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Beyond the Research/Service Dichotomy Claiming *All* Research Products for Hiring, Evaluation, Tenure, and Promotion

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As qualitative communication researchers, we encounter daily stories of the persistent reluctance in the academy to value work that steps outside of the traditional report format for hiring, evaluation, tenure, and promotion. Devalued genres include writing for the general public (e.g., op-eds, blogs), embodied performances, reports for community organizations, and nonprofit website material. Yet dismissing these "other" necessary creative products of our research reinforces a dichotomy between research and service. Although the former is valued almost exclusively as legitimate scholarship and its boundaries carefully patrolled, the latter is devalued and disparaged, ironically amid increased demands for such work as resources in higher education grow ever more scarce.

The narrative turn in the social sciences, in conjunction with feminist, postmodern, and constructivist theorists, challenged the hegemony of positivism and established the value of qualitative and interpretive research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Yet antiquated processes for evaluating research (particularly in regard to promotion) remain steeped in this world view and often fall back on unstated assumptions that research products will be limited to peer reviewed

journal articles and related publications (Rawlins, 2007). Alternative research products, written for stakeholders outside the academy, are often dismissed as nonacademic and valued only in terms of a superficial gesture to fulfill information dissemination requirements of a grant or to maintain good relationships with participants.

We reject this false division between research and professional (and community) service. In this essay, we provide overviews of five current academic discourses that provide constructive justifications for the value of the diverse array of products qualitative communication researchers produce and share with various stakeholder audiences (e.g., newsletters, organizational reports, letters to policy makers, community performances, etc., herein after referred to collectively as research products) when we undergo formal evaluation of our research in job applications, tenure cases, and promotion cases (hereinafter referred to as promotion). Moreover, allusions to these expansive types of projects may be strategically mobilized informally in conversations among colleagues in order to foster positive recognition of such work by our own institutions, at professional conferences, and within broader communities. The five discourses are: translational research, community engaged scholarship, interdisciplinarity, postmodern validity, and the ethics of reciprocity. Although they are separated here for ease of discussion, these discourses significantly overlap and share many common epistemological and pragmatic assumptions.

Translational Research

Translational research (TR) has been a rapidly growing area for several years because of serious concerns about the relevance and accessibility of traditional scholarly research. Due to the perceived lack of accessibility, scholarship typically has to be translated for other audiences (Trethewey, 2002). TR involves a mandate to make theoretical and esoteric studies accessible to practitioners and publics that can put such knowledge to everyday use (Sharf, Harter, Yamanski, & Haider, 2011).

TR is gaining importance as the National Institutes of Health (NIH)¹ and other U.S. federally funded agencies, including the National Science Foundation (NSF), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the Health Resources and Services (HRSA), among other prominent large-scale programs, serve as

models for developing translational communication inquiry (Kreps, 2011). Given that federal agencies require in grants that we make our research accessible, we need to cite these requirements (and the products they inspire) as part of the research process. Dale Brashers exemplified a researcher who translated the scholarly into the practical. He was the Principal Investigator on a National Institute of Nursing Research grant to study the role of communication in the management of health and illness for persons living with HIV/AIDS. Brashers and colleagues translated their findings by developing and testing an uncertainty management intervention for individuals newly diagnosed with HIV (Brashers et al., 1999).

When promoting our work, communication scholars need to make our scholarship accessible to the public (Keyton & Rhodes, 2009). When Maggie went up for third year reappointment at the UNC-Charlotte, she argued in her promotion narrative that translating the findings of her *Text & Performance Quarterly* (Quinlan & Harter, 2010a) article for the *Communication Currents* newsletter (Quinlan & Harter, 2010b) and writing for organizational websites are not separate from her research but integral to her passion for using her research and theoretical sensibilities to make a difference. She documented these practices as scholarship, not merely as supplements to what traditionally counts as research.

Another way to celebrate the work of TR is to link it to the commitments of public intellectuals (Harter, Norander, & Quinlan, 2007). When communication scholars share our work as public intellectuals, we emphasize the paths our scholarship carves and the ways in which we connect the stories of the discipline to peoples' lives (Papa & Singhal, 2007). The work of public intellectuals calls for publicly responsible scholarship that speaks to specific issues of communities. Beth Haller, who specializes in communication and mediated representation of disability, demonstrated the scholarly value of her blog *Media Dis & Dat* (media-dis-n-dat.blogspot.com/). Her blog offers a bibliography of media and disability resources, and she uses Facebook and Twitter to share them. We argue that public intellectuals like Haller and Brashers should receive credit for translating their scholarship and making it accessible to broader publics.

