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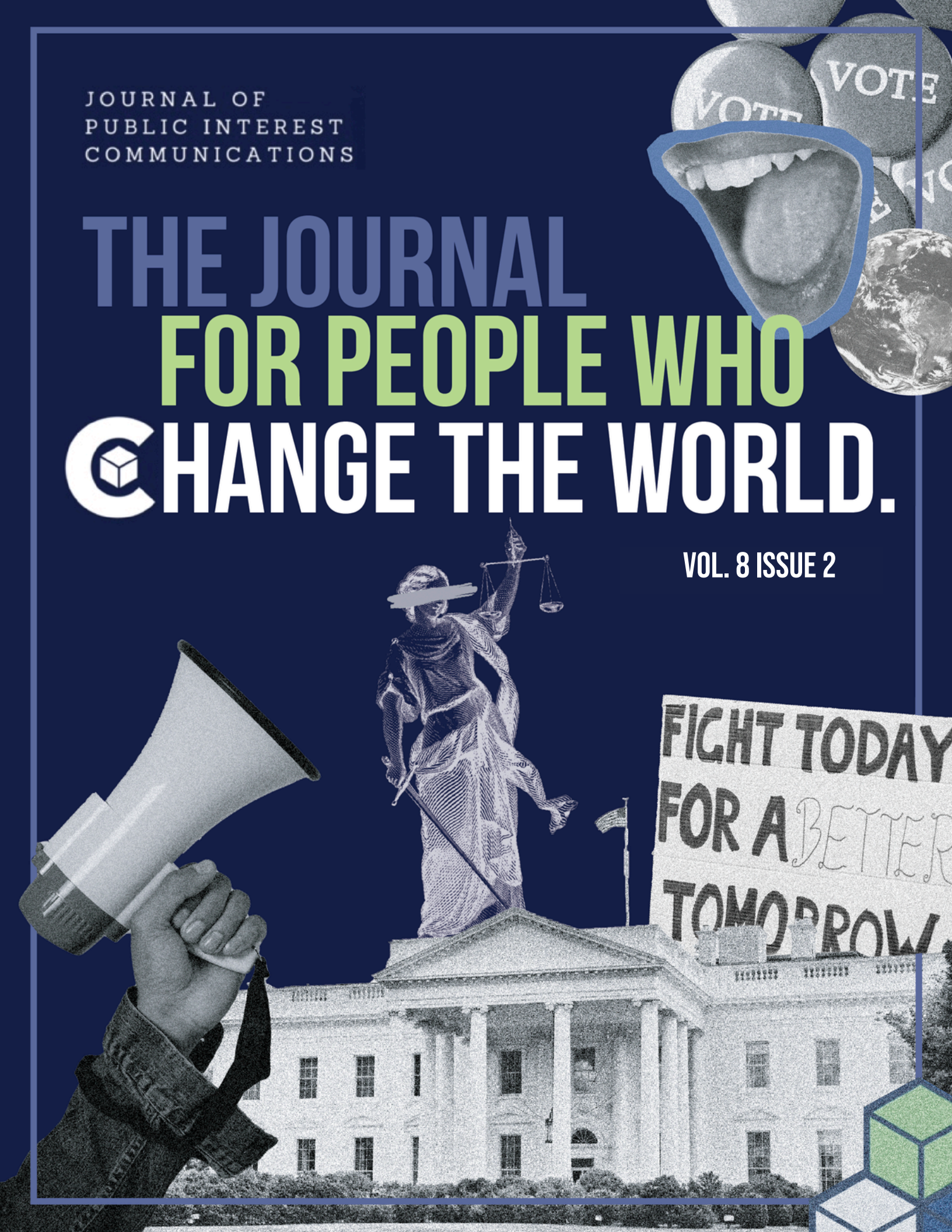

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JPIC Editorial Board

Special thanks to our recent reviewers

We would like to take this opportunity to extend a special thanks to the reviewers who contributed to the new issue. Your expertise and hard work make our journal's success possible.

Pam Bourland-Davis, Caty Borum, Luke Capizzo, Eun Ji Chung, Christie Kleinmann, Chad Wertley

EDITORS' ESSAY

THE POWER OF COMMUNITY AND RESILIENCE

KELLY CHERNIN AND JOSEPH RADICE

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Editors' Essay: The Power of Community and Resilience

Kelly Chernin, Joseph Radice

Appalachian State University, University of Florida

Our editorial team is scattered across the United States, including Western North Carolina and Southwest Florida. As you might imagine, the past few months have proven difficult given the impacts of Hurricanes Debbie, Helene, and Milton. Yet, while the rest of the world saw stories of devastation, loss, and even anger and distrust, we witnessed a different side of our communities in the aftermath of these storms. People came together to help their neighbors by sharing food, repairing homes, and donating resources to help farmers recover their land.

From the outside, it is easy to forget about the resilience and bonds that underlie communities—especially in today's polarized political climate. In the midst of tragedy and confusion, these glimpses of resilience and hope hold even more power.

One of the core tenets of public interest communications is to create sustainable social change. This means there will be setbacks along the way. It is important, perhaps now more than ever, that our field, our researchers, and our practitioners build our own community in a way that foregrounds the importance of resilience. Social change does not happen in a vacuum or overnight; it takes effort, hope, and individuals supporting one another to build a network that can truly sustain change, no matter how dire the situation might appear.

We saw firsthand the devastation created by these hurricanes. Houses in Western North Carolina and along the southwest coast of Florida were washed away; some folks lost everything, including loved ones. Observing hardships like these, it would be easy and understandable to lose hope, but that is never the whole story. Instead, we saw restaurants that reopened quickly to serve free meals to those in need. Universities in hurricane-struck areas in both states opened their doors to those who had been displaced, needed a warm shower, or a place to charge their phones.

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The areas we live in are still struggling even though the news cycle has moved on. Local citizens are exhausted and there is still a long road to recovery ahead, but our communities are still rallying together. We are still helping neighbors and showing up for those who need it. This continued effort gives us immense hope that people do care—our goal as communicators is to determine how best to represent the resilience and power of our communities to those who don't experience it firsthand.

At the time of writing in November 2024, we understand that it can be difficult to maintain hope or to feel energized enough to act in the face of the unknown. We hope that all of you, our readers, continue to seek solace in your own communities and recharge however you can. This issue features research and practitioner content that highlights how important resilience is to public interest communications and offers some insights as to how we can move forward in meaningful ways.

In "Calling all activists to the Capitol," Adegbola examines how Rep. Cori Bush leveraged her story of resilience as a single mother who experienced homelessness as a form of advocacy to extend an eviction moratorium following the pandemic. While many politicians operate in the policy sphere given their place of privilege, Bush utilized social media to tell her story and communicate with audiences, including fellow lawmakers, to pass legislation that brought relief to countless individuals who were struggling during the pandemic. She understood the anxiety and turmoil associated with the prospect of homelessness and advocated so that others did not have to experience what she had. Adegbola's research demonstrates that politicians can also be powerful activists.

This issue's practitioner interview features Brooke Kaufman and Jennifer Smith from the Seattle Clemency Project, who discuss how formerly incarcerated individuals are able to live productive lives outside of prison. The interview also showcases how to use stories of perseverance to build greater understanding of the circumstances experienced by those who have served time and gain funding for programs that help with better legal representation.

Finally, this issue's book review explores Phoebe Hart's *Crafting Contemporary Documentaries and Docuseries for Global Screens*. The book describes how documentary filmmaking changed during the pandemic, and how filmmaker resilience during this period led to new ways of thinking about funding, work-life balance, and interacting with subjects.

As with our own hurricane-impacted communities, our nation also has a long road ahead. It will not always be easy and there will be setbacks to the progress we have all created as public interest communications researchers and practitioners, but we are resilient. We have persevered through other challenging periods—we will do so again, because that is what must happen. Even in the face of setbacks, we will continue to do the research and the work that makes a difference. Our work still matters.

CALLING ALL ACTIVISTS TO THE CAPITOL: THE CASE OF CORI BUSH'S ADVOCACY FOR AN EVICTION MORATORIUM EXTENSION

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Calling All Activists to the Capitol: The Case of Cori Bush's Advocacy for an Eviction Moratorium Extension

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Abstract

The role of elected officials as focal points of activism is well understood. However, activism by politicians is underexplored. Drawing on the collective action framing literature and the protest paradigm, this study examines the strategic messaging employed by elected officials in their efforts to rally media attention and act as oppositional publics able to influence other citizens to action. Centered on the case of a congresswoman, Cori Bush, who mobilized support for an eviction moratorium during the COVID-19 pandemic, this study reveals patterns of strategic messaging used to mobilize key publics in support of the moratorium and highlights the potential use of activism to elevate elected officials' public profile. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

Introduction

On July 30, 2021, as a temporary national eviction moratorium issued by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to curb the spread of the coronavirus was ending and with no extension of the moratorium in sight, Cori Bush, a representative for Missouri's 1st

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congressional district and member of "The Squad," a group of eight progressive democratic lawmakers, posted on X (formerly Twitter)[1]:

> "The eviction moratorium expires tomorrow. I've lived in my car. I know what it's like not to know where I can use the bathroom, or where I can sleep safely. We have the opportunity to keep millions of people in their homes. That's a policy choice we must make." (Bush, 2021c)

As the U.S. House of Representatives entered a recess without voting to extend the moratorium (Haroun et al., 2021), Rep. Bush began to protest by sleeping on the Capitol steps. She called for others to join the protest, while sharing updates with her followers via X and Facebook Live, even hosting media interviews from the Capitol steps. A few days later, on August 4, the CDC issued a new 60-day eviction moratorium for areas experiencing high levels of COVID-19 infections. Although some criticized the extension as unconstitutional, others viewed it as a win for the congresswoman and an attestation to the power of advocacy (e.g., Fandos, 2021).

