THE PEOPLE'S PR: PUBLIC RELATIONS, OCCUPY WALL STREET, AND

THE STATUS QUO

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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This dissertation presents a case study of the New York City based Press Relations

Working Group (Press WG) of Occupy Wall Street (OWS), the 2011 social movement

that advocated for economic justice in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis. The inquiry

explores the group's practices of public relations in order to understand how they and

other stakeholders co-constructed meanings concerning social justice at the time. The

semi-structured interviews with former group members, public relations practitioners in

their own right, as well as select work product (e.g. press releases) and internal

documents are analyzed through the circuit of culture (Du Gay, et al., 2013). A theory

stemming from Cultural Studies, the circuit of culture framework affords sharper

understandings of power relations and processes of making meaning—of which public

relations is a part. The case study data reveal at least six findings related to four themes

concerning governance, professional and amateur practices, social media usage, and

diversity of representation. Through these lenses, the interpretive analysis advances three

arguments: 1. Although social movement activists and scholars have claimed that OWS

was horizontal or flat in its governance structure and decision making processes, in

practice the picture was complicated by multiple, often hierarchical forms of decision

making and governance; 2. Despite widespread evidence of social media use throughout

the movement, the Press WG was largely dependent on traditional tactics of public

relations; 3. Public relations as practiced in the group empowered some, but oppressed

others. These arguments not only clarify the role(s) of public relations practice in the

case study, but also advance critical-cultural understandings of public relations theory.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are more things in Heaven and Earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your

philosophy.

William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

My father quotes Shakespeare frequently. He deploys the epigram to remind his

little Horatio that wonder and ghosts are to be welcomed; learning something new is

sometimes scary, but that's when the important discoveries are often made. I can easily

say that I have been terrified on many occasions throughout the process of this

dissertation, but to whatever measure I overcame my fears I owe the fruits to my

Heavenly Father-Mother and to my earthly advisors. I'd like to tell you briefly about

them now, starting with my dissertation committee at the School of Communication and

Information at Rutgers University—a community that funded my work for three years

through the opportunity to teach hundreds of wonderful students.

Todd Wolfson, my chair, knows more about social movements and activism than

I ever will. He is also exceedingly kind. I am a better researcher for working with him

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Susan Keith is the kind of close reader and editor one only dreams of working with and I

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"Hoghead" Pate, and aunts Lorrie and Karina Pate were also lovely. Alan, in particular, always asked thought provoking questions.

Living with Granny put me in proximity to my father and stepmother, Antonio and Michel Reyes. My day off each week was spent with them playing tennis, eating pizza, and watching *Game of Thrones*. They fueled me with joy. My father was and is my greatest cheerleader, and I his. The entire Reyes family, a.k.a. the Cuban contingent, made me laugh throughout the process.

My mother, Dr. Linda Pate Miller, inspired me to go into the family business. I thank her for reading and editing many drafts in a way that advanced clarity and helped me to sleep at night. She instilled in me a life-long love of learning and provided a strong, intelligent role model. I guess in a way, Mom gave me a yearning for philosophy and Dad gave me a wonder about ghosts.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION: THE PEOPLE'S PR

The booth at the back of the McDonalds four blocks from the New York Stock Exchange seemed an unlikely incubator for Occupy Wall Street. There on the hard plastic benches under the golden arches near the brass bull, members of the Occupy Wall Street press relations working group (Press WG) gathered frequently from September to December of 2011 to write and edit press releases, craft sound bites, respond to more than 10,000 emails from journalists, and importantly, debate what it was they were doing and why. The working group, which included approximately 25 active members, was a subset of a movement that began when hundreds of protesters united to build what would become an encampment in Zuccotti Park, a concrete slab, zoned public/private, near the financial epicenter of the world.

The protestors of Occupy Wall Street held disparate political views, however, the focal point of their indignation was clear: Wall Street and the corporate greed it symbolized. Soon the world took notice of a new discursive formation born of the movement: the poor, including the vanishing American middle class, represented by The 99% versus the richest Americans, The 1%, who held the extreme concentration of the nation's wealth. The members of the Press WG engaged with mainstream media outlets to play an important part in establishing this narrative concerning income inequality. They understood the irony of crafting anti-corporate messages in the back of a McDonalds. However, such venues seemed almost normal, another wink in a movement

that started when a Canadian magazine named *Adbusters* issued a challenge to occupy

Wall Street and to bring tents (https://www.adbusters.org/blogs/adbusters-

blog/occupywallstreet.html).

On September 17, 2011, a small group of activists, inspired by the M15

movement in Spain and the protests across the Middle East, met near Wall Street to talk

about gross inequalities under the current social and economic order. Some did bring

tents. They intended to stay awhile. What happened next surprised even veterans of

social movements past. "The sort of sea changes in public conversation that took three

years to develop during the long-gone sixties—about brutal war, unsatisfying affluence,

debased politics, and the suppressed democratic promise—took three weeks in 2011"

(Gitlin, 2012, p. 5).

Although this remarkable change did happen quickly, there is an important back-

story prior to September 17, 2011. There was already at least one encampment in June of

2011, months before the celebrated occupation of Zuccotti Park. This earlier group of

mostly anarchists was called Bloombergville, and they were camping out and protesting

New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg's neoliberal policies (Gitlin, 2012). This

group would later fuse with a menagerie of other protesters to form what Gitlin (2012)

describes as "a political culture of horizontalism intertwined with the defiant, in-your-

face style of the punk movement" (p. 85). As will be explored in the next chapter,

descriptions of the protestors involved in the anti-globalization movements of the 1990s

and 2000s (Mertes, 2004) bear a striking resemblance to the kind of hybrid Gitlin (2012)

illustrates.

For now, returning to the rag tag group of public relations practitioners at the McDonalds, their anti-corporate work in an outpost of a global corporation illustrates another odd juxtaposition, namely providing leadership, fraught with hierarchy, in the midst of a supposedly horizontal, or flat, movement. The members of the Press WG that I interviewed would bristle at this claim. There is little doubt of their sincere desire to follow some of the hallmarks of horizontalism, such as the use of general assemblies to reach consensus on important movement issues. However, as the research will demonstrate, their aims often fell short of a shared vision for participatory democracy. That vision, for OWS, begins arguably *before* the takeover of Zuccotti Park.

The first General Assembly took place on August 2, 2011, and it was an act of unity, bringing together anarchists, including anthropologist David Graeber, with the punks, and members of the vertically integrated Workers World Party who "came equipped with prefabricated demands" (Gitlin, 2012, p. 85). This makes the eventual decision by the large GA to *not* make formal demands of any traditional authority figure all the more unexpected. The 'no-single-demand' tactic was as much about a realization of a prefigurative ethos, wherein people live the change they want to see, as it was about creating broad social change. In her study of the New Left, Wini Breines (1989), defined prefigurative politics as "an essentially anti-organizational politics [...] recognized in counter institutions, demonstrations and the attempt to embody personal and anti-hierarchical values in politics" (p. 6). Once again, there is a tension, an odd juxtaposition between a group within OWS, the anti-organizational movement, coming into repeated, deliberate contact with institutional journalists. The power dynamics were often not in

favor of the volunteer, more or less anarchist, public relations practitioners—a subject to be explored.

That being said, it is important to note that this embodiment or process of the prefigurative way in OWS was just as important as the desired change to the protestors, and the process was rooted in the hallmarks of prefigurative politics: "suspicion of hierarchy, leadership, and the concentration of power" (Breines, 1989, xiv). Yet, it was easy for the hierarchical mainstream media to use the 'no-single-demand' tactic as a wedge, and in fact much of the U.S. mainstream media painted Occupy Wall Street with a broad brushstroke of incoherence—perhaps the better to support the status quo (Reyes, 2013) or perhaps reflective of a genuine cognitive dissonance on the part of some journalists. Mike[1], a 31-year-old Ph.D. student at the time of OWS, sided more with the former idea based on his experiences as a member of the Press WG.

Based on our interview, Mike wanted to make radical politics more palatable to the public through the mainstream media. He is one of many anarchists that were in the group; others identified more as liberal reformers. No matter their political persuasion however, all the members of this group wanted to engage with the media; they wanted to tell their story of Occupy Wall Street. This is remarkable since many activists within the movement wanted nothing to do with the mainstream media. They viewed mainstream media as a weapon wielded by capitalism or as something of little interest.

Several members of the Press WG, such as Sam, a 29-year-old, unemployed teacher, had prior professional experience in public relations. Sam was a former publicist

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[1] All names of interview subjects in this study have been changed.

for a small record label in New York City. There was also Thomas, who had worked in communications for a large NGO, as had Dana. The professional experience of these members—inside, institutional knowledge of how to relate to journalists—proved productive. However, it surfaced tensions around professionalization, especially among the anarchists of the group who advocated for a voluntary rotation of work—the better to keep power in check.

The themes sketched thus far, namely uneasy juxtapositions between horizontal and hierarchical models/media processes, and professional understandings of public relations practices versus amateur ones, will join with other themes as yet not brokered concerning the relative importance of social media technologies and issues of diverse representation. Taken as a whole, these themes emerged from three inter-related research questions that guided the inquiry.

Research Questions

RQ1.

In order to explore public relations practices and their connection to contemporary social justice work, I utilized a case study: the Press WG of Occupy New York. Examining the practices used by public relations practitioners to mount a counter-campaign against the neoliberal status quo, I asked the first research question: What do practices of public relations look like in a contemporary social justice context? What are the conditions that make these practices possible?

This study marks the practices, work products, tensions, organizational structure, and identities of a group of activists fighting for social change. Unlike their corporate

counterparts in public relations, the Press WG had scarce resources, yet they orchestrated an arguably successful campaign using at least a dozen tactics. Through in-depth interviews and textual analysis, this study will examine such practices and their concomitant power relations in detail through the lens of the circuit of culture. The circuit of culture, to be described in-depth in Chapter Three, is an a priori framework useful in tracing the socio-political dimensions and the myriad contingencies of public relations work.

RQ 2.

Much has been made in the press and in the academic literature of the role(s) of technology in contemporary struggles for social justice. By some accounts, technology is the engine of the movements of 2011. On the other hand, others have insisted that the importance of technology in these struggles is grossly overstated. This leads to a closely related question to the first research question of the study: What role, if any, did technology play in the practices of public relations? In this vein, sub-questions concerning technology include: How important was the use of technology within the group? What tools were utilized to accomplish public relations work? What was the nature of this work (e.g. proactive storytelling)? What workflows were associated with these tools?

In this case, technology includes the low-tech (e.g. the press table and sign in Zuccotti Park) and the high-tech (e.g. digital, social media). This wide-ranging consideration of what constitutes technology stems from Heidegger (2014/1954). Heidegger (2014/1954) defined technology, working with the Greek origins of the word, as "a mode of revealing" (p. 308). In this sense, technology becomes much less about

particular gadgets or popular software used by activists and, following Heidegger (2014/1954), much more about the ongoing processes of uncovering truth. The current evangelism concerning technology in social movements and in American culture generally seems rooted in an instrumental definition of technology. Technology, in this view, becomes a set of exciting tools for bettering society.

As Heidegger (2014/1954) argued, such an approach to technology, while commonplace (even in the '50s), is especially dangerous, as it obscures truth. "Everywhere we remain unfree and chained to technology whether we passionately affirm or deny it" (Heidegger, 2014, p. 3). By my reading, the way people set upon or unlock the meaning or essence of technology is the crux of the enslavement. While it stretches the imagination to think of a tweet as analogous to a chain, it is not so far-fetched to consider struggles over the use of technology, as will be discussed in social justice contexts, as being a matter of critical import.

RQ 3.

The primary benefit of using a critical-cultural lens to study public relations practice is that it enables the researcher to interrogate power and subjectivity within the ever-increasing boundaries of what constitutes public relations activity. For example, instead of asking what makes communication more or less persuasive, a critical-cultural scholar might ask who decides the terms of persuasion and why. This line of inquiry leads to the third research question of the study: How was power articulated and contested in the context of the group's public relations practices? The study will explore power dynamics within the Press WG, as well as relationships between other movement activists and media makers.

These questions, qualitative and critical-cultural in approach, resist easy answers. As the research instrument, I try to put the empirical findings in conversation with previous literature and my own interpretative work. Through this work, a case study of the OWS Press WG, I will make three corresponding arguments. First, I argue that while social movement activists and scholars have claimed that OWS was horizontal or flat in its governance structure and decision making process, what we see is a more complicated picture of multiple forms of decision making and governance. In the case of the OWS Press WG, this was necessarily the case because members of this working group were often former professional public relations practitioners following hierarchical protocols and/or they interfaced with journalists following different governance structures.

The majority of the global mainstream media outlets that formed the primary public of interest to the Press WG are organized vertically, from the top down. Although individual journalists have some degree of autonomy, they must integrate with a media system characterized by clearly defined hierarchies, responsibilities, and more often than not, a profit-making orientation. This means that even if the members of the Press WG had carried out horizontal public relations in practice (a feat they did not manage well), they would have inevitably encountered friction within a hierarchical media system. In other words, at least from a public relations perspective, horizontalism impedes strategic communication with mainstream journalists. And because of the pressure on members of the Press WG to interface with journalists on deadline and therefore make fast decisions, the process did not always move in ways that conform to the values of horizontality. This fact is important as while OWS and other contemporary movements promulgate values of

horizontality, as my case study shows, on the ground the picture is much more complicated.

My second argument is that while there was a vibrant Media Working Group as part of OWS, which used live stream tactics and social media platforms such as Twitter, Tumblr, and Facebook to build their own less-mediated narrative about OWS, the movement was still dependent on mainstream media to co-construct meanings across a wide-range of publics. Mainstream media with its powerful reach still required care and feeding, work that the OWS Press WG did arguably well. This fact challenges the overly triumphant narratives about the democratizing potential of new media as mainstream media and traditional public relations were a critical element of the OWS movement.

Finally, the empirical findings of the case study in conversation with the public relations literature and viewed through a cultural studies framework, all accrue to a larger argument about public relations as practiced in a particular social justice context. I argue that the members of the Press WG and the journalists with whom they worked brought some measure of power to the marginalized, however that power was discursive, not material; it was under the banner of a constructed economic class: the 99%. Within that statistical class, the most marginalized, namely women and/or people of color, were largely left out of the conversation. Some members, as will be shown, would argue that this exclusion was in service to the collective good or the consensus-made public relations message of economic justice. Others, and I tend to agree, would assert that the issues of the 'have nots' *are* the issues of the 99%. For example, a persuasive case for economic justice is made through the voices of women of color. In short, the role of

public relations in relations of power, perhaps especially in a social justice context, is a vital and complex one.

Building community, especially around a class argument, was difficult when the very people who were hurting the most were not represented fairly in the movement. While OWS does not get enough credit for successes at the discursive and affective levels when speaking to/for the middle class, it must be conceded that the movement failed to improve material conditions for the marginalized, or the bulk of the 99%. This is a major shortcoming, but the very existence of OWS is important to interrogate and appreciate given that it was, as Chomsky (2012) describes, the first mass, popular response to some thirty-years of class warfare. Through a critical-cultural lens, the complexities of this class response come into view with public relations serving as a path toward understanding how and why OWS proved successful on the one hand, but failed on the other.

The examination of public relations in OWS then begins with a remarkable achievement, in some measure influenced by the members of the Press WG. Although the debates around the efficacy of the movement are many, the cultural and discursive influence of Occupy Wall Street is accepted to the point where "the 99%" has entered the cultural lexicon. The activists changed the narrative around social justice by naming the oppressor as the minority, "the 1%." They took what had heretofore been relatively obscure work from the field of economics (Stiglitz, 2001, 2011) and vivified the statistics to the point where income inequality became a part of the national conversation as represented through mass media.

The slogan alone did not do the heavy lifting. The story of the 99% versus the 1% was a collaboration of countless actors—from politicians to teachers, police officers to tycoons. Social media and so-called "user-generated" content providers certainly played a role, but much of this story was furthered a more old-fashioned way, by journalists and by those who influence them. Although the Press WG was but one influential group, they had the dual advantage of being located in New York at the epicenter of the movement and the media capital of the nation. Although they did not achieve immediate, tangible change (what movements, much less subgroups do?), the Press WG played an important role in the discursive transformation. In short, Occupy Wall Street was a public relations coup for activists engaged in the continuing struggle against gross social and economic inequality at the hands of the 1% and the leaders of the status quo. This dissertation will treat organizers of Occupy Wall Street as public relations leaders in their own right, as practitioners of what I call *the people's pr*.

The members at the core of the people's pr, the activists of the Press WG, volunteered their time and expertise by doing public relations in the public interest, a notion some consider incongruous given the associations of public relations with the plutocratic status quo. To be fair, the practices of public relations examined in this study share much in common with the kinds of public relations in corporations. That said, their aims were anti-corporate, making their interactions with corporate-owned media, especially of conservative stripe, challenging at best. They bridged the gap as best they could with a desire for equitable change in society.

Public relations, as practiced by these particular activists, did not cover the many facets of the profession from lobbying to event planning, public affairs to image

management. The members of the Press WG were engaged mostly in one subset of public relations called media relations. Media relations is the art and science of strategically helping the press in order to influence desired outcomes. Although Occupy Wall Street famously issued no single demand, the desired, overarching media outcome of the members of the Press WG was to connect the issue of economic justice with a broken system of government and economics. It is this populist, progressive, and somewhat anarchist aim that brings the people to the people's pr. It is this mission that drives and differentiates their practices of public relations from others.

The people's pr is a departure from most academic accounts of public relations work. In the past, public relations scholarship was (and to a certain extent is) dominated by the managerial approach to the profession. Research in this vein seeks to further the efficacy of organizational communication in the interests of stakeholders.   In this model, public relations practitioners listen as much as they inform. Various stakeholders build mutuality in the pursuit of compromise and common interests. The managerial approach, epitomized by Grunig's excellence theory (Grunig, 1992), has been critiqued for glossing over inherent asymmetrical power relationships that exist in society, often centered on issues of race, class, and gender (Curtin and Gaither, 2005; Holtzhausen and Voto, 2002; Pieczka, 2006). Despite such critiques, over twenty years later the excellence theory still provides the foundation for the majority of work in public relations scholarship, especially in the United States.

I join with other scholars in advancing a different approach, one that Edwards and Hodges (2011) refer to as the "radical, socio-cultural turn" (p. 2). This approach departs from the functional theories of Grunig and others by entertaining questions of power,

subjectivity, and social change. Culture is crucial to this approach, for public relations is a cultural practice. Edwards and Hodges (2011) "understand public relations to be fundamentally about producing, sustaining, and regulating […] meaning" (p. 3).

This definition provides a sharp contrast to "the functional understanding of public relations as a disinterested channel through which organizational interests are achieved" (Edwards and Hodges, 2011, p. 4). A cultural approach to public relations practice, according to Curtin and Gaither (2005), is one where, "developing theory should be able to describe and inform public relations as a cultural practice of meaning making that encompasses contested identities, relational characteristics of difference, and the primal role of power " (p. 97). Such an approach lends itself well to a study of public relations practice within the Press WG of Occupy Wall Street because the members represented often clashing political perspectives that are deeply concerned with the corruptible potential of power.

Public relations has been used in social movements long before OWS, as will be discussed. But the people's pr was distinguished from predecessors by at least two characteristics: a focus on class (not racial equality, not identity politics) and the reliance on traditional practices of public relations in a time when new digital tools were at their disposal. Indeed, such tools were being used in other, less-PR-centric actions and groups across the movement. Finally, the people's pr emerged during and was shaped in part by the events of the so-called Arab Spring and the movements of 2011 to be presented briefly along with relevant histories of public relations and social movements in the next chapter.

In addition to taking a cultural approach to the study of public relations, I acknowledge the affordances and challenges of my role as the research instrument and the need for self-reflexivity on the part of the researcher (L'Etang, 2011). My work is greatly informed by thirteen years of public relations practice in a variety of settings from a large agency serving multi-national corporations to small, not-for-profit organizations. This work, combined with graduate studies in media, culture, and communication, allows me to recognize a gap in the scholarship on public relations theory and practice. On the other hand, such experience requires vigilance against bias that might, for example, contribute to leading questions of the study participants about public relations. My corporate bias towards public relations is somewhat tempered by my personal experiences as an activist for social justice causes, including participation in the Occupy Wall Street "Day of Action" on November 17, 2011 in Manhattan. I marched with thousands in protest of a broken system as police clad in riot gear waited in formation. In short, it is possible to be both a rebel, speaking truth to power, and a public relations practitioner and educator working within systems of power.

Perhaps it is this diversity of experience that leads to my view of the practice of public relations as a phenomenon not bound to a profession per se. Practices of public relations transcend institutional forms, taking root even in contemporary social justice movements such as OWS that advocate for horizontal organizing and direct actions that eschew institutional politics in favor of alternative, prefigurative ways of being. However, as will be demonstrated, there were a number of similarities between a managerial style of public relations and the people's pr. By interrogating the similarities as well as the differences, a more complex picture begins to emerge. As I will argue, the

people's pr represents a "polemology of the weak" (De Certeau, 1984, p. 39) –the warfare of those without an institutional fortress so-to-speak. This "weakness" does not dampen the power of the people's pr to exert discursive influence. In fact, Occupy Wall Street influenced the highest institution of power in the United States, when President Barak Obama identified income inequality as the "defining challenge of our time" ("Press Release," p. 1 of Whitehouse.gov) years after Occupy Wall Street precipitated increased media scrutiny on the issue (Smith, 2011).

