

RHETORIC OF TRANS* IDENTITIES: PUBLIC REACTIONS TO PRIVATE
CONFESSIONS

by

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Abstract

The year 2015 provided a hotbed of discussion about trans* identities. Caitlyn Jenner's public announcement of her identity as transgender shortly followed by Rachel Dolezal unveiling as a woman with Caucasian heritage. Using publically accessible interviews such as the Diane Sawyer interview with Bruce Jenner, both of Matt Lauer's conversations with Dolezal and Jenner, Melissa Harris-Perry's interview with Dolezal, as well as two *Vanity Fair* stories provide a space for a closer examination of how trans* identities are negotiated in a conversational setting. Using Hecht's (1993) communication theory of identity to investigate how the four proposed frames (personal, enactment, relationship, and communal) operate under the lens of trans* identities in flux. This thesis aims to explore the kinds of linguist framing motifs used by both an exemplar of the transgender community and an individual treading the barrier between Caucasian and black identities, ultimately leading to a discussion about how language confines personal and socially structure identity and identification. The implications of this identity work tangles with the reliance on personal experience as an expression of identity and its persuasive power to impact discourse. The linguistic tropes that confine identity expression inherently impact a community of individuals struggling to navigate trans* identity acceptance in a larger sphere.

Keywords: trans*, identity, identification, race, gender, language, communication
theory of identity

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Dedication

For those who taught me how to SPEAK, I would not be here without you.

Chapter 1 - Rationale

In the spring of 2015 former Olympian Decathlon champion Bruce Jenner shocked the world with a secret 65 years in the revealing. Through incredible feats of strength, three wives, and six children, Bruce Jenner spoke freely of an internal ‘her’ that had been hidden from all for the last 65 years and was finally going to make a real appearance. Real, because the ‘her’ called in the third person pronoun during Jenner’s primetime interview with Diane Sawyer on April 24, 2015 may be more accurately Jenner’s true internal identity that had been ignored and sequestered from public and private life. Jenner told Diane Sawyer, “For all intents and purposes, I’m a woman” (Sawyer, 2015) repeatedly referring to “her” as this alternative and newly discoverable side of the Olympian. That July, *Vanity Fair* unveiled a cover that made the unprecedented interview seem a fleeting precursor to a much more visually impactful transformation. On the cover, Jenner, long hair perfectly curled and blowing in the staged fans, white bustier hugging previously unknown curves, and a revealing feminized skin, “Call me Caitlyn” became the hottest magazine sales for *Vanity Fair* in the last five years (Tadena, 2015) and sparked responses from all over the globe. From high praise including her Woman of the Year award for her public coming out story, to the hotly contested transphobic “Call Me Caitlyn” Halloween costume, Caitlyn Jenner revolutionized a conversation about public acceptance of transgender narratives.

Occurring almost simultaneously to Jenner’s announcement, Spokane Chapter National Association of the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) President Rachel Dolezal was pushed into the spotlight regarding her racial identity. Visibly light-skinned, and working for a predominantly black organization, Dolezal had passed for the last year as a black woman before her parents produced childhood photographs of a clearly Caucasian teenager. Known in the

community for her consistent good work for the NAACP, Dolezal came under scrutiny for what appeared to be blatant disregard for apparently clear color boundaries, calling herself something other than her genetic race described. Shockingly though, Dolezal's subsequent interviews record her using the same language as Jenner had in her interviews. Especially in her conversation with Matt Lauer on June 16, 2015 Dolezal explains, "how I've identified, and this goes back to a very early age, with my self-identification with the black experience as a very young child" (Lauer, 2015 *Dolezal*). Despite their linguistic similarities, and parallel identity transgressions of race and gender, Dolezal's outing induced an outraged public response in contrast to Jenner's predominantly positive reception. If the two women are using similarly framed identity claims, in similarly structured interviews, why was public favor so decidedly lopsided? Further, if the socially formed boundaries between binaries of race and gender are maintained through identity formation and identification by third parties, why does one boundary crossing narrative have positive reactions while the other starkly negative? In turn, this conflict raises questions about identity and identification for individuals treading the border between two identities.

In the most basic terms, Jenner and Dolezal's public outing differs in two ways, a personal lens or how they see and describe themselves, and a public lens or how others view and describe them. This generally divides the perspectives between identity (the personal) and identification (the public) (Burke, 1950; Blakesley, 2002). When seen through a rhetorical scope, Jenner and Dolezal's linguistic similarities highlight the parallel social constructions of gender and race. Therefore examining this timely cultural advent draws attention to communicative shifts for transitional identities and identifications. The personal interviews of Rachel Dolezal and Caitlyn Jenner provide insight to how individuals negotiate identity formation specifically in

relation to public disclosure. Publically accessible through online and cable mediums, interviews highlight presentational methods of identity as well as illustrate how individuals describe their identities to audiences.

Not only would a rhetorical study of race and gender transitional identities provide insight for discrepancies in linguistic usage, but could also elucidate ways in which a rhetorically conscious perspective could aid conflicted individuals. This look at two case studies will help to illumine ways in which identity intersects with identification and how those intersections problematize the social categories constructed to harness identity.

RQ1a: How do people of trans* identities frame identity through public disclosure?

RQ1b: And what do these processes teach us about identity and identification in relationship to gender and race?

RQ2: What do the respective rhetorics of Caitlyn Jenner and Rachel Dolezal tell us about the relationship between identity and identification?

RQ3: How do interviewers use identification rhetoric to construct borders of in-group/out-group identity?

In its most broad definition, identity can be negotiated through a variety of formats and actions, but ultimately is determined by the individual (Rueckert, 1982). Identification, on the other hand, predominantly relies on the immediate perceptions of those outside of the self (Blakesley, 2002). All of these traits get transmitted through communication, especially in interviews looking to know more about the individual (Blakesley, 2002). Those with trans* identities must intentionally navigate the boundaries between individualized self while still justifying identity to an external group. In the cases of Caitlyn Jenner and Rachel Dolezal, aligning self concept of identity and external perspectives relies on distancing a prior identity

from the current self. Under this division, individuals have to establish self through external understanding. In this thesis, I will first outline the literature relevant to a discussion of identity and identification in relation to race and gender, second describe Hecht's (1993) communication theory of identity and its utility to this study, third examine the two case studies of Caitlyn Jenner and Rachel Dolezal under this lens, and finally offer some implications of what this analysis says about identity and identification for identities in transition.

Chapter 2 - Review of Literature

In order to understand the factors of identity as they are determined through visible characteristics, I will first look to how scholars have defined of race in identity, next the differences between sex and gender identity before contextualizing both components as part of the larger identity and identification structures. As both race and gender have broad contextual elements, this review will focus on how both factors influence identity. Finally I will conclude the literature review with a discussion of how passing and trans* identities function within identity and identification frameworks.

Race Identity

At its most general conception, offspring inherit race from their parents (Appiah, 2006). Race may originate with psychological and physical being, confining race to the body (Kawash, 1996). Though typically a biological referent, Carlson (1999) explains that “race” only sometimes adheres to biological lineage. Before 1989 in the United States the race written on a birth certificate was the race of the non-white parent. If both parents were not white, then it lists the assumed race of the father unless one parent was Hawaiian, in which case any Hawaiian lineage is listed. After 1989, the race of the child is what the mother reports (Greenberg, 2002). Legal institutions and most scholars “have rejected these assumptions as they apply to race and now believe that race is not binary and it cannot be defined solely by biological factors” (Greenberg, 2002, p.103). For instance, the Supreme Court upheld that race is predominantly stipulated by social and legal institutions (Greenberg, 2002). Race as a linguistic term also frequently categorizes entire socioeconomic populations or cultures (Carlson, 1999). Generally speaking, race belongs to Burke’s category of “positive terms” (1950). As he defines, “a positive

term is most unambiguously itself when it names a visible and tangible thing which can be located in time and place” (Burke, 1950, p. 183). However when applied to people, race as a positive term becomes troublesome as it negates the individual’s will and choices (Carlson, 1999). By positioning race in motion or dialectical terms, it permits rhetorical transformation and hierarchical negotiation (Carlson, 1999). Removing race from a strict lineage perspective resituates race in a social context.

In order to fully understand identity as it relates to race, Nakayama (1994) explains that race must be constantly viewed with acknowledgement of master narratives. Conversations, and communication are rife with spatial language that designates centers and margins (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995). Naming race at the boundaries as “other,” assumes whiteness as the universal unnamed (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995) but cannot be implicitly described as one dimensional or simplistic (Nakayama, 1994). Folk races, according to Appiah (2006) rely primarily on social identity. Some individuals may self-describe as “X,” and be described by others as “X” which establishes a norm for treatment or interactions with those in that category (Appiah, 2006). In this example, people agree on what makes “X” though generally the criteria for ascription does not have to align for everyone. Essentially, characteristics of “X” will not be universally agreed upon, ultimately leading to categorization of “X,” “not-X,” and “neutral.” Fanon (1952/2008) refers to external labeling by features as “body schema,” or the inscriptions of the body as they interact with the world, “a definitive structuring” (p. 91). He furthers, “the Other, the white man, who had woven me out of a thousand details, anecdotes, and stories” (Fanon, 1952/2008, p. 91) uses the collected details of various interactions in order to define future encounters. By basing all interactions with members of another race off of previous meetings, the actions and attributes of one get projected on to others of a matching body schema.

Appiah (2006) explains that “membership in a subspecies is not an intrinsic property, but a relational one” (p. 364). Membership within a group does not occur because of an inherent attribute, but more commonly because of the interrelationships between individuals within a specific proximity to each other. People with similar intrinsic properties may be unreachable or unlikely to meet and therefore reproduce. Therefore, racial differences are culturally constructed, (Weinauer, 1996) based on accessibility of interactions and can be manipulated or altered by individualized exchanges. Rohy (1996) describes the perpetual creation of the “other” as, “the white or straight world invents its other in order to recognize itself, making the ‘inauthentic’ define the authentic” (p. 228). Yet in the realm of identity expression in the black community continues to be limited by both internal and external voices. As hooks (1990) describes, “we have too long had imposed upon us from both the outside and the inside a narrow, constricting notion of blackness” (p. 2514). Blackness as an exclusionary, essentialist identity ignores the multifaceted aspects of blackness, especially when whiteness is the sole comparison.

When basing race discussions around the dominant white perspective, whiteness becomes both visible and invisible (Nakayama, 1994). Where all other racial descriptors include distinct color clarification, whiteness remains unnamed, a non-color seemingly tagged to some kind of purity (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995). Ginsberg (1996) contends that if whiteness connotes personhood, blackness must reference property and subsequently racial differences and categories are created and labeled for exploitation, not definition. Without definable racial traits, the default is white (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995) and further functions as a social structure organizer (Allen, 2001). To conflate race and nationality, or equating white with “American,” removes access to power from minority groups; if only white people are American, then others are without national identity and also exist outside of the social structure too (Nakayama &

Krizek, 1995). Ethnicity, on the other hand, names a heritage, reinforcing an ideology of individualism. Meaning that an individual does not claim “whiteness” but instead claims “German” as part of their lineage (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995).

Double consciousness as coined by DuBois, creates a dual perspective for black individuals, as one perceives oneself and what it must be to look at oneself from the eyes of an outsider. This subsequently bifurcates personal identity into a hyphenated duality (Allen, 2001). As Ginsberg (1996) explains, “cultural logic presupposes a biological foundation of race visibly evident in physical features such as facial structures, hair color and texture, and skin color” (p. 4). Hence identification structures inherent in labeling schemas rely on the visual cues ascribed to identity. Fanon (1952/2008) reiterates that black identity only occurs in relation to whiteness, emphasizing the conflicted duality of identity described by DuBois. Similar to gender identity, black individuals will have a specific personal sense of self additionally impacted by culture, context, and structures (Allen, 2001; Greenberg, 2002) and should be seen within a “black formal cultural matrix” as well as a white matrix (Gates, 1988, p. 2435). Race instead “is a text (an array of discursive practices), not an essence, It must be *read* with painstaking care and suspicion” (Gates, 1988, p. 2435, author emphasis). Ignoring blackness, or race as a spectrum, imposes a false binary between black-identified and white-identified descriptors (hooks, 1990). Therefore, a singular self-concept cannot be rigidly defined, but must be dynamic and inclusive to external impetus.

Sex Identity

In its most basic terms, sex is determined through genetic qualities like chromosomes, which in turn impact genital formation. Most frequently these identities fall on a binary spectrum to be read on a birth certificate as male or female. In reality, there are infinite variations of sex

that are genetically apparent though not manifested in genital recognition (Greenberg, 2002).

Lorber (1994) makes an argument for recognition of five sexes: unambiguous male, unambiguous female, transsexual male to female, transsexual female to male, and hermaphrodite. For example intersex individuals who may have elements of both male and female genitalia, or those who have three chromosomes either XXY, or XYY do not technically fit into the gender binary either. As Judith Butler describes,

Originally intended to dispute the biology-is-destiny formulation, the distinction between sex and gender severs the argument that whatever biological intractability sex appears to have, gender is culturally constructed: hence, gender is neither the causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex. (1990, p. 8)

The confining adage of sexual essentialism as imposed by Western cultures deems “sex as a natural force that exists prior to social life and shapes institutions... consider[s] sex to be eternally unchanging, asocial, and transhistorical” (Rubin, 1984, p. 2385). In its shortest explanation, sex is attributed to biological traits built into genetic codes, where as gender may be ascribed through socialized behaviors. As a reminder, sex identity is not the same as a sexuality or sexual attraction. As Gayle Rubin (1984) describes, “the body, the brain, the genitalia, and the capacity for language are all necessary for human sexuality. But they do not determine its content, its experiences, or its institutional forms” (p. 2386). So though there is a biological component to both sex and sexuality, they are neither defined in the same way, nor exhibited similarly.

Monique Wittig laments that although womanhood has been filtered through the “capacity to give birth” (Wittig, 1981, p. 1907) which aligns having a uterus with a gender referent of womanhood historically. By confining gender and sex definitions to historical

constructions only reinforces a binary. Additionally, “the ostensible conflict between ‘gender’ and ‘historical authenticity’ which begins to collapse within the arguments of both sides, is ultimately self-cancelling. Both gender and history are finally ‘inauthentic,’ offering imitations rather than originals” (Young, 1996, p. 184). Young refers to the limiting definitions imposed by binary status of gender as well as the historic descriptions of individuals. Hence, the way we describe individuals within this constrictive structure can only be a farce. As Bordo (1988) adds, “to reshape one’s body into a male body is *not* to put on male power and privilege. To *feel* autonomous and free while harnessing body and soul to an obsessive body-practice is to serve, not transform, a social order that limits female possibilities” (p. 2250-1, author emphasis). Essentially, though a physical transformation that adheres to the binary possibilities may free an individual from a social displacement, remaining true to the binary inherently supports the hierarchical social order.

Gender Identity

Though definitions confine sex to the corporeal and genetic readings, gender is also read upon the body, though not defined by the body. “Gender is what we do not what we are” (Sloop, 2004, p. 6) which refers to how gender is performed rather than a physical descriptor. Lorber (1994) continues the concept of five sexes with five gender displays: masculine, feminine, ambiguous (androgynous), cross-dressed as man, and cross-dressed as woman. Though a slightly dated description, Lorber’s framework generally resonates as individuals may display a gender different than their self-described gender. According to the Bem sex role inventory (1977), those who identify with high masculine and low feminine traits are masculine; high feminine and low masculine traits are feminine; and those with both high femininity and masculinity are androgynous. Bem’s (1977) scale furthers that those with low femininity and low masculinity

would be asexual. Linguistically, English uses “sex” to mean male and female as well as “sex” as the act of intercourse, which conflates sexuality and sex identity theories though the two identities operate separately. Even in Bem’s (1977) use of the term “asexual” can refer to those without a designated sex, or those who have no sexual desires. As Rubin (1984) so clearly describes, “sex and gender are related, they are not the same thing, and they form the basis of two distinct arenas of social practice” (p. 2401). Consequently, we must examine how those social practices impact gender in addition to sex. Gender as a social practice is “a human invention, like language, kinship, religion, and technology; like them, gender organizes human social life in culturally patterned ways” (Lorber, 1994, p. 6). More specifically, gender can be displayed by “the body—what we eat, how we dress, the daily rituals through which we attend to the body—is a medium of culture” (Bordo, 1989, p. 2240). That cultural expectation, varied and diverse dependent on the location or class norms, may deem behaviors or articles of clothing appropriate or inappropriate on the spectrum strung between the universal binaries of gender. Gender, like race, “is from one perspective performative, neither constituted by nor indicating the existence of a ‘true self’ or core identity. But, like racial identity, gender identity is bound by social and legal constraints related to the physical body” (Ginsberg, 1996, p. 2). The physicality of gender comes from performed acts, readable on the body.

Outside of dual embodiment, individuals are typically expected to conform to a binary appearance (Norwood, 2013). Butler (1990) explains that to be a ‘woman’ is not a singular stand-alone identity construction because “gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts, and because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities” (p. 4). Essentially, gender when seen across the spectrum or history, geography, class, and ethnicity is enacted,

portrayed, and received in a sundry of ways. Bordo (1989) furthers, “the body, as anthropologist Mary Douglas has argued, is a powerful symbolic form, a surface on which the central rules, hierarchies, inscribed and thus reinforce through concrete language of the body” (p. 2240). Gender ambiguity refers to a refusal to fall into a binary category, whereas gender fluidity refers to the refusal to stay in any one designated category (Sloop, 2004). Rules enforced through bodily presence are additionally policed by acceptable forms of femininity or masculinity.

Norwood (2013) explains that individuals have a specific sovereign self or an identity that is inborn in some combination of mind and soul existing independently of the body. However the social self by contrast is malleable to contextual situations and observable from an external perspective. Norwood (2013) furthers, if the mind and body are misaligned, as in the sovereign self is not accurately represented by the physical embodiment, the body is clearly the defective component, not the mind. Bordo (1989) encourages an “awareness of the after contradictory relations between image and practice, between rhetoric and reality” (p. 2254). Therefore constructing a readable image of gender does not necessarily translate to reality in the same perceived way. Some criticisms have been leveled at transgender individuals claiming they do not have a sense of a “stable” identity (Elliot, 2009), yet this concept of stability relies on an enforced binary. In addition, hegemonic gender boundaries are “protected through the language” (Sloop, 2004, p. 13) usage. For example, a transgender individual seeking identity validation through language will opt to change personal pronouns from he to she or vice versa. This common vernacular though pervasive language reference might be jarring to others around them, challenging the perceived stability of the individual’s identity as a whole. Those who do not change pronouns are thereby protected by a consistent pronoun referent.

Identity

As Burke (1959) suggests that an individual's identity "is something private, peculiar to himself" (p. 263) under the bourgeois thought. Identity as inherent to the individual, not labeled or rhetorically constrained, exists completely external of language (Charland, 1987). Identity when placed in context must use language in order to navigate social situations, thereby molding the core identity Charland (1987) describes. Where "personae" occurs in the realm of words, "persons" occur outside of language, and only use language as a tool to communicate that existence (Charland, 1987). As Charland explains, in order to speak, one must already be a subject and therefore exist prior to the formation of language. Identity only becomes a contested issue when it is no longer stable and cannot be labeled concretely through established language (Ginsberg, 1996). Identity, especially when told through one's own story, creates the public identity of self (Yousman, 2001). In order to adapt to societal structure pressures, identity must include change (Burke, 1959). As Squires and Bouwer describe, "identity construction is not a unidirectional process" (2002, p. 285). Construction of identity is an ongoing and labor-intensive process forged over years and experiences with others (Hundley & Rodriguez, 2009). As a culture, understanding gender or sexuality as a stable entity forces individuals who may enter relationships with same sex partners late in life to ignore previous self-identities in order to form acceptable stable internal identity (Sloop, 2004). The retrospective redefinition in order to accommodate external perspectives discounts previous experiences for the comfort of external understanding.

Identification rests on the power of categorizing from an external perspective (Yousman, 2001). Rather, identities are not so self-defined, as they are linked to external elements in which a person may connect *with* under the persuasion of others (Burke, 1959). Within a community,

polyvocality helps to position multiple voices, which encourages individual agency and empowerment (Hundley & Rodriguez, 2009). “Persuasive discourse requires subject-as-audience who is already constituted with an identity and within an ideology” in order to be negotiated in context of others (Charland, 1987, p. 134). In their study of transliterature, Hundley and Rodriguez (2009) found three primary goals within the literature: autonomy of individual experience, polyvocality in encouraging multiple present voices, and community building. Under the persuasion of others does not necessarily silence or envelop singular voices. Through a chorus effect, it could enhance the complex dimensionality of communities negotiating similar identities. In essence, common identity, personal or community occurs fluidly, constantly transgressing imposed boundaries, where as categories enforced by external influences are less willing to change.

Yousman’s (2001) work on the identities and identifications of Malcolm X illustrates the impending conflict between the self-defined identity that fluctuates over time as compared to the rigid definitions historically imposed on public figures. He looks to the differences between the snapshots of Malcolm X at particular points as compared to how he is described by holistic history. Entire populations can at specific historical moments gain different identities, which necessitate different definitions of collective life (Charland, 1987). Rubin (1984) declares that it would be impossible to talk about the politics of race or gender without including the social constructs that illuminate what those identities mean in context regardless of the fact that we are prone to defining them in biological terms. In her examination of the Rhinelander versus Rhinelander court case in 1925, Carlson (1999) notes that gender was used as a bridging device to appeal to the jury’s sense of womanhood and therefore distract from her debated race. Destabilizing race worked only through knowing the contextual beliefs about the persuasive

appeals of both race and gender at this particular moment in history. This documented case in shifting hegemonic structures demonstrates the appeal of historically framed rhetorically based arguments.

Identity has the capabilities of determining character traits and motivations (Charland, 1987). Carlson (1999) describes how both sides of the Rhinelander versus Rhinelander case used generalizations in order to cast the defendant in a particular light. For instance,

The plaintiffs portrayed Alice as sexually aggressive woman who lured the younger, more innocent Leonard into an unfortunate liaison. The defense cast Alice as a girl whose innocence arose from her lack of social standing, thus making her emotions exploitable by the wealthy, more sophisticated Leonard. (Carlson, 1999, p. 116)

The case continued by using uncouth generalizations such as the sexually aggressive black woman, and the predatory older woman aimed to interpret Alice as seductress and mastermind. Cultural codes, according to Brouwer (2004) allow certain identities as displayed on the body the leniency for abstraction. White, male, heterosexual bodies are not marked for particular behaviors or motivational traits, as are “bodies of color, female, homosexual” who represent larger characteristics and qualities assumed of similarly described individuals (Brouwer, 2004, p.414). “Marked” bodies become tokens of cultural, racial, or gendered behaviors. Predicting how people will behave either as individuals or collectives based on identity have benefits ranging from generalizations about elections to day-to-day responses to events (Appiah, 2006).