Activism can be used as a powerful tool to draw attention to social problems (Walgrave et al., 2012; Wouters & Lefevere, 2023). Although a growing body of work has explored the use of activism to achieve public interest goals and drive social change (e.g., Thompson, 2016; Williams et al., 2022), little is known about activism as a tool used by political officeholders to influence policy, or how protest by elected officials is covered in the media. The rise of activist lawmakers such as Rep. Bush provides an opportunity to explore their use of activism to advocate for, or shape, policy.

This study addresses two issues. First, it examines how Rep. Bush used a variety of tools including X messaging and statements released over the course of her protest to frame the expiring eviction moratorium and engage with citizens, activists, members of Congress, and the White House. Given that media coverage of protest tends to be negative, caricaturize protesters, and misrepresent their aims (e.g., Boyle et al., 2005, 2012; Di Cicco, 2010; Lee, 2014), this study also compares media coverage of Rep. Bush's protest at the Capitol to other pro-eviction moratorium protests not involving her (i.e., citizen protests) to examine potential differences in reporting.

This specific case was selected due in part to Rep. Bush's use of activism prior to and after being elected (Wilson & Hill, 2023), but also due to the media attention she garnered. While political officeholders such as Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez have used activism as a tool to draw attention to issues ranging from climate change to reproductive rights (Freelander, 2021; Guitar & Studebaker, 2023), these efforts have primarily been one-off appearances to show solidarity with social movements or collectively express dissent with fellow officeholders. In contrast, Rep. Bush's protest was an individual, sustained act of opposition lasting until the eviction moratorium was extended. Findings not only reveal how messaging was strategically used to engage activists and concerned citizens, but also point to a pattern of media coverage of her protest that was generally neutral and, in some cases, positive.

[1] The data studied pre-date Twitter's sale to Elon Musk and the transition to X.

Literature review

Activism in politics

Considerable scholarly work has examined how political office seekers and politicians utilize public relations and diverse communication strategies to achieve their goals. As expected, much of this research focuses on the use of messaging during electoral campaigns to fuel emotions such as anger and anxiety (e.g., Borah, 2016), influence candidate evaluation (e.g., Kenski et al., 2022), defend against threats to reputation during the electoral campaign process (e.g., Boyle et al, 2023), and persuade the undecided while enhancing turnout among supporters. A substantial portion of this research has also examined political officeholders' efforts to boost public support for their policy positions (e.g., Froehlich & Rudiger, 2006; Schweickart et al., 2016).

Research seldom explores the use of activist tactics by elected officeholders, possibly because politicians and activists are often seen as playing distinct and opposite roles, embodying different values and occupying separate worlds. For instance, Kerrey (2016) notes that where politicians favor compromise and negotiation to formulate policy, "good activists must be uncompromising" and willing to use aggressive or offensive tactics. Moreover, for politicians utilizing activism, the apparent disconnect between their position in institutional politics and their use of noninstitutional, contentious tactics can create unique challenges. Unlike election campaigns where candidates may primarily focus on motivating core supporters to turn out and, to a lesser extent, persuading undecideds, activists seeking broad policy change must establish mutual understanding, collaboration, and engagement with a coalition of diverse but equally passionate publics to achieve their goals (Tattersall, 2017).

Specifically, politicians using activism need to engage with and unite individuals having diverse political persuasions for a common cause, an effort that relies on strategic and careful message framing. Cultivating a sense of cognitive and emotional engagement with such publics through dialogue is essential (Devin & Lane, 2014). Dhanesh (2017) adds that mutual interest in and recognition of issue salience is the cornerstone and an antecedent of such engagement, resulting in commitment to achieve shared goals. For political officeholders seeking to use activism to advance their policy positions, strategically framing the issue is key.

Existing research indicates that activism is at the heart of many efforts to effect social change. For instance, Christiano (2017) identifies activism as one of six spheres of influence through which social change can be executed, while acknowledging that activism functions as part of a broader effort to elicit media attention, grow influence by cultivating communities consisting of relevant stakeholders, and ultimately, influence policy. Although triggering events may help to focus attention on a problematic issue and increase the propensity for action (Ciszek, 2018), strategic communications efforts must build on such triggering events, including by framing of the problematic issue in ways that resonate with stakeholders, to generate collective action and elicit meaningful change (Fessmann, 2017; Napoli, 2009).

Collective action framing and the anti-eviction protests

The way activists or social movement organizations use language to frame their grievances and the causes they consider important can determine success in mobilizing and achieving their goals. Collective action framing is a dynamic process through which activists "engage in the production of meanings and interpretations to be shared with and contrasted by constituents, antagonists, bystanders, and outsiders," and is central to recruitment, expansion of their influence, and attainment of their goals (Benford & Snow, 2000; Vicari, 2010, p. 506). This use of language to frame protest discourse may be combined with any number of tactics including dramatic and staging activities and occupation of symbolic spaces (Doherty & Hayes, 2019).

Central to the process of collective action framing is the ability of activists to frame (or reframe) discourses in ways that legitimize their grievance, portray the status quo as unjust, and proffer specific courses of action to remedy the problem (Snow et al., 1986). Accordingly, research indicates that collective action framing performs core tasks, including problem diagnosis, solution recommendation, and calls to action (Snow & Benford, 1988; Snow et al., 2019). With respect to problem diagnosis (i.e., diagnostic framing), activists seek to label certain events or situations as problematic while identifying causal agents, and thus, allocating blame. Prognostic framing involves the suggestion of prospective solutions while motivational framing refers to calls to action as well as articulation of the rationale for the proposed action. In fact, Snow and Benford (1988) note that "[protest] participation is contingent upon the development of motivational frames that function as prods to action" (p. 202).

Vicari (2010) suggests that these core framing tasks (i.e., diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational framing) address different message components articulated by Gamson (1992), including injustice, agency, and identity. For instance, by drawing a connection between causal agents and identifiable problems, diagnostic framing defines the core issue as one of injustice which should elicit moral outrage. Further, by suggesting prospective solutions, prognostic framing highlights the quality of agency and the potential for victimized individuals to act. And lastly, when making an explicit call to action, motivational frames draw on aspects of group history and identity in justifying recommended actions that "we" must take in opposition to "them," referring to groups with opposing goals. These framing structures reflect messaging strategies to mobilize participants and can be revealed through thematic analysis of the discourses of activists and activist groups (Vicari, 2010, 2023; Xiong et al., 2019).

For housing rights advocates, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, accompanied by widespread shutdowns, loss of employment/income, and the potential for mass evictions, served not only as a focusing event but also as an opportunity to reframe public discourse around homelessness. The expiration of the eviction moratorium and the failure of the House to extend it led to protests by various housing rights activist groups, including a brief but well publicized sleep-in by Rep. Bush to pressure Congress and later, the White House, to act. To examine her strategic use of messaging to advance her anti-eviction protest, the following question will be addressed:

RQ1: How did Rep. Bush frame opposition to the expiration of the eviction moratorium?

The protest paradigm and media coverage of Rep. Bush's protest

The media-activism interaction has been characterized as a "competitive symbiosis" (Wolfsfeld, 1991). The news media rely on activist groups for newsworthy material, while activists are dependent on the media for publicity. However, the relationship is asymmetrical. The media influence how activists and their causes are viewed, and by extension, their ability to achieve their goals (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993). More importantly, news media are crucial to social change efforts through their ability to shape perception of issue relevance, contribute to the construction of master narratives, frame issues, and lend credence to (or undermine) social change actors (Christiano, 2017). The emergence of digital media in the past two decades has undeniably empowered social movements to express their grievances directly and more articulately, yet these new media do not nullify the capacity of legacy media outlets to influence public perception through framing (Tarrow, 2022).

One prominent framework for understanding media reporting on social movements is the protest paradigm (Chan & Lee, 1984), which reflects a theorized set of routines, guidelines, assumptions, and orientations that guide journalists in reporting social conflict, and ultimately shape media representations of protest. Given the media's tendency to affirm official narratives and support the status quo, in contrast with activists who espouse transformative agendas that may be seen as radical, coverage of protests tends to reflect selection and description biases (McCarthy et al., 1996), resulting in patterns of coverage that delegitimize protesters (Boyle et al., 2005; Smith et al., 2001).

With respect to selection bias, the news media predominantly attend to large-scale, dramatic and/or disruptive protests (e.g., marches and rallies) that generate substantial conflict although these tend to be relatively infrequent, while ignoring small-scale protests using less contentious tactics, although these protests occur more frequently (McCarthy et al., 1996; Oliver & Maney, 2000). Among protests that are selected for coverage, *description bias* refers to media portrayals of protest in ways that emphasize less substantive aspects (e.g., deviant acts, physical appearance of protesters) and privilege official sources and voices over those of protesters, while ignoring core aspects such as the causes of discontent and aims of protesters (Adegbola et al., 2022; Di Cicco, 2010; Lee, 2014; Smith et al., 2001). Taken together, these patterns of coverage not only delegitimize protesters but also present a unique challenge for protesters, who may be caricaturized if aggressive means of protest are used and ignored if nonconfrontational means are used. Protests that use disruptive tactics and displays of deviance by protesters tend to receive greater media attention. However, the same attributes that elicit media attention ensure a predominantly negative pattern of coverage that undermines the substantive goals of protesters and portrays them as a nuisance (Boyle et al., 2004; Boyle et al., 2012). As a result, protesters run the risk of being largely ignored on one hand, or misrepresented, negatively portrayed, and their goals trivialized on the other. While activists no longer have to rely solely on the news

media for mobilization, the news media retain the ability to validate and broaden the scope of social movements, including furthering understanding of their grievances and generating sympathy for their cause.

While research has found considerable support for the protest paradigm, protest coverage depends on a variety of factors. For instance, alternative media outlets tend to be more legitimizing in their coverage of protests compared to mainstream media (e.g., Harlow & Johnson, 2011). Other influences on reporting of protest include media outlets' ideological or partisan slant (e.g., Adegbola et al., 2022; Kananovich, 2022) as well as whether influential individual actors are involved in the protests (e.g., Coombs et al., 2020).

