productive to examine these materials in more direct, analytically comparative terms (possibly using interactionist conceptualizations of generic social processes as particular comparison points).

Quite directly, even though these statements are fictionalized in certain regards,²⁰ they were prepared by very capable scholars who are (pragmatically) attentive to a great many of the enacted features of human group life. Thus, for those pursuing cross-cultural analyses, the French poets considered here provide materials from another place and time that compare notably with the cross-cultural ethnographic materials developed by contemporary anthropologists.

In addition to the conceptual continuities that they provide in the development of Western social thought (from Christian, Roman, and yet earlier Greek sources to subsequent developments in Western European poetics and broader scholarly understandings of human relations), these statements also represent

²⁰ Materials presented in fictionalized manners (as in fabrications, expressive emphases, allegories, and misrepresented content) and subscribing to a specific poetic form (as in preset formats, rhymes, and tempos) may pose additional challenges for those questing for authenticity in the social sciences. As well, these renditions also are apt to be more difficult to translate directly than prose (particularly of an intendedly direct and overt sort). However, because of their comparatively strong pragmatist emphasis, and highly detailed text and self-reflective presentations, these 12th-13th century French poets provide some particularly valuable resources from the past.

reference points that would strengthen contemporary comparative analysis of human knowing and acting. In that sense, these early French materials represent part of a highly instructive but much neglected intellectual treasure chest from the past.

Moreover, beyond the significance of these texts for considerations of community life in their own time, it also might be appreciated that these French materials, in conjunction with earlier Roman texts and the subsequent rediscovery of Aristotle's *Poetics*, contributed notably to what would become 13th and 14th century Italian humanism.

Indeed, these French authors appear to have provided considerable inspiration for Brunetto Latini's (1220-1294) *The Little Treasure* and *The Book of Treasures*; Dante Alighieri's (1265-1321) *The Divine Comedy*, *The New Life*, and *The Banquet*; and Giovanni Boccaccio's (1313-1375) *Decameron* and other works on interpersonal relations.²¹ Denoting highly competent precursors to the 15th-19th century European theater (via playwrights, critics, and analysts), there is much emphasis in the works of Latini, Dante, and Boccaccio in establishing contexts, defining roles and characters, portraying human activity and tactical interchange, attending to sensate intrigues and community morality, and achieving authenticity and other audience connections in the midst of elaborately-developed fantasy.²²

²¹ Along with Francesco Petrarch (1304-1374) whose poetical emphases are of a very different quality, Latini, (and especially) Dante and Boccaccio represent central participants in the 14th century "humanist movement" (in which classical Greek and Latin scholarship were given priority in matters of intellectual development).

²² For a more detailed account of the poetic productions of Brunetto Latini, Dante Alighieri, Giovanni Boccaccio and the relevance of their work for the study of community life, see: Prus (2014 [forthcoming in *QSR*]).

The 12th-13th century French poets considered here are much more idiosyncratic in their presentations and analyses than those pursuing Chicago-style interactionism. However, because of the broader base of premises, concepts, and studies associated with Chicago-style interactionism and the careful attention that these early French poets have given to pragmatic matters of human knowing and acting, contemporary scholars can employ these texts in comparative-analytic terms to assess and extend interactionist conceptualizations (especially generic social processes) of human group life.²³

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²³ In drawing attention to the considerable value of these texts for comparative transhistorical and transcultural analyses, it is not proposed (also see: Prus 2008d) that contemporary social scientists strive to be poets or poetical in their representations of the human condition. Indeed, had these French authors been more attentive to the social science venture, their materials likely would have been yet more valuable as instances of scholarship. Still, these texts (along with Part II of the three part *Summa Theologica* of Thomas Aquinas [1981]) appear to be among the very best material on human knowing and acting that is available from this era. Thus, we can be particularly grateful to these French poets. Perhaps, as well, it may be because of their entertaining qualities that these literary materials have been preserved over the intervening century.

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Optimizing the Epistemological Potential of Focus Groups in Research on a Contested Issue

Abstract This article explores the potential of the focus group to generate analyzable social interaction. We investigate the ways in which group interaction may lead to new insights using examples from a 2011 study on transformation at a South African university campus. Certain aspects of sociable interaction, such as communicative interaction, power and agency, conflict, as well as exchange are touched upon and their roles in the intersubjective construction of reality are emphasized. We also look at the role of the facilitator in setting up a successful focus group session and the ways in which a naturalistic interactional setting may compensate for the relative unnatural nature of the group situation. Our argument is for the realization of the potential of the focus group as a qualitative method of data collection that is inherently geared towards generating understanding of contested issues, as it allows for an exciting positioning of the researcher between that of interviewer and participant observer, readily able to experience interactional exchange first hand while subtly directing the group conversation into areas of special interest. We believe that the unique epistemological possibilities of the focus group merit a re-engagement with the method by any social scientist interested in the dynamics underlying the social construction of reality, as it offers a window into the ways in which unfolding reality is intersubjectively contested, debated, and finally agreed upon.

Keywords Communicative Interaction; Conflict; Conversational Exchange; Constructivism; Epistemology; Exchange; Interaction Ritual; Negotiated Knowledge; Power and Agency; Sociable Interaction

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Introducing the Focus Group

Most sociologists will agree that the focus group consists of a small group of people assembled to explore/discuss a specific topic (Flick 2009:195). But, for some time now it has been accepted that “the hallmark of focus groups is the explicit use of the group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group” (Morgan 1988:12). This article focuses on this very issue of “interaction.” We will argue that focus groups are specifically effective when picking up on and highlighting the processes of social interaction as participants present, explain, and defend their personal opinions and beliefs (Bloor et al. 2001). It is a useful “stand-alone” method for seeking socially grounded insights into people’s lives, beliefs, and experiences. The purpose of the focus group is not so much to generate accounts of individuals’ perceptions – that can be achieved through individual interviews. The interest is rather in what is happening within the group and to what extent the interactions within the group will lead to new insights.

Focus Group Interaction

An important condition for the effective functioning of the focus group is what Warr (2007:153) refers to as “a group’s capacity for sociable interaction.” The interaction within the focus group can only take place if the members of the focus group are capable of participating in the discourse opened by the focus group facilitator. In other words, they need to know what the issues are. The capacity of the focus group for “sociable interaction” coincides directly with their conversational competencies:

their capacities for reflexive discussion. Members of the focus group are requested to speak to the others. They need to use the discursive and interpersonal skills that they use in everyday life to converse with others. An assortment of talk (narrative, explanation, persuasion, domination, defense, rationalization, etc.) should ideally be generated in the focus group. For this assortment of talk to take place a fair amount of management skills on behalf of the facilitator is required. A relaxed, conversational atmosphere, created by the facilitator, can make up for the fact that focus group discussions mostly do not take place in truly natural settings (real contexts of everyday life). In lieu of a lack of natural setting, the facilitator needs to promote as natural an interactional setting as possible.

Speaking of a spontaneous interactional setting, a successful focus group can often be somewhat disorderly as members of the group compete for a turn to speak. The sharing of opinions and stories may lead to challenges, interjections, and commentaries. This points towards a successful focus group because lively interaction implies a spontaneous situation, even though the focus group itself might not be a natural setting. Lively focus group interaction challenges participants to join in or drop out of the discussion. Group members can share their experiences, views, and aspects of their life-worlds. During the discussion, meaning can be created, disputed, contested, reworked, and refined within the processes of the group. The real challenge for the facilitator is to prevent the interactions from moving towards silencing, suppressing, or forcefully persuading certain members of the group rather than allowing true opinions to be raised. For this

reason, it might be easier to obtain reliable information from focus groups in which equality is strongly embedded. Conversational competency is often perceived to be easier to obtain when the group members' interpersonal skills and reflexive abilities are relatively similar. To gather superiors and subordinates into the same focus group often stifles conversational competence. Diversity of opinion, on the other hand, is the hallmark of a successful focus group discussion. It is important that the focus group discussion should be directed in such a way that it might reveal the social and cultural contexts of participants' individual beliefs, and not merely the existence of diverse opinions.

To obtain a high level of conversational exchange might be ideal, but it is not often achieved. Gamson (1992) refers to the issue that many participants in focus groups are not accustomed to a situation in which they exchange ideas freely with others. Speaking in a focus group is, for most participants, tantamount to speaking in front of an audience. Speaking out in a focus group equates to "sociable public discourse" (Gamson 1992:20-29). The success of a focus group therefore depends largely on the way in which interaction is produced in the focus group. Some members of the focus group find the aspect of public discourse problematic even when other members of the group are perceived as their equals and as trustworthy, and even when they are personally known to them. The skilled focus group facilitator will be sensitive to the effect of this public nature of the discussion and will attempt to maximize the group's capacity for sociable interaction. He or she will do this by drawing on his/her own conversational competency, as well as the group's capacity for reflexive discussion, using

as much as possible the discursive and interpersonal skills that people use to communicate their opinions (Gamson 1992).

Lively discourses, and sometimes a noisy assortment of talk, are not limitations of the focus group as a method. During data analysis, the researcher has to return to the ways in which meaning was created, challenged, reworked, and shaped. The emphasis is on insightful interaction, and the researcher will be on the lookout for consistent reports of opinion and consistent representations of experience (Warr 2007:154), both of which are conveyed by language. The interaction recorded during the focus group needs to be transcribed in order to establish an account of this interaction (a text that can be submitted to hermeneutical analysis).

The main aim of the hermeneutical interpretation of the text is to move towards understanding the underlying meaning conveyed during the focus group session. This relates closely to the understanding of the underlying meaning that individual remarks, discussions, interventions, arguments, or expressions might have within the context of the focus group. During the focus group session, through language, the participants engage in constructing their social worlds and the way in which they operate within social reality.

The Focus Group as an Interaction Ritual

In the previous section, emphasis was on the interaction between research participants. In the words of Wilkinson (cited in Silverman 2011:169), "the moderator does not ask questions of each focus group

participant in turn, but, rather, facilitates group discussion, actively encouraging group members to interact with each other." A focus group in which interaction successfully occurs becomes a window to how people experience the issue under discussion because it constitutes a social context that is amenable to direct observation. We will come back to this later on in the article, but at this point it is sufficient to mention that conversational analytic, hermeneutical, reflexive interpretational and ethnomethodological approaches provide a useful epistemological base for the analysis of data obtained through focus groups. In the focus group discussion, everything points towards language in action. The researcher therefore aims at a detailed understanding of talk and text in its social setting.

When focusing on the interaction between participants in focus groups, one is drawn to the microsociological work of Randal Collins. His initial references to the microfoundation of sociology (Collins 1981:985) were followed by his "theory of interaction ritual," as elaborated on in the book *Interaction Ritual Chains* (Collins 2004). Some of the issues raised by Collins in this book that are relevant to the assessment of the epistemological strength of focus group research include:

- Intentionality and consciousness expressed during verbal exchanges;
- Symbolic and strategic interaction that constitute an arena within which bargaining, exchange, and rational choice can take place;
- Situations that are defined as momentary encounters between participants;
- "Agency...as the energy appearing in human bodies and emotions and as the intensity and focus of human consciousness" (Collins 2004:6);
- The interaction ritual as based on the participants' definition of the situation (the principle that makes shared reality effectively real for participants);
- The ritual taking place in a condition of situational co-presence – a full-scale encounter;
- The interaction ritual as situation/encounter incorporating a wide spectrum of emotions, symbols, thinking, subjectivity, and intersubjectivity.

In the data analysis section, we indicate to what extent these issues are reflected in the focus groups conducted for a research project on transformation at a South African university campus. The stories told by individuals during focus group sessions are incorporated into narratives that attain a broader, collective dimension. The participants' individual accounts open a new dimension of insight into the experience of social transformation on a university campus. The individual accounts also reflect on the

collective lived experiences of the groups within which the discussions took place. For this reason, successful focus group discussions should also contain ethnographic dimensions in as far as gestures, facial expressions, confirmation, negation, and other forms of observable behavior and communication are concerned.

Interaction and Negotiated Knowledge within the Focus Group

This article draws from a series of focus groups conducted among students on the campus of a South African university currently undergoing significant transformation. The focus groups took place between May and August 2011 in Bloemfontein, South Africa. Formerly an Afrikaans-language institution for white South Africans, the post liberation University of the Free State (UFS) is now a non-segregated, parallel-medium institution. Currently, the majority of students (about 70%) can be described as black. The research probes the ways in which students from different cultural and racial backgrounds generate critical comments on how directed transformation processes impact on intergroup relations and personal wellbeing. Most of the discussions focused specifically on students' experiences of transformation with regards to the integration of student residences (where segregation along racial lines existed previously). Racial integration of residences appears to be one of the most important issues pertaining to the overall experience of transformation.

In the focus groups, the students' experiences, frustrations, fears, and hopes are explored. This happens within the context of the focus group as a space for

constructing a different way of knowing. Departing from the assumption that these focus groups provide an interactive setting for the expression of synergy, conflict, dispute, dialogical exchange, and reconciliation, the article explores negotiated knowledge. How does the interactive setting of the focus group contribute to students formulating opinions, expressing views, declaring beliefs, and managing polarities?

In the preceding sections, we made the argument that focus groups offer epistemologically different insights from other qualitative methods. This is the case because focus groups are more "naturalistic" than interviews, biographies, or life stories. Focus groups are more "naturalistic" because they are closer to everyday conversation and include a range of communicative processes (Wilkinson 2004:180). They make it possible for participants to react to remarks made by other members and to create a "synergistic effect" (Wilkinson 2004:180). The communicative processes facilitated by focus groups include those covered in the examples below.

Under the guidance of a trained facilitator, conversational exchange, engagement, and encounter took place, and knowledge and insight were created. In many ways, when the spoken word gets transcribed, we freeze and solidify the personal and unique characteristics of the focus group as an interaction ritual. The transcriptions therefore do not do full justice to illustrating the communicative processes involved in the interactions that took place during the focus group discussions. However, something of the encounter and interaction will become apparent through the following examples.

Unpacking the Data

This section highlights the ways in which focus groups offer access to aspects of sociable interaction that are not readily available through other methodological means, as argued throughout the article. Various dynamics of face-to-face interaction and the underlying ritual chains, during which participants consciously and strategically engage in the process of intersubjective meaning making, are explored alongside relevant examples from the 2011 study on transformation mentioned earlier. We focus on four major facets of group interaction in particular, namely, communicative interaction, power and agency, conflict, and exchange. Each of these aspects is explored along with relevant subthemes and practical examples from the data.

Communicative Interaction

Communicative interaction encompasses the various ways in which language, bodily gestures, and other expressions are harnessed to symbolically create meaning in social encounters. Examples of communicative interaction commonly generated in focus group discussions include argument, explanation, and rationalization.

Argument

Argument refers to a communicative interaction in which diverging or opposite views are exchanged, typically but not necessarily, in a passionate fashion. In the following example, we see two black male respondents arguing over the possible abolition of Afrikaans as an official language of the UFS, in favor

of single-medium English instruction. At first, they disagree, with Sir supporting the idea and Tezovic opposing it, mentioning the idea of first language tertiary education for all. It then becomes apparent that Tezovic had misinterpreted the question, seemingly understanding the question to be about Afrikaans as an official national language. He then corrects himself and agrees with Sir, who displays signs of irritation, as indicated by his offhand final reply, and accompanying facial and bodily expressions of disbelief.

Sir:¹ Exactly. Now, it starts to become a problem because now you have 11 different classes. [South Africa has 11 official languages]

Tezovic: No. English, I believe, should be the medium of instruction.

Sir: So then exactly. Now, coming down to the question, should Afrikaans go away or not in varsity?

Tezovic: In varsity?

Sir: Yes, that was his question.

Tezovic: Oh, okay, then I misunderstood it.

Sir: Exactly.

Explanation

Explanations are commonly produced during instances of sociable interaction, usually in order to make something clear or justify a certain action, belief, or opinion. After acknowledging the widespread presence of recreational substance use in hostels, two white male respondents justify the phenomenon.

¹ Each participant in the focus groups picked her/his own pseudonym. The same pseudonyms are used in this article.

Mr. Gericke: There's no addiction or anything. I would rather call it regular use.

Chomp: Casual use. Look, there are many guys who drink and use soft drugs like dagga. You can find it anywhere on campus. There are so many people who use it, black and white. Alcohol is consumed privately in dorm room. Dagga, I'm not so sure about. [Dagga is South African slang for marijuana]

Mr. Gericke: Look, because drug use is a recreational activity, as students, quite a lot of people do it. Because it's so freely available, it isn't really hard to get.

Rationalization

Rationalization refers to a special kind of explanation in which an attitude or behavior is explained with logical reasons, even if said reasons are inappropriate. The following example by a white female respondent was given when she, as a member of a House Committee (an elected body of senior students overseeing aspects of life in a student residence), was asked how the friction between an increasingly multicultural student body and the deeply entrenched initiatory traditions and hierarchies of authority in certain residences was being managed. The arrogance of her response, while it is a logical one, neglects, amongst other things, the alienation experienced by students who choose not to participate in residence initiations.

Ané: Nobody's forced to participate in anything.

Upon being asked about the Christian character of residences, even though many students are not

Christian, a white male participant rationalizes this seemingly discriminatory state of affairs by overtly acknowledging the fact that, in the residence, majority rules.

Chomp: We open with prayer and everyone sits there, Christian or not. They're not going to moan, it doesn't bother them. They accept that the majority are Christian.

In the next example, a black male respondent illustrates the need to accept at some point one's inability to bring about change.

Tezovic: I'd like to elaborate on this point. I think it's very true what he says, because I don't. It's very difficult to change a place where something has been going on for so many years. It's one of those things you either adapt or you just move out. So now, when you come to a certain place, and you are this kind of person and it's done in a certain way in this place, you try and: "Listen guys, it's like this, it's like this." After a while, it's like you're farting against a brick wall, you're just not...and then after that it's like: "Listen, maybe that's the way to go."

Power and Agency

Individuals often influence the behavior of others during social interaction, intervening in various ways in order to direct social intercourse in a desired direction. Meaningful action and domination are the most readily observable examples of issues of power and agency in focus group discussions.

Meaningful Action

People continuously strive to attach serious or worthwhile meaning to their actions and opinions, and do so in various ways. In the following example, a black respondent reacts to the idea that a residence should be no more than a place of temporary accommodation, with students coming and going freely, and not having to kowtow to some collectively invented identity.

Tezovic: No, you have to. When I went to UCT [University of Cape Town], and I saw what I saw, no. You have to at least know your mates...

The second example relates to the frustration of overregulation and diminished decision-making opportunities.

Pikes: Let's face it, we're all adults here and being older than 18, I'm allowed to drink wherever. This place has become a school where you don't...you're not allowed to drink. When you want to drink, it's going to be like you're feeling back at home when you were like 16 or 17 and you go to the bars and buy stuff, and when you get caught, you're in trouble. Here, it's a totally different story. I think that's the main problem, because the bonds [drinking facilities in residences which were forced to close] and alcohol was banned, we progressed to anger, and we don't want to. It's just not the same, it's not the same. I mean, people, for me, the bond was the place, it was part of the culture. But now, what do they expect at the University? I mean, you go to Traumerei [a conventional coffee shop on campus]. What do you do there? It's not the same.

Domination

Domination is a more aggressive form of exercising power over others in a social context. Here, a white male respondent does not hesitate to place 10 minutes of exposure to what he believes to be the "true faith" above the rights of an individual belonging to a religious minority. The tone and seriousness of his voice, along with the shrugging of his shoulders and a relaxed sinking back into his chair, conveyed the sense that he was talking from a position of power. Being Christian means having one less thing to worry about in the residence.

Mr. Gericke: Look, he has the whole 24 hours of a day to practice his religion. He only has to sit for 10 minutes when meetings [opened by prayers according to Christian tradition] are convened. That's not a problem or asking too much.

In the following example, the respondent, again a white male, might come across as domineering in his views, though the crux of the matter lies in the fact that he refers to the general domination of students by top management who, according to him, ignore the discrepancies between the University's public image and the realities of life on campus. He attempts to diffuse the situation by making the reference jokingly. Here, the focus group, with members carefully selected, once again proved its potential. Had the speaker been involved in a multiracial discussion, he is unlikely to have made this comment as the majority of black students attach great importance to Oprah Winfrey's visit to the UFS.

Chomp: Look, it's great publicity to have Oprah here and all that stuff [well-known TV celebrity, Oprah Winfrey, visited the UFS in 2011]. To have this or that big famous face here. It's good publicity for campus, but it doesn't show what's happening on ground level, what's really happening...all the rough spots. Everything they ignore. It's great that campus is moving in that direction, but actually, it's not there yet.

Conflict

Individuals sometimes find themselves incompatibly clashing with others. The protracted and serious nature of conflict differentiates it from momentary, diffusible instances of misunderstanding and disagreement. Challenge and frustration are examples of conflict that often arise in social settings.

Challenge

In conversational situations, people often dispute the validity of each other's opinions and make rival claims, essentially engaging each other in verbal contests of superiority. Here, a young black male rejects the notion that residence traditions, including often humiliating initiations, are an integral part of campus life.

Tezovic: The hostel. There is one or two instances where I guess the hostel has got no choice but to change, like where a certain tradition just isn't on any more. While it was done in 1992, you can't do it in 2011. It's just, it's not on, you know.

A black female respondent elaborates on whether Afrikaans should remain an official language of instruction at the UFS.

Neo: No. What are you going to do with Afrikaans? What if you get a transfer to the United Kingdom, what if you get a transfer to the United States? Who is going to understand you if you speak Afrikaans? Reality check.

In the next example, a black female participant negates the argument that racial differences in sexual behavior and attitudes result from cultural differences, accusing white female students of hypocrisy. This was a touchy subject as, during the course of the study, it was found that only black residences had condom dispensers, as white female students were too embarrassed by their presence.

Galesho: I personally have white friends. They have the tendency it's [sex] something dirty. They think it's something dirty. "So, it can't affect us." But, they're the ones who are more rebellious. You see, that's the thing. So, I think it's more on race. It's more about race than Christianity and everything, it's more about race. I also have white friends that are not Christians but they also have that mentality that, you know, only a black girl would carry a condom around, not her. She's too clean for a condom, but she's the one who's sleeping around, so.

Frustration

People voice their frustration when they are annoyed or upset at a state of affairs which they have

little or no control over, or when they perceive progress or the fulfillment of something important to them being prevented. Here, a white female respondent offers an argument against the abolition of Afrikaans as an official language of instruction at the UFS, unfortunately with little rationality.

Michelle: If they feel so strongly about that, then they can get people to lecture in Xhosa and Sotho [two of South Africa's indigenous languages]. They go out of their way to get us English and Afrikaans lecturers, so if they feel so strongly about that, they should get other lecturers to cater for everyone.

In the following example, a black female participant disapproves of the fact that the UFS's coat of arms was changed without consulting students, even after a petition was submitted in favor of keeping the old colors.

Nicky: About the logo. I feel they should not have changed the logo, the logo should not have changed in the first place. It had a good meaning – the first one. This one is just lines that are going everywhere and you don't really even know what they mean.

A white male respondent's reaction to the thought of residence traditions dying out due to lack of participation and culture clashes brought about by forced integration and top management's policy of placing first year students in residences further illustrates the issue of frustration.

Chomp: This forcing must end. They should put guys in the hostel who want to be in the hostel.

Those that don't, should go to private accommodation. The University builds a new building every second day, they can build private accommodation. It can be for black and white because there are lots of people who are put in hostels who don't want to live that life. There should be private accommodation on campus, academic accommodation!

A white female participant ponders the ways in which top management engaged with the issue of residence integration.

Ané: They don't know what's going on exactly in the rez [residence], so they decide things which are good things. But the practicalities, how things are done in practice, they do not understand. So, they don't realize what the setup is in a rez. So I think rather they should really get people to look into, ... how a rez works, before they make decisions and just force it down on rezes.

Exchange

An exchange is a short, active argument or conversation which usually leads to greater mutual understanding resulting from dissimilar starting points. The narratives below reflect the views of black males expressing their feelings about race-based quotas in residences (often resulting in empty beds and waiting lists of students who do not meet racial requirements).

Lord Mizzy: The system is there. They tell you to put how many whites, how many blacks. But, along there they don't monitor the whole thing. So, it's just a complete failure. I don't think it's going on nicely.

Sir: I've been here for five years, I've lived off campus in my first year, I came to campus in my second year, and I must say in the five years that I've been here this place has changed drastically. All thanks to the systems that have been put in place. Coming here back in the day and seeing how things are now, it's a huge difference. It's a huge turnaround. I just can't say it enough, it's really been big. So me, I totally say yes, but in some manners they could have done things differently, understand. But then, I think their objective by doing the things they did or setting the things in place which they did, I think the objective was definitely reached. And yes, there's a problem with the University management I think us as students have. They mean well and they set good things in place or in motion, but then, when coming to implement them, it's a different story, understand. They don't go throughout with the process, so. But, heads up to them. Heads up to the management.

Mugabe junior: Just to add on that. Let's say, for first years there's round about 40 first years that you get [in one residence], and then maybe 25 are blacks and then 15 are whites. Round, during the year, let's say round 10 leave, 10 white first years leave. You have 5 left. Instead of finding more white people, management only bring black students. Meaning, there's still no integration, there's still more blacks, and it's a cycle that happens every year. We are only being ethnically integrated instead of being diverse cultures like white and black.

