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Viewing organizing through a feminist lens: The discursive and material creations of individual and organization identities.

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Abstract
In recent years, feminist scholars have made substantial inroads toward a better understanding of the intricacies and complexities of organizing. Through the metatheoretical lens of a "feminist communicology of organization," gender is seen as a dynamic principle of organizing, and organizations are seen as fundamentally gendered. By looking at both the macro- and micro-level activities of gendered organizing, we obtain a much richer, organic understanding of the processes inherent in creating and sustaining organizations.

*Such an approach helps us to understand one of the newest forms of organization-the virtual one-that exists both discursively and materially **only** in the virtual world. To better understand how organizing is accomplished in the virtual world, we have chosen to focus on the postings to a "renegade" web site called "Teamster.net." This site was established by and for members of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters but is not sanctioned by The Teamsters. Through content analysis, we studied the ongoing discussions concerning if, and how, this site should be moderated, and by whom.*

We found that these chat room dialogues exhibit the key characteristics of multiple discourses occurring simultaneously. Contributors are both social actors and the objects of multiple discourses that seek to normalize and control these actors, often occurring in disjunctive and contradictory ways. While contributors acknowledge the need for both social equality and respect, their mechanisms for dealing with these contradictions are most often unconscious; in psychoanalytic terms, compromise formations. Thus we offer this deeper understanding of virtual organizations through the metatheoretical lens of feminist communicology and the theoretical lens of compromise formations.

Key words: Feminist communicology, compromise formations, organizing

As research into the nature and extent of organizing has enveloped feminist strategies, a new framework for a deeper and richer understanding of organizations has emerged: i.e., the "feminist communicology of organizing" (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004b). The six premises of the framework serve as tools to examine (gendered) communication processes in the workplace. Arguing that all organizations are inherently gendered and that gender is a fundamental principle of organizing, Ashcraft and Mumby (2004b) suggest that a metatheoretical approach to studying organizations and organizing is required which views an organization as an *enduring* social structure, offers the tools needed to analyze the structure as a *material* object, and incorporates both social and institutional contexts in the analysis. Thus their approach to studying organizing is both conceptual and analytical, situating everyday actions within the broader theories of feminism and gendered relations.

To begin this exploration, we have chosen to focus our research on the postings to a "renegade" web site called "Teamster.net." This site was established by and for members of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters but is not sanctioned by The Teamsters. In fact, organizers of the site have indicated that the union has been trying to shut it down since it was launched in mid-2002. The site appears to cater to individuals who want to converse about union-related issues in a public space but do not want to, or are unable to, appear in more traditional public spaces such as union meetings.

Chat rooms are possibly the newest form of organizing in action. But since the medium is so new, we know virtually nothing about how individuals are influenced and changed through participation in a site, especially when the postings are influenced by an organization, its leaders, or organizational activities. Research into the multitude of uses and effects of electronic media is young. It is only in the last decade that widespread installation of these tools has made possible both routine and not-so-routine electronic communication between individuals and within organizations. Dialogue in a chat room can be simultaneously more equalizing and less respectful. The ability to post anonymously has the potential of equalizing contributions, or at least of eliminating preference based on name or position. (It does not, as we demonstrate below, eliminate other forms of preference based on, for instance, language use or misuse.) We know of no models of interactivity associated with individual development and change via chat-room postings. Nor is there any available research focusing on the interconnectivity of the knowledge economy, gender, organizing, and electronic communication media.

Ashcraft and Mumby's (2004) model of organizing suggests that organizational and individual identities can best be examined by evaluating the relationships between gender, discourse, organizing, and power. Their framework consists of six basic elements: (1) a feminist perspective of subjectivity that is unessential, unstable, and evolutionary; (2) a privileging of the contradictory nature of dynamic, resistive power relations in everyday communication; (3) inclusion of historical context which gives rise to dominant discourses; (4) acknowledgement that organizational discourse has "tangible effects on real, flesh-and-blood people" (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004b, p. 78); (5) a fundamentalist notion of gender, and the dialectics of masculinity and femininity; (6) an ethic of political engagement that uncovers discursive mechanisms that privilege the status quo. Finally, they situate the model at the intersection of modern and postmodern theorizing, incorporating the materialism and dominance that are inherent in modernity with postmodernity's notions of discourse, identity, power, and organizing, "a view that moves beyond essentialism and toward irony and contradiction" (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004b, pp. 111-112). It is this contradiction that we are most interested in as we explore Teamster.net.

Thus we begin our paper with a discussion of feminist communicology. We then situate Teamster.net website within this framework before proceeding to identify contradictions inherent in this act of organizing.