Identification

Identification labels identity based on an external viewpoint (Blakesley, 2002). One of the cornerstones of Kenneth Burke’s assumptions of humankind is an inherent desire for “order.” Carlson (1999) furthers, “society mirrors that sense of order in its obsession with categorizing

everything from plants to people and arranging them into clear, unquestionable, hierarchies” (p. 111). By use of comparison, Sloop (2004) explains hegemonic order to structured music and anything outside of that as noise. Music reaffirms dominance while any irritating noise should be silenced. Order helps to rationalize tone quality, harmonic intervals, and how rhythm and pitch work in tandem, operating outside of these constructs transgresses musical understanding. Burke uses the aforementioned positive, dialectical, and hierarchical classes to help determine societal order (Burke, 1950) and further manipulate those orders for individual objectives (Carlson, 1999). As Robinson (1994) advances, societal structures invest skin with social significance. Additionally, identification may have hints at transformation, as it must adapt to the exact temporal context of the individual (Blakesley, 2002).

Identification predominantly relies on the needs and abilities of individuals to categorize or classify others. The struggle over “*who* gets to label *whom* in the social construction of identity” (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995, p. 645) becomes more contentious based on what categories already exist. There is a “cultural impulse” to label sexuality according to perceived stable gender categories (Sloop, 2004, p. 129). Generally, those impulses rely on binary systems already in place, unable to create category hybrids (Greenberg, 2002). Categorization also determines discrimination laws. Individuals must prove different treatment from the opposite identity that presumably receives benefits (Lester, 2002).

Gender studies using quantitative measurements heavily rely on categorical placement of biological sex (Hegarty, 2002). Unfortunately, this methodology ignores the fluidity between gender boundaries that many individuals may feel, completely removing the complexity that might be negotiable on a day-to-day basis. Though an objective perspective, it excludes personal flexibility an individual might express verbally instead of checking a box or ranking a number.

Even categorical ranges, say on a scale of masculine to feminine, does not necessarily create objectivity, instead measures cultural perspective of gender expectations (Hegarty, 2002). Positioning ranges as a dichotomy only exacerbates the binary construction of sex (Hegarty, 2002).

Complications in Identification

Burke (1950) argues that if identification were a pure, clear-cut instance, there would be no complications. Separateness does not facilitate arguments or conflict, but rhetoric occurs in the grey area between oppositional sides. The “wavering line” (Burke, 1950, p. 25) between two sides invites rhetorical discussion. He furthers, “impurities of identification lurking about the edges of such situations introduce a typical Rhetorical wrangle of the sort that can never be settled once and for all, but belongs in the field of moral controversy where men properly seek to ‘prove opposites’” (Burke, 1950, p. 26). Identity politics is a skill in cultural reading, where a claimed identity breeds intuition and ability to recognize others by the same general inscribed optics (Robinson, 1994). This in turn replaces the visibility or invisibility of identity with multiple codes of intelligibility framed not by substance, but by optics (Robinson, 1994). The enacted communities then may create vernacular codes by which to speak to each other (Ono & Sloop, 1995). The failure of an individual to place someone accurately in a group must call in other methods to determine the specific identification, always working toward an elimination of blurred categories (Squires & Brouwer, 2002). They also articulate that labeling by external encouragement (as in a census form, or study) might be helpful for a broader cause, but it silences a perspective that is otherwise not present (Squires & Brouwer, 2002). As that silenced voice may fall on an infinite spectrum, categorizing identity by definitive boxes limits access to hybrid identities.

Yousman (2001) articulates that as historical figures succumb to past tense, there emerges a tension between identity, identification, and representation through external mediums. For instance, the identity of an individual, as they may personally in that moment describe themselves, may directly conflict with the identification imposed on them by other individuals. For example, someone who may not identify on the gender binary (preferring the pronoun ‘they’) may be called ‘he’ based on masculine presentation that day. Representation by contrast is further extracted from the individual meaning how they might be described by tertiary sources, meaning the original person may have no say in their distinct categorization. Time adds layers of identification and representation to historicized figures based on contextual and modern indicators (Yousman, 2001). This contention becomes particularly prevalent in the quest for the truth, “the struggle over who gets to tell a person’s story, and which version of the story becomes codified as the truth, must be recognized as a crucial battle despite our awareness that truth is always contingent and subjective” (Yousman, 2001, p. 4).

Identification in Language

Political and public structuring relies on hierarchical employment of language. Language then establishes the building blocks by which identities and systems appear to function and operate within an established structure. As Sloop (2004) describes,

The very idea that a way of life becomes a rigid object of discourse, that it works as part of a visible publicity effect, means that the materiality of rhetoric forces people into Foucault’s ‘fields of stability,’ making them, in advance *understandable*. (p. 21, author emphasis)

The use of rhetoric is therefore critical to the continuation of social organization up to and including governmental levels as it illuminates characteristics of populations (Sloop, 2004). For

individuals actively transgressing boundaries of identity, they must utilize words in the cultural wheelhouse in order to identify themselves. For example, those who consider themselves gender fluid may prefer the English pronoun “they/them” rather than the artificial he/she binary. Though they/them is technically gender neutral, according to the grammatical constructs of the English language, it is also plural. So to alter the sentences: “I saw Alex the other day. He and I decided to go to a movie” to “I saw Alex the other day. They and I decided to go to a movie” initially feels cumbersome and awkward. This example highlights the need for individuals who do not identify on a binary to use the language to their benefit, even if that language will be modified in meaning over time. The use of rhetoric works beyond connotation and denotation to include the rhetor and how the rhetor may alter meanings of a word in alternative contexts (Sloop, 2004).

While rhetoric aims to invest in transformation through discourse, the building blocks of language have concrete limitations as to what can be changed and how. As Sloop (2004) describes, “while rhetoric is ‘about’ the transformation of public meaning, public discourse is also material and sedimented...reifying norms and stabilizing identities” (p. 54). Placing individuals within the regimented confines of language places boundaries on the descriptors of identity. Gender for instance still operates on a male-female binary linked to sex. Categories, regardless of their accuracy are more comfortable to deal with than ambiguity of any kind (Sloop, 2004).

Typically, critical discourse is largely studied from the words of those in power. Produced in speeches, documents that have changed or shaped the world, it leaves huge swaths of historically marginalized communities passed over. Given the missed opportunities based on popularity and prevalence of dominant discourse, Ono and Sloop (1995) advocate for studies examining vernacular discourse, or speeches that resonate within communities. Everyday

speeches have access to communities that are typically silenced in major media arenas. Further, these communities produce culturally specific rhetoric that likely challenges dominant perspectives, but in order to investigate the marginalized vernacular discourse it must be removed from the dominant context that might overshadow the rhetorical choices. Combining elements of popular culture in order to challenge mainstream and create community produces vernacular (Ono & Sloop, 1995). Because of the transient nature of popular dominant media, ever-marginalized communities are always in transition, never fixed in one place, as they must continually adapt (Ono & Sloop, 1995). Take for example Gates' (1988) remarks about the measure of the black community: "the salient sign of the black person's humanity...would be mastering the very essence of western civilization, of the very foundation of the complex fiction upon which white western culture had been constructed" (p. 2431). For example, to examine vernacular as Ono and Sloop (1995) recommend would necessarily include slang intrinsic to the community, however in Gates' appraisal, in order to be equally valued, members of the community will adapt to more rigid or formal dominant norms. Gates' expresses that in order to be seen even as human, black individuals must use the tools of western civilization, accommodating vernacular to the dominant whims.

Passing

With the complications between identity and identification, it necessitates a discussion of passing. Robinson (1994) describes that passing is based on the "optical model of identity" (p. 718). Therefore someone who passes visually promises one identity, while knowingly retaining an alternative identity. As passing relies on visual indicators of identity, gender, race, sexuality, and class passing operates using the same generalized principles (Squires & Bouwer, 2002). In the act of the pass, there are three actors: the *passer*-the person working to pass usually

performing a privileged identity, the *in-group clairvoyant*—a member of the passer’s non-privileged group that can see through the pass, and the *dupe*—who is part of the privileged group that accepts the pass (Squires & Bouwer, 2002). In-group members, or those who belong to the retained identity, are likely to recognize the disguised visual codes of the passing member due to the familiarity of the mechanics of the pass (Robinson, 1994). Just as members of the in-group may recognize visual codes, vernacular codes allow communication within a specific group (Ono & Sloop, 1995). Members of the in-group, or the in-group clairvoyant may consider the pass as a demonstration of disloyalty to self, or enacted self-hatred (Squires & Brouwer, 2002).

Because passing is based on the visual “readability” of an individual’s identity, passing may pertain to either gender or race dependent on the context. For instance, someone may “pass” as a man while retaining the self-identity of a woman, or may “pass” as white while retaining the personal identity of black. Of course this implies that both gender and race are necessarily visibly inscribed on a physical portrayal, as Judith Butler would contend, a performance (Butler, 1993). As passing does not designate an inherently true identity, “passing is merely one more indication that subjectivity involves fracture—that no true self exists a part from its multiple, simultaneous enactments” (Rust, 1996, p. 35). By assuming that race constitutes a facet of identity, the act of the pass demonstrates a deviation from a presumed direct and authentic connection between the passer and their assigned or supposed race (Kawash, 1996). As both race and gender are physically read, perhaps the more accurate reading of Kawash (1996) might be that if visibly inscribed traits indicate identity, blurring the lines between groups ruptures physical portrayal from identity formation. The concurrent performances complicate the nature of which identities are read and which are innate, suggesting that any identity portrayal has enacted elements of culturally relevant identifiers. Passing rests on the concept that identity can be cultivated through

“social, psychological, national, or cultural attributes, whether bestowed by nature or produced by society; it forces us to pay attention to the form of difference itself” (Kawash, 1996, p. 63). Rust (1996) continues that passing includes a simulation of likeness. Playing on the space between assumption and witness, “passing foregrounds what is between—between origin and enactment, body and gesture—calling into question all such fixed ways of determining identity” (Rust, 1996, p. 23). As the act of passing is never permanent (Ginsberg, 1996) passing has the ability to expose the faulty expectations of performance; demonstrating how unreliable visual cues are for classifying identity (Squires & Brouwer, 2002).

Note, that passing largely relies on the identification of an individual intentionally conflicting with the personal identity of that person. The passer only enacts the pass to maintain standing in the duped community, not in order to fulfill personal identity definitions. Thus, outwardly, the passer insists the performed identity is authentic (Squires & Brouwer, 2002) while preserving the personal private identity not performed. Rohy (1996) notes,

as a figure, passing insists that the ‘truth’ of racial identity, ... relies on the presence or possibility of the false. Yet passing is not simply performance or theatricality, the pervasive tropes of recent work on sex and gender identity, nor is it parody or pastiche, for it seeks to erase rather than expose, its own dissimulation. (p. 226)

Determination of group belonging resting on exclusive visual cues troubles the accuracy of the identification, creating a “category crisis” (Squires & Brouwer, 2002). Conflict between the accuracy of identification and acclaimed identity challenges the agency of labeling members of a group.

Passing is not however limited to race and gender, as it can branch additionally to sexuality. Though distinctly different performances, these passes are inextricably linked as white

men historically controlled race, gender, and sexuality (Ginsberg, 1996). Sexuality's visual cues, typically more subtle than either race or gender, can be ascribed through dress and mannerisms in the same way that gender performance manifests. However to conflate gender and sexuality by any stretch would be a mistake, in the instance of passing, assuming masculine dress frequently implies more than gender identity, it may also imply heterosexuality as well, though the two identifiers operate in separate spheres. To be clear, a woman may pass as a man, though based on performativity may pass as either a heterosexual or homosexual male. On the other hand, a gay man may pass as a heterosexual man through dress and mannerisms as well. These levels of passing as Robinson (1994) contends, happen on the same body almost simultaneously. Additionally, sexuality does not have clear identifiers in the same way that gender and race do across cultures and class (Robinson, 1994).

In an introduction to a collection of essays about passing, Ginsberg (1996) describes, "Passing is about identities: their creation or imposition, their adaption or rejection, their accompanying rewards or penalties" (p. 2). This statement presumes that there would be incentives to passing as something else. Social benefits of crossing the imposed binary, especially before the middle to late twentieth century had significant impacts on living conditions, opportunities, and legal restrictions. Passing, according to Robinson (1994) stakes a claim to the real that does not have to connect to the truth. However she counters, if appropriating another identity, what is the cost to belong to an in-group? Ginsberg furthers, "assum[ing] a new identity, escaping the subordination and oppression accompanying on identity and accessing the privileges and status of the other" (1996, p. 3) offers a pricey incentive to slide into a more accepted identity. Based on the hierarchical construction of valued identities, passing from a lower tier to a higher tier destabilizes the presumed social order (Ginsberg, 1996).

Importantly, passing to a new identity shifts that individual away from their “essential self” and takes on multiple roles, masks, and performances in order to convincingly inhabit a different social landscape (Cutter, 1996). Taking on a variety of social roles positioned by societal demands necessitates continuous reframing of the pass in order to be believable to the out-group. As passing frequently occurs from the less privileged role to the more privileged position, it “exerts rhetorical or political force not primarily as the betrayal that must be disavowed for an oppressed group to claim its own essential identity but as a betrayal of ‘identity’ that offers one way of reading the production of the dominant culture’s own identifications” (Rohy, 1996, p. 226-7). In essence, passing for a different group is not a betrayal of the in-group identity, but rather, betrayal occurs when passing to an out-group identity that perpetuates the hierarchical system that necessitates the pass to begin with. According to Bornstein (1994) “A more universal and less depressing definition of passing would be the act of appearing in the gender of one’s *choice*. Everyone is passing: some have an easier job of it than others” (p. 125, author emphasis).

Trans*

“Trans* identities” as I will continuously use throughout the remainder of this thesis are defined as identities that seek to change from one established and recognized identity to another similarly recognizable identity. If specifics are needed dependent on context, “transsexual” will refer to someone who has undergone sex reassignment surgery (SRS) in order to attain congruence with gender identity (Lorber, 1994), “transgender” someone who identifies with a different gender than before-typically at odds with physical sex, and “transracial” someone who identifies with a race other than the race present on their birth certificate. The definition of the word “transvestite” has changed dramatically over the past decades. Lorber (1994) uses

“transvestites” to mean people who pass in opposite gender without intending sex reassignment surgery, today would resonate better as a definition for transgendered. I will use “transvestite” infrequently at best, and only to refer to someone who derives pleasure from dressing in clothing typical of the opposite sex. To refer to all identities in a transitional stage, “trans*” will be the more inclusive term.

Transsexual lives and theories typically are celebrated because their existence critiques heterosexist gender order (Elliot, 2009) by operating outside of the established norms. Yet norms do not disrupt the systematically imposed binary. For transsexual individuals, a shift in identity operates as a way to work within the binary spectrum in order to establish congruence between sex and gender (Elliot, 2009). Butler (1990) would contend that designations of sex are largely unimportant and transsexual people should separate their live gendered experience from bodily functionality. Outside of the binary, those who do not ascribe to a specific pole, resonate with terms closer to gender variance, gender ambiguity, or gender fluid. Further, if we completely accept gender as a fluid attribute, Butler reiterates that “transsexual” is an unnecessary distinction as sex is irrelevant (Elliot, 2009). Surgery is not enough to completely change the perceptions of others, also must be socially accepted and recognized with a new name and new preferred pronouns (Lorber, 1994).

Even transgressive bodies, both transgender and transsexual, are pressured to self-describe in binary categories (Sloop, 2004). For example, transsexuals looking to undergo sex reassignment surgery (SRS) must get approval from doctors after a waiting period. This forces them into a rhetorical bind to represent themselves in a way that the evaluating doctors observe a “man or woman ‘trapped’ in the body of the ‘other’ gender” (Sloop, 2004). Therefore in order to receive the surgery, they must fit into the prescribed, pre-established gender norms forgoing any

expressed fluidity. The imposed bi-gender system is so overtly oppressive that transsexual identity is expected to perform the new sex reassigned gender identity flawlessly (Sloop, 2004). Patients self-reporting gender descriptors for doctors therefore have right or wrong answers based on doctor appraisal (Hegarty, 2002). Meaning that post reassignment surgery, the binary gender system becomes the failsafe for performing the new gender. “If gender is nothing but an oppressive social order...are transgender persons more politically progressive in refusing to comply with it than their transsexual counterparts who seek recognition with in its terms?” (Elliot, 2009, p. 6). Refusing binary ascription fractures the social concept of acceptable identities.

Chapter 3 - Communication Theory of Identity

This thesis will use the communication-centered research on the difference between identity and identification to illuminate the contextual and historical descriptions of self. Grounding this thesis in the communicative elements of identity construction extends the rhetorical implications. The broad definitions of “identity” and “identification” are explained better when rationalized through the various social interactions an individual encounters. Hecht’s (1993) communication theory of identity (CTI) clearly articulates the different social spheres in which identity and identification collide.

In order to investigate how identity rhetoric conflicts with identification rhetoric, Hecht’s (1993) CTI addresses how messages involving identity construction relay through diverse social spheres. He explains, that although identity may be symbolic (as in a title, or described relationship) communication must occur in order to express it. Hecht (1993) divides frames of identity into four bubbles: personal, enactment, relationship, and communal. For a visual explanation, imagine these four frames as permeable bubbles, or in two-dimensions, circles of a Venn diagram, able to overlap and encapsulate in layers of two, three, or four at a time (See Figure 1). Elaborating further, I will break down each frame and explain how this lens helps to illuminate the identities and identification conflicts using the simplified example of a crayon.

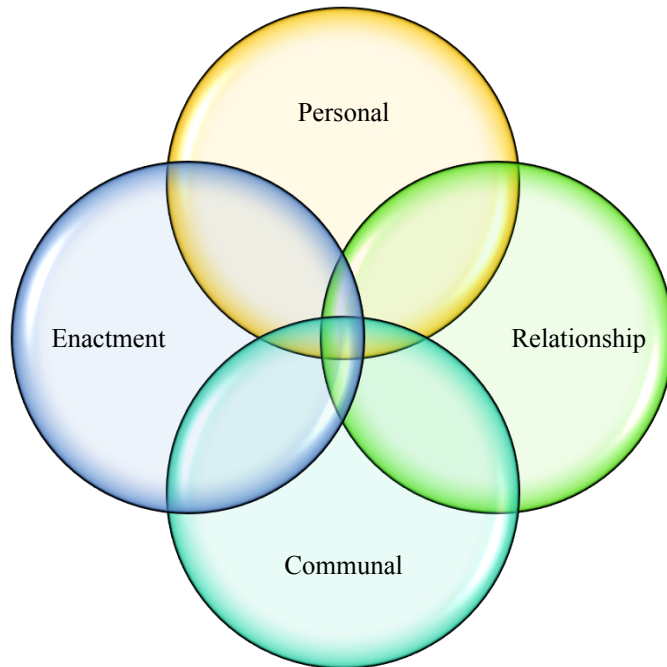


Figure 1: Communication Theory of Identity
Personal Frame

First, Hecht (1993) describes the personal frame as an individualized characteristic defined by feelings about self, including self-concept, or self-image. Further, personal identities are hierarchically ordered meanings of self as a defined subject in a social sphere. The self cannot completely divorce personal self-descriptors from social perspectives, permanently locating inherently mental self-image within a larger group construction. Personal identities also include meanings ascribed to self by others in the social group. In one study, belonging to an identifiable group, such as a choir or club, impacted self-identity by including the group title (Meisenbach & Kramer, 2014). This personal identity is the source of expectations and motivations for the self to accomplish. Therefore according to Hecht (1993), individuals are intrinsically driven by perceptions of desirable qualities.

For our purposes, the personal frame can be seen through the example of crayons. Take for instance the crayon whose label reads Red-Orange. In a personal frame, the Red-Orange, or

self-identifier, maybe under scrutiny or relatable dependent on the context in which that color is used. Anyone who is an avid colorer might point out that the way the label looks, or the way the crayon looks to the eye may very well differ from what it looks like on paper. Thus Red-Orange may look lighter in context of the finished artwork, or darker dependent on how it is used. So if the finished work includes a Red-Orange basketball, it may look more orange because perceptions and context typically consider basketballs to be orange. Red-Orange, the conscious crayon cannot permanently locate the self removed from context and therefore sees itself partially through social input. Likewise, personal frame can be seen for Caitlyn Jenner and Rachel Dolezal through personal descriptions in interview or personal press statements.

Enactment Frame

Second, Hecht (1993) describes the enactment frame as social interactions or shared messages. He furthers, though not all messages are about identity, they all express a component of identity by proxy of enacting a message, which must be interpreted through communication. In this frame, identity is emergent, as in slowly revealed through continued enactment. For example, first encounters with an individual reveal only one facet of an identity, but continued interactions unveil other components dependent on comfort, situation, and context. Enactment is also disclosed through social behavior and symbols. In the context of a large party or gathering, different behaviors manifest and translate differently than a close-knit assembly of friends. Symbols worn or displayed reflect conscious or unconscious aspects of identity as well. A simplistic explanation might be dressing in a uniform, or exhibiting a lapel pin, which might indicate allegiance, or belonging to a group. Similar to the personal frame, enactment also hierarchically orders identity in accordance with social roles. Continuing with the party motif, if someone in attendance snaps brusquely and a server appears, social roles may dictate that the

person snapping has a higher social value in this context as they have been invited to the event, rather than employed to work it. The enactment of ordering someone else around then construes a specific social identity at least to this individualized context.

Within the example of the coloring box, Red-Orange operates differently dependent on the associated context. As advanced coloring enthusiasts might do, Red-Orange may become a layer of color in a larger depiction, or an element in multiple figures of the picture. So through extended use of Red-Orange various facets of its versatility are highlighted. In one corner, a basketball, in another corner a child's backpack, in a third corner an accent on an elegant ball gown all demonstrating the sundry of uses for Red-Orange through continued interactions. Similarly, repeated and negotiated interactions for both Jenner and Dolezal with interviewers and others reflect enacted identity over the course of years.

Relationship Frame

Third, the relationship frame (Hecht, 1993) includes communication with content and relationship elements, which are mutually constructed through social interactions and jointly negotiated. Relationship identity emerges through interactions with others, then enacted communally through the relationship. Further, as relationships develop, identities become distinct social entities. For instance, after getting married, what were distinct individuals now become the singular couple: "Bill" and "Jean" become the "Johnsons." Therefore relationships in dyads interconnect so closely that they operate as one or as a component of a larger entity. To take this concept one step further, when placed in social settings, dyadic entities then interact with others to create deeper and more layered relationships. At this point the way these frames work together and overlap becomes clearer. Even in dyads or relationships, enactment between

couples or parts of couples forges deeper bonds between parts of groups or the whole, and can operate independently from a personal frame (See Figure 2 and Figure 3).

As one crayon in a whole box, Red-Orange, may be used in a variety of settings, but more commonly within certain prerequisites. For example, when drawing or coloring “fire” Red-Orange will likely be one of the core colors, but will also accompany Red, Yellow, Orange, and Yellow-Orange to make the full picture. This repeated association with the same group of colors that make up the combination for “fire” would further constitute the collective of “warm colors.” In the same way that repeated interactions with a specific individual may change the identity between the two and ultimately restructure their interactions within a group setting, the transition from Red-Orange to a member of Warm Colors renegotiates the relationships between them. In the instance of Caitlyn Jenner and Rachel Dolezal, several interviews invoke the names of family and friends or bring into the interview other individuals to reflect the relationship frame.

