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Two Decades of Reflection and Critique. The Continuous Fear of Replacement—The Renaissance of Feeling and Intuition in the Age of Artificial Intelligence in *Qualitative Sociology Review* (2005–2025)

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Keywords: Qualitative Research Methodology; Autoethnography; Artificial Intelligence (AI); Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS); Precarity; Resonance; Empathy; Intuition

Abstract: On the twentieth anniversary of *Qualitative Sociology Review* (QSR), this article offers a critical and autoethnographic reflection on how qualitative sociology has responded to technological innovation over the past two decades. I argue that the recurring fear of replacement, first by online publishing, then by CAQDAS software, and now by Artificial Intelligence (AI), reveals a persistent disciplinary anxiety. Anxiety that qualitative sociologists are being reduced to merely instrumental analytical roles. Drawing on personal recollections as a QSR co-founder and a review of global debates, I demonstrate how these fears have shaped our collective identity. Using the example of precariat research, I highlight the importance of the intellectualization of qualitative research, underscoring how qualitative researchers have become replaceable by technology. While AI now threatens to take over many tasks once considered the province of our expertise, it also highlights what remains uniquely human in our field: resonance, empathy, intuition, and ontological courage. I propose a competency profile for future qualitative sociologists that integrates digital literacy and AI collaboration with a renewed emphasis on embodied and empathetic inquiry. My conclusion presents AI not as the end of qualitative sociology, but as a catalyst for its renewal.

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The Institutional Anxiety: "Some Little Online Newsletter" and the Fight for Academic Legitimacy

When I look back at the early days of *Qualitative Sociology Review* (QSR) in 2005, I recall not only the technical decisions and editorial discussions, but, most of all, the emotional atmosphere surrounding the initiative. These discussions went beyond publishing formats. They were existential struggles over academic legitimacy, identity, and the place of qualitative research in sociology. I especially remember the surprised and sometimes even disgusted faces of some colleagues at the Institute of Sociology at the University of Lodz when I explained that our new journal would appear exclusively online. The skeptical questions were always the same: *How can such a thing be serious? How can an "internet-only" journal keep peer-review standards? Who will archive these files? How do we tell authentic from non-authentic scholarship?* Some critiques were ironic; for instance, when QSR was dismissed, it was described (in Polish) as a *gazetka internetowa* (some little online newsletter), akin to an academic pamphlet pinned to a community board. Other critiques were more formal and bureaucratic. I still remember a senior colleague warning me, *No one will cite you. These are not real publications.*

Now, I see that skepticism stemmed less from publishing technology than from the symbolic authority of paper. Bourdieu (1986) described cultural capital as being tied to institutional forms, such as degrees, titles, and academic journals. Printed volumes carried not only text but also authority. Without paper, the hierarchy was threatened. Online-only publishing was seen as lacking standards. People assumed that a lack of materiality meant weak peer review and archiving. It is ironic. From the start, QSR's peer review was as rigorous as in any scientific journal, maybe even more so, because suspicion made us more attentive. But to others, no print meant no legitimacy. Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical analysis is a good fit. The printed journal was the "front stage," a performance that reassured audiences of credibility. Going digital disrupts this performance, leaving readers unsure how to interpret what they have seen.

In retrospect, the rejection of QSR's format was part of a pattern. Each new technology in qualitative research came with anxiety, not excitement. The "little

online newsletter" debate mirrored old fears about tape recorders in the 1950s. Becker (1958) noted that early users of audio technology were accused of losing the "natural" rhythm of notetaking and delegating the ethnographer's ear to a machine. The fear was not only about tools. It was about researcher identity. If note-taking could be replaced by tape, what remained of the ethnographer's craft? If a journal could exist without paper, what remained of editorial authority? For me, the anxiety toward QSR felt personal. I was not merely editing the journal; I was defending a vision of qualitative sociology grounded in openness, accessibility, and methodological experimentation. Choosing an online-only publication was a political act and a stand for open access. It meant that qualitative research could circulate freely rather than being locked behind paywalls. Still, this made us, Krzysztof Konecki, Anna Kacperczyk, and me, "deviant innovators" (Becker 1963). We challenged norms and risked exclusion.

We were not alone. Around the same time, other pioneering journals, such as *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research* (established in 2000), also adopted online-only models. In North America, *Qualitative Inquiry*, founded in 1995 by Norman Denzin, maintained its print edition while becoming the center for experimental qualitative writing, including autoethnography (Ellis and Bochner 2000). QSR found its own identity. It was rooted in the Polish interpretive tradition (Znaniecki 1926; Chałasiński 1982), but open to global dialogue. I recall exchanges with invited reviewers from Europe and the US, some of whom were supportive and others somewhat skeptical—*You are brave to go fully digital*. For us, though, it felt like necessity, not bravery. Print costs were too high, and digital distribution offered boundless reach. We sought to provide international readers with easy access to Polish and Central European research. That is the core of sociological dialogue: crossing language, geography, and institution. I vividly remember 2004, in a crowded seminar room at the University of Lodz. We were finalizing QSR's first call for papers. The room buzzed with enthusiasm and anxiety, young and old colleagues alike. One younger colleague whispered, *Are we sure we want to do this?* An older one raised a practical worry: *What if the university library refuses to list us? Without a print ISSN, who will recognize us?* That night as I walked home, I felt both exhilarated and terrified. Exhilarated that we were taking a risk. Terrified because I remembered colleagues' laughter. What if they were right? What if it fails? As a young researcher, backed by my mentor, Krzysztof Konecki, I knew we both faced the risk of being labeled "academic deviants." This mix of fear and hope continued through my career. It returned when I first saw CAQDAS code my interview transcripts. It returned when I asked ChatGPT to generate an analytic memo. Each time, I ask: *What is left of the human researcher when tools take over?*

From 2025, it is almost amusing to recall how radical online publishing once seemed. Today, every major journal has a digital version, and many have become only online. What once felt like a threat to academic quality is now the norm and an international standard. The early fears surrounding QSR never materialized. Peer review is strong, archiving is secure, and digital access has democratized scholarship. Still, these early fears are worth remembering. Every new technology, such as tape recorders, CAQDAS, and AI, brings the same anxiety: the fear of replacement. The issue is not the tool but the qualitative researcher's identity, and the lesson is clear. Resistance to technology often hides uncertainty about our role. The key question is not *Whether technology will degrade research*? but *Who are we as*

qualitative sociologists if machines do our tasks? The "little online newsletter" story foreshadowed current debates on AI. As we once feared online journals would dilute standards, we now fear AI will dilute interpretation. In both cases, the real challenge is not machines, but self-definition.

The First Wave of Instrumentalization (2005-2014): From Narrative to Code

The first decade of QSR took shape through both consolidation and subtle transformation. On the one hand, we sought to strengthen the foundations of qualitative sociology in its classic variations, such as Symbolic Interactionism (Blumer 1969), Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Charmaz 2006), and the narrative and biographical traditions deeply rooted in Polish sociology (Znaniecki 1926; Chałasiński 1982). On the other hand, new methodological tools, especially Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS), emerged, producing both enthusiasm and unease. Looking back, I see this decade as the **first wave of instrumentalization**, a moment when qualitative researchers began to embrace software as an aid, while simultaneously internalizing its logic, subtly reconfiguring their identity from "interpreters of meaning" to "managers of data."

The arrival of CAQDAS amplified this tendency. I still remember my first encounter with Atlas.ti around 2007. A colleague had demonstrated how quickly one could assign codes to long interview transcripts, retrieve all instances of a code, and visualize co-occurrences. I was impressed by the sheer speed and efficiency, which felt liberating. Gone were the days of coding using paper and pencil, with hundreds of Post-it notes representing codes, ready to be placed on the flipchart to organize them into categories, diagrams, and grounded hypotheses. But I also felt a chill of unease when the software window presented a neat hierarchy of codes, families, and networks. Everything seemed so orderly, so tidy, analytically perfect. Interpretation was reduced to dragging and dropping, to clicking checkboxes. It felt as if the messy, hermeneutic struggle, the dwelling in contradictions, and the silent listening to pauses in an interview were being flattened into digital order. I recall late nights staring at my screen, watching colorful code stripes accumulate on the margins of a transcript. Part of me felt proud of this new efficiency. Another whispered: *Am I becoming a data clerk?* Silver and Lewins (2014) carefully explained the strengths and limitations of software for qualitative research, yet many warned that CAQDAS risked **standardizing the interpretive act**, subtly aligning it with the normative logic of quantitative research (Coffey, Holbrook, and Atkinson 1996; Kelle 1997). The critique was not that software itself was harmful, but that it carried an **epistemic imperative**: to code, to categorize, to segment. As Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss (1998) had already recognized, coding is never neutral. It is always an act of interpretation, but when coding is embedded in software interfaces, it risks being treated as a technical rather than a hermeneutic procedure.

Several dangers followed:

1. **Reification of Categories:** Codes created early in analysis became "sticky," shaping subsequent interpretation. The software favored stability over fluidity, despite the Grounded Theory principle of constant comparison (Glaser and Strauss 1967).

2. **Reduction of Ambiguity:** CAQDAS systems favored discrete codes, discouraging re-

searchers from lingering in ambiguity or paradox. Yet ambiguity is often where the richest insights lie (Denzin 2001).

3. **Managerial Identity:** Researchers increasingly described themselves as "handling" or "organizing" data, adopting the language of management rather than interpretation. This subtle yet significant shift marked the beginning of what I call the **instrumental researcher identity**.

I must confess, however, that part of me welcomed this instrumental turn. As the Executive Editor of QSR in the 10s of the twenty-first century, I was overwhelmed with manuscripts, teaching, and research responsibilities. CAQDAS offered relief because it promised control over the chaos of transcripts. I could search, retrieve, and visualize with astonishing ease. One night, after coding an especially complex set of ethnographic interviews, I printed out a network diagram generated by the software. The nodes and links looked impressive, like a sociological constellation. For a moment, I felt triumphant because the messiness of human life had been transformed into a coherent picture, one that was integrated and comprehensive. But the next morning, as I looked at the diagram with fresh eyes, I felt uneasy, recognizing imposter syndrome in myself. The elegant network seemed to *close off* possibilities rather than open them. It suggested finality, as if interpretation was complete. Yet I knew that the heart of qualitative research lies in the *incompleteness* of interpretation and openness to multiple readings, so I removed the diagram. This minor incident crystallized for me the paradox of CAQDAS. It empowers us but also tempts us to surrender our interpretive agency. These tensions were not unique to Poland or Central Europe. Across the globe, qualitative researchers debated the promise and peril of CAQDAS. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) argued that qualitative inquiry was entering a "seventh moment," characterized by new technologies and political struggles over representation. They warned against "methodological fundamentalism," the belief that technical rigor could substitute for interpretive imagination. In the UK, Coffey, Holbrook, and Atkinson (1996) cautioned against the "coding fetishism," emphasizing that codes are tools, not findings. In the US, Riessman (2008) emphasized the narrative integrity of interviews, which cannot be fully captured by fragmenting them into coded segments. In Germany, Kelle (1997) highlighted the risk that CAQDAS would push qualitative research toward a quasi-quantitative paradigm, emphasizing reliability over meaning. These debates echoed in QSR pages, where contributors experimented with CAQDAS and critically reflected on its influence. Some authors praised the ability to manage large datasets; others worried about the "banalization" of qualitative analysis, producing results that were technically precise but conceptually thin. The underlying anxiety of this first wave was the fear that the qualitative sociologist would become a **skilled technician** rather than an **artist of interpretation**. Józef Chałasiński (1982) had already warned decades earlier that, without deep sociological insight, the researcher degenerates into a collector of facts, or "data surgeon," as Krzysztof Konecki (2021) vividly and accurately put it. CAQDAS seemed to heighten the danger that the researcher might become a collector and manager of codes. During one of the methodological consultations, a doctoral student proudly showed me her NVivo project, filled with hundreds of meticulously coded nodes. She asked me, *Is this enough? Have I done the analysis?* I hesitated. The coding was, indeed, impressive. But analysis is not coding; it is the leap from

data to concept, from fragments to meaning. I gave her a metaphorical overview: *You have prepared the ground. Now you must build the house*. That situation captures the essence of the problem that CAQDAS encouraged the illusion that analysis could be completed through technical procedures. However, by doing so, the most critical imaginative, empathetic, and risky work remained. The work that no software could perform.

The Foreshadowing of AI

In hindsight, the CAQDAS debates foreshadow the anxieties we face today regarding AI. In both cases, a new technology offered unprecedented analytic power. In both cases, researchers feared being displaced by the machine. And in both cases, the real danger lay not in the tool itself but in the **researcher's self-reduction**. By uncritically embracing CAQDAS, we risk narrowing our identity to that of analysts, coders, or data surgeons. By fearing AI, we reveal that we have accepted a narrow definition of ourselves. If analysis and coding were our only value, then, indeed, AI threatens to replace us. The lesson of the first wave, then, is that instrumentalization is seductive; it offers order, efficiency, and control, but it also risks stripping us of the very qualities that make qualitative sociology unique, such as empathy, intuition, and ontological courage.

The Second Wave (2015-2025): The Precarity Trap and the Limits of Intellectual Analysis

If the first decade of QSR (2005-2014) was marked by the growing **instrumentalization of analysis** through CAQDAS, the second decade (2015-2025) was defined by an intellectual intensification. Studies on precariousness exemplify that phenomenon (Mrozowicki 2016; Hlatshwayo 2019; Cardone, Tümpel, and Huber 2021; Pilch 2023). In the pages of QSR, authors reflected and contributed to the international rise of research on insecurity, instability, and the fragility of social life. Yet here, too, I detect a paradox. While our analyses became sharper, more theoretically sophisticated, and more critical of power, they often remained confined to **conceptual abstraction**. The embodied, emotional, and intuitive dimensions of human life were present in our data, often painfully so, but they were frequently tamed into categories, discourses, and frameworks. I call this the **precarity trap**: the risk of turning lived experiences of suffering into intellectual artifacts.

The years following the 2008 financial crisis and the ensuing austerity regimes produced a global wave of scholarship on precariousness. Guy Standing's (2011) *The Precariat* popularized the notion of a new class defined by insecurity. Arne Kalleberg (2009) examined the spread of unstable employment and its implications for inequality. Judith Butler (2004; 2009) emphasized vulnerability and precarity as fundamental to human existence, linking them to questions of recognition, ethics, and violence. Meanwhile, Holmes and Marcus (2008) proposed "para-ethnography" to engage with the complex negotiations of risk and uncertainty in global capitalism. QSR was part of this global conversation. Authors examined precarious work, migration, biographical ruptures, and the "trajectories of suffering" (Schütze 1997) produced by systemic transformation in Central and Eastern Europe (Kaźmierska 2014; 2016; Mrozowicki 2016; Dopierała 2019; Nowicka-Franczak 2021), biographical accounts of institutionalization and exclusion (Golczyńska-Grondas 2014), and explorations of coping strategies in the face of structural chaos (Burski et al. 2022; Bieńkowski and Życzyńska-Ciołek 2023). The concept

of biographical work (Strauss 1993) became central to this research when individuals facing poverty, unemployment, illness, or migration engaged in continuous efforts to make sense of their disrupted lives. QSR authors documented how these efforts produced fragile forms of identity, tenuous hope, or, at times, despair. One case that remains vivid in my memory is the story of Natalia, published in QSR (Golczyńska-Grondas 2014). Natalia's life was marked by poverty, parental alcoholism, institutionalization, and the early death of her sister due to medical neglect. Her narrative revealed a profound struggle to maintain dignity amidst systemic indifference. I remember reading Natalia's account. Her words were raw pain. Yet when the article was published, Natalia's voice was inevitably reframed within academic categories such as trajectory, coping, and structural chaos. These categories are valuable, as they enable us to connect individual stories to systemic forces. But I also sensed the absence of immediate resonance, the embodied compassion her words evoked in me. This gap between lived pain and analytic abstraction was not unique to QSR. It was characteristic of much precarious research. Scholars across Europe and North America analyzed discourses of neoliberalism, forms of governmentality (Foucault 2006), and systemic transformations. In Poland, Piotr Sztompka (2021) wrote about the importance of trust and sensitivity in sociology. Yet, in practice, the dominant mode remained intellectual critique. We analyzed, categorized, and theorized, but we rarely allowed ourselves to dwell in empathy, to acknowledge that our knowledge was born not only of concepts but also of resonance, intuition, and feeling.

During this decade, I conducted ethnographic research on street vendors (Marciniak 2016). I spent many mornings and afternoons at urban marketplaces, walking between stalls and talking with vendors whose lives spanned a wide range of fortunes. There were prosperous stallholders, selling imported goods with confidence, and there were older women with trembling hands, offering jars of homemade fruit preserves for a few coins. In their stories, I heard layers of hardship: poverty, petty thefts, illnesses, the weariness of life, and, at times, the sting of being treated harshly by customers. As I listened, their emotions flowed openly: anger, sadness, resignation, and, at times, pride in small victories. I felt their burdens resonate within me; their words and gestures left traces within my body. My instinct was to linger with them, to respond not only as a researcher but as a fellow human being. In those moments, I felt a part of that world, with a sense of belonging, because I had come from the same social class as a child, wandering for hours between the stalls. I felt I was exploring people and places that shaped my identity. But I did not dare to reveal that identity in my analysis and the results. My methodological training reminded me to remain composed, to record, and to ask questions. Later, by coding the interviews, I produced tidy diagrams of processes and categories, as well as maps of phenomena that appeared ordered and clear. But what was most alive in the field: the tremor in a voice, the moist eyes, the heaviness of silence, and my belonging identity, evaporated in abstraction. The analysis captured the structure but not the pulse. Accurate, perhaps, but incomplete. In this, I, too, fell into what I have called the **precarity trap** when translating vivid and painful stories of struggle into abstract categories that conveyed structural truth but lost existential depth. This dissonance deepened my conviction that we need a sociology that makes space not only for categories and diagrams but also for the embodied and emotional vitality of social life.

Marginalization of Embodiment and Intuition

The second wave thus intensified the very tendencies that had begun with CAQDAS: the marginalization of feeling, empathy, and intuition. Three dynamics stand out:

1. **Exclusion of Emotion:** Emotions were often treated as data to be coded rather than as *co-experienced phenomena*. Sociological norms continued to view emotions as subjective, unscientific, or in need of regulation (Grandey 2000). Yet, as Arlie Hochschild (1983) has shown, emotions are central to social life and social processes (Kacperczyk 2016). Ignoring them meant ignoring a vital source of sociological insight.

2. **Suppression of Intuition:** Reflexivity became the watchword (Hałas 2011), but intuition, the pre-analytical grasp of meaning (Woroniecka 2003), was sidelined. Intuition was considered untrustworthy, too personal. Yet some of the most profound sociological insights have arisen from intuitive leaps (Bell and Willmott 2020; Kump 2020).

3. **Lack of Ontological Courage:** Scholars hesitated to step beyond established categories. To theorize precarity, we leaned heavily on Foucault, Bourdieu, or Butler. These are powerful lenses, but we rarely dared to create new ontologies from the ground of lived experience.

Looking back, I see the precarity trap as a mirror of our discipline's identity crisis. By reducing suffering to categories, we maintained intellectual authority, but at the cost of our human responsiveness. We feared being perceived as unscientific if we acknowledged our feelings. We repressed intuition, even though we knew it was often our guide. We avoided ontological risk, preferring the safety of established frameworks. And so, when AI entered the scene in the early 2020s, we were unprepared. For if our value lay only in coding, analyzing, and theorizing within given discourses, then AI could do so faster and more efficiently. We have marginalized capacities such as empathy, intuition, and courage, all of which AI cannot replicate. The second decade of QSR was thus both intellectually rich and existentially precarious. We produced essential analyses of systemic injustice, but often at the cost of silencing the resonance of lived experience. The challenge of the next decade is clear: to move beyond the precarity trap by reclaiming the human capacities we have suppressed. That is where AI, paradoxically, may help. By taking over the instrumental tasks of coding and categorization, AI forces us to confront the limits of intellectual analysis. It challenges us to rediscover the value of feeling, intuition, and ontological courage.

AI as the Ultimate Mirror: The Crisis of the Instrumental Researcher

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is not the first technological innovation to unsettle qualitative sociology. We have already faced the tape recorder, the video camera, the word processor, and CAQDAS. Each of these elicited fear, provoked debates about legitimacy, and, ultimately, became normalized. Yet AI is different. Unlike previous tools, which extended human capacities, AI threatens to **replace them outright**. Where the tape recorder captured sound, AI can transcribe, translate, and even summarize. Where CAQDAS organized codes, AI can generate them autonomously, cluster them, and suggest

interpretations. Where word processors corrected grammar, AI now drafts entire analytic memos, literature reviews, or even research articles. That is why I call AI the **ultimate mirror**, as it reflects to us the limitations of the role we have constructed for ourselves. It shows, with stark clarity, how deeply we have internalized the identity of the **instrumental researcher**, a collector, coder, and analyzer of data. If this is all we are, then AI can do it faster, cheaper, and, perhaps, more consistently.

I will never forget the evening I first opened ChatGPT in 2024. With a mix of curiosity and skepticism, I typed a prompt I had often given my graduate students: *Summarize the key principles of grounded theory methodology*. In less than a second, the screen filled with text. To my astonishment, it was accurate, precise, and stylistically polished. It mentioned constant comparison, theoretical sampling, coding, and memo-writing. It cited Glaser and Strauss (1967), Corbin and Strauss (1998), and Charmaz (2006). I felt a wave of conflicting emotions. Relief, because here was a tool that could instantly do what often takes students weeks to master. Anxiety, because if the machine could do this, what would be the need for my lectures? Excitement, because I imagined the possibilities for accelerating learning. And a deep, gnawing fear—*Was my expertise now obsolete?* Later that year, I took it a step further and uploaded anonymized interview excerpts, asking AI to code them. Again, the results were unsettling. It identified themes, grouped patterns, and even suggested analytic memos. Some of its insights were banal, but others were strikingly perceptive, almost indistinguishable from what I might have written myself. I remember staring at the screen in silence, the room around me dark. A thought crystallized—*This is the "little online newsletter" moment all over again, but magnified*.