Suffice it to say, the influence of public relations practice on social movements past and present is a matter of great import. In fact, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said,

> Public relations is a very necessary part of any protest of civil disobedience…. The public at large must be aware of the inequalities involved in such a system [of segregation]. In effect, in the absence of justice in the established courts of the region, nonviolent protesters are asking for a hearing in the court of world opinion.
>
> (quoted in Hon, 1997, p. 163, from Garrow, 1986, p. 172)

King understood that without legal justice and without violence, people engaged in the struggle for equality must appeal to the majority by building awareness through the practice of public relations. For him, public relations practice was not confined to a corporate office park or even a profession. It was a practice he used to powerful effect through his own rhetorical gifts and through the portion of his staff dedicated to public relations work (Hon, 1997). In a similar sense, those activists who sought to influence representations of the OWS movement through media relations work understood the importance of public relations to mobilizing broad support for equality in the 21st century.

Contribution of the Dissertation

The benefits of this study are three-fold. First, this approach stands to fill a gap in the public relations literature. The dominant, managerial literature on public relations tends to treat activism as something to be managed in opposition to the corporate interest (Dozier and Lauzen, 2000), or at best activism is seen as a subject of study to improve the corporate practice of public relations among other uses (Hon, 1997). There is nothing inherently wrong with this managerial approach, and many scholars and practitioners have found such research useful. However, there is an assumption or embedded point of view in this work from the perspective of the institution (Dozier and Lauzen, 2000). It seems incongruous to apply corporate logics of practice-- rich with resources, institutional memory, and structure-- to the practices of public relations within a new social movement.

Rather than adhering to an institutional view, this project will center marginalized voices in keeping with the tradition of cultural studies. By flipping the script on the practice of public relations to privilege the activist rather than the corporation, I have uncovered new insights that speak to the power of persuasion to mobilize social justice aims, rather than corporate profits. This is not to say that profits and social justice are mutually exclusive, but rather, the methodological privileging of public relations practice within Occupy begins to uncover to what degree the activists used "the master's tools […to] dismantle the master's house" (lorde, 1984). As will be shown, the use of the tools of institutional public relations was more common that might be expected from a group of anti-capitalist activists and public relations practitioners.

Secondly, this study will contribute to debates around the roles and prominence of technology in social movements embedded in such popular labels as "the Twitter Revolution." The project examines the literature ranging from the work of Clay Shirky to Jody Dean, commenting on the liberating and oppressive potentials of technology. The use of technology in social movements warrants much consideration, however few researchers speak of the phenomenon in terms of public relations. This project explores Occupy Wall Street's use of technology within the Press WG and the role it played (or did not play) in the movement's contact with mainstream media outlets.

Thirdly, studying public relations in the context of Occupy Wall Street contributes to increased understanding of tensions within the movement itself and the importance of those tensions on the development of the people's pr, theorized here as a different set of logics than managerial public relations. To be clear, there were many tactical similarities between the people's pr and what could be described as a managerial approach to public relations. As will be illustrated by the case study, the professional practitioners, schooled in managerial methods, changed the practices of the initially amateur group. For example, press releases became more formalized, adhering to industry standards. However, these changes were not altogether productive. Struggles concerning professionalization, leadership, race, and gender to name several begin to mark the differences of practice. Granted, one finds such tensions within institutional settings of public relations, too, but unlike managerial pr, the people's pr was both furthered and hindered by its social justice mission and concomitant, desired horizontal structure. Also unlike managerial public relations, some of the practices of the Press WG expressed different articulations of power to be analyzed.

OWS strove to make decisions on a consensus basis through the use of general assemblies and working groups. It was designed to eschew hierarchy in the tradition of anarchy. However, as early as October of 2011, less than one month into the movement, members of the Press WG of Occupy Wall Street at the New York City headquarters of Zuccotti Park began to designate spokespeople to speak with the media (Bray, 2013). This fact alone challenges the non-hierarchical ethos of the movement, for naming people to speak for the whole elevates certain individuals above others.

Of course, tensions have always existed in social movements. What makes the Press WG of OWS particularly interesting is the opportunity to analyze the juxtaposition of a strategic form of communication in public relations with a prefigurative ethos embedded in a networked, digital age. Thereby, the study will further consider Polletta's (2013) contention that "[i]n some ways, a network logic makes obsolete the old antagonism between the prefigurative and the strategic" (p. 44). Her point being that the horizontal spread of a movement, enabled in part through technology, offers flexible, pragmatic, and strategic choices without sacrificing the desire to live the change through alternative, prefigurative politics.

I disagree with her argument, especially with regard to the public relations practiced in this case study.   I contend that the strategic practice of public relations is too disruptive, too vertical, too hierarchical—that it does not put to rest the "old antagonism." On the other hand, any inevitable hiccups within the practices of the Press WG, may be more attributable to internal personality conflicts and alliances, as Freeman (1973) found in the Feminist movement. In short, the dissertation will offer important commentary on

a relationship between prefigurative politics and public relations in the context of a 21st Century social justice movement.

Chapter Two opens with a brief history of public relations and social movements, followed by a consideration of the other movements of 2011. Chapter Three follows by providing a literature review spanning public relations, public relations and social movements, and social movements and technology. The chapter closes with an explication of the primary theoretical frame: the circuit of culture. Chapter Four presents the methods used to answer the research questions. Chapter Five describes four themes and six findings emergent from the study of interview transcripts with members of the Press WG, as well as documents chronicling their practices of public relations and select accounts from the mainstream media. Chapter Six analyzes the findings through the theoretical framework looking at each moment of the circuit in isolation. Finally, Chapter Seven brings the moments together in articulations concerning a single incident, and then expands the analysis to consider the role of difference in practice. The war-like element of the case study is framed as a "polemology of the weak" (De Certeau, 1984, p. 39), an articulation of power that finds creative possibilities within strategically limited boundaries. The final chapter then presents implications for future research and draws conclusions about the power of public relations in a particular social justice context.

OWS was but one movement rising in 2011 that had a prefigurative quality or charter. As Young and Schwartz (2012) described the struggle to create alternative systems "can be spatial (for example, land occupations), and/or temporal (for example, short-lived street protests, or longer-lasting 'Occupy' encampments), and/or resource-based (for example, a community establishing control over its water supply)" (p. 2). It is

thus useful to offer a brief comparison of OWS with a couple of the other prefigurative

flashpoints of 2011.

CHAPTER 2: HISTORY AND CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT

It is through the past that one comes to a better understanding of the present. The members of the Press WG would be the first to acknowledge that OWS now belongs to the past. In fact, many had a difficult time recollecting their public relations work for the movement just three years removed from the events. In a self-conscious way then, this research, marks an early attempt at writing a history of public relations. This history-in-progress is built upon previous histories of public relations work in social movements in at least two ways: several of the Press WG members expressed an awareness of communication efforts (if not called public relations) from social movements past and the researcher compared and contrasted available histories of public relations in recent social movements to aid her analysis of the case study.

PR History, The American Way

While there are many histories of public relations (e.g. Cutlip, 1994; Marchand, 1998; Ewen 1996), histories of public relations in the context of recent American social movements are in short supply. Instead of a more horizontal chronology of public relations activities across sectors and cultural phenomenon including social movements, the historical public relations literature, in much the same way as the literature on more contemporary practice, follows a vertical narrative largely dominated by the United States (L'Etang, 2008) and by stories of corporate or government officials (Lamme & Russell, 2010; L'Etang 2008). According to L'Etang (2008), "US scholars have always tended to assume that activities referred to as PR have been invented by Americans and then exported elsewhere. However, I think that one should distinguish between the history of the term and the history of the activity" (p. 328).

L'Etang's (2013) history of public relations in Great Britain alone demonstrated that the United States did not invent public relations and that public relations, even in Western nations, is far from monolithic; it is significantly influenced by particular times and places. Such studies complicate a degree of cultural imperialism from United States scholars who conceive of the ratification of the constitution, for example, as "history's finest public relations job" (Nevis, 1962, p. 10) or as Cutlip (1997) put it: "Surely this [the ratification] was the most important public relations campaign ever done" (p. 18). Furthermore, as L'Etang (2008) argued, a focus on public relations as a contextually-rooted *activity* opens space to avoid public relations campaigns *disguised* as non-contingent, historical fact; campaigns that would have one believe that public relations, for example, changed from propaganda to wise, socially beneficial counsel (Bernays, 2005/1928) in short order after the World Wars.

Furthermore, much of the existing histories of public relations in the United States follow a progressive narrative (L'Etang, 2008; Lamme & Russell, 2010). "US PR history is essentially "Whig history", that is, it is progressivist. Public relations in the USA, according to the 'dominant paradigm' (a term first used by Magda Pieczka in 1994), is supposed to have 'improved' and 'developed', not only in terms of intellectual and technical ability, but also morally" (L'Etang, 2008, p. 329). This upward trajectory of increasingly enlightened public relations is also challenged by Lamme and Russell (2010) who claimed such perspectives should be critically examined by focusing less on the powerful status quo and more on *meanings* of public relations work over time in a variety of contexts. Lamme and Russell (2010) reviewed the extant literature of public relations history before 1900, and found, among other insights that "profit, recruitment, legitimacy,

[and a desire] to participate in the marketplace of ideas through agitation and advocacy"
motivated the public relations work of the past (p. 355). Importantly, they concluded
"the public relations function has remained remarkably consistent over time, even
without the 20th century rules of engagement" (p. 356). Their work, grouped with the
contributions of other public relations scholars such as Coombs and Holladay (2012),
lays the foundation for what might be called 'alternative' histories of public relations.

Resisting Corporate Takeovers

In the spirit of Howard Zinn's alternative accounts of American history (2005),
public relations histories that eschew progressive arcs focused exclusively on influential
power brokers offer explanations of complicated patterns of dominance and resistance.
Unlike the chronologies of the powerful, such studies take typically marginalized groups
(based on race, class, and gender) and center them for analysis. Such analytical
maneuvers are important in the context of social movements in particular because without
them "[a]ctivists become marginalized actors in the discussion of U.S. public relations
history rather than driving forces" (Coombs & Holladay, 2012, p. 351). Furthermore,
Coombs and Holladay (2012) made a persuasive argument that it was the dominated and
oppressed who often led the way in public relations practice rather than the other way
around. They explained that in the early years of reform, "there were no corporations to
react by co-opting public relations from the activists. Activists had been practicing what
became known as public relations for some seventy to eighty years before corporations
appropriated and refined the concept" (Coombs & Holladay, 2012, p. 349).

This state of affairs invigorates L'Etang's (2013) assertion that "[h]istorians need
to see public relations as part of the political, economic and socio-cultural fabric rather

than ideologically neutral management technocracy, a notion that is implicit in the longstanding campaign for the public relations of public relations" (p. 803). Activists in particular form a thorny challenge to this neutral, technocratic image of public relations practice. As Dozier and Lauzen (2000) pointed out, "Activists pose a paradox for the contemporary nomothetic model of public relations theory, a paradox that cannot be resolved at the organizational level of analysis or from the perspective of invisible clients who shape the agenda in public relations research" (p. 3).

Alternative Histories of PR and Social Movements After 1960

The few existing histories in the literature that intersect with social movements after 1960 build a case for the importance of public relations practice in the pursuit of social change. "For instance, in *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, Gene Sharp presents a list of 198 'nonviolent weapons' used in movements throughout world history; and many of these are 'textbook' public relations tactics, including leaflets, pamphlets, speeches, symbols, media relations, signs, and advertisements." (Murphree, 2006, p. 2). The history of resistance is littered with public relations tactics, but the technocratic, corporate agenda of research restricts the volume of work on the topic lest public relations researchers be forced to "evaluate their own complicity in the production of culture, whether in support of corporate capitalists, or alternative subjectivities" (Weaver, 2001, p. 288). Not wanting to be hypocritical, it should be clear that I am complicit with advancing *both* camps as a former corporate practitioner and as an activist for marginalized groups.

Civil Rights.

Two studies focused on the public relations within the U.S. Civil Rights

Movement offer insights useful to the study of public relations. The better known of the

two is Hon's (1997) study of the public relations work of the Southern Christian

Leadership Conference and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. According to Dozier and Lauzen

(2000), Hon's research "used practices consistent with J.E. Grunig's models of public

relations" (J.E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Hon found various common facets of a public

relations campaign in the work of the SCLC: a powerful leader in King, an organizational

and strategic hub, and goals around awareness and perception change.

By contrast, Dozier and Lauzen's (2000) suggested that public relations

researchers might emphasize differences between movement and corporate public

relations. "In our response to Hon's study, we suggested that it would be more

interesting to study social movements to see how they differ from other types of publics,

how they are not adequately accommodated by existing public relations theory" (Dozier

and Lauzen, 2000, p. 9). This reorientation of theory accomplishes much more than

increased interest. Indeed, the study of public relations in social movements benefits

from a more critical cultural lens—a focus not only on similarities, but also on difference

and power, that may serve at least two purposes: to better account for power relationships

in context (a gap in the more technocratic theories of public relations) and to instruct

public relations practitioners in all fields how (and how not) to communicate to diverse

audiences in an ethical manner.

That being said, Hon's (1997) study is perhaps more critical/alternative than it is

given credit. Hon (1997) explicitly offers a "blueprint for other scholars interested in

exploring social movements as long-term public relations campaigns" (p. 166). Few have

built upon her plan. In fact, almost two decades later, there remains much untapped value

in this line of research. Hon (1997) situates the approach to her study as somewhere in

the middle between two poles: 1. Research that takes the voices and experiences of

marginalized communities and explains them using the models of the dominant paradigm

(in her case White men, in my case free market ideology) and 2. Research that analyzes

the experiences of 'the other' on their own merits, struggles, and level of influence

relative to the progress (or digression) at hand. The latter pole is an "ideal" (p. 165), one

that Hon (1997) candidly admits she does not reach, in part because the historical

literature only studies the charismatic leaders.

The second major study of public relations in the context of the Civil Rights

Movement offers much historical evidence on practices of public relations. Murphree

(2006) investigated a large volume of public relations work carried out by the Student

Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Initially, as Murphree (2006) described, a

paid staff member by the name of Jane Stembridge, "a theology student, poet, and

intellectual" applied her many talents to an impressive practice of public relations (p. 12).

Stembridge led a communications committee that harnessed the power of a network of

students throughout the South, producing protests, pamphlets, newsletters, press releases,

and letters to the editor. "Her success in providing a continuous and reliable stream of

information to the organization, the national media, and government officials is

remarkable in light of her lack of prior communication experience" (Murphree, 2006, p.

13).

Much of the public relations work of SNCC was grounded in media relations. The need for such work then was clear, as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, "Had the press been doing its job, we would not have needed such an extensive communication shop. We were offering compensation for the deficits of the Southern news media." (quoted in Murphree, 2006, p. 4). The white press to which King was referring was filled with misinformation and racial stereotypes. The counter-campaign from SNCC, according to Murphree (2006), accomplished much and evolved overtime. Murphree (2006) explained:

> Despite the combative image presented in most of the white press, SNCC still managed to communicate a message of racial and cultural solidarity. As the decade progressed, the message contained a growing international relations component that promoted unity between American blacks and African nations trying to pull away from the final vestiges of Western colonialism. By creating international partnerships, SNCC forced an international awareness of racial tensions and violence in the United States and of human rights shortcomings throughout the globe. (p. 7)

Such partnerships with third parties are a cornerstone of public relations in at least one way: the increased credibility with the press, and by extension the public (Gower, 2007).

The SNCC philosophy of nonviolence was rooted in the example of Gandhi in India (Murphree, 2006). "Gandhi's strategy of creating a centralized communications force for the purpose of gaining sympathy and building support for Indian independence" (Murphree, 2006, p. 15) was a touchstone of SNCC public relations. SNCC used the press release as the chief tactic (Murphree, 2006). Thanks in part to its centralized communications structure, SNCC was able to release locally relevant news on a global scale (Murphree, 2006). SNCC used press releases to advocate for "the inclusion of civil rights goals in the platforms of the Democratic and Republican parties" (Murphree, 2006,

p. 4). In short, SNCC created a reformist, normative message in keeping within the bounds of representational democracy.

According to Murphree (2006), "SNCC workers were very aware of which media outlets were open (even if guardedly) to their message, and purposefully avoided sending press releases to those that were resistant. (p. 14). The SNCC message, "at least for many years," was civil rights through nonviolence (Stembridge as quoted in Murphree, 2006, p. 27). The idea of a nonviolent social movement had successfully been planted in American thought thanks in part to the early years of SNCC and other civil rights organizations, yielding the space for later movements to emphasize economic justice and horizontality, allowing nonviolence to operate more in the background. SNCC had the advantage of a clear purpose, racial equality, to communicate. This equality was also expressed along class lines. SNCC made great public relations use of "[t]he unconventional partnership of young college students and the rural poor [that] made a lasting impression on oppressed black Southerners" (Murphree, 2006, p. 28).

Consumer Choice to the Battle of Seattle.

In the wake of the Civil Rights Movement, activism in the United States began to pose more of a challenge to the status quo on a wide range of fronts, until reaching perhaps new levels of power in the 1990s, according to L.A. Grunig (1992), when the environmental, feminist, and consumer movements demonstrated renewed strength in response to increasingly complex public relations campaigns and corporate branding techniques (Klein, 2000). At the same time that corporations re-entrenched within the status quo, Klein (2000) successfully argued that consumers were far savvier about the attempts to mimic and build connections to corporate brands than the persuaders may

have acknowledged. Yet, she was among the early challengers to the notion that the

Internet provided a level playing field for consumers, pointing out that protest rooted in

consumer choice was really no protest at all given the consolidation of corporate power

both online and off (Klein, 2000). In other words, one could vote with their feet, but

when the same company in some cases literally owns the town, the shuffle makes little

difference to the corporate bottom line.

Consumer protest gave way to political protest in grand fashion with the advent of

the Global Social Justice Movement beginning near the turn of the 21st century. Here

Internet communication technologies began to be used to produce networked, but

importantly independent media, inspired in part by the Zapatistas in Mexico who used

ICTs to help mobilize peasants and indeed the world against the hostile takeover of their

way of life by the neoliberal power barons.

The high point of the Global Social Justice Movement, an important precursor to

the Occupy movement in the United States, occurred in 1999 with the Battle of Seattle.

Protestors took to the streets of the city using tactics of direct action to successfully

disrupt and shut down portions of the proceedings of the World Trade Organization

meeting taking place there. Weaver (2001) captured the relevance of this moment in the

context of public relations practice writing, "the dominant discourses of corporate public

relations are now, however, experiencing challenges from activists who demonstrate a

detailed understanding of the practice of discourse management themselves" (p. 283).

The formidable practice of these activists differed from their Civil Rights

forbearers in at least one important way, the effective use of new ICTs. "This technology

partly enabled protesters to communicate and control the discursive construction of their

actions as well as the political legitimacy of their identities" (Perkins, 2000 as quoted in Weaver, 2001). The speed and wide-distribution of the Internet platform enabled the space and time for competing discourses to flourish counter to the mainstream media depictions of the protestors, that largely painted them, according to Perkins (2000) and Weaver (2001) as illegitimate.

According to Cockburn and St. Clair (2001), accounts of the Battle of Seattle have come to be dominated by the liberal elite. In this version of events, one thousand anarchist protestors misbehaved by smashing corporate storefront windows, thereby diminishing the power of some thirty thousand "non-violent" activists marching in step with the labor establishment (Cockburn and St. Clair, 2001). Such "myth-making," Cockburn and St. Clair (2001) argued, co-opted the movement for the power brokers of the WTO, essentially colluding with organized labor and NGOs to negotiate future trade deals in secret (p. 97). In fact, they contend, it was the anarchists on the streets who garnered the ire of the police and, importantly, the sympathies of the media (Cockburn and St. Clair, 2001).

Furthermore, as Ehrenreich (2001) asserted, the liberal elite myth of the Battle of Seattle represented hypocrisy. She wrote, "The same people who administered a public spanking to the anarkids featured, as one of the anti-WTO's honored guests, one Jose Bove, the French farmer who famously torched a McDonalds" (p. 100). Such double standards form the foundation of her argument that such "left-wing protests" have become "absurdly ritualized" to the point where any kind of edge is dulled by political correctness (Ehrenreich, 2001, p. 100). The research to be presented here marks a similar

kind of internal policing, but with different power dynamics at play in the context of public relations practice.

Occupy Wall Street in Contemporary Context

2011: The Year of the Social Movement.

Occupy Wall Street and the organizers of Press WG did not conduct their activism and public relations in a vacuum, nor did the movement form from the mists of the Lower East Side. From Tunisia to Iceland, Egypt to Spain, the world in 2011 seemed poised for revolution and Occupy was but one strand in a short fuse. The Indignados in Spain provide an explicit link to the U.S. uprisings of Occupy Wall Street—hence its selection for discussion. The Egyptian revolution will also be considered in order to better understand the ways that media and technology relate to social movements.

15M/Indignados. The movement, known variously for its start date of May 15, 2011 and for its indignant protesters, marks a response to the crumbling of the Spanish economy as part of the global financial crisis. Castells (2012) writes, "they were encouraged by the example of Iceland; by the possibility of successfully confronting the collusion between bankers and politicians through grassroots mobilization" (p. 111). Oddly, Castells later neglects the economic contestations of the movement by reducing it to a political effort based on the slogan [in English] "Real Democracy Now!" Occupy Wall Street is also sometimes reduced to a slogan ("We are the 99%"), but one that emphasizes economic inequality. Such a reduction occludes the political valence of Occupy Wall Street—a rejection of establishment politics in favor of direct action.

The organizational structure of 15M is defined by Castells (2012) as a "decentralized network with autonomous nodes in different cities" (p. 111). Occupy Wall Street would later adopt a similar structure. This is arguably less due to the affordances of the Internet and more attributable to the presence of Americans, many based in New York, who were at the Spanish encampments (Casteneda, 2012). Likewise other organizational synergies run deep, including the use of working groups, consensus-based decision making on major issues at general assemblies, and of course, the occupation of public space itself.