Tezovic: I guess it's true what you're saying, Mugabe, but I don't think you can force. I can't force you to run a marathon, you know. As much as, yeah,

they can have their structures and policies and whatever the case may be, but I can't force you to go stay if you don't want to, you know. I guess that is another barrier where, as much as they're really trying hard to transform, integrate, at the end of the day, it's up to the people. I do believe that transformation can't happen without force, it's my opinion. There has to be some kind of force because when I speak to some of these guys, it's always the case, some of them understand the concept that it has to happen at some time, but when you talk to them, no one wants it to happen in their time. Since because maybe their grandfather or their father was in the hostel at a time, so it's: "No man, it must happen, but why can't it?" If I don't want it to happen in my time, and the next one doesn't want it to happen in his time, and the next one, when is it going to happen? Because we're just delaying the whole process, so the force has to be then: "Listen, like it or not, it's going to be like that."

Conclusion

In this article, we have illustrated the ways in which focus groups are suitable for capturing qualitatively rich data that shed light on the ways in which people create and interpret social reality in a group setting. Few other methods, be they quantitative or qualitative, allow for the same depth of analysis capturing the various nuances of communication, conflict, and exchange that constitute the foundation of everyday social interaction, and the focus group's unique situating of research participants attains a level of interactional realism that both the survey and one-on-one interview are unlikely to match. Where interaction is of the essence the

focus group has the potential to deliver, allowing the researcher to take the best that the in-depth interview has to offer and combine it with some of the advantages of participant observation, and to create an interactive encounter that, while it closely mimics natural interaction, allows the experienced facilitator to direct the inquiry as necessary. The examples given in this article present a compelling case for the continued development of the focus

group as a method of data collection that allows unique glimpses into the very moment in which intersubjective reality is collectively created or agreed upon. The epistemological potential of the focus group is vast, and the method has much to offer the social scientist interested in the role of human emotions, symbols, and language, and the intersubjective exchange thereof, in the construction of social reality.

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"The Machines Don't Lie": A Study of the Social Production of Mechanization in the Determination of Voter Intent

Abstract Because election results are the essential measure of the popular will in liberal democracies, accurate determination of voter intent is a necessary pre-requisite since "what [N] does is not simply make a mark on a piece of paper; he [sic] is casting a vote" (Peter Winch). If every vote counts, then every valid vote must be counted – which means seeing the mark on the paper as intentional action. But, electronic voting systems are increasingly used in Canada. Given the operational vagaries of the use of such machines, the paper asks: How is voter intent mechanically achieved as a practical, social accomplishment of the human beings charged with working the machines and counting the votes? The paper then reports a case study of the tallying of ballots in one municipality in a recent Ontario municipal election where the official result between the two top candidates was a difference of one vote. It focuses on the social production of mechanical consistency in the determination of voter intent during the recount process.

Keywords Ethnomethodology; Ethnography; Voter Intent; Electronic Voting; Machines; Mechanization; Counting; Practical Reason

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If the purpose of voting is to determine the will of the electorate, then the reliability and validity of the methods used to measure the electorate's will become practical issues for those bodies charged with administering elections in electoral democracies. These matters have been much discussed in the professional and academic literature on the conduct of elections. We do not propose here to review either body of work, but to focus attention on what is perhaps a neglected, though in our view fundamental, dimension of such deliberations. This is the matter, after ethnomethodology (Garfinkel 1967; 2002), of the irremediable dependence of any judged-to-be-reliable and valid electoral outcome on the practical, interactional means by which in any actual instance that outcome is achieved. In the present case, we wish to take advantage of an unusual circumstance in which one of the authors had participatory access to an election in which the winning margin was a single vote. The resulting two recounts, both of which confirmed the original result, afforded an opportunity for gaining an ethnographic view of the practical procedures used to determine voter intent in terms of both the reliability and validity of the counting methods used. We wish to focus particularly on the methods used by the counters-as-vote-determiners to achieve identical results across the three counts, even more particularly on how the final manual recount eventuated in the same outcome as the previous two counts produced by the optical scanning tabulators. We call this outcome the "mechanization" of voter intent, an outcome we analyze as a practical, interactional (and therefore human, social) achievement of the parties involved.¹

¹ Three things make the particular election under investigation here noteworthy. First, there was a one-vote difference between the leading candidates; second, the ballots were tallied using

Electronic voting systems (EVS) are increasingly used in Canada. Because election results are the essential measure of the popular will in liberal democracies, accurate determination of voter intent by EVS is a necessary pre-requisite. "The notion that voters can expect to have their preferences recorded accurately and fairly is fundamentally important in a democracy" (Dee 2007:681). For just this reason, the mechanization of voting has come under critical scrutiny. Regarding testing of electronic machines, Balzarotti and colleagues (2010) state that "while current standards provide a 'checklist' of characteristics that must be verified, there are no guidelines or suggestions on how these characteristics can or should be verified" (p. 454).

Reliability of the counting procedure is one thing, its validity another. After all, "what [N] does is not simply to make a mark on a piece of paper; he [sic] is casting a vote" (Winch 2008:46). Voting is observably an intentional action in the context of certain political institutions, those say, of parliamentary democracy. In Searle's (1969) terms, a vote is an institutional fact, not a brute one. If every vote counts, then every vote that is a vote must be counted – which means seeing the mark on the paper as intentional action.

Whereas the reliability of a measuring device is the extent to which it produces the same result when

optical scanning tabulators; third, there were two recounts following the announcement of the Election Day results. The results of the study were used to recommend changes to out-of-date aspects of the Ontario Municipal Elections Act, including further suggestions on how to ensure that all votes are counted. These recommendations and suggestions are reported elsewhere (Chapman 2012). The authors wish to thank Professor Robert Williams for his thorough and able critique of the manuscript of that paper, the lessons of which have been carried into this substantially amended and variant version.

measuring the same thing on different occasions, the validity of a measuring device is the degree of confidence the measurer can have that the device actually measures the phenomenal property in question, however reliably it produces the same result on different occasions (Eglin 1987:195). For example, in the case of voting, it may be that the adopted method of counting ballots produces the same result on successive counts of the “same” ballot; the method is reliable, it may be said. But, it may also be the case that the adopted method miscounts the ballot in question by repeatedly mistaking for whom the voter intended to vote. For municipal election managers (deputy returning officers [DROs], city clerks), the validity problem typically arises when the voter’s mark on the ballot does not conform to the rules. It falls outside the circle or box, for example, or consists of a mark that is not the prescribed “X.” In “Is the Ballot Valid or Invalid?” Mr. W. D. (Rusty) Russell, Q. C. (1980) provides a particularly thorough account of the variety of problematic marks that have been used on ballots in municipal elections in Canada and of the legal grounds on which determinations have been made by the courts of what the voter intended in specific cases.

He reviews the problematic cases under four headings, namely, the position of the mark, the type of mark, the presence of other marks, and the marking instrument used. He reports that the “paramount” legal consideration is “fulfilling the voter’s intention,” and the primary disqualification is, interestingly enough, that the voter’s mark should identify the voter. His account makes reference to a variety of commonsense explanations of errant marks that are entertained more or less in passing – poor eyesight (particularly among senior

citizens), illiteracy, “nervousness, misunderstanding and confusion,” drunkenness, unsteadiness of hand, changing one’s mind (Russell 1980:232). These are treated in effect as reasonable excuses for inaccurate marking of the ballot that should not, in themselves, be sufficient to invalidate the ballot.

Finally, Russell (1980) worries that the delicate parsing of legal judgments should be beyond the capacities of DROs:

[i]t is one thing for me to report the decisions of judges learned in the law as to what is and what is not, a valid ballot (even the court interpretations are not consistent). It is quite another thing on how a Returning Officer should instruct the deputy returning officers on their statutory duties in the polling place. Certainly, they cannot get too technical. (p. 232); [f]rankly, it is a near impossible task to teach deputy returning officers the sophistication of these “judgment calls” of the court. (p. 237)

In a footnote thanking a particular city clerk for his comments on a draft of the article, he writes, “[n]othing quite equates the experience of ‘an old pro’ who knows the practical side of the problem” (Russell 1980:237). In line with this view of distributed expertise is the 1874 opinion of Lord Neaves recommending the virtue of the cross as a suitable mark: “[i]t is, I think, a mark well devised for the purpose, easy of execution by men of the most moderate intelligence” (Russell 1980:235). And underlying all these considerations is the *sine qua non* of Western jurisprudence, the presupposition of the “reasonable man” (sic). Thus, Mr. Justice MacLennan of the Ontario Supreme Court in 1898:

[i]f a ballot is so marked that **no one looking at it** can have any doubt for which candidate the vote was intended and if there has been a compliance with the provisions of the Act **according to any fair and reasonable construction of it**, the vote ought to be allowed. (Russell 1980:234, emphasis added)

The above rehearsal of the range of practical circumstances and background assumptions acknowledged as being taken into account in the legal and logistical determination of voter intent for the purpose of counting ballots as between competing candidates for electoral office is not meant to bring into doubt the validity of a foundation stone of electoral democracy, albeit at the municipal level. On the contrary, what we wish to bring out is the inevitability of the recourse to just such practical matters in the determination of valid ballots and reliable counts in every actual case. It is just such taken-for-granted, seen-but-unnoticed recourse to the *ad hoc* practices of practical reasoning that holds up the whole edifice of electoral democracy as an institutional, social fact, and therefore, as an object for sociological inquiry: “[t]he objective reality of social facts is sociology’s fundamental phenomenon” (Durkheim as cited in Garfinkel 2002:65). The point being made here is the cardinal ethnomethodological insight made long before by Garfinkel in his *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (1967):

[t]o treat instructions as though *ad hoc* features in their use were a nuisance, or to treat their presence as grounds for complaint about the incompleteness of instructions, is very much like complaining that if the walls of a building were only gotten out of the way one could see better what was keeping the roof up. (p. 22)

The particular point we will take up in the Discussion section is the method of practical reasoning employed by the city clerk in the election in question to standardize its outcome across three counts. It is a rule that may be glossed with the phrase – “the machines don’t lie.”

The Technical Background: Electronic Voting Machines

Balzarotti and colleagues (2010:453) remind us of a quote that has been attributed to Stalin and which states, “those who cast the votes decide nothing. Those who count the votes decide everything.”² Of course, this was stated prior to the use of electronic voting machines. With the current voting methods, one could add that *blind confidence in voting machines gives decision making powers to machines and not the elector* on the assumption that it is the machines that decide everything (Chapman 2012). The dynamic is similar in that in both cases agency is taken from the elector and placed on the counter, whether the counter is a person or a machine. Much of our purpose here is, following Wittgenstein, to assemble reminders that what the machine is seen to have counted is the product of persons’ decisions; it is through and through a social outcome. Mechanization is a social production.

The idea of a secret paper ballot dates back to 1888 in Australia (Balzarotti et al. 2010:45). In the 1930s, mechanical lever machines were introduced. The 1960s welcomed punch card machines. Direct recording

² There is no primary source for this assertion, though it is believed that he said it in an unpublished speech or private conversation. It is fitting for the argument being developed here.

electronic machines were first used in the mid-1970s. Since then optical scanners, Internet, voice activated, mail-in, telephone, and touch screen voting have come to be used. It is not that one has replaced the other. In some cases, a variety of the different methods have been used in the same province, municipality, or region.³

There has been much concern about voting procedures and tallying since the 2000 U.S. Presidential election in Florida when hanging and dimpled chads created uncertain results. More recently, in a congressional election in Sarasota County, Florida in 2006, the Election Day results found “17,846 ballots (14.9 percent of the total number of votes) cast on electronic voting machines showed no vote for either candidate in the race” (Balzarotti et al. 2010:453). Again, in 2008 in Minnesota, there were almost 7,000 ambiguous ballots challenged in a senatorial race. In so far as electronic voting systems are being widely adopted, then these U.S. examples call into question current election methods around the world.

There are numerous studies of the reliability and virtue of different voting methods (AMCTO 2011), the influence of voting methods on voter turnout (Card and Moretti 2007; Allers and Kooreman 2009), the reliability and security of electronic systems (Balzarotti et al. 2010), and whether residual votes increase or decrease depending on the method used (Mebane 2008). For example, Lott (2009) makes an

³ In a letter from the president of the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario (AMCTO) to the then Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Kathleen Wynne, Daniel Gatien (Feb. 24, 2012) states the need to improve the likelihood of municipal electors having newer technologies available for voting.

important observation about so-called under-votes. He questions whether non-votes or under-votes “are intentional or the result of problems using the voting machines” (Lott 2009:171-172). If the Dominion optical scanner used in the Midwest municipal election could not read the markings on the ballot, because they were outside of the box or because the marking did not cover at least 25% of the box, then they would be registered as under-votes. One very thorough study of Diebold optical scanning machines (Hursti 2005) goes so far as to examine technical aspects of the scanners and the irregularities found in the memory cards of these machines.

The study being reported here differs from, yet complements, those referred to above. As a Canadian case study of voter intent and recount procedures at the municipal level, it does not examine the technical function of the machines, but is concerned with the procedural aspects of the *use* of the machines. As Balzarotti and colleagues (2010:455) state, “electronic voting systems [are] far from being the final solution to voting problems. In fact, technology alone does not guarantee the absence of irregularities or problems.”

Method

In methodological terms, the subject of investigation here is addressed through a partially ethnographic case study of the tallying of ballots in Ward 9 in the City of Midwest, Ontario in the 2010 municipal elections. The study examines aspects of the Ontario Municipal Elections Act, official court and City documents, selected studies of election procedures, and observations made during the count-

ing/recounting of the ballots. The court documents come from the Ontario Superior Court of Justice, Court File #C-1016-10, [Name] versus the Corporation of the City of Midwest, which documents are accessible at the City of Midwest Ontario Superior Court of Justice. Because it permits the investigator “to observe and collect rich and detailed information about [a setting], which cannot be collected using the standard interview methods” (Hughes and Sharrock 2007:221), participant observation of the recount process was used to complement the official data sources drawn on for the study. The data collected through observation are the most valuable component of the analysis presented here, given that access to the process was limited to the City Clerk, the candidates for the ward in question, one scrutineer for each tabulator/polling station, one lawyer per candidate and one for the City, an Assistant Recount Officer for each machine, and the media (whose interest was to record the reaction of the candidates and report the official results) (City of Midwest Nov. 3, 2010).⁴

The Formal Legal and Organizational Context

Throughout the province of Ontario, 444 municipal elections were held on October 25th 2010. Municipal election processes fall under the Ontario Municipal Elections Act (MEA), 1996, a provincial act that grants the (municipal or city) clerk the responsibility of conducting local elections (see Section 11.1 of the MEA). We focus on the city clerk’s powers and

⁴ In order to ensure full disclosure, it should be noted that Chapman participated in the electoral recount process as the losing candidate (Candidate B below).

responsibilities in the election of the councilor for Ward 9 in the City of Midwest, Ontario.

As detailed in Section 11. (2) of the MEA, the clerk is responsible for:

- a. Preparing for the election;
- b. Preparing for and conducting a recount in the election;
- c. Maintaining peace and order in connection with the election; and
- d. In a regular election, preparing and submitting the report described in subsection 12.1 (2) (said report details “the identification, removal and prevention of barriers that affect electors and candidates with disabilities”).

The clerk has legislated powers to determine the logistical operationalization of the election rules set out in the MEA and its accompanying regulations. He/She will determine such things as whether a composite or a separate ballot will be used (41. [4]), and “shall, (a) establish procedures and forms for the use of, (i) any voting and vote-counting equipment authorized by by-law, and (ii) any alternative voting method authorized by by-law” (42. [3]). In fact, according to Section 12.1, “[a] clerk who is responsible for conducting an election may provide for any matter or procedure that, (a) is not otherwise provided for in an Act or regulation; and (b) in the clerk’s opinion, is necessary or desirable for conducting the election.” While this section of the Act already gives the clerk discretionary powers

that supersede those of the elected councilors, with the proviso that the “use of voting and vote-counting equipment such as voting machines, voting recorders or optical scanning tabulators” must be *authorized* through a by-law passed by municipal council (42. [1]), the AMCTO recommends that

the innovative capacity of municipal clerks [be recognized] by placing the authority of deciding on vote casting and counting methods and advance voting days with an official who is without a conflict of interest on this matter – shifting from the incumbent council to the municipal clerk such authority. (Gatien 2012)

The AMCTO suggests an amendment to the MEA that would “clarify...the breadth of the clerk’s duties/responsibilities as it relates to election administration.” Clearly, there is every reason to suppose that the responsibility for conducting an election that is efficient and secure and that provides for the reliable and valid counting of ballots falls heavily on the shoulders of the City Clerk.

On June 19, 2006 By-law 2006-135 was passed in Midwest, which stipulated that “[t]he use of voting and vote-counting equipment such as voting machines, voting recorders or optical scanning vote tabulators is hereby authorized in respect to the municipal elections to be held in 2006 and in subsequent election years.”

It was in keeping with this by-law that voting tabulators were used in the 2010 municipal elections in Midwest.⁵ Voting tabulators/optical scanners were

⁵ Not all municipalities in Ontario used tabulators in 2010. According to a post-election survey of municipalities con-

ducted by the AMCTO (with a participation rate of over 50%), the following methods were used on election day 2010: 110 used paper ballots; 15 used touch screen machines; 54 used mail-in ballots; 23 used vote by phone; 28 used vote by Internet; 3 used other (AMCTO 2011:11); and 49 used a combination of two or more of the above mentioned methods (AMCTO 2011:33).

leased, programmed, and serviced from Dominion Voting,⁶ a multi-national corporation originating in Toronto and currently based in Denver, Colorado.

The ballot contains sections for all the offices being filled. There is a section for the Regional Chair, Regional Councilors, City Mayor, City Councilors, School Board Trustees, and two referendum questions, that is seven votes in all. Ballots are marked with black felt pens provided at the polling stations. The elector is required to place an “X” in the box, or fill in the box, beside the candidate of their choice, and then take the completed ballot to the machine operator who feeds the ballot into the optical scanning tabulator, facedown. While the MEA does not detail the machine jargon, the tabulators are programmed to distinguish between proper votes, over-votes, under-votes, and ambiguous ballots.⁷

The following is an idealized or formalized account of the counting process as it was designed for and supposed to happen in Midwest.

(1) If the ballot is “properly” filled out, the machine accepts the ballot and the process concludes.

ducted by the AMCTO (with a participation rate of over 50%), the following methods were used on election day 2010: 110 used paper ballots; 15 used touch screen machines; 54 used mail-in ballots; 23 used vote by phone; 28 used vote by Internet; 3 used other (AMCTO 2011:11); and 49 used a combination of two or more of the above mentioned methods (AMCTO 2011:33).

⁶ Diebold, the subject of Hursti’s study on tabulator memory cards, was bought by Dominion in 2010. Hursti made some important observations about the security lacunae in the storage of data (2005).

⁷ In the U.S., the concept of “residual votes” is used to refer to “those ballots for which ‘no vote can be recorded’” (Dee 2007:674). These are similar to ambiguous ballots but can also be over-votes. They “can be due to an error, or to an intentionally invalid, or blank vote” (Allers and Kooreman 2008:163).

(2) If the ballot specifies that the elector is, say, allowed to vote for 4 school board trustees and the elector votes for fewer than 4, the tabulator registers this as an *under-vote* and counts all the markings on the ballot, including the section that is under-voted. In this case, the machine accepts the ballot and the voting process is complete.

(3) If the ballot is “incorrectly” filled-out, then the machine beeps and spits the ballot back out. There are two scenarios that can cause a ballot to be questioned or indeed rejected by the machine.

(3a) If the voter selects too many candidates in one of the sections of the ballot, then the tabulator notifies the voter and the operator that there is an *over-vote*. At this point, the operator is to turn to the voter and notify him/her that they have over-voted on some part of the ballot. The voter is then given the option to re-cast their ballot. If the voter rejects the offer, the operator presses the override button (button #2) and the ballot is fed into the machine. When the results are tabulated, all sections of the ballot, with the exception of the over-voted section, are tabulated. This happens if, for example, the voter selects 5 school trustees instead of the allotted 4, as per the example in (2). If the elector accepts a new ballot, the old one is placed in Envelope A with “cancelled” written on it.⁸

(3b) There are several circumstances in which the machine rejects ballots, returning them to the machine operator. For example, if the deputy returning

⁸ While most ballots are fed through the tabulators and counted, there are envelopes at each voting station to hold ballots that are not counted. Envelope A is for cancelled or spoiled ballots, Envelope B is for declined ballots, and Envelope C is for ambiguous ballots.

officer’s (DRO) signature is illegible, the machine will reject it. Torn or damaged ballots are also rejected. Markings that cover the barcode along the side of the ballot can also result in a rejected ballot. In order for a marking to be considered a vote, it has to cover “at least 25% of the box” (Clerk’s Affidavit 2010) beside the candidate’s name. In these cases, the operator cannot override the machine. A ballot that is rejected by the machine for any of the aforementioned reasons becomes an *ambiguous ballot* and needs to be redone or corrected in order to be counted. If the voter refuses to *recast* the ballot, then it automatically becomes a *declined ballot*.

Declined ballots are not replaced or remade. They are placed in Envelope B. According to the DRO’s handbook (City of Midwest Oct. 25, 2010:6.2), ballots are “declined” when the “voter deliberately declines the ballot at tabulator or the original ballot had an ambiguous mark and the voter declined to mark a new ballot.” It is important to note that the second option (“original ballot had an ambiguous mark and the voter declined to mark a new ballot”) does not refer to the voter declining to vote but rather declining to “mark” a new ballot. We take this up below.

Thus, ambiguous ballots are ballots that are not recognized by the machine. These non-recognized ballots are placed in Envelope C, for ambiguous ballots. Ambiguous ballots can be replaced and the elector may then mark a new ballot, which is then fed into the tabulator. If the elector chooses not to mark a new ballot, then the ballot becomes a declined ballot and is put in Envelope B. Declined ballots are not counted because the machine cannot read them.

(4) A final category is that of *spoiled ballot*. A ballot is “spoiled” when “the voter has spoiled their ballot through error or made an unintentional mark on the ballot and wishes a new one” (City of Midwest Oct. 25, 2010:5.5). Spoiled ballots are never fed into the machine. The DRO writes “cancelled” on the ballot and issues a new blank ballot to the elector. The cancelled ballot is placed in Envelope A.

Results

The Count on Election Day in Midwest

The voting day process will first be discussed, followed by the two recounts that were realized shortly after the publication of the election results. The voting process is important because the legislation states (section 60. [1]) that if there is to be a recount, it must be “conducted in the same manner as the original count, whether manually or by vote-counting equipment.” This means that if the original count was by mechanical means, but the candidate requested a manual recount, all the city council can approve is a mechanical recount using the same vote-counting equipment. When it comes to procedures, Section 52 of the MEA makes no reference to the particular election procedures or terminology used on October 25th 2010. Sections 52.(3) and 52.(4) read as follows:

Marking ballot, etc.

52. (3) On receiving the ballot from the deputy returning officer, the elector shall,
- a. make a cross or other mark on the ballot, within the space designated for the marking of

- the ballot to the right of the name of each candidate for whom the elector wishes to vote (or, in the case of a by-law or question, to the right of the answer for which he or she wishes to vote);
- b. fold the ballot in a manner that conceals its face; and
- c. return the folded ballot to the deputy returning officer. [1996, c. 32, Sched., s. 52 (3); 2002, c. 17, Sched. D, s. 19 (2)]

Deposit in ballot box

52. (4) On receiving the ballot from the elector, the deputy returning officer shall immediately deposit it in the ballot box, in the full view of the elector and any persons described in clauses 47 (1) (b), (c), (d), and (e) who are in the voting place. [1996, c. 32, Sched., s. 52 (4)]

On October 25th, 2010, the actions of the DRO and the electors in Ward 9, Midwest, were not in keeping with these sections of the MEA. Instead, the process as predetermined by Dominion was adopted by the clerk who chose to use the Dominion tabulators on Election Day. Furthermore, Section 54.1 details the counting of the votes in the following way:

Counting of votes

54. (1) Immediately after the close of voting on voting day, the deputy returning officer shall open the ballot box for his or her voting place and proceed to count,

- (a) in the case of an election for office, the number of votes for each candidate;
- (b) in the case of an election to obtain the assent of the electors to a by-law, the number of votes in favor of the by-law and the number opposed to it; and
- (c) in the case of an election to obtain the opinion of the electors on any question, the number of votes for each possible answer to the question. [1996, c. 32, Sched., s. 54 (1)]

The process stipulated in this section of the Act also does not describe how the voting machines were used to count the ballots in the election in question. Thus, for example, once the polls closed in Midwest, the operator pushed a button and a cash register type tape was produced with the totals of all the offices being filled. The ballot boxes were not emptied, nor were the ballots removed and counted. While the City of Midwest approved the use of voting machines in 2006, no by-laws or amendments to the MEA were made detailing the new procedures. The DRO’s Handbook details the steps to be followed by adopting the language used by Dominion, such as *over-vote*, *under-vote*, and *ambiguous ballot*. These different types of ballots are not identified as such in the MEA.

