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What Is Going On? An Analysis of the Interaction Order

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Goffman; Interaction Order; Situations; Disruption; Alignment; Power; Generational Cleavage; Visual Sociology; Local Sociology of Action

Abstract: Seeing sociology visually adds a sense of *realness* to the viewer compared to only reading sociological texts. In this paper, I aim to provide an example of how a single scene from a feature film can be utilized as a practical and meaningful means to analyze a social situation and to help students of sociology to grasp key features of Goffman's theory of interaction order. More precisely, the main aims of the paper are 1) to illustrate Goffman's theory of the interaction order by identifying acts of disruption and alignment in interaction through a film clip; and 2) to attempt to analyze, in a Goffmanian sense, what is really *going on* in the situational interaction. The scene is from the 2013 American movie *August: Osage County* and follows a dinner of immediate family in the wake of the funeral of the hostess's late husband. The normative and civilized interaction of the meal is, however, jeopardized by the hostile and provocative mood of the hostess, as she repeatedly disrupts the interaction order with attempts to mock and/or uncover the hidden and vulnerable truths of the immediate members of her family, exemplifying her power status in the particular situation. The dinner guests, however, try to overlook and resist the provocation of the hostess and stick to their predetermined roles to save and sustain their idealized selves (their faces) and the interaction order (the faces of others). In doing so they, on the one hand, discard the uncomfortable truths acclaimed by the hostess and, on the other, explain the hostess's provocative actions in terms of their claim that she is unwell and in need of medical attention. Thus, the attacked dinner guests in the scene align more alliance to the interaction order than to truth itself.

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Rules for behavior while in the presence of others and by virtue of the presence of others are the rules that make orderly face-to-face communication of a linguistic kind possible.

[Goffman 2005:148]

Symbolic interactionists argue that the most fruitful approach to understanding the actions of people is through micro-level investigations of the interactions of people within the context of a situation (Blumer 1969; Collins 2004). The argument states that it is within such micro-sociological analysis of the face-to-face interactions of people that larger societal norms and customs of society can be identified, thus providing a link between the micro and macro levels (Rawls 1987; Berger and Luckmann 1991; Verhoeven 1993:6; Collins 2004; Tavory and Fine 2020). That line of sociological inquiry centers on what the renowned sociologist Erving Goffman (1983) referred to as the interaction order (see also Rawls 1987).

People's behavior in situations rests on predetermined rituals that, on the one hand, make social interaction possible, but, on the other hand, constrain the actions of individuals as such rituals compel people to act not only towards their sentiments but under the expected norms of behavior of a particular situation. When people comply with those predetermined norms of behavior, the expected line of action is set, as everyone within the given situation accepts everyone else's line of motivation and action. That kind of mutual acceptance seems to be the basic structural feature of social interaction, making social interaction smooth and functional. Thus, those who partake in social interaction represent a "team," responsible for staging a successful "show" (Goffman 1990).

The mutual norms of action in a given situation only hold if all those involved play their part according to the script of the interaction order, which, however, is not always the case. Disruptions, or breaches in interaction, are common as people do not always stick to their prescribed lines of action. Such disruptions tend to unsettle the interaction order and can make people feel vulnerable and uncomfortable, and even ashamed. Disruptions in interaction can further endanger the whole encounter and lead to the breakup of a situational interaction. People who experience disruptions in interaction thus rely on a set of predetermined strategies and rituals as they try to align their actions to counter the disruption and reinstate some kind of normalcy of order in the interaction, in line with the interaction order. Such mutual dependency in social interaction can be described as social "dance" in which everyone has a common focus of attention, making conversational moves and counter-moves according to the moves of others to maintain a collective performance in a given situation.

Symbolic interactionists have been interested in the dynamics of face-to-face interactions of people within given situations where they have, in particular, contrasted successful interactions with those that were strained or violated due to the disruption of the interaction order (Goffman 2005:20). Randall Collins (2004:20), for instance, stated how "the extreme instance highlights the mechanism that produces the normal." And, in his series of books on the methodology of the social sciences, Howard S. Becker (2007), accordingly, argues that an effective method to understand the normative workings of society is to look for opposites that contrast what normally is to be expected.

In this context, Tavory and Fine (2020) have argued that micro-sociological theorists have overempha-

sized how actors make use of alignments in interaction, but they have to a lesser degree focused on the motives of disruptions of the interaction order that, in turn, would propose broader cultural issues of situational interactions. Thus, to illustrate how Goffman's theory of the interaction order works, it is important to provide examples and analysis both of how actors disrupt the interaction order in a particular situation and of the subsequent attempts of other actors within a situation to align the interaction and reinstate normalcy in line with the interaction order.

This paper can be defined as a study of local sociology of action (Tavory and Fine 2020). The analysis of the paper builds on the examination of a twenty-minute scene from the 2013 movie *August: Osage County*. More precisely, the scene, which follows a funeral dinner of those closest to the family patriarch, shows how the newfound widow, and hostess of the dinner (in particular), repeatedly disrupts the interaction order by her hostile and provocative conduct towards the dinner guests and thus breaking the norms of behavior she is supposed to maintain during the dinner. The unstable widow makes a *scene* and acts as if she was trying to pick a fight with everyone at the dinner table, and the scene unfolds to illustrate how the dinner guests try to preserve the rituals of the meal and to save face, and the interaction order in general, by submitting to, or sidestepping, the widow's attempts at provocation for the show to go on (Goffman 2005).

The main aims of the paper are 1) to illustrate Goffman's theory of the interaction order by identifying acts of disruption and alignment in a situational interaction through a film clip; and 2) to attempt to analyze, in a Goffmanian sense, what is really *going on* in the situational interaction, with further impli-

cations of the broader social themes and issues of the interaction.

The Interaction Order

The mere participation of people in social interaction is associated with some kind of risk. Just as people can face danger when encountered in hallways, elevators, and alleys, people can face danger in any situation of social interaction, in particular to their notion of selves (Goffman 1990; 2005). Social situations thus may force people to put their selves on the line, with the danger of being exposed, exploited, and/or violated in the presence of others (an audience).

When persons come into one another's immediate physical presence, they become accessible to each other in unique ways. There arise the possibilities of physical and sexual assault, of accosting and being dragged into unwanted states of talk, of offending and importuning through the use of words, of transgressing certain territories of the self of the other, of showing disregard and disrespect for the gathering present and the social occasion under whose auspices the gathering is held. [Goffman 2005:147]

Due to the instability and potential dangers of participating in social interactions, established lines of appropriate action or strategies have emerged to facilitate interaction, representing the interaction order. Although Goffman did not propose a systematic theory of the interaction order, his theory of the interaction order is built on several of his works (1961a; 1963; 1974; 1981; 1990; 2005). The main components of such a theory have been noted as being 1) the social self needs to be maintained through social interactions, which, in turn, places constraints on the individual and provides them with a motivation of compliance; 2) these constraints define the interaction order and

defy social structures; 3) the interaction order generates meaning for the sake of the order; and 4) people commit themselves to the interaction order for moral reasons (Rawls 1987). The interaction order is thus based on pre-existing rituals and the meanings people bring to a particular situation in which people are deployed by frames of meaning, forms of talk, and symbolic gestures, which are deemed appropriate and necessary for successful social interaction (Goffman 1961a; 1963; 1974; 1981; 1990; 2005).

Participants in a given situation represent a team collectively responsible for successful interaction and a showing of a good performance. Goffman used the metaphor of a staged theater play to describe social interaction as dramaturgical, as our daily encounters consist, on the one hand, of our backstage behavior, which refers to our solitary experiences, and on the other hand, of our front stage performance, where all are supposed to play their part in a situation before an audience, according to the proposed script of a given circumstance (2005). The main objective of such a team is to “sustain the definition of the situation that its performance fosters” (Goffman 1990:141). That means that the team members need to accept certain moral obligations to sustain the line the team has taken and cannot exploit their presence to stage their show. Adhering to the line of the interaction order thus protects one against risks and rewards those who toe the line as it reaffirms their worth. In this sense, Lawler (2014:125) has described the interaction order as sacred:

Interactions are “sacred” in the sense that, like religious ceremonies, they give us a sense of our social belonging and our sacredness as persons. Involvement in interaction...is an act of social worship and social binding. To disrupt the interaction is to disrupt society.

Thus, people in interactions work within a specific framework of appearances (Goffman 1990:242) as their involvement in interaction is an interlocking obligation. When one person breaks the collective frame of reference in a given situation, it affects everyone else present. Participants, therefore, cannot “denounce their team” by breaking that interlocking obligation, which serves as a base for the interaction order (Goffman 1990:208). Goffman (1983:5) thus sees social interaction as an order:

An order of activity, the interaction one, more than any other perhaps, is, in fact, orderly, and this orderliness is predicated on a large base on shared cognitive presuppositions, if not normative ones, and self-sustained restraints.

People are expected to play out their anticipated roles in a given situation, where they are supposed to act not only towards their agenda, to maintain their face in situational social interaction, but they are also expected to sustain a standard of considerateness for others present, where they go to great lengths to save the face of others if needed (Goffman 2005:10). That pressure to comply with anticipated roles craves discipline from everyone present in social interaction. One needs to “suppress his spontaneous feelings in order to give the appearance of sticking to the affective line” (Goffman 1990:211), for instance, when faced with inappropriate acts or hostility. A good demeanor is what is required of an actor. In this sense, situations have their moral character.

Disruption and Aligning the Interaction Order

The mutual considerateness of people in social interaction, that is, their motivation of sticking to the script of the interaction order, is, however, not always how things turn out. Disruptions of the

interaction order, or what Goffman referred to as breaking the frame of appropriate action, threatens the whole encounter, as it can lead to uneasiness and emotional vulnerability of those involved in the interaction and deteriorate further, causing the breakup of the situation (Goffman 1963; 1974). For instance, ethnomethodologists, such as Harold Garfinkel (1967), used breaching experiments to show the detrimental effects and social dangers of disruption upon social interaction. Due to the potential dangers of disruption of the interaction, people go to great lengths to counteract such breaches by applying “remedial interchanges” (Goffman 1963)—to reinstate the collective sense of alignment and normalcy of a situation and, more theoretically, to preserve the interaction order. People attempt to do so by making use of specific tactics to avoid disruption, for instance, such as using silence to ignore the disruption (see: Perinbanayagam 2018:67), or to correct the disruption by applying a particular “face-work,” to save one’s face or the face of others, for instance, by applying humor to defuse the situation (Goffman 1990:210-11; 2005:5-46), or by “footing,” which means to redirect the inappropriate conversation into a different route (Goffman 1981:124-159). Thus, discipline requires one to save the line in a situation of inappropriate behavior of others so the show may go on.

Such alignment measures, or remedial interchanges, however, mean that people in interaction often need to put on false fronts and even be dishonest for a social interaction to run smoothly. Symbolic interactionists, in this sense, argue that deception in social interaction can, for pragmatic reasons, be a good thing as deceptions facilitate and maintain the interaction order—regardless of whether people’s behavior is ethically right or wrong (Scott 2012). Manning (2000:287) even argues that Goffman’s

book on *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* is like a “textbook of deception.”

Thus, the interaction order builds on deceptions of actors in a situation as total frankness would jeopardize the interactional harmony (Scott 2012). The shared mission of people in social interaction is to protect and restore the interaction order when it is violated so that it does not unsettle the civilized communication and harmony of the situation and harm the social atmosphere (Griffero 2016). People, therefore, need to suppress their emotional responses when faced with inappropriate acts or hostility (Goffman 1990:210-211).

Tavory and Fine (2020:372) have, however, suggested that although disruptions of interaction are usually perceived as detrimental to communication, they are, at the same time, “essential to any interactional order.” That statement proposes the view that disruptions need not be a bad thing. Accordingly, most disruptive behavior does not lead to the breakdown of interactions due to alignment measures. Disruptions, however, provide opportunities to challenge the false fronts of actors and thus have the potential to deepen the actors’ relationships with one another in return. It is sometimes necessary to rock the boat. The attempts of a breacher to restore honesty, for instance, in place of deception, can be defined as *disruptions-for relations*, and therefore considered positive for interaction, instead of *disruptions-of relations*, which have negative consequences for the interaction (Tavory and Fine 2020). Disrupted interactions, however, need to hold the right balance between order and disorder since disrupting behaviors face the risk of relational rupture and the breakdown of interactional relationships and can even lead to violence (Frank III 1976; Tavory and Fine 2020).

Analyzing the Interaction Order

Collins (2004:3) argues that to understand human behavior, we need to use the situation rather than the individual as a starting point. Situations are key venues for the study of interactions as it is from situations that social scientists can uncover broader social forces (Cooley 1964). Goffman (1963) further saw the individual self as embedded in particular situations. It is from the dynamics of the situation that we can understand almost everything about individuals and their social worlds. An interactionist perspective, thus, sees the interactions and the individuals, as well as the passions and their persons, and not the other way around (Verhoeven 1993:6; Collins 2004).

While individuals make up the interaction chains, which carry social messages across situations, each situation has its emergent properties (see: Mead 2002). Situations have, in this sense, laws and processes of their own. Participants in situations are motivated to uphold their shared understanding of a given situation. The situation, thus, gives rise to a social atmosphere, which can be perceived as *good* or *bad* (Griffero 2016). The atmosphere is good—or it works—when everyone adheres to the expected line of action, but it can turn sour when people step out of line and make others uncomfortable. Disrupting the interaction order can thus bring shame, embarrassment, and discomfort to actors in a given situation and further jeopardize the whole encounter. Emerging discomfort and embarrassment of actors within a situation are socially contagious, spreading, once started, in ever-widening circles of the discomfiture of the whole encounter (Goffman 2005:106; McLean 2017).

Finally, sociologists have shown some interest in “celebrative social occasions” (Schneider 2019).

George Simmel, for instance, saw the meal as a primordial social institution, which consisted of sacred rituals (see: Frisby and Featherstone 1997:130-136). Frank III (1976) further argued how situations that may appear to be private and are lived as private, such as family dinners, can also be considered public since public rules apply to those settings and they, in turn, expose larger cultural themes. In other words, collective meals are situations that consist of interaction rituals within a confined social setting, making the meal an ideal situation to study social interaction.

Setting the Scene

A Visual Analysis

Howard S. Becker (2007) argues that representations of society can be found in various types of material, for instance, in popular fiction. Symbolic interactionists, in particular, have utilized such material to a considerable extent in their studies of people and societies. In this vein, Collins (2020:2) argues how various data serve to provide a fuller and more detailed experience of social situations and interactions than written texts:

By recording conversations and playing them back carefully, we can see whether conversations are in rhythm or not (people are in sync with each other, or out of sync); who gets the speaking turns; who sets the rhythm and who follows. By analyzing photos of faces and body postures, we have learned how to read emotions; we can see when people are confident or tense, anxious or depressed, angry or sad, and whether smiles are fake or genuine. In face-to-face interactions, we can discern who sets the mood, who is emotionally dominant, and when people emotionally clash.

Through the analysis of moving pictures, such as feature films as applied in this paper, we do not only encounter the spoken words, as when we read written texts, but we also experience the various tacit implications of the communication; the facial expressions, the looks and gazes, the body language, and the utterances of interactions (Goffman 1981; 1990; 2005; Perinbanayagam 2018:67). Moving pictures, therefore, combine those elements Collins described above and serve to enhance our understanding of individuals and society, more so than one-dimensional written texts—as Carl Couch and his colleagues proposed in the late 1970s (see: Katovich 2017).

One of the strengths of utilizing visual media for sociological analysis is that the researcher can slow the world down, freeze time, and study particular moments repeatedly through visual media content, to raise awareness of a certain topic at a particular time and place (Katovich 2017; Halldorsson 2018; 2020). Visual media also provide the researcher with access to multiple socio-historical sites, which they usually cannot access through other means. Visual material can build a bridge between lectures, research and textbooks, and the world as it is (Demerath III 1981). Even extreme experiences of fictional characters from popular media have been seen to resemble real-life experiences (Halldorsson and Katovich 2019). Visual material can thus be used to help those interested in people and societies in general to grasp the meaning of the often complex and hypothetical theories of social interaction and in comparison to their lives. It has been argued that it is through the analysis of visual media that the researcher can enhance their understanding of the relationship between the individual and society (Berger 1977; Katovich 1984; 2021; Prendergast 1986; Burton 1988; Tipton and Tiemann 1993; Harper 2012; Moskovich and Sharf 2012; Rose 2016).

The main aims of this paper are to make use of a scene from an American fiction film; to identify the interaction order by highlighting the scripted roles of participants in the scene, and, in particular, how they disrupt and restore the frames of interaction to analyze the social interaction of the specific situation, and to analyze the underlying meanings of what is really *going on* in the scene. However, as Goffman did not provide tangible methodological procedures on how to conduct micro-level analysis on the interaction order (Schneider 2019), this study can also be seen as a contribution to the methodological applications of such research. Thus, this paper proposes the underlying methodological question of what can be learned sociologically by seeing interaction in a film, in contrast to more conventional sociological analysis.

August: Osage County

August: Osage County is an American film released in 2013. The film is an adaptation of a Pulitzer Prize-winning play by Tracy Letts and was directed for the screen by John Wells. The film takes place in present-day rural Oklahoma in mid-summer and begins when a renowned poet in his seventies, Beverly Weston, suddenly disappears from his home, and his body is found shortly after; he had committed suicide. Beverly's suicide had left his unstable, cancer patient, and narcotic-addicted wife, Violet, alone at the family estate, only accompanied by newly hired house help, Misty, as their three grown-up daughters have all moved away. The film thereafter centers on the estranged relationship of Violet with her daughters, as with other members of the immediate family, who first come to the family estate due to the disappearance of Beverly and then stay for his funeral.

The scene in question takes place in the wake of the funeral where the immediate family is having a funeral dinner at the family estate.¹ The scene portrays the ritual of the meal (Frisby and Featherstone 1997:130-136) where the family sits around an oval table, loaded with the customary props and aesthetics of a well-served special occasion dinner, served by the house help.

The characters in the scene are:

- The widow, mother, and hostess, Violet Weston (Meryl Streep). Her late husband, Beverly (Sam Shepard), is not a direct participant in the scene, but he is referred to on several occasions;
- The eldest daughter, Barbara Weston-Fordham (Julia Roberts), her husband, Bill Fordham (Ewan McGregor), and their teenage daughter, Jean Fordham (Abigail Breslin);
- The second eldest daughter, Ivy Weston (Julianne Nicholson);
- The youngest daughter, Karen Weston (Juliette Lewis), and her new fiancé, Steve Huberbrecht (Dermot Mulroney);
- Violet's younger sister, Mattie Fae Aiken (Margo Martindale), her husband, Charles Aiken, Sr.—a.k.a. Charlie (Chris Cooper), and their

son, “Little” Charles Aiken, Jr. (Benedict Cumberbatch), who is probably in his early thirties;

- The house help, Misty Upham (Johnna Monvata)—is of Cheyenne origin, making her the only person who is not of Caucasian descent. Furthermore, she can be regarded as a *non-person* in the scene, as she is the only one who does not sit at the dinner table, nor does she participate directly in the interaction during dinner (see: Goffman 1990:223).

In the following pages, the aforementioned scene will be used to analyze and demonstrate how the interaction order works, and more specifically, how the interaction dynamics emerge when 1) someone disrupts the interaction order (breaks the frame of reference in the situation), unsettling the proposed line of action (D = disruption) and 2) how the dinner guests respond to such disruptions in the interaction order with alignment (A = alignment).² It is recommended that the reader watch the movie clip before reading the analysis, presented on the coming pages, as the written analysis cannot convey everything of interest in the scene. It is further suggested that the reader watch scenes from the clip concerning the presented analysis to match the analysis with the visual representation of the topic.

The Analysis: Disruption and Alignment of the Interaction Order

Everyone is seated at the dinner table, except Violet (the grieving widow), who is in another room, when “Little” Charles enters with a casserole. His mother,

¹ The scene starts at 45:34 minutes of the DVD version of the movie and lasts for around 20 minutes. The analysis is made from the uninterrupted real-time depicted action. Furthermore, I made use of the text version of the scene dialogue from the adapted screenplay to help me note scenes from the dialogue (<https://ia800909.us.archive.org/19/items/pdfy-oj5ZIZEvqLa4-QGT/August-Osage-County.pdf>). There could be some minor inconsistencies between the screenplay and the movie dialogue.

² The letters and associated numbers placed in brackets in the following text are intended to systematically mark and categorize the acts of disruptions and alignments in the dinner scene.

Mattie Fae, greets his late arrival by cheekily saying, "There he is. I wanted to put you at a kid's table, but they wouldn't let me." Mattie Fae is publicly mocking her son in front of an audience (D1). The other guests (the audience) react by smiling. "Little" Charles is, however, embarrassed. Karen comes to his rescue as she responds: "I want you to meet my fiancé, Steve," and shifts the attention towards her new fiancé instead of "Little" Charles (A1).

Only a moment later, "Little" Charles (low on confidence after being the target of his mother's abuse) drops his mother's casserole, which spills all over the floor. In return, "Little" Charles faces further verbal abuse from his mother (Mattie Fae), who quickly gets up from her chair and yells at him, "You goddamn clumsy goofball!" (D2a). "Little" Charles apologizes for his clumsiness (A2a[1]) and Charlie (his father) tries to reduce the significance of the accident as he shifts to a lighter vein, saying: "All right, nobody's hurt" (A2a[2]). Mattie Fae, however, keeps on complaining and takes the role of a victim as she states: "What about me? I'm hurt... That's my casserole!" (D2b). As an outsider to the family, Steve (Karen's new fiancé), tries to defuse the increasing and emotional seriousness of the situation, as he light-heartedly remarks, "It's not a party until somebody spills something" (A2b[1]). Charlie finally directs the conversation into another route, as he asks, "Who wants chicken?" and the dialogue starts to center on the food (A2b[2]).

Right in the first minute of the scene, we can see examples of how Mattie Fae breaches the interaction; firstly, by belittling her son ("Little" Charles), and secondly, by harshly reprimanding him, and how others successfully restore the frame with a joke (to try to lighten the mood) and by guiding the conversation into another direction (towards the meal).

Such acts of breaking the frame and attempting to restore the frame are evident for the rest of the scene. However, aligning to the frame will not always turn out successful.

Now, Violet (the widow and hostess of the funeral dinner) enters the scene, and she is the last person to join the dinner table. She plays her role as the sympathetic widow, all dressed in black and carrying a framed photo of her and her late husband, a prop that represents the symbolic ritual of the funeral meal (see: Frisby and Featherstone 1997:130-136). When Violet enters the dining room, she feels that the four men present are guilty of showing disrespect on the special occasion by just wearing their shirts, but not their jackets. Violet, therefore, reprimands the four men like little boys, although they are all grown men, for not wearing their jackets, as she hastily shouts, "This is a funeral dinner, not a cockfight" (D3). Thus, Violet shows right from the start of the scene who is the boss of this house and the person who holds authority in the situation. Goffman (1961a:87) notes in that respect how "Incumbency tends to be symbolized through status cues of dress and manner, permitting those who engage in a situation to know with whom they are dealing." The four men obey the power order as they stand up and look embarrassed as they put on their jackets before they sit down again to resume the meal. Violet diffuses the awkward situation herself as she casually lights a cigarette and suggests: "Someone should probably say grace" (A3)—following the ritual of such occasions. As the family patriarch, Beverly, has passed away, Violet suggests that her eldest daughter, Barbara, should be the one to take on the traditional role of saying grace. Barbara, however, acknowledges that the rightful patriarch should be the oldest man at the table and suggests that Charlie should say the grace, which he even-

tually does after Violet gives him a commanding stare. That start of the dinner portrays the normative rituals of the traditional family meal, which, firstly, consist of representing the appropriate props of such a meal, such as matching cutlery, as well as family photos and memories around the dining table; secondly, the aesthetics of the served food and drinks; and thirdly, the collective ritual and associated gestures of saying grace before accepting the meal (Frisby and Featherstone 1997:130-136).

During Charlie's saying of grace, Violet repeatedly performs all kinds of negative gestures, such as through her facial expressions and body language, which are a clear sign of her dissatisfaction with Charlie's grace. However, the others do not notice her gestures as they have their eyes shut during the saying of the grace—thus, the disruption attempts go unnoticed. However, the ritual is suddenly disrupted when Steve's mobile telephone goes off and interrupts the delivery of the grace, which annoys those at the dinner table (D4). Steve apologizes, says that he has to take the call, and goes to another room (A4[1]). Karen is apologetic for her new fiancé and states that it was a "work" call (A4[2])—not that she has any clue as to the nature of the call. Bill, however, nods in acceptance of Karen's excuse, which indicates that her attempt has worked; that is, to minimize the interactional damage that her fiancé caused by not silencing his phone before the dinner ritual. Steve comes back as the grace is about to end and apologizes. Bill says: "Let's eat" (A4[3]), which puts an end to the case.

Next, after a discussion between Violet and her three daughters as to whether the two older girls would like to take on a sideboard their mother wants to get rid of, in which they are not interested, an awkward silence follows (interestingly, Violet ignores Karen's

interest in the sideboard, indicating that the two older sisters are favored over Karen). The situation becomes awkward due to the inappropriateness of the discussion of the sisters' inheritance at the time and how Karen was disregarded (D5). As the atmosphere at the table is getting heavier, Charlie brings the interaction back to the line everyone is comfortable with as he remarks, "The food is just spectacular" (A5)—again drawing attention to the meal. Everyone else hums and nods in acceptance, thus becoming "sweet conspirators" joining in Charlie's attempt to save the interaction order (Goffman 1990:237).

Violet, however, does not accept the compliment that Misty, the house help, is receiving for her food and scornfully remarks: "That's what she's [the house help] getting paid for" (D6)—denoting Misty as a non-person—which is followed by an awkward moment. But, Charlie shifts the discussion right away into another direction (A6). Earlier in the scene, Jean, the only teenager at the dinner, had proclaimed that she does not eat meat. Charlie picks up this point in a discussion:

Charlie: Jean, so I'm curious, when you say you don't eat meat, you mean you don't eat meat of any kind?

Jean: Right.

Charlie: And is that for health reasons, or...?

Jean: When you eat meat, you ingest an animal's fear.

Violet: Ingest what? Its fart?

Jean: Fear.

A central theme in the scene is the power domination of the older generation over the younger ones. The fact that young Jean does not eat meat stirs astonishment and disbelief among the elders, who collectively mock and belittle her stance (D7). Charlie goes on further to state how he has been eating *fear*

three times a day for sixty years, and that is what is considered a legitimate meal. “Little” Charles and Steve try to support Jean as they come to her defense against those attacks with some sound arguments (A7). Jean, however, is the victim of the collective joke.

The discussion about meat gives rise to a discussion between Violet and Mattie Fae about an old television commercial, which reportedly said, “Where’s the meat?” However, as Karen tries to correct her mother by stating: “Beef. Where’s the beef?” her mother screeches at her: “Where’s the meat?! Where’s the meat?! Where’s the meat?!” (D8). Others gaze in alarm at Violet’s sudden outburst. Barbara sighs, “That’s pleasant” (A8[1]), and Charlie glances over the table and again changes the course of action as he shifts the discussion towards the funeral service, as he states: “I thought the services were lovely” (A8[2]), a statement that gains support from others who hum in acceptance.

But, Violet is on fire and now, as the discussion has centered on the funeral services, begins to sabotage the memory of her late husband Beverly (D9).

Nobody talked about the good stuff. Man was a world-class alcoholic, more’n fifty years. Nobody told the story about the night he got wrangled into giving a talk at the TU alumni dinner... [laughs]. Drank a whole bottle of Ron Bocoy White rum—don’t know why I remember that—and got up to give this talk, and he fouled himself! Come back to our table with this huge...

Violet is pointing out the hypocrisy of funeral services, which only show the deceased in a favorable light—and not always truthfully. However, the audience responds with a certain sophistication, trying

to save face under the embarrassing circumstances. Only Barbara responds sarcastically, “Yeah, I can’t imagine why no one told that story” (A9[1]). Steve then tries to salvage the memory of the late patriarch as he directs the conversation from the man himself into the quality of his poems, as he argues, “I don’t know much about poetry, but I thought his poems were extraordinary” (A9[2]), and then he speaks directly to Bill, who read a poem at the funeral service: “and your reading was very fine.” “Little” Charles shows support as he nods his head in acceptance.

Next, Violet goes on to attack the secrecy of the intimate lives of some of those at the dinner table. For instance, Violet suddenly focuses her attention on Steve (the newest member of the family) and blatantly asks him: “Who are you?” As Karen explains that Steve is her fiancé and they are soon to be married, Violet starts to interrogate Steve about his former life. She verbally attacks his privacy by asking personal questions that put him in a vulnerable and embarrassing position in front of others (frontstage) (D10). As she asks whether he has been married before, Karen steps in to protect her fiancé’s privacy and tries to place her mother back in line and not pursue that thread of interviewing any further because the subject is too personal for such an occasion (and belongs backstage). Violet, however, disregards Karen’s balancing attempt and goes on to reveal that Steve has had three previous marriages. Violet gloats at her victory of having divulged Steve’s secret in front of everyone and speaks of him as if he were not present. Karen, then, directs the conversation on a different route as she says: “I took Steve out to show him the old fort and it’s gone!” (A10), and the other guests follow her lead and start to participate in a discussion about the old fort.

Karen recalls when she used to play Cowboys and Indians in the fort in her youth when Violet suddenly shouts in a rage: “Karen! Shame on you!” (D11), and as people are taken aback by her harsh reprimand to Karen, Violet continues and says: “Don’t you know not to say Cowboys and Indians? You played Cowboys and Native Americans, right Barb?” Violet is being sarcastic as she is making fun of Barbara’s wokeness, who earlier in the film tried to correct her mother’s frame of reference that Misty, the house help, was not an Indian but a Native American. Barbara answers back to her mother: “What are you taking? What pills?” in a rather hostile tone (A11[1]). Charlie, then, tries to defuse the intensifying situation (A11[2]) as he fakes that he has a heart attack, but when everyone starts to panic, he smiles and cries: “I got a big bite of fear! I’m shaking in my boots! Fear never tasted so good,” and everyone burst into hysterical laughter (except Jean and her father Bill), portraying triumphant glances, and pointing fingers at young Jean, the target of the joke (D12a). Jean’s mother, Barbara, even takes part in the mockery and continues the joke where she calls her daughter a liar as she likes to eat cheeseburgers now and then, “Double cheeseburger, bacon, extra fear” (D12b). Jean answers her mother and calls her a liar in return (A12b). Violet then comes to Barbara’s defense as she stares commandingly at Jean and reprimands her: “Y’know...if I ever called my mom a liar? She would’ve knocked my goddamn head off my shoulders” (D12c). Nothing but silence follows. Interestingly, no one tries to diffuse the situation—perhaps because Jean has the lowest status at the table as the only teenager.

Violet then goes on to use that delicate occasion as a way to coerce her daughters into giving up their rights to inherit her husband’s estate (D13a). Thus,

according to Beverly’s will, his daughters would receive his inheritance on the day of his passing. However, Violet argues that her late husband had changed his mind and decided to leave everything to her instead of their daughters—although that supposed change of mind of her late husband had not been manifested in a changed will of the man who committed suicide. She then pressures her daughters, one by one, in an awkward and tense scene to give up their right to inherit their father’s estate, to which they all agree, however hesitantly, as they are in front of an audience and do not want to be perceived so greedy as to be interested in their father’s money on the day of his funeral (A13a). Besides, Violet offers to sell some of his furniture to her daughters at a price that would probably be lower than she would get for those items at an auction. The daughters decline the offer, and Barbara responds: “Or you might never get around to the auction and then we can just have it for free after you die” (D13b). Thus, the conversation is turning ugly for others present at the dinner table, and Ivy sighs: “Barbara!...” (A13b[1]). As Violet and Barbara are arguing about her inheritance, “Little” Charles tries to draw attention to the poems: “Excuse me, Bill? I’m wondering, the reading you did, those poems...?” (A13b[2]). However, due to his low status in the situation, “Little” Charles has no voice at the table, and Violet thus ignores his comment.

But, since the attention has finally turned to Bill, who has been quiet in the scene so far, Violet maintains the focus on Bill and starts to bring the alleged marriage problems he and Barbara are facing to the surface in front of the audience. That includes Bill’s relationship with a younger woman (D14a). Violet thus exploits the opportunity to have a go at the marriage of her eldest daughter, Barbara, and her main adversary in the situation. Violet

goes on to talk about how women lose their attractiveness as they grow old, and as women grow older, they have no chance to compete with younger women for their husbands, aiming that point at her daughter, Barbara. Ivy tries to step in to put her mother in line (A14a) by explaining that what her mother meant was that women do not grow more attractive with age, and Karen further states that she disagrees with her mom. But, Violet rejects the lifeline Ivy is sending her, as she steps out of line when she states:

I didn't say they "don't grow more attractive," I said they get ugly. And it's not really a matter of opinion, Karen dear. You've only just started to prove it yourself.

Thus, Violet is now belittling her daughter's self-image in front of a larger audience present at the dining table (D14b), and Charlie states: "You are in rare form today, Vi." Charlie further tries to reason with Violet's increasingly hostile attitude as he says: "I just don't understand why you're so adversarial" (A14b). Violet answers, "I'm truth-telling. And some people are antagonized by the truth." Charlie further tries to reframe the sentiments around the table to save the interaction order, aiming his words at Violet as he says: "Everyone here loves you, dear." Violet, however, rejects the direction of the dialogue suggested by Charlie and states: "You think you can shame me, Charlie? Blow it out your ass!" In other words, Violet is looking for a fight, not a ceasefire (D14c). The situation has become highly emotional and fragile due to Violet's repeated refusal to stick within the line of interaction in the situation, despite the attempts of others to keep her in line. Barbara then stands up to her mother for her hostile behavior and meanness (A14c), which Barbara experiences

as "attacks" against everyone at the dinner table; Violet gets up on her feet, her voice booming, and goes on a rant (D15):

Attack my family?! You ever been attacked in your sweet spoiled life?! Tell her 'bout attacks, Mattie Fae, tell her what an attack looks like!

