

ORGANIZING LIVELIHOODS: AN EXAMINATION OF POLITICAL DISCOURSES
ORGANIZING A PUBLIC PARK

by
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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my wife, Molly, as she has always encouraged me to do my best work. I am incredibly thankful for the support Molly has given me and the ways she inspires me far beyond the writing of this thesis.

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ABSTRACT

Organizational communication scholars have a history of challenging previous understandings of organization and complicating the ways organizations are understood and practiced. As organizations have been studied from communicative perspectives, some scholars have suggested moving beyond the organization to apply the rich insights gained to new problems and phenomena. Guided by the call to take organizational communication insights beyond the “organization,” this thesis examines constitutive communicative interactions and lived experiences within a public park. Public parks are frequently overlooked as mundane places in contemporary Western society, but this study demonstrates how they are important places for meaning making and organizing. Specifically, embracing an organizational communication perspective focused on discourse and power, I spent seven weeks in a public park as a participant observer and engaged in 12 semi-structured interviews. The findings of this study demonstrate ways that power-laden discourses organize identities and understandings of the world. These findings demonstrate how organizational communication scholarship can be applied to areas and phenomena beyond the “organization.”

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Public parks are important places for meaning making and organizing. Whether walking a dog, eating lunch on a picnic bench, escaping a workplace for a few moments, or engaged in a variety of other activities, people spend time in public places such as parks. In addition, for some people without a home or place to be throughout the day, a local park becomes one of the few available places to spend time. Some parks with playgrounds or skate features provide a place for young people to spend time and play. The time spent by people in public parks is significant because it allows people to make friends, socialize with others, and engage in leisurely activities outside of the workplace and marketplace. The range of activities and interactions taking place in public parks are important because they can shape how people understand themselves and their relationship to those around them. Although many individuals visit public parks and interact with others, these interactions are largely taken for granted. However, the people that frequent public parks form relationships with other people and groups. While these relationships might be created through identification with similar interests, activities, or economic status, the interactions taking place in public places become interesting as people reaffirm existing identities or create new ways of knowing themselves in relation to the world around them.

Public parks are often considered open places in urban environments that exist for leisure and laziness. Young (1995) described modern urban parks as places designed with

specialized areas for children to play, athletes to engage in sporting, and others to enjoy art and open space. Each of these specialized areas demonstrate that public parks are places for relaxation, recreation, and the general enjoyment of green spaces in urban centers, but there is more going on beneath the surface. While social interactions taking place in public parks can be assumed to be inconsequential to society, others claim that social interactions in parks are significantly constrained. For instance, Madden (2010) argued that public parks can be understood as a representation of an ideal public sphere where all citizens are free to attend and engage in inter-subjective communication. While this would be the ideal notion of what a public park could be, public parks can also be understood as exclusive and political places where particular citizens are regularly excluded or criminalized. Furthermore, Arantes (1996) shared that public places are filled with people living out their everyday life, creating symbolic boundaries between groups of people; groups of people that might be business people, drug dealers, prostitutes, or call the public places home. However, there is little research on the ways social interaction in public parks influences identity creation and whether these identities are openly formed or significantly constrained. Thus, this research regarding the complex ways discourse organizes meanings about selves and relationships to society in the midst of public parks is an intriguing and important area for study.

Research shows that as people congregate and interact, they often demonstrate who they are and where they “belong” through their interactions with others (e.g., Kuhn & Nelson, 2002). For instance, Boden (1994) discussed this idea as she noted that peoples’ talk is more than a neutral statement and can be understood as an expression of their self, and place within society. Over time, society has collectively created many

taken-for-granted ways to group or categorize others that are used as working definitions for understanding who people are. Regarding this study, I am interested in the ways that people interact in public places to reproduce these social categories, resist the predefined categories, or create new understandings of their selves when interacting with others. Guided by the previous works generated by organizational communication scholars studying language use and identity in the workplace, I studied the relationship between interactions in public places and categorization schemas that organize society. The aim of this study was to understand how social categorization schemas might organize the very interactions of people in public places.

Organizational communication scholars have been interested in the ways people are organized and organize themselves through communicative acts. Since the early 1980s, Putnam (1983) and others have embraced the interpretive perspective as a useful approach to study organization because it directs attention toward meanings as constituted in social interaction. In other words, the interpretive turns changed the way researchers approached and conceived of organization. Continuing this move toward an emphasis on language and social interaction, Alvesson and Kärreman (2000a) furthered the discussion by noting a “linguistic turn” in the field of organizational communication. This linguistic turn can be described as a move from viewing language as something taking place in organizations, to viewing language as the central object for studying organization. Making the move to understand language in this way allows communication to be discussed as constitutive of organization. Language is no longer considered something that mirrors reality, but the very activity that creates reality. Following the work of McPhee and Zaugg (2000) and the Montreal School (Taylor & Van

Every, 2000; Taylor, Cooren, Giroux, & Robichaud, 1996; Taylor, 2000; Taylor & Robichaud, 2004), scholars of organizational communication have considered organizations as constituted in language and communication. Further, Alvesson and Kärreman (2000a) discussed how a focus on language could reveal how talk shapes subjective understandings of organization. As people talk organizations into existence, they constitute an understanding of their very existence in relation to organizations in different ways.

Thus, a key idea that has come from paying attention to the relationship between language and the construction of organizations is that of subject positions. Foucault (1988) explained how people “confessing” to various discourses position the self in reference to that discourse, and thus one’s identity is conceptualized as a subject position within particular discourses. For instance, when one identifies as a “manager” they position themselves within the discourses of work in ways that enable and constrain particular relationships with others at work. Deetz (1992) noted the need to separate the role of managers from the person holding or performing the role. What it means to be a manager is discursively created, and therefore people who identify as “manager” can become subject to the role. In other words, a manager can do some things, but not other things at work. Similarly, Tracy and Trethewey (2005) noted that peoples’ subject positions are increasingly created by systems and structures of discourses in modern-day organizations. As people interact at work, they discursively position themselves with and to various organizational discourses. These subject positions both enable some possibilities for organizational members, yet constrain others.

While organizational communication scholarship has provided new insights into the ways individuals subject themselves to discourses within workplaces and organizations, a leading question for this study comes back to the interactions happening in public parks. Some organizational scholars have expressed the need to take ideas from organizational communication beyond the organization. For example, Cheney (2007) stated that the early 1980s prompted organizational communication scholars to “study some aspect of organizational culture that had nothing whatsoever to do with productivity or making money” (p. 85). That move separated organizational communication scholars from their roots in the business or management sectors. Furthermore, Cheney claimed that in contemporary times “we live in an age with more than a half-dozen urgent global threats: overpopulation, poverty and hunger, . . . cultural destruction, . . . If now is not the time for action, for moving beyond both reflection and sentiment, I wonder when that time is?” (p. 84). Cheney called for organizational communication scholars to take their work outside the organization to learn about other organized systems in society. Much like the move in the 1980s away from research fit to benefit management, moving outside of the organization can allow for what has been gained in organizational communication studies to reach a greater audience and set of issues, and for traditional organizational communication research to benefit as well (Cheney, Wilhelmsson, & Zorn, 2002; Papa & Singhal, 2007; Weaver, 2007). Like Cheney (2007), I believe the knowledge gained through studies in organizational communication can be moved out of the organization and applied to various phenomena that could then be understood in new ways. Organizational communication studies have demonstrated that many of the taken-for-granted practices associated with the workplace are more meaningful and complicated

than typically understood. For example, Cooper, Laughlin, and Power (2003) demonstrated that the taken for granted process of accounting can be understood as power-laden and subjective, and Sotirin and Gottfried (1999) worked out the mundane talk or “bitching” between female secretaries as an important place for identity construction and resistance to gendered stereotypes. Just as the mundane and taken-for-granted practices and interactions in the workplace have become rich sites for inquiry through studies in organizational communication, there are many other phenomena and sites that can be understood in new and interesting ways by taking what has been learned outside of the organization.

Public places offer an alternative area of interest to engage the ideas of people organizing themselves, and their subject positions. By embracing organizational communication scholarship that demonstrates the political nature of talk at work, I studied interactions in a public park that could have been understood to be free of organizing discourses. Much like Cheney (2007) commented, the world has many complicated and serious problems. Perhaps now is the time to move research beyond the organization and into public matters that have been left outside of organizational scholarship. Several researchers have begun to make the shift out of the organization and have chosen to study the way individuals’ identities are constituted outside of the organization proper with organizational communication literature guiding them (Gill, 2011; Rashe, 2012). This study aims to continue this work by moving organizational communication scholarship “outside” the organization and into the public park.

I am specifically interested in public parks as they demonstrate a taken-for-granted neutrality. What I mean by a taken-for-granted neutrality is that public parks are

often considered unimportant, apolitical, and less complicated than organizations or the “corporate world” due to the commonplace understandings of parks as places for leisurely activities and a step out of the bustle of organizational life. The commonplace understanding of parks as places for leisure allows parks to be understood as inconsequential to the overall workings of society. However, public places (parks included) could be potential sites for civic engagement wherein citizens are treated with equal status within meaning making processes (Crawford, 1995). Conversely, public parks could be places controlled by the same discourses guiding and organizing contemporary organizations. Public parks can then be situated as unique places that are at least ideally open and free of corporate control (Madden, 2010). Much like the way organizations are considered to be constituted in communication (Taylor, 2000; Alvesson & Karreman, 2000a) and the identities of organizational members are understood to be constituted in social interactions in the workplace (Trethewey, 1999, 2001), the meanings associated with public parks as well as the identities of individuals spending time in public parks can also be recognized as constituted in communication. With regard to Deetz’s (1992) description of how the lifeworld has been colonized by “corporate life,” I am concerned with how individual’s lifeworlds are similarly colonized in places outside the organization, such as public parks.

In this study, I took a discursive perspective that focuses on the manner in which discourses organize and structure society at both the macro and micro levels (Heracleous, 2012). Since public parks are often considered open places, free from constraining, organizing discourses, the interactions that shape the identities of people outside of the workplace become an important area for studying the relationship between social

interaction and the constitution of subject positions that organize peoples' lives. This study is significant because it takes insights from organizational communication out of the organization and brings to light the ways that communication is power-laden and political, creates discourses and identities, and organizes within seemingly open and free environments. Furthermore, bringing organizational communication concepts to groups and interactions that appear to be open or even disorganized could further inform the more traditional studies of organization. This study is thus focused on both the organized and disorganized realities that are present within the public places of the world, and how communicative acts organize these realities. Overall, I explain the ways people communicatively organize themselves in a public park that could be understood as open and free, but has been demonstrated to be a political and contested ground to investigate the possible ways the interactions in this park may be productive and enabling or political and constraining.

In order to present this research project, I will first review recent organizational communication literature on discourse, organizing, power, and identity to ground this study in organizational communication understandings of language use, organization, and subjectivity. I will then review current research on public places to show the importance of investigating the discursive practices of organizing in public parks. Following this, I describe the methodology that guided my study and then demonstrate the significance of my findings. Lastly, I discuss the importance of my findings in relation to my theoretical grounding to provide several implications for organizational communication research.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Studying the organizing qualities of social interactions in public parks requires a review of relevant organizational communication literature and an explanation of the importance of public parks. I begin with a discussion of discourse as related to organizations and the ways in which people define themselves. Following this, I review the political nature of talk and its relationship to discourse and organizing processes. I then review literature on identity, subject positions, and their importance when focusing on social interaction and discourse. Embracing these perspectives, grounded in organizational communication, I briefly review the idea of public parks and explain the need to examine social interactions within public parks to uncover the possible enabling and constraining qualities of discourse among participants in public parks.

Discourse

Many organizational communication scholars have turned to discourse to understand organization. The recent attention to discourse brings language and its use to the center of the discussion about organizations, and specifically focuses on organizations as constituted in language use (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000a). Discussing discourse first requires a definition of what is meant by discourse, which is no easy task, as discourse has been defined many ways over the last few decades. For instance, Phillips and Hardy (2002) discussed discourse as an interrelated set of texts that only contain meaning in relation to other discourses, and Heracleous (2012) defines discourse as collections of

texts wherein “language is the raw material that constitutes texts, collections of which in turn constitute discourses...” (p. 9). Such definitions of discourse are not only referring to the action of talking, but to the meanings that come to be known by those involved in the making of meaning, through talk. Furthermore, social reality is considered to be made real through discourses, or interrelated sets of discourses (Hardy, 2004). Therefore, interactions can then be understood and interpreted through a study of discourse(s) or sets of interrelated texts.

Some attention to discourse also focuses on its continuity and fluidity through various levels. Alvesson and Karreman (2000b) addressed the broad spectrum of the ways the term discourse is used by making a distinction between “discourse” and “Discourse.” A “discourse” refers to a local or situational discourse at close range such as people talking to one another in a meeting, whereas a “Discourse” refers to a “historically situated, set of vocabularies... referring to or constituting a particular phenomenon” (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000b, p. 1123). For instance, everyday talk among people at work can be considered a “discourse” while the overarching understanding of what it means to be a worker or manager can be understood as “Discourse.” Making distinctions between various levels of discourse is useful because attention can be focused on local-level discourses being scaled up and the macro bearing down (Hardy, 2004). In other words, various levels of discourse operate simultaneously in the construction of organizational reality. Additionally, the local practices of talk (discourses) can be seen as informed by the vocabulary for knowing the self in relation to experiences with the world (Discourses). Simply put, what is said is understood in relation to various historically situated discourses while a local-level discourse is simultaneously being co-created.

The way scholars focus on discourse becomes increasingly interesting as it helps direct attention to language use constituting multiple understandings of reality. As Fairclough (2003) expressed from a discursive perspective, the social world is textually constructed. Furthermore, the various texts and discourses constructing the social world do not always align. Sometimes discourses align and other times discourses contradict. The large web of discourses that constantly overlap and separate understandings of the world is important to investigate at the intersections of discourses. Fairclough points to the places where discourses intersect as the most important place for discursive scholars to enter and pay attention because meaning is being negotiated at these sites. Understandings of the world are being contested at the intersections and there is a potential for new understandings to emerge. Focusing on the ability of discourse to construct reality allows researchers to pay attention to both micro levels of talk and macro-levels of discourse that express large viewpoints of society as well as the various places they intersect (Grant, Keenoy, & Oswick, 2001).

Organizational communication scholars have thus embraced a discursive perspective in part because it allows for all levels of organization to be analyzed from the known reality of organizational members to larger organizational practices and protocols (Grant et al., 2001). As interrelated sets of texts form discourses, certain ways of knowing the world become organized. Discourse perspectives highlight the ways people organize through discourse and focus on the way that interactions between discursive acts (such as talk) and larger macro-level discourses (such as what it means to be a “good worker”) sustain coordinated action (Hardy, 2004). Studying the manner in which social reality (or

organizational reality) is constituted in discourse has provided many insights into the processes of organizing and organizations for organizational communication scholars.