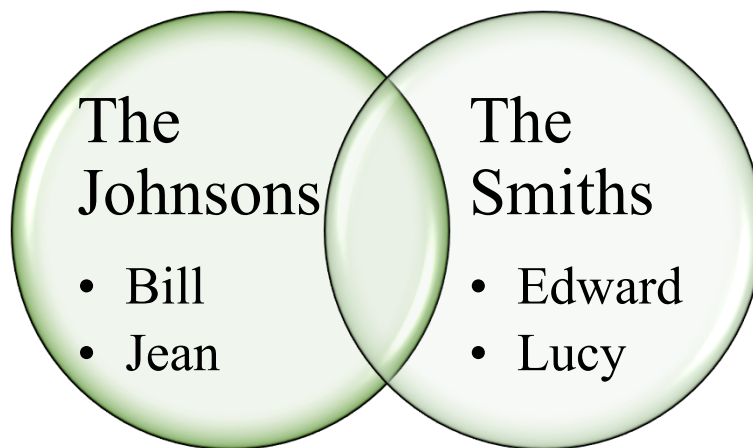


Figure 2: The Relationship Frame

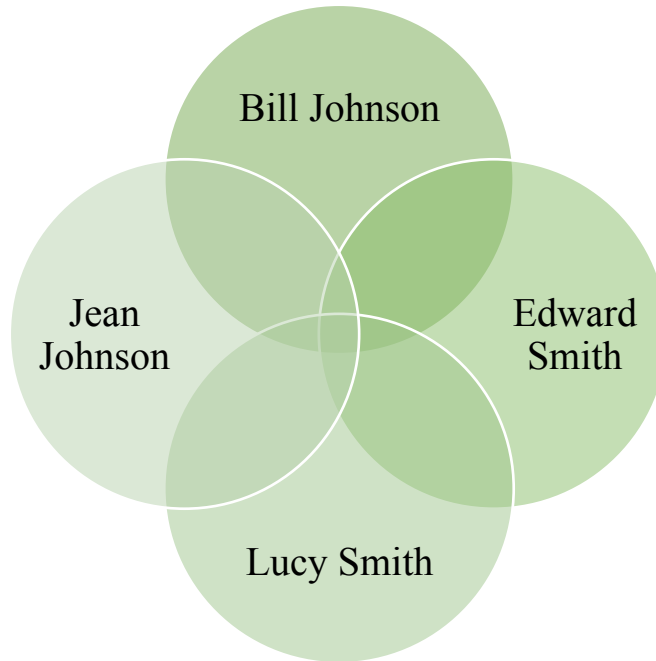


Figure 3: Relationship Frame Explanation

Imagine that each of these represented circles is actually a permeable sphere. Each sphere overlaps independently and collectively with every other sphere-creating spaces between each dyad (Bill & Jean, Bill & Lucy, Jean & Edward, Jean & Lucy, Bill & Edward, Lucy & Edward) to form six total dyad relationships. Each individual dyad has their own relationship built. For instance, Jean and Lucy have a different relationship than Jean and Edward. The way that Jean and Edward communicate their relationship is fundamentally different than the way any other enacted dyad works. This figure becomes more complicated when broadened to triads. The interactions between each triad (Jean, Lucy, & Edward; Lucy, Edward & Bill; Jean, Lucy & Bill; Edward, Bill, & Jean) are each uniquely different than the dyads, though the dyads play a part in the triadic reactions. Finally, coupling all of the participating individuals creates one group relationship (Bill, Jean, Lucy, & Edward) that is informed by both the dyads and the triads.

Communal Frame

Finally, Hecht (1993) describes the communal frame, or the identity held by the group, which bonds them together and will be further taught to new members. For the communal frame, identity emerges out of association with groups and networks of other individuals. Belonging to an ‘in group’ gives an additional layer of identity to an individual that they could not maintain without the combination provided by the group. Unsurprisingly, groups can form through a variety of means, all operating differently dependent on the type of group. From an ancient

biological perspective, groups were initially formed for safety in numbers, usually composed of close kin (Bar-Tal, Halperin, & de Rivera, 2007). Emotional contagion helps to cohere individuals by demonstrating the appropriate group response to a situation (Spoor & Kelly, 2004). As individuals feel a sense of belonging to a larger community, identity frames shift, at least in a linguistic reference, from ‘I’ to ‘we’ demonstrating a sense of the collective (de Swaan, 1995). By identifying with a group of similar individuals, it creates a larger sense of self, believing that the collective reacts and operates similarly to self.

Under this communal lens appears the crux of identity. However the external labeling, as in a communal frame, does not necessarily agree with the individual’s self-proclaimed identity. Therefore the conflict between identity and identification comes to a head through the communal lens. Which groups willing to claim and include individuals who would label themselves in the same way as compared to collectives who do not label those seeking membership like the in-group. Personal frames of identity do not necessarily align with communal identity frames (See Figures 4, 5, and 6).

The communal frame also struggles with which community holds the label gun. Though in theory the in-group can claim or reject individuals based on their qualities that align with group beliefs, the out-group may also have the power of identification. There is an elite group of crayons called the “Reds” consisting of designated red shaded crayons in a variety of pantones. In our situation, there is a Red-Orange crayon, which by label could belong to the Reds. Assuming that crayons have the power of conscious decision making, the Reds may claim Red-Orange as one of their own, making Red-Orange part of the in-group. So long as Red-Orange also believes him/her self to be a member of the Reds, personal identity and in-group identification align, welcoming Red-Orange to well-deserved communal identity frame. At this

point Red-Orange, belongs to the in-group and is likely granted the use of the communal ‘we’ to describe both self and group. Now if someone outside of the in-group, such as a child on a coloring binge, sees Red-Orange as not belonging to the Reds, and instead labels Red-Orange as a member of the Oranges, the out-group identification would not align with both the in-group claim and the personal frame of Red-Orange. The trouble is, although the in-group communal and personal frames work together, the out-group child has enough power to use and label Red-Orange as something else. Of course this could also happen where the Reds do not claim Red-Orange, meaning that although Red-Orange identifies Red on a personal frame, is rejected by the communal frame. Though a childish description, breaking down identity and identification by way of in-group and out-group coloring examples provides a tangible visual. Caitlyn Jenner and Rachel Dolezal’s conflicted public response stems from the friction between the personal and communal frames.

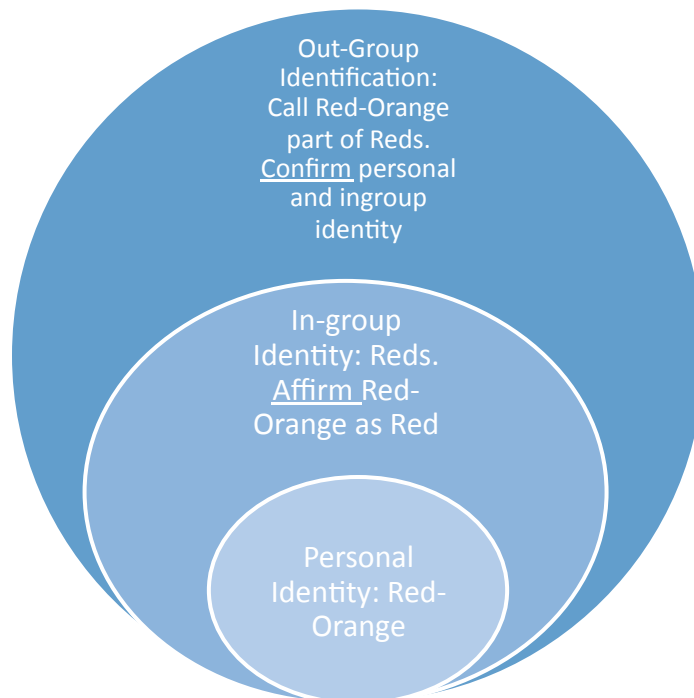


Figure 4: Communal Frame, Aligned Identity

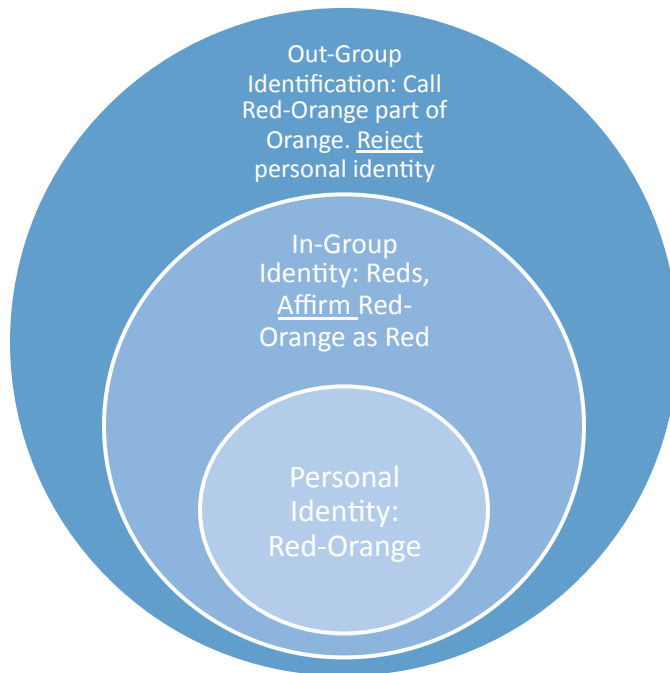


Figure 5: Communal Frame, Unaligned Out-Group Identification

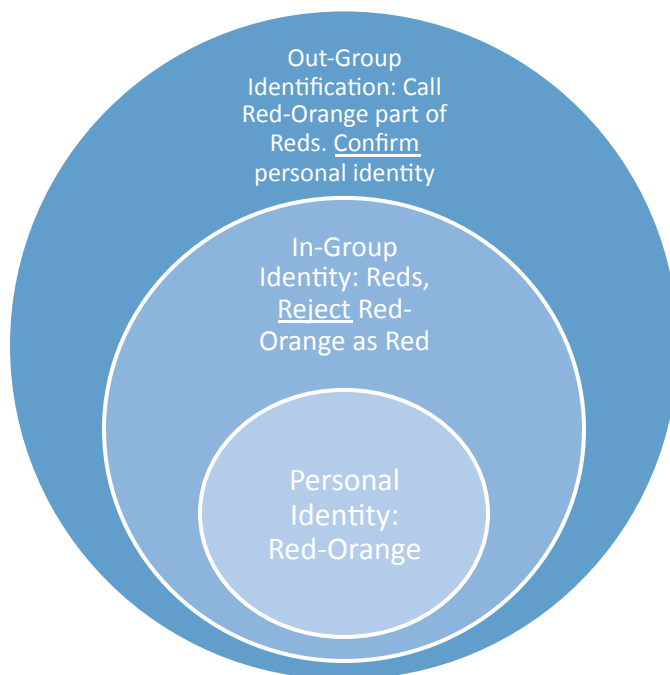


Figure 6: Communal Frame, Unaligned In-Group Identification

Chapter 4 - Analysis

Justification of Texts

The following texts were selected for their versatility in this analysis. In order to find similarities to aid the analysis between the case studies pairs of interviews fall under this criteria. Sawyer's (2015) interview of Bruce Jenner demonstrates an in-group lens of one white woman interviewing another. In the same vein, Melissa Harris-Perry's (2015) interview of Rachel Dolezal connects two black women as members of the in-group. Both case studies had interviews with Matt Lauer, providing a similar perspective for the enacted and communal frames. Finally, both case studies had interview published through *Vanity Fair*. Although those interviews and published stories had different interviewers, the medium and audience reading the stories is likely to be similar.¹

Personal Frame

Hecht (1993) describes the personal frame as something inherent about the sense of self in independent and social situations. A spiritual sense of being encompassing the individual's source of expectations and motivations for self, the personal frame operates as both separate from the social pressures, and bends to the whims of context. For the purpose of interviews, the focus of the situation is on the honest self-description of the interviewee, though given that the interview itself is broadcast to a larger audience, the interviewee may negotiate the personal

¹ For the sake of clarity in this thesis, texts related to Caitlyn Jenner will be textually cited as (Sawyer, 2015) for the Diane Sawyer interview on April 24, 2015; (Lauer, 2015 *Jenner*) for the September 9, 2015 interview with Matt Lauer; and (Bissinger, 2015) and (Bissinger, 2015 Extended Interview) for the two part *Vanity Fair* installments the longer of which will include paragraph numbers for direct quotations. Texts related to Rachel Dolezal will be textually cited as follows: (Harris-Perry, 2015) for the interview on July 16, 2015 with Melissa Harris-Perry; (Lauer, 2015 *Dolezal*) for the July 16, 2015 interview with Matt Lauer; and (Samuels, 2015) for Allison Samuels publication in *Vanity Fair* which will also have paragraph numbers for direct quotations.

refraction of self in other ways. Broadly, the interviews with Caitlyn Jenner and Rachel Dolezal describe themselves by answering the questions of the interviewer. For instance, Jenner's interview with Diane Sawyer provides detailed descriptions of internal self meanings as well as negotiated meanings in relation to social context. Jenner positions the described self as both member of families, though uncertain of what that continued position will be, as well as historic Olympian. However, Jenner also distinguishes between what historic context meant publically and what famous images or moments meant internally. Similar interview tactics occur with Dolezal who reflects on the publicized image from her parents as well as describes her internal monologue as an adolescent. Using these self-reflective interviews provides a glimpse at what the personal frame encompasses.

Caitlyn Jenner

A move toward self-honesty.

First, Diane Sawyer interviewed Bruce Jenner² on April 24, 2015 with a two hour special billed by the network as the tell-all interview of the mysterious and scandalous change happening to the former Decathlon gold medalist. Jenner, having lived under the spotlight of the popular juggernaut reality television show "The Kardashians," used this interview to clear the air of speculation and rumor once and for all. Dressed in a royal blue collared shirt and black dress pants, with his long hair initially pulled back in a thin ponytail, Jenner sat down with Diane

² For the purpose of the Diane Sawyer interview on April 24, 2015, I will refer to Jenner by the requested pronouns of the date. The Sawyer interview was the last interview done where Jenner used masculine pronouns and had not yet released a "feminine" name, going by birth name Bruce instead. As the interview in large scope uses both masculine pronouns and the transcript refers to Bruce rather than the current preferred name Caitlyn, I will stay consistent with the text examined. The *Vanity Fair* article released the feminized name, and Bissinger's article uses both pronouns-masculine to describe conversations with Bruce, feminine to describe conversations with Caitlyn. I, in similar fashion, will use the pronouns requested in accordance with the article suggestions.

Sawyer in the star's living room. Sawyer's voice over at the beginning of the special describes him as "welcoming and a little apprehensive...the person whose face has changed so much over recent years is quiet, knowing the moment that carries you forward can also mean no way back" (Sawyer, 2015). She knowingly sets up a situation that opens the previously protected discussions about identity and disclosure, allowing for an equally forthcoming response. Almost as an attempt to relieve the pressure of the moment, Jenner jumps into a muddled monologue about his emotional state coming to this day:

I have been thinking about this day forever and what I should do with my life. How do I tell my story? How do I tell people, you know, what I've been through? And that day is today. I need the tissues. It's gonna be kind of tough, but today is the day, to be honest with myself. (Sawyer, 2015)

Jenner's initial hesitation, though arguably an introductory tactic, illustrates the complexity in revealing a portion of identity that had previously been kept secret. Like peeling back layers of disguises, Jenner edges closer to honesty, closer to truth, and always through the guidance of Diane Sawyer working as the voice of the curious.

After allowing Jenner to hedge his answers, Sawyer (2015) asks him, "So Bruce Jenner is..." and calmly waits for a response. A deep breath later, Jenner responds, "Bruce Jenner is, I would say, I've always been very confused with my gender identity since I was this big" (Sawyer, 2015) Though the initial question permitted him to answer in the third person, he changed tactics, reverting instead to a personal perspective, using "I" rather than Sawyer's proffered deflection, "he". In other interviews Jenner admits that some language choices are a force of habit. Bissinger quotes a conversation, "I don't really get hung up. A guy came in the other day and I was fully dressed—it's just habit, I said 'Hi, Bruce here,' and I went, Oh fuck, it

ain't Bruce, I was screwing up doing it" (Bissinger, 2015 para. 24). Language usage when tied to identity can linger long after a transitional phase.

Jenner, either by his history as a world-renowned athlete, or fondness of metaphor, refers to confrontation with identity in terms of "running." He states in his initial breaking of a question as "Bruce Jenner, you know, has to deal with these issues, literally running away from all of this stuff" (Sawyer, 2015). First made famous for his triumph in the decathlon, Jenner became the famous "world's greatest athlete" adorning Wheaties boxes across the country, collected as an action figure, and in his own reflection, "a confused person at the time, running away from my life, running away from who I was" (Sawyer, 2015). Sawyer holds up a picture, a solemn broad-shouldered athlete standing atop the 1976 Olympic podium, not rejoicing with the accomplishment, he sees himself as "so sad. Not only was that part of my life over, I had so many other issues to deal with, you know, in my life that, oh, my God, what do I do now?" (Sawyer, 2015). Running also implies creating a sense of distance between self and true self. Jenner's consideration that the two "beings" operate separately indicates specific differentiation between self-presentation and internal turmoil. Echoing Butler's concept of performativity, Jenner's identity performance as male disguises the inner feminine core. He furthers, "Bruce always telling a lie. He's lived a lie his whole life about who he is and I can't do that any longer" (Sawyer, 2015). Reverting to referring to himself in the third person for masculine personification, he creates a distance for the true self to emerge by shifting to the personal pronoun who will independently move forward. Bruce may have done things in the past, but "I" will move forward into something new, separate from the old configuration of self. Later he uses the same tactic, referring to Bruce as an alternative figure external of self, "Bruce lives a lie. She is not a lie. I can't do it anymore" (Sawyer, 2015). Refusing to designate the only performed

aspect of himself, quite literally referring to the curtain that separates on stage and off stage, he opens the space to a mingling of presentation and preparation. He echoes the same separation of self from past self in responding to Sawyer's narration, "he said he could no longer endure the possibility he might die after only living in someone else's life" (Sawyer, 2015). Designating a past experience as a different person, living a different life casts performativity in a distanced acting portrayal. He comments later "I'd be so mad at myself that I didn't explore that side of me, you know?" (Sawyer, 2015). Using the vernacular of "sides" in an almost Jekyll and Hyde polarity, Jenner describes a clean separation of one self from the other.

Born this way.

From the beginning of the interview, Jenner refers to personal embodiment and individual struggles as something inherent within, un-imposed by external impetus. As he explained to his children, and again to Sawyer, he walks through the envisioned process of divine creation.

He's looking down, and he says, ok, what are we going to do with this one? ...And he gave me all these wonderful qualities... And then, at the end, when he's just finishing, he goes, wait a second. We've got to give him something. Everybody has stuff in their life that they have to deal with, you know? (Sawyer, 2015)

Relying on a creation narrative removes the presumed sense of choice to become something else and instead promotes a feeling of correction or return to the center. If his core is something other than the physical presentation, then in true chiropractic form, transgender become a realignment with an internal sense of self. He describes that he may not be "genetically born that way" but upon internal reflection knows he was created a woman. As Christian, Jenner turned to prayer in navigating the internal conflict. He says,

I would always wonder, in God's eyes, how does he see me? I had this feeling and a kind of a revelation that maybe this is my cause in life. This is why God put me on this Earth is to deal with this issue. (Sawyer, 2015)

Designating creation of self as a mission or directive in leading a fulfilled life lifts the burden of choice between right and wrong and instead indicates a motivational purpose, therefore able to deflect criticism for past actions.

Soul.

Jenner conceptualizes the foundation or truth of creation as centered on the internal workings, in his words, "a soul." As he described to his children, God looked down and "goes, you know, hey, let's give him the soul of a female and let's see how he deals with that, you know?" (Sawyer, 2015). He furthers under the guidance of Sawyer's question, "are you a woman?" that "yes. For all intents and purposes, I am a woman... but my heart and my soul and everything that I do in life, it is part of me. That female side is part of me" (Sawyer, 2015). The coupling of action as embodied by a person encapsulates the inter-connectedness that forms the whole of identity. Actions, dictated by the internal personal motivations or expectations form the physical portrayal of what it means to be human. Gender identity becomes then part of an internal struggle, or as Jenner describes, "gender identity is how to do with who you are as a person and your soul, and who you identify with inside" (Sawyer, 2015). Later in the episode, Jenner discusses what it was like to tell his third wife Kris Jenner. He admits, "I probably was not as good at saying, you know, he, this is down deep in my soul and I don't know if I can go any farther like this" (Sawyer, 2015). By depicting identity as hidden deep within something, at an unreachable level, it positions the core of a personal identity as the crux upon which everything else is based.

Body.

As the described soul is the crux of Jenner's self-identity concept, then the body must alter in order to accommodate the same alignment goals. Bissinger's representation of the shift from one personal embodiment to another dramatizes, "*Bruce* Jenner went to the office in Beverly Hills, thinking the facial-feminization surgery would take about five hours. *Caitlyn* Jenner left the office in Beverly Hills after the procedure had taken roughly 10 hours" (Bissinger, 2015, [emphasis mine]). Cleverly, Bissinger uses the same sentence structure for both sentences down to the verb, but changes the first name. At the core of the diagrammed sentence, the same things happen, but the external proper noun changes slightly. In similar light, shifting an external bodily performance alleviated the tensions internally. Even as a young child, Jenner described how he wanted to put on a dress, "at that time, I didn't know why I was doing it, besides it just made me feel good" (Sawyer, 2015). He intentionally transposed his appearance in order to find alignment with the conflicted and feminine leanings he felt internally. Matching the internal self-descriptors to the external performative aspects of identity relieved the friction between the two opposing forces. Under the guidance of a therapist, he began taking hormone treatment, further altering his physical appearance to match his internal conflict. Taking estrogen chased away the turmoil of frustration, alleviating the tensions between conflicting selves. The things that most women take for granted, such as wearing traditionally feminine clothing like skirts or dresses, are performative aspects of identity. For Jenner, "his goal as her is so modest, just to have nail polish like everyone else" (Sawyer, 2015) would be enough of a performative alignment akin to a full-length movie instead of a snapshot of identity. He explains, to "be able to have my nail polish on long enough that it actually chips off" (Sawyer, 2015) would be a liberating experience, to

finally portray the hidden her long enough to outlast a manicure. To consistently act in agreement with internal identity would be a welcome relief to the sixty-five year old.

Though Jenner's physical portrayal works as a soothing balm to the internal turmoil, bodily becoming Caitlyn relieves the pressure to uphold the enacted qualities of Bruce Jenner and develop a different, more welcoming personality of Caitlyn. When asked by journalist Buzz Bissinger of *Vanity Fair* about what will be the first thing to do after the unveiling of Jenner's transition, "I'm going to enjoy life. I have nothing left to hide. I am kind of a free person, a free soul" (Bissinger, 2015 Extended Interview). By separating the actions of an individual as constrained by the physical portrayal in which they occur, Jenner uses the new performative aspect of her identity as a liberating representation of aligning an inner soul with an external likeness. Bissinger's article highlights a frugal nature of Bruce Jenner who scrounged for golf balls on the course rather than buying new ones, and skimmed on luxury items. Jenner confesses that to meet her mother for the first time as Caitlyn, she will splurge on a private plane explaining,

"Isn't Caitlyn a much better friend?" Bruce, he would never send a plane. No, no, no, what a jerk the guy was, O.K., Caitlyn is like, "send the plane. Mom, we're sending a plane, we're going to go pick you up and bring you down here." It seems like she has a lot more friends than he ever had. (Bissinger, 2015 Extended Interview)

Jenner repeats several times in the extended interview how Caitlyn has the freedom to do things traditionally out of character for Bruce. For instance, calling a woman who had written her a letter after the Diane Sawyer interview aired. Caitlyn in her physical and mental form would happily call someone across the country to talk whereas Bruce would never have thought to do the same.