The Particular Case of “Declined” Ballots

Decline appears once in the Act under section 52. (1) 5, titled “Voting Procedure,” which states (emphasis added):

5. An elector is no longer entitled to vote if, after receiving a ballot, he or she leaves the voting place

without returning the ballot, or *declines* to vote and returns the ballot. [1996, c. 32, Sched., s. 52 (1); 2002, c. 17, Sched. D, s. 19 (1); 2009, c. 33, Sched. 21, s. 8 (24)]

Similarly, at the provincial level, according to the Ontario Elections Act, ballots are declined when:

53. An elector who has received a ballot and returns it to the deputy returning officer declining to vote, forfeits the right to vote and the deputy returning officer shall immediately write the word “declined” upon the back of the ballot and preserve it to be returned to the returning officer and shall cause an entry to be made in the poll record that the elector declined to vote. [R.S.O. 1990, c. E.6, s. 53]

In both of these acts, *decline* gives agency directly to the elector who either walks out carrying the ballot or returns the ballot to the election official without voting. The DRO’s handbook, however, defines declined ballots in two senses – one where the voter deliberately declines the ballot as above, and one where the voter declines to remark a *new* ballot. In the second case, when referring to declined ballots with voting machines, voter agency is lost. A ballot is here defined as declined when the voter refuses or declines to *remake* the original ballot. Here, it is the machine that effectively creates this category of declined ballot, not the elector. The *remaking* or *marking of a new ballot* is the relevant action here. As confirmed by the Midwest City Clerk in the court hearing on December 16th, 2010, the act of not redoing the ballot is the act of declining the ballot. The elector had the opportunity, but did not take it, and therefore they declined the ballot, he argued.

It is not unreasonable to suppose, however, that there are circumstances in which an elector might feel reluctant to remake a ballot that they considered to be their vote. As far as they were concerned, they had voted and they expected it to be counted. A person originally from a country where election fraud is the norm could be understandably disinclined to re-vote. Somebody in a hurry on their way to work could also walk away and say, “Sorry, I don’t have time to redo my vote.” It is not at all clear in such circumstances that the elector declined to vote. As far as they were concerned, they had voted.

In practice, it turned out on Election Day that a third category of “declined” ballots was produced. This possibility arises from a further technical feature of the electronic counting process. If the machines break down during Election Day, completed ballots are set aside in what is called the *auxiliary* ballot box. As stipulated in the DRO’s Handbook, when the polls close, all ballots found in the auxiliary ballot box are to be fed into the tabulating machine. If any of these ballots are illegible when fed into the machine after the poll has closed, they automatically become declined ballots because the elector is unavailable to remake the ballot.

McMenemy (1995) describes the standard concept of the declined or rejected ballot when he states,

a ballot may officially be “rejected” by an elector and so recorded, as an act of protest. Otherwise, ballots cast will be tabulated as valid or declared “spoiled” if the elector’s preference is unclear or the ballot is not marked in a way designated as acceptable. (p. 8)

The machine-determined “declined” ballot does not fit the “rejected” ballot category because it is not the result of an act of protest. It is more accurate to consider them “spoiled” because the elector does not clearly mark the ballot. However, if the ballot comes to be labeled ambiguous because the DRO’s signature is missing or illegible, the elector’s actions do not in and of themselves result in a spoiled ballot. To state that a ballot is unclearly marked means different things if the interpreter is a person rather than a machine. This idea will be further elaborated below.

The election results for city councilor in Ward 9 in Midwest, Ontario on October 25th, 2010 produced a one-vote difference between the winning candidate and the next candidate. From here on in, the winning candidate will be referred to as Candidate A, the second placed one as Candidate B.

The First Recount

On October 27th, two days after the election, Candidate B submitted a request to the city clerk for a manual recount. Recounts can come about in three ways. The first is through a request to city council, the second is a judge ordered recount, and the third is a judicial recount. If requested through city council, the process is as follows (as quoted in relevant part):

Recount for municipality, local board or Minister

57. (1) Within 30 days after the clerk’s declaration of the results,

(a) the council of a municipality may pass a resolution requiring a recount of the votes cast,

(i) for all or specified candidates for an office on the council,

(ii) for all or specified answers to a question submitted by the council,

(iii) for and against a by-law submitted by the council.

Section (60), as detailed above, stipulates that the recount must be conducted in the same manner as on Election Day. In the case in question, Midwest City Council approved the request for a recount, but was bound by the Act to make it a mechanical recount, as this was the manner of the original count. In the event this required the emptying of all ballot boxes and the feeding one by one of all ballots into the tabulators. Scrutineers for all candidates and lawyers were invited to witness the recount.

Unlike the process on Election Day if, during the recount, the tabulators did not now accept ballots they had accepted on that day, these ballots were inspected by the candidates, the clerk, and the lawyers and then remade. On Election Day, these ballots would have been considered ambiguous and the elector would have been given the opportunity to re-vote. At the recount the elector was not in the room or available to remark the ballot, so the clerk exercised his authority to remake the ballot for the elector, with the approval of the candidates present. This is an example of the inability of the machines to replicate the electoral process of Election Day without human intervention. Some of the ballots that were rejected by the machine had clearly been damaged/torn from the transportation of the ballot boxes. However, there

were 3 ballots that appeared to be without damage. The clerk explained that in one case the DRO’s signature was not dark enough, and that in the second case the markings had crossed into the barcode on the ballot causing it to be illegible. The third ballot looked properly completed to all concerned. It was unclear why the machines accepted these ballots on Election Day, but rejected them during the recount. That this kind of thing happened at the recount also means that it could have happened on Election Day: an unknown number of ballots may have been rejected by the machines and thereby judged ambiguous when, in fact, there was no apparent reason why voter intent should have been questioned. In those cases where the elector was not there to remake the ballot or refused to remark it, the ballot would have been considered declined. Formal indefiniteness of outcome is here, as always, overcome by substantive human fiat.

A further concern that arose during the recount was that there were three occasions when the tabulators ceased to function and were replaced with alternative machines. In contrast, when tabulators broke down on Election Day, the ballots were placed in a box⁹ or in a pile beside the tabulator¹⁰ and electors were told the operator would feed them into the machine once a replacement machine was provided or the machine was fixed. The elector was no longer at the polling station when the ballots were fed into

⁹ This is according to an email message from an elector in Ward 9 who was concerned about seeing his ballot being placed in a box to be fed into the machine at a later time when the machine was fixed or replaced.

¹⁰ This is according to a hand written letter from an elector in Ward 9 who was concerned about the pile of ballots that was sitting beside the “counting machine” because the machine was not working. He was told to leave his “folded, marked ballot beside the machine and that it would be counted later.”

the machine, as they entrusted their ballot to the operator. Again, any ambiguous ballot from the box or the pile would automatically become a declined ballot because the elector was not there to remake the ballot.

In summary, during the recount, the ballots were re-fed into the machines and re-tabulated without a glitch. Because the ballots identified as ambiguous during the recount were re-made, the final result remained the same. In fact, the recount was realized in such a way that it was designed to reproduce the same result: Candidate A beat Candidate B by one vote. If the ballots that were identified as ambiguous during the recount had been treated the same way as ambiguous ballots on voting day, then they would have all been placed in the Declined ballot envelope and not counted. This shows the inability of the machines to replicate the process realized on Election Day. Human intervention was (and always is) not only required for mechanization to work but to be seen to have worked consistently.

The Second Recount

Scrutineers for Candidate B present at the first recount identified two over-voted ballots that showed, in their view, clear voter intent for said candidate. [The machine read these ballots as over-votes presumably because there were markings opposite two of the candidates’ names instead of just one of the names. But, to the human, socialized eye one of the markings in each case could be seen to have been “crossed out” in favor of the other marking.] In keeping with Section 58. (1) of the MEA, Candidate B’s team submitted an “application for order for re-

count” which would allow for the manual inspection of the ballots in question.

Section 58. (1) states that:

[a] person who is entitled to vote in an election and has reasonable grounds for believing the election results to be in doubt may apply to the Superior Court of Justice for an order that the clerk hold a recount. [1996, c. 32, Sched., s. 58 (1); 2002, c. 17, Sched. D, s. 22 (1)]

The application was successful and a second recount was conducted. The tabulated election results indicated 40 over-voted ballots for Ward 9 councilor. The judge ordered the clerk to look beyond the machine reading of the ballots in question and to determine voter intent through visual inspection. All of the ballots were to be removed from the ballot boxes and the over-voted ballots identified and inspected. The judge’s order stated:

if the markings on any of those 40 ballots can show a clear intention to cast a sole vote for any one of the council candidates, even if the markings indicate that the voter has changed his or her preference, those ballots must be counted in favor of the candidate so determined by the Clerk and thus added to the tally previously declared by the Clerk, who will then determine what the final count is for each of the Ward 9 candidates.

All the ballots were removed from the boxes and fed into the tabulators. As the tabulators progressively identified the 40 over-voted ballots, they were set aside for further inspection. Inspection was done by the candidates (including any who ran for election

in that ward and were present at the recount), their lawyers, the city clerk, and the city’s lawyer. Each ballot was looked at and 5 “disputed” ballots were identified. They came to be identified as disputed ballots because upon “close inspection” voter intent could be “reasonably” determined by an appropriately socialized “reasonable man” (sic), but not by an “unsocialized” machine, which treated the markings in each case as an over-vote.

With the principal parties sitting around a square table in the middle of the room in City Hall set aside for the recount, and with the other involved parties sitting around the edge of the room, the first of the five ballots was disclosed. Candidate A’s lawyer identified it as a clear vote for his client, Candidate B’s lawyer identified it as a spoiled ballot, and the city clerk identified it as a spoiled ballot. In this fashion the first four ballots were dealt with: one candidate’s lawyer would claim the ballot as a clear vote for his client, the other candidate’s lawyer would say it was spoiled, and the clerk would say it was spoiled. The fifth and final case was different. On the fifth ballot, Candidate A’s lawyer identified the ballot as a clear vote for his client, Candidate B’s lawyer concurred with this assessment, and the clerk identified it as a spoiled ballot. This was the tipping point for Candidate B. From the point of view of the reasonable [person], it was clear at this point that Candidate B had actually lost by two votes, a result that was not, and will never be, recorded as such because the clerk identified all five disputed ballots as spoiled. While not to be found in the final recorded results of the recount, the visual inspection of the disputed ballots proved to be essential to ensure that voter intent be respected. Had the recount resulted in favor of Can-

didate B, notwithstanding the clerk’s determinations, a further, judicial recount would have been sought.

Discussion: The Mechanization of Voter Intent as a Social Production

The official election result remained unchanged through the two recounts, and was reported as such. This can be seen, and was seen in some quarters, as a vindication of the mechanized manner of counting votes through the use of optical scanning tabulators, and called into question the wisdom of Candidate B in pursuing the recounts. The topic of interest here, however, is not the advisability of seeking recounts, but the social production of a mechanized result, the all-too-human accomplishment of a non-human consistency. There are several aspects to this production.

First, it cannot be too stressed that voting and counting votes are human, social actions, however practiced, routinized, legislated, rule-bound, institutionalized, technologized, and mechanized they appear to be. Indeed, it is in just the way they have these features that they *are* human, social actions as Weber, Schütz, Winch and the “action” school of social theory, not to mention Austin and Searle, have been at pains to argue for over one hundred years. Putting marks on pieces of paper only makes sense in the context of a set of institutions that constitute such behaviors as meaningful actions in the first place (Eglin 1975; 1980; Coulter 2009).

But, secondly, this fundamental sociological idea extends to the sphere of machines and the mechanical as well. Not only are these technological things hu-

man inventions with human consequences, having human uses and symbolizing such human ideas as divine design (Noble 1995: chap. 7; 2005:69-86), not only do they participate in socially organized courses of action (such as those that organize a factory floor, or office layout, or research laboratory, or space station, or living room), including human-computer interaction and vote counting – but they are social in a deeper sense as well. That is, it may be said that they are social objects in the sense that they are “socialized” by humans. They are enlivened (Suchman 2007), brought to life – not in the sense of robotics – but in the way, say, we respond to their displays by saying they are “telling us something” (the number of over-votes, for example). That is, we “read” through their penciled or pixelated displays of marks and signs to the real-worldly, that is, social, facts we see them as reporting (Garfinkel, Lynch, and Livingston 1981). And that includes the “mechanical consistency” we see them as exhibiting, for what could be more human than the awe we feel before such a phenomenon. It is something we can trust, we feel, being other than us, mired as we are in our human unreliability and fickle judgment.

Thirdly, and finally, however, we can further articulate the preceding action-theoretical, interpretive, and phenomenological/ethnomethodological accounts of the social character of mechanization by turning briefly to some observations occasioned by symbolic interactionism and conversation analysis. At the end of the introduction, we proposed that the clerk could be seen to have acted according to some such rule as might be expressed in the catchphrase “machines don’t lie.” One advancing the claim that he followed such a rule (so as to be seen to be governed by it) could

point to the various steps the clerk took during the first recount to preserve the integrity of the machine result of the original count; for example, problematic ballots that emerged in the first recount were re-made so that they *were* accepted by the machines, so guaranteeing an identical outcome. And in the second recount, his judgment of the five disputed ballots was not only the same in each case but also the same as the verdict rendered by the machines in the previous counts. It may then be said that he acted, in a sense, as the machines’ representative, their mouthpiece. Since they could not speak for themselves, he would speak for them. In so doing, he could also be seen as not just defending his professional reputation – after all, the reliable operation of such machines was his responsibility – but acting in the same professional spirit and with the same professional expertise that had led him to support their use in the first place.

Nevertheless, it may be countered that the clerk’s five successive determinations of “spoiled ballot” in the second recount were not simply the product of conformity to a pre-adopted rule, as an interactionist account might have it, but the result of genuine, independent scrutiny of each case; that each ballot was adjudged by him to be spoiled was because, after all, to his reasoned, fair, and in-good-faith gaze they *were* spoiled. There is, however, a further feature of the “rolling out” of the clerk’s judgments that is relevant here. The utterances that conveyed these judgments did not occur in a vacuum, but in the course of a sequence of essentially three-party interaction with the candidates’ lawyers. It may be called a “determining” sequence, the turns being partially pre-allocated in that for each ballot one of the candidates’ lawyers would go first, followed by

the other lawyer, with the clerk going last in each case. Why is this significant?

As indicated above, the fifth case departed from the action pattern of the first four ballot adjudications. In the first four cases, the lawyers could be seen to be acting in an adversarial fashion, that is, *as* lawyers, finding for their clients and against their opponents by disagreeing with one another; their judgments could be seen to be category-bound actions (Sacks 1974:221-224 calls them “activities”) of the category “lawyer.” But, in the fifth and final case, Candidate B’s lawyer, going second, could be seen to be continuing this practice (that is, acting adversarially as a lawyer in favor of his client), but by now agreeing with Candidate A’s lawyer that the ballot did indeed record a vote for Candidate A. Against this now undisputed agreement between the two lawyers the clerk again said “spoiled.” The lawyers’ agreement, achieved by Candidate B’s lawyer in the immediately preceding turn, now provided the interpretive means for making observable the clerk’s unwavering subscription to his rule. The social facticity of his rule-governed actions was the joint product and interactional accomplishment of the methods of sequential organization and membership categorization of the participants in the recount determination itself.¹¹

¹¹ To be clear, in invoking the category-bound character of the lawyers’ actions, we are saying that it is the hallmark of the privately retained lawyer that they shall act in the best interest of the client who has hired them: such actions and their accompanying disposition may then be said to be bound to the category “lawyer” as what lawyers do. Such category-bound predicates may then afford an interpretive means by which lawyers’ actions can be identified as such. In disputed matters involving other parties, this means acting, and being seen to act, “adversarially,” that is, taking their client’s side despite what they might otherwise think of the merits of the case at hand. In this way the two lawyers in question produced “disagreements” over the voter intent displayed in the first four ballots, and “surprise” in the audience when “agreement”

The warrant for this last account, informed as it is by ethnomethodology and conversation analysis, is to be found in “next turn,” that is, the subsequent judicial hearing for costs. Though the plaintiff (Candidate B) “lost” the recount, the judge, who had ordered that “if the markings on any of those 40 ballots can show a clear intention to cast a sole vote for any one of the council candidates...those ballots must be counted in favor of the candidate so determined by the Clerk,” did not make the plaintiff liable for the City’s costs. This anticipated, possible outcome was the context invoked and reached for in Candidate B’s lawyer’s agreeing turn in the fifth case of the determination sequence (cf. Heritage 1984:242-243).

In the end, the mechanization of voter intent is seen to be, after Garfinkel, the artful, achieved, ongoing product of the everyday practices of organized settings of ordinary social affairs populated by actors going about the business of their occupational lives (so as to make visible to one another how their actions are) in accordance with the mores (see Coulter 2009).¹²

was produced in the case of the fifth ballot. Only in light of such category-bound predicates, and what Garfinkel (1967:41) calls the “‘retrospective-prospective’ sense of a present occurrence,” could Candidate B’s lawyer’s act of “agreement” be seen to be motivated by his concern for the interests of his client in the anticipated hearing for costs. His action may be seen as directed by the desire to make visible the clerk’s unwavering subscription to his rule, arguably in contravention of the judge’s ruling enjoining him (the clerk) to identify voter intent if he can, and thus making him liable for at least his side’s (that is, the City’s) costs. In this way not only the “disagreeing” but also the “agreeing” actions of Candidate B’s lawyer may be seen as adversarial, that is, motivated by his desire to be acting in his client’s interests.

¹² The authors wish to express their appreciation for the helpful comments of Wes Sharrock on an early formulation of these ideas. For entry into his voluminous writings on matters germane to the subject under investigation here, see the website: <http://www.sharrockandanderson.co.uk>.

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Our Family Functions: Functions of Traditional Weddings for Modern Brides and Postmodern Families

Abstract In many ways the continued popularity of traditional weddings in the United States may seem surprising in light of the increased rates of divorce, cohabitation, and non-marital child-bearing in the latter half of the twentieth century, which have accompanied the rise of what has come to be called the “postmodern” family. This research draws upon in-depth interviews with twenty white, middle class women who recently had traditional weddings and explores the connections between the postmodern family context and the desirability of traditional weddings. Specifically, it examines how traditional functions of formal weddings are still relevant within contemporary society. Findings indicate that the traditional functions of weddings operate differently in the current family context, but are important aspects of the appeal of formal weddings for modern brides. Large, formal weddings encourage extended family bonding, which may be more important now than in past decades due to the high rates of divorce and remarriage. New “invented traditions” are sometimes being included in weddings to allow for the participation of the wider range of family members that exists in post-modern families. Furthermore, having a large, traditional wedding may serve to decrease anxiety about marriage through providing a predictable entry into marriage and a testing ground for the couple’s marital work ethic.

Keywords Weddings; Bride; Marriage; Tradition; Ritual

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Most people in American society can probably describe the key ingredients in a “traditional” wedding. They include: a long white dress, flowers, music, a clergy member, attendants in matching clothing, and a ceremony with a ring exchange, which is followed by a reception with a tiered cake. Although sometimes appearing centuries older, this

“traditional wedding” (or “white wedding”) only began in the United States in the 1800s. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century “traditional” weddings slowly began growing in popularity and spread from being only rites of the white, upper class to include other classes and races (Pleck 2000; Howard 2006). That traditional weddings became very popular in the 1950s should not be surprising as their themes in many ways expressed the values of that time, which emphasized traditional marriage and female domesticity. That traditional weddings have continued to remain popular – and have increased in size and in the average amount of money spent on them each decade since – is less easily understood.

Since the 1950s, the institutions of marriage and family have undergone incredible changes. Marriage rates have declined; divorce rates and cohabitation rates have soared. In many ways the need to marry has decreased as marriage has become disconnected from cohabitation, economic support, sexual activity, and child bearing. These changes in the American family have been well documented, and along with changes in gender roles and the legal recognition of same-sex relationships they have contributed to an increasingly “deinstitutionalized” model of marriage (Cherlin 2004; 2010). As family structures become diverse, and neither gender nor marriage needs to dictate one’s destiny, the age of the “postmodern family” has arrived (Stacey 1990; Cherlin 2010). Yet, how can these changes in society be reconciled with the continued popularity of traditional weddings?

Recently, there have been scholars from a variety of disciplines interested in the popularity of traditional weddings. They have explored the history of wed-

ding rituals (Pleck 2000), the rise of the bridal industry (Howard 2006; Mead 2007), how weddings and consumption come together in a “commodification of romance” (Otnes and Pleck 2003), and the relationship of weddings and heterosexuality (Lewin 1998; Ingraham 2008). Most researchers have emphasized the power of the bridal industry and consumerism in encouraging their continuing popularity – sometimes to the detriment of examining other aspects.

This study seeks to extend these explorations by focusing on the relationship between the continued appeal of traditional weddings and the changes in the institution of family. How traditional weddings continue to play an important role in the lives of the families they touch has not been given adequate attention. Although the bridal industry has many techniques to encourage people to consume, unless the items or rituals “connect” to real people’s lives and beliefs (and in this case ideas about the family), they will not succeed. Examples of this principle can be found in looking at the successful acceptance of wedding bands for grooms (who previously did not wear them) that began in the 1940s as men went away to fight in WWII, but the failure of the wedding industry to convince a significant number of consumers that it is appropriate to purchase engagement rings for grooms in the 1920s or since (Howard 2006).

This research draws upon in-depth interviews with twenty white, middle class women who recently had traditional weddings and explores why these recent brides say a traditional wedding was appealing. Specifically, it examines if and how traditional functions of formal weddings may still be relevant within contemporary society. How rituals and their

functions adapt as society changes are important sociological questions. It argues that there are important connections between the postmodern family context and the desirability of traditional weddings that have thus far been overlooked and under-theorized. Findings indicate that the postmodern family context adds new resonance to the traditional function of bringing extended family members together. Additionally, easing anxiety over divorce continues to be an important – even if somewhat altered – role of formal weddings, which scholars should take into account when considering reasons for the popularity of weddings.

Functions of Wedding Rituals

Anthropologists have defined rituals as formal actions that are repetitive, structured, and filled with symbolism (Turner 1969). All rituals – and family rituals in particular – have a recognizable structure to them, which is played out each time they are performed, although each family might personalize them in some way (Pleck 2000). Like other rituals, a family ritual fails when it is “empty” or when the people participating in it do not feel anything. Functionalist theory suggests that rituals, like other practices, exist in society because they fulfill specific functions (for at least some people in society), and when they cease to fulfill these functions, they will end, unless they begin to fulfill other new or unrecognized functions (Goffman 1967; Merton 1968). Traditionally, wedding rituals have served three functions. These include: (1) serving as a transitional rite for an individual moving from one life stage to another (adolescent to adult, single to married), (2) providing reassurance that one is making the

correct choice of partner and has approval of family and friends, and (3) uniting two families and fostering emotional bonds between family members.

Although in past generations all three of these functions were believed to be important, to some extent they all have been dismissed as less important for modern brides than they were for earlier generations. The increased power of the wedding industry to encourage specific trends and personalization, as well as the increased autonomy of the wedding couple, has been seen as evidence that traditional weddings are no longer about uniting family groups and instead simply about individual achievement. As Rebecca Mead explains, weddings are now “an individualistic adventure rather than a community sacrament” (2007:11).

It makes sense that a wedding would be less important as an individual life course ritual (function one) now that men and women are waiting much longer to get married. Whereas in the 1950s, marriage was the boundary between adolescence and adulthood, that is no longer usually the case today. In contemporary times, both men and women move out of their parents’ home, economically support themselves, cohabit with a partner, and sometimes have children all without marrying. This does appear to decrease the importance of a wedding as a ritual that indicates the onset of adulthood, although it does still define the onset of married life.

Historian Ellen Rothman (1984) wrote at length about the role of the second function when she argued that it was not a coincident that formal weddings became popular initially during the Victorian Age. She

argues that its rise at the time was linked to the vulnerability that women must have felt when marrying and knowing that their entire economic security (as well as emotional happiness) was tied to making a good choice. As she explains, formal wedding rituals helped provide a “predictable beginning for a life that appeared unknowable and risky” (Rothman 1984:172). Whether this role of providing reassurance for women is still an important part of formal wedding ceremonies now that women can economically support themselves and divorces are easy to obtain has not been clearly examined. Regardless, the idea that having an elaborate “white” wedding could be a way to stave off divorce has been implicitly encouraged by the wedding industry for decades. Advertising slogans such as “A diamond is forever” (coined in the 1940s) encourage couples to connect their decision to have an expensive traditional wedding with the chances of marital permanence (Pleck 2000; Ingraham 2008). Otnes and Pleck (2003) state that it makes some sense that this function would still apply as there is currently anxiety over marriage due to high divorce rates; however, they dismiss this idea as contributing to the popularity of traditional weddings today because they believe Americanized “white” weddings are on the rise even in countries where the divorce rate is not rising.¹

How the third function of weddings – promoting group solidarity and/or uniting families – may

¹ Otnes and Pleck (2003) do not specify which countries they are referring to (see page 8), so it is impossible to confirm whether divorce rates are rising or not. Traditional Western “white” wedding rituals do appear to be on the rise around the world but so, too, are concerns about marriage. In most countries, falling marriage rates can spark concerns about marriage in a way similar to the debate generated by the high divorce rates in the U.S. Only a few countries have escaped a decline in marriage rates over the last few decades (Cohen 2013).

work differently in contemporary society has not been recently examined. Castren and Maillochon (2009) carried out related research when they explored the social and familial influences that Finnish and French couples experience when choosing the guests to invite to their weddings. They argued that although modern couples often see weddings through an individualistic framework, the presence of family and friends is an integral aspect of traditional weddings and serves an important function. They find that it is only those people who are close to the bridal couple and/or significant in their life (i.e., family and close friends) who can truly understand the commitment they are making through the wedding ceremony and how significant the transition from being single to married will be. It is their recognition of the event and its significance that helps to create the meaning in the event (Castren and Maillochon 2009).