Discourse and Organizing

Embracing a discursive perspective enables us to see how talk and text organize the social world. For instance, organizations have been regularly discussed as discursive constructions with focused attention on normalized understandings and local-levels of talk (Boden, 1994; Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000a). Iedema and Wodak (1999) explained the benefit of understanding organizations as discursive constructions in that it removes the dichotomy between independent actors in a workplace and social structures to a focus on discursive practices that create and re-create organizations. In other words, the everyday talk around the water cooler and hierarchical structures are brought together when studying discourse. Through a study of discourse, everyday talk between organizational members can be understood as texts that create discourses that can be “scaled up” to macro-level discourses that promote further local interactions to be in line with them. Thus, paying attention to the interplay between societal discourses and talk at the local-level is paying attention to the process of organizing. It is this interplay between local and macro that caused Hardy (2004) to ask scholars to remember that even the macro-level discourses are being constructed and negotiated at the local-level. The local-level of talk and interaction is where normalized discourses are being called upon and new understandings are emerging.

From a discursive perspective, organizing happens at the local-level through discourse because it is the practice that creates knowledge(s) of the world, yet this is always done within a field of existing discourses from which to talk about the world.

Discourses then construct particular understandings about issues, groups of social subjects, and ways of being (Hardy, 2004). Phillips and Hardy (2002) discussed this concept as they noted that discourse analysts are usually attempting to understand how reality comes into being. If reality is understood to not merely exist out there to be related with, but discursively constructed and re-constructed, the social world can be understood as ordered and organized through discursive acts. An example of this is Trethewey's (1999) study on professionalism as a gendered discourse. Society's very idea of professionalism is a macro-level discourse providing a particular understanding (a masculine understanding) of what it means to be a professional. Macro-level discourses, such as professionalism, are not completely re-constructed in every situation, but can be understood as being acquired by others, and therefore historically situated even when called upon in local-levels of talk (van Dijk, 1990). Discourse can then be understood as organizing and constituting the many understandings society takes for granted within and outside of particular organizations.

Identifying how various levels of discourse interact is important in understanding the benefits of taking a discourse perspective on the communicative constitution of organization perspective. Fairhurst and Putnam (2004) worked this out as they reviewed three common ways scholars orient themselves to organizations as discursive constructions. First, Fairhurst and Putnam discussed the "object orientation" wherein organizations are conceived of as objects that contain discursive features. Essentially, the organization as object shapes the discursive acts within an organization. Second, the "becoming orientation" explains organizations as being in a constant state of becoming where discursive acts continually organize and reorganize. Third, Fairhurst and Putnam

provided a “grounded in action orientation” that attends directly to the simultaneity between local-level discourses and macro-level Discourses. Local-level discourses and macro-level Discourses become mutually constitutive as they interact in a cyclical manner. The local informs the macro and the macro informs the local. Discussing Taylor and Van Every’s (2000) explanation of emergent organizations, Fairhurst and Putnam (2004) stated that “discourse and organization then mutually constitute one another in that conversations form texts through linguistic patterns that both develop and draw upon memory traces and discursive objects as organizational forms” (p. 18). The structural components of an organization are then explained as discursive constructions that effect future discursive acts that allow for the structural components to constantly be negotiated through discourse. The focus on discourse organizing also requires asking where people are in the midst of organizing processes.

Discourse, Organization, and Subjectivity

Organizations are discursive constructions, and people organize themselves to various ways of knowing the world such as what it means to be a professional, a manager, or a good employee. One of the main ways that people organize themselves to various ways of knowing the world has been conceptualized through subject position(s). Weedon (1997) discussed the idea that people subject themselves to particular meanings or discourses in order to make sense of the world around them, their subject position. As individuals subject themselves to a particular way of knowing what it means to be a manager or a cashier, they are organizing themselves within a web of discourses related to work. Further, this process of individuals organizing themselves to various discourses at different times focuses attention on the fragmented nature of identity.

The discussion of subject positions coincides with the concept of individuals' identities. The nature of identity is complicated and should not be defined simply, yet providing some sense of what identity can be understood as is necessary. Hall (1996) discussed identity as a duality of sorts that relates "on the one hand [to] the discourses and practices which... speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand [to] the processes which produce subjectivities" (p. 6). In other words, identity can be thought of as both the manner in which an individual subjects himself or herself or is subjected to a particular discourse, and the very place identities are created. Additionally, as people understand themselves in relation to different discourses at different times, identities can be seen as fragmented. Peoples' lives and identities are then organized around various understandings of what it means to be a man or woman, a worker or manager, and a multitude of other ways to know the self.

Subject positions and identity have been large topics in organizational communication studies as they exemplify discourses organizing individuals and understandings of the world. For example, Trethewey's (1999, 2001) work demonstrates the use of subject positions and how experiences in the workplace are guided by discursively constructed ways of knowing what it means to work from a particular position. Discussing the intersection of sexism and ageism at work, Trethewey (2001) interviewed middle-aged women holding professional positions about their experiences in workplaces as they grew older. The entire concept of ageing and midlife has been socially constructed over time, and the effects have placed middle-aged professional women in a precarious position of needing to manage their "personal problem" of growing older. Trethewey noted that women embraced discourses revolving around

needing to continue to grow as a professional, needing to become a better planner, and needing to learn to remain youthful in order to combat their own changing. Each of these discourses position the women as having to do something to sustain their own position as a professional, which directly relates to the societal discourse that discusses aging as a decline instead of growing in wisdom or experience. As people organize and subject themselves to various discourses, questioning how various discourses are controlled or constrained is important.

Power and a Political Social World

Recognizing the organizing qualities of discourse also exposes the intersections of power, control, and the politics of everyday life. Critical Theory from the Frankfurt School offered a communicative introduction into understanding these issues as it made sense of the influence of ideology. Habermas (1984, 1987) and his theory of communicative action added to this discussion by focusing on systematically distorted forms of communication. Critical Theory and its focus on structure and societal level power issues transformed studies at the local-level through concepts such as hegemony. In the following section I review how organizational communication scholars have embraced Critical Theory to explain the political nature of the social world and to help inform the critical study of identity, subject positions, and power as they are related to the organizing qualities of discourse.

Critical Theory

Organizational communication scholars have embraced Critical Theory to investigate uneven power relations that can be traced back to the Frankfurt School

(Horkheimer & Adorno, 1947; Marcuse, 1964) and later Frankfurt School writers such as Jurgen Habermas (1984, 1989, 1987). Scherer (2009) claimed that the basic interest of Critical Theory was a concern “to analyze social conditions, to criticize the unjustified use of power, and to change established social traditions and institutions so that human beings are freed from dependency, subordination, and suppression” (p. 30). In other words, the Frankfurt School was interested in the ways that humans were controlled by forces and structures even though Enlightenment philosophy had promised emancipation from social control. Horkheimer and Adorno (1947), Marcuse (1964), and other Frankfurt School scholars were also concerned with the many ways that positivist philosophy and scientific methods were playing a role in the construction of powerful systems that benefit those already in power (Jay, 1996). The invention of Critical Theory from the Frankfurt School offered a beginning for scholars interested in the social world and social practices to question the effects of power, oppression, and subordination in the midst of historically situated societies. In particular, a significant focus of their critique revolved around ideologies that informed cultures and the inability of Enlightenment philosophy to be fulfilled with these ideologies in place.

The concern surrounding ideologies and Enlightenment hopes have been taken up by organizational communication scholars to challenge contemporary notions of managerialism and other organizational phenomena (Deetz, 1992; Mumby, 1988, 2001). Mumby (2001) explained that critical studies of organization have “provided us with important insights into the relationships among identity, power, and everyday organizational practices” (p. 604). The notion that managers are in a place to lead and help workers achieve an organizational goal can be questioned in light of the ideologies

that have set the organizational goals in place. The critical impetus to challenge and critique the very understandings that are taken for granted by organizational members is valuable in contemporary society. As organizations are considered complex and political sites (Deetz, 1992; Mumby, 2001), questions surrounding the ways that organizational members are oppressed are important.

Habermas has proposed potential solutions to the systematic control theorized by the Frankfurt School. At the core of Habermas's concern are various systems' abilities to colonize the lifeworld (Habermas, 1984, 1987). Scherer (2009) described the lifeworld as the social world that people freely create for themselves, whereas systems are specialized mechanisms that should be used in service of the lifeworld. Habermas's concern is then with the ways in which systems begin to colonize or steer the lifeworld. It is this problem that Habermas most clearly addresses. By promoting a theory of communicative action, Habermas (1987) put forth the desire for people to make decisions and live based upon communicative rationality. In contrast, as systems colonize the lifeworld, decisions are made through instrumental rationality wherein decisions or ways of being are determined by what is most effective, efficient, or useful for the various systems in control. Any communicative act that is not in line with Habermas's ideals on communicative rationality is distorted and linked with instrumental rationality. Habermas's concern with communicative rationality provides a theoretical base to allow for communicative acts to begin to be seen as the place where power, control, and distortion are happening.

The idea of the lifeworld being colonized by systems has also been taken up in the field of organizational communication. Beginning with the realization that organizations and modern corporations are significant features of Western society, Deetz (1992)

demonstrated that contemporary organizations are playing a colonizing role within the lifeworlds of individuals. For instance, Deetz noted that as corporations offer childcare to potentially relieve the tension between working and raising children, corporations are also colonizing individuals' lifeworlds by systematizing the very process of raising children. In this way, the everyday practices that millions of people encounter in the workplace are not neutral as some might assume, but are political. As Deetz explains, every interaction and speech act is political because they are historically produced and serve to reproduce particular ways of being or knowing the world. Consequently, a central concern within the discussion of organizations and power has been with participation. Deetz (1992) stated that, "people produce organizations, but people are not all equal in their abilities to produce or reproduce organizations that fulfill their interest. Organizations are thus never politically neutral" (p.55), but are always political manifestations of the needs and desires of those in the past. Organizations are therefore political in terms of being social and historical creations that sponsor particular values over others. The question quickly becomes, who has the opportunity to represent their thoughts and concerns with an organization, and furthermore their own position within an organization.

While Deetz (1992) moved the discussion of power as discussed by the Frankfurt School from the macro or societal level to the local-level of language, hegemony has been an important concept for critical theorists and organizational communication scholars alike as they seek to understand how people are controlled by ideologies, discourses, and systems. Approaching the concept of hegemony, Mumby (1997) offered a rereading of Gramsci (1971) in light of the field of communication's slow move toward

understanding power as a constitutive feature of social life. Mumby (1997) described hegemony in terms of a dialectic existing between domination and resistance. It is not enough to discuss moments of domination or moments of resistance, but to understand that both work together in a complicated way that allows taken for granted ideologies and ways of being to be continually reproduced. The reproduction of dominant ideologies with some sort of action taken by individuals allows for dominant ideologies that are not in their best interest to be continually propagated, and this problem is at the center of the discussion of hegemony.

The problem of hegemony is its pervasiveness in the entire process of the social world being constituted and organized. Deetz (1992) discussed all talk within organizations as political, whereas Heracleous (2012) moved to say that the entire process of discourses constituting social reality and organizations is hegemonic. Put simply, the discursive construction of reality is hegemonic as various discourses are privileged over others even though the privileged discourses might be disadvantageous to people subjecting to the discourses. Additionally, Marcuse (1964) was concerned with the way that people were being moved into a false enlightenment driven by capitalistic ideologies, but as discursive constructions are considered to be hegemonic, attention is shifted to the local-levels of talk and text to understand how power is being enacted relationally.

Understanding hegemony this way allows for hegemony to be a bridge between the traditional notions of Critical Theory, and the poststructuralist concepts of subjectivity, subject positions, and power. Approaching hegemony as a struggle between dominance and resistance moves ideology from something that is static to something

wrestled with at the local-level of talk and discourse (Mumby, 2001). Further, as Mumby (1997) noted, hegemonic processes are happening most regularly at a local discursive level, which makes paying attention to talk and interaction important for those studying power and communication. For example, Clair (1993) studied various framing devices that women in the workplace who were sexually harassed used to share their experiences with harassment. One particular device framed sexual harassment as a misunderstanding on the woman's part wherein sexual harassment was explained as being a normal thing to be endured. Each of the framing devices allowed for the oppressed to subordinate themselves while simultaneously explaining that they were sexually harassed. Organizational communication scholars have then used the discussion of hegemony to explain how power manifests at the local-level while large ideologies or macro-level discourses are maintained, reproduced, and negotiated at the local-level, which is consistent with a discursive perspective. The benefits of Critical Theory can then be linked to poststructuralism by paying attention to language and the micro-moments of power in language.

The time spent working through Critical Theory, ideology, and hegemony are important for this project as they all point to a social world that is constituted through power-laden interactions. Organizational communication scholars focused on discourse often discuss power by examining hegemony and ideology manifesting in talk and text (Mumby, 1997, 2001; Trethewey, 1999). While Critical Theory problematizes society and the social structures within and guiding it, focusing attention on the local practices of talk and interaction does not limit the attention paid to large societal ideologies and discourses, but demonstrates how these ideologies and discourses are being (re)produced

and negotiated through talk. With hegemony as a link, I now move on to a discussion of identity and subject positions as discursive constructions, and therefore hegemonic, power-laden relationships.

Subjectivity (and Power)

The concepts of identity and subject positions play an important role in the maintenance of hegemonic power structures. To subject oneself to a discourse and become the subject of the discourse is to subject oneself to the meanings of the discourse. As Foucault (1980) explained, power is not something that exists out there, but is within the process of choosing to pay attention to one thing over another, or to embrace one knowledge over another. In this way, power and knowledge are closely linked to one another. By embracing one way of living, or one knowledge of the world, an individual is both enabled and constrained to act in certain ways. In this manner, people become the subjects of discourses as they embrace or “confess” (Foucault, 1980) to the various positions that are desirable (Deetz, 1992). Who they are in a given moment may be understood by the discourse they are confessing to, such as what it means to call oneself a manager. Moving to understand power in this relational manner requires paying close attention to historically situated discourses and the discursive actions of people that explain their current, yet fragmented identity.

Further complicating the manner is the question of which discourses are available to various people. Weedon (1997) discussed subjectivity in terms of people identifying with various positions within chosen discourses. People may only know themselves in relation to the discourses that are available to them. It is for this reason that the complex web of discourses surrounding any individual or group of individuals creates systems of

meaning making (Foucault, 1972). The only conceivable ways that individuals can come to know themselves is in relation to various discourses. As greater numbers of people subject themselves to a particular discourse, the discourse is normalized within a society. For example, what it means to be a worker or a manager has been normalized over time proclaiming any other way of being a worker or a manager as strange or unnatural. Thus, power is relational and embedded in the normalization of particular discourses over others. Identity is then in a constant flux as people subject themselves to various discourses deemed normal, strange, or otherwise. Consequently, Hall (1996) described identity in this way as he stated, “Identities are thus points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us” (p. 6). The availability of discourses regarding any topic or way of being greatly effects the way individuals understand themselves. Discourses are not free of context and have become normalized over time, making the concept of identity linked to a historical progression as well.

Organizational communication scholars focused on discourse have turned to this relational understanding of power at the local-level to explain the complexities of organizational life. Writing about this type of power, Deetz (2003) stated that “disciplinary power resides in every perception, every judgment, every act. In its positive sense it enables and makes possible, and negatively it excludes and marginalizes” (p. 29). Discourse is then understood as always power-laden, making every interaction within an organization a contestation over meaning, and individual or collective identity. Power is now not only discussed in terms of the large systemic processes that have destroyed the enlightenment hopes as Horkheimer and Adorno (1947) discussed, but is found in all interactions that maintain, resist, and construct power relations. The individual does not

have a stable sense of identity intact, but exists in a world filled with meaning, constantly negotiating their identities to discursively make sense of their position.