Violet goes on to describe an incident where Mattie Fae (her younger sister) intervened when she was about to be attacked with a claw hammer, with the argument that that was a real attack. She then goes on to ridicule her daughters:

We sacrificed everything and we did it all for you. Your father and I were the first in our families to finish high school and he wound up an award-winning poet. You girls, given a college education, taken for granted no doubt, and where did you wind up?
[jabs a finger at Karen] Whadda you do?
[jabs a finger at Ivy] Whadda you do?
[jabs a finger at Barbara] Who are you? Jesus, if you'd worked as hard as us, you'd all be President. You never had real problems, so you've got to make all your problems yourselves.

After Violet's emotional outcry, where she belittles her ("spoiled") daughters, Ivy tells her mother to calm down (A15[1]). Violet sits down and says: "It's a damn fine day, to tell the truth." Charlie takes the opportunity and states: "Well, the truth is, I am getting full" (A15[2]), referring once more to the meal. Steve shows consent as he nods and adds: "Amen."

Next, "Little" Charles suddenly jumps off his seat and begins to stutter: "I have a truth to tell." He is highly anxious (D16a). Ivy gives him a hint (A16a) not to reveal their secret sexual relationship, which

was probably “Little” Charles’ intention. He withdraws his intended confession for another less significant one, and in a moment of panic, runs out of the room. Mattie Fae is embarrassed by her son and states that she had given up on the boy a long time ago. Violet joins her sister in her lack of respect for “Little” Charles and humiliates Ivy in return (D16b). Ivy, again, stands up for her secret lover and insists that he is not “Little” Charles; his name is Charles (A16b). Violet, in return, placed pity on Ivy and states that “She always had a thing for the underdog” (D16c). The scene ends when Barbara finally gets fed up with her mother’s vicious attacks and abuse towards everyone at the dinner table, and she faces her mother with some unpleasant facts, as she declares to her mother: “You’re a drug addict!” (A16c). Violet, however, seems relieved as she answers, “That is the truth! That’s what I’m getting at! Everybody listen... I am a drug addict. I am addicted to drugs, pills, especially downers,” and as she pulls a pill bottle from her pocket, all hell breaks loose when Barbara lunges at the bottle, and they start to wrestle for it and end up in a fierce battle on the living room floor. As Goffman (1990:205) notes:

When the audience decides it can no longer play the game of polite interaction, or that it no longer wants to do so, and so confronts the performers with facts or expressive acts which each team knows will be unacceptable. This is what happens when an individual screws up his social courage and decides to “have it out” with another or really “tell him off.”

The crucial balance in the situation between disruptions and alignments is lost as the disruptions become so severe and persistent that the interaction order can no longer be sustained. The situation explodes and people start to behave in a gross-

ly uncivilized manner, tumbling and fighting on the floor (see: Frank III 1976).

Discussion

The dinner scene of *August: Osage County* can be utilized to illustrate Goffman’s theory of the interaction order, and in particular, how disruptions and responding alignments take place. As the description above shows, the frames of reference in that particular situational social interaction were repeatedly broken. The categorizations of the acts of disruptions and alignments in the scene are summed up and portrayed in Table 1. The table further illustrates sequences of action, where it can be noted how interactional communication develops.

As Table 1 illustrates, there were various kinds of disruptions in the scene. Most of the disruptions share the effect of making someone at the table feel bad or insecure. Those disruptions included bursts of rage and attempts to shame, mock, and coerce others (mainly by Violet, but also by Mattie Fae, Charlie, and even Barbara). In addition, there were instances of disruptions of the dinner ritual (where the dress code was broken and when the mobile phone rang). The table further illustrates how almost all noted disruptions in the scene were met with some kind of alignment. The dinner guests, for instance, used footing to change the subject of conversation (mostly referring to the meal or the funeral service); tried to diffuse the situation with a light-hearted remark (such as a joke); made apologies or stood up for someone who was under attack; tried to help and/or reason with the breacher; and blamed the breacher for their inappropriate behavior. Those instances of disruptions of the interaction order and the alignments that followed are discussed in a wider context below.

Table 1. Disruptions and alignments in the dinner scene

Scene starts:	Disruptions (D):	Alignments (A):
46:44	D1: Mattie Fae belittles Charles Jr., as she jokingly greets his late arrival by suggesting that he should sit at the kids' table.	A1: Footing by Karen: "I want you to meet my new fiancé, Steve."
46:57	D2a: Mattie Fae is enraged as Charles Jr. drops her casserole on the floor.	A2a(1): "Little" Charles apologizes for his clumsiness.
		A2a(2): Charlie tries to defuse the situation: "All right, nobody's hurt."
	D2b: Mattie Fae plays the role of the victim and claims she is hurt since it was her casserole that was ruined.	A2b(1): Steve tries to defuse the situation with a playful remark: "It's not a party until somebody spills something."
		A2b(2): Footing by Charlie: "Who wants chicken?"
47:44	D3: Violet reprimands the four men for not wearing their jackets.	A3: Violet casually lights a cigarette and suggests that: "Someone should probably say grace."
48:57	D4: Steve's mobile rings during the saying of the grace.	A4(1): Steve apologizes.
		A4(2): Karen apologizes for her fiancé and says that it was a work call.
		A4(3): Bill says: "Let's eat."
50:47	D5: Constrained discussion between Violet and her daughters about which of them should get a sideboard that belonged to their father.	A5: Footing by Charlie: "The food is spectacular."
51:30	D6: Violet derides the praise of the cooking of the house help.	A6: Footing by Charlie as he starts to ask Jean why she does not eat meat.
51:44	D7: A general mocking of Jean as she argues that she does not want to eat fear.	A7: "Little" Charles and Steve, to some extent, stand up for Jean.
53:03	D8: Violet screeches at Karen: "Where's the meat!"	A8(1): Barbara reacts by saying: "That's pleasant."
		A8(2): Footing by Charlie: "I thought the services were lovely."
53:22	D9: Violet shames the memory of her late husband.	A9(1): Barbara responds with a sarcastic note: "Yeah, I can't imagine why no one told that story."
		A9(2): Footing by Steve: "Now I don't know much about poetry..."
54:22	D10: Violet exposes Steve's former marriages and embarrasses him.	A10: Footing by Karen: "I took Steve out to see the old fort and it's gone!"
54:38	D11: Violet is mocking Barbara, who earlier criticized her for referring to Indians as Native Americans, as she jokingly reprimands Karen.	A11(1): Barbara answers back: "What are you taking? What pills?"

		A11(2): Humor by Charlie as he acts as if he has a heart attack—regarding a former discussion about Jean not eating fear.
56:12	D12a: Following Charlie's joke, most of the people laugh at Jean's expense.	None.
	D12b: Barbara continues to make Jean the target of the joke where she says that Jean loves hamburgers with extra bacon.	A12b: Jean answers her mother back and calls her out on her lying.
	D12c: Violet reprimands Jean for calling her mother a liar: "Y'know...if I'd ever called my mom a liar? She would've knocked my goddamn head off my shoulders."	None.
56:55	D13a: Violet talks her daughters out of claiming their inheritance from their late father.	A13a: The daughters give in to their mother's claim, and thus avoid making a scene.
	D13b: Barbara sarcastically speaks of the gains she and her sisters would receive when their mother dies.	A13b(1): Ivy sighs: "Barbara."
		A13b(2): Footing by "Little" Charles: "Excuse me, Bill? I'm wondering, the reading you did, those poems....?"
58:28	D14a: Violet exposes Bill and Barbara's marriage problems, and goes on to explain that women get ugly with age.	A14a: Ivy tries to defend her mother by explaining what her mother really meant, in a more refined language.
	D14b: Violet attacks Karen's self-image where she comments that Karen herself is getting uglier with age.	A14b: Charlie tries to reason with Violet and says: "I just don't understand why you're so adversarial," and he goes on further to try to connect with her on a caring note as he states: "Everyone here loves you, dear."
	D14c: Violet screams back at Charlie: "Blow it out your ass!"	A14c: Barbara stands up for everybody at the table as she accuses her mother of being rude to all the dinner guests.
60:20	D15: Violet criticizes her daughters and picks them out as losers, compared to her and her sister.	A15(1): Ivy tells her mother to calm down.
		A15(2): Footing by Charlie: "Well, the truth is, I am getting full."
62:50	D16a: "Little" Charles jumps off his seat and anxiously stutters: "I have a truth to tell."	A16a: Ivy gives him a hint not to reveal their sexual relationship by softly pleading: "No, no."
	D16b: After "Little" Charles runs out of the room, Mattie Fae states that she gave up on her boy a long time ago.	A16b: Ivy stands up for "Little" Charles as she says, "His name is Charles."
	D16c: Violet talks down to Ivy as she states that: "She always had a thing for the underdog."	A16c: Barbara declares to her mother: "You're a drug addict."
The interaction breaks up.		

Source: *Self-elaboration*.

Disruptions—Breaking the Frame of Reference

How a situation develops is, to a large extent, built on power and authority (Tavory and Fine 2020). Social interactions are stratified in the sense that some people within a situation have more power than others. Goffman (1983:10) notes: “Those individuals who are in a position to authorize and organize such occasions are often the ones who star in them.” Persons of power can set the tone of the interaction, impact the atmosphere, and determine who is at the center of attention, for good or bad reasons, as well as dictate who is marginalized and disregarded and who is not. Goffman (2005:107) further stated that “if there is to be talk, someone must initiate it, feed it and terminate it; and these acts may awkwardly suggest ranking and power which are out of line with the facts.” The audience of those in power is further motivated to take the side of those in power and impress them (Kelly and Archibald 2019).

The dinner scene features Violet as the person with authority and power, as well as being the center of attention. Violet, as the owner of the house, the grieving widow, the mother to the three sisters, the mother-in-law, grandmother, older sister, sister-in-law, and hostess of the dinner can, as head of the family, be assumed to be the rightful holder of power at the funeral family dinner. In this respect, Goffman has created a contrast between “dramatic” and “directive dominance” (1990:105), where those who possess formal power and authority do not necessarily hold the actual authority, although these often go hand in hand. Violet, in this sense, not only possesses dramatic dominance; she further enacts and exercises her directive dominance right from the start of the scene (see: Alexander 2011). Violet is the star of the show, which, for instance, is notable by the fact that she is the last one to arrive and that the dinner does not start until she gives it a go.

However, Violet is highly unstable, rude, and hostile to almost all of the dinner guests, from the start to the finish of the scene, as illustrated above. We see how Violet is guilty of breaking up the interaction by showing meanness and hostility to her dinner guests by bringing up topics and subjects that should be handled backstage, not on stage in front of an audience. That both adds embarrassment to the situation and endangers the selves of the targeted dinner guests. Violet’s estranged relationship with her daughters seems to play a fundamental part in her vulgar and offensive behavior, which unsettles the civilized communication and harmony of the encounter and places the whole situation in jeopardy. Disruptions, such as those illustrated in the scene, tend to be more dramatic in intimate relationships, for example, in immediate families, than elsewhere (see: Tavory and Fine 2020).

Violet seems to see the situation as a game with her daughters, where she tries to gain as many points as possible for herself at her daughters’ expense (Goffman 1961a; 1963; 2005:24-26). Violet prides herself in that with statements in the scene such as “I had that one pegged,” after she uncovered Steve’s former marriages, and when she declared: “Nobody slips anything by me,” after she uncovered Barbara and Bill’s marriage problems. Thus, it seems that Violet sees the situation as an opportunity for some kind of settlement with those in her immediate family, as she exploits the delicate situation to make her case and to settle some scores.

On the other hand, Violet also appears to be concerned about getting to the truth of things, as she, for instance, declared: “It’s a damn fine day, to tell the truth.” It could thus be argued that Violet’s attempts to deepen the families’ relationships by restoring honesty at these crossroads of her husband’s passing.

Violet's attempts to set the record straight by refusing to sugar-coat life and staging the usual hypocrisy of regular small talk, as people usually do frontstage (Scott 2012), are symbolic of disruptions of relations, as proposed by Tavory and Fine (2020), which, in this sense, could frame her intentions as worthwhile for the families' relationships in the long run. Thus, Violet is inspired to tell the truth as she sees it, despite the general resistance of others present to engage in such interaction. Attempts at truthful interaction can, in this sense, be attributed to Violet's motivation, which tends to endanger social interaction as participants tend to lose face when their backstage selves become exposed. The interaction, in turn, becomes uncivilized and hostile, and such acts of honest confrontations are, therefore, commonly perceived as deviant and problematic. Goffman notes how rigid honesty can cause problems (1990:212).

The scene further illustrates an interesting theme in interaction; that is, how the older generation is guilty of disrupting the interaction by verbally and symbolically attacking younger people and inserting feelings of vulnerability and inferiority among them. Examples from the scene illustrate how the collective power of older persons is used to suppress and restrain the younger ones through mocking their proposed silliness and humiliating them by exposing their backstage secrets to the other dinner guests. In this context, Goffman has noted how individuals who dominate situations sometimes do so at the expense of others, where they insult others, make jokes at their expense, and even expel them from the interaction (Collins 2004:21). That misuse of power by the elders in the scene embodies a generational cleavage and strain. Violet, in particular, as the main adversary, as well as the other elders (Mattie Fae and Charlie) sense that they are becoming outdated in a changing society—just like the outlaws in Sam Peck-

inpah's *Wild Bunch* (see: Þórlindsson 2012)—so they fight back at the youngsters. The younger ones adhere to more modern ideas and customs, which, in this case, include not eating meat and showing respect for minorities, which sounds foreign and threatening to the elders. Jean (the teenager) in particular provides a fresh, convincing, and intellectual argument of how eating meat involves eating fear, which sounds bizarre, and even ludicrous, to the elders. The elders thus experience a sense of anomic insecurities, in a Durkheimian sense, as they feel that the world is rapidly changing and the views and customs that they have incorporated from their youth are fast becoming outdated. So, the elders go on the offensive by attacking and ridiculing the younger generation on account of their different ideas and because they stand for divergent norms and values from those of their elders. Due to their experience, emotional and financial resources, the elders enjoy an advantage in such situations, leaving youth vulnerable to these attacks since they both lack the power of authority in the given situation and are also, at times, outnumbered by the older generation.

Alignment—Restoring the Frame of Reference

When a person disrupts the frame of the interaction ritual by acting inappropriately in a situation, towards oneself or towards others (as illustrated above), others present try to save the situation by making some kind of gesture, vocal or otherwise, to save the face of the person acting inappropriately, the face of others who may be affected by the inappropriate act, as well as their face. As the scene unfolds, Violet appears to be looking for a fight, but everyone tries to resist her antagonism by enacting the situation here-and-now and maintaining their face and the interaction order by playing their prescribed supporting roles in the collective ritual performance. However,

as the dinner guests experience a repeated violation of the normative interaction rituals, they come under increased pressure to keep up their normal appearances, despite the mounting and intensifying breaks in the script (Collins 2004:20). For the show to go on, those involved put up false fronts, which they try to use to save the faces of those present in the damaged situation (Goffman 1990:244). It is most often Charlie's responsibility as the oldest—the new patriarch of the family who sits at the end of the table—who is responsible for saving the line with footing and has the neutral authority to do so when Violet steps out of it, as she repeatedly does. However, despite repeated attempts by Charlie and others at the dinner table to preserve the interactional line of the situation, when Violet steps out of line, their efforts remain insufficient as Violet is looking for a fight. She is playing solo as the star of the show and is indifferent to attempts by the dinner guests to align to the customary interaction ritual of such a dinner.

Interestingly, despite Violet's constant confrontation and hostility towards most of the dinner guests, she gets away with her demanding behavior for a prolonged period. That lack of collective punishment towards Violet from the attacked dinner guests may be due to several reasons. First, due to the shared history of those present at the dinner table, who are members of Violet's immediate family; they, therefore, know how Violet can behave at times and what could be expected, and thus have a higher threshold towards Violet's eccentric antics than outsiders (Katovich and Couch 1992; Fine 2012). Second, Violet is grieving for her late husband, and emotional expressions of grief—although unanticipated—may be labeled as acceptable due to circumstances that provide the grieving widow with more latitude towards her provocative behavior than under less vulnerable and emotional circumstances. Third, Goffman (1963:218) notes that

“The more ‘legitimate’ the offender's reasons...the more these contingent offenses are viewed as fully excusable, and the less intentionality is imputed on them.” In other words, it may be argued that Violet got away with her offenses for a prolonged period since her verbal attacks on the dinner guests (who are her immediate family) were not necessarily wrongful or inaccurate *per se*, as she was speaking the “truth”—although some of her comments were more debatable than others. And fourth, the lack of collective punishment of the dinner guests towards Violet's hostile attacks may be due to her power of authority in the situation (Goffman 1963:229-230; Kelly and Archibald 2019), as discussed above. Both history and authority bring Violet some support in her stance, and obedience (for instance, from Mattie Fae, Steve, and others), as well as extended permissiveness from the dinner guests, despite her inappropriate and mean behavior. We may wonder what the reaction of others would have been if the teenager, Jean, had behaved similarly to Violet. Her behavior would have been defined as “interactional vandalism,” a term that has been singled out for those from subordinate social positions who breach the social interactions of the more powerful (Duneier and Molotch 1999). For that, she would probably have been harshly reprimanded right from the start, made to apologize for her behavior, and sent to her room.

However, as the scene unfolds, the funeral meal is stripped of its mystical atmosphere (Griffero 2016; Sumartojo and Pink 2019) due to Violet's virtual offenses (Goffman 1963), and despite attempts by the dinner guests to align the situation; they are unsuccessful in preserving the interaction order, which finally causes the premature termination of the situation as further interaction is not possible. The collective and somewhat spiritual conscience of the funeral dinner as an event (see: Durkheim 1965) is spoiled as Violet does

not try to modify her behavior despite being provided with several remedial interchanges as opportunities to do so. And, as she, furthermore, seems to be generally amused by her acts of “contingent malice,” the situational interaction results in a relational rupture (Goffman 1963:218). The ending of the movie shows Violet, the main breacher, alone and abandoned after having driven her daughters and their families away, due to her ruthless confrontation and objectionable behavior in social interactions.

Interestingly, Violet’s unstable and antisocial behavior, as illustrated by her disruptions, is blamed on her addiction to prescription drugs in the storyline rather than on her refreshing quest to restore more honesty among her immediate family. That interpretation demonstrates how powerful the interaction order is. Backstage issues should be kept backstage, and those who deviate from the expected norms are defined as unwell or sick and in need of medical help, as it turns out to be the case in the episode following the dinner scene in the movie where Violet is accompanied by her family members to see a doctor, representing the medicalization of society (Goffman 1961b; 1963:235). But, the key point here is that people tend to align more alliance to the interaction order than to truth itself since Violet’s verbal comments and attacks on the dinner guests were perceived rather as inappropriate than untruthful. Deception thus becomes a virtue in the interaction order, as the show must go on smoothly (Scott 2012).

Conclusion

In this paper, I attempted to provide the reader with a sociological reading of a movie clip through a micro-sociological analysis of the dinner scene in *August: Osage County*. However, that reading is only one of many potential readings of the scene, which

first and foremost serves to provide the reader with an insight into how the interaction order works and how products of popular media can be utilized in sociological description and analysis. That means that I was not able to do the whole scene justice in describing and analyzing everything of sociological interest the scene offered. And, other interpretations and themes could as easily become the output of such an analysis, given the different perspectives of viewers and analysts of the scene.

However, the above analysis shows how an atmosphere in a particular social situation is built on the ongoing interactions of participants, which, on the one hand, are characterized by frequent disruptions of the interaction order (by the few), and on the other, by attempts to withhold and sustain the interaction order and safeguard its balance (by the many). Interestingly, the attempts of the dinner guests aim towards avoiding disruptions of the interaction order, and in turn, they also avoid confronting reality, which shows more alliance to the interaction order itself than to the straightforward and truthful revelations that surfaced in the interaction. From a wider sociological perspective, the analysis further highlights and exposes larger cultural themes, which influence the situational interaction, such as themes of power and authority, subordination, generational cleavage, and the medicalization of society (Goffman 1961b). Thus, the fictional film clip can be noted to portray truthful themes and elements of real life that can be detected, specified, and illustrated in detail through the analysis of the film clip by freezing moments of action in time, which allows the researcher to examine various kinds of explicit and tacit impressions and gestures of the situational interaction.

Hopefully, this analysis can serve to enhance the reader’s/viewer’s grasp of important parts of the the-

ory of the interaction order and the functioning of society at large. By providing an examination of the interaction order through the use of a film clip, this analysis should be able to further stimulate and encourage students and scholars of sociology to utilize

visual products in doing sociology because visual material—whether fact or fiction—contains helpful insights and observations of *what is going on* in a situation, and, in turn, of *what is going on* in society (Becker 2007:3).

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Gender, Embodiment, and Self-Regulation: Surveillance in Canadian Intercollegiate Women's Distance Running

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Abstract: This article draws on data collected through semi-structured interviews with intercollegiate cross country and track athletes to investigate how female distance runners experience their sport concerning gender and embodiment. The runners identified gender as affecting their sport by way of shorter distances for women's races, heightened involvement of coaches in corporeal matters such as diet and weight, as well as sex verification policies. Distance running was also specifically identified as a sport that intensifies societal pressures for women to be thin. Drawing on Foucault's theory of disciplinary power, this paper explores how dominant discourses on gender and the body are reproduced within distance running through a combination of structural and cultural practices. However, the paper also highlights resistance to cultural ideals among female runners, calling for a more dynamic understanding of disciplinary power that accounts for individual agency.

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The central thrust of Foucault's (1977) work is that individuals are subjected to covert disciplinary practices that are internalized, prompting them to become self-regulating. In this manner, individuals develop forms of embodiment that are consistent with the discourses they are exposed to. Sport

has been shown to be an institution that replicates dominant discourses on gender and the body, facilitating the production of what Foucault (1977) calls "docile bodies." Docile bodies are produced through regimentation, making organized sport a strategic site for analyzing disciplinary power. Women's distance running is especially suitable for this kind of analysis due to its highly regimented nature and emphasis on fit bodies. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of female distance runners through semi-structured interviews, attending to the following research questions: First, to what extent does women's distance running reinforce dominant conventions on gender and the body? Second, if disciplinary power operates in women's distance running, what are the mechanisms through which it does so? And finally, how do female distance runners respond to the disciplining forces and discourses to which they are subject?

The paper begins with a brief discussion of Foucault's theory of disciplinary power and his concept of "docile bodies." Following an explanation of the methodology employed, the study's findings are presented in three sections that describe the discourses that permeate women's distance running, the participants' descriptions of the mechanisms by which these discourses are enforced, and their responses to disciplinary power in their sport. I conclude with a discussion of the implications of the study's findings for our understanding of precisely how disciplinary power works.

Docile Bodies

A central figure in studies of modern and pre-modern forms of power, Foucault wrote extensively on matters pertaining to corporality, surveillance, governmentality, and power relations more broadly

(Rabinow and Rose 2003; Foucault et al. 2009). His works have been applied to the study of various cultural phenomena, including art, music, literature, and sport, elucidating some of the ways that power dynamics operate within diverse cultural settings. Because of his emphasis on power relations, Foucault's work is particularly salient for understanding cultural platforms as vectors of control (Beckman 2018).

Although Foucault was not a sports sociologist, his work on power relations provides an understanding of how surveillance practices become habitual within sporting environments in ways that replicate dominant cultural discourses. His analysis of corporeal disciplinary practices is especially useful for understanding women's competitive distance running as a site of self-regulation and social control. In his 1977 work *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, Foucault's discussion of power foregrounds the body as an object and target of power. According to Foucault, disciplinary power is a form of social control rooted in surveillance and regimentation. It operates through covert disciplinary practices that become normalized and prompt individuals to become self-regulating.

Foucault (1977) argues that in modern societies, surveillance plays a key role in sustaining power relations through subtle disciplinary techniques. Surveillance is covertly embedded in all facets of society, prompting self-regulation and adherence to social convention. Since surveillance mechanisms are subtle, their presence lacks external visibility. That covert nature of surveillance lends itself to normalization; individuals adopt the disciplinary techniques they are exposed to (Foucault 1977). Disciplinary techniques promote self-regulation and impose restraints on docile subjects in ways that uphold existing power regimes.

As subjects internalize surveillance technologies and become self-regulating, they become “docile bodies” (Foucault 1977:138). Foucault (1977:138) asserts that docile bodies constitute “subjected and practiced bodies.” These bodies respond to disciplinary techniques through compliance, and do so efficiently (Foucault 1977). Key features of docility include discipline, economic efficiency, and political obedience (Markula and Pringle 2006:20). Bodies become “docile” through exposure to disciplinary techniques, such as repetitive exercises and manipulation involving the use of space, time, and architecture (Foucault 1977).

Sport and exercise constitute one form of disciplinary practice through which docile bodies are shaped (Markula and Pringle 2006). Different exercise techniques produce different types of bodies suited to particular sports or particular cultural ideals. Markula and Pringle (2006) assert that disciplinary technologies can produce a multitude of bodies within a fitness context. For instance, coaching practices can help sustain such bodies within specific sporting environments. Disciplinary technologies, such as drills, skill sessions, fitness programs, or punitive measures can all serve to create docile bodies capable of fitting into a particular athletic setting. In fact, the highly regimented nature of athletic training renders sport a particularly efficient way to promote docility. As such, the sport has been aptly characterized as “an important social regulator” (Barker-Ruchti and Tinning 2010:231).

Although the term “docile bodies” implies passivity, it is important to note that Foucault’s analysis does not view power as unilateral. Instead, Foucault’s conception of power is relational and exerted through all acting agents in a relationship (Foucault 1988a). Thus, rather than being seen as a determin-

ing force, disciplinary power exerts influence in ways that can be modified and resisted. While some agents are better positioned than others to influence its balance, power can be harnessed by all (Foucault 1977; 1988a). Moreover, power cannot be held; it can only be translated, as it remains in constant motion in a web of exchange (Foucault 1988a). By conceiving of power as fluid, relational, and multifaceted, Foucault’s analysis leaves room for resistance. Indeed, Foucault (1978:95) views power and resistance as intertwined and explicitly states that “where there is power, there is resistance.” According to Foucault, power relations are always characterized by points of resistance distributed throughout the power network.

Although Foucault is attentive to the agency throughout his extensive body of work, much of his writing on resistance has been overlooked in discussions of disciplinary power and the subject’s capacity for resistance (Oksala 2005). Nonetheless, some Foucauldian analyses have made notable efforts to highlight the attention to agency and resistance (e.g., Butler 1997; McWhorter 1999; Oksala 2004; Amigot and Pujal 2009; Medina 2011). For example, McWhorter (1999) critically examines Foucault’s key works through the lens of her experiences as a sexual minority, explicitly stating that Foucault’s work does not preclude agency. Medina (2011) draws on Foucault’s genealogy to highlight memory practices as a critical approach to resistance against oppression and dominant ideologies. Similarly, Amigot and Pujal (2009:655) identify “practices of the self” as a precursor to resistance and freedom. As these works illustrate, Foucault’s writings clearly address avenues for resistance.

In the *History of Sexuality*, Foucault (1978) identifies the body as a channel of resistance. Bodies and plea-

asures, he argues, yield the potential to subvert normalizing practices. In his later work, Foucault develops his analysis to discuss conscious awareness as a key element of resistance, highlighting the self as the locus of transformative potential (Foucault 1988b). In that work, Foucault articulates how conscious awareness of normalizing practices can effect self-transformation, enabling individuals to transcend disciplinary power (1988b). According to Foucault, individuals adopt "technologies of the self," which are mechanisms by which individuals can invoke self-transformation towards "a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality" (Foucault 1988b:18). Technologies of the self are characterized by self-care and self-knowledge through which individuals can recognize themselves as subjects and develop resistance against disciplinary power (Foucault 1988b).

Following that line of thought, several scholars have examined how runners disrupt normative assumptions about idealized athletic bodies. For instance, Chase's (2008) study of Clydesdale runners examines how normative assumptions about the ideal running body are challenged by a heavier class of runners. Chase (2008:145) finds that the existence of Clydesdale running bodies and communities "challenges the normative ideals of appropriate running bodies and the disciplinary processes associated with distance running." While Chase's study provides an excellent example of resistance in distance running, resistance is located primarily in the body. Foucault, on the other hand, emphasizes the need for developing a requisite level of critical awareness before being able to use technologies of the self as freedom practices (Markula 2003). In a similar vein, Bridel and Rail's (2007) study of gay male marathoners examines how these athletes discursively construct their bodies in ways that contravene domi-

nant representations of the male body, identifying conscious resistance as a requisite for change. Although a Foucauldian framework is not employed, Tulle's (2007) work also acknowledges the transformative potential of distance running by revealing how the agency and embodiment of elite veteran distance runners can challenge dominant discourses on aging.

As with other sports, distance running can reinforce dominant discourses on gender and the body. Broadly speaking, organized sport is structured in ways that are highly gendered and privilege masculinity (Lenskyj 2003). Moreover, some sports cultures promote the idealization of thinness, which can result in a heightened preoccupation with body image for athletes (Heywood 2011). Dworkin and Wachs (2009) argue that with the rise of neoliberalism, there is increased pressure for individuals to scrutinize their bodies, self-regulate, and strive for health and fitness. These trends have resulted in healthism, which amounts to the widespread pursuit of health and fitness that is especially evident among the middle and upper classes (Dworkin and Wachs 2009). Nettleton and Hardey (2006:455) observe that the growing commodification of health has been accompanied by a growth in urban marathon running, which they characterize as "an educative spectacle that reflects the values of self-discipline and healthy lifestyles."

Although corporeal self-regulation occurs among both men and women, self-regulatory practices have a highly gendered component (Butler 1997; Fausto-Sterling 2000; Bartky 2009). Fitness regimes for women tend to emphasize weight loss, while men's fitness activities promote muscular development (Dworkin 2001). Additionally, women are judged more harshly on appearance and are encour-

aged to present themselves in conventionally feminine ways (Davis-Delano, Pollock, and Vose 2009). Dworkin's (2001) study on women's fitness practices reveals that many women are reluctant to exercise in ways that promote muscular expansion, creating a glass ceiling on women's muscular strength. Dworkin argues that this trend places an upper limit on women's muscular strength, thereby reproducing socially constructed understandings of female embodiment.

Emphasis on female slenderness, combined with the popular discourse of healthism, has resulted in a substantial preoccupation with weight for many women. That preoccupation has been accompanied by notable growth in the prevalence of disordered eating patterns, especially among young, white, middle-class women (Bordo 1993; Hesse-Biber 1996). Although there is substantial pressure for women, in general, to strive for thinness, that pressure is arguably intensified in some athletic subcultures where athletes are faced with additional performance-related pressures to lose weight. In this vein, Heywood's (2011) work uses a biocultural approach to examine how beauty ideals and gender prescriptions mesh with sports culture to produce *anorexia athletica*, a form of anorexia associated with excessive exercise. Heywood notes that performance-related idealizations of leanness stemming from sports subcultures can combine with appearance-related idealizations of leanness from the dominant culture, which can provoke body image anxiety among female athletes. That is especially true in leanness-promoting sports, such as running.

Heywood's research is consistent with literature suggesting that female athletes may be at higher risk for developing eating disorders compared to non-athletes (Swami, Steadman, Tovee 2009; Torst-

veit, Rosenvinge, and Sundgot-Borgen 2013; Quinn and Robinson 2020) and that higher levels of competition are associated with elevated rates of eating disorders (Smolak, Murnen, and Ruble 2000; Swami et al. 2009). For many runners, identity becomes increasingly tied to their athletic pursuits as their involvement in the sport grows (Allen-Collinson and Hockey 2007; Shipway and Jones 2007). Heywood (2011) specifically notes that for competitive runners, identity becomes attached to the numbers produced by their performances, such as race times or rankings. That can heighten performance-related pressures to strive for leanness within athletic subcultures, a trend that may be exacerbated for female runners. Research suggests that female athletes in leanness-promoting sports are more apt to develop eating disorders (Nattiv et al. 2007; Swami et al. 2009; Javed et al. 2013; Quatromoni 2017). That finding is consistent with existing research suggesting that distance runners face elevated levels of eating disorders (Krebs et al. 2019; Quinn and Robinson 2020). For example, a recent study of NCAA cross country and track athletes identifies an elevated risk of eating disorders for both male and female runners compared to the general population, although the risk was found to be more than twice as high among female runners compared to male runners (Krebs et al. 2019).

Pressure to be thin stemming from performance-related goals, athletic subcultures, and broader societal idealizations of thinness may prompt female runners to engage in corporeal self-regulation. Although rationales for doing so may vary, the literature suggests that female runners may experience considerable pressure to self-regulate. Foucault (1977:138) argues that as individuals are exposed to surveillance, they engage in self-regulatory behavior, ultimately becoming what he calls "docile bod-

ies." According to that perspective, individuals internalize the corporeal discourses they are exposed to and become self-regulating. That trend is consistent with the scores of women who have adopted weight-loss strategies in a manner that mirrors the discourse of healthism and idealizations of thinness.

Distance running subcultures emphasize training, nutrition, and the balancing of caloric intake and energy output—things that embody discipline and self-regulation. They also reproduce socially constructed gender ideals through structural and cultural practices. Foucault argues that dominant discourses are reproduced via disciplinary practices that are covertly embedded in all facets of society. As such, what are the specific mechanisms by which disciplinary practices operate in distance running? Moreover, how do female runners respond to the disciplinary practices to which they are subject?

Methods

The study is based on semi-structured interviews with nineteen female distance runners. A semi-structured interview style was chosen for its conduciveness to flexibility, allowing for greater depth in participant dialogue (Adler and Clark 1999). All of the interviewees fell under the category of middle-distance runners. "Middle distance" is defined as any race between 800 meters and five kilometers long. All of the interviewees were also intercollegiate cross country and track athletes, attending one of three Canadian universities used for recruitment. I focused on intercollegiate athletes because, like many elite-level runners, there is a tendency for them to form subcultures centered on their athletic involvement. University running in Canada is competitive, holding national cham-

pionships and drawing many of the country's top athletes. Many university athletes take their athletic pursuits seriously and dedicate much of their time and energy to their training. They spend countless hours in each other's company: traveling, competing, socializing, and sometimes even living together. Close relationships form between runners, and a subculture emerges as their athletic pursuits become central to their identities. Consistent with Eliasoph and Lichterman's (2004) concept of "group style," intercollegiate runners develop their culturally patterned styles of interaction based on their shared group membership. Given the sheer level of their athletic involvement, the experiences of competitive university runners may be different from those who run recreationally. Since I was interested in interviewing competitive runners who were familiar with both structural and subcultural elements of their sport, intercollegiate cross country and track provided a useful locale for a cultural examination of distance running concerning gender and corporeality.