The Increase in Expensive Traditional Weddings

It is difficult to obtain data on the exact numbers of brides who choose to have “traditional” weddings each year due to the variations in definitions, although researchers agree that weddings became bigger and more expensive throughout the twentieth century. Scholars have estimated that between 60-80% of Americans getting married for the first time choose a traditional wedding, and increasingly some people marrying for the second time will also choose to have a formal wedding (Whyte 1990; Pleck 2000; Ingraham 2008). As over 2 million women get married in the U.S. each year (CDC/NCHS National Vital Statistics 2013), the numbers are sizable. Most

data on issues connected to the wedding industry is problematic as it is collected by the wedding industry itself and not by neutral sources. That most Americans do choose a traditional wedding when marrying for the first time is supported by recent data, which found that 93% of first weddings had over 50 guests (with an average of 139 guests), 69% of couples had their own personal wedding website, and the average wedding had 4-5 bridesmaids in attendance (The Wedding Report 2012). While the average wedding cost only \$392 in the 1930s and \$4000 in 1984, the cost soared in recent decades and quickly reached over \$20,000, as “lavish” weddings became more and more common (Pleck 2000; Otnes and Pleck 2003; Howard 2006). In percentage terms, the average wedding increased from costing about one third of a family’s yearly income to almost two thirds (Pleck 2000). Although the average cost of a wedding declined during 2008-2010 due to the economic recession, by 2012 it rebounded to \$27,021 and almost reached the 2007 pre-recession rates of \$28,730 (Reaney 2012; The Wedding Report 2012).

There are several theories as to the increasing popularity of expensive, formal weddings. One simple reason is the changing demographics of the couple involved. As couples decide to wait longer before getting married, it often results in couples who are further advanced in their careers and with more disposable income (Pleck 2000). This is not the whole story, however, as scholars have found that couples and their parents in recent decades are also more willing to go into debt to pay for an extravagant wedding (Pleck 2000; Ingraham 2008). That couples may have more money to allocate is important as the traditional rules concerning who pays for which

wedding item have also broken down. In 2011, 83% of couples and 51.5% of their parents contributed money to the wedding, with other relatives (14.6%) and friends (6%) also sometimes contributing (The Wedding Report 2012).

Americans are different from couples in many other Western nations as they continue to legally marry at rates much higher than one would expect given the lack of practical necessity for sexual activity, cohabiting, or child rearing (Cherlin 2010). Cherlin (2004; 2010) has argued that this may be due to one perceived benefit to legal marriage over cohabitation, which is the emergence of higher amounts of “enforceable trust,” or the perceived lower risk that one’s partner will easily end the relationship. He writes that legal marriage produces higher levels of enforceable trust because by its nature it is a public commitment to a lifelong relationship (whether it lasts or not). Having a large, traditional wedding where family and friends hear one’s vows may help increase the public nature of marriage, and therefore, increase feelings of enforceable trust (Cherlin 2010).

It is believed that couples also may be drawn to traditional weddings as a way to communicate social prestige. As marriage rates begin to decline, marriage itself becomes a “marker of prestige,” and formal weddings can be viewed as a status symbol in a way they were not in the past (Cherlin 2004:855). In addition, as weddings become increasingly paid for by the couple themselves, this can enhance the way in which weddings become an important symbol of the couple’s personal achievements (Cherlin 2004; 2010). It is a common idea that conspicuous consumption is behind the popularity of tradition-

al weddings and their increase in cost as weddings provide significant opportunities for families to demonstrate their wealth and status (Pleck 2000; Ingraham 2008). Nonetheless, Otnes and Pleck (2003) point out that consumption has become democratized in recent decades due to credit cards and loans, and lavish weddings have become standard in even many middle and working class households. They argue that although some couples or families may see a traditional wedding as a status symbol, merely the occurrence of an expensive formal wedding does not set one apart from the masses.

Recent research has examined the influence of the bridal industry in convincing couples that marrying lavishly is in good taste, and the ways in which it is tied to the broader processes of commodification and consumerism in the U.S. (Currie 1993; Pleck 2000; Howard 2006; Mead 2007; Ingraham 2008). Otnes and Pleck (2003) argue that a symbiotic relationship between romantic love, consumer culture, and “magic” has been created that explains the popularity of traditional weddings today. They write,

[w]e believe that while lavish weddings do glorify the institution of marriage, enhance the status of participants, and have special appeal to women, these explanations are insufficient to explain the popularity of the event ... the rite of the lavish wedding is increasingly popular because it glorifies both romantic love and the love of “romantic” consumer goods, promises transformation to its participants, provides a repository or memories of this magic and romance, and offers the promise of perfect (e.g., boundless and guilt-free) consumption. (Otnes and Pleck 2003:19)

Other researchers interested in the material and consumer aspects of weddings have had different goals and/or have reached different conclusions. Chrys Ingraham’s (2008) examination of wedding culture and the wedding industry focuses on patriarchy and the institutionalization of heterosexuality, while Vicki Howard’s (2006) book analyzes the origins of the wedding industry to examine how it grew into such a powerful business.

Within the United States, the wedding industry does not always target or serve all people equally, but instead more often targets those upper-income groups that are better able to take advantage of their services (Ingraham 2008). Due to higher rates of marriage, the overall population size, and lower poverty rates, Ingraham argues that, “the white wedding industry targets primarily whites more prominently than any other group” (2008:52). This is done through media images, marketing campaigns, and strategies used in advertising by the wedding industry.

Data and Methods

This research is based on twenty semi-structured in-depth interviews with young women who had married for the first time in the previous eighteen months and had a formal or “traditional” wedding. Two methods were used to recruit participants; referrals from six local clergy members of varying religious affiliations who were contacted for the study (two Catholic, one Jewish, three different Protestant denominations) and snowball sampling methods. The majority of women who desire to have a traditional wedding are married by a clergy member

(Otnes and Pleck 2003), so reaching out to local clergy members was deemed an appropriate method. All clergy members who were contacted agreed to assist with the study, which included allowing flyers to be hung up in their house of worship (in their location of choice) and directly referring couples. Twelve women were located through referrals from clergy members² and eight through snowball samplings methods. Snowball samples begin with a short list of people who have the pertinent characteristics and then use referrals from those initial contacts. Although snowball samples are said to contain some amount of bias (i.e., are not representative) because people are likely to know other people like them, they can often lead to high-quality interviews as participants tend to be more honest and willing to reveal personal information to researchers who have been endorsed by someone they know (Small 2008). No more than three participants were obtained through any one referral chain and no participants were related to each other. Recruitment ended when a point of theoretical saturation had been reached. All the names used throughout this article are pseudonyms.

Sample Characteristics

The range in participants' ages was 24-40 years old with an average age of 28.9 at the time the interview took place, which is a little older than the state aver-

² The clergy members I contacted included two who were at houses of worship that had large racial minority populations; however, I received only one referral from one of them and none from the other. The other eleven women referred were from the four other clergy members. I am not sure if this reflected church marriage rates, or if some clergy members were more willing to refer to me or some women were more willing to volunteer.

age at first marriage of 26.7 years (American Community Survey 2010). As young women in their twenties and thirties, all the women had grown up in a time in the U.S. when postmodern family forms were common, which was clear in their own relationship choices and family histories. Of the twenty women interviewed, fifteen of them had cohabited before marriage, while the other five lived independently before marrying. In the general population, rates of cohabitation among young people today are very high with the majority being preceded by the couple cohabiting (Cherlin 2010). Several of the women interviewed were also coming from families of origin that had experienced divorces and/or remarriage. Seven of the women interviewed came from families where their parents had divorced. Of these seven, five women had experienced one or both parents remarrying and three had step or half siblings. This is aligned with current estimates that approximately one-third of first marriages will end in divorce and that approximately two-thirds of divorced men and women will remarry (Bramlett and Mosher 2002). In addition to their own experiences with divorce, many women were marrying men whose parents had divorced and/or remarried. The women also held a variety of viewpoints about gender norms within relationships, which were expressed during the interviews and measured using a brief survey.

There were significant differences in the economic means of the women and their families, although the sample did not include any poor women. The jobs the women held ranged widely and included a bank teller, an administrative assistant, a mental health worker, a veterinarian technician, a nurse, three public school teachers, two engineers, a psy-

chotherapist, and a computer systems manager. The amount of money that the participants and their families spent together on their weddings ranged from approximately \$8000 to \$60,000, with a mean of \$16,000.³ As some of the women were much more detailed and forthcoming in their calculations, and other women were very unsure or just gave a rough estimate of the wedding expenses, this should be understood to be a loose approximation. Out of the twenty women, there were three women in particular who spent considerably more than the rest, with the woman who spent \$60,000 renting a small island hotel off the New England coast for her guests for the entire wedding weekend. All of the couples used some of their own money to pay for the wedding, although the amount of money contributed by parents and the level of influence that parents had in the wedding planning process varied greatly.

All of the women were born in the United States and residing in Connecticut during the interviews. Fifteen of the women were college educated and three additional women were still working on their bachelor's degrees at the time of their participation. Nineteen of the women were white and one was African American. Ten women were Protestant, eight women were Catholic, one woman was Jewish, and one woman had a combined Jewish/Protestant wedding. Among the Protestant and Catholic women, there did not seem to be any differences in the way they interpreted the rituals they used or why they

³ The average the women gave me was supposed to include all the expenses of the wedding event – ceremony, reception, the dress, the rings. It did not include the money spent on a honeymoon, which differs from how some industry averages are calculated. If the money spent on their honeymoon was also included, then the average spent in my sample would be significantly closer to the amount spent on the average U.S. wedding.

included them. In addition, the answers of the two Jewish women appeared similar to those given by the Christian women, although there was variation in the specific rituals included. All of the women (and their husbands) were marrying for the first time and only one had a child prior to marriage (with the groom). There is considerably more variation in the formality and size of weddings of people marrying for the second time (Ingraham 2008), which is why it is important to differentiate between first and second marriages.

The final group of participants in many ways matches Ingraham's (2008) description of the group that is catered to by the wedding industry and those most likely to choose a traditional or "white" wedding. As Ingraham has argued, traditional weddings are primarily a ritual "by, for, and about the white middle to upper class" (2008:33). My final sample appears to mirror this most sizeable group of brides and allows me to examine the ways in which the women who *are* embracing "white" weddings (i.e., heterosexual, middle-class, white women) explain their choices.

Research Design and Analysis

An in-depth semi-structured interview was conducted with each woman at her home, lasting between one to two hours. The interview guide covered many topics, including: why they chose to have a traditional wedding; a detailed description of their wedding ceremony and reception; how and why they decided to include each wedding element; her feelings/beliefs about marriage, divorce, and cohabitation; and the division of wedding planning. A brief history of her relationship with

her husband was also taken and each participant was asked to fill out a brief survey. During fourteen of the twenty interviews, the women got out either wedding photos or the ceremony bulletin to be able to show, as well as verbally describe, the ceremony and/or reception.

Like many other researchers who conduct semi-structured interviews, I loosely relied upon grounded theory methods of data analysis. Grounded theory methods involve taking an open-ended approach to one's data and modifying hypotheses as the analysis proceeds (Glaser and Strauss 1967; LaRossa 2005). As part of the grounded theory techniques, I used a thematic or "issue focused" approach to data analysis. My initial coding categories were developed and defined in an ongoing interaction with the data and data collection process. I first coded for specific themes, and then worked on integrating the separate themes into a single coherent story (Weiss 1994). Because this study uses a non-random sample, it is not generalizable to the larger population. However, like most other qualitative studies, generalizability is not the major purpose of this research, as instead the goal of this study is to describe in detail a particular phenomenon and experience (Krefting 1999).

Findings

Traditional weddings in part functioned to help encourage emotional bonds between family members and reassure brides about the choices they were making. While the American family has undergone a dramatic transformation over the past several decades, according to the women interviewed,

these are still important reasons to choose a traditional wedding. The high rates of divorce and other postmodern family patterns may actually make it not less but *more* appealing to have a traditional wedding.

Bringing (Post)Modern Families Together

Several of the women I interviewed said that they had considered holding a small, informal wedding with only immediate family members or getting married at a courthouse, but they decided to hold a larger "traditional" wedding and reception because they wanted to allow all their extended family members to be present. Traditional weddings are usually held in venues big enough to hold large numbers of people and are usually planned months in advance, which allows more friends and family to attend than other types of weddings. The important role of these weddings in bringing their extended family together was often stressed by the participants. As one woman explained, "[w]eddings are our family reunions – they're the only time we see each other." Another woman said,

[i]t's the only good time in your life where you're probably going to have all your friends and family together in one spot, all at once. It was quite an experience, but one day just wasn't enough. It didn't last long enough. [Lily, age 29]

One woman downplayed the significance of the event being a wedding at all and argued that bringing her family and friends together was the reason for the event.

I was really interested in having this giant family and friend reunion. This was the one opportunity we would have to get everyone together that we were close to all at once. If you've got to call it a wedding, because that's what's going to get people there, then okay. [Laurie, age 27]

In these women's statements, one can see the value they are placing on their weddings as important times to reconnect and reinforce social ties with extended family members. Many of the women argued that weddings were the only time set aside in contemporary American society for this to be done. This supports previous research that found that due to a lack of other family rituals, weddings frequently are seen as *the* major life ritual for many people (Young and Willmott 1957; Pleck 2000). During the interviews, the women also suggested that in contemporary life family members are more disconnected and have fewer opportunities to visit each other than in past decades. Americans are more likely to move from place to place than citizens from other countries, although there is no evidence that this level of mobility has increased in recent years (Cherlin 2010). Regardless, their belief in this increasing lack of connection with their extended family members influenced their decision to have a traditional wedding.

Although the idea that weddings are an important life ritual and a significant time to see extended family members is not novel, how this dynamic may have changed in an age of high marriage and divorce rates has not been clearly addressed. Researches on traditional weddings that include the issue of divorced families have so far regarded divorce as a reason for couples to simply avoid hav-

ing a traditional "white" wedding (Otnes and Pleck 2003; Mead 2007). Although some women from divorced families do undoubtedly decide that it may be easier to forgo a large traditional wedding, it is important to understand that it also can encourage women to have one.

Among the women in my sample, the importance of having all one's family members in the same room or at the same event appeared to be heightened for those brides who came from divorced families. Although there were additional concerns about seating arrangements and hurt feelings, there were also more expressions of joy in having everyone together. This appeared to be especially true for the three women who had half-brothers or sisters. One woman whose parents had divorced when she was young and who has half-siblings on both her mother's and father's side explained:

[m]y father and mother were divorced before I was a year old and I have a stepsister and three half-brothers between both sides. I had a great childhood and wonderful parents who communicated well and I really grew up between both houses my whole life. But I knew that the day I got married would probably be the only time that would bring my whole family together – all of my extended family. I would have all of my siblings in the same room – and I think it was the first time that had ever happened. For everyone to be there seemed to be such a special thing. It was really huge for me! [Katherine, age 35]

This description is similar to that of another woman who had half-siblings on her father's side living

in a different state than the sibling on her mother's side. Her wedding was the first time the siblings met each other, which she described as having waited years for this to have happen. Rather than discouraging them from having a formal wedding, the greater need to bring extended family members connected (or separated) by marriages and divorces appeared to encourage the women to choose to have a large, traditional wedding.

Among two other women who had parents who had divorced when they were young, the parental divorce did not seem to either encourage or discourage having a formal wedding. In both cases, they were not in touch with their fathers and other family members stepped in to fill the traditional role of the father at the wedding. One of them explained,

[m]y father's not around. I don't really know my real father because my parents divorced before I was three and I haven't seen him since then, so I think it was always going to be my older brother who walked me down the aisle. And I wanted to include my brother somehow so it was sort of perfect. He was the very first person I asked to be in the wedding. [Jessica, age 30]

Due to my sampling method, those women who chose not to have a traditional wedding because of issues connected to parental divorce would not appear in this study; however, this does not diminish the validity of the finding that for some women divorce is not a reason to skip having one. Instead, among some women, it may actually encourage the practice because of the unique opportunity it pro-

vided to bring one's divorced parents and step/half siblings together.

Constance Ahrons (2004) has argued that "good" or civil divorces are often largely ignored both in popular culture and by academics. Her research shows how people connected by "divorce chains" can support each other both emotionally and practically (Ahrons 2004). The way in which formal weddings today can bring together people connected through chains of divorce/remarriage in a way that feels appropriate and unifying is both traditional, yet, historically specific, and should be acknowledged.

New & Changing Wedding Rituals Acknowledge Family Bonds

That an important function of formal weddings was the opportunity to strengthen family bonds was also frequently illustrated by the deviations that couples chose to make from traditional rituals. Many of the rituals the brides followed, from music to vow choices, were included simply because they were seen as traditional. When questioned about why these were included, brides frequently said it was because "that's how it's usually done." In contrast, the deviations that were chosen could usually be more clearly explained and were frequently done to include additional family members. One woman explained the deviation that she and her husband made to begin their ceremony,

I had always thought that it wasn't fair [to your mother] to have only your father walk you down the aisle. I thought this from years back, from

when I was seven or eight. [My parents] laughed at me then, but I think they liked doing it. And David's parents both walked him down the aisle. So, first the Justice of the Peace walked down the aisle, then David and his parents, then the bridesmaid, then me and my parents. [Kelly, age 29]

In this instance, the parents of both the bride and groom were still married, but in the other two instances where the bride asked both her mother and father to walk her down the aisle (one mother accepted and one refused), they were in families where the parents had been divorced. By having both one's mother and father walk down the aisle with the bride, it provides a visible symbol that both parents are important in the life of the bride without her having to verbalize it. It also avoids the potential of hurt feelings as – traditionally – mothers of the bride have not had as visible a role in wedding ceremonies as the role of fathers in walking the bride down the aisle.

In addition to altering older rituals, several of the women who participated decided to include new rituals in their wedding, although many of them were unaware of how recently these rituals had been created. The last few decades have seen the emergence of new wedding rituals, including the Unity Candle, the Rose Ceremony, and the Family Medallion Service. These rituals may be understood as "invented traditions" as they imply continuity with the past, even though this continuity is largely fictional (Hobsbawm 1983). According to historian, Eric Hobsbawm, invented traditions are a "set of practices...of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms

of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past" (1983:1).

The only one of the three new rituals that scholars have investigated thus far is the Unity Candle, which was introduced by the Catholic Church in the 1980s and performed by several of my participants. In the Unity Candle ceremony, a husband and wife each take a lit candle and together light a more elaborate center candle. Although the reason for the rise in popularity is unclear, prior research suggests three reasons, including that (1) couples liked the religious symbolism of two halves becoming whole, (2) including white candles and candlelight in the ceremony appeared romantic to some couples, and (3) that the rise in popularity may be due to the strong marketing by the candle industry (Otnes and Pleck 2003).

In contrast to these explanations, among the seven women I interviewed who included the Unity Candle ceremony, all but one of the women said that they performed the ceremony as a way of including their parents. In a common variation of the ritual, the couples all had either their parents or just their mothers come up to the altar to light their "individual" candles before the bride and groom lit the center candle together. One woman explained, "[i]t gave both our Moms some kind of special role in the lighting of it." Among brides of divorced families where the mother and father may be reluctant to act together, but desire equal inclusion in the ceremony, inviting one's mother to light the Unity Candle was seen as a balance for having one's father walk her down the aisle.

Another new ritual that was performed at two of the weddings was the Rose Ceremony. While data on

the frequency of the use of this ritual is unavailable, it appears to be a new and fairly un-formalized ritual.⁴ In this ceremony, the bride and groom usually both say a few words of thanks to special people in attendance, and then give the people they wish to acknowledge a long-stem single rose, which is often wrapped with a ribbon. One woman reported that she and her husband included this ceremony and gave roses to their mothers. The woman explained this decision,

[i]n the middle of the ceremony we did a rose ceremony. He [the groom] went to my mom and gave her a rose and I went to his mom. I think part of it was paying respect. I think the moms kind of get lost in the ceremony. You know, your dad walks you down and I think my mom would have liked to have walked me down the aisle. [Caroline, age 26]

This quote suggests that, like the Unity Candle ceremony, the introduction of the Rose Ceremony is also being influenced by a desire to have the mothers of the bride and/or groom play an equal role in the ceremony.

In addition to providing a special acknowledgment for their mothers, these new rituals are flexible enough that they also can allow for the participation of any kin or non-kin (or those that are in-between

due to the postmodern construction of family) that the couple wants to include. The other woman who also included the Rose Ceremony in her wedding explained that she and her husband chose to give out roses to various family members, including aunts, uncles, and nephews, that they were especially close to. Furthermore, they not only attached a small note to each rose saying how much they appreciated the support of their family they also held a special “rose dance” during the wedding reception where only the rose recipients were out on the dance floor. As a ritual not yet formalized, it allows couples great flexibility in whom to include, and may be used to reflect the increased diversity of family structures.

One other new wedding ritual that celebrates the reality of the postmodern family is the Family Medallion Service. Although no women in my sample included this, the ritual was discussed in five of the interviews, and has been witnessed by the author on several occasions. This ritual was first created in 1987 by a Christian minister who wanted a way to acknowledge the children of the bride or groom, especially in cases of second marriages. In the Family Medallion Service, a child of the bride, the groom, or the couple together is called up to the altar during the wedding ceremony. A blessing is then read that emphasizes how the marriage of the bride and groom is also the beginning of a new family, which includes the child. A pin or necklace is then given to the child in the shape of three interconnecting rings to symbolize the new family. As more people now remarry or marry for the first time after having children, this ceremony lets the new couple include these children in the ceremony. It also implicitly acknowledges that the temporal order between

marriage and childbearing is not as straightforward as it used to be, and in doing so is more aligned with postmodern family patterns.

It should also be mentioned that these new rituals appear to be less religious than traditional wedding rituals. While God is often mentioned by the presiding clergy member during the Unity Candle ceremony, it can just as easily be performed leaving out the religious wording. The Rose Ceremony has no religious symbolism and appears to include no mention of religion at all. Although the Family Medallion Service was created by a Christian minister, it was designed to be non-denominational, and can be performed in either religious or civil wedding ceremonies.

As big, formal weddings increased during the twentieth century, so did the percentage of couples who were married by clergy members, as this came to be seen as an important part of a “traditional” wedding (Pleck 2000). Nonetheless, one should be careful not to assume that this indicates that couples today therefore place a higher value on the religious component of the wedding. Recent polls have found that just less than 20% of all adults and a third of adults under age 30 do not identify with any religion (Pew Research Center 2012). Although women in this study chose to be married by a clergy member as a part of having a traditional wedding, a number of them expressed a desire to have a fairly secular ceremony.⁵ One woman reported that she asked the minister to “take God out” as much as possible. An-

⁵ These requests appeared to be made more frequently by those women who were married by Protestant ministers than by those married by Catholic or Jewish clergy members.

other said they eliminated most of the references to God because otherwise it would have been “hypocritical.” Choosing to be married in a church or by a clergy member may be done simply as a reflection that one sees marriage as a “sacred” or special institution (Pleck 2000), not because one is especially religious. In some cases, these new wedding rituals may be appealing because they can be performed as secular rituals, while still reinforcing family bonds.

Decreasing Anxiety over Marriage in a Time of Divorce

An additional reason that formal weddings are still relevant and appealing to women, even though marriage and families have changed, also emerged during the interview process. Having a traditional wedding may be an attempt to decrease anxiety about marrying in an age of high divorce rates. The U.S. has the highest divorce rates in the world, with nearly half of all marriages predicted to end in divorce (Cherlin 2010). While the wedding planning process itself may be stressful, successfully planning the event together and holding a large public ceremony that displays their commitment may decrease apprehension about marrying. Having a traditional wedding helps provide a predictable entry into married life and allows the couple to demonstrate their “marital work ethic” (Hackstaff 1999).

A little over half of the women expressed the belief (some explicitly and some implicitly) that it was important to have a “real” wedding if one wanted to get one’s marriage off to a positive start. While there is no evidence that having a large traditional wedding decreases the divorce rate (Otnes and

⁴ Although I cannot find any information on its origin, someone reading this manuscript later suggested a possible connection between this type of Rose Ceremony and the one done on the television show, *The Bachelor* (ABC network), which first aired in the United States in 2002. On this reality show, the bachelor gives long stem roses to those women he would like to single out for special attention and be able to spend more time with. Conversely, roses have long been a symbol of love and the wedding ritual may have risen completely independent of the TV show.

Pleck 2003), the idea that having a large formal wedding may serve as a form of “divorce insurance” was evident in my interviews. For the majority of the women, only a traditional wedding was seen as constituting a “real” wedding. One woman explained that she had considered a small private wedding, but said,

[i]t was important to [my husband] to have a traditional wedding. You know, a **real** one, with lots of people. [Samantha, age 36]

The idea that having a “real” or high quality wedding increased the odds that one would have a high quality marriage was also something they frequently implied. One woman said,

[t]here are a lot of things that happen in marriage that you can’t control. What kind of wedding we had is something I could control, so I wanted the best wedding possible. [Danielle, age 25]

In this quotation, the woman acknowledges that she has been thinking about (and perhaps worrying about) the fact that there will be things in her relationship in the future that she cannot control. Her way of dealing with this uncertainty was to focus on what she felt she could control – their wedding – and to try to have “the best wedding possible,” with the implication being that this would give her relationship the best start possible. It is also noticeable that she believes that the “best” wedding is a traditional one.