The discursive perspective allows organization scholars to embrace a concern for power in terms of large scale ideologies from traditional Critical Theory, and as relational and disciplinary at the local-level. While it may be tempting to embrace one perspective of power instead of the other, organizational communication scholarship suggests blending the two perspectives in order to recognize the interaction between discourse, power, organizing, and subjectivities. Specifically, embracing a fluid understanding of discourse at various levels (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000b) allows for large-scale ideologies such as capitalism or managerialism to be understood simultaneously in terms of both the macro-level discourses that inform interactions at the local-level, and the local moments of talk where meanings and subjectivities are negotiated and large-scale ideologies are constituted. It is through this perspective that organizations can be understood as political at all levels (Deetz, 1992). As Heracleous (2012) noted, the discursive processes of organizing that constitute the working world are power-laden. However, this recognition of the power-laden reality of organizational life can be expanded to less formally organized environments by exploring the discursive acts that constitute meanings and identities outside the organization.

Public parks are not regularly considered places that are highly organized; yet in the same way that discourses organize the experiences and identities of individuals in the workplace, they enable and constrain the lived experiences of people in public parks. The manner in which individuals understand their own identity and lived experiences revolves around subject positions and discourse. As particular discourses are made normal and

expected, the essence of what it means to be successful, happy, or professional are made normal. Public parks are an interesting place to examine the various ways that people understand their positions and experiences as they are not specifically guided and constrained by the conditions common to the corporate world. Taking the understandings from organizational communication scholarship on discourse, power, and identity to a place seemingly separate from formal practices and power-laden influences of organizational discourses provided for unique insights into seemingly free and open places such as public parks.

Public Parks

Public parks are frequently overlooked as mundane places in contemporary Western society, but I propose that they are important places for meaning making and organizing. A brief look into the history of public parks helps to understand their importance in contemporary society. Public parks have existed in the Western world since the industrial revolution and have a history that is significant to the wellbeing of society. Created as a response to the overcrowded urban living environments that plagued the Victorian era following the industrial revolution, Taylor (1995) noted that public parks became well known in the middle of the 19th century in England. The vast amount of people moving from rural to urban environments caused various forms of sickness, depression, and societal unease. Thus, public parks created in the 19th century were designed to offer better places for the working class to escape to from their own harsh working realities. Filled with gardens, libraries, and other forms of respite, Taylor discussed public parks as a place designed to inspire citizens to spend time and relate to their community in ways as vibrant as the parks' colorful displays. Public parks have

certainly changed in the last two centuries, but their history has guided their development.

The creation of public parks in the Western world throughout the 20th century has declined, but their purpose has remained concerned with creating areas of common good for citizens. For instance, Stewart, Gil-Egui, and Pileggi (2010) discussed public parks in the Western world throughout the 20th century as being places focused on human coexistence for leisurely activities and civic engagement. Events have often been held in large public parks, and the parks symbolize a space between the private homes of citizens, nature, and the corporate world. These spaces having been understood as important during the industrial revolution to better the quality of life for people living in sub-par conditions are now epicenters for coexistence as public spaces are continually limited.

While public parks began as a guise to mask and hopefully improve the urban environment, a contemporary question is whether or not public parks can stand as places for discursive and democratic involvement for a community. Crawford (1995) was interested in who is given “citizenship” within public places today. As she described public parks and other public areas, she noted that public spaces are ideally considered to be free of all restrictions and oppression where any individual can choose to live in any manner, while simultaneously reproducing the very ideologies driving society as a whole. For example, Arantes (1996) discussed public places as lively sites where individuals engage in many different activities alongside and separated from others. Within public parks it is evident that people from various backgrounds come together, but may be separated based upon other societal effects such as economic class.

The unique place and discursive space that is offered by public parks allows for various groups of people to spend their time in public parks for many different reasons, and the interactions that happen within parks are interesting as people constitute individual and collective identities through their discursive acts. Deetz (2003) understood organizations as contested sites where individuals negotiate meaning and subjectivities, which allows for inquiry into public parks to become interesting as meaning is surely negotiated and organized beyond traditional organizations. Whether people are in parks for leisure time, or are there out of need, they are discursively constructing their own identity with others. Public parks are also a unique place as they are not structured as corporate organizations, market places, or even how family life would be. However, it is important to look deeper into the interactions within public parks to explore both micro-level interactions and how people are influenced by the same macro-level discourses that organize other facets of life.

Public Parks as Important Places to Study

Bringing the insights from organizational communication studies to places outside of the organization such as a public park can provide insights to practices of power and control beyond corporate institutions. Additionally, further understanding social interactions in public parks can reflect back upon organizational communication research. If discourse helps to explain the ways people organize, understand and create their own identities in the workplace, and interact in power-laden organizations, then what happens when people interact outside of organizations? Studying discursive acts in a public park helped to express the ways in which people organize their own subject positions in the midst of power-laden social interactions in a public place that is seemingly free of the

structural and corporate control mechanisms familiar to workplace organizations. The following question for my research is informed by the literature thus far discussed and guided this investigation into discursive acts within public parks.

The question is as follows, how do discursive acts within a public park organize individuals' subject positions and social practices? Organizational communication literature has focused on the ways that individuals subject themselves to various discourses and become organized in a particular manner (Trethewey, 1999; Trethewey, 2001; Boden, 1994; Tracy & Trethewey, 2005). As people interact in public parks, they are engaging in similar discursive practices and I am curious about how these practices organize groups of people. Organizations are constituted in discourse, and people interacting in a less structurally organized manner in a public park provide an interesting place to look into how discourses organize people and subjectivities outside of a more traditionally defined organization.

In addition, as individuals in a park interact with one another or explain their own position within a park, they are discursively creating an understanding of themselves and the world they live in. The various ways that society is understood and experienced is constantly in flux as it is being continually (re)produced and (re)negotiated through discourse. Much like Fairhurst and Putnam (2004) described organizations as discursive constructions being negotiated at the local-level and influenced at the macro-level in a cyclical manner, the lived experiences of individuals in parks are being constructed and organized. Exploring, participating in, and interpreting the meanings that individuals espouse were important processes for this project.

Engaging in the ways that individuals discursively constructed their subject positions demonstrated the manner in which discursive acts organize people and their identities, and also served to expose the ways individuals are enabled and constrained to construct their subject positions. Deetz (1992) expressed a concern with the way corporate life was colonizing the lifeworlds of organizational members. This is directly linked to Habermas's (1989) concern with the state of the rationality through the ability of people to come together in a free discursive space. I am interested in the interactions of individuals in public parks and how discursive acts (re)construct subject positions. In line with Deetz's (1992) concepts of interactions being political, I am interested in how interactions in a public park are power-laden and I am concerned with the ways individuals are able or unable to freely construct their understandings of self in relation to society.

The above question demonstrates the interests that guided this project. While a public park is not a traditional organization, the organizing qualities of discourse (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000a) promote a view of interactions in public parks as a site for discursive acts to organize subjectivities and understandings of the world. The next section explains the research methods I embraced to obtain, interpret, and analyze the discursive interactions within a public park. The analysis of the data incorporates questions of power into the interactions within public parks that could be understood as inconsequential or free of institutional control. Overall, my aim was to take insights from organizational communication research out of the organization to explore interactions at a public park, typically considered outside of corporate influence, and to understand how

social interactions enable and constrain the ways people organize understandings of themselves in relation to larger society within which they participate.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

This study focused on interactions and experiences among people in a public park. Embracing critical discourse perspectives and an interpretative approach to data collection, I studied the discursive acts that constitute peoples' experiences in a public park. In the following section, I explain the specific methods I used to engage in this study, describe the particular site that was chosen for research, explain the methods used for data collection, and review the ways I analyzed the data to respond to the guiding question presented above.

A Discourse Approach

Embracing a discourse perspective for this study, I contend that the social world is not merely experienced by people and mirrored through language, but is constituted through language and discourse (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000a; Heracleous, 2012). As such, researching the discourses of those interacting in a park provided insights into the webs of interrelated discursive texts (Phillips & Hardy, 2002) that imbue parks and people participating in parks with meaning. Additionally, each interaction or experience is connected to both long-term historical trends and personal experiences. Therefore, studying discourses involved exploring the ways people negotiated an understanding of their experiences through discursive acts to understand how they constitute understandings of themselves and the world around them.

The lived experiences of individuals in a park are fragmented and dependent upon not only their experiences in the park, but their previous experiences within society, culture, and anything else in the discursively constituted social world. This study was thus focused on the various ways that individuals made sense of their lived experiences within a public park. Because of this, it was important to pay attention to the various ways that individuals discursively constituted their reality in the context of a public park. Alvesson and Karreman (2000b) discussed the challenge of linking the local-level discourses of talk and text with the macro-level discourses that order society. Discourse(s) at various levels constitute the social world, but the link between a specific discourse at the local-level and a macro-level discourse such as managerialism or other social roles cannot be explicitly connected. Through a complicated web of discourses, the social world is meaningful and can be understood as such through a study of discourse.

Consequently, this study embraced the notion that insights into the ways people come to know the world (or are continually coming to know the world) can be gained by observing social interactions and interpreting varied explanations of experiences. Engaging in participant observation to provide context and treating interview transcripts as texts, I researched these discourses to gain insights into the ways participants in public parks came to understand the park, themselves, and larger society. Phillips and Hardy (2002) discussed an individual's identity as being maintained, contested, and discursively constructed, which is consistent with the notion of subject positions and individuals subjecting themselves to particular understandings of being within larger discourses (Hall, 1996; Weedon, 1997). Thus, I explored how individuals understood themselves in relation to larger discourses and examined how they were organizing themselves with

others around them by trying to understand how they positioned themselves within the discourses of the larger social world. Studying how individuals make sense of their position through their language allowed me to better understand how particular subjectivities and their relationship to other discourses within society interact (Trethewey, 1999, 2001). Specifically, through a study of discourse at the local-level, I examined specific ties to macro-level discourses to see how individuals potentially drew upon macro-level discourses to make sense of their own positions (Grant et al., 2001). It is through this process of constant (re)negotiation of meaning through discursive acts that the social world can be deemed meaningful. Macro-level discourses are created and maintained as more and more people subject themselves to the discourses, thus making particular ways of understanding the world normal.

However, it is not enough to merely explain the way that individuals understand themselves, their experiences, or the world because the very process of social construction through discourse is hegemonic (Heracleous, 2012). Heracleous (2012) pointed to the study of discourse as needing to be aware of the way that discourses "...far from being merely representational and neutral, and beyond being constructive (or perhaps through their constructive role), mask and perpetuate unequal and unfair power relations and social practices" (p. 21). Consequently I attempted to be aware of the ways discourses are power-laden. Positioning myself as a critical scholar, I paid attention to how certain ways of knowing the world are privileged over others. For example, financial prosperity has long been associated with social success or happiness and has even been coined "the American dream," which positions all other financial positions as subordinate. As the discourses identified for this study were analyzed, it will was

important to pay attention to the various ways that discourses may reconstruct, create, and resist power relations.

Overall, this study embraced discourse perspectives to explore the discursive acts of people in a public park. Specifically, I considered observations of social interactions in the form of field notes as context to provide meaning to the interview transcripts, which were the texts analyzed for this study. These texts were examined to gain insights into the question guiding this study. To review, the question is, how do discursive acts within a public park organize individuals' identities and social practices? This question and the findings that responded to the question captured both my hope to understand how individuals discursively construct their subject positions in a public park and allows for further questions to be engaged with regarding the manner in which the processes of discursively constructing subjectivities is power-laden. Further, the question was explored and answered through an analysis of texts (interview transcripts) to offer a rich interpretation of their various meanings.

The discursive approach guiding this study requires first an explanation of the particular park within which I will engage in this study and a brief description of the potential participants of this study. The site and participants are further elaborated upon in the following chapter. I will then review the qualitative methods used to attain the specific texts that were treated as the data to be explored in this study. I follow with the methods I used to analyze the data through various qualitative analysis techniques.

Site and Participants

The public park that was chosen for this study is positioned in a mid-sized city in the Northwest United States. The park's main attractions are a large skate park as well as

basketball hoops that are surrounded by various benches and landscaping including trees, bushes, and flower beds. For the purpose of this study, I will refer to this park as “City Park.” In addition, an overpass covers City Park from sun or rain throughout much of the day, which allows for people in the park to enjoy their time in a variety of weather conditions. Surrounding the park are local businesses, restaurants, and coffee shops as the park is only blocks away from city center.

The participants of this study were comprised of individuals that regularly spent time in City Park. After receiving IRB approval (see Appendix A), I engaged in participant observation of the people spending time in the park and invited some for interviews about their experiences in the park. The people that come to this park were typically there to skateboard or were there out of necessity and considered themselves homeless. As the people went about their regular activities within the park, I interacted and participated with them as an additional individual in the park. Through these interactions and observations, I identified individuals that appeared particularly interesting throughout their interactions in the park. As Thomas (1993) noted, a good place to start when using qualitative methods is talking with and identifying individuals that can be spoken with on more than one occasion as they have a greater understanding of the site and are more regularly available. Individuals were identified that spent a lot of time in City Park and expressed their own lived experiences as related to the park through discursive acts. I then asked if it would be possible to interview them to gain a further understanding of their involvement and experiences within the park. How individuals were approached is further discussed in the following section, but the participants in my

study were those that regularly spent time in the park and were willing to talk about their experiences.

Data Collection

The data for this study included my field notes and interview transcripts. The field notes obtained from participant observation provided the social context for the interview transcripts (as texts) that are a representation of the ways people make sense of their experiences in City Park. Phillips and Hardy (2002) explained the importance of gaining an understanding of the social context surrounding a body of interrelated discursive texts as discourses can never be known in their entirety. As such, this study required participant observation and interviews to capture the data for this study. The first step in this research study was preliminary work to determine the times of the day that the park was most occupied. Next, I created a schedule consisting of 4-5 days a week for 4-6 hours a day for 7 weeks that outlined when I would engage in participant observation in the park. After scheduling the days that I was at the park, I engaged in participant observation and took detailed field notes of my experiences in the park. I then selected and interviewed particular participants and audio recorded the interviews if permitted by the participants. In total, I interviewed 12 people within City Park and was able to audio record 9 of the interviews. When audio recording was not permitted, I took extensive notes to capture the language used by participants as they responded to the questions.

Lindlof and Taylor (2011) described participant observation in terms of a scholar engaging with a group of people as a participant that engages in the rituals and performances of a given group while also maintaining their position as a scholar interested in the people and their interactions. As a participant observer, I “[became]

increasingly skilled at performing routine practices in ways that are honored by other group members, and ... create[d] increasingly precise, vivid, detailed, and theoretically relevant accounts of this experience” (p. 136). The vivid and detailed account was captured in the field notes that were taken throughout the course of the study, which became rich through the relational developments that took place while being a participant observer. Therefore, the field notes documented the interactions I had with various participants and other occurrences in the park, and the interview texts were used for discourse analysis.