Rep. Bush's protest was unique in various ways. As an elected member of Congress, which possesses policymaking powers, she deviates from the archetypal protester who fights injustice despite being the underdog. Rep. Bush's identity as a member of the "Squad" also arguably positions her as a celebrity, which could shape the perceived relevance and responses to her protest, as indicated by previous literature (e.g., Duvall, 2020; Jain et al., 2024). In fact, while celebrity involvement in social issues can elicit controversial responses, celebrity activism in support of "good causes" or issues considered to be in the public interest, tend to be viewed more broadly positive (Tsaliki, 2016). Perhaps more importantly, while much of the existing work recognizes celebrity activism as a phenomenon that primarily unfolds online through low-effort social media behaviors, Rep. Bush's activism played out in public over the course of several days on the Capitol steps.

Rep. Bush's protest was also unique with its use of noncontentious tactics, relying solely on sleep-ins on the Capitol steps as the form of protest. Further, unlike most protests that feature groups of demonstrators, Rep. Bush was the individual protester and continued to be the focus even after having supporters including Reps. Ayanna Pressley and Ocasio-Cortez join her sleep-in effort. Given the unique attributes of the case, this study not only examines the extent to which media coverage of Rep. Bush's protest adhered to the protest paradigm, but also examines whether the coverage of her protest differed from coverage of other anti-eviction protests held around the same time. Therefore, the following questions were addressed:

RQ2: Did the tone of news reporting in stories featuring Rep. Bush's protest differ from anti-eviction news reports that did not feature her protesting?

RQ3: Did the sources quoted in news stories featuring Rep. Bush's protest differ from those that did not feature the congresswoman?

Methodology

Overview

This study relied on both qualitative analysis of X data, letters and press statements released by the congresswoman, and quantitative analysis of news transcripts on the protest. To address RQ1, which explores Rep. Bush's message framing, the congresswoman's communications during her protest were analyzed. Content posted by Rep. Bush using both her official (i.e., @RepCori) and personal accounts (i.e., @CoriBush) between July 30 and August 4, 2021, were collected for analysis. The former date was selected because it was when the congresswoman first called attention to the expiration of the moratorium and Congress' failure to extend it, and expressed her intention to protest. The CDC under the Biden administration announced an extension of the eviction moratorium on August 4, bringing Rep. Bush's five-day protest at the Capitol to an end.

X was selected partly because it has been described as a kind of "public sphere," but more importantly, because it is the platform on which Rep. Bush has the most followers, compared to platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. Moreover, an assessment of Rep. Bush's Facebook posts regarding the eviction moratorium and efforts to mobilize for protest highlight Facebook messaging identical to her X posts. Lastly, her advocacy through press statements and letters to Congress regarding the eviction moratorium was also examined and analyzed separately from her posts.

Given the relatively short timeline examined and the limited data consisting of press statements and content posted during this period, the X posts were retrieved manually from both Rep. Bush's official and personal accounts by reviewing each content posted by the congresswoman during the selected time. This yielded a total of 49 posts across both accounts, of which only 42 were focused on the eviction moratorium and thus included in the analysis. Text-based visuals such as statements and letters to Congress that were posted as images were included for analysis, but not images devoid of text, such as photo-ops with supporters at the Capitol. Further, her official media archives were reviewed and yielded three press statements and a letter to Congress published between July 30 and August 3. These materials were focused on the eviction moratorium and included in the analysis.

The data (posts and press statements) were first analyzed in an exploratory manner using NVivo to examine frequently used words for potential codes. Subsequently, the author analyzed the data (posts and press statements separately) manually using in vivo-coding and descriptive coding to tag, label, and summarize keywords and phrases relevant to the protest. The coding of posts and statements yielded 27 and 13 codes, respectively. Despite slight variations in presentation and emphasis, all 13 of the codes developed from the press statements mirrored codes emerging from the posts. Codes were aggregated to form four broader and more abstract themes. These emergent themes, while distinct in their focus, reflect interrelated messages used by Rep. Bush to cultivate support for her protest.

To answer the remaining research questions, this study examined and compared Rep. Bush's protest to ongoing anti-eviction protests that did not involve the congresswoman. All news published in the United States about protests aimed at extending the eviction moratorium between July 1 and August 30 were collected and analyzed. This period was selected to capture anti-eviction protests that may have occurred prior to, during, and after the expiration of the eviction moratorium, as well as protests that continued demanding a permanent moratorium or "rent freeze" even after the CDC reintroduced a temporary eviction moratorium. News transcripts were accessed from the *Nexis Uni* database using the search terms "Evict* moratorium" AND "protest*" to retrieve reports.

The initial search yielded a total of 486 news manuscripts published in the United States but was reduced to 413 after removing duplicates. Lastly, each news manuscript was assessed to determine inclusion in the study. Unrelated stories and transcripts constituting mere mentions (i.e., mentioning the eviction moratorium in passing, without offering context) were removed, resulting in a final sample of 311. A preliminary assessment of reporting showed that *CNN* published the highest number of articles with 54 transcripts, followed by alternative news services and blogging platforms like *Newstex* and *MarketBeat*, which published 34 stories each. Cable news networks including *Fox News* and *MSNBC* published 21 and 18 stories, respectively, while several others had much fewer manuscripts.

Intercoder reliability

Content analysis was conducted using *A Priori* coding, with the news transcript as the unit of analysis. However, for transcripts discussing multiple topics that dedicated a single paragraph to the protests, the paragraph was used as the unit of analysis. Guided by the existing literature on the protest paradigm, a codebook was developed and used to train an undergraduate researcher to code for relevant content categories. Subsequently, the author and the undergraduate researcher independently read and coded 20 transcripts for *politician-activist involvement, evaluative tone,* and *sources* in accordance with the codebook. This initial effort revealed low intercoder agreement for *evaluative tone* and *source* with Krippendorff's alpha values of .67 and .71, respectively. Areas of disagreement were discussed and used to improve the codebook by further refining the coding categories. A new set of 35 transcripts (i.e., 11% of the sample) was randomly selected and coded using the updated codebook and achieved Krippendorff's reliability values ranging from .80 to 1 for all categories.

Politician-activist involvement was assessed based on whether Rep. Bush's protest was featured (i.e., mentioned) in a news story. Because members of the Squad, including Ocasio-Cortez and Pressley, participated during certain days of the sleep-in, they were also coded as politician-activists alongside Rep. Bush. Therefore, news stories were coded for the presence (1) or absence (2) of Rep. Bush and other politician-activists in anti-eviction protest coverage.

Evaluative tone was assessed by examining the overall slant of news articles on the anti-eviction protests. Following Dunaway (2013), the evaluative tone of news stories was assessed

as (1) positive; (2) negative; or (3) neutral. News stories were coded as positive if they predominantly portrayed the anti-eviction protests in a positive light (e.g., by praising protesters or rendering the protests as valid), while stories were coded as negative if they predominantly focused on negative aspects of the protests. Stories that were primarily fact-based or equally focused on negative and positive aspects of the protests were coded as neutral.

Sources were assessed by examining individuals to whom verbatim statements about the protests were attributed in the news coverage. Coders analyzed news stories to determine absence or presence of sources including (1) politicians involved in the protests, including Rep. Bush; (2) politicians and government officials not involved in the protests; (3) citizens involved in the protests; (4) citizens not involved in the protests; (5) social media/alternative media; and (6) experts/non-governmental organization (NGO); (7) others, to capture sources not previously mentioned; and (8) none, referring to news stories in which no source was cited. Due to low expected counts for various news sources including citizen protesters, citizens not involved in protests, politicians or government officials not involved in the protests, and experts/NGOs, these were recoded into an "other" category. As a result, news stories were categorized as having (1) political protester sources (i.e., politicians involved in the anti-eviction protests); (2) "other" sources including citizen protesters, citizens (non-protesters), experts/NGOs, social/alternative media; and (3) no sources.

Results

RQ1 asked about the messaging used by Rep. Bush to advocate for extending the eviction moratorium and cultivate support for her protest action. The qualitative analysis of posts and statements revealed four themes that reflect messaging strategies used by the congresswoman. These include "reminding and defining," "connecting and broadening dialogue," "personalizing and contrasting," and "calling for action." These interconnected themes also map onto distinct but overlapping phases of her act of protest.

Reminding and defining

"Reminding and defining" reflects efforts by Rep. Bush to call attention to the time until the expiration of the eviction moratorium on July 31 and the number of potential victims of eviction. This theme also reflects efforts to frame the problem, including defining potential evictions as "injustice" and "violence" and the expiration of the eviction moratorium as a "crisis" and "an emergency," and characterizing at-risk tenants as "our neighbors" and the "unhoused," a departure from the more commonly used but value-laden issue of homelessness. This "reminding and defining" effort began before the congresswoman took to the Capitol steps in protest.

For instance, on July 30, before the expiration of the eviction moratorium, Rep. Bush posted that "the eviction moratorium expires tomorrow" or "expires in 36 hours." On July 31, prior to

actively mobilizing for protests, she posted: "We have until midnight to act right now to keep 11 million people in their homes. Extend the moratorium!" (Bush, 2021j). She also described COVID-19 policies, including allowing the eviction moratorium to expire as "policy violence" and contended that extending the moratorium would amount to securing justice. At this time, the congresswoman began to describe the moratorium expiration in the more dire terms of life and death, saying "I know that people will die if we let the eviction moratorium expire" and "we still have time to save lives" (Bush, 2021a).

The shift from "reminding" to "defining" also marks a change in messaging. While reminding efforts were used in the hours leading up to and shortly after the expiration of the moratorium, defining and framing of potential evictions as a "crisis" and "emergency" began after the expiration of the moratorium as Rep. Bush began to seek federal intervention rather than a moratorium extension through Congress. On August 3, she claimed in a statement that "what has become clear is that the quickest way to get this [extended moratorium] done is through the executive branch" (Bush, 2021n), and subsequently began to demand executive action.