Throughout most of the twentieth century, the wedding industry has been encouraging this un-

supported but powerful idea that having an elaborate wedding is a way to stave off divorce (Pleck 2000; Ingraham 2008). It appears that it has been since the 1970s when divorce rates began to soar in the U.S. that the idea has had truly fertile ground. Perhaps coincidentally, but perhaps not, the 1980s, 1990s, and more recent decades have seen huge increases in cost in the average wedding. Splurging has been encouraged as a way to show your commitment to the relationship (and if nothing else is permanent, the debt may be for some couples).

In addition to providing a practicable beginning for married life, weddings also appear to reduce anxiety by providing opportunities for the couple to demonstrate their marital work ethic (Hackstaff 1999). Previous research has found that most couples today believe that having a successful marriage that does not end in divorce involves “marital work.” Important aspects of marital work include communicating, adapting, and compromising with each other (Hackstaff 1999).

Five of the women who were interviewed argued that the wedding planning process can act as an important testing ground for relationships. One woman explained,

I think maybe you can see, especially in the wedding planning process, how people work together, and what some of the issues that may come up in the marriage will be. [Anne, age 24]

The women were generally in agreement that if a couple can work together and support each other throughout the wedding planning process, then it

was a good indication that they would have a successful marriage. Although all the women reported doing more of the wedding planning work than their fiancés did, they also said that they had “expected” to do more of it. This is aligned with previous researches that found that weddings are viewed as primarily “women’s work” by those involved (Nett 1988; Currie 1993).

Among the couples in the study, there was a wide range in the amount of planning and decision making being done by the groom. In the last two decades, grooms have begun to become more involved in the wedding planning process (Otnes and Pleck 2003), which may increase the likelihood that women see it as an important testing ground for their relationship. In the cases where the bride-to-be was doing the bulk of the work, her fiancé demonstrated his marital work ethic by being emotionally supportive of her through the process and being available when she did ask for his help. In other cases, the division was much more equal. One woman explained,

[a]lthough the wedding planning was hard, I felt really good about it at the end. The wedding was so beautiful and it was something we had done together. That just felt good. A symbol of what we could do together. You know? [Gloria, age 28]

Successfully navigating the wedding planning process provided this woman with tangible evidence that she and her future husband could work together effectively. It appeared to allow her to enter her marriage feeling happy and optimistic about her chances of marital success.

Discussion

Ritual scholars contend that rituals generally become more elaborate when people perceive that the social institution being celebrated is vulnerable and tenuous (Otnes and Pleck 2003). When elaborate weddings first became popular in the Victorian era, they expressed not only the value that was placed on marriage but also the common anxieties about it at the time (Rothman 1984). There is little doubt that the institution of marriage today is often seen as fragile and unstable due to the declining marriage rates, high divorce rates, and changing gender roles. Contrary to what some might have expected, this has not led to a decrease in the popularity of large traditional weddings.

Recent researches have highlighted a number of reasons for the continued popularity of traditional weddings (Pleck 2000; Otnes and Pleck 2003; Mead 2007; Ingraham 2008). Although these studies explain their phenomenon of focus, they are insufficient as a whole as they do not fully consider the continued functions that traditional weddings can play in contemporary family lives. Weddings have not lost their usefulness as a family ritual, even though their usefulness may be different than in years past, and families definitely are. Although the practical significance of marriage has been lessened over the last several decades, traditional weddings continue to play important roles in the lives of postmodern families.

The personal narratives of women in this study indicate that traditional weddings can function to decrease anxiety for modern brides through creating a predictable entry into marriage using rituals which

appear to have ties to a past where divorce was much less likely. These anxieties are different than the ones eased by wedding rituals two centuries ago, although the function they play may be similar. In the 1800s, women were concerned with the rise of the companionate marriage and the increased expectation for emotional happiness and intimacy in marriage (Rothman 1984). Today's brides often seek reassurance that they and their future husband are both committed to "working" together through life's challenges (Hackstaff 1999), which wedding planning gives them a space to practice and seemingly conquer. Although this function of traditional weddings in decreasing anxiety for modern brides has been overlooked by some wedding researchers and discounted by others, it deserves to be examined more closely and among various populations.

Traditional weddings also continue to bring families together – a role that has changed, but not decreased in importance as divorce and remarriage rates have climbed. While weddings traditionally united two separate kinship groups (and to some extent continue to), weddings also function today to bring together people connected by "remarriage chains" (Ahrons 2004). This role holds unique significance in a society that otherwise does not set aside a space for these extended family members to come together. The ways in which modern brides value involving family members in their wedding celebration can be seen in the deviations they make from traditional rituals and in new "invented traditions" they are including.

The women who were the focus of this study were those most likely to have a large traditional wed-

ding – white, middle class, heterosexual women who are marrying for the first time. This group has seen very little decrease in marriage rates over the last few decades as their rate of marriage is still over 90% (Cherlin 2010). This contrasts sharply with other groups. Rates of marriage among African American women have declined noticeably. At current rates, only two out of three African American women will marry, and 70% of these marriages will end in divorce (much higher than the 47% of white marriages that end in divorce) (Cherlin 2010). Nevertheless, beginning in the mid-1900s, African Americans also embraced traditional weddings, although they spend less money on average than do whites (Howard 2006; Ingraham 2008). In recent decades, some couples have also chosen to include older ethnic traditions, such as jumping over a broom and/or ritual drumming (Otnes and Pleck 2003). The role of traditional weddings in African American communities, where families have experienced even faster levels of change than white families, should be examined in future research.

The U.S. is one of a few countries where women with higher incomes and education levels are more likely to marry than those with lower incomes and education levels (Cherlin 2010). Although low-income women tend to marry at lower rates, this should not be taken as proof that the less affluent do not value weddings or the institution of marriage, as they will frequently say they are just waiting for the right situation (partner, job, money in the bank) or even to save enough money to have a traditional wedding (Edin and Kefalas 2007; Cherlin 2010). Future research should explore whether tra-

ditional weddings play similar functions as those discussed in this study in the lives of those with lower education and income levels.

Although rituals are by nature repetitive, rituals and their functions can and do change. This study has examined how two of the three traditional functions of weddings have adapted to the rise of postmodern family patterns so that they continue

to fulfill family needs. Many other family rituals (Thanksgiving dinner, Mother's Day, trick-or-treating, etc.) that appear to be long-standing traditions are actually not as old as many believe (Pleck 2000). How some traditions continue to adapt as families change, and how other traditions remain relatively fixed while their functions change, are important sociological questions that should be re-examined in this age of family transformation.

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"I Feel Like I'm Going to Win": Superstition in Gambling

Abstract Drawing on in-depth interviews with recreational gamblers (N=67), the paper focuses on superstitious beliefs and practices used by players of various games to influence or control outcomes. The study was conducted in the spirit of the interpretative approach formed by folklorist Alain Dundes (1961). Results suggested that superstition, in a variety of forms – signs, magic, conversion – was clearly an accepted part of gambling for most respondents. Although more pronounced in games of chance, superstition appeared to be more significant in the experience of interviewees who played skill games, creating "illusion of control." Future research on the link between superstition and religion, and on the role of social networks in fostering and developing superstition-related knowledge is warranted.

Keywords Gambling Behavior; Gambling Beliefs; Magic; Personal Luck; Superstition

Conceptual Background

Sestri Ponente (Genoa, Italy), September, 2005: the champagne bottle used for Costa Concordia christening ceremony fails to smash when it is thrown against the hull.

Isola del Giglio (Grosseto, Italy), seven years later, January, 2012: the cruise ship Costa Concordia hits rocks off the Italian Tuscan coast and partially sinks. It is Friday the 13th, on the centenary of the Titanic sinking.

This recent disaster exemplifies the use in everyday life of a class of beliefs and behavior that might well be labeled "superstition": the ceremonial champagne bottle does not break, Friday the 13th.

There is controversy concerning the exact criteria that should be used to determine whether a belief or practice is superstitious or not. As a result of the confusion around this concept, the term "superstition" encompasses a multitude of meanings and interpretations. Researchers, in turn, have characterized

superstition as irrational thinking (Kramer and Block 2008), a ritual which usually takes place in contexts of uncertainty (Malinowski 1955), a belief that relies on a mistaken causal link between two independent events (Foster and Kokko 2009), a "pseudo-religion" (Pihlström 2007), a belief inconsistent with scientific knowledge and self-oriented (Stanke 2004), a paranormal belief or behavior (Hergovich, Schott, and Arendasy 2005; Aarnio 2007), a confusion of core knowledge about physical, psychological, and biological phenomena (Lindeman and Aarnio 2007), a "half-belief" (Campbell 1996).

Very often, the definition of superstition is omitted or substituted with examples of such beliefs and behavior (Žeželj et al. 2009). In this lack of conceptual clarity, the borderline between superstition, the paranormal, magic, witchcraft, or even religion is ambiguous and vague (Delacroix and Guillard 2008).

This study is based on the work of folklorist Alan Dundes (1961) who proposes a definition of superstition in term of grammatical conditions and results. The distinction between "generalized belief" and "superstition" relies on the "Condition-Result" structure of superstition. According to Dundes, "superstitions are traditional expressions of one or more conditions and one or more results with some of the condition signs and others causes" (1961:28). Generalized belief does not have this basic structure, but normally states a matter in the form of direct and general statement. So, *never open an umbrella in a house, or you'll have bad luck* has a "Condition-Result" structure and is superstition; on the contrary, *the porpoise will push a drowned body to shore* is not superstition.

Analysis of the relationship between conditions and results enabled Dundes to classify superstition in three main categories.

The first is omen, significant coincidence or synchronicity. Dundes called it *sign*. Such superstition is generally made up of a single condition and a single result, often serving as the basis of prediction. Thus, in Western culture, Friday the 13th is bad luck or if one finds a penny, it is an auspice of good luck. Under this category Dundes found two kinds of superstition: non-human signs – consisting of celestial, animal, and plant indicators, for example, a red moon means death by pestilence, and accidental or coincidental signs of human activity, for instance, if the champagne bottle does not break, it is an omen of bad luck, or if one's palms itch, money is coming. Signs are purely accidental or coincidental and man is passive – when a black cat crosses your path, there is nothing you can do to avoid that happening. People may read such portents; moreover, no activity is required in interpreting either the shooting star or whippoorwill's call as a sign of death.

Unlike signs, *magic* is causal. Dundes argues that this second category of superstition is concerned with manipulating the future, not with predicting it. Instead of foretelling death and good/bad luck, one can, using magic, bring death or good/bad luck. Thus, magic aims to produce desired results: for example, when launched, a ship is traditionally christened by *breaking a bottle of champagne against its bow*. Human activity is intentional and man is active with regard to magic. Since human activity is intentional, it is also avoidable: for instance, one can avoid seven years of bad luck by not breaking a mirror.

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Therefore, unlike signs based only on belief, magic superstition requires both belief and practice. Lastly, magic frequently makes use of rituals, as seen by looking at cures and divinations.

Dundes named *conversion* the third type of superstition – it is a hybrid category in which signs are put into practice, that is, they are “converted.” Here, the individual’s action is required. *Friday the 13th* is supposed to be a day (“Condition”) of bad luck that may be passively observed. One’s action to prevent the outcome presaged by the sign *Friday the 13th* is “conversion”: maybe, *staying at home or not travelling* (“Result”). Similarly, some people consider finding a penny a sign of good luck. In a sense, this is a call to action, to shape the future rather than just let things happen – thus, one could purchase a lottery ticket and hit the jackpot.

Thus, for Dundes, superstition is a macro-concept encompassing a complex set of phenomena, including magic. In other words, just like conversion or signs, magic involves some of the possible manifestations of superstitions. In this article, I will try to understand whether and how Dundes’ approach can help researchers investigate the role of superstition in gambling behavior and practice.

Focus and Objectives

Superstition related to gambling behavior receives considerable attention in several fields; sociologists, however, have not addressed it much. Henslin’s classical article, “Craps and Magic” (1967), was one of the first sociological studies of superstitious phenomena. He observed that crapshooters often

believed they were able to control the outcome of each throw of the dice. For example, they might link the force employed when throwing the dice (hard or soft) with the number obtained (large or low). So, when they needed low numbers, they rolled the dice gently; when they needed large numbers, they cast them in an energetic fashion.

The purpose of this paper is to examine in depth the role of superstition in the creation, maintenance, and legitimization of gambling behavior. It deals with recreational gamblers, those for whom gambling is a leisure time pursuit, thereby excluding two types of gamblers, that is, the professional and the compulsive. The focus on regular gamblers is for two reasons.

First, because the ways superstition affects what constitutes “normal” or low-risk gambling behavior has not yet been fully explored. In addition, qualitative accounts of the superstitious and magical beliefs, values, practices influencing or directing gaming decisions are lacking. Further work on these issues is central to understanding why some gamblers have a greater perception of control and believe in their ability to alter fate; why for some individuals superstition may have a robust influence on gaming decisions, while for others less so; why, more broadly, superstition does not decline in modern society. Furthermore, these issues become sociologically interesting from the perspective of explaining superstition in a rational, logical way.

Second, because in Italy research on gambling behavior has been surprisingly scarce until now, though interest in it is growing (D’Agati 2004; 2005).

This lack of interest is surprising given that in the early 16th century games such as the Lotto were seemingly widely practiced in Genoa.

There are three objectives of this study. The first is to provide descriptive information on superstition – as defined by Dundes, that is, a complex phenomenon which includes signs, magic, and conversions – and its effectiveness in gambling from the viewpoint of players. Relevant questions include: Which of Dundes’ categories are most common in gambling behavior? What is the nature of the magic in the gambling process? What exactly are signs and conversions?

The second objective is to examine the circumstances in which superstition will be most pronounced. That is, when is a gambler more likely to call upon superstitious practices or beliefs? Is it when he/she is unfamiliar with the rules of a given game? Or in situations when his/her perception of control wavers? Or, is it when the outcome of a game/bet is perceived by the gambler as crucial or decisive? By definition, gambling involves risking something of value on the unknown outcome of some future event.¹ However, the degree of uncertainty in games varies. Since gambling is a complex phenomenon, “chance-skill” analytical distinction, first raised by Caillois

¹ Although there is much debate on how to define, assess, and understand gambling (see also Reith 1999; Curtis and Wilson 2001; Weiss, Demski, and Backen 2011), for the purposes of this paper, the term gambling is confined to its conventional meaning. The definition adopted here is that of sociologist Edward Devereux (1968) who referred to gambling as an “activity in which the parties involved, who are known as bettors or players, voluntarily engage to make the transfer of money or something else of value among themselves contingent upon the outcome of some future and uncertain event” (p. 53). So, gambling means risking something of value on the unknown outcome of some future event. This definition covers all forms of gambling, whether undertaken privately or offered commercially.

(1961), may provide a conceptual framework for categorizing different gambling activities. Therefore, it is useful to distinguish between “games of chance” and “games involving some skill” (or both skill and luck). The former typically refers to gambling in which winning is purely a matter of chance. From this point of view, in games of pure chance, the outcome is unpredictable as it is beyond the gambler’s control – consequently, these activities do not require skill or knowledge, and the underlying events on which gamblers bet are both random and independent. Examples of games of pure chance include: roulette, slot machines, lotteries, bingo, and others. Conversely, the latter refers to activities involving different degrees of skill and luck. Here, the success of gamblers may depend on their knowledge, strategies, and decisions during play. Games involving both luck and skill include, for example, horse race and sports betting. From this perspective, in soccer matches gamblers can make intelligent guesses and bet on a particular team based on previous statistics and knowledge of the current quality of the team. So, those with more knowledge and skill may have an objective advantage over other gamblers.

So, in view of all this and considering the complexity of gambling, can superstition be considered a response to situations of high uncertainty? In other words, how much more likely is a gambler to call upon superstitious beliefs or practices when the outcome of a bet is subject to chance or luck rather than controllable forces (such as skill, ability, preparation, etc.)? It is assumed here that the structural characteristics of games (i.e., whether they are games of chance or games of skill) may influence superstitious belief and behavior to some degree, but not

completely. Although it might be expected that superstition is more pronounced in games of chance, there is no reason to assume that the belief in and practice of superstition declined with advancing certainty, for example, in games involving skill.

Contrary to the uncertainty hypothesis introduced by anthropologist Malinowski, I also consider that, no matter whether in games of chance or of skill, gamblers resort to superstition because they believe that the outcome is determined by controllable forces. Related to this is the perception of randomness – chance and skill may differ according to whether they are perceived from the inside, subjectively by a gambler, or from the outside, objectively by an observer.

I am also interested in understanding at what stage in a bet a gambler is more likely to call upon superstitious beliefs and/or practices. It is at the start, that is, before the odds are defined, or after placing the bet, perhaps to justify the event of defeat to others? Or else, is it while actually placing the bet (as an act of support), when nothing is known yet about the outcome of the wager?

Finally, the third objective of this study is to focus on the dynamics and processes by which superstitions become part of a game, influencing it. In other words, how might a sign, for example, affect an individual's bet? This article hypothesizes that the concepts of conversion and magic, as defined by Dundes, help interpret how people incorporate superstitions and other luck-related strategies into their gambling ventures. Specifically, both concepts suggest an idea of superstition that is causal rather

than random, in which belief and practice overlap and influence each other mutually.

Methodology

Design

This research is qualitative in design, using mainly individual in-depth, face-to-face, interviews. Narrative accounts were selected as the mode of data collection, the aim of the study being detailed exploration of experience, behavior, attitudes of gamblers, and evaluation of the factors affecting them. Also, interviews were supplemented with occasional visits to betting shops and casinos as observer.

Participants

Sixty-seven gamblers (40 men, 27 women) participated in the interview process. Their age ranged from 18 to 76 years. At the time, all interviewees lived in or around the Turin area; one was in Naples, two in Rome.

Any study of gambling behavior is notoriously fraught with a multiplicity of methodological difficulties. Firstly, although *many people* admitted gambling in one form or another, very few considered themselves “gamblers” at all. Some did not consider buying lottery tickets or betting on a horse as gambling. Secondly, people are often reluctant to own up to strangers about their gambling habits. So, it is hard to find individuals willing to talk about their gambling. This explains why the snowball sampling approach was adopted for recruiting: interviewed subjects gave researcher referrals of other potential

respondents. Thus, the sample was specifically designed to achieve range and diversity, and was not intended to be representative of the wider gambling population. Selected gamblers had to meet the following criteria:

- not to have had previous problems with gambling;
- play games of chance (Lotto,² SuperEnalotto,³ Roulette, national lotteries and instant lotteries, Bingo, etc.) or games of skill (Totocalcio,⁴ sport betting or horse race betting);
- gamble regularly.⁵ The aim was to select only people who were significantly engaged in gambling.

² The Lotto is a very ancient game in which five distinct numbers from a set of 1 to 90 are randomly selected in 10 different Italian cities, three times a week (Tuesday-Thursday-Saturday). Gamblers can place several types of bets: *estratto*, *ambo*, *terno*, *quaterna*, *cinquina*. Betting two numbers is called *ambo* and pays off at 250 times your original bet. Betting three numbers is *terno*; four, *quaterna*, and five, *cinquina*. These pay off, respectively: 4,250 times, 80,000 times, and one million times whatever you bet.

³ The SuperEnalotto is a popular Italian lottery draw game that was launched in 1997. It is played three times a week on a Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday night and offers huge jackpots in every draw. Players have to select six numbers from a choice of 1-90 and they must match all six of these numbers to win the SuperEnalotto jackpot.

⁴ The Totocalcio is a betting game which began in 1946 and is based on weekly football matches. The punter, using the *schedina* (betting card), must predict the outcome of 14 football matches. The Totocalcio was an immediate success and soon came to symbolize Italy's “economic miracle,” in a country, which was beginning to have hope and believe in its ability to change. Today, Totocalcio is on the decline on account of competition from other similar betting games that are considered more attractive. One case is the football betting system which provides more freedom and is not restricted to making forecasts on a pre-defined list of 14 matches. Any adult can build his or her own betting card from the matches that interest them the most (which may be one or several) and select the forecasts they prefer.

⁵ For Roulette, “regular” meant at least once a month. For the other games, at least once or twice a week.

For the sake of anonymity, all interviewees were given pseudonyms.

Procedure

Most of the data used for this article come from interviews (N=54) collected between February 2003 and May 2004. Further interviews (N=13), conducted in 2012-2013, were also used. Gamblers were interviewed at a location of their choosing (their home, the researcher's office, a local coffee shop, etc.). Four subjects preferred telephone contact; eleven declined to be interviewed after the study was explained to them.

Interviews were semi-structured, generally lasting 45 to 90 minutes. Questions were open-ended to allow participants to direct the conversation. The main focus of each interview was the participants' account of their gambling experience and attitude. Interviewees were asked to describe the different strategies they used and to provide examples of each. In several cases, some players were invited to make a prediction, for example, filling out a coupon for Totocalcio, sport and horse race betting, or Lotto. They were also involved in discussing the experience of winning (through anecdotes, major episodes, etc.) and the emotions felt when losing.

Analysis

Interviews were fully recorded and transcribed verbatim. Detailed inspection of the texts was used for identifying recurring patterns. Transcripts were then submitted to content analysis by the interpretative approach proposed by Dundes (1961). Results

hereunder, topic by topic, start with signs, followed by magic, conversion, and content characteristics. Each section contains direct quotations. All quoted extracts include information on the gambler's pseudonym, game/games most practiced, and age.

Discussion

Signs or Accidental Superstition

The first type of superstition emerging from the analysis of the interviews conducted presents strong points of contact with Dundes' concept of "signs." This form of superstition is generally accidental: premonitions, hunches, indicators of good or bad luck, in some cases, looked for or pursued, but not intentionally produced by the gambler. For example, looking for a four-leaved clover may be a very long activity; finding it, however, is a completely random event. One important aspect of signs is, moreover, that they may constitute, as we will see in the next paragraph, the basis for formulating forecasts.

Respondents' experience provided considerable evidence of superstitious omens and portents alluding to a narrow distinction – autobiographic and non-autobiographic signs.⁶ The former are "inside" portents and omens directly related to gamblers' lives or with some sort of special significance to them; non-autobiographic signs, on the other hand, are "external" and refer to events not directly related to the gamblers' life, but which are taken over by gamblers.

⁶ I prefer this distinction to Dundes' differentiation between "non-human signs" and "accidental or coincidental signs of human activity" (1961:30).

Our discussion begins with autobiographic signs, for which the analysis of the interviews provides a wealth of information. Autobiographic signs mentioned include, first of all, superstitious belief in the "power" of dates, such as family birthdays, anniversaries, recurrences, or certain numbers "assigned" by someone. This kind of conviction is frequent, especially in chance-related games which involve making forecasts on the extraction of numbers, such as Lotto or Roulette, or numbers-based games in general, such as Bingo. As the interview extracts show, some gamblers assign a premonitory significance to circumstances and events of their own lives, such as births, weddings, and anniversaries. In other words, they consider these events (which are not always random, as in the case of wedding dates) as signs of good or bad luck.

I've got "my" numbers...: 4, which is my birthday, and 18, which is my granddaughter's birthday [Angelica, Roulette/SuperEnalotto, age 62]

7 and 11 are "my" numbers. ... Why I liked them? The numbers of my basketball T-shirt were 7 and 11, so... [Marco, Lotto, age 43]

When I buy a [Bingo] card, I immediately look to see if it has any lucky numbers. For example, 15, which is the day of my wedding anniversary, or 17, which has always been lucky for me when I'm playing. Or, even 6, the day my husband was born, and 20, which is my birthday. If the card has none of these numbers, or no numbers that are similar to them (I don't know, 51, say, which is the opposite of 15), I know, it's not going to be a good round for me [Stefania, Bingo/Lotto/Roulette, age 55]

Therefore, as suggested by the stories of the gamblers, the process of building a reliable gambling sign runs along biographical lines (their own or a loved-one's birthday, a basketball shirt number, etc.). A sign is considered reliable if it somehow links to the person's existence or aspects of it. It is not uncommon, as in the extracts below, for repetition to be the guarantee of the "reliability" of a portent in the eyes of a gambler.

12 is a recurring number in my life because on the 12th I met my two husbands...; because my son was born on the 12th, and his bed number in hospital was 12 [Angelica, Roulette/SuperEnalotto, age 62]

When you wake up, as I have done, for three nights...at the same time for three nights in a row...you take it as a sign... You see it as a positive sign [Vittorio, Lotto, age 44]

Adopting autobiographic signs is frequent, as I said, especially in chance-related games; although to a lesser extent, they are also found in skills-based games. Of my interviewees, three horse race bettors and four respondents keen on Totocalcio and sport betting mentioned autobiographic signs. Those refer mostly to intuition, empathy, or attachment to a football club, taken as "prophetic signs." Typical statements in this regard are: "I've always been guided by my instinct" [Loredana, horse race betting, age 56], "[i]t's bad luck to bet on your favorite team's defeat" [Enrico, Totocalcio, age 42], "[y]ou should never bet on your own team. It's bad luck" [Mara, Totocalcio/sport betting, age 39].

In spite of this, most respondents betting on games of skill were especially critical of what they perceived as lack of commitment and poor teaching skills of some gamblers. The following extract reflects this perspective:

[y]ears and years ago there was [a horse named] "Irma Ve" and I was in love with a girl **named** Irma, but I've never played Irma Ve because... my woman was good, but the horse wasn't! The real punters don't pick a horse at random because they like the name... There are many factors to be considered when betting on a horse...the odds [of a horse winning], information about the fitness level of the horses, performance in previous races and pedigree, track conditions, some lucky rumors... [Giuseppe, horse race betting, age 44]

Precognitive dreams also featured in interviews as a sign that some gamblers considered to be harbingers of luck. More subtly, dreams that respondents described can be classified into two categories.