The truth revealed by AI is uncomfortable. For decades, we sought to legitimize qualitative sociology by emphasizing its **analytical rigor**. We adopted systematic procedures, coding, categorization, and discourse analysis, to demonstrate that we were not merely "storytellers" but "scientists." In doing so, we distanced ourselves from the messy, embodied, emotional, and intuitive dimensions of inquiry. This strategy worked, up to a point. It secured legitimacy, funding, and publication. But it also led us into a trap. By defining our value primarily in terms of intellectual procedures, we created a role that machines can now perform.

AI exposes this reductionism with brutal clarity. It is an **analytical machine par excellence**. It can:

- Transcribe and translate with near-perfect accuracy.
- Generate codes, clusters, and categories across massive datasets.
- Summarize and synthesize literature from thousands of sources.
- Produce draft analytic memos and even article sections with stylistic fluency.

If this is what we believe makes us valuable, then the fear of replacement is justified. The **instrumental trap** has been vindicated. Unsurprisingly, the emergence of AI has provoked fear and resistance in our community. In editorial discussions, I have heard colleagues insist that AI cannot possibly replicate the subtlety of human interpretation. Others dismiss it as a fad, a gimmick that will soon fade. Some universities have even banned its use, fram-

ing it as a threat to academic integrity. These reactions remind me of the debates in the early 2000s about online publishing. Then, too, people insisted that "real" journals required a print format. Then, too, they feared that legitimacy would collapse. Moreover, the fears proved misplaced. What we are seeing now is a form of **disavowal**: a refusal to acknowledge that AI can perform many of the tasks we once considered ours uniquely. This disavowal protects our identity as analysts but only temporarily. Reality will not be denied for long.

Beyond the Instrumental: Rediscovering the Human

Paradoxically, AI may be the most significant development for qualitative sociology in decades. By threatening to replace our analytical procedures, it forces us to confront what cannot be replaced. It holds up a mirror and asks, *Who are you, really, if the codes and categories can be generated without you?* The answer lies in what I call the **renaissance of human uniqueness**. AI cannot feel empathy, cannot resonate with an interviewee's trembling hands, or perceive the heaviness in a silent pause. It cannot take ontological risks, generating concepts that transcend the existing knowledge on which it is trained. It cannot intuit, imagine, or create in the radical sense of leaping beyond the given. That is where the future of qualitative sociology lies: not in rejecting AI, but in embracing it as a partner for instrumental tasks, while reclaiming our irreducibly human competencies.

After my initial shock with ChatGPT, I began experimenting with it more systematically. I asked it to generate summaries of long transcripts, to draft literature reviews, and to propose coding schemes. One day, I assigned it a task that, given the analyses it had previously performed, seemed trivial in light of ChatGPT's capabilities. I asked it to generate a bibliography for a previously uploaded article, including in-text citations. And I felt a mix of relief and unease. This time, the relief came from a different source, not so much from the convenience of working with AI as from the errors it made. A seemingly reliable algorithm that generated codes, categories, hypotheses, and extensive descriptions in seconds proved unreliable. The simple task of compiling a bibliography ended in complete failure, as ChatGPT generated fictitious publications, distorted titles, and erroneous dates. After all, it makes mistakes. *It makes mistakes! It fails! We are safe and irreplaceable*—I thought with relief.

After relief came doubt. What if it is just a matter of time and algorithm refinement? I have discovered that AI lacks morality; it is not ashamed of its mistakes; it does not take responsibility for false information; it does not think critically or probabilistically; and it fails to consider the consequences of its unreliability. But does this not shed light on instrumental, unfeeling analysis, which, in its most extreme form, produces knowledge through categorization, abstract theorizing, and purely intellectual reasoning? AI is, thus, more than a methodological tool. It is an existential challenge to our discipline. It reveals the consequences of decades of self-reduction to the role of instrumental analysts. It forces us to decide whether to cling to that identity—and risk obsolescence—or to embrace a new one, grounded in resonance, intuition, and ontological courage. The challenge is not technological but ontological. The question is not *What can AI do?* but *What does it mean to be a qualitative researcher in the age of AI?*

The Renaissance of Uniqueness: Reclaiming Feeling, Intuition, and Ontological Courage

AI does not simply pose a methodological challenge; it calls for an epistemological reorientation. If AI can now perform the instrumental and analytical tasks we once considered our core expertise, then our survival as qualitative sociologists depends on embracing what machines cannot replicate. I call this the **renaissance of uniqueness**, the deliberate reclaiming of feeling, intuition, and ontological courage as the indispensable qualities of human inquiry.

The first step in this renaissance is counterintuitive but necessary. We must consciously **delegate the instrumental to the algorithm**. That means not resisting AI in transcription, coding, or preliminary analysis, but rather fully embracing it as a collaborative tool in these domains.

- **Systematic Analysis:** AI can perform the mechanical dimensions of coding—segmenting data, identifying patterns, and comparing categories. That aligns with the logic of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Charmaz 2006) but frees the human researcher from repetitive labor.

- **Descriptive Synthesis:** AI can generate clean summaries, draft literature reviews, and propose analytic memos. While imperfect, these outputs are often sufficient as starting points.

- **Technical Labor:** including translation, anonymization, and formatting. All tasks that consume our time without requiring interpretive depth are better handled by AI.

Far from diminishing our role, this delegation liberates us. It allows us to redirect our energy toward the **irreducibly human** dimensions of inquiry.

The first of these dimensions is **resonance**. Hartmut Rosa (2019) argued that modernity is characterized by acceleration, which produces alienation; the antidote, however, is resonance, a responsive, "vibrating" relationship with the world. For qualitative sociology, resonance is not a poetic metaphor but a methodological principle. When we sit with an interviewee, share silence, and notice trembling hands or sudden tears, we are engaging in a form of embodied knowledge that cannot be captured in text alone. Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962) described the body as our primary way of being-in-the-world: perception and knowledge are always embodied. Drew Leder (1990) elaborated on how the lived body functions as an instrument of knowing, particularly in moments of suffering. These insights compel us to reframe qualitative research not as the extraction of information, but as a practice of resonance through empathy. Empathy has long been viewed with suspicion in sociology, dismissed as "unscientific." Yet Arlie Hochschild's (1983) work on emotional labor and Candace Clark's (1997) studies of sympathy norms show that emotions are structured, cultural, and sociologically significant. To ignore them is to ignore a vital dimension of social life. Reclaiming empathy means legitimizing it as a source of insight. It means acknowledging that our feelings during fieldwork are not contaminations of the data, but rather part of the data, part of the interpretive process. Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner (2000; Ellis, Adams, and Bochner 2011) advocated for autoethnography: the researcher's emotions, vulnerabilities, and experiences are not distractions but windows into social life.

The second indispensable quality is **intuition**. In philosophy, Hans-Georg Gadamer (1975) described *Vorverständnis* (pre-understanding) as the horizon that enables interpretation. Alfred Schutz (1976) emphasized typifications and stocks of knowledge that precede explicit analysis. These insights remind us that interpretation always begins in intuition: a pre-analytical sense of meaning, a hunch, a felt resonance. In my research, intuition often presents itself as a bodily sense—a discomfort with a category, a sudden recognition of a pattern, or a phrase that echoes long after the interview. I have learned to trust these moments, to record them in memos, to return to them as potential seeds of theory. Yet academic training often discourages such trust. Students are taught to bracket their intuitions until they can be justified through systematic coding. But intuition is not opposed to rigor—it is the spark that guides rigorous inquiry. Without it, analysis risks becoming sterile.

The third quality is **ontological courage**: the willingness to move beyond established frameworks and create new concepts. Pierre Bourdieu (1990) warned against scholastic reason, the tendency to endlessly refine existing theories without taking risks on new ones. Goffman (1967), in contrast, dared to invent his dramaturgical ontology, forever reshaping sociology. Ontological courage means daring to theorize from the ground up, to risk concepts that may be fragile, contested, or unconventional. AI cannot do this. By design, it works with what already exists, synthesizing from past data. It cannot leap beyond the archive into the new. Only human researchers, through intuition and courage, can take that step.

Several scholars have already pointed the way toward such a renaissance. Norman Denzin (2001) called for a "performative" turn in qualitative research, emphasizing evocative representation. Sarah Pink (2015) developed sensory ethnography, foregrounding the concepts of embodiment and perception. Hartmut Rosa (2019) articulated resonance as an ethical and methodological principle. In Poland, Krzysztof Konecki (2018) advocated for contemplative sociology, integrating mindfulness and presence into the inquiry process. These approaches share a commitment to reclaiming the **researcher's full humanity**. They remind us that sociology is not only about intellectual analysis but also about lived, embodied, and emotional engagement with the social world.

Competency Profile of the Future Researcher

The renaissance of uniqueness can be summarized in a competency profile for the qualitative sociologist of the future:

Table 1. Competency profile

Knowledge	Skills	Attitudes
Theoretical traditions	Building rapport and trust	Empathy and compassion
Digital literacy, including AI tools	Facilitating dialogue and resonance	Ontological courage
Ethics of data, consent, and AI use	Conceptual creativity and theorizing beyond existing categories	Comfort with ambiguity and uncertainty
Embodied epistemologies	Reflexive use of intuition in analysis	Commitment to resonance as a value

Source: Self-elaboration.

Each category requires elaboration:

- **Knowledge:** Beyond classical traditions, researchers must now master digital and AI literacies, while also engaging with phenomenology and the concept of embodiment.

- **Skills:** The art of rapport, dialogue, and resonance becomes central. Analysis remains, but as a creative and interpretive act rather than a technical procedure.

- **Attitudes:** Empathy, courage, and comfort with ambiguity are not optional; they are the core.

Ultimately, the renaissance of uniqueness points toward what I envision as a **sociology of resonance**. That is a sociology that fully embraces AI for its instrumental capacities but insists that the essence of qualitative research lies in human resonance, our capacity to feel, intuit, and courageously reimagine social life.

Such a sociology would:

- Legitimize embodied, emotional, and intuitive knowledge.

- Value risk-taking in conceptualization over safe reproduction of theory.

- Treat empathy not as bias but as a method.

- Recognize the researcher not as a data technician but as a resonant interpreter of the human condition.

In this vision, AI is not a threat but a catalyst: by taking over what can be mechanized, it compels us to reclaim what cannot.

Conclusion

Anniversaries invite both celebration and reflection. On the twentieth anniversary of *Qualitative Sociology Review*, I find myself returning not only to the journal's milestones but also to the trajectory of qualitative sociology as a discipline. QSR's story is, in many ways, the story of our collective anxieties: the suspicion toward online publishing in 2005, the ambivalence about CAQDAS in the 2010s, the intellectualization of suffering in the mid-2010s and 2020s, and now, the fear of AI in the mid-2020s. At each stage, the pattern has been the same. Technological or methodological novelty is usually greeted with skepticism, often framed as a threat to legitimacy or identity. The community resists, sometimes ridiculing, sometimes ignoring, sometimes prohibiting. Over time, the novelty becomes normalized, even indispensable. And the researcher's identity quietly shifts, often in directions we had not anticipated.

The first fear, that online-only publishing would destroy legitimacy, has long since vanished. The so-called "little online newsletter" (which, in fact, is an online publishing) became the standard for all major academic papers. Today, no one questions the seriousness of digital journals. In fact, the printed version now seems antiquated, a symbol of exclusivity rather than authority. Looking back, it is striking how much energy was spent defending paper when the actual value of scholarship lay in dialogue, openness, and accessibility. QSR contributed to this transformation, not only by demonstrat-

ing that online publishing could be rigorous but also by showing that a Polish-based journal could reach a global audience. We became a meeting place where Central European traditions intersected with international ones, where memoirism and symbolic interactionism converged with narrative inquiry, grounded theory, and autoethnography.

The second fear, that CAQDAS would replace interpretation, proved more complex. CAQDAS did not replace us, but it did change us. It encouraged managerial identity, a focus on coding and categorization, and a sense that analysis could be standardized. It contributed to what I have called the **instrumental trap**, the subtle reduction of the qualitative researcher to a skilled technician. At one point, this identity appeared to be a step forward. It provided legitimacy, structure, and the appearance of rigor, but it also narrowed our sense of what qualitative sociology could be. It marginalized feelings, empathy, and intuition, which means qualities that were harder to code, quantify, and justify within the norms of academic publishing.

The third fear, that of confronting suffering too directly, emerged during the precarity turn. We produced profound analyses of systemic transformation, precarious work, and biographical disruption. However, these analyses often remain confined to conceptual abstraction. They captured discourses but not resonance, categories but not trembling hands. That, too, was a form of self-protection. To dwell in empathy is painful. To acknowledge intuition is risky. To propose new ontologies is precarious. And so, we intellectualized suffering, convincing ourselves that this was enough. But the result was a sociology that was at times brilliant, yet curiously bloodless.

The fourth fear, that of AI, confronts us now with unprecedented intensity. Unlike earlier tools, AI can not only provide technical support but also perform intellectual labor, such as summarizing, coding, synthesizing, and drafting. In doing so, it exposes the limits of the instrumental identity we have built. If our value lies only in analysis and description, then we, indeed, risk obsolescence. But AI also offers us a chance to rediscover what we had neglected. By delegating the instrumental to the algorithm, we are forced to reclaim what cannot be delegated: resonance, empathy, intuition, and ontological courage. In this sense, AI is both our most significant threat and our greatest gift. It is a mirror that reflects our reductionism and a threshold that invites us to step into a new era.

As I envision the QSR industry twenty years from now, in 2045, I see a journal that is transformed yet remains continuous. I envision articles co-authored with AI, where algorithms handle data synthesis while humans provide context, resonance, and interpretation. I envision special issues on "remote empathy" as a method, on contemplative sociology and multiverse experiences, and on the phenomenology of AI-human relationships. I imagine that submissions will be judged not by the sophistication of their coding schemes but by the courage of their conceptual risk, the depth of their resonance, the clarity of their ethical commitment. In this imagined future, QSR will remain what it has always aspired to be: a home for interpretive sociology. However, interpretation will no longer be defined solely by technical rigor. It will be defined by the human qualities that AI cannot replicate.

The twentieth anniversary of *Qualitative Sociology Review* is not only a celebration of what we have

achieved. It is a threshold. Behind us lie two decades of resistance, adaptation, and growth. Before us lies an uncertain yet promising future in which AI and human resonance must coexist. If we accept the challenge, we may discover that AI is not the end of qualitative sociology but its renewal. By liberating us from the instrumental trap, AI can catalyze the renaissance of uniqueness, a qualitative sociology grounded in empathy, intuition, and ontological courage. This, I believe, is our task for the next twenty years. And if we embrace it, then in 2045, when QSR celebrates its fortieth anniversary, we will not be lamenting our obsolescence. We will be celebrating our rediscovered humanity.

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Emotional Framing of Emotional Deviants as a Political Strategy for Strengthening Collective Emotional Resilience

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Abstract: This article examines how leaders in the United States and the United Kingdom used rhetoric to frame emotional deviants and strengthen collective emotional resilience during two crises in 2024. Drawing on emotion management theory and critical discourse analysis (CDA), we analyze House Speaker Mike Johnson's response to the Columbia University protests and Prime Minister Keir Starmer's address during the Southport riots. Both leaders framed dissenters as emotional deviants, deployed emotional dichotomies, and constructed "others" to consolidate solidarity. We demonstrate that emotional framing functions as a political strategy used to foster cohesion within the dominant group, suppress dissent, and narrow the boundaries of legitimate political expression. Our comparative design reveals

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cross-case convergence in the use of discursive mechanisms (feeling rules, othering, and surface/deep acting) despite divergent institutional roles and rhetorical situations. This convergence underscores the structural nature of emotional framing and reveals that it is part of the governance toolkit that leaders use in mass-mediated democracies. We contribute to political sociology by showing that collective emotional resilience is not only discursively constructed to facilitate cohesion but is also employed as an exclusionary practice that marginalizes dissent and reinforces existing power hierarchies. In doing so, we highlight the ethical dilemmas of emotional governance, including the risks of inequality, alienation, and the foreclosure of authentic political expression.

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Political emotions are defined "as lasting affective predispositions supported reciprocally by the political and social norms of a given society, playing a key role in the constitution of its political culture and the authoritative allocation of resources" (Demertzis 2020:22). Emotions shape political behavior and social structures by influencing power, governance, and political identity. Although emotions are fundamental to understanding how political life is experienced and practiced (Berezin 2002; Demertzis 2020; Ciulla 2023), they were largely overlooked by mainstream political sociology until the 1980s. Since then, scholars have increasingly studied social movements, nationalism, and crises through the lens of emotions such as fear, resentment, and hope.

Researchers such as Gould (2009), Hochschild (2016), and Ahmed (2004) have significantly contributed to this growing interest in emotions by linking them to political actions. Emotions can be conceptualized as either individual or collective experiences. Collective emotions are defined as "a macro-level emotional response to a specific situation by multiple individuals who are interacting with one another" (Goldenberg 2024:183). The role of political leaders in shaping collective emotions has attracted increasing attention in academic literature, particularly in contexts of social crises, political polarization, and widespread dissent (Boin et al. 2005; Ansell, Boin, and 't Hart 2014; Troth, Jordan, and Ashkanasy 2023; Gigliotti 2024).

One promising line of inquiry concerns the influence that political leaders exert on collective emotional resilience, which is understood as a community's capacity to adapt and maintain emotional stability in the face of adversity (Walker et al. 2004; Hollnagel, Woods, and Leveson 2006; Garcia and Rimé 2019). These studies assert that collective emotional resilience is vital to the preservation of social cohesion and democratic stability (Aldrich 2012; Sousa et al. 2013; Teo, Lee, and Lim 2017; Sanfuentes, Valenzuela, and Castillo 2021). Political leaders, through rhetorical and discursive strategies, play a pivotal role in constructing the emotional narratives that support this resilience (Laclau 2005; Fairhurst 2011; Wetherell 2012; Yorke 2020; Zubrzycka-Czarnecka 2024).

The study of political discourse is essential because it links culture, language, and social organization to emotional experiences. Language is not merely a tool for expressing emotions but also a force that actively contributes to their production and transformation (Illouz, Gilon, and Shachak 2014). The extant literature emphasizes the positive aspects of collective emotional resilience such as its capacity to foster hope, trust, and a shared sense of purpose (e.g., Meneghel, Salanova, and Martínez 2014; Zubrzycka-Czarnecka 2024), while ignoring how emotional resilience can also be discursively constructed in ways that marginalize and delegitimize dissenting groups by portraying them as threats to societal stability and emotional well-being. We narrow this gap by examining how political leaders cast dissenters as emotional deviants and subject them to emotional framing.

We employ a theoretical framework that conceptualizes emotional framing as a political strategy and utilize Fairclough's (2003; 2013) critical discourse analysis (CDA) as our methodological approach as we investigate the interplay between discursive political strategies and collective emotional resilience as two political flashpoints ignited in the United

States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK) in 2024. Our selection of these cases was motivated by an intriguing and somewhat unexpected observation: Leaders in both countries drew on emotional framing as a tool of governance, albeit within distinct rhetorical contexts defined by their roles, audiences, and immediate challenges. We identify the specific mechanisms of emotional framing deployed in political discourse, irrespective of situational variation. Although we focus on how political leaders use emotional language, we do not attempt to assess the characteristics or perspectives of protest groups except for the narrow purpose of establishing the study's background context. We begin by presenting the theoretical foundation of our research, then move to the study's context, methodology, empirical findings, and discussion.

While we analyze how leaders strategically deploy emotion-laden rhetoric, we do not in any way attempt to justify or legitimize any form of hate speech, antisemitism, incitement to violence, or dehumanizing rhetoric, regardless of its origin. Neither do we attempt to validate the actions or arguments of any political leader or protest group. In keeping with the ethical standards of social research and academic discourse, we categorically condemn all expressions of antisemitism, racism, and ideological extremism that have emerged either within or alongside protest movements. The presence of such rhetoric within broader dissent poses a serious threat to democratic values and undermines legitimate struggles for justice and human rights. The sole purpose of our work is to understand how political leadership navigates these emotionally charged and morally complex situations, not to diminish the seriousness of the aforementioned concerns or their ethical implications.

Theoretical Framework

Our work contributes to the growing literature in political sociology and the sociology of emotions, which emphasizes that emotions are not private states but socially constructed, culturally embedded, and politically consequential phenomena (Berezin 2002; Illouz 2007; Demertzis 2020). Following Stets and Turner (2006), we adopt a cultural theory of emotions, which stresses that emotions are shaped by social norms, institutional arrangements, and political discourses rather than by universal psychological mechanisms. This perspective allows us to see emotional life as contingent on cultural contexts and open to political manipulation. In particular, we underscore how political leaders intervene in collective emotional life by privileging feelings that promote social cohesion (unity, resilience, and trust), while devaluing those that tend to disrupt it (anger, grief, and indignation) (Jasper 2011; Flam and Kleres 2015).

Within this framework, rhetoric is understood as the public use of language by political leaders to shape emotions and social norms. Rhetoric is more than just an ornamental style; it is a performative act that redefines situations through word choice, moral and emotional figures, and the way leaders simultaneously address multiple audiences (Charland 1987). Political rhetoric thus operates as a mechanism of emotional governance, shaping which emotional expressions are deemed appropriate, legitimate, or pathological in the public sphere.

The concept of discourse, which resembles rhetoric, broadly refers to the system of meanings, narratives, and cultural norms within which leaders' statements are embedded. Consistent with Fairclough

(2003; 2013), we understand discourse to be a communicative practice that does not simply reflect reality but actively constructs it. Political discourse is not reducible to a single speech but constitutes a repertoire of interpretive strategies that draw on established values and culturally available emotional frames. Discourses about dissent, violence, and resilience determine which groups are entitled to sympathy and which are stigmatized as irrational or dangerous (van Dijk 2011; Wodak 2015).

In what follows, we use the term "strategy" to refer to the deliberate and recurrent ways in which leaders deploy rhetorical and discursive practices to achieve political objectives, particularly in moments of crisis. Strategy designates how leaders portray opponents as emotional deviants to isolate them from public debate and strengthen in-group cohesion. When employed as a strategic practice, emotional framing reinforces social solidarity and simultaneously delegitimizes alternative interpretations of crisis events (Snow and Benford 1988; Benford and Snow 2000).