In May of 2011, having received ethics board approval, I began recruitment. As a distance runner, I had connections to running communities in Nova Scotia and Ontario that facilitated the recruitment process. Participants were initially approached informally, and those who expressed an interest in participating were provided with a formal recruiting document. All of the participants in the study were either involved in competitive running at the university level or had been within the past two years of the interview. The interviews took place between July and September of 2011. Despite being collected in 2011, the data provide valuable insight into how the sport is experienced on a subcultural level. Moreover, the data reveal the structures and practices that reproduce dominant cultural ideals in distance running,

as well as identify how these have shifted over time. Notably, the data highlight recent developments in women's cross country and track at the international level and the intercollegiate level in Canada.

Being an insider to the group I studied had both benefits and drawbacks. First, there was the possibility that my insider status might interfere with my ability to interpret findings. As such, I was careful during interviews to listen to the stories as relayed by participants and to clarify any ambiguities with follow-up questions. A second consideration relates to the fact that my insider status influenced the communities and participants that I chose to study. Having access to running communities in both Ontario and Atlantic Canada, I chose these locations for my research. Finally, my insider status may have affected the degree of comfort participants felt in disclosing certain information. To minimize discomfort, I took specific measures to ensure anonymity and confidentiality, such as non-disclosure of names and specific locations. The fact that I recruited participants from two separate communities likely facilitated anonymity. Despite these challenges, however, the participants seemed eager to discuss their experiences. Perhaps my insider status was more of an asset than a hindrance, facilitating my rapport with participants and attuning me to important questions relating to the sport's subculture.

The participants shared several characteristics. They were similar in age, race, and sexual orientation. Their ages ranged from seventeen to twenty-four, with twenty being the average age. All of the participants self-identified as Caucasian and heterosexual. Most described their socio-economic backgrounds as middle-class, which is interesting given that distance running has been identified as a largely middle-class pursuit (Serravallo 2000; Abbas 2004). The

lack of racial diversity among the research participants was particularly notable. Although racial categories are socially constructed, the effects of these constructions merit attention. Coakley (2003) argues that racial stereotyping can help channel individuals into particular sports, producing racial segregation. That finding may be relevant to women's distance running, as the runners I interviewed noted a lack of racial diversity within the sport. They suggested that there is more racial diversity on the men's side and among sprinters, but observed very few non-Caucasian women in university cross country. The homogeneity of my research participants presents a major limitation to my study; however, it also raises important questions for further study regarding demographic trends within the sport and their implications for inequality.

The interviews centered on the experiences of the runners concerning training, competition, gender, and the body. With the permission of participants, the interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim. Pseudonyms were selected for the participants, and identifying information, such as names and places, were removed from the transcripts. Following transcription, I analyzed the data thematically. I adopted a grounded theory approach that involved grouping similar concepts together and identifying common patterns and themes. Grounded theory is a dynamic approach that integrates data analysis throughout the research process and facilitates the development of a theory that is firmly grounded in the data (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1998).

I began with an open coding process that involves systematically and thoroughly analyzing the data line-by-line to identify broad themes. That can involve writing notes in the margins of transcripts of

field notes and creating documents compiling relevant observations, ultimately identifying broad themes (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995). I engaged in both strategies, analyzing the interview transcripts and notes line-by-line to identify larger themes and subthemes. That process generated two overarching categories: (1) mechanisms of disciplinary power and (2) responses to disciplinary power. I created documents for these themes, compiling the relevant information provided by each of the participants. These documents listed all the relevant information from each participant on the specific theme addressed, which I referred to during subsequent coding and writing stages.

I also created documents to analyze the emergent subthemes. Early on, it became evident that various mechanisms operate in the sport of distance running in ways that uphold dominant discourses on gender and the body. Subthemes that emerged in this category were "self-surveillance," "peer surveillance," "coach surveillance," and "structural surveillance." These represent the central mechanisms by which dominant conventions of gender and the body are upheld in women's distance running. It also became evident that responses to these mechanisms are polarized, with participants expressing a mix of compliance and resistance. Thus, addressing the second overarching theme involved identifying how participants were compliant and resistant to the constraints they experienced within their sport.

Once the core analysis documents were created, I coded each emergent theme into smaller subthemes detailing the processes by which the participants experienced gendered and corporeal discourses in their sport. Consistent with Strauss and Corbin's (1998) approach, I used axial coding to link categories and subthemes to glean further insights

and provide a fuller picture of their experiences and selective coding to refine and integrate the emergent themes.

Experiencing Discourses on Gender and the Body

Distance running is a sport where the pressure to be thin can be intense. The runners all claimed that there is substantial pressure for runners to be thin. Moreover, they specified that the pressure is intensified for female runners, who also face societal pressures to be thin. Haley, for instance, described the pressure she felt to be thin as double-layered, stating: "you're female, number one, so you should be thin anyways, and if you're a runner, you should be really thin because you're a female runner...it's kind of like double thinness." Runners described how the pursuit of thinness is reinforced within their running subculture, but also noted that the dominant conventions surrounding femininity mandate thinness for women in general. They identified themselves, coaches, peers, and clothing as the sources of their body image anxiety.

In addition to promoting the pursuit of thinness, the runners described how their sport promotes conformity to conventional gender ideals more broadly. Distance running is structured in highly gendered ways; most notably, through shorter races for women and sex verification testing (at the international level). Some runners noted that the sport's subculture also emphasizes a need to maintain a conventionally feminine appearance. The runners described various ways in which they felt pressured to adhere to conventional feminine standards, citing demeanor, facial expressions, and appearance more broadly as specific examples. Some runners perceived contradictions between conventional femininity and ath-

leticism in general. Nicole, for instance, observed that female runners may be referred to as “beasts” or “tanks.” These are terms she perceived as unfeminine: “stuff like that; women wouldn’t normally want to hear about themselves.”

The interviews revealed how distance running promotes a particular brand of femininity that is largely embodied by the pursuit of thinness. The runners felt pressured in varying degrees to maintain a thin, conventionally feminine appearance within their athletic environments. In line with Foucault, that suggests that disciplinary power shapes distance runners into docile bodies that conform to dominant conventions on gender and the body. However, the runners were often aware of how dominant these ideals impact their sport, exhibiting a combination of self-regulation and resistance.

Mechanisms of Disciplinary Power

Self-Surveillance

Self-surveillance is central to disciplinary power and the production of docile bodies (Foucault 1977). As evidenced by the data, self-surveillance plays a key role in promoting a gendered pursuit of thinness among female distance runners. Consistent with Foucault’s theory of docile bodies, some runners described pressure to be thin as an internal manifestation and downplayed other factors that contribute to body image anxiety among runners:

There’s a lot of personal pressure, too, that I put on myself. [Ellen]

Pressure comes from coaches, but I think a lot of it comes from the runners themselves. [Nicole]

Part of the pressure is obviously from myself. [Brittany]

I think it’s internal. [Kayla]

The runners also conveyed that the culture of distance running facilitates self-surveillance, as weight-based assumptions about running ability are frequently made. Megan, for instance, felt the need to monitor her weight: “I will watch what I eat, try to run more because I feel like people are going to judge me just because I have a bigger body.” For Anna, pressure to be thin is exacerbated by being surrounded by thin people in her training circle:

Hanging out with basketball players or just friends, you feel like you’re not really thinking about your body weight at all. But, as soon as you’re with runners, everyone is so fit and so lean that you’re constantly comparing yourself to other people.

Self-surveillance was also evident in discussions about gender. For Haley, disparaging remarks about the bodies of female runners deemed too muscular caused her to become self-conscious of her body, especially when her lean physique gained disapproval from her boyfriend: “I was really fit and had a really fit stomach. I had a six-pack, and my boyfriend did not like it. He thought it was too much.” Anna felt the need to control her facial expressions while running, which she felt detracted from her ability to direct 100 percent of her energy on performance:

Guys have, like, drool or spit, like it’s just so different! But, if you see a girl like that, it’s a different reaction like “Eww! What are they doing?!” I think that’s kind of held me back a couple of times. You don’t want to lose control of yourself or something. [Anna]

Anna's concentration during races was also inhibited by an urge to downplay competitiveness:

Sometimes I'll be really close to my teammates in a race, and it's hard to want to pass them or catch them and beat them, and I think that kind of comes off as too competitive, or you're not being nice or considerate. I feel like with the guys, I don't know if they even consider that. I think it's a totally different mindset.

For Megan, tensions between femininity and muscularity have helped guide her sporting pursuits. A multisport athlete before joining her university cross country and track teams, Megan's decision to focus exclusively on running stemmed from the positive reaction she received from running versus other sports. She used to play hockey—a sport she described as masculine. She felt that running is more consistent with feminine ideals, in part due to its promotion of bodily reduction: “it's more feminine because of the attire and the body types associated with running. They aren't as muscular and stuff.” For these athletes, gender conventions heightened their corporeal self-awareness, and in some cases, promoted self-regulation.

As stated by Foucault (1977), disciplinary societies are characterized by surveillance practices that operate in a covert fashion, thus leading to their normalization. Consequently, individuals adopt self-regulatory techniques, often without a strong awareness of external influences. All the runners stated that, to a certain degree, pressure to be thin is internal, although many also cited additional sources of pressure. Asserting that pressure to be thin is internal may indicate that surveillance practices have been internalized. The fact that many were cognizant of additional sources of pressure, however, indicates an awareness of this internalization.

Peer Surveillance

Although surveillance from coaches had a significant impact on the runners, peer surveillance also contributed to self-regulation. For some runners, pressure to be thin was rooted in performance. It was suggested that there is a common perception that weight control can improve performance, prompting bodily comparisons among runners. Kayla, for instance, perceived that weight is covertly monitored within her team environment:

It's kind of like that hush-hush thing you don't talk about. Like no one's ever like, “Oh, you've gained weight.” But, in the back of your mind, you're like, “Oh, that person's lost weight or that person's gained weight.” And then you kind of monitor how they're running.

Surveillance also influenced the dietary choices of some runners. Some runners described times when they felt pressure to alter their eating habits in the presence of others:

I tend to eat healthy anyways, but I find that when I'm around other runners, I'm extra healthy or extra conscious of what I'm eating. [Anna]

I feel like I'm conscious of what I'm eating. Like, I try not to overeat. I think like, everybody feels a bit of pressure with food, just to fit in with the team. [Alyssa]

Although dietary restriction was discussed at length, some athletes also described gluttony as a frequent topic of conversation within their training circles. Many claimed that because there is such a high prevalence of eating disorders among runners, they tend to take specific measures to disas-

sociate themselves from weight-loss practices. It is common for runners to both speculate about others having eating disorders and to take measures to avoid similar speculations about themselves. For example, Brittany claimed that many of her teammates often talk about all the junk food they eat to deflect suspicions of eating disorders:

People are always talking about all the food that they have eaten or that they're going to be eating, like junk food and stuff. It's almost like they feel they have to say, "Oh, I ate all this stuff" or "I'm going to be eating all this," just because they almost feel they need to get across that they are eating all the time. [emphasis original]

Kayla expressed a similar sentiment, stating that the prevalence of eating disorders has helped fuel the constant focus on food within her team environment: "I think some people feel the need to be monitoring them, and while you monitor them, you start kind of monitoring everyone." Kayla further explained that monitoring encourages behavior aimed at deflecting suspicions of disordered eating habits. For example, Kayla claimed that she feels the need to eat in front of others, even if she is not hungry:

It's almost gotten to the point where it's difficult to eat in front of other people. Because let's say, I had lunch and I meet people, and they're like, "Let's go for lunch," and I already had lunch. In my mind, I feel the pressure to eat another lunch even if I feel sick.

By taking measures to control their appearance and manage their diets, especially in the presence of teammates, the runners demonstrate internalized docility. Their comments suggest that surveillance plays a key role in dictating the general focus on body image and weight within their sport's subculture.

Coach Surveillance

For the runners in this study, coaches played an integral role in promoting the pursuit of thinness. Besides from themselves, coaches were the most widely cited source of pressure to be thin. While it is important to note that many coaches do not engage in training methods that specifically draw attention to body weight, they are a subtle source of body image anxiety among female runners. Athletes shared stories of coaches commenting on their weight or the weight of other runners. Conversations about diet and "weigh-ins" were also cited as sources of body image anxiety stemming from coaches.

A few athletes described how weight-related comments made by their coaches about other runners contributed to the emphasis on weight control within the sport:

He would often comment on girls that didn't train with him anymore, but that moved on to a different coach and got bigger and stuff like that. [Jasmine]

I've had another coach mention to a girl...she said you need to start exercising and lose that weight. [Emily]

Haley described a situation in which her coaches asked her to speak to a teammate about her weight in hopes that the teammate would lose weight:

They wanted me to talk to a girl runner because she had gained weight. They wanted me to talk to her, and I didn't end up. I was like, that's not my place. [Haley]

Several runners were told directly by their coaches to lose weight. Nicole was told that she was "running with a ten-pound backpack." Olivia's club

coach would regularly tell his athletes that “pounds are seconds.” Ellen was told by club coaches to “watch what you eat.” As a high school student, Megan’s club coach spoke to her on several occasions about diet and weight. He would say things such as “you’re fat,” “you look heavy,” or “you have too much body weight,” and would also offer weight-loss tips. On one occasion, he even felt her body and told her where she needed to lose weight:

I came back from winter one year, and he said, “You look fat.” He really said that. He said, look at your face, you’re heavy. And your legs. And then he literally felt my leg. He was like, “that’s fat on your leg.” [Megan]

That was not the only experience Megan had with coaches pressuring her to lose weight. Following the touching incident, Megan described several other examples of weight-related remarks made by her coach in the months that followed while she continued to train with him. She was once told that her high school race results were a reflection of her body weight:

After I had a bad race...he said, “Well, that’s what you get. You’re out of shape. That’s what you get.” Because I didn’t have a good race. And he was like, “That’s what you get. Your legs aren’t fit. You have too much bodyweight.”

Although some runners were resistant to their coaches’ emphasis on weight control, all of them described how weight-related remarks had a way of sticking with them and making them more self-conscious about their bodies:

I know I’m not overweight, but it makes me feel more self-conscious, you know what I mean? [Jasmine]

Because of that one time they talked about it, now I always feel like I’m being analyzed. [Ellen]

Ever since then it was always sort of at the back of my mind. Running with a ten-pound backpack on my back. [Nicole]

Well, it just stuck with me... I just can’t forget it. [Haley]

Every time I have a bad day, have a bad run, I always think of that. I feel like that’s always hanging over me now. I just can’t get it out of my system. [Megan]

For Anna, comments from coaches about diet and weight made her feel uncomfortable eating junk food in their presence, especially when traveling with her team:

I think it depends on the coach. If you know they’re not going to say anything, then you can just do what you normally do. But, if it’s one you know has said something to people about losing weight, then it would definitely run through my head what I order in front of them.

Comments remained embedded in their minds for a long time and surfaced every so often, causing them to think negatively about their bodies. By criticizing their athletes’ bodies, coaches made athletes more self-regulating and, in extension, docile. Commenting on an athlete’s weight affected workouts, food intake, and appearance consciousness, which ultimately led to high levels of surveillance and control within training environments.

Structural Surveillance

Numerous structures promote dominant conventions on gender and the body in distance running.

These include shorter races for female runners and sex verification testing, which promote the ideology of male physical superiority. Uniform requirements can serve as a means to promote corporal self-regulation and the idealization of thinness. By promoting gender dichotomization and the idealization of thinness, these structures constitute mechanisms of disciplinary power in distance running.

When asked about the sources of their body image concern, the runners identified clothing as a key contributor. The types of clothing that runners typically wear are form-fitting and do not cover much flesh. It was suggested by many that such clothing contributes to the pressure they feel to be thin. Several runners described how clothing made them pay more attention to weight and body composition. Megan described the feeling as though she is under the constant surveillance of others while wearing spandex, prompting her to tone her body. Megan's comments emphasized how clothing can intensify feelings of being under surveillance:

I feel like wearing spandex, you want to have nice legs. And you want to keep your legs free of cellulite. I think it provides the incentive to keep training and strengthen the muscles that are exposed that other athletes or coaches...that other people can see because I think that a lot of females feel as though they're constantly being watched.

Several runners professed a marked desire to look good in running clothes. Excess body fat spilling out of clothing was described as something that female runners seek to avoid. Their comments indicate a preoccupation with maintaining a lean physique that is closely linked with the clothing they wear:

If you look at pictures of yourself running, you want to look good. You don't want to make a fool of your-

self. It's easy for girls to think they're big in comparison to other girls, even if they're not big at all. The clothing kind of compounds that. [Katrina]

To wear spandex, you have to be compact in a way. [Jessie]

When you're wearing those fitted tank tops, you want to look nice in them. [Kara]

People are going to be able to see every little roll. [Jasmine]

I don't necessarily like hanging out. [Kayla]

These comments suggest a strong preoccupation with maintaining a lean, tight body, void of visible excess fat. Katrina's comment about "making a fool of yourself" highlights the extent to which this preoccupation is felt among some runners, indicating internalized docility.

Some runners discussed how some required team uniforms were too tight or too revealing for their taste. Kayla insightfully pointed out that team uniforms can function as a mechanism of control since they make runners feel more self-conscious about their bodies: "I don't think the coaches are making us wear it to control our weight, but on some level, it's doing that." Kayla also suggested that the trend of tight, form-fitting uniforms in distance running is not solely due to coach preference. Some coaches even accommodated their athletes' preferences by providing them with several uniform options. The trend of wearing form-fitting uniforms for the competition is embedded within the subculture of the sport on a deeper level. Form-fitting clothes are typically worn by competitive runners. Many of the runners preferred running in minimal cloth-

ing. When asked why they thought uniforms are form-fitting, the runners cited comfort, efficiency, and tradition. While it may be difficult to identify the historical origin of tight, revealing uniforms, it would be ill-informed to suggest that coaches choose such uniforms to promote weight control. It is clear, however, that team uniforms that are particularly tight or revealing can promote the pursuit of thinness that characterizes distance running subcultures. Clothing can thus be seen as a conduit of surveillance, promoting self-regulation and weight control.

Another structure that promotes disciplinary power in the sport can be found in the race distance differential for men and women. In Canadian intercollegiate cross country, women's races have traditionally been significantly shorter than men's. At the time of the interviews, women's championship races were five kilometers long, while the race distance for men was ten kilometers. In recent years, however, there has been some debate over the differential race distances for male and female runners at all levels of competition. At the international level, the IAAF decided to equalize race distances in men's and women's championships (Hambleton 2021). While motions to equalize race distances were initially rejected by U Sports, the governing body for the intercollegiate sport in Canada, women's championship races were increased to 6 kilometers in 2013 and again to 8 kilometers in 2016, while the men's race distance remained unchanged at 10 kilometers. In 2020, U Sports decided to equalize the men's and women's race distances, requiring both men and women to run 8 kilometers in championship races (Hambleton 2021). Since the 2020 cross country season was canceled due to the global pandemic, the 2021 cross country season marks the first season in which both men and women will run 8 ki-

lometers at the national championship in November. Race distances still vary by gender in many locales, however, including some Athletics Canada events, some high school events, and American and British intercollegiate cross country.

There have been some efforts to address gender equity within the sport, as evidenced by race distance equalization. However, the legacy of gendered practices within the sport remains part of a larger culture of sexism observed by some participants, who at the time of the interviews still ran half the distance as their male peers. Thirteen of the nineteen runners interviewed described this race-distance gap as problematic. While most were not particularly bothered by running the shorter distance, the gendered disparity in race distance was commonly understood as irrational, and by some as a product of lingering gender stereotypes:

I kind of wonder why there is that big gap because I feel like there isn't really any need for that. I think it's probably traditional. [Jessie]

I would rather run a ten than a five. I'm not offended that we only run five, but I don't see why we couldn't run ten. [Haley]

I think that some people still like to see men as...not dominant but above. Like men are on a pedestal and they have to almost prove themselves. Well, not prove themselves but almost show that they are the men. [Kara]

One runner insightfully noted that women are forced to run shorter races throughout their entire careers and are thus conditioned to appreciate the shorter distance. Although happy to run five kilometers, Megan stated that she would have preferred

the opportunity to “build up” and run longer races. Megan’s discussion illustrates how covert disciplinary practices can become normalized through repeated exposure.

Shorter race distances for women provide a clear example of a structural limitation that restricts female athleticism and maintains women’s inferior status within the sport. Historically, limiting women’s race distances served as a means to promote the “female frailty myth” that associates female bodies with physical deficiency (Lenskyj 2003; Mewett 2003). A Foucauldian analysis suggests that holding shorter race distances for women in CIS cross country helps preserve that myth. Limiting women’s race distances serves as a disciplinary practice that covertly promotes unequal gender relations within the sport.

Several runners identified sex verification testing as contributing to sexism in their sport, citing the high-profile testing of Caster Semenya that occurred in 2009 as a specific example. Until 2011, female runners remained subject to sex verification testing on a case-by-case basis at international competitions. Testing could be ordered when a “challenge” was issued by another athlete, team, or delegate (IAAF Policy on Gender Verification 2006). Appearance played a role in determining who was identified as a candidate for testing, encouraging female runners to present themselves in conventionally feminine ways (Cavanaugh and Sykes 2006). To deal with the eligibility of female athletes, the IAAF enacted a new policy in 2011 titled “IAAF Regulations Governing Eligibility of Female Athletes with Hyperandrogenism to Compete in Women’s Competition” (Cooky, Dycus, and Dworkin 2018:43). That new policy abandons all reference to “gender verification”

but still governs the eligibility of athletes to compete as women (Cooky et al. 2018).

Although they are not subjected to sex testing themselves, some runners suggested that the practice is sexist and expressed displeasure that appearance plays a role in the testing process. Moreover, they stated that the abilities of female runners become suspect when they perform well, noting a double standard between how male and female athletes are treated:

I think she was treated really badly...you think of Usain Bolt. Like there’s something different about him compared to everybody else? So, I mean like Caster, there’s something different about her, too, but because Usain Bolt is a guy, nobody tries to kick him out, and nobody tries to be like, “Oh, you can’t be in the competition.” But, in her case, they take her out of the competition. [Alyssa]

She is muscular, so they associate that with being male. That says a lot right there, just saying, “Oh, she has muscles, she can’t be a female.” That’s what I feel the undertone of that was. Like how they called her out on that. So I don’t think that’s right. [Haley]

These runners adopted a position similar to that argued by Cooky and Dworkin (2018), whereby sex testing is characterized as arbitrarily creating a narrow category of acceptable femaleness, policing the boundaries of sex.

Responding to Disciplinary Power

The runners had varied responses to disciplinary power in their sport. As illustrated by their statements, some succumbed to pressure to self-regulate. They controlled what they ate in the presence

of teammates and coaches and, in some cases, strove for leanness in response to perceived judgments from others. Megan, for instance, claimed to “watch what [she] eats and exercise more.” Others, like Kayla, felt the need to make a conscious display of eating to deflect suspicions of eating disorders. Most runners claimed that they felt pressure to be thin. A few initially claimed that they ignore pressure to be thin, but subsequently described how they altered their diets in the presence of teammates or coaches. One runner who was relatively unconcerned with her weight stated that one advantage of running is being able to eat larger quantities of food and remain thin. Similarly, runners who claimed to be unaffected by gender norms later complained about their shorter race distances or opined that sex testing is sexist. These contradictory messages reveal that athletes may be unaware of how they are affected by dominant discourses until taking time to reflect on their experiences. By providing contradictory statements, these participants highlight the subtle nature of disciplinary power. As Foucault (1977) asserts, surveillance mechanisms operate covertly, which promotes self-regulation and permits dominant discourses to become normalized. For some athletes, it was only upon deeper reflection that they were able to identify gender as a factor that shapes their experiences as runners, which exposes the power of gender discourse.

In most cases, however, the runners seemed well-aware of how they were influenced by the dominant discourses in their sport. Some were quite vocal in their opposition to gendered practices and corporeal surveillance. Notably, there was explicit resistance to the emphasis placed on weight control within their sport, especially in terms of the perceived associations between thinness and athletic success:

[Running] kind of has almost a strict sort of body type...which is 120lbs, very slim, very skinny, not an ounce of fat. But, I think that people are realizing that you don't need that type of body. [Megan]

A lot of people have the idea that the smaller you are, the better you're going to do, although I've realized that's only up to a point. Everyone has a set bodyweight that's best for them, and once you go under that, you're setting yourself up for all these different types of health complications. [Brittany]

In high school, I had that view that if I was thinner then I would run faster. But, I realize now that you don't have to be stick thin to be a good runner. [Karen]

There was also opposition to coaching practices that emphasize weight loss. Haley, for instance, refused to talk to a teammate about her weight, as requested by her coach. In reference to her coach's remarks about her weight, Megan pointedly stated: “I think it shouldn't ever be said. I feel like everyone makes their own decisions to run and when to run and what to eat and what not to eat.” Even runners who claimed to regulate diets and exercise to control their weight expressed resistance to the idea that runners should necessarily be thin. Moreover, some runners vocalized their displeasure with shorter races for women and sex verification testing, citing sexist traditions as the reasons behind these practices. Others requested alternative uniform options from coaches. Although the term “docile body” implies passivity, the runners were not passive subjects who conformed unequivocally to cultural ideals. Instead, their descriptions highlight the pressures that exist in their athletic milieus and their responses to these pressures.

Discussion and Conclusion

The paper presents a discursive analysis of how disciplinary practices are subjectively experienced by intercollegiate female distance runners. Notably, the paper is attentive to the ways that runners resist the various mechanisms of disciplinary power that they are exposed to. The interview data reveal that despite substantial progress in women's sport, competitive distance running continues to uphold dominant conventions on gender and the body. Shorter distances for women's races and sex verification testing constitute key ways in which gender continues to affect the experiences of female distance runners in some locales. Moreover, distance running subcultures promote corporeal self-regulation among female runners, especially concerning weight. As many runners stated, running can intensify general societal pressures for women to be thin. Pressure to be thin stems from their athletic subcultures and Western society more broadly, creating a multilayered effect on weight control. Female runners are exposed to intersecting discourses that promote thinness and conventional femininity simultaneously. They are encouraged to adopt a brand of femininity that is largely centered on the thin ideal. Although thinness is valued in distance running for both men and women, thinness is particularly emphasized for female runners, who are expected to be thin both as runners and as women. Gender thus facilitates the imperative for female runners to lose weight.

The runners in this study demonstrated a combination of internalization and resistance to gender and corporeal discourses. While pressured to self-regulate, they also exhibited awareness, and sometimes even rejection, of the disciplining forces within their sport. That finding is consistent with Foucault's arguments that disciplinary power does not operate

unilaterally but rather serves as a subtle force by which dominant discourses are strengthened and maintained. Although aware of the constraints they faced, the runners in this study were compliant towards the dominant discourse to the degree necessary for continued participation in their sport. For these athletes, the surveillance and discipline they were subjected to did not overshadow the satisfaction they derived from running. The runners' love for their sport trumped any pressures they felt to conform to cultural ideals in ways that interfered with their participation. Runners with muscular builds continued to train, runners whose coaches commented on their weight took pride in their athletic accomplishments, and one runner even refused her coach's request to speak to a teammate about weight loss strategies. There was also a common understanding that the idealization of thinness is largely irrational. Finally, the runners demonstrated high levels of critical awareness, indicating that they were not passive recipients of disciplinary power. These findings reveal important ways that athletes actively resist disciplinary power, not only as coping mechanisms described in much of the literature (Markula 2003) but as transgressive practices. Critical awareness can be understood as resistance and constitutes an important first step towards change. As Foucault (1988b) argues, through critical awareness, individuals can start to develop technologies of the self and transcend disciplinary power.

Although disciplinary power encourages adherence to dominant corporeal discourses and facilitates the production of docile bodies, that does not occur in an authoritative manner that suggests blind compliance. Instead, discourses are simultaneously observed and resisted by individuals who are often very much aware of their influence. While distance running may outwardly appear as a site of excessive self-regu-

lation, elite female runners exercise varying degrees of resistance to corporeal disciplinary practices. And through these processes of resistance, cultural discourses and practices can be reshaped. Such an example can be observed with the recent race distance equalization movement in cross country at the national and international levels (Hambleton 2021). In Canadian intercollegiate cross country, for instance, the 2021 national championships will be the first in which male and female athletes race the same distance—a direct outcome of active resistance. In this case, resistance led to a re-evaluation of a gendered regulatory practice within the sport after years of vocal opposition to women's shorter races.

In sum, resistance enables us to see that while “docile bodies” is indeed a relevant concept for analyzing the production of dominant discourses, such analyses must consider individual agency and potential for self-awareness. More attention to agency and the micro-processes by which disciplinary power is enacted can facilitate a deeper understanding of how

cultural discourses are produced, maintained, and reshaped.

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Whiteness and the Black Fan Imagination: Making Meaning of Whiteness within the Geographies of NASCAR

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Abstract: This article places its attention on how the spatial boundaries, practices, and separations—as structured by whiteness—impact the contestation and negotiation of meaning-making processes in the production and consumption of NASCAR space(s) for Black fans. It was through that vantage point that the participants demonstrated a nuanced understanding of whiteness, particularly through an awareness of NASCAR as a White space, how to effectively navigate such a White space, and a contextualization of more recent enactments of whiteness within these spaces. To explore and define Black individuals’ racialized experiences and movements as NASCAR fans from their perspective, this article uses a qualitative approach as grounded in narrative inquiry. Thus, findings demonstrate how Black fans make meaning of whiteness within the geographies of NASCAR, which advances theoretical understandings of how whiteness is perceived and represented in the Black imagination. Informed by Southern regional identity and the navigation of White space, these representations of whiteness as exclusive, fearful, and possessive are made salient through NASCAR’s attachment to racialized cultural values.

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Whiteness can be understood as a system of racialized power that is in a perpetual state of (re)working—accomplished and upheld through several elements such as cultural frames, narratives, symbolic boundaries, and values. In turn, each of these elements works together to maintain and normalize an imbalanced racial hierarchy. That is, whiteness is accomplished through culture, which is oftentimes viewed as the “connective tissues” fused between racial ideologies, practices, and structures (Wray 2014). It is through culture that whiteness is “done,” at which point it becomes important to hone in on culture as an operative lens through which to examine issues of race and racism (West and Zimmerman 1987). The “White space” is one such framework that captures that understanding of whiteness, which suggests that spaces can serve as “areas” where whiteness goes unquestioned and racial oppression is normalized (Anderson 2015). In all, that concept allows for whiteness to be positioned as an embodied disposition, whereby in this sense, culture—such as how we act, believe, and think—is not only a response to but also works to reproduce the systematic modes of separation (both discursive and physical) that exist between Whites and people of color (Anderson 2015).

As it concerns the (re)production of racialized meaning, there is much to be explored regarding how one’s understanding of race and identity is shaped amidst the physical, psychological, and social costs incurred as a Black individual within White spaces—in particular, as it concerns a historically and predominantly White space, such as the physical and discursive spaces associated with the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR). That is, mapping the sporting space of NASCAR as “White space” helps elucidate the cultural log-

ics that govern it and how racialized meaning is formed. Enconced within a sporting discourse that has typically been assessed and understood at a hyperlocal level, NASCAR is a sporting body whose aesthetics, culture, and practices have been made both significant and problematic by its Southern dialectics and contingency to whiteness. It is when that “practical” domination of Whites in these spaces interacts with, constructs, and henceforth perpetuates a theoretically entrenched whiteness that a normative sensibility is strengthened and upheld in spaces where Blacks are absent, underrepresented, or outright marginalized when present (Lipsitz 2011; Anderson 2015). In other words, it can be contextually surmised that as a result of that pervasive, rather normative, understanding of whiteness in NASCAR spaces, Black fans are forced to navigate a racialized sporting space that simultaneously perpetuates whiteness as “normal,” and blackness as “other.”

Taken together, there is much to be explored regarding these experiences, as well as the physical, psychological, or social cost of being a Black individual within White spaces, particularly as it concerns a historically and predominantly White space as NASCAR. As such, given that its racialized geographies extend across a multitude of events, locations, scales, and social settings—both on and off the race track—NASCAR is a requisite place through which to explore the subaltern resistance of racially marginalized communities (i.e., Black Americans). Although NASCAR has expanded beyond its southern roots—and recent attempts to distance itself from attachments to a conservative, White cultural nationalism and a related brand of reactionary racial politics in the wake of the 2020 racial unrest experienced throughout the US—it remains to be marked, if not outright stigmatized by past (and present) as-

sociations with personal and institutional-level reports of racism (Lee et al. 2010).

Compounding that further is the fact that since NASCAR's inception in 1948, only a handful of Black drivers have competed at the premier level of the sport, as Wendell Scott and more recently, Darrell "Bubba" Wallace, Jr., have served as the sole two to compete in any significant and sustained manner. Specific to Scott's racing career, NASCAR served as an extension of US society in that it "sought to sustain White supremacy by restricting the movement of African Americans on tracks and enforcing the idea that being a major league driver was a livelihood and cultural identity reserved exclusively for Whites" (Alderman and Inwood 2016:601). Decades later, Wallace has faced similar resistance, albeit less from the organizational body and more so from the sport's contingency of conservative, White fans. The respective stories of both Scott and Wallace are undoubtedly part of a much larger history of the struggles and strides of Black Americans in redefining and refining the terms of their lived experiences and mobility. By extension, so, too, is the experience of the Black fan of NASCAR, who much like their racial counterparts on the track have had to navigate the racialized geographies of "a sport developed primarily by and for White, working-class men [of the South]" (Pierce 2010:9). Likewise, how Black fans make meaning of whiteness within the geographies of NASCAR is a requisite context through which to further observe and make sense of whiteness as it is perceived within the Black imagination.