The first contains dreams in which they claimed to have seen numbers: "[n]umbers were strong and clear, and I played them" [Luca, Lotto, age 68], "[s]ometimes I dream some numbers, for example, a bus number" [Ambrogio, Lotto, age 38]. Sometimes one or more characters in the dream disclosed "winning" numbers: "I once dreamt my grandma who told me to write numbers on a piece of paper" [Tiziana, Lotto/SuperEnalotto, age 47], "[i]n that dream an unknown person gave me his mobile number. I saw it...it was divided into several parts, in numbers of two digits" [Amanda, Lotto, age 33].

The second category of dreams was more common among respondents and constituted very strong triggers to gamble. It contained images and actions of different individuals they knew, including family members, friends, or neighbors: “[w]hen I dream about my grandparents, I always play some numbers on the Lotto” [Marzia, Lotto, age 46]. In these types of dreams, deceased loved ones often *return* to visit those they have left behind and give them advice.

Data show that autobiographic signs can also be objects. Many of the gamblers interviewed had their own specific lucky charms, including pens, talismans, or even particular garments which go everywhere with them. Nonetheless, lucky charms do not all have the same value. As Antonello notes, “[l]ucky charms must be gifted to you if you want them to work” [Lotto/Totocalcio, age 46]. From his perspective, Antonello’s anti-jinx card made him feel lucky, it having been gifted to him by a friend.

Another commonly mentioned sign – which in this case is not only autobiographic in nature but often is also non-autobiographic – includes different types of distressing and tragic events. These were seen as synchronicities or coincidences which “mean something” rather than misfortune. It emerged as a significant theme in gamblers’ experience, especially for those who played Lotto. For example, disgrace, accidents, or the death of loved ones (relatives, friends, acquaintances), tragedies (earthquakes, the 9/11 attacks), the passing of a celebrity or someone unknown to them. As we will see in the next paragraph, the conversion process gives these events a different, new – paradoxically – positive and playful meaning.

Staying with non-autobiographic signs, hence with events unrelated to the gambler’s life, the experience of extraordinary situations that are “strange,” in some ways surprising and “interpreted” as portents, is recurrent in the stories of the gamblers. For example, the striking repetition of some numbers, a vehicle overtaking another, or seeing a car’s plate numbers or signboards, et cetera.

If you see a coffee spoon fall, it means you’re about to have good luck. [Annalisa, Lotto/Gratta e Vinci/SuperEnalotto, age 34]

Sometimes there is a strange coincidence and you win. I remember that once a car overtook me and its plate number was 18 8 81... It was a small car, maybe it was a Fiat 126... I was driving very slowly and it was a crazy overtaking maneuver... I loved it [that plate number]... [Stefano, Lotto, age 44]

Furthermore, some respondents believed past random events to contain information on future realization. From this point of view, they thought that the *delay* was a sign that “means something.” In games of chance, it might consist in the numbers of draws after which a particular number was *due* to appear. When playing the Lotto, some interviewees tended to expect that a certain number (or a combination of numbers) would be more likely to come up if it had not been drawn for a long time; similarly, when playing Roulette, others tended to expect that a black number would be *due* after a sequence of red numbers. In games of skill, horses and football teams can be erroneously perceived in a similar way. In Totocalcio or sport betting, some respondents often perceived a series of losses by a team as

strong evidence of impending success. This illusory belief has been dubbed “gambler’s fallacy” (Tversky and Kahneman 1971), as shown hereunder, it is a tendency to believe that a streak of events is likely to end.⁷

[He comments while filling out a football pool coupon] so...Perugia-Brescia... Brescia...is slightly stronger than Perugia; but Perugia hasn’t yet won a match, and for this reason, I would bet on Perugia winning. [Paolo, Totocalcio, age 49]

Look at the latest Lotto draw results. Analyze carefully the various draws, and you can see what I call “coincidences.” ... For example, let’s start from the first wheel: [that of the city of] Bari. So, in [the draw of] Bari there aren’t numbers ending with zero, or sets of numbers with the same last digit,⁸ or numbers with two identical digits⁹... So, this is, in my opinion, a draw that needs to be considered. On the basis of my learning and experience, I realize that the lack of coincidences lasts up to three times... Then, the fourth time one of those numbers comes up. [Battista, Lotto, age 76]

There was also evidence of interviewees’ belief in “hot outcome.” This is the opposite of gambler’s fallacy and refers to expectation of positive results in random sequence.¹⁰ For example, some Roulette

⁷ The “gambler’s fallacy” is a belief in negative autocorrelation of a non-autocorrelated random sequence of outcomes like coin flips (Sundali and Croson 2006:1). It is also known as the “Monte Carlo fallacy” (because its most famous example happened in a Monte Carlo casino in 1913).

⁸ For example, 15-25-35.

⁹ For instance, 11-22-33.

¹⁰ “Hot outcome” is an (incorrect) belief in positive autocorrelation of a non-autocorrelated random sequence (Sundali and Croson 2006:2).

gamblers believed that a streak of blacks from the wheel would continue because black was *hot*. Some Lotto respondents paid attention to the *frequency* with which a particular number had come up in the past, as in the following comment:

[m]y father had a big influence on me [my gambling]...he suggested recently that I should pick frequent numbers. ... Generally, [when I go to the casino], in the first fifteen to twenty minutes, I take a look at the different Roulette tables... I look for hot numbers and I play them. [Edoardo, Roulette, age 25]

How Gamblers Incorporate Superstitions into Their Gambling Ventures: Non-Random Superstition

In this paragraph, I will consider the ways in which superstition becomes a concrete part of the process of gambling. The focus of my analysis shifts therefore from superstitious beliefs (which were identified as signs in the previous paragraph) to superstitious practices. Specifically, I will show how Dundes’ concepts of “conversion” and “magic” – the former concerning the area of forecasting and the latter the area of manipulating the future – can help researchers focus on the process by which gamblers translate their superstitious beliefs into the act of gambling, leading to definition of forecasts or predictions.

Conversion: The Translation of Signs into Practice

The concrete use made of signs by the gamblers interviewed is reminiscent of another type of superstition, which Dundes refers to as “conversion.” In

fact, “conversion” is closely related to the concept of signs and it is their translation into practice. Nearly all respondents playing games of chance mentioned conversion.

It is not infrequent, as in the examples that follow, for conversion of a sign to be a fairly quick and simple operation, requiring no other effort than paying attention to all surroundings, both outer and inner, and intuitively taking advantage of synchronistic and coincidental events (signs) occurring in everyday life.

I always play...number 74, my mother's age when she died, and 28, the day she died. [Diana, Lotto, age 62]

Last week, I went to the Christmas market at Montreux. So... I picked 20, that is the day I went [to Montreux]...and number 6, which was the departure time. ... Yes, I was inspired by that trip [Aldo, Lotto/SuperEnalotto, age 34]

There are dates in all of our lives that are luckier than others. They say that one of the best days in our lives is when we get married. That's why when Giuseppe [my husband] and I got married, we didn't ask for money or appliances or holidays...but the equivalent in Gratta e Vinci¹¹ because we love them! So, at the end of our wedding reception we had over 800 cards to scratch! [Rossella, Gratta e Vinci, age 37]

In the first example, Diana plays Lotto using numerology related to her mother's death. She “converts,”

that is, translates, into odds the signs considered to predict good luck: “my mother's age,” the “day she died.” The second Lotto player draws inspiration from a trip taken, using numbers corresponding to the date and time of departure. In the third case, “wedding days” are considered portents of good luck. The consequent act of conversion consists in putting into practice what is considered an indicator of good luck by making a somewhat original request – to receive instant lottery tickets as a wedding gifts.

Also surprising or apparently “strange” signs (especially non autobiographical, as we saw in the previous paragraph) become a great source of inspiration for conversion superstition, for instance, the striking repetition of some numbers, signboards, or car's plate numbers, et cetera. Such superstitions were very popular among those who engaged in Lotto and in general in games of chance; however, some of those who were keen on games of skill seemed also to succumb to the charm of these beliefs.

It was two years ago... I won two thousand five hundred euro. I was in my office filing some documents...and it occurred to me to see two numbers. Then, I saw them again, by chance, on a piece of paper. Then, a colleague called me to say, “Please, could you go to the post office to pick up a letter?” Okay, I went to pick up the letter. I take a look at the envelope: the same numbers again. ... When I saw those numbers, I felt a shiver down my back, and then I thought that I had to play... [Vittorio, Lotto, age 44]

Last month I saw a car in a movie on TV. It attracted me because it was an antique model and I saw

the registration number. I took note of it; I played the numbers and won. [Giovanna, horse race betting, age 47]

A colleague and I stopped at the entrance of the church to wait for the hearse carrying our boss to arrive...and then, when it did, my colleague said to me “Let's take note of the plate number... We'll bet [the plate number] on the Lotto.” And so, I first started playing Lotto systematically. It has me gripped. My colleague gave me the input... as I had never played the Lotto before in my life... [Antonello, Lotto/Totocalcio, age 47]

In the last extract, the gambler described a particularly poignant episode in which a daily event took on a whole new meaning. The number plate of the hearse bearing his deceased boss – a negative event – is perceived by Antonello's colleague as being a favorable circumstance, that is, a sign pointing to future good luck. This story allows us to introduce another form of conversion, which draws inspiration from inauspicious events which may either concern the gambler's close network (including strong relationships with family-members, friends, and even acquaintances) or a wider, less family-related context, such as the international scene or television. “Even in what is called misfortune, there is good fortune to be discovered” [Marzia, Lotto, age 47], observes this gambler. Thus, bereavements and exceptional or tragic episodes are submitted to a process of conversion into numbers to bet on. It emerged as a significant theme in gamblers' experience, especially for those who played Lotto or Roulette as in the following comments:

[f]ifteen years ago a friend of my mum and her family died in a car crash. My mum and I played the numbers [associated with this accident] and they all came up. We played the numbers of the day and the month of the accident, the members of the family who had died. That week we got lucky. All the numbers came up. ... I think there may be something magical, which makes numbers come up, because it's strange that these numbers [those associated to tragic events] came up. [Marzia, Lotto, age 47]

I picked the numbers for the 9/11 attack...[but, I said to myself], “Oh my God, how shameful! It's ridiculous.” [Diana, Lotto, age 62]

[Many people bet on] the numbers of Marco Pantani's¹²...or Alberto Sordi's death. All these numbers were drawn! ... [You have to pick numbers corresponding to] the day they died [and] their age. [Viviana, Lotto, age 44]

Beliefs such as “gambler's fallacy” and “hot outcome” (see *Signs* above) are often at the origin of many conversions, as mentioned. Some Lotto players track past draws in order to find meaningful signs from their point of view; then, they adjust their choices to the period in which a certain number has not been drawn, or tend to favor numbers drawn in several consecutive weeks, that is, “on streak.” Similarly, football punters sometimes think that a team that has lost, say, two matches in a row, may be “due” for a win.

¹¹ Introduced to Italy in 1994, Gratta e Vinci is an instant card lottery system with a hidden foil-covered section. The silver or gold foil is scratched away to reveal the winning combination (usually symbols or numbers) and the value of the cash prize.

¹² Marco Pantani, nicknamed “The Pirate,” was an Italian road-racing cyclist. Alberto Sordi was one of the most popular Italian movie stars.

Sometimes, I buy the newspaper and if I see that a number, say 17, has not been drawn in the past fifteen draws or more, I feel I must play it. I play it with other numbers. For example, last week I played the combination 17 and 6, and it came up. [Stefano, Lotto, age 40]

[He speaks while filling out a football pools coupon] So, Triestina-Atalanta... Well, the Atalanta comes from two consecutive losses, last Thursday lost at home 1-5... Well, I think Sunday Atalanta will not lose...I'm expecting a score like 1-1. [Salvo, Totocalcio/sport betting, age 20]

However, translation of a sign into a forecast is not always as quick and simple as the above cases seem to suggest. In many gamblers' experience signs, no matter whether autobiographic or non-autobiographic, usually required a good deal of interpretation. Some gamblers stated clearly that "hard work" combined with experience of play made the difference:

[m]y aunt...recommended to me [play numbers] using the first letter of the first name or last name. For example, a man called Charles has to play numbers in [the draw of the city of] Cagliari...or if you are Livio [and] there isn't a draw which begins with the letter 'L', [you have to take the initial of] your last name. If there is neither the initial of your first name nor the initial of your last name, [you have to take the first letter corresponding to the place] where you were born. If there isn't, [you have to take] the initial of the region, and so on. Or, [you have to play in the draw of the city] where you live. [Vittorio, Lotto, age 44]

Findings revealed that conversion also emerges as a result of dream interpretation. Behavior of that nature is mostly specific to Lotto gamblers. Half of them considered dreams as signs needing further understanding or analysis. Gamblers reported some sort of techniques for choosing lucky numbers. From this perspective, *La Smorfia*,¹³ the popular Neapolitan book, contains lists of numbers associated with hundreds of dreams and events.

Two days ago, I had a dream that my mom gave my husband a kiss... So, I played 47... Because [in *La Smorfia*] 47 is "the dead." ... It's my mom. Then [I played] 71 because [my mom] gave a kiss to my husband and I interpreted that her kiss would protect him...because my mom was very sweet when kissing him and according to *La Smorfia*...the number was 71. Then, I played 4 because my mom came down the stairs and gave my husband a kiss and the stairs in *La Smorfia* are number 4. And then, I played 17 because [my mom] hugged [my husband] and the hug is 17. I've played in [the draw of the city of] Turin because [in the dream] the stairs reminded me of those in my mom's home. [Viviana, Lotto, age 44]

Using lucky charm gifts is another typical conversion reported by some respondents. Objectively, a lucky charm given by someone is different from buying lucky charms for yourself. Lucky charms given can be regarded as an accidental or coincidental sign experienced without active or concerted effort, that is, he or she receives a gift, maybe unexpected. With charms bought, the lucky charm is the result of in-

¹³ *La Smorfia* is a traditional Neapolitan book which assigns numerical values 1-90 to an exhaustive list of things, including occurrences, concepts, and dreams.

tentional action, that is, he or she deliberately buys a certain object for magic purposes. Consequently, using a good luck charm gift for gambling purposes is a conversion, a transformation of a sign (the gift); on the contrary, as we will see in the next paragraph, using a lucky charm bought by yourself is magic.

However, from a subjective viewpoint, some respondents believed that gifted lucky charms worked better than lucky charms which were not gifted. As it emerges in the following comment, Antonello felt more confident when using a card which he considered a sign of good luck because given to him by a friend: "[v]ery often I rub [the ticket played] on it..." [Antonello, Lotto/Totocalcio, age 46].

Conversion might be inaction to prevent the outcome presaged by the sign. For example, for Mara, Friday the 13th was a bad day (sign) which would affect her game play; she converted the presumed omen simply by choosing not to gamble: "I never play on Friday the 13th" [Mara, Totocalcio/sport betting, age 39]. The same can be said in the first of the two extracts that follow. Believing Wednesday to be an unlucky day, Antonello prefers to delay betting until a less inauspicious day.

The case in the second extract, however, is different: conversion consists in trying to benefit from the good luck pointed to by a sign. Annalisa (a gambler we met in the section on signs) considers seeing a coffee spoon fall as a portent of good luck, and thus, feels encouraged to bet.

Wednesday isn't a lucky day. That's what I've been told. I was born on Wednesday. That's why I never bet on Wednesdays. [Antonello, Lotto/Totocalcio, age 62]

Whenever I see a coffee spoon fall, I have to bet, on anything, Lotto, SuperEnalotto, or Gratta e Vinci, but I have to bet on something. [Annalisa Lotto/Gratta e Vinci/SuperEnalotto, age 34]

In other cases, conversion appeared as a strategy in response to gambling loss. It was some kind of rationalization, a need for some respondents to somehow justify the failure of a gambling tactic in their own minds. They attempted to psychologically accept their own actions and emotionally "shift the blame" to anyone or anything other than themselves. From this perspective, some particular physiognomic signs and characteristics of hoodoos were associated with bad luck; some respondents might transform such accidental omens into *magic* by using them as a scapegoat for gambling losses.

We [my friend and I] stopped at a Roulette table where there was a croupier with the evil eye...we made two or three bets, but we didn't win; then my friend said: "Let's go away, this croupier is bringing us bad luck!" [Greta, Roulette, age 46]

Following an unsuccessful bet, the punter...links his lack of success to the presence of people believed to be suspect and untrustworthy: "Here there are too many with the evil eye, it's not possible to bet, that's enough!" [from field notes]

Magic: A Way to Manipulate or Control Gambling Outcomes

Another form of superstition throwing light onto the process by which gamblers translate their convictions into the act of gambling is "magic."

Data show the existence of at least two types of magic – “ex-ante magic” and “ex-post magic.”

“Ex-post magic” takes place after placing a wager on the game’s outcome. It is an act of superstition, which works as “support” for one’s bet. In this sense, it becomes an addendum to the bet rather than being the reason for it. It may follow number choices or forecasts of the outcome of sporting events or matches, that is, the winner of a horse race or to predict whether or not the favored team wins by X points.

Most of the “ex-post acts of magic” described by gamblers seem to link the belief in luck as a self-perceived personal quality to the two main laws of sympathetic magic (Frazer 1890). Although conceptually distinct, the laws of contagion and similarity tend to blend in. Extracts of the interview with Alessandro offer a clear understanding of this:

[i]f I buy a bet slip at the racetrack, I put it in my left rear pants pocket. If I win, I put the next slip there, but not for superstition. It’s just a gesture... I try, but I’m not superstitious. [It’s something you do] hoping things go well... [Alessandro, horse race betting/sport betting, age 42]

In attempting to influence the outcome of the race, Alessandro first transmitted his supposed “lucky” property (a portion of his person, his back¹⁴) to the ticket through brief physical contact (an instance of contagion); then, his personal luck transferred from the numbered ticket to the horse bearing the

same number (the law of similarity). From this perspective, luck was perceived as an unconventional skill and the use of sympathetic magic occurred in the service of illusory control.

Note that even though Alessandro practiced magic, he emphasized he did not believe in it very strongly. Magic was partially accepted by this horse bettor who distanced himself from his superstitious practice. “I’m not superstitious,” he says repeatedly; but, he does not seem to be entirely sure as he adds, “[y]ou never know” because if he wins, he continues placing the bet slip in the left rear pocket of his trousers.

Thus, some respondents behaved as if luck was the ability they possessed, which could be transferred to an object central to the game (a horse, some numbers, a ticket, etc.) by mechanisms akin to sympathetic magic. Also, the use of inanimate objects, such as charms or amulets (not given to them by someone, but bought for themselves; see under *Conversion*), reported by gamblers can be understood in this way.

[Making me see a card that shows a list of some numbers of La Smorfia and a memorandum of how much money you could win playing Lotto] Here are numbers and their meanings. If you dream something, maybe...the Italian flag, you go there to see what number is associated with it, and maybe find it. Italy is number 1. 47 is “dead man”...90 is “fear.” I use it, after playing Lotto, to see how much I can expect to win...as a lucky charm. [Marco, Lotto, age 43]

Respondents also reported following certain “liturgical” patterns or recommendations. For Diego

[Lotto, age 28], “[p]eople who tell their numbers will never win.” Consequently, after selecting a number, he starts a sort of “propitiatory silence” according to which numbers must not be revealed.

Another “ex-post magic” respondents declared practice was that of the Roulette world. In their experience, frequently used acts take place when the Roulette wheel spins or the slot reels are coming to a stop. For example, it is common for some interviewees to naturally cross their fingers and hope that they get the winning numbers, change seats and position, if they are losing, or never watch the Roulette wheel as it spins.

In contrast, “ex-ante magic” is an act taking place before placing a bet on the game’s outcome. It may consist of a form of influence a player can have over the outcome, both in games governed by a random selection process and in games of skill. Here, what matters in determining the outcome is ex-ante preparedness rather than ex-post luck. From this perspective, a number of respondents reported doing everything possible to attract good luck so that they could win. Some attempted to improve their chances of winning by performing some kind of pre-game ritual, like touching, wearing, or using a supposedly lucky object or something with strong magical powers, whereas others, such as Tiziana, felt more confident when using some parts of their body believed to possess magic properties:

I enjoy selecting numbers at random...as when you play...bingo... If my hand is magic, I pick the good ones. [Tiziana, Lotto/SuperEnalotto, age 47].

Some respondents thought that objects resembling one another possessed identical underlying properties. Namely, according to the magical law of similarity, if a thing or an image is like a supposedly lucky thing, it shares the same lucky properties. In the extract hereunder, a gambler describes an unusual ritual that she and her husband carry out before entering the casino at Sanremo, namely, touching a male statue’s genitals.¹⁵ Some winning bets convinced them about the effectiveness of such propitiatory gesture. Indeed, the ritual was sometimes used as a pretext for rationalizing their losses – forgetting to do it meant risking almost certain loss.

On the steps [leading up to the Sanremo casino] stand two statues, one female and the other male. Every time my husband and I pass by the male statue, we usually touch...his genitals [of the statue]...as we think that it brings luck! When we forget to touch the statue and we do not win, he [her husband] says: “That’s why we don’t win: we didn’t touch the statue!” [Greta, Roulette, age 46]

Many interviewees thought they had *insider information*, they *know the system*. As reflected in the data, gamblers’ feelings of control were often based on using lucky charms, both in games of skill and in games of chance.

Sometimes, I have won using a certain pen that I have at home. One day my pen disappeared... After a few months I’ve found it...my son had it... So, I used it again and I won. [Vittorio, Lotto, age 44]

¹⁵ Touching one’s own (male) genitals is considered a propitiatory sign in Italy.

Everyone had, to a greater or lesser extent, their propitiatory rites. Mine was kissing a small wooden mask from Africa in my bedroom. Before I went to the racetrack, I kissed my amulet. [Giuseppe, horse race betting, age 44]

Other ex-ante magical rituals mentioned by respondents were developed by personal observation. They consisted in preliminary analysis of some "situational characteristics" of gambling (Griffiths and Wood 2000). These are features of the gambling environment and may be very important variables in any decision to gamble. They include the location of shops, points of sale, or gambling ticket kiosks. Many interviewees often did not gamble just anywhere; their choice was meticulous. As shown by this extract, this gambler likes street corner Lotto booths.

You must play at the corner betting shops...because I've been told that crossroads bring good luck. I've played in various betting shops on street corners and I've always won; when I didn't [play in betting shops on a street corner], I never won. [Vittorio, Lotto, age 44]

Even the looks of people who work at the points of sale or gambling house were believed to be crucial. For some gamblers, it was important that they should not have "the evil eye." This is the "ability" to cause harm to people or things, either intentionally or otherwise, through negative powers, which are cast or directed through a person in the store. Magic here consists in believing that a conscious decision to gamble in an office pool where employees do not have "the evil eye" would increase their

chances of winning. As in the following comment, to possess sensorial "skill" here is essential.

Before playing, I check that he [the employee who works in the office pool] doesn't have an evil look...as it could bring me bad luck! Many times I just look at him and say to myself: "I will never win here. He brings me bad luck!" [Anna, Totocalcio, age 57]

Conclusion

You Never Know If It Works...

The results of this investigation show that superstition, in a variety of forms (signs, magic, conversion), plays a significant role in gambling. This is not to say that interviewees think of themselves as superstitious or define lucky numbers, signs, magic, or conversion as instances of superstition; but, it means that if superstition is defined as pointed out in Dundes's work – as a traditional expression "of one or more conditions and one or more results with some of the conditions, signs, and other causes" (1961:28) – then we can say that the respondents did believe in and practiced it.

So, according to my study, people might have a lucky number when betting or a lucky lottery outlet, but still not consider themselves to be superstitious. How can this somewhat bizarre attitude be explained? What are the possible reasons for it?

One of the answers to these questions may include the meaning of the term superstition. In its wider sense, superstition has come to refer to all

of those beliefs and practices that scientific experience identifies as irrational or false, meaningless "relics" of former eras that continue to survive in broad sections of the population. This pejorative acceptance, which is not present in the etymology of the concept, as Benveniste (Belmont 1979) argued, provides us with two different interpretations for the attitudes of the gamblers interviewed.

First of all, they may not consider themselves to be superstitious because, contrary to common meaning of the term, they think their beliefs and practices make sense. Bailey (2007), one of the foremost international scholars on magic and witchcraft of recent years, observed that superstition is any type of action that is not considered effective (by those observing it but also by those putting it into practice) in terms of the expected results. If we accept this conclusion, we then have to hypothesize that the interviewees believe in the effectiveness of their actions or convictions because they do not define themselves as superstitious. Yet, my data appear not to confirm this. As evidenced in the previous pages, a small number of gamblers interviewed would justify their behavior and statements by saying, for example, *I really think that rubbing the lottery ticket on a lucky card will make me win*. Most would explain their gestures with arguments such as: *I never know if it works...* In other words, they did not really believe in mistaken causal links and were reluctant to say they believed in superstition; however, they also would not declare that they did not believe in superstition, nor can we say that they do not believe in it at all.