Central to this perspective is emotion management, a concept elaborated by Hochschild (1979; 1983), who defines it as attempts to change the quality or intensity of feelings in accordance with cultural "feeling rules." In political life, emotion management alludes to practices that leaders use to prescribe the boundaries of "appropriate" and "inappropriate" emotions in the public sphere. Leaders practicing emotion management strategically deploy both explicit statements (e.g., condemning hate) and implicit signals (e.g., praising the courage of certain groups). Within this process, feeling rules serve as normative instructions that guide audiences toward sanctioned emotions and away from proscribed ones. Leaders enforce these rules through rhetorical strategies that involve both surface acting—controlled performative outward expressions of emotion—and deep acting, which involves attempts to genuinely experience and project emotions to signal authentic moral alignment.

Another mechanism is othering, the rhetorical process through which certain groups are depicted as moral, emotional, or social outsiders. Othering stabilizes the political community by constructing boundaries of belonging and exclusion (Laclau 2005). In this way, opponents are not only politically delegitimized but also discursively positioned as emotional outsiders. When leaders employ othering, they categorize groups as emotional deviants whose affective expressions fall outside dominant cultural expectations. Protesters who express anger, indignation, or despair may thus be labeled "radical," or "extreme," which stigmatizes their emotions as illegitimate and strengthens solidarity among the majority (Thoits 1985; Ahmed 2004). This discursive labeling simultaneously discredits dissenters and consolidates the authority of leaders by affirming their role as custodians of emotional order.

Finally, scholars sometimes define framing as "the process of culling a few elements of perceived reality and assembling a narrative that highlights connections among them to promote a particular interpretation" (Entman 2007:164). Because political events are open to alternative interpretations, frames naturally play a role in political discourse by signaling "how politics should be thought about" and by "encouraging citizens to understand events and issues in particular ways" (Kinder 2007:156). Although the framing literature is voluminous and longstanding, some scholars have lamented its conceptual ambiguity and the confusion that follows when the same label is attached to different phenomena (Druckman

2004; Mintz, Valentino, and Wayne 2021). Unlike the equivalency framing associated with Kahneman and Tversky's (1979) prospect theory, our usage of "framing" more closely resembles the value or issue framing common in the communications literature—"emphasizing a subset of potentially relevant considerations, a speaker leads individuals to focus on these considerations when constructing their opinions" (Druckman 2004:672). But even so, the fit is less than ideal. Although the aforementioned conceptual definition appreciates how messages can advance specific interpretations through emphasis, it fails to appreciate the distinct nature of emotion-laden rhetoric, which often couches the object of the communication in moral terms, which may well impact the magnitude and duration of the framing effect. Clifford (2019), for instance, found that the effects of a single exposure to moralistic frames produced durable changes in how people thought about political issues, persisting for at least two weeks. Furthermore, much of the literature that employs the aforementioned definition is rooted in cognitive psychology, which is at odds with the cultural theory of emotions that we leverage here. Therefore, we advance a new concept that is a better fit with our theoretical framework, which we call "discursive emotional framing." We define this type of framing as a strategic, rhetorically enacted, language-based selection that amplifies moral-affective meanings through which leaders prescribe "feeling rules," dichotomize acceptable and deviant emotions, and position opponents as emotional outsiders to organize public sentiment and consolidate collective emotional resilience. Unlike visual, institutional, and purely cognitive forms of framing, it operates primarily through moralized affect (e.g., hope/unity/resilience versus fear/anger/hate) that not only encourages audiences how to think about events but also how to feel and how to judge others' feelings, thereby shaping the magnitude and durability of downstream effects on cohesion and dissent.

Although frames can be impactful, their effects are moderated and conditioned by a variety of factors. A vast body of literature transcending several cognate fields, thoroughly discussed by Ladd (2010), indicates that people are more inclined to rely upon information from sources they perceive as credible, knowledgeable, and like-minded. Framing effects are, therefore, more likely to manifest when the audience perceives the message's source to be trustworthy or ideologically congruent (Druckman 2001; Hartman and Weber 2009). As such, the influence that a given frame can exert is contingent on people's pre-existing attitudes and opinions, as people have a greater tendency to resist frames that are incompatible with their worldview. Frames also compete with each other, so that when multiple frames are simultaneously present within the political environment, the impact of a given frame can be diminished (Druckman 2004), and strong frames tend to prevail over their weaker competitors (Chong and Druckman 2007). Similarly, some studies show that the politically sophisticated are more resistant to framing, presumably because they have been inoculated against the argument at hand, are less moved by novel information, and possess cognitive resources that allow them to refute counter-attitudinal messages (e.g., Nelson, Oxley, and Clawson 1997:227). And although the matter is far from settled, some scholars have either argued or demonstrated that framing effects are fugacious (for a thorough discussion, see Baden and Lecheler 2012). Finally, and more crucially, discursive emotional framing does not necessarily reshape how dissenters themselves feel; rather, it influences how the broader public perceives dissenters and their af-

fective claims, organizing the "emotional common sense" of a community.

Our theoretical framework assumes that emotional framing operates through three primary discursive elements: (1) delegitimizing dissent, (2) establishing emotional cohesion, and (3) defining the "other." First, by framing dissenters as emotional deviants, leaders diminish their credibility and curtail their ability to influence public discourse. Dissenters are often depicted as "overly emotional," "irrational," or "ideologically extreme" to delegitimize their grievances and diminish their impact on political narratives. This marginalization of dissenting voices stabilizes emotional dynamics within the majority and encourages emotional control and alignment within the dominant group. Second, leaders promote emotions like hope, trust, and resilience while discouraging negative emotions such as fear, anger, or despair. This creates an emotional climate conducive to the community's emotional resilience, solidarity, and sense of purpose during times of crisis. Such regulation of emotions aligns public sentiment with the leadership's policy goals and reinforces the perception that these objectives are valid (Hochschild 1983; Lively 2024). Third, by constructing dissenters as the emotional "other," leaders demarcate the boundary between the in-group and the out-group, which reinforces social cohesion and emotional resilience within the majority while simultaneously isolating and discrediting the opposition. This process highlights how the creation of an "other" enables political communities to consolidate internal unity and stifle dissent by defining themselves against perceived threats. These political strategies underscore how collective emotional resilience is discursively constructed as a form of governance. While resilience is often characterized positively in the literature (because it fosters hope, trust, and unity), our framework exposes its paradoxical nature by allowing us to demonstrate that it can also be used to exclude, delegitimize, and reinforce existing power hierarchies. These dynamics raise two significant ethical concerns: (1) Emotional labor is thought to induce alienation and burnout (Hochschild 1983), and (2) The imposition of emotional conformity restricts authentic expression. These insights emphasize the need for a critical evaluation of the balance between emotion management as a tool for social cohesion and its potential to perpetuate existing power hierarchies. The ethical dilemmas inherent in emotional framing highlight the risk of prioritizing collective emotional resilience without carefully considering its impact on inclusivity, authenticity, and equity within democratic societies.

Study Context

In what follows, we analyze the context that gave rise to discursive strategies that political leaders in the US and the UK used to frame emotional deviants and to foster collective emotional resilience.

Johnson's Case

Our first case study focuses on the US, where House Speaker Mike Johnson publicly responded to a wave of student protests that enveloped Columbia University in April 2024. The unrest began on April 17, 2024, while this Ivy League school's president, Nemat "Minouche" Shafik, was in Washington, DC, to testify before Congress about rising campus antisemitism. On that same day, a group of student demonstrators erected an unauthorized encampment on the university's Morningside Heights campus in Manhattan. Called the "Gaza Solidarity Encampment," the site rapidly expanded to over

100 tents (Goldstein and Zuloaga 2024; Sentner and Touré 2024). This protest emerged in direct response to the ongoing Israel-Hamas war that erupted on October 7, 2023, when Hamas launched a deadly surprise attack, killing approximately 1,200 Israelis and taking 250 hostages (Sentner and Mitovich 2024). Israel's military response, widely reported to have resulted in over 34,000 Palestinian deaths and the mass displacement of Gaza's population (McDonough 2024), became the central concern of the encampment. While the International Court of Justice in The Hague provisionally ruled that Israel's response was excessive, it did not classify it as genocide (Huddleston 2024).

Although the protest appeared grassroots in nature, it was in fact highly organized. Demonstrators relied on decentralized leadership but coordinated via social media and through strategic consultations with veteran activists from groups such as the Black Panthers and National Students for Justice in Palestine (Hobbs, Bauerlein, and Frosch 2024). Journalistic accounts attach special significance to the events at Columbia because they are perceived as the catalyst for a wave of similar protests that impacted more than 100 university campuses across North America, Europe, and the Middle East (Craig, Natanson, and Morgan 2024; El Chamaa and Suliman 2024).

On April 18, President Shafik authorized the New York Police Department (NYPD) to clear the encampment, citing a "clear and present danger to the substantial functioning of the University" (McDonough 2024). The police arrested 108 individuals, primarily for trespassing. Notably, Police Chief John Chell reported that those arrested "were peaceful, offered no resistance whatsoever, and were saying what they wanted to say in a peaceful manner" (Stahl, Huddleston, and Vance 2024). Nevertheless, the university's response was swiftly criticized, prompting Columbia to reverse course the next day, stating that reintroducing the NYPD "would further inflame what is happening on campus" (Blinder 2024).

Despite the temporary withdrawal of law enforcement, tensions escalated. Demonstrations outside the campus gates became more intense and involved individuals unaffiliated with the university, which by then had been closed to the public (Polgreen and Peterson 2024). Negotiations between university administrators and student organizers soon broke down, and students resumed occupying adjacent campus lawns. On April 30, a group of masked and helmeted protesters seized control of Hamilton Hall, disabling security cameras, breaking windows, and barricading entrances (Davis et al. 2024). Columbia employee Mariano Torres, trapped inside the building during the occupation, reported being "terrified" and filed an accident report after a physical altercation with one of the protestors (Otterman 2024a). NYPD riot police regained control of the building within 24 hours, arresting 44 individuals—31 of whom were students or employees at either Columbia or one of its affiliated colleges (Wu 2024). The university issued a "shelter-in-place" order (Ailworth, Bhattacharya, and Kamp 2024), transitioned to remote learning (Blinder 2024), and canceled its primary graduation in favor of 19 smaller, off-campus ceremonies (Otterman 2024b).

The encampment and subsequent escalation generated polarized responses. Protesters framed their actions as morally necessary civil disobedience designed to pressure Columbia to divest from companies with ties to Israel. Many invoked historical struggles, comparing their protest to past movements at Columbia against the Vietnam War and apartheid in

South Africa. For instance, one student told journalists that "Conscientious people everywhere should stand up against the murder of innocents by Israel" (Ailworth, Choiniere, and Pisani 2024), while others chanted "'68 and '85! History is on our side!" (Wu, Morgan, and Meckler 2024). The protesters and their supporters described the crackdown on the encampment as disproportionate and repressive. In May 2024, Columbia's Arts and Sciences faculty passed a vote of "no confidence" in Shafik, accusing her of violating students' rights to free speech and assembly (Blinder and Otterman 2024).

In contrast, many Jewish students expressed deep concern, stating they felt unsafe and targeted by antisemitic rhetoric. Alleged chants and statements such as "We don't want no Zionists here" (Blinder 2024), "The 7th of October is going to be every day for you" (Garrity 2024), and "There is only one solution: intifada revolution" (Polgreen and Peterson 2024) were viewed by some as threats of violence. Phrases like "from the river to the sea" and "intifada" were interpreted by many Jewish students as calls for the destruction of Israel, drawing comparisons to the language of the Holocaust (Meckler and Boorstein 2024; Polgreen and Peterson 2024). A particularly disturbing incident involved protest leader Khymani James, who was recorded saying "Zionists don't deserve to live" (Ailworth, Choiniere, and Pisani 2024; Edmonds, Betts, and Hartocollis 2024). In response to these developments, Orthodox Rabbi Elie Buechler advised Jewish students to return home, stating that neither Columbia nor the NYPD could ensure their safety (Blinder 2024). The Anti-Defamation League concluded that Jewish students had been "explicitly threatened, increasingly menaced and physically attacked" (Craig et al. 2024), echoing concerns about a broader national increase in antisemitic incidents (Mangan and Hicks 2024).

Protesters rejected accusations of antisemitism, distinguishing their anti-Zionist stance from anti-Jewish hatred. Jewish activists were visibly present within the encampment, organizing Seder dinners and Shabbat gatherings (Ailworth, Choiniere, and Pisani 2024). Many of these participants expressed that their activism was rooted in Jewish ethical traditions and a belief in justice for Palestinians (Ferré-Sadurní, Edmonds, and Cruz 2024). However, critics argued that the line between anti-Zionism and antisemitism had been blurred, and that Zionism was being used as a stand-in for Jewish identity itself (Rosman 2024). In some cases, Jewish students reported being physically ousted from the encampment by protestors forming human chains (Rosman 2024).

President Shafik resigned on August 14, citing the toll on her family and institutional strain. In her farewell message, she wrote: "It has been difficult to overcome divergent views across our community" (Natanson, Svrluga, and Seth 2024). Ironically, her resignation was welcomed by both sides of the political divide. Republican leaders, including Mike Johnson, and some Jewish Democrats saw her departure as justified, criticizing her restrained response. Conversely, defenders of academic freedom viewed her resignation as vindication for student rights, citing administrative overreach (Blinder and Otterman 2024; Sentner and Mitovich 2024). For many student activists, her resignation was proof that sustained protest could achieve real outcomes (Natanson et al. 2024).

Starmer's Case

Our second case examines UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer's response to violent protests that followed a tragic mass stabbing that occurred on July 29, 2024, at the Hart Space dance studio in Southport,

Merseyside, England. At the time of the incident, children ages 6 to 11 were attending a Taylor Swift-themed yoga and dance workshop when the perpetrator, 17-year-old Axel Rudakubana, attacked them with a kitchen knife. Three young girls—Bebe King (6), Elsie Dot Stancombe (7), and Alice da Silva Aguiar (9)—were killed. Ten others, including eight children and two adults, were injured, some critically (Waddington, Lazaro, and Humphries 2025).

On July 30, a large vigil was held in Southport, while misinformation quickly spread online that falsely claimed the attacker was a Muslim migrant. This disinformation fueled violent protests near the Southport Mosque, where rioters clashed with police (Paul 2024). On July 31, local residents began repairing the damage caused by the unrest, and efforts were launched to counter the spread of hate and misinformation. By August 1, authorities had charged Rudakubana with multiple counts of murder and attempted murder and revealed his identity to the public. By August 2, the unrest had escalated and spread to London, Hartlepool, and Manchester. Despite the chaos, the Southport community responded with resilience in the days that followed by organizing memorials and prioritizing healing and unity (Paul 2024).

The attack deeply shocked the nation and triggered a wave of public grief and outrage. It also exposed significant shortcomings in early intervention efforts, as Rudakubana had reportedly exhibited troubling behavior and yet had been repeatedly denied admission to the Prevent program. The widespread misinformation that followed not only exacerbated tensions but also exposed how social media can amplify fear and inflame public sentiment. In the end, the social unrest at the heart of this episode reflected broader public frustrations over the government's perceived failure to manage threats and safeguard communities (Lawless 2024).

In the wake of the tragedy, Prime Minister Keir Starmer faced immense pressure to address the nation and decisively respond to the escalating crisis. His initial public statement, delivered from 10 Downing Street, expressed deep sorrow for the victims and their families, while urging calm and unity in the face of tragedy (Prime Minister's Office 2024). However, Starmer's leadership was tested as violence intensified and unsettling reports emerged that violent reprisals had been directed against Muslims. In the days that followed, his approach to crisis management evolved as he attempted to balance the need for swift action with the need for thoughtful, proportionate responses.

Starmer ultimately convened an emergency meeting of the Cabinet Office Briefing Room (COBRA) committee to coordinate the government's immediate response to the crisis (Burge 2024). While this move was widely viewed as necessary, critics argued that it came too late to prevent the initial outbreak of violence. As the unrest spread, Starmer authorized the deployment of additional police and riot control units to affected areas. This decision was met with mixed reactions. Some applauded the government's efforts to restore order, while others warned that a heavier police presence would only heighten tensions. Starmer defended his decision, asserting that protecting lives and property was paramount, while also emphasizing the necessity of balanced and restrained policing.

Beyond short-term law enforcement measures, Starmer pledged to overhaul counterterrorism laws to better address non-ideological acts of violence. He emphasized the need to respond to "acts of ex-

treme violence perpetrated by loners, misfits, young men in their bedroom, accessing all manner of material online, desperate for notoriety, sometimes inspired by traditional terrorist groups, but fixated on that extreme violence, seemingly for its own sake" (Booth et al. 2025). His proposal was, therefore, designed to overhaul outdated laws that were not designed to counter contemporary forms of political violence and extremism. Furthermore, recognizing the social dimensions of the crisis, Starmer initiated a series of pre-announced reforms intended to promote equality and community integration. These included increased funding for youth services, a review of hate crime legislation, and the formation of a cross-party commission to investigate issues of integration and social cohesion (Progressive Britain 2024). Although these reforms were generally welcomed, critics claimed they were inadequate and failed to remedy the immediate crisis. As the situation deteriorated, both Starmer's political allies and opponents pressured him to take more decisive action. In response, he invoked emergency powers that allowed the government to temporarily impose curfews and restrict public gatherings. This decision was roundly criticized by civil libertarians and some members of his own party, who viewed it as an overreach of executive authority that risked further alienating marginalized communities (Elliott, Heffer, and Tapsfield 2024).

Starmer's communication strategy during the crisis was also subject to intense public scrutiny. His initial calls for unity and calm were perceived by some as "tone-deaf" and "out-of-step" with the gravity of the situation. As conditions worsened, he assumed a more aggressive posture, unequivocally condemning the violence and pledging a more immediate response. Yet again, many perceived his actions to be inadequate and untimely (Maclellan and Demony 2024). Moreover, critics castigated him for the way he managed the media. Although Starmer made frequent appearances on national television, some accused him of evading difficult questions and failing to meaningfully engage with the communities most affected by the violence. While his decision to meet privately with local religious leaders and community organizers was seen by some as constructive, others argued that such meetings should have been more transparent and inclusive.

Competing frames emerged across the political spectrum and civil society. Right-wing commentators, who framed the unrest as evidence of governmental weakness and the erosion of law and order, called for harsher policing and stricter immigration controls (Letters to the Editor 2024). In contrast, those on the Left emphasized the dangers of scapegoating minority communities, choosing instead to frame the crisis in terms of either failed social cohesion or the inept management of online disinformation on the part of the state ("A Rediscovery of Who We Are" 2024). Moreover, civil libertarians cast the imposition of curfews as a dangerous precedent that risked normalizing authoritarian practices (Halliday and Vinter 2024). Leaders in the Muslim community framed the violence as a form of collective punishment rooted in prejudice, emphasizing their communities' vulnerability and demanding stronger protections against hate crimes (Mason et al. 2024). Meanwhile, grassroots activists and local residents framed their own initiatives—vigils, community cleanups, interfaith gatherings—as alternative narratives of resilience that countered both state-centric and extremist frames of the crisis (Dearden 2024). Lastly, academics challenged the dominant narrative that the riots were primarily the work of right-wing extremists. Whiteley (2024) argues that such accounts oversimplified the crisis

and obscured its deeper social roots. Although extremist actors did in fact participate, his analysis of census and voting data showed that deprivation and poverty in "left-behind" communities were more strongly correlated with the incidence of violence. This interpretation parallels those offered in the wake of the 2011 London riots and the 1986 Bristol riots, where heavy-handed policing and socioeconomic marginalization were thought to perpetuate the violence. According to this view, the Southport unrest was not only attributable to the inability to counter online disinformation, but also resentment fueled by long-standing structural inequalities and relative deprivation (Whiteley 2024).

In the aftermath of the crisis, public assessments of Starmer's leadership were mixed. Some praised his ability to eventually grasp the complexity of the situation and to productively respond with a comprehensive, multifaceted strategy. Others, however, criticized his initial hesitation and insinuated that it was this indecisiveness that exacerbated the unrest (Maclellan and Demony 2024). The long-term consequences of his leadership during this period have continued to shape public opinion and influence debates over national security, social cohesion, and crisis management in the UK.

Situational Embedding of the Speeches

Although both leaders deploy emotional framing, they do so from markedly different rhetorical situations. As the Speaker of the US House of Representatives, Johnson speaks as a partisan legislative leader who lacks direct operational authority over campus security, which fell squarely within the jurisdiction of a private university and the local police. His speech is, therefore, designed to assert moral leadership and redefine a campus conflict as a national moral drama within the constraints of federalism and First Amendment norms. The intended function of his speech was to condemn his political opponents and draw boundaries by using emotion-laden rhetoric to escalate the tensions and emphasize the gravity of the threat.

Starmer, by contrast, speaks as Prime Minister—the chief executive expected to directly manage a fast-moving public crisis with real-time implications for public safety. He too faces institutional constraints, several of which parallel those faced by Johnson, such as the operational independence of local police and civil liberties concerns. However, unlike Johnson, he appears to face more intense pressures from within his own party. The intended function of his speech is de-escalation with assurance of capacity: restore order, signal protection of vulnerable groups, and justify proportionate state action. Accordingly, Starmer's message is more procedural and policy-laden (promises of coordination and legal tools), whereas Johnson's is more moralizing and adversarial, leaning on sharp binaries and symbolic censure. In short, who speaks, to whom, and under which constraints condition not only the targets of deviance framing but also the expected uptake (symbolic sanction versus operational reassurance).

Press coverage across both cases points to divided reactions. In the US, some commentators suggested that Johnson's remarks inflamed tensions, while others praised his defense of Jewish students. In the UK, some segments of the public found Starmer's appeals to be reassuring, while others criticized them for being inadequate or even provocative (Allen and Ross 2024; "How Effectively Has Keir Starmer Handled the Riots? Join The Independent Debate" 2024; "Keir Starmer Condemns 'Far Right Thuggery' as Unrest Flares across Britain" 2024).