Community Engagement

Community engaged scholarship (CES) or *community-based participatory research* (CBPR) recognizes that work needs to be done with communities (Harter, Hamel-Lambert, & Müllesen, 2011). Like translation research, there is not a single, agreed upon definition of community engagement (CE). One useful definition is "the application of institutional resources to address and solve challenges facing communities through collaboration with these communities" (Commission on Community-Engagement, 2005). Plenty of published peer-reviewed literature and research reports point to the benefits and importance of CE in research, including linkages to community needs and work that matters in the world (Horowitz, Robinson, & Seifer, 2009). CBPR increases community members' understanding of the issues under study and enhances researchers' ability to understand community priorities and the need for culturally centered research approaches (Rosentock, Hernandez, & Gebbie, 2003). Such collaborations create the possibility for disenfranchised individuals to have a voice in decision making and improve the community's ability to address its own needs (Dempsey et al., 2011).

We posit that a university's values are clearly articulated in the criteria used to evaluate faculty. Often CE is viewed as mere service and perceived as an inferior activity, rather than acknowledged as genuine scholarship. More extensive forms of documentation and peer reviewed standards for CE should be institutionalized within the academy. If scholars are expected to address community concerns, colleges and universities need to develop institutional practices that support and reward such activity by faculty members (Boyer, 1990). In addition to publishing in traditional outlets, faculty may choose to connect their teaching and research to tangible, practical concerns. Increasingly, colleges and universities evaluate the overall impact of academics in the community and acknowledge that the "one size fits all" approach to promotion needs to be updated. Increasingly, universities have Offices of Community Engagement and are including CE in their promotion documents. For example, the promotion and tenure guidelines at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) reward faculty who practice community engaged scholarship as distinct from service (communityengagement.uncg.edu/resources.html). At UNCG, Marianne LeGreco framed her communication studies as CE research

that demonstrates the scholarly value of bringing a farmer's market to a low-income neighborhood within a "food desert," a place where supermarkets are difficult to access (LeGreco & Leonard, 2011).

Lynn Harter at Ohio University shows the scholarly importance of her CE study of an art studio, *Passion Works*, for individuals with and without developmental disabilities in a sheltered workshop in Athens, Ohio (www.passionworks.org/). Harter volunteered for the organization, served on their board of directors, conducted service learning courses, published journal articles and book chapters (e.g., Harter et al., 2006), and wrote for their website (e.g., Harter & Leeman, 2006). She also received a grant to develop a process guide that marries theoretical notions and practical insights that help *Passion Works* share their model of employing individuals with disabilities in the arts (Harter, 2008). Like Harter and LeGreco, other scholars can highlight the tremendous value of CE projects as research endeavors in their promotion materials.

Postmodern Validity

A third way to frame varied research products is as collectively constituting a postmodern form of validity (Lather, 1986a). *Crystallization* offers a framework for qualitative research that builds on Richardson's (2000) concept as an alternative metaphor to the two-dimensional, positivist image of a triangle as the basis for rigor and validity:

Crystallization combines multiple forms of analysis and multiple genres of representation into a coherent text or series of related texts, building a rich and openly partial account of a phenomenon that problematizes its own construction, highlights researchers' vulnerabilities and positionality, makes claims about socially constructed meanings, and reveals the indeterminacy of knowledge claims even as it makes them. (Ellingson, 2009, p. 4)

Crystallization provides diverse perspectives on a topic (i.e., multiple truths), while destabilizing those claims (i.e., demonstrating that there is no single Truth), yielding a postmodern form of validity (Saukko, 2004). Crystallization features two primary types: integrated and dendritic (Ellingson, 2009, 2011a). *Integrated crystallization* involves multigenre texts that reflect the above definition in a single representation (e.g., book). In a study of "backstage" communication on

an interdisciplinary team, Laura juxtaposed genres—ethnographic narrative, grounded theory analysis, embodied autoethnography, and feminist critique—in order to crystallize the complexity of teamwork (Ellingson, 2005).