Through engaging with people at City Park as a participant observer, specific individuals became interesting or valuable for my research wherein I asked them if they were willing to participate in an informal interview about their personal experiences to gain deeper insights. The interviews were audio recorded if approved of by the participant and then transcribed and treated as texts for this study. Lindlof and Taylor (2011) explained that qualitative interviews are useful as they allow participants to express their experiences and perspectives in their own language through stories, brief thoughts, and explanations (p. 173). The interviews that I conducted with participants were informal and driven by a mutual conversation about their personal experiences, understandings of themselves, and their position and experiences in the park. Through participant observation and informal interviews, I embraced qualitative methods and conducted the interviews in a similar manner. Lindlof and Taylor discussed informal interviews as situational interviews where the researcher chooses to begin an interview due to some social queue while spending time with a group of people, and guides the questions within a conversation about the specific thing that made the person or situation

interesting to the researcher. This type of interviewing was useful as it allowed individuals to discursively explain their own position through stories and performances in their own language. Through participant observation and interviews, a robust set of data was obtained that is representative of the real experiences and interactions of those in the public park. Embracing a deeply qualitative approach to observation and interviewing, I recognize that I was part of the meaning-making processes. Thus, I consider my role as participating in the co-construction of meanings. As such, I did not seek to find ‘truth’ regarding the individuals’ in this study, but provided a rich understanding of how people participated in this public park as well as a robust understanding of the language used that constituted participants’ experiences in the park, the knowledge of themselves in relation to the park and larger society, and organized groups of people.

Data Analysis

My method of data analysis was informed by discourse perspectives and embraced both interpretation and critical discourse analysis. Specifically, when shifting from collecting to analyzing data reflects my interest in discourse and power at the local-level as well as their connection to macro-level discourses. Engaging in such critical analysis involved two specific analysis steps. First, the data was interpreted wherein I developed an in-depth understanding of the texts to reveal various patterns of meaning that existed and came to be (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Second, embracing ideas from critical discourse analysis (CDA), I moved beyond an explanation of the data for the purpose of “revealing structures of power and unmasking ideologies” (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 8). These two stages of analysis provided an in-depth reading of the discursive texts and an analysis of the texts with attention being paid to the political nature of talk.

Interpretation

The process of interpreting the data began with the field notes and interview transcripts. Lindlof and Taylor (2011) noted that a portion of the importance of field notes revolves around the researcher's ability to cultivate an "empathetic understanding of their participants' experience" (p. 159). Thus, as I engaged with the field notes, I gained a deeper understanding of the experiences of the participants in my study to provide a greater social context to make sense of the interview transcripts. In addition, Thomas (1993) noted that "interpretation of data is the defamiliarization process in which we revise what we have seen and translate into something new" (p.43). Throughout this process of digging deeper into the data, stepping back from the data, and back into something new, patterns of meaning emerged. These patterns of meaning are discursive constructions and themes that the participants identified with to make sense of their reality.

Engaging in this study by interpreting the data (field notes and interview transcripts) directed my attention to various patterns of meaning and these patterns of meaning were understood as discursive constructions that were being organized by the participants. Phillips and Hardy (2002) discussed the importance of an analysis of discourse in relation to identity as unpacking the competing discursive constructions that simultaneously define how an individual or group of individuals understand themselves. As individuals in City Park shared their experiences and understandings of their own position through stories and in the midst of conversation, I later engaged with the field notes and interview transcripts to unpack various patterns that became apparent. These patterns were different ways individuals categorize their experiences or made sense of

their subject position in relation to others. This process of unpacking the contesting discourses helped to highlight the various ways that participants talk about their position and I was able to connect these to macro-level discourses that assist in constructing various ways of being. Grant et al. (2001) discussed the importance of paying attention to discourses at the micro level to understand and link them to macro-level discourses. The patterns that I interpreted and made sense of were then analyzed with attention being paid to power and subjectivities.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Researchers studying organizations have regularly turned to CDA to explain the ways that organizations are constituted in discourse, and to demonstrate that the constitutive process privileges certain discourses over others (Anderson-Gough, Grey, & Robson, 2000; Covalski, Dirsmith, Heian, & Sajay, 1998). Similarly, as people explained their experiences and made sense of their subject positions in City Park, they were subjecting themselves to certain ways of knowing themselves over others. Heracleous (2012) understands discourse as power-laden and constituting “normal” ways of knowing the world, which positions CDA as a method focused on demonstrating that discourses “mask and perpetuate unequal and unfair power relations and social practices” (p. 21). In addition, discourses may resist the privileged ways of knowing the world. CDA is intertwined with critical theory and is focused on power, ideology, and emancipation as they manifest in talk and macro-level discourses (Wodak & Meyer, 2009; Phillips and Hardy, 2002). Through CDA methods, I analyzed the patterns of meaning or themes from my field notes and interview transcripts to demonstrate the manner in which they constitute, maintain, or resist uneven power relations.

While my interview transcripts represent texts emergent from local experiences, interactions, and interviews in City Park, I was not concerned only with what was present at the local-level but how these intersect with other levels of discourse. Exploring the intersections of discourse in this way required methods capable of analyzing and placing these discourses in conversation. While there are a variety of CDA techniques, one approach is to pay close attention to the patterns that are evident at the local-level and link them to macro-level discourses. For instance, Anderson-Gough et al. (2000) engaged in this type of research as they discussed the socialization of accountants in Big 5 accounting firms. Specifically, these researchers were looking at the way new trainees in the accounting firms were socialized to become professionals for their clients. They conducted interviews and engaged in observation to gain an understanding of the local discourses about what a professional that cared about the client looked like in terms of the new trainees. In addition, Anderson-Gough et al. looked into how the term professional, regarding clients, was being used in other accounting firms to gain an understanding of the macro-level discourses surrounding the term “professional.” Both the macro- and micro-level discourses played a role in socializing the new trainees. Embracing such a critical method of analysis I investigated the texts identified for this study and examined the ways that local and macro-level discourses interacted and intersected. This analysis method provided further depth into the ways that discourse constitutes reality and individual identities at City Park.

While I am not concerned with a specific discourse such as what it means to be a professional, I am concerned with the ways that individuals made sense of their own identity with others in a public park. After I identified patterns and themes that explained

the various ways that individuals in the park made sense of their position, I took a closer look at the ways that these local-level discourses are connected to macro-level discourses to mutually constitute and organize the social realities of City Park. Throughout this process, I analyzed how the interrelated sets of texts collected from the park reproduced uneven power relations, or resisted discursive constructions that might publicly define an individual such as what it means to be “homeless.”

Analyzing the discursive texts collected in the park provided new understandings about how individuals come to know themselves in relation to others in City Park. This is significant as public parks are not regularly considered places of significant meaning making and organizing, but are considered places for leisure and activity. The analysis also helped me understand the many ways that the interactions within public parks are power-laden. By taking approaches from organizational communication outside the organization and utilizing the aforementioned methods, this study examined the various ways individuals organize themselves in a public park with special attention paid to the political nature of discourse.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

City Park is located underneath a highway overpass, several blocks from the downtown area of a midsized Northwest city. Within the park there are two weathered basketball hoops that are missing nets and are rarely used, a skate park that is used throughout the day and night, and an open area filled with benches, tables, and a public restroom. The skate features take up the majority of the space in the park and the open area filled with benches and picnic tables is positioned at the far edge of the park. Beyond the picnic tables, there is a chain link fence with several gates, a small parking lot, and a public restroom. This area (picnic tables, parking lot, restroom, benches) of the skate park is usually occupied by a group of individuals who identified themselves as “homeless” throughout my study. During most afternoons, six to ten people use the skate park at a time and congregate on a set of cement ledges in the middle of the skate features. In addition to the individuals skating, there were typically 15-30 other individuals in the park between eight in the morning and five at night. Throughout the night, a few people occasionally skate as the park is lit underneath the overpass and several other people would sleep near the picnic tables and restroom.

I began a typical day of research in City Park by sitting on one of the many benches that surrounded the perimeter. Some benches are positioned in the midst of the people that are in the park to skateboard, and other benches are positioned near the area most commonly occupied by people that identified as homeless. I spent a total of seven

weeks in City Park and would average around twenty hours per week in the park. The first week that I spent in the park I sat on the benches, observed, took field notes, and spoke with individuals who accompanied me on the benches. During the first few weeks, I would also vary the timeframes that I spent in the park in order to gauge how many people were in the park and whether or not they were typically in the park at the same time. I quickly realized that the park was quite empty before noon and became heavily populated (20-40 people) from noon until five in the evening. From five throughout the remainder of the night there would be around 7-10 people in the park at a time, including some who slept in the park overnight. With this in mind, I spent the majority of my time in the park throughout the afternoon, but spent three nights in the park from around nine at night until two in the morning. The second week through the seventh week of my research, I met many people, became friends with some, and interviewed a total of twelve people. An immediate finding that emerged from my time in the park was that there were two very distinct groups of people that regularly spent time in the park. These groups were made up of people that came to the park to skateboard and people that told me they were homeless and were in the park because the shelters were closed throughout the day.

In order to write about these two groups of people, I will be referring to them collectively as the “homeless community” and the “skaters.” I have not made the decision lightly to refer to one group of people as the homeless community. Throughout my experiences and interactions with this group of people in City Park, many of them referred to themselves as homeless and spoke about the collective group more fully as being homeless. With that being said, I have chosen to write about this group of people using the same language that they use speak about themselves. However, as I analyze the

data from my study in the next section, I will speak more fully to the title of homeless and the relations to a larger classed society. Similarly, the group of people that came to City Park to skateboard referred to themselves as skaters when speaking about their group of people. Thus, I have chosen to talk about the two communities of people within City Park in terms that emerged through the language of people that regularly occupied the park.

The opportunities to meet people, participate in daily interactions and activities, and interview several regular participants of the City Park communities provided me with unique insights regarding discourse, organizing, and power in the context of this park. Employing qualitative methods with a focus on discourse, three key themes have emerged as I have thought, read, and engaged with my field notes and interview transcripts. The first theme emerged from my participation in the park as an outsider. I was given the nickname “Rich Fuck” that (initially) discursively situated me as an outsider and someone that did not belong. My entrance and initial interactions with members of the homeless community that entitled me with this nickname was originally created out of hostility, but eventually transformed into my token of acceptance, which speaks to how discourse, in terms of naming, reveals the collective identity of the homeless community in relation to larger society. The second theme involved the clear emergence of distinct spaces in the park. City Park is divided by an invisible and discursively constituted boundary that created two separate but distinct areas within the park. There was an area for people who skated and an area for the homeless community and the discursively constituted boundary created both material and discursive space for the groups to exist. The third emergent theme is that of identity and “othering.”

Specifically, individuals in both park communities spoke in ways that provided a strong sense of group identity and constituted a discourse of hostility towards the “other” (either the homeless, the skateboarders, greater society, or the mutual ‘other’ of any cop or outsider to the park). In the following section, I present each theme and explain how each provides a rich set of findings that will be further discussed in the following chapter.

“Rich Fuck” and Discursive Difference

During my second week in City Park, I chose to sit on a bench that was surrounded by people and bedding sprawled across the ground. As I sat down, I removed the notebook from my bag that was filled with field notes and began to describe the scene around me. There were several groups of people (6-10 people per group) standing within twenty feet of me talking, laughing, and pulling one another close so that they could stay warm in the midst of the cold air. Much like the afternoons that I spent in the park the week before, the groups of people standing around were hassling one another and arguing about the ridiculousness of being locked out of the local shelters until dinner time. On this particular day, as I sat on the bench near the back of the area the homeless community was occupying, I experienced an elevated sense of self-consciousness and was fully aware that I was the outsider. Although I had already spent over a week in City Park, I did not feel as though I belonged, which made it challenging to enter into conversation within the park.

While I had not yet become comfortable in City Park, I had met several individuals over the course of the first two weeks that identified as homeless and wanted to introduce me to their friends. The discomfort that I was experiencing came primarily from brief interactions with members of the homeless community. I would look around

and find people staring at me or would occasionally be avoided and walked around as people walked from one side of the park to the other. As I worked through my own discomfort, I regularly looked for the few individuals that I had met in the homeless community that would introduce me to more of their friends. Having not developed a positive sense of rapport with many members of the homeless community up until this point, I felt nervous that the few people I had met were absent from the park. As I sat on a bench observing the people in City Park, I grew in confidence and moved further into the area where the homeless community sat. Walking through a group of 6-10 homeless people, I sat alone on a new bench surrounded by members of the homeless community and began recording the activities of the people surrounding me. After five or ten minutes, I felt increasingly uncomfortable as more and more people stared at me, but would not approach me. Prior to this day I would only sit on benches in the middle of the park if I did not see members of the homeless community that I had previously met. With the absence of the two individuals that introduced me to their friends, I was simultaneously eager and nervous to meet new people in the park. I had just finished writing about how I felt especially self conscious and worried that I was beginning to offend those around me due to the place I had chosen to sit when a tall middle-aged man walked by and pulled the notebook from my hands. After taking the notebook, he asked me why I was in the park and I explained that I was working on a project for my work in graduate school and I wanted to understand the culture of City Park. Following my response, he asked again why I was in the park, but this time in a substantially louder voice. He then said, do you know who these people are? They are the homeless. Why are you here? I responded once again and stated that I was not here to offend or interfere, but

wanted to meet people and hear about their experiences in the park. At this point, I reached out my hand, offered my name and waited for a response. The man then said that he wouldn't tell me his name and after all, who was I to be in the park. At that point, he handed me my notebook and said "I don't care who you are, and I'm just going to call you 'Rich Fuck,' how does that sound?" Everybody else laughed, repeated the name, took a step closer, and I became quite concerned about my position as the outsider. I was concerned that I had offended people and would not be able to represent myself well. In addition, as more and more people began to laugh and yell, I was worried that I might not be able to simply stand up and walk away if the situation continued to escalate.

This somewhat abrasive experience toward the beginning of my study in City Park caused a large amount of discomfort and even fear for my safety. While I had anticipated a certain level of discomfort as I planned for this study, the experience of having my notebook taken caused me to wonder if I could safely develop relationships with members of the homeless community that would be necessary to engage in interviews and participate in the conversations within City Park. After my notebook was handed back to me, all I wanted to do was leave that portion of City Park, but I chose to stay seated. Eventually, everyone walked off still laughing about the man calling me "rich fuck." The man that coined the nickname "Rich Fuck" will be referred to as Carl from here forward. My relationship with Carl grew over the course of my study, but during the second week I wondered if my research was even worth the discomfort.

Obtaining the title or nickname of "rich fuck" initially brought about apprehension for the relationships I was hoping to develop in City Park. Upon further reflection, I asked myself why I was concerned with this title. In retrospect, the title made

perfect sense as I had explained to individuals in the park that I was a graduate student from Boise State University that was interested in the social experiences of individuals in the park. In addition, the day that I obtained this new title I was wearing a pair of jeans, a polo shirt, and a quality winter jacket as it was quite cold. Between my clothing and reason for being in the park, the nickname was a local-level discourse that served to position me as an outsider that fit the mold of “rich.” During the first two weeks of observing and participating in the interactions in City Park, there were several other experiences that positioned me as the outsider.