Data and Methods of Analysis

In this research, we analyze how Mike Johnson (the 56th Speaker of the US House of Representatives, Republican Party) and Keir Starmer (Prime Minister of the UK, Labor Party) strategically use rhetoric to frame emotional deviants to strengthen collective emotional resilience. To do so, we apply Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis (CDA) framework within a constructivist ontology. Like Bierre and Howden-Chapman (2022:6), we assume that language and socially constructed knowledge shape our understanding of the material world and that human behavior can be understood through discourse and rhetoric. Fairclough's CDA recognizes the discursive (semiotic or linguistic) nature of policy and policy-making and aligns with anti-positivist and interpretative approaches to policy studies (Fairclough 2013:177). CDA functions as both a theory and methodology for analyzing discourse, which is seen as an integral part or "moment" of the political, economic, and social contexts and dialectically related to other elements (Fairclough 2013:178). Therefore, CDA is appropriate for exploring how the aforementioned leaders discursively managed collective emotional resilience that was compromised by divisive socio-political crises triggered by opposition groups. Specifically, we investigate: How was discursive emotional framing of emotional deviants employed as a political strategy for strengthening collective emotional resilience in the US and the UK during the political crises of 2024?

Our analysis is based on the transcripts of three speeches: (1) Mike Johnson's April 24, 2024 speech delivered at Columbia University amidst the pro-Palestinian protests (Johnson 2024), and (2) Keir Starmer's statements from Downing Street delivered on August 1 and 4, 2024 (Starmer 2024a; Starmer 2024b). We selected these speeches through purposive sampling. Our selection is justified by the extant literature and our study's theoretical framework, with the criteria for inclusion being that these were the public statements made by political leaders during significant political crises driven by social groups with opposing political views. These crises profoundly affected the collective emotional resilience of American and British societies, and both leaders addressed this in their speeches. Our data analysis and interpretation follow abductive reasoning.

Our examination proceeds according to Fairclough's three-dimensional framework: (1) textual analysis, (2) discursive practice, and (3) sociocultural practice (Fairclough 2003). First, the textual dimension involves a linguistic analysis of selected speeches and public statements by Mike Johnson and Keir Starmer that concentrates on lexical choices, modality, and rhetorical devices. This allowed us to identify how these leaders constructed and deployed emotional categories. Second, the discursive practice dimension focuses on the production, distribution, and consumption of these texts. Here, we paid particular attention to how Johnson and Starmer framed emotional dissent and used surface and deep emotional labor to regulate public affect, drawing on Hochschild's (1983) concepts as part of our analytical lens. Third, the sociocultural practice dimension situates the discourses within broader ideological and institutional structures. We, therefore, explored how these rhetorical strategies reflected and reinforced dominant social norms, national narratives, and hegemonic ideologies. In this dimension, we drew on Laclau's (2005) theory of antagonistic identity formation and Demertzis' (2020) understanding of emotion as a tool of governance, highlighting how the emotional framing of dissenters serves as a mechanism of political control.

We analyzed the texts in three iterative rounds, employing "a flexible deductive approach" (Fletcher 2016:186). We derived categories and subcategories from our theoretical framework and introduced additional codes throughout the process to ensure comprehensive and accurate coding of all text segments. Initially, we analyzed the transcripts to identify and explain the theory-based strategies for strengthening collective emotional resilience through the emotional framing of emotional deviants (i.e., casting political opponents as emotional deviants; establishing an emotional framework; and creating "others" to foster solidarity), framed as discursive (rhetorical) practices. Next, we focused on the selected elements and techniques used in discourse to understand how meaning, power, and persuasion are constructed (Table 1).

Table 1. Selected elements and techniques used in discourse to understand how meaning, power, and persuasion are constructed

Code	Description
Active and passive styles	Sentences that are passive usually entail the author placing the object in the subject position. In academic and policy contexts, authors frequently deploy passive writing styles to convey a sense of objectivity.
Ambiguity	Vague or imprecise terms are often used deliberately to convey multiple meanings. In policy writing, for example, it is quite common for the word "community" to be used. The term has no precise meaning, so it is difficult to take exception to its deployment.
Audience	The audience of any text can differ quite markedly. In academic texts, for example, there is an internal audience of other academics and an external audience made up of students and general readers. Very often, the producer of texts will target particular audiences.
Metaphor	The figurative use of terms. Often used by authors to make a point by offering an example, which, while not strictly relevant, nevertheless helps make a point. An example of the use of metaphor is the sentence: "The government minister has been forced to make a U-turn."
Modality	A term signifying the author's or speaker's level of commitment to the claim being made within a sentence. Usually, claims are made in terms of obligation or truth. An obligation modality is a statement about what ought to be. An example of obligation modality is offered in the following sentence: "It is important in politics to have a clear agenda and not get sidetracked by events." A truth modality is a statement about what is (which is ideologically informed rather than objective). An example of a truth modality claim is as follows: "Australia's education system is in crisis."
Emotion management	In the coding process, particular attention should be paid to the following analytical dimensions: the general idea, the application of feeling and display rules, the application of surface and deep acting, the use of emotional narratives to enforce power dynamics, and the social construction of emotional expectations.

Source: Jacobs 2019 and own work (emotion management).

We also incorporated elements of Aristotle's rhetoric theory (Table 2) to help identify key discursive strategies employed by the political leaders.

Table 2. Aristotle's modes and proofs

Code	Description
Ethos (Credibility)	Ethos refers to the credibility, character, and authority of the speaker or writer. It involves convincing the audience that the communicator is trustworthy and knowledgeable by ethical appeal, character, reputation, expertise, and moral integrity. Speakers and writers establish ethos by demonstrating their knowledge of the subject, building a rapport with the audience, and showcasing their ethical principles. Examples include citing qualifications, highlighting experience, and presenting oneself as fair and respectful.
Logos (Logical Appeal)	Logos refers to the use of logic, reason, and evidence to persuade the audience. It involves constructing a coherent and logical argument that supports the communicator's claims with facts, statistics, logical reasoning, evidence, and rational arguments. Speakers and writers use logos by presenting clear, logical arguments supported by data, facts, and well-reasoned analysis. This includes organizing points logically, using syllogisms, and referencing credible sources.
Pathos (Emotional Appeal)	Pathos involves appealing to the audience's emotions to elicit feelings that support the speaker's or writer's argument through emotional engagement, empathy, and connection. Communicators use pathos by telling stories, using vivid language, and addressing the audience's hopes, fears, values, and desires. Techniques include using metaphors, anecdotes, and passionate delivery to elicit an emotional response.

Source: Own work based on Richardson 2007:156-177.

Our comparative strategy relied on the logic of controlled comparison. Rather than attempting to explain outcomes through strict causal inference, our goal was to identify recurring mechanisms of emotional framing across two different rhetorical situations. The cases were selected because they provide variation in key contextual dimensions—political role (legislative leader versus chief executive), type of crisis (campus protest versus public-order emergency), and immediate institutional constraints—while displaying a shared phenomenon: the use of emotion management to frame dissenters as emotional deviants. The comparative logic was, therefore, heuristic rather than strictly causal. By holding the dependent phenomenon constant across contrasting contexts, we sought to illuminate the specific mechanisms through which emotional framing operates in political discourse. The analysis and interpretation were conducted through the lens of our theoretical framework, which allowed us to interpret similarities as evidence of transferable discursive practices and differences as products of situational embedding. Although we divided responsibility for drafting different sections of the paper, all parts were collectively reviewed and refined until consensus was reached.

While CDA has its limitations, such as susceptibility to partiality and selection bias due to its focus on small text samples, it is particularly well-suited for our study, and our use of it is entirely defensible. The selected speeches by Johnson and Starmer were crucial cases because they involved high-profile political interventions in response to violent protests and because they were delivered by leaders speaking in their institutional capacities. Another critique of CDA is that it tends to overemphasize language at the expense of material realities. However, our approach acknowledges that while the material and discursive realms are distinct, access to material reality is mediated through discourse. Lastly, CDA is sometimes criticized because it emphasizes individual agency at the expense of structural factors. To mitigate this limitation, we situated individual ac-

tions within a broader social and political context. On balance, the advantages of the CDA outweighed its limitations in the context of our work, and, therefore, it was a viable method for examining how political leaders employ discursive strategies to shape collective emotional resilience and marginalize and delegitimize dissenting voices.

Finally, we used generative AI (ChatGPT-5) in two ways. First, we used it for language support and mechanical tasks such as paraphrasing, reformulating sentences, improving clarity and readability, harmonizing terminology, and minor reference reformatting. Second, we used it as a scholarly assistant in an advisory capacity, consulting with it on the coherence of successive stages of the project. In all cases, AI outputs were reviewed, verified, and edited by the authors. The overall logic and intellectual contribution of the article—including the identification of the research problem, selection of theoretical frameworks and methods, choice of sources, and the design of the analytic and interpretive strategy, as well as revisions made in response to peer review—are entirely the result of the authors' multi-stage work. AI was used with responsible-use guidelines (accuracy checks, source verification, privacy, and IP safeguards), and the authors retain full responsibility for the content.

How Was Discursive Emotional Framing of Emotional Deviants Employed as a Political Strategy for Strengthening Collective Emotional Resilience in the US and the UK During the Political Crises of 2024?

Our analysis shows that leaders in both the US and UK carefully considered and deliberately deployed discourse and rhetoric to frame emotional deviants as a means of accomplishing their political objectives. Both Johnson and Starmer framed their opponents as emotional deviants, created clear emotional frameworks, and created "others" to isolate dissenters. In what follows, we discuss these discursive practices in greater detail.

Framing Political Opponents as Emotional Deviants

Johnson addresses multiple audiences (students, Congress, and the broader American public) and seeks to ensure that his message resonates with these different groups. He immediately asserts his authority: "As Speaker of the House, I am committing today that the Congress will not be silent as Jewish students are expected to run for their lives and stay home from their classes hiding in fear" (Johnson 2024). This statement engenders trust in his leadership and enhances his moral integrity. It also creates a power dynamic that legitimizes his position and delegitimizes dissenting voices by insinuating that the pro-Palestinian demonstrators are radical, extreme, and associated with terrorism. To this end, he claims that protesters have "chanted in support of terrorists" and describes their actions as "detestable" and "lawless" (Johnson 2024). Moreover, he accuses protesters of shouting racial epithets and mocking Jewish students, behaviors portrayed as un-American, socially unacceptable, and morally repugnant. By depicting protesters' expressions as emotional outbursts, Johnson delegitimizes their motives and discounts the validity of their grievances. This strategy can be read as a form of emotion management in Hochschild's sense, as Johnson implicitly prescribes "feeling rules" for how Jewish students (courageous, resilient) and protesters (angry, irrational) ought to feel and display their emotions in public. This strategy reflects his rhetorical position. Because

he lacked operational authority over campus security, he instead relied upon symbolic escalation to transform a local protest into a national moral drama. Press commentary mirrored this duality. Some outlets praised his moral clarity in defending Jewish students, while others accused him of exacerbating polarization and exploiting the unrest for partisan gain (Allen and Ross 2024).

This interpretation is consistent with Demertzis' (2020) view that emotions function as tools of governance, helping explain how leaders leverage societal norms to marginalize dissenters by stoking collective outrage and building trust among their constituents. Johnson's invocation of shared moral outrage against antisemitism can be understood through Illouz and colleagues' (2014) argument that emotions are culturally constructed and strategically deployed. By associating protesters with Hamas, a terrorist organization, Johnson (2024) amplifies their perceived deviance: "If you are a protester on this campus and you are proud that you've been endorsed by Hamas, you are part of the problem." Such rhetoric is intended to reduce protesters' impact on public discourse by depicting them as fanatics. Johnson's (2024) description of protesters' ideologies as "radical and extreme" is deliberately vague and strategically advantageous because it invites audiences to associate them with a wide range of deplorable beliefs. Additionally, Johnson uses active voice to assign blame and emphasize accountability. For instance, he states: "Columbia's administrators have chosen to let the threats...overtake American principles" (Johnson 2024). Finally, he demonstrates surface acting by expressing measured condemnation and deep acting by engendering sympathy for Jewish students. Johnson's use of surface acting is visible in the restrained and clinical way he condemns the protesters, while his deep acting empathetically aligns with Jewish students' fear and vulnerability. Together, these strategies illustrate Hochschild's distinction between performative displays of indignation and inward attempts to inhabit emotions of solidarity. His vivid emotional narratives reinforce the protesters' moral deviance while setting normative expectations that reject antisemitism and demand inclusivity.

Similarly, Keir Starmer's speeches target multiple audiences, including law enforcement, marginalized communities, and the general public. Like Johnson, he too emphasizes inclusivity and collective resilience while discrediting violent actors. His speeches following the discord of 2024 exemplify the use of discursive emotional framing to shape public sentiment, marginalize opponents, and promote unity. By framing participants in the violence as emotional deviants, Starmer delegitimizes their actions and appeals to broader societal values of justice and cohesion. He consistently portrays far-right actors as emotional deviants, labeling them a "gang of thugs" (Starmer 2024a) engaged in "organized, violent thuggery" and "marauding gangs intent on law breaking. Or worse" (Starmer 2024b). This rhetoric delegitimizes dissent by characterizing these actors as irrational, criminal, and morally reprehensible. More specifically, he states: "It's not protest. It's not legitimate. It's crime... Violent disorder" (Starmer 2024a), stripping these actions of any political or social legitimacy. Like Johnson, Starmer also defines the boundaries of what emotions are acceptable during a public demonstration. Legitimate protest may involve anger or passion, but "crime" must only elicit condemnation and fear. This is a clear attempt to police the emotional boundaries of the public sphere, consistent with Hochschild's concept of emotion management. Starmer, speaking as Prime Minister, was directly responsible for crisis

management in the wake of violent riots, with expectations of reassurance, de-escalation, and coordination with police. Media reactions reflected this complexity. While many reports credited him with steady leadership and praised his unifying message, others found his remarks to be inadequate or overly procedural, arguing that they risked alienating certain communities ("How Effectively Has Keir Starmer Handled the Riots?..." 2024; "Keir Starmer Condemns…" 2024).

Starmer's rhetoric can be interpreted in light of Wahl-Jorgensen's (2019) analysis of the emotionality of political rhetoric, which emphasizes justice and cohesion while delegitimizing dissent as criminal behavior. Wahl-Jorgensen (2019) argues that emotions are mobilized in mediated public life to reinforce dominant narratives and marginalize opposing voices. Accordingly, Starmer isolates far-right groups from broader public discourse by using active language to assign agency to perpetrators (e.g., "These people are showing our country exactly who they are" [Starmer 2024a]) and to affirm governmental action (e.g., "We will establish a national capability...To tackle violent disorder" [Starmer 2024a]). Furthermore, he demonstrates surface acting through his controlled outrage and deep acting when he appeals to the broader moral imperatives of justice and inclusivity.

Establishing an Emotional Framework

The deliberate construction of emotional dichotomies is central to both leaders' rhetorical strategies. These dichotomies contrast positive emotions like hope, unity, and resilience with negative emotions such as fear, anger, and hatred. By attempting to regulate public emotions, both leaders seek to strengthen collective resilience while delegitimizing disruptive affective expressions. As our framework suggests, emotional frames interact with broader cultural repertoires, media logics, and counterpublics, which, as Papacharissi (2015) and Gould (2009) argue, may reinforce, resist, or reinterpret leaders' intended messages.

Johnson juxtaposes fear and anger (associated with the demonstrators) against resilience, hope, and unity (associated with the Jewish students). In reference to Jewish students, he states, "Their bravery is inspiring" (Johnson 2024), which elevates their moral standing and attaches value to their resilience. In sharp contrast, he insinuates that the demonstrators created a climate of "fear" and "intimidation," underscoring the emotional toll that opposition imposed upon the Jewish community. He also evokes strong emotions by describing the brutal acts of Hamas: "Israeli women and children were savagely raped and murdered, and infants were cooked in ovens" (Johnson 2024). This vivid imagery evokes a sense of urgency and encourages moral outrage, appealing to the audience's empathy and shared values. Johnson's (2024) call for order and the protection of Jewish students underscores a narrative of collective security and resilience: "We will punish those who have allowed this violence and bigotry to go unchecked." In Johnson's case, emotion management works by invoking dramatic images of Hamas atrocities, which impose a hierarchy of appropriate emotions: outrage and sympathy are mandated for Jewish victims, while fear and intimidation are deemed unacceptable reactions to campus protests. In the press, this framing was read both as a necessary defense of vulnerable students and as a dangerous escalation that could exacerbate the volatile situation on campus (Allen and Ross 2024). Johnson's statements are intended to restore trust and hope within the targeted com-

munity. Therefore, he strategically deploys emotions to shape public sentiment and regulate collective affect in keeping with Hochschild's concept of emotion management. However, as the literature we referenced earlier suggests, his ability to impose this framework is likely diminished by competing media framings and counter-narratives circulating at the time of his remarks.

Starmer's rhetoric can also be interpreted through Hochschild's concept of emotion management, as it reveals mechanisms designed to foster unity and trust by regulating collective affect. He establishes credibility by positioning himself as a defender of justice and inclusivity, thanking law enforcement, and vowing to hold perpetrators accountable. His direct rebuke of the far-right bolsters his moral authority. He contrasts disruptive emotions associated with far-right groups (fear, hate, division) with constructive ones such as trust, resilience, and unity. For example, he stresses: [We] "will not allow understandable fear… To curdle into division and hate in our communities" (Starmer 2024a). Starmer's framing likewise prescribes "appropriate" emotions. By stating that fear must not "curdle into division and hate," he distinguishes legitimate feelings (fear, anxiety) from illegitimate affective outcomes (hate, division). This is an explicit invocation of feeling rules that direct audiences to transform negative affect into resilience and solidarity. This clear dichotomy encourages resilience by uniting the public under the shared values of safety, justice, and cohesion. He reinforces these values by thanking police officers for "[standing] up to intimidation and violence" (Starmer 2024a) and reaffirming the government's commitment to public safety through actions like enhancing police capabilities. Formally thanking police officers is a form of surface acting (an outward expression of gratitude and respect), while his empathetic tone toward Muslim communities targeted during the riots exemplifies deep acting accomplished by morally aligning himself with the victims of the attacks. His appeals bolster Berezin's (2002) argument that political emotions help forge shared identities and sustain cohesion during crises. In Starmer's case, his rhetorical position as Prime Minister demanded not only moral framing but also procedural assurances. Press coverage highlighted this dual role: his mix of empathy for affected communities and promises of concrete tools (e.g., policing powers, facial recognition) reassured some audiences but was derided by others as either too cumbersome or inadequate given the magnitude of the crisis ("How Effectively Has Keir Starmer Handled the Riots?..." 2024). Logical appeals are also evident in his proposals to use facial recognition technology and criminal behavior orders, which project a pragmatic approach to maintaining order. At the same time, Starmer evokes empathy for victims and communities while channeling anger and disdain toward perpetrators. He uses vivid imagery (e.g., references to "attacks on Mosques" and "residents and staff in absolute fear" [Starmer 2024b]) to elicit emotional responses, while also relying upon inclusive terms like "right-minded people" (Starmer 2024b) to position dissenters outside the moral community.

Creating "Others" to Foster Solidarity

Both Johnson and Starmer construct clear "others" to serve as foils against which their respective communities define themselves, a practice consistent with Laclau's (2005) theoretical lens on the creation of antagonistic identities in political discourse. Yet, as our theoretical framework suggests, such constructions must be understood as attempts to hegemonize emotional and moral boundaries rather than as unilateral acts of definition. The "other" is discur-

sively produced in interaction with broader cultural repertoires, media narratives, and counter-discourses that may reinforce, resist, or destabilize leaders' intended framings (Gould 2009; Papacharissi 2015).

In Johnson's case, he engages in othering by juxtaposing the protesters against the shared American values of liberty, democracy, and religious tolerance. He also draws on historical and cultural symbols (including Winston Churchill and the American Revolution) to associate Jewish students with the ideals of democracy and resilience. In contrast, he accuses the protesters of debasing freedom of speech and the rule of law (e.g., "They have co-opted First Amendment arguments to protect genocide and to elevate the voices of antisemitism" [Johnson 2024]). Johnson enhances the urgency of his message by situating his speech within the broader context of antisemitism and national security concerns. By framing the protests as threats to American values and Jewish safety, he positions his intervention as a defense of democracy and moral integrity. The division that Johnson rhetorically constructs promotes solidarity among those who align with American democratic ideals while isolating and discrediting the protesters. Phrases like "the madness has to stop" and "we are better than this" create a unified call to action that links specific events to broader national values. Statements such as "this is dangerous" and "we cannot allow this to happen" employ strong truth modality, emphasizing urgency and necessity. Johnson (2024) also grounds his rhetoric in factual references, such as: "By some counts, as many as 200 universities have a similar form of protest right now." Likewise, Johnson strengthens his argument by linking these facts to broader implications for safety and American values. His portrayal of protesters as threats to American principles also mirrors broader mechanisms of emotional framing by insinuating that the protesters are morally and emotionally deviant. Johnson demonstrates emotion management through othering by repeatedly contrasting "American principles" and the protesters' alleged hatred. By doing so, he is essentially instructing the public to feel pride in democratic traditions and shame or indignation toward those who violate these traditions. Through surface and deep acting, he projects emotional sincerity, contrasting moral actors with radicals to reinforce cohesion. His narratives depict the dissenters as dangerous deviants who fail to uphold shared national values, constructing expectations of pride in these values and rejection of hate-driven behaviors. Press responses reflected this framing. Sympathetic commentators praised him for defending democratic values, while his critics insisted that his rhetoric deepened divides and stigmatized legitimate dissent (Allen and Ross 2024). Finally, Johnson's speech uses a moral framework to advance his conservative ideology and agenda by invoking traditional values, appealing to national identity, calling for law and order, and vigorously opposing progressive movements.