With that being said, attention should be turned to how the spatial boundaries, practices, and separations—as structured by whiteness—have an impact on the contestation and negotiation of meaning-making processes in the production and consumption

of NASCAR space(s). It was through that vantage point that the participants of this study demonstrated a nuanced understanding of whiteness, particularly through an awareness of NASCAR as a White space, how to effectively navigate such a White space (see: Vadeboncoeur 2021 for a detailed examination of "Black placemaking" within NASCAR spaces), and contextualization of more recent enactments of whiteness within these spaces (i.e., in the wake of the 2020 racial unrest experienced throughout the US). Conversations with the participants yielded insight that aligns with hooks' (1992:341) assertion that representations of whiteness are "not formed in reaction to stereotypes, but emerge as a response to the traumatic pain and anguish that remains a consequence of White racist domination, a psychic state that informs and shapes the way Black folks 'see' whiteness." As such, how Black individuals make sense of whiteness, make sense of themselves relative to whiteness, and how whiteness influences their multidimensional experiences—in general, and per the purview of this study, when situated within the realm of sport—requires further exploration. Thus, in providing empirical evidence showing how Black fans make meaning of whiteness within the geographies of NASCAR, I advance theoretical understandings of how whiteness is perceived and represented in the Black imagination.

Literature Review

It can be argued that whiteness is a prevailing cultural, social, and economic logic that exists within American institutions, social identities, and social relationships (Moore 2007). As a structure of domination, whiteness is most salient when it manifests in interactional spaces, which is "where institutions parameterize interaction, where identities are deployed and accomplished in interaction, and

where meaning through our behaviors is the glue that holds these spaces together” (Brunsmas, Joong Won, and Chapman 2020:9). Moreover, it is through the processes of normalization within White spaces that the interactional work is completed to “accomplish” whiteness and its counterpart, racial exclusion. As such, in White spaces, meaning-making processes that take place there within will determine a position where being White serves as the “default,” while people of color are constructed in opposition as the “other.” As a result, the racialized “other” is generalized into racial stereotypes, which, in turn, are internalized within the cognition of Whites and allow for the perpetuation of race-based discriminatory practices (Bonilla-Silva, Goar, and Embrick 2006; Bonilla-Silva 2014). Therefore, by spatially normalizing whiteness, blackness is identified as unfit and cultural membership within a given space is “gatekept” (Anderson 2015), all the while a strategy is adopted that ambiguously highlights the “ethos” of said space while downplaying racial matters.

In doing so, Whites can continue reproducing the normalization of whiteness in spaces, much of which can be applied to the sub-cultural sporting space of NASCAR. There is much to be explored regarding how the spatial boundaries, practices, and separations—as structured by whiteness—impact the contestation and negotiation of meaning-making processes in the production and consumption of NASCAR space(s). As already noted, the racialized geographies of NASCAR are embodied across a myriad of events, locations, scales, and social settings, which allow for NASCAR to serve as a point of exploration on the meaning-making processes of Black fans. In other words, how might Black fans make sense of whiteness (or even their White counterparts) within NASCAR spaces? To move in

that direction, I argue that our attention must be oriented towards (a) scholarship that speaks to understandings of whiteness through the “Black lens” and (b) an overview of the historical development of NASCAR’s attachment to a distinctly southern, White cultural identity.

Representations of Whiteness in the Black Imagination

According to hooks (1992:339), scholarship abounds (particularly within the annals of postcolonial studies) on how blackness is perceived by Whites; however, there exists “very little expressed interest in representations of whiteness in the Black imagination. Black cultural and social critics allude to such representations in their writing, yet only a few have dared to make explicit those perceptions of whiteness.” Nearly three decades later, hooks’ observation remains ever-present within the social sciences, as little scholarship has attempted to explicitly interrogate whiteness and White racial identity from the vantage point of Black individuals (see: Robinson 2014). Although a sole focus on whiteness across academic disciplines is relatively nascent, researchers—in particular, and as noted by hooks, scholars of color—have long since been acquainted with the concept of whiteness.

Du Bois (2007:20) conceptualized whiteness as the constitutive measure against which all else (e.g., people of color) is measured, such that whiteness serves as “the one fundamental tenet of our practical morality.” Much like any other racial category, that whiteness serves to be understood as merely a construct that in its malleability, operates to not only exploit people of color on an ordinate scale for immense profit, but to substantiate that whiteness, alone, is inherently better than blackness. It is in

a similar vein that Fanon (2008) spoke to whiteness as having fundamentally distorted blackness, in that it serves as nothing but a creative representation to be negated in the White imaginary. As such, blackness is a representation created for the benefit of whiteness, serving as a mirror for whiteness to know itself. While Fanon admitted that Blacks may be able to comprehend and learn what is meant by whiteness, he contended that they are ultimately betrayed by the reality of their embodied blackness. According to Baldwin (1984), that is only further reinscribed by how whiteness exists in spite (and without knowledge) of blackness. Thus, hooks (1992:340-341) opined that since whiteness grants White individuals the ability to not “see” Black individuals, it is no wonder that

some White people may even imagine there is no representation of whiteness in the Black imagination, especially one that is based on concrete observation or mythic conjecture; they think they are seen by Black folks only as they want to appear...many White people assume this is the way Black people conceptualize whiteness. They do not imagine that the way whiteness makes its presence felt in Black life, most often as terrorizing imposition, a power that wounds, hurts, tortures, is a reality that disrupts the fantasy of whiteness as representing goodness.

Moreover, hooks (1992:346) argued that by “critically examining the association of whiteness as terror in the Black imagination, deconstructing it, we both name racism’s impact and help to break its hold.” It is in this vein that Morrison (1992) positioned the ethical and moral costs of racism as lying within the White psyche. In speaking on “the gaze of whiteness as the unacknowledged norm,” Morrison (1992:90) advocated for the need to “avert the critical gaze from the racial object to the racial

subject; from the described and imagined to the describers and imaginers; from the serving to the served.” Similar to hooks, Morrison argued that whiteness (or rather, being White) is a social position that has gone largely under-examined and as a result, leaving whiteness relatively unexamined ignores the construct (i.e., whiteness) on which race, racism, and racial inequities are founded. It is in this vein that it becomes of necessity to critically examine the spaces, experiences, and spectacles that encompass NASCAR, such that the manner by which whiteness manipulates and contours that sporting space for the benefit of some and to the detriment of others.

Tracing NASCAR’s Relationship to Southern Identity and Whiteness

The subculture of NASCAR “emerged as a powerful moral, political, and economic piece of the social mosaic of the modern-day American South,” as well as a discursive formation and system of subjectification that reflects and (re)produces the socio-cultural context in which it persists (Newman and Giardina 2011:40). As such, in NASCAR spaces, whiteness is not only performed, it is on full display such that sporting spaces have historically offered a popular public space through which to make visible the privileges of being White. Given the socio-cultural, -political, and -historical foundations of NASCAR, these spaces can become places where whiteness is provided power and made normal, while any other identity (or set of identities) is confined to the margins as “other.” It is for this very reason that NASCAR has been criticized as an institution that, from the outset, was utilized as a means to “transmit culture—customs, values, history, and habits—‘across the generations’” (Cohodas 1997:14) of the Southern White collective.

However, to understand the discursive power of NASCAR within this context, how the visibility of hyper-White identity politics and the marking of institutional space have reconstituted “a conceptual space for desperately clinging to the social relations of an imagined past” must be considered (King and Springwood 2001:154). As such, as noted, whiteness is not only performed in NASCAR spaces, it is on full display. However, that display of whiteness is not a natural extension of history, but rather serves as a product of social relations enacted by—and empowered through—the preponderance (or lack there) of racial contestation. However, to better reveal that relationship, we need to know how NASCAR developed its uniquely Southern identity, and more pointedly, has served as an embodiment of reactionary, neo-conservative morality, fear, and attachment to whiteness.

To do so is to make apparent the lengths to which NASCAR as an organization—and by extension, as a cultural space—positioned itself alongside a reactionary White, southern-style conservatism; a relationship that has operated in tandem since its growth in the late-1950s and through recent years. In promulgating close ties to a mythologized, racialized southern US, NASCAR—as a social institution—and the modern sport of stock car racing “benefit[ted] from this myth of its rural roots among so-called southern good ole boys” (Hall 2002:630), whereby propagating the exclusionary practices and conservative values of the South, NASCAR brought to life a contextually significant, yet racialized exclusivity (Newman 2007). In addition to the race-based identity politics that defined NASCAR’s parochialism, it served to be very much intertwined with the cultural fabric of the “Industrial Era” of the South. NASCAR’s southern allure (if you will) evolved out of the South’s admiration and celebration of a region-

ally-based individualistic spirit as mythologized in the outlaw status of the “moonshine tripper,” entrenching itself as

a social space where acolytes of the Rebel South could cathartically race with the specters of their Confederate calling...becoming both the quintessential “Southern sport” and the archetypal site of sporting individualism...It became a celebration of white masculine courage, of capitalist ingenuity, and of Southern tradition (and particularly the traditions of patriarchy and racial exclusivity). [Newman and Giardina 2011:39]

By upholding a more localized distinction, NASCAR carved itself a niche among populations of the working class, White South, especially in the advent of the Civil Rights era and the integration of professional and intercollegiate sports teams. Despite the racial barriers being broken through in the sporting industry more broadly, NASCAR remained an exclusively White sport, whose “sovereignty and isolationism” within the U.S. South

permitted the France family and others inside the governing faction to perpetuate all-white participant, owner, and spectator exclusivity within their sport. Grafted onto a pervasive lynch mob vigilantism, Ku Klux Klan—led public spectacles, and spectacles of political racism of the 1960s South, NASCAR emerged as a distinctly conservative sporting and cultural space during the late civil rights era—one seemingly mobilized to maintain, if not celebrate, the white (supremacist) status quo. [Newman and Giardina 2011:38]

That “all-White exclusivity” extended beyond socio-cultural norms and into the politics of the sport, as NASCAR developed close, working relationships with several conservative southern figures throughout much of its growth in the 1950s and into the late-1960s:

NASCAR's first so-called superspeedway opened in 1950 in Darlington, South Carolina, with Gov. and Mrs. J. Strom Thurmond there to celebrate the occasion. In the track's early years, Bob Colvin managed it with a particularly racist tone...In order to create his largest and fastest track, the Alabama International Motor Speedway in Talladega, France developed a close relationship with notorious Alabama governor George C. Wallace. Wallace at one point assured France that he would "do anything...to help make this project possible in Alabama." (In 1972, France chaired Wallace's presidential campaign effort in Florida.) In 1969, France named the rigidly conservative South Carolina politician L. Mendel Rivers NASCAR's commissioner. Rivers lauded France's hospitality on many occasions during the decade and called him "the best fellow on earth." [Hall 2007:272-275]

Thus, by the end of the 1960s, it was no surprise that by "successfully weld[ing] together tough-minded business tactics and conservative politics... the organization was in tune with the South and roaring toward America's future" (Hall 2007:275). While many sports organizations throughout the continents of Europe, North America, and South America were in the process of transformational shifts towards democratic systems then, the "golden era" of NASCAR remained tethered to commercial spheres productive of a cultural, political, and social order as filtered through a political structure of individualism and exclusivity (Hall 2002). That is, NASCAR subculture became "more than a site of motorhead amusement—it had emerged as a powerful moral, political, and economic piece of the social mosaic of the modern-day American South," as well as a discursive formation and system of subjectification that reflects and (re)produces the socio-cultural context in which it persists (Newman and Giardina 2011:40).

In all, when coming into contact with(in) the White spaces of NASCAR, it may come as no surprise that Black individuals navigating those spaces link concepts of distrust, fear, and/or trepidation with the representations of whiteness there within. Thus, seeking a more nuanced understanding of how whiteness makes its presence felt in the experiences of Black NASCAR fans is imperative. To do so is necessary to not only critically examine the representations of whiteness within the Black imagination more broadly but also to offer Black individuals within a historically and predominantly White sporting space (i.e., NASCAR) the opportunity to share their experience, as well as deconstruct and make sense of it. As noted by hooks (1992:345), Black Americans

still feel the terror, still associate it with whiteness, but are rarely able to articulate the varied ways we are terrorized because it is easy to silence by accusations of reverse racism or by suggesting that black folks who talk about the ways we are terrorized by whites are merely evoking victimization to demand special treatment.

Taken together, the objective of this study is to extend the scholarship on the representations of whiteness in the Black imagination by providing a platform to and henceforth exploring how Black fans make meaning of whiteness within the geographies of NASCAR.

Method

Participants' narratives were examined through critical, feminist, and symbolic interactionist lenses as operationalized within a methodological approach known as critical feminist narrative inquiry (CFNI). From a CFNI perspective, narratives are

considered to be storied spaces. Such an approach to narrative analysis emphasizes the agency of social actors, who are viewed as experts of their respective social worlds. That is, “as agency is enacted in response to rules, routines, territoriality, and reflexivity, the interactions between storytellers and the personal, historical, social, structural, and ideological contexts of their life are explored,” whereby the scrutinization of “the forces and conditions that enable and constrain social actors’ identity, choices, decisions, successes, and challenges [allow] storied spaces [to] be sites of conformity, contest, resistance, defiance, and/or emancipation” (Pitre, Kushner, and Hegadoren 2011:263). In all, a narrative-based approach can allow stories to reveal the social worlds, agentic understandings, and performed realities of the very people who shared them in the first place.

Participants responded to an advertisement posted in an online social media fan group that serves as a virtual space for Black NASCAR fans to share personal experiences, news stories, and engage in a general discussion on matters relating to the sport of NASCAR. Individuals could participate in the study regardless of gender identification and if 18 years of age or older. Specifically, participants needed to (1) consider themselves a fan of NASCAR and (2) racially self-identify as Black or African American. Sixteen individuals inquired about the study, however, three did not follow up to schedule an interview. Thus, a total of 13 individuals were interviewed, 12 of whom identified as men and one as a woman. It should be noted that the terms “Black” and “African American” are used interchangeably in this article, which is in alignment with the participants’ perspectives that both “Black” and “African American” were appropriate terminologies to racially identify them. The terminology “Black” was explicitly used in this article’s introduction since

each of the participants noted that their racial identity (i.e., Black) was more salient than that of their ethnic identity (i.e., African American). Moreover, the terminology “Black” is a more encompassing categorization, which allows for a diversity of experiences—in a socio-cultural and -historical sense—to rise to the surface. Ten participants were married, six of whom had children with their spouses (either one or two children). While each participant was born and raised in the US, seven presently reside in the Southeast, two in the Northeast, two in the Midwest, one in the Southwest, and one in the West. Participants were between the ages of 22 and 61 (average age of 44). Nine participants were finishing or had completed an undergraduate or graduate university degree program, whereas two had a technical diploma. Occupations represented amongst participants included city manager, machine operator, insurance administrator, entrepreneur, and student (two participants indicated that they were retired—one from an executive finance role and the other from the military).

Initial e-mail conversations served to provide information and clarify any questions or concerns about the study. Individuals who chose to participate identified a date and time that was most convenient for their respective schedules to interview. Before each interview, participants were provided with an informed consent form stating that they would be interviewed on their experiences as Black NASCAR fans. Moreover, participants were informed of their right to decline participation at any point in the study, as I considered informed consent to be a continuous process and was steadfast in reminding each participant of their agency to refuse to answer, skip, or transition away from questions with which they did not feel comfortable engaging. Data collection utilized a semi-structured interview format,

which is an established method of data collection within qualitative methods to allow participants to share their experiences, thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs. Out of respect for the time of the participants and spatial availability, interviews were conducted by way of either telephone or video communication. Concerning the contextualization of a broader experience for participants, the interview protocol included questions and follow-up probes to conjure related discussion.

Initial interview questions were developed by drawing on themes as identified from the existing literature on space, race, and sport, which were henceforth developed into an interview guide. Thus, the interview guide was constructed in such a way that it would provide early insights into how participants perceive their experiences as fans of NASCAR, as well as provide flexibility for self-identified topics to be raised when and where it was appropriate. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim by a professional transcription service (I reviewed each transcript following the audio recording to verify accuracy). To add credibility and trustworthiness to the collected data, I provided each participant with a copy of their interview transcript to review and as a means to conduct preliminary member checks. Additionally, to best preserve their respective communications styles, I only edited certain phrases or words that might compromise anonymity for the participants. Any personal identifiers were removed before transcription and pseudonyms were given to each participant.

Most interviews lasted around 1.5 hours, but a handful were 2 to 2.5 hours as participants shared in great depth their respective stories. In total, interviews resulted in over 1,300 minutes of participants' narratives. Narratives were analyzed through mul-

multiple constructions and reconstructions, as well as through a process of de- and re-contextualization of the interviews to identify any similar attributes and prominent differences that would offer nuanced insight into the particular experiences of each participant. As such, analysis began along two lines of inquiry. First, I wanted to gain an understanding of the holistic sense of Black fans' experiences and the relative significance given to individuals and events in their lives. And second, I wanted to critically assess the various forces that influence the level of trust, agency, and voice exacted within their storied spaces. Moreover, narratives were examined to understand the context of Black fans and the relative power said context places on their agency, that which became salient through their accounts of interpersonal interactions and decisions (un)made within their particular social contexts. That is, these interaction-based stories were examined to locate the manners by which the power of ideology (i.e., meta-narratives), and the routines and rules embedded within social structures, might have worked to enable or constrain agency. Additionally, counter-stories were examined, which are narratives where participants' reflexivity (as informed social actors) allowed them to practice agency to resist and/or subvert the oppressive circumstances or environments within which they are located.

Throughout the research process, verification strategies were implemented to ensure that the data were both reliable and valid (Morse et al. 2002). Due to the integration of narrative research with that of a critical, feminist ontological and epistemological disposition particular attention was provided to methodological coherence as an intentioned commitment to give voice to Black fans' experiences in a context where visibility is not typically the norm and to do research "for" Black fans rather than "about" Black

fans. As such, participants from several contexts and experiences who possessed intimate knowledge of the phenomenon were sought. Narratives were analyzed in a dialectical and iterative manner, which included the use of memos that outlined both analytic and interpretive decisions made, as well as the exploration and modification of emergent theoretical ideas resulting from successive data verification. Specific emphasis was placed on the situation of participants' agency and experiences within their everyday embodied circumstances, as well as accounting for my positionalities relative to the participants. For instance, concerning my gaining access to participants, I needed to be particularly mindful of considerations to be made as a researcher of intersecting privileges. To do so, I made initial contact with the social media fan group administrator to introduce myself, the nature of the present study, my intentions for the study moving forward, and provide an appraisal of my personal (and professional) intentionality as a self-identified White scholar seeking the personal experiences of individuals who self-identify as Black or African American. Since my objective was to curate a space for individuals with marginalized racial identities to share their lived experiences, I wanted to acknowledge and embrace my subjectivity as part and parcel of that portion of the research process.

Findings

As the participants shared their perception(s) and understanding(s) of whiteness, three overarching themes rose to the surface. First, they offered representations of whiteness as exclusive, fearful, and possessive, which they noted were informed, in part, by Southern regional identity and the navigation of White space. Second, participants discussed representations of whiteness as becoming salient

through NASCAR's attachment to racialized cultural values, demonstrating their awareness of (White) NASCAR culture. Third, participants offered their perceptions of Whites, particularly within the purview of how White fans continue to feel as though their local identities are becoming increasingly disenfranchised within a rapidly diversifying sporting space. With that being said, participants' narratives relating to these respective themes are explained in further detail in the sub-sections that follow.

Realizations of Whiteness: Regional Identity and the Navigation of Southern Whiteness

Southern regional identity is grounded in the cultural and historical differences rooted in chattel slavery, Jim Crow segregation, and the resulting organization of space, place, and individuals there within the South. As a result, regional identity is inherently racialized, always being shaped and reshaped according to the norms prescribed by social and political institutions alike (Robinson 2014). Processes of regionalization reinforce and reproduce racialization in ways that root Black American identity in the South. In short, region subsumes differences of class, gender, and sexuality among African Americans in service of one racially authentic Black identity. The relative impact of these processes has, in part, shaped how the participants make sense of and navigate the day-to-day racialized geographies within which they are located.

For some of the participants, their conceptualizations of race and racial interactions were ingrained at an early age from family, the likes of which, I argue, may have been informed by intergenerational collective familial memories of "Old South" racism. For instance, David (entrepreneur, age 36) discussed how growing up in Virginia influenced his percep-

tion of his racial identity. David shared that his understanding of blackness and what it means to be a Black individual was instilled upon him and his siblings at an early age; however, in doing so, he suggested that “being Black” was not only taught but a reflection of lived experiences:

I was taught it... you know, my mom, she was big on us [David and his siblings] being connected to who we are. My uncle was always deeply connected to who we are in talking about that [being Black]. It was taught and then, also, learned at the same time. There's only so much you can be taught. At some point, you have to take the initiative yourself to start digging into it some more.

Here, David reflected on how he has drawn on regionally ingrained wisdom about race and racism, which he has been able to situate to best engage and navigate the racialized aspects of society. David mentioned that he descends from a lineage of individuals who faced not only enslavement but the ills of Jim Crow as tobacco farmers, which he acknowledged has contributed to his family's “collective memory” of a stigmatized and traumatic set of lived experiences in the American South.

There's a lot of good people in the South. Friendly, laid back, slow pace of life... lots of good things. But, being Black in the South also comes with its share of challenges. Between being racially profiled in many places that you go to having your run-ins with law enforcement for no reason.

That notion of “collective memory” has helped shape many African Americans' attitudes and perceptions of the South and its related cultural attachments, such as that of NASCAR. According to Finney (2014:53), collective memory refers to how a particu-

lar group of individuals remembers the past, and as such, is “used as a cognitive map to orient people's present behavior,” as well as “offers the opportunity to engage people's ideas, imaginings, and feelings about the past as a way of understanding how memory informs present actions and planning for the future.” Much like those shared by David, these historical narratives shared by African Americans are shaped by the collective (and individual) “remembrances” that allow for families and communities to be bonded—in this case, by 250-plus year history of chattel slavery, Jim Crow laws, and resultant subordination and oppression. Despite changes in the South's ethnic, political, and social landscape over time, a relatively uniform Southern White identity endures in attitudes and public culture (Reed 1986), wherein the Black collective response to this reality—whether through resistance, self-improvement, or other means of expression—is truly a reaction to the “White gaze” embedded there within (Finney 2014).

It is in a similar manner that William (project manager, age 52) discussed how growing up in Arkansas influenced his perception of his racial identity, which he viewed as a relational construct. Additionally, William reflected on the impact that race has on his everyday life, suggesting that the concomitantly fixed and fluid nature of the race has made difficult work of navigating the realities of race:

I'm a Black man because that's the way people see me, and that's the way people are going to treat me. So it's important that I maintain a certain decorum when you're confronted with situations, such as in the workforce. You know, that's really where your “blackness” comes into play, is more prevalent. When you're around family and friends, that's not an important issue, but when you're at work, there's certain

things that you can do, certain things you can't do. Some things you can say, some things you can't say. Because they will get perceived negatively, automatically.

As a result of that difficult balancing act, William's discussion lends credence to the reality faced by many African Americans, such that it may become increasingly difficult to locate racial discrimination with certainty, leading them to draw on "tools that allow us to see what [Whites] say, or even do, into their very hearts," to determine whether White individuals (with whom they encounter) are, in fact, racist (Jackson 2008:87). That is particularly true for Black southerners, whose historically intimate interpersonal contact with Whites requires a sophisticated system of negotiation and has resulted in enduring theories of White individuals' behaviors. Thus, participants claimed to have "figured out" White individuals because of that regional-based experiential and epistemological position, gained over generations of proximity to Whites.

That is, despite their experiences with racism in its varied iterations, participants, especially those who were either raised or had parents raised in the South, largely saw themselves as "not worrying" over race. In conversations about their perceptions of race and racism, that overarching narrative was surprisingly consistent across age and class groups. As such, participants could always point to an embodied culprit, a real-life perpetrator of racism, even in structural contexts. They refused the notion of paranoia, taking comfort in what they saw as a known quantity—White racism.

Although born and raised in New York City, James (retired finance executive, age 61) has lived and worked throughout the Midwest and South for sev-

eral years, and in the process has come into contact with the types of "Old South" racism that has informed other participants' understandings of whiteness and White racism. However, James—much like the participants who have a familial connection to the South—acknowledged having to navigate an American society that has historically worked to restrict and regulate his movements as a Black individual, which has meant moving through spaces that uphold White America, the costs of which are an unavoidable subjectification to White racism:

When you go to the [NASCAR] races, the fact of the matter is there's still racism that you're going to encounter at the track. But, the fact is, I encounter that if I go to the store. So it doesn't bother me in part because I have a lifetime of dealing with it. I've got numerous techniques to deal with it. So it doesn't really faze me because I know how to deal with it.

That is, having had close encounters and interpersonal contact with Whites has required James to adopt a rather sophisticated system of negotiation that has resulted in enduring understandings of White individuals' behaviors. James knows what White behavior is and when to anticipate it. Moreover, knowing that behavior and its level of pervasiveness allows him and others to protect themselves, as well as to move freely within geographies such as NASCAR despite the relative proximity to White racist behaviors and sentiment:

There are some that are going to accept you and welcome you with no questions asked. But, there's still going to be a large portion of that fan base that does not want you there. And the good news is, we as African Americans are saying, "Okay, you don't want me there? That's fine. But, I'm still coming. I'm still going to sit at the table. It's your issue, not mine anymore."

Here, by suggesting that the onus is now on Whites to accept the diversification of cultural spaces such as NASCAR, James hints at the increasing class-based and racialized anxieties held by many White Southerners. Robinson (2014:16) argued that Black Southerners are aware of the fact that “[White] Southern identity is the performative and ideological glue that holds contemporary American whiteness together as a distinct and superior culture, rooted in ideals synonymous with the highest national and Western principles.” In accounting for that reality, some of the participants demonstrated an ability to categorize White individuals within the collective notion of whiteness rather than in an individualized sense. That is, by understanding the oppressive nature and omnipresence of whiteness, some of them did not feel the need to necessarily care about or manage the beliefs or impressions of Whites. As noted by James:

You think about anything in America, and there’s a racial component to it no matter what...I have the right, like anybody else, to enjoy the sport [NASCAR]. Now, the fact is that there are people who enjoy it, but don’t enjoy being around people that look like me. Well, that’s not my problem, but that’s their problem. And too many of my ancestors fought and died for the right for me to enjoy life on my terms, and that’s the way I’m going to do it.

As a result, participants such as James understand the pervasiveness of whiteness—particularly through and as embodied by institutions attached to Southern whiteness, such as NASCAR—and, as a result, hold a relatively stable perception of whiteness and how to navigate it accordingly. For James, by maintaining that approach, he has been able to maintain interpersonal relationships with White individuals:

We have to begin to educate ourselves and become a little more willing to new lived experiences...one of the things I did when I became a vice president, I would take my leadership team to events where they were the minority in the room. And it was not about making them uncomfortable but about building their awareness of what it’s like for African Americans when they’re the only ones in the room. Because, in fact, most of my leadership team, actually, all my leadership team was White. But, most of them had never experienced being a minority in a room because they’ve always been the majority in the room. So I would take them to events where the majority of the audience was African American. And the other reason for doing that, too, is for them to provide a different perspective against their stereotypes, their conscious and unconscious biases about African Americans to see the community in a much broader lens. I’d say some people embraced the experience for what I intended it to be. Others simply did it because I was the boss. And that’s fine. I knew I was not going to convert everyone, but if I got one person to open up and just see things a little differently, it would help. Except for some, it did. It changed their perspective because they saw it differently, and they now have an understanding, or, you know, having experienced what it’s like for an African American or even a female when they’re the only ones in the room.

While he does not wish to manage impressions or believes wholesale race-based change is to come, James understands the importance of building a certain level of awareness—not only for those Whites within their social circles but also and more importantly, for his cognizance. That notion of personal cognizance was understood and shared by other participants, particularly relating to their understanding of Whites, which is expounded upon

in the section that follows on their level of awareness of a distinct (White) NASCAR sporting culture.

Racialized Awareness of (White) NASCAR Culture

Within the purview of NASCAR, the participants have taken notice of how White fans have responded to more recent efforts at diversifying the sport, stated commitments to racial justice, and the rise of conservative populism under the Donald Trump presidency. For Chris, the presence of the Confederate flag and related paraphernalia has served as one of the few, albeit prevalent, reminders of the sport's history and the racialized sentiment that is actively embraced by some White fans in attendance at races:

The only time I really think about it [racism] is when I see the Confederate flags and because that's kind of a striking thing to see in this day and age. So when I drive in [to the race track] and you see them at the campgrounds as you drive through, you're thinking, "Okay, what's the logic behind that? What's going on there that they're still flying this thing?" You know, I was in Florida for most of the 80s, and I told all my friends when I lived in Florida that even to this day, the South is still upset about the outcome of the Civil War. But, back then, it was even worse back then, in the 80s. But, when I go to a race, that doesn't even cross my mind, it really doesn't. It hasn't crossed my mind in a very long time about that. Now, I haven't been to a race this year [in 2020] to see what the thought process is for some people who are still going as far as how I might be perceived after the Bubba Wallace thing and... I see some of the postings and that kind of stuff on Facebook and I'm like, "Really? You people are still upset about this? Is this really going on?"

But, that's not going to deter me from going to races. That's... no. I've never felt any sense that I needed to not be somewhere when I'm at the track.

Chris argued that as NASCAR has taken a more active stance against the Confederate flag in recent years, the response(s) by disgruntled fans is akin to an unwillingness to accept change and the present socio-cultural realities of the country. For instance, Marie mentioned that as more and more race tracks moved to ban the Confederate flag from their facilities in recent years, she noticed that the flag and related paraphernalia were becoming more prevalent in areas just outside of the race tracks. Likewise, with NASCAR's decision to ban the Confederate flag from all sanctioned events and properties in the summer of 2020, Marie felt as though this had only pushed those who embrace the flag and its meaning to respond in alternative forms:

Usually, when I go places that I know not many Black people or brown people are there, I play this game with myself... count the Black people as soon as I get there. So in 2018, when I went [to a NASCAR race], I went, "Oh my God." You know, they [other Black people] were everywhere, and they weren't working there, but they were fans. And I thought, "This is really cool. It's getting better"...last year [2019] was a little less welcoming. We saw a lot of "Trump 2020" signs up, and by that point, they [the race track] had banned the Confederate flag. I noticed in the distance you could see the vendors that were there selling stuff... they were outside the track, so they had their Confederate flags up and the Trump signs. So it was a little more unnerving.

Similarly, Chris mentioned how for many conservative, White NASCAR fans in the advent of the Trump presidency, paraphernalia that demon-

strates support for Trump and his politics have taken on shared symbolic meaning with that of the Confederate flag. In other words, Chris posited that

They're one in the same as far as I'm concerned. I could be wrong, but that's my perception. In that environment... in the NASCAR environment, I would say that one has taken the place of the other. It's like, "I can't put up a Confederate flag? Well, I can put *this* up, and that'll suffice." You can kind of figure out... you're telling people where you're at. They're practically interchangeable...they're practically one in the same. And it's interesting that that has come up this year, that all this has kind of culminated in one year here...But, do I think there's a definite link between the two, between the "MAGAs" and the Confederate flags? Oh, without a doubt. I don't think there's any doubt about that. And I don't think anybody is trying to hide behind that being a doubt. They almost wear it [Trump paraphernalia] with a badge of honor, so to speak, and that's just how it is. But, it is what it is. That's where we're at.

It is in this vein that the contemporary spaces of NASCAR remain problematic such that they continue to harbor a level of group solidarity in response to the present social narrative surrounding progressive ideologies and mainstream acceptance of diverse communities, much in the same manner that "symbolic properties of the Confederacy were evoked [in the 1960s and 1970s] to represent the backlash politics of defiant early Civil Rights-era Whiteness, and thus interpellated the White individual with a more visual orientation and with more corporeal desires" (Newman 2007:266-267). As noted by participants, many White fans have been "forced"—by virtue of the more progressive stances taken by NASCAR as an organization—to embrace and undergo an internalization of South-

ern culture and identity. For the participants, they have observed the waning presence of the Confederate flag become reified and replaced through the symbolism of Trump-related paraphernalia. As such, I interpret that observation and therefore argue that the Confederate flag—by way of the embracement, performance, and posturing of Trump-related paraphernalia—remains a relevant symbol of an imagined, conservative, and exclusionary ideology, as well as retains a certain level of power within what, in many regards, continues to be a divisive sporting culture. Moreover, Chris noted that

[NASCAR is] a very White Republican sport in the sense that the owners of the cars are huge money makers. So I've always felt like that was a very Republican sport...and that's what you're going to still have. The roots are always going to be there. The roots are never going to go away because that's where this whole thing started. So I think that's what is going to be the case.

While Chris suggested that the "roots" of NASCAR will never cease to be a part of the cultural discourse of the sport, Brad argued that this "recovery movement" has indeed placed NASCAR in a precarious position. According to Brad, NASCAR is at a juncture where they could either remain limited by a cultural attachment and introversion to its localized roots or "actually realize that, 'You know what? We were making a very small segment of people way too comfortable for far too long.'" For many White fans that remain attached to these roots, Brad suggested:

I think [NASCAR and their support of Bubba Wallace] embodies things that they either don't want to accept... there's NASCAR fans that are racist, they

don't want Black people there, they don't like Black people being around, and when this guy [Wallace] comes into their living room, essentially, and basically tells them like, "You guys are racist. Stop being racist." They're like, "No, we like this. We kind of like this sport because we can be ourselves here." So I think to some of them he represents the fact that they can no longer be as comfortable as they want to be in open society.

That perceived level of discomfort for White fans, as expressed by the participants, has not necessarily phased them in their continued fandom of the sport, nor has it come as a surprise. That is, much of these assessments and perceptions of Whites' reactionary attitudes and behaviors have been forged through their navigation of White spaces throughout their life course (the many nuances of which were discussed in the prior sub-section). Likewise, my participants understand the "possessiveness" of Whites over space and the "fear" that can ensue when said space is perceived to have been "dispossessed." As such, the following sub-section details my participants' perceptions of Whites, particularly within the purview of how White fans continue to feel as though their local identities are becoming increasingly disenfranchised.

White Fear, White Possessiveness, or Something In-Between?