Perhaps more useful is *dendritic crystallization*, the dispersed process of making meaning through multiple forms of analysis and genres of representation without (or in addition to) combining genres into a single text. When constructing a promotion case, dendritic crystallization may be used as a framework for putting separate research products "into conversation" with one another (Ellingson, 2009). Such meta-analytical discussion of research products simultaneously enriches and problematizes knowledge claims as well as providing a context to explore methodological, epistemological, theoretical, and practical implications. A scholar can describe and provide excerpts (or images) of several disparate analyses and representations and then explore how they inform, contradict, complexify, and illuminate one another. As in multigenre texts, the goal is to illustrate myriad lessons learned through the crystallization process. A second strategy for placing dendritic accounts into conversation involves utilizing websites to highlight connections among research products by forming online exhibits. Miller-Day (2005) and colleagues crystallized their project "HOMework: An Ethnodrama" (cas.la.psu.edu/research/material/homework.html), based upon her study of low-wage working mothers and the challenges facing households living in poverty. The website includes a script written by Miller-Day, video clips of a live performance, publications including foundation and agency reports, a conference paper, a public address, a working paper, and links to other resources (Miller-Day, 2008). The multiple forms of sense-making establish a complex, yet highly pragmatic form of validity. Further, communication scholars now have two online peer-reviewed venues for bringing together research and art or performance: the *Alternative Scholarship* section of the feminist journal *Women & Language* and *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies*.

Interdisciplinarity

A fourth discourse that situates a variety of qualitative research products is interdisciplinarity. "Interdisciplinarity is a means of solving problems and answering questions that cannot be satisfactorily

addressed using single methods or approaches" (Klein, 1990, p. 196). Efforts to blur disciplinary boundaries and traverse the arts/science continuum spark conversations across theories, models, and paradigms, generating new questions, creative applications, novel solutions, and collaborative efforts to effect social change (Jordan, 2011). Interdisciplinary research (IR) is now widely recognized as a necessity for thinking outside disciplinary and paradigmatic boxes that limit problem solving, innovation, and creativity (NSF, 2006). Funding agencies support IR centers to promote collaboration, cross-disciplinary dialogues, and sharing resources with the goal of enhancing efforts to translate research into practice (Sa', 2008).

However, IR is challenging, and requires significant time, investment, and risk (Repko, 2008). Establishing common ground and achieving critical awareness of the inherent limitations of any one field are difficult hurdles for interdisciplinary teams (Borrego & Newswander, 2010). It takes training to learn skills necessary for successful interdisciplinary collaboration (Larson, Landers, & Begg, 2011). IR requires team members to communicate effectively not only with each other but also with a variety of stakeholders, policymakers, practitioners, and publics (Van Hartesveldt & Giordan, 2009). Also, efforts to secure grant money for IR often are more difficult due to traditional disciplinary silos in funding agencies. Thus pursuing IR results in 'transaction costs' (Sa', 2008), which make productivity slower and often yield products suitable for one discipline but not others, necessitating a variety of products.

But the possibilities are rich. For example, a collaboration among computer scientists, artists, and medical researchers yielded a visual model of adult stem cell interaction, producing an art installation, a complex computerized process model, and critical insights into stem cells that promise to advance medical treatments (Prophet, 2011). Interdisciplinary collaborations include projects where feminist communication scholars have worked with colleagues in sociology, women's studies, and cultural studies to study how gender is represented in the media, and organizational communication scholars have joined forces with researchers from the STEM disciplines to create learning environments that are welcoming to women and students of color (Putnam et al., 2009). An interdisciplinary team from communication, sociology, and psychology co-lead *The Road Home* project,

conducting research to better understand the homeless population of Pierce County, Washington, and working with local law enforcement, government, and social service agencies to reduce homelessness (Houston, Weisz, & Anderson-Connolly, 2006).

Interdisciplinarity currently enjoys a great deal of academic currency. When promoting our research products, communication researchers can cite authoritative sources such as the National Academy of Sciences, which recommended that institutions "review and revise appointment, promotion, and tenure policies to ensure that they do not impede interdisciplinary research and teaching" (Pellmar & Eisenberg, 2000, p. 6). Explaining how our research bridges disciplinary divides and detailing the work that goes into, and the variety of products generated by, IR illustrates our ability to address complex social problems (Schewe et al., 2011).