The feminist communicology of organizing

Ashcraft and Mumby (2004b) open their discussion of a feminist notion of organizing by first exploring the modernist-postmodernist-critical triumvirate that frames organizational studies. They situate their model at the intersection of modern and postmodern theorizing, incorporating essentialism and relativity in the same model. Thus gender, discourse, organizing, and power are both constitutive and productive of the act of organizing as evidenced in their six-element framework of subjectivity, resistance, history, materiality, masculinity/femininity, and an ethic of political engagement.

Subjectivity

Ashcraft and Mumby (2004b) seek to redefine the agent/identity dichotomy in modern organizations by suggesting that a much more powerful concept of subjectivity derives from the acknowledgement of the multiplicity of identities, discourses, organizations, and actions that exist simultaneously. This is, in part, a melding of feminist's values of agency and identity with the postmodernist position of the decentered self. "We see no contradiction between viewing people as both decentered selves who are the product of multiple discourses and as agents who engage in the social world in an active and meaningful way" (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004b, p. 119). Identity construction is an evolutionary process that happens in a range of contexts and through a variety of discourses which simultaneously complete, complement, contradict, and resist each other.

Resistance

Long positioned as a reactive affect of domination and control, resistance takes on a much more holistic meaning in Ashcraft and Mumby's model. Instead of the dualistic definition of power that is prevalent in most organizational research, they suggest that a more fruitful approach is dialectic which examines power as disjunctive and contradictory discursive formations of day-to-day communicative events.

History

Again citing apparent inadequacies in many models of organization, Ashcraft and Mumby (2004a, 2004b) position the third element of their model-history-as providing contextual understanding of the ever-changing economic, political, and cultural forces that influence organizing and help shape organizations. An historical perspective provides two benefits. First, it enables researchers to explore developing discourses in the context of the already established discourses. Second, it acknowledges the evolutionary nature of discourse that responds to changes in shifting economic and cultural environments.

Materiality

Materiality enhances the organizing model by acknowledging that communicative processes are enacted by real people in real settings. They do not dismiss the discursive nature of organizations; they just situate them within the material world. This approach is an enhancement of the constitutive nature of communication within the highly politicized context prevalent in most organizations today.

Masculinity/femininity

In the feminist communicology model, individuals within an organization as well as the organization itself are gendered (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004a). Thus their model argues for a fundamental notion of gender that is enacted in multiple ways in multiple settings. Gender is always present in organizing; how it appears is the focus of this model.

Ethic of political engagement

In this model, the ethic of political engagement is a values-driven analysis of the creation and evolution of hierarchies and other forms of structure. Thus it is a process-driven look at how some voices are privileged over others, how some interests and needs take precedence over others, and the resulting consequences of such privileging. Again, Ashcraft and Mumby (2004b) assume that all organizing is privileged; their model seeks to uncover the ways in which day-to-day interaction create organization hierarchies and structure.

Organizing and virtual materiality

The use of postings to the Teamster.net site produces an interesting and unique melding of organizing and the virtual world. Established in 2002 by and for the 1.4-million members of the International Brotherhood of the Teamsters, the website serves as virtual organization of union members, most of whom have never met face-to-face or interacted in any other way. Its stated purpose: "Teamster.Net is a web site built and maintained by Teamster Members who share the idea that Members of the Teamsters Union needs (sic) a common

place to exchange ideas and information" (www.Teamser.net). Thus it is a site of participation and engagement. This participation is just one of the ways that union members create, establish, and recreate their identities.

Most researchers view participation as a positive element of worker identity. This is true of mainstream organizational researchers such as Monge & Miller (1988), Wisman (1997), Deetz (1992), Stohl and Cheney (2001), and Holtzhausen (2002), as well as industry specific scholars, such as Lazes and Savage (1996) and Schurman and Eaton (1996). Holtzhausen initially describes it as an anecdote to "The marginalization of workers in decision-making about their own future…" (p. 30). She then suggests that participation is "the most visible and dominant variable" (p. 33) in workplace democracy, citing more than a dozen scholars who have investigated workplace participation. Wisman (1997) privileges worker-owned and worker-controlled organizations, and then uses "democracy" interchangeably with "participation." Dissatisfied with a simplistic explanation, Cheney (1995) delves into the meaning of participation:

> A system of governance which truly values individual goals and feelings (e.g., equitable remuneration, the pursuit of enriching work and the right to express oneself) as well as typically organizational objectives (e.g., effectiveness and efficiency, reflectively conceived), which actively fosters the connection between those two sets of concerns by encouraging individual contributions to important organizational choices, and which allows for the ongoing modification of the organization's activities and policies by the group (pp.170-171).

From the perspective of the individual, Chaney's definition incorporates self-actualization, voice, and accomplishment, and requires a structure (system), presumably with rules that govern behavior. It is still participation-driven, as evidenced by the phrase "individual contributions to important organizational choices." Thus the act of organizing is multi-faceted, occurring simultaneously at the discursive and materialistic levels. It requires an ethic of participation at the micro level while reacting to the dialectic of control that is inherent in the macro-level practices.