This is not to suggest that Occupy Wall Street was a copycat movement. On the contrary, the 15M movement has many links (both human and technological) to not only the protests of the Arab Spring, but also various European uprisings and older movements in Mexico and South America. Following Tilly (2008), Casteñeda (2012) writes, "there were important transnational connections in terms of agendas, tactics, contentious performances and activists themselves" (p. 316). One vignette offered by Casteñeda (2012) tells the story of Brazilian activists who spurred a tactic of banging on pots and pans (also used in Iceland) at the Barcelona encampment as an auditory signal of protest. Sympathetic Spaniards would stand in their kitchen windows around the plaza and bang their own kitchenware in solidarity (Casteñeda, 2012), literally and symbolically amplifying the performance of dissent.

The 15M movement departs from the later global Occupy Wall Street movement and various earlier social justice movements in at least one interesting way. As indicated by the much-publicized occupation of the Hotel Madrid, an abandoned property left in the wake of rampant real estate speculation, the 15M movement found unique ways to

modify the occupation tactic to both discursive and material effect. From the moment of the occupation, the 15M assemblies crafted a story and a use of the hotel that would be "different from any other existing 'traditional' squat in Madrid, most of which consist of alternative social centres bringing together left-wing activists around a shared political project" (Abellán, Sequera, & Janoschka, 2012, p. 323). The revolutionaries dedicated multiple floors to people evicted from their homes (a massive social problem in the wake of the Euro-crisis) and to various working groups of the movement (Abellán, et al, 2012). They also took care to recast the language of the squat tactic as one of "liberated and recovered space" (Abellán, et al, 2012, p. 323). This discursive shift, coupled with the gross inequality on the ground and non-violent actions, won significant public sympathy in the media and in Spanish society (Abellán, et al, 2012).

This unique and relatively sustainable continuation of the occupation of space was not accomplished through "networks of outrage and hope" (Castells, 2012), but rather through a strong, pre-existing tie with a more established movement: the Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca (PAH, "translation: Loan affected platform" in Abellán, et al, 2012, p. 323). Abellán, et al (2012) explain, PAH "had already been developing a coherent discourse about the right to housing and had been focusing on the fight against evictions for more than [two] years when the 15-M mobilisations occurred" (p. 323). In other words, the coalition between PAH and 15M successfully leveraged the credibility of the former with the spectacle-charged publicity of the latter.

Egypt. Inspired by both a long history of protests against Egyptian leader Hosni Mubarak and by the uprising (also not spontaneous) in Tunisia to oust Bashar al-Assad, Egyptians claimed Tahrir Square as the birthplace of their revolution in 2011. Aside

from its central location in Cairo, Tahrir was symbolic of Egyptian neoliberalism led by an authoritarian regime and deep economic class divisions (Gerbaudo, 2012). This heated context had a long history, starting with Sadat's opening of the country to Western financial interests and institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank (Kellner, 2012). The income inequality and cultural suppression only increased under Mubarak. "The rise of […] gated communities," according to Gerbaudo (2012), "has been accompanied by a sanitization of the 'popular life' which used to thrive" (p. 32).

Egypt became the centerpiece of the so-called Arab Spring, a time of social unrest that was not confined to the Middle East. The protesters in Tahir affected unimaginable social change towards a more just and equitable government, however briefly. This inspiration spread to the encampments of Spain, and later to those of Occupy Wall Street, all buoyed by the message that the status quo could indeed be changed through direct action.

Many Movements, Common Threads. Although the Egyptian revolution, 15M, and Occupy Wall Street mark their own dynamic geopolitical histories, they have at least four common features: a commitment to non-violence, a reliance to some extent on network technology (to be addressed), a rejection of neoliberal policies and the spatial tactic of occupation. I shall briefly take a closer look at non-violence, neoliberalism, and spatial occupation here.

There were, of course, incidents of violence on the part of the revolutionaries. The Oakland encampment of Occupy Wall Street reportedly engaged in violence motivated by self-defense, actions which the larger movement disavowed. In Egypt, the

protestors posted flyers with the pictures of individuals suspected to be inciting violence as plants or moles for the regime (Attalah, 2012). But across the movements, people recognized the necessity of non-violent action as an ethic and as a tactic to gain widespread public sympathy.

Although neoliberalism is a through-line in all of the contemporary protest movements, neoliberalism is especially prevalent in literature around Occupy Wall Street. This is to be expected in that the very name of the movement gestures to the oppressive power of economics in the heart of capitalism in the United States. Political scientist Wendy Brown (2011) argued that Occupy Wall Street was inspired by the Arab Spring protests abroad and the failure of the Obama administration to intervene in the problem of neoliberalism and its continued chokehold of the U.S. government. Brown (2011) asserted, "OWS has revived the classical image of the nation as *res-publica*, the nation as a public thing." In the same journal issue, Richard Grusin (2011) expanded the idea of Occupy Wall Street as a public rejection of neoliberal policies to include his theory of premediation, a process that "works by mobilizing affect in the present."

The occupation of space as a tactic was present in all of the movements highlighted here, although the use of the tactic in Occupy Wall Street has stimulated some debate. According to Crane and Ashutosh (2013), representations of Occupy Wall Street as a movement actually do a disservice to the horizontal, practice-based ethos of Occupy Wall Street. By reducing Occupy Wall Street to a movement that has a 'home' (e.g. Zuccotti Park), the prefigurative political practices of the protestors are confined, delimited by a tidy version of space easily put under surveillance by the status quo, and further contained by the expectations associated around the term 'social movement.'

These expectations, according to Crane and Ashutosh (2013), are born largely of the movements of the 1960s and 1970s and provide expected templates around leaders and demands. Even positions generated from within Occupy Wall Street, such as 'We are the 99%', actually "conceal, and even suffocate occupations' place-based potential" (Crane and Ashutosh, 2013, p. 170). While I agree with the potential confining aspect of such master narratives, the term 'movement' is still a useful descriptor. Movements such as Occupy Wall Street offer spectacle—a legibility that disconnected practices (e.g. protest marches) alone might obscure. The study of practices is critically important, however the 'movement' label is also a necessary, if slippery, element of creating change. The rhetoric of movements, even new 21st century prefigurative ones, connotes a struggle for change, not necessarily (and not likely) a change in some state apparatus (e.g. the Tea Party), but perhaps a change that gestures towards alternative conditions--conditions first articulated in Egypt, Spain, and the United States, through the occupation of space.

To further complicate the connections between these movements of 2011, it is useful to consider social movement frames. "Social movement scholars interested in framing processes begin by taking as problematic what until the mid-1980s the literature largely ignored: meaning work—the struggle over the production of mobilizing and countermobilzing ideas and meanings" (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 613). Here we find a shared project with critical cultural studies of public relations, or the ways in which public relations practitioners translate and co-construct meanings with strategic intent. When viewed through a social movement framing lens, the three movements highlighted for contextual purposes here emerge as parts of a larger frame of collective action. According to Gamson (1992), "[c]ollective action frames are not merely aggregations of

individual attitudes and perceptions but also the outcome of negotiation shared meaning"
(p. 111).

As these negotiated meanings are circulated within and outside of social
movement circles, various articulations co-construct a discursive formation. These
negotiations are contested (Benford & Snow, 2000). Despite these contestations, some
common patterns emerge, even in movements as seemingly culturally disparate on the
surface as those of 2011. For example, all of these movements share an "injustice frame"
(Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 615) where movement actors challenge leaders who have
wronged them collectively. It follows that with the identification of injustice, there is
often an "attributional component" (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 616) to the movement
where the blame is placed. In this case, the blame was placed at the hands of actors
bound to the State in a complicit program of oppression, variously articulated. Zeroing in
on OWS, this study takes a particular interest in the relationships between media and a
small group of protestors.

A nucleus of veteran activists intervened in what they viewed as
misrepresentation on the part of the media. Soon after September 17, 2011, these
activists formed the Press WG to specifically address the mounting attention from
mainstream media sources (e.g. *The New York Times*, *Fox News*, *CNN, The Guardian*).
This group of activists and their practices of media relations during the early weeks of the
movement form the case study of the dissertation.

The members of the Occupy Wall Street Press WG used many techniques also
utilized by institutional public relations without calling it public relations per se. For

example, the members created press releases, crafted sound bites, and designated spokespeople (Bray, 2013). Much of this early work was reactive, meaning they were responding to journalists' requests rather than proactively pitching story ideas or creating their own content in hopes of distribution through mainstream media channels. Organizers spent the majority of their time staffing a media table in the park and/or replying to the thousands of emails from mostly mainstream media journalists sent to the account set up specifically for the press. Early proactive work, though minimal, included ad hoc tweeting on the part of members.

The major difference of their practices of public relations—the people's pr—involves the centrality of the mission to push for economic justice, as well as the concomitant desire to create social change through horizontal means outside of the status quo. Unlike most forms of institutional public relations that arguably further the status quo, the Press WG actively challenged it. Yet they challenged it in a hopeful way, knowing full well that many of the journalists and fellow activists they chose to engage with would shun or mischaracterize their attempts to advocate for social justice. That being said, the status quo of neoliberal capitalism is practically inescapable in the contemporary American context. As the research will demonstrate, members of the Press WG were complicit in reifying some of the same characteristics of oppression prevalent in the dominant world order the activists fervently wished to change. In other words, capitalism oppresses, even in an anti-capitalist movement, and it oppresses people differently, despite the unifying cry of the 99%. The practices of public relations in this context reveal fissures between the marginalized and the merely discontented.

The practitioners of the Press WG broke ranks with many of their fellow activists because they acknowledged the power of the media and possibility of influencing that power in the direction of equality. Their practices were, like most, filled with contradictions and pitfalls, and the analysis will not shy away from such critique. On the other hand, their remarkable role in a significant discursive shift to recognize the punishing disparities of wealth in the United States should be celebrated. Many of the participants interviewed for this study spoke of the "magic" of the countless volunteer hours they spent working to promote justice for the marginalized majority. This research also seeks to honor their commitment and to better understand the complexities of public relations in a social justice context.

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Technology in Social Movements

In context, it is clear that Occupy Wall Street shares many common threads with

other international social justice movements past and present in terms of the philosophies

of non-violence, the activism against the neoliberal status quo, and the occupation of

space. The use of technology is yet another commonality. This next section begins by

examining literature about relationships between technology and infrastructure within

social movements in general. This opens another space for the case study in terms of

how members used human and technological networks to do public relations work and to

what extent the infrastructure furthered or impeded this work. This section is followed

by a consideration of the academic debates on technology in social movements that are

running in the background.

In an editorial in the *New York Times*, Tufecki (2014) argues that although digital

technology has proven adept at organizing mass protests globally, this same technology

stands behind infrastructures that are inadequate to sustain social movements. Her

critique is not new. Wolfson (2011), writing prior to Occupy Wall Street, criticized

Hardt and Negri on similar grounds for an overreliance on the role of technology to

create a sustained political campaign.

By way of background, Hardt and Negri (2004) theorized labor as being itself.

The multitude, their model of resistance, is organized around the tensions between labor

and capital. Wolfson (2011) writes, "[…] Hardt and Negri hail a form of 'swarm

intelligence' as political action, where there is no center that dictates orders, but the

multiple parts of the multitude swarm their enemy. The connective tissue that coheres this swarm is communication, linking the different nodes, inspiring them to attack a shared point" (Wolfson, 2011, p. 374).

Wolfson (2011) argues that one problem with this decentralized mass action is a lack of sustainability as evidenced by the Global Social Justice Movement, which arguably hit its peak in the 1999 WTO protest in Seattle. Specifically, Wolfson (2011) asserts that this type of technologically driven leadership model "forces the question, however, 'If the multitude can't build, strengthen, or maintain core institutions, how can it challenge the concentrated, flexible power of capitalism?'" However, the very assumption in Wolfson's question begs the following question: Does a movement have to be sustainable or flex institutional power to be successful in the way he describes?

I would argue that Wolfson's critique hinges on the difference between discursive and material change. If OWS does follow a technologically driven leadership model, then this model has arguably contributed to *discursive* change. For instance, *Politico*'s Ben Smith (2011) found, using Nexis News, that the mainstream media's use of the phrase "income inequality" had more than quintupled from pre-occupation levels to the usage during the week of October 30, 2011. This prominent example marks what Juris and Razsa (2012) consider the "effective use of the viral flows of images and information generated by the intersections of social and mass media" (p. 1). OWS helped to move the discourse from one of austerity to one of social justice (Juris and Razsa, 2012). That being said, it is interesting to recall that the Press WG, fielding more than 10,000 requests from journalists in a couple of months, used relatively little social media; this fact calls into question the celebrated connection between discursive change and technology.

Regardless of how the discursive shift exactly came to be, OWS did not build lasting, institutional infrastructure. It is this lack that Wolfson rightly claims will not challenge capitalism. The public relations of OWS might inspire hope and awareness, important harbingers of social change. However, following Wolfson (2011) such a discursive shift will not result in material change. In other words, social movement swarms might deliver affective power, but the everyday struggle is not likely to improve. This suggests, at a minimum, a need for public relations in future social movements to better connect rhetoric with tangible improvements for the marginalized.

Wolfson (2011, 2014), Tufecki (2014), and others (e.g. Gladwell, 2010; Dean, 2009) correctly assert that technology should not be the singular focus of social movements. The elevation of technology to the seat of power ignores the cultural relations of everyday life and the material struggles of those without digital networks and social capital. However, the subject of technology so dominates academic discussions of social movements, and by extension social change, that it is useful to think through relevant perspectives and their proponents on a continuum.

The Continuum of Technology.

On this continuum, Shirky (2009) sits on the left representing the 'technology- as- liberation' view and Jodi Dean (2009) to the far right (somewhere she has never been before) embodying the 'technology- as- oppression' ethos. To be fair, Shirky (2009) has said that he acknowledges the actual and potential dangers of technology, but in the end, its productive, liberating capacity over determines the results. However, Shirky (2009) does not consider (or reasonably evaluate) race, class, and gender in his grossly simple formulation of freedom. His Internet freedom is another's chains.

Turning to Dean (2009), her concept of "communicative capitalism" is useful to the study of technology and social movements. Communicative capitalism is a material ideological formation—a relation between democracy, media, and neoliberalism (Dean, 2009). Communicative capitalism turns democracy into a fantasy through the exploitation of communication, a materialization of democratic ideals for capital (Dean, 2009). Technology demands communicative equivalence; it is an additive space with a self-reflective loop (Dean, 2009). In this conception, content does not matter as much as the scale and structure of media.

Although I agree with Dean's larger points, she uses the same monolithic brush as Shirky, just in the opposite political direction. For example, while Dean argues that all social media are weapons in the fantasia of democracy, Reddit provides one ready counterexample. Reddit is one contemporary site where comments are not simply additive and equivalent. In terms of visibility, comments are voted up and down by the community for the community. This will certainly not replace the necessity of bodies protesting in the streets, but it is not, by virtue of being a social media site, inherently anti-democratic. It also represents what could be considered a practice of public relations, a democratic promotion of ideas, albeit in a privileged space. Dean (2009) is similarly too dismissive of technology's mobilizing potential for social movements. Castells (2012), Juris (2008), and others draw from empirical evidence to demonstrate the important role decentralized, network technologies play in mobilizing forces for contemporary social movements.

Yet, as Dean (2009) and Bratich (2011) make clear, the same networked technologies used by more egalitarian forces to mobilize protesters are also used by

oppressive actors to subvert opposition and maintain dominance. The activists in Egypt

did use the Internet among other technological networks and tools to gather in the square,

and that same Internet was turned off by the Egyptian government almost as easily as

flipping a switch. Furthermore, such oppressive tactics are often not bounded by the

geography of the nation-state. For example, the Alliance of Youth Movements, a group

connected to U.S. State Department, deployed all sorts of technical knowledge to

protestors affiliated with the Arab Spring, yet many of these same technical practices are

criminalized when mobilized by U.S. actors such as Anonymous (Bratich, 2011).

"Convergence produces hybrids, some of which are encouraged, mobilized and 'friended'

while others are pre-empted, dissuaded and targeted as unspecified enemies by sovereign

and network powers" (Bratich, 2011, p. 621). It is no small feat of public relations work

to navigate such convergence. One wonders what, if anything, would have changed if the

Press WG had included government actors in a proactive way. Granted, they had so few

resources, but if they were willing to engage with the resolutely opposed at Fox News,

then efforts to create more friendly hybrids might have been beneficial.

Parallel to these suspicious constellations of sovereign power and networked

technologies, there exists the very real potential inside of the networks—by activists in no

way affiliated with State or other ancillary powers—to exacerbate the very kinds of

control that the techno-evangelists conveniently ignore. According to Kreiss, Finn, and

Turner (2011), within these networks, supposedly free from hierarchies, "[t]he absence of

formal rules, for instance, allows charismatic individuals to determine who is appointed

or dismissed according to fiat" (p. 252). Followers of the Occupy Wall Street Twitter

account run by activist Justine Tunney saw this play out in surprising fashion as Tunney,

an organizer behind the original Occupy Wall Street web site, began using the account to attack the character of anarchist professor and movement organizer, David Graeber. The tweets were, in public relations parlance, 'off message' to say the least and potentially damaging to the solidarity of a movement in a fragile stage of its existence.

The Egyptian Revolution and technology.

Turning from more academic debates to the tactical level of contemporary social justice movements, it is useful to look at the role(s) of technology in the Egyptian Revolution of 2011. In addition to the physical occupation of Tahrir square, and public spaces in cities such as Suez and Alexandria, the Egyptian revolutionaries made use of social media, telephones (when the regime cracked down on new media), and a variety of publicity tactics. More than 1,500,000 (Kellner, 2012, p. 42) supported the "We Are All Kheled Said" Facebook page established by Google executive Wael Gohnim in protest of the murder of the young martyr Said allegedly by Mubarak's order. A viral video by Asmaa Mahfouz helped to draw the masses to Tahrir on January 25 and beyond.

On the "Friday of Wrath," Egyptian revolutionaries, finding their internet blocked, took to telephones, contacting friends near and far, and dictating messages to web sites and social media outside of the country (Attalah, 2012). Nabulsi (2012), for example, "set up a call center to take information about people who were wounded or missing […,] reached out to TV channels, […] printed thousands of leaflets [,…] and passed them around at Tahrir Square" (p. 34).

Kellner (2012) makes an insightful argument for the importance of "media spectacle" in understanding the various insurrections of 2011. He purposely strays from

Debord's tendency to "valorize artistic and subcultural activity" (Kellner, 2012, p. xvii),

focusing instead on the heterogeneous and often contradictory nature of spectacle as it

plays out in mainstream media. Kellner's (2012) work is especially useful then in taking

account of the role of Al Jazeera and other media outlets. Al Jazeera was especially

important in the Egyptian case.

Far from merely documenting the revolution, Al Jazeera was an active participant,

presenting demonstrations and even live broadcasting Mubarak's trial. Some critics have

read interference from the U.S. in the coverage on Al Jazeera (Kellner, 2012). Kellner

(2012) asserts that although Al Jazeera did not go directly against U.S. foreign policy, it

certainly editorialized freely and almost exclusively in favor of the end of the regime.

The people and the protestors in the streets relied heavily on Al Jazeera news, and by

some measures judged it more important than social media in relation to the revolution

(Fuchs, 2012).

Technology and Liberty.

Looking deeper into the debate, Castells' (2012) contention that the Internet, with

its "networks of outrage and hope", spurred the many protest movements of 2011--"each

revolt inspiring the next one by networking images and messages" (p. 221)-- ignores

inconvenient evidence. In a challenge to Castells' (2012) argument, Fuchs (2012) turns

to data from the Egyptian activists and from occupiers in the U.S. to show a much less

Internet-centric approach to protest. Presenting survey data from Wilson and Dunn

(2011), Fuchs (2012) shows that older forms of media were much more important to the

protesters in Tahrir Square: "face-to-face interaction (93%), television (92%), phones

(82%), print media (57%), SMS (46%)" (Fuchs, 2012, p. 788). Fuchs (2012) adds,

"Interestingly, Castells ignores Wilson and Dunn's results, although they were published in the *International Journal of Communication* that he co-edits" (p. 788).

Wilson and Dunn (2011) also include questions about communication based on motivation to protest. Egyptian revolutionaries identified phone and face-to-face, in that order, as the most motivating media. To be fair, Facebook does count higher as a motivating factor than it does under the category of 'importance', but email and Twitter are then far behind even satellite television as motivational sources for the protestors. Here the techno-evangelists seem to have had their revival tent trampled; "digital media was not as central to the protester communication and organization on the ground as the heralds of Twitter revolutions would have us hyperbolize" (Fuchs, 2012, p. 789, quoting Wilson and Dunn, 2011).

Although Fuchs (2012) does not address this, perhaps one might counter that "importance" is an especially broad qualitative metric, one that might hide the idea that the Internet is an unsung hero. After all, Castells did not title his book 'networks of importance.' Perhaps the outrage and hope he correctly identifies as necessary affective conditions for action, are indeed still best contained and guided by the channel, the medium, the network. One might call the relationship between outrage, hope, and technology a space of motivation, rather than importance.

Fuchs' (2012) analysis of data from OWS protesters in the U.S. is perhaps less damning than the Egyptian case to the argument of Internet centrality/causality. One is struck by the heterogeneity of media used by the protestors—at least once a week or more frequently-- for OWS information. Using data from the Occupy General Survey

with 'n' ranging from 1052 to 1132, Fuchs (2012) summarizes: "Especially Facebook, word of mouth, websites and e-mail played an important role. […] Broadcasting and newspapers had a much less important role than the Internet" (p. 790). At first glance, such data damages the case for the effectiveness of the Press WG given that they gave short shrift to social media technologies.

However, I would argue that further qualitative work is required to contextualize Fuchs' (2012) interpretation of importance here. For example, although YouTube and Livestreams registered 72.2% and 61.4% respectively, the usage of the technology broadly may not account for the relative importance of the message within the medium. For example, Livestream has been credited for helping to educate protesters on the finer points of consensus based general assemblies in the various protest camps springing up in the U.S. after New York (Reyes, 2013). Perhaps only GA facilitators were watching these images, but what they lacked in numbers, they surely made up for in amplification and mimicry—different measures of "importance." In other words, the message and the type of audience reached must be contextualized; data on the channel alone is insufficient to gaining a fuller picture of the messy work of awareness and mobilization.