In what he denoted as "White fear," Kovel (1984) argued that Whites typically project their fears—a racialized anxiety over potential resistance from marginalized and minoritized groups—onto Black individuals, which allows them to reject blackness and Black bodies more broadly. According to Kovel, most Whites are socialized from a young age to associate blackness (or Black individuals, that

is) with danger, ignorance, or the unfamiliar, such that those who are on the receiving end of White discrimination are seen as outsiders that are to be discriminated against, excluded, and/or marginalized. Taken together, the participant, Greg (City manager, age 59), encapsulated that all in what he believed to be the crux of White Americans' beliefs and behaviors towards issues of race and racism. To begin, Greg offered the following framing:

When things have always been a particular way, then you don't recognize it as a privilege, if it always has been. But also, when you clearly accept... I'm pausing because I do measure my words, I definitely try to measure my thoughts so it comes out right. The United States of America is a very capitalistic and individualistic country. We don't share anything well and we don't really, as a general culture across the board, think about where or how our wealth came from. With the American ideal of manifest destiny, you know, "This is ours. This is our birthright." Most people don't think about what it actually is, don't even think about how removing Indians from their land and essentially marching them... you know, essentially killing off thousands of a culture, the systematic killing of Indians. We don't think about how much generational wealth that is just grounded in now. It was produced off of slave labor. It's way easier to not think about it at all than to think about historically what happened or how you and your family actually became as you were, and not even thinking about that most people were immigrants. You know, there aren't too many of the Caucasians who were actually Native Americans.

It is at this point that Greg shifted his focus to what he believed to be one of the primary motivating emotions driving White Americans' approach to issues of race and racism:

There's probably an inherent fear, and hear me on this one because I may say this wrong, but there is an inherent fear of if the non-dominant culture had the means and treated the dominant culture like the dominant culture treats the non-dominant culture, they'd be scared shitless. Do I need to say it more plainly? There is now a significant part of the culture that almost says, "We have to maintain this. We are very scared of losing this." Because if Caucasians got treated by Blacks or whomever with the same values and mores that the Whites used to treat Blacks, they wouldn't want to trade places. You know, one study [asked] how many of you [White participants] would want to trade places with African Americans and hands don't go up. Well, there's a reason why.

As argued by Greg, it is emotions such as fear that have informed and thusly, allowed Whites to structure their particular worldviews on any number of cultural, economic, political, or social matters to safeguard their accumulated privilege(s), if you will. According to Greg, as an individual with a particular set of structural advantages, "you'd feel differently about social discussions. You probably feel differently about medicine, Medicaid, Medicare, et cetera. You'd feel differently about food stamps, et cetera. But, that's part of the capitalistic society... that it all depends on who has the capital." Based on countless experiences across his lifetime—both personally and professionally—interfacing with White individuals has allowed him to process and develop his understandings on how not only Whites but also he, as an individual, perceives matters on race and society more broadly. As it concerns that notion of "White fear," Greg and other participants were keenly aware of its implication within the culture of NASCAR. For each of the participants that expressed that awareness, they believed that many White NASCAR fans feel as though with calls for

the diversification of the sport in recent years, their culture is being challenged and outright threatened. That is, many White fans may perceive NASCAR as a sporting space that signifies, to them, much more than sporting leisure, but a subculture reflective of the socio-cultural mosaic within which they are located. For Greg, he understands that particular "culture is being challenged," which he believes has only been amplified in recent years:

I saw enough of the posts within [the online community] or other posts that say... you know, Bubba Wallace, who actually has taken the stones to make some comments and actually share what he feels and what he believes. And you can tell that there has been backlash by some. And really, I think as a nation we give too much credence to the fringe. But, you know, your [average White] NASCAR fan is probably going to be more close to the fringe anyway... you know, kind of a little bit further right [politically]. So it's [NASCAR culture] probably going to give you a fairly good representation of the right or the fringe right. And so, there are people who definitely feel like, "Okay, you're messing up my Sunday now. You're making me think like a human being. You're making me acknowledge things that I would rather not think about. I'd rather just go drink beer, and now you're making me think of nooses and Black/White." A lot of [White] people are like, "I don't want to think about that. I don't want to interface with that on my Sundays at all, or I really don't want to interface with that any day. You're bringing my history to my face, and I don't want to deal with that. I would prefer not to deal with that."

Here, Greg makes the connection between NASCAR culture and right-wing conservatism to suggest that many White fans who subscribe to that socio-political linkage do not want to be made uncomfortable in what they believe to be "their space."

It is in a similar vein that James offered a contemporary contextualization as to how these sentiments of “White fear” and “culture is being challenged”—as expressed by White NASCAR fans—are ever the more heightened given the saliency of issues relating to race and racism within the national dialogue:

I think the typical fan base is threatened, but I think it goes back to the divide that exists in this country today. That fan base is... the majority of them are Republican. The divide that exists today, politically, I think it makes it harder for them to be able to change. The only thing I can call this negativity that divides us...it's not about agreement. It's more about respect and civility, but I think the current political environment, the current racial and economic divide that exists in America will make it harder for that traditional fan base to become more accepting. Because right now, they have no reason to because there are people out there who are validating long-held beliefs that exist in terms of racial identity as a country.

As witnessed through the accounts of Greg and James, many right-leaning White fans are feeling increasingly validated in their beliefs that fans of color are a threat to their culture, as enacted within NASCAR spaces. However, the question can be raised as to whether White fans perceive fans of color and NASCAR's diversity and inclusion efforts as legitimate threats, or is that simply a pretext for not wanting to confront how elements of their sub-cultural space—or that of American society as a whole—might be implicated within discourses of historical marginalizing and oppressive practices? Whichever the motivation, the underlying notion here remains constant. That is, many White fans believe that they are entitled to these respective spaces, whether physical or psychological and are free to

move in and out of them without challenge or obstruction, particularly from other individuals—that being, people of color.

However, for that reality to occur—that being, for Black individuals to be able to move freely within the geographies of NASCAR—James admitted that “it's going to take some time for the [White] fan base to adjust and evolve.” With that being said, James argued that:

I think the NASCAR community will evolve much quicker than the fan base...And in some ways it's no different than what's happened in other sports, right? Baseball, you know, with Jackie Robinson. The baseball players themselves evolved much quicker than the fan base. It took the fan base a lot longer to come on board. Football was somewhat the same. Basketball, even golf... you think about Tiger Woods and his impact. History says the fan base will evolve, but it just will take a little longer.

James touched on something, here, that other participants brought up in our conversations, which is the belief that the NASCAR community (i.e., those associated with the organization itself such as executives, officials, drivers, team members, etc.) have evolved or is on the trajectory towards evolving in a more progressive-oriented manner, whereas the predominantly White fan base has not or will be relatively slow to match pace. That is, while James offered his critical assessment as to why White fans are feeling threatened, he was not completely doubtful in that evolutionary trajectory of the NASCAR fan base. For James, he feels as though there may be several White fans who may be more progressive in their viewpoints on issues of race and racism, but for a particular set of reasons (e.g., family and friend influence, political leanings, regionality) may

choose to either remain silent or even outright “perform” an oppositional identity:

I suspect there’s peer pressure in that [White fans not supporting NASCAR’s stance on racial injustice and efforts to diversify the sport], too. Because you may have people in there who are extremely supportive of what’s going on, but because of the family dynamics or even their neighborhood dynamics, they’re not going to come out and publicly say that or express that. It reminds me of a scene from the movie *42*, and I think this was the scene where the Dodgers were playing Cincinnati. Pee Wee Reese went over and put his arm around Jackie Robinson, but in that scene, the crowd all of a sudden started to boo. And this young [White] kid, he looks around watching all the adults boo Pee Wee Reese and Jackie Robinson. He looks around and it’s not that he wanted to boo Pee Wee Reese, who’s his hero, but he looks at his father. He’s looking at all these other adults. And he finally just goes, “Well, I guess this is what I should do,” and he starts booing. I think you have that inside the NASCAR fan base that happens to be White. I don’t think everybody is like that, but I also believe people who might come out and [want to] be more supportive, they’re not because they’re that little kid watching everybody else boo, and they’re not about to go against the broader community.

It appears that James is touching on the power of socialization processes, the very likes of which affect White Americans across a myriad of identity sources. According to Feagin (2010), White Americans (un)wittingly operate under what he conceptualized as the “White racial frame.” This concept serves to demonstrate how the institutionalization of whiteness in and through American society normalizes a certain way of thinking and living that is rooted in the histories, perspectives, and interests

of Whites, while also marginalizing and devaluing those of the racialized “other.” From a young age, that racialized framing of society is ingrained through everyday socialization processes and interactions as fostered in familial and other social settings. It is the constant repetition of aspects of that frame in everyday interactions that allow for it to reproduce spatially and temporally. As such, this allows many Whites to adopt elements of their personal, racialized framing, and perform them within the very social settings from which they were derived. For that matter, Feagin (2010:94) indicated that in “literally millions of these kinship and friendship networks negative stereotypes and images of Americans of color are regularly used, refurbished, and passed along—from one generation to the next and one community to the next.” Thus, James’ example of the White child from the movie *42* holds up as an “in real-time” moment of adopting this dominant racialized frame from those in their network of White family, friends, and peers.

However, whether this holds up in regards to present-day White NASCAR fans who inhabit social networks with fellow Whites harboring more negative racialized framings of society and racial minorities is merely a topic for conjecture. Nevertheless, that is not to understate James’ assessment. Rather, this is to highlight the fact that James, through his observations, made a critical assessment on the spatial dynamics of whiteness—that being, how socialization processes can take root and metastasize within various spaces to uphold an overarching racialized frame—and applied it to a phenomenon that exists within the NASCAR fan base. Space has been argued to be a relational concept in that it does not exist except in relation to experiences, ideas, objects, and time (Harvey 2006). Moreover, Harvey (2006:121) suggested that space, in a relational sense,

is “contained in objects in the sense that an object can be said to exist only insofar as it contains and represents within itself relationships to other objects,” the likes of which can be an important aspect of human social practice and relationships. As it concerns the spatial dynamics of whiteness, the participants took note of the relational implications of space and the human practices inscribed there within—in particular, they demonstrated an understanding of whiteness as fearful and possessive in relation to a perceived spatialized “encroachment” of blackness.

Discussion and Conclusion

As a result of a pervasive, rather normative, understanding of whiteness in NASCAR spaces, Black fans are forced to navigate a racialized sporting space that simultaneously perpetuates whiteness as “normal,” and blackness as “other.” With that being said, this study placed its attention on how the spatial boundaries, practices, and separations—as structured by whiteness—impacted the contestation and negotiation of meaning-making processes in the production and consumption of NASCAR space(s). It was through this vantage point that the participants demonstrated a nuanced understanding of whiteness, particularly through an awareness of NASCAR as a White space, how to effectively navigate such a White space, and a contextualization of more recent enactments of whiteness within these spaces. Conversations with the participants yielded insight that aligns with hooks’ (1992:341) assertion that representations of whiteness are “not formed in reaction to stereotypes, but emerge as a response to the traumatic pain and anguish that remains a consequence of White racist domination, a psychic state that informs and shapes the way Black folks ‘see’ whiteness.” Thus, this study demonstrated how

Black fans make meaning of whiteness within the geographies of NASCAR, which advances theoretical understandings of how whiteness is perceived and represented in the Black imagination.

While White individuals usually avoid what are considered to be predominantly Black spaces, Black individuals are required to navigate predominantly White spaces as a result of their racially marginalized and minoritized existence (Anderson 2015). As it concerns the participants, many shared that they believe their understanding of White people and whiteness is due in part to their lived experiences—both personal and professional—having existed within and moved throughout predominantly White spaces. However, based on the personal background of the individuals I spoke with for this study, to say that their understanding of White people and whiteness is a result of navigating White spaces is an incomplete assertion. Rather, for the participants, the navigation of White space is a practice that is mediated by a regional-based experiential and epistemological position developed from either personal or familial connections to Southern regional identity. Thus, it is that understanding of Southern regional identity that has informed their respective knowledge of Whites, White racism, and whiteness more broadly.

Moreover, many of the participants—whether directly or in so many words—hinted at the increasing class-based and racialized anxieties held by many White Southerners, whose vision and versions of the South are challenged by an increasing racial and ethnic diversity of the region and the nation at large. As a result, individuals’ performative investments in Southern identity, as everyday identity practice and as a commercial product, are resurging. That is, the “Old South” continues to

persist in the region's White suburban enclaves, as much as it exists in the oft-stereotyped "backwoods" of low-income and poor Whites. Moreover, an undeniable history of racism, sexism, and social class exclusion has and continues to operate within the day-to-day experiences of many Southerners, whereby the centrality of that Southern knowledge-power dynamic is located within a more pronounced, visible (and empowered) White center. In the context of the South—such as through the social practices of institutions such as NASCAR—the performativity of racialized representation offers a return to a cultural politics of the normative power of whiteness. The process of normalization manifests itself through several core institutions in the South, such that sport and leisure formations have contributed to an interconnected universe underpinned by White supremacist ideologies (Newman 2007). It is in this line of thought that the symbolic manifestations of racism are propagated and performed by Southern Whites, as are found to appear in the practices—both discursive and physical—within NASCAR spaces.

Here, the participants engaged the stakes of emergent phenomena, similar to what Newman and Beissel (2009) argued to be a "recovery movement" within the social institution of NASCAR. Staking their claims within Joe Kincheloe's theoretical framework, Newman and Beissel (2009:519) suggested that a movement had "been produced and wielded through social institutions that privilege dominant, if not monolithic, formations of whiteness, patriarchy, jingoistic nationalism, proselytizing Fundamentalism, heteronormativity, and consumer capitalism to iniquitous social-political ends," the likes of which gained momentum through the paleoconservative shift under the George W. Bush presidency and therefore, placed

NASCAR upon a pendulum between (trans)national expansion and the preservation of traditional, localized culture. Fast-forward nearly 15 years, we are presently in the wake of the Barack Obama and Trump presidencies, the former "producing" a reactionary right-wing nationalism that allowed for the latter's ascent and subsequent tenure. The level of reactionary sentiment that was prompted by the Trump presidency can be looked at as a more recent "recovery movement" that has witnessed an outpouring of resistance among many conservative White fans who feel as though NASCAR is abandoning their localized, conservative Southern (read: White) cultural sensibilities.

It is in a similar vein that Feagin and O'Brien (2003), in their study on the racialized perspectives of elite White men, found that while many of their participants understood the benefits attached to whiteness, they believed societal shifts were trending towards a "shortchanging" of White Americans. That is, they felt the advantages associated with being White were "slipping away as the society becomes more multicultural and multiracial," allowing them to "express concern, fear, or resentment that they are having to, or might soon have to, give up some of the substantial privileges that Whites have been historically afforded" (Feagin and O'Brien 2003:78). Although attributed to the commentary of upper-income White men, much of that was likewise suggested by Feagin and O'Brien to apply to the sentiments of White Americans, in general. For some Whites, by linking their perceived social position with the view that Whites' access to certain resources and status is deserved privileges, it is no wonder that many may believe that these privileges are becoming lost in an ever-diversifying social landscape. Rather than acknowledge their advantages, these individuals are convinced

that it is Americans of color, particularly African Americans, who seem to have significant, even, unfair, societal privileges...and thus believe that they [Whites] are now victims or scapegoats in regard to racial or related social problems for which they do not feel personally responsible. [Feagin and O'Brien 2003:81]

An underlying assumption, here, could be asserted that with continued societal progression on social issues and further interracial contact within NASCAR spaces, an “evolution” is likely to occur such that the geographies of the sport are less socio-politically polarizing and more harmonious for all engaging there within. However, as argued by Brown and colleagues (2003), while sporting spaces can (in theory) provide the conditions through which racial attitudes are positively acquired, interracial contact may produce a negative interaction. In other words, generalized contact alone is not a sufficient intervention to ensure that positive racial attitudes are realized and that negative stereotypes and prejudicial behaviors are eradicated. Moreover, within these spaces, Whites are likely to separate their interactions in a contact situation from their beliefs on broader societal issues of race and racism (Brown et al. 2003).

Given that the subculture of NASCAR “emerged as a powerful moral, political, and economic piece of the social mosaic of the modern-day American South,” it likewise serves as a discursive formation and system of subjectification that reflects and (re) produces the socio-cultural context in which it persists (Newman and Giardina 2011:40). As such, in NASCAR spaces, whiteness is not only performed, it is on full display such that sporting spaces have historically offered a popular public space through which to make visible the privileges of being White.

Thus, when coming into contact with(in) the White spaces of NASCAR, it may come as no surprise that Black individuals navigating these spaces link concepts of distrust, fear, and/or trepidation with the representations of whiteness there within. As was found within the larger project from which this study is located (see: Vadeboncoeur and Bopp 2021), participants mentioned that NASCAR needs to reassess how aspects of their culture require reform, which they argued will require a level of intentionality that has yet to be adopted by the organization. Likewise, the participants were aware of and attuned to the fact that manifestations of racism are multidimensional, and as such, there can be no single answer to racism, which means that simply positioning oneself against racism is in no manner to be conflated with being anti-racist (Gillborn 2006). That is, for NASCAR to progress and break its racialized stigma within the Black imagination (a) they need to transform aspects of their culture to be more inclusive and (b) they must endeavor to intentionally listen to, engage with, and understand the communities (and associated issues pertinent to these communities) from which their Black fans derive.

In all, this study centered its attention on one particular understudied population of individuals, and in the process, demonstrated how Black fans make meaning of and navigate the machinations of whiteness within the geographies of NASCAR. That is, by focusing sole attention on the Black NASCAR fan, I believe that helps deepen our understanding of the practices and processes that entrench whiteness within the everyday space of sport—and in turn, the everyday, racialized experiences of Black individuals within said sporting spaces. That is, there is much to be explored regarding these experiences, as well as the physical, psychological, or social cost of being a Black

individual within White spaces, particularly as it concerns a historically and predominantly White space as NASCAR. As such, given that its racialized geographies extend across a multitude of events, locations, scales, and social settings—both on and off the race track—NASCAR is a requisite place through which to explore the subaltern resistance of Black Americans. Although NASCAR has expanded beyond its southern roots—and recent attempts to distance itself from attachments to a conservative, White cultural nationalism and related brand of reactionary racial politics

in the wake of the 2020 racial unrest experienced throughout the US—it remains to be marked, if not outright stigmatized by past (and present) associations with personal and institutional-level reports of racism (Lee et al. 2010). As a result, it stands to reason that until NASCAR effectively, efficiently, and earnestly addresses issues concerning its racialized culture—and in the process, takes the time to understand their Black fan base—efforts to expand their reach will likely remain stifled by an inability (and/or possibly, unwillingness) to transform a self-limiting, “aging” culture.

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Alfred Schütz Revisited: Social Exclusion of Refugees in Brandenburg

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Abstract: For refugees, the transition from their home to the host society is especially challenging. In particular, their situation shortly after arrival entails the risk of social exclusion. Based on two case studies, this article reconstructs experiences of exclusion within the integration processes of Cameroonian refugee men and unaccompanied minors in the region of Brandenburg, Germany. What connects the studies are the existential threats of being forced to wait due to having an unclear future and a pattern of being unable to refer to (positive) lived experiences in the local environment. The article approaches these dynamics by applying Alfred Schütz as a helpful analytical heuristic to the findings. The possibilities and pitfalls of the deployed Schützean framework are highlighted considering current methodological developments in the field.

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Since the so-called *Long Summer of Migration of 2015*, which saw an extraordinary movement of refugees to Europe, social issues of integration and participation have been under constant debate. In that regard, it is not possible to speak of integration and participation without at least touching upon the problem of social exclusion (Cresswell 2013). Refugees' efforts to

integrate are subject to specific pressures to prove themselves to the established actors of the majority of society. In that respect, refugees are much more than “outsiders” in the classical sense described by Elias and Scotson (1965). In a social climate in which xenophobic attitudes are becoming increasingly widespread (Davidov and Semyonov 2017; Gijssberts, Hagendoorn, and Scheepers 2017; Herowitz-Amir, Raijman, and Davidov 2017), a particular danger lies in that the majority society projects its fear of social decline onto them (Bauman 2004). Racial discrimination and marginalization then lead to a significant increase in situations of social exclusion.

Questions of integration and participation highlight the issue of social exclusion in that drastic fashion; first and foremost—by referring to it as a social status: refugee subjects are described as either included or excluded in society based on various factors that can lead to that state (for orientation, cf., the survey by Foblets, Leboeuf, and Yanasmayan 2018). However, less is made explicit about the processes involved at the micro-level: how is social exclusion experienced by the subjects? Where—in the individual experiences of those concerned—does social exclusion begin to take shape? Drawing on two case studies (Zalewski 2017; Thomas, Sauer, and Zalewski 2018) that constitute the empirical background of the qualitative analysis, this article seeks to unravel the broader notion of refugees’ exclusion, exploring the concrete social-psychological mechanisms of its (un)making. To do so, first, the state of the art—the circumstances feeding refugees’ social exclusion and discussions surrounding the contested concept of integration—is documented. Second, that state of the art is referred to in the theoretical perspective of Alfred Schütz (1944; 1946) as a tool to unfold such concrete mechanisms.

Theoretical Framework

Social exclusion is directly linked to people’s mental health situation. A plethora of studies emphasizes a special mental vulnerability of people in the arrival phase, observing that its specific stresses can be even greater than those caused by traumatic experiences during forced migration or in the country of origin (Lindencrona, Ekblad, and Hauff 2008; Carswell, Blackburn, and Barker 2011; Schweitzer et al. 2011). Subjective well-being after arrival is thus significantly lower (Ryan, Kelly, and Kelly 2009; Davidson and Carr 2010; Li and Rose 2017). First, low subjective well-being is directly connected to the asylum procedure. In that regard, one’s future essentially hangs in the balance. Residency status is usually only temporary (Momartin et al. 2006; Steel et al. 2006). The resulting uncertainty concerning the future must also be understood in the context of the looming scenario of possible deportation back to the violent conditions from which the asylum seeker has fled (Wright 2014; Robinson and Williams 2015). Compounding that situation, asylum procedures often drag on for long periods: serial renewals of “tolerated status” in Germany (*Ketten-duldungen*) are quite common and perpetuate stress (Laban et al. 2004; Laban et al. 2008). Consequently, that stress only subsides when permanent residency is obtained (Laban et al. 2004; Laban et al. 2008), which can often take years and is attained by very few people. Furthermore, the asylum procedure is often accompanied by unemployment. People are either legally prohibited from doing paid work, or there are too many institutional barriers to overcome. Without paid work, one’s situation seems all the more meaningless and stressful (Beiser and Hou 2001; Tinghög, Hemmingsson, and Lundberg 2007; Paul and Moser 2009). Being forced to live in collective accommodation also creates the risk of spatial exclusion, which can lead to social isolation (Porter

and Haslam 2005; Pieper 2008; Täubig 2009). That is particularly manifested in a declining social network (Steel et al. 2006; Ozer et al. 2008). Altogether, refugees usually have to simply sit out the arrival period. They can neither leave their past behind nor look to the future with hope for a new life in the host country (Denov and Akesson 2013). Arrival must rather be characterized as a state of waiting that constitutes a threat to one's power to act (Dupont et al. 2005; Vitus 2010; Kohli and Kaukko 2018).

Framing these circumstances more conceptually, the notion of "integration" has to be discussed. Particularly influential are approaches that conceive of integration as an outcome: the complexity of integration is determined using stage-and-phase models in an objectifying and quantifying way (Eisenstadt 1954; Gordon 1964; Esser 1980). That is manifested, for instance, in dichotomous perspectives (included/excluded), or in the establishment of degrees, or intermediate phases of integration, often shaped by external indicators, especially one's position in the labor market (Heath and Cheung 2007). Therefore, research into refugees' integration often poses the question: "What constitutes 'successful' integration?" (Ager and Strang 2008:184). As an answer, Ager and Strang (2008:184-185) propose four core domains: (1) achievement and access across the sectors of employment, housing, education, and health; (2) citizenship and rights; (3) social connection within and between groups in the community; and (4) barriers to such connection related to linguistic and cultural competencies and to fear and instability. These conceptualizations consider the causes and circumstances of integration, but less its concrete mode of manifestation. For that, a processual language is needed, grasping the ambivalence of integration processes' significance for the everyday lifeworld.

Alfred Schütz did not discuss the specific problem of refugee integration. Nevertheless, I argue that some of his conceptual insights may help out in that case. Worthy of being mentioned alongside Georg Simmel's (1971) studies on the sociology of migration and Ezra Park's (1928) work on migrant marginality, Schütz's (1944) study, "The Stranger: An Essay in Social Psychology," is a classic in migration theory. Beyond the concept of foreignness highlighted in "The Stranger" and his essay "The Homecomer" (1976a),¹ Schütz's fundamental insights into the sociology of knowledge expand our understanding of integration and provide solid ground for the analytical questions raised here, with Schütz focusing on the everyday lifeworld as the key point of reference. It is precisely that social reality in which the subject follows a "pragmatic motive" to satisfy their needs immediately and where the subject's "natural attitude" appears unquestionable and inevitable (Schütz 1962:208). In "The Stranger," Schütz claims that a migrant's everyday lifeworld shortly after arrival in the host society is fundamentally disrupted. Like an "approaching stranger," the everyday lifeworld structures of his home society are the points of reference for his "unquestioned scheme of relevance for his relatively natural conception of the world" (Schütz 1944:502). Thus, he automatically begins to interpret the new social environment by applying the knowledge framework of his home society. However, there is often a considerable chasm between the two societies. In the new society, refugees have no lived history; they lack local experien-

¹ Both texts focus on the problem of foreignness, but differ in their methodological attitude. On the one hand—and that is my primary reference point—Schütz defines the stranger as a figure who tries to approach a new group that he does not know (yet). On the other hand, the homecomer from a different way of living, for whom Schütz chooses the example of a war veteran, expects to come along in his once known and intimate group, but fails.

tial and interpretive schemes (“relevance systems”). These must be painstakingly acquired from scratch.

Furthermore, a focus on the subjective meanings refugees attribute to processes of integration and participation is obstructed when a rather rigid understanding of integration as one-sided assimilation is applied, as was the case in the past (Alba and Nee 1997; Alba 2005). Therefore, critical refugee and migration studies emphasize refugees’ agency and the “autonomy of migration” (Bojadžijev and Karakayali 2007; Mezzadra 2011; de Genova 2017). In addition to these critics, Schütz offers a good tool for a virtual in-depth analysis of subjective meanings. For him, subjective meaning is created based on categorizing a social situation within the subject’s prior relevance systems: an internal (and thus subjective) representation of the objective action situation is formed, based on which the subject can act within the framework of the “stock of knowledge” on the situation (Schütz 1970). That creation of subjective meaning is driven by the so-called intrinsic relevances and imposed relevances (Schütz 1946). Whereas the former arise from one’s conscious plan of future action, the latter are (powerfully) forced on people by their past (Göttlich 2011). In the end, subjective meaning—in accordance with Max Weber (1978)—is the meaning the subject combines with their acting in a specific situation. Hence, in applying Schütz against the notion of integration as assimilation, the agency is employed not only as a political category but subdivided into empirically useful heuristics.

Set against the above backdrop, the underlying data and the methodology are subsequently outlined. Thereafter, this article demonstrates that using Schütz as an analytical tool opens one’s eyes to some very specific dynamics regarding integration processes and mechanisms of exclusion from the

standpoint of the subject. The empirical data are then meaningfully interpreted in three key ways: integration processes are understood as a crisis of understanding; imposed waiting in integration processes is strongly acknowledged; and Schütz is used as a starting point to grasp affective manifestations of subjective meanings in mechanisms of social exclusion. Finally, the article critically discusses its theoretical framework.

Data and Methodology

Geographical Context: The Region of Brandenburg

My analysis relies on two case studies, which are heterogeneous considering age groups, countries of origin, and methods applied, but which both cover integration processes in a single geographic context: the East German federal state of Brandenburg, one of the five new states founded after the German reunification in 1989. Since then, the region has undergone massive economic changes, times of increasing unemployment, demographic imbalances, and depopulation (Cassens, Luy, and Scholz 2009). Refugees entering Brandenburg in the context of the *Long Summer of Migration* brought about another form of a recent change to the region. Investigating integration processes in that specific environment appears to be particularly relevant: the region shows eroding social acceptance of refugees. Racist ideologies are gaining strength here, as evidenced by the right-wing party, Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), coming second (23.5%) in 2019’s local elections (Falkner and Kahrs 2019). Brandenburg is also one of Germany’s largest states, consisting predominantly of rural areas and few cities, thereby compromising social-spatial mobility and structures of supply (Born 2009).

What can be concluded is that the risk of social exclusion within everyday lifeworlds in Brandenburg is particularly high and thus worth a closer look. In the following, two case studies investigate that risk. They are utilized to understand how social exclusion begins to take shape in daily Brandenburg life from the standpoint of two groups of refugee subjects entering that local environment: Cameroonian asylum seekers (case study 1) and unaccompanied minor refugees (case study 2). The aim is not to compare these groups but to reconstruct the general patterns that apply in that region even when looking at two very different groups. Due to the combined analyses tied together through the specific geographic context, further questions of legitimacy arise. Potential clearly lies in the extraction of social exclusion mechanisms regardless of either country of origin or institutional treatment. Hence, the pitfalls of an ethnic lens and methodological nationalism can be avoided (Glick Schiller 1999; Brubaker and Cooper 2000; Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002). Proceeding in this way may appear unconventional, but it was chosen as a novel way to identify commonalities where a research field of highly fragmented studies drawing on isolated ethnic and age groups tends to overlook them.

Case Study 1: Cameroonian Asylum Seekers

The first case study investigates the challenges faced by Cameroonian refugee men upon arrival in Brandenburg (Zalewski 2017). Qualitative interviews, which provide a classical gateway to subjective meanings (Kvale 1997), were utilized to facilitate in-depth exploration. The interviews were conceptualized as problem-centered following Witzel (2000), allowing a thematic focus on everyday experiences of social exclusion. The interview guideline covered topics such as spatial, financial, institutional, and cultural

exclusion, exclusion in the job market, and experiences of racism, the last of which may be regarded as part of the previous, but was added as an independent category worthy of investigation because it was of major importance to all the interviewees. Conducting interviews with refugees is a sensitive issue that requires one to reflect on power dynamics and research ethics (Fedyuk and Zentai 2018). Crucial in that regard was the researcher supporting the most important self-organized association of refugees in Brandenburg voluntarily beforehand and always relying on informed consent. Through building trust in that way, the group could function as the “sponsor” of the research (on the significance of sponsors, cf., the classic study by Whyte 1943). The group supplied the facilities in which the interviews took place: a public Internet-café that is run and owned by the group and serves as a safe space for refugees. The selection criteria were affected by that. Interviews were based on the trust-building process, which, in turn, established a snowball system, as all of the interviews were mediated through the sponsor. Further, the theoretical sampling approach, as suggested by grounded theory methodologies, was employed (Charmaz 2014:41). As the research was interested in an in-depth exploration of how social exclusion can be manifested in the everyday and not in a variety of life realities, a homogeneous group was selected: 6 male refugees from Cameroon, aged 22 to 36, living in collective accommodation in the same town. At the time of the interviews in 2015 and 2016, the men had been in Brandenburg for periods ranging from 2 to 17 months while awaiting the results of their asylum procedures. All of them were unemployed at that time. The interviews took from 41 minutes up to 1 hour and 19 minutes, with an average of 55 minutes. In the following, the interviewees’ names are anonymized for privacy policy reasons.

Case Study 2: Unaccompanied Refugee Minors

Additional data are presented from a second case study, which used mixed methods to evaluate the situation of unaccompanied minors from a variety of countries of origin in Brandenburg (Thomas et al. 2018). At the beginning of data collection in 2017, 1,503 cases of unaccompanied minors were accommodated in the facilities of the Brandenburg youth welfare system (Thomas et al. 2018:43). Two surveys that guided the study with $n=133$ and $n=138$ cases will not be part of the following; all data presented here were derived from group discussions and participatory fieldwork conducted with the minors (Thomas et al. 2018:48). In doing research with a vulnerable group, particular attention was paid to research ethics: in addition to informed consent, the participatory approach was chosen to enable moments of agency and empowerment for the youth, which worked against their social stigmatization in everyday life (for illustration, cf., Sauer, Thomas, and Zalewski 2019). The selection was based on voluntariness and was open to all. In that setting, peer research (Burns and Schubotz 2009) and photo-voice (Wang and Burris 1997) methods with a total of $n=40$ minors were employed. All of the participants were male, an important limitation of both case studies (for female-specific forced migration challenges in Germany, cf., the study by Schouler-Ocak and Kurmeyer 2017). Given that data on age and ethnicity were only provided in detail through the questionnaire, which admittedly had considerable overlap with the participatory fieldwork, the following information represents an approximation: 62% of the minors were aged 16 or 17, 32% were 18 years or older, and 6% were 15 years or younger (on the vague and limited means of age determination among unaccompanied minors, cf., Kenny and Loughry 2018). Numerous countries of origin were represented, the main ones being Syria, Afghanistan, Eritrea, Somalia, and Guinea. In addi-

tion, one expert interview (Bogner, Littig, and Menz 2018) conducted with a manager at a child and youth welfare institution is presented.

Integration Processes as Crises of Understanding

It is particularly in their first months in the host society that refugees risk experiencing the sort of crisis elaborated by Schütz (1944). They are confronted with a fundamental and reciprocal problem of understanding. Their “thinking as usual” (Schütz 1944:501) has lost its universal validity in the new context. Thus, they experience a lack of orientation via a life-world that initially appears completely fragmented to them. For instance, unaccompanied minors initially have no grasp of their situation in the German youth welfare system because they have no prior lived understanding of institutional life in the host society, especially concerning the roles of carers (Nelson, Price, and Zuburzycki 2017) and guardians (Crawley and Kohli 2013; Sirriyeh 2013). That was stressed in an expert interview with a manager of a residential youth welfare facility for unaccompanied minors.

When they have been here for a while, they notice that not everything works. And, of course, that is frustrating at first. Because they don't come to Germany and start work. They first come into child and youth welfare. Then there are carers. Then there are guardians... And then some other people want something from them. What is actually going on around me? [Manager of a residential youth welfare facility for unaccompanied minors, m; trans. from German IZ]

The minors' initial lack of orientation within the German society addressed here by the manager of a responsible youth welfare facility manifests itself between two clearly disparate lifeworld systems. In

particular, the complex institutional structure of the new German lifeworld remains unclear here. As a Syrian minor (m) argued during participatory fieldwork and consequently stressed when he co-presented the results of the participatory research at various conferences, being new in Germany means to him “being a baby” once more, having to learn everything from the bottom up.