One issue that the organizers of the Teamster website still deal with is the structure of participation. Initially seen as way to equalize voice, the website existed for almost three years with little restraint on postings. But as participation grew, contributors started to demand control, asking, for instance, that some postings be eliminated because of disrespectful language or because a contributor was "hogging" the site. What started out as a purely democratic environment, soon turned into one of debate and derision, leading site administrators to grapple with the process of constraint. It is this grappling that we study here.

The influence of the mind on an ethic of participation

Since participation is a social contract that begins with the individual, it's important to understand how we come to develop ethical stances. Although ethical knowledge has been assumed to be analytic (e.g., Brady 1986), we take the position that management ethics rely upon individual psychodynamics. To some extent, we agree with ethicists who describe ethics as "conversations": i.e., "dialogues people have about their experiences and the abstract principles designed to account for those experiences. . . . The principles are mirrors in which a person examines his or her own moralities" (Kahn, 1990, p. 315). Since the ethic of participation concerns individual dynamics rather than normative or contextual dynamics, we examine this ethic as individual *compromise formations*. Brenner (1982) defines a compromise formation as a consequence of psychic conflict: i.e., a land of paradoxical wish accompanied by unpleasure (p. 7). Brenner (1982) identifies

the components of this type of psychic conflict as drive derivatives, anxiety and depressive affects, defenses, and superego functioning (p.7). Drive derivatives are wishes for gratification of the biological needs of libido and aggression (Brenner, 1982, p. 24). Individuals seek satisfaction of these drives but are not always successful. When their wishes are frustrated, individuals experience anxiety and/or depressive affects and are motivated to defend against the affects. For example, if a child feels that the mother no longer loves him or her, the child experiences depressive affect: i.e., loss of love. Depressive affect occurs as a result of past misfortune and anxiety occurs as a result of anticipated misfortunes. When unpleasurable affects are aroused, individuals do whatever is possible to avoid or reduce the affects. Defenses ward off unpleasurable affects.

The superego is born of the conflict between wishes and unpleasurable affects. As explained by Brenner (1982), "The superego is both a consequence of psychic conflict and a component of it. . . . . The superego is a compromise formation or, to be more precise, a group of compromise formations originating largely in the conflicts of the oedipal phase" (p. 120). In short, the superego has multiple functions. Its moral strictures oppose drive derivatives and conflicts of the oedipal phase, but the superego continues as a component of later conflicts as well.

Brenner (1982) identifies compromise formations as either "normal" or "pathological." A vocational choice is a normal compromise formation (p. 222); neurotic symptoms, such as a fear of flying, are pathological (p. 143-144). The underlying conflict becomes apparent in dialogue through discontinuities in expressed thought: that is, failures of defense in psychoanalytic terms. Shevrin and Dickman (1980) discuss such failures in terms of "discontinuity" (p. 422). They explain, "A discontinuity is inferred when the apparent (i.e., consciously accessible) causal factors for a particular thought, feeling, or act are not, in and of themselves, sufficient to explain its occurrence" (1980, p. 422).

Influenced by Freudian theories of the unconscious, Swogger (1999) addressed "the reality of psychic complexity" and its contribution to studies of "personal and ethical responsibility" in organizations (p. 233). That is, according to Swogger, unconscious dimensions influence behavior, and Swogger posed questions for the Western legal tradition that focuses on *conscious* intent and state of mind. In his discussion, Swogger describes the relevance of the individual *superego* to conscience and ethics.

Swogger generally describes the relevance of depth psychology to organizational ethics, but in this paper, we use empirical data to examine the emergence of ethical democracy. In the following paragraphs, we argue that these ethics are normal compromise formations that occur when an individual seeks to resolve the paradoxes inherent in the practical application of workplace democracy. Thus, to better understand the development and application of workplace democracy, we must first study these compromise formations.

Methodology and description of data

Our data are drawn from the general forum discussions and freight chat rooms on www.Teamster.net. We chose to gather data from Teamster.Net for several reasons. First, web-based organizing is a new phenomenon which obscures the boundaries between the materialistic and discursive. Second, a gendered notion of organizing provides new insight into an abundantly masculine forum. Finally, we can think of no better way to evaluate the validity of a feminist metatheory that privileges a gendered notion of organizing than an abundantly masculine forum. In short, we see in the Teamsters a conflation of gendered identities and issues that are uniquely suited to an exploration of the communicology of

organizing.