In addition to the group of individuals that had begun calling me “rich fuck,” two days later an individual in the park shouted at me on the Friday of my second week of research. I was sitting on a rock ledge talking with a group of people skateboarding and we were laughing about the times I used to skate in the park when I was in high school. As the group of people returned to the center of the park to skate, a man that was around 50 feet from me across the park began to yell to me. He said, “Hey you, hey you, white boy! You sit there writing and talking, you are a little white bitch! Oh, you know I’m talking to you! You just stay on that side of the park!” Considering that this was only two days after obtaining a nickname from one group of people, I began wondering why my presence in the park brought about such resistance. A moment later, an individual approached me, explained that he was homeless and told me not to mind that guy over there. I introduced myself and once again offered my hand to shake. The man shook my hand and told me that he would never tell me his name, but I could call him “no-name” or “McDonalds.” After speaking for a few minutes, he looked at me very seriously and asked if I was like that other girl. I asked what other girl, and he said the one that was

around asking about everyone's private lives. He then said he thought she was recording them all and told me that if I had a secret recorder hidden in my coat he would "trash me." I then told him the only way I would ever record someone was if they gave me permission. After obtaining his permission for an interview, McDonalds shared the following insight about the culture of the park that guided my future experiences:

I come to this park because I have no other choices. I get kicked out of Sanctuary [a nickname for a local shelter for those in need] in the mornin' and I can't return 'til night. That's why all of us homeless are here. The only other people that come to this park are the skaters and they usually stay away from us... Sometimes other people come, but they are usually made fun of and don't come back unless they are people that bring us some food.

This insight from McDonalds showed me that there were really only two groups of people that spent time in City Park, people that skate and people that considered themselves homeless and spent their nights in the shelters, cars, or elsewhere.

McDonald's also explained that

people think we are lazy and stuff, and they look at us like we shouldn't be here...
some of us people can be mean, but if you treat us good, we will treat you good.

It was at this moment that I realized that my sitting upon benches and writing in a notebook could have made people feel as though they were objects to be studied. From this point on, I did not carry a notebook unless I was in the midst of interviewing people. In order to continue to capture rich field notes, I would regularly stand up and walk to either the restroom or stand behind a column in the park and quickly speak everything I had just experienced into a voice recorder. This change in my research methods and

appearance altered my experiences over the following weeks and provided a way for my nickname of Rich Fuck to take on new meaning.

The Tuesday of my third week of research, I engaged in conversations with the group of people that gave me my nickname and my involvement with the people began to change. As I approached the group, Carl, the man that took my notebook, once again loudly proclaimed that Rich Fuck was back. With a little hostility from the group of people, I once again sat down with all of them and we eventually began discussing the weather, cars that drove by, and the hopes that cops wouldn't show up that day. After an hour of talking, a clean shaven man that was dressed professionally approached. Everyone began to "oohh" and "ahhh" and tell him how "pretty" he was looking. At this point, I realized that hassling one another was a way of life for the people that spent their days in City Park. The clean shaven man then asked everyone if they knew how good he smelled. He said he had shaved, showered, and been given a new set of clothes for a job interview he had that day. The people that were now surrounding him were all excited for his interview and one man said, "you're still a piece of shit, but you smell good. I'm sleeping by you tonight... maybe it will rub off. Hey Rich Fuck come smell this guy!" I went to smell the guy and he pulled me and another woman tight and yelled, "a bunch of good smelling people all together now!" As this happened, I felt conflicted about how I should respond. Was it my appearance and ability to afford hygienic supplies that made me privileged enough to be considered one of the "good smelling people." Overall, being called "rich fuck" was beginning to change from an insult to a comical title that both separated me from and included me with everyone else in the group.

After many more encounters with the people that gave me my nickname, I had the opportunity to interview the man that coined the name and once took my notebook. Throughout the course of this interview, I learned about the purpose of calling me this nickname and the significance of the change in meaning behind this discourse. During my interview with Carl, I asked about his experiences with other people in the park and he responded by talking about his experiences with me.

You know “rich fuck,” you alright. A lot of people come around and it is [my] job to protect all the people. Most of us don’t want to be homeless, and people show up and get us in trouble or say they’ll help and don’t come back.

I then asked Carl why he called me “rich fuck” to begin with and he responded by saying,

I was just trying to make you go away. But I mean you are a “rich fuck.” I went to college and I was a rich fuck and so are you. Some people come to help and they are rich fucks that don’t care about us but want to feel good. You aren’t one of us and you can’t never get us.

Carl’s statements demonstrated that the nickname that I continue to be called was once meant to offend, but was now just another way of joking around and making sure that I knew I was not one of “them.” The tension of inclusion and separation that surrounded my nickname Rich Fuck was constantly being negotiated through discursive acts. The title itself was a discourse constituted to ensure that I was always separated from being a member of the homeless community regardless of the other forms of acceptance that I had experienced throughout my time spent in City Park. In addition, Carl was making a claim about the level of privilege I have experienced through my ability to go to college and live a seemingly secure life in terms of finances. Simply put, the name called

attention to the fact that I was “rich” in terms of the homeless community and that distinction was not one easily reconcilable.

The comments by Carl reveal the way that discourse organizes groups of people. Carl considered himself to be the leader and protector of the homeless community and wanted to make sure that I understood that we could get along, but I could never understand them. Throughout my first weeks in the park my appearance alone demonstrated that I was an outsider. Not only was I an outsider, but white and an exemplary figure of race and class privilege. My nickname was a discursive act of resistance to the power associated with macro-level discourses of race, class, and success, which will be further elaborated upon in the following chapter. Within City Park, the nickname that was given to me by a portion of the homeless community was a way of providing discursive distance between the homeless community and me. Even though I was eventually trusted by Carl and others, it was still made clear through language that I was not one of them. A comment by a woman named Sheila further exemplifies the ability of discourse to simultaneously separate and organize. When I asked Sheila to tell me about her best experiences in City Park, she responded by saying,

some of the best friends I have ever had are people I know here. My friends would do anything for me. We usually just sit around and talk or drink. People rush by and are scared to walk by us but we are happy. You people don't get that though.

Similarly to the nickname of Rich Fuck prompted by Carl, Sheila was explaining to me that I was not a part of the group. When I asked Sheila who the people were that “don't get that,” she said, “all the people that isn't homeless and has nice cars and jobs and isn't

on the streets.” The nickname that I had received was not only about me, but was connected to larger power-laden discourses.

The nickname “rich fuck” demonstrates my experience with a small group of individuals within City Park that called themselves homeless, and it exemplifies the way discourse organizes understandings of the world for a group of people. The second group of people in City Park that make up the majority of other park attendees is the group of people who skateboard, which I will be calling the skaters. My experience as an outsider was more notable with the community of people that were homeless, but the homeless community and skaters within City Park also othered one another through their discursive acts and use of space. In doing so, two additional themes emerged from my research. First, there were discursively created symbolic boundaries within City Park that provided context for who was allowed to be where and use what material objects in the park. Next, a strong sense of group identity was organized through discourse that allowed for others to be discussed in particular ways.

Property and Contestations Over Space

City Park is separated into two unique areas that are defined through the discursive acts and are not fixed, but are regularly negotiated by the people in City Park. Each area revolves around the needs and desires of the two communities of people in City Park. The area associated with the homeless community regularly consisted of any and all picnic benches around the perimeter of the park. In addition, the homeless community usually congregated on one end of the park near the edge of the skate features where there were picnic tables, a small parking lot beyond a chain link fence, and a public restroom. The other area of the park associated with the skaters was comprised of

the entire center of the park that was filled with various skate features such as rails, jumps, a half pipe, and several cement ledges. Each of these areas became apparent and distinct to me during my second week of research when I acquired my nickname. For instance, as Carl asked several times, “what are you doing here?” he was not asking about my being in City Park, but why I was in the corner of the park that the homeless community typically inhabited. This discourse about why I was “here” and not elsewhere was related to the space that the homeless community valued and my presence could be considered a form of trespassing. It was not that I in particular didn’t belong in this area of the park, but that the people who skateboarded, police officers, and anyone else shouldn’t be in this area of the park. However, it was through my own experiences in this portion of City Park that I realized the significance of this area of the park as it related to the experiences of the homeless community.

The homeless community in City Park often explained their presence in City Park out of a sense of ownership or necessity. For example, Charles discussed his reason for regularly coming to City Park by stating that,

where the fuck else would I go? I can’t go sit inside anywhere because I get kicked out. One time I was at Subway and went into the bathroom. And then I passed out or something. Woke up to cops banging on the door. Spent [the] night in jail and now I have some stupid warrant for not going to court. I need to get out here, I was just fucking tired.

Charles, like many others, came to City Park because he felt that he could not be anywhere else. Considering himself to be homeless, Charles was explaining the divide

between himself and the rest of society. Shelia also explained that City Park was a place that she and others could go to do whatever they wanted to do by saying that,

I come to this park because I know people here and we have a place we can just be. At the shelters there are so many rules. Here we have a place that is ours.

Nobody tries to tell us what to do.

While City Park was a place that the homeless community could just be, it was not the entire park that could be considered a place for them.

The area in City Park that was occupied by the homeless community was not just a boundary within City Park, but served as an area that seemed to protect the homeless community from the rest of the city and environmental conditions. Charles's statement expressed a certain form of hostility that he experienced trying to survive and passing out in a restroom and this made City Park a place that he wouldn't be troubled. Similarly, Jackson stated that he came to City Park because "people don't give us [the homeless community] shit," and when I asked what people he was talking about he elaborated,

Just everyone. Sometimes I try to fly a sign and everyone just looks at you. I hate it and the people staring at me. You think I want to be living in a park... sleeping on the fuckin' hard ground? It's bull shit. At least here all those people don't come. Just us and the skaters.

Jackson was not able to sleep in the shelters at night due to a negative history between him and the shelters, so City Park was one of the only places of refuge for him.

Throughout my conversations with Jackson and others, it became apparent that the majority of the homeless community desired a chance to move beyond the shelters and City Park. While the reasons for this not happening are complicated and beyond the

scope of this project, City Park was always considered a place where the homeless community could exist somewhat free of criticism and other forms of hardship.

Beyond the ways that individuals within the homeless community talked about City Park, the material aspects of the park also provided a sense of refuge. Due to an overpass covering the entirety of the park, the park was always protected from rain and snow in the winter and sun throughout the summer months. Also, the buildings surround the park and the columns that hold up the overpass serve to shelter the park from cold winds throughout the winter. One thing regularly noted by members of the homeless community was the need to be in City Park because they did not feel as though they could be anywhere else throughout the city without being hassled. The public restroom available in the park enabled members of the homeless community to have access to a lavatory without needing to worry about trouble from business owners or in some cases the police. Each of these features of City Park were discussed by members of the homeless community as they mentioned that this was a place they could be free of ridicule. Due to the location of the park within the city, people also rarely walked through the park beyond the skaters. The material nature of the park's construction was imbued with meaning for the homeless community and the discourses of refuge begin to make sense in light of these features.

As previously mentioned, one of the ways the park is divided is through a sense of ownership and necessity that is described by people using the park for various reasons. While I was in the park to meet, know, and understand people, the majority of the other individuals in the park were there due to limited options. Jason was an individual that I

met in the park who came to skateboard a few days a week. During an interview, he stated that,

we [skateboarders] come here to skate because there really isn't anywhere else to skate without driving very far...Everyone just sticks to themselves... Well, I mean we hang out over here and skate in this area. All the homeless people just sit over there. Sometimes they talk to us, but usually we skate, and they leave us alone.

In talking about City Park in this way, Jason was making it clear that the area to skate was not for the homeless community. The homeless community had their area and as long as they were not interfering with skateboarding, it didn't matter what they were doing. The two distinct areas of the park cannot be separated by a clear line, but those that spend time in the park have an understanding of what places should be used for certain people.

The discursively constituted boundaries that exist in City Park served to organize groups of people in the park, but were regularly crossed and hostility emerged. Throughout my time spent as a participant observer in the park and through stories that were told to me in interviews, it became apparent that various forms of heckling would reinforce the discursive boundaries. Much like the first time that I sat on a bench in the area that was primarily used by the homeless community and had my notebook taken away, the homeless community and the skateboard community regularly reinforced their boundaries through discursive acts. In doing so, the park was constantly being (re)organized spatially through discourse. Hostility emerged at times when the boundaries conceived of by the two communities of people were not understood to be the

same and then through discursive acts such as heckling, the park would be (re)organized.

For instance, Charles explained the contestation over the benches by saying that,

sometimes the skateboarder kids think they own the place. They get all pissed and yell at us and tell us to get outa the way. We just try to find a place to sit and then they all they just they yell and try to hit us and stuff.

However, as each community of people understood areas of the park as partially owned by them, these types of interactions often ended with one group feeling as though their space was not rightfully distributed.

Although clear boundaries could not be drawn in City Park to represent exactly what areas were to be used by the skateboard or the homeless communities, material objects were regularly understood to be possessed by one group or the other. For instance, benches and picnic tables within City Park were not to be used by people in the park that were skateboarding. Conversely, the boxes, rails, or other skate features could not be sat on by members of the homeless community if all other seats were full without harsh criticism from the skateboard community. During one of my days in City Park, this became clear as a group of homeless individuals were sitting on a skate box while I was talking with them. Over the course of fifteen minutes, a group of skateboarders continued to jump onto the box and skate closer and closer to the homeless individuals. Eventually, a woman sitting on the box yelled to the skateboarders that they were going to hit her and they responded by screaming back that this park was for skating and to move somewhere else. After another five or ten minutes of hostility, the homeless individuals moved and sat on the ground as there were no other seats and talked about how the skateboarders had

no respect for them. The boundaries that separated the homeless community and the skateboarding community were regularly sustained through these types of interactions.

The contestations over space regularly emerged through stories told in interviews about the opposing group of people's intrusions. One interview question that I asked was, "what are the worst things about other people in the park?" The responses that I gathered further demonstrate the importance of space and a sense of ownership over certain areas in the park that were reinforced through discourse. Ashley, a young woman who came to skateboard with several friends responded to this question by saying, "...sometimes the park is just filled with homeless people. They sit all over everything [skate features] and stand around so we can't skate in very much of the park. It makes me wish they weren't allowed to be here." Ashley's statement equated the occasionally crowded nature of City Park with the rights of who was allowed to be in the park. The skate features were understood to be owned by the people that came to the park to skate, and although there were no written rules regarding the use of the skate features, it was unacceptable for members of the homeless community to be in the way. Kyle, a friend of Ashley's that came to City Park to skateboard, agreed that this was the worst part about other people in the park. When I asked what usually happened during these times, Kyle responded by explaining that,

I don't know usually we just ask them to move. They never do and say they can be wherever they want in the park. One time it all got really heated and everyone was yelling at each other and cussing. We said some pretty mean things, but, um, we just wanted them to move. It sucks that they can't be somewhere else. This is a skate park.

Kyle's elaboration is consistent with several encounters that I observed between the two communities. An interesting note is that following these hostile interactions, the homeless community always seemed to move away from the skate features and toward the picnic tables, benches, and open spaces. The discursive acts that appeared violent served to (re)organize City Park into two distinct areas.

The areas of City Park that are considered off limits to certain populations are not static, but change depending on the people at the park. Due to the timeframe of this study, I conducted this research from the middle of September through the beginning of November. During these months, after nightfall, the park is quite cold and is rarely populated by individuals that skateboard. Additionally, after six or seven at night, the majority of the homeless community has moved to the shelters for the evening. Those that most often remained in City Park were individuals that were not allowed to stay at the shelters and therefore slept in the corner of the park under the overpass and near the restrooms. While interviewing Mike one evening, he explained the lack of boundaries by stating that, "after everyone leaves and stuff we can do whatever we want. None of the rich kids [referring to the people who skateboard] are here to push us around." The boundary lines within City Park were constantly changing depending on the actions of those present. The moments of hostility and conflict regulated and redistributed the places in the park that people could occupy.