Ethics of Reciprocity

A final strategic discourse is the ethics of reciprocity. "Reciprocity is a matter of making a fitting and proportional return for the good or ill we receive" (Becker, 2005, p. 18). Research products can be framed in terms of an ethical imperative that necessitates production of nonacademic products. Traditionally, reciprocity in qualitative research was framed as a practical necessity; through developing friendly, open relationships with participants, researchers presumably generated better data (Powell & Takayoshi, 2003). Advocates of social justice research (Frey, 2009), feminist methodologists (Preissle, 2007), and participatory action researchers (Wang, 1999) currently frame reciprocity as more complex and political, including doing no harm to communities, collaborating with participants as equals, speaking *with* rather than *for* participants and highlighting their voices, acknowledging embodied inequities and their material circumstances, critiquing structural inequities, and developing solutions to participant-identified problems. Researchers may invoke reciprocity to frame nonacademic research products in four ways.

First, researchers have an ethical responsibility to give back in ways that are meaningful to participants. Renee Houston's work with *The Road Home* project mentioned earlier exemplifies the ethical imperative to present findings in meaningful ways to public stakeholders. She

worked closely with local organizations, attending meetings, giving community presentations, and producing reports that helped government and social service agencies make decisions (Houston & Weisz, 2010). Second, reciprocity requires researchers to reflexively negotiate power as an ongoing relational process with participants (Powell & Takayoshi, 2003). "Reciprocity promotes recognition that partners have varying amounts and types of power in different situations and different interests in a specific project—and thus will benefit from different things" (Maiter, Simich, Jacobson, & Wise, 2008, p. 321). Acknowledging power encourages researchers to provide representations that directly benefit participants, such as a skills-focused piece Laura wrote for a monthly professional publication for dialysis technicians and nurses (Ellingson, 2011b).

Third, reciprocity can include *catalytic validity*, offering tools so the research process "re-oriens, focuses, and energizes participants in what Freire (1973) terms 'consciousness,' knowing reality in order to better transform it" (Lather, 1986a, p. 67). SunWolf (2010) embodies this form of reciprocity through engaging criminal defense lawyers in empathic artunement, a process of putting themselves in clients' shoes (SunWolf, 2006). Lawyers reported that as a result of this experience, they positively changed how they conceptualized and interacted with capital clients. A final aspect of reciprocity involves the "mutual negotiation of meaning and power ... [at] the junctures between ... data and theory" (Lather, 1986b, p. 263). That is, reciprocity necessitates openness to new and even contradictory ideas that fly in the face of theory or previous research. Thorp (2008) demonstrated reciprocity with participants with whom she constructed a community garden at an under-resourced primary school. She adopted a strategy of "letting go, getting lost, and finding my way" which she describes playfully as allowing her participants to "have their way with" her (p. 117). As a gesture of authorial surrender, she constructed her text to highlight the children's meanings through drawings, photos, and journals. Scholars can cite this imperative to engage in processes that are reflexive, responsible, and empowering and that treat participants ethically. Such research products are evidence of enhanced ethical responsibility.

Conclusion

We began by noting that we face everyday reminders that our non-academic research products are devalued. We want to end on a positive note by affirming the success we have had as a senior and a junior scholar, respectively, in advocating for the scholarly value of all our research products. Laura works for a private, Jesuit liberal arts university; Maggie is employed by a large, research-intensive, public university—both of us have earned institutional support for our work. In the same way that we dismiss the false dichotomy between research and service, we also reject the notion that altruism and professional ambition cannot or should not coexist. Stubbornly, we insist on having it all—academically speaking—and increasingly we find colleagues in communication and beyond with similar goals and strategies for making a difference and taking (academic) credit for it. We hope that our ideas on how qualitative communication researchers are uniquely situated to harness discourses of translational research, community engagement, interdisciplinarity, postmodern validity, and ethics of reciprocity assist others in establishing the scholarly value of their work. Collectively, these five approaches provide a serious challenge to narrow definitions of scholarship. We urge those with the privilege of tenure to work toward progressive institutional change in criteria for evaluation and promotion.

We realize that our argument does not challenge the devaluing of service relative to research for promotion but rather seeks to enlarge the privileged category. We regret that such a discussion is beyond the scope of this essay. We also wish to forestall the misconstruing of our ideas as an attack on traditional scholarly genres. Valuing nonacademic research products does not negate the value of scholarly books, journal articles, and chapters in collections and handbooks. Such quintessential academic prose (when done well) fosters scholarly discourses that we continue to engage, even as we embrace a multiplicity of forms.

Note

- 1 The NIH has made translational research a priority, forming centers of translation research, founding the Clinical and Translational Science Award program in 2006, and launching the "Roadmap for Medical Research" initiative that fostered translational research.

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