Using the qualitative research software NVivo (2002), we utilized a four-step process to identify and analyze postings to the site. First we searched for conversation threads that specifically used such words as "morals," "democracy," "right," "free speech," "equality," and "participation." We then read those postings closely, focusing on a wealth of comments relating to free speech in the context of democracy. Two topics stood out: the role of the Teamster.Net moderator, especially in regards to potentially offensive content; and the propriety of anonymous postings. As of January 2, 2008, there were 6,676 registered users and more than 235,000 posts to eight forums. Teamster.net imposes few restrictions on screen identities. It permits users to contributive through multiple screen names with or without identifying information. It also permits anonymous postings but does prohibit the "hijacking" of another poster's identity.

Based on Ashcraft and Mumby's model, we make the following assumptions: (1) the identities of the moderator, administrators, and contributors to Teamster.net are fluid, and because of the virtual nature of the medium, are perhaps, more erratic than the "real world" ones; (2) Any debate about restrictions to the site will produce contradictory, dynamic, resistive power relations because all communication does so; (3) Any discussion of restrictions occurs within the historical context of the nature of The Teamsters Union and the origins of Teamster.net; (4) Postings to the site and discourse about restricting/controlling those postings have real life effects on the site participants; (5) The unfolding of the discussion is influenced by the gendered nature of the site participants, the union itself, and the medium of electronic communication; (6) The resulting restrictions are heavily influenced by an ethic of engagement and participation that is one of the cornerstones of unionization. Our working hypothesis was that Teamster.Net, a site for Teamsters to exchange ideas and participate in open and democratic forums, would reveal multiple discourses, occurring simultaneously and played out in disjunctive and contradictory ways. That is, we expected to see individual compromise formations apparent in the posts; in dialogue with others, the individual would experience unpleasurable affect and modify a compromise formation.

Sample Data

Since we are particularly interested in discursive contradictions that arise through the management and control of posts to this web site, we chose to read messages posted during the first six months of the site's existence--June 20, 2002, and January 2, 2003. In the passages reproduced below, we have omitted some discussion in order to focus on those passages most relevant to our research. Omissions are noted in the text. In order to familiarize our readers with Teamster.Net, we provide below examples from discussions of the role of the moderator, Phil Ybarrolaza, and examples from discussions regarding anonymity.

Teamsters - Teamster Net Heisler free board

Anonymous
User not Registered Posted 10-07-2002 at 03:56

Phil, is there any chance of getting a Heisler-Free board.
As soon as I see his name 50 times on a page, I wanna puke, and I certainly won't read him. . . . . He's just so dam long winded. He's not a Teamster.
Please block him. I'm not registered yet....but this is Maniac.

JC53Agent
Posted 10-07-2002 at 05:10

Hey Phil;
I agree. Why you won't respond to this I don't know, but certainly there would be no "free speech" issues if you incorporated some sort of ignore feature on this board to allow us to block the incessant "spam" posts that take away from this board so much . . .C'mon Phil, help us out here.

[discussion omitted]

Moderators Needed!
AuthorModerators Needed!
TeamsterNet
Posted 17-07-2002 at 20:05

I would like to assign some people to moderate the various message boards as well as some of the system areas like polls and the calendar. I was
wondering if anyone had any ideas on how to select the moderators. One mandatory requirement is that all moderators must keep their politics separate
from any moderation or system responsibility. If I can do it you can to!
I'm looking for some feedback on how this should be done.

-Phil

[This message was edited by: TeamsterNet on 17-07-2002 20:06]

[some discussion omitted]

Bill
Posted 17-07-2002 at 22:28
Phil
Being a moderator is not at all that difficult, if the person you select has the ability to seperate there personal beliefs and take a middle (moderate) stance on all issues that come before them. Any

The above posts from July 2002 exemplify much of the discussion about the role of the moderator. The following posts from September 2002 and December 2002 discuss anonymity:

Teamsters - Teamster Net 115 meeting.....got a minute?

115 meeting.....got a minute?
Author115 meeting.....got a minute?
FU-Smith
Posted 22-09-2002 at 19:30

Well the September meeting was incredibly

informative! [omitted discussion about lack of information at meeting]

JC53Agent
Posted 26-09-2002 at 10:19

I see that the summer is also over for the "115 whiners" who are so brave to comment on a public forum only days after sitting on their hands when they had the opportunity to speak up. I know those posting here are in the minority of 115 members, but they are the poorest examples of Teamsters you can provide for the world to see.

Anonymous
User not Registered Posted 26-09-2002 at 12:53

To JC53 Agent: Do you know what happens to Local 115 members that speak up? They get fired, laid-off, brought up on charges at the Joint Council and suspended by Hoffa's hand-picked lackeys, hassled, or otherwise screwed for publicly or privately asking a legitmate question.

[part of posting deleted]
There is no democracy.