Connecting and broadening dialogue

"Connecting and broadening dialogue" refers to the use of the platform's connective affordances (i.e., tagging) to engage with other personalities, include them in the conversation, and thus broaden the dialogue. Specifically, Rep. Bush tagged prominent individuals who had demonstrated support for the protest, using praise and appreciation as tools to engage them. This strategy was unique to her messaging on X.

For instance, she posted on July 31:

> "The House can't extend the eviction moratorium without the Rules Committee. Chairman @RepMcGovern just joined us and announced his full support and that THE RULES COMMITTEE IS WILLING TO RECONVENE immediately to get this done" (Bush, 2021f)

Tagging Bernie Sanders after he joined Rep. Bush and other activists at the Capitol, she posted: "We had no question whether you were on our side @BernieSanders. Thank you for showing up. Our movement will save lives" (Bush, 2021m). Rep. Bush also used blame and shame when including prominent individuals or groups considered to be responsible for the expiration of the eviction moratorium. For instance, on July 31, just hours before the moratorium expiration, she posted:

> "Good morning. The eviction moratorium expires tonight at midnight. We could have extended it yesterday, but some Democrats went on vacation instead. We slept at the Capitol last night to ask them to come back and do their jobs. Today's their last chance." (Bush, 2021g)

These efforts to blame or attribute responsibility for the expiration of the moratorium were primarily aimed at her party as she noted the failure of the "democratic-controlled government"

to take action: "Millions are at risk of being removed from their homes, and a Democratic-controlled government has the power to stop it" (Bush, 2021i).

Lastly, tagging was used to include individuals at whom demands were directed or to seek public commitments toward the extension of the moratorium. For instance, the congresswoman posted:

> "I'm calling on @POTUS to extend the eviction moratorium. I'm calling on @SpeakerPelosi to reconvene the House for a vote. I'm calling on @SenSchumer to extend the eviction moratorium in the Senate. We control the House, Senate, and White House. We must keep people housed." (Bush, 2021h)

On August 2, Rep. Bush also posted:

> "I just had a conversation with @VP Kamala Harris. I needed her to look me in my eyes and I wanted to look in hers when I asked for help to prevent our people from being evicted. Madam Vice President let's work together to get this done. We need a federal eviction moratorium." (Bush, 2021l)

Personalizing and contrasting

"Personalizing and contrasting" reflects Rep. Bush's centering of her personal experience with homelessness in messaging, including characterizing herself as a "formerly unhoused" and "evicted" mother, and thus credible and empathetic, while contrasting herself with others in Congress. While personalizing was evident in press statements, letters to Congress, and posts, contrasting was used only in X messaging. In a letter to Democrats in Congress, she said, "I've been evicted three times myself…", "I know what it's like to be forced to live in my car with my two children…", and "I know firsthand the trauma and devastation that comes with the violence of being evicted" (Bush, 2021b).

The congresswoman also posted, "I've lived in my car. I know what it's like not to know where I can use the bathroom, or where I can sleep safely" (Bush, 2021c). In another instance, she posted that "the *House* is about to go *home* for August," in contrast to those at risk of eviction as the moratorium expires. "Delta variant is surging. I know not all of my colleagues get it, but take it from the formerly unhoused Congresswoman, we need to keep our people housed. We MUST extend the moratorium" (Bush, 2021d). Rep. Bush thus used her experience as a source of authority to make the case for an extension to the eviction moratorium, while contrasting her experience with the inability of many members of Congress to grasp the severity of the issue. "Earlier today, I sent a letter to my colleagues stressing the urgency of extending the eviction moratorium," she posted, adding that "many of them failed to meet this moment" (Bush, 2021e). The congresswoman also described the decision of the House to adjourn without voting on legislation to extend the eviction moratorium as "a moral failure," followed by a call to reconvene and later, to protest at the Capitol.

Calling for action

"Calling for action" refers to specific calls to act and extend the eviction moratorium. These calls were embedded throughout the messaging, beginning with calls to reconvene and address the expiration of the moratorium through legislative means. For instance, Rep. Bush first reached out to members of Congress, urging them to "reconvene to protect people from violent evictions during a deadly pandemic." Subsequently, she posted regarding her colleagues in Congress: "I'm inviting them now to join me in sleeping outside the Capitol in a push to extend the moratorium. It's not too late" (Bush, 2021e). This was followed by posts directed at President Joe Biden, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Shumer, and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. Finally, calls to action were extended to include potential protesters, as she posted:

> "Tonight, at Midnight. We're rallying for the extension of the eviction moratorium at the steps of the Capitol. If you're in DC, bring a mask, bring your voices, bring your signs. We need you here. To my colleagues: I'm asking you to join us, too." (Bush, 2021k)

These calls to join the protest action were accompanied by statements positioning the protest as a growing "movement" even as supporters joined Rep. Bush at the Capitol. For instance, the congresswoman posted updates such as, "It's 1 AM. Our solidarity is strong, and our numbers are growing" or "Our movement is growing. Tag your Rep…we need all hands on deck" (Bush, 2021i), while mentioning and tagging other politicians and activists who expressed support.

Most importantly, "calling for action" was characterized by a shift in messaging from emphasis on the individual (e.g., "I have been unhoused and evicted. I've slept in my car and slept outdoors. I know what it's like") to the collective (e.g., "Our movement is strong…our movement will save lives"). This shift in focus from the individual congresswoman's effort to the collective action of the movement was also reflected in Rep. Bush's post when the Biden administration through the CDC extended the eviction moratorium on August 4. She posted:

> "On Friday night, *I came* to the Capitol with my chair. *I refused* to accept that Congress could leave for vacation while 11 million people faced eviction. For 5 days, *we've been out here*, demanding that our government acts to save lives. Today, *our movement* moved mountains." (Bush, 2021o)

RQ2 asked whether the tone of reporting about Rep. Bush's protest differed from reporting that did not feature her protesting. A crosstabs analysis revealed that the tone of news stories featuring Rep. Bush protesting differed significantly from those that did not feature her (χ^2 (2, N = 311) = 25.60, $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = .29$). A z-test of proportions showed that reporting on her protest was more positive (28.3%) compared to other anti-eviction protests (4.5%). Conversely, news reporting on her protest featured a smaller proportion of neutral stories (65%) compared to other anti-eviction protests (93.2%). The percentage of news stories on Rep. Bush's protest that were negative (6.7%) was not significantly different from that of news stories that did not feature the congresswoman (2.3%).

RQ3 asked whether reporting featuring Rep. Bush's protest differed from those that did not feature the congresswoman in terms of reliance on news sources. A crosstabs analysis revealed

that the use of sources in news stories featuring her protest was significantly different from news stories that did not feature the congresswomen (χ^2 (2, N = 311) = 96.60, $p < .001$, Cramer's V = .56). A z-test of proportions showed that most anti-eviction news stories had no sources (87.5%) compared to reporting on Rep. Bush's protest (29.6%). Further, Rep. Bush and fellow activist-politicians (e.g., Ocasio-Cortez) featured as sources in most news stories about Rep. Bush's protest (60.1%) but only in a small portion of anti-eviction stories not focused on her sleep-in (1.1%). The use of "other" sources, including government officials, experts/NGOs, and social media sources, was not statistically different across news stories featuring the congresswoman (10.3%) and other anti-eviction stories (11.4%).

Discussion

This study set out to investigate the use of strategic messaging for protest mobilization by an elected office holder with the goal of influencing policy. Specifically, this study examined the use of messaging by U.S. congresswoman, Rep. Bush, as she mobilized in opposition to the expiration of the eviction moratorium initially put in place by the CDC during the COVID-19 pandemic. Second, this study compared media coverage of Rep. Bush's protest to coverage of other protests by anti-eviction groups. While this study is limited by its focus on a single case, findings can shed light on how activism could be used by political officeholders to mobilize, engage and connect with diverse groups, while eliciting favorable media attention.

Regarding the messaging used in advocacy and protest mobilization by the congresswoman, findings highlight strategic efforts to "remind and define," "connect and broaden dialogue," "personalize and contrast," and "call for action." These themes also reflect the core tasks of collective action framing, which include defining the core issues, blame allocation, recommending solutions, and calling for specific causes of action to be taken (Snow & Benford, 1988; Vicari, 2010; Xiong et al., 2019). Moreover, the selective use of different messaging strategies on Twitter versus official communication channels reflects shifts to match specific audiences and goals.

Specifically, reminding and defining messages appear intended to create a sense of urgency and evoke empathy by humanizing individuals affected by the expiration of the eviction moratorium, both in appeals to Congress using various statements and letters, and in mobilization efforts on X. Connecting and broadening dialogue not only offers praise or allocates blame, but also bolsters Rep. Bush's position by touting her powerful allies and increases the reach of her message. As such, broadening dialogue enables activists and movements to expand their influence (Tattersall, 2017). This could also be seen as a pressuring strategy intended to publicly elicit explicit or implied commitment from others, especially individuals who may be in a position to effect the desired change.

The use of personalizing and contrasting is noteworthy. In employing this type of message, Rep. Bush reduces the distance between herself and ordinary citizens whom she sought to

mobilize. In combination with the contrasting messaging, she is calling out colleagues who, despite having the same policymaking influence, cannot claim experience or familiarity with the situation. In other words, juxtaposing her personal eviction experience with their indifference toward the issue may reflect a strategy to prevent potential challenges to her legitimacy, while positioning herself as an activist rather than a participant in the existing power structure.