So, we can say that these findings are partly in agreement with Campbell's (1996) concept of "half-belief" commonly referred to the fact that people adopt superstition without deeply believing in it.¹⁶ It is this ambiguous and paradoxical aspect (which mixes belief with disbelief) which, according to Campbell, characterizes superstitions. These are half-beliefs, that is, phenomena in which a lack of faith in the efficacy of a certain practice co-exists with actions which would suggest belief in the self-same practice. Anyway, this dual reticence to admit both a genuine belief in the validity of the superstition and, at the same time, a full commitment to it does not reveal the deep reasons for a behavior that remains bizarre.

A second interpretation that I might give is that the gamblers interviewed do not define themselves as superstitious and they do not define their beliefs and practices as superstitious because they fear being judged by others. In other words, given modern society's negative view of superstition (see Belmont 1979), those who use or practice it may tend to be ashamed of the fact, denying its importance towards others. Future research on this topic is warranted.

Superstition, Uncertainty, "Chance-Skill" Distinction, and Everyday Life

Although it might be expected that superstition is more pronounced in games of chance, there is no

¹⁶ Nevertheless, when Campbell talks of superstition, he refers to a modern transfiguration of magic, that is, it is the remnants in contemporary society of the ancient beliefs and magic rituals of pre-modern societies, believed to be effective by those who adopted and practised them.

reason to assume that the belief in and practice of superstition declined with advancing certainty, for example, in games involving skill. Superstition was clearly an accepted part of gambling for most respondents. However, some differences were noted. Dundes's categories of superstition are very useful to investigate connections and relationships between use of superstition and skill-chance distinction. This study shows that autobiographic signs and their conversion have a robust influence on the decision-making of gamblers keen on games of chance (especially those involving numbers). Conversely, the other types of superstition, namely, non-autobiographic signs, their conversion, and magic, cut across both games of chance and games of skill. Although more pronounced in games of chance, magic appeared to be more significant in the experience of interviewees who played skill games. For many respondents, magic consisted in a rite through which individuals thought of "manipulating" the outcome or, more simply, of giving support after placing a bet. For others, magic was instead associated with conversion of non-autobiographic signs, that is, transforming belief into practice.

Data confirmed that the majority of respondents subjectively perceived the game they played, whether of chance or of skill, primarily as a game of skill (rather than mainly chance-based or a combination of skill and chance). Thus, superstition created an "illusion of control" (Langer 1975). According to my assumption, gamblers use superstition not because they attribute the outcome to uncontrollable forces, but on the con-

trary – because they believe forces are absolutely controllable. This means that most respondents may have overestimated their prospect of success or the probability of a positive outcome. In other words, they believed that they had more skill, knowledge, or ability to predict the outcome of gambling events or influence the game result than they actually had. Sometimes, such skill is useless and not really an advantage *per se*, as evidenced by many interviewees who attributed excessive ability level to games involving no skill or choice judgment, as Lotto or Roulette; in skill situations, on the contrary, many respondents believed that their skill was *excessively* influential (see also Ladouceur and Walker 1996). Some respondents considered themselves to be more skilful than others. Very often the elements which may induce an illusion of control are the possibility of choice, familiarity of stimulus and response, and competition. To this effect, it is interesting to observe that a number of studies maintain more generally that escape from common routine in modern society is a reason for gambling (Bloch 1951; Zola 1963). However, one theme running through gamblers' accounts has to do with the relationship between gambling and everyday life. For many respondents, gambling behavior only made sense if closely linked to the events and facts of their ordinary life. So, it was not a way of escaping from the boredom and humdrum of daily life – on the contrary, respondents were constantly looking for signs of their gambling success in everyday life. Conditions involving factors of choice or familiarity stimulated expectancy of success more than objective probability would warrant.

How to Predict or Influence the Outcome of a Game, et cetera...

This research has provided some insights into the world of micro strategies used by respondents to predict or influence the outcome of an event. Some tactics were specific to a particular game, whereas others were not. Among the latter, the most typical include carrying lucky charms, moving away from someone who is supposed to represent a bad omen, playing some "favorite" numbers.

Additionally, data were consistent with a growing body of literature (Friedland 1998; Wohl and Enzle 2002; Wohl, Stewart, and Young 2011), proving that many people believe luck to be an inner quality of the self rather than a random event that happened to befall the self. Interviewees' accounts suggest that illusory perception of control may be attained by transferring supposed personal luck onto an object central to the game through the laws of sympathetic magic.

Results were also consistent with research showing the existence of significant biases, mistaken perceptions, and cognitions (i.e., "gambler's fallacy," "hot outcome") in gambling behavior (Bersabé and Martínez Arias 2000; Ladouceur 2004). Some respondents often attempted to predict what was to occur next based on the history of a previous outcome, even when the underlying process governing those events was independent and static. Contrary to previous research, the above data suggest that superstition is not mere irrationality or a belief/behavior confined to primitive people. Rather, it includes complex and ingenious thinking

and rituals with discernible rules and practices. As Henslin (1967) pointed out, such false perception of control over game, although objectively irrational, is logically consistent from the point of view of craps shooters. Basically, they are "rational in their irrationality" (Henslin 1967: 321).

One limitation of this study is the small number of participants. However, being an exploratory study, it was meant to provide an insight into the role of superstition in gambling and to identify the needs for further research, not to draw definitive conclusions or generalized results covering the entire gambling population.

Despite their limitations, the findings suggest two directions for future research; first, a study of the link between superstition and religion. A great number of superstitious gestures are religion-based. For example, Diego Armando Maradona crossed himself every time he left the pitch; other footballers do the same before a penalty shot. Is this just superstition? Or, is it only popular devotion?

Second is an investigation in the role of social networks (family, work colleagues, friends) in fostering and developing superstition-related knowledge. Most gamblers interviewed were not born superstitious, but "became" superstitious through complex processes of transmission, learning, and reproduction of attitudes and behaviors. A comprehensive approach to this topic is needed to promote a deeper understanding of the reasons for the persistence of superstition in modern society. It is hoped that this study will stimulate further work in both areas.

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Tension in the Field of Art: The Practical Tattoo Artist and Perceptions of the Fine Art Community

Abstract This is an ethnographic study utilizing observation and in-depth interviews. The following research analyzes a collaborative circle of tattoo artists and its tension with the fine art community. The tension is a result of perceptions of the fine art community and the nature of tattoo shops as enterprises. This article contributes to the understanding of collaborative circles by incorporating taste distinctions and a formal group element, the enterprise. Taste distinctions and the enterprise allow artists to erect boundaries between themselves and others in the art community.

Keywords Tattoo Artists; Collaborative Circles; Taste; Boundary Making; Goal Orientation

“It’s not just tattooing, it is all artists. We all as artists guard the secret that art is really a sham, it’s not just tattooing, it is all artists.” Thor, a tattoo artist, implies artistic recognition and inherent tension within the art world regarding the practice of art. How artists function on a day-to-day basis and what their goals are produce a tension between these individuals occupying specific social fields.

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Theoretical Context. Choice and Taste

Choices are constrained by location, personalities, norms, and the social context. Agency, the capacity to choose freely, is a difficult concept to pinpoint because, as Collins (2004) suggests, agency “is a conceptual morass” distracting from the study of interactions prior to individual action (Hitlin and Elder 2007:171). Agency is self-reflectiveness, intentionality, and the forethought that allows actors to act with, as Hitlin and Elder (2007) state, a “personal causality.” This creates a better-defined concept of agency which can be contextualized with taste distinctions. The result of choices produces social worlds that are composed of individuals similar to one another (Fisher 1982). These individuals harbor various and differing tastes. Tastes are predispositions towards behaviors, individuals, and objects that can be thought of as a marker of class, more importantly, they indicate a social position. Taste creates boundaries as individ-

uals act on their tastes (Bourdieu 1979). These boundaries contain others with similar tastes and networks are formed. A network composed of likeminded individuals reinforces cultural norms and behaviors, and this is an efficient process because those within the network can develop expectations and boundaries of what is appropriate and acceptable. As these expectations and boundaries are further stratified, the potential to form a collaborative circle heightens. The collaborative circle contains those willing to work together concurrently to propagate their art. Through actions and practice, the artists take their place within the social field.

The Field

Bourdieu (1996) stresses the positioning of an artist within the field. The field is the social space in which skills, relationships, and habits of practice are built. The field contains other like-minded social actors participating in the same types of behaviors and interactions. An artist’s search for autonomy produces maneuvering and positioning within a field, and cultural resources are necessary in the process. Beyond the individual, there are social institutions and social structures, which delineate fields of art. The artists acquire cultural, social, and economic capital inside social institutions and social structures, all defined by particular standards. The social structure is a layer of negotiation and a structure of relationships (Lin 1999:29). The forming of relationships, both outside and inside social institutions, creates boundaries. Bourdieu (1982), in his discussion of Flaubert, states that the French salons distinguished themselves more by whom they kept out as opposed to whom they let in, akin to the

“magnet places” discussed by Farrell (2001). A magnet place is a defined social space, such as a bar, that attracts circle members because of the types of individuals that frequent the place. Each magnet place will define itself in relation to the dominant culture of the field or art. Crucial to self-definition is a relational understanding of other groups in the field and the power these groups hold. Typically, there is a group of reference that gauges the attitudes of all other artists. In this study, this group is fine artists. I define fine artists as those that create art through traditional mediums, such as: painting, sculpting, and drawing. Fine artists generally work independently of a continuous employer and are not heavily directed by a consumer as are tattoo artists, architects, print makers, and digital artists. My definition of fine artists is informed by my understandings of the art community but also my observations at Jobstopper Tattoo and my discussions of art with the artists at Jobstopper Tattoo. Tattoo artists have experiences in institutions and organizations that reify the standards of the field in expectation of the customer as the driving force.

Boundaries

Forming a collaborative circle is a process of boundary making, it is a social mapping process that includes a particular few and excludes others. Inclusion and exclusion are stratification processes that allow for sub-stratification along various lines of categorization. In the context of art, fields are formed based on distinctions of taste and modes of practice, whether learned inside or outside formal art institutions. How one thinks about art and how they practice art set up boundaries that can be sub-stratified

based on economic functions, such as degrees of entrepreneurship and profit motive. Art for the sake of art or art for the sake of profit and the degree to which artistic vision is limited by profit motives create boundaries between artists in the fine art community and the tattoo community. The boundaries are reinforced through practice and routinization of behavior informed by habits and, in the case of tattoo artists, framed by the enterprise. Tattoo artists intentionally make decisions or behave in a manner that consciously reinforces their habits, but are limited by the rules of the enterprise. An artist governs themselves according to their tastes, which reproduce the environment and actions appropriate for the given social context. Depending on the social space, success is more likely achieved if one is a specific type of artist, and what is defined as success can bring about tension between artistic communities. If success is defined through profit or capital gain, it conflicts with definitions of success based on artistic merit and reputation as the primary motivations of each are markedly different. Fine artists may suppose that the motivation of tattoo artists is maligned with assumptions of ideal art. The tattoo artists, on the other hand, may suppose the motivations of fine artists are maligned with the realities of making a living. An enterprise provides the tattoo artists with consistent standards, employment, and limits on a daily basis, aspects not typically experienced by fine artists.

Artists and Collaborative Circles

The tattoo artists in this study discussed their frustrations with the rules of the fine art community, as well as feeling a sense they are on the fringes of the

art world. The feelings they expressed are similar to artists Howard Becker (1982) labels as mavericks. Becker (1982) details mavericks as artists that were a part of the conventional art world, but found it too constraining because of rules, the orthodoxy of the medium, or a combination of the two. Mavericks pursue innovations without the support of the art world they distanced themselves from, yet they continue to utilize all the conventions of the art world they have left (Becker 1982). They may keep up to date on various works or artists in the medium, though perhaps not the day-to-day workings of the specific field of art. Being a maverick is to take a divergent path from the conventions of the medium, but it is not total abandonment of all conventions. With an increasing number of tattoo artists with formal art backgrounds, the techniques used by tattoo artists are becoming similar to those of fine art forms. These techniques include: lighting, shading, 3d effects, and distancing within the tattoo. Using these techniques in tattooing is divergent and innovative, but these techniques are becoming more popular, as are tattoos, and thus, more acceptable. Over time, if the innovations and styling of the maverick become more acceptable to the conventional art world, they may be fully re-assimilated into the conventional art world. Acceptance and assimilation extinguish the maverick quality of the work and the artist. For tattoo artists, what is conventional is difficult to pin down. Tattoo artists may come from traditional art backgrounds and feel the fine art community is too protective and stuffy, but by breaking from these rules and constraints, they create another set of rules and constraints governed by the enterprise. The difference is a spacial difference between the maverick and those in the conventional art world, artists at

the margins, but yet not outside the margins. How one defines and understands convention in the field of art is dictated by their habits of practice. In the context of tattoo artists, they may see their medium as non-traditional and non-conventional, yet what is more conventional than establishing an enterprise or working for a private enterprise on a daily basis? Within these enterprises artists that work together may form a collaborative circle.

According to Farrell (2001), a collaborative circle is “a primary group consisting of peers who share similar occupational goals and who, through long periods of dialogue and collaboration, negotiate a common vision that guides their work” (p. 11). A shop of tattoo artists typically occupies a shared space and they often discuss designs and ideas with one another (Johnson 2008). The ability to discuss and criticize in concert within a shared spaces allows for tattoo artists to be considered a collaborative circle. According to Farrell (2001), a collaborative circle also engages a group of individuals in a shared vision, each playing a different role. The collaboration of the circle leads to the production of highly creative work that reinforces and routinizes their shared vision. Producing artistic work entails practiced behaviors from conceptualizing ideas to applying these ideas in the medium. How an individual practices relies on their disposition towards acting and reacting (Bourdieu 1996:12)? Dispositions towards acting and reacting which generate practices are part of what Bourdieu labels as habitus. Habitus is the result of experiences that can be thought of as cultural baggage; a set of skills and characteristics that allow an individual to move throughout the social world. The set of skills and characteristics that an individual

possesses may be consciously drawn “on demand” in response to something, or they may be reproduced at the non-conscious level through how one acts. How an individual practices indicate a style, it is a replication and reproduction of past behaviors and experiences. Predispositions are practiced and reproduced through interactions with others in the social environment and acting or choosing not to act on predispositions replicates one’s cultural understandings and experiences. This is further modified by roles individuals adopt within the circle.

Farrell (2001) notes that roles within collaborative circles emerge, such as charismatic leader and executive manager. The charismatic leader produces energy that the other members draw upon, and the executive manager oversees the practical duties of the group. In Farrell’s (2001) context, the executive manager and charismatic leader apply in the informal group setting. It is essential to apply these roles to a formal group setting as artists that work for an employer on a day-to-day basis have the capacity to form a collaborative circle within the structure of the environment. Roles, such as executive manager and charismatic leader, still emerge, yet take on additional meanings within the structure of an enterprise.

The Tattoo Industry

An important overarching characteristic of tattoo shops is that they exist to make a profit in order to pay the working artists and continue to operate. Recently, the number of tattoo shops in the United States has increased as the tattoo industry experienced an economic expansion as a result of legitimization of the art by celebrities and, in certain

instances, the fine art community. The number of tattooed individuals in the contemporary United States has grown with the tattoo industry. Penn and Zalesne's (2007) analysis of data from the *Journal of American Academy of Dermatology* states that nearly 1 in 4 adults have a tattoo, and their analysis of a Harris poll conducted in 2003 shows the best represented income group among tattooed Americans were those making over \$75,000 a year, reflecting 22% of the sample. The crux of their analysis is the indication that tattooing may be a growing economic middle class phenomenon. Therefore, artists and shop owners may want to move upscale, increase pricing, properly license themselves, modernize their designs, establish national chains, and hire celebrity spokespersons to maximize the middle class clientele (Penn and Zalesne 2007:237).

The trends in clientele will determine the trends in the tattoo economy. Adapting to an upscaling market may result in heightened tensions with the fine art community through growing commercialization of tattoo art heavily dictated by profit motives. Commercialization runs contrary to what is instilled in fine art academies, and DeMello (2000) describes a growing segment of tattoo artists find it difficult to marry their ideas of artistic conventions, specifically in the context of being "mainstream" or too commercial, with the reality of the tattoo industry. It is a consumer's game, the tattoo industry may be more of a service industry than an art industry.

As with most enterprises in the United States, service is paramount. The customer base of your service depends on how you serve. Of course, this may result in an implicit closed-door policy to certain groups

of consumers whose interests do not align with the artists'. How tattoo shop owners operationalize "service" determines their place in the field of art and their relationship to other artists and the consumer. Is the shop owner seeking to provide good service to all those that come in the door or are they directing good service to a specific group of customers that share their artistic taste distinctions? This question points to a process of commercial branding. Grossi (2007) discusses what tattoos on an individual express and indicate to others in the social world. Tattoos point to something of an individual's identity and this is translatable to the tattoo shops themselves. Habits informing style and marketing in the shop can result in the formation of a brand. How the tattoos are designed, applied, sold, and marketed speak to a specific brand and further specific shops. "It's a consumer driven market and I'll say it a million times, we are a service industry" [Thor]. The shops must market their service to potential customers who, in turn, market themselves to employers.

Marketing and the expanding tattoo industry must be addressed according to Jones, Lipscomb, and Totten (2009). Private and public employers will encounter more tattooed individuals if the industry and its consumers continue to expand. Tattoos are still not allowed in some police departments, branches of the military, and private corporations. While some gains have been made in the acceptance of tattoos in the workplace, highly visible tattoos severely limit job prospects and may directly violate workplace policies. Images and specific placement areas on the body are off limits for some customers, and this is limiting to the tattoo artists. This is something that is not necessarily seen in the fine art

world. It is not always up to the tattoo artists to design the tattoo, customers can have highly specific ideas and designs to be strictly adhered to or very closely adhered to. This comes with the territory in service-based enterprises which rely on expectations of the customer to be satisfied. Satisfying expectations creates social disruption in tattoo artists that have fine art backgrounds or that compare themselves to fine artists. Their finances may be in more control, but their creativity is not.

Working or owning a shop puts the tattoo artists themselves in contact with a human resource component that fine artists may never come in contact with (Timming 2011). Whether hiring processes for potential employees and apprentices are formal or informal, they entail some form of recruitment and/or applicant selection component. Habits may inform these components as small shops may have less formal human resource management procedures than larger shops. As they are hired, tattoo artists interact with standardized institutional processes, such as employment paperwork, workplace policies, terms of pricing, and terms of payment. The standardized procedures must be managed by a member or the owner of the enterprise. At best, this can be considered managing art compared to fine artists. A freelance artist or independent fine artist is not in contact with these processes or management of these processes on a day-to-day basis. This may have rather large implications when discussing whether one is an artist or an employee. This may also reach beyond the world of art in considerations of those in other fields being identified or self-identifying as employees of institutions and organizations.

Setting

Tattoo artists seldom work individually, most work at a tattoo shop with other artists (Johnson 2008). Some shops have rooms for each artist and others have open, shared space. The artists at Jobstopper Tattoo share one space cordoned off by small waist high walls. The shop is located in a small plaza on a high traffic street in the suburbs of a medium sized city. Inside, each artist has their own cube full of personal affects, art, and tattoo equipment. Physically, it is a very ordered, structured, and clean environment. The shop is home to four working tattoo artists, and three of the artists agreed to participate in the research. Each artist chose a pseudonym, El Zombero, Thor, and Stanley Snodgrass, and together they created the pseudonym for the shop, Jobstopper Tattoo.

Methods, Data, and Findings

I have multiple tattoos and my casual dress fits in with that of the artists', so I did not look out of place in the shop and this may have made the artists more comfortable with my presence. The collection of my data spanned from September 1st, 2011 to December 15th, 2011. During the data collection, I maintained my casual appearance to make the artists more comfortable and to build rapport. I used direct observation on a weekly basis and I conducted in-depth interviews with each artist that agreed to participate in the study. The direct observations lasted three to four hours once a week, and the interviews lasted between 40 minutes to 90 minutes. Reactivity became a concern during the initial visit, and I became aware that taking notes in person may hamper the

artistic environment, verbal freedom of the artists, and possibly make customers uncomfortable. I did not want to drive customers away, and this allowed me to recognize I was in more than an artistic environment, I was in a business environment. After the initial visit, I recorded my notes and observations on a digital recorder after my observations and interviews took place. The interviews were recorded real time on a digital recorder.

The observation notes were transcribed and structured in three parts, the initial physical setting, observations of the artists' interactions and work, and analysis. The observation and interview transcriptions were analyzed for keywords to connect to themes within the context of collaborative circles and fields of art. I searched the transcriptions for the following keywords: difference, connection, mainstream, expectation, and satisfaction. I used these words as they pertain to the artists themselves and the works they produce, compared to the others in the shop, tattoo artists outside the shop, or artists using other mediums. Analysis of the transcriptions pointed to tensions between the artists and the fine art world stemming from the nature of their employment and perceptions of the fine art community.

Irwin (2003) described tattoo artists as "a group occupying an important social location as elites on the boundaries between conventional and outcast social groups" (p. 54). The three tattoo artists composing my primary group occupy a space between the fine art world and the marginal art world, the artists all have a fine art background at local colleges; two four-year institutions and one two-year institution. The initial instruction each received and their ex-

periences created value distinctions regarding the practicality of having a career in the art world.

"Yeah, I got a two-year. Stupid little two-year degree. Completely worthless when slapping a tattoo, and it doesn't mean anything when it comes to tattooing either." Understanding that the value of his diploma is low according to his defined taste builds boundaries around El Zombero. He conveys a difference between credentialed fine art and practical tattoo art. El Zombero chose to describe providing someone with a tattoo as "slapping a tattoo," which implicates the work as not very complex and repetitive. Thor also expressed tension regarding his fine art background and the day-to-day of tattooing. "Everybody told me I was an illustrator and not an artist. I liked to render instead of draw to abstraction and I am like, 'Well draw a chair.' They couldn't, if you can't draw a chair, how can you draw some lofty concept you are working with?" As with El Zombero, Thor conveys a sense of practicality regarding the technical aspects of art and implies that the fine art world is too high-minded. Prior to becoming a tattoo artist, Thor worked as a print screener. He worked five days a week creating and producing art based on customer direction, similar to his experience at Jobstopper Tattoo. Practicality, it may have been a large factor in the pursuit of becoming tattoo artists for Thor and El Zombero. I asked Stanley whether a member of the fine art world would consider him an artist. "I don't think he can deny it. He might have more talent or classical training, but I am working artist. How many painters can claim that?" As with the others, his focus is on more practical issues, such as being employed and having a steady income. El Zombero, Thor, and Stanley differentiate themselves as being more pragmat-

ic, they are working artists creating art and making money. Being an employee is part of their identity as an artist and, at times, this is more conscious than subconscious, specifically in considerations of scheduling and pricing.

A contributing factor to this tension is the continued muddling of definitions of fine art and the backgrounds of the artists themselves. Kosut (2006:87) discusses the increasing amount of university-trained artists since the 1970s. She states that these university artists may choose tattooing to support their struggling art careers or as an alternative to entering the impenetrable contemporary art world. Legitimate academy training provides education on what constitutes fine art and how to produce fine art outside the university, but there may be a lack of opportunity to enter the field. A career in fine art may not at all be practical for many of these artists. The understanding of the particulars of the fine art world becomes more socially distant to artists that remain outside of the field. The distance grows the longer they are not a part of the community or its institutions. Gallery exhibitions of tattoo art, as discussed by Kosut, have legitimized the art form in the "high art" environment, but it has yet to be seen if tattoo art will heavily influence other art forms or be totally accepted by other art forms as opposed to carving out a small space in the field of art by being "recognized." These exhibitions have provided a bridge to the fine art community, but have not necessarily compacted the social distance to a great degree.

During their interviews, El Zombero, Thor, and Stanley said that they seek to provide fair prices, a good experience, and customer satisfaction. Honing their

skills is seen as part of satisfying the customer, the better the artist, the more accurately they can apply the customer's desired tattoo. What the participants described sounds much more like hallmarks of the service industry rather than the art industry. Sharpening skills for the customer speaks more to being an employee or business owner than an artist. My observations and interviews pointed to the artists as being in a constant state of application guided by pricing, customer experience, and customer satisfaction. The artists apply ideas to a sketchpad, the sketchpad to the stencil, and the stencil to the body. The driving force of the shop is application and not conceptualization of art. The day-to-day life of the tattoo artists is guided by creating quality tattoos limited by price and customer expectations. The tattoo artists are employers, and employees first and artists second. Working on their own art is something that is typically done at home for these artists.

"Most of the stuff I do is pretty meat and potatoes." Stanley's description of his work encapsulates that which produces the tension with the fine art world. If you can apply a technically sound tattoo efficiently and often, then you are a successful artist. He is not pushing the limits of artistic technique and thought. The definition of being a successful artist is, in Stanley's context, a matter of a practiced routinization rather than freedom of creation or expression. Each artist has an understanding of art history and techniques, but their shared vision boils down to a sense of practicality juxtaposed to that of the conceptual in the fine art world.

El Zombero is an artist with nearly twenty years' experience, is the shop owner and approaches

his work with a straightforward attitude. He explained that he learned when there were a lot more rules and being told one cannot do something was common. El Zombero expresses an implication of structural dominance, which is a function of a legitimated power structure. In this case, the legitimacy creates restraints on the individual, which is a part of the business environment. El Zombero internalized the structured environment and reproduced it by owning a shop. Owning a shop or working for a shop may provide the artists with fewer restrictions than employees of other work institutions, but compared to fine artists, the restrictions are fairly significant. The restrictions must be managed by someone in a structured environment.