Teamsters - Teamster Net Controlling Anonymous Posts.
[introductory debate omitted]

Quote
Anonymous
User not Registered Posted 02-12-2002 at 13:01

Why are so many of the people who are always complaining about losing civil liberties and civil rights under the new administration so upset about a person wanting to remain anonymous on a chat board? Isn't it their right? If many of us are forced to register, we will simply leave. It is our right.

[discussion omitted]

scb
Posted 02-12-2002 at 14:17

The major objection I have about going back to the "old" format is that of people posing as others by hijacking their handles. Sometimes you could tell who was posing as who by the IP name posted against the comment, but with the AOL proxies, etc., they could be coming from anywhere. I never appreciated people appropriating MY handle to promote THEIR issues....I thought of it as the basest form of dishonesty then, and still do today. To my mind, having people pose as someone else is an evil that's even worse than the "anonymous" problem....although I grant you that not knowing which individual to address responses to is "gruesome". I'm against "anononymous" posters; however, I'm a strong believer in allowing incognito posts. Those with handles aren't truly anonymous...you have a name to associate comments with and post response to. On the other, those that place their true names (and hence the ability to be "found") on this board seem to be just asking for trouble.

.

We analyze the issues of ethics and voice in the following paragraphs.

Data Analysis

In order to analyze the data, such as that data exemplified above, we looked for "discontinuities" or failures in defenses (Brenner 1922; Shevrin and Dickman, 1980, p. 422). Given our data, discontinuities appear as contradictions, logical inconsistencies, and changes in grammar or spelling. Such discontinuities reveal conflicts, which may or may not be interpretable here due to data limitations. In other words, Teamster.Net is not a therapy group.

The consequences of conflict are compromise formations, as defined by Brenner (1982), and may be normal or pathological. Using the threads about the role of the Moderator and the function of anonymity, we looked for conflicts that result in new, normal compromise formations. The superego as a moral function is itself a compromise formation or group of compromise formations arising in the oedipal phase (Brenner 1982, p. 120). Here, we proceed by providing examples of discontinuities; then we provide an example of a new compromise formation; finally, we interpret the discontinuities to the extent possible with our data. The example of a new compromise formation together with an interpretation of the data provide evidence of emerging ethics through dialogue.

Discontinuities

Sentences and phrases that we consider discontinuous are highlighted and italicized in the following posts. The following posts from July and August 2002, address the problem of free speech on Teamster.Net. The posters are JC53 Agent and the moderator, Phil Ybarrolaza.

JC53Agent
Posted 11-07-2002 at 08:27

I actually enjoy intelligent debate and am a proponent of those who wish to exercise their right to dissent. That, however, is not you. You seem to flood this board like it's your own personal website and I believe you cross the line from someone who simply likes to express his opinion to someone who floods the board for only one purpose: Annoying those that wish to participate. I've seen so many threads die because you post 3 page long cut and paste rebuttals that have no significance to the issue at hand. I wish to employ an "ignore" feature BECAUSE I enjoy intelligent debate. Note the operative word in that last sentence.

JC 53 Agent expresses a contradiction: i.e., he is "a proponent of those who wish to exercise their right to dissent," but "that, however, is not you." In short, he advocates and stifles dissent. The contradiction is a discontinuity and indicates conflict.

TeamsterNet
Posted 10-08-2002 at 08:58

I am entitled to an opinion. I have also moderated TeamsterNet to the highest standard of neutrality!

The moderator's statement that he is "entitled to an opinion" and has "moderated . .. to the highest standard of neutrality" is a discontinuity. If he expresses his opinion, he's not neutral. The discontinuity indicates conflict.

The following posts are responses to the Trent Lott fiasco. We see posts that welcome dissent, but struggle with racist comments.

Vegas Jim

Posted 14-12-2002 at 13:22

anon,

Perhaps you should type a bit slower, as you see I've always found much difficulty in comprehending racism, and those who support and/or excuse it. ***I love discussing and debating issues on this forum, however I refuse to do so with an obvious racist such as yourself - I just don't believe views like yours deserve the time of day.***

[discussion deleted

Vegas Jim loves "discussing and debating issues," but he refuses "to do so with an obvious racist." His statement is discontinuous, contradictory, and conflictual. Vegas Jim's post is followed by a "niger funeral" joke which we do not include. The joke was posted by an anonymous user on December 14, 2002 at 14:52. The joke precipitates additional discussion about free speech and the role of the moderator. For example, on December 16, 2002, one poster writes, "Heisler giving a warning on T Net rules is similar to a hooker trying to teach morals at Sunday School."

Heisler responds in the following post:

Posted 16-12-2002 at 10:30

I have only urged that clearly racist "jokes" be deleted from TeamsterNet and suggested that those who persist in posting them might very well be banned by Phil the Webmaster.

[discussion omitted]

Now answer the question. Do you think the Webmaster should delete racist "jokes" posted on TeamsterNet or not.