Rejection of stuck.

The tensions between the internal self and the external appearance left Jenner struggling in an invisible battle between outside perception and internal perspective. Near the beginning of the interview, he says, “so, here I am stuck, and I hate the word, you know, a girl stuck in a guy’s body. I hate that terminology” (Sawyer, 2015). The metaphorical forked path creates the illusion of choice between two polarizing identities. Instead he rejects the immobilizing weight of the conflicting sides, singling out the sole center of self in the midst of the oppositional definitions. As he describes,

I’m me. I’m me. I’m a person, and this is who I am. I am not stuck in anybody’s body.

It’s just who I am as a human being. My brain is much more female than it is male. It’s hard for people to understand that. (Sawyer, 2015)

His claim of a singular entity pulled by two sides rejects the either/or mentality of two beings fighting for dominance over a body. Instead he accepts a center point that has ability to change with the multifaceted approach to his personal frame. In contrast to the repetitive notion of “running,” his reaction to some kind of imposed stagnation indicates a desire for complete agency over identity negotiation. When “running” from something, he has a choice to wrestle with the conflict, whereas “being stuck” removes his sense of agency over his own identity.

Emergent self.

As the Sawyer interview was the last interview before Jenner assumed his new identity as “her,” Sawyer asked him what the dream might be. Simply put, to “reemerge as her” indicating a kind of physical metamorphosis to a being that has the same chemical and genetic make up, just with a little more make-up. To emerge as from hiding “as myself. How simple is that? Isn’t that great?” again re-centers a complete being at the crux of the identity discussion without imposing

a false separation between perceived self and other unknown identity. By coming into one's own, the transformation of enacting femininity is not a new identity, but rather a growth into a person always meant to be. Just as a caterpillar dissolves one physical form to become another, so will Jenner have to dissolve the hyper-masculinity lingering from the 1976 Olympics in order to emerge as a new being.

Rachel Dolezal

Race and cultural blackness.

Unlike Caitlyn Jenner's interviews, which spanned a matter of months, the breaking news story of Rachel Dolezal's identity happened over a whirlwind of a week with some interviews lingering into later months. Consequently, the three primary texts used here happen over a period of three days. Initially, the interview with Matt Lauer on June 16, 2015 questioned directly, "are you an African-American woman?" (Lauer, 2015 *Dolezal*). Dolezal instead answers, "I identify as black" which intentionally creates a distinction between two categories: African-American and black. Notably, Lauer never proffers a category 'black' as a viable option, though Dolezal clings firmly to the self-ascribed definition. Though she acquiesces to his terminology when asked without alternative, she never verbally ascribes African-American as part of her self-identification. As a point of polarity, Lauer pulls up a picture of Dolezal during her teenage years asking, "is this an African-American woman, or is that a Caucasian woman?" (Lauer, 2015 *Dolezal*) which more directly addresses the controversy of Dolezal's story. Though she had described herself as 'black' in the previous statement, he continues to use a third category of African-American. She responds that during that particular time in her life she did not self-identify in the way that Lauer asks (African-American).

Dolezal's story initially broke because of her presumed parents holding up the same picture of a visibly Caucasian woman. The outing of a white daughter masquerading as a black activist turned the question as to what part of identity was genetically inherited and what part derived from a connected experience. Dolezal clearly separates the two factors, one as a "biological identity [that] was thrust upon me and married to me" (Harris-Perry, 2015), and a central experience or connection to blackness. As Dolezal described to Allison Samuels of *Vanity Fair*, "I wouldn't say I'm African American, but I *would* say I'm black, and there's a difference in those terms" (Samuels, 2015, para. 10, emphasis in transcript). Samuels adds, "If there is a difference between being black and being African American, it's one that escapes the vast majority of people I know" (Samuels, 2015 para. 11). Dolezal seems to delineate between a genetically inherited African American identity, and a culturally adapted blackness to which she ascribes. In the Lauer interview, she quotes her son as saying, "mom, racially you're human and culturally you're black" (Lauer, 2015 *Dolezal*). Separating culture and race has intricate nuances that feel a bit like sifting sand from silt, intrinsically they go together, though could be studied independently, they are more commonly seen intertwined.

Complexity.

Dolezal's initial instinct when prefacing her identity experience to interviewers is to start with a hedging phrase about complexity of identity. She tells Matt Lauer, "I did feel that at some point I would need to address the complexity of my identity" (Lauer, 2015 *Dolezal*). By the time he asks whether or not she has been intentionally deceiving other people about her identity, she balks, "I do take exception to that, because it's a little more complex than me identifying as black or answering a question of 'are you black or white?' ... It's more complex than, you know, being true or false in that particular instance" (Lauer, 2015 *Dolezal*). Relying on the 'complex'

narrative allows her to muddle the line between the bifurcated identities of black, white, and African American. Under her nuanced definitions, she does not have to completely ascribe to one perspective or another; she could navigate between personal ascriptions and publically enforced ones without discrediting her narrative. If identity does rely solely on the personal frame, working through a singular definition determined by an individual, then Dolezal's narrative does not have to undergo the validation process of communal definitions. Her complex notion of identity factors from her heritage, her cultural ascription, visual indicators, and physical portrayal all interpreted through multiple lenses rather than her own strict perspective. As she tells Melissa Harris-Perry,

If I was to drop back into different moments of when I've either been identified, including by the police as black, white and unidentifiable, because I'm all three. Or you know, I've identified as, in certain moments, different ethnicities, I can explain what's going on in those moments. (Harris-Perry, 2015)

Dolezal suggests that identifying with a population based on color of skin recognized by an external individual might force into self-awareness the identity enacted by the assumed person.

Experience and connection.

Unlike Jenner who claims that an internal feminine core-being justifies her described identity, Dolezal's approach to justification relates to experiences and meaningful connections. True, Dolezal has a wealth of education about black culture, including a master's degree from Howard University (a historically black college/university- HBCU) and her time at Eastern Washington University as a part time lecturer specializing in black politics and history of black hair. She described to Lauer, "this is on a very real connected level, how I've actually had to go there with the experience, not just the visible representation, but with the experience" (2015

Dolezal). Dolezal values the connective experience to a culture or a group of individuals as part of the formation of her personal identity. Strikingly, much of the criticism has come from her *lack* of experience as a black woman. Harris-Perry, having asked if Dolezal was black, furthered, “what does it mean to you to assume the mantle, the identity of blackness?” (Harris-Perry, 2015). Dolezal responded, admittedly eloquently,

First of all, it means that I have really gone there with the experience in terms of being a mother of two black sons and really owning what it—what it means to experience and live blackness... Another aspect would be that I, as a—from a very young age, felt a spiritual, visceral, this feeling of central connection with black is beautiful, you know, just the black experience and wanting to celebrate that. (Harris-Perry, 2015)

To break this lengthy list down, her experience with blackness hinges on two things: motherhood of two black sons, and a powerful connection to black appreciation. Her identity as mother impacts more fully what her personal frame entails, and connections to a culture that enhances her relationships. Her central connection never exceeds a more specific phrase than the actual word, “connection.” In all of the interviews described and considered in this project, her go-to phrase has to do with a “connection to the black experience” without further defining what that experience looks like, or feels like. When addressing the context of her outing, she talks readily about the occurrences in the community that would have been better served by her forthright activism unobscured by the media melee. In the *Vanity Fair* interview, she explains, “I don’t know spiritually and metaphysically how this goes, but I do know that from my earliest memories I have awareness and connection with the black experience, and that’s never left me” (Samuels, 2015 para. 5).

Besides relying on the trope of connection, Dolezal also heavily uses the idea of “going there” to indicate the connective qualities of her experience. With Lauer she states, “I’ve actually had to *go there* with the experience” (Lauer, 2015 *Dolezal*, emphasis mine), and with Harris-Perry she describes, “I have *really gone there* with the experience” (Harris-Perry, 2015, emphasis mine). To use the metaphor of distance to reflect experience also in itself creates a pre-prescribed distance between the two facets initially. If she has to go there with the experience, then she had to travel, to remove herself from a different aspect in order to enact an alternative. In the same way that Jenner uses a running metaphor about avoiding identity confrontation, Dolezal uses active language of doing, going, and accomplishing something on this journey toward identity.

Identity on a continuum.

Where Jenner used the idea of an emergent being beginning a new life, Dolezal frames identity formation on a personal level as on a “continuum.” In her interview with Lauer, she describes, “my life has been one of survival, and the decisions I have made along the way, including my identification, have been to survive and to carry forward in my journey and life continuum” (Lauer, 2015 *Dolezal*). Instead of fracturing a life experience into before this identity and after this identity, she instead views her identification process as a constant evolving matter. To put a trite visualization to it, Jenner’s identity description looks more like the flipping of a light switch: on or off for a look at past or current self. Dolezal’s identity as she describes it changes over the course of time, a lava-lamp morphing in response to the heat of the lamp. In the *Vanity Fair* interview she states,

It's not something I can put on and take off anymore. Like I said, I've had my years of confusion and wondering who I really [was] and why and how do I live my life and make sense of it all, but I'm not confused about that any longer. (Samuels, 2015 para. 5)

This quotation suggests that Dolezal is not looking to create a new identity to align with an internal polarity, but rather has actively tangled with identity definitions while molding an external presentation. She furthered to Harris-Perry, "This has not been something that just is a casual, you know come-and-go sort of identity you know, or an identity crisis. It's something that I've paid away" (Harris-Perry, 2015). Had this conflict stemmed from some kind of abrupt change as indicated by a crisis, or a voluntary physical representation, her personal frame would have been less resolute, hedging on ambiguity rather than complexity.

Near the end of the interview when Harris-Perry asks about the possibility of returning to whiteness as a solution to the media backlash, Dolezal abruptly shuts down the question.

No. No, like my entire life is—life is a journey and you're kind of evolving and growing all along the way. And so it it's accumulation of all these choices that you've made. And the Rachel that I was before Thursday is still the Rachel I am now and the Rachel I'm going to be in the future. And so I haven't kind of twist faces back and forth. I think that it can be read as, I was supposed to condition to sanction part of myself. I finally, you know, had the freedom to start owning this and celebrating and re-connecting. What it is in a spiritual sense, a cultural sense, race, ethnicity, et cetera. When it comes to then, you know, there's also a window where it's then re-sanctioned. (Harris-Perry, 2015)

Viewing herself on a long path with an unspecific destination creates an identity lived perspective rather than an exclusive snapshot, or sudden perspective. Where Jenner discussed sides, dividing her self-identity into one of two portions, Dolezal's description is more holistic,

looking to all aspects rather than one element that has more weight than another. Dolezal does not refer to a prior identity such as Caitlyn's description of "Bruce," Dolezal's personal history uses the same reference identity. In this light, perhaps connection is to multiple components as a whole, rather than privileging one trait or another.

Physical portrayal.

As with most identities, physical expression completes an alignment with an internal self-description. During the Lauer interview Dolezal describes her childhood years drawing self-portraits "with the brown crayon instead of the peach crayon and black curly, hair, you know, yeah. That was how I was portraying myself" (Lauer, 2015 *Dolezal*). Granted, kindergarten self-portraits do not strictly indicate a deep personal connection to something, especially a culture. However her self-imagery would indicate a similar alignment to Jenner having referenced that she has always dreamt as a woman (Sawyer, 2015). Dolezal explained to Harris-Perry that it wasn't until after graduation from high school that she felt that she had "the personal agency to express" (Harris-Perry, 2015) her identity. By a combination of experiences with her family's adopted black children learning hair-braiding techniques, and through her academic research, Dolezal turned to altering her hair to align her physical appearance. As a woman with braids herself, Harris-Perry asked out-right, "What's up with your hair?" (Harris-Perry, 2015). Harris-Perry describes black hair as one of the core tenets of black womanhood dealing with the adolescent pain of tight braids or scalding hot iron. Dolezal explained her hair journey as learning through her adopted little sister about braiding and by the time she moved to Mississippi she tried braids herself. As she describes, "I always used to pull my hair back because I didn't like didn't feel comfortable... And then when I got braids it was like, just the smiles and OK, you know?" (Harris-Perry, 2015). Samuels (2015) in a far more skeptical tone states that while

Dolezal's inclusion of braids may have helped her internal identity journey, she also frames this act as "the way she presents herself" as in physically donning a costume to complete the facade. Braids as a hairstyle choice helped to physically reaffirm an internal identity in the same way that feminine clothing affirmed Jenner's identity.

Identity impact work credibility.

Perhaps most significantly about Dolezal's identity as presented in a physical form is the implication of the effects of her activism. As the former president of the Spokane NAACP chapter, an unpaid position, the question of her identity also threw her work under a microscope. Her birth parents asked why she would be unable to do the same work as a Caucasian woman, though her resignation from the presidency and non-renewal of her contract at Eastern Washington University seems to indicate that her biological credentials played a greater role in her credibility than her employment as an academic assumed. Lauer even credits her work for the NAACP chapter as "a lot of people feel you breathed new life into that chapter—could you have been as successful, could you have had as big an impact had you been a Caucasian woman as opposed to being identified as African-American woman?" (Lauer, 2015 *Dolezal*). The honest answer she gives is that she does not know whether she could have had the same impact. During the interview with Samuels (2015), she seems surprised that her work for the NAACP did not stand for itself. Her credibility, integrity, and quality of leadership, traits that she self-describes, come under question along with her seemingly unstable identity. If the work being done, even for an already established organization, is inherently tied to the identity credentials of the person doing the work, then only those people with justifiable and readily recognizable identities can potentially do meaningful work.

Enactment

For Caitlyn Jenner in her interview with Diane Sawyer, identity is clearly emergent as Jenner reveals piece-by-piece elements of “her” as compared to the previous Bruce identity. Over the course of the interview, Jenner enacts differently pieces of identity, slowly removing layers of built up masculine, pop culture, hero to uncover a less publicized self and presumably a more true identity. At one point, Jenner invites the cameras back to her closet to show Sawyer her favorite dress, acting as a symbol of identity. In Dolezal’s case, media outlets dug up reports of her past, including her enrollment at Howard University, and a court case she filed years ago describing racial discrimination. By highlighting these elements in a new media context, Dolezal must react and enact her new identity under the past constraints of previous actions.

Caitlyn Jenner

Familial interactions.

Jenner’s family includes six biological kids, three ex-wives, and four stepchildren from his final marriage. The most famous children are those from the highly publicized *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* with his third wife Kris. In order to examine the kinds of interactive qualities of each element, I will break down the reactions to a wives category and the reactions from the kids.

Wives.

In 1972 Bruce Jenner had decided to pursue his Olympic dream again, he married flight attendant and college sweetheart Chrystie Crowover. Supporter, and confidant, Jenner told Sawyer (2015) that Chrystie was probably the first person to know. One day early in the second year of their marriage, Chrystie notices a rubber band attached to the hook of one of her bras.

When she brings it up, he denies it at first, then addresses it head on, “That’s why the rubber band. Because I’ve been wearing your clothes” (Bissinger, 2015 para. 55). He states,

I didn’t go heavily into it back then. I said, these are my issues. This is what I deal with. I do a little cross dressing. I do a little of this, a little of that, you know, it’s gonna be fine. We’ll work all that stuff out. You know, cross dressers, in most cases, they do it for all sorts of reasons. I had bigger issues than just crossing dressing. (Sawyer, 2015)

In this relayed conversation, Jenner minimizes the reality of the situation. He localizes the conflict to something that he alone has to deal with, and that it will not play a significant role in their continuing relationship. It almost feels like a confessional, while still taking on the agency of “fixing” the problem. Chrystie does not balk at this confession, rather she seems to take this new piece of information in stride. Bissinger’s (2015) article quotes Chrystie as saying she knew much more than Jenner relates to Diane Sawyer (2015). The *Vanity Fair* exposé cites Chrystie, “He told me he always wanted to be a woman” (Bissinger, 2015 para. 56). As Jenner relates, “like most women, they think, oh, I can fix that. You know, it’s going to be okay. I can fix that” (Sawyer, 2015). Though this confession in which ever form it actually took carries immense relationship weight, Chrystie said that as a whole, the information was not all that troubling. She told Bissinger,

If he had been wanting to dress up when he was with me or any of those things it would have been different. But he was still masculine... It wasn’t like it was a hard thing to handle. It was like a piece of information he shared with me and then he went back to being a real guy... He had a strong, healthy sex drive and seemed like a pure man. (2015)

For six years the couple continued to guard the secret. They had a son named Burt, and by the seventh year they are expecting again (Cassandra) and in the processes of separating. Jenner

explains that the divorce was not due to gender issues, but rather his own restlessness in the marriage.

Shortly after his first divorce in 1980, Jenner begins dating singer/songwriter Linda Thompson. As Hollywood's glamour couple, they openly discuss the physical and sexual attraction of their marriage. Together they have two children, Brandon and Brody and Linda describes it as "a dream marriage" (Sawyer, 2015). However from Jenner's perspective, all is not well and it has nothing to do with the marriage. As Sawyer narrates, "one day, he walks in the room. He is suffering, distraught and tells [Linda] about an agonizing conflict inside. He thinks that he is a woman, not sure he can hold together the man she married" (Sawyer, 2015). Note the striking difference in confession between Chrystie and Linda. A brief span of years between them, and where Chrystie heard the glossy version of appearance alone, Linda hears something strictly tied to personal identity and gender. Again, the burden of keeping something together rests on Jenner, and not the interaction between the couple. Taking on the singular responsibility is perhaps more isolating, though indicative of the associated responsibility of an internal struggle. This time however, the couple seeks therapy. The therapist in turn tells them both that, "this is real. This is not a choice. Linda realizes it's not something you can overcome, fix or pray away" (Sawyer, 2015). With two young children (Brandon three and a half, and Brody 18 months), Linda told Bissinger (2015) that the therapist presented her with two options: live with him through this transition and stay married, or "move on". She concedes that she "opted for the latter because I married a man...I thought my pain doesn't compare to the pain that he's in. At least I'm comfortable living in my own body" (Bissinger, 2015 para. 67). Here Linda acknowledges the deeper experience of Jenner's gender dysphoria, though learning about the

condition does not happen from Jenner, but through the words of a therapist. In this instance, a common experience helped to illuminate the tied relationship connections.

By 1990, Jenner had been on female hormones under the guidance of a therapist, but was desperate to find another career lead. While doing a celebrity fishing show in Alaska, a friend mentioned the magnetic shop-a-holic Kris Kardashian and insisted on making introductions. With four children of her own, Jenner and Kris hit it off right away and were married by 1991. However, this is where reports of their personal conversations get cloudy. Jenner told Sawyer (2015) that having taken hormones for five years, he was wearing a 36B cup size, and had to finally address his appearance to his wife. Her response in his words, “yell, you know, okay, you know, you like to wear women’s clothes. And I’m going well, I kind of downplayed it some” (Sawyer, 2015). Bissinger (2015) outlines the situation as a petty discussion of semantics with Jenner claiming he was a solid B cup, and Kris likening it to a “little bit of man boob situation” but certainly not a B cup. The same minute differences in description occur with the discussion of when and how long Jenner had taken hormones and what he told his new wife. On one hand, Kris claims that Jenner had said a decade ago without any connection to “a gender issue” (Bissinger, 2015 para. 79). On the other, Jenner insists that he told her up until the year they met, but maybe had not been as clear about the struggle he faced. Jenner explained to Bissinger, “probably a mistake I made was maybe not having her understand—not the severity of it but that this is a condition you cannot get away from” (2015). He equally told Diane Sawyer, “I probably was not as good at saying, you know, he, this is down deep in my soul and I don’t know if I can go any farther like this” (Sawyer, 2015). Both statements admit to some degree of fault in clarity. Though perceptions between the couple may have been misunderstood, Jenner takes the blame for not being pristinely clear. His reasoning, “Honestly, I feel in a lot of ways, that when you

love somebody, you have a tendency, you don't want to hurt them" (Sawyer, 2015). Jenner's rationale though sentimentally sweet, frames his reasoning as self-sacrifice. As in, if he alone could deal with this personal issue, it was not worth the trouble it would cause his family. Only communicating part of the personal turmoil may have shielded the family from the further instability of a parent's identity. Ultimately the recent divorce after 23 years of marriage to Kris allowed Jenner the "opportunity to live more freely as a woman" (Bissinger, 2015 para. 16).

Kids.

In Jenner's discussion of his transition with his kids, he first explained that he was terrified to tell his children. He described that "Those are the only ones I'm concerned with and the only ones in my life that I don't, I can't allow, I can't let myself hurt them.... How do I, how do I [do] this and not hurt my children?" (Sawyer, 2015). His solution was to turn to an explanation that incorporated the "her" side into the past narrative. He "tried to explain to them that as much of your upbringing was her as it was the he side, okay? That I'll always be there. I'm not going anywhere" (Sawyer, 2015). The first child to hear the news was middle son Brandon (eldest son with second wife, Linda). Brandon told Diane Sawyer, "it wasn't a perfect, you know, the way he did it wasn't perfect" (Sawyer, 2015). Understandably nerve-wracking, Brandon guesses that his father's heart was pounding harder than his own. But at the end of the day, Brandon recognizes the turmoil of the internal struggle and felt relief at the announcement that his father intended to transition saying, "I feel like I'm getting an upgraded version of my dad, you know, of a parent" (Sawyer, 2015). Jenner's initial framing of the "her" that had always been there subsequently helps to alleviate the tensions between old and new identities. Aiming instead to work on improved relationships rather than renegotiating the past.

Sawyer sat down with the four eldest Jenner children during the primetime special. The collective of now adult Jenners all cuddled on a couch looking nervously toward the camera equally reflected the abnormal situation they had found themselves in as the offspring of the world famous athlete who was about to shock the world with an announcement of a totally different variety. Eldest daughter Cassandra remembered her experience hearing the news, “I just held his hand and I cried with him and I just told him how proud of him I was and how inspired I was” (Sawyer, 2015). Youngest of the four, Brody recalled, “the first thing I thought was just like, oh, it finally makes sense” (Sawyer, 2015). Brody’s statement pairs nicely with how Cassandra remembers the explanation from their father, “Dad said, it’s not that I’m trying to dress up like a woman, it’s that I’ve spent my whole life dressing like a man” (Sawyer, 2015). Both statements use the idea of realignment as a sudden way of correcting what had seemed off or incongruent about their father. Long before this announcement, Burt recollected at time in middle school having learned about “something called a gender struggle” and ran out of the room afraid that his dad would transition to a woman and he “was never going to see him again” (Sawyer, 2015). For an event that likely happened over thirty years ago, Burt’s response indicates a suspicion harbored long before his father officially came out.

Moving forward, Jenner has encouraged all of the children to “ask any questions” and as Brandon said, “if we mess up, it’s not a big deal” (Sawyer, 2015) which fosters an open dialogue rather than a veiled secret. Cassandra asked, “what do you want us to call you, and he just interrupted me and just said, I’m dad, you know, you can call me dad. I will always be your dad, and that was just a huge relief” (Sawyer, 2015). Terminology and family titles certainly play a role in how families communicated. The slang terms that become inside jokes or old habit suddenly feel out of place. As Burt described, “it’s hard for me, he’s always answered the phone,

you know, what are you doing, big guy? Well, nothing, big guy. And now, you know, do I ever, would you ever call a female big guy? Like, no, you would not” (Sawyer, 2015). Though “dad” seemed an easy accommodation serving as a functional term to describe a relationship, Burt’s typical interaction with his dad did not align with the new identity.

