

From November 14<sup>th</sup> through 17<sup>th</sup> 2019 I attended the annual conference convention for the National Communication Association (NCA). This was the 105<sup>th</sup> annual convention for the association, which acts as the leading association for communication studies scholar, pedagogues, and practitioners in the United States. Throughout my four days at the conference I presented and chaired two panels, which I also created, as well as presented one solo-authored full paper, and chaired one additional panel that I did not participate in. In this relatively brief document I outline some of the major topics discussed across these panels, as well as offer additional information on one other panel that I attended as an audience member. The time I spent at was intellectually enriching, professionally rewarding, and highly useful in shaping both my current research agenda and teaching practices here at Lincoln University.

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**Panel One:** Thursday, November 15th

**Panel Title:** The Time is Here: The Role of Theory in the Ongoing Critical Turn in Interpersonal Communication Studies (Critical Cultural Studies Division)

This discussion panel brought together both established and up-and-coming scholars in the field of interpersonal communication who are working to accelerate the ongoing critical paradigmatic turn in scholarship and teaching in the field. I designed the panel to embrace dialogic interplay between the audience and presenters in order to curate rich conversations on theory, specifically. The panel explored issues relevant to critical interpersonal communication research, including theory construction, adaptation, application, and (re)visionings for the future of the discipline.

My individual contribution to this panel was titled *The Building of Communicative Compartmentalization Theory: Correlating Micro Relational Elements of Ambivalence to Macro/Public Dismissiveness*, which was born out of my PhD dissertation project. In my dissertation, I construct a framework specific to the aims and scopes of critical interpersonal communication scholarship, based off of the data I had compiled across a series of participant interviews. This panel presentation discussed my concept of communicative compartmentalization, the relational and psychological process of compartmentalizing, moderating, modifying, and suppressing or enhancing specific forms of communication (such as words, styles, topics, and so on) across a spatial, relational, and temporal context. Given the inherent interest in power dynamics that defines CIC research, communicative compartmentalization is interested not only in how such processes materialize within and across relational partners, such as same-sex friendships, but the *implications* of those processes on a more macro level.

Other participant discussion titles for this panel included *Creating Contributions*, *Continuing Colonization*, and *Conceptualizing Critical interpersonal Communication*, *Affect Theory and Critical Interpersonal Communication Studies*, *Utilizing Performative Face Theory to Assess Gender and Discourse in the Workplace*, *Conceptual Development as CIFIC Theory Building*, and *Realizing the Promise of Relational Dialectics Theory for Advancing Critical Interpersonal and Family Theorizing*.

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**Panel Two:** Friday, November 16th

**Panel Title:** Notes on Method: Centering Methodology in the New Wave of Critical Interpersonal Communication Research (Interpersonal Communication Division)

I designed and put out the initial call for participants for this panel as a way to create a scholarly platform to address the burgeoning subfield of critical interpersonal communication (CIC) research. The interpersonal communication division of NCA is one of the organization's largest, reflecting the foundational status of interpersonal communication scholarship and pedagogy in our broader field. Within interpersonal communication scholarship, ongoing arguments by scholars have continued as they relate to the advancement of critical approaches to interpersonal communication research. Historically, interpersonal communication research has been largely defined by post-positivist and interpretivist theoretical frameworks and quantitative methodologies. The past decade has witnessed an emergence of scholars seeking to transform the sub-discipline by revisiting and retooling its theoretical and methodological contours and foundations. Arguing that in order to not only reflect advancements made in and by other disciplines, but to, more specifically, act as a leader within our larger field, such scholars have proposed that interpersonal communication researchers need to more fully welcome critical approaches to the study of human interpersonal relationships.

At its core, the coupling of critical theory/approaches and interpersonal communication research is to understand the ways in which communicative behaviors and processes within relationships are both deeply influenced by and reinforce governing social, cultural, and political power dynamics and hegemonics. In this sense, personal relationships and the communication therein becomes politicized in ways reflecting the second wave feminist mantra, the personal is political. Although still in its infancy stage, CIC is invested in and pays close attention to the ways in which interpersonal phenomena are tied to discourse, (re)produce discourse, sustain inequities in various ways, and aid in the ongoing social construction of the material world. In short, such scholars believe that micro relational normative behaviors are intrinsically connected to larger macro systems in recursive, circular ways. As such, an ethos of social justice pursuits often underpins such scholarship.