Finally, given the celebrity status of social media in contemporary society, it is important to highlight the heavy usage of older digital technologies on the part of the OWS Press WG. According to participants, a sub-section of the team made up of four or five members devoted the majority of their time for two months just to respond to the 10,000 emails waiting in the inbox built for press inquiries. Between the emails, the inquiries at the table in the park, and the service of editing the press releases of the other working groups within OWS in New York City, the Press WG had little time for sending

out coordinated, thematic social media updates, and even less time for proactive story pitching to the media.

Case study data also indicate that Twitter was used more formally as a means of monitoring press activity and stories, than as a means of coordinated promotion. This media monitoring was done in an ad-hoc fashion with no one assigned to cover particular beats and/or media outlets as is standard practice in institutional public relations environments. This statement, however, belies the assumption that the activist practitioners were (however insufficiently) following the lead of corporate practices. In fact, there is another plausible argument based on previous literature.

Public Relations and Digital Technology

"The development of the Internet offers opportunities for activism that, like the activism of earlier eras, is mimicked and co-opted by corporate public relations." (Coombs & Holladay, 2012, p. 347)

Studies of the Internet and public relations are similar to the most cited and plentiful corporate, progressive histories of public relations in that they often ignore alternative perspectives. Coombs (1998), Heath (1998), and Coombs and Holladay (2007), all challenge this trend with variations on the argument that resistance came first. **"**Activists were pioneering the use of various Internet channels to create reputational threats to leverage changes in corporate practices" (Coombs & Holladay, 2012, p. 350).

Coombs and Holladay (2012) identified a study by Taylor, Kent, and White (2001) as an exception to the dominant corporate perspective in research that explores the intersection of technology and public relations. While it is true that Taylor et al. (2001)

study the activities of activist groups instead of corporations, their analysis uses a managerial theoretical framework that impeded the study. They asserted, "Activist organizations have unique communication and economic constraints and may be able to use the Internet dialogically" (Taylor, et al., 2001, p. 268). Notice that the premise begins (and ends) with the *constraints* of activist organizations; it is hoped the activists will be able to overcome their tight budgets and other shortcomings through dialogue, presumably with their less constrained corporate "peers." When Taylor et al. (2001) dig further into the way activist organizations supposedly work, they make additional assumptions.

For example, they wrote, "Since activist organizations are conceived of here as organized around the mobilization of public interest, it may be expected that activist Web sites will target volunteer publics more than they will media publics" (Taylor, et al., p. 268). In practice, public relations work in activist organizations may not support this expectation. Firstly, the volunteer publics and the media publics are not always separate, neither are they consistently "targeted" one way or the other, for better and for worse. Secondly, the media is often seen as a conduit to reach those volunteer publics so the web site would and does often include areas either designed for the press or of interest to the press, ideally written in the language of the press for easy repurposing. Thirdly, the premise assumes that media publics want content especially designed for them by activist organizations.

Sobieraj (2011) complicated the last point in her study of journalists and the activist organizations they cover, finding that the journalists preferred more "authentic" activist voices *not* filtered through web sites, much less specially designed web site areas.

Granted, Taylor et al. (2001) were writing a decade before Sobieraj; journalism, activism, and the web have changed. That being said, it is likely that such changes are more technical than relational. In other words, the web looks different and has advanced functionally, but relationships and dialogic communication within and between activist and media publics is not always a given, nor always desirable. As the Global Social Justice and Indymedia Movements amply demonstrated it is sometimes an advantageous strategy not to engage with certain publics, i.e. with the mainstream media. Just like the Excellence Theory from which Taylor's work grows, dialogic communication as applied to public relations does not adequately account for power imbalances between stakeholders. This is, perhaps, no more apparent than when exploring the relationships between activists and other powerful media, government, and corporate actors. This is not to say that the latter groups always have more power, but rather to remind that power is a struggle, one that cannot be removed from an analysis based on a progressive sense of a profession and practice in public relations with a decidedly mixed record.

This is not to suggest that Taylor et al. (2001) ignore the power imbalance between activist organizations and corporations. On the contrary, Taylor et al. (2001) recognize the disparities, and find the potential for equality through the Internet. They write, "At the most basic level, the presence of activist organizations on the Internet gives them equality in status to corporations" (Taylor, et al., 2001, p. 280). There are at least two problems with this contention. One, it ignores the political economic infrastructure of the Internet. The most persuasive Web site on the planet is worthless if a government turns off the Internet (as in Egypt) or if a hidden algorithm pushes the site into relative obscurity based on so-called customer preferences, i.e. ad revenue. Two, equality is not

justice. The presence of a polished Web site does not magically advance the public interest over the trillions of dollars spent on public relations in the corporate interest.

Technology is only one small, if largely celebrated, part of the power dynamics at play in public relations work across a variety of contexts. While taking a refreshing look at activist organizations instead of corporations, Taylor et al. (2001), persist in the use of managerial frames to explain phenomenon better understood using critical-cultural approaches to public relations theory and practice. Before I explain the theoretical framework used for this study, it is useful to reflect upon this more widely used (at least in the United States) managerial approach.

Managerial Approaches to Public Relations

The dominant literature in the United States concerning public relations takes a managerial or functional approach. These studies are meant to further scholarship and/or practice by researching how to improve various processes of influence on behalf of clients or key stakeholders. The Excellence Model of public relations, developed over the course of some fifteen years by Grunig (1984, 1992, 2006), is foundational to this managerial approach, and is a useful model at the institutional level. It says that best practices in public relations are based on symmetrical relationships between relevant publics, resulting more often than not in positive outcomes for the (funding) organizations' interests.

Grunig (2006) builds the excellence model on cognitive dissonance theory and selective exposure, or why people tend to seek out information that confirms the attitudes and opinions that they already hold. From there, he develops the situational theory of

publics, which addresses information-seeking behavior in decision making (Grunig, 2006). The theory, according to Grunig (2006), "provides a tool to segment stakeholders into publics, to isolate the strategic publics with whom it is most important for organizations to develop relationships to be effective, and to plan different strategies for communicating with publics whose communication behavior ranged from active to passive" (p. 155).

As Grunig (2006) began to study more organizations, he found a preponderance of one-way, asymmetrical information flow, i.e. there was much telling and little to no listening on the part of the organization. This work leads to his four models from 1984: press agentry/publicity, public information, two-way asymmetrical, and two-way symmetrical (Grunig, 1984).

Grunig (2006) finds the ideal approach to practice in the form of the fourth model: the two-way symmetrical. He writes, "The symmetrical model […] proposed that individuals, organizations, and publics should use communication to adjust their ideas and behavior to those of others rather than to try to control how others think and behave." (Grunig, 2006, p. 156) This two-way symmetrical model would become the core of the excellence theory and influence the profession right down to the definition of public relations by the primary professional organization, the Public Relations Society of America. The PRSA's definition states, "Public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics" (http://www.prsa.org).

Both the PRSA definition and the Grunig model turn on this idea of mutuality among stakeholders with two-way exchange as the fulcrum for success. But Grunig was

hardly the first to identify the two-way flow as a means of achievement. Edward Bernays, one of the key figures in formalizing the profession of public relations in the mid 20th century, also wrote about two-way communication (2005/1928). However, Bernays (and others such as Walter Lippmann) did not conceal the non-egalitarian idea that the public relations professional, working on behalf of a corporation, was meant to manipulate the other publics at the table. "Modern propaganda is a consistent, enduring effort to create or shape events to influence the relations of the public to an enterprise, idea or group" (Bernays, 2005/1928, p. 52).

Grunig might counter that propaganda is a form of one-way communication, a top-down, hypodermic needle affair that has been proven ineffective time and time again. Such a response is far too simplistic an understanding of propaganda. This is not to suggest that Grunig and other scholars working in the managerial tradition (or practitioners) are purposefully occluding the process of public relations. However, it is to say that, as does Mark Crispin Miller (2005), "propaganda easily seduces even those whom it most horrifies." (p. 30). I would add that this seduction is most often achieved through hegemony, Gramsci's (1985) concept that cultural dominance is achieved not through direct violence, but through the workings of power to achieve the social idea of common sense. This social coercion furthers the aforementioned progressive histories of public relations practice, suggesting that public relations is somehow a neutral process, an apolitical practice in a political world. This notion is deployed often by powerful public relations practitioners and theorists who do not interrogate their own complicity in relations of capital.

Pieczka (2006) and Holtzhausen and Voto (2002), as well as Curtin and Gaither (2005), highlight the problem of power in Grunig's work. The mutuality and level playing field of all stakeholders in public relations practice is an assumption, a common sense notion within the field and within the uncritical managerial approach. The question of power is so problematic, nay absent, in the excellence model that Curtin and Gaither (2005) coined the phrase, "Grunigian fallacy," to describe the exclusion of "power as an integral and defining concept in public relations" (p. 96).

Grunig (2006) has responded to critics about power in the excellence model. For example, Grunig argues that Pieczka (2006) and Hotzhausen and Voto (2002) misinterpret the placement of power in the model. Pieczka (2006) asserts that public relations people should avoid being in the "dominant coalition" because this would inhibit them from being an activist voice for their publics. Grunig replies that the model seeks to empower public professionals at all levels of the organization; power does not necessarily have to be at the center.

Here Grunig (2006) assigns almost limitless agency on the part of public relations practitioners across all strata of an organization. In other words, according to Grunig (2006), the public relations practitioner has the power to provide a check and balance to any disparities of power among stakeholders. In my thirteen years of practice, including several years in management, such an assertion borders on the absurd. Furthermore, Pieczka (2006) and the others are right to call out the corrupting influence of groupthink so often found at the center of power where pressures to conform are enormous. Of course, many practitioners resist such pressure and maintain ethical communication practices with great integrity, but to dismiss the dangers of such pressures, as well as the

many who succumb, is an all-too-convenient explanation of power dynamics in any organization.

Summarizing and supporting Grunig, Heath (2001) writes, "An excellent organization exhibits characteristics that make it a more positive part of its larger system" (p. 3). This statement turns on a significant unexamined assumption: the system itself is positive. What happens when the system is corrupt? In such cases, the excellent intentions of public relations practitioners may be for naught. The system is not designed to be mutual or egalitarian. Activists, as one particularly vulnerable audience, are not in the excellent family of publics. As Dozier and Lauzen (2000) point out, activists are absent publics in the context of most organizational public relations work; the activists represent "invisible clients" (p. 15).

Public Relations and Activism

Smith & Ferguson (2001) call for further research on activism and public relations to test Grunig's (1997) doubt that "activists 'do' public relations any differently from how other practitioners do it" (p. 299). There is evidence to suggest that Grunig (1997) is correct, there are a great number of similarities between activist public relations and corporate public relations (Taylor et. al, 2001; Vasquez & Taylor, 2001; Roper, 2002). Perhaps the better question, then, is why is there a *perception* that activist public relations stands apart from its corporate counterpart?

Demetrious (2006) offers one possible answer: due to dominant narratives about the evils of public relations at the hands of corporations and other large institutions, activists typically view themselves as victims of a corporatized public relations function. Although activist organizations and social movements employ what they sometimes term

"public communication," there is little attention paid to public relations, which is characterized as part of a larger threat to society (Demetrious, 2006, p. 107). Thus, the managerial public relations literature sees activism as an "antithesis" to institutional organizational power, while the activist literature would rather not recognize the utilization of processes similar to those of the ruling class (Demetrious, 2006, p. 104).

I differ from Demetrious (2006) on how to move the study of public relations in social movements from the margins to the center. Demetrious (2006) advocates for the use of Beck's theories of the risk society and reflexive modernization to make this turn. The risk society describes a perilous global community where old institutions, such as the nation-state, are crumbling (Beck, 2009). Reflexive modernization responds to this challenge by looking anew at old policies and reforming them to achieve new forms of solidarity (Beck, Bonss, and Lau, 2003). Contemporary social movements, with their various disillusionments concerning the implications of globalization, could indeed be read through Beck. However, Demetrious (2006) underestimated the importance of class when she argued that Marxist theories are a part of the problem when studying social movements. She contended that a focus on class warfare only further emphasizes the victimization or marginalization that activists experience (Demetrious, 2006). By contrast, postcolonial scholars of public relations such as Dutta (2009) argued that through the recovery of subaltern voices we see how concepts such as dialogue actually highlight "the unequal terrain of relationships that constitutes dialogue" (p. 294).

Henderson (2005) managed to centralize and consider the power of activist public relations through a critical interpretive study of activists working to affect public opinion and policy in New Zealand concerning genetically-engineered (GE) foods. Through

various tactics of identity management including use of web sites for more direct communication with publics, the GE-free coalition was successful in harnessing and shaping multiple discourses in New Zealand to influence policy in their direction (Henderson, 2005). This co-construction of discourses in a site of contestation leads to a more meta review of the discourses concerning the epistemology of public relations itself.

Discourses of Public Relations

There exist a variety of discourses, some competing, about the definition and characteristics of public relations. Stauber and Rampton (1995) crystallized a popular, anti-PR discourse that views public relations as nothing short of outright deception on a mass scale. PR's "cunning" (p. 204), according to Stauber and Rampton (1995) is that the lies of the industry are based on "half-truths" that come "*from us*" (p. 204) in the form of surveys and scores of other information given voluntarily to the persuasion machine. Furthermore, they and other scholars (e.g. Chomsky, 2013) link the business of public relations with the decline of democracy. Stauber and Rampton (1995) claimed that the public relations sector "is related to democracy in the same way that prostitution is related to sex. When practiced voluntarily for love, both can exemplify human communications at its best. When they are bought and sold, however, they are transformed into something hidden and sordid" (p. 14). They find hope in curbing the power of PR in the form of other counter-groups to the "corporate soul" (Marchand, 1998), e.g. the family, churches, volunteer organizations—a sort of "Bowling Alone" as anti-dote for "Mad Men."

Jackson and Hall Jamieson (2007) also illuminated some of the more egregious examples of deception on the part of the persuasion industries, including public relations. With a focus on American politics, Jackson and Hall Jamieson (2007) looked at how politicians of both major political parties manipulate facts through omission and misdirection, i.e. spin. "Spin is tolerated and even admired in some circles" (Jackson and Hall Jamieson, 2007, vii). Their book is an instruction manual for everyday citizens to seek facts in a media environment saturated with spin. This environment co-creates the discourse of spin—of public relations as a part of everyday life that is counter-factual.

Gower (2007) offered a different perspective on this pr-as-deception discourse. A former public relations professional turned lawyer turned academician, Gower (2007) argued that public relations and journalism, both professions reliant upon the other, have a positive role to recover in democracy. She and others (e.g. McChesney and Nichols, 2011) argued that the balance of power between public relations and journalism has shifted toward the former. However, unlike many scholars, Gower (2007) posited that the public relations industry was not to blame, but rather "a marketing mind-set that has developed into a potent force in government, corporations, and nonprofit groups at the same time that journalism has been weakened by budget cuts and increased competition" (xvii). Gower (2007) challenged journalists to move away from conceptions of objectivity that allowed for "docile, passive reporting" (p. 221) and she analyzed the link between this kind of journalism and a managerial discourse of public relations, the kind of public relations that seeks to control journalists rather than to build relationships with them. Finally, Gower (2007) challenged the pr-as-spin discourse with the assertion that "[…] public relations needs a strong, credible press, too" (p. 221). This is to say that the

best public relations relies upon clear, independent endorsements from third parties, including the press.

Gower (2007) and her marketing mind-set argument bring the discussion full circle to the administrative academic discourses of public relations dominated by the excellence theory. In fact, Weaver (2011) argued that the marketing mind-set, or "ideologies of the marketplace" (Weaver, 2013, p. 3), was so pervasive in certain U.S. public relations academic circles as to render them blind to "how their own cultural prejudices were privileging economic interests over wider public interest and wellbeing" (Weaver, 2011; Weaver, 2013, p. 3). Weaver (2013) was one of many advocating for a critical cultural studies approach to public relations scholarship. As L'Etang (2011) wrote, "Such an approach [British cultural studies] assumes contested meanings, alternative readings and dialectical processes involved in the production of social meanings that inform the nature of culture." (p. 22)

Theoretical Framework: The Circuit of Culture

The circuit of culture theory (Figure 1), first developed by du Gay, Hall, Janes, Mackay, & Negus (2013)-- at the cultural studies hub, the Open University in the U.K.-- forms the primary theoretical framework of the dissertation. The theory defines culture as a continuous process of making meaning. This process consists of incalculable moments of "articulation," or moments where processes within the circuit interact and "lead to variable and contingent outcomes." (Du Gay, et al., 2013, p. 3). The scholars first developed the theory to help explain the cultural import of a particular artifact, the Sony Walkman music player.

Figure 1
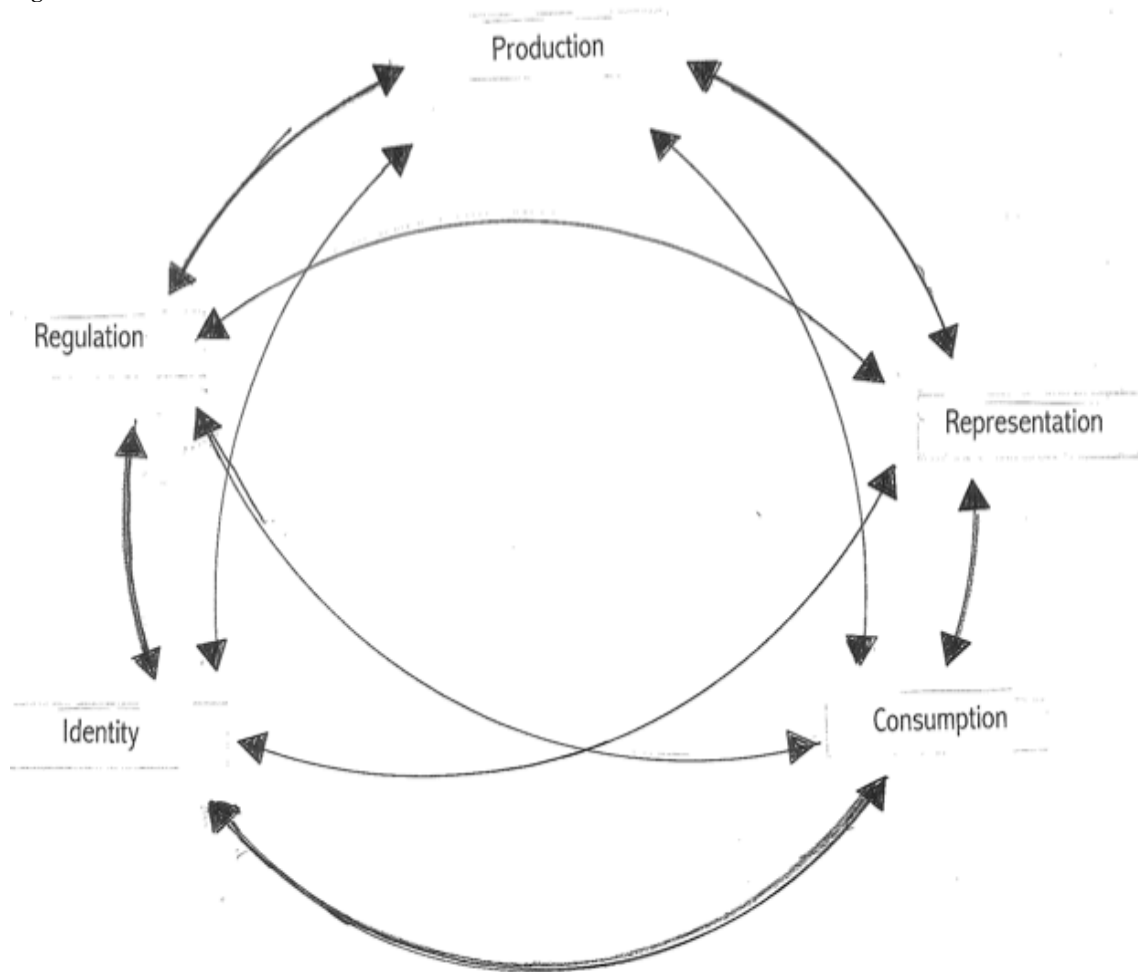
Source: Courtesy of Michel Reyes

The theory is a heuristic with five "major cultural processes" forming the circuit, namely: representation, identity, production, consumption, and regulation (Du Gay, et al., 2013, p. 3). As with any circuit, one may begin at any point and still complete it. Hence one may begin a cultural study using this approach from anywhere within the circuit. Each moment on the circuit is briefly explained below.

Representation comprises denotative and connotative meanings that, according to Du Gay and his co-authors (2013) combine with techniques that construct "the object in a

certain way" (p. xxiii). In their Walkman example, an ad for the new device in the 1980s, written in Japanese no less, has clearly identifiable meanings and techniques. The techniques could be the headphones (an older, familiar technology) paired with the new, boxy device signaling that it is used for recorded sound. The meanings might be the connotation that the device is for young people as the ad juxtaposes a fashionable young woman listening to the device while an old man stands adjacent and aghast (Du Gay, et al., 2013).

The process of identity explains the society behind the object of study—their culture. In the case of Sony, it includes their branding efforts to not only infuse the object with the cultural prerogatives of Sony, but also to link the consumer's identity to the commodity in an ideally seamless fashion so one may not discern if the Walkman represents the person or the person represents the Walkman.

Processes of production, or following Hall (1993) the "encoding" of meaning, are in conversation with processes of consumption, or "decoding" (Hall, 1993). At its most simplistic level, a producer encodes a cultural text/artifact with a particular or dominant meaning. The consumer may take any variety of dynamic readings: accepting the inserted meaning (the "dominant") or accepting some, but not all, of the desired meaning (the "negotiated"), or rejecting the dominant altogether (the "oppositional") (Hall, 1993, p. 136 - 138).