As for the Kardashian side of the family, step children Kourtney, Kimberly, Khloé, and Robert junior as well as Jenner’s two biological youngest daughters, Kendall and Kylie had a much different reception of their father’s confession. Jenner told Diane Sawyer that Kim was the first one of the Kardashian sisters to know. She had caught him wearing a dress years ago, Jenner remembers that she didn’t say anything at the time, but “walked out and jumped in the car and went for a ride. And I tried to call her and said, hey, you okay? It was like this big secret in the family and we never talked about it again” (Sawyer, 2015). A few years later, that silence was broken as rumors started to surface about surgeries. Finally, Kim asked what was happening and Jenner spilled everything and felt instantly better. Bringing the subject up again, he asked, “are you like, avoiding this, I would understand that. But are you okay? And she goes, well, I just thought it was one of these subjects that I couldn’t talk about” (Sawyer, 2015). When gender is treated as a taboo topic, starting conversations and asking questions about identity struggles fall to the wayside as casualties of political sensitivity. After that conversation, the topic disappeared until Jenner put on one of his own dresses and snuck into Kendall’s room to look in the only full-length mirror in the house. True to Kardashian drama, Kendall had believed her younger sister Kylie to be stealing clothes from her so her computer had been on security mode, ready to film the thief in action. So by the time her dress-clad father walked into the frame, the secret was out. But once again, taboos and embarrassment silenced the reaction.

By the time Jenner sat the Kardashian-Jenner collective down to tell them of his decision, they all cried, and according to Jenner, “mainly because they don’t want anybody to hurt dad. They’re very protective of me, especially Kendall and Kylie” (Sawyer, 2015). Several voiced concern about taking this decision public, questioning why now and what it would do to the family name. Jenner said that Khloé was taking it especially hard, confessing that Bruce has “been an incredibly strong male figure in my life, which we don’t have many of” (Sawyer, 2015). Jenner has tried to console her, saying that although his identity is shifting, their relationship is not dissolving. All of the girls had been reluctant to meet “her” though at the time of the interview, Jenner expressed patience in pushing the point. Strikingly, after some advice from husband Kanye West, Kim has been far easier to talk to about the transition. Kanye in a stroke of wisdom had said,

Look it, I can be married to the most beautiful woman in the world. And I am. I can have the most beautiful little daughter in the world. And I have that. But I’m nothing if I can’t be me. If I can’t be true to myself, they don’t mean anything. (Sawyer, 2015)

After this revelation, Kim has been adamant about throwing in her fashionista support telling Jenner, “if you’re doing this thing, I’m helping you. You’re representing the family. You’ve got to look really good” (Sawyer, 2015). Either due to age, or prior relationship distance, the youngest pair, Kendall and Kylie, have had the most difficult time accepting their father’s transition. They have made a public statement regarding their father’s happiness, but declined to comment further. Enactment in relationships continues to unfold over time, working to create lasting interactions.

Salvage relationships.

As individualized and personal Jenner's pain appears from the outside, part of his rationale for divulging this experience so late was in efforts to protect the relationships he had forged. Sawyer had asked whether or not he had been fair to the women he married, he responded, "No, I wasn't as fair as I should have been" (Sawyer, 2015). She pushes the point, asking if he looks back and apologizes. To which he says, "I went to every [sic], and I have apologized to everybody. I've done nothing but apologize for my entire life" (Sawyer, 2015). To apologize for an entire life frames the act of transitioning or not transitioning as a mistake in either direction. Placing self-blame for an identity even more so than the actions incorporated into that identity corrodes the efforts to become at peace with an identity shift. It would be one thing to apologize for not spending enough time with his oldest four children after the divorces, or to accept some blame for the crumbling of the marriages; but to pin all of that guilt on the shifting of identity places high pressure on the individuals working to resolving and find acceptance for their newly aligned identities.

Jenner also knows the potential impact of his transition on the lives of others struggling with similar gender dysphoria. In speaking about the impact and popularity of *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*, he told Diane Sawyer,

The one real, true story in the family was the one I was hiding and nobody knew about it.

The one thing that could really make a difference in people's lives was right here in my soul and I could not tell that story. (Sawyer, 2015)

This suggests that Jenner knew well ahead of the public announcement what the power of this revelation could have on a community, but intentionally shielded the immediate family from the blowback. The cost-benefit analysis of international good compared to familial strife places Jenner's identity turmoil at the center of a devastating tug of war. Picking one side or the other

does not entirely relieve the pressure of duty to one side or the other. As Jenner told Bissinger, despite the criticism for unveiling a new reality television show called *I Am Cait*, “I’m not doing it for money. I’m doing it to help my soul and help other people” (Bissinger, 2015 para. 123). With the apologies out of the way, and a certainty of self previously undiscovered, a familiar platform in a new way provides Jenner with the ability to enact some of that potential good.

During a spirited round of gold Matt Lauer spoke to Caitlyn Jenner about the ability to identify with the experience of other transgender individuals. Because of the wealth and privilege Jenner has accumulated since the decathlon of 1976, she will never likely know the generic experience of others with similar struggles. Jenner in clear honesty responded,

You’re absolutely right. I’ve never had that. I’ve worked very hard for all my life, I have no excuses about my life and what I’ve done with my life. Yes, I’ve worked hard, and been able to put a few bucks away. Good for me that’s the American dream. But I get it. I have learned so much. It’s devastating to me to see people dying over this issue. (Lauer, 2015, *Jenner*)

Under this lens, only through the initial experience of coming out was Jenner able to begin to understand the context of the issue. However the personal accumulations of nearly fifty years of celebrity status partition her from the unfortunately more common experience of harassment, unemployment, and all too frequently assault, murder, or suicide. Jenner’s status as a wealthy reality star distances her from the experiences of others in the transgender in-group.

Masculine/feminine different actions.

Jenner’s transition from a celebrated hyper masculine hero of the 1976 Olympics has high hurdles to overcome when working to create a public appearance of a woman. The masculine icon came out of self-pressure to be something other than what his internal conflict

had told him to be, consequently building barriers that became hard to deconstruct. Even the morning after the world record setting decathlon accomplishment,

He walked past the grand piano into the bathroom. He was naked. The gold medal was around his neck. He looked at himself in the mirror. The grand diversion of winning the decathlon was finished.... He didn't see a hunk. He didn't see success. Instead of reveling in the accomplishment, he diminished it in his mind because *he* had done it.... The little boy who knew he had been born a girl and was not just trying to put one over on the rest of the world. (Bissinger, 2015 para. 50)

Bissinger's relayed narrative isolates the different behaviors between the masculine iteration of Jenner and the desirable feminine Jenner. Since *he* had won the gold medal, then it was not an accomplishment that *she* did and therefore not as wanted. This bifurcated approach to the actions of gendered identity illustrate the dual perspective in adhering to a binary gender construction.

Sports now and then.

The trials of the muscular hunk that dominated the Olympics were strictly a cover up for the timid and feminine side that the 1976 iteration of Jenner felt ashamed to confront. As a high school athletic all-star, every effort turned "to prove his masculine gender to himself" (Sawyer, 2015). In her own words when playing golf with Matt Lauer, "I've lived the ultimate male. Ok?... Hardly nobody gets to live two genders in their life" (Lauer, 2015, *Jenner*). That ultimate male perspective came about having found athletic abilities as a young child, "Sports saved my life" because athletic prowess was like winning the popularity lottery and "it helped to prove his masculinity" (Bissinger, 2015 para. 42). The masculine attributes typically ascribed to a man served double duty working to confirm a male identity Jenner didn't believe and place a barrier between himself and any prying questions that might say otherwise. Similarly an issue of

Playgirl depicted Jenner and his second wife Linda on the cover as seductively posed as possible. The interview discusses the “masculine qualities” he has, their healthy sex life, and according to Bissinger, an attempt to “maintain his cover in a society that still largely condemned transgender women and men” (Bissinger, 2015 para. 64).

Ever the potent athlete, Jenner continues to play golf though usually alone. Under the skepticism of reporters and paparazzi, she told Bissinger (2015), “I’m not doing this so I can hit it off the women’s tee.” Though seemingly minute, the emphasis that Jenner has had on sports and the creation of identity since elementary school, Jenner took the opportunity to confirm enacted identities when playing golf with Matt Lauer. As they walk to the course, Lauer’s first question opens, “when I told my friends that we were coming to play golf, you know what every golfer asked” (Lauer, 2015, *Jenner*). Jenner in a golf skirt and visor, finished the question for him, “Am I going to hit from the woman’s tee... Of course I am” (Lauer, 2015, *Jenner*). This answer confirms that although sorting had been an integral part of her identity, it would still serve as a way to enforce an established identity rather than slip back into the previous mask. In an effort to change the sporting paradigm for good, she announces, “the question has been: playing with boobs” (Lauer, 2015, *Jenner*). Though out of the blue and intentionally uncomfortable, the conversation turns into the advantages of playing golf when having breasts rather than solely focusing on the hyper-masculine realm of traditional sporting. She says, “As far as the full swing, I haven’t really noticed any difference. But where they are an advantage, is putting” playing up the sexualized difference in sports (Lauer, 2015, *Jenner*).

Dress or appearance.

Shortly after winning the decathlon, Jenner embarked on a speaking circuit. Reliving the glory of 48 hours in a stadium became a staple of the career he would lead for decades afterward.

Jenner confessed, “underneath my suit I have a bra and panty hose and this and that thinking to myself, they know nothing about me” (Bissinger, 2015 para. 52). During a period of internal turmoil, unable to fall back on the hyper-masculine parade of training for the Olympics, Jenner turned to hiding layers underneath a tough exterior in order to get through the charade. After the performance was over, “I would walk off the stage, and I would feel like a liar. I would say, you’ve just got no guts, and then literally go up into the hotel room, change clothes, and go out and walk around” (Sawyer, 2015). Publically presenting one side of himself while silently slipping back into the more comfortable her when the cameras were not looking provided Jenner a way to sustain a conflicted lifestyle for years. Now that the layers have been peeled away, Jenner has made more permanent changes to her appearance including feminization plastic surgery, tracheal shave, and as Lauer heard in full form, breast implants. The most symbolic of these moments occurred during the Sawyer interview, “So, can I take my ponytail out? Yeah, why not, huh, we’re talking about all of this stuff. Yeah, let’s take the damn ponytail out” (Sawyer, 2015). The subtle unveiling, though seemingly at odds with the rest of Jenner’s attire during the interview, served as a clue for what kinds of appearance changes were to come. Throughout the interview, Sawyer comes back to the concept of cross dressing, asking on repeated occasions a variation of “were you dressing then?” Sawyer seems to be looking for previous indicators that would have lead to this revelation, anything that would make this announcement easier to believe rather than so strikingly uncharacteristic of the masculine ideal of the 1970s and 1980s.

Girls’ night.

Matt Lauer asked Jenner whether she had kept in better touch with male or female friends after transitioning. Without missing a beat, she talked about how women were far more accepting

and less hesitant about the “new” Jenner. For about a year and a half before the official announcement, Jenner had been hosting informal events called “Girls’ Nights” where close friends would gather to have good food, wine, and talk. Her daughter Cassandra met Caitlyn for the first time at one of these girls’ nights reflecting, “I was just nervous that I wouldn’t make her feel comfortable. I was worried I wouldn’t say the right things or act the right way or seem relaxed. [But we ended up talking] more than we ever have. We could just be girls together” (Bissinger, 2015 para. 111). Jenner talked about how prior to her transition she had been surrounded by women, but was not included in their version of girls’ nights. Creating a safe space in which to express her identity without the prying eyes of the press or less accepting males permitted her to learn ways to lower previous barriers without worrying about repercussions. This specific location allowed for investigation of identity without making any commitments, a sort of identity training ground. Here, as in the case with her daughter Cassandra, she could re-navigate long-held relationships under new premises. The hesitations of meeting an old friend in new light disappear as they relearn that “it’s still kind of the same person. Your identity might be different, but I’m still the same person. The same sick sense of humor” (Lauer, 2015, *Jenner*).

Rachael Dolezal

Rachel Dolezal’s enactment frame operates differently from Caitlyn Jenner’s as Dolezal does not reference two different situations of pre-transition and post-transition. Instead, she contextualizes her enactment based on the roles she plays from her professional obligations and her family, how those roles impact her appearance, and the actions and their reception.

Roles.

Professional.

The roles and positions that Rachel Dolezal held at the time of the initial story had a significant impact on the reception of her identity. When the story first broke, Dolezal was the president of the NAACP Spokane chapter as well as working for the police accountability board in the city, and a lecturer at Eastern Washington University. Based on her record, these are all positions that she was academically eligible, and passionate about pursuing. The video of her infamous three-second pause had begun by asking her about a rash of assumed hate crimes in the area that the accountability board had been investigating. As she stated during the interview with Melissa Harris-Perry, all of the positions for the NAACP and the police accountability board were unpaid, volunteer positions. The NAACP only pays the executive officers at high level positions, though all regional and city chapter volunteers are expected to adhere to a strict set of bylaws. Dolezal followed all of the bylaws by all accounts, only resigned her positions in both organizations because of the publicity melee that targeted her after the first reports. Fearing that the publicity would detract from the goals and capabilities of the organizations, she put distance between herself and the rest of the mission. She still describes herself as “deeply invested in those issues” (Harris-Perry, 2015), regardless of the media backlash.

In her dedication, she tells Harris-Perry that “I never want to be a liability to the cause. And I take that very seriously in consideration there’s so much to process with sort of going from being celebrated as a black woman” (Harris-Perry, 2015). Here she is willing to sacrifice her own identity confirmation for the movement as a whole to succeed. Dolezal also holds a position at the local university where she teaches a variety of classes mostly centered on African or Ethnic studies. She describes herself as a mentor to her students referencing her role as a teacher. Working as an educator also means that her job in the classroom is to open discussion through

cultural events or popular figures. Claiming these roles as part of her functionality and purpose inherently influences her self-concept, but further, they impact how her other roles operate. A woman who works for the NAACP may seem more credible when teaching a black studies course or vice versa. She describes her personal accountability in terms of the interactions and spheres of influence ranging from her students to her various committees and family. The context and roles that she plays have a significant impact on the reception of her identity.

Familial.

A major role in her identity description has to do with her sons. As she told Matt Lauer, the moment she got full custody of her son Izaiah, “he said, ‘you’re my real mom,’ and he’s in high school, and for that to be something that is plausible, I certainly can’t be seen as white and be Izaiah’s mom” (Lauer, 2015, *Dolezal*). In an effort to make her adopted son more comfortable and reaffirm his identity, she recognized the need for her to also accommodate and adapt her physical presentation. In the same way she learned braids based on the inclusion and teaching of her little sister, Dolezal wove her identity through her actions and interactions with members of her family and social circle. At one point in her conversation with Melissa Harris-Perry, she describes herself as “the link for the kids in coming to the family” (Harris-Perry, 2015). Using these interaction points informs her identity in other spheres of her life, working toward presenting a coherent and cohesive self.

Interacting with the in-group.

One striking instance about Melissa Harris-Perry’s interview is Dolezal’s willingness to talk about things in more depth and more openly than with other interviewers like Matt Lauer. Granted, Allison Samuels of *Vanity Fair* is also a black woman who interviewed Rachel Dolezal, though the tone of the article is much less curious than Harris-Perry’s approach. At one point in

the Samuels (2015) article, she states, “Even in conversation with an actual black woman on the other end of the line or sitting in her cozy home, Dolezal unequivocally identifies as black”. In the Harris-Perry interview she does not balk either, though seems much more willing to confide in her than any other situation. When Harris-Perry asks, “what’s up with your hair?” Dolezal’s first response is “Well, I’ll talk to you about it” (Harris-Perry, 2015). This suggests that only another black woman with braids could possibly understand the rationale behind Dolezal’s appearance. As an interviewer, Harris-Perry asks the tricky questions but openly announces why others are wary of the potential response. Yet both women have a commonality that opens the floor to more intricately phrased and negotiated responses. As the original interview was part of the MSNBC production *All In With Chris Hayes*, Harris-Perry returns to the studio to debrief. There, in speaking to a white male, Harris-Perry herself struggles to create the same nuanced connection by explaining how she as a member of the group to which Dolezal identifies has complicated responses to the interview. Chris Hayes by proxy does not seem to grasp the intricacies of the conversation, as he, a white male, is a member of the out-group. Harris-Perry mentions how she has very similar experiences, or at least to how Dolezal described them, but had a hard time rationalizing what made this encounter so unique. Though Lauer and Harris-Perry ask similarly framed questions (“Are you an African-American woman?”-Lauer, “Are you black?”- Harris-Perry), the familiarity of Harris-Perry as an interviewing entity who readily recognizes the same cultural tropes and distinctions encourages a more detailed and free-flowing response. Additionally, when Harris-Perry points out that there will be people who are enraged by the interview and Dolezal’s response, Dolezal willingly steps outside of herself to acknowledge how that must feel to have someone don a different identity. Where most of

Lauer's pressing questions were returned with defensive tones and little anecdote, Harris-Perry's questions opened up a forum for discussion inaccessible to someone outside of the in-group.

Authenticity of action.

Dolezal's intricate connections to the black community throw her identity into relief against her works. Her parents, according to the Lauer interview, question why she would be unable to do the same work as a Caucasian woman. However her resignation seems to be a strong indicator that her identity played an integral factor in the work she could do. In the same way the personal frame detailed how her actions informed her identity, the enactment frame displays those works in context of a situation. After her resignation from the NAACP position, the new president, Naima Quarles-Burnley stated, "I feel that people of all races can be allies and advocates, but you can't portray that you have lived the experience of a particular race that you aren't part of" (Samuels, 2015). Clearly directed at Dolezal's described deception, Quarles-Burnley undermines the work accomplished by her predecessor. In the same interview, Dolezal tells Samuels that she has been in contact with other members of the local chapter, and many of the older members in the black community continue to reach out to her. The NAACP made an announcement prior to her resignation that supported her work in the Spokane area, yet in order to allow the new president to clear the air, Dolezal has kept her distance. Her response to Samuel's question about whether or not her dishonesty affected the organization, "I mean taking away my ability to lead in the community by questioning my integrity or my character or whatever really hit all of those things really hard" (Samuels, 2015 para. 19). This response seems to indicate that Dolezal does not feel that the discrediting of her identity was detrimental, but rather that her identity was tied to her credibility to do good work, no matter what the national organization said. The responses about her ability to lead have been mixed. Some see her as a

valuable component to the movement, where others find her a liability and detraction. Prior to her outing, the authenticity of her actions and abilities seemed unequivocal.

Traditional actions and conflict.

One of the ways Dolezal's identity has been validated has been the interactions of people around her making snap judgments. In multiple interviews she references how the police when she gets pulled over for a traffic ticket automatically check either the unidentifiable box or the box indicating black or African-American. She has no authority over those situations, though she uses those experiences to reiterate her similarity of experience to the community as a whole. During the conversation about hair, she tells Harris-Perry about having her hair felt by TSA in the airport and feeling violated. Harris-Perry questions whether that reaction to her appearance was in a sense validating her identity. Dolezal balks at the question, "oh no, hell no. I'm like get your hands out of my hair! And no. Like, you know, no. No that's a personal violation" (Harris-Perry, 2015) and further denies that the interaction confirms her identity in some capacity. Dolezal's reported reactions in the public sphere indicate that she, at least at this level, corresponds with the expected actions of a black woman. Even her intentional actions confirm her identity. Knowing how to work with black hair is traditionally a skill ascribed to members of the black community. She describes walking up to families in the grocery store, typically with adopted black children, and presenting them a business card saying, "I do hair. If I'm, if it looks like I would get it because from a person, of course, her hair" (Harris-Perry, 2015). Her appearance in public helps to solidify her identity. Without these affirming situations, her identity must be enacted in other ways, or at least externally confirmed elsewhere.

Starting a conversation.

Dolezal's identity conversations have sparked a much larger conversation as to what race means and how does someone enact the expected attributes of visual identity. Lauer suggests that her confrontation with identity has started a national conversation wrestling with how this country deals with race, though he does not press how she will continue to rattle the issue. Samuels suggests that Dolezal's continued persistence in her claim for identity won her attention going far beyond the more common appearance changing attributes like lip injections or self-tanning. The circulating story of a woman "pretending to be black" caught national news wires with unusual fervor. Harris-Perry shared in her brief discussion with Chris Hayes that one of the predominant problems with the conversation is how it has centered around the apparent concept "how could anyone *want* to be black?" Under the framework of desirable identities, Harris-Perry points out the desperate racism that forbids someone, especially a white woman, from wanting to identify with the black experience. Though Harris-Perry provides Dolezal the option to use this national discourse as a rationale behind following the media rigmarole, Dolezal rejects the idea that she would intentionally seek attention for her unique position. Instead of spring boarding her outing of identity as a larger conversation, Dolezal shrinks from the idea, calling it "grueling...I felt attacked by this, out of the blue, blindsided and certainly nothing I would choose" (Harris-Perry, 2015). In this terminology, Dolezal shies away from using her identity as an action, sticking instead to a personal frame.

Relationship

For Caitlyn Jenner, the Diane Sawyer interview includes multiple conversations with various family members. Children, previous wives, siblings, and even Jenner's mother all speak to this new side of their parent/ex-husband/sibling/child. By looking to these glimpses of conversation, though admittedly fabricated through the impersonal lens of an on-camera

interview provides a way of seeing Jenner's identity through a relationship frame. As both parts of the relationship (Caitlyn Jenner and the other individual) have the opportunity to speak, it allows for a glance at how these relationships are negotiated and enacted together. In the case of Rachel Dolezal, most of her interviews occur with just her and the interviewer. Though she does mention her family, most prominently her adopted son, she imposes her understanding of their relationship without a specific interview with her son. Even this one-sided look at the relationship frame helps us to understand what kinds of pressures their family unit faces under scrutiny of her identity.

Caitlyn Jenner

As a unique instance, Jenner's transition happened after years of playing into hyper-masculine ideals. An athletic wiz, three marriages, six children, and seemingly living the American dream, Jenner's transition as a sixty-five year old provides a distinctive look at the ways established relationships shift through the period of a transition. By no means the only way to examine relationships, during the interviews with Jenner several interviewers reached out to other family members or friends to offer another perspective. Over the duration of the interviews, Jenner also established interpersonal connections with the interviewer, creating an additional relationship.

Protect family from harm or emotional hurt.

One of Jenner's greatest fears before transitioning was the reaction his children would have. In the 1980s when he first began taking hormones, as Diane Sawyer relayed, "He simply lost his nerve. He looked at his little children and couldn't bear to cause them pain and thought about the public spectacle of someone so famous coming out" (2015). Though in the '80s the fear might have been predominantly from the media uproar the announcement of his transition

would have inevitably caused, fear of the reaction kept his foot on the breaks (Bissinger, 2015). Jenner openly says, “I am a pushover for my family” (Sawyer, 2015) always working toward protecting and providing for them. Yet in Jenner’s mind, protecting his family came at the cost of keeping a personal secret. He asked, “I can’t let myself hurt them. And that is, how do I do this?” (Sawyer, 2015). For daughter Khloé, having lost her biological father at a young age, Jenner has been the most consistent masculine role model in her life. A dramatic turn of identity felt more like an uprooting than an identity shift. For Khloé, Jenner’s transition mirrors the same reaction as the death of a father, “like my whole life is falling apart” (Sawyer, 2015) regardless of Jenner’s persistent reassurances. Even having delayed this revelation for years did not completely nullify the painful reactions.