Starmer likewise constructs a distinct "other" against which *his* political community can define itself. In turn, he uses vivid depictions of far-right violence to channel disgust and moral outrage toward the perpetrators, while simultaneously reassuring Muslim and minority communities that fear is legitimate but should be met with collective solidarity rather than withdrawal. By doing so, Starmer is attempting to balance the management of both disruptive and restorative emotions within a single rhetorical frame. He also uses vivid imagery to describe the far-right: "Flares thrown at the statue of Winston Churchill," "a Nazi salute at the Cenotaph," (Starmer 2024a) and "attacks on Mosques" (Starmer 2024b). These descriptions evoke outrage and en-

courage solidarity among those who reject such actions, rallying the political majority around values of tolerance, diversity, and the rule of law. Again, Starmer (2024b) reassures targeted communities by stating: "I know how frightening this must be...this violent mob do[es] not represent our country." Not only is he trying to isolate and discredit the far-right with this statement, but he is also urging the inclusion of marginalized groups and the promotion of their safety. His phrases—"crime is crime" and "we make no distinction"—create a unified message affirming fairness and justice across all communities. By framing government actions as responses to "far-right hatred" and "violent disorder," Starmer (2024a) advances a narrative of moral responsibility and decisive leadership. He also applies feeling and display rules to shape appropriate emotional responses. He does so by condemning violence and promoting solidarity with affected communities. Through these emotional narratives, he underscores the harmful actions of the "other" while simultaneously promoting unity and harmony within the moral majority. His speeches reflect a democratic and egalitarian ideology that emphasizes equality before the law, which is antithetical to divisive extremism. But because Starmer was addressing riots as head of government, he was expected to initiate a meaningful response that went beyond symbolic overtures. This was reflected in the journalistic accounts that followed his public statements. While some accounts suggested that his rhetoric was reassuring, others worried that his emphasis on law and order would exacerbate tensions with marginalized groups ("Keir Starmer condemns…" 2024).

We interpret Johnson and Starmer's strategies not merely as rhetorical but as part of a broader system of governance in which leaders seek to harness collective outrage and empathy to align public sentiment with their political objectives. Their framing of "others" stabilizes collective emotional dynamics while discrediting and delegitimizing opposition groups. However, consistent with our theoretical framework, such strategies should not be seen as all-powerful. The creation of "others" is always contested. Dissenters and other interested parties may resist, reinterpret, and/or subvert the frames being advanced by circulating their own counter-narratives through the media, activism, and cultural repertoires. This underscores that the emotional politics of "othering" function both as a unifying force and as a mechanism of social control—partial, negotiated, and subject to challenge.

Cross-Case Convergence in Mechanisms of Emotional Framing of Emotional Deviants as a Political Strategy for Strengthening Collective Emotional Resilience

Despite the many contextual differences, both leaders relied on a shared toolkit of discursive techniques that traveled across settings. As previously discussed, Johnson and Starmer used moral dichotomization coupled with othering to stabilize in-group cohesion. They also assigned agency and blame through the consistent use of active voice and agentive predicates, while strategically using ambiguous terms like "radical," "extreme," or "thugs" to broaden the scope of stigmatization. Moreover, they invoked culturally available feeling rules that allowed them to police the emotional boundaries of the public sphere. Their rhetoric included claims of protection for vulnerable groups with promises to decisively institute certain policies or law enforcement measures. At the same time, they engaged in surface and deep acting by projecting controlled

indignation alongside authentic concern. In sum, we observed the use of similar specific practices of emotion management: the imposition of feeling rules (who may feel fear, who must express resilience), the performance of surface and deep acting (controlled outrage, authentic empathy), and the policing of emotional boundaries that separate legitimate protest from illegitimate disorder. Finally, both leaders relied on vivid imagery to dramatize events and heighten the moral urgency of their messaging. Although both leaders employed elaborate rhetorical strategies, press coverage showed that their messaging did not go uncontested. While Johnson's condemnations were seen by some as justified and protective, others found them to be incendiary. While Starmer's reassurances helped allay the concerns of some, they riled others who found his response to be either too reserved or overzealous (Allen and Ross 2024; "How Effectively Has Keir Starmer Handled the Riots?..." 2024).

Why did these similarities recur despite divergent rhetorical situations? Our interpretation is that high-profile leaders like Johnson and Starmer face structural incentives of mass-mediated crisis politics: (1) media logics reward moral-emotional clarity; (2) democratic accountability pressures leaders to project control and concern; and (3) moments of perceived threat invite securitizing frames that emphasize order and protection. Emotional framing functions as a governance shortcut—a way to quickly organize public meaning in uncertain, fluid, and volatile political contexts—regardless of ideological orientation or institutional role (cf. Papacharissi 2015; Wahl-Jorgensen 2019; Demertzis 2020). The specific targets and policy levers differ (symbolic sanction versus operational reassurance), but the mechanisms remain strikingly consistent.

Discussion and Conclusion

Our analysis advances political sociology by demonstrating that emotional framing (Peterson 2006; Lively 2024) functions not only as a rhetorical tool but as a governing mechanism through which political leaders consolidate power and manage collective emotional resilience during times of national crisis (Teo et al. 2017; Zubrzycka-Czarnecka 2024). Drawing on Hochschild's (1979; 1983) concept of emotion management, we show how emotional norms are actively shaped by political discourse—particularly through the strategic labeling of dissenters as emotional deviants.

Our empirical findings reveal that both Mike Johnson and Keir Starmer employed emotionally charged rhetoric to frame political opponents as irrational, dangerous, and emotionally unstable. In doing so, they constructed emotional dichotomies—juxtaposing fear, anger, and hatred with unity, resilience, and hope—to regulate public sentiment. They also defined moral "in-groups" and deviant "others," using narrative, historical references, and emotion-laden appeals to consolidate solidarity and exclude dissenting voices. These practices are central to what we call "discursive emotional framing," which attempts to align collective emotions with dominant political and ideological norms.

A key contribution of our comparative design is the identification of cross-case convergence in the mechanisms of emotional framing. Despite substantial contextual differences—an American legislative leader addressing campus protests versus a British Prime Minister managing violent riots—both Johnson and Starmer borrowed from a shared toolkit of discursive strategies. These included moral dichot-

omization and othering to stabilize in-group cohesion; the assignment of agency and blame through active, agentive predicates; the use of strategic ambiguity to broaden stigmatization; and the invocation of feeling rules to prescribe which emotions were legitimate and which were not. Both leaders combined claims of protecting vulnerable groups with promises of decisive action, performed surface and deep acting to project controlled indignation alongside authentic care, and dramatized events through vivid imagery. The recurrence of these mechanisms across divergent settings lends credence to our central claim: emotional framing has become a generalized repertoire of governance in liberal democracies.

Such convergence suggests that emotional framing is not idiosyncratic but structural—a technique of governance in mass-mediated democracies, particularly in times of crisis and polarization. These strategies offer short-term emotional stability and cohesion but raise deeper concerns about their long-term effects on democratic culture. Moreover, our findings highlight the tension between individual liberty and collective order in contemporary democracies. Emotional framing is often justified through appeals to security, public safety, or national unity. Although these concerns are not unfounded and must be taken very seriously (particularly in light of the genuine fears expressed by Jewish communities in the US and Muslim communities in the UK), we caution against allowing emotional regulation to become a pretext for curtailing expressive freedoms and suppressing legitimate dissent.

Our work informs recent sociological debates by extending the emerging literature on emotional governance and collective resilience. Recent treatments emphasize the shift from individual affect to institutional and systemic dynamics of emotion regulation (Zhang et al. 2024), as well as how states and political elites seek to regulate public affect through discourses of security, migration, and crisis (Cantat, Pécoud, and Thiollet 2023). Our comparative analysis furthers this agenda by demonstrating cross-case convergence in the mechanisms of emotional framing across divergent rhetorical situations: symbolic sanctioning in the US and operational reassurance in the UK. In doing so, we show that leaders leverage strikingly similar tools that include feeling rules, othering, and surface/deep acting. While these tools have a rhetorical dimension, they clearly function as governing techniques designed to strengthen collective emotional resilience. By foregrounding the paradoxical character of resilience as both integrative and exclusionary, we expose and explore an important gap in the existing literature where scholars have largely celebrated resilience as inherently positive (Meneghel et al. 2014; Garcia and Rimé 2019), while overlooking its use as a means of marginalization and control.

The observed ethical challenges of emotional framing are not limited to elite actors. Protest movements themselves can perpetuate exclusionary or extremist discourse, as seen in cases of Antisemitic and Islamophobic rhetoric within or adjacent to protest spaces. This sort of language is not only morally repugnant but also compromises the inclusivity of democratic expression, just like the rhetoric used to discredit emotional deviants. Thus, both state and non-state actors contribute to the narrowing of the emotional and discursive space available for authentic political participation.

In light of the tensions that we described above, we suggest that future research explore how emotional politics can also be democratizing rather than ex-

clusionary. Historical figures such as Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and Nelson Mandela illustrate how emotional rhetoric can serve inclusion, justice, and collective empowerment, rather than marginalization and control. Investigating bottom-up emotional framing in social movements may offer insights into how counter-hegemonic emotional narratives challenge dominant norms and expand the boundaries of democratic engagement. We also urge future researchers to nudge us forward by examining the long-term effects of emotional framing on political participation and institutional trust; the cultural specificity of emotional norms and deviance; and the mediating role of digital platforms that increasingly shape how emotions circulate and are publicly performed.

In conclusion, our study demonstrates that emotional framing is a political strategy that has serious implications for democratic integrity. When leaders use emotionally charged narratives to silence dissent and enforce conformity, they do more than secure order—they reshape the emotional boundaries of political life. Conversely, when protest movements traffic in exclusionary and caustic rhetoric, they inflict harm, erode the moral legitimacy of their cause, and stifle the meaningful exchange of ideas. A truly resilient democratic society must manage emotions not through repression, but through inclusive dialogue. Equally important, it must protect public safety without sacrificing expressive diversity and foster emotional cohesion without foreclosing the possibility of moral and political dissent.

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"Care Work" in Facilitative Mediation: Interactional Techniques for Emotional Support in the Context of Conflict Resolution

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Mediation; Care Work; Emotion; Conflict Resolution; Conversation Analysis; Interaction

Abstract: This paper investigates how facilitative mediators use "care work" techniques when participants display emotional or relational concerns during the session. Conversation analysis is used to analyze a pre-existing dataset of video-recorded small claims and divorce mediation sessions. Techniques the mediators used to do care work include reflection, topic refocusing, complimenting, role modeling, and coaching. The analysis shows how the trajectory of the talk in the mediation session is impacted by care work. The results are discussed in terms of their implications for the mediator's role and the effectiveness of the interaction for the conflict resolution process in mediation.

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Previous research on emotion management and care work has been done in a variety of settings, both informal and institutional. The purpose of this paper is to discover how mediators in family and small claims mediation sessions use "care work" techniques to respond to participants' displays of emotion, relational issues, or vulnerability. A qualitative approach is used to analyze a pre-existing dataset of conversation analytic transcripts of videotaped mediation sessions. While a need for care work may be expected in the family and divorce mediation sessions because of the nature of the challenges those participants are experiencing, the need for care work in small-claims mediation may be less obvious, as these mediations are typically, at least officially, about monetary issues. However, at least some types of care work were found in both family/divorce and small-claims mediation sessions. The techniques mediators used to respond to participants' displays of emotion, vulnerability, or relationship challenges include reflection, topic refocusing, complimenting, role modeling, and coaching. The results of this analysis of how mediators respond to clients' emotional displays during the session will be discussed in terms of their implications for the effectiveness of the mediation process and for how they facilitate conflict resolution.

Literature Review

Previous research on emotions in the work of caring for others has focused on social roles and statuses. Examples include Hochschild's (1983) well-known study of the emotional labor done by airline flight attendants during interactions with passengers, Gilligan's (1982) analysis of the role of "care" in how women's moral development is shaped by their relationships with others, Charmaz's (1991) study of how being chronically ill shapes one's identity and self-care work, and DeVault's (1991) study of how caring for family members through meal planning and food provisioning tasks are tied to mental and emotional work. Recent studies of emotion work in various contexts include Milan's (2023) study of activists working on refugee issues, which showed how emotions experienced shifted during different stages of involvement with that type of work, and Lee's (2023) study of the emotion work women do as they manage conflicting work and family demands. Siegel (2021) also uses Hochschild's (1983) concepts in his study of how women who define themselves as feminists do emotion management around their abortion experiences, and Robinson (2021) uses Hochschild's (1983) concepts to study how Black female ballet dancers do emotional labor in the context of this profession.

In the context of mediation sessions, there is evidence that participating in mediation can help clients with their emotions relative to the dispute. For example, a survey-based study by Heard and colleagues (2024) found that divorcing couples in an Australian mediation program experienced a decrease in acrimony after mediation, regardless of their level of interest or enthusiasm for the mediation. Cohen, Dattner, and Luxenburg (1996) describe how mediators can help divorcing couples with emotionally laden decisions by reframing in ways that allow each couple to see the other's needs and positions more clearly. Tanz, McClintock, and Kyritsi (2023) found that holding caucuses before the main mediation session affected the emotions experienced during mediation sessions. In particular, they found a decrease in stress and a calmer mood in these facilitative mediation sessions. Greco, Cigada, and Jermini-Martinez Soria's (2022) study of French mediation sessions showed how naming an emotion can help mediators impact the trajectory of the interaction in mediation sessions. This labeling work can provide the groundwork for a transition from negative to positive feelings, which may assist in dispute resolution. Rypi's (2017) study of victim/offender mediation showed that mediators used preliminary meetings with each side to coach participants on how to construct their contributions in joint sessions to avoid eliciting negative emotional responses. For example, the offender might be advised to adjust how they describe the reasons for the crime, or a victim might be asked to avoid certain questions about the perpetrator's identity.

Attending to clients' emotions has long been considered part of the role of mediators (Ury 1993; Domenici and Littlejohn 2001). Chang (2018) used a conversation analytic approach to study civil mediation cases in Taiwan that were conducted in the Chinese language. In the paper, she analyzes how emotion and face work are intertwined in a mediation session. She found that participants in this wrongful death case worked to elicit empathy or emotional support from the opposing participants. The emotion work in this context was complicated by cultural conventions and expectations regarding face work.

Mišauskaitė and Sondaitė (2022) conducted interviews with a small sample of family mediators in Australia and found that family dispute resolution practitioners "create safe environments to process disputes and emotions" (Mišauskaitė and Sondaitė 2022:100). However, this interview study does not examine the interactions themselves, so how the mediators accomplish this remains to be shown. Some conversation analytic studies have addressed the role of emotion work in mediation sessions. For example, Garcia, Vise, and Whitaker (2002) conducted a single-case analysis of a mediation in which a client made an accusation of bias against the mediator during the session. One source of a client's perception of bias may have been due to the mediator's emotion work in support of the first client to speak, and its absence during the opposing client's turn to tell her story.

While previous research shows that mediation benefits participants, including emotional benefits such as reduced animosity or stress, more research is needed on how this outcome is achieved. The current study examines how mediators in facilitative mediation do care work in response to participants' actions and utterances that display emotional or relational concerns or vulnerabilities. In this article, conversation analysis will be used to investigate interactions in mediation sessions to discover how

mediators do care work as they work to facilitate the session. Conversation analysis grew out of the ethnomethodological approach developed by Harold Garfinkel (1967). Conversation analysis enables direct observation and sequential analysis of naturally occurring data (Schegloff 2007; ten Have 2007; Hutchby and Wooffitt 2008; Heritage and Clayman 2010; Sidnell 2010; Antaki 2011; Liddicoat 2021; Garcia 2023a). Previous research from a conversation analytic perspective has explored how ordinary conversation differs from talk in institutional settings (e.g., Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974; Boden and Zimmerman 1991; Sacks 1992; Heritage and Maynard 2006; Heritage and Clayman 2010; Antaki 2011; Arminen 2017). Recent conversation analytic studies in workplace settings include business settings (e.g., Barnes 2007; Asmuß 2008; Vöge 2010; Kevoe-Feldman 2018), legal settings (e.g., Garcia 2019; Gibson and Fox 2021), and medical settings (e.g., Peräkylä 2019; Stivers and Timmermans 2020; Wang 2020). Previous conversation analytic research on mediation investigates how the interactional organization and turn-taking system of mediation facilitate the conflict resolution process (e.g., Garcia 1991; 2019; Greatbatch and Dingwall 1997; Jacobs 2002; Heisterkamp 2006a; 2006b).

Conversation analytic approaches to care work focus on the types of actions performed when people are in interaction with each other rather than on the emotions experienced by individuals. The implications of the activity of "care" for the management of emotions can be seen in how the work done is placed in relation to previous actions that may display an orientation to emotion, or in how a recipient of the activity of care may then display a different type of response or action after the care work has been done. Whalen and Zimmerman's (1998) article shows that emergency service call takers helped callers who were so upset that they could not communicate clearly; they used directives designed to help the callers calm down. Garcia's (2023b) study of care work in emergency service calls showed that call takers used a range of techniques to accomplish care work to assist or support callers in their emotional management or ability to handle the ongoing emergency. In some cases, the call takers provided this assistance because emotional upset was displayed, while at other times, they preemptively worked to lower stress levels to maintain the caller's level of self-control during stressful circumstances. Actions such as providing reassurances, expressions of empathy, or coping techniques for stress reduction can assist callers in emotion management. Other techniques, such as offering compliments or providing other forms of distraction, can also serve as methods of emotional support. In a study of an emergency services call made by a person who was threatening suicide, Garcia (2024) found that displays of compassion or empathy, active listening, and sharing personal information to create a bond with the person in crisis were effective when carefully placed in the interaction so that their effect was supportive of the person and their autonomy rather than done in a way that could be seen as pressuring the caller (see also Tracy and Huffman 2016).

In addition, conversation analytic research on crisis negotiation shows how interactional techniques can effectively bring the person in crisis back from the brink. For example, Sikveland, Kevoe-Feldman, and Stokoe (2020) found that, contrary to existing advice, challenging the person in crisis can sometimes be effective. Finding ways to get help to the person in crisis while respecting their autonomy has also been shown to be effective (Sikveland and Stokoe 2023).

Methods and Data

The conversation analytic approach involves the analysis of participants' actions in the sequential context in which they occur. The focus of the analysis is on the interactional procedures participants use to construct their actions and interpret the actions of others. This paper reports the results of a qualitative analysis of a pre-existing dataset of conversation analytic transcripts of facilitative mediation sessions (Garcia 2000; 2012; 2019). For this analysis of care work in mediation sessions, I identified all instances in the data in which emotions were explicitly addressed, conveyed indirectly (e.g., through tone of voice), or otherwise potentially relevant to the ongoing discussion.

These data were collected in 1994 and 1995 for a *National Science Foundation* grant (Law and Social Sciences Program, SBR # 9411224). The videotaped sessions were previously transcribed using conversation analytic conventions (Jefferson 2004). Brackets indicate simultaneous speech, numbers in parentheses show the approximate length of pauses, words in parentheses are tentative transcriptions, and empty parentheses are inaudible words. Capitalization indicates increased volume, and degree signs indicate decreased volume. Inhalations and exhalations are indicated with ".hh" or "hh" respectively, and equal signs show that two words were latched together with no pause or overlap. Colons indicate a word is drawn out, and a dash indicates a word was cut off abruptly. Punctuation indicates intonation rather than grammatical structure, and laughter is spelled out (e.g., "heh"). A tilde indicates a quavery tone that conveys tearful emotion, and carets indicate an increased rate of speech.

Approval for the study was obtained from the IRB, all participants signed consent forms, and all identifiers were replaced with pseudonyms. In the transcripts, mediators are labeled "Med" in the transcript excerpts from the small claims cases, which were facilitated by one mediator, and "MedA" or "MedB" in the excerpts from the divorce mediations, which were facilitated by two co-mediators. Mediation clients are labeled in the transcript excerpts with either a pseudonym or a shortened version of their pseudonym.

The 20 mediation sessions analyzed in this paper were all conducted using a facilitative model of mediation (Boulle, Colaterella, and Picchioni 2008; Frenkel and Stark 2012; Moore 2014; Goldberg et al. 2017; Garcia 2019; Maxwell and Ingram 2022). Five of the mediation cases were facilitated by a nonprofit organization in the Midwest region of the US. This program provided services to families with children. These divorce and family mediations were facilitated by co-mediators who were also trained family therapists. One of these cases involved a couple who were having challenges in their relationship stemming from their decision to marry. The other four cases were divorce mediations involving couples with children. These mediation cases typically involved three or four mediation sessions of 1 ½ hours each.

The remaining 15 mediations were small claims mediations provided by a city-run program, also in the Midwest. Each mediation was facilitated by a trained professional mediator. These mediation sessions typically ranged between 30 minutes and an hour in length. A range of issues were mediated, such as car repairs, the loan of a camera, roommate issues, pet issues, and workplace disputes.

I have identified all instances of care work performed by the mediators in these 20 mediation cases. The analysis below shows how participants' actions displayed emotional or relational vulnerability in some ways and how the mediator responded to those situations. The talk following the care work intervention is analyzed to gauge its impact on the subsequent interaction. The goal of this analysis is to discover how care work is performed in the context of mediation and how different types of care work can be used to assist participants through emotional or relational challenges during the session.

Analysis of Data

Five main categories of care work were identified in these data. First, a traditional facilitative mediation technique of mirroring or reflecting participants' statements was frequently used to support participants emotionally or to highlight the emotional aspects of the dispute. Second, mediators often worked to focus on or shift the topic toward emotions and relationship issues when relevant for the resolution of the conflict. Third, compliments were used to reward clients for emotionally positive utterances or actions. Fourth, mediators acted as role models to animate ways the participants could communicate about emotions or express empathy and care for each other as they interacted about the issues that were triggering conflict. Fifth, mediators took on a coaching role, giving advice or instruction about how to handle emotions and/or relational problems. The analysis below shows how the mediators used each type of care work to respond to participants' emotional concerns and how that care work impacted the trajectory of the talk that followed.

Reflection or Paraphrasing Display of Emotion

Reflection or "mirroring" is a common technique in many types of mediation, although how the technique is performed differs. In transformative mediation (Bush and Folger 2005; Simon and West 2022; Garcia and Cleven 2024), a reflection should (as closely as possible) directly repeat the words or emotions spoken or displayed by the participant to highlight areas in which they may need support or clarification. However, in facilitative mediation, the mediator's reflection may directly repeat, but often paraphrases, what the participant has said (see Boulle et al. 2008; Ewert et al. 2010; Frenkel and Stark 2012; Picard 2016). These paraphrases often reframe the participant's words or position with an aim to further the process of dispute resolution.