This panel was designed to afford space to both junior/emergent and established scholars in the field whose work is self-defined as CIC. The objective of the panel was to carve space within the interpersonal division of NCA, something that many of the more "traditional" gatekeepers of the field have been quite resistant to, as they interpret the aims and scope of CIC as fundamentally antithetical to the foundations of the sub-field. This panel specifically examines the role of method in the development of CIC research. My discussion contribution, titled *Methodological Tiptoeing: Establishing Dialogue and Navigating Researcher/Participant Political Differences through Invitational Rhetoric as Interview Practice*, was born out of the research executed during my PhD dissertation project (defended in March, 2019) titled *From the Ground, to the Ballot, to the System: The (Critical) Interpersonal Reproduction of Masculinity within Homosocial Friendships of Male Donald Trump Supporters*.

During my presentation I spoke on some of the issues that emerge when scholars work 1) with research participants that have conflicting political views as one's own, and 2) on projects that are explicitly or directly political in theme and nature. Borrowing from my past year and a half in the field, I spoke on the importance of empathy, critical reflection, cross-cultural/political dialogue, as well as some of the responsibilities researchers have in the "fake news" and "post-truth" era. These are strategies that are vital not only for research practitioners, but also for pedagogues in the classrooms, professionals in the workplace, and relational partners navigating the increasingly complex social world.

In addition to my discussion on the importance of researcher-participant dialogue across difference, other discussion titles from scholars included *Power and Difference in Interpersonal and Family Communication Studies: Multiadic Analysis as a Critical Qualitative Research Tool*, *Duo Autoethnographic Exploration/ Interview Inquiry as Method for Queered Performative Face Theory*, *Using Critical-Qualitative Inquiry to Effectively Speak to Traditional IFC Studies*, and *Realizing the Promise of Critical Discourse Analysis for Advancing Critical Interpersonal and Family Methods*.

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### **Individual Paper Presentation: Saturday, November 17<sup>th</sup>**

**Paper Title:** *Communicating with/in the Fourth: Feminist Horizons in the New Public Sphere*

On the third day of the NCA conference I presented an original essay submitted to the Feminist and Women's Studies division. The paper confronts new feminist possibilities in the digital age by addressing the conflation of the public and private sphere through social media platforms. Examining both the 2017 Women's March and the rise in feminist-based social media hashtag activism, the essay encourages scholars and activists to rethink the significance of the digisphere and its potential for feminist worldmaking. Moreover, I argued that the coupling of the digisphere and the newly reformed public sphere, defined by its fluid boundaries, inaugurate and define a decidedly unique, fourth wave of feminist praxis. The essay seeks to further solidify the work of other scholars who also claim that a new, fourth wave era of feminism is here, therefore contributing to a discourse that both sediments and legitimizes a turn in feminist thought, activism, praxis, scholarship, and pedagogy.

I presented this work alongside other scholars who also confronted the future of feminist theorizing and activism in their work. This was a particularly inspiring and useful panel of papers as it afforded both the authors and audience members a space to creatively think about 21<sup>st</sup> century feminism and some of the most important challenges and opportunities that currently define it.

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### **What this Means for my Role at Lincoln**

The discussed panel presentations, along with the panel that housed my individually authored paper, were fantastic opportunities for me to consider ways to enhance my teaching, intellectual approaches and considerations, and educational outcomes in my position of Assistant Professor of Communication Studies at Lincoln. Moreover, an additional panel I attended as an audience member on the importance of freedom of speech in communications courses was also

helpful in shaping how I approach diversity and, at times, conflicting beliefs, ideological tensions, and competing values among students in my courses here at the university.

Given that I teach an interpersonal communication course at Lincoln, gaining better insight into and participating in conversations surrounding critical interpersonal communication research have obvious benefits for our students here. CIC research remains a relatively new and cutting edge approach to the study—and subsequent teaching—of interpersonal communication phenomena. As such, the conversations had during our two panels were insightful, constructive, and provided many new ideas for not only what material to incorporate into my interpersonal communication class, but also how to treat human relationships (and the subsequent communication therein) with my students in our classroom space. I look forward to continuing my efforts in expanding the emphasis of CIC through my teaching here at Lincoln, and I believe these nuanced approaches will greatly shape student learning outcomes in the future.

My piece on fourth wave feminism grapples with the role of social media, among other things, as it relates to current modes of activist participation and public modes of communicative engagement. This attention to social media is relevant for both my interpersonal communication courses and communication theory/public speaking courses at Lincoln, as both fully situate and pay attention to social media as significant communicative platforms. Many of my students in the public speaking course like to take on more political or activist-oriented topics in their work, and having additional knowledge of and experience with various modes of activism certainly helps shape their understanding of new possibilities in the digital/social media age.

In conclusion, my time spent at the 2019 NCA 105<sup>th</sup> annual convention was rewarding both intellectually and professionally. I was able to experience meaningful conversations with communication studies faculty across a wide range of universities, geographic locations, and research foci. Moreover, I have been and will continue to be able to translate those moments of intellectual growth into important pedagogical outcomes for my students here at Lincoln, drawing closer the connections between faculty professional development and student intellectual engagement.