El Zombero has adopted Farrell's (2001) role of executive manager focusing on the day-to-day functions of the shop. He later commented that when he was not an owner, he had more time to focus on tattooing and did not have to worry about paper towels or toner in the printer. When it comes to practice, El Zombero's distinctions have allowed him to conserve his space as executive manager within the collaborative circle. He must worry about the business first, and tattoos second. Making sure the artists have enough business to work a forty-hour week and enough supplies to work with places the enterprise above the art. The artists working under the executive manager contribute by booking enough appointments or "filling out their week" completely so they may bring in enough capital to sustain the business and their livelihood. The resources are funneled to the business, whereas in fine art the resources are funneled to the artist.

When asked what could be done to improve or change the tattoo industry, El Zombero focused his answer on licensing not artistic quality. "It's illegal to tattoo out of your house or basement, yet there are tons of people that do it. I wish, I wish there was some way to buckle down on that." The problem for El Zombero is not health or art, it is business. People participating in underground tattooing are taking away potential customers. It is not that their tattoo art is low quality and they are hurting the reputation of the medium, they are not legitimately practicing business. Shop ownership and its duties are more important than the art for El Zombero, which is partly a function of necessity, as he is the executive manager.

Thor is second in the shop – as far as seniority – and has been at Jobstopper Tattoo for nearly five years. He is not willing to sacrifice the marginality of the art form giving way to mainstream acceptance of tattoos. "I love how tattoos still kind of have an outsider rebellious nature to them, and if it ever lost that, I would become kind of bummed. I like how people don't like them, I guess it seems counter intuitive to my career, but I want people to be aghast at tattoos." Thor wants to stand out and wants his art to stand opposite of what is accepted as conventional, but he is not able to sustain a living without a continuous flow of customers. The more customers he sees, the more money he and the shop make, and the more mainstream and common tattoos become. How he perceives his medium and how his practices stand at odds?

Thor is often the most jovial and audible person in the shop. He is self admittedly egocentric and has

taken on the role of charismatic leader. Farrell (2001) describes a charismatic leader as narcissistic, energetic, engaging towards novices, and more apt to be exploratory, and this perfectly describes Thor. In 2010, Thor developed the "tattoo generator project." Customers blindly choose three pieces of paper out of a jar, each having the name of a person or object on it. Thor then develops a design incorporating the three elements and applies it on the customer for free. This is a function of his taste distinction reflecting a break from the conventional approaches to art that the fine art world maintains, and a reflection of his role as charismatic leader. The tattoo generator is also a way for Thor and the shop to market their work and their service. The story behind the tattoo generator tattoos signifies certain characteristics of the shop to potential customers.

Stanley has been at Jobstopper Tattoo for nearly a year and his role is that of novice. He began in the shop as an apprentice. Stanley discusses tattoo methodology and openly expresses his opinions regarding tattooing and art in general to Thor. At times, Thor degrades Stanley's opinions and, in response, Stanley does the same. The open exchange of opinions, insults, and ideas liberates the artists from actively being criticized. As Stanley's methodology and technique develop, it is apparent that he draws heavily on what he has learned from Thor. This is seen in how he describes the tattoo that he had applied on me. "I knew you wanted a cartoony zombie, so I drew a cartoony zombie, and Thor's stuff is kind of cartoony and comic bookie. I don't know, that is just the way it turned out I guess." The tattoo he is discussing is very similar to Thor's work and stands in sharp contrast to the earlier tattoo

work in his portfolio. The similarity is a function of the instrumental intimacy Thor and Stanley share. The instrumental intimacy is possible because each artist has taken on a role within the circle. Role adoption helps perpetuate the circle and stems from the distinction of taste the artists possess. The unification of the artists has produced a shared style and a shared vision. As Farrell (2001) points out, a shared vision pulls the artists together and pushes them towards a common goal. In this case, the goal is to provide quality artwork and satisfied customers, thus setting them apart from other shops in the area. It is a business model, not an artistic model.

The tension between the primary group of artists and the fine art world has trickled down to the artists' opinions of boutique tattoo shops. Boutique shops are typically in urban trendy areas of town and much business is drawn from word of mouth and reputation. The artists in this group discuss boutique shops and their artists in much the same way they do with fine artists. Their taste of art production and consumption is different than other tattoo artists. "The thing is, anybody can do this shit. Anybody can draw and anybody can paint, you just have to put the effort in to do it. Artists get snooty when they feel exposed." Thor went on to say that many boutique shops become snobby and will choose which customers and designs they will accept and the others are sent out the door. For Thor, these shops are too like-minded to fine artists, they are trying to be too much like fine artists. Stanley stated that the artists in the shop apply a number of tattoos in which they are not partial to the client's design, but as long as the client is happy, that is what is important. It is not about holding up or onto fine art ideals, it is a matter

of practicality. He has a job as an artist and he is dependent on customer satisfaction, turning away customers is not practical. El Zombero, similar to Stanley, said that many people come in with awful ideas and designs, but it is their satisfaction that is important. The artists in the collaborative circle are working for their customers, and not their peers. According to the artists at Jobstopper Tattoo, creating work for peers is a defining trait of the fine art world and the boutique shops. Their shared vision reflects their nature as members of an enterprise and as employees. Their art exists for the consumer and for profit, whereas fine art may exist only to exist.

Discussion and Implications

Individuals harboring similar taste distinctions place themselves in a position in the field where recognition of those who may share their vision is highly accessible. Taste can be defined as attitudes and predispositions relative to membership in a field, and refining taste by stratifying individuals in the field is at the core of a collaborative circle. Refining taste often includes practical concerns, as seen in this group of tattoo artists. Setting up an enterprise or working for an enterprise sheds light on how practiced habits are informed by taste distinctions. One cannot simply arrive in a defined social space and obtain capital, it is a boundary making processes. How and why one acts leads to barricading or embracing others.

The tattoo artists in this study have fine art backgrounds. Whether the artists were not able to penetrate the fine art world or they did not wish to be part of that world, each ended up at Jobstopper Tattoo. This is where the artists share and practice

a similar vision. The nature of the artists' work on a day-to-day basis separates them from those in the fine art community. The tattoo artists are limited by their customers' expectations and satisfactions. The tattoo artists also come in contact with human resource components, as they are either being hired or hiring someone. Being an employee or an employer breeds an inherent tension between these artists and the fine art community. Being regarded as employees does not take on the pejorative form for the artists at Jobstopper Tattoo. Being considered as fine artists or comparable to fine artists is not something the group of tattoo artists desire.

The tattoo artists in this study acknowledge that they are working artists. They receive a relatively steady paycheck, generally work set hours, and are managed or manage other employees. It is critical to understand that the participants in this study consider themselves artists. They do not call themselves tattooists or tattooers, colloquially this implies a lack of a high artistic skill level common in shops that do not tattoo custom pieces. The participants in this study call themselves tattoo artists, and asked to be referred as such. The point of emphasis in my discussions is the ability of the tattoo artists to make money creating and applying art as opposed to fine artists that do not get paid consistently. The tattoo artists in this study understand there is something one must make money doing it once one's training is complete. This runs contrary to the ideal of art for art's sake or the starving artist. Not all fine artists lack consistent paychecks or regular work, but these artists are not as limited by the customer or by a manager as many tattoo artists are. While they are limited in some regard, the

tattoo artists have artistic skill and are able to make a living using these skills. The participants in this study consider themselves as artists and employees, and this may have extended implications.

Outside or self-perceptions of professional and employment identities may shed light on performance and decision making within organizations and institutions. The degree to which an individual or group of individuals identify as an employee or a specific job title may deeply impact their work environment. For example, the degree to which an individual identifies as professor, researcher, or employee of a university can highlight mode and quality of production. How much one identifies as an employee may impact creativity and social network formation. Class and race may also shape how much or to what degree an individual identifies as an employee. We must keep in mind that identities are not self-referential, studying, participating, or observing groups and the perceptions of their fields can unearth the group or groups they use as a reference. Reference groups anchor perceptions of experiences in a particular field and understanding which groups are viewed as the guideposts or anchors can shed light on pathway mobility in employment networks.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to analyze a group of three tattoo artists utilizing Farrell's (2001) theory of collaborative circles and Bourdieu's (1979) theory of taste distinction. I focused on the circle's vision, role adoption, and tension with the fine art world produced by taste distinctions and the nature of the artists' place of work. The circle's ability to function

is a result of the roles each member has adopted within the business enterprise. This allows the artists to strive towards a common goal that sets them apart from others in the art field.

The works of art produced and how they are produced spark tension between the tattoo artists and the fine art world. The tension is built by the day-to-day workings and not solely reliant on ideological differences. Incorporating the formal group setting into the collaborative circle framework allows for a better understanding of how the circles are formed, how they negotiate their identities, how they work towards their vision, and how this process may be a function of a business enterprise. Tattoo artists are paid to create and apply art, but are severely limited by the nature of the business and the customer. While they do identify as artists, they are uncertain if they are understood and appreciated as much as those in the fine art community. Gallery expositions of tattoo art and celebrity endorsement of tattoo art have raised the profile for the medium, but this does not ensure that boundaries within the art community will be torn down rather than erected. The nature of modern tattoo art is rooted in the business enterprise and the label of employee may overshadow and undercut the talents of the tattoo artists and the perceptions of their art. Being an employee places them at odds with the fine art community.

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Book Review

Emmison, Michael, Philip Smith, and Margery Mayall. 2012. *Researching the Visual*. 2nd ed. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage

The second edition of *Researching the Visual* has been substantially extended and updated in relation to the first edition from the year 2000. The idea of visual studies has undergone a new in-depth problematization and significant enlargement. The authors explaining how they define this type of research refer to the Belgian sociologist Luc Pauwels. According to him, a valuable scientific view of a society can be achieved by observing, analyzing, and theorizing its visual manifestation of behavior and material cultural products (p. 18). For the authors, key importance in this approach is that we do not find here references to any technological aspects of recording of the reality, such as shooting or filming. According to Emmison, Smith, and Mayall, that would not have been possible 30 years ago – when visual sociology began to appear in the academic field of interest, and when it was associated mainly with the performance and analyses of photography and video. This image-centric

visual sociology was limited mainly to the area referred to as two-dimensional. 2D images include various media, such as: photos, billboards, videos, posters, cartoons, directional signs diagrams, et cetera. The authors propose broadening the fields of the researchers interest of three-dimensional objects (e.g., houses, parks, city centers, institutions, monuments, etc.), as well another aspect should be taken under consideration – living visual data, that is, people in interactions. The widening horizons of visual exploration is one of the main tasks of the book, as we may read in introduction.

In the first, short chapter, which deepens the introduction, we may find an important remark: “[v]isual research as a field is not defined by any methodological or theoretical presuppositions. It simply explains or make use of that which is visual, visible and therefore observable, or visually regulated” (p. 6) In other words, common to visual

field of exploration is the subject of research, while the choice of methods and theoretical consolidation may vary in each research project – in order to provide adequate theory for explication. By the way, observation is, for the authors, the main research technique in the field of visual research, and I totally agree with that.

The second chapter of the book was devoted to ethical issues appearing in visual studies. The authors rightly point out that in any research project ethical issues must be taken into account from the moment of the initial conceptualization. In the case of visual research, this seems particularly important. Meanwhile, in many sociological books, those issues are either ignored or marginalized. The fundamental ethical problems relate primarily to two areas: the principles of fair conduct and respecting the rights of the others. This does not concern only the data collection process, like: taking pictures, filming, recording – ethical issues must be included in any situation and on every step of research, from preparation till presentation of the research results. It is important to be aware of local law regulations and informal codes of behavior. Keeping in mind that those rules change in time and space might be very helpful.

One of the sections of this part of the book deals with ethics in Internet research. Global net offers, on the one hand, unlimited amount of resources, on the other, forces us to ask questions about the ethical basis for such studies. Issues of privacy, anonymity, surveillance must be the subject of reflection for each investigator who explores this area of visuality.

The third chapter of the book contains a description of the four basic (and most popular) visual methods. The **first** one involves the use of materials recorded by the investigator. This tradition derives from the ethnographic and anthropological field study and is based mainly on the photo and film shooting but also includes other visual materials made by researchers (such as sketches, plans, diagrams, etc.). The **second** method is based on the active collaboration between researcher and research subjects. During this collaborative process of data collection knowledge is evolving, and researcher gains access to the cultural world that otherwise might remain inaccessible. There are multiple techniques that might be used in this case: photo-elicitation, auto-photography, photographically aided interview, visual storytelling, et cetera. The **third** method focuses on the study of existing materials (photos, ads, videos, Internet resources, etc.). It offers a wide range of techniques which are well-established in the literature (e.g., Rose 2001).

Lately, as the authors point out, a lot of research projects are oriented on the Internet, which is not a surprise for at least two reasons: ease of access to materials and scale of this mass phenomenon. The last, **fourth**, distinguished method focuses on the use of materials generated through video filming (also very well described by Sarah Pink [2001]). In this chapter, we find comments on the history and development of visual anthropology and visual sociology in references to the most famous classic research projects, such as the famous photographic explorations of Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson, carried out in Belize, or the study of the culture of the Navajo Indians by Sol Wirth and John Adair.

In the fourth chapter, the authors present the qualitative and quantitative research techniques for analyzing two-dimensional images. Focusing on photography, they show also other, less explored examples of visual materials, such as: cartoons, posters, signage, maps, and plans.

Describing their quantitative research approach, they highlight the effects and relevance of content analysis, which is perfect for testing the long-term phenomena, trends, and tendencies which smoothly change over time. A classic example here is the study conducted by Jane Richardson and Alfred Kroeber (1940) relating to the transformation of women's fashion for over three centuries. Huge and methodically selected samples enabled the accurate depiction of how varied the different elements of feminine dress. Thirty-six years later, Dwight Robinson (1976) conducted a similar study which subject matter were constant changes in male facial hair. He has retraced the predominant trends in the photographs published in the *Illustrated London News* in the period 1842-1972. "Robinson found that men's facial hair changes underwent similar cyclical changes and observed a 'remarkable correspondence' between the width of skirt wave reported by Richardson and Kroeber and his own finding concerning the frequency of beards" (p. 65). With this example, the authors show that with proper coding applied on a large sample, visual data may become the subject matter of quantitative analysis. If the gathered data incorporates long periods of time, we can capture the trends, rhythms, and circulation, as well as we may correlate categories seemingly distant from each other.

In the description of the qualitative methods, the authors begin with short reviews of key terms essential for such analysis. Among them we find *inter alia* terms like: binary oppositions (indispensable for analyzing war posters: we – others, winners – defeated, and so on), frames (understood as a relationship between a part and an entirety but also as an institutional framework and cultural conditionings of receiving visual messages), genre (classification of materials due to genres and styles, their codes and conventions), reading (process of decoding the image), denotation, connotation, signifier/signified, identification (how people relate to images).

There is also an interesting indication of the use of ethnomethodology tradition in the visual data analysis, especially when asking the question of how people use different visual signs, how they gain orientation in unknown space. The authors demonstrate that the adoption of this perspective works effectively when examining markers, directional signs, and all types of maps. Here we also have a few examples, including a study conducted by Wesley Sharrock and Digby Anderson (1979) in medical school complex. The authors took pictures of subsequent directional signs moving around the campus and hospital in an attempt to recapitulate the reasoning of people who were setting the directional signs. The discovery of the logic behind the location of the signs shows also the way in which space is structuralized.

The next chapter was devoted to the study of the objects referred to in the book as a three-dimensional visual data. In this section, the authors the

most fully realize their initial approach to broaden the program of visual research, and thus go beyond photography and other two-dimensional images. At the outset, they recall the part of Roland Barthes' *Mythologies* (2009) in which French semiologist analyses famous car, Citroën DS. This "decoding" of the car is a classic example of how the object may be subjected to a semiotic analysis.

Photographic recording of objects is not necessary at all, observation may become the main research technique, what the authors emphasize as a huge advantage of this type of project. Other benefits include: easy access to a huge amount of various objects, possibility of anonymity, covert observation, and – what might be most important – a chance to explore what people do with objects. Interactions with objects seems to be one of the most interesting issues.

Questions: how we use them, destroy, collect, acquire, get rid of, take care, et cetera may become an important area of visual research. The authors propose locating such studies in four contexts. First, cultural consumption – as a status indicator, social belonging, and taste (referring to Thorstein Veblen and Pierre Bourdieu). Second, personalization, that is, how we give individual character to the mass-produced things and how we use them to display our identity. Third, the question of use of the objects, understood as an indicator of social activity (e.g., traces left by people on a variety of subjects, the inscriptions on the walls, signs of usage, etc.). And the last context, this includes the culture, knowledge, beliefs, and ideology. In this

case, we search for social values, discourses, epistemologies encoded in the objects. Semiotics and methods of interpretive methods become crucial here (p. 111). This aspect of visual research is coming very close to the field of sociology of things, and, in certain dimensions, even becomes identical with it. In the field of three-dimensional space, the authors describe also: museums, houses, vehicles, cemeteries, memorials, each time invoking examples of research and proposing for students a set of exercises and projects to complete.

The sixth chapter extends the previously signaled threads; this time focusing on what Anthony Giddens defines as *locale*, that is, socially constructed environments where human interactions took place. Places such as shopping malls, offices, parks and gardens, houses, and streets reflect the social system of implicit knowledge (tacit knowledge) and common-sense, cultural codes. The best examples of this may be found in the flats and houses (p. 153). For instance, re-photographing interiors of the houses and their external appearance (as well as the immediate surroundings: garden, street, neighboring houses) makes breaking the "here and now" perspective and capturing changes in the way of organizing space, design, as well as the habits of the inhabitants possible.

Other research areas suggested here by the authors include: prisons and hospitals (as examples of institutionalized and ideologized planning of buildings), the workplace (ethnography of institutions and organizations), shops (exclusion and inclusion of certain types of clients), public places, such as squares (ways of using such space by

residents and the reasons for the popularity of some of them), museums (e.g., as an example of precisely coded space, and the ritualized behaviors of visitors and personnel). Of course, a reference to Michel Foucault's works appears in the last part of this chapter. His ideas are still very useful while we take under consideration issues of control, discipline, and surveillance. By adopting this perspective, we can study how changed plans and the locations of hospitals, homeless shelters, prisons, and asylums. But, in terms of panoptic institutions, we can also gain insight into shopping malls.

The penultimate, seventh chapter was devoted to the examination of *living forms of visual data*. Therefore, it focuses on the human body (modifications, decorating, body movement), reciprocal relationships, gestures, and self-presentation, it also explores the issues of gaze, territoriality (distances between people), organizing the space, everyday interactions, and nonverbal communication. Again, Emmison, Smith, and Mayall try to broaden the understanding spectrum of visual studies research, this time by incorporating the elements of interactionism, ethnomethodology, and sociology of the body.

The last chapter deals with virtual visual data. The authors describe the advantages and disadvantages of online research in the context of visual research. They point our attention to the extremely important ethical problems, including the key (and still unresolved) issue of public versus private relations. Uncertainty, which reveals here, forces the researchers to caution and prudence

whenever this kind of data is used. Also, it might be problematic how to distinguish what is true from what is false. However, all those dangers do not release the social researchers from necessity to explore the Internet environment. In the book, we will find many suggestions for topics which, in the opinion of the authors, are important and worth investigating.

This book was primarily designed mostly for students interested in exploring the wide field of visuality. However, it is offering great potential of use and inspiration for lecturers and researchers. It has many advantages and I have no doubt that it is a very useful handbook. The authors anchored their expositions in classical sociological texts, as well as in the latest books from the field of sociology and anthropology. In addition, the authors propose a whole range of exercises and projects to complete. The exercises are a proposal for individual students, and most of them can be done within an hour. Projects are more complex and their implementation requires longer time and group cooperation. It is a great complement to the books and a huge help for lecturers.

For teachers leading courses somehow related to the area of visual research, it may become a very inspiring and structuring theoretical and empirical material handbook, referring to the rich literature sources. *Researching the Visual* helps to design research projects, shows methodological possibilities, points out interesting areas to examine. Concluding, it is a valuable and worth reading book, even for those who are not yet convinced of the need to conduct visual studies.

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Book Review

Khan, Shamus Rahman. 2011. *Privilege: The Making of an Adolescent Elite at St. Paul's School*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press

Shamus Rahman Khan, in the *Privilege*, delineated a panorama of one elite high school, St. Paul's, in the United States. He tried to explain four questions in this book: (1) what the difference between new elite and traditional elite is, (2) how the elites' characteristics were cultivated, (3) how the hierarchy inside elite school was formed, and (4) why diversity did not bring equality.

The text was well organized to answer those questions above. Khan, in the first chapter, introduced the history of St. Paul's School in which "the new elites" were cultivated, and "the old elites" in the history of the United States. He claimed a hypothesis that the transition from the old elites to the new elites does not bring back the equality. With meticulous observation, in the next two chapters, Khan analyzed the everyday lives of the students in St. Paul's, and he concluded how the mentality of the new elites was formed. But, Khan did not regard the new elites as a homogeneous group; in the fourth chapter, he studied the women and black students of the new elites. For him, these minor elites rep-

resented the old inequality in the new time, which corresponds to his previous hypothesis. Khan also criticized the new elites group in the fifth chapter, to some extent, that they are indifferent, or even arrogant, to the world around them, and that is how they were distinguished from normal people in the new time.

Through Khan's participant observation in St. Paul's, the most notable characteristic of the new elites in St. Paul's, just like the leisure boy on the cover, is the embodiment of their "at ease" (p. 196). As the society is more open than before, some old-fashioned symbols of elite status, such as fine art and classical music, are accessible to all the society. Therefore, the characteristic of new elites lies not in their different tastes, but in that they can make themselves comfortable, or say "at ease", in any circumstances. The way they get to "at ease," according to the author, is through the cultivating in elite school. In the school, they were taught to "take one's place" by rituals in school (p. 48) and by inequality of status between them and the staff

in school (p. 52), by resolving into the hierarchy which made by their senior peers, by being cultivated a sense of audacity for knowledge and the exterior world (p. 161) from their teachers, by being indifferent to high culture, and by the excessive access to high culture in elite schools as St. Paul's (p. 186). Khan also suggested several phenomenon of anomie, in Durkheim's context (1997), in the elite society of St. Paul's, which covered the inequality which was experienced by black students and girls in the school. White students are easier to be at ease than their non-white counterparts, and boys have more advantages than girls to be at ease in school. For these two groups of disadvantaged elites, Khan analyzed that the cause of their plight is that in the whole society both female and black are in disadvantage status, which reflected into the reality in St. Paul's then compelled these students to have to work harder than their peers, which made them not at ease in the school. By these cases, Khan suggests a social fact that "the production of privilege will continue to reproduce inequality while implying that ours is a just world" (p. 199).

Khan, in his book, concentrated on the hidden inequality behind a seemingly "meritocracy" society, including not only the inequality among elites, rising elites, and non-elites but also the inequality of gender and race in the elite group. One of the most impressive parts of *Privilege* is its cultural analysis on the potential elites. In *Privilege*, the distinction, in Bourdieu's context, has vanished, but new distinction has been established through the different states of living of people. Khan found that the high culture is no longer the symbol of the elite since they are more accessible to all the society, and wealth

does not amount to elite status, ease has become the new symbol of elite. Therefore, the students' indifference of high culture has become the embodiment of elites' at ease.

In conclusion, Khan discussed the paradox of new elites culture in the United States, that is, the surface diversity in elite group does not result in equality. The reasons which lead to this paradox lie in the two macro-level social changes: collectivism society was replaced by individualism society and democratic society displaced aristocratic society of the United States. The former gave rise to the diversity in new elite group, since it enables individuals through striving to rank among elite level, whereas the latter lead to new inequality, since, according to Khan and the concept from Bourdieu (1984), the embodiment of the new elite is ease (p. 197), which was not possessed by those who were not elite before, but just step into elite groups by personal strivings. It is a brilliant part for Khan to bond his observation to the social structure of the United States.

In the *Privilege*, Khan also would like to delve into the transition of the elites groups. According to him, the distinction between elites and normal people has never been changed, even in a more open society. What has changed was merely the way in which they were distinguished from normal people. For him, these elites are capable of forming their own circle, which is very stable and exclusive. I am basically in agreement with this argument. A more open society means that the opportunities could be fairly distributed to more people but it also means a highly competitive society, and the competition inevitably bring about inequality. The major new

elites and the old elites are not two distinct generations, instead, they share the same blood lineage, so even if these new elites have to compete with more people today, their resources, which were inherited from their old elite parents, would help them out in the competition. However, the minor new elites, just like the black girl in St. Paul’s, could not be comfortable at school while they could get into St. Paul’s and get very high scores at school. Therefore, although the open society may be meritocratic nowadays, the elites group still remains aristocratic.

As an ethnographic research, *Privilege* includes large amounts of observations and interactions with the young elites. However, a crucial question the author did not address is that to what extent these teenage elites could represent their adult counterparts? The

adolescent elite might be indifferent to high culture by now, but when they grow up and contact with other elites in formal occasions, the elites seemingly might no longer be indifferent to those culture symbols, then how could we be so sure that these young elites, by that time, will not fall into the old elites’ set pattern? In other words, while Khan endeavored to use his cases to illustrate that the students in St. Paul’s are the potential elites in the future, *Privilege* did not cast a strong argument on the transition from adolescent elites to real elites in the society and connecting the phenomenon in an elite school with the social fact in the whole society. However, while with this tiny imperfection, there is no doubt that *Privilege*, as a creative qualitative research on elite group in the United States, would be widely debated by scholars who are interested in this area.

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