Distance and Silence.

Assumed moratorium of discussion.

As described in the enactment frame, Jenner did confess his secrets to various members of the family, though these confessions did not always lead to dedicated confidants. More frequently, once the topic had been broached, the other member of the family felt less comfortable addressing the topic again. In the mid 1980s, Jenner told his sister Pam his well-maintained secret. Pam told Diane Sawyer after that dinner conversation, “I cried the whole way. I could hardly see the road for tears. I guess the tears were for me, but they were for him mostly, the pain that he experienced as a child” (Sawyer, 2015). Though the secret was out, the siblings did not mention it for another thirty years. Sawyer pushed the point asking why Pam did not reach out to talk about it. She simply states, “I felt like it was up to him to talk to me about it again. I thought maybe it was just a passing phase” (Sawyer, 2015).

Similarly, when Kim caught Jenner wearing a dress, she left the house and “never talked about it again” despite Jenner’s attempts to reach out to her and clear the air (Sawyer, 2015). It was not until the media had gotten their teeth into the story that Kim asked what was happening. Jenner happily told her, but asked if she had been avoiding the topic. Her response indicated the same pressure of silence, “I just thought it was one of those subjects that I couldn’t talk about” (Sawyer, 2015). By the time the younger sisters found out through the closet-raiding camera escapade, the same silence greeted the family secret, only this time, Jenner let the secret sit. Sawyer’s narration describes, “Jenner says he was complicit since the secret seemed like nitroglycerin that could blow their world apart” (2015). Treating identity as a guarded and dangerous practice inherently limits the amount of relational growth between individuals. Strikingly, where in most relational frames development of a friendship or at least a sense of camaraderie occurs naturally over prolonged encounters. Jenner’s example of a transitional identity seems to indicate there must be a moment of confession and then a shifted relational trajectory in order to foster continued growth.

Internal struggle creates relational distance.

Though clearly a national icon turned celebrity status, Jenner describes himself as a solitary individual. In his conversation with Sawyer, he says he was a “very lonely little boy. I’m still a lonely big boy” (2015) indicating his propensity to keep to himself. Perhaps a strange depiction given his highly televised presence, he furthers, “I don’t socialize a lot. Okay. I’m not, like an outgoing person... I’ve never fit in. When you deal with this issue, you don’t fit in” (Sawyer, 2015). The echoes of mothers sending shy children into elementary school classrooms with a gentle push, “just be yourself” happened to be the most difficult task for Jenner even as an adult. Being himself, meant being herself, and it was simply easier to not have to explain it at all.

Rather than getting caught in the complications of explanation, Jenner focused inward on the reactions and emotions she could control instead.

Diane Sawyer's voice over near the beginning of her interview describes an internal torment he had to be kept hidden from "marriages to the women he loved, raising children he could not bear to hurt, and finally...that reality show, in which every private thing in life seemed ready to be bartered for fame" (Sawyer, 2015). This description sets up the divisions between the personal sphere and the relational connections. Jenner, personally, wrestled with significant identity confusion and selectively chose to share those thoughts throughout his life. However this practice distanced Jenner from making open relationships, keeping instead to himself rather than hurt those near him. As Bissinger (2015) relayed, "mistakes had been made, ones that caused terrible scars, but as many others had said about him, they emanated from following a path of least resistance as well as from a hatred of confrontation." In his avoidance of instigating conflict, Jenner ran from revealing more than necessary, and consequently sabotaged the relationships that require interpersonal confessions.

As Jenner continued to keep concepts of identity to himself, especially the internal turmoil, the imposed echo chamber subsequently pushed away those close to him. As Bissinger describes, his inner conflict served as "a precursor to the fractured relationship that would occur when he essentially lost contact with the four children from his first two marriages" (2015). Bissinger (2015) catalogues how after hours of interviews with all of the children, "a picture emerges of a father who had been absent for years at a time, insensitive, hurtful, and weak in no longer making an effort to keep up contact after he married Kris Kardashian." Though circumstantially it might have been difficult maintaining connections with two ex-wives while committing to a new relationship, "not seeing his children for long periods, beginning around the

time of their adolescence, not acknowledging birthdays, not going to graduations, and intentionally not being there for the birth of his daughter were Jenner's own decisions" (Bissinger, 2015 para. 30). However once Jenner told his wives about his various struggles, after the divorce, some of them told the children. First wife Chrystie told Burt and Cassandra when they were 13 and 11 about their father's gender identity. Linda, Jenner's second wife, did not tell her children until they were much older. Youngest son Brody told Bissinger, "it just made a lot of sense growing up. Reasons and things like why he wasn't there. Not around. I finally realized he had his own issues he was dealing with at that time" (2015). Cassandra added, that while gender plays no role in quantity or quality of love, "there's no way to separate what he's going through, the trap he's been in for the past 60 years and how that has affected his choices around love and relationships. It's impossible" (Bissinger, 2015 para. 32). By intentionally severing relationships due to foreseen complications, limited the amount of connection Jenner could have with his oldest children as they grew up. Now, decades later, the stunted relationships have the opportunity to flourish from buds.

Reconnection and relational growth.

Having struggled to make connections with family members for most of his adult life, Jenner's transition opened up new paths to more fulfilled relationships. By no means an easy task, turning over a new leaf as Caitlyn forges perhaps new relationships rather than reviving old ones. As son Brandon told Bissinger "This is the fourth quarter of [her] life. But within our relationship this is the first quarter, the relationship that [she] has with the kids³" (2015). For Brandon, fostering a relationship with Jenner's grandchildren remedies some of the strife in their

³ Refers to Brandon's kids, Jenner's grandchildren.

own relationship. By starting anew, the parenting practices and opportunities missed decades ago have a second chance. Brandon continued,

I think the relationship will take a new shape. My hopes that the relationship would blossom, that we would turn over a new leaf, has kind of turned into, I just want a relationship that is sustainable. I just want to have the best parts as possible. (Bissinger, 2015 para. 135)

To reverse the distance incurred from privately defending her internal identity, Jenner has since reached out to her children more frequently, looking to find more genuine commonality and openness. Jenner hopes that encouraging questions will keep those connective relationship paths open, “will keep talking and ask [her] everything” (Sawyer, 2015). And the progress goes both ways, the newfound support from her children has inspired Caitlyn to do more.

After her official transition, Caitlyn has endeavored to begin a television docu-series cataloguing her life and her work with the community. Naturally under the circumstances and the bitter backlash from the Jenner side of the family with the rise of *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*, Jenner’s oldest children have not loved the idea. But running low on second chances, “the last thing the Jenner kids want to do is reverse the rebuilding of the relationship” (Bissinger, 2015 para. 29). As Jenner has created spaces in which she can establish a new sense of self, daughter Cassandra has found that in these new spaces the two can connect more freely. She describes, “I feel like he’s been the closest to us and the best parent when he’s been moving toward his true identity” (Bissinger, 2015 para. 110). The freeing response of no longer guarding a masculine identity and allows Jenner the ability to use honesty in creating relationships anew.

Caitlyn as both different and improved Bruce.

One way that Jenner has established a platform for these revised relationships to flourish has been to separate the actions of “Bruce” from the actions of “Caitlyn”. Arguably, and certainly in line with the accounts of the oldest Jenner children, “Bruce” suffered some significant pitfalls as a father. Though in later interviews Jenner glows about the accomplishments of all of the children, Bruce’s absence was keenly felt from important milestones early on. Brandon told Sawyer, “I feel like I’m getting an upgraded version of my dad, you know, of a parent” (Sawyer, 2015). As Jenner’s revealed identity allows for reconfiguration of relationships to begin new trajectories, in Brandon’s description, Caitlyn is a new and improved version. Oldest son Burt echoed similar sentiments to Bissinger (2015), “I have high hopes that Caitlyn is a better person than Bruce, I’m very much looking forward to that.” Even in the interactions with Esther, Jenner’s mother has differentiated between the son who stood on the podium at Montreal and the daughter she had only yet conversed with one the phone. Jenner relayed a conversation with her,

We were talking about a lot of things, and, you know, she goes, “You know what, I think I can have a better relationship with Caitlyn than I can with Bruce,” because we’ve always had a little tension in our relationship throughout the years...when she ends the conversation, she goes, “O.K., good-bye, Caitlyn.” (Bissinger, 2015, Extended Interview)

Separating the differences between two embodied identities based on timeline functions in two ways in the relationship frame. First, it indicates the beginning of a new and alternative relationship from one that maybe happened in the past. For instance, Caitlyn, does not carry with her the failings and baggage of Bruce. Familial grudges under this umbrella get shoved away, how can someone hold a grudge against a person who had struggled against themselves for so long and who no longer exists in the same reference? Second, it conflicts with the idea of a core

being who “has always been” one-way or another. If Jenner’s core being is “Caitlyn” then in the enactment frame, “Bruce” may have done it, but establishing blame or consequence still rests with the core. In this lens, a relational new beginning struggles to take root.

Choose friendships over romantic entanglements.

Having coasted through three marriages and six biological children as well as taking on the task of raising four more, one of the prominent questions for Jenner has been about romantic relationships moving forward. Perhaps due to the sexually iconic images of an American pristine athlete capitalized on after the Olympics, or the association with the Kardashian crew full of relationship conversations and scandal, Jenner’s love life has been under the microscope. Diane Sawyer not deterred from the repeated avoidance or clarification about the differences between sexuality and gender, finally got a response near the end of their interview. She asks, “And if you marry again, do you see it with a woman? Is that what you visualize?” Jenner responds, almost completely nullifying the question, “I’m so far down the road, it’s like the last thing in the world” (Sawyer, 2015). Not dissuaded, Sawyer pushes the question again, to which Jenner responds,

I can’t figure that side of it out. I just want to have a free soul, and have a lot of great friends. I’m 65, it’s not like, you know, you want to go out and get it on all the time. I mean, I just want to enjoy life. (Sawyer, 2015)

Jenner intentionally shelves the idea of a romantic involvement for the company of friends.

Similarly in the interview with Matt Lauer,

At this point in my life, I’m just in a different spot. All the girls on the show, are all young, they want a family, you know, they want to find love, all that kind of stuff. For me, I’ve already had all of that. (Lauer, 2015, *Jenner*)

Though Lauer pushes the idea in the same way as Sawyer, Jenner refers instead to “a companion. I want a lot of great friends that I can share my life with, and that’s important to me” (Lauer, 2015, *Jenner*). Elevating the needs for a companion over a lover changes the conversation about Jenner from the heartthrob of the 1970s and 80s, to someone who looks for other characteristics. Jenner had previously used romantic entanglements to justify an element of masculine virility, but now, at age 65, feminine obligations prefer social functions to family providing. Valuing the exchange of personal encounters without the concern of intimacy highlights a reconnection with the body in ways that are not necessarily common to societal structures. In some ways this removal of sexual involvement harkens back to the prepubescent stage where children first learn of themselves, then their social interactions and familial connections before developing sexual interests.

Interviewer connection.

These three selected interviews have interesting dynamics. The first interview at least chronologically occurs officially pre-transition with Diane Sawyer, a white heterosexual woman. Jenner at the time of the interview still preferred masculine pronouns and birth name Bruce throughout. Bissinger with the luxury of an off air reporter “spent hundreds of hours with the man over a period of three months. Then I spent countless hours with the woman” (2015). Covering the transition period on either side of the conversation gave Bissinger insight that could not be tapped over the course of a few television hours. This kind of unprecedented access allowed for a more full-bodied relationship to form between the interviewee and the interviewer. Finally in September of 2015, Matt Lauer accompanied Jenner on the golf course. Now openly living as Caitlyn and swinging from the women’s tee, Lauer a straight white male provides the athletic foil to Sawyer from five months before. The still masculine dressed Bruce in the Sawyer

interviewer confided “girl secrets” to Sawyer, while the feminized Caitlyn buddied up to Lauer playing golf. The adaptability between interviewers, though both actions are within the character wheelhouse of Jenner, parallels the identities of the interviewers.

In the Sawyer interview, Jenner takes a moment to tease Diane after she mentioned that 65 years old misses a lot of the fun part of being a woman, the pantsuit phase as she calls it. Jenner pipes back, “I know, the black shoes and the black pants and the white shirt” (Sawyer, 2015), which accurately describes Diane’s outfit during the interview. Recognizing the jab, Sawyer responds with “excuse me” playing up the playful encounter between friends rather than the power dynamic of the interview itself. Partially due to her own femininity, Sawyer relies on personal connection as an interviewer, mentioning her own distaste of make up and capitalizing on the girl talk about the closet. Jenner willingly shows off the closet holdings to Sawyer, inviting her to dinner with “her” where she triumphs, “the good news is, Diane, you won’t be the tallest girl in the room” (Sawyer, 2015). Sawyer reported back after the exclusive dinner, “by the way, that night, she looked great and really happy” (Sawyer, 2015). Though it would be hard to assume that any interviewer would have unprecedented access to Jenner’s exclusive closet, speaking to a member of the woman in-group had to have impacted the reception for the audience and the likeability of welcoming another woman to share in the glam room.

Lauer’s interview in a totally different context of the golf course relied more heavily on the jocular tone of buddies going to the greens. When Lauer expresses nervousness about risking saying the wrong thing, Jenner steps in and says that she will “get you through it” and throws an arm around Lauer’s shoulders. Jenner also easily forgives the potential mistakes crediting how she is “the easiest on people.... I understand that it’s difficult for people to understand this. And that’s ok” (Lauer, 2015, *Jenner*). In order to keep the conversation moving, the pair rarely linger

at any one topic, focusing instead on the technicalities of the game. Speaking in between rounds and in transition to the other holes allows the conversation to function in much the same way as any friendly outing to the golf course. Most commonly, the two tease each other, bantering back and forth about the game or the swing. At one point, Lauer takes a second swing at a tee and Jenner taunts him by directing the attention of the camera crew, “You’ll want to get this, he’s taking a second one. Did anyone say Mulligan?” and by the time Lauer hits a much better round, she pipes in “There you go, now that’s the Matt Lauer I know and love” (Lauer, 2015, *Jenner*). Having commented on her persistent sense of humor, Jenner retorts, “well not right now, you’re up two” playing off the mock competitive streak that the two reasonably athletic people would consider (Lauer, 2015, *Jenner*). Jenner’s willingness to adapt to the situation and circumstance provides a more full picture of an individual who enjoys hobbies and activities in the same way as before, while still using the context to connect to the interviewer. Establishing those connections provides a more intimate look at the complex personality of someone who has lived so fully in the spotlight.

Rachel Dolezal

Family definitions.

It is worth noting that although she refers to her sons (plural), one of them is adopted, and the other her biological child. For Dolezal, the intricate lacing of language and identity takes on peculiar micro-definitions. She detaches culture from race; she also pigeon holes ideological differences between father and dad. In common English, “father” and “dad” serve as interchangeable relationship tags. Melissa Harris-Perry asked directly, “when you talk about the people who are your parents, who are you talking about?” (Harris-Perry, 2015). Dolezal responded,

Well, if I'm talking about Mom and Dad, I don't really have a mom figure in my life right now. I have a dad and I talked about him and—or that's been—that was the 3-second pause when his picture was pulled out, is this your father? Are you African-American? And I was like, yes—well, first I was like, yes, that's my dad. And then I was like, ok, African-American man's your father, are you African-American?... And so I do acknowledge that the people that raised me are Larry and Ruthanne. I do not feel like they are mom and dad. (Harris-Perry, 2015)

For context, the three-second pause she recalls is the first story that began the melee of questions about her identity. She had publically referred to a man named Alfred Wilkerson, a black man, as her dad, which Samuels describes as “could only be characterized as misleading” (2015). The parents who showed a picture of their young Caucasian-looking daughter are the named “Larry and Ruthanne” she mentions who *raised* her, but do not fall under the terminology of mom and dad which she takes to mean fostering cultural identity growth. As she describes in her interview with Lauer, “Albert Wilkerson is my dad. Every man can be a father, not every man can be a dad” (Lauer, 2015, *Dolezal*). Her personal separation between “father” as biological and “dad” as mentor-figure ultimately tripped her public explanation of identity, creating a binary between biologically inherited race and culturally enacted identity.

Mother to Izaiah and Franklin.

Though Dolezal distinguishes between the cultural raising of an individual, she does not excuse herself from visually misrepresenting her sons. As she told Lauer, “I got full custody of Izaiah. And he said, ‘you’re my real mom,’ and he’s in high school, and for that to be something that is plausible, I certainly can’t be seen as white and be Izaiah’s mom” (Lauer, 2015, *Dolezal*). Without acknowledging the irony of the statement, Dolezal’s response indicates a belief that

visual likeness represents familial linkage. Melissa Harris-Perry challenges Dolezal's apparent need to represent herself as a likely visually recognizable parent of a black child and connecting that to her identity. A black woman herself, Harris-Perry asked,

So my mother is a white woman who in the three, grew up in Spokane, Washington, who's raised black children. But she doesn't herself feel black, right. Because she's a white woman doing the work of parenting black children. Help me to understand why you see a distinction between on the one hand being a white person raising and rearing black children, whether those children are initially your siblings or whether they're your bio children or whether they're your adopted children, right, all the different ways we make family versus feeling in your own skin, in your own personhood that you are yourself black. (2015)

Dolezal clearly uses the parentage justification to rationalize her physical portrayal, though she herself was raised by her biologically Caucasian parents and regularly recognizes that there are other families with conflicting visual indicators. She told Harris-Perry, "I do a lot of hair for black girls that are adopted into white families" (2015). Dolezal distinguishes that there mixed families, but uses her own adopted black children to springboard her identity into something else.

Dolezal relays to Lauer that one of her sons referred to her "racially you're human and culturally you're black" (Lauer, 2015, *Dolezal*). She positions herself as the refuge Izaiah ran toward as to get away from a less culturally accommodating family. Having received full custody,

it was kind of like just to shield him from that, that he's adopted, you know, that's just like not what he—and he was like you're my real mom. And he came to me, out of all my four youngest siblings, and said, get me out of this situation. (Harris-Perry, 2015)

Shifting her role in his life from sibling to mom indicates a pre-existing connection between the two. Dolezal describes herself as accommodating and adapting to the needs of others, being a culturally black maternal figure for Izaiah, a hair-braiding phenom for her sister Esther, and a leader in the community for the NAACP. She staunchly defends the accusation of bending to the whims of pressure saying, “when it comes to being there for my kids, for my sister, I would never stand down on that” (Harris-Perry, 2015). Dolezal inherently prioritizes the effect her actions would have on her closest relationships, protecting them above all else.

Hereditary obligations.

In the interview with Melisa Harris-Perry, Dolezal confronts the idea of race as a biological factor. With the circulating photograph of her biologically white parents, Harris-Perry explains, “for more people even than I expected, race is based in some sort of biological realities. And that is has everything to do with parentage” (2015). Dolezal also intermixes the stories told about her biological parents and her “dad” Alfred Wilkerson. For instance, she has told stories about her dad’s (Wilkerson) exit from the south, and also talked about her time spent with her family living in a teepee or in South Africa. Note, Wilkerson’s story has little to do with Dolezal’s family travels, but when placed in the same framework, the stories become jumbled together and difficult to follow. She does confess, “some of it has kind of a little bit of creative non-fiction with regards to what happened in sequence of events and dates and so forth.” She furthers, “you know, my family moved here and then did this. That doesn’t necessarily mean I went this place with them through that whole process” (Harris-Perry, 2015). To lay out an explicit timeline would limit the amount of negotiation around her experience. In some ways, painting a picture of her life in grayscale provides the opportunity to embellish or creatively describe aspects that are not documented elsewhere. If a fight for credibility comes to her lived

experience, it would be her word against that of her family of origin, Larry and Ruthanne. Perhaps by limiting the amount of catalogued information, Dolezal leave her relationships and her negotiated identity up to debate, never confirming information that cannot be retracted or adapted later.

The Howard case.

One such instance of her own actions coming back to haunt her was a legal suit against Howard University. Working on a graduate degree at Howard, she describes her experience to Harris-Perry,

I was seven months pregnant and actually it helped catalyze the first Howard University Young Artists Academy over the summer, right before my second year of grad school...right after [putting up the exhibit] I go into the office and kind of say like, OK, everything is good with financial aid. You got a full ride, teaching position, I just got done doing this kind of brand-new, yes, you know, summer program. So I feel really good but I wanted, you know, check in. And the director says no, you—what scholarship? What teaching position?... [H]e’s like come back when you’re back and safe and have a 1-year old. And other people need opportunities for the teaching position and you have white relatives so you probably—you know, they probably can afford to finance and assist you. (2015)

This comment on the part of the Howard administrator started a legal battle about discrimination. Dolezal frames it as a discrimination case based on her pregnancy, not race. She clarifies to Harris-Perry that she does not believe in reverse racism, or non-white supremacy, but the legal advice of the lawyer she hired crafted a case based on the premise of “white relatives” instead. She won the case, but for many, it resonates as an opportunistic way of working a racially

ambiguous presence in order to capitalize on an opportunity. Where Howard had framed her ability to financially compensate for graduate school based on racial familial ties, Dolezal personally disengages from the alignment characterizing her work over her relationships. As she told Harris-Perry, “I hope that people can understand the family is fluid. So many people probably have nephews, cousins, maybe have somebody that they identify as, yes, that’s my family. But you know, they might not be biologically” (2015). She does not negate that she may have biological ties to a Caucasian family, but in the Howard case, she instead recalls her work and efforts for the university.

Changing identity to accommodate has repercussions.

Sadly, not all relationships whether romantic or friendships responded well to Rachel Dolezal’s identity questioned on national headlines. Having lost friendships, jobs, and work, Dolezal has struggled to position where to turn next. Even sacrificing all of the connections she has made with the community, her stance has remained true to her children and herself above all else. She told Samuels that there are people she wishes she could get a “do-over with” (Samuels, 2015 para. 15). Dolezal regrets not being able to address some of these identity questions earlier in relationships that have since fractured. Surely some have felt a violation of trust, or deception in that regards, though Dolezal sticks staunchly to her identity claim. Even having left her position at the NAACP, she remains in contact with some of the older members of the black community. As she mentioned to Samuels, “everything I do is connected to other people, so I don’t know how to assess the damage other than within my own mind” (2015 para. 19). Dolezal fully recognizes the impact this revelation has had on other members of the community, though she aims to reestablish those connections over time.

Communal

Caitlyn Jenner openly states in the Diane Sawyer interview that she is still learning about the transgender community that knows more than she does about transgender identities. Though she finds a recognizable community, one likely to welcome her, her communal identity at the time of this interview is still in flux. Since that interview, public identities have shifted and responses that more closely relate to the in-group transgender community have altered. Part of the negotiation between Jenner and the transgender community brings to light the question of if any member of the community, regardless of duration of belonging or adherence to group beliefs, may speak for the group as a whole. Spokespersons as perceived figureheads draws ire from the members of the group who do not revere that member of the community as the appropriate microphone. Rachel Dolezal as someone in a leadership position for the NAACP had similar complaints thrown against her. The identity she describes as a personal characteristic did not match what the public perception of what identity could be claimed.