In these data, mediators produced emotion-targeted reflections in two of the five family mediations and in 8 of the 15 small claims mediation sessions. There were two types of participant actions that led to mediators' use of reflections to do care work. First, the mediator may reflect a participant's verbally expressed emotion, thus providing support or validation of the feelings the participant is expressing. Second, the mediator may reflect the gist or impact of the emotions the participant conveyed through paralinguistic actions such as tone of voice, use of emphasis or volume, or through specific aspects of the story they are telling about the dispute. This technique highlights and focuses attention on the emotional experiences or issues involved in the details of the dispute. For example, Excerpts 1 and 2 show a mediator reflecting a participant's emotion. The two excerpts differ in how the mediator constructs the reflection and in how the reflection impacts the trajectory of the talk after the intervention.

Excerpt 1 is from a small claims mediation between a landlord ("Tish") who is trying to get her tenants to pay for a washer/dryer installation. In this excerpt, the mediator reflects the emotion or relationship issues that were conveyed by Tish, even though these were not explicitly articulated. The mediator does care work by putting a label on the emotions.

Excerpt 1: Small Claims Mediation "Washer/Dryer Installation," Tape 17, lines 389+

1 Tish: and you would pay HALF (1.0) the next month, and half the following month! in
2 two month payments! (0.3) .h and he called me (0.4) .h a: blanking liar! (0.6) >and I
3 hung up on him!< (0.8) there is where my allegiance (0.8) went to (0.3) Robert
4 (0.4) a hundred percent! (0.9) I don't deserve to be talked to that way? and I will
5 not stand for [it!]
6 Med: **>[so] you were< offended.**
7 (0.4)
8 Tish: yes ma'am!
9 (2.5)
10 Med: and (0.4) by now we're what, into August:? (0.9) >September or something<
11 [°like that?°]
12 Tish: [>OH it's HHHH<] °just-° eh July!
13 (0.5)
14 Med: °July.° (1.0) .h (2.7) >how close do you< (0.5) live to: Anne and John?
15 (0.1)
16 Tish: thirty miles.
17 (1.3)
18 Med: °°okay.°° (0.3) >is this is a< house they're °renting?°
19 (0.5)
20 Tish: °>it's a two< family.°
21 (0.4)
22 Med: °two family.° (1.2) are there tenants in the other half?
23 (1.5)
24 Tish: there are now! there haven't been >most of the< time!

In lines 1-5, the landlord Tish describes the conflict that has occurred between her, her partner Robert, and her tenants over the issues. While Tish does not directly articulate emotions or emotional issues, the events she describes (e.g., "and he called me (0.4) .h a: blanking liar!"; line 2 and ">and I hung up on

him!<"; lines 2-3) convey strong emotion. In addition, her use of louder volume (e.g., "HALF"; line 1) and stress (throughout lines 1-5) also conveys strong emotion.

The mediator reflects the emotion conveyed in Tish's turn by labelling the emotion underlying her statement (">[so] you were< offended."; line 6). Tish agrees with this characterization of her feelings ("yes ma'am!"; line 8). After the mediator's intervention, the two then return to discussing the details of the story (lines 10-24) in a calmer manner. The mediator shifts the topic of talk to the dates the events occurred (lines 10 and 11), and Tish responds (line 12). The mediator then asks more questions about the facts of the case, which Tish calmly answers. In addition to the topic shift from complaints to a discussion of the facts, the tone of voice and intonation of Tish's speech are calmer. Both Tish and the mediator speak quietly (lines 10-24), and there is no use of raised volume (indicated by capital letters) or stress/emphasis (indicated by underlining). In sum, the mediator's reflection, in which she labeled the feeling Tish was experiencing, succeeded in helping Tish transition to a calmer way of speaking and to discussing facts rather than continuing to elaborate her complaints.

Excerpt 2 also shows a mediator doing reflection. This excerpt is from a small claims mediation between the buyer and seller of a house. Vince and Martha are disputing about the poor condition of the house Vince has just bought from Martha. She had also delayed her move-out day, which caused problems for Vince and his family. As the excerpt begins, Vince continues his complaints about these issues (lines 1-4).

Excerpt 2: Small Claims Mediation "Real Estate," Tape 6, lines 1379+

1	Vince:	first time in ten years! I lived with my MOTHER in law! (0.6) okay? (0.6) .h
2		>and when someone< sits here and says oh! you can have it on the nineteenth (0.4)
3		in front of fi:ve other people!? (1.3) and then keeps moving, and moving, >and
4		then< when you come in? you have to deal with things like this?
5		(0.8)
6	Med:	Mar[tha]
7	Vince:	[that]'s >nuh THAT!< is not fair! (0.7) THAT is NOT FAIR!
8		(0.1)
9	Med:	**you >feel like< you're?, (0.4) being treated unfa:irly in**
10		th[is.]
11	Vince:	[ex]treme°ly°!=
12	Med:	=Martha mentioned (0.5) that she has some memory problems.
13		because of some medication? (0.7) .h that she's taken?
14		(0.4)
15	Vince:	um hm?
16		(0.5)
17	Med:	.h uh and I DON'T (0.4) I haven't heard her at a:ll?, (0.5) .h say that you're big bad
18		gu:y. (0.6) I >haven't heard her< (0.5) at- at least >in what she's< told me (0.4) .h

19 >did it< sound >like she was saying< look he's bullying me around! (0.4) .h I've
20 not heard that if=that-
21 (0.4)
22 Vince: I ha:ve!=
23 Med: =helps at all.=
24 Vince: =>missus Martha said< how we were harRASSing her? she
25 mentioned that sitting here today! (0.6) all's I did was contact her when she said to
26 contact her. >the only< co:ntact I did not make! (0.4) .h that she did not (0.5) say
27 call me?
28 (0.4)
29 Med: °mm hm?°
30 (0.4)
31 Vince: was o:n (0.4) to have one person come out and measure a few things
32 at the [house!]
33 Martha: [CHUM] chum-!
34 (0.2)
35 Vince: tha:t is it! >that's the only< time (0.3) I: made the phone call!
36 (0.1)
37 Med: >was that<? the nineteenth? ((Discussion continues with Vince making more
complaints about Martha.))

After Vince described the problems that occurred when Martha kept changing her move-out date (lines 1-4), he then emotionally characterizes these experiences: "[that]'s >nuh THAT!< is not fair! (0.7) THAT is NOT FAIR!" (line 7). He raises his voice and uses stress and emphasis to convey the emotion behind that statement. Note that in line 6, the mediator had initiated a turn, which may be an attempt to solicit a response from Martha; however, she dropped out when Vince continued speaking, letting him have the floor to produce his emphatic turn in line 7. When she speaks again in lines 9-10, the mediator does not make another attempt to address Martha. Instead, she addresses Vince and reflects the emotion he expressed, mirroring back his feeling of unfairness ("you >feel like< you're?, (0.4) being treated unfa:irly in th[is.]"; lines 9-10). Note that the mediator's reflection was a downgraded version of Vince's emotional turn in line 7 (Pomerantz 1984). She mirrored the emotion experienced (unfairness), but not the intensity of his emotion. Vince's response to the mediator's reflection upgrades the intensity of her response ("[ex]treme°ly°!="; line 11). This upgraded response suggests that the mediator has not accurately characterized the intensity of Vince's emotions. The mediator then refers to Martha in the third person as she speaks on her behalf, reminding Vince that Martha has some memory problems (lines 12-13). This could be seen as an attempt to help Vince see why Martha has behaved as she has, rather than assuming that Martha has been deliberately treating him unfairly. Vince's response to this seems initially to be a calmer response. His "um hm?" with questioning intonation (line 15) seems to request more information. The mediator goes on to explain that Vince may be mistaken in

how he is interpreting what Martha is saying (lines 17-20). However, this explanation does not succeed in convincing Vince that he is not being bullied or treated unfairly by Martha ("I ha:ve!="; line 22). Although he is not raising his voice as he did earlier in lines 1 and 7 above, the stress on "I" conveys his disagreement with the mediator's representation of Martha's position. Vince then goes on to produce complaints and defend his position that Martha has been treating him unfairly. In this instance, the reflection seemed to downplay the intensity of Vince's emotional response, thus resulting in a different trajectory after the intervention.

In sum, the use of reflections or paraphrases to do care work occurred in two types of contexts. Mediators could reflect participants' utterances in which they verbally articulated an emotion or relational concern, or they could reflect participants' utterances in which they displayed emotion or relational concerns without verbally articulating the emotion, instead displaying the emotion through paralinguistic features such as volume, tone of voice, stress, or emphasis.

Focusing or Shifting the Topic to Emotion

When participants were discussing the issues without specifying or labeling the emotional aspects of the experience, but their stories nonetheless conveyed unarticulated emotional contexts or issues, mediators often worked to refocus the topic toward emotions and relationship issues. While this technique was not always successful in getting participants to directly address the emotional issues, it served to show that the monetary issues of the dispute or extended stories about what happened were not the only issues keeping the participants from reaching a resolution of their dispute.

Excerpt 3 from Mike and Kelly's divorce mediation occurred early on in the session and illustrates how a mediator's topic shift to emotions can lead the disputants to address these issues.

Excerpt 3: Divorce Mediation, "Mike and Kelly," Tape 7, lines 324+

1	Kelly:	he likes to do that. .h (0.5) the other two ip-! >my oldest one<
2		>he doesn't really say anything< he just? He's kind of quiet °and° .h (0.8)
3		and [our boisterous one] is Mary
4	MedA:	[°( )°]
5		(1.0)
6	MedA:	°°okay.°°=
7	Kelly:	=and uh (0.4) >she has to s-< (0.7) say everything? and
8		anything? and .h >hh! hinh hinh hinh< .h tell everything so .h >enh hinh
9		hinh!< .h (0.8) that's about it! >unh henh hehn!<
10		(0.7)
11	MedA:	**are they experiencing any STRESS >from the< separation that you**
12		**could °identify?°**
13		(1.1)
14	Mike:	°u:m yeah. I'm sure.° (0.7) °I- I mean it h (1.4) u::h h! (0.6) I

15 >went out and< talked to? h um (0.6) counselors at school. °a:n:d°
16 >made them aware of our< situation? (0.7) °an:d° .h (0.6) because I did
17 >want them to keep an eye on< the kids and see because
18 (0.1)
19 MedA: °that's real[ly impor]tant?°
20 Kelly: [chum!]

When the mediators asked Mike and Kelly to describe their three children, their responses were brief and focused on their children's personalities (e.g., lines 1-3 and 7-9). Mediator A then shifts the topic to the emotions the children are experiencing as a result of the breakup of their parents' marriage ("are they experiencing any STRESS >from the< separation that you could °identify?°"; lines 11-12). This topic shift successfully redirects the talk to the emotional issues affecting the family. Mike responds and explains how he has tried to respond to the children's emotional needs (lines 14-17). Getting divorcing parents to focus on the needs of the children is a key piece of the divorce mediation process.

Excerpt 4 shows a successful attempt to refocus the topic from a participant's complaint story to the participant's feelings about the story. In this small claims mediation between two former roommates (Kris and John) who were disputing an unpaid electric bill, aspects of Kris's story convey the underlying emotional layer to the dispute without directly articulating these emotional impacts.

Excerpt 4: Small Claims Mediation, "Roommate's Electric Bill," Tape 9, lines 188+

1 Med: can you? (0.4) explai:n to me, because I'm not understanding why:, (0.3) it's a
2 problem for his cousin to be there.
3 (0.3)
4 Kris: U:m well! because (0.4) it was still our residence. (0.4) it was still Kurt's
5 residence,=
6 Med: =>so you felt-< (0.6) >you sh-< (0.3) he should of (0.2) come to you
7 and go:t (uh) permission?, before he allowed someone [to move] in?
8 Kris: [we:ll,]
9 (0.6)
10 Kris: Kurt GAVE him permission for a two week trial basis. (0.6) to see how it would
11 work out. (0.4) .h and we walked in during that two week trial basis and saw all of
12 Rick's stuff thẽre? (0.5) .h ã:nd (0.6) then realized >that it< was >not a< on a
13 trial basis.
14 (0.6)
15 Med: **and- and- how >did you< feel about that?**
16 (1.1)
17 Kris: betrã:yed? (0.7) because we told (0.5) °k k° Kurt to:ld John, it was a two week

18 trial basis? a:nd .h (0.2) yeah, >but THAT'S< not really what I'm: (0.3) I'm
19 [upset about you know? That's::]

When the mediator asks why John's cousin should not be living in the apartment (lines 1-2), Kris uses stress and emphasis as she says "because (0.4) it was still our residence." (line 4). Kris thereby displays her deep conviction that John has somehow violated their rights to the apartment. Kris uses "our" in line 4 to refer to herself and her partner Kurt. Kurt had leased the apartment from the landlord and later allowed John to live with them. The mediator asks for clarification in lines 6-7, and Kris's explanation shows that while they agreed to a "two week trial basis" (line 10), they soon realized John's cousin had moved in permanently, not just for a two week stay, as agreed (lines 10-13). The mediator then refocuses the topic to Kris's emotional reaction to this ("and-and- how >did you< feel about that?"; line 15). This topic refocusing move is successful—the first word Kris produces in her response is "betrã:yed?" (line 17), which directly and concisely conveys the emotion she experienced (the tilde indicates a quavering voice conveying tearful emotion).

Not all attempts by mediators to refocus topics to emotions were successful. For some participants, emotional or relational issues and experiences are deeply connected to the dispute, and surfacing these issues can often help the participants move toward resolution. However, for other participants, the issues may be straightforward financial, contractual, or legal concerns. Excerpt 5 is from a small claims mediation between two former roommates, Rob and Brian. They are in disagreement over whether Rob, who signed a lease and then moved out, should be responsible for unpaid rent.

Excerpt 5: Small Claims Mediation, "Broken Lease," Tape 4, lines 138+

1 Med: are you still reSIDing? (0.5) [there?]
2 Brian: [yes.]
3 (1.2)
4 Med: an:d how long is this lease for?
5 (0.9)
6 Brian: till: June.
7 (0.9)
8 Med: June. (0.5) next year?
9 (0.3)
10 Brian: yes.
11 (0.7)
12 Med: .h a:n:d uh: tch (1.6) TCH=.h (0.4) when di:d Rob move out?
13 (1.3)
14 Brian: S:eptember::: >ninth<? (0.7) >seventh.<
15 (7.8)
16 Med: **°°okay.°° (0.5) uh:m, (3.5) HOW DID YOU FEEL About Rob's decision to**

17		**leave?**
18		(2.1)
19	Brian:	well, >it was::< up to him. I mean, in whether or not he wanted to stay or leave?
20		(0.7) is up to him. but he had (0.4) a leas:e? (0.5) >he had a< legal contract
21		that he: agreed to.
22		(1.7)
23	Med:	[(and)]
24	Brian:	[and] and so whether he wanted to stay there or NOT it was:: (0.9) i:h it didn't
25		bother me? (0.4) but as long as he paid the rent.
26		(1.6)
27	Med:	okay. (0.6) and how much are you suing?

The mediator refocuses the topic to the emotional aspects of their relationship ("°°okay.°° (0.5) uh:m, (3.5) HOW DID YOU FEEL About Rob's decision to leave?"; lines 16-17). Brian's response (lines 19-21) does not address his feelings about his roommate's decision to leave. Instead, Brian discusses the legal and contractual issues relevant to the rent due. The mediator then follows Brian's lead by addressing the legal issues and ignoring the lack of a response to his question about Brian's feelings (see line 27).

In sum, when participants' construction of their stories displays an emotional component without specifically articulating it, the mediator may work to shift or refocus the topic to the emotional issues. When successful, this may lead to a participant directly articulating the emotions that are now seen to be relevant to the dispute, and/or may lead to them being able to continue to communicate about the topic more calmly now that the emotion has been recognized. When the mediator's moves to refocus the topic onto emotion are unsuccessful (as in Excerpt 5 above), this is not necessarily a failure of the mediator or a problem for the participants. The participants have autonomy in facilitative mediation and may feel that the emotional issues are not relevant to their dispute.

Complimenting and Role Modeling

Another method of performing care work was using compliments to support or reward participants for emotionally positive utterances or actions. The instances of care work done through compliments all occurred in the family and divorce mediations; none occurred in the small claims mediations. This may be because the compliments served to reinforce actions or utterances that used emotions or relationships positively. Since one of the goals of family/divorce mediation in couples with children is to help the parents learn how to work together for the care of their children after the divorce, this type of care work may have been more relevant in the family/divorce mediations than in the small claims cases. Participants in small claims mediation are much less likely to have to maintain a significant relationship after the dispute is resolved.

At times, mediators also provided care work through acting as a role model. This technique worked to demonstrate how the participants could manage relationship and emotional challenges as they interacted about the issues that were triggering conflict between them. This was typically done by the mediator animating a hypothetical utterance

on behalf of a participant to demonstrate how they could communicate with each other. This technique was also used only in the family and divorce mediations; there were no instances of doing care work by role modeling through producing hypothetical utterances in the small claims cases.

Excerpt 6 from a divorce mediation involving Liz and Jon illustrates care work done through complimenting and through role modeling. As Excerpt 6 begins, Jon is explaining how they managed sharing their time with their four-year-old daughter on Halloween, even though their custody agreement listed it as Liz's day. They worked it out so they each had time to take their daughter trick-or-treating.

Excerpt 6: Divorce Mediation, "Jon and Liz," Tape 8, lines 1157+

1	Jon:	so what <u>we</u> had do:ne, is that from s:ix to s:even (0.9) Liz took her around <u>her</u>
2		complẽx an her:=uh (0.3) neighbors: and it-=
3	MedA:	**=that's great.**
4		(0.3)
5	Jon:	and had halloween. (0.5) she then dropped her off (1.3) yeah you <u>did</u> drop her
6		õff rĩght >I didn't pick her< up. (0.3) yeah she dropped her off, (0.8) and from
7		se:ven until ei:ght: (0.5) she went around <u>my</u> neighborhoo:d, (0.8) uh (0.6) you
8		know <u>I</u> got to see her, >well I< got to see her co:stu:me (0.3) and then I think (0.8)
9		around: (0.8) eight: (0.6) <u>liz</u> came by and picked her up and I think (0.7) tch (0.6)
10		had the rest of the hour with her ih.
11		(0.3)
12	MedA:	**well that's splendid.**
13		(0.5)
14	MedB:	**and you two are doing <u>great</u>! [you] worked that one out**
15	MedA:	[yeah.]
16	MedB:	**beautifully on your [own! and] it's a <u>won</u>derful start.**
17	MedA:	[yea:h]
18		(0.4)
19	Liz:	and u:h (0.3) I asked him, if he wanted the time, because if I- (0.3) .h I know if I
20		was in <u>his</u> shoes I'd want to see her in her [costume,] and
21	MedB:	[(sure)]
22		(0.3)
23	MedA:	°yeah° and that's a **<u>WON</u>DERFUL MESSAGE** to your child. (0.6) **I <u>know</u>**
24		**daddy's going to want to see you.**
25		(0.6)
26	Liz?:	°um hmh°=
27	MedA:	**=I'll CALL him up and we'll: (0.3) pick we'll: (0.3) figure it out.**
28		(0.7)

29 MedB: °°um mm°°=
30 MedA: **=that's a gre:at message.**

Mediators A and B both respond with compliments after Jon has finished explaining how they shared time with their daughter on Halloween (lines 12, 14, and 16). Liz then joins in and explains that her empathy for her husband led her to ask him to participate in the trick or treating ("I asked him, if he wanted the time, because if I- (0.3) .h I know if I was in his shoes I'd want to see her in her [costume,] and"; lines 19-20). Both mediators respond positively to this display of empathy and cooperation between the parents. Mediator A first compliments Liz on how she has handled the situation, and then acts as a role model by animating a hypothetical utterance that the parents could have said to their daughter ("°yeah° and that's a WONDERFUL MESSAGE to your child. (0.6) I know daddy's going to want to see you... =I'll CALL him up and we'll: (0.3) pick we'll: (0.3) figure it out."; lines 23-24, 27). Another mediator compliment ends the exchange ("that's a gre:at message."; line 30). After the excerpt, Mediator A changes the topic to other issues the couple needs to discuss in mediation, such as how they will share vacation time and cover insurance payments after their divorce.

When using hypothetical speech to role model for the participants on how they could construct positive emotional and relational messages with their partner, the mediators effectively taught participants and gave them specific examples of how they could handle these situations on their own. These types of examples could help divorcing parents communicate better in the future by providing a template for constructive ways to address emotional and relational issues.

Coaching

The coaching category includes occasions when the mediator actively instructs or assists participants in working through emotional or relational issues. While coaching sometimes occurred in the small claims mediations, it was much more common in family and divorce mediations. First, mediators may use coaching after a participant has raised an issue relevant to emotion or relationships, in a way that instructs or reinforces the positive emotional or relational issues expressed and how to handle them. In other instances, they may work to help bring the participant to an understanding or a way to handle an emotional issue. Finally, in some cases, they may use a coaching approach to help one participant see why the opposing participant experiences emotional issues differently.

In Excerpt 7, from a family mediation, the mediator works to help Kate learn how to handle emerging arguments between herself and her partner, Tim.