Much has been made in the popular and academic literature (see Shirky, 2009) of the blending of the processes of production and consumption in the advent of the digital age—the time of the 'produser' (Bruns, 2008). Even the creators of the circuit of culture

recognize in their 2013 update to *Doing Cultural Studies* that the blurred lines between producer and consumer might render this part of the circuit model less useful. Although I appreciate their humility, I still find the distinction and interaction of the two processes (without using clever neologisms) to be of service, in large part because there is little new in the fact that consumers have radically intervened in production throughout history. Take, for example, the phonograph.

Gitelman (2008) recovers the social history of the phonograph, a cultural artifact with a contested meaning at the turn of the 20th century. According to the dominant discourse, Thomas Edison is the father or producer of the phonograph. His company manufactured them and people bought them in a neat, linear production and consumption chain. However, as Gitelman (2008) explains, Edison intended the invention to be used for the purpose of dictation for business. It was the consumers, largely women, who wrested control of the meaning of the device by using it for sound playback and leisure, thereby completely flipping the roles of producer and consumer in terms of making meaning (Gitelman, 2008).

This brief interlude demonstrates the way power is contingent within the circuit of culture, and leads to the final process requiring explanation: regulation. No cultural process exists in a vacuum (Du Gay, et al., 2013); in moments of regulation or regulatory culture, the rules or controls surrounding a cultural text are made manifest. Here one often finds tensions between ideas such as public/private or liberty/order. Just as with moments of production and consumption, however blended in contemporary, digitally-mediated life, the specifics will change (e.g. the regulatory body), however the flexibility of the circuit to explain cultural processes and tensions remains constant.

Critique of the Circuit of Culture.

The most persistent critique of the circuit of culture insists that the model is too static and rigid to account for the fluid contestations of meaning characteristic of contemporary society, especially with regard to technology. This critique, as advocated by Taylor, Demont-Heinrich, Broadfoot, Dodge, and Jian (2002), argues that while the model may have been sufficient to explain older technologies of the day, such as the Sony Walkman, the circuit does not adequately account for the more transformative discourses surrounding digital technologies.

In their study of the controversial music sharing site Napster, Taylor et al. (2002) argue that the battle between the "information-wants-to-be-free" camp and the music industry camp demonstrates that the *circuit of culture model* as used to understand the Walkman falls short. "There is little discussion of opposing stakeholder discourses, and the identity of Walkman consumers appears to be an "effect" of Sony's successful manipulation of image politics" (Taylor et. al, 2002, p. 615). Their interpretation is insightful, but the gap they recognize is one of application, not the model itself. The model will easily handle competing discourses as demonstrated by uses of the model to explain various public relations efforts, including the polysemic, multi-cultural meanings of the international small pox eradication campaign (Curtin and Gaither, 2007).

Taylor et. al (2002) contend that the circuit of culture "yields insight into the Walkman's production. However, given several fundamental differences between Napster and the Walkman, we offer here a rather different emphasis" (p. 617). They mistake their "different emphasis" as a fault of the model, and confuse a different product and socio-political context for the model's original, though by no means exclusive, object of

analysis. They emphasize production at the expense of the other moments. "Because of these contingencies, we argue that Napster's moment of production is most significant in facilitating a new mode of distribution. This development threatens powerful commercial interests configured around a tradition of production" (Taylor et. al, 2002, p. 618). While the moment of production was certainly exciting at the turn of the century when bricks and mortar were being replaced with bricks and clicks, the authors' own emphasis clouds the other articulations in operation at the time. There is no "most significant" in a contingent, dynamic process of making meaning. Napster would not have threatened a record-pressing grandmother, if the consumption had not been voracious, if the identity had not been youthful and new, if the representation had not been groundbreaking, if the regulation had not closed (as it later would) the creation and use of the technology.

Taylor et al. (2002) summarize, "Simply put, Napster threatened an entire culture of production. In contrast, the Walkman conformed to and advanced the industrial mode of production" (p. 619) While this is a compelling point, it does not negate the model's usefulness. On that score, all Taylor et al. (2002) did (and this is significant) is extend the model to a new and interesting case. The fact that Napster circulated meaning differently than did the Walkman does not mean that the model is broken. In fact, the application to the case study shows that the theoretical lens is wide enough to account for phenomenon such as the collapse of the producer/consumer dichotomy and specific enough to allow for the context so critical to Cultural Studies.

Applications of the Circuit of Culture in PR studies.

In the next section, I will briefly highlight previous uses of the circuit of culture to make sense of public relations practices, and discuss the relevance of such work to this

project. Importantly, Curtin and Gaither (2005, 2007) emphasize that one cannot simply affix the five labels—representation, production, consumption, identity, and regulation-- on various segments of public relations practice because, following Du Gay et al. (2013), processes of making meaning are recursive and discursive--teeming with power relations that resist linear analysis and practice.

That being said, the circuit of culture does allow for the utility of analysis to zero-in, to rest upon a moment; such moments are thus studied as articulations, or points of conjuncture between the five features (Curtin & Gaither, 2007). These articulations allow for flexibility and variety when theorizing public relations as "a meaning-making practice within a ritualistic, nonlinear view of communication" (Curtin & Gaither, 2005, p. 105). Researchers who employ the circuit of culture consider articulations of moments, allowing for multiple meanings and contingencies. This cultural approach to public relations allows for a fuller, more dynamic spectrum of qualitative description and understanding rather than predicting or forcefully reducing polysemic public relations campaigns into one fixed meaning,

Through a number of case studies, Curtin and Gaither (2007) test their cultural-economic model of international public relations, which is based on the circuit of culture. They developed their approach in part to address critiques of cultural theories of public relations developed by Sriamesh and Vercic (2003), Vasqez and Taylor (1999). Such theories attempt to add a cultural dimension to managerial approaches to public relations in an effort to compare and contrast cultural similarities and differences in the increasingly global context of public relations practice. Turk and Scanlan (1999) argue that this approach does not generate culturally sensitive models, but rather furthers old

approaches that leave power dynamics untouched. Curtin and Gaither (2007), at one level, intervene in this debate with work that "summarizes limitations of the Western neoliberal model of international public relations practice" and furthers the critical-cultural study of public relations practice (p. 116). They write, "The circuit of culture redefines public relations as a signifying practice that produces meaning within a cultural economy, privileging identity, difference, and power because of the central role these constructs play in discursive practice" (Curtin and Gaither, 2007, p. 110).

As the dissertation will explicate, the Press WG of OWS conducted the people's pr in order to encourage the press to consider the movement as an alternative to a broken system of government and economics. However, this was not a simple transference of meaning from one party, the activists, to another, the press. Through the circuit of culture, the practices and tensions of the group will emerge as contingent, yet bound to the flows of identity and power within a group.

Terry's (2005) usage of the circuit of culture is particularly relevant to this project due to her application of the model to activists practicing public relations in Kazakhstan. Here, the international context is critical as she demonstrates that Western-centric, neoliberal models of public relations fail to explain the case of Kazakhstan, where she spent ten months doing ethnographic research (Terry, 2005). Using the circuit model, Terry (2005) describes moments of production as consumed by money. Everyone is paying someone in this practice of public relations; articles are literally bought and sold (Terry, 2005). This destroys any shred of credibility. "Communication/meaning in the public domain becomes, in effect, meaningless." (Terry, 2005, p. 34)

Perhaps most important, Terry (2005) challenges the idea that "fervor and motivation" (Dozier and Lauzen, 2000) are all that is needed for activists to challenge the power of public relations practiced in the service of corporations. Terry's (2005) findings from her case in Kazakhstan demonstrate that much more is required to challenge the status quo, not the least of which is sustainable structure.

L'Etang (2011) criticized Terry's (2005) study in the public relations literature. She argues that Terry (2005) furthers the dominant, managerial approach to public relations practice and theory by privileging it as the desired, "Western" way to do PR instead of acknowledging and exploring the cultural differences in Kazakhstan where her fieldwork takes place (L'Etang, 2011). Although this is true to some extent (after all, Terry is a Westerner and no amount of ethnography or self-reflexivity will change this), Terry's use of the circuit of culture is instructive for the study of public relations practice among activists.

At a minimum, Terry's (2005) work suggests that the social and political environments surrounding public relations activity must contain a high level of freedom in order for counter-publics to thrive. Her work complements that of Ferguson (1998) who argued that socially responsible public relations had a role to play in the changing media landscape of the former Soviet Union. As Ferguson (1998) stated, "independent, free media and an environment conducive to the formation of activist publics are elements necessary for the practice of socially responsible public relations. Both elements, likewise, form important pillars in Western democratic societies" (p. 165).

The case of Occupy Wall Street places activists within a relatively free media environment and a political culture that allowed protest camps throughout the country,

however briefly. In this study, the heterogeneous political identities of Occupy Wall

Street, all more or less opposed to neoliberal capitalism, challenge managerial models of

publics and public relations. However, as the study will show, many of their media

relations practices were similar to those employed by corporations, albeit undertaken

from weak positions of power compared to the mainstream media and from radically

different identities.

CHAPTER 4. METHOD

The press relations working group of Occupy Wall Street is an apt case with

which to frame a qualitative research question and study about grass roots public

relations practices during a moment of cultural importance. The case study and

interpretative analysis are in conversation with the public relations literature. To form the

study, I collected three main types of data, as follows: 16 semi-structured interviews, the

work products of the group (press releases, talking points, sound bites, tweets), and

external/internal 'listservs' containing email correspondence within the group and with

the press. The selection of materials for analysis was based on criteria constructed from

the interviews. For example, the group received over ten thousand emails from press at

the 'occupypress' address in the first few weeks of the movement. In order to delimit this

large email corpus, group members indirectly assisted the study with the construction of a

matrix made of important moments and corresponding work products/background

information, as detailed by the Press WG members.

Case Study

Initially, I had intended to conduct an ethnography of the Press WG of OWS in

New York. Unfortunately, the group disbanded before I could begin the project so a

primary method of ethnography, participant observation, was out of the question. As I

began to think about alternative approaches, the main challenge was to mitigate for an

overreliance on one type of data. The case study emerged as a suitable strategy given my

research questions, the relatively recent, but not current timing of the phenomenon, and

the room for a theoretical framework, as well as triangulation within the strategy. The

situation was consonant with Yin (2003) who claimed, "In general, case studies are the preferred strategy when […] the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context" (p. 1). There are, of course, shortcomings with the case study approach, as with any research design. For example, most of the interview data for the case study is the product of memory; most group members were three years removed from the events of OWS when I spoke to them. Perhaps such memories were unreliable or fuzzy at best. Even a relatively clear, accurate memory/perspective, is not fact, but rather a presentation of "*verbal behavior* and not necessarily of actual events" (Yin, 2003, p. 110). Here again, the case study approach offered the flexibility to add other types of evidence to either support, challenge, or remain inconclusive in terms of the arguments springing from the inquiry.

With the overall strategy chosen, the next step was to find a way into the group, despite the fact that they were no longer meeting. Initially I had planned to ask some friends whom I had known to be active in OWS generally, to somehow make connections for me until we found a member of the Press WG. This strategy might have taken months given the sheer size of OWS in New York at the time, and the waning, some might say dormant, nature of the movement when I formally began the project in 2014. Serendipity occurred at a union meeting that I attended on my university campus. I began talking to a fellow graduate student in another department when she asked about my dissertation topic. She asked me if I knew a friend of hers who was particularly active in the Press WG. From there, it was only a matter of Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval before I tracked down her friend for the first interview.

Interviews.

I conducted 16 interviews, representing 64% of the approximately 25 active members (Bray, 2013), with former group members in order to understand the practices, perspectives, and tensions of the Press WG during the period of their most intense activity, hypothesized (and confirmed) to be from just after the start of the occupation of Zuccotti Park on September 17, 2011 to soon after the eviction from the park on November 15, 2011. The sample was purposive, a term meaning researchers "make informed judgments about what to observe and whom to interview" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 110).

The sample was a snowball, meaning that it grew from one participant who suggested other group members to interview, then the next participant suggested more people, and so on, until sufficient data were collected. According to Lindlof and Taylor (2011), "Snowball sampling is well-suited to studying social networks, sub-cultures, or people who have certain attributes in common" (p. 114). The Press WG fit this description as it was a group of people joined around a common activity and cause. All of the names of the interview subjects were changed to maintain a degree confidentiality in compliance with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocol. Of the 43 people contacted via email and/or text, 16 agreed to be interviewed (a response rate of 37%). I exchanged more than 25 emails to schedule and re-schedule an interview with one informant. Other interviews were less arduous to schedule.

One subject, Byron, was the exception to the snowball method; he was one of many activists who approached the researcher in Liberty Plaza/Zuccotti Park on the third anniversary of OWS, September 17, 2014. Byron agreed to be interviewed on the spot

once it was learned that he had participated in a meeting of the Press WG. He did not become an active member because he did not feel the group was militant enough; Byron wanted every action and story to involve at least the threat of arrest, and possibly violence. The members of the Press WG generally avoided arrest and did not condone violence.

The other 15 interviews followed the snowball approach from August 2014 to May 2015. Half of the interviews took place in mostly public spaces in New York City and New Jersey. Skype calls were used for the remaining half of the interviews, and only when logistics made it too difficult to meet in person. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. I stopped the interview portion of the data collection when I reached saturation (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011), an admittedly subjective measure, but a standard practice in qualitative research. I knew I had reached the saturation point when I was able to fill in the crux of the sentences from my informants in my head before they uttered them.

The interview protocol (Appendix A) was semi-structured, the better to invite the participants to talk at length about their experiences and practices of public relations. The questions followed a grand tour format, beginning with general questions about their work and then getting more probing and responsive to their answers, building upon what came before. Most interviews lasted between one and two hours.

Press WG Work Product.

Information pointing to the work product (press releases, editorials, sound bites, FAQ) included a non-profit press wire called Common Grounds, Google searches for

specific actions discussed in the interview, a book entitled Translating Anarchy (Bray, 2013) written by a member of the Press WG, and the Occupywallst.org web site. Interview subject Paul granted the researcher access to an archived and no longer public area of the Occupywallst.org site. There I found 12 daily communiqués, or the earliest form of press releases mostly written by Paul according to multiple sources.

Press WG Internal/External Communications.

Given the volume of internal and external email generated by and to the group, the researcher relied upon several group members for documents from the now defunct listservs. One member opened up her home and allowed me several hours to informally catalog and to analyze one large file box filled with documents, emails, signs, flyers, and other artifacts dated approximately from September 17, 2011 to November 20, 2011. Still other members retrieved and sent relevant emails based on significant/reoccurring incidents that the researcher identified across interviews. A set of approximately 450 documents were gathered and perused in this manner and then further limited to 102 based upon significance as described. I then sorted this document set into topics, namely Media Relations Strategies, Processes/Structure, Media Requests, Internal Tensions, Web Site Content, and Training. These topics were later cross-examined with the interview coding to develop seven initial themes. One theme, PR Practices, was later collapsed into the other six (Messages, Internal Processes, Social Media, Diversity, Professional/Amateur, and Relationships with Press) when I decided that the practices applied to all of the other themes and therefore was not distinctive enough to constitute a theme.

Data Analysis.

I employed the theoretical framework of the circuit of culture (Du Gay, et al., 2013) to better understand the practices of public relations in context. This application took place after months of open coding using analytic induction. I began by coding the interview transcripts at the sentence level, going back to the audio several times to better understand intonations and to correct a few errors of transcription. From there I re-coded at the paragraph level, once I determined the sentence level did not provide enough thematic fodder. These codes eventually became the headings and sub-headings for three data summary tables (Appendix B - D) following (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

At approximately the same stage, I created a table with basic demographic information about the participants, including their occupations in 2011 and in 2014/15. I searched for patterns, first within each interview, then, using the data summary tables, across all of the interviews, followed by the same process with the documents. I conducted this pattern analysis with special care "to avoid postulating very subtle patterns, so that your pattern matching deals with gross matches or mismatches whose interpretation is less likely to be challenged" (Yin, 2003, p. 120). This process suggested six findings of relevance to public relations in a social justice context. From here I developed analytic categories which after a number of interpretation outlines, following Bloomberg & Volpe (2012), led to the themes of the dissertation. Interrogation of those themes using the articulations of the circuit of culture, in turn, precipitated the arguments, along with self-reflection on my years of public relations practice. Finally, I referred back to the literature review and to historical accounts of public relations in social justice contexts to further analyze the data for pattern consonance or dissonance.

Chapter 5. THEMES AND FINDINGS OF THE PEOPLE'S PR

The purpose of this study is to better understand practices of public relations in a social justice context through a case study involving both amateur and professional public relations practitioners who participated in the OWS Press WG. This study illuminates ways of doing public relations that are theoretically and practically different from managerial practices of public relations. Conversely, this type of case demonstrates commonalities between dominant ways of doing public relations and ideally more democratic ways, presenting uncomfortable synergies for those public relations practitioners committed to radical rejections of the status quo. As will be argued throughout, the practices of the Press WG often did not align with the movement's drive towards consensus-based decision making and the notion of having many leaders with equal power distributions. Furthermore, the media system of which they were a part, was organized in a top-down manner, a model that even disruptive social media (underutilized by the group) could not displace.

This chapter presents four key themes from 16 in-depth interviews with OWS Press WG members, as well as selections from more than 100 documents from a variety of sources including group members, press wires, and the occupywallst.org web site. The themes are stated as follows: 1. The struggle to practice public relations through participatory democracy, 2. The tensions, productive and counterproductive, between professional and amateur identities, 3. The use and non-use of social media, 4. The failure to achieve diverse representation. The themes will be explored here through more description than analysis—a turn that will be completed in the following chapter. The descriptions presented here are meant to serve as evidence in the form of findings that

support the generation of these particular themes and, in concert with the theoretical

framework in the next chapter, the analysis. Prior to the presentation of these themes and

their attendant findings, however, it is important to elaborate the immediate context in

which this public relations work took place.

Complicating the Crisis

Heretofore I have presented the financial crisis of 2008 and the emergence of

OWS in response to it in a cause and effect manner. However, the crisis was not simply

financial and OWS was not simply a protest about the state of the economy in the

aftermath of the crisis. In fact, Williams (2012) disrupts the stability of the words crisis

and aftermath, tracing the historical evolution of both terms to find a cyclical quality in

the latter and a dialectic in the former. Of crisis, she wrote, "[…] the ideology […] of

progress emerges as the dominant concept of history at the same time the concept of

crisis is beginning to be applied to history as a sinister episode disrupting the underlying

march of progress" (Williams, 2012, p. 25). This dialectic of progress and crisis conceals

in plain sight what has become the new normal (Williams, 2012). "[T]he locus of

vulnerability sets up ever-expanding circles of trouble, which intersect with those from

other such points, in a new historical pattern of intersecting and mutually reinforcing

calamities" (Williams, 2012, p. 29). This is perhaps why arguments, such as "too big to

fail," from the political elite are so easily accepted by much of the media and the public.

In the dialectic of progress and crisis, it becomes too difficult to single out individual

actors at the micro-level or philosophies at the macro-level.

At the macro-level, the crisis perhaps illustrates the new normal of late capitalism.

Castells, Caraca, and Cardoso (2012) argued:

> We have reached a threshold in the evolution of this particular type of capitalism, which in the autumn of 2008 entered a process of implosion only halted by the intervention of an old acquaintance, the state, which had already been sent to the oblivion of history by the apologists of market fundamentalism (p. 3).

The state re-regulated financial markets putting a stop to free flowing credit. Consumption then dropped. Businesses failed and unemployment rose dramatically as did public debt. A political blame game ensued and public trust in government, not high to begin with, was eroded to record lows. This crisis of trust also further eroded public trust in media and other institutions. But with the implosion of late capitalism came a concomitant challenge to its cultural counterpart, namely a pervasive brand of individualism. OWS is one of those cultural traces in the aftermath.

Engalen et al. (2012) characterized the crisis or "new normal" thusly: "Technocratic elites and their political sponsors have failed in their first duty as public servants, to protect the citizenry from predatory capitalist business which privatizes its gains and socializes its losses" (p. 377-78). They advocated for a dramatic shift in socio-economic thought, a move to bring finance back under "democratic control" (Engalen et al., 2012, p. 378). Here again, OWS, could be read as a cultural maneuver to re-imagine some form of "democratic control."

The Occupiers

"A man named Hero was here. So was Germ. There was the waitress from the dim sum restaurant in Evanston, Ill. And the liquor store worker. The Google consultant. The circus performer. The Brooklyn nanny" (Kleinfield and Buckley, 2011, p. A1). As the lead to this front-page article in the *New York Times* attests, Occupy Wall Street encompassed an eclectic mix of people. Some suggestions of the demographics of the

movement, based on survey data compiled from occupywallst.org, were reported in *Fast Company*: 81.2% identified as White, 61% male, 44.5% aged 25 – 44, 60.7% college educated, and 70% calling themselves politically independent (Captain, 2011).

Focusing on Zuccotti Park, The Writers for the 99% (2011) described different experiences of physical access to the park during the encampment phase. The eastern end was densely packed with small tents and the major activity centers of the occupation. Despite the newly introduced urban density in this portion of the park, there were clear paths and easy access into the park itself from the eastern end (Writers for the 99%, 2011). By contrast, a police barricade obstructed much of the western end, and the raised element, combined with the masses of protesters sitting on the steps, made access difficult. Other corners for possible entry were blocked by groups of tents. Near the northwest access point one found this scene:

> [J]ust across the road from the tranquility of the meditation space, a raised dais encircling a tree adorned with holders of burning incense and various indeterminable spiritual icons and tchotchkes, loomed the white cantilever of a mobile NYPD observation tower, maintaining a sinister Panopticon stare on the vista below. (Writers for the 99%, 2011, p. 63)

According to the Writers for the 99% (2011), there was a contentious division, spatially marked, between the eastern and western ends of the park. The western side, containing the somewhat infamous drum circle, brimmed with the more anarchist or revolutionary people of the movement, whereas the eastern side brimmed with the more system reform minded protesters. Resentment on the western end grew as the eastern side tried to build more and larger structures in the name of (legitimate) concerns about safety and organization (Writers for the 99%, 2011).