Sniper71 responds, as follows, by pointing to Heisler's discontinuity:

> Sniper71
>
> Posted 16-12-2002 at 10:46
>
> ***No is correct but it'd be meaningless if you were not leading the pack, based on today alone.***
> And now a word from Heisler himself
>
> Author: Ed Heisler (---.peinternet.net)
> Date: 11-07-01 16:14
>
> Is Teamster Net finished? It sure is starting to look like it. Today the Webmaster at Teamster Net has made a threat which is unheard of at any public forums or message boards anywhere on the world wide web. There are probably thousands of message boards on all kinds of subjects on the World Wide Web. To my knowledge, never has any Webmaster at any of this boards threatened to delete the history and record of past posts of specific individuals. Until now. . . .[Phil] threatens to conduct his own style of internet "book burning". . . . he will destroy the complete history of all posts made by persons he determines have "violated" his rules.
>
> Here is what Phil wrote:
> author: TeamsterNet ()
> date: 11-07-01 14:02
>
> "I don't want to get in the business of trying to clock people out so it is likely that if someone doesn't get the message they will have all of their previous posts, no matter how many, erased. That may seem harsh but I would imagine that no one would want to waste everything that they have worked on over the course of many years." This threat goes way beyond simply banning someone that Phil does not agree with under the guise of violating new posting rules. This threat has absolutely nothing to do with enforcing Phil's guidelines. Phil's threat is tatamount to book burning, since he would wipe from the historical record all documentation of what a poster said or did not say on TeamsterNet. With that history destroyed by one person, Phil, a poster cannot prove or disprove anything about what a poster wrote or did not write in the past on TeamsterNet. The historical record is destroyed by one person. And that act will be done in the name of free speech and expression on the net! … Such a despicable act would be a betrayal of the democratic and free speech ideals of both this nation and most readers of TeamsterNet.

Sniper 71 points out that Heisler wants to delete racist jokes, but Heisler also is incensed when the moderator suggests that he [the moderator] will delete posts that violate Teamster.Net rules. (Note that Sniper 71 is quoting Heisler, who refers to a 2001 post from an earlier version of Teamster.Net.)

When Heisler responds on December 15, 2002 at 13:08, he castigates "'white power' loosers [sic] . . . that could tickle [sic]

your funnybone." Citing the spelling errors, an anonymous poster recognizes the discontinuity or failure of defense of Heisler and writes, as follows:

> Anonymous
>
> User not Registered Posted 16-12-2002 at 13:16
>
> ***Hang on now, your starting to upset Ed, his spelling has gone all to hell. That is a sure fire way to tell he is upset, as he is usually the first to criticize others spelling.*** When his goes bad, you know you have hit a sore spot.

The point is that sudden misspelling is a discontinuity that indicates preconscious conflict. In Brenner's words, "Conflict occurs whenever gratification of a drive derivative is associated with a sufficiently intense, unpleasurable affect" (p. 55). We suggest that the above discontinuities in posts indicate the authors' conflicts. New compromise formation would be consequences of conflict.

Compromise Formation

Our data include a new compromise formation for the moderator. As a consequence of psychic conflict regarding his role as a moderator, Phil struggles to develop a compromise formation: i.e., a new ethical position. The superego, the moral function, is itself a compromise formation and becomes a component in later compromise formations. Because of the psychic conflict, we would expect the moderator to develop a new compromise formation. He does in the following post from August 10, 2002:

ThePghKid

Posted 10-08-2002 at 08:10

I believe Phil is allowed to have his own opinion, and post as he he see's fit. I also think to seperate his views from those of "Teamster.Net" he should post under another handle, as to not confuse his own views with "Teamster.Net" as a whole.

PK

Anonymous

User not Registered Posted 10-08-2002 at 08:16

I agree. TeamsterNet is suppose to be a fair and neutral website. Phil entitled to his opinions and should be allowed to present them ... using his name, and not as TeamsterNet. I think Phil crossed the lir here.

TeamsterNet

Posted 10-08-2002 at 09:02

I just read all of the replies and posting with a separate handle is not a bad idea, I will do that in the future!

Thanks!

-Phil

The moderator has developed the new compromise formation-i.e., to post his opinions separately-as a consequence of internal conflict. His new compromise emerges in dialogue with posters.

Interpretation.

In our interpretations of conflicts, we cannot exceed our data. Our interpretations are based upon Brenner's conflict theory (1982), so we focus on libidinal and aggressive drive, derivatives, unpleasurable affects, defenses, and superego functioning. Also, interpretations are contextual and require that analysts, of any sort, know their data. We read and re-read and re-read again the postings about free speech.