Excerpt 7: Family Mediation, "Tim and Kate," Tape 1b, lines 1350+

1 MedA: so it just escalates aga[in (until >he gets he what he wants.<]
2 Kate: [O:H! yeah! it] just gets worse!
3 (0.2)
4 MedA: **how could [you]=**

5 Kate: [because-]=
6 Tim: =°>not always<°=
7 MedA: **=deescalate. (0.3) is my**
8 **ques[tion.]**
9 Kate: [no.]=°not al[ways.°]
10 MedA: **[how co]uld you deescalate. (0.5) when- when- you see that**
11 **(0.3) starting >to happen.<**
12 (0.8)
13 Kate: tch (0.3) .hh (1.2) hh! .h=
14 MedA: **=you- gosh. you're getting MADder and madder**
15 **[Kate.]**
16 Kate: [huh=huh]=HUH=HUH=HUH=HEH=HEH .h CHUH=CHEH=CHUH! chuh!
17 [chuh!]
18 MedA: **[you kn]ow where this train is [going to go?]**
19 Kate: [chuh chu]h chuh! (1.4) wow that takes a lot of
20 (0.8) fortit=h=ude=heh=heh=(some) self contr=h=ol. [I mean] because- .h
21 MedA: **[you're right!]**
22 Kate: because °it's=an° issue that (0.5) repeats it- it's too repetitive, you know? if it
23 came up occasionally, it- (1.4) you know, (0.8) but it's- it's too repetitive. and it's
24 [you know]
25 MedA: **[>it's HAPpen]ing< a lot. (0.5) okay. (0.3) it's=and- it is? it is a real problem.**
26 **.h (0.4) and**
27 (0.8)
28 Tim: yeah? (0.3) but I think >you have to admit< that I've °made some° (1.4) some
29 changes °in some of the° (1.6) do you feel uncomfortable with the health
30 club (issue)?
31 (1.8)
32 Kate: I just started last week to feel comfortable. (0.6) °about°
33 (0.2)
34 MedA: **there's a change then.**
35 (0.3)
36 Tim: mm hm!
37 (0.1)
38 MedA: **there's- there's a- there's a change going °on there.°**

Initially, Kate agrees with Mediator A that escalation of conflict is a pattern ("[O:H! yeah! it] just gets worse!"; line 2) while Tim quietly disagrees ("°>not always<°"; line 6). Kate then agrees with Tim ("[no.]=°not al[ways.°]"; line 9). While this exchange between the partners is occurring, Mediator A raises a question about how they could de-escalate a conflict "when- you see that (0.3) starting >to happen.<"

(lines 4, 7-8, 10-11). When Kate does not produce a substantive response (see line 13), Mediator A probes further, giving an experiential prompt describing Kate's hypothetical emotions when a conflict happens ("=you- gosh. you're getting MADder and madder [Kate.]"; lines 14-15). Kate laughs (lines 16-17), and eventually responds after the mediator prompts her again ("[you kn]ow where this train is [going to go?]"; line 18). Kate then acknowledges the emotional challenges of dealing with conflicts with Tim. She describes the fortitude and self-control required to avoid escalating a conflict (lines 22-24). Mediator A acknowledges these challenges (lines 25-26), and Tim joins in. Tim is not disagreeing that they have had problems with escalating conflict in the past, but is seeking recognition of the progress they have made, in particular about some conflicts related to their health club (lines 28-30). Kate's acknowledgment that there has been some improvement (line 32) is reflected by Mediator A ("there's a change then."; line 34). Tim also expresses agreement (line 36). Through these interventions, which included coaching Kate to describe how she reacts to escalating conflict, the mediator brings the couple to a point where they both acknowledge the problems that have occurred and agree that progress has been made on the issue. The coaching provides tools they can use the next time they are in a situation of conflict to practice stopping escalation.

In sum, doing care work through coaching differs from acting as a role model because the mediator in Excerpt 7 does not animate hypothetical utterances for the participants, but she does instruct, advise, and prompt participants to consider the emotional aspects of their conflicts and to come to a shared understanding of how they are doing with this issue in their relationship.

Discussion and Conclusion

While previous research on emotion management and care work has been done in a variety of settings, both informal and institutional, this paper specifically investigated the interactional techniques mediators use to perform care work during mediation sessions. These results should lead to a greater understanding of whether and how facilitative mediators assist clients during the mediation process when they display emotional vulnerability or challenges.

Mediators performed some type of care work in all five of the family and divorce mediation cases in the collection. These mediations were facilitated by mediators who were also licensed family therapists. The subject matter of divorce and family mediation more often lends itself to emotional and relational issues than do small claims cases; this may be why care work occurred in all five of these cases. Care work was also done in 11 out of the 15 small claims mediation sessions. While the disputes in small claims mediation tend to focus on monetary issues, participants do make emotions and relationships relevant in many of the mediation sessions.

There were five different interactional techniques used to perform care work in these data when participants' utterances or actions indicated emotional, relational vulnerability, or concerns: reflection, topic focusing, complimenting, role modeling, and coaching. In many instances, the care work intervention resulted in a shift in what was being talked about or how it was being discussed. For example, in some cases, participants were able to either acknowledge or process the emotional aspects, to topicalize them, or to move beyond them to discuss other issues. Mediator's care work thus affected the trajectory of the talk in the conflict resolution process.

This study of the techniques used by mediators to respond to emotional aspects of the mediation and provide some type of intervention reveals the choices mediators have about how to handle the emotional aspects of disputes. Whether care work "should" be done in mediation is still an open question. One possible critique is that mediators may be infringing on participant autonomy when they work to change the topic or otherwise bring emotional issues to the fore that participants have not chosen to directly articulate or focus on. Should care work be considered a routine part of facilitative mediation? Or, should it only be expected to be provided by those mediation programs in which the mediators also have training as therapists or counselors in addition to their mediation training? The results of this study will be useful to mediators who may be facing similar situations in their conflict resolution work.

Further research on a larger dataset should examine how prevalent care work is and whether its use is tied to the resolution of the dispute, satisfaction with the mediation process, or other positive outcomes. Given the fact that the data analyzed in this paper were collected a number of years ago, comparison studies with current facilitative mediations should be conducted to discover if and in what ways care work has changed. In addition, since the time these data were collected, innovations in mediation now provide potential mediation clients with more choices of types of mediation in addition to facilitative mediation, which is studied in this paper. While facilitative mediation is still very popular, other types of mediation, such as narrative mediation (e.g., Ewert et al. 2010) and transformative mediation (Bush and Folger 2005), are now available as well. Investigations of care work in these newer types of mediation should also be conducted. More research on mediation sessions led by mediators who are trained as therapists or counselors should also be done to see how these sessions differ from typical mediations in terms of how emotions are handled.

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Too Little, Too Late: Consent Education, Sexual Practice, and Institutional Power in College Life

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Abstract: Despite widespread efforts to address sexual assault on US college campuses through consent education, understanding and practicing consent remains a complex and under-researched area. Consent, defined as clear, continuous, and voluntary communication, is often emphasized as a preventive measure against sexual assault. However, high rates of sexual assault, particularly among college students, highlight the limitations of current educational approaches. Our study examines college students' conceptualizations of consent, their application of consent in sexual relationships, and their views on the effectiveness of consent education. Findings indicate that many students harbor concerns about consent education, particularly regarding best practices, the influence of alcohol, and individual interpretations of consent. Notably, students report that their educational experiences have a limited impact on their understanding of and practices regarding consent, and they often struggle to apply these concepts effectively in real-world contexts. These findings underscore the need for more nuanced and impactful educational consent strategies that address the complexities of consent in intimate relationships and provide clearer guidance on managing factors like alcohol. This research aims to inform more effective approaches for activists and educational institutions in reducing campus sexual assault.

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Defining and educating students about sexual consent in educational institutions is a strategy endorsed by contemporary activists to prevent sexual assault in colleges and universities in the US. Yet the role of consent in romantic and sexual relationships is imperfectly understood by educators, activists, and scholars. This article examines how institutional consent discourses collide with peer/media "counterdiscourses," producing a gap between stated definitions and inpractice negotiation, using a case study at a small residential liberal arts college. Despite the focus on consent in assault prevention efforts, however, sexual assault remains a serious issue in the United States, especially among college students. Annually, an estimated 734,630 people experience threatened, attempted, or completed rape (Morgan and Truman 2019). Additionally, 51% of women who experienced rape were raped by an intimate partner, and 40.8% were raped by an acquaintance. These numbers suggest that despite educational focus on understanding and practicing consent, additional research on the role of consent in sexual relationships needs to be conducted. Consent is complex, especially for intimate partners who often use implied consent in place of verbal, affirmative consent. Existing research finds that, especially among young people and college students, the ability to define consent is rarely associated with the use of consent in sexual relationships (Curtis and Burnett 2017; Groggel, Burdick, and Barazza 2021; Setty 2021; Hardesty et al. 2022). These findings highlight gaps in college students' understanding of consent and suggest that more comprehensive research could provide resources for activists and institutions.

To address this issue, our research draws on qualitative, in-depth interviews with students at a small liberal arts college to examine how they define and understand sexual consent, how these understandings shape communication and decision-making within their intimate relationships, and how students perceive the role and effectiveness of formal consent education in influencing their attitudes and behaviors. Our findings indicate that participants have significant reservations regarding consent education, best practices surrounding consent education, the impact of alcohol on consent, and individual students' consent definitions and practices. Our analysis reveals a disconnect between consent education and students' lived experiences, with many students reporting that these programs provide limited knowledge and insufficient guidance for navigating consent.

Applying the analytic framework of discourse and counter-discourse central to Michel Foucault's work (1984; 2000; 2003) to this issue, we analyze how institutional consent discourse is interpreted and enacted by students in everyday sexual interactions, and how alcohol-controlled social settings and heteronormative assumptions mediate this process. Our analysis is informed by the following questions. How do students translate institutional consent discourse into daily practice in intimate encounters? How do gendered/heteronormative sexual scripts and party drinking cultures shape this translation? How do students evaluate consent education relative to competing peer/media discourses? Our findings demonstrate how institutional consent discourses collide with peer/media counterdiscourses around sexual behavior. In practice, this effectively produces a consent disconnect, a gap between stated definitions and inpractice behavior, within a residential, small liberal arts context. This case study can help us better evaluate how larger frameworks of sexual behavior in contemporary culture may be tied to high rates of sexual violence in society and on campuses, despite efforts to focus on teaching consent discourse.

Theoretical Framework and Literature of Consent

For this project, we treat discourse as a historically situated set of statements, practices, and rules that delineate what can be known, said, and done; in our context, this refers to the college's consent training. This training defines appropriate subjects for "responsible students," authorized speech, verbal, ongoing consent, and legitimate behaviors within institutional consent discourses (Foucault 1984; 2000). Because of systems of power, institutional efforts to normalize sexual behavior inevitably encounter counterdiscourses that contest, reject, or sidestep official norms (Foucault 2000; 2003). In our context, peer talk, media tropes, and party routines function as counterdiscourses that normalize sexual behavior and dilute the institutional authority (Foucault 2000; 2003). This lens clarifies how colleges may attempt to shape intimate behavior through policydriven discourse and why this may fail about sexual behavior when counterdiscursive logics are better aligned with normative expectations (Foucault 1984; 2000).

There is no single legal definition of consent, but individual policy definitions exist (Hust, Rodgers, and Bayly 2017; Baldwin-White 2021). Generally, most state that consent must include a voluntary choice to engage in sexual activity (Jozkowski and Peterson 2013; Baldwin-White 2021). Many also include that consent can be retracted, cannot be coerced through threat, and cannot be given if one or both parties are incapacitated, such as through

intoxication (Baldwin-White 2021). Some policies also require consent to be given explicitly and verbally (Jozkowski and Peterson 2013; Curtis and Burnett 2017; Hust et al. 2017; Goodcase, Spencer, and Toews 2021; Groggel et al. 2021). However, consent often involves a complex interactional relationship between the parties engaged in a sexual relationship, in which consent may be implicit or nonverbal (Jozkowski and Peterson 2013; Hust et al. 2017; Groggel et al. 2021; Setty 2021).

Written definitions of consent are an important element of consent practices at colleges and universities (Graham et al. 2017). All colleges and universities that receive federal funding must comply with Title IX by establishing policies to address campus sexual misconduct, including the definition of consent (Singleton 2017). In an analysis of consent definitions from 995 colleges and universities, researchers found that 93% of schools had sexual assault policies and consent definitions, and 87.6% of those were available online. Singleton (2017) found that college consent definitions tend to discriminate against the accused party and benefit the accuser in sexual assault cases. Singleton (2017) cited some cases that highlighted the lack of investigation into sexual assault at institutions with broad and all-encompassing consent definitions or that favor specific identities.

Existing research also attempts to understand the difference between students' knowledge of consent and consent practices in sexual relationships. In studies on this topic, students could define consent, including affirmative consent, but they did not view it as a realistic component of their sexual relationships, leading them to be unlikely to seek consent (Curtis and Burnett 2017; Setty 2021; Hardesty et al. 2022). Students with a difference between their understandings of consent and their behaviors attributed this discrepancy to social norms and expectations surrounding sex, such as the idea that kissing and touching always lead to sex (Setty 2021). Students further emphasized that they do not wish to seek verbal consent for sex when it is preceded by nonverbal actions, such as kissing or leaning in (Groggel et al. 2021; Hardesty et al. 2022:1122). These findings indicate that students may misunderstand nonverbal cues, leading to nonconsensual sexual interactions (Groggel et al. 2021; Hardesty et al. 2022).

Further, the literature on consent education identifies why some types of consent education may fail. In one survey, students ranked their sources of consent education from most to least influential, with the internet and social media as the most influential, followed by friends, school, and parents (MacDougall et al. 2020). On average, students ranked the sexual health education that they received in school as poor (MacDougall et al. 2020). 46% of respondents said that their school-based consent education had no impact on them, and 76% stated their consent education from their parents had no impact on them (MacDougall et al. 2020).

Still, some students can benefit from consent education in college (Thomas, Sorenson, and Joshi 2016; Ortiz and Shafer 2018). A survey of students' understanding of consent before, during, and after a campus consent education campaign found that consent education in college improved students' understanding of consent (Ortiz and Shafer 2018). The groups that experienced the greatest improvement in their comprehension of consent, based on the information they learned from the education campaigns, were men and sorority or fraternity members (Ortiz and Shafer 2018). Thomas and colleagues (2016) examined specific tactics to increase

the effectiveness of college consent education campaigns. They found that direct messages are most effective for college students, especially when they use bright colors and witty language. This research provides a model for how education can become effective for college students if it targets groups without existing consent education (Thomas et al. 2016; Ortiz and Shafer 2018).

Alcohol and Stereotypes as a Situational Organizer of Sexual Scripts

One specific context where consent behaviors may change in a sexual relationship, according to research on college students, occurs when alcohol is present (Jozkowski and Wiersma 2015; Baldwin-White 2021). In one survey of heterosexual undergraduate students, researchers found that students believed expectations of alcohol consumption made them more likely to consent to sex, and it also made them more likely to expect sex (Jozkowski and Wiersma 2015). This effect was particularly pronounced for students in relationships, who were more likely to expect and use nonverbal and passive forms of consent (Jozkowski and Wiersma 2015). Similarly, students in another study said that alcohol made them uncertain about how to handle consent (Baldwin-White 2021). Because nonverbal consent may increase misunderstandings surrounding consent, and alcohol increases students' preferences for nonverbal consent, alcohol can negatively influence students' abilities to identify and give consent (Jozkowski and Wiersma 2015; Baldwin-White 2021).

Stereotypes also play a role in how individuals respond to nonconsensual behaviors. Jozkowski and Peterson (2013) discovered that students who endorse traditional sexual expectations, such as that women should perform oral sex, that men are aggressive, and that men use deception to obtain sex, were less likely to negotiate consent in their sexual relationships. Jozkowski and Peterson (2013) discussed that, according to college students, men are framed as seekers and women are characterized as gatekeepers of sex. Overall, existing research highlights factors that impact perceptions of consent and how consent is used in sexual relationships. This project seeks to contribute to the growing body of research on the complexity of meanings associated with the concept of consent and to provide insights into how college students may use this knowledge to inform their understanding of consent.

Methods

This study draws on indepth interviews to examine how students move from learning definitions of consent to negotiating consent in real situations. Rather than asking only what students know, we focus on how consent is communicated, avoided, or assumed in practice, especially in moments shaped by alcohol, awkwardness, and relationship dynamics. This approach makes visible where institutional consent discourse fails and how peer norms and mediainfluenced counterdiscourses create alternative rules for what counts as acceptable behavior. Our central research questions are: How do students translate institutional consent discourse into daily practice in intimate encounters? How do gendered/heteronormative sexual scripts and party drinking cultures shape this translation? How do students evaluate consent education relative to competing peer/media discourses?

In this project, we elected to conduct a case study of a small, private liberal arts college in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. A small, residential

liberal arts college provides strong analytic leverage for examining the gap between consent discourse and practice. High residential density and close social networks mean students repeatedly encounter one another across classrooms, residence halls, and social spaces, making norms around dating, hooking up, and consent highly visible and quickly shared. Partycentered residential social life further concentrates situations in which consent must be negotiated in real time, often under social pressure to avoid discomfort or disruption. By interviewing both firstyear students and seniors, this study captures how students initially interpret institutional messaging and how their consent practices develop over time within campus peer cultures. Our focus was to provide insight from the perspectives of college students, whose experiences make them cultural insiders (Knott et al. 2022; Small and Cook 2023).

We collected in-depth semi-structured interview data from 20 participants between the ages of 18 and 22. The average age of the participants was 20 years old. 10 participants were seniors in college, and 10 were freshmen. Of the participants, 75% were female, and 25% were male. 15 participants identified as white, 3 as Hispanic or Latino, and 2 as Asian. Further, 11 participants stated that their sexuality was straight, 6 said they were bisexual, 2 said they were gay, and 1 participant said they identified as asexual. The participants had a variety of majors as well.

Participants were recruited for this project using three methods. First, posters advertising the research were distributed to individuals who oversee the student residences. Interested students could contact the researcher by email, and they were then sent a description of the research and a link to sign up for an interview. After conducting initial interviews with students contacted via posters, additional participants were recruited through referrals from those initial participants. Finally, information was sent to officers of on-campus student organizations via email to solicit student participation within their organizations. No incentives were offered for student participation, and all students were over the age of 18. These data were collected with IRB approval from Gettysburg College and by CITI-trained researchers. The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

Interviews were conducted in person for this project. The interview topics included experiences with romantic and sexual relationships, defining consent, describing experiences with consent, and education related to consent. Interviews lasted for approximately 30 minutes and were recorded through an audio transcription service. A codebook was developed through open coding of 10 transcripts. Next, the remaining 10 transcripts were selectively coded for topics such as knowledge of consent, types of consent, sources of consent education, beneficial aspects of consent education, harmful aspects of consent education, the role of alcohol, and sexual practices related to consent. After coding based on these themes, the data were categorized into the themes with the strongest findings for further analysis.

Limitations of this research include the small sample size, which is effective for a targeted case study of a single institution, such as this project. Future research might include a more comprehensive, systemic collection of survey data. Additionally, this work may provide a theoretical basis for future research evaluating how students conceptualize consent across different universities in other regions of the United States, thereby gaining a broader understanding of this topic.

Results and Discussion

Several key themes emerged from this research surrounding students' perceptions of consent and consent education. First, they identified issues specifically related to consent education, including that students received it too late, that the education they received was not interactive, and that it was not inclusive. Secondly, students believed the best practices for effective consent education included realistic examples, presentations and lectures, and videos and media, which they did not feel were reflected in their educational experiences. Third, the ways students defined consent differed significantly from how they understood their practices related to consent in sexual relationships, especially when alcohol and party culture were involved.

"This is Annoying": When Consent Education Fails

The central framework at this institution is the use of pre-matriculation online modules. These modules appear to secure procedural compliance without fostering interactional competence or student buy-in. Students routinely described "clickthrough" engagement and rapid forgetting, caused by low interactivity, inconvenient timing, and sexual stigma. These accounts show how the university's institutional discourse, organized around oriented training before students enter actual campus social life, fails to translate into memorable, inthemoment language for negotiating consent. The mechanism is straightforward: low interactivity + prematriculation timing + stigma result in limited discursive buy-in, leaving students trained yet unprepared.

The actual structure and framework of consent education were identified as a significant concern for participants in this study. These issues included recommendations for improving consent education, as well as issues such as timing, inclusiveness, and structure. Our results identified that over half of the participants believed the consent education they received occurred too late in their lives. Among the 20 interviewees, 11 stated they had no formal education on the topic of consent. Lilly, a first-year student, said, "I think [consent education] comes a bit too late, like the fact that we're going into college and…almost all of us are adults, and it's the first time that at least I've had an actual education about consent." Rose, a senior, shared, "I don't think I heard about [consent] until like college…which is kind of concerning." Among the nine students who received a formal consent education before college, most said that their education emphasized not having sex rather than how to have consensual sex. Maddie, a first-year student, stated, "I went to a religious school…no one ever really wanted to talk about sex because sex was supposed to be this thing between married people and married people only."

Another issue with students' consent education was that before college, it was not inclusive of members of the LGBTQ+ community. Many students remarked that their consent education focused primarily on heterosexual relationships, resulting in a lack of understanding about consent for LGBTQ+ students. Regarding the consent education she received before coming to college, a senior named Marie said, "I felt like a lot of things were missing, especially once you reached high school and realized that like there's more to the world than straight sex, and like, that's the kind of sex that's mostly talked about." A first-year, bisexual student named Abigail also said that her consent education before college "was just focusing on sex between a man and a woman." Given that Abigail identified as bisexual, her consent

education did not account for her sexual orientation and practices. Students also expressed that their college consent education did not adequately discuss consent within the LGBTQ+ community. Charlotte, a bisexual senior, said that she wished the education included "more conversations about different sexualities and how [nonconsensual relationships] can still happen in non-straight relationships." While discussing his experiences with college consent education, Ben, a gay-identifying senior, stated that in his education:

> Anything about gay people [was missing]. Now, I get that getting a "yes" from a gay person isn't exactly that different from getting a "yes" from a straight person, but…even before you get to like sex is like, when you want someone's consent to flirt with them…you really don't have any way of knowing if he's gay or straight until you ask him, and most straight men aren't going to be comfortable with you flirting with them, so…there's aspects of consent that matter in almost every interaction you have with a romantic or sexual partner.

According to Ben, asking for consent to flirt with an individual is an experience that is unique to the gay community, which is why consent education that accounts for various sexualities is important. Without this specific education, students may be misinformed about the expectations of consent within some communities. Students felt that the consent education they received before and during college did not provide them with knowledge about consent that applied to members of the LGBTQ+ community. This impacted how they viewed the value and quality of their consent education.