The contestations over space and intrusions into certain areas are important to discuss in terms of discourse because the boundary areas were regularly changed or reinforced through discursive acts. The homeless people discussed City Park in terms of ownership, refuge, or their need to be in the park. Conversely, the skaters most often

talked about City Park and their right to be able to skate throughout the park because that is what it was built for. As the material area of the park is limited, the skaters understood the homeless community to be trespassing on their areas whenever a member of the homeless community was in an area that could be used to skate on. However, when the park was crowded, the homeless community talked about their need to sit in areas that the skaters regularly occupied within City Park as one place of refuge from the weather and cold hard ground, condescending looks from members of society, and troubles with the law. These conflicting understandings of what City Park was to be used for required people within City Park to regularly construct boundaries that organized the two communities of people through discourse.

Discursive acts within City Park also ascribed meaning to material objects that would be understood as the boundaries within City Park. As meaning was ascribed to various material elements in the park such as skate features or picnic tables, the discursive acts of those in the park were often used to negotiate the meaning of the various elements within the park. However, it is important to note that the material elements in the park were never fixed in the understandings of those in the park. Each day, through discursive acts, various elements of the park were (re)organized to fit the needs of the people present in the park. Discursive acts then allowed for the understandings of the park to constantly be changing. This is not to say that the park was always distributed in a manner that was free of power, but that the park was organized through the discursive acts.

Group Identity and Hostility Toward the Other

The importance of interactions in this public park became most evident through the group identities that emerged. Over the course of the seven weeks that I spent in City Park, I was eventually afforded the opportunity to take part in many conversations wherein I began to understand the ways people in City Park made sense of the world around them. Throughout this process, a strong sense of group identity emerged for both the homeless community and skaters, albeit, in different ways. I have identified the following two themes that have emerged from the discourses that I observed and recorded in the park. First, the communities of people explained their experiences in City Park in terms of their relationships to each other and toward other individuals or groups of people in society. Next, each of the communities in the park expressed hostility towards the other, which could be people that skateboarded, the homeless community, or additional people throughout society. Further, discursive acts that constituted a hostility toward the other seemed to be an important organizing mechanism and token of group membership within City Park. Thus, discursive acts in City Park organized, created, and expressed a shared experience within the two primary communities that spent time in City Park.

The homeless community in City Park most clearly explained their sense of community and group identity. The lived experiences of various members of the homeless community were understood to be unique to the group as a whole. Returning to my interview with Carl, he noted that,

A lot of people come around and it is [my] job to protect all the people. Most of us don't want to be homeless, and people show up and get us in trouble or say they'll help and don't come back.

Carl considered himself to be a self-proclaimed leader of the group and spoke in a way that expressed the interests of everyone that made up the homeless community. This became more evident as he told me, "you aren't one of us and you can't never get us." Although I had spent seven weeks talking with this group of people nearly every day, I would never be considered "one of them." One of the reasons for this is that particular lived experiences and understandings of the world were tacitly agreed upon by members of the homeless community and this was regularly expressed in language.

A profound experience that was shared by many members of the homeless community was a feeling of being understood as lazy and useless in society. This is also reflected by the ways that the skaters talked about the homeless, which will be discussed shortly. For example, Mike explained that he came to City Park because, "people here know I want to do something better. When I try to ask some people for money and food stuff they just won't even look at me." Through this type of shared experience, various individuals explained the ways that they deeply understood one another. Jackson shared in an interview that most days in City Park his group of friends (the homeless community) "just try to have fun and uh make it through the day." When I asked what it looked like for them to have fun he elaborated by saying, "we get money sometimes and then maybe we buy some booze and sit around and bull shit. When it was warmer it was a lot more fun." I then asked who the people were that he did this with and he said, "all my brothas and sistas. The people that are like me." These statements express a shared

experience that has been created through similar experiences and is understood by the members of the homeless community. The jokes, stories, and conversations that I listened to and participated in were all part of creating a sense of group identity.

The shared experiences between members of the homeless community provided context for each of their interactions on a day-to-day basis, and through their continual interactions they often spoke of themselves in terms of their community. When I asked questions regarding why a particular person came to the park, or what they enjoyed about City Park, they usually responded by discussing what their community of people enjoyed. For instance, when interviewing Stacy about why she came to the park, she said, “really I just come here before the shelters let us come back. We like to come here ‘cause it’s close and we stay pretty warm.” This type of response was common when I interviewed members of the homeless community. When Stacy thought about herself and why she came to the park, it was inseparably tied to the notion of why her community of friends came to the park. This communal understanding of the reasons for doing things was also evident throughout the conversations between members of the homeless community. Much like Carl’s statement to me during the beginning of my study that “these people are the homeless,” the members of this community would regularly talk about their position as homeless and what that meant for them. Over time I realized that the group was not necessarily just taking on the title of “homeless,” but they were redefining what that meant.

Being homeless was not a condition of living without a home for the people in City Park, but a description of who they were that was not shameful, but a present reality. With this being said, the group identity that was created around homelessness was only

inclusive insofar as people were “properly” homeless. During an interview with a woman named Kelly who considered herself homeless, she explained that the worst thing about people in City Park was a particular group of homeless people. Our conversation about this went as follows,

I: “What are the worst things about other people at the park?”

Kelly: “You know, just those people, over there... they give all of us a bad name.”

I: “Who are the all of us?”

Kelly: “You know... the homeless. They just sit over there and complain and yell at people and never ... umm... take care of themselves. It makes me mad. I’m trying to turn my life around and they are screwing all of us over. We come to the park everyday because we can’t stay at shelters during the day. And, uhhh, that’s because of those people.”

According to Kelly, being properly homeless meant that an individual should be attempting to leave the physical state of homelessness. Further, this group of individuals that Kelly was referring to was not allowed to sleep in the shelters at night due to prior disputes. While Carl explained to me, an outsider, that all of the people in this area were the homeless, Kelly explained that the unity of their community was split into various segments by their discursive acts. During my interview with McDonald’s around the very beginning of my research, he made a similar statement to me regarding this exiled group within the homeless community. McDonald’s said to me, “Look, all of us homeless are actually real nice if you give us a chance and are nice back. We are not crazy. The crazy ones are those people over there.” McDonald’s was once again drawing a distinction

between the majority of people within the homeless community and a certain group of people that they had trouble with. These explanations by McDonald's and Kelly imply that the homeless community has unspoken, but agreed upon guidelines for what is acceptable.

The skateboarding community also demonstrated a sense of group identity, but it was not as developed as the homeless community. When I asked Jason, a skateboarder in his mid-twenties, about his most enjoyable moments in City Park, he responded by saying,

sometimes there are a ton of people that come out to skate in the summer. And, this one time we had a bunch of music and just hung out, drank some beers, and skated late into the night. I dunno, whenever there are a ton of us out here skating, it is usually pretty fun.

Jason noted that the group of people centered around the action of skateboarding was what created a memorable experience in City Park. Similarly, a friend of Jason's that came to skate named Stephen explained that, "whenever we are all skating really well is when I have most fun. Then we are all eggin' each other on and its really cool." The responses from Jason and Stephen discursively situate their community of people around the act of skateboarding. The reason the community exists in City Park is because it is one place in the area that they can come to skate, and beyond the action of skateboarding, little else was discussed in favor of their community of people. However, as I will explain shortly, the skateboarding community was tightly connected in terms of their hostility toward the homeless community.

There was a defined difference in the ways that the homeless and skateboarding communities organized and understood themselves. City Park was less about identity for the skateboarding community, and more about a place where they could go for an hour or two to perform an activity. Conversely, the park was uniquely tied to the identity of the homeless community. City Park was discussed by the homeless community as a place where “nobody bugged them” and “they could do what they wanted” even if it was as Charles explained the only place they could go. In this way, City Park for the skateboarding community was about doing and for the homeless community it was about being or, for some, surviving. While this difference is key and helps to demonstrate the difference in the depth of relationships that exist in City Park, there is one feature of each of these communities that is similar. Both the homeless and skateboarding communities speak in a way that demonstrates a strong hostility for the other.

Throughout the course of my interviews, every person had a story about an “other” that depicted them as subordinate or oppressive. Initially, I thought these stories were told to explain how one group was either better than the other or being unfairly treated within City Park. Eventually though, I realized that telling stories and speaking in a hostile manner about others was more than a statement about the other group, and was a ritual within both communities in City Park that allowed for somebody to prove their allegiance to their respective community. Some of the stories below will demonstrate the hostility toward the other or outsider and will also demonstrate how these stories further organize group identities. As much as the communities in City Park could be described as having a strong sense of group identity, they could also be described by what they stood against or spoke out about. In order to explain the ways that each of these communities

bonded through a shared hostility toward an “other,” I will first explain the homeless community’s stories and hostile moments I experienced followed by the skaters’ stories.

One of the primary ways the homeless community talked about the skateboarding community was in terms of them being a bunch of “rich kids.” This depiction of the skateboarding community is most evident by Mike’s statement that,

all the rich skater punk kids come here and do whatever they want. I’m sure they go home at night to cry about how hard their day was and talk to mommy about how somebody was mean to them. Life’s a bitch, [laughs] get used to it.

Mike was referring to the skateboarding community in terms of small children that were not capable of succeeding in life without the guidance of their parents. This idea that the people that came to City Park to skateboard were immature and fully supported by their parents was confirmed by Stacy as she said, “the skateboard kids don’t know anything about respect. Their whole life is paid for and easy and stuff.” Equating the people who skateboarded as kids positioned members of the homeless community as more fully capable to understand the harsh realities of life in a way that “children” couldn’t comprehend. Each of the members of the skateboarding community that I interviewed and interacted with were between twenty and thirty years old. However, as they were positioned as “rich kids,” the homeless community was able to joke about them as being irresponsible and naive.

Beyond being considered “rich kids,” the homeless community also referred to the people who skateboarded by claiming they were inconsiderate and rude to them. During my time in City Park, I took part in several conversations with members of the homeless community where they referred to the people skateboarding as “a bunch of

assholes,” “selfish dicks,” or similarly hostile terms. These types of remarks were most noticeable in response to particular situations, but in casual conversation were used as a way to demonstrate a sense of group membership. For example, Carl discussed the skateboarding community by saying, “those assholes [skateboarding community] always think they are better than us.” In addition, while members of the homeless community were sitting around telling jokes, one man said, “those pricks wouldn’t even know what to do with a woman if she was naked in front of them.” This statement reinforced the theme of the skateboarding community being children while simultaneously considering them to be rude. These types of statements were rarely in reference to one particular person that was skateboarding, but were made more generally about the community of people.

It was not only in interviews and conversations that hostile name calling towards the skateboarding community happened, but members of the homeless community occasionally shouted to people as they skated. During the fifth week of my research, a man that appeared to be in his mid-twenties was skating near the homeless community and was yelled at by various people. One person shouted, “why don’t you go get back in your car and go home to mom and dad” and another yelled, “it must be nice to have warm clothes. Why don’t you give us your coat?” As the man skateboarding ignored them, another man chimed in and yelled, “you got nothing to say? You a little bitch?” At this point, the man skateboarding turned around and shouted, “fuck off!” and moved to the other side of the park. After this, the members of the homeless community that had been yelling started laughing and moved on to new conversations. It appeared that the members of the homeless community didn’t actually care about the man skateboarding,

but yelled because it was something that they did out of habit. While this particular confrontation does not demonstrate aggressiveness from a member of the skateboarding community, some explanations from the homeless community described the people that skateboarded as such.

The examples I have given thus far have demonstrated the ways that the homeless community spoke about the skateboarding community in a hostile manner. Conversely, many members of the homeless community described themselves as kind and considerate and positioned people that skateboarded in City Park as aggressive. Sheila described herself and her friends in the homeless community by saying that,

we are all real nice people and look out for each other. If my friends are cold I would give them my coat or anything. A lot of people think we might be mean but we go to church and stuff and love each other.

Later in our conversation, Sheila described the skateboarding community as she told me,

they are always yelling at us and telling us to move. Sometimes they get mad and tell us to get a job. One time they even tried hitting us with their skateboards to make us go away.

Sheila described the homeless community as a group of people that were kind and cared for one another whereas the skateboarding community constantly harassed them. This narrative of skateboarders as aggressive was also described by McDonald's as he explained, "they [the skateboarders] are always hassling us and yelling at us for no good reason... but I dunno, I guess they're just kids." Although McDonald's shared that he had multiple experiences where members of the skateboarding community were acting in an aggressive manner, he framed it in a way that allowed it to be acceptable by comparing it

to a childlike temper tantrum. Regardless, the notion that the skateboarding community was aggressive regularly fed into the name calling and overarching understanding of skateboarders as being “jerks” or “assholes” for the homeless community.

Much like the homeless community spoke in a hostile manner about the skaters, the skaters emphasized three negative characteristics through discourse of the homeless community. The skaters regularly referenced the homeless community in terms of them being lazy, drunks, or inconsiderate. Each of these ways of talking about the homeless community discursively constituted a reality wherein the homeless community was to be laughed at or mocked. However, as I spent time engaging with my field notes and interview transcripts, it was evident that this form of hostility existed in part to continually organize the skater community. In other words, to be a skater you needed to speak in a hostile manner about the homeless community. This type of discursive act was performed by members of the homeless community and by the skaters. Below I have expressed a few ways that the skaters talked about the homeless community as being lazy, drunks, or inconsiderate.

Talking about the homeless people in terms of laziness was a common way for the skaters to talk amongst themselves and to speak more publicly about the homeless community. In an interview with Kyle, he talked about the homeless community by saying that, “I mean, they wouldn’t have to sit around in a park all day if they would go get a job. I don’t really feel bad for them.” This statement represents a common understanding amongst the skaters that the homeless community could simply move beyond poverty if they would put in the effort to do so. Stephen further supported this as he explained to me,

sometimes they [homeless community] constantly ask us for stuff or want to borrow a cell phone. It's just really annoying. It's not like I have very much money but I go to work to pay for my shit you know? If you want something in life, go get it, don't just sit around all day.

Stephen's statement expresses both his understanding of what he hopes to be true of his life and how the homeless community is too lazy to make anything good happen for themselves. Beyond the statements made by the skaters in my interviews, they would often infer that members of the homeless community were lazy as they skated around the park. For instance, one evening when it was quite cold, a group of skaters arrived at the park as I was talking with a few people in the homeless community. As the three young men skated around the park, one of them called out to his friend loud enough that anyone in the park could hear and said, "it sure must suck to have to sleep in the cold park! It must be time to get a job." While some members of the homeless community had jobs and worked throughout the week, the discourse of laziness assumed that to be an impossibility for the skaters. Following the statement about getting a job, the group of people I was sitting with ignored the statement, but the concept of referring to the homeless community as lazy was constantly reinforced through discursive acts such as this.