Unlike conventional calls to action in which social movement organizations focus on mobilizing individual activists and supporters, the theme of "calling for action" reflects a broader effort to rally diverse individuals and groups, including activists and nonactivists. Specifically, results show an initial call to action targeted at Congress (i.e., to vote on a potential extension of the moratorium) and, subsequently, shifting to a strategy that focused both on calling for executive action and mobilizing supporters to protest the expiration of the eviction moratorium. Taken together, while the protest itself may be viewed as a reflexive act in response to the looming expiration of the eviction moratorium, analysis of Rep. Bush's messaging suggests that it was strategically crafted and deployed to motivate different groups ranging from activists to government officials to take action. For political officeholders intending to use activist messaging strategies, these findings offer insight about how to leverage triggering events, position themselves effectively in the opposition, and gain authenticity, while simultaneously engaging diverse stakeholders including policymakers and activists. This, in turn, can strengthen their position and enhance the ability to achieve the goals of the movement.

Findings regarding media reporting of the anti-eviction protests indicate clear differences between coverage of the general anti-eviction protests (i.e., by citizens) and Rep. Bush's protest. Specifically, reporting about Rep. Bush's protest was more likely to have a positive tone compared to anti-eviction stories that did not feature the congresswoman. Further, news stories featuring her protest relied heavily on her or other activist politicians as news sources. Conversely, close to 90 percent of stories featuring anti-eviction protesters other than the congresswoman had no sources.

These results lend support to the protest paradigm, to an extent, but also highlight its limitations as a framework for understanding media coverage of protests that may fall outside of the typical. On one hand, the absence of ordinary protesters as news sources is consistent with previous research (Adegbola et al., 2022; Boyle et al., 2012) and reflects a pattern of reporting that marginalizes protesters. Yet, the distinct pattern of coverage seen in stories that featured Rep. Bush point to a few possibilities.

The relatively positive tone of reporting in stories featuring the congresswoman's protest, and the fact that stories mentioning her activism heavily relied on her as a news source, suggest that reporting of protests featuring elected officials is inconsistent with the protest paradigm. That is, such protests may elicit media attention and positive coverage, without needing to resort to contentious tactics. In fact, given that reliance on official/political elites' voices is an attribute of the protest paradigm (Di Cicco, 2010; Lee, 2014), the involvement of elected officials in protest, as in the present case, could serve as a useful strategy to amplify the official's voice and publicize the grievances of the oppositional group they represent.

In addition to gaining more positive and legitimizing coverage, stories featuring Rep. Bush included several instances in which the CDC's extension of the eviction moratorium was attributed to the congresswoman's activism. For instance, *The New York Times* described her as a leader among progressives and wrote that "the first-term congresswoman from St. Louis intensified pressure on the Biden administration and showed her tactics could yield results," while the right-leaning *The Wall Street Journal* recognized her effort in a piece titled, "How Cori Bush Put Life Story to Work in Eviction Protest at Capitol." Others, such as *The CUT* were more direct in their attributions of the extension to Rep. Bush, with a headline claiming that "Cori Bush Kept Millions of People from Losing Their Homes." Such attributions, coupled with the positive coverage, could have an enhancing effect on the congresswoman's profile.[2]

This study has both practical and theoretical implications. First, the findings of this study suggest that activism can be used as a strategy by political officeholders/politicians to enhance their public profile, and potentially, as a tool to augment conventional policymaking efforts. From a theoretical standpoint, findings suggest that the very routines and guidelines that lead to delegitimizing coverage of protests may benefit certain types of activism, and thus, may allow activism to be used strategically as a tool for gaining publicity and achieving political goals. Perhaps, most importantly, this study reflects a case that is at the intersection of public relations, public interest communications, activism, and political communication, and highlights the importance of recognizing how public relations and public interest communications practices and strategy are embedded in and utilized in different areas.

Limitations

This study is not without its limitations. As a case study focused on a single instance of politician-led activism within the specific context of a global pandemic, it is difficult to extrapolate the findings of this study to other protests. Moreover, the short period under consideration further limits the findings of this study. Lastly, this study does not parse potential differences in news reporting across ideologically dissimilar media outlets, largely because of the modest subsamples of news stories published by each outlet. Despite these limitations, this study offers useful insight into the use of strategic messaging for protest mobilization by a political office holder, and its potential implications for media attention and coverage.

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PRACTITIONER Q&A

BEYOND BARS: CRAFTING FREEDOM STORIES WITH THE SEATTLE CLEMENCY PROJECT

BROOKE KAUFMAN AND JENNIFER SMITH

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Practitioner Q & A

Beyond Bars: Crafting Freedom Stories with the Seattle Clemency Project

Interview with Brooke Kaufman and Jennifer Smith

Seattle Clemency Project

Description of the Seattle Clemency Project

The Seattle Clemency Project increases access to justice by connecting people seeking early release from prison and those facing deportation due to old criminal convictions with free legal representation (Seattle Clemency Project, n.d.-b).

The organization represents individuals who committed crimes decades ago and have changed their lives for the better. Washington state abolished parole in 1984, leaving the public with a prison system that fails to recognize and reward redemption (Braveman et al., 2022). Washington is also home to many immigrants who qualify for post-conviction relief but lack access to affordable legal representation (McQueeney & Lavelle, 2015).

To date, the Seattle Clemency Project has had a substantial impact. The organization has helped 102 people secure freedom from life or long sentences, worked on 22 cases preventing deportation and permanent family separation, matched 275 clients with pro bono attorneys, and generated an estimated $11 million dollars in free legal services (Seattle Clemency Project, n.d.-a).

Brooke Kaufman's Biography

Brooke joined the Seattle Clemency Project as a Communications Specialist in 2022 after graduating from the University of Washington with a degree in Law, Societies & Justice. Prior to joining SCP as a full-time employee, Brooke was a volunteer with the UW Juvenile Parole

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Project, providing advocacy for petitioners going before the Washington State Indeterminate Sentence Review Board. She previously worked with the Human Rights Defense Center as an independent research contractor and has published writing in Criminal Legal News. During her time at UW, Brooke served as Editor-in-Chief of the student newspaper and published articles on access to justice, identity and relationships, abortion access, outdoor recreation, and the arts. As the communications lead for SCP, she is responsible for writing and developing content to raise awareness for the organization and its clients. Her goal is to raise the visibility of SCP's mission to assist persons seeking early release from prison, prevent deportations and permanent family separation, and support the reentry of people returning to the community. Brooke is also the communications lead for the Redemption Project of Washington, a partnership between SCP and the Washington Defender Association (Seattle Clemency Project, n.d.-c). Brooke published her first book, *On Redemption: Second Chances and the Post-Conviction Landscape in Washington State,* in 2024.

Jennifer Smith's Biography

Jennifer is a Co-Founder of the Seattle Clemency Project and has served as the Executive Director since 2016. Jennifer began her legal career as a public defender in San Francisco and worked in private criminal defense for several years. Her commitment to ensuring those who have been impacted by the criminal justice system have a voice and second chance is grounded in a deep belief that we are all fallible and capable of reform, and a healthy legal system must account for that. Jennifer is a graduate of the University of California San Francisco College of Law and the University of San Diego (Seattle Clemency Project, n.d.-c).

Question: *Can you share an overview of what the Seattle Clemency Project is, the work you do, and how strategic communications play a role in achieving your mission?*

Jennifer: The Seattle Clemency Project's mission is to fill a critical need for free legal services for people with decades-old criminal convictions. We help individuals seek early release from prison and prevent deportation triggered by old convictions. We recruit volunteer lawyers from the private legal community to fill this gap (McQueeney & Lavelle, 2015).

Most of the private lawyers we recruit don't have direct experience with the criminal justice system, but many are concerned with how the system operates and disproportionately impacts communities of color and economically depressed communities (Braveman et al., 2022). Our strategic communications play a crucial role in drawing these lawyers into the work. We do this by highlighting how people in need of free legal representation have weathered

the criminal justice system with extraordinary resilience and grace. We show lawyers how their legal skills can be used to advocate for people impacted by the criminal justice system.

Question: *What unmet need was the Project trying to fulfill in Washington's criminal legal system?*

Jennifer: Before we started, there was no mechanism in the legal system to get people a free lawyer for clemency cases or post-conviction relief for immigrants facing deportation. Washington state abolished parole in 1984, leaving us with a prison system that fails to recognize and reward redemption (Braveman et al., 2022). This has had profound impacts. People who have transformed their lives while incarcerated had no way to have their growth recognized or to seek early release based on their rehabilitation.

For immigrants, old convictions were triggering deportation proceedings and tearing families apart, even when these individuals had long since turned their lives around (McQueeney & Lavelle, 2015). We wanted to create a bridge between those needing legal representation and private sector lawyers willing to volunteer their services. Our goal was to fill this critical gap in the justice system and provide hope for those who had been left behind by the abolition of parole.

Question: *Who had to act or do something differently for you to achieve the goals of your project?*

Jennifer: We needed private sector lawyers to step up and volunteer their time and skills. This was a big ask because many of these lawyers had no experience with criminal law or immigration law. They had to be willing to step outside their comfort zones and learn new areas of law. But we also needed to change how we talked about these cases. When we first started the project, it was two lawyers, me and another lawyer, and one non-lawyer. Our initial idea was to focus on the injustices of extreme sentences like the three strikes law. We thought we'd get lawyers to go in and make arguments about how unjust and unfair these sentences were. However, we found that sharing stories of transformation and resilience was more effective in engaging volunteers and supporters (Clark, 2020).

Brooke: For example, when we started visiting prisons and meeting with people, they didn't want to talk about the injustice of their sentences. Instead, they wanted to share stories like, "Can I tell you about how 20 years ago, 10 years into my sentence, I got a letter from my daughter, and it changed my life, and I've been sober ever since after a lifetime of addiction and negative patterns?" Or, "Can I tell you about how I had a teacher in here who told me that I was smart for the first time as a 40-year-old man, and I went back to my cell, packed up my TV, picked up a book, and I've never been the same since?" These stories of personal growth and transformation became our most powerful tool for engaging volunteers and supporters (e.g., Clark, 2020).