While there is little a college can do when faced with inadequate consent education in secondary education, this finding remains important. Understanding that a significant number of first-year students may come into college with extremely limited or unrealistic knowledge of safe sexual practices and consent education is an important element in developing consent education and college policy. Furthermore, their education may be shaped by shared media and peer culture, creating discourse that runs counter to consent education models.

Though most students claimed they did not receive thorough consent education before college, it is a mandatory component of the first-year orientation at the institution they attend. Despite receiving consent education in college, students often did not remember it, with many stating they did not receive any college consent education. Others, such as senior Noelle, shared that while she knew she received a consent education in college, she did not remember what she learned because "it was freshman year." First-year students also indicated that they did not receive consent education in college, even though they had completed it less than six months before these interviews. A first-year student named Josie shared, "I don't see when [consent] would have come up [in college], like definitely not in any of my classes." Another first-year student, Katie, initially shared that she did not learn about consent "through college-mandated learning," then exclaimed, "oh my god, maybe we had to do something…but not that I can think of off the top of my head, because if it was something I feel like I already knew, so it didn't stick by me." The fact that both senior and first-year students were unable to recall the consent education they received in college highlighted the issue that consent education itself was not memorable enough.

Other students explicitly stated that the consent education they received in college was not interactive

enough, leading them not to engage with it. Most of the consent education students received occurred through online modules they completed before arriving at college. Regarding the online consent education modules, Lily recalled:

> There were multiple [modules] that we had to do, so I think that just because there were multiple, everybody just wanted to like to scan through them and do them as quickly as possible…I feel like people probably didn't read it well enough. I know that…everybody was just kind of like, "this is annoying."

Lilly's comments on the volume of the modules she completed and how other students perceived them indicated that those students did not appreciate the education they received. Senior Donny shared similar sentiments, stating, "They gave us the mandatory online training, [and] I was kind of sitting there like… 'Why am I doing this?' It is important, but…it was like 'Now I gotta sit through and click all these buttons.'" Donny continued by explaining his perception of the online modules in general, "Multiple choice boxes don't do jack crap…having a checkbox that says, you know, 'is this rape' or 'is this not rape' is not going to do anything." Another senior, Brock, said, "I just feel like the way it was distributed was like an online module that needed to be completed; a lot of people, me included, didn't take it seriously. I have never once heard someone talk about how the consent modules were useful." Brock's stance stressed that not only did students tend not to take their consent education seriously, but they also did not reflect on it meaningfully. According to Lilly and Brock, students did not dedicate attention to their college's existing consent education system, which undermines the institutional authority of the consent discourse.

Colleges often rely heavily on online training modules to meet state and federal guidelines for employee and student training. Our case study is no exception, and a deeper dive into college policy found that students are expected to complete an online training module before the start of their freshman year that includes consent education. The research on the effectiveness of online training modules is mixed (Means et al. 2013), but this research suggests that such training may not be sufficiently effective for consent education. One possibility is that the timing of training, before the freshman year, may play a role. Additionally, the content of the training may encourage some students to move through quickly, due to social stigmas around sex and sexual behavior (Astle et al. 2021).

The online module is an institutional discourse that frames consent as policy knowledge. Yet students rapidly produce a counterdiscourse of trivialization ("just click through"), which undermines the policy's normative force before it can shape everyday practice. In interactional terms, the module offers definitions but not interactional resources (phrases, strategies) that students can deploy in intimate moments, leaving official discourse outcompeted by local, peer, and media-generated meanings. This helps explain why institutional efforts yield compliance without conversion; a discourse that travels poorly from the training portal to the settings where sex happens.

"When You Can Find Yourself Enjoying Consent": Best Practices for Consent Education

In contrast, students consistently described interactive and examplebased forms of consent education as meaningful and memorable. Videos, presenta-

tions, and reallife scenarios helped them understand how consent works in practice and gave them clear models to follow. These examples suggest that concrete stories and live interactions help students remember and apply consent discourses in meaningful ways. By building on realistic and compelling storylines, consent discourses can be communicated effectively and authoritatively. Such approaches help students practice the language and actions needed in real situations.

Participants identified several practices as effective approaches to consent education. From a discursive perspective, effective consent education operates through persuasive discourses that normalize consent-based sexual ethics and produce students as self-regulating subjects. Rather than relying on abstract rules, these discourses are most effective when they appear realistic and are embedded across institutional contexts. A first-year student named Charlie shared that in his college consent education, "They showed videos about situations, which was memorable. A guy sees a girl, who is, like, kind of passed out, and he just gave her a blanket and left instead of proceeding to have sex." Charlie's ability to recall this example illustrates how visual narratives function as disciplinary tools that make norms of consent visible, memorable, and seemingly commonsense. By presenting a clear model of consent, these videos work to emphasize institutional expectations and encourage students to govern their behavior accordingly. Charlie also suggested that colleges should consider "reflecting on cases that happened on campus," so that students could learn from them. He thought that the more cases that students received about consent, the more they could learn how to implement consent into their sexual relationships. Another first-year student named Rebecca said:

> There was one girl that was really drunk in the slide, and, well, they said that she couldn't give consent. They gave a scenario for if the guy continued even though the girl was not conscious enough to give consent, and one where he respected her unconsciousness, and another one where a girl was uncomfortable, and the guy noticed, and then the same one if he had ignored it.

Like Charlie, Rebecca provided an example from the consent education she received, which, once again, demonstrated that some of the most memorable elements of consent education are realistic lived experiences. Her answer highlighted the value of learning about how consent works in practice, normalizing the institutional discourse of consent. Another first-year student named Henrietta stated, "I feel that giving real-life examples goes a long way, giving examples of what happened on these campus grounds, and how it's been resolved, like, success stories, I think are really important." For Henriette and Rebecca, such examples function as institutional narratives that transform individual cases into moral lessons, delineating acceptable and unacceptable sexual conduct within the discourse. By framing incidents as "success stories," institutions present consent not only as a rule but as a normalized outcome of self-governance. Such stories encourage students to internalize the behavior and effectively police themselves in a disciplinary fashion. Henrietta further suggested that exposure to examples of nonconsensual sexual relationships increases student investment in consent education, indicating how consent discourse becomes more effective when it is grounded in recognizable experiences. Authentic examples of consent's role in sexual relationships increase the effectiveness of consent education because students more easily remember what they learned.

Participants also discussed integrating presentations and lectures into their education. A first-year student named Sally explained, "I learned a lot about [consent] in some lectures…" She continued, stating that "more lectures about consent" would be the best way to improve college consent education. For some students, lectures and presentations function as formal sites of knowledge production, where institutional authority legitimizes certain definitions of consent and sexual responsibility. Katie discussed her experience of voluntarily attending a consent education presentation that she described as "one of the best consent conversations [she] ever had." She explained that in the presentation, the speaker talked about how "consent adds to your relationship, it doesn't take away from it… when you can find yourself enjoying consent, that can also be good." Katie's belief that the presentation she attended was valuable, and her ability to clarify what she learned, emphasized the benefits of presentations in consent education. In addition, Charlotte explained:

> During first-year orientation, they…had a whole conversation about the whole, like, even if you're drunk, it's not consent. You can't consent if you're drunk, and that consent has to be verbal. I feel like they did a pretty decent job at it, at least from my perspective.

As a senior, Charlotte's ability to recall the consent lecture she had in her first year is a clear indicator of the effectiveness of in-person communication in normalizing the consent discourse. Not only did she remember that the lecture occurred, but she also recalled the details she learned from it.

Finally, students explained the positive impacts of videos and media on their consent education. Three of the interviewees discussed the same video they watched as a crucial component of their consent education. Lilly explained the following about the video:

> It's about like the tea, so if you order tea, and if you're given tea, that's great. But if you order tea, and you change your mind, and you don't want it anymore, but you're still given tea, like, that's not okay. Or you can change your mind about wanting to drink the tea halfway through, and you shouldn't have to finish it.

Each student who cited the video said they found it a helpful metaphor for consent practices. Students shared detailed memories of this video, demonstrating that videos are effective for distributing information about consent. Moreover, they named social media as a source of their consent education. Charlie, a student from Vietnam, stated that Western media taught him about consent because "it wasn't a big thing to talk about sexuality and sex" in Vietnam. The media served as Charlie's only consent education before he arrived at college. This is a reminder that media, especially visual media, do not merely transmit information; they exercise disciplinary power by normalizing consent as an expected component of ethical behavior. Josie explained that media-based consent education helped her learn about consent more than her school education. She said, "Just reading other people's experiences helps me form what I think applies to me and has made it seem more real than just like a slideshow in a classroom." Josie's experience reflected the notion that examples of consensual and nonconsensual behaviors may be more useful than definitions alone, and social media helps to distribute these examples. Brock shared that "media is in the form of like television shows where there's possibly a situation of, like, sexual assault or rape, and in those situations, they discuss consent," which was beneficial for him.

He also provided an example from the television show *Switched at Birth* to illustrate what he learned:

> There was a situation where…one of the characters was drunk and the male was drunk, and then they engaged in, and both drunk parties engaged in the sexual act together. And then they were discussing how, after the situation, the girl felt like there was a problem. She didn't feel okay. She felt like she was used.

Brock's explanation of the television show he watched as a source of his consent education emphasized its impact on him. Students' discussions of videos and media as tools that facilitated their consent education highlighted those options as some of the best practices for consent education.

Participants explained that, based on their experiences, best practices for consent education included realistic examples, presentations and lectures, and videos and media. Foucauldian theory would tell us that these formats function as discursive technologies that translate institutional knowledge into scripts students can rehearse and internalize. By repeatedly staging consent through recognizable scenarios, institutions strengthen the legitimacy of their discourse and extend disciplinary power into everyday sexual interactions. These narrative scenarios and recurring phrases work to counter peer and media discourses that trivialize or normalize nonconsensual behavior. In doing so, they provide students with memorable, shareable language that circulates within student networks, allowing consent to emerge as a taken-for-granted norm rather than an institutional policy. This discursive framework reshapes consent by creating individuals who regulate their conduct in alignment with institutional expectations, thereby reinforcing consent norms through everyday practice rather than overt enforcement.

"It Just Happens": Differences in Consent Definitions and Sexual Practices

Finally, many students demonstrated a gap between how they define consent and how they practice it in their relationships. Publicly, students often reproduced institutional discourses that frame consent as clear, verbal, and ongoing. Privately, however, they described relying on implied consent, routine behaviors, or "reading the vibe." This dissonance highlights the limits of institutional discourse when it competes with entrenched norms governing intimacy. Discomfort with interrupting sexual encounters, expectations rooted in gender roles, and established relationship routines frequently outweighed formal consent definitions during real interactions.

Alcohol use and party culture further complicate the alignment between consent discourse and sexual practice. These social contexts function as counter-sites in which institutional norms are suspended or reinterpreted, weakening mechanisms of self-surveillance and ethical self-control. As a result, students navigate competing regimes of truth, one articulated through institutional consent education and another embedded in peer culture and intoxicated social environments. This reveals how power operates unevenly across contexts and how consent remains contingently practiced rather than uniformly enacted.

Nine out of the 20 interviewees provided inconsistent consent definitions and explanations of their sexual practices. First, Charlie explained that consent "must be a clear, verbal agreement," but "if I have a romantic partner, I would have an agreement that I would nod my head" to give consent. While Charlie defined consent as a verbal agreement, his consent practices indicated nonverbal consent. Like-

wise, Marie referred to consent as "both partners are agreeing to whatever activity that they're doing," but defined consent differently in her relationship. She explained, "I feel like it'd be weird if my boyfriend was like, 'Can we kiss?' I'd be like 'Not now that you asked'…I feel like, at least in our relationship, I feel like implied consent is there." Marie stated that she believes consent requires agreement, yet in her relationship, it is implied, indicating discrepancies between her definition and practice. Ben, however, demonstrated how consent practices in relationships might be negotiated, noting that "it's important to ask before like every single act," but that this could differ in practice. He described how his former boyfriend "wanted to know if it was okay to wake me up with a blowjob, and I was like, 'Oh, yeah, that's weird, because I guess I can't consent if I'm sleeping,' and he was like, 'Yeah, so we can set up a thing where if we agree beforehand that that's okay.'" Next, Rebecca explained that for consent to be obtained, "We should always discuss it, have a conversation with your partner, and be sure they're comfortable with it." However, she later said that "in the moment, you kind of forget to ask [for consent] because it just happens," which differed considerably from her view that consent should always be discussed.

Unlike other interviewees, Rose provided two conflicting explanations of her sexual practices related to consent, rather than a definition that differed from her practices. She started by explaining, "When I'm like with someone, and we're like, gonna have sex, I usually like ask them like, 'Is this okay? Is this okay?' like the whole time as we're going through it." Later in her interview, Rose said:

> Sometimes the communication hasn't been good in the past with me…maybe because we just don't, like, aren't like compatible or whatever and, like, don't really like vibe as well, and then it just feels awkward, so then I feel weird asking, and then in that case, I'm like, I don't know if they want this, but I'm just gonna do it and see if they say anything or respond.

Although Rose initially stated that she liked to ask for consent before every sexual act, her second explanation indicated that she would not ask for consent if she felt awkward doing so. In general, these responses indicated that even though students may be able to define consent, and they may think that their sexual interactions are consensual, their explanations of their sexual practices show that this is not always the case.

Unsurprisingly, a major theme among student responses was that while they understood that alcohol impairs the ability to give consent, they did not incorporate this understanding into their perceptions of consent. Party culture and peer expectations shape how students apply consent rules in specific situations. Alcohol often speeds up intimacy and reduces verbal communication, making students rely on assumptions rather than clear agreement, even when they know official guidelines say otherwise. Out of the 20 interviewees, 13 stated that consent was possible with some amount of alcohol consumption. Josie explained that from her college consent education, she learned "consent is different sober than drunk." However, she later stated that "it'd be easy to say not have sex when you're drunk, but that's not going to change and that's not inherently wrong," because "[having sex while drinking] is fun at the time, and like, while it can result in potential regret and uncomfortableness, like, it's not always bad." Josie's knowledge about consent showed that while she knew consent differed with the presence of alcohol, she did not believe that having drunk sex was "inherently wrong." Similarly,

Rebecca stated that "It's not wise to be under the influence of alcohol" while having sex, but consent is possible "with a few drinks." Like Josie and Rebecca, Brock explained:

> When people are under the influence, they are likely unable to give consent. However, people do process alcohol in different ways and at different times based on a variety of factors, so just because someone has had a drink does not mean that they are tipsy yet or drunk yet, like, I could likely have something like a Mike's Hard Lemonade at a meal and not be under the influence at all or not feel like my judgment is impaired and still feel like I could probably consent.

He then continued, stating, "For the sake of educational purposes, the tagline needs to be once you've had something to drink that you can no longer consent, otherwise people will likely abuse that." Brock's explanation reflected most students' perspectives as they disagreed with the notion that alcohol automatically inhibits consent. His reference to the educational "tagline" also sheds light on how students may dismiss consent education related to alcohol because they do not perceive it as realistic. Donny discussed his perception that "the law and… morals are pretty clear about, you know, if you're intoxicated, you can't consent." Nevertheless, he added, "I think if both parties are intoxicated, it kind of, in some way, should cancel out" and "this is college, drunk people go home together all the time…999 times out of 1000…it's not an issue." Donny's perspective represented similar inconsistencies to other students' perspectives because, while he knew that intoxicated people could not consent, that knowledge did not change his personal view. This counter-discourse is deeply culturally embedded within the institution and often supersedes the discourse of institutional consent. Without question, peer and media knowledge is normalized in a way that overrides institutional power.

Additionally, students shared that they perceived alcohol as an acceptable component of sexual relationships in college, even if they did not participate in this practice themselves. Lucy explained, "I think especially because of hookup culture…there's a more and more variable approach to alcohol use and consent." She added, "I haven't been to a frat yet, I haven't drunk, any of that, but I'm guessing that if you have like a little to drink and you don't feel intoxicated…you engage in sexual acts." Through her explanation, Lucy highlighted that many students do not view alcohol as a definitive barrier to consent, which is especially problematic for first-year students, like her, who have not yet experienced this challenge. Next, Charlotte said, "I feel like sex is just generally considered a thing people do in college, like it's a bigger part of culture and campus life, like you go to parties, you get drunk, and then you hook up with someone," even though she had not participated in this practice herself. Like Lucy, Charlotte expressed that she knew about alcohol-fueled hookup culture in college, despite not engaging with this culture. Lastly, Toni shared her perception of alcohol and sex on college campuses:

> I think it's been like really normalized, like about hookup culture, like the way that you hook up with someone is to go to a social setting that usually involves alcohol, find someone there that you want to hook up with, and you go home with them, and like, that's just what happens, and that is kind of what college is advertised as.

Through this perspective, Toni emphasized that drinking during sexual activity is highly normalized, even when it runs counter to institutional con-

sent narratives. She then provided an example of what she learned about the role of alcohol in sexual relationships from her older brother before coming to college:

> He did just talk all the time about how, like, that was all people do on the weekends, like they go out and get drunk and then like, hook up with people. He'd be like, "Yeah, I walked one of my, like, girlfriends back to her dorm after she hooked up with a guy that lived in my dorm. Like she came to my room, and I walked her back."

Toni's experience with her brother showed how harmful perceptions about alcohol and consent are passed down to students before they enter college. This normalization reflects the operation of discursive power, in which repeated representations of college as a space of alcohol-fueled sexual freedom produce expectations about how intimacy "should" work. Whether they learn through siblings or friends, students know what to expect in their sexual relationships long before they arrive at college. This peer-based knowledge operates alongside institutional discourse, often reinforcing dominant sexual scripts rather than challenging them. If students believe that alcohol does not impede their ability to give or obtain consent, then this may impact how they approach their sexual relationships. In these contexts, a partyculture counterdiscourse normalizes nonverbal communication and rapid sexual connection, redefining what counts as consent despite the institutional discourse of affirmative, sober agreement. Alcohol functions as a situational organizer that activates alternative sexual scripts ("a few drinks are fine") and overturns explicit consent.

This pattern shows students publicly voicing the institutional discourse while privately adopting peer/partner counterdiscourses that privilege smooth interaction, implied consent, and gendered expectations. At the level of social interaction, the desire to avoid awkwardness tips the balance toward nonverbal scripts, widening the gap between stated norms and enacted practice. The persistence of this gap indicates that counterdiscourses are not merely resistance but working logics that practically organize intimate and sexual behavior unless institutions supply usable alternatives. This dissonance between experience and expectation may play a significant role in issues of sexual violence on college campuses.

Conclusion

Future research could build on this work by including a larger, more diverse sample of students using more systematic recruitment methods. Second, because this study was conducted at a single college in the United States, the findings may not reflect students' experiences at other types of institutions or in different regional contexts. Future studies could examine how students conceptualize and negotiate consent across multiple campuses and geographic regions to develop a broader understanding of consent practices in higher education. Additional areas for future research might include a deeper analysis of where and how counter-discourse around sexual consent emerges, especially as it relates to narratives of college culture, sexual behavior, and, in particular, alcohol consumption. A deeper understanding of the students' concepts of consent and how they use these in their everyday sexual practices could be especially beneficial in addressing concerns about sexual violence on college campuses. Still, this specific case study provides strong findings that allow us to examine institutional consent education within the framework of Foucault's view

of educational institutions, such as universities, as powerful bodies capable of creating discourse.

Given the power colleges possess over their students, Foucault's theories suggest that consent education should shape students' conceptions of consent (Foucault 1984; 2000). However, the findings indicate that this is not the case as students perceive the consent education they receive as largely ineffective in changing behavior, though they do highlight some areas of effectiveness. They also demonstrate misunderstandings surrounding crucial components of consensual sexual relationships. As a result of this disconnect, a counter-discourse surrounding consent persists within communities of students that shape sexual behavior and may contribute to sexual violence. Understanding the external networks through which students acquire knowledge about consent may be key to altering their behavior.

Our findings suggest students perceive their consent education as flawed due to its timing, limited interactivity, and lack of inclusion of LGBTQ+ experiences. These shortcomings reveal how institutional consent discourse often fails to establish itself as authoritative or relevant within students' everyday sexual lives. Even when consent education is provided, students reported that it was frequently ineffective, suggesting that the discourse lacks sufficient power to reshape conduct. These findings align with prior research showing that many students rate the consent education they receive as poor (MacDougall et al. 2020). However, they contradict studies suggesting that inadequate pre-college consent education can be remedied through college-level instruction, as participants in this study reported learning little from their college consent education (Thomas et al. 2016; Ortiz and Shafer 2018).

Students also identified effective forms of consent education as those that included real-life examples, presentations and lectures, and videos and media. These discursive technologies translate abstract institutional norms into strategies and scripts. These methods directly address one of students' primary critiques—its lack of interactivity, suggesting that consent discourse gains power when it is experienced as participatory rather than purely informational.

In addition, students acknowledged that while alcohol limits individuals' capacity to consent, they simultaneously viewed alcohol as a normalized and expected component of college hookup culture, often incorporating drinking into their sexual relationships. This reflects the presence of competing discourses in our findings. Institutional consent education frames alcohol as a risk factor, while peer and media discourses normalize it as integral to college life. These findings are consistent with prior research demonstrating that students are often uncertain about alcohol's role in consent (Jozkowski and Wiersma 2015; Baldwin-White 2021).

Many of the responses further highlighted a persistent disconnect between students' definitions of consent and their sexual practices. Although students articulated definitions emphasizing communication and mutual agreement, they frequently expressed discomfort with explicit, verbal, and ongoing consent in practice. As existing research suggests, the ability to define consent does not necessarily translate into the ability to enact it (Curtis and Burnett 2017; Setty 2021; Hardesty et al. 2022). Overall, our research suggests that students may misunderstand or selectively apply consent based on existing educational approaches, leading to practices that normalize alcohol use and avoid explicit consent communication. These findings indicate that

peer-driven, media-amplified sexuality discourses exert greater influence over students' behavior than the formal, structured consent discourse provided by our educational institution. Further study is needed to consider how common this is, but it may be that some institutions have succeeded in producing a definition of consent without producing subjects who can consistently practice it, revealing a fundamental weakness in how consent discourse is constructed, circulated, and embodied.

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