In line with the discourse of laziness, the skaters also regularly referred to the homeless community as a "bunch of drunks." The skaters talked about the homeless community as drunks throughout several of my interviews. Stephen explained that, "most of 'em (homeless community) just sit around and drink themselves to death." While Stephen did not provide context for this statement in terms of why it was important to

share, Kyle talked about the homeless community as drunks by saying that, “all they do is drink, beg for more money and then drink some more before moving on to somewhere else. I mean seriously, go get a job and stop feeling bad for yourself.” The statement by Kyle links the idea of drunkenness to laziness and positions the homeless community as a group of people who are not worth worrying about. The need to point out the ways that some members of the homeless community drink appears to be less about the action of drinking alcohol, and more about a broader conceptualization of what kind of people make up the homeless community.

Through the action of talking about the homeless community as drunks, the skaters were describing them in terms of their usefulness to society. This was most apparent through an additional comment made by Kyle as he said,

why should I feel bad for people who choose to sit around and drink all day. I know they get a bunch of money from people and they waste all [of] it. If you aren't going to do something to make your life better, I am not going to waste my time, I don't know I mean waste my time by, um, thinking that they do anything to help out.

The discourses of laziness and drunkenness were uniquely tied to the skaters' views of the homeless community not contributing within society. Ultimately, while various members of the homeless community explained themselves in terms of desiring to change their lives and move beyond their current position, the skaters discussed the homeless community in terms of their decisions to waste all of their money on alcohol. The discourse of drunkenness was then developed alongside a discourse of laziness to

position the homeless community as subordinate to the skaters' conceptions of what it means to be a contributing member of society.

The last theme of hostility that emerged through my data was that of the skaters considering the homeless community to be inconsiderate. Although the word inconsiderate was never used to describe the homeless community throughout my interviews, it describes the multiple ways that the skaters spoke negatively about the homeless community. For instance, when I asked Ashley what the worst things about other people in the park were, she responded by telling me that, "sometimes the homeless people can just be so mean you know." Ashley's experience with the homeless community relates to Jason's statement wherein he said that, "the homeless people are assholes. They yell at us and get in our way and leave their trash and shit all over the park. It gets old." In addition, Kyle explained that, "every now and again some homeless people are just shitty... They just have nothing better to do but sit around and act like 'douche bags' and stuff." Ashley, Jason, and Kyle all described the homeless community in different ways, but each pointed out how the homeless community often acted like "assholes" or "jerks." While these explanations of the homeless community were sometimes linked to specific experiences, they were often generalizations about the nature of the homeless community.

Through discursive acts, the skaters regularly discussed the homeless community as lazy, drunks, or in various ways as being inconsiderate. These discursive acts provided a sense of community for the skaters and while conflict and hostility toward the homeless community was not always present, it is telling of the culture of the skaters. These three discourses about the homeless positioned the skaters at a moral or ethical high ground.

The discourses of laziness and drunkenness elevated the position of the skaters by implicitly claiming that they were not these things. Similarly, the discourses surrounding the homeless community being inconsiderate positioned the skaters as the group of people in the park who are considerate or kind. Overall, each of these discourses served to provide a sense of community for the skaters and positioned the homeless community as an other or group of outsiders that needed to continually be explained as separate from the skaters.

Each of the communities in City Park spoke of the other in hostile ways, but these discourses of hostility demonstrate both power relations and performances of group identity. The ability to talk about the other group of people in the park in hostile ways was a key characteristic of being considered a part of the group within the park. The discursive acts that I observed through conversation and interviews helped me to understand the ways that individuals in City Park understood themselves in relation to those around them. Primarily, this was through shared experiences of considering oneself homeless or coming to the park to skateboard and having the ability to talk about the other group in a hostile manner. Each of these types of discursive acts serve to constantly (re)organize the individuals within City Park. As was noted, being a part of the homeless community required being homeless in a particular way that was evident through the discursive acts that individuals engaged in. The discourses of hostility draw upon many power-laden, macro-level discourses that are enacted through local-level acts within City Park that I will further analyze in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The findings represented in the previous chapter described three major themes that emerged through the initial analysis of my field notes and interview transcripts. In doing so, the discursive acts that I observed and participated in throughout my time in City Park provided a rich set of data to contemplate the primary question of inquiry that has guided this study. To review, the question of inquiry was, how do discursive acts within a public park organize individuals' subject positions and social practices?

Throughout the following discussion of my research findings, I will answer this question in terms of both my findings and the theoretical underpinnings represented through my review of relevant literature. In order to respond to this question in depth, I will first review my findings to provide context for the following discussion. Next, I will explain the various ways that different levels of discourse intersected within City Park to organize the people within the park. Then, I will analyze the discourses that have emerged in terms of power at the macro-level, which relates to the primary tenets of Critical Theory and at the local-level in terms of subjectivities.

The first theme that emerged through my findings was that of my initial experiences with the homeless community in City Park and the continually changing discourse of being called Rich Fuck. Being called Rich Fuck demonstrated a tension that was regularly (re)negotiated through the local-level discourses surrounding my involvement with the homeless community. Initially, the nickname was used to express

the ways that I was noticeably separate and disconnected from the homeless community as well as a term used to intimidate me. Over time, the term remained a discourse of separation, but was held in tension with a playful spirit of joking with me much like the homeless community regularly communicated with one another. The tension between inclusion and exclusion was demonstrated through this nickname and was also related to a separation of class expressed by the homeless community. In this manner, I was always positioned as an outsider that was a friend of the homeless community, but not a member of the community. This theme of inclusion and exclusion is important as the discourses surrounding my title of Rich Fuck played a role in organizing the homeless community and my relation to the homeless community.

The next theme identified in my findings was the way that discourse (re)constituted symbolic boundaries within City Park, imbued material objects with meaning, and organized the communities of people within the park. City Park was then organized and understood in terms of the discursive acts engaged in by the communities of people in the park. Group identity and a hostility toward the other was the final theme that emerged through my field notes and interview transcripts. This theme encompassed ideas discussed in the first two themes and elaborated upon the various ways that discourses about self and others served to organize and make sense of the world for people within City Park. Each of these themes have complicated and extended the literatures used to ground this study. Returning to the theoretical discussions based in organizational communication research will help to analyze and discuss my findings in terms of discourse, organizing, and power.

Discourse and Organizing

Organizational communication scholars have regularly embraced discourse perspectives to explain the ways in which organizations come to be (Hardy, 2004), sustain coordinated action (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004), or resist commonplace understandings of what it means to be a particular way within an organization (Trethewey, 1999; 2001). Engaging in this study beyond a traditional organization has complicated these concepts while demonstrating the ways that discourses organize everyday life within City Park. I've grounded this study by discussing the ways that various levels of discourse (local to macro) mutually constitute organization (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000b; Grant et al., 2001). Similarly, the local-level discourses within City Park that provided the data for my findings intersect and draw upon macro-level discourses to organize people within City Park. In this section, I discuss the ways in which the themes in my findings that were derived from local-level discourses in City Park can be understood in terms of the literature guiding this study and intersect with macro-level discourses that organize society.

As I began my study in City Park and was given the nickname "Rich Fuck," discourses that organized the park quickly became apparent. First, by calling me Rich Fuck, Carl noted he was trying to both intimidate me and make it known that I was not one of the members of the homeless community. During this initial encounter, Carl loudly explained to me that "these are the homeless." Referring to the group of people as homeless was not only done by Carl, but various members of the homeless community described themselves this way throughout the duration of my study. The discourse of homelessness for members of the homeless community was not a discourse surrounded

by shame as the skaters would have discussed it, but a subject position embraced by members of the community to explain their experiences and reason for being in City Park. Ultimately, the discourse of homelessness was the defining feature that allowed for people to be a member of the homeless community. I, the outsider and the Rich Fuck, could never be “one of them.”

The discourse of homelessness is not unlike the discourse of professionalism as discussed by Trethewey (1999) in that an unspoken, but called upon and powerful, understanding of what it meant to be homeless organized members of City Park. Some people defined homelessness in terms of needing to get out of the park or move beyond this period in their life. However, the discourse of homelessness draws upon a greater discussion and macro-level discourse of class. Members of the homeless community wanted to move beyond their current position, not be stared at by others in society as they asked for money, and ultimately made it clear that I could not fully understand or engage with their experiences. By labeling me “rich,” the discourse of homelessness is further linked to a macro-level discourse of class as related to capitalism and economic means. Although the homeless community discussed themselves as being kind, caring for one another, and greatly enjoying their friendships within City Park, their descriptions about homelessness can also be linked to a desire for economic success. This is similar to the way that Trethewey (1999) discussed the discourse of professionalism as being related to gender and male privilege. Professionalism is constantly linked to masculinity just as the discourse of homelessness is related to class. In either case, the discourse organized the ways that people understood me, themselves, and the world around them.

The second theme derived from my findings discussed the ways in which space in the park was discursively organized and linked to a feeling of ownership or trespassing for the communities within City Park. The homeless community and the skaters regularly talked about what parts of the park they could use and hostility emerged when lines were crossed such as a member of the homeless community sitting on a ledge that could be used to skateboard. Material aspects of the park were then imbued with meaning and served to organize the park as members of the community understood what was “theirs” compared to “ours.” Fairhurst and Putnam (2004) discussed the relationship between discursively constituted structural components of an organization and local-level discursive acts by stating that the structural components of an organization inform discursive acts, but remain negotiable. Similarly, Taylor et al. (1996) noted that as text and conversation are distanced, objects or policies take on an agency of their own to continue to organize and reinforce the status quo. In light of these concepts, the various skate features, benches, and ledges were imbued with meaning through local-level discursive acts and the meaning was then distanced to guide future moments of action and organization. As the skaters and the homeless community interacted daily, material aspects of the park reinforced discursively constituted boundaries and understandings of ownership. In this way, discourses within City Park regarding space and material objects served to sustain coordinated actions that continually (re)organized people in the park.

The spaces that were regularly occupied by the skaters and the homeless community were not however fixed or static, but could be considered to be “grounded in action” (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004). The demarcation of spaces in the park occurred through ongoing discursive activities. Much like Fairhurst and Putnam (2004) discussed

the cyclical and mutually constitutive arrangement of micro/local-level discourses and macro-level discourses, the daily interactions within City Park intersected and related to the distanced discourses and material objects. However, as the objects that were imbued with meaning were negotiable and regularly changed depending on who was in the park at a given time. Whenever City Park was highly populated with members of the homeless and skater communities, the park was often (re)organized in terms of the taken for granted meanings that had been ascribed to the material objects. Skate features would once again become the property of the skaters and benches or picnic tables belonged to members of the homeless community.

The final theme addressed in my findings related to the strong sense of group identity that emerged and was tied to a hostility toward the “other.” Boden (1994) described talk within organizations as being far more meaningful than it is often conceived of as. Talk and interactions within organizations moves beyond the act of just communicating, but relate to the identities of organizational members and serve to situate individuals within a particular organization or society. Within City Park, group identity was fostered through talk, or discursive acts, and was regularly related to discourses about the “other.” The homeless community discussed the skaters in terms of them being children that were rich or spoiled. Conversely, the skaters discussed the homeless community by claiming that they were lazy and drunks that didn’t make any effort to change their lives. Each group spoke of the other group and told stories related to being treated poorly by the other group. All of these discourses served to strengthen an identity that was related to a form of disdain for the other (being either skaters, the homeless community, or occasionally the entire rest of society). In order to embrace the subject

position (Weedon, 1997) of either “skater” or “homeless” required engaging in discursive acts that represented hostility toward the opposing group of people.

The discourses of hostility that organized a sense of group identity are also connected to the macro-level discourse of class, which is inherently tied to capitalism in contemporary Western society. By naming me Rich Fuck, the homeless community drew a distinction based on class between myself and their community of people. Similarly, the skaters discussed the laziness or drunkenness of the homeless community in terms of their inability to remove themselves from their current position. While the skaters assumed that members of the homeless community needed to “go get a job,” they insinuated that this was the only means for them to be successful adults. However, members of the homeless community talked about the skaters as a bunch of children, which positioned members of the homeless community as adults that had reached an important level of maturity. This discourse regarding mature adults versus children incapable of doing things themselves resists the discourse of class and will be attended to more fully in the following section.

Each of the themes discussed above demonstrate various ways that the local-level discourses that I participated in and observed served to organize City Park. One overarching theme that runs through each of the other themes is that of tension. As my relationship with the homeless community developed, the tension of me being both included within the community yet separate from the community was highlighted. Next, the discursively constituted symbolic boundaries within City Park were both fixed in one sense, and constantly negotiated through hostile encounters. Lastly, a tension emerged as the communities in City Park spoke in hostile manners about one another. The hostile

discourses that were used to define the “other” group of people within City Park simultaneously defined the other group in negative ways while further developing an understanding of what it meant to be a “skater” or “homeless.” Consequently, each of these discourses, local-levels of talk, created and recreated how I was known to the participants of the park, the spatial boundaries of the park, and the social identities of the participants of the park. These meanings organized the lives of the park participants and did it in a way that was tension-filled and consistently negotiated. Each of these tensions are connected to the macro-level discourse of class, which is analyzed in terms of power in the next section.

Power and a Political Public Park

While other macro-level discourses could be discussed in relation to the local-level discourses observed within City Park, I think each of the themes falls into a greater discussion of class as the key large-scale discourse drawn upon in the local interactions. The macro-level discourse of class is based in capitalism and can be considered a form of instrumental reasoning (Habermas, 1984, 1987) that distorts the understanding of what it means to be successful. Class as related to capitalism is instrumental in that it supports a form of reasoning that positions economic status and the ability to achieve in the financial world above other forms of success that could be imagined through communicative rationality. For Marcuse (1964), this form of instrumental reasoning promotes one-dimensionality insomuch as reflecting upon life beyond economic success becomes unlikely. Much like Deetz (1992) discussed the various ways that corporate culture, practices, and reasoning had colonized the lifeworld of individuals, the discourses of class and economic stature colonized the lifeworlds of individuals in City Park. In order

to problematize the ways in which the discourse of class is called upon within City Park to privilege certain ways of being over others, I begin with a discussion of myself as Rich Fuck and what it means to be homeless. Following this, I discuss the discourses of laziness, drunkenness, and age/maturity.

The separation between myself being labeled Rich Fuck and the homeless community points specifically to a class distinction wherein the perception of my “richness” was the dividing characteristic. Prior to any other conversation being possible I was separated from the homeless community. Further, the discourse and subject position of homelessness was defined in terms of class and the desire to make changes based upon economic stature. Throughout my interviews and other interactions with members of the homeless community, a separate group of people who identified as homeless was discussed as the people that “give us (the homeless) a bad name” by not desiring or trying to “turn their life around.” To be properly homeless then was to at least attempt to climb the economic and capitalist ladder to success. In this manner, being homeless was defined in terms of desiring an alternative that related to a change in class. While members of the homeless community defined what it meant to be homeless in this way, skaters viewed the homeless community in terms of their perceived laziness and drunkenness.