The adult Cameroonian refugees face a similar situation. Their everyday lifeworld in Cameroon was characterized by the social norms of spontaneity and mutual curiosity, whereas their everyday lifeworld in Germany is prestructured entirely differently, as was made apparent by Joseph (m, 26, Cameroon): “In Africa, people are very curious. They wanted to know what was going on there. But here?” Joseph could not immediately reduce the gap between the two lifeworlds via experience. He had been in Germany for 13 months, not enough to acquire the prerequisite “tested recipes” (Schütz 1944:502), but sufficient to experience the “old” recipes from Cameroon proven to no longer be valid. Hence, he has encountered severe social irritations in Germany. That was also made clear by Daniel and Armand:

I have always been with people around me. In Africa, we are like, “Hey, let’s go out, hey, let’s go there, let’s do this.” But here, you don’t see stuff like that. [Daniel, m, 25, Cameroon]

Here, it’s very different, because you see someone somewhere: “Hello.” “Good.” Go. “How are you?” “Good. Good.” When you say, “I’m fine, and you?” “Good. Thanks.” Then go. But, in Africa, it’s different. [Armand, m, 36, Cameroon]

Joseph, Daniel, and Armand live in different anonymous collective accommodation centers. Unaccompanied minors live in closely supervised child and youth

welfare facilities (Kohli 2007; 2011; Allan 2015; Thomas et al. 2018:109). Furthermore, they attend school daily and are not (yet) looking for work (Pastoor 2015; 2017). Nevertheless, their basic experiences of social exclusion in everyday life display a remarkably similar structure to the cases of Joseph, Daniel, and Armand cited above. The minors also experience a disruption of their relevance systems in the lifeworld. That is principally encountered at school, the primary site of contact with their German peers (Lems 2019), as one minor pointed out during a group discussion:

It’s difficult with Germans in my class. I am alone... Just “Hello,” “Hello, how are you?” or “Good morning.” That’s it. In my class. That hurts. [Unaccompanied minor, m; trans. from German IZ]

The Cameroonian men often share functioning lifeworld recipes, mainly with other refugees from similar contexts, although they had not necessarily been in contact in their home country: “As we are here, we are not friends, we were never friends back then, but we are brothers here” (Daniel, m, 25, Cameroon). It is crucial that mutual understanding functions in the way in which they are accustomed, as they can refer to the same normative framework. Unsurprisingly contact among them can initially be highly functional, as Alfred argued:

I don’t know anybody here. Only them from Cameroon. If I speak with them, that’s everything I want. If I see them, speak with them, they understand what I want, what I don’t want. [Alfred, m, 30, Cameroon]

Imposed Waiting in Integration Processes

In the following, Schütz’s (1946) notion of imposed relevances is employed to examine a particular manifestation of exclusion in the everyday.

Imposed upon us as relevant are situations and events which are not connected with interests chosen by us, which do not originate in acts of our discretion, and which we have just to take as they are, without any power to modify them. [Schütz 1946:470]

Refugees may have a great deal imposed upon them, especially legal restrictions within the context of asylum procedures. In the following quotation, it is only via the conceptualization of waiting as imposed beyond Daniel's plan of future action that subjective meaning becomes apparent to some degree.

I don't have anything to do. As for now, I'm always at home. How can a man of my age, I'm 25 years old. I get up in the morning, take a bath. Dress up. Sit at home right up to the next day. Sometimes when it's boring, I'll have to go out in the streets, take a walk. So it's really, really, really tough. It's really, really tough...Just sitting at home all day makes a man go crazy, you know. [Daniel, m, 25, Cameroon]

Daniel implies here that a man in his mid-twenties has rather strong orientations towards building a future. What is more, after months of personal struggle relating to his escape from Cameroon and facing death during his journey by boat, he longs to leave his past behind. However, upon arrival in Germany, his situation is structured through his personal history of forced migration. Time is crucial here in ways that intrinsic relevances are directed towards future action, whereas imposed relevances lie in the subject's past (Göttlich 2011:505). Having to orient the structure of one's everyday life towards these imposed relevances goes hand-in-hand with doing nothing and idleness in Daniel's case. Performing empty everyday routines, such as dressing, taking a walk, or sitting at home until the next day,

is without (positive) subjective meaning for him; on the contrary, it forces him to question himself as a whole because his new existence in Germany is what Dupont and colleagues (2005) describe as "killing the time." In the case of unaccompanied minors, the bed can function as a symbol of that experience; indeed, when asked within the framework of the participatory research to take pictures of the things that were most important to them in their homes, one presented a picture of his bed. He explained that it is the place where he spends most of his time (Thomas et al. 2018:165). Furthermore, the minors openly addressed problems of imposed waiting while searching for a job.

I am looking for vocational training. The immigration authorities say, "You have to do an internship first. I don't give you permission, you do an internship."... Then I go for an internship, I have the papers for my applications, I write them all. One hairdresser's shop here...I say to the immigration authorities, "I am doing an internship."...Then the immigration authorities say, "No, you have to first wait." How long do I have to wait? I am here for one year, and I am here waiting. [Unaccompanied minor, m; trans. from German IZ]

Imposed waiting then points to a captive life situation: the individuals cannot leave behind their old lives, nor can they begin a new one. Rather, they become "the mere passive recipients of events beyond our control" (Schütz 1946:470). Finally, in Mathias' self-descriptions, the extent to which that imposition ultimately progresses becomes clear.

When I came here, the more important for me was to make a new life. But, since I came here, I didn't get any chance here to make a new life. I don't know why. I don't know if I will stay in Germany or not, that is a very long time waiting...I don't know if I will stay or I will not

stay. Because I'm in the asylum procedure. Then I'm still waiting...Eat. And sleep. Eat. And sleep. It's very difficult for somebody who all the time works, then one time sleeps and eats. Six months. One year. Don't do anything. It's very, very difficult...Especially me, I didn't like all that time because I saw that I was spending my time on nothing. Since I'm here in Germany, I don't know what's going wrong with me. I look, one year and five months in Germany. Nothing is especially good for me. Just wait. [Mathias, m, 30, Cameroon]

Understanding these dilemmas as being forced to be inactive and to wait for one's "new life" to begin, it is unsurprising that one participant suggested that, ultimately, the situation resembles a form of imprisonment.

A human being is not supposed to sit down in the house. Just sit down in the house, not do anything. Nothing. You feel like in prison! [Alfred, m, 30, Cameroon]

What must be concluded from such experiences of imposed waiting in integration processes is that, in the end, they are accompanied by a severe subjective experience of alienation, disidentification, and loss of meaning, a finding that is in line with other studies in the field (Vitus 2010; Denov and Akesson 2013).

Affective Manifestations of Subjective Meanings in Mechanisms of Social Exclusion

By acknowledging that participation is structurally hindered in a way that may lead to personal alienation and subjective loss of meaning, the question arises of how these situations can be tracked down in the most comprehensive way possible. In the above cases, the loss of meaning was easily traceable: the researcher simply had to listen to what the participants

had to say about it. All of the interviewees were reflexively aware of their unfortunate situation and could verbalize their dilemmas in a way that was clear to others. However, in such a burdensome situation it may be the case that this is not possible for everyone (anymore). Subjective manifestations of experiences of social exclusion are not evident as such all the time. Rather, they may be implicit, such as embodied, or they may be so overwhelming that the individual cannot find the right words to describe them. In such cases, the researcher must be aware of what is being said between the lines, especially what emotions may convey when experiences can no longer be verbalized. That helps attain a better understanding of Luc's situation. He was in a situation where he had tried to find a job or something to do, but to no avail. As he claimed:

I have tried, and I haven't found work. It was so difficult then. I also tried to have an apprenticeship, but to do one?...Together with this woman, we tried to find an apprenticeship. It was so difficult then we didn't find one. The exact problem was that I came to Germany without certificates, and I can't do an apprenticeship without a certificate. That was the exact problem...I thought why don't they just do a test. A trial period, for example. Why don't they do that? We made a CV. We did that. I did that, did that, did that. Why don't they do a trial period to see whether I can do the apprenticeship or not? They just say, "You're an asylum seeker at the moment, and you cannot, may not, do that." [Luc, m, 22, Cameroon; trans. from German IZ]

What directly followed in his narration was first and foremost a description of a whole string of depressive feelings:

When I heard that, I feel very weak, I lose my courage, I don't have the strength to try or do anything.

I mean, I lose all my strength, I can tell you. Then I have too much stress and wonder, “What should I do? What will I do tomorrow? With my studies, how can I continue studying?” Questions like that. I ask myself such questions often, and I don’t know what the solution is (pause). And I feel very, very, very bad (speaking very softly). How can I say this? [Luc, m, 22, Cameroon; trans. from German IZ]

In the first paragraph, Luc’s effort to overcome structural disadvantages due to his status as an asylum seeker on his initiative and with institutional support is evident. However, ultimately, the barriers he faces to the labor market seem so great that such efforts fail after several attempts. In Luc’s experience, personal investment is then associated with his failure, a selective creation of relevance by him if we follow Schütz once more:

He groups the world around himself (as the center) as a field of domination and is therefore especially interested in that segment, which is within his actual or potential reach. He singles out those of its elements which may serve as a means or ends for his “use and enjoyment,” for furthering his purposes, and for overcoming obstacles. [Schütz 1944:500]

Luc assumes that finding a job in Germany, especially considering his significant efforts and the institutional support available, lies within his “potential reach.” Thus, in the event of failure, he experiences the moment of his enormous expense (“did that, did that, did that”) in direct connection to that lack of success. He experiences as irrelevant whether he does something or not; he will remain unemployed. In short, he experiences himself as powerless.

When relating the last paragraph of the quotation as the (emotional) long-term consequence to the

first, it becomes clear that in Luc’s case, the manifestation of the subjective meaning of his experiences has already proceeded to a point that can no longer be accessed just by an account to the conscious sphere. It seems as if Luc is virtually missing words (“How can I say this?”) to describe his condition in meaningful ways to others. His inability to determine his employment situation gives rise to feelings of resignation and self-abandonment coupled with a strong rumination on existential fears for his future (“What will I do tomorrow? With my studies, how can I continue studying?” I ask myself such questions often”). The subjective meaning of his situation upon arrival is decisively expressed in his emotions: despair (“I feel very, very, very bad”), despondency (“I lose my courage”), exhaustion (“I feel very weak”), and lethargy (“I don’t have the strength to try or do anything”), for instance. Thus, it is not only the reflexive consciousness—as Schütz would suggest—where subjective meaning must be explored (for current discussions in this regard, cf., Kissmann and van Loon 2019). What is more, subjective meaning is a delimited notion, that is, even though it can be reconstructed to a certain extent, it can never be grasped completely. As Wacquant (2004:vii) emphasizes, we must rather take into consideration that “the social agent is before anything else a being of flesh, nerves, and senses (in the twofold meaning of sensual and signifying).” Luc’s affective access to the world is, therefore, taken into consideration. Emotions show that what is happening to someone is of subjective importance (Katz 1999). In the sense of “sensitizing concepts” (Blumer 1969), Luc’s emotional expressions here are most important to attaining a view into his subjective situation upon arrival in Germany. They urge us to understand it as an existential threat.

Discussion and Concluding Remarks

This article has undertaken a qualitative analysis of the mechanisms involved in experiences of social exclusion within the integration processes of refugees in Brandenburg, Germany. On the one hand, the use of Alfred Schütz's theoretical perspective as a conceptual tool was found to have several benefits. First, following current approaches that criticize normative notions and models of integration (Crul 2016), it was able to challenge a very problematic, one-sided view of integration as assimilation. Second, it allowed for a broad focus on the processual level of daily life. Here, the theoretical argument outlined may go hand-in-hand with a more contemporary methodological one. Schütz's approach can potentially complement various qualitative methods that are used to empirically map everyday lifeworlds (cf., Yalaz and Zapa-Barrero 2017; Chase et al. 2019; Weidinger, Kordel, and Kieslinger 2019), as well as participatory approaches that enable their joint analysis (cf., Korjonen-Kuusipuro, Kuusisto, and Tuominen 2018; Mohammed et al. 2019). By referring to Schütz, the terminology and concepts used in studies applying these methodologies would become much sharper. Moreover, implementing his framework within the heart of empirical rendering promises the following: a profound basis for the now common, but sometimes blurred and tendentially underdeveloped concept of the everyday lifeworld. The term appears to be used broadly under different objectives, whether to reconstruct "everyday experiences," "daily lives," or "subjective perspectives." Referring to Schütz, it can also be argued that such attempts remain incomplete as long as an analysis of subjective meanings fails to form part of them.

On the other hand, pitfalls in applying Schütz to analyses are close at hand, too. The first to men-

tion is an essentialist conceptualization of refugees as strangers. Refugees, of course, are involved in much more than merely the subject position of an "approaching stranger" (Dahinden 2016; Hui 2016). Hence, when applying Schütz, it is strongly recommended that refugees are not pre-labeled as strangers per se and that overemphasis is thus not placed on conflictual moments in processes of integration and participation. One should rather, as a first step, make the social construction of strangers the object of study (Reuter and Warrach 2015:186). Beyond that, Schütz's lack of differentiation between migration and flight is problematic and outdated (Long 2013). His conception of foreignness is indifferent to the question of what causes it (Göttlich, Sebald, and Weyand 2011:23); it is necessary to add the moment of violence inherent in every act of forced migration to it. In particular, Schütz's assumed figure of "the ordinary citizen" in "The Stranger" can be highly misleading. What does it mean if one has experienced the existential threat of forced migration, but the other has not? Is the common world of everyday life still then intelligible? As Schütz (1976a) himself argues in "The Homecomer," a transcending foreignness may arise due to experiences such as war. Building reciprocity of perspectives may also fail in the light of the omnipresence of the discursive figure of *the refugee* in the mass media (Caviedes 2015; Vickers and Rutter 2016; Cooper, Blumell, and Bunce 2021). It might lead to what Schütz (1975:114) calls the "discrepancy between the uniqueness" of personal experience and people's "pseudo-typification." Ultimately, their everyday worlds must always experience validation through a socially significant other and be maintained as such (Schütz 1976b).² Otherwise, they may find themselves in the situation

² Schütz (1976b) illustrates that thought in his literary analysis of *Don Quixote*.

Robert Park (1928) once described: “The individual who through migration...leaves one social group or culture without making a satisfactory adjustment to another finds himself on the margin of each, but a member of neither. He is a ‘marginal man’” (Stonquist 1961:2-3).

We should go beyond making use of Schütz as merely a classic study and take into consideration his whole approach to social reality, thus revealing the mechanisms of social exclusion in a postmigrant society.³ In countries like Germany, migration is no longer an isolated phenomenon, but constitutive of society itself (Yıldız 2018:22). Thus, foreignness becomes more and more a phenomenon of general interest—as does the challenge of mutual understanding and building trustworthy relationships (Zalewski 2022). As has been pointed out recently, “consistent recognition of social realities of migration also requires adequate analytical and conceptual approaches” (Wiest 2020:3). Against this backdrop, it is worth (re-)examining Schütz’s ambitious program, old-fashioned as it may seem, in more detail. It should be thoughtfully adapted and expanded within how empirics are being processed. That means, amongst other things, that not only the reflexively available aspects but also the affective manifestations of subjective meanings in the mechanisms of social exclusion should be taken into consideration. Where it is difficult to verbalize experiences, new types of ethnographic methods (Kissmann 2009) may be applied, allowing us to observe emotions in detail and enabling us to capture the implicit aspects of subjective meanings.

³ In the notion of “postmigration,” “migration is to be considered a normal component of society, that is, all people are mobile in one or another way and live in a migration society, then migration research must address the analysis of society as a whole” (Hill 2018:100-101 as cited in Wiest 2020:3).

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Biographical Work as a Mechanism of Dealing with Precarity and Precariousness

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Abstract: The article aims to explore the relationship between biographical work and the strategies of managing precarity (low-paid and unstable employment) and precariousness (insecurity and instability of life conditions in general) in Poland's new capitalism. Poland witnessed the rise of precarity during the entire capitalist transformation after 1989, while the expansion of precarious, temporary, and non-standard employment accelerated in the first two decades of the 21st century. The main theoretical framework of the article is based on concepts deriving from biographical sociology and was elaborated during a joint workshop with German biographical researcher, Fritz Schütze, within the PREWORK project. The case of a young female shop assistant, Helena, with a difficult family and work background was selected from a larger sample of 63 biographical narrative interviews with precarious young workers in Poland. Based on the case study and the broader context of the research project, it is argued that biographical work may have the potential for questioning and challenging precarity; yet, without necessary biographical and social resources, such a process is hard to be completed. As a result, the paper questions the macrosocial vision of "precariat" as the "class in-the-making" and instead offers a detailed account of the microsocial ways of dealing with precarity by a representative of the most disadvantaged group of precarious young workers.

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The main aim of the article is to present the relationship between strategies of managing precarity and precariousness and biographical work done by an individual in a difficult family and work situation. Precariousness refers to a universal human condition of dependency on other people and socio-economic circumstances that protect us against vulnerability deriving from our finitude and mortality (Butler 2009:14-15). It is not reducible to paid employment and reflects our vulnerability of being hurt or even dying if not defended

by supportive social conditions, including, among others, supportive social relations and welfare institutions. Precarity, in turn, can be understood in terms of “work for remuneration characterized by uncertainty, low income, and limited social benefits and statutory entitlements” (Vosko 2010:2). Finally, biographical work is defined as interpretative practices “carried out in the service of an actor’s biography, including its review, maintenance, repair, and alteration” (Strauss 1993:98).

This article aims at contributing to the debates on the relevance of workers’ agency, as well as biograph-

ically and structurally defined resources for managing precarity (Haratyk, Biały, and Gońda 2017; Manolchev, Saundry, and Lewis 2018; Petriglieri, Ashford, and Wrzesniewski 2019; Waniek 2019). Earlier studies (Manolchev et al. 2018; Mrozowicki and Trappmann 2020) suggested that the effects of precarity may be mitigated if an individual possesses and can mobilize biographical and social resources that protect them against general precariousness. However, less explored are the ways of managing precarity in the case of individuals whose biographical and social resources remain very scarce. By addressing that issue, the article focuses on young workers in Poland. Poland is a country where the share of precariously employed continued to grow since the early 2000s, and the welfare state institutions, reformed according to neoliberal principles in the early 1990s, did not provide sufficient protection against the precariousness for the unemployed and those excluded from the labor market (Maciejewska, Mrozowicki, and Piasna 2016). In the mid-2010s, according to the Eurostat Labour Force Survey data, 47% of people aged 20-29 worked with various kinds of temporary contracts, which was one of the highest shares in the EU. Focusing on the experiences of precarious young workers, in the article, we deal with two specific research questions: (1) How do precariousness and precarity interact within an individual biography and contribute to a biographical trajectory of suffering? (2) How does an individual cope with precarious life and work circumstances by doing biographical work, and is it possible to overcome them?

The article is divided into two parts. First, in the theoretical introduction, we explain the distinction between the concepts of precariousness and precarity. We also introduce the concepts of biographical work, trajectory potentials, and the trajectory of suf-

fering as a process structure. Our understanding of the latter is primarily based on the work of the German sociologist Fritz Schütze (2008) and researchers using his strategies of a (sociolinguistically based) analysis of social processes mainly developed based on autobiographical narrative interviews. The empirical base consists of 63 interviews collected within the PREWORK project, focused on the biographical experiences and coping strategies of precarious young workers in Poland. The second part of the paper is focused on the analysis of a biographical narrative interview with Helena—a young woman in a precarious life situation who is burdened with a complex and difficult life history. The article makes use of some of the discussions of the PREWORK team on Helena's case with Fritz Schütze during a workshop held in October 2018 in Wrocław. The interview with Helena had been translated into English. Importantly, it is not a verbatim transcript of the workshop, and the entire responsibility for its shape and the presented findings lies solely with the authors.

The article demonstrates that, even by limiting the analysis to a single narrative, it is possible to point out tensions that are characteristic of the biography of a precarious young female worker—tensions of being torn between different risks located in both family and relationships. It also argues for the importance of biographical work for mastering a trajectory of suffering as it is referred to in biographical research (Schütze 2012), the sources of which can be found both in the narrator's family experience and in her occupational career. Contrary to earlier studies on the "precariat" as the social class "in the making," which is prone to be "externally" mobilized by various political forces (Standing 2011), this analysis is focused on the development of biographical resources as a result of biographical work that can

help an affected individual to cope with precarity and precariousness at the same time.

Before the case study is presented, a brief introduction to the main elements of the PREWORK project theoretical framework will be explained.

Precariousness, Precarity, and Precarious Employment

In sociology, there is a longstanding discussion on the meanings of concepts denoting uncertain, fragile, vulnerable aspects of human existence and work (Castel 2000; Standing 2011; Arnold and Bongiovi 2012; Pałęcka and Płucienniczak 2017; Polkowska 2018; Dörre 2019). In this article, we refer to the concepts of precariousness and precarity to respectively denote life- and work-related aspects of contemporary insecurity. According to Butler (2009:13), precariousness is a shared condition of human life that is injurable, that is, which can be “lost, destroyed, or systematically neglected to the point of death.” Even though precariousness is universal, the various categories of individuals are unequally exposed to it. Firstly, social and family relationships enabling an individual to reproduce their existence on “an emotional and social level” are an important mechanism of sheltering against precariousness (Castel 2000:520). They provide individuals with various resources, such as helpful networks, as well as material and emotional support, which could be used to minimize the effects of our universal fragility as human beings. Secondly, in the labor market context, the unequal exposure to precariousness is conceptually captured by the concept of precarity. It designates a “politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic support networks and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death” (But-

ler 2009:25). The modern welfare state (Castel 2000), as well as labor market institutions linking workers’ rights to a standard employment relationship (Doellgast, Lillie, and Pulignano 2018), are aimed at reducing precarity through employment policies, social transfers, and inclusive collective agreements. The selective access to social protection, usually based on employment history, has also been a way of managing the population. For instance, women and ethnic minorities, who often found themselves outside the standard employment relationship due to cultural stereotypes and discrimination, were often pushed to the margins of the labor market and deprived of protection.

The erosion of welfare institutions and standard employment relationships in the wake of neoliberalism has a twofold effect. First, it threatened those in the core segments of the labor market with insecurity and contributed to the expansion of precarious forms of work on the labor market peripheries (Dörre 2019). The term “precarious employment” refers to the forms of work that are “uncertain, unpredictable, and risky from the point of view of the worker” (Kalleberg 2009:2). Its expansion contributed to the well-known claim by Guy Standing (2011) on the possibility of the emergence of a new social class “in the making,” between the class in itself and the class for itself—the precariat. The latter is said to consist of people who—due to their work situation—lack industrial citizenship rights typical of Fordism, such as employment and income security, or the right to join and establish trade unions, and share a “minimal trust relationship with capital or the state” (Standing 2011:8). Yet, the thesis about the emergence of the precariat was criticized as it was said to be too heterogeneous in terms of its sources of income (Wright 2016) and lacking a coherent socio-political consciousness (Gardawski 2020).

Second, neoliberal ideology appealed to the idea of a self-managed entrepreneurial subject who manages their biography like a company and takes responsibility for protecting oneself against precarity by mobilizing individual resources (Bove, Murgia, and Armano 2017). As documented by biographical case studies (Haratyk et al. 2017), the latter ideology significantly marked the social consciousness and coping practices of working Poles. In the case of young people, the ideologies of entrepreneurship and meritocracy were said to underlie the “normalization” of precarious employment that is seen as an inherent aspect of occupational biographies.

In practice, the forms of precarious employment vary depending on country-specific institutional contexts. In Poland, they range from informal work in the shadow economy, through the various forms of civil law contracts and dependent self-employment that are not covered by the stipulations of the Labor Code, to low-paid full-time and part-time jobs of workers with standard employment contracts. The expansion of precarious work can be linked to the adoption of a low-wage model of the business competition after 1989, the weakening of institutional protections of the employed and the unemployed in the course of successive labor market reforms aimed at counteracting high unemployment, and the weakness of industrial relations of actors and institutions in regulating and monitoring employment conditions. Even though we can observe a trend towards regulating some of the most precarious aspects of the labor market in Poland since the mid-2010s, the number of those working with civil law contracts remains significant (1,2 million in 2019) and decreases very slowly.

Biographical Trajectory and Biographical Work

In the PREWORK project, we paid attention to the consequences of precarization for the life strate-

gies of young people as one of the groups among the most affected by insecurity in contemporary Polish society. In the course of the research, it was observed that labor market precarity is experienced and defined as a biographical problem in particular by those who lack biographical, economic, and social resources and thus are exposed to greater precariousness. In this article, we examine that argument further, focus on the research subjects’ biographical experiences, and discuss, first, how the intersection of precariousness and precarity occur at the level of individual biography, contributing to a growing disorder and lack of control over one’s life. Second, we examine under what conditions and how can an individual affected by precariousness and precarity counteract them. In other words, acknowledging the difficulty (or hopelessness even) of precarious life and work situations, we would also like to explore the processes and practices of biographical resilience to them and conditions for overcoming them. The tools of biographical sociology by Fritz Schütze and, in particular, the concepts of biographical trajectory and biographical work appeared to be well-suited to address such research questions.

The biographical trajectory of suffering is one of the four biographical process structures distinguished in his writings by Schütze to denote the most important organizing principles of an individual life story or a narrators’ orientations towards the most important parts of their life (Schütze 2005:294). In doing sequential and comparative analyses of spontaneous oral narratives (in the context of autobiographical narrative interviews), Schütze discovered four biographical process structures, ways of experiencing one’s life, among them biographical trajectories of suffering and losing control (Schütze 2005:294). In discovering such processes of suf-

fering (by way of analyses of spontaneous autobiographical narratives), he was also sensitized by Glaser and Strauss's research on the "trajectories of dying" (Glaser and Strauss 1968). Schütze's concept of trajectory depicts "social processes structured by conditional chains of events that one cannot avoid without high costs, constant breaks of expectations, and a growing and irritating sense of loss of control over one's life circumstances" (Riemann and Schütze 1991:337).¹

The dynamics of a trajectory are connected with a nagging sense of losing control over one's life, being subject to overwhelming external circumstances, with growing alienation from the life world and oneself. Then, a person stops intentionally planning their everyday activities and more and more often reacts passively to external circumstances. An individual falls into an increasing existential abyss and has the feeling of being trapped or standing against the wall (Riemann and Schütze 1991; Waniek 2016). In this context, trajectory potential can be understood as the conditional framework for the gradual or fast emergence of a trajectory of suffering. A trajectory potential may develop due to illness or death of close friends and relatives, the experience of war or physical violence, other forms of abuse and lack of recognition, et cetera. In the context of precarity, as a potential source of the emergence of a trajectory, the structural inability to conduct one's career

following internal and external expectations can be mentioned, which under certain circumstances (which beg for in-depth exploration) may translate into other fields of biographical experience.

Schütze (2006) points out that, in the case of a trajectory potential, we can distinguish its two basic components: biographical vulnerability dispositions and a set of key adversities within the current life situation. At the same time, trajectory potentials play an important role in the course of the trajectory process, which consists of the following phases:

- The gradual accumulation of trajectory potentials;
- The sudden crossing of the protection wall against activation of the decrease or loss of a capacity for intentional action;
- Attempt to regain an unstable equilibrium;
- Destabilization;
- Breakdown in the organization of daily life and orientation towards oneself;
- Attempts at theoretical reworking;
- Attempts to cope and control the trajectory or escape from it (Riemann and Schütze 1991).

The phases indicated do not necessarily occur in every case of the biographical trajectory of suffering. Schütze (2012) also points out that various kinds of "deviations" and "transformations" may occur that can be carefully discovered in the reconstructive analysis of particular interviews. Waniek (2016:119) finds the sources of the abovementioned components of a trajectory potential in family relations in the first case (biographical vulnerability dispositions), and she explores the second aspect (a set of key adversities within the current life situation) in the mechanism of entering the labor market. In this sense, precarity can be seen as a salient source of

¹ Other process structures include: (1) biographical action schemes (describing "the intentional mode of relating to one's own identity and to one's own potential for construction and realization of certain plans of one's own life" [Schütze 1992:191]); (2) biographical metamorphoses ("processes of being confronted by the sudden emergence of some self-creative capacity which drastically changes one's outlook on life and the world" [Schütze 1992:191]); (3) institutional expectation patterns in which "persons are following up institutionally shaped and normatively defined courses of life, for example, careers in organizations or the family life cycle that opens up family life in the first part of adulthood" (Schütze 2008:11).

trajectory potentials. As a consequence of low and insecure earnings, lack of insurance, limited creditworthiness, and other issues related to precarious employment, young people face problems not only in the context of their occupational life but also in building stable relationships with their environment. It has been demonstrated that precarity can affect family and social relations and extend the process of entering adulthood by young people. In response to precarization, various ways of managing precarity occur. They range from its “normalization,” which is characterized as redefining uncertainty as a transitory career phase or accepting it as a “necessary” cost of autonomy and creativity, to its critique and individual and collective resistance against it.

In this article, normalization, critique, and resistance against precarity will be explored. It can be assumed that both individual and collective practices of managing precarity can limit trajectory potentials; yet, they are conditioned by (socio-)psychological and (socio-)economic factors. In the context of the former, the mechanism of biographical work can play an exceptionally salient role. As stated by Anselm L. Strauss (1993), virtually every form of a life story, whether written, spoken, or conceived, is a process of symbolic ordering of the events in which biographical work is (usually) involved. By recalling and adjusting concepts to explain the disorder of the past, which is done in the process of biographical work, we make sense of our lives. Biographical work as an element of reflection, ordering, or closing the history of life is connected with a process of redefining identity (Kaźmierska 2008:29). In the biographical narratives, one can see and observe their connection with the formation of the self-concept, the construction of identity (identity work), accompanied by the actual process of working through

the past in one’s biography (Golczyńska-Grondas 2012). It can be said that the activation of biographical work is a kind of response to life crises and difficult situations, unexpected, sudden, requiring some significant change in individual habits, lifestyles, or expectations. The need to initiate or intensify biographical work is linked to the (sometimes sudden) need to reorient one’s biography. As it tends to be a strenuous and time-consuming activity, it is reasonable and appropriate, according to Schütze (2008), to call this activity “work” (Betts et al. 2008).

In the moments of life crises, biographical work is a prerequisite for putting one’s history in order again under circumstances of cognitive and emotional chaos. In ordinary, non-crisis situations, it can be an activity undertaken on an ongoing basis, quickly, or even subconsciously while continuing other activities. The ability to undertake biographical work is linked to the course of biography and involves learning processes to a large extent, and depends on the structural and contingent barriers that are inherent to individuals (narrators) (Schütze 2008). In practice, biographical work is based on the mechanisms of recalling memories through autobiographical narration, during which the attribution of symbolic meanings to them takes place, placing them in a certain historical order of the self and comparing alternative possibilities for interpreting one’s history. Importantly for the methodology of biographical interviews, the mental and emotional activity of biographical work is formed and initiated in conversation (Mažeikienė 2012). Fritz Schütze (2008) notes that it is essential and usually constituted in dialogue with significant others and oneself. As Kaja Kaźmierska and Fritz Schütze (2013:134) argue, reflexive “engagement” with biographical work is a certain way of ordering the structure of narratives to bring out biographical processes. In the fol-

lowing sections of the article, we will introduce the case of Helena, a young woman experiencing precarity in the context of a small town in Lower Silesia, to explore the emergence of trajectory potentials at the intersection of working and private life and the ways of managing them.

Methodological Note

The case of Helena was chosen out of the sample of 63 biographical narrative interviews collected in the PREWORK project in 2016-2017. It has been earlier discussed by Mrozowicki and Trappmann (2020), who analyzed the relationships between precarious working lives and experiences beyond work. For the sake of the current article, there are three reasons behind the choice of the interview with Helena. First, her biography is one of the most precarious in the PREWORK collection concerning limited material, social, and cultural resources at her disposal. If biographical work can counterbalance the precariousness of Helena's situation and create a potential for individual and even collective awareness, it should also be present in other cases in which material and symbolic means to "immunize" oneself against the precarity (Lorey 2015) are more developed. Second, even though there is a growing body of biographical research on precarity in Poland, it often concerns precarious middle-classes (Haratyk et al. 2017; Waniek 2019). This article addresses the need for case studies of people representing the category of low-paid, low-educated, and low-skilled workers (Kozek, Kubisa, and Zieleńska 2017). Third, as mentioned earlier, the authors felt obliged to share some of the salient categories developed jointly with Fritz Schütze during a PREWORK project workshop in 2018.

In the PREWORK project, empirical data were collected with the use of a modified biographical nar-

rative interview method by Schütze (1983; 2008). Our way of conducting biographical narrative interviews and our analytical approach were shaped by the procedures developed by Schütze (1983; 2008), but we also made some modifications. Interviews started with an unstructured conversation before we asked informants to tell us their complete life stories (from childhood to the present moment). After the narrator had presented their narrative (which we did not interrupt), additional biographical questions followed that were focused on recalling events and experiences that were unclear (or implausible) in a more detailed way in the main story. In the third part, and this was the PREWORK project's modification of Schütze's original recommendations, a semi-structured interview guide was used to further explore informants' experiences of work, their images of decent work and a good life, their civic involvement (or the lack thereof), their class identities, the images of socio-economic order, and their plans. Interviews were collected with three categories of young (18-35) people: (1) workers with temporary employment and civil-law contracts, (2) those involved in various unpaid or low-paid traineeships, and (3) temporarily unemployed following a previous experience of a non-standard employment contract. Recruitment for interviews was based on personal contacts, but also proceeded via social media and trade unions. In the course of the analysis, new categories (e.g., participation in labor- and socio-political organizations) emerged as salient categories for sampling, in line with the logic of theoretical sampling.

In the article, we present the case analysis on Helena. In the first part, we followed the procedures of the sequential analysis as spelled out by Schütze and, in the second part, coding procedures developed by the (classic) grounded theory methodology

(Glaser and Strauss 1967; Glaser 1978). In the case of the former, the main goal of the analysis was to reconstruct the internal logic of the case as a combination of biographical process structures (Schütze 2005). It involved the following steps: a text sort differentiation aimed at reconstructing the communicative schemes of an interview; a sequential structural analysis designed to explore biographical process structures and other social processes; an analytical abstraction in the course of which an overall biographical structuring (*Gestalt*) as a sequence of biographical process structures was reconstructed (Schütze 2008). In the course of the analysis, we were also inspired by theoretical sensitivity developed during open coding and selective coding carried out on the entire sample of interviews (Trappmann et al. 2021).