Caitlyn Jenner

Presentation.

As Caitlyn Jenner transitioned over the course of these interviews, she made several remarks about physical presentation. Though in the interview with Diane Sawyer, Jenner dressed in a more masculine presentation with a button-up shirt and dress pants. Bissinger as the interviewer who watched the transition happen over the course of months, described Jenner's physical changes, "It was initially surreal, having seen Bruce Jenner set seven personal bests as he won the decathlon in 1976 with that perfectly buff body, and seeing him now in an elegant black dress with fine-looking breasts" (Bissinger, 2015 para. 23). He furthers that although his previous sentence may have been a little crass, it demonstrated an honest description as to how

dramatically Jenner's physical appearance had changed. After Caitlyn gave an emotional rendition of a TEDtalk to Bissinger's audience of one, he writes,

The light then suddenly shifted. It angled on her face in a perfect dissection of brightness and shadow down the centerline. Caitlyn looked gorgeous in the light. Her features were accentuated and popped. Just as her features were obscured in the shadow. I did not know which way it would go. Only where it had already gone. (2015)

This arguably poetic diatribe more fully illustrates how striking this change has become even to those who were present for all of it. The divisive line of shadow and sun provides a cinematic portrayal of Jenner's internal conflict finally relegated to the battle of the body.

During the 1980s, Jenner told Sawyer that he would finish with speaking obligations and get dressed as a woman and go walk around the city. Shocked, Sawyer asked, "we have seen you out, but didn't know?" (2015). To which Jenner replied a simple yes. Public presentation is inherently risky as there are social expectations as to what appearance matches the perceived gender. Bissinger describes the same period of time,

Everything had seemed perfect then, or as close to perfect as it can be when you are pretending your way through light, conforming to the vision of millions because that's what they'd expect, and that's exactly what you give them because you are good at it, scary good. (2015)

In fact, the quality of presentation of Jenner's assumed gender established credibility. Only through continuing to align with the media representation of the Olympic star was Jenner able to fly under the radar.

Once Jenner did come out as transgender, presentation became a key for establishing identity publically. As she told Bissinger in relation to the *Vanity Fair* photo shoot,

You never wanted to look like a guy in drag, you never wanted to look like a guy in a dress, O.K. If you're going to do that, come out, you really have to look the part. You have to look very feminine, you have to be able to, what I call my presentation is extremely important because it puts people at ease. (2015, Extended Interview)

Jenner frames presentation as the way other people will feel comfortable. As a tactic for interacting with individuals outside of the immediate circle of friends and family, relying on physical presentation also means strictly adhering to gender norms. *Vanity Fair*'s cover, Jenner in a fierce bustier emblazoned with the text "Call Me Caitlyn," played the hyper-feminine card in order to dispel any lingering questions about Jenner's gender identity. For Jenner, a strictly feminine presentation is the path to "just blend in" (Sawyer, 2015). Granted, with the assortment of cosmetic surgeries Jenner had undergone for years prior, the ability to present an unambiguous feminine form is a luxury few transgender individuals can afford.

Out-group.

The communal frame aims to look at how identity can possibly be affected by the other members of a group. In order to make this potentially clearer, it is useful to delineate between the "out-group" and the "in-group." Without these designations, imposed identity from a source unspecific as to what credentials that source has hold the reigns as to identity construction. In Caitlyn Jenner's case, the most in-group would be members of the transgender community, though Jenner arguable belongs to the LGBTQ+ designation too, as well as the broader category of "woman". For this purpose, the in-group will be most concretely viewed as the transgender community, where as the out-group is anything other than that. The communal frame helps to establish who has the authority to designate identities.

Paparazzi and the media.

As a celebrity, especially with a key role in a phenomenally successful reality television show, Jenner struggled with the paparazzi. Like sharks after the scent of chum, the minute they caught a whiff of Jenner's gender turmoil, they swarmed. Caitlyn told Bissinger, "Bruce would wear, you know, sweatshirts with hoods on them so paparazzi can't get pictures and all that kind of crap, and I didn't want them to see if my fingernails were polished" (2015, Extended Interview). Hiding under the blandest disguise during a period of searing to find the right look for the new Jenner, paparazzi hurled pointed questions at the reclusive figure. Ranging from "He Bruce, you wanna be a woman?" (Sawyer, 2015) to "Are you a woman yet?" and most invasive, "Do you still have a penis?" (Bissinger, 2015 para. 4) these questions aim to place identifiable categories on tabloid covers. After Jenner's tracheal shave in December of 2013, popular celebrity gossip site, TMZ leaked pictures and a story online despite his pleading for them to keep it private. Knowing that time to come public with the transition was limited Jenner crafted a new timeline. It has taken years of careful orchestration to reveal the Caitlyn Jenner who appeared on the cover of *Vanity Fair* in June of 2015. Months earlier, Diane Sawyer had asked for a name, but Jenner refused saying, "if I do [tell you a name], the media would go crazy and I would never get rid of them. I've still got a little bit of time" (Sawyer, 2015). The unveiling process already in motion, Jenner told Bissinger (2015) that she couldn't wait to tell the nosy paparazzi to "make sure it's a good shot" instead of dodging between other patrons in an effort to hide. Feeling comfortable in her own skin provides the necessary confidence to encounter the media cameras head on, finally displaying a countenance that matches the internal identity and is recognizable by the out-group.

Reaction to jokes.

When the public began questioning Jenner's gender identity, the jokes rolled in with it. Such a public figure for the past several decades places Jenner as a primed target for the late night monologue routine. Sawyer's interview showcased part of Conan O'Brien's sketch, "And they'll assign Bruce Jenner a dance partner as soon as he assigns himself a gender" (Sawyer, 2015). Much closer to the Halloween season, Lauer's interview directly addressed the sensitivity of the "Call Me Caitlyn" costume, marketed to men but only consisting of the now infamous white bustier and sash. Considering the clearly negative press Jenner's expression has had in popular media, the transgender community worried that the frivolous and exaggerated publicity circus would have on the progress of the movement. For such a sensitive topic, the willingness of the out-group to make fun of a clearly tumultuous internal conflict creates a distinct difference and clarification of "other." Jenner mentions in several interviews the spiteful comments of the "rags" or gossip columns and the attacks of the late night circuit, though personally, as Jenner told Matt Lauer, "I'm in on the joke. No, I don't think it's offensive at all" (2015). This singular opinion, especially from a public celebrity figure does not sit well with the transgender community at large. Yet Jenner seems to take jabs like the costume as all part of the irony of a formerly hyper-masculine athletic super star touted around as the cover mockery of the year. Jenner told Lauer, "To be honest with you, I think it's great. Except they could have a better outfit for him ya know?... You got to enjoy life, life's too short, I can't get too upset about that type of thing" (Lauer, 2015, *Jenner*). Though Jenner clearly belongs in the transgender in-group at this point, Caitlyn believes the costume to be reflective of a personal individual prod rather than an attack on the community as a whole. By individualizing the mockery, the costume can't reflect on the community, but rather only ridicules Jenner's contrasting identities.

Popular reactions.

By in large, the reactions to Jenner's transition have been well received publically. After the Diane Sawyer interview, celebrities ranging from Lady Gaga to Oprah Winfrey and Jimmy Fallon tweeted responses expressing support (Bissinger, 2015). Jenner reasons that people do react to Caitlyn differently than they did with Bruce, but not necessarily in negative ways. Bissinger (2015, Extended Interview) catalogues that Jenner has received dozens of letters from people across the country, some from trans individuals, and others from fans that watched the Olympic games and just wanted to say how proud they are. Sawyer cites the messages the studio has received from Jenner's decathlon teammates saying "they wish him well, and will always count him as a friend" (Sawyer, 2015). For a generation of people who do not recall the 1976 Olympics, but know the intricacies of *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*, Jenner's transition is not the same shocking dichotomy, but rather all part of the ongoing reality television saga. Some people had accused Jenner of adding to the media speculation in order to boost ratings for the show, but Jenner scoffed, "Sorry, Diane, it ain't happening. Okay? Yeah, we're going this for publicity. Yeah, right" (Sawyer, 2015). Recognizing the skepticism, Jenner shuts down the speculation referring again to his own personal turmoil, rather than tying it to the television show production.

In-group.

Conflicts with the transgender community.

Similar to the split opinions on the role of transgender jokes, Jenner takes a light-hearted approach, where as the community actively battles against them. Perhaps to seem less stringent or more tolerant of the out-group hesitations, Jenner positions herself as patient and eager to learn. During the Sawyer interview, Jenner requested masculine pronouns (him, his, he), but

Sawyer also made a clarification denoting the importance of correct pronoun usage and acknowledging the appeal for familiar pronouns. Typically with an announcement of an identity shift, a trans individual will also claim specific pronouns or request gender-neutral pronouns in lieu of binary options. Jenner did not switch pronouns until after the *Vanity Fair* cover which also announced a new name: “Caitlyn.” During the interview with Diane Sawyer, Jenner openly claims, “They [the transgender community] know a lot more than I know” (Sawyer, 2015) acknowledging himself as a newcomer to the community. Even as a new member of the in-group, Jenner does not completely align herself with the ideals of the community. Whether intentionally or not, Jenner distances herself from the “image” of the community,

I’m the easiest on people. Now the community, GLAAD [Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation], you know, all the people in the community, are like Oh My God you have to get the pronouns right, you have to do this you have to do that. I’m much more tolerant than that. (Lauer, 2015, *Jenner*)

Creating a separation between the staunch, strict rules of the community and the way that Jenner interacts paints Jenner as the more lenient and therefore accepting party. She intends to paint herself as approachable to the out-group but does not adhere to the stringent boundaries of the in-group. Separating one visible part of the community fractures what might have looked like a more cohesive front. Jenner’s presence in the media automatically connects her to the trans community, but during those interviews when she publically disconnects from the larger group, it discredits the larger movement.

Spokesperson.

A prominent member of the community, Jenner has struggled with the burden of the assumed spokesperson. As previously mentioned, Jenner creates a distance between herself and

the community, but her popularity and prevalent media presence makes her impossible to ignore. Consequently, the out-group deems her an appropriate spokesperson for the community. In the Diane Sawyer interview, Jenner overtly states, “I am not a spokesman for the community” (2015). However in the Lauer debriefing of the *Today Show*, one of Lauer’s co-hosts says, “a good spokesperson for the trans community. She really has embraced it” with Lauer responding, “and that’s really important to her” (2015). Jenner has not verbally acknowledged this role of spokesperson, though her popularity seems to indicate that regardless of her personal stance, the out-group might bestow that designation regardless.

Shortly after the *Vanity Fair* cover, Jenner received the Arthur Ashe award for courage. An award given as part of the Excellence in Sports and Performance Yearly Award (ESPY’s) acknowledges individuals whose work exceeds the bounds of sports. Typically for some exceptional feat of courage, or efforts in the face of controversy, Jenner’s accomplishment was not universally praised. Some pundits had claimed that she did not earn the award, or that there were other nominees who deserved it instead. In 2014, the Arthur Ashe award for courage went to Michael Sam, the first openly gay NFL player, so the award has a history of supporting social advocacy issues. Jenner accepted the award in stride despite the controversy, telling Lauer, “I’m very honored to have them award that to me. Not just to me and this entire community” (Lauer, 2015, *Jenner*). Claiming an award on behalf of a community as a whole contrasts the distancing effect from before and reinstates Jenner as an imposed spokesperson for the community as a whole.

Common experience.

Far from awards and magazine shoots, trans individuals across the country suffer unparalleled injustices and discriminatory acts. Jenner admits to being privileged in this capacity

with the family support and financial ability to make desired body modifications to align her identity. She told Lauer, “I have learned so much. It’s devastating to me to see people dying over this issue” (2015, *Jenner*). In an effort to educate the out-group community, both Sawyer and Bissinger provide statistical evidence as to the devastation in the trans community. Bissinger writes,

The estimated 700,000 transgender women and men in the country are virtually all anonymous, too many of them suffering from job discrimination and violence.... The National Transgender Discrimination Survey Report in 2010, based on roughly 6,500 responses to an extensive questionnaire, determined that the attempted-suicide rate for transgender women and men was a staggering 41 percent, compared to the 1.6 percent in the general population. (2015)

Jenner does not suffer from the same economic hardships of the community on average, nor does she have specific conflicts with employment hardships. In several interviews she mentions a moment where she contemplated suicide after the press leaked her tracheal shave. As she told Sawyer, “I wanna know how this story ends” (2015) could stand as a beacon of hope for other trans individuals who wrestle with suicidal thoughts. Notably, Jenner does not in the interviews do the work of an inspirational speaker. Most of her comments are directed toward the out-group and their understanding of the issue, rather than working to inspire or connect with other members of the in-group. Interpersonally, Jenner has reached out to others who have contacted her, though the large-scale media platform of an interview targets the educational ability for the out-group instead. True, Jenner’s proposed reality television show *I Am Cait* has plans to work within the community connecting with other trans individuals. The interviews also include glossy statements about “making a difference” though do not directly engage the hurting

community. As a supposed spokesperson, Jenner's efforts have been largely focused on personal presentation and explanation to the out-group rather than advocacy or in-group connections.

National Conversation.

As of April 2015 at the time of the Diane Sawyer interview airing, the United States had seen seven murders of transgender individuals and hundreds around the world are attacked, stoned, or burnt every year for trans gender identities. A year later, four states have bills in legislation about trans individuals' use of public bathrooms. Kansas has proposed legislation that encourages college students to report any trans gender individual's use of the 'incorrect' bathroom to the hearty reward of \$2,500. As rampant as this kind of discrimination is, Jenner has the media presence to make an impact. In reaction to a political question, Jenner unequivocally claims to be Republican because "I believe in the Constitution" (Sawyer, 2015). Given that all four of the states with bills posed to cripple the rights of trans gender individuals have Republican majorities, Sawyer balked. Jenner reassured, "neither political party has a monopoly on understanding" (Sawyer, 2015) and Jenner insisted that Republican leaders like Mitch McConnell and John Boehner would help advocate for the cause "in a heartbeat, why not? And I think they'd be very receptive to it" (Sawyer, 2015). Perhaps this could be a sphere of influence Caitlyn Jenner could pressure for significant change.

Rachel Dolezal

Visible identification.

Rachel Dolezal holds a unique position by the visibility of her transitional identity. The story about her identity broke through a visual image of her family of origin holding up a photograph depicting a younger Caucasian blonde woman with strikingly similar features to Dolezal. Her parents, as Lauer calls them, revealed, "she's clearly our birth daughter and we're

clearly Caucasian. That's just a fact" (Lauer, 2015, *Dolezal*). When Lauer holds up the same picture to Dolezal during their interview, he asks, "Is she a Caucasian woman or an African-American woman?" (Lauer, 2015, *Dolezal*). Immediately prior to holding up this image, Dolezal had acknowledged that the picture was of her by correcting Lauer's assumption that she was in her early 20s. Her response does not fall into the trap Lauer sets through the binary option, "I would say that visibly she would be identified as white by people who see her" (Lauer, 2015, *Dolezal*). Instead of caving to the binary presentation, Dolezal forges another dimension to the question. She does not herself claim either identity posed, she instead acknowledges the distinction between what someone might claim as identity internally while still recognizing the imposed physical identification indicators that would label someone. Lauer clarifies, "But at the time were you identifying yourself as African-American?" (Lauer, 2015, *Dolezal*). In order to narrow the options, Lauer must conform to the limitations Dolezal has imposed. Dolezal acquiesces, "In that picture, during that time, no" (Lauer, 2015, *Dolezal*). Still imposing a sense of distance from that identity, Dolezal characterizes it in a temporal context.

Dolezal fractures the concept of identity between identity and identification throughout the remainder of the interview with Lauer. She insists on the complexity of the classification, as her response does not necessarily match that of what others might say of her. She claims,

I was actually identified when I was doing human rights work in north Idaho as, first, trans-racial, and then when someone of the opposition to some of the human rights work I was doing came forward, the next day's newspaper article identified me as being a biracial woman, and the next article when there were actually burglaries, nooses, etcetera, was, this is happening to a black woman. (Lauer, 2015, *Dolezal*)

Over and over again she uses the terminology of an external force identifying her as something else without imposing her own self-definition of her identity. Lauer insists there must be a right or wrong, true or false response to each of these questions, positioning Dolezal as an inherent liar by failing to correct the identifier. Dolezal sidesteps the same imposition by claiming there is not necessarily a clear-cut true or false description in any of these instances. This distinction creates a gap between honesty and credibility. In the case of honesty, Dolezal's reaction depends on the preconceived notion of "truth" based on her experience and beliefs. Honesty only relies on her concept of truth whether or not others believe her account. Credibility on the other hand, depends entirely on the public or communal response to the account. If the public buys her description of her identity, she must be both honest and credible. If the others do not believe her testimony, then her credibility equally dissolves.

Though Dolezal operates under the premise that external opinions and definitions do not have the authoritative final judgment of her identity, she still worries about what might be said. After Lauer likens her performance to putting on blackface, Dolezal defends her actions by clarifying her connectedness to the black experience. She furthers, "which that really solidified was when I got full custody of Izaiah... and he's in high school, and for that to be something that is plausible, I certainly can't be seen as white and be Izaiah's mom" (Lauer, 2015, *Dolezal*). It seems that previous delineation between identity and identification had cast other opinions aside, here those opinions help to validate the relational unity of mother and son. External opinions and identifications validate the familial and assumed hereditary connection between the two simply based on appearance.

Passing.

When Melissa Harris-Perry asks bluntly if what Dolezal is doing is passing, Dolezal genuinely thinks before responding. She honestly considers the concept, acknowledges the complexity, then uses past contextual examples to explain how passing does not quite fit her experience. She describes, “I think they’re in different, if I was to drop back into different moments of when I’ve either been identified, including by the police as black, white and unidentifiable, because I’m all three” (Harris-Perry, 2015). By claiming at times that she may embody more than one racial identity at any given time, Dolezal blurs the distinctions between claimed and imposed identities. If one external force labels her as one race, and a different external force says something different but she corrects neither label, she successfully inhabits multiple identities in the minds of the out-group. Samuels clearly disregards Dolezal’s personal testimony describing, “It is precisely the look of a white woman who tanned for a darker hue, who showcased a constant rotation of elaborately designed African American hairstyles, and who otherwise lived her life as a black woman” (2015). She furthers that although woman for centuries have adopted qualities of black womanhood such as full lips, self-tanners, “attempting to *pass* for black? This was a new type of white woman: bold and brazen enough to claim ownership over a painful and complicated history she wasn’t born into” (Samuels, 2015 para. 3). To pass into a new identity brings with it more than the appearance in Samuels’ appraisal. Dolezal’s ability to slide under the radar of racial divides ignores the ramifications of representing a community’s accumulated historic baggage.

Others actions validate.

Part of Dolezal’s response to identification has been how people react to her. When she claims that the police have identified her as black, she notes that the police have to report such things without necessarily confirming them with the individual in question. Speaking about

Dolezal's hair, she mentions that she has had her hair searched by the Travel Security Agency (TSA). Harris-Perry jumps at this depiction, "[my producer] feels, deeply, profoundly, violated. And she said she probably likes it because it confirms her black racial identity" (Harris-Perry, 2015). TSA may be notorious for racial profiling and aggressive body searches, but Dolezal stands her ground, "oh no, hell no. I'm like get your hands out of my hair!" (Harris-Perry, 2015). To press the point further, Harris-Perry asks bluntly, "even if it confirms your blackness in some way" (Harris-Perry, 2015) which insinuates that our personally held identities can be validated and affirmed by others who see us the same way. Dolezal does not flinch, "that never crossed my mind" (Harris-Perry, 2015). Dolezal's rejection of external validation as part of her identity journey rejects her need to be seen as such. It directly contradicts her need to be seen as Izaiah's mother from earlier. Though arguably different instances, the outcome in acknowledging Dolezal as a black woman remains the same. In order to maintain her braiding business, Dolezal recognizes the need to be seen as someone who has both the ability and the history of doing hair well. To approach a family in the grocery store Dolezal mentions "if I'm, if it looks like I would get it because from a person, of course, her hair" (Harris-Perry, 2015). Her business model depends on her external recognition as someone who would know how to braid, to be recognized as a black woman.

Backlash in the black community.

Rachel Dolezal's identity has caused severe reactions within the black community. Harris-Perry points out that there are listeners to her program that are "not confused, enraged" (2015). Dolezal recognizes that there are individuals in the black community who are both offended and betrayed by the former president of the Spokane NAACP portraying herself as the black woman she is not. Dolezal poses this question to herself, "if you're rejected by the black community,

what do you do?” (Harris-Perry, 2015). As other people in the area distance themselves from someone they consider a fraud, Dolezal says, “I’ll be me. I’ll be me because you know, I feel like the same time, I never want to be a liability to the cause” (Harris-Perry, 2015). In this moment Dolezal recognizes the power of influence behind identity. When accepted by the black community, she wields the ability to mobilize and make change, if she is rejected, then the only identity she has left is what she holds unto herself. Removing herself from “the cause” as she puts it, does not change her personally held identity, only how she interacts within the broader community. Dolezal mentions how the relationships she valued before the publicity of her identity have crumbled under the revelation. She says,

I’ve gotten from friends that really had my back up until Thursday you know? Saying that if I continue to do anything for the black community or with the black community they will do everything in their power to destroy me. And make sure I’m completely ineffective. (Harris-Perry, 2015)

Remember, Dolezal resigned from the NAACP position, they supported the work she had done with the organization, indicating the quality of work she had done for the community. Though she had made significant strides in the community over the course of her tenure, a period of hours dismantled her credibility for only some of the community. She remarks that others “are like, do not stop fighting for us. You go. Please don’t stand down” (Harris-Perry, 2015). The split responses from within the in-group indicate the complexity of what it means to belong opposed as what it means to advocate. If belonging to a group indicates ability to advocate, then Dolezal’s liminal identity only accepted by a portion of the in-group has equally limited capabilities for support.

Definitions of race.

When it comes to conflict within the black community about her identity, Dolezal remains steadfast to her personal frame of identity and what it means to be black. Part of that certainly comes from her involvement with the cause on a broad scale and doing advocacy work therefore defining what it means to be an integral part of the community. Dolezal explanation of this in-group conflict boils down to different definitions of race. As she told Samuels, “I’ve had my years of confusion and wondering who I really [was] and why and how do I live my life ... but I’m not confused about that any longer. I think the world might be, but I’m not” (Samuels, 2015 para. 5). Under perhaps the same definition of race, then everyone would agree on the identification process as well. Dolezal told Samuels, “If people feel misled or deceived, then sorry that they feel that way, but I believe that’s more due to their definition and construct of race in their own minds than it is to my integrity or honesty” (2015 para. 10). If the concept of race is individualized within a personal frame, and that personal frame defines how the communal frame forms through identification, then Dolezal’s identity can only be claimed or affirmed by those who share the same definition. This in turn fractures the communal bubble into dozens of self-definitional frames that work to categorize according to personal opinion and preference.

Chapter 5 - Discussion and Implications

Having examined the two case studies of Rachel Dolezal and Caitlyn Jenner and their descriptions of identity as portrayed through public interviews, I will first answer the posed research questions before turning to implications, limitations, and future studies.

RQ1a: How do people of trans* identities frame identity through public disclosure?