Sam, a member of the Press WG, also saw spatially marked divisions within the encampment:

> It [Zuccotti Park] became cliqy [sic?]. You'd have the techies up closer to the front, and that's where the media lab was, and all the lawyers would gather together because there was a New York Civil Liberties union that was really active. And then you'd have this drum circle with the most obnoxious hippies, and then you'd have a crew of people who have tattoos on their faces and were clearly doing heroin in the corner, and you couldn't stop that from happening you know, and it was annoying. And when they finally decided, because people didn't have tents for a long time you know, they were sleeping on the ground, when they finally decided 'we're going to put our tents here.' Then, it got really crowded. You couldn't walk around anymore.

The space was also teeming with invention. For example, Sam observed, "One woman was building an old cb radio transmitter onto cell phones so if they [the police] knocked down the cell phone service, they could use these transmitters to get in touch with people in a certain range."

Situating the Press Working Group of Occupy New York

In late 2011, during the occupation of Zuccotti Park by protestors, the press table anchored the physical presence of the OWS Press WG (figure 2).

Figure 2

Photo of the sign above the press table in Zuccotti Park, October 2011. Source: *Columbia Journalism Review*, 2011.

Like many of the 70 plus working groups, the existence of a designated gathering place with signage helped to establish group identity and direct interested parties to the appropriate location. For example, the People's Library, led by a corresponding working group, was the place to go for books; the Kitchen was the obvious place to obtain food.

Less clear, however, was the distinction between two working groups, Media and Press. These groups, with similar sounding names, worked close together in physical proximity, but often inhabited ideologically and practically different spaces. The Media

area contained all the computers and electronic gear used to create various media, including a livestream, or nearly continuous video feed broadcast on the Internet, of the park activity. Other less immediate forms of media production emanating from this space included *The Occupied Wall Street Journal*, social media activity, and video from veterans of Paper Tiger Television, the counter-culture group that began in the '60s and later included such content as *Noam Chomsky Reads the News*.

The Media WG perhaps best embodied the culture jamming spirit of the movement, which ran deep given the connections to the Global Social Justice Movement. After all, OWS began with a call from *Adbusters*, the magazine that gained notoriety for its anti-corporate culture jamming, a phrase defined as the (re)appropriation of cultural tropes in order to disrupt and expose dominant, unjust aspects of the status quo. The movement was chock-full of culture jamming at various scales. On the grand end, OWS activists famously projected '99%' on the side of the Verizon building in Manhattan. The projection became a frequently used visual by the mainstream media, extending its short life cycle. In addition, members of the Press WG used the myriad visuals of the encampment, from fliers to signs to sidewalk chalk, to enhance story-telling opportunities for journalists. OWS even had at least two academic-style journals, *Tidal* and *N+1*, to push the boundaries of relevant theory. Taken as a whole, all of these media production activities, from the high-tech to the low, constituted a robust independent media engine, connected digitally to Occupy encampments throughout the world and bent on disrupting the status quo.

This is not to say that public relations work is always separate from culture jamming. At times, public relations work in social justice contexts constitutes culture

jamming, as is the case when activist groups engage in Yes Men-style actions, for example, posing as credentialed journalists in order to later disrupt events and pull the media focus. I separate the culture jamming of Occupy New York from the public relations of Occupy New York because, for the most part, the Media WG ignored the press, and carried out the culture jamming through the aforementioned organs and joint actions with other working groups such as Direct Action, the group responsible for numerous marches and protests around the city. In short, the Media area thrived on media production and further extended the traditions of independent media embodied by social movement entities past (e.g. Students for Democratic Society, Paper Tiger) and of more contemporary movements (Global Social Justice and the Indymedia Movements).

For the most part, the protestors under the Media WG tent had no interest in communicating with or through corporate-owned/mainstream media. Such interaction would acknowledge the power of mainstream media and the attendant world of bi-partisan politics and political intrigue on Capitol Hill. In contrast, the Press area was the locus of this sort of engagement, albeit through refutation. The Press WG members and their area of the park also lacked the gadgets and wires found in the spaces of their more tech-minded compatriots, as well as their concomitant disdain for the media system. The Press table was more of a facilitator for engagement with outside media of any kind, including but not limited to corporate-owned outlets.

Journalists would approach Press WG members at the table (and online) in order to be connected to spokespeople for a specific story that needed to be completed by a certain deadline. Press WG members would then consult their lists of potential spokespeople and connect the journalist with suitable sources in a process known in the

industry as 'fixing.' In many cases, due to deadlines and/or thematic expertise, the Press

WG members at the table would serve as spokespeople themselves. The process appears

simple enough until one factors in the hundreds of requests physically logged at the table

per day and the sheer volume of email requests to the press email inbox. A purposeful

lack of hierarchy, a volunteer workforce in the Press WG, and a wide range of political

views added to the chaotic scene.

The lack of clear definition between the Media and Press working groups is

illustrated by a brief story of how one Press WG member, Pam, first found her way to her

preferred place to volunteer. On October 1, 2011, Pam listened to a story on the radio

about hundreds of OWS protestors arrested by the NYPD on the Brooklyn Bridge. A

veteran (then retired) public relations professional, Pam knew that the arrests would

attract throngs of reporters to the encampment. When she arrived at the park soon

thereafter, she was immediately asked to give directions to the delivery van containing

the day's editions of the *Occupied Wall Street Journal*.

After she gave directions and helped to distribute the papers early in the morning,

she spotted a sign that read, "Media."

> I'm seeing a few kids sleepily sort of on the computers. That's the media group.
> I was like, 'So can I help you guys?' No. I'm like, 'I can do some PR for you'
> and they're like, 'oh, you mean with corporate-owned media?' I'm like, 'You
> might want to get them on your side. Sorry, that's all I know. No, I can't Tweet;
> no, I'm sorry. All I know is this… .' (Pam)

She explained that she had done public relations work with the anti-nuclear and women's

rights movements, as well as served as the press agent for Nelson Mandela after he was

released from prison. She gave her full name and an earnest pitch to be involved. After

this prelude, the young men explained to Pam that this was not the right group. They

directed her to the adjacent press table—without a sign on this particular day. Pam's first official task as a member of the Press WG was to make a new sign for the press table.

Unbeknownst to Pam, her entire exchange at the media tent was being recorded and broadcast on the livestream. A conservative media journalist happened to be listening at that moment and had heard Pam's credentials. He then blogged about the "professional, hardcore left" behind the supposedly grass-roots movement (Gainor, October 7, 2011). Quick research revealed to the journalist that Pam had been the co-owner of a large public relations agency dedicated to liberal social justice causes. Other conservative media outlets picked up on the thread and constructed a large, liberal public relations operation based on Pam's background alone. This constituted an ironic, if incorrect, capture and debunking of OWS through the use of their own livestream and a volunteer looking to lend her expertise to the small press team, so casual that they did not have a sign displayed on this particular morning.

This ironic incident illustrated one of the anti-democratic pitfalls of social media, especially the medium of livestreaming. True, the medium in this case offered a way to circumvent traditional media channels and provided a kind of radical, unedited disclosure, but it did not exist in a vacuum. The livestream broadcast, as an artifact of the open part of the digital media system, was edited and controlled in a way that obscured truth and served ideological ends. The journalist used one slice of the livestream to paint the Press WG as something it was not: a highly organized leftist machine of the liberal establishment. The Press WG, in fact, was a mix of grass roots activists and more professional political operatives, and it had humble beginnings.

By most accounts, the Press WG was formed at the request of one organizer, Paul. He explained the impetus for the group as follows:

> Yeah, so I saw a bunch of people who were getting interviewed at the sort of rally spot over by the bowl in Bowling Green and some people were just making a really bad hash of it and were talking about really boring things like traditional Republican/Democrat politics kind of stuff, […] so I just kind of grabbed as many reporters as I could and then said the same thing over the course of the day; I basically started to get lines [in the press] and stuff. (Paul)

Inspired by this work, Paul called for the formation of a press group later that day in a breakout session after the first General Assembly on September 17, 2011. The General Assembly of OWS was a large body/meeting characteristic of direct action movements that tries to build horizontal, consensus-based decision-making among its members. When someone wishes to speak, they are "put on stack" by facilitators who arrange the list to prioritize recognizable people of color and women since these two marginalized populations and their intersections are often repressed by society.

The General Assembly model proved challenging almost immediately for Occupy New York in terms of accomplishing day-to-day tasks. The GA often became a last-person-standing affair, and not representative of people who needed to sleep at night or who had children at home, for example. The more inclusive spokes council model began operating in early November of 2011(Bray, 2013). In this model, used with notoriety by the Zapatistas, members of the working group communicate to the larger spokes council on behalf of their respective groups.

Members of the Press WG engaged frequently with activists in other working groups through email listservs, joint membership, editing press releases, verifying information (e.g. donation numbers with the Finance working group), and searching for

story ideas. Reaching consensus on decisions was challenging within the Press WG, even more so within the diffuse network of other working groups. In response, the activists went to significant lengths to improve processes and communication. For example, many working groups, including the Press WG, designated point persons to serve as contacts with specific working groups or as representatives at spokes council meetings and general assemblies.

Demographics of the Press Working Group.

The Press WG membership reflected the demographic composition of the larger movement headquartered in New York City. According to research conducted by Schultz and Cordero-Guzman (2011), 81.2% of their survey respondents on occupywallst.org were white. Of the 16 Press WG members interviewed for this study, 94% were white. (Two of the 16 identified with particular ethnic groups: Italian and Puerto Rican, respectively.) The people most often interviewed by the press were also white, as much as 71% according to Bray (2013, p. 135).

As the research will show, these facts proved problematic for a movement trying to create social change in favor of the most economically marginalized, which in the U.S. often overlaps with African Americans and other communities of color. The Press WG members were also almost all young with only a few exceptions, but perhaps not as young as the fresh-out-of-college age frequently depicted by the media. The average age of the study participants in 2011 was 32.5. Most of the members did not know each other prior to their involvement in the Press WG. Figure 3 provides a snapshot of the informants interviewed for this study.

Figure 3: INFORMANT DEMOGRAPHIC SUMMARY

Alias	Age (2011)	Age (2014/15)	Race/ Ethnicity	Occupation (2011)	Occupation (2014/15)	Relevant Professional Background
Byron	22	25	Black	Unemployed	Same	N/A
Emma	31	34	White	Freelance Communications	Same	Comm. work for NGOs
Eric	48	50	White	Freelance Film Producer	Same	N/A
Jacob	20	23	White	Unemployed	Grocery clerk	N/A
Linda	22	26	White	Grad Student	Environmental Analyst	N/A
Mike	28	31	White	PhD/TA (History)	Same	N/A
Nathan	27	31	White	Freelance Web Designer	General manager of a restaurant	Political campaigns; some television production
Pam	55	58	White	Writer/ Filmmaker	Same	Former PR agency co-owner

Paul	23	26	White	"Freelance Revolutionary" Unemployed	Same	N/A
Rachel	33	36	White	Unemployed	Museum Professional	Comm. work for NGOs
Sam	31	34	White	Unemployed	Teacher	Former publicist
Shelly	27	30	White	Writer/Film Archivist	Same	Former magazine editor
Skylar	24	27	White	Grad Student	Same	N/A
Theresa	35	38	Italian	Part-time Journalist	Journalist	Print journalist
Victor	64	67	Puerto Rican	On Disability	Same	Television reporter; public affairs
Zane	30	33	White	Unemployed	Director of a non-profit	N/A

It is interesting to note the high number of unemployed, freelance, and/or part-time work status of the informants. One would imagine a person working three jobs, for example, or a nine-to-five type of employment would find it difficult to devote significant

time to a movement such as OWS. Yet many of Press WG members reported working 20 – 40 hours a week on behalf of OWS in addition to managing paid employment. Several of the informants had personal stories of economic hardship that strengthened their ties to the movement, as well as their commitments to politics. But their hardships also made it possible for them to volunteer more time and their relative degree of privilege in terms of being white and college educated granted them social capital upon which to survive. For example, Paul, the freelance revolutionary, slept on friends' couches, and Pam frequently opened her large home to OWS activists.

The political orientations of those interviewed were mixed, but with a strong anarchistic bent, a fact that is supported by the findings of Bray (2013). The skill level of the activist practitioners ran the gamut from the former head of a public relations agency to mid-career communications consultants for various non-profit activist groups to complete newcomers to public relations. The goal of the group was to help the press produce stories about OWS, however the findings reveal conflict in the motivation behind and implementation of this goal.

Participatory Democracy in Practice

With the Press WG situated thusly, the chapter will now explore the four previously enumerated themes, beginning with the first: the struggle to practice public relations through participatory democracy. The members of the OWS Press WG used at least 13 practices of public relations in their activist work of 2011. They conducted the majority of their efforts in reaction to a significant volume of requests from journalists, a majority of them representing international outlets. All but two of the practices of public relations, stakeholder outreach and web site content generation, would be classified as

media relations. Again, there was an automatic tension in terms of governance structure because the Press WG was at least *attempting* to practice horizontal governance while their journalist counterparts were operating under a predominantly top-down system.

The Practices.

As is the case with any group activity, there was not one single, monolithic practice of public relations. Instead OWS Press WG members utilized some combination of the following 13 practices: fixing interviews for the press, creating web site content, monitoring of the press coverage, writing/editing press releases and sound bites, media spokesperson training, serving as spokespeople, soliciting and/or writing of editorials, press email management/interaction tracking, strategizing, staffing the press table, delivering presentations to press, stakeholder outreach, and utilizing social media.

The work was fast paced with many moving parts as illustrated by the following:

> So okay, this thing is happening tomorrow and who can go and talk to the press? Who do you know who's going to be taking part in that? We should come up with talking points, that kind of stuff. And then talking about like things that were going on in the park that we were anticipating would get press, positive or negative and then talking about specific journalists--things they had said to kind of get a sense of what people were thinking. (Sam)

Clearly, despite a lack of formal planning documents, the Press WG benefited from the strategic practices of Sam and others who knew to anticipate what was newsworthy. He and most of the others monitored the press to gauge public sentiment and adjust tactics accordingly.

> We'd have meetings at the end of the day and sometimes that included like what are we going to do for the next day. Other times it would just be like me or someone watching trends and then saying here's what I think is going to be the story tomorrow, here's the way we should probably approach that, etc. etc. (Paul)

Here Paul echoes Sam in his description of the way the Press WG operated as a group with a flat structure, rather than, as was sometimes the case, a bunch of decentralized members acting autonomously often in conflict with group consensus, according to informants and to internal documents, as will be explored. When friction would occur, the lack of consensus building was typically motivated by feelings of urgency around the volume and speed of media requests.

"A Productive Set of Emergencies".

Participants frequently characterized the volume of press requests in the early days of the movement as a form of crisis. "When it was at its peak," according to Sam, "it was this kind of very productive set of emergencies that were all kind of rolling out." There were over 10,000 emails in the box dedicated to press and, according to Paul, another 700 to 1,000 reporters with requests in the park every day during the first two months of the movement.

Difficulties with internal communication also added to the challenge of the public relations work. Sam said:

> It was like okay there's this march…we didn't know about this, a march is suddenly marching up Lafayette. A 16-year-old girl got her shirt ripped off by the police and there's photographers. Now we're getting press requests. We're getting press requests before we heard about the event taking place. So now we're like okay, who's the girl that got arrested? What happened, talking to the people we know that are there and then trying to have that conversation without letting the press know that we don't know what's happening and we're figuring it out so we can convey it to them.

The interest from the international press, identified as the greatest type of press activity for the OWS Press WG, resulted in at least one unexpected experience for participant Linda. An international newspaper in Sweden approached the group and

offered an all expenses paid trip abroad to their offices for a group member to come and better explain the movement. Linda volunteered at a Press WG meeting and the members approved. She gave two presentations "on our consensus process, what we were about, what it was like in the park, with pictures, etc."

Reactive Media Relations.

All but two of the public relations practices of the group, stakeholder outreach and web site content generation, could be categorized under 'media relations'. Media relations[2], a subset of public relations activity, takes the media as the broad target audience conceived as a conduit to reach a mass audience. Stakeholder outreach, in this case, was less about media relations and more about coalition building with outside, interested parties. Two group members mentioned doing this type of work with various labor unions and one discussed programming panels for the Columbia University community. The second exception to media relations work involved content created for the web site for a general audience, rather than for journalists specifically. All participants also performed a significant amount of internal communications, but again, with the two exceptions, such communication was carried out for the purpose of media/press relations as befitting the name of the group. Of course, many participated in more than one working group and their skills were not one-dimensional.

The reactive quality of the practices of public relations within the Press WG during the encampment period is remarkable. This is to say that the majority of the press interest was generated by the press and not by proactive pitching, for example. Pitching

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[2] Wilson and Supa (2013) refer to media relations as "one of the most common functions" of public relations (p. 1).

is the process whereby practitioners proactively propose story ideas to the press in an effort to garner media attention. It is meant to both build awareness and to frame a certain angle from the point of view of the practitioner for the benefit of a client/organization. Pitching is more tailored to a specific journalist/outlet than, say, a press release. As Sam explained: "We never really pitched, either. We'd send out a press release and then have to deal with the incoming requests." Some of the reasons for the unusual level of press interest and the relative effectiveness of the group's press releases will be explored in the next chapter. Suffice it to say, the practitioners of the people's pr tried to help journalists with their stories under tight deadlines and in great volume. Without unified messaging, the power of the media to craft the narrative of OWS might have remained unchecked.

Messaging.

Half of the group members discussed the challenge of creating a unified message-- this despite the fact that all group members reduced the key message of OWS to one of economic justice. Variations within the economic justice message were in concert with individual political identities. Messaging, or what is said and how it is said, in public relations is generally recognized as an important category of research taking place in the middle of the planning process (Newsom & Haynes, 2014). I found little evidence of formal research or planning documents in the data collected for this study. When I questioned Pam, a veteran professional public relations practitioner, as to this gap, she spoke of the intense reactive quality of fielding hundreds of media requests a day in the park and online. The immediacy of the need, then, coupled with a relative lack of formal guiding documents partially accounts for the sentiment among half of the group members

interviewed that agreeing upon the primary message concerning economic justice was a struggle.

Another likely explanation as to the disconnect between the primary public relations message, one that harmonized with the 99% slogan, and the struggle to achieve cohesion relates to the first argument of the dissertation: that despite their intentions to practice in a participatory democratic manner, the people's pr was not a horizontal pr. The reasons for this are manifold and to be explored.

The activists of OWS generally refused to reduce their purpose to one demand—a move that contributed to confusion in the media and debate within the Press WG as far as the primary message of OWS. The wide-ranging political identities and goals—from revolution now to reform of campaign finance law—created an array of potential messages to deliver to the press. For the most part, the activists focused on the economic implications and failures of the current system. Pam and another member staffing the press table grew so weary of the press asking for the one demand, they began to point to buttons on their shirts that read: 'Economic Justice.' Linda followed a similar tactic by consistently reminding the press, "Let's talk about income inequality because that's what I'm here to talk about."

The battle for clarity and message construction was not confined to the group or to relationships with the press. There were tensions between working groups concerning messaging, as well. For example, according to Mike, in response to an incident at the Occupy Oakland encampment, the Occupywallst.org site based in New York City wanted to publish a headline that said, "'Fuck you, Mayor Quan!'" Mike explained, "We had a

pretty heated argument and eventually they ended up publishing something slightly different like regime change; we need a regime change." Clearly, the working group structure, designed to be a practical extension of the OWS version of participatory democracy, was difficult to manage from a public relations perspective.

The group did more behind the scenes than extol the benefits of decorum in public messaging. The Press WG diligently tried to make radical, often anarchistic politics more palatable to larger audiences.

> My strategy for most of it was to avoid using any words that people thought they knew; so like don't use the word capitalism; don't use the word communism; don't use the word socialism, don't use the word…anything that someone thinks that they have a notion for was a bad word for us to use for a lot of reasons. (Paul)

This strategy was also nuanced, in part, because although the anarchistic bent was strong within the group and within the larger movement, OWS attracted a variety of political identities with a general (some critics said vague and incoherent) message of populist economic justice. The perspectives on the challenges created by the multiple political identities varied widely within the press group.

> The fact that we had everybody from Ron Paul Libertarians in our camp to black revolutionaries, there was no way to kind of form the coherent political idea of what we wanted to actually accomplish from that. And so our ideas were always like economic reform, better handling of debt, don't spend money on politics. And I think that was a failing when you start to see kind of a fragmentation in message, which was around November. (Nathan)

Where Nathan found a failing of messaging as a result of competing (if complementary) ideologies, Mike viewed such challenges on a smaller scale. He said, "There wasn't like, in my opinion, really explicitly ideological arguments usually. It was more about should we focus on this issue? How should we frame that?"

Despite political differences, there was agreement on the major framing of the purpose of the movement being about economic justice. For the most part, the practitioners were careful to discuss economic justice as opposed to income inequality, yet the latter phrase was the one adopted by much of the mainstream media. The difference, in the eyes of the practitioners, was one of scope. Economic justice refers to all manner of sustenance, from food to housing to education. Justice is also different than equality. One could conceivably have equal pay, but experience disadvantage in say, home buying, because of racism, for example. In short, income inequality limits the debate to wages alone. In addition, it moves further away from the fact that the concentrated wealth of 1% of Americans has little to do with income and everything to do with investments, subsidies, assets, and policies that favor the status quo.

As will be analyzed in the following chapter, this difference between economic justice and income inequality became a secondary issue or problem to solve. From a messaging standpoint, the issue of diverse representation will come to the foreground, but first, the description of the data turns to organization to gain a better sense of the conditions on the ground.