The Case of Helena: An Introduction

Helena was born in 1997 in a small town (EM) in the Lower Silesia region in Poland into a family with two brothers; later on, her younger sister was born. Her mother was a hairdresser, and her father was an electrician. They came from the Greater Poland region, not far from Poznan, and have no close family in EM. At the moment of the interview, her mother was unemployed due to her poor health, and her father worked in a Czech factory near the border between Poland and the Czech Republic after many years of unemployment. Her family struggled with poverty, magnified by the problem of alcoholism of her father. During her childhood, Helena's parents did not show her much love. Since she was a teenager, it was the narrator's responsibility to look after her younger sister and her mother, who suffered from depression. Her father attempted to kill himself when she was ten years old, and one of her brothers committed suicide.

Helena attended primary school in EM. She claimed that she was expelled from gymnasium² in EM and had to attend school in another town because she and her brothers were stigmatized as troublemakers. Her education at the gymnasium combined general and vocational training, and she specialized in the training of a shop assistant. She mentioned her current plans to continue her education at the Academy of Physical Education³ in another region, yet she admitted that she lacked resources and family support to do so.

The narrator started working when she was 13 years old while attending school. She worked, without any contract, as a housekeeper, babysitter, and then shop assistant. She passed the money earned to her family. She had an apprenticeship during the entire school time as a shop assistant, and she mentions that she learned many things about the occupation. During her vacations, she also worked in a seaside town as a shop assistant. Then, she completed an internship co-funded by the Employment Office in a small local store in EM as a shop assistant. Next, she continued working with a civil law contract at the same place.

Helena did not mention her intimate relationships. She said that she was raped (by a person from her town) at the age of 17 and alluded to therapy that she underwent afterward. She complained that she got bogged down in her hometown, but she dreamt of living independently from her family.

² In Poland, the gymnasium was the lower secondary school; during 1999-2019, it educated young people aged 13-16; its completion was mandatory to start education in a high school, technical college, or basic vocational school; gymnasiums were closed on August 31, 2019, as a result of the 2017 reform of the education system.

³ In Poland, there are six physical education (sport) universities; all of them are public and have the rank of academies.

She had a boyfriend at the moment of the interview and thought about starting a family in the future. She spoke of herself as an adult, experienced, and responsible. She also mentioned that she was determined to achieve an easier life. Therefore, she worked hard for a living and dreamed of a brighter future.

A Biographical Case Analysis: Precariousness, Precarity, and Biographical Work

According to Fritz Schütze (2008), the analysis of a narrative interview should start with the phase of a formal textual investigation (focusing on a differentiation of the different schemes of communication—narration, argumentation, and description—and their functions in this context), which also includes taking into account how the interviewee understood the context of the interview and how they made sense of the opening question. In this phase, it is also important to self-critically look at one's interviewing. In Helena's case, a mutual understanding between her and the interviewers (three members of the research team, two females aged 40 and 26, and one male aged 40) was reached, and the informant started her story appropriately, that is, she went along with the request to tell her life history, did not merely feel obliged to go along with the interviewer's request, but ratified the action scheme of the interview and could get something out of it. In the first sentences, we can observe the pattern that will frequently be present in the whole narrative—the narrative communication scheme was densely intertwined with argumentative and descriptive parts:

[in response to the first question about her life story]
Of course, of course. In... yes. If I am to, uh, if I am to

start, it was here, here my life started, my whole life, so to say. Ach... everything started, in fact, in primary school. There was not such a point in my life in which I would believe that this is how my current life would look. I imagined everything differently. That I would study, that I would go to a sports school. That my life would be full of energy, uh, and joy in the first place. And a lot, a lot of optimism. And this approach to life, with a smile, with joy. Later, my problems started, already in school, in junior secondary school. Uh, I was expelled from school due to the fact that here, too, many people knew my family. My brothers were total troublemakers. And everybody thought that I was the bad one, that I was also able to fall so low that nobody would be able to help me get up again.

Helena started referencing primary school in which, as she claimed, her life began. It was only a figure of speech; however, it was significant that she chose that phase of her life for the opening statement. It can be interpreted as a turning point that was mentioned to demonstrate a possibility of an alternative path of her life in which she would have studied and attended the Academy of Physical Education—a university that specializes in sports sciences. Unfortunately, the idyllic vision could not have been fulfilled. Following a brief argumentative commentary, she moved back to the actual line of events in her educational career, which was far from her primary expectations. The pattern of moving back and forth between actual and imagined (or alternative) courses of biographical events was a unique feature of Helena's presentation in the interview. Even though it could have also been observed in other biographical narrative interviews, extended argumentative statements and theoretical comments almost entirely dominated the first part of the interview with Helena. When the narrator spoke about specific situations in her life, such references were marked by

an almost complete lack of time attributions, which gave the listeners the impression that they could have happened either recently or in early childhood. There were only scarce references to particular life encounters and interactions with other people. An important question is how to interpret such a way of telling one's life history? Helena finishes her narrative with a disintegrated narrative coda: there are many argumentative commentaries embedded in her narrative, and, at times, argumentation becomes dominant and tends to drown her narrative, as well.

In our opinion, the scarcity of narration in the interview with Helena may be explained in at least two ways. First, it could be seen as a result of complex trajectory potentials regarding precarious family relations, work experiences, and social relationships more broadly. Being entrapped in uncontrollable processes that resulted from the precariousness and precarity of Helena's life and work situations made it difficult for the narrator to chronologically order her biography. Its chaotic reconstruction mirrors the disorder of her actual life experiences. Second, it can be suggested that extended argumentative commentaries reflected Helena's biographical work through which she attempted to make sense of her predicaments and to reconstruct her identity affected by a biographical trajectory of suffering. While both interpretations can be seen as complementary, the first one is focused on Helena's incapacity to build a coherent identity, and the second on her continuous efforts to do so. Following the case analysis, the subsequent part of the article argues that despite super-precarious conditions, Helena retained her capacity to do biographical work, and thus the second hypothesis proves to have stronger explanatory power. Yet, Helena's effectiveness of doing biographical work for overcoming biographical predicaments remains limited due to a very low

level of all kinds of social, economic, cultural, and symbolic resources that are at her disposal.

Looking closer at the main ("spontaneous") part of the interview, we can observe how the actual and imagined courses of biographical events continue to shape the logic of her self-presentation. Having started with her school-related story, Helena began to narrate about her work experiences. The transition from education to work was connected with her transfer from general junior secondary school to a vocational school that combined education and occupational training (the informant does not clarify what type of school it was). She referred to it as an event beyond her control—a regrettable consequence of her family background and the misbehavior of her brothers. Since the rationale of that administrative decision is unknown, it can only be speculated that the lack of family recognition might not have been the only factor behind it. As a result, Helena unintentionally started a specific career path that eventually led her to work as a shop assistant.

I was transferred to a school in which I did junior secondary school and vocational school at the same time, and I can also say that I have no higher education. This was an ordinary junior secondary school, and the fact that I had professional training was another matter. I finished school, finished training to be the shop assistant that I am now. And... what else can I say here? Hmm, later I went for a traineeship. I finished that. There was a post-traineeship agreement, rather short, uh, but this was normal work, normal, normal conditions. Uh, and, how to say it, learning that this is the adult life. That these are the obligations of an adult. And, in fact, this is not, uh, these events are not always pleasant. Uh, many things happened, uh, like, in my family, this was an escape. Towards people. Uh, earlier, I was surrounded by a group of friends, but

they started to be against me. I started running away to work, lost all my friends, all my friends. Now I am left to myself. I work, go back home, sit at home. Ordinary, gray monotony. I only lack, I mean, only family, yes. Children, a husband. And, in fact, this is all. Uh, there are no, there is no entertainment. Hmm, so this life and these events would make more sense. Uh, even though I try to be a positive person, always smiling. Unfortunately, life kicks you, totally kicks you in the teeth. And life showed me that this is... that this is not... a fairytale. That this is, mostly this is a struggle. That is, we, people, we are like, let's say, proverbially, in a jungle. Everybody fights for survival. Everybody does it the way they can. Uh, not everybody manages, and everybody, the majority of young people, reach the bottom.

The above quotation shows how Helena combined different plots of her life story from the very beginning of her interview. She recalled the school transfer and admitted that it let her work as a shop assistant. However, she linked it with the phrase "learning that this is the adult life," which should be understood as an introduction to the story of the loss of meaningful and supportive social ties. In the quote, markers of precariousness can be found, including those related to her family ("many things happened...in my family"), fragile social networks (losing friends, lack of social support, isolation at home), and a blocked educational career. Yet, she does not elaborate in detail on the social processes that led to her disappointment and remain at the level of argumentative commentaries and generalizations, including those concerning the situation of young people in Poland. Her situation is framed in terms of a "social jungle" (Narojek 1982), a lack of trustful relationships, and the collective degradation of young people. In the further parts of the interview, all of those threads are mentioned in argu-

mentative sequences on the situation of herself and people like her in EM and Poland, more broadly.

The structure of the first part of Helena's interview can be described by the metaphor of a container in which subsequent trajectory potentials are layered. It is important to note that all of them, at some points in the narrator's life, impacted her biography and led to the unfolding of a biographical trajectory of suffering. Overall, the stake for Helena, meaning, the rationale for the actions she undertook, was to regain control over her life and find the resource of stability and safety.

After the education-related story, Helena went on to describe a complicated and hard to control situation in which the precariousness of her family life and the precarity at work were intertwined. She reconstructed the deep financial deprivation of her family and linked it with her need to find a job. It led her to extensive theoretical comments on "unrewarding" working conditions and relations with customers that were the sources of her constant disappointments and the feeling of humiliation. Once again, they were followed by a short narrative part related to the educational and economic exclusion of Helena and her family:

Even though I could say I am not proud of that, that I do not have the appropriate education, as a woman, yes. Everybody knows that the majority of women, some kind of, let's say, also have completed higher education of some kind. I, unfortunately, got blocked. And I had a choice. Either I go to school and have nothing to wear, nothing to wear, or even how to charge the stupid phone. To stay in touch with the more distant family or closer family. And going to work and being able to afford something. Even though, on the other hand, I work, I still cannot afford anything. It

is because I earn little this is completely unrewarding work. And, in fact, if somebody told me that they wanted to be a shop assistant, I would do all in my power to stop this person, so they don't get involved in it. Everything else but a shop assistant. Because this is... this is so monotonous, but unrewarding. People cannot be grateful to us, shop assistants, those who do everything so they can be served quickly and efficiently, so they are satisfied. And they are still able to make it difficult for us. Complain, insult us all the time... And, in fact, if somebody told me a few years back that I would be doing what I am doing now, all my life, uh, so far sacrificed myself for people, I would not believe them. Everybody thinks that, uh, work in the shop that is it. Warm, dry, there is no, no problem. But, here, in your head, everything gets destroyed. If you feel that you are trying, even though I do everything so people are satisfied with what I do. I still get stumbling blocks in my way. All the time, it is humiliation, insults all the time. And I am to smile and say: "Yes, you are right because you are right." There is no way for me to stand up to them.

The above-quoted passage allowed the narrator to demonstrate the contradictory nature of her work situation. She talks about being humiliated by customers, which is an isolating experience. Furthermore, in the next part of the interview, Helena reconstructed relations with her employer and work colleagues as "total exploitation." On the one hand, it was marked by a precarity trap due to limited earnings, a lack of recognition, and supportive social relations. Additionally, the necessity to start work early in her life was interpreted as the main reason behind abandoning her educational aspirations. On the other hand, it was work that let Helena perform her gendered role as a care provider ("adult woman") and the less traditional, but not atypical role of a young working-class woman who supports

her parents financially. That is mentioned in the subsequent parts of the quotation:

And because of that, my life so far was full, full of nerves, unpleasant situations, not nice, really upsetting events, which not everybody can manage, carry on their shoulders, right. But, everybody has a cross to bear. So far on my shoulders falls this obligation, that even though I am as young as I am, I have no family, I have no husband, I have no children, in my head, I have this feeling of being an adult woman as if I had my children, a husband, a family.

In Helena's narrative, precarious and alienating work partially became the space where she could have fulfilled her "family obligation"—reinterpreted religiously as a "cross to bear." In other words, biographical work on precarity helped the narrator find some source of internal strength in extremely insecure and alienating conditions, which can be connected to a specific sense of obligation related to female adulthood and family responsibilities.

The interpretive frame of sacrifice due to family obligations is crucial for the next part of the interview, in which Helena recalled more deeply the family relations and focused on her traumatic dealings with her father. The lack of recognition and support of her father were central to the narrator's ongoing efforts to prove her maturity through work. The theme of precarious family relations and the motif of work as an escape from her family (Piotrowski, Kaźmierska, and Waniek 2011) were interconnected:

In my life, I did not experience anything like, I don't know, my father telling me he was proud of me. He has never told me that. And that is why I ran away here. Some run away to books, read a lot of books, submerge in the world that, that is described in the

book. I run to work. Because I have no other option. I have no option to, I don't know, meet somebody who understands me. Who can grasp me, uh, my way of thinking, my experience would be at least a bit similar to this person's.

Helena narrated about her father in the context of the lack of recognition for efforts to provide for her family. While work was a space of retreat from her fragmented family, it did not offer what the narrator sought for, namely, meaningful social relations (friends), support, and understanding. As a result, it was redefined as another kind of biographical trap. In the next parts of the interview, there are more and more references to how she increasingly suffered in her relationship with her father. The story of his suicide attempts led Helena to narrate, in a very restricted manner, about her attempted suicide. It needs to be mentioned that it was not the only suicide-related story in Helena's family. She had a brother who committed suicide a few years before the interview. The part in which she recalled that situation was very similar to her current situation. In the fragments concerning the relations with her father, Helena also mentioned her psychiatric treatment and went deeper into the description of her psychological condition:

I was, went to psychiatrists, psychologists, took psychoactive drugs, nootropic drugs, because of that I got neurosis. That led to neurological problems, psychiatric issues, everything started to fall on my head, on my shoulders. I started falling apart. But, beyond that, I am mentally really down, I try to show that it is not there. That I am not a person who went through, who saw, uh, continuous fights at home, who was mentally destroyed, "You are such and such, you are the worst," insulted, really, even by people, who... you would not want to hear it from your father, and that

was a common daily thing. They would tell me, for example, my mother never told me anything like that. She would not be able to utter it. I can bet with you that she would not be able to do it. But... for example, my father never had any scruples, no remorse. Even when, when he told me that he never wanted me. That I was a child, simply... not his. That he never loved me. Yes, he was able to say that. He was able to call me the worst names. He was capable of saying that if... if I managed to do what I wanted, it would be for the best. To hear that from your father, it hurts more from your mother, but from your father, that is equally important, because if it was not for my father, I would not be here, right. That is why, that is why things that happened in my, you could say, childhood, even though I am still a child, and I am not ashamed of that. I do not want to pretend that, God knows, I am an adult and all that. That, I think, caused me to decide to run away to work. Because I have contact with people and I see people every day, not everybody is nice. But, I am among people, I am not closed within myself, I do not think about what hurts, what my problems are, but I think that when I am among people, I have to smile. And, uh, as they say, to put on a brave face. Show that everything is OK, that I am an OK person. And, and, in fact, nothing can destroy me. Nothing can destroy me.

In response to psychological problems, Helena sought both the professional help of psychiatrists and supportive social relations at work. As she mentioned in the later parts of the interview, she could not afford private psychiatric consultancy due to limited financial resources, so she decided to discontinue therapy. The social environment at work also proved to be unhelpful; for instance, despite serious psychiatric problems, Helena admitted that she could not take sick leave because her boss would be "mad" at her. Vulnerability dispositions developed at home,

including the lack of recognition of the narrator's value by her father, blocked her biographical identity formation, and scarce institutional support (intervention of educational institutions being limited to moving Helena to another school for "difficult kids") made the narrator accept her precarious work environment as the only available escape from general life precariousness. Lacking the support of other people and institutions, such as her school, the local employment office, and the social welfare center, Helena could only rely on her biographical work to regain at least appearances of control ("a brave face") and restore the source of inner strength. The conviction that "nothing can destroy her" may sound unrealistic, but it seemed to well-reflect Helena's attitude towards her biography, in which she was the only source of agency in her life.

The biographical work of Helena had a gendered character not only due to her reference to a violent and uncaring father as a negative reference point for her biographical identity construction. It was also because it helped her situate her problems in the context of women's fate in general, represented by the story of her mother. Comparing herself and her mother, Helena saw many similarities, including the danger of being trapped in abusive and suffocating family relations reproduced by a strong, moral obligation to permanently and unconditionally help family members and care for them. Recalling the dramatic events of domestic violence perpetrated by her drunken father, the narrator explicitly refers to collective, gendered categories:

He used to drink, notoriously, uh, there were arguments at home, not only shouting, violence as well. Uh, it is not easy to watch it and wake up every day with a smile going to school. Or, I do not know, watching your mother at night when she sleeps, so fa-

ther would not hurt her. Because that... because I was also a witness of how my father tried to suffocate my mother. I, in fact, as a small child that did not understand anything, because I did not know life at all, and I did not know how brutal it could be and how many unpleasant things a woman can encounter. Not so much a person as such, but, in fact, a woman, what life a woman can have, be kicked by it in the teeth, and how many unpleasant things can happen.

The story of her father's violence at home and "unpleasant things" a woman can encounter serves as a background for another, even more traumatic, narrative—the story of the rape Helena experienced two years before the interview. That devastating experience had been faded out to some extent by the narrator, but was so crucial that she could not miss it entirely. First, she only mentioned it with one sentence in the context of the loss of contact with her friends who "turned away" from her not long ago. She did not specify details of losing friends and did not yet refer to the fact of being raped. However, she stressed that they started to be "against her." Next, she returned to it after she was describing her relations with her father. In that moment of the interview, she mentioned the "unpleasant event" that happened among friends that we can connect with the previous description of losing friends:

Because I have already... despite my young age, I have lived through so many things. The difficult climate at home. Among friends, so to say, a very unpleasant event that I do not wish any woman to go through, what I went through. It was, it was not so long ago, only two years ago.

Eventually, she narrated it in a more detailed way in the final part of the first part of the interview, which combined with the coda structure:

I dealt with problems because despite coming from this and other family problems at 17 I was raped. And that was such an experience that... I could not live normally. Nobody would want to go through that. And even more so, I was alone at the time. There was nobody I could tell about it, who would help me, would go with me to a stupid doctor. To learn, simply, if everything was ok. I already accepted that what happened, happened. But, later, when there were moments I was tormented by that person. And blackmailed. By a person from EM. It was not easy. Keep seeing the perpetrator, the person who hurt me. That is why I would do everything to run away from here. But, I cannot, I have nowhere to go. I am blocked from all sides. My mother, even though she sees that everything hurts me, memories come back, I cannot sleep at night, there is no clear thinking, sober thoughts, like. I do not think normally about life, but all the time only: "Helena, you still have time, you are young. Work a bit, you will save some money, you will go where you want, start everything afresh. You will cut all this off, you will not see the people who hurt you." But, it is always like this that if I do not give them money, they will take it from me. One way or the other. What else can I say?

It needs to be highlighted that the story of the rape was preceded by a longer fragment that started with recalling her father's statement that he did not want Helena to be born. She recalled her mother as a character similar to her ("good heart, soft bottom") and passed to a longer argumentation on people's disgracefulness. She eventually commented again on the harm she experienced from her relatives. In the final part of the coda, she once more referred to the choices she had made and which she regretted, such as not continuing her education. In a way similar to the beginning of the interview, she revealed an alternative vision of her life in which she would

spend her time like a "normal teenager" enjoying time with her friends. Once again, she alluded to premature adulthood, the lack of a loving and supporting family, and forced self-reliance ("I learned that nobody will help me if I cannot deal with it myself").

In this context, the traumatic experience of being raped at the age of 17 represented a peak of the biographical trajectory of suffering and the key to the understanding of Helena's entire story. She revealed that event at the very end of the first part of the interview. As a result of her reflexivity, which was, most likely, reinforced by a psychological (or psychiatric) treatment, Helena developed self-awareness of the negative feedback loops of her precarious family life, vulnerable social relations, and precarious work. The psychiatric treatment itself is only briefly mentioned and was not further elaborated by the narrator. Most importantly, it is not recalled in a positive light as an event that helped Helena develop a new sense of her life, but rather an event that contributed to further problems related to taking "psychoactive" drugs.

I was, went to psychiatrists, psychologists, took psychoactive drugs, nootropic drugs, because of that I got neurosis. That led to neurological problems, psychiatric issues, everything started to fall on my head, on my shoulders.

The narrator does not consciously link her capacities to reflect upon her life to psychological or psychiatric treatment. Moreover, the reconstructed, very chaotic character of her biographical narration also suggests that the psychological support was not fully successful in providing her with a coherent sense of self-identity. On the other hand, contrary to the suggestions coming from earlier studies (Schütze

2015), the treatment has not completely blocked Helena's capacity to develop a critical reflection about her situation. She reflected on and recognized her precarity trap in terms of "being blocked from all sides," lacking solidarity, social relations, and supportive institutions in particular, in the moments of deep biographical crises in which social support was needed. Having been raped, Helena felt abandoned not only by her friends but also by the local community that accepted the presence of the perpetrator and excluded the victim. The local community did not punish the perpetrator. That traumatic experience stigmatizes Helena, not the perpetrator. Perhaps the most pessimistic overtone appears in the last sentences of the first part of the interview. Her mother's advice to save money was right, but Helena did not delude herself—all money she would earn would eventually be taken by her family.

The case of Helena was one of the most extreme examples of the intersection of precarity and precariousness in the sample of interviews collected in the PREWORK project. Yet, even in this case, some positive consequences of biographical work can be observed. It is not known what the origin of Helena's biographical work is. We suppose that it is a derivative of contacting a psychiatrist and psychologist, and it results from her natural abilities. First, biographical work helped the narrator recognize the limitations and contradictions of precarious work as a strategy of coping with precarious life, which can be seen as a salient aspect of the "roads to awareness," to social and public discourses, and socio-political activation. Second, it made it possible to define some of Helena's problems as collective ones, experienced by young people or women. Third, as it appeared in particular in the final part of the interview, reflexivity enabled the narrator to redefine her biographical resources in positive terms, as

something that can be used in the future; a potential marker of overcoming a biographical trajectory of suffering. Asked about her plans, Helena mentioned her dream of becoming a kindergarten teacher. That plan does not seem realistic, but is not impossible. She said:

I will surely enjoy life one day. That is, uh, now that is collecting experiences. So, in the future, when I have a problem, I know how to deal with it. And what is my strong suit, and what is not, right? We all have them. Also, sensitive points, but not everybody manages to discover them.

Based on the story of Helena, and similar stories in the PREWORK project, some other, more general features of the "roads to awareness" of precarious workers can be identified: (a) questioning and delegitimizing insecure, low-paid jobs and abusive workplace relationships: a realistic definition of the precariousness of individual work situation; (b) defining precarity as a collective rather than individual problem concerning intersecting social inequalities along with class, gender, age, and other lines; (c) starting voluntary social support and counseling work in one's social environment (e.g., willingness to support other people in a difficult situation). The existence of the latter approach is visible in Helena's answer to the question about the social group she would identify herself with; yet, she did not elaborate on activities she undertook:

Interviewer: Listen, and with all the baggage, who you are. With all your person, with what you do, what was, what your past was, with your aspirations, taking into account everything, where would you place yourself... in the group division that you mentioned, where are you in that division?

Helena: Right, in that, in that group of people who are able to do something for somebody. A person who, despite that I have my own life, my problems, I am trying to help others, get involved in other people's lives. Even though I cannot deal with my problems, I am able to deal with other people's problems, which is sick. That is in my, in my opinion, and it is, in fact, that, that is sick. I cannot deal with myself, with my problems, but with the problems of, I don't know, a friend, or, I don't know, somebody from the family. I advise, I tell them, even though I have no experience.

In the interview with Helena, the next step, namely, (d) starting a socio-political gospel that would translate into new political or social movements was not visible, and the entire story was dominated by the search for "escape" from biographical suffering. That is the reference to the discourse of the need for collective mobilization. Yet, it is worth mentioning that some forms of collective organizing of precarious workers did emerge in other cases in the Polish sample of precarious young workers.

Conclusions

In the article, biographical work in the story of a precarious young shop assistant, Helena, was scrutinized employing the textually focused biographical analysis of her life course and current experiences, based on a biographical narrative interview conducted with her. Following the interpretive sociological tradition by Schütze (2008:249), biographical work "consists of shaping one's own personal identity by referring to oneself" in several dimensions, such as "autobiographical recollection, reflection about alternative interpretations of one's life-course tendencies, self-critical attempts of understanding one's own misconceptions of oneself and self-chosen or self-erected impediments, a circumspect

assessment of impediments superimposed by others and by structural conditions, imagining future courses of life that support the overall 'gestalt' of the unfolding biographical identity as essentially one's own." As documented in the analysis, Helena's biographical work contains two types of reflections: on current working and living conditions, as well as on individual socio-biographical process structures and features. In the narrative rendering of Helena's autobiography, her practices of narrating, describing, and evaluating her life situation and precarious working conditions were studied. In line with earlier arguments of Castel (2000) on the twofold nature of precarity as economic uncertainty and social disembedding, precarious life situation, and the precarity work traps were intertwined as reference points for shaping the fragile biographical identity of the narrator. The analysis confirmed the observations of earlier studies that the scarcity of meaningful and supportive social networks and limited institutional support makes managing work-related precarity difficult (Manolchev et al. 2018; Mrozowicki and Trappmann 2020).

Unlike the studies focused on the macro-structural aspects of precarity as the mechanism of class formation (Standing 2011; Wright 2016), this article offered a micro-sociological exploration of the precariousness and precarity as conditions of individual life and work experiences. The analysis of Helena's story demonstrated, first, the fragility and vulnerability of a personal life course burdened with cumulated features of precariousness, that is, a life course dominated by the biographical process structure of trajectory and the typical threats associated with structural precarity work traps that cause a loss of trust, difficulties in defining and interpreting complex interactions and situations. Second, it showed the potential for developing and actively building

a critical and creative biographical identity; that was combined with self-confident self-esteem that was partly due to structuring one's biography, that is, biographical work. Third, the case reconstruction demonstrated how the narrator's biographical work was connected with a potential of undertaking a kind of relational work—instead of isolated individual actions—a relational work of shaping and improving the general working and living conditions of a young woman. It was visible in the declared readiness of Helena to “do something” for other people and engage in dealing with problems of other people, in particular her family, but also her friends. As part of that process, Helena attempted to regain confidence in herself and actively explored her vulnerability, general fragility, and uncertainty (precariousness), and that was the core of her biographical work.

Fourth, and finally, the case of Helena revealed the possibility and relevance of biographical work even in the most difficult socio-economic circumstances. It can be assumed that were it not for her persistent argumentation, reflection, or commentary, Helena's biography would be emotionally unbearable for her. Thanks to the constant return to certain themes (the obligation to cope with the precarious world, physical and emotional violence and abuse, the responsibility towards loved ones, caring for siblings), Helena found a meaning for her suffering. Importantly, the struggle with the trajectory of suffering did not, in her case, preclude work (perhaps still preliminary and impossible to realize fully) on a biographical action scheme, which would finally allow the dreams outlined in the alternative visions of her life to come true. Proposing an empirically grounded conceptualization of the “roads to awareness” of precarious young workers in place of abstract debates on the “precariat” as a new social class, this article can also

be seen as a contribution to sociological imagination (Mills 1967) that seeks to understand the sources of individual problems in socio-structural and institutional processes affecting individual biographies. In that way, the article goes beyond the existing conceptualizations of the emergence of the precariat as the result of political mobilization by various “external” political forces, including populist social movements and political parties (Standing 2011). Instead, it explored in detail “internal,” subject-driven factors and emphasized the relevance of biographical work, its potential, and limitations for the emergence of critical consciousness.

Going beyond Helena's case alone, it is important to emphasize the relativity of the category of precarity as objectively harmful or biographically burdening to individuals without any rescue. It may also be one of the few ways to emancipate people affected by precariousness beyond work. Precarious work can be an escape from precariousness, and that is what the case of Helena shows. However, the escape from precariousness by undertaking insecure and low-paid jobs presents—in particular in a longer perspective—a risk of being trapped in a situation of biographical trajectory. In this context, there is an urgent need for institutional intervention to help the precarious youth, like Helena, in their transitions to adulthood, gaining independence from their family, and entering the labor market. The analysis demonstrated that precarity might also be seen as the result of institutional failure to provide such support.

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Parental Technology Governance: Teenagers' Understandings and Responses to Parental Digital Mediation

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Abstract: Research on parental mediation of children's online engagements situate historically long-standing anxieties within the dynamics of present-day information communications technologies (i.e., concerns over new "cyber risks," as well as opportunities). Yet, there remains a lack of emphasis on children's reactions to and experiences with parental strategies and responses. In the current article, we highlight research involving semi-structured focus groups (n=35) with Canadian teenagers (n=115). We highlight themes directly related to parental digital mediation, including the role of ICTs in driving addictive behaviors, social connection, differences in parental responses between sons and daughters, and differences concerning age and birth order. Disrupting cultural discourses of young people who lack agency in relation to their use of ICTs, our discussions with teens reveal qualified support, even degrees of sympathy, for parental efforts to restrict access and use of digital technologies, but illuminate multifaceted reasons for resistance: their vital role not only for social connection but access to crucial information and knowledge.

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Since early 2020, the rapid shift to online schooling, increased time of video gaming, use of social network sites, and so on has amplified risks and parental anxieties linked to young people's online activities (Livingstone 2020; Nagata, Abdel Magid, and Gabriel 2020; Orgilés et al. 2020). The "limitless victimization risk" (Hinduja and Patchin 2009:24) the Internet promotes often produces anxieties in parents and guardians, which are compounded upon other, more longstanding anxieties concerning adolescence (Livingstone 2009; Livingstone and Blum-Ross 2021). Parenting practices and understandings need to be situated within wider shifts that have occurred at least in part due to moral panics over youth and technology (e.g., concerning sexting, see: Marker 2011; Jeffery 2018), and changes in expectations regarding where children play and socialize; namely, a shift from unsupervised outdoor spaces to highly regulated spaces online (boyd 2014; Livingstone and Sefton-Green 2016; Vickery 2017). Youth are also frequently understood as placing their social and psycho-emotional development at risk by engaging in inappropriate and harmful conduct online (Gabriel 2014; Jeffery 2021). However, often in stark contrast with media-hyped headlines about cyberbullying's ubiquity (Wall 2021), "Facebook murders," and other sensationalistic cybercrimes perpetrated by youth,

researchers frequently report most youth have not experienced direct victimization from cyberbullying or sexting, and most benefit from the *opportunities* information communications technologies (ICTs) enable for social connection, education, social activism, and "digital citizenship" (Livingstone 2008; Hinduja and Patchin 2014; Jenkins et al. 2018).

Societal discourses of new digital technologies often feature paradoxical representations of young people as both agentic creators and technologically savvy digital citizens, and vulnerable to a plethora of risks entailed through accessing ICTs (sometimes with the same sources, see: Wall 2021; cf. Spencer 2005). That applies especially to social media platforms and includes risks from access to wide, anonymous, and invisible audiences, the reproducibility and permanency of what is posted online, and potential privacy breaches, aggression, and harm that may ensue (boyd 2014).

Regardless of the "irrationality" of moral panics and evidence regarding the positive draws of technology, many parents feel pressured from multiple sources to adopt a variety of governance practices to help protect the well-being of their children as they navigate online spaces (Fisk 2016; Wall 2021). The emergence of what has been called "intensive par-

enting” involves pressure on “good” parents (especially mothers) to be perpetually vigilant with their children; a pressure reinforced through a wider neoliberal framework where responsibility for children’s efficacious socialization rests “downloaded” to parents—as opposed to previous eras with greater emphasis on the welfare state (Hays 1996; see also Garland 1996; Loader 2006). The need for research on parental mediation strategies and understandings of the contexts of their use is obviated, with the middle class and affluent children spending more time at home and online, for wide-ranging pursuits in education, socialization, and entertainment in comparison to previous generations (Livingstone and Blum-Ross 2021); dynamics that are, no doubt, amplified due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Mediation may include verbally checking what children are doing online and maintaining ongoing lines of communication, surreptitious use of web-monitoring software (or “spyware”), or engaging in punishments for bad behavior, which include either restriction or removal of phones, tablets, Internet access, screen time, et cetera. Children are to be “out-smarted” by parents anxiously wading in “uncharted” technological “territory” (Wall 2021:8).

Yet, what is often less pronounced in research is *knowledge regarding how parental digital mediation is being received by children and youth themselves*. Our research centers on the voices of teenagers, highlighting their perceptions and responses to parental anxieties regarding online addiction and their practices of technological mediation, including restrictions and punishments limiting or barring access to social media, phones, and so on. We highlight findings from qualitative interviews with Canadian teenagers, with several overarching questions: What are teens’ perceptions of parental mediation and governance? What are their expe-

riences when they first receive smartphones, and how does that relate to parental mediation? What are teens’ perceptions of how parents regard gender, birth order, and personality as it relates to online engagement, technological access, and mediation? We proceed by highlighting literature related to parental mediation and surveillance, as well as concerns often centered on the addictive draw of ICTs, with particular attention to dynamics related to age and gender.

The Neoliberal Digital Parent & The Neglected Voices of Children

Portability and early adoption of digital devices, sometimes from infancy, means children start to use mobile digital tools as part of their daily routines (e.g., homework, checking the news, while conversing, or before bedtime [Benedetto and Ingrassia 2020]). For many families, the ubiquity of access to high-speed Internet and an array of devices (e.g., smartphones, tablets, computers), coupled with anxieties about online dangers, incentivizes parents to mediate their children’s online activities. Media discourses often act to exacerbate anxieties and engender moral panics by reifying a view of youth as invariably naive and susceptible to being lured by the harmful consequences of technologies often presented as mysterious and dangerous (boyd 2014; Fisk 2016; Wall 2021). These “Frankensteinian” concerns are projected onto parents who are presented with mixed messages—simultaneously to be perpetually vigilant over their children’s technology use but also, when children are older, to “let off the gas” to allow teens to internalize responsibilities for themselves and regulate, prudentially, their behaviors (Adorjan and Ricciardelli 2019). As Wall (2021:11) found regarding Canadian media and governmental discourses, conflicting messages are themselves

related to media representations framing youth “as being vulnerable (but also potentially deviant and dangerous), passive, lacking agency and judgment, and malleable.”