For JC 53 Agent, Heisler and Vegas Jim, we do not find enough data for an interpretation. However, for the moderator, we find data. We think the following thread provides interpretable data, and we have highlighted significant words.

mickyfinn
posted 10-08-2002 at 23:40

I understand and realize that you are entitled to your opinion, so let me ask you this now that you have opened this can of worms. What is your opinion on the Hogan/Passo deal. I don't really want your opinion I just wanted to point out that ***you may have created a monster here.***

[discussion omitted]

The moderator replies, as follows, on August 11, 2002:

TeamsterNet

Posted 11-08-2002 at 12:07

Yes a can of worms is open but in my experiance this has been a necessary discussion about once a year. I don't feel that I need to make any attempt to defend TeamsterNet's neutrality. There is a overwhelingly large amount of data that proves that everyone has been treated equally. I am guilty! I am guilty of catering to everyone.

[d i s c u s s i on omitted]

I am also guilty of creating a monster! It was done back on June 6th 1996 or '98 it's been so long I can't remember. ***The monster was named TeamsterNet and it's been scaring the hell out of people ever since. Some love the monster and some want to kill the monster and they both have damn good arguments.***

As for my thoughts on Passo and Hogan, they suck. Like Carey they should be expelled and barred from any IBT anything. Bad, lazy or incompetent union officials need to go! They all give union officials a bad name. I think Trumka should be expelled from the AFL-CIO for taking the FIFTH. I also think that Hoffa screwed us out of a great opportunity to demonstrate our ability to self govern by excusing himself from the investigation and in the end he gave an example of why we can't.

[discussion omitted]

Well enough of that I'm going to try and salvage my day and get out in the sun.

-Phil

The moderator's reference to "creating a monster" is interpretable data. Mary Shelley's Dr. Frankenstein created a monster when he harnessed electricity and obtained the brain of a criminal; he was the monster's father. The moderator has combined electronic technology and an organization with a history of corruption; he is the monster's (Teamster.Net's) father. In an earlier post, Bill writes about the moderator's

father:

> Bill
> Posted 17-07-2002 at 22:28
>
> Being a moderator is not at all that difficult, if the person you select has the ability to seperate there personal beliefs and take a middle (moderate) stance on all issues that come before them. Any individual having been elected by there peers, understands this, only to well. ***Your Father*** was a good example of this, and that was why he was so well respected.

One interpretation is this: The moderator wishes to replace his father; such a wish causes conflict. We expect additional conflict and additional compromises in future postings; however, the point is that the compromise is moral and ethical in the sense that the superego is a component of the compromise and the new, ethical position is internalized in a way that formal ethics are not. In addition, the moderator is himself a component in the formation of others' compromises.

The moderator (below) is open to information from posters, who are open to each other. Teamster.Net serves as a powerful example of emerging ethics through dialogue.

Anonymous

User not Registered Posted 11-08-2002 at 19:09

Your bonus opinions are well taken Phil.
[discussion omitted]

We address ourselves as anonymous out of fear but are no less Teamster. Retaliation suck's too Phil. Physical or by innuendo. ***The headache you created,T.Net, has been a great experiment at seeking the truth about ourselves and T.Net is evolving. Great Job.*** But, thanks for the tip that you are not neutral. You might have the clutch in, but it's not neutral.

[discussion omitted]

Your role as moderator is important Phil. Most who come here don't post. But they are searcing. Looking to see if a problem can be resolved, an idea exposed, a trust extended. Non of this can happen without some rules of order. There are some here that are out of bounds, offsides, and I for one have been clipped from behind. Common sence makes this all work or NOT work.

Discussion

The feminist model of communicology provides a rich approach to examining identity formation and organizing in the virtual world. It's clear from this research that all of its elements are at play. Teamster.net permits anonymous postings and permits contributors to post under multiple names. The website consists of multiple forums, where contributors may (re) create their identities based on context and control. Issues of control consume significant resources; in fact, a review of postings in February 2008, almost five years after the initial debate about control, clearly shows the ongoing, contradictory nature of equality and participation (Teamster.net).[27] Considerations of right and wrong (ethics) coupled with equality and respect (democracy) are of paramount concern to individuals who use chat rooms as a way of building community. It's evident from the postings that the contributors all have at least one thing in common, and perhaps only one thing: a level of interest in the International Brotherhood of Teamsters. Some are Teamsters; others are not. Some post regularly, others log on and never post at all. Some are knowledgeable about the workings of the IBT and some are members of various locals. Only the moderators have any assigned duties related to the site and only the moderators have any obligations concerning the site. The only acknowledged objective of the individuals who are part of the site is to discuss various topics of interest; not all topics are even related to the IBT.