Infrastructure and Organization.
Informants identified plentiful challenges around building infrastructure and processes while simultaneously handling a significant amount of press requests. Group members heavily utilized email for inter-group communication and for contact with journalists. The press table in Zuccotti Park was also a frequent location for media relations work, but communication between members at the park and off-site was strained due to the lack of Internet connection in their area of the park.

Physical space and multiple modes of communication pose problems for any

organization. When combined with a lack of time to establish clear processes in line with

the horizontal ethos of the movement, it is a marvel that the Press WG was as well

organized and consensus-based as it was, despite falling short of its own goals.

By the second week of the movement, the informants faced tens of thousands of

unanswered emails parked in the press email account and hundreds of interview requests

fielded daily at the press table in the park. Unlike social movements past, OWS had little

to no infrastructure and processes in place prior to receiving a deluge of requests from the

media. The scene was chaotic at times as illustrated by Sam, "I showed up at this

meeting and it's this kind of steep learning curve, because even with all of these

people…nothing was preplanned; everybody was also getting to know each other and

learning who each other was while [working]."

Simply managing the influx of volunteers was difficult in part because as Sam

points out, most people did not know one another before the movement began.

According to Linda, the founder of the group delayed relinquishing power for "a good

two weeks." Once a level of trust was established, he offered the password with access to

the email account to a few members. This came none too soon as he was later arrested

and held overnight. Journalists were still getting communication from the movement

even whilst their former contact was incarcerated, providing a lesson about the

importance and challenge of putting the ideal of a flat organizational structure into

practice.

"Mission Inbox Zero".

With power and access more distributed within the group, the task of responding

to ten thousand emails, mostly from journalists, began in earnest. Four group members

attacked the problem.

> We created subfolders for all of the different types of requests because a lot of it
> was kind of like Leftie spam. It wasn't self-promotional spam but it was like –
> 'Check out all of these links that I think you'll find interesting.' We can't. We're
> not going to read eight million links right now. It was figuring out where
> everything goes and then answering all of the ones that needed to be answered.
> We stayed up really late every night and it took us a month and we called it
> Mission Inbox Zero. (Shelly)

Once rudimentary internal processes had been established, the group next tackled

inter and intra-group communication. As the group began to send more formal press

releases, Linda questioned, "Were we supposed to write press releases for groups when

they did an action? What was our relationship between groups and the actions?" The

informants relied heavily upon daily (later reduced to three per week) large-group

meetings supplemented by sub-group meetings (press releases, fixing, strategy), as well

as Google Docs to provide real-time, synchronous editing of documents. Scores of

internal emails inundated the group. These emails were a source of consternation for

Shelly. She said, "People would just argue and argue and argue and then people would

be like – 'Well, we don't have to meet in person.' We had email. We should be meeting

in person just so we liked each other."

That being said, the Press WG was relatively peaceful compared to the power

struggles within the Media WG and the Tech WG. At one point, one person took over

the primary OWS web site and locked out all other participants, claiming she had built it

and it belonged to her. Even before this dramatic action, there were challenges with

getting information onto OccupyWallStreet.org or 'Storg' as it was called. "I think had

we had a place to cohesively publish our stuff," said Linda, "we would have done that.

But instead, occupywallstreet.org wrote what they wanted to write." Intra-group

negotiations to publish information, much of it time-sensitive, were slow and inefficient,

according to the informants. Efforts to build alternative, more horizontal sites were slow,

according to Linda, due to a commitment to using open source software. While

personality conflicts and design choices impeded the work of the press team in virtual

spaces, there were also problems in the park.

Connection Failure.

The people at the press table in the park were especially challenged by a lack of

Internet connectivity. According to Linda, "It was only the Media group that had all the

fancy tech. We couldn't even figure out how to get ourselves a Wi-Fi hot spot. It was

really a mess." Press requests and daily developments (e.g. a change in the route of a

march) were frequently being addressed by Press WG members connected to email, but

such information was frequently not relayed to people at the park. This also meant that

strategic decisions, such as who to recommend as spokespersons for high profile cable

television shows, for example, were made by those members of the group connected to

email, leaving out some highly skilled public relations practitioners who happened to be

working in the park on a particular day.

The NYPD evicted the activists from the park before the Internet connectivity

problem could be solved, however donated office space in lower Manhattan starting in

October did provide some improvement to other problems of infrastructure. For

example, the group created a rotation of people in the office to serve as a point of contact

to prioritize the flow of communication. This proved especially important during bursts of activity, such as the "Cleaning Day" on October 14, 2011 when it appeared Mayor Bloomberg would order the police to evict the protestors for the purposes of cleaning. The office team was better able to interface with journalists and fellow activists by being away from the confusion in the park and having a fixed, reliable, quiet, connected location from which to work.

Professional/Amateur

The second key theme that emerged from the analysis of interviews and documents is the tensions, productive and counterproductive, between professional and amateur identities. The working group was launched by three amateurs to public relations and grew within two weeks to include many individuals with significant experience in public relations/strategic communications and/or journalism. Roughly half of the informants interviewed for this study had some prior, relevant professional experience in public relations and/or journalism. According to five members, this mixture changed the group practices, some for better, some for worse. The professional/amateur dynamic of the Press WG existed in complex relation to the horizontal ethos of OWS. The informants and the documents resist simple dichotomies where one might expect the leaders, transgressive in the very fact that they are leading or exerting power in a supposedly leaderless movement, to be the former professionals. In fact, this was often not the case.

Many amateurs were drawn to the practice of public relations within OWS because they recognized the benefit of speaking to a larger, broader audience; they viewed interaction with the mainstream media as a way to reach the masses. The first

group members had little to no experience. Paul, one of the founders and the only one of the three to remain active with the group, issued "daily communiqués" to the press as opposed to formal press releases that followed certain conventions of form and style. He received a small press list from a friend and conducted hundreds of interviews, becoming in a sense, the first spokesperson of OWS. As more and more professionals joined the group, the dynamic and practices changed. For example, press releases became more formal; language was less provocative; diverse representation became a goal.

The Wunderkind.

This new dynamic was complex, resisting the easy narrative of the professionals teaching the new practitioners. Pam, a veteran of the group in both age (55) and experience (23 years, first as a journalist, then as a public relations professional who co-founded a global agency), shared, "I couldn't teach [Paul] anything. He could teach me. Yes, he didn't have the experience, but he was just…it's like he was a natural. There was nowhere for me to lead him…he led me."

Pam gave one example. She explained that initially she thought the decision by the General Assembly not to narrow the movement's purpose to a single demand was a mistake. However, in subsequent conversations with Paul and other specifically anarchist members, Pam viewed the "no demand" tactic as a way for masses of people to attach their own desires to the movement, as a way or entry point into alternative political and economic systems. The thinking on the part of these advocates of direct action was that to make a demand implicitly recognized the authority/leadership of the government, something antithetical to most anarchists. After a long history of working in the public

relations trenches touting various liberal causes, during OWS, she became, in her words,

"an accidental anarchist."

The Drag of Teaching.

Other members had a different perspective on the professional/amateur dynamic

within the group.

> There were a lot of us who were like PR professionals of different varying experiences and then there were people who were like, 'I don't know, but I want to help' and it was like okay, trying to be inclusive, but also trying to be like, 'Look, we're not necessarily here to be teachers all the time.' (Emma)

The teaching Emma mentioned referred to everything from formal media training to

informal coaching about the press and messaging. The formal media training was not

always well received. Two group members visited the offices of a major public relations

agency to receive spokesperson tips from its CEO. One person described that training as

follows:

> Well, like mostly it was like the sort of traditional bullshit, here's how to be a politician thing, you know? He was like look directly at the camera and don't answer the question, just say whatever you want, which to a degree is sort of beneficial advice, but also it's not, especially when we're trying to combat against some of these things. [name withheld]

The advice to essentially ignore journalists' questions is typical within managerial,

corporate media spokesperson training. Spokespeople are trained to answer the question

they want to answer. Paul recognizes that such training is useful "to a degree." The

difference lies in the fact that attempting to control the media and the message is,

according to Paul, what politicians representing the status quo, or the ruling 1%, do.

Rotten Public Relations.

In fact, the very idea that members were "doing pr" caused consternation among some group members. Shelly stated, "There were people, I think, who thought we shouldn't have the PR group at all because everybody should just say whatever they want, and thinking about a strategy or messaging or something was something that corporations do, and not us." Even among the members opting in to the Press WG, there were members who vehemently resisted the idea that there were spokespersons for the movement, despite actively providing spokespeople (fixing) to journalists. Such seeming contradictions were, in part, borne of fear. The activists were "resentful of some idea of like Occupy being professionalized or something," said Sam. "There was this tension going on between like resisting the notion that it was somehow…that there was a way in which it could be corrupted [.]"

Rachel was not alone in being deeply wary of co-optation from the inside and the outside. From the outside, for example, there was the Manhattan public relations firm that won a prestigious Silver Anvil industry award for their work on Occupy Wall Street (Roberts and Argetsinger, 2012), an award for work they arguably had no authorization to do. But then, who gives authorization in a supposedly leaderless movement. As Rachel tells the story, a representative from Workhouse Publicity approached a friend about taking on Occupy Wall Street as a pro-bono client. This was anathema to the protestors, who also famously turned down financial support from the likes of the founders of Ben & Jerry's-- so intent were the activists to maintain the independent, direct action spirit of the movement. Rachel took a meeting at the PR agency to try to explain to them their options: 1. Volunteer to contribute your skills to the press relations

working group, elbow-to-elbow with many people who had zero experience, or 2. "[G]et the fuck out."

The public relations head was not persuaded, and this was a problem. Although many outsiders wanted the movement to be the Left's answer to the Tea Party, Occupy Wall Street wanted nothing of politics as usual, especially when it came to internal control. In the end, the corporate public relations firm "sent a press release to 500,000 global contacts, then organized concerts and an album — all without any official affiliation with Occupy" (Roberts and Argetsinger, 2012,). Suffice it to say, the Workhouse PR incident only added to the tensions surrounding the members' practices and what they considered to be the typical work of professional public relations.

From inside the Press WG, Rachel also had concerns as reflected below:

[W]e saw certain people writing press releases and certain voices that I didn't think were as good as the strident and the kind of crazy and the wild voice that the first press releases were written in [.] Later on it was too perfect. […] You need fresh blood. You need to be challenged a little bit by newcomers, in my opinion. (Rachel)

In addition to being concerned about professionalization, Rachel's words recall Gitlin's (2013) description of the punk attitudes of OWS. The opposition to the status quo was in this sense aesthetic, too. Rachel found value in their public relations being rough around the edges.

Meanwhile, others viewed such leadership as non-threatening to group dynamics. For example, Emma said, "There was no one who really had like control. Certainly there were some of us who had more experience, so people were sort of like 'I'll listen to you,' but that didn't necessarily ever make the meetings any shorter." For the most part, the

seasoned veterans were respected. Calling out two professionals in particular, Shelly

said, "[They] were both very, very smart and I think they really had a strategy for –

What's the story? Who is the audience?"

That being said, frustrations rumbled about prioritization and individuals seeking

the media spotlight. Sam and Shelly both voiced fatigue regarding earnest philosophical

debates that took time away from action.

> I mean you would get into these like drawn out conversations and sort of debates
> and arguments with people and then halfway through them realize this is doing
> nobody any fucking good. We still need to set up this press release at the end of
> this conversation [.] (Sam)

The debates ranged from ideological ones to disputes about who to nominate as

spokespeople. The latter were often thorny.

> I think there were people, quite frankly, who just wanted to be in the news and
> wanted to do it at the expense of other people and wanted to be spokesperson and
> wanted to have lots of attention and would throw tantrums when they didn't get us
> to do that. It's a difficult thing to be in the position to say – I don't think this
> person should talk to the press because who am I to say that? (Shelly)

The lack of hierarchy in the group produced problems with accountability and

governance. Despite these tensions however, the group—professionals and amateurs

alike—remained committed, at least in theory, to decision making through modified

consensus. In practice, infrastructural challenges coupled with the crisis nature of the

public relations work in the early weeks of the movement made for numerous isolated

decisions and individual practices of variable quality.

Relationships Press WG and Press.

All but two informants adopted a service orientation to the media; they considered

journalists to be a helpful, if often underprepared, group of people influential in

mobilizing their mass movement. The exception to this view positioned the press as the enemy. For the most part, Press WG members were unified in their formulation of service and collaboration as the ideal relationship between group members and journalists. Emma summarized the majority sentiment well when she said, "Our job on the PR team was to figure out like okay, how are we helping press tell this story? And we're not the ones who are necessarily creating the story."

The bulk of that help typically came in the form of fixing, or providing spokespeople for interviews. The journalist would often have a certain demographic profile in mind to complement a specific angle; the activist practitioners would then (in the ideal scenario) reach consensus on a spokesperson to offer if the opportunity was deemed large enough for group input. Although the group was earnest in building various processes to improve productivity and diversity, they did not discuss, nor create criteria for which opportunities required group consensus. The equivalent, though hierarchical, process in managerial public relations would be 'tiering' wherein tiers of media outlets/journalists are created based on criteria such as audience size and demographics. The most resources are devoted to the highest tiers and each level has clearly defined "services" associated with it.

Of course, journalists were not dependent on the Press WG for collaboration, a fact not lost on the informants. Multiple members relayed stories of the press seeking the most colorful people one could find in the park. They tried to offer alternatives because as Sam pointed out, "Your friend that's got the face tattoo who isn't very articulate, that interrupts meetings to say stuff like 'fuck the corporate media,' probably isn't going to convey the best argument."

In a handful of cases, especially when the group member had previous public

relations experience, journalists were pitched specific stories about OWS. These stories

were strategic, suggesting angles that placed OWS in a positive light, or importantly

moving the press *away* from less substantive angles. For example,

> Our big excitement with the press, and I would take them to see it, was the toilets
> when we got a Port-A-Potty donated by some union, because all the stories before
> that [talked about] pooping in the street and it reminded me of [a PR executive
> telling her] that's what reporters will write about if you don't give them
> something else. So we had to get the toilet to show them. It was a huge victory,
> to the press group at least; they stopped talking about that.

With such victories in hand, a few of the practitioners offered stories that renewed the

focus on economic justice, as well as provided visuals, reflecting an understanding of

journalists' needs. For example, Pam successfully led journalists on multiple tours of

warehouse space donated to OWS from unions, knowing that the activity would

demonstrate solidarity, open doors to discuss labor/economics, and offer strong visuals.

That being said, most group members did not have time/need to pitch stories because of

the tsunami of media attention prior to the eviction from the park.

Setting the Table.

One of the most distinguishing characteristics co-constructing the practice of

public relations in OWS in New York City was the enormous volume of media coverage.

Emma, a communications professional, explained,

> I mean we didn't have to do anything to attract [the press]. They were coming
> just like nonstop […]. That's not normal. I've never experienced that. I don't
> know if I'll ever experience that again, I don't know. But we just had to then
> figure out like okay, what do we want them to know as opposed to like…like they
> were coming and so hungry that they'd eat up anything and so it was less like
> trying to sell food. It was more like trying to keep up with a starving person in
> front of like a huge table of food and they would just eat anything. They'd eat the
> silverware. You're like wait, wait, wait, hold on! Try this first, get through this

course and then just trying to like lay it out a little bit instead of just like the mass consumption.

Emma's press-buffet analogy exemplified the service attitude prevalent within the group. For the most part, the practitioner/activists of the Press WG wanted to help guide the press through the scene of OWS.

However, even amidst this service orientation, many members were frustrated by the lack of preparation on the part of many journalists. As Mike opined, "[…] a lot of the people doing this work [journalism] are really just not that different from the undergrad who is like trying to write an essay the night before, but they wield so much power in terms of how people think [.]" Other members were living a surreal moment as they struggled to find "professional" paid work in communications, while at the same time engaging regularly with producers at the BBC and other powerful media outlets. In other words, their contacts alone would have been valuable to myriad public relations enterprises, however the activist nature of the work did not count.

The Guardian Editorial.

That being said, several Press WG members harnessed high profile opportunities to forward the movement, despite their diminished power. For example, *The Guardian* gave members of the Press WG the opportunity to write an editorial potentially reaching an audience of hundreds of thousands. The writing team was meeting in the early hours of the morning of November 15, 2011 to craft the editorial when something remarkable happened. Linda explained, "So here we are writing and we start getting texts from our friends in the park saying they're [NYPD] evicting. You can't get in. You can't get close. They're not letting journalists in. So we just started writing about that."

The pull to stop writing and rush to the aid of friends in the park was strong. However, the opportunity to speak to *The Guardian*'s audience in almost real-time (The newspaper published the editorial that morning.) proved stronger. The editorial chronicled the eviction in New York City and declared, "Our idea is that our political structures should serve us, the people- all of us, not just those who have amassed great wealth and power" (Smucker, Manski, et al, 2011). The headline of the editorial, "Occupy Wall Street: you can't evict an idea whose time has come," became, according to Linda, "the battle cry for November 17th when we had 30,000 or something people on the streets. It was amazing."

The writing of editorials for mass publication is a classic tactic of public relations. In this case, the tactic proved effective as one tool of mobilization and of message cohesion regarding economic justice. Furthermore, the exchange with *The Guardian* represented one cooperative relationship between the activist practitioners and the press. However, at least two members of the Press WG, while certainly amicable and often helpful to the press, maintained a different outlook on the press; they viewed journalists as "enemies" of the movement.

At Odds with the Press.

The casual observer might assume that only non-professionals might take this enemy approach, however one of the two members expressing this viewpoint had many years of experience in public relations. His thoughts on relationships between practitioners and journalists had less to do with the level of experience (in public relations and journalism) and more to do with social movements in general. Sam explained, "I think protest movements, I think you're supposed to have enemies. Like I feel like it

makes perfect sense and it's supposed to happen that the *New York Post* [for example] is

hostile to Occupy." He added, "And you should have like enemies. That comes with

taking a position, whereas none of those things play out when you're doing press for a

client." In other words, according to Sam, there is an inherent antagonism between

protestors and journalists that one does not necessarily experience in the context of

business.

While Sam expressed a productive tension between the mainstream press and

social movements, Paul ratcheted up the enmity in a way he identified as being somewhat

unique to OWS.

> I'm certain that if there hadn't been like a concentrated effort to propagandize the
> press that no one would have heard of us, no one. We would have been
> on…*Reddit* for a couple of days and they would have swept us up on Thursday or
> something. That would have been it. But we used the press as a weapon and
> that's something that seems pretty obvious, but at the time there was a lot of push
> back against that. People didn't like the idea of talking to the press at all. (Paul)

Paul explained that the mainstream press was "mostly invested in maintaining the status

quo." While Paul shared the distrust of corporate-owned media, he, unlike many of his

peers, sought to use or propagandize the press to suit the aims of the movement. In

hindsight, Paul viewed this approach as innovative, saying, "[I]f you look at movements

since Occupy, using the press as a weapon is like THE strategy now." Regardless of the

veracity of his claim, his strategy was at the edge of practices in the Press WG. The

majority of the informants were committed to a less adversarial approach to media

relations. This is not to say the approaches of Sam and Paul were somehow less

successful in terms of media outcomes. It is out of scope to literally test the friend versus

enemy approach, however the general lack of difference (for example, Sam and Paul

seemed to have just as many instances of positive interactions with the press as the other members) is noteworthy. As I teach my students of public relations, there are two fundamental ways to approach media relations: journalists as friends or journalists as foes. Over the course of my career, I had observed that both approaches, regardless of profit or non-profit organizational structures, could achieve success. It was interesting to find both approaches at work within a social justice context representing a third type of organizational structure, loosely defined as horizontal.

Social Media

The third theme to emerge from the examination of the interviews and documents relates to the use and non-use of social media. Coordinated social media communications were largely the domain of the separate Media WG. All but two of the informants considered social media to be of minor importance to their practice of public relations. In terms of the professional practice of public relations, the use of social media in any campaign should not have been optional in 2011. Social media networks expand exponentially the reach of public relations activity, affording not only larger publics, but also greater attention where people spend increasing amounts of time (Newsom & Haynes, 2014). Although some of the older professional practitioners simply had neither the time nor the desire to learn how to use social media tools in 2011, I argue in the following pages that turf fighting between the Media WG and the Press WG, ironically encouraged by the supposedly flat structure of the movement, hindered what could have been a powerful synergy between new social media tactics and traditional media relations tactics. Importantly, I argue that social media platforms are necessary, but not sufficient for mobilizing publics.

Although a few Press WG members had their own social media accounts, including blogs, the majority of content produced for social media in a coordinated fashion (to be defined) was generated by the Media WG. "[…] social media, they pretty much had their own working group, the Media Group," said Paul. "There were some overlaps, but mostly it was just a matter of like we would pow-wow and give them lines and stuff like that." This is not to say that some members of the Press WG did not use social media for non-promotional purposes. Instead, three Press WG members identified social media tools as a means for monitoring mainstream media activity. For example, Shelly mentioned, "Oh, Twitter can be an effective tool for sharing information and not just seeing what people ate for lunch; seeing the links in articles and stuff that people were tweeting. We watched the news, we watched MSNBC."

Although he acknowledged the primary role of the Media WG in generating content for social media, Paul was the one Press WG member who undertook a deliberate strategy, using social media, to conduct a 'brownout' of the media. A media 'blackout' would involve cutting off all communications with a particular outlet or type of media, whereas a media 'brownout' means that the tide of communications from perceived gate-keepers is slowed, but not completely shut.

> Well, so we started with a media brown-out. It wasn't a black-out, but it was definitely a brown-out. They tried to portray us as hippies, as not having a clue, as whatever, whatever, whatever and then they more or less stopped reporting on us and even then they really didn't report on us that much, except to call us a joke that was doing nothing, except for Colin [Moynihan, *New York Times*]. He's for real--everyone else sucks. Not really, but he's the best.