Parental “omnipresence” (Nelson 2010; Ranson 2018) and the “downloaded” responsibility from governments onto parents themselves to safeguard children’s safety and security online is itself driven by wider neoliberal logics of self-regulation. That logic spotlights potential parental agency in producing good (i.e., economically productive) children *through* obfuscation of wider social structures and processes that play an arguably larger role in shaping children’s subjectivities (Fisk 2016; Livingstone and Sefton-Green 2016; Wall 2021; see discussion below). Conducting focus groups with parents in the US, Fisk (2016:126) discovered that parents imposed upon each other a moral standard of “good parenting,” positioning parents who did not take up online surveillance of their children as “bad” and “disinterested.” In similar Canadian research, focus group participants revealed parents often feel “pressured to take any steps they could to keep their children safe, including subjecting them to constant monitoring” (Johnson 2015:339; see also Steeves 2014).

Some teens may, grudgingly, accept the need for their parents to “monitor” their online activities (see: Adorjan and Ricciardelli 2019), though teens themselves and increasingly researchers distinguish between more and less intrusive forms of parental mediation. The use of the term “parental mediation” is most relevant to the context of our research because it not only refers to parental management of and restrictions on children’s media use but also, as previous scholarship notes, encompasses the conversations, strategies (Nathanson

1999; Valkenburg et al. 1999), and monitoring activities (Kerr and Stattin 2000) that parents implement (Livingstone and Helsper 2008). For instance, parents may effectively mediate their children’s online actions through verbal check-ins and active dialogue or more intrusive and undisclosed surveillance like the use of “cyber safety” applications that often trace social media posts and followers (Stattin and Kerr 2000; Racz and McMahon 2011). Perhaps unsurprisingly, teens often abjure the latter, seeing parental reliance on intrusive “spyware” as fostering distrust and besmirching open communication (Adorjan and Ricciardelli 2019).

Despite omnipresent concerns regarding cyberbullying, sexting, hacking, and other forms of online harm and aggression, parents often express relatively more (albeit everyday) concerns about the long-term behavioral and psychosocial impacts of addiction to ICTs (Adorjan and Ricciardelli 2021; Jeffery 2021). In response to concerns, parents may track their children’s screen time, especially of younger children, to prevent excessive use and addiction to popular sites like YouTube and TikTok. A nationally representative survey in the US of 2326 parents with children aged eight and younger revealed parental concern that ICTs, including television, computers, and mobile devices, all have a negative impact on their children’s physical activity; the most significant negative outcome attributed to technology in the study (Wartella et al. 2013). Shin’s (2015) interviews with parents (primarily mothers) in Singapore reveal largely positive views on the impacts of the Internet, with some concerns over addictive use tempered by their view of the effectiveness of parental regulation.

Age. Studies examining the influence of age on parental mediation and reception from children,

especially those that sample both parents and children, find younger children are more receptive to parental mediation (Cabello-Hutt, Cabello, and Claro 2018). Active parental mediation tends to dissipate as children age, especially into their late teens. Though surveillance and mediation are distinct, various parental mediation styles of children's media use involve some form of surveillance, whether overt or covert (Holloway 2017). Benedetto and Ingrassia's (2020:8) overview of research on digital parenting concludes that "active mediation strategies more often are adopted with younger children, whereas restrictive mediation fades with older [children] and adolescents." Sanders and colleagues (2016), who sampled 615 parents with children ranging from early childhood (3-7 years old), middle childhood (8-12 years old), and teenagers (13-17 years old), found the adoption of technology-related strategies was associated with less screen time for younger children, and to a lesser extent—children in mid-childhood. They note, "at least for young children, screen time may best be managed through rules and enforcement strategies around technology use in the home, guided by parents who utilize warmth and clear communication with their children" (Sanders et al. 2016:645). The general pattern is most parents minimize mediation strategies as their children enter their mid-teen years, suggesting the expectation is for mid-teenage youth to be relatively independent and "self-steering." These perspectives highlight the relationship between adolescent age and parental mediation. Our study advances that literature by focusing on *teen perspectives* on the different strategies they report that their parents employ to mediate their technology use, their views regarding how age impacts parental mediation strategies, especially concerning siblings, and how youth respond to parental strategies related to age.

Gender. Some researchers have examined the relationship between gender dynamics and parental mediation of online activities. Although findings are largely inconclusive, some variance exists between those who do not find any differences in parental strategies between sons and daughters (Livingstone and Helsper 2008; Lee 2013) and others who find sons to receive restrictions more than daughters (Eastin, Greenberg, and Hofschire 2006). The latter finding may relate in part to societal perceptions that male teens are more likely than female to engage in risky online behaviors, explained by individual characteristics such as sensation seeking (Lau and Yuen 2013; Notten and Nikken 2016). Some also argue that male teens are more likely to be "addicted" to the Internet than female teens, and children with Internet addiction have lower positive parental support and higher negative parental control (Li et al. 2014). At the same time, parental concerns over online safety and security tend to center on daughters more than sons, for example, meeting strangers online (boyd and Hargittai 2013). Likely influencing parental concerns is the gendered marketing of risks to parents, which play a role in wider moral panics over youth accessing ICTs. For instance, some mobile advertisements focus on father-daughter surveillance discourse, with daughters portrayed as at-risk and parental monitoring as the expected norm (Taylor and Rooney 2016). As we noted in our review of literature on the impacts of age, the previous studies mentioned here either lack or provide a limited account of *teenage views* on the impacts of gender on parental mediation of their digital access and use.

As indicated, most research on parental mediation of their children's online activities, understandably, centers on parents themselves. The work of Catherine Jeffery (2020; 2021) makes significant

contributions to parental mediation literature but lacks a focus on children's views. Wall's (2021) review of Canadian media and governmental discourses directed at parents aligns well with similar research in the US conducted by Fisk (2016). Yet, societal discourses often position youth as lacking agency in response to their decisions regarding technology adoption and use (Wall 2021). There is a need for research to attend to youth voices that does not presume agency nor lack of agency but explores their reactions to and experiences with parental mediation; specifically, youth's reactions to parental regulation of access to technology and punishments for bad behavior, such as removal of technologies (e.g., phones, etc.). The need is especially great for qualitative research geared towards unpacking the meanings and contexts of children's experiences from their perspective (see: boyd 2014; Bailey and Steeves 2015; Fisk 2016; Livingstone and Sefton-Green 2016; Adorjan and Ricciardelli 2019). The work of Livingstone and Sefton-Green (2016) does capture how youth conceptualize various aspects of their identities, as well as the meaningful connections in their everyday lives—at school, at home, online, et cetera. Although they dedicate a chapter of their book to youth responses to parental practices as they cultivate relationships online and offline and maintain privacy from the public, there are analytic directions left to pursue, such as views regarding effective and ineffective practices and questions regarding youth age and gender. Our research, therefore, extends, in part, Taylor and Rooney's (2016) empirical study conducted with youth in the UK, exploring their views on the impacts of modern-day forms of surveillance on their daily lives. While we focus on teen responses to parental *surveillance* elsewhere (Adorjan and Ricciardelli 2019), here we widen our analytic focus to include a range of mediation practices, including

restrictions on screen time to combat “addiction,” restrictions on technology use and access, as well as teens' perceptions and responses to the impacts of age and gender on parental digital mediation and surveillance.

In the current article, we highlight research involving semi-structured focus groups with Canadian teenagers examining, in the wider project, their experiences with ICTs, cyber-risk, and parental, as well as school responses. We highlight themes directly related to parental mediation, including the role of ICTs in driving addictive behaviors, social connection, differences in parental responses between sons and daughters, and differences concerning age and birth order. Our discussion reviews key findings with an emphasis on the context of social connection for teenagers and includes reference to future directions, especially considering the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and study limitations.

Methods

Focus groups are still relatively rare in “cyber”-based studies of teens when compared to large quantitative surveys, especially those centered on cyberbullying (Agatston, Kowalski, and Limber 2007; Vandebosch and Van Cleemput 2008; Allen 2012). In the current study, we provide knowledge from teens' words, which will be useful for parents, educators, teens themselves, and others interested in the role that ICTs play in family dynamics. Focus groups are useful for unpacking the “situated character” of experience within the “practical and mundane contexts” of people's everyday lives (Sparks, Girling, and Loader 2001:888; see also Stewart, Shamdasani, and Rook 2007) because the dynamic group interactions and discussions

generate knowledge that extends beyond attitudes and opinions (Morgan 1997). Vandebosch and Van Cleemput (2008), for instance, chose to examine cyberbullying using focus groups. They expected that the interaction among youngsters about a conversation topic that is part of their everyday (social) life—namely, ICT—would reveal detailed information about their concrete Internet and mobile phone practices and their individual and group norms and values concerning electronic communication (Vandebosch and Van Cleemput 2008:500). Ideally, focus group discussions progress in directions controlled by participants more than moderators (Madriz 1997), and as such, garner a “certain ecological validity” illuminating the lived experiences of participants (Stewart et al. 2007:39). That is especially important for groups involving youth, who often are challenged to find a platform for their voice (cyberspace being one such platform).

Our sample emerged from a purposive, snowball sample design, drawing on initial contacts from participating schools and university undergraduate classes, as well as referrals made from these initial contacts. A total of 35 focus groups were held with 115 teenagers (aged 13-19; average age 15). The groups averaged 3.3 participants, with a minimum of two and a maximum of five. We aimed to have groups of greater than two (akin more to a group discussion than a focus group *per se*); however, that was not always possible (e.g., some scheduled groups of students at a participating school occurred on a “snow day,” with fewer students showing up). We also kept groups to a maximum of five to help prevent the problem of under- or over-participation among members (Morgan 1997).

The focus groups were between 30 to 120 minutes in length, conducted by Adorjan and Ricciardelli, in

addition to trained research assistants. Participating schools were located in an urban region of Western Canada, as well as rural Atlantic regions. Ethics approvals from school districts were obtained before schools were approached (i.e., through school principals). Two “pseudo-regions” will be referred to concerning focus group locations: Cyber City, referring to the Western, urban location, and Cyberville, referring to the rural Atlantic region. We conducted 15 focus groups in Cyber City, with the remaining 20 conducted in Cyberville. In total, 67 female and 48 male students participated in the study. While ethnic minorities were included in the sample, the majority of participants self-identified as White. Most groups were held with teens of similar ages and gender (e.g., a group of male teens, 13 and 14 years old). The sampling stratification strategy was designed to mitigate problems with participants who may feel threatened by others older than themselves or uncomfortable disclosing experiences in coed groups (Morgan 1997).

Analysis of focus group transcriptions applied an inductive, comparative approach that remained initially tentative regarding any substantive or theoretical conclusions (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Concepts and theories emerged from the focus groups’ dynamic discussions. Data analysis proceeded with the use of NVivo qualitative analysis software. Coding allowed for comparisons to be made both within individual focus group discussions, as well as across groups, for example, to gauge differences between all male and female groups, between Cyber City and Cyberville (Morgan 1997). Validity of the coding was assessed over time through regular research meetings between the investigators, which ensured thematic development emerged consistently and reliably, as well as a hermeneutically attuned validity of the data (Twinn 1998).

Results

In the current results, we highlight both parental mediation motivations from the perspective of teens and the different strategies teens report that their parents employ to regulate their technology use. Despite popular depictions of child-parent antagonism, especially when it comes to parental restrictions placed on technology access and use, we found degrees of sympathy, or at least begrudging empathy, that teens have concerning parental digital mediation. We unpack how teens interpret the rules and regulations parents impose around technology (e.g., smartphones, iPads, iPods) as restrictive but well-intended (e.g., protecting eyesight, sleep considerations). We also discuss forms of hidden contestation, including “workarounds” employed by our teens, referring to the different ways teens circumvent or adhere to their parents’ rules, as they use their technology for social connectivity and practical reasons as much as for entertainment. Next, we provide insight into how teens respond to parental restrictions on, or the removal of, their technological devices as a punitive response to youth behaviors. We continue by exploring teens’ views regarding how age (including birth order) and gender impact parenting strategies, especially concerning siblings.

Parental Motivations for Online Mediation and the Role of Digital “Addiction” and Social Connectivity

In several of our focus group discussions with teens, participants discussed their interpretation of their parents’ motivations for restricting screen time. One group of four 15-year-old females from Cyber City were allowed devices in their bedrooms, but they recalled previous restrictions based on pa-

rental concerns for their eyesight. Fatima says, “it wasn’t so much a concern for me getting bullied or doing something inappropriate; it was more my mom doesn’t want me to ruin my eyesight.” Amber adds: “my parents were also worried that I wouldn’t be getting enough sleep if I kept my phone in my room, I think they, they trust me with it, they were just concerned with my health and my eyes as well.” Evidencing some degree of sympathy for parental concerns, here, parental restrictions were based less on overt concerns for “cybercrime,” cyberbullying, or online predators, and more centered on anxieties regarding the health impacts of excessive device use, like the sleep patterns of their children.

For teens themselves, adhering to parental regulations of “being online” is often challenged by the compelling draw to ICTs (see: Adorjan and Ricciardi 2021 for a more detailed explication of teen views on Internet “addiction”). For instance, during one discussion with three 13-year-old females from Cyberville, Greta admits that she “stay[s] up on Facebook... even though I’m supposed to be off” after she goes to bed. Amelie adds her comparable experience: “and then I turn it off, hey, I turn it on, I’m wide awake, falls asleep during the movie, turns it off, wide awake, and it’s me every night.” Amelie discloses that her bedtime is 9:30, but “I don’t get off my phone until 10:30.” All three participants distance themselves from strict adherence to their parents’ rules about when to remove themselves from their electronics for bed, demonstrating resistance against proscribed bedtimes.

Similar to strategies reported by Livingstone (2002) and Barron (2014), resistance often involves a series of subtle behavioral adaptations or hidden contestation. Amelie, for instance, reports that “when [her parents] come, I turn my [phone screen] brightness

down, when they come in.” The exchange continues:

Greta: That’s what I do, I hear someone walking...

Irene: ...Just chuck it across the room, falls on the floor, it won’t break.

Amelie: Good night, by the time she comes in, opens the door, I’m like, shut the door, pretending I was sleeping.

The excerpts here reveal that (especially younger) teens are not always compliant with their parents’ rules; however, teens in our sample do not engage in blatant rule violation—they do it discretely, almost secretly, in hopes to avoid being “caught” and thus, the risk of having their devices removed as punishment. Their hidden contestation is a way to not overtly antagonize parents and to stay within parental regulations and boundaries regarding screen time and sleep (drawing on several rather Goffmanian forms of front stage presentations for parental audiences [Goffman 1959]). Irene, in the same group as Greta, mentions that in her home, her “phone has to be off by 9:00, and then I can read until 10ish” but adds, “I check [my phone] sometimes, I mostly read in like hardcover, though.” Amelie picks up on what Irene implies here: “Hey, read a book, I get a phone, get a book and put your phone beside the page, eh!” Irene confirms this applies to her as well: “I did that once, my mom got mad!...I didn’t ever do it again.” Such creative resistance against parental rules demonstrates the agentic strategies some younger teens may engage in to resist restrictions on their online access. Teens, like Irene’s words confirm, do not always “get away” with their resistance, as parental mediation is not completely ineffective. The forms of hidden contestation here relate to the relatively dependent relationship younger teens often have with their parents.

A central concern that our teens expressed quickly emerged concerning discussions over parental mediation—the unintended consequences of restricting access to social connections online. Technology is addictive in quality among teens foremost due to ICTs’ mediation of *social connectivity* (boyd 2014); particularly given many teens use social network sites to maintain relationships previously established with peer groups offline. In online spaces, teens check social media feeds to learn about relationships, and perhaps ultimately, how they are being perceived by their peers (boyd 2008; Livingstone 2008; Adorjan and Ricciardelli 2019). In our focus group discussions, participants often referenced having parents who “just don’t understand” the motivations and *modus operandi* of teens that drive home their desire, often perceived as a need, to stay near their devices—their need for connectivity. Gordan, age 15 from Cyber City, admits

what my parents are kind of crazy about is how many hours I’m online or something. I could sit in my room and text for 3 hours on Instagram, but that’s just like, *it’s just communicating* but, but *it’s screen time for them*, so they don’t really want me to. [emphasis added]

Gordan notices that parents, who may be unsure and skeptical about the allure of new technologies for teens, see their children’s technology use as abstracted “screen time” rather than as a medium for communication among peer groups. During a discussion of parental mediation, a coed group of five teens, aged 14 and 15, was asked what their response would be to their parents if they were “saying ‘no’ to social media for a week or so” in an attempt to manage their access and screen time. Aidan responds, “you lose connection,” to which Ava agrees “yeah.” Aiden continues:

I'm 15 now, I've probably had social media since I was 12, since I was in grade 6 or so, and that's 3 years of being used to seeing statuses and seeing what's going [on] around. It's kind of like turning on the TV, never watching the news for two years. What happens when you don't know that there was a shooting in Paris, you don't know all this stuff, you lose connection to what's actually going on, it's one can literally, can access information is through social media. [see also Adorjan and Ricciardelli 2019:31-32]

A few minutes later, Isabella adds, "not having my phone for two days, I don't get to access people, I can't do a lot of things, I can't get homework from someone else, I can't get help." The group suggests policies that are too restrictive, as well as punishments involving additional restrictions on technology, have detrimental consequences that arguably outweigh any "productive" effects of parental efforts to control their children. Unintended consequences center here on peer connections, but also the resultant inability of youth to check the news and keep informed, access schoolwork, and seek help or resources online.

Critiquing Parental Punishments: Degrees of Qualified Empathy

Overall, our teens expressed antagonism towards parental punishments involving restrictions on and/or the removal of their technology. A common response among our participants is that tech punishment "just made me really angry" (Seth, age 17, Cyber City). Participants living in Cyber City and Cyberville made roughly the same number of references to restrictions in access, although self-identifying female participants expressed the majority of positive or negative views. However, while criticizing parental removal of technology may be antici-

pated among teens, our sample of teens sometimes expressed a degree of empathy—if not sympathy—for parental practices they deemed too restrictive regarding their technology access and use. Such empathy was certainly qualified, often with reference to how stressful the removal of technology is, particularly given the *consequences of severed connection* with peers—again reflecting the significance of social connection for teens. For instance, like many of the teens we interviewed, Kimberly's parents adhered to a "no technology at the dinner table" policy. When asked how she felt about the policy, Kimberly replied, "in some ways, I find it's good, and in other ways, I get really annoyed with it... I find it like really stressful." When asked if the stress relates to not being able to know about gossip being spread about her, Valerie interjects with disagreement:

I don't feel like that... I don't know, if I'm talking to someone about something and then my dad [will] be like "[Valerie,] put your phone off" or something like that, and then I'll put it off, and be like, honestly, I was in the middle of a conversation.

Kimberly agrees with a quick reply: "What's going on?" Although Valerie did not agree that her stress was related to a fear of missing out, her reply suggests annoyance at being cut off mid-conversation from her friends. The significance of social connection appears to be a core source of tension brought forth through punishments and parental mediation practices that teens deem too restrictive.

Rather than finding expressions of overt antagonism, our discussions often revealed interesting qualifications. Admittedly exceptional, Judy, 15 from Cyber City, offers her reflections on (perhaps unintended) benefits of her parents punishing her by taking away her smartphone:

it was a fair one, to be honest...like I had more contact with my friends and like we hung out more because I didn't have it, and so like I actually did stuff, so I like went out and like talked to people.

Judy valued the increase in face-to-face social interaction that resulted from the removal of her device. Older teens offered the most nuanced and reflective responses, seeming to demonstrate their maturity when interpreting their parents' intention in their imposed restrictions on technology use. For instance, Denise, an 18-year-old undergraduate student from Cyber City, argued that parents taking away a smartphone would be justified in certain circumstances but not necessarily in others:

I think it depends what they did... like you found out they were bullying someone, or you found they were talking to some creep in person, I think that's the time to take away the phone, but like in my experience, like parents would just take it away over nothing, and it would be like, it has to associate. Like, you just can't take away this thing [motions to the phone] because they didn't do the dishes, like there has to be a point to taking this away, 'cuz like, the way we are now, with phones and stuff, we're pretty dependent. When you take it away... I can't text my friends and stuff... you're taking away directions to get home... you're taking away my schedule, you're taking away like me being able to get in contact with people, so I think, I think it depends. [emphasis added]

Denise, in her response, suggests she accepts that teens ("we") are dependent on technology, and central to the dependence are the *social* consequences of removing access to the technology. The underlying reasons for youth antagonism towards punitive device restrictions as punishment are not just linked to "addiction" *per se* but to the *social exclusion* in which

being "offline" may result (boyd 2014; Adorjan and Ricciardelli 2021). Also of note in Denise's response is her degree of agreement with the need for removing technology (e.g., taking away a smartphone) in more serious cases of cyberbullying, but not in more minor cases (e.g., not completing everyday chores). Parents must have appropriately considered, Denise argues, proportionate punishments in response to the particular behaviors of their children. The stress of severed social connections is also expressed by Janelle, 16 from Cyber City, who recalls one experience with parental punishment:

every time they like, when I got my iPod taken away, it's like, when I was at my friend's house and everything, it's like they were all on their phones, and I'm like, "K let's do something," and then they're like "No, we chilling here."...And they're like, "Hey, did you get my thing," it's like I don't have my iPhone on me, it's taken away, so I'm not going to get your Snapchat, I'm not going to get your message, don't ask me questions, like put down your phone and like ask me face-to-face.

Janelle's frustration comes from the feeling of social exclusion while hanging out with peers who still have access to their phones. Janelle thus experiences a form of *ex-communication* that results from her social exclusion. Removal of a device has consequences for teens extending well beyond not being able to listen to music or surf the web; the devices are the tools they use to not only stay "in the loop" with friends (often offline peer groups linked to school) and about events but how they are being talked about by their friends. In short, they lose agency when punished; losing control over both how they are being represented and responded to online (Przybylski et al. 2013; boyd 2014; Oberst et al. 2017; Adorjan and Ricciardelli 2019).

Beyond the unintended consequences of social exclusion, parental punishments, which include extended removal of access to technology (usually phones), were deemed by our teens as unsustainable and were often met with explicit contestation. For instance, during a focus group with three students from Cyber City, ages 13 and 14, Darius recalls: "I actually had my phone taken away for like a long time too... but then I got it back because I needed [it] for some school assignments." Sidney adds, "I use my iPod as an alarm." "Same," replies Darius. Sidney's response, like Darius', demonstrates how the "do it all" nature of many of the devices teens frequently use inhibits the effectiveness of removing the devices for purposes of punishment—teens depend on devices for practical needs tied to learning responsibilities (e.g., waking up for school). While not "addiction" in the social sense as we highlighted prior, teens (alongside adults, see: Adorjan and Ricciardelli 2021) are increasingly gravitating towards using their devices (e.g., smartphones, iPads, laptops) for multiple purposes, including work and school, as well as entertainment. Similarly, Manuel, an 18-year-old undergraduate student, argues that the "tech punishment" of phone removal

doesn't really motivate me to do my homework, 'cuz, again, I'm not doing my homework, they take my stuff away, OK, I'll just sit there not doing my homework. It just makes me pissed off at them, right, it makes me less motivated to do my homework... and then I'll get it back eventually anyway, right, so.

Despite the best of intentions parents may have in applying practices of "intensive parenting," by their mid-teens, hyper-vigilant responses and "zero tolerance" removals of phones, et cetera are found by children to be frustrating at the least, and disruptive to both accessing school work and, perhaps

most significantly, to pivotal social connections and communications. Beyond that, our discussions also explored both gendered and age dynamics affecting parental mediation.

Gaining Independence: Gender and Aging Out of Parental Mediation and Restrictions

In wider discussions about their general use of technology and when participants were first introduced to various devices like tablets and social network sites, we also asked teens when they got access to their first smartphone. Most of the participants recalled receiving their first phone when old enough to begin using public transportation independently, often to and from school. This aligns with neoliberal pressures on parents to remain hyper-vigilant as their children more regularly commute through physical spaces that may be seen as inherently dangerous (including public spaces especially seen as risky for daughters, as we discuss below). Our teens often cited their parents' concern for their safety as the reason they first provided them with a cell phone. The school grades when participants received their first phone ranged from grade four (primary school) to grade 11 (high school). Almost all participants who reflected on when they acquired their first phone stated they received a "flip" phone when younger, often in junior high school or middle school (e.g., "around grade seven") and, subsequently, received their first smartphone by high school (e.g., by "grade 9" [Yasmin, 18, Cyber City]). Some female siblings received phones at a younger age than male siblings. Saylee, age 16 from Cyber City, disclosed that her younger niece, who is four, already "has an iPad." Asked if girls are given devices at a younger age than boys, Saylee agrees, replying "safety issues." Asked about the fairness of that, Saylee elaborates:

It's not necessarily fair... because what if, like, if the female wants to go out and be out later than they're allowed... but, the guy's allowed to be out until whenever he wants to. Right, how's that fair? She has to be home at a certain time, and you [the guy] can do whatever you want? Yeah, that's not fair.

Some of our female participants pointed to heightened parental concerns over daughters' safety more than sons, for example, for walking their dogs at night. Indicating a gendered double standard that dynamic also applied to online engagement. When a group of three 17-year-old females from Cyberville were asked why parents are more concerned for girls than boys after they had confirmed possessing this view themselves, Ally responded:

the way girls are sexualized these days is really, really bad, and they can, [people] can do anything on the Internet; they can lie, they can get anything from you if you let them, like, you can fake who they are or anything, like catfish, that stuff's scary, man!

During another focus group, a similar remark comes from Patricia, 15 from Cyberville:

Like using Facebook and stuff like that, people find you, and then try to add you and then try to message you, and try to get your Snapchat so then they can get pictures, but it's just like, that's what my mom's worried about.

We also found male teens expressed the same perceptions. For instance, Samson, age 17 from Cyber City, reflected on his parents' responses concerning his younger sisters:

what really strikes me, my little sisters both of them are younger. When they were going to junior high,

that's when they sort of got a shared cell phone, 'cuz it's a hand-me-down from my mother... whereas I only got my cell phone as soon I started 10th grade, so they were going into 7th, they got their cell phone. *I think they're a bit more protected, or at least more concerned for my sisters.* [emphasis added]

The words of these participants confirm awareness of gendered parental interpretations of cyber risk and the presence of gendered double standards regarding parental governance of technological access and use (Stanko 1997). From the experiences of these teens, female children appear more regulated and restricted in comparison to males, suggesting females are thought to be more vulnerable than males and thus, require more online regulation (Bailey and Steeves 2013; 2015; Bailey et al. 2013).

Despite these findings ostensibly confirming a gendered double standard regarding parental mediation impacting daughters with greater restrictions than sons, not all of our groups agreed with that differential treatment. During one group of 14-year-old male teens from Cyberville, Mark projected that he would be more protective with a daughter than a son, stating "like, if I had a son, I'd be kind of lenient with [him], but if I had a girl, I'd wanna see what she's doing because it's my little girl." However, that view was not shared by others during the discussion. Trevor, replying to Mark's comment, admitted to likely being "protective" over his future children, but "if I had two kids, one male, one female, I'd be the same amount of protection of both." During some discussions, teens suggested that birth order and age played a larger role than gender in parental mediation practices. Donald, aged 19 from Cyberville, spoke about his sisters, who are three years younger, and how his parents were stricter with him. He explains: "but, like, my sister's

smart like she is super, like she's a good kid right, so, like..." Interviewer: "they don't have to worry as much?" "They don't have to worry too much," Donald agrees. The impact of birth order is unpacked in greater detail by Serena, speaking in a group of four female undergraduate students (ages 18 and 19) from Cyber City. Referring to two younger sisters, ages 15 and 12, she says:

they both got like iPods and laptops, they both have MacBook Airs! Like, I never had that, like *what?* And they're like so young; like my sister got her iPod when she was in grade 3 or something, and like I didn't know, like, that existed, I don't think that existed when I was in grade 3, but I feel like they're getting a lot more things at a younger age *and my parents are way more relaxed with them because they've seen me go through it*, and they've seen so many other people's kids go through it, that like, now that it's at their age, it's like "Oh, whatever, she's been on the iPod for like 13 hours, it's ok, it's normal." [emphasis added]

Our teens included those whose parents, from their perspectives, were more concerned about their daughters online than their sons. Yet, a fair number of participants felt their younger siblings are treated more leniently (e.g., given smartphones earlier with less active mediation) simply because their parents have become increasingly accustomed to the technologies and adjusting mediation concerning both their experiences with their firstborn, but also the personality of their later child or children (i.e., rather than solely influenced by wider gender norms or gendered double standards *per se*). Parental perceptions of gender regarding technological mediation practices likely play a role alongside interacting factors such as the age of the child and/or children, parental experience, child personality, and socio-economic class, as well as mobility.

Discussion

In the current study, we held focus groups with teens to explore experiences, perceptions, and attitudes towards parental mediation of technology, including access and use, and punishments such as the removal of phones. Finding teens do experience technology as addictive, particularly in the context of social connectivity, we unpacked how youth understand their parents' motivations for limiting screen time (e.g., in the name of health and well-being, for safety) and the stress they associate with being forced offline. Our discussions highlight, at times, teen frustration with parental mediation over their use of technology but also, simultaneously, degrees of qualified empathy with the perspective of their parents, regardless if they agree or disagree with said perspective. Our qualitative focus group discussions were geared to provide teens with a platform to discuss their views directly, in dialogue with each other. That helped bridge gaps in understandings from teenage standpoints, for example, of parents just thinking of "screen time" rather than the role it plays in teen communication.

True to research demonstrating a lack of effectiveness regarding restrictive parenting controls on children, especially older teens (Benedetto and Ingrassia 2020), many of our participants referred to strategies of implicit or explicit resistance to efforts by their parents to control their access to and use of digital technologies. Based as they are within rationality of intensive parenting (Hays 1996) and neoliberal expectations for parents to practice hyper-vigilance in the face of the cyber risks ostensibly facing their children (Wall 2021), excessive controls often ironically contribute to a culture of fear, fuelling moral panics that act to ultimately reinforce the internal logic of restrictive technological re-

sponses (Marx and Steeves 2010; boyd and Hargittai 2013). Teens in our sample were personally resistant to technology removal or restriction as a punitive measure or as part of their daily living regulations (e.g., having a phone use curfew); moreover, they described a variety of creative “workarounds” to overcome the limitations imposed. Notably, they also indicated that more well-calculated responses, such as to serious instances of cyberbullying, are more appropriate and effective.

Teens desire spaces where they feel their privacy or experiences are not impinged upon; for example, when parents mediate or govern their device use and connectivity. Consistent with prior researchers, who expressed that “most youth are less disturbed by abstract invasions of privacy by government agencies and corporations than the very real and ever-present experience of trying to negotiate privacy in light of nosy-parents, teachers, siblings, and peers” (Marwick and boyd 2014:1056), our teens were focused on how their parents disrupted their social living. Significantly, excessive parental restrictions are deemed ineffective, our participants expressed, due to the collateral consequences on connectivity, including socialization with peers, but also connections crucial for education and accessing important news online (arguably all the more prescient during the present COVID-19 pandemic). Marx and Steeves (2010:218) recognize that

the home as a traditional refuge is under siege by connectivity from all sides. As the lines between home, play, and commerce become permeable the child in constant contact with friends and family is now also in constant play as a commodity.

Our findings also revealed nuances beyond expected antagonisms to parental control, especially regard-

ing dynamics of gender, age, and personality. However, the multifaceted and everyday embeddedness of technologies makes unpacking the impacts of age and gender on parental online mediation difficult to discern. Some of our participants felt that parents are more concerned over daughters than sons due to wider gendered double standards in society. At the same time, others felt that birth order and personality, combined with the general exposure of parents to new technologies, are likely influential factors in determining parental practices. What does come across in our discussions, especially those with older teens, is that teens distinguish themselves as much apart from their parents as their younger siblings (to whom they sometimes refer as more addicted to digital technologies than themselves [see: Adorjan and Ricciardelli 2021]). That also suggests the need for more nuanced examinations of generational divides that delineates patterns among younger and older children, but also dynamics of family size, child gender(s), and so forth.

Our qualitative focus group discussions help illuminate context and meaning, but it is also crucial to consider the wider contexts of structural inequalities that affect connectivity and the patterning of digital parenting practices linked to institutional and socioeconomic dynamics and changes (Livingstone 2020). Further research is required to build on understandings of gender variations in how youth interact or are granted access to technology, and many additional questions regarding the influences of age, birth order, personality, as well as race, ethnicity, and social class. Scholarship on parental styles and approaches to managing children’s technology use have found important differences regarding socioeconomic status, race and ethnicity, and sexual orientation (Yardi and Bruckman 2012), including work in the Global South (Madianou and

Miller 2011; Shin and Lwin 2017; Cabello-Hutt, Cabello, and Claro 2018). Research is warranted that unpacks gender discrepancies in the age that youth receive cell phones due to perceived variations in safety needs by gender, as well as the influence of birth order (perhaps juxtaposed with gender) in shaping parental technology mediation. Digital divides, influencing both access to ICTs and the proficiency of their use (Hargittai 2002; Keegan Eamon 2004), have been greatly amplified during the COVID-19 pandemic, and warrant research on both the perspectives of parents and children.

Prior researchers support that lower SES families are more likely to face challenges related to a parent-child digital generation gap (Tripp 2011; Lee

2013). Research is thus needed that unpacks the structural inequalities influencing parenting and technology governance during the COVID-19 pandemic (Orgilés et al. 2020; Ramsetty and Adams 2020). Research is also needed on how these circumstances have impacted the already strong neoliberal pressures on parents, especially mothers, to remain hyper-vigilant with their children's online access and use. Mothers are much more frequently targeted by corporations selling "cyber-safety" solutions, including monitoring software (Fisk 2016; see also Gabriels 2016), and research on the gendered nature of hyper-parenting discourses is warranted, especially regarding teen experiences in comparison to fathers and mothers (a direction we did not pursue during our focus groups).

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