The discourses of laziness and drunkenness used by the skaters to describe the homeless community further reproduced class distinctions and privilege. Considering the homeless community to be lazy or “drunks” was not a statement only connected to the perceived actions of members of the homeless community, but is tied to instrumental rationality (Habermas, 1984, 1987). It certainly was not the mere action of sitting around

and drinking, as the skaters regularly partook in similar forms of leisure, but the ways in which the homeless community was considered to be lazy or “drunks” is related to common statements such as, “pull yourself up by the bootstraps.” Instead of drunkenness being talked about in terms of communal health or participation in conversation, it is tied to the ability of the homeless people to be “properly” productive in line with a capitalist ideology. As such, these discourses connect the class distinctions with contemporary notions of capitalism. Furthermore, a tension exists because the homeless community discussed sitting around and drinking in terms of friendship, fun, and survival. However, the skaters hostile remarks about the homeless communities actions demonstrated the many ways that actions are connected to class and capitalist ideology. In this way, the discourses of drunkenness and laziness relate to Heracleous’s (2012) discussion of discourse as always being hegemonic. Although the homeless community drinks and talks about their community in terms of the enjoyment they get from drinking with one another, it cannot be disconnected from their perceived inability to be financially successful and productive in the social world. This type of hegemonic tension is further drawn upon through the discussion of age/maturity.

The homeless community talked about the skaters in terms of their being like children who were inexperienced, immature, and lacked the ability to understand life in the mature ways. As previously mentioned, this was not due to the age of the skaters as most of them were between 25-30, but discussing the skaters in this way provided a subject position of maturity for members of the homeless community. Tension once again emerges here as the homeless community espoused a certain form of maturity that resisted the previous discourses of laziness and drunkenness. The action of calling the

skaters “kids” organized the identity of the homeless community in relation to the other immature members of the park. The homeless community was then resisting the macro-level discourse of class and capitalism, which positioned members of the homeless community as immature through the discourses of laziness and drunkenness within City Park.

This tension makes sense in light of Mumby’s (1997) rereading of Gramsci wherein he discussed the problem of hegemony in terms of the constant tension between resistance and domination. Although the homeless community resisted classed discourses by proclaiming the skaters as children and themselves as mature adults, many members of the homeless community imagined progressing up the economic ladder to leave behind their state of homelessness. In doing so, the homeless community simultaneously resisted the macro-level discourse of class rooted in capitalism while actively participating in the ideological hopes for financial security, and therefore a classed sense of maturity.

Overall, the question of inquiry that has guided this study has been responded to in the following ways. The overarching theme that ties each of these responses to the question of inquiry is tension. By tension, I am calling attention to the ways that discursive acts labeled me as Rich Fuck, which both separated me from the homeless community and became a token of acceptance. Similarly, contestations over space within City Park imbued material elements of the park with meaning to organize individuals into spaces defined by their discursively constituted needs within the park. However, as has been demonstrated, the needs of the two groups of people within City Park were not always satisfied by the symbolic boundaries that were created, which relates to a tension between a sense of ownership within City Park and a desire for more. The homeless

community desired more places where they could feel as though they were not being harassed and the skaters desired more places to skateboard. City Park is then a complicated place that is understood through discourses related to satisfaction, need, and desire. Lastly, through each group's statements of hostility toward the opposing group, they embraced various subject positions to define who they were. Each group understood themselves to be harassed by the "other" and embraced a vision of themselves as more mature or at least better at living and understanding contemporary society. As discourse organized City Park in terms of space and identity, the discursive acts were always political and were often connected to the macro-level discourse of class, which served to mutually organize City Park.

The discourses of me as the Rich Fuck, the homeless community as lazy and "drunks," and the skaters as immature children each drew on the macro-level discourse of class as rooted in capitalism. In doing so, the local-level discourses that I observed and co-created within City Park regularly intersected with macro-level discourses to mutually constitute understandings of the world and organize the park participants. However, as I have demonstrated here, the discursive acts within City Park are not neutral, but are hegemonic (Heracleous, 2012) and rooted in instrumental rationality (Habermas, 1984, 1987). The same macro-level discourse of class that is rooted in capitalism is a strong force that organizes much of the rest of society and can ultimately lead to one-dimensionality (Marcuse, 1964) wherein any sort of reflection upon the "true" needs of humanity is overlooked for the needs of systems. The ways in which public parks need to be thought about in terms of power are further elaborated upon in the following chapter.

CHAPTER SIX: IMPLICATIONS

This study was conducted in part to explore the abilities of recent organizational communication literature to offer insights in areas of society and human interaction that are not regularly conceptualized in terms of organizing. Having studied discursive acts and interactions at City Park, two primary implications can be offered due to this study. First, this study offers an interesting way to conceptualize the importance of interactions in public parks and conceptualizes public parks as significant places of meaning making and organizing. Next, when the findings from this study are used to reflect back upon more traditional forms of organizational communication research, the importance of thinking about organizations as constituted in discourse is both complicated and enhanced. Each of these implications provides useful directions for future research and I discuss these below.

I began this study by noting that public parks are often considered places for leisure activities, which can lead to them being discussed as places that are not connected to significant forms of meaning making. However, Crawford (1995) discussed public parks as areas that are ideally free from oppression, but can often be places that serve to reinforce the ideologies that guide the rest of society. Similarly, Arantes (1996) talked about the many ways that public parks can be filled with diverse populations of people that regularly end up segregating themselves from one another due to differences such as preferred forms of respite, class, or race. This study has demonstrated that City Park was

an important place for meaning making, identity formation, and group organization. Furthermore, in line with Crawford's (1995) observation, the discursive acts within City Park ultimately served to reinforce ideologies (of class and capitalism within this study) that inform the rest of society. In future studies, it would be important for public parks to be considered significant places of meaning making that are constantly negotiated within the realms of power and politically laden language.

The framework derived from organizational communication research that guided this study was useful in thinking about the organizing qualities of discourse within City Park. Focusing on the intersection between discourse, organizing, and power highlighted the many ways that people within City Park understood the world around them, their own identities, and provided a unique perspective regarding the ways the communities of people within City Park organized themselves. Embracing a CCO perspective of organization also helped to describe the ways that material objects within public parks can be imbued with meaning and understood in (un)common ways for the people that populate a public park. Ultimately, grounding this study in organizational communication research provided an interesting perspective to talk about interactions within a public park that draws attention on the many ways that meaning is constituted, organized, and maintained or resisted. Thus, taking organizational communication research beyond the organization (Cheney, 2007) has demonstrated that public parks can be understood to be contested locations where people may organize and embrace various ways of knowing the world.

Beyond providing an interesting way to think about public parks, this study also informs more traditional studies of organizational communication. The Montreal School

(Taylor, 2000; Taylor & Robichaud, 2004; Taylor & Van Every, 2000) has ontologized organization as a communicative construction starting from local-level processes of text and conversation that are ultimately scaled up and distanced. While this framework adequately describes the ways that organizations come to be through communication, my focus on local-levels of discourse within City Park has demonstrated that organizing happened in City Park in similar ways as it would in a more traditional organization. People in City Park cooriented around objects or issues of interest such as the reasons for why they were in City Park and material objects and symbolic boundaries were organized. Further, this research also challenges the Montreal School's CCO model by suggesting that power is an important component of organizing at the local-level and throughout the process of distancing. As individuals within City Park cooriented around objects of concern, they did so in power-laden ways most specifically related to the macro-level discourse of class. The concept of distancing then can be further complicated to ask what is being distanced? The findings of this study reveal tensions and contestation as processes by which meanings were negotiated and distanced. As such, the tensions themselves were distanced to become the way the park was organized. In other words, the local-level tensions surrounding the negotiation of relations among individuals, identities, space, and material objects constituted the park. Consequently, the findings of this study challenge the Montreal School's discussion of distancing by extending it to include the ways in which meaning is distanced in the midst of tension and power-laden relationships.

In light of the ways that this study challenges and extends the Montreal School's CCO model (Taylor, 2000; Taylor & Robichaud, 2004; Taylor & Van Every, 2000),

organizational communication research can continue to become better equipped to attend to a variety of social issues and phenomena. This is significant as communication, or discourse more specifically, can be thought of in terms of the many ways that it can organize the lived experiences of individuals in a diverse set of contexts throughout society. In this manner, I have hoped to demonstrate that organizational communication research is equipped to do as Cheney (2007) had hoped, to move beyond the organization to address different social issues for new audiences.

The implications mentioned above provide for a few ways that I can see future research benefitting from this study as well as how this type of study could continue to be explored. First, public parks have been demonstrated to be significant places of meaning making and organizing. Future studies should continue to explore public parks in terms of discourse, organizing, and power to better understand the significance and potential of public parks within contemporary society. Next, organizational communication researchers should consider public parks as an interesting stepping stone to move beyond the traditional organization as this study of City Park has begun the process of understanding the ways that discourse organizes people in everyday life. However, this study by no means has provided a complete understanding of organizing within public parks and further research would be needed to better understand the relationship between organizing and interactions in a public park. Lastly, as organizational communication researchers continue to explore organization and communication, it would be interesting to continue to relate the communicative processes that constitute the large structures often thought about as organizations to additional sites where these processes are inevitably taking place. Perhaps there are many discursive acts happening daily that have the

potential to be scaled up. Research that offered a distinction between the organizing processes that become the grand organizations that are often thought about and the local-level organizing processes within everyday life could be useful in further contemplating the potentiality of organization in everyday talk.

At this point, it is also necessary to discuss the limitations that this study has faced. One major limitation of this study was the constraint of time. Having spent seven weeks in City Park for roughly 20 hours per week provided a rich set of data, but a longer period of time more consistent with ethnography could have served to provide even richer insights. An additional limitation to this study relates to the strong focus on organizational communication research to ground this study. In focusing specifically on organizational communication research to explore the organizing practices of a public park, other ways of understanding public parks and the unique aspects of the public nature of the park were not discussed. The public aspect of the park makes it a unique and atypical site for study. As such, if the rich literature on public place and space was utilized to describe the significance of public parks as unique places within society, then this study might have offered more insights to the literature on public places. Had I embraced various discussions of power and public place, for instance, the findings of this study could have been bolstered or complicated in intriguing ways. Future research could call upon additional communication scholars that have studied public places such as parks to further inform this type of research. Investigating other ways of thinking about public parks and blending them with this organizational communication approach would add to and complicate this study while allowing for this study to contribute to greater conversations revolving around publics, place, and space.

CONCLUSION

This study began with the emphasis that the study of discourse and power in organizational communication has offered many insights that are valuable, and that these insights should be taken out of the organizational communication literature and applied to other sites of study. City Park was a unique site to apply organizational communication insights to, as the park does not possess many of the characteristics that are often applied to organizations. For example, City Park does not have explicit hierarchies, defined workplace practices and rituals, or structures that define many organizations. However, organizational communication scholars have largely agreed that organizations are not things, but are constituted in communication (Putnam, 1983; Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000a; Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004; Taylor & Robichaud, 2004). The interactions and relationships in City Park were interesting in light of this as individuals constituted their own sense of identity and understanding of the world with others in the park. The manner in which individuals in the park organized their experiences together was worth investigating through an organizational communication lens as the interactions were free of the explicitly power-laden relationships that are attributed to organizational settings. However, power-laden relationships and discourses (such as class and capitalism) influenced and were influenced by the discursive acts within City Park. Much like Deetz (1992) was concerned with the way that the lifeworld was being colonized by corporations through managerialism, professionalism, and everyday workplace practices,

City Park was colonized by instrumental reasoning related to the macro-level discourse of class sponsored by contemporary forms of capitalism.

In addition to understanding the many ways that individuals in City Park made sense of their subjectivities, this study offers insights to better understand organized life outside formal corporate organizations. Through my being named Rich Fuck, the contestations over space, and group identity as related to hostility toward the other, it was evident that the two communities that populated City Park organized themselves and the park through discursive acts. Scholars such as Trethewey (1999) have looked into the ways women understand themselves as professionals in the workplace. In line with this, the workplace has been demonstrated to be an important place for meaning making and identity creation, but I would suggest that places often considered mundane such as a public park also contribute in significant ways to meaning making and identity creation. These interactions could take place anywhere, but focusing on a public park proved to be an interesting and useful way to talk about the organizing and constitutive characteristics of discourse and communication.

Overall, this study of City Park is an attempt to take organizational communication research beyond the organization (Cheney, 2007). In doing so, the data has provided interesting ways to think about public parks and the relationship between communication and organization. It is my hope that this study has proved itself to be interesting and that future research can continue to pursue this avenue of inquiry. To do so, it seems as though it would be wise to continually seek strictly communicative understandings of organization (Koschmann, 2010). Then, from these strictly communicative understandings, places such as public parks, social issues, or other

phenomena can be addressed from a unique position grounded in the rich insights provided over the last four to five decades of organizational communication research.

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APPENDIX A

Institutional Review Board Letter of Approval



DIVISION OF RESEARCH & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
Office of Research Compliance
 Institutional Review Board
 humansubjects@boisestate.edu | (phone) 208.426.5401 | MS 1138

DATE: July 19, 2013

TO: Jared Kopczynski (PI)
John McClellan (co-PI)

FROM: Office of Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board (IRB)

SUBJECT: IRB Notification of Approval
Project Title: *Organizing livelihoods: An Examination of Discourse(s) Organizing Public Places*

The Boise State University IRB has approved your protocol application. Your protocol is in compliance with this institution's Federal Wide Assurance (#0000097) and the DHHS Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46).

Review Type: Expedited, Category #7	Approval Number: 008-SB13-038
Date of Approval: July 19, 2013	Expiration Date: July 18, 2014

Your approval is effective for 12 months. If your research is not finished within the allotted year, the protocol must be renewed before expiration date indicated above. The Office of Research Compliance will send a reminder notice approximately 30 days prior to the expiration date. The principal investigator has the primary responsibility to ensure a RENEWAL FORM is submitted in a timely manner. If the protocol is not renewed before the expiration date, a new protocol application must be submitted for IRB review and approval.

Under BSU regulations, each protocol has a three-year life cycle and is allowed two annual renewals. Please note that if your research is not complete by July 18, 2016, a new protocol application must be submitted, rather than a third annual renewal form.

All additions or changes to your approved protocol must also be brought to the attention of the IRB for review and approval before they occur. Complete and submit a MODIFICATION FORM indicating any changes to your project. When your research is complete or discontinued, please submit a FINAL REPORT FORM. An executive summary or other documents with the results of the research may be included.

All relevant forms are available online. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Office of Research Compliance, 208-426-5401 or humansubjects@boisestate.edu.

Thank you and good luck with your research.

Dr. Mary E. Pritchard
 Chairperson
 Boise State University Social & Behavioral Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX B

Supplemental Documents

Interview Protocol

Prior to the interview through participant observation I would have ascertained that the individual was regularly at the park.

- What brings you to the park today?
 - o How often do you come to the park?
 - o Do you come here with a group of people?
 - o How long have you been coming to the park?
 - o Tell me about a typical day at the park
- Why do you come to this park rather than other parks or locations?
 - o What does this park mean to you?
 - Why? (general follow up)
 - o Are there particular aspects of the park make it a place that you choose to spend time?
 - What are they? Why are they important? Was there a moment that illustrates this? – or follow up per response...
- How would you describe other people that use the park?
 - o What are the best things about other people at this park?
 - o What are the worst things about other people at the park?
 - o How are people similar or different than you?
 - o Do people in the park generally get along?
- How do you typically interact with other people in the park?
 - o Tell me about a great interaction you have had with others...Tell me about an experience that was not so great...

- What was your best experience at this park?
 - o Why was this such a great experience...
- What was your worst experience at this park?
 - o Why was this such a bad experience for you?
 - o What would have made this a better experience?
- Is there anything else about your experiences in the park that you would like to share?