Question: *What did you think would motivate individuals to engage and participate in this project of restorative justice?*

Jennifer: We believed in the power of personal stories. When we started going into prisons and meeting with people, we were struck by how much they wanted to share about how they had changed their lives, even under these hopeless circumstances. It wasn't about the injustice of their sentences; it was about their personal growth and transformation. We found these stories incredibly motivating, and we believed others would, too (Clark, 2020). For example, we met individuals who had committed serious crimes in their youth but had spent decades turning their lives around. They had earned degrees, mentored other inmates, and developed profound insights into their past actions and their potential for positive impact in the future (Jones, 2022).

Brooke: We believed that sharing these stories of transformation would not only motivate lawyers to volunteer but also change public perceptions about the potential for rehabilitation. It's one thing to argue abstractly for second chances; it's another to meet someone who has profoundly changed and see the potential impact of connecting them with that second chance (Clark, 2020; Clough et al., 2023).

Question: *How did you get that message in front of them?*

Brooke: We use various communication channels to share these powerful stories. Our newsletters have been a key tool. We create success stories that are about 1,000 words long, focusing on how a person is doing since their release—what school they're attending, their job, their family life, and a bit about how they connected with Seattle Clemency Project and their earlier life (Mcqueeney & Lavelle, 2015).

We also use social media, although we're very careful about how we present stories on these platforms to avoid exploitation (Clough et al., 2023). Direct outreach to the legal community has been crucial, often involving in-person presentations where we can share these stories more fully.

This fall, we published a book project that shares more in-depth stories of our clients' lives and transformations. This project allowed us to dive deeper into people's experiences to provide a more comprehensive look at their journeys. Our approach to capturing and sharing stories centers on finding the right balance between showcasing these powerful narratives and respecting our clients' privacy and dignity (Jones, 2022).

The book includes professional photos to give our clients a memento of their participation. It's taken over a year to put everything together, with a big part of that time dedicated to building trusting relationships with the participants. It's crucial that they have full agency over what they put out there, especially since the stories include insight on their families and other personal relationships (Bryan, 2023).

Question: *What are the unique challenges you face when communicating about issues*

of injustice, and how do you navigate the balance between raising awareness and advocating for change without sensationalizing individuals' stories?

Jennifer: It's a delicate balance. We feel very protective of our clients' stories and very fortunate to be hearing them. We need to share these stories to recruit volunteer lawyers and raise funds, but we're always cautious about not exploiting our clients' experiences (Jones, 2022; McQueeney & Lavelle, 2015).

There's a risk of sensationalizing these stories or creating a sort of trauma porn that doesn't respect the dignity of the individuals involved (Clough et al., 2023). We're also aware that once a story is shared publicly, it can't be easily retracted. This could potentially impact a person's life after release by creating an unfair expectation for them to live up to a certain narrative (Clough et al., 2023).

To navigate this, we've developed a lived experience compensation model to pay people for sharing their stories, and we always ensure they have control over what's shared. We want to honor their experiences without putting them under a microscope or creating unrealistic expectations for their lives post-release (McQueeney & Lavelle, 2015).

Brooke: We're very conscious of not overexposing people who might be vulnerable. We take time to build trust and make sure our clients understand they're under no obligation to share their stories.

There have been times when we've started interviews and then realized that the person wasn't comfortable or ready to share their story publicly. In those cases, we respect their decision to step back and refrain from sharing their story (McQueeney & Lavelle, 2015).

It's about honoring their experience and navigating the process respectfully. We've learned to be patient, to listen, and to always prioritize the well-being and comfort of our clients over our communication goals. It's a constant learning process, but one that we believe is crucial to maintaining the integrity of our work and the trust of those we serve (Jones, 2022).

Question: *In terms of communications, what strategies have been most effective in gaining the trust of incarcerated individuals and encouraging them to engage with the project?*

Brooke: Building trust takes time, and we've learned to be patient and adaptable in our approach. We've changed our interview styles many times, adapting to the different comfort levels and needs of the individuals we work with (Jeung et al., 2018). For our book project, we did introductory meetings before any interviews, gave people control over what they shared, and involved them in the review process (Bryan, 2023).

We've found that face-to-face meetings are incredibly valuable. I've made it a priority to meet people in person, visit their homes, and attend their photo shoots. This personal connection has brought out more honesty and openness in our conversations (Paxton et al., 2020).

Question: *How do you navigate the complexities of communicating with a*

diverse stakeholder group, including victims' families, community members, and the legal system, while ensuring all voices are heard and respected?

Jennifer: This is a challenging aspect of our work, and we're always striving to balance different perspectives and needs. While our primary focus is on our clients, we're aware that their stories impact many others. We try to be mindful of all stakeholders in how we frame and share these stories (Braveman et al., 2022).

With the legal system, we focus on the transformative power of second chances and the potential for rehabilitation. We use our clients' stories to illustrate how people can change and contribute positively to society if given the opportunity (Clark, 2020).

For community members and the broader public, we try to humanize our clients and show their growth and potential. We're careful not to minimize the impact of past actions, but we emphasize the possibility of change and redemption (Paxton et al., 2020).

Regarding victims' families, we approach this with great sensitivity. While we don't typically engage directly with victims' families in our communication efforts, we always keep in mind the impact of crimes on victims and their loved ones. Our goal is to promote healing and restoration for all affected by the criminal justice system (Clough et al., 2023; Jones, 2022).

Question: *How have you used communications strategies to address public skepticism or opposition to clemency, especially for individuals with long or life sentences? Could you provide an example of a campaign or message that significantly impacted public opinion?*

Brooke: One of our most effective strategies has been to focus on personal transformation stories rather than abstract arguments about justice. When we share stories of individuals who have profoundly changed during their incarceration—earning degrees, mentoring others, developing deep insights into their past actions, and rebuilding relationships with family and community members—it challenges people's preconceptions about those serving life and long sentences as somehow irredeemable or incapable of change (Clark, 2020; Paxton et al., 2020).

For example, we had a client who committed a senseless act of violence when he was 19. He shared with us that his decision was motivated by immaturity and a warped desire to provide for his girlfriend and young son. He spent nearly 40 years in prison, and during this time, he found mentorship and grace from other men who were incarcerated. Through positive influence and renewed faith, he accepted responsibility for his actions and committed himself to a higher purpose.

After successfully petitioning for clemency with the aid of Seattle Clemency Project volunteer attorneys, he returned home to his family. He upheld his promise to live a life of purpose and became the program director and pastor for a nonprofit ministry that connects people released from prison with transitional housing and community support. When we shared his story, focusing on his growth and his

contributions to society, it resonated with people who might otherwise be skeptical of the rehabilitative potential of someone with such a long sentence.

More and more, we're seeing support from diverse quarters, including prosecutors and judges, who recognize the value of second chances when they're earned through genuine transformation.

Question: *What role has the legal community played in the Project's communication efforts, and how do you leverage their expertise to foster continued volunteer engagement and public advocacy?*

Jennifer: The legal community, particularly private sector lawyers, is a key audience for our communication efforts. We share our clients' stories to inspire these lawyers to volunteer their time and expertise. Many of these lawyers have never had direct experience with the criminal justice system, so these stories serve as a powerful introduction to the realities faced by our clients.

We also educate lawyers about the intricacies of the criminal justice system and the impact they can have through pro bono work. We've found that once lawyers engage with our project and meet our clients, they often become passionate advocates themselves. We leverage their expertise in multiple ways. Some volunteer lawyers write op-eds or speak at events, sharing their experiences and insights gained from working on clemency cases. Others help us refine our legal arguments and strategies, which in turn informs our broader communication efforts.

The involvement of respected members of the legal community also lends credibility to our work, helping to shift perceptions among other legal professionals and the broader public.

Question: *In what ways have you adapted your communications strategies over time to ensure your messaging remains impactful, engaging, and aligned with the public interest?*

Brooke: Our communications strategy has evolved significantly over time, adapting to the needs of our clients, our volunteers, and the broader public. Here's a breakdown of how we've changed and what we've learned:

1. Shift in Focus: We started with a focus on legal injustices, but quickly realized that personal transformation stories were much more impactful. This shift allowed us to humanize the issues and connect with people on an emotional level.
2. Expanding Content: We've moved from short "success stories" in newsletters to more comprehensive, person-first storytelling methods.
3. Collaborative Storytelling: We've developed a much more extensive process for building trust, conducting interviews, and reviewing content with our clients. This ensures that the stories we share are authentic and respectful.
4. Ethical Considerations: We've implemented a lived experience compensation model, recognizing the value of our client's stories and the

emotional labor involved in sharing them.

5. Diversifying Platforms: While we still use newsletters and direct outreach, we're exploring how to effectively use social media and other digital platforms while maintaining our commitment to ethical storytelling.

Our interview process for the book project illustrates many of these changes:

1. Initial Outreach:
    - We reach out via email, text, or phone call to potential participants.
    - About 60% are people we've worked with before, while others are new clients or referrals. The qualifying factor is incarceration experience and/or experience with the post-conviction review and relief process.
    - We hold focus groups with potential participants to get their input on the interview process and project purpose.
2. Project Introduction:
    - We have an introductory meeting or call to share project documents and answer questions.
    - We provide a participant agreement that outlines the conditions of participation.
3. Two-Part Interview:
    - Each interview is limited to two hours to prevent fatigue.
    - The first part covers early life and adolescence, focusing on the participant's mentality and motivating factors at different life stages.
    - The second part focuses on the incarceration period, the turning point toward transformation, and life after release.
    - Interviews are structured by the writer, but the participants are encouraged to discuss whatever topics and experiences they see fit.
4. Post-Interview Process:
    - We create a chronology after the first interview to guide the second interview.
    - We conduct a draft story review with the participant.
    - We get final approval from the participant before the story goes into the manuscript and is sent to the copy editor.
    - Participants reserve the right to cut their story from the project at any point if they are uncomfortable or unsure about moving forward.
5. Ethical Storytelling Approach:
    - We emphasize that this isn't just a book of success stories, but a nuanced look at struggle, dedication, and overcoming adversity.
    - We encourage honest depictions of the ups and

downs of reentry and other life periods.
    - We focus on relatability, showing that extraordinary stories are often extraordinarily relatable.