The negotiation of trans* identities as exemplified through Caitlyn Jenner and Rachel Dolezal during their interviews when examined using Hecht's (1993) communication theory of identity occurs in three primary spheres: reliance on personal experience, recollection of relational support, and prioritization of self-understanding over external evaluation. First, both Caitlyn Jenner and Rachel Dolezal rely heavily on personal experience as a way to justify transitional decisions. As the interviews are focused on the interviewee and not the public response, the medium provides key shareable insight as to how they independently conceptualize themselves through the lens of their experiences. For instance Jenner responded to Sawyer's question about personification in dreams, and Jenner states "I do [dream as a woman]. I always have" (2015). Here only Jenner could possibly know the answer to the question, immediately indicating the independent personal response as intrinsic to identity. Especially in the Sawyer interview, Jenner recalls the number of times that he had put on a dress, or intentionally displayed feminine traits with or without other's acknowledgement. Jenner also speaks openly about prior distaste for her masculine body, or how at specific moments she felt. These personal emotional reactions guide transitional evidence when communicating to the public and the interviewer. The commonality of emotions allows the viewer to recognize similarities and empathize with the internal struggles of the interviewee. Dolezal on the other hand relies on specific instances and experiences. She cites various cases where someone else's actions aligned

with her own identity and therefore confirm her personal identity. Using past experiences even as a child drawing a self-portrait help to illuminate her internal struggle. The times where Dolezal expresses any kind of emotional connection center on her self-description with her hair style changes. She talks about feeling beautiful and affirming that black is beautiful in her interview with Melissa Harris-Perry (2015) another black woman with braided hair. She mentions how she always “used to pull my hair back because I just like didn’t feel comfortable. No it’s like; your hair is so beautiful kind of a thing. And when I got braids it was like, just the smiles” (Harris-Perry, 2015). Again the emotional response to the common experience of finally feeling beautiful in your own skin adapts readily to other individuals regardless of their personal beliefs of Dolezal’s identity. Using emotional appeals through personal experience imply the importance of connectivity through narrative elements.

Second, both Dolezal and Jenner rely on former expressions of relational support in order to validate their identity. Jenner repeatedly recalls the various interactions or responses to her identity from her children and other family members, all of whom expressed shock but ultimately acceptance and support. Given the climate surrounding transgender identities, the validation through support systems and being accepted universally by those immediate family members would be sadly an anomaly in the community. Discussion of close family members reminds viewers that though a dramatic shift in identity might be rare, the similarity to family still resonates universally. Dolezal uses almost identical framework when speaking about her accepting sons. By talking about her family in her specific definitional form and their support, she validates her experience. Perhaps the premise indicates that if even those closest to the trans* identity individual accept and support them, then there should be no reason as to why the broader community should not do the same.

Even under the conflicting perceptions of their identities, both Caitlyn Jenner and Rachel Dolezal defer to their personal definitions of identity instead of the community understanding. Jenner recognizes her new standing in the community and may pass on questions about the community at large, but she frames her responses as to her specifically rather than trying to answer for the whole community. In her conversation with Matt Lauer, she isolates her responses to certain stimuli as her reaction alone instead of speaking for others as well. This inherently narrows those responses to the confines of Jenner's definitional operation, and she does not try to exceed those bounds. Dolezal more directly approaches confrontations by stating her definitions of race and then explaining that she understands, but the world might not. In her conversation with Samuels (2015) she talks about nuanced definitions of blackness as opposed to African American, but does not accommodate the understandings of other individuals. Because she labels herself according to her definitions, it makes it harder to understand her identity outside of those boundaries. Consequently she holds fast to her own definitions and her identity without having to confront the other argument. The world can be confused, but under her code, her identity makes sense.

RQ1b: And what do these processes teach us about identity and identification in relationship to gender and race?

Given the striking communal responses between Caitlyn Jenner and Rachel Dolezal, the predominant differences must be the common perception of identity in these two contexts. For Caitlyn Jenner, socially the out-group has accepted with only slight reservations that gender can be flexible. Diane Sawyer pointed out in her interview (2015) that nearly 87% of Americans know someone who is gay, where as only 8% know someone who is transgender. Historically there have been highly publicized cases of transgender individuals in the public sphere from

tennis star Renee Richards to the American soldier who returned from Denmark in 1952 as Christine Jorgensen. Even at the Academy Awards in 2016, Eddie Redmayne was nominated for Best Actor for his rendition of a transgender woman. With *Time* magazine calling 2015 the “transgender tipping point,” the out-group opinion about these individuals seems a minor setback in comparison to the widely acknowledged phenomenon. Consequently, the out-group seems far more willing to accommodate transgender identities.

However the public understanding of racial identities are restricted to heredity. Rachel Dolezal’s story broke because of the slip in response about her “dad” versus her “father” and the concern as to whether or not her parents were Caucasian. The previous pictures of her only exacerbated the response to her family of origin’s testimony. Dolezal’s identity was predominantly contingent on in the minds of the public on her parental lineage searching for birth certificates and childhood evidence rather than the more generalized questions posed for Jenner. Despite the emphasis on lineage, Dolezal’s identification was overwhelmingly based on her physical appearance. Her presentation as a black woman with braided hair highly influenced how the public perceived her. To put in perspective, Jenner even in masculine dress for the Diane Sawyer interview did not have to present as feminine to be believed.

RQ2: What do the respective rhetorics of Caitlyn Jenner and Rachel Dolezal tell us about the relationship between identity and identification?

In the case of Caitlyn Jenner, she acknowledges the hesitations that outside identification from the out-group might have based on their knowledge of her as the former Olympic gold medalist. Even under those constraints, Jenner repeatedly mentions how willing she is to answer questions or explain parts of her identity. The distance she creates from the in-group, in this case the LGBTQ+ community, allows her the flexibility to explain various components of her identity

in her own way rather than relying on the rhetoric of the community as a whole. Consequently she positions herself as more informative and relatable rather than operating or speaking for the masses. By becoming an individual with information to share about herself, she instills the same logical process she uses in other out-group members. An important element of Jenner's position is her standing as a celebrity figure. A once celebrated athlete and recognizable reality television star protects her from certain aggressive questions in publicity efforts. For her, few interviewers would risk affronting the highly recognizable star for a few less than politically correct questions. Regardless of the out-group opinion, Jenner continues to operate on knowledge gained from the community and her internal personal frame of identity.

Dolezal's status as a former volunteer for the NAACP does not offer her the same protections as Jenner. Also the less recognizable status of her identity means that interviewers are operating under an investigatory lens rather than a quizzical informational frame. For instance, where the questions Jenner was asked were more sensitively, Dolezal defended her identity rather than explained it. Yet her defense rests solely on her definitional interpretation of race. So as she rejects the questions of Matt Lauer, she also has to reframe them in a way that she can answer. Interestingly, without the pressure of the media, she opts to protect herself by resigning from the public positions, but openly acknowledges how she does not anticipate changing her identity because of the pressure of the out-group, or the in-group. She removes herself from the public eye, but continues to identify well within her personal frame regardless of the acceptance of the communal frame. Ultimately, though identity has the ability to impact the communal acceptance or rejection, the personally held identity does not change in these two instances. Both Rachel Dolezal and Caitlyn Jenner continue to identify despite the communal pressures.

RQ3: How do interviewers use identification rhetoric to construct borders of in-group/out-group identity?

These interviews were partially selected for their ability to address the in-group perspective of the interviewee. Harris-Perry as an interviewer asked questions about elaborating on specific aspects of Dolezal's identity such as her hair. As a black woman with braids, Harris-Perry had similar experiences allowing the two to connect on an interpersonal level during the interview. Similarly, Diane Sawyer spoke to Jenner about the role of a woman in her 60s, such as wearing a pantsuit instead of the "fun" outfits of young adulthood. Their connection based on age and similarity of current life trajectory makes the interactions genuine and believable. By contrast, Matt Lauer's two conversations were strikingly different. Playing golf with Caitlyn Jenner, Lauer hedged some of his questions before asking them, where as with Dolezal he asked point blank, and aggressive questions. There might be two explanations for this experience. First, where Harris-Perry is a member of Dolezal's perceived in-group, Lauer is not and therefore less willing to be sympathetic than a member of the in-group. Second, Lauer had interviewed Jenner before that episode, so asking questions of an acquaintance might be an easier response than a stranger.

Due to the nature of public interview, interviewers had to adhere to requested language and framing tactics. For instance, Diane Sawyer explains repeatedly how Jenner at the time of the interview had requested familiar masculine pronouns. Of course that changed over the subsequent months, but by explaining why specific choices had been made collaboratively between interviewer and interviewee, it creates a distinction between the two entities.

Interviewers also operate under the assumption that they should ask questions that help explain concepts to the general population. So where Sawyer may understand the difference between

gender and sexuality, multiple segments explain the difference and then pose an additional question to Jenner to make it clear. This act automatically aligns the interviewer with the out-group learning the intricacies of these identities along side the viewer. The interviewer holds a dual role in forming a comfortable space for the interviewee as well as illuminating to the viewer the intricacies of the other person.

Implications

Having answered the research questions, I now turn to a series of implications under the following headings: language, community, metaphor, and method. The language implications aim to illustrate the complications with the construction of the English language and how identities are articulated through it. These language issues equally inform aspects of both the LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and others) identities as well as the black community. Metaphor addresses the use of visual imagery of both case studies when describing identity and how that description holds problems for out-group identification. Finally, the versatility of Hecht's (1993) communication theory of identity has room to expand beyond this analysis.

Language

Categories are persistent through language confines.

In the Diane Sawyer interview, she has to clarify that she will be using masculine pronouns throughout the interview in accordance with Jenner's requests. Selecting "he/him/his" over "she/her/hers" has been an important distinction to the trans community historically, though it places extra emphasis on the imposed gender binary. Linguistically speaking, the English language does not allow for individuals to exceed the bounds of gender unless envisioned under a plural lens. Just as Jenner's presentation changed to specifically feminine, so did the communal

frame expect an equal response to her transition linguistically. Think of all of the gender specific terms used in relation to individuals as compared to the gender-neutral version. Changing man or woman to person automatically makes the sentence less specific. The shift from “The woman entered the grocery store” to “the person entered the grocery store” leaves the reader feeling less informed than before. Socially, asking questions about other people’s identities, specifically about their gender isolates the other individuals and reinforces the societal pressure to belong to one category or another. Our language framework insists that the personal frame explanation should automatically align with one of the pre-established categories of the communal frame. Consequently, the categorical imposition of language seeps into the other organizational structures of our society. Men’s and women’s clothing departments, gendered baby clothes, appraisals as to what is a manly meal or a girly drink all influence what someone with a specific identity should or should not use or eat. Even gendered phrases like “man up” assume a hierarchal order to what kinds of actions should be taken but strictly in a masculine sense. Jenner’s transition from a hyper-masculine personification dramatically shifts what kinds of social expectations are held for the new identity. However a longitudinal view of Jenner’s identity complicates the descriptive capabilities of the communal frame. To describe Jenner the same way today as in the 1976 Olympics would now feel inappropriate at best, and offensive at worst. The gendered constructs expressed through our language work to enforce the same gender binary that many transgender individuals works to escape in the first place.

Non-binary identity does not fit structures.

Not only are there enforced categorical boundaries expressed through language, but for those who do not identify on the binary spectrum, our current language structures forbid their participation. Simply put, the English language does not have gender-neutral singular pronouns.

To write the sentence, “they is going to go to the store today” makes less grammatical sense than the gendered version, “she is going to go to the store today.” Outside of creating additional gender-neutral pronouns, the non-binary individuals must work within the established confines of the already existing language, which includes implying self-plurality to the communal frame. In order to justify their singular experience, members of a non-binary identity have to negotiate how to describe themselves to the out-group in a way that still makes sense to others. Without the language to do so, the ability to successfully and accurately describe identity to any member of the out-group becomes significantly limited.

Community

LGBTQ+ in communicating with the out-group.

Over and over during the various Jenner interviews, either the interviewer or Jenner has to stop and reiterate that gender and sexuality are different facets of identity. One “is who you go to bed as” and the other is “who you go to bed with” (Sawyer, 2015). However the framework of the all-inclusive LGBTQ+ language automatically aligns descriptions of one facet with the other. Where lesbian, gay, and bisexual all connote sexual attraction, trans* (gender or sex in this case) and queer relate to identity elements of self, not of sexual attraction. Lumping all aspects of identity outside of the hetero-normative cis-gendered identity together creates complications when explaining those identities to members of the out-group. Unaware members of the out-group struggle to distinguish the differences between the nuanced and varied identities of the in-group. Though the LGBTQ+ has worked to be exceedingly inclusive of multiple aspects of identity and those who may be othered because of gender identity or sexuality, the inclusivity of the group makes it increasingly more complicated to explain the differences to the out-group. Take for instance the rhetoric surrounding “gay rights.” From the legalization of same-sex

marriage in 2015, gay rights activists have also been burdened with the battle for transgender rights as well. By all means, there can be power expressed in numbers and having such an expansive inclusion of identity descriptors under one heading would in theory be a powerful force for legislators to reconcile. However in-group division struggles to maintain cohesion, as group priorities do not necessarily assist all members of the LGBTQ+ in-group.

Identity relegates attraction binary.

As the LGBTQ+ community includes both sexual attraction and identity, it is important to discuss how that collective grouping impacts linguistic descriptions of attraction. Commonly, the term “homosexual” means at its broadest definition “attraction to the same sex” whereas “heterosexual” means “attracted to a different sex.” For cis-gendered individuals, this terminology makes sense as it can be easily reflected through one’s personally held identity. However for those who either do not ascribe to a binary definition of their gender, or for transgender individuals, that designation becomes tricky. Under these circumstances, what does “same” or “difference” mean? Both Matt Lauer and Diane Sawyer asked Jenner questions about sexuality wondering if she was “a lesbian” (Sawyer, 2015), or “attracted to a specific kind of person” (Lauer, 2015). This kind of terminology not only requires a specific identity designation, but it also places rigid categories on sexuality. Without an understandable gender identity, it becomes increasingly difficult to also describe sexuality under the same linguistic restraints.

Identity has historical baggage.

For most individuals, race as an identity descriptor arrives with more than personal attributes but also the history of a community. When Dolezal describes how she has “been there” or “really gone there with the experience” she refers to the historical underpinnings of the identity she assumes. The critiques leveled against her are similarly about how she cannot

possibly understand the experiences of the black community having not undergone the inherent discrimination that others have. These historical threads tied through an entire culture or race automatically makes those assuming the identity more cohesive, though exclusive in the capacity that others cannot even work to understand the same ingrained experience. Different than the LGBTQ+ community, the black community hands down historical and cultural elements through lineage, teaching children about past actions and ways to interact with others in the present context. In the LGBTQ+ community, there are similar historical events to recollect, though those events do not get passed down through family units. As Dolezal did not have the same biological heritage and therefore not the same history passed down to her, she from the in-group perspective may never be able to understand the identity they inherited.

Metaphor.

True versus new self.

As mentioned in the analysis, Jenner uses the continued metaphor of emerging as something new, or to become something that has always been present, just not visible. To transcend carries with it the connotation to go beyond to an elevated status. Transcend as a verb also removes the past in order to create a new being, a new state of being. Jenner repeatedly uses metaphors that carry the creation of being, or creation anew removed from the old version. From an alternative perspective, to emerge as one's self, implies the existence of an already true and core being internal to the visible presence seen by others. A protected inner core self can then only be released and physical portrayal aligned in accordance. Transcendence leaves previous context behind, creating a new self, separate from the past. Jenner's selection of rhetoric uses both elements, to create anew, and to return to core, which problematizes the experience of assuming another identity. In simpler terms, if identity is inherent, or at the core of a being, then

there should be no impetus to create an alterative identity. Further, the communal frame seems more willing to accept a return to a core identity rather than the ungrounded creation of a new identity.

Stability of identity comes into question.

The creation of a new identity, ungrounded by the testimony of an inner core becomes unstable under the scrutiny of the communal frame. For the communal frame to be confident in identification, then the identity established must be believable as an organic entity rather than something that was created from spontaneous impulse. Trans* individuals who justify their expression of identity through a transcendent or “new” metaphor for identity force the communal frame to question the authenticity of the identity. Regardless of the legitimacy of the identity in question, if the out-group cannot validate it, then it is less likely to be accepted. Consequently the instability of an individual’s identity in the mind of the out-group minimizes their claim to the identity. In the case of Rachel Dolezal, several members of the black community believe her to be faking her identity likely due to her expression of identity that relies on her current state rather than some inherent trait. Perhaps on a more common level, there are moments in our own lives where we move to different places and aim to recreate ourselves in a more favorable image. The philosophy of a “new start” aims to escape the old enactment of identity in hopes to establish new and potentially more favorable identity traits. The “new you” has fewer burdens of past experiences or mistakes and can reestablish connections with others. In a dramatic turn, can someone with a specific identification from the communal lens escape that label by moving to a new location and establishing a new identity.

Rhetorical impact of self-held truth.

For both Dolezal and Jenner when asked questions about their identity the fallback response relied on personal experience or expression. At the end of each interview, the viewer is left taking them at their own word for their experience without having a counterpoint to pit against the narrative. Interviewers found it difficult to negate or dismantle any perceived inauthentic points in either Jenner or Dolezal's narratives, as it would dissolve the interview into credibility attacks rather than a presentation of viewpoint. In order to keep the interviews as informative and objective as possible, interviewers accepted the bulk of the narrative without question. However the continued referral to individualized self-experience or self-expression places a specific copyright on applicability to external perspectives. From a psychological standpoint, it makes complete sense that we as independent, conscious beings would hold our personal experiences above all other input regardless of logical counterpoints. We, for better or for worse, trust our senses and our thoughts more so than other responses. Knowing that the first instinct for Jenner and Dolezal was to recall personal expression, from a persuasive outlook, it becomes difficult to parry independent and viable truth according to an individualized perspective. Therefore, continued reliance on self-held truth may function as a persuasive rhetorical tactic safe from the logistical questions of others, though it leaves individuals vulnerable to attacks on credibility, which disregard personal truth.

Credibility of actions.

One of the significant complaints leveled against Rachel Dolezal has been the credibility of her work. The NAACP stood behind the work she had done for them as the chapter president, though other members of the community seek to discredit her involvement. They claim that her true self or true identity must intrinsically motivate her work. If race is strictly hereditary in nature, then not only can Dolezal not claim blackness as an identity, but her attempts to alter her

identity fundamentally discredit her work as an activist. Under this constraint, she cannot advocate for an identity that is not hers, and any attempt to aid the cause would do more damage than good, regardless of her national reputation. If our own advocacy is limited to our inherent or true identity then we cannot work beyond our boundaries imposed on us by the communal frame.

Methodological design.

Reliability of interviews in rhetorical lens.

Though scholars have debated the reliability of the speeches produced by individuals as a reflection of their identity. Using interviews, the filters of revisions that occur with speeches fall by the wayside and the organic thoughts pressured by a time sensitive medium like television rise to the surface. Of course there is the question of the authenticity of an individual presented in a mediated form like television considering that television networks may edit a segment for time, or may be under obligation to ask only questions under this line of thought. In the case of these interviews however, there appears to be a general consensus about providing a product that accurately represents an individual in a way that the common public can connect with and understand. Interviews in this frame are looking not for broad truth as described by hegemonic orders, but rather responses from an individual based on their understanding of their identity. Therefore this study serves as a halfway point from the ideas of Ono and Sloop (1995) who suggest further rhetorical investigation of vernacular discourse. Here, the Jenner and Dolezal rely less on vernacular, but also do not have prepared statements describing their identity and must respond to interviewer's questions. If Jenner and Dolezal did in fact play an inauthentic character for the course of an interview, it seems unlikely that they would be able to maintain the same characterization over the course of multiple interviews with various interviewers.

Hecht's influence on rhetorical investigation.

One thing to note about Hecht's (1993) framework is the compact and cross-sectional look at the expression of identity. For Hecht, these instants have insights all their own rather than delving into the immense depth of identity formation over a period of years. In this way, Hecht's (1993) lens provides a remarkable alignment with the concepts purported by rhetorical scholarship. Most rhetorical studies examine a particular instant that impacts or molds others through persuasive means. Of course scholars can examine multiple occasions and find parallels between particular speeches or cases of text that match or negate influence over time, however this study looks to how identity formation itself may have persuasive tendrils in its description. Inherently, we as listeners and purveyors of language look to the credibility of the rhetor, asking whether they seem authentic in their persuasive aims. Hecht's (1993) communication theory of identity could provide additional insight into how the identity of the rhetor impacts our willingness to buy into their message based on the reactions of the communal frame. In examining how individuals manage their identity in accordance to the context, Hecht's (1993) theory might provide a new way to gain understanding about the functionality of identity on a broader persuasive scale.

Interpersonal.

Hecht's (1993) method provides insight into how different perspectives of identity intersect and work interdependently to depict a more complete identity. However there are significant limitations to Hecht's theory. In order to complete the enactment frame, Hecht's model should be extended to include more complete analysis of interpersonal elements. Both Enactment and relationship provide glimpses at cross-sectional analysis of a specific instance for those interactions. By including a more thorough interpersonal lens, Hecht's theory could include the growth and changing of a relationship over time. In the case of trans* identities, the

transformational period of time includes intentional changes to demeanor and ways to communicate the altered enactment of identity. Consequently the relationship and the enactment of the relationship must accommodate the transitional identity in order to keep adapting the interaction. This study only looked at a slim cross-section of information available to the public, but future studies could use the similar constructs but investigate more nuanced identity interactions between individuals over a period of time.

Communal frame for identity and identification.

Finally, Hecht's (1993) theory addresses in the broadest sense of the term the communal frame. However this analysis suggests that in order to better examine the differences between the communal frame and the personal frame it would be beneficial to separate the in-group from the out-group in reference to identification. For some in the community, the communal frame should be enforced with specific protocols and identity alignment, however the out-group expects those individuals to behave differently. Separating the two spheres into different sub-frames helps to distinguish how personal identities can be accepted or rejected dependent on the type of communal lens. By expanding the communal frame, there can be more nuanced and complex investigations of how the four spheres of identity intersect and highlight expectations of identity. Researchers should take note to designate what the in-group and out-group could mean under this level of detailed analysis.

Limitations and Future Research

Due to the nature of case studies, this analysis suffers from some limitations as far as scope. Only selected interviews on public networks were used here, though future studies should look to include other interactions not mediated by television. Additionally, this study aimed to examine the similar rhetorical constructs of language used by those with trans* identities. A

budding field of research seeks to examine identities, especially trans* identities, of those with disabilities, or other identifiers. Applying a similar lens to those of the trans-ablest community might diversify the understanding of claimed identities, creation or formulation of identities, and the communal response to those identities. Investigating the use of language surrounding individuals of the community who had the option to align their identity with a physical portrayal as compared to those who do not have that agency could prove fruitful in distinguishing further pitfalls in linguistic binaries.

Conclusion

Caitlyn Jenner's public interviews juxtaposed to Rachel Dolezal's controversial outing highlight the imposed linguistic binaries constraining identity. Regardless of the individualistic opinions we may harbor for those with ambiguous or complex identity construction, Hecht's (1993) communication theory of identity allows a critical examination of what it means to use language to craft our daily interactions. Our identities may be individually defined, but the identification imposed by the communal frame encourages further investigation as to how those identities become inscribed into social standards.

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