[27] http://www.teamster.net/index.php?act=announce&f=1&id=6

As shown in our data analysis, conflicts arise between the theoretical and practical. This is most obvious when trying to understand the need for a moderator. The initial discussion in the chat room began when Maniac asked Phil (the moderator) to block the postings of a non-Teamster. “Phil, is there any change of getting a [name omitted]-Free board. As soon as I see his name 50 times on a page, I wanna puke, and I certainly won't read him…He's just so dam long winded. He's not a Teamster. Please block him.” JC53Agent initially agrees but then backs off of the blocking, asking for an “ignore” feature so that site doesn't have any “'free speech' issues”. Phil responds by asking for volunteers to serve as moderators. “One mandatory requirement is that all moderators must keep their politics separate from any moderation or system responsibility. **If I can do it you can to** (sic)**!**” Another poster named “Bill” maintains that “Being a moderator is not at all difficult, if the person you select has the ability to seperate (sic) there (sic) personal beliefs and take a middle (moderate) stance on all issues that come before them.” We have moved from individuals who can “keep their politics separate” to those who “take a middle (moderate) stance on all issues”. Since Phil is forced to come to some kind of resolution of these contradictions, psychoanalytic theory would suggest that a internalized ethic in the form of a compromise formation be used as the bridge from equality (anyone can post anything) to respect (I am entitled to a personal opinion). That does happen with three postings on October 8, 2002 from “ThePghKid” who says “I believe Phil is allowed to have his own opinion…I also think to seperate (sic) his views from those of “Teamster.Net” he should post under another handle.” An anonymous poster continues “I agree. TeamsterNet is suppose to be a fair and neutral website. Phil is entitled to his opinions and should be allowed to present them…using his name, and not as TeamsterNet. I think Phil crossed the line here.” And Phil responds “I just read all of the replies and posting with a separate handle is not a bad idea, I will do that in the future! Thanks!”

Phil has clearly come to an internal resolution of the discontinuity between having an opinion of his own and being the moderator of the site. An important element of this compromise formation was the input from contributors to the site, some of whom are probably known by Phil and some who are not. (Since some of the postings were anonymous, it's impossible either for us or for Phil to know for sure.) In fact, the anonymity of some of the postings raises some interesting issues concerning external influences in the compromise formation. The dialogue cited above concludes when Phil is challenged by an identifiable poster-mickyfinn. Once Phil has reached a resolution of the discontinuity, he is unable or unwilling to accept additional criticism and input. In other words, he's happy with his compromise formation and does not, at least at this time, see the need to change it. mickyfinn says, “I understand and realize that you are entitled to your opinion, so let me ask you this now that you have opened this can of worms…..I don't really want your opinion I just wanted to point out that you may have created a monster here.” Phil responds, “Yes a can of worms is open but in my experiance (sic) this has been a necessary discussion about one a year. I don't feel that I need to make any attempt to defend TeamsterNet's neutrality. There is a (sic) overwhelingly (sic) large amount of data that proves that everyone has been treated equally. I am guilty! I am guilty of catering to everyone….I am also guilty of creating a monster!” So not only has Phil rejected mickyfinn's input, but in the process has in fact defended himself and the site even though he maintains that he doesn't fell the need to! Would Phil have been so quick to reject this criticism and defend himself if the poster had been anonymous? It's impossible to tell with these data, but the influence that identity plays in democracy and ethics is an important one.

It's also clear that these posters do not consider participation to be a means to an end, since there is no “end” here except the ability to post commentary while respecting others. These postings demonstrate both the

fundamental principles of democracy and the paradoxes inherent in each: equality ("everyone has been treated equally" and "I just don't believe views like yours deserve the time of day") and respect ("Phil is entitled to his opinions and should be allowed to present them" and "I wish to employ an "ignore" feature"). Recognizing the inherent contradictions in organizing, the identities of the contributors, moderators, administrators, and the site itself shift as the discourse enfolds. To deal with the contradictions, the individuals employ compromise formations as an ethical device in their conversations, all the while maintaining a democratic stance. Thus they effectively resolve the tensions inherent in organizing and everyday interaction.

Conclusion

Clearly, organizing in the virtual world exhibits many of the same complexities as does organizing in the more traditional settings; perhaps more. We've gotten just one glimpse into it with this project. While the feminist communicology of organizing is a recent creation, we believe it's provided a valuable theoretical lens by which to study just one aspect of organizing: compromise formation and its role in virtual identity development. We also have just begun to scratch the surface of this phenomenon. Our data were drawn from "the third space." We have no knowledge of the posters' feelings about their virtual identities or about what catalysts exist to spur deliberate creation of multiple identities through multiple user names. We know little about the context of the identities or about the relationships between the posters outside of the web site.

Ultimately, the value of such any metatheory, including the communicology of organizing, is in its ability to explain entire phenomenon-not just pieces of it. So our exploratory analysis is just that-exploration. Further work with this site, other chat boards, and other aspects of organizing is necessary before we can draw any generalizations about this virtual world.

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