For organizations looking to implement a similar process, here are some actionable steps :

1. Develop a Clear Agreement: Create a participant agreement that outlines the entire process, including how the stories will be used and the participant's rights.
2. Implement a Multi-Stage Interview Process: Break interviews into manageable parts and allow time for reflection between sessions.
3. Prioritize Participant Review: Build in multiple opportunities for participants to review and approve their stories.
4. Create a Compensation Model: Recognize the value of lived experience by compensating participants for their time and emotional labor.
5. Focus on Trust-Building: Allocate significant time to building relationships with participants before diving into their stories.
6. Embrace Complexity: Don't shy away from the nuances and contradictions in people's stories. These often make the narratives more relatable and impactful.
7. Continually Seek Feedback: Regularly ask participants and your audience for feedback on your storytelling approach and be willing to adapt.

Remember, this process is as much about respecting and empowering the storytellers as it is about creating impactful narratives. It requires time, patience, and a willingness to continually learn and adapt.

Question: *What advice would you give to someone interested in starting a similar initiative, particularly regarding developing a strong communication strategy to engage the public and stakeholders?*

Brooke: Take the time to build trust with the people whose stories you're sharing. This isn't a process that can be rushed. It takes time and emotional labor for people to feel comfortable enough to share their stories openly and honestly (Jeung et al., 2018; Mcqueeney & Lavelle, 2015). Give people control over their narratives. Make it clear that they can decide what to share and what to keep private. Involve them in the review process and be willing to make changes based on their feedback (Clough et al., 2023).

Ultimately, this work should elevate the voice and perspective of the person with lived experience. It should honor the bravery that is required of someone who is sharing the complete truth of their life (Clark, 2020).

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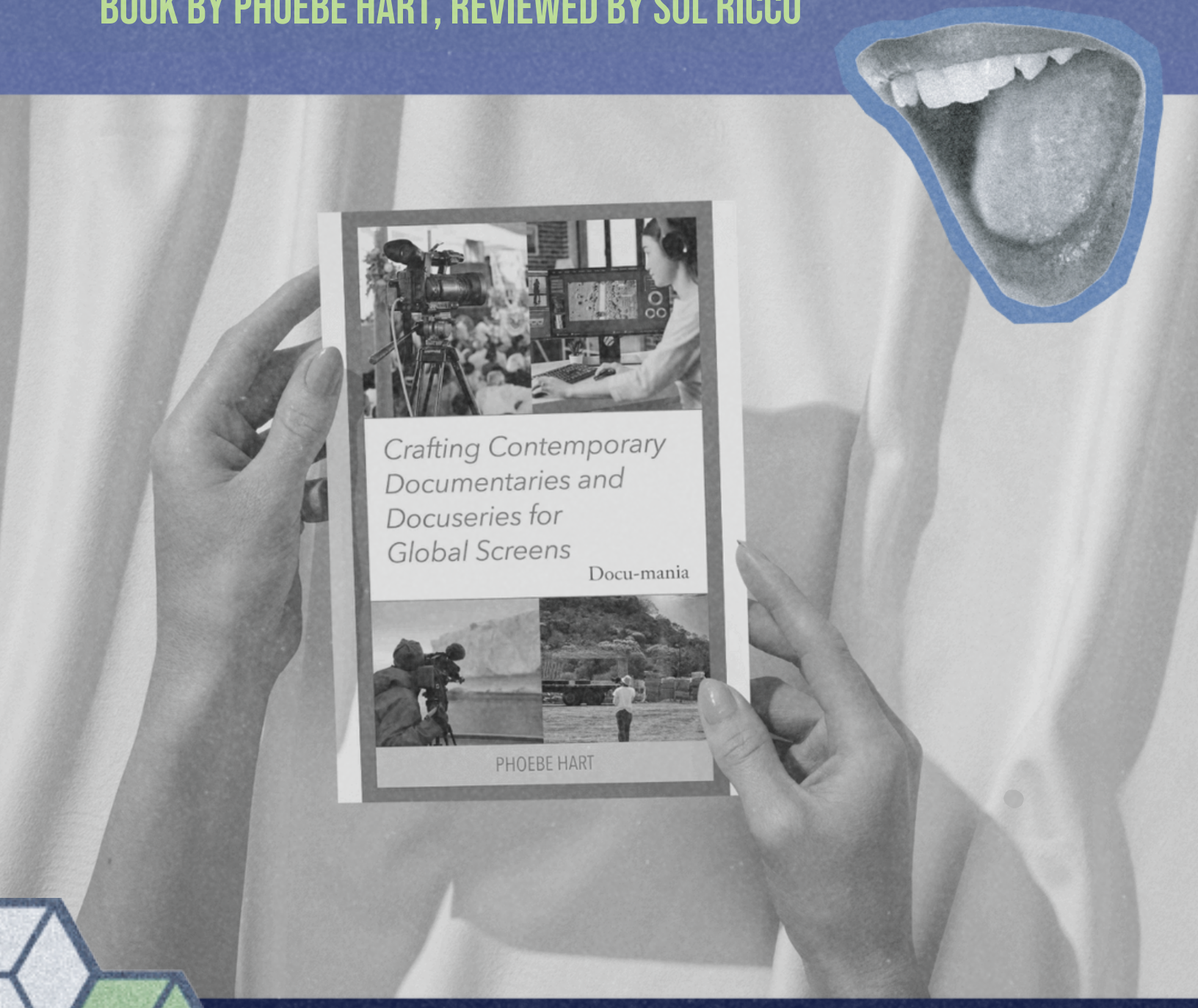
BOOK REVIEW

CRAFTING CONTEMPORARY DOCUMENTARIES AND DOCUSERIES FOR GLOBAL SCREENS: DOCU-MANIA

BOOK BY PHOEBE HART, REVIEWED BY SOL RICCO



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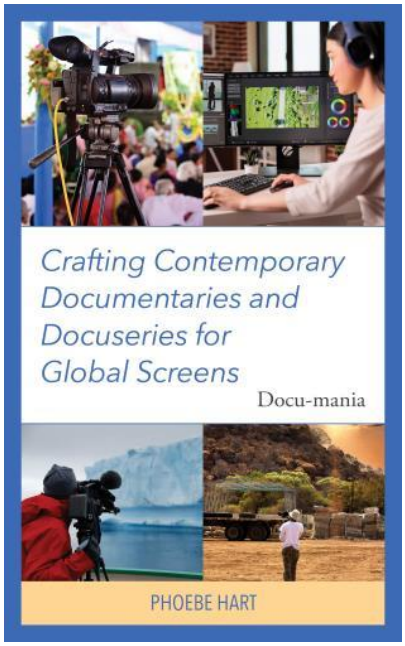
Book Review: *Crafting Contemporary Documentaries and Docuseries for Global Screens: Docu-Mania*

By Phoebe Hart

Reviewed by Sol Ricco

California State University, Sacramento

Hart, P. (2024). *Crafting contemporary documentaries and docuseries for global screens: Docu-mania.* Lexington Books.



In a world of increasing media consumption and accessibility, *Crafting Contemporary Documentaries and Docuseries for Global Screens* is rooted in empowering the social and cultural value presented in documentary filmmaking. Author Phoebe Hart (2024) offers a critical approach that combines diverse perspectives, blending theoretical frameworks with the lived experiences of contemporary filmmakers. One of Hart's fundamental assertions throughout the book is that documentary filmmakers can serve as changemakers if they choose to do so, and Hart explores how documentaries can serve as a tool to inform and unite diverse audiences. While not all documentaries or filmmaking practices are rooted in public interest communications principles, many of the frameworks in Hart's book could be of use to public interest communicators building compelling narratives to drive social change.

Much of Hart's book is oriented to budding filmmakers and includes advice for succeeding in the documentary filmmaking industry. Hart (2024) informs readers that "to achieve mastery of the craft, one needs not only specialist resources[...]but also continued and iterative opportunities to present their creative works to an audience" (p. 162). The

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book seeks to provide readers with necessary perspective and insight into the actionable tools one can use to carve out a path in the profession of documentary filmmaking, encouraging readers to adopt a mindset of flexibility and resiliency to withstand the continually diversification of demands embedded into the profession. Specifically, Hart's work examines post-COVID-19 documentary filmmaking, exploring successes and struggles for recognition amid industry limitations through a series of case studies. Interviews with global filmmakers reveal challenges, innovations, and recommendations to support impactful storytelling.

Hart highlights the importance of lived experience by synthesizing in-depth interviews with established documentary filmmakers to navigate the themes of each chapter. The author also continually emphasizes reflexivity "by acknowledging and creating an awareness of how my research values and assumptions affect the collection and interpretation of data" (Hart, 2024, p. xxiv), thus maintaining a realistic and relatable perspective for readers. In many ways, the book acts as a historical encapsulation and academic time stamp as the content development for the book intersects with the COVID-19 pandemic. Hart addresses the ambitious concerns associated with complex storytelling and offers a key takeaway: that global documentaries and docuseries are influenced by and, in response, shift and shape societal values, often amplifying underrepresented narratives and marginalized experiences. According to Hart (2024), the public's "appetite and tolerance for voices outside dominant paradigms is increasing" (p. xv) even in the face of "contemporary limitations on creativity, creative practice, work, mobility, and access" (p. xv) that impact the modern filmmaker. Understanding the need to promote counternarratives to harmful dominant narratives is a core tenet of public interest communications.

Providing layers of depth in each chapter, Hart develops arguments based on filmmakers' lived experience and advocates that documentary filmmaking deepens viewers' awareness and understanding of social phenomena by encouraging a self-driven connection. Chapter One homes in on the documentary industry's history and contemporary state of affairs and explores several key filmmakers' career journeys, characterizing these careers as boundaryless and requiring adaptability, flexibility, and alignment with personal values. Much like the process of filmmaking itself, Hart positions a career in documentary filmmaking as a lesson in self-efficacy and confidence, emphasizing the ability of individuals in the field to "take control of their own destiny" (Hart, 2024, p. 2). In describing the industry itself, Hart paints a picture of a complex landscape organized around specific markets, content formats, genres, and platforms. The book promotes the idea that documentary filmmaking is effectively a form of knowledge production with an emphasis on empathetic learning. Documentary filmmaking also shares certain features with the field of journalism, including a commitment to fairness and accuracy. However, Hart underscores a key difference in approach with documentary filmmaking: filmmakers build lasting subject relationships and often explore topics from a single nuanced perspective. Chapter One ultimately offers tips for budding filmmakers, including learning on the job and finding a hot topic to explore, all to take advantage of those unique career opportunities available in different markets and with different types of content.

Chapter Two focuses on the process of development in documentary filmmaking, outlining how filmmakers generate ideas, conduct research with experts, and create initial materials like synopses or proposals. These materials support funding pitches, enabling further script development, preliminary shooting, or sizzle reels to attract investment, and the chapter focuses on various elements within these steps—all leading toward the goals of production and distribution of viable projects. Hart (2024) proposes that documentary filmmakers "may be viewed as functional authors, typically crafting the story arc, and preparing detailed scripts, treatments, synopses, and voice-over narrations" (p. 30). In this function as an author, Hart recommends one possible route that she calls "following a thread" (p. 35), or maintaining a thematic or topical pattern both within a single documentary and across documentaries in a broader portfolio of work. This tactic could help budding filmmakers establish their own reputation and carve out a niche in the field. For example, Hart (2024) discusses filmmaker Betsy Kalin, who "declared a strong interest social justice theme, although she often sought out a thematic of community in her work in arenas where she was at times an insider and at other times an outsider" (p. 38). Above all, Hart champions the position that documentary filmmakers must be persistent and possess the ability to contextualize the social layers surrounding the topic of interest both while seeking investors and during the actualization of the project itself.

In Chapter Three, Hart examines the crucial and often complex relationships between documentary filmmakers and collaborators, highlighting how support, competition, and power dynamics influence creative success, ethical challenges, and project development from start to finish. Collaboration is often essential in the process of filmmaking, but, as Hart notes, "Collaborations are subject to disturbances, divergences, and differences in the speed at which people prefer to work" (Hart, 2024, p. 58). In discussing the role of relationship building, Hart again touches on the recurrent theme of filmmaker reflexivity. The chapter positions collaborators as co-creators, emphasizes the importance of the filmmaking crew, and illuminates the sometimes-contentious relationship between documentarians and the subjects who allow their lives to be documented. Hart (2024) recalls, "In the past, many documenting ventures were exploitative at their core, visiting vulnerable communities and extracting their stories for the entertainment of the masses or career advancement" (p. 67). Per Hart, an intentional awareness of intent versus impact—or gain versus loss—is key to mitigating the exploitation of participants for entertainment and is an essential aspect of the creative filmmaking process. This takeaway rings true across disciplines, as it is also inherent to the task of making personal narratives public more generally.

Chapter Three also reinforces the notion that social relationships, whether between creative collaborators or between filmmaker and subject, are strengthened through an experience of immediacy and validation. Hart encourages readers to consider the function of meaningful collaboration and urges documentary filmmakers to build genuine connections with participants, celebrating their openness in sharing stories in such a public manner. As Hart (2024) explains, "The time and space before documentary filming begins is critical for the smooth production of the documentary, and to 'brief' the participants on not only the questions that will be asked, but

how the filming works," arguing that this actionable step contributes to a foundation of building trust with your participants (p. 73). The author thus presents a balanced argument considering the difficulties embedded in collaboration, but ultimately posits that embracing a person-first mindset and community-centered approach to documentary filmmaking is both necessary and respectful in terms of interacting with subjects.

In Chapter Four, Hart shifts from framework and philosophies to a more concentrated focus on pragmatic approaches to documentary filmmaking. Specifically, Hart explores the more technical aspects of filmmaking, including cinematography and sound recording, as well as contemporary filmmakers' perceptions of this technology. The author acknowledges the increasing accessibility of filming equipment, but again underscores the central role of the filmmaker in that, "The effective deployment of all these technologies requires a raft of skills, dispositions, and cognitive abilities that contribute to the crafting of exceptional visions and potent screen stories" (Hart, 2024, p. 88). Hart asserts that filmmakers' choice tools and technology should be reflective of the documentaries' goals and argues that participant comfort and creative experimenting with respect to such tools are also key elements to impactful documentary filmmaking. For instance, Hart (2024) explains how filmmaker Yilmaz Vucuru infused his work with experimentation, noting, "His creative explorations of self-expression may be a form of…catharsis or the emotional release from speaking about traumatic experiences, recognising the potential therapeutic benefits of the creative work" (p. 98). The author offers readers actionable takeaways such as infusing the process of filmmaking with creativity, including not only the art of storytelling but also the more technical aspects. According to Hart (2024), "The practical uses of these tools are highly cognitive, and their applications speak to the intentions, ideas, and aims of individual documentarians more broadly" (p. 100).

Hart uses Chapter Five to explore editing and rewriting in documentary filmmaking. In doing so, Hart provides practical guidance to budding filmmakers in terms of preparing for the reality of feedback about their work. The process of incorporating feedback and conducting revisions allows filmmakers to address concerns that arise around complex narratives, including the ongoing struggle to translate multidimensional storylines into the meta-analysis of a documentary's final product. As Hart (2024) describes, "contemporary documentary filmmakers are faced with the challenge of crafting content in the edit for increasingly sophisticated audiences who often desire longer formats with intricate interweaving storylines" (p. 111). Hart thus prepares readers for common challenges in post-production, characterizing these hurdles as innate to the creative process. The author also explores how essential narratives will be unlocked by embracing the post-production phase through balancing the emotional intensity of revision with time, perspective, and an open mind. Hart (2024) assures readers, "Crafting the documentary narrative in the edit is testing, as it requires a re-writing of the narrative that adds more time to the edit than a typical fictional film of a similar length if justice is to be done to the creative undertaking" (p. 120). Hart effectively characterizes the editing phase of filmmaking as a challenging but necessary step in the making of a successful documentary.

With the understanding that filmmakers develop a deep emotional and personal attachment to their work, the sixth and final chapter of the book explores gauging and growing the real-world impact of documentaries. While not all documentaries will reach global or commercial success, Hart (2024) provides readers with encouragement, in that "even the modest majority of finished factual screen projects may achieve significant audiences and influences for the documentary subjects and their situations if distributed and promoted carefully" (p. 121). Hart describes common distribution and promotional tactics including film festivals and broadcasting, but also more innovative and strategic approaches that may be suitable for certain types of documentaries. For instance, Hart discusses the case of Karina Holden, the documentarian behind *Blue*, which presented audiences with a message of protecting oceans and marine life from the negative impacts of industrialization. Hart (2024) notes, "As part of their plan, the *Blue* producing team built strategic partnerships between community groups such as the Australian Marine Conservation Society, the corporate sector, NGOs, and policy makers, and drummed up support for the project with the assistance of Good Pitch" (p. 134). Especially for topics of public interest, filmmakers can get creative by forging connections with established groups and building strategic communications approaches to expand the impact of their work.

Ultimately, even as documentary filmmakers may seek to create compelling work around contemporary issues, documentarian are not solely responsible for the impact of what they produce. Per Hart, "For all the ways that creators try to ensure their documentaries are provocative and court controversy, the distribution period is highly unpredictable and may rely on the available human resources to be stretched to their limits, which may lead to burnout for the creators" (p. 140). Documentary reception is influenced by various aspects such as depicted realism, modality of viewing, and prior knowledge. Audience members bring in their standpoint when watching documentaries and become active participants who are emotionally invested in the film. Hart argues that this transformative process builds a bridge of trust in the viewer, as the narrative is trusted to be real and true because the film is recognized as a documentary, so much so that the audience member may start to experience attitudinal changes after viewing. From this perspective, the book seeks to influence an awareness that compelling nonfiction narratives have ripple effects and a unique relationship with social change. Chapter Six underscores the ongoing assertion that documentary films can be tools to inform and/or unite audiences across social and cultural differences, presenting filmmakers as agents of change.

Overall, Hart effectively characterizes the industry and art of documentary filmmaking, while reinforcing the notion that documentaries have the power to influence societal values and amplify underrepresented narratives and social experiences. Hart's concluding chapter provides readers with support and perspective to overcome documentary making barriers. The final notes are pragmatic and layered with perspective from established filmmakers, highlighting the impact of COVID-19 on filmmaker's decision-making processes as it relates to sustainability and well-being. Hart asserts that there were both positive and negative hurdles to overcome but ultimately, the pandemic brought about a heighted sense of work-life balance within the industry. Hart speaks to the fundamental role of funding and how documentary filmmakers must often

supplement their work portfolios with peripheral work. Funding challenges are an ongoing hurdle for documentary filmmakers, but Hart also recognizes not all filmmakers prioritize financial gain—the closing chapter provides budding filmmakers with the reassurance that there is diversity in how filmmakers define and achieve success.

Crafting Contemporary Documentaries and Docuseries for Global Screens ultimately seeks to identify methods for building support for documentary filmmakers through exposure to a variety of viewpoints rooted in lived experience, reminding readers of the importance of reflecting on intent versus impact. As a source of academic scholarship, the book provides readers with practical skills and theoretical frameworks to approach the layered challenges present in documentary filmmaking. As a critical piece of scholarship, Hart's book acknowledges and encourages readers to recognize the social context and power dynamics inherent to documentary filmmaking, reminding readers that documentary filmmaking at its core is relational. *Crafting Contemporary Documentaries and Docuseries for Global Screens* leaves readers reassured that filmmakers oftentimes embody a role of changemaker, recognizing that this form of filmmaking grows to become a tool to inform and unite audiences across social and cultural differences.