> And so I went to a lot of Indy media during the brownout and we did a lot of social media stuff and this was at the height of what I would call the media's panic about social networking. They were sure that they were obsolete and that

> this was the future; that everyone was going to get their news from Facebook and Twitter. (Paul)

Paul perceived most mainstream media journalists as shunning the movement. Therefore, he took action in the form of exploiting a perceived weakness of the mainstream media: the rise of social media. For a time, he deliberately slowed his communication with mainstream media journalists and turned to independent and social media sources that, by his estimation, circumvented mainstream media players. By his argument, social media enabled an alternative conduit that offered better control of messaging and punished mainstream sources for by turns demeaning and ignoring the movement. Given the extremely limited use of social media by the other Press WG members, it is also interesting to note that Paul saw the strategy as a collective one, as indicated by his use of the word 'we.' Paul was likely referring to the movement as a whole.

Paul's weaponized use of social media against the press, viewed as part and parcel of the neoliberal Wall Street status quo, recalls the literature concerning the relative importance of social media and other technologies to contemporary social justice movements. Although scholars argue at the poles of a continuum describing the emancipatory potential of digital technology, I join others (Gerbaudo, 2013; Wolfson, 2014) at the middle ground where internet-enabled communication technologies constitute a necessary, but far from sufficient means of contemporary protest. If one were to place Paul on this continuum, he would likely be near the far left with the techno-evangelists, although Paul is too punk for such monikers.

Despite my more moderate position in the debate, I found Paul's social media strategy potentially prescient and certainly intelligent. He understood that the advertising-funded business models of the traditional media (even those outlets with strong social media presence) were under threat, and that this scared the journalists he hoped to influence. In the future, social media might largely replace traditional media unless new business models emerge to preserve the old, expensive ways of producing journalism.

In the present, however, Paul's logic breaks down under the important public relations measure of audience definition. Paul and his peers of the Press WG did not systematically define and divide their target audiences. This step is crucial especially when trying to communicate strategically about a social movement—a phenomenon that by definition wants to change something. That message of change needs to be tailored both in terms of content and in terms of channel or delivery. Thus, when looking at Facebook, for example, Paul's social media brownout strategy could reap benefits depending on the desired public.

In a Pew Research study, Mitchell, Kiley, & Gottfried et al. (2013) found that "younger adults, who as a group are less engaged than their elders are with news on other platforms, are as engaged, if not more so, with news on Facebook" (p. 1). The public relations practitioner might apply this research to a movement such as OWS by making Facebook an important part of the plan. However, this begs the question of intended response and intended audience. Here the ill-defined purpose of OWS meets the ill-defined public relations target. If the Press WG had, for example, chosen to define a certain segment of older adults, say American policy decision makers, then a reliance on

Facebook would be misplaced. The same Pew study found, "Most U.S. adults do not go to Facebook seeking news out" (p. 1). In short, even Press WG members such as Paul who incorporated social media usage into his practice of public relations, missed an opportunity to amplify their campaign for social justice.

In contrast to Paul, Sam perceived social media and other digital technologies to be important only in so far as the movement was divorced from the physical space of the park.

> But without the park, Occupy doesn't exist. There's no Occupy. It doesn't happen. It's just a bunch of people 'winjing' [sic?] on Twitter and having demonstrations, which is fine, but a lot of those demonstrations, I think, struggle if they don't feel that they've achieved some success; Occupy felt like a success for people so that they kept building upon it and there became this kind of joyous quality, but nothing would have happened if people hadn't somehow found a way to stay at the park. (Sam)

Sam was one of the members behind "Mission Inbox Zero." Ironically, he spent more time in the virtual space of Occupy, than the physical space, yet he privileges the latter.

In general, social media played a minor, supporting role for the Press WG. Older methods and technologies were more critical. For example, Pam said, " I had this incredible notebook […containing] every person I would meet that I thought could be a source for a reporter." This notebook was divided into sections, including details down to who speaks a variety of foreign languages from Farsi to Hebrew—a fact that proved helpful given the bulk of the media interest fielded was from international outlets. Pam was not alone in this practice. She added, "[…D]own at the plaza, for whatever reason, cell phones didn't work…everybody [on the press team] had a pad in the back of their pocket."

Diversity

The fourth theme emerging from the analysis of interviews and documents involves the failure to achieve diversity. Problems concerning diversity in representation provided the greatest tension within the group. The overwhelming majority of the group members interviewed discussed conflicts over having more women and people of color serving as spokespeople. While all supported this idea in theory, in practice, white men dominated the interviews with the press. Achieving diverse representation in public relations practice is a challenge in part because of societal norms still enveloped by patriarchal gender roles and subtle racism. Even in my own practice of public relations, I encountered friction around race when a manager told me to include a black person in a video intended to promote our pr team; we had no black people on our team. Finding this unethical, but wanting to keep my job, I reluctantly asked a black friend in Human Resources of all departments if she would participate. She agreed with a knowing smile that seemed resigned to me, as if she had played the token role many times before. As in corporate pr, the public relations practiced by members of the Press WG did not exist outside of the status quo. As will be demonstrated, there was a battle to be inclusive in words and deeds within the movement for the 99%.

Diversity of representation, or the attempt on the part of the Press WG members to push women and/or people of color forward for interviews, emerged as a persistent problem for the group for at least three specified reasons. One, there was a perception that the media favored white men from the start. Two, white men were the majority of the movement. Three, the majority of members staffing the press table were white men.

> … I mean they would be white men often that were doing good work and were bright people to talk to about a particular action, but if there was a very strong female presence to an action or like planning component or an interesting perspective, we would highlight that and privilege that over the white dude who we knew would get contacted anyway. We weren't too worried that he would be marginalized. It would be different if it meant that white men would be written out of history if we didn't supply their names. We knew that they would get interviewed anyway. (Rachel)

The white men among the group found it difficult to be in this dominant role both internally and externally (on the media). To their credit, the group almost immediately identified the problem and proposed solutions, including the creation of lists and protocols that privileged people of color for interviews. One example follows:

> I'm white and I read male, so I didn't want to be the face of the movement. I never wanted that. I was always really, really against the job I was doing. I just didn't see anyone else doing it. So what I did very early on was to start a list of people [100 names of people of color]. (Paul)

All agreed that their attempts were not entirely successful. For example, a majority of informants identified the interview of two OWS protestors on the *Colbert Report* as a source of great debate and frustration in relation to the diversity initiative. The group split into two rival factions over whom to suggest to producers looking for representatives of the movement. One faction wanted to push forward a woman of color, per the agreed upon strategy. The other faction wanted Ketchup, a white woman with shocking red hair and large spectacles to match. Ketchup, a performance artist, was argued to be the most provocative choice.

In the end, Ketchup did do the interview, but not until a white male, acting without the consent of the group, utilized his own connection with the producers to make the interview a joint one. Paul explained, "Yeah, it ended up with me like shouting on the phone at [the white male] and all sorts of stuff and then having to put out like a bunch

of fires, because two white kids were on [Colbert], but it ended up okay." However, many group members some three years later are still not satisfied with the way the *Colbert Report* and other media opportunities were handled in terms of diversity.

> We did have a rotation and we had different perspectives within the PR team about how much of a rotation there should be, different names that we supplied to the press. I was one of the people who really believed in a constant rotation and trying to shift through and represent as wide a perspective as possible, even if it meant sacrificing a little bit of consistency to the message. (Rachel)

Internal documents, to be discussed momentarily, corroborate the struggles over diverse representation in a largely white movement.

Document Findings

The analysis shifts now to a set of documents that serve to complicate the previously described material from the interviews with Press WG members. Forty-five internal emails (of the 102 total documents analyzed) from the Press WG listserv were obtained from three group members. The researcher divided these emails into categories that were later connected to themes from the interview data. Attention was paid to those examples that contradicted and those that corroborated the interview accounts in order to offer a more complex and valid picture of the case study.

Participatory Democracy in Practice.

The documents pertaining to messaging ran the gamut from what to say in press releases and how to say it to discussions that were more internally focused, planning talking points for other purposes than releases. In some cases, the documents demonstrate a high level of cooperation within the group as well as with other working groups. But even with this general spirit of collaboration, leaders were emerging and

sometimes waxing and waning in their influence. This quality was only problematic insofar as the movement was striving to be leaderless.

From Communiqués to Press Releases.

In the early days of OWS, Paul, the edgy strategist above, was by many accounts a one-man show, fielding as many media interviews as possible. According to one activist, he had stopped returning phone calls from the media because of the overwhelming volume of requests he managed at the park alone. He also began writing a series of at least 11 "communiqués" from September 19, 2011 to September 28, 2011 that appeared on the OccupyWallSt.org web site. The communiqués, likely a term borrowed from '60s counter-culture movements, were intended to be press releases. The following description of the communiqués is meant to serve as a point of comparison between the earliest days of the Press WG and the subsequent weeks leading up to the eviction from Zuccotti park. The documents mark a broad shift from a more amateur practice of public relations to a more professionalized one. As will be discussed further in the next chapter, this shift is not easily valorized or dichotomized, as there were many strengths and weaknesses on both ends of the practice spectrum. The shift also posed problems for the OWS, punk-style vision of participatory democracy with its refusal of professionalization and other tropes of the establishment.

Paul told me he wrote the communiqués prior to the transition to more formalized press releases. One need not have this knowledge however to ascertain the fact that the communiqués were authored by a non-professional, and as will become clear, this fact had implications for better and for worse according to group members.

There were a number of clues pointing toward non-professional authorship indicated by the language and formatting. To begin, each communiqué was written from the first person point of view with heavy usage of pronouns 'we' and 'us' to emphasize the vantage of "the 99%." The first communiqué described the events of the first day of the movement, September 17, 2011, and depicts the so-called villains of Wall Street almost like a snake: "[…] marched on the head of Wall Street." The language is also militaristic (e.g. "still held the plaza") and the police feature prominently. It emphasized the movement's commitment to consensus-decision-making. The casual tone and language do not mimic the status quo language of public relations.

The second communiqué, also published on September 19, 2011, focused on the second day of the movement and again pushed the importance of consensus. The tone, while less strident, remained casual, as demonstrated by reference to an "impromptu dance party." By the third communiqué, a pattern of inconsistent and collage-like style had developed. For example, the use of the well-known Anonymous phrase, "Expect us" appears arbitrarily in the third communiqué, the only time this phrase is used in any public document of those studied authored by a member of the Press WG.

In addition, Paul experimented with a couple of boiler plates-- the language that appears traditionally at the end of a press release that explains the authoring organization's purpose and is seldom changed. At first, the phrase "consensus by the group, for the group" filled the boiler-plate role, later joined by the line, "we intend to stay [in Zuccotti Park]. By the eighth communiqué, neither boiler-plate-style phrase appeared. The police actions against the protestors had come to dominate the content over the message of consensus.

Over time, the author used a variety of rhetorical devices, including a repeated, problematic, and self-conscious use of a series of demands, each one prefaced with "We demand." He acknowledged that this technique was not meant to suggest authorized or group-sanctioned demands as the General Assembly had famously agreed to no single demand for the movement. Paul stated it was simply a "rhetorical device." Additionally, one journalist, Colin Moynihan, of the *New York Times*, is singled out and praised for his coverage. While Moynihan might have been flattered, his inclusion in the communiqué was yet another sign of a more casual style than would be expected in a professional release.

By November 4, 2011, after many professional public relations people had joined the group, communiqués were replaced by press releases distributed through the email to the press list and through at least one wire service, CommonDreams.org. The more formal formatting of the releases compared to the communiqués is readily noticeable. For example, the release included the words 'press release,' a dateline, and two quotes from a protestor (albeit a Press WG member). The focus of the release was on home foreclosure, setting up the 99% vs. the banks. The release also looked forward to future events, unlike the communiqués that, for the most part, looked back on the previous day. Although this early press release looked more professional, there were still errors following AP Style (e.g. incorrect datelines) and other oddities, including a headline that directly addressed President Obama.

I will analyze changes like these in relation to the press in the next chapter, but here it is useful to again make the connection that professionalization, outside of any benefits it may or may not have had in terms of press coverage, presented challenges as

formal professionals took over clear leadership roles in the group. This process was less discussed in interviews, making the documents useful in helping to explain relationships at the time between public relations practices and participatory democracy.

Cleaning Day.

A seven-page-email exchange (relatively long) within the Press WG regarding preparations for "Cleaning Day" on October 14, 2011 provides another window onto their practices of public relations. In it, one finds a spirited discussion about stakeholder outreach, messaging, and media relations. At issue was the perceived threat of the NYPD coming to evict the protestors from Zuccotti Park under the pretense of cleaning the park. The protestors claimed they had already planned to clean the park themselves and undertook an effort to publicize this fact and the perceived threat. They reached out to several outside groups including the Working Families Party and Community Board One, a group of citizens responsible for advising government officials on decisions affecting the area including Zuccotti Park. Members of these outside groups called "an emergency press conference," issued a "good neighbor policy," and contacted Mayor Bloomberg with the intent of supporting the occupation. Meanwhile, practitioners within the Press WG were working behind the scenes to generate/confirm support from allies, to craft messaging, and to call key journalists.

In one instance, the practitioners missed a deadline with the *New York Times*, in part because of their slow, murky process of group consensus. Although the journalist had already filed his story, he agreed to "sneak a quote in," a development which prompted the practitioner to use her own instincts and synthesis of group input to provide a quote in real-time. This prompted much discussion around what the group members

began calling the "rapid response process," which perhaps not coincidentally, is a common feature of more corporate/hierarchical forms of public relations work. However, the activists struggled to devise rules for working under tight deadlines because of the time intensive nature of consensus- based-decision-making and the lack of role clarity within the group.

The messages concerning "Cleaning Day" also posed a challenge within the group, as supported by the emails. One faction was displeased with the "communication breakdown" that swept aside stronger language to the press that said no one "allows" the protestors to stay in the park, declaring that the occupiers do not recognize the governing authorities. The other side found such language to be exclusionary and therefore against the ethos of the movement. They wanted language that invited everyone (including presumably the NYPD) to join in the cleaning, but on terms created by the protestors, terms that did not include vacating the park for any duration.

Underlying this debate was a keen awareness of then recent history. The protestors reminded one another over email that the pre-Occupy encampment in June of 2011 called Bloombergville had been evicted under the same cleaning pretense, as had the occupations in Barcelona and Madrid during May of that year. This contributed to a palpable fear among the protestors that precipitated the kind of debate that one practitioner felt took them "too much in-the-weeds" at the expense of losing focus "on Wall Street and our purpose." This practitioner suggested adding language to a press statement that said "something like:"

> You want to talk about dirty? Let's talk about what's been going on every day on Wall Street. And let's talk about a billionaire mayor who stands up for bankers

> instead of for the majority of people who are struggling in this economy and who have had enough!

The multiplicity of suggestions and styles around messaging was further complicated by the fact that most of the exchange was taking place over the email listserv and not necessarily being captured in a single document, a problem that one practitioner tried to solve with a plea to the group to add to the Google doc. The 'Cleaning Day' emails supported the variety of practices identified in the interviews, as well as debates concerning messaging and struggles with infrastructure, organization, and power.

International Interest.

Several other emails support the international quality of the incoming media requests. For example, one request from a journalist at Radio Free Europe wanted to broadcast the requested interview in Farsi to people listening in Iran. In another example, a journalist from the *Guardian* sent a series of questions to a practitioner in the working group on a tight deadline. Once again, as no rapid response process was established, the activist answered the questions on his own with little group consultation. He had less than two hours to respond to the journalist about similarities between OWS and the revolution in Egypt. A brief group exchange emerged internally over email including the following plea, "Oh dear. Let's not even get into Sharia Law talks. Poison." This advice arrived long after the reporter's deadline. As it stood, the resulting quote from the practitioner/spokesperson in the *Guardian* avoided the topic of Sharia Law and conveyed a sense of solidarity with the people who are oppressed by systems of government around the world.

Professional and Amateur.

The internal documents supported the assertion on the part of almost every group members that there existed a tension between those people with more experience in public relations and journalism compared to those people with little to no experience in these inter-related fields. That being said, the tension was often subtle and sometimes productive. For instance, many interactions proved that a little guidance on the part of the professional practitioner in terms of language and style was all that was needed to make a particular message more similar to the language and style of the press in general. Such mimicry is widely thought to improve the likelihood of press attention.

On the other hand, there was a great deal of individual freedom within the Press WG; this sometimes created confusion. For example, an email exchange between one non-professional practitioner and a journalist demonstrated that the practitioner did not even realize the person on the receiving end of her emails was a journalist; in fact, she asked him to write something specific on his blog, to which he kindly revealed that he is "not a pr person." One would assume that had the novice practitioner approached a seasoned peer in the group, the peer might have recognized the name of the journalist or at the very least suggested a quick search on the contact's background. As it happened, the journalist was not offended in the slightest and the two struck up a friendly relationship moving forward.

The Fox Incident.

The difference between professional and amateur was often one of degree, rather than a strict dichotomy. Members seldom used their resumes as weapons with at least one notable exception documented in an email exchange between a veteran newsman and

member of the Press WG and a more junior member with some experience in communications work. The exchange concerned the veteran journalist who decided to answer questions from a Fox news reporter without group consultation. This in and of itself was not at all unusual as deadlines, logistics, convenience, personal relationships with journalists, and sometimes ego, contributed to many a spokesperson in the group moving forward without discussion. Furthermore, there was no formal structure or agreement in place. What was unusual about the Fox incident was that the veteran practitioner decided, 1. To share his answers with the group, and 2. To strike a snarky, or insincere tone with the reporter at Fox.

The following is an excerpt from the email Q&A between the reporter at Fox and the Press WG spokesperson:

> [Reporter] There are accusations that these hired activists are being used as door-to-door canvassers to collect money that is used to support the OWS protests.

> A: There are accusations that I've also heard from my "sources" that many of these are actually Fox News interns being required to do it for Fox News as an effort to augment their salaries. Pending some hitting the jackpot as other [sic] have done when they have filed sexual harassment charges against certain talents at Fox.

In response, the less experienced Press WG member tells the group over the email listserv, "I'm sorry, but I really really dislike this type of slander fighting slander approach." This prompted another member to ask why he felt that way and what might work better. There was no response, only two more agitated emails from the veteran

member taking great offense to the suggestion that his approach was anything less than appropriate. He closed by stating, "Suffice it to say that personally, I have over 41 years of experience in News and public relations and feel comfortable in my ability to handle press."

Social Media.

With one exception, the documents supported the relative lack of coordinated social media use for promotional purposes by the Press WG. The one exception is detailed below.

The Exceptional Tumblr.

Although most informants placed little to no importance upon social media in terms of their practice of public relations, the internal email listserv documents revealed one notable exception to the finding that social media did not play a significant role in the practices of the Press WG. On October 19, 2011, representatives of the Press WG launched a Tumblr entitled, occupywallstreetcarepackages.tumblr.com. The site shows photos of care packages (e.g. home-baked cookies) and letters of support for OWS sent from all over the United States.

The Press WG issued a press release to support the site, however the entries on the blog stop after ten days and the mainstream press coverage appeared minimal with only the Associated Press (picked up by CBSnews.com) and *The Nation* utilizing the story, according to the top search results. The press release underwent a round of editing by the Press WG, primarily not to bury the lead: the existence of the site. Early versions of the press release did not include the important information about the site until several

paragraphs into the document. One of the members of the group, a professional

practitioner, corrected this error of Associated Press style among others, however her

advice was either ignored or not seen by the member who issued the final release with the

errors intact. (Attempts to contact the adroit editor proved unfruitful.)

In contrast, the Wearethe99percent.tumblr.com site, a site not developed by the

Press WG, which predates the occupation of Zuccotti Park, continues to exist and appear

active in 2015. The 99% tumblr is a grass roots location for people to submit their stories

of hardship, often hand-written on pieces of notebook paper along with a photograph of

the writer. This tumblr even spawned a parody site: the99purrcent.tumblr.com, featuring

cats.

By the start of the occupation in September 2011, it had garnered significant hits

in large outlets such as *The Washington Post*, *Yahoo News* (prior to buying Tumblr),

Huffington Post, and ABC News to name several. One potential reason for the relative

failure of the donations site launched by the Press WG may have been poor timing with

the news cycle. Regardless, the care package tumblr is somewhat of a footnote in the

record of public relations in OWS. The trouble with the editing process also suggests that

the tumblr might have been released to the press, but then not followed up with tailored

engagement with specific journalists. The document analysis now moves to consider the

final theme: the struggle for diverse representation.

Diversity.

The internal emails provide substantial detail to the struggles of the Press WG to

create diverse representation among spokespeople and subsequent press coverage. The

Colbert Report incident, as previously highlighted, was mentioned by nearly every group member interviewed as being a low point of group interaction, especially in terms of diverse representation. In a string of emails 45 long from October 10 – 11, 2011, no less than 12 practitioners argued about whom to send on the show.

Sparkle Ketchup!

The debate began when one member disputed the idea of someone named Ketchup representing the movement on the *Colbert Report*. How would they be taken seriously? (In addition to the unusual alias, Ketchup was a white performance artist with shocking red hair.) Someone suggested two others for the show, prompting agreement with a caveat: "[do we really want] two white dudes?" This prompted the promotion of asking a particular black woman [name withheld] to appear on the show. A bitter division between two choices ensued.

Another member mounted a passionate defense of Ketchup, declaring this is not "the *Today Show*." He continued, "Diversity is not what we need to rep on *Colbert*. […] This started as a youth movement, and *Colbert* delivers to (predominantly) youth." This prompted a rebuttal, complete with hyperlink to a *Forbes* article as support, and second-hand knowledge from a television insider, explaining that Colbert's audience was trending much older. The practitioner continued, writing,

> [I] hope this discussion can illuminate the deep need to have people who are not white 20 somethings doing ALL these interviews. […] We must be more mindful. [I]t is really a challenge to convince friends and colleagues in the community that they have a place in this movement when they turn on the TV and see nothing but white faces. If we think Ketchup is the best we have then PR has to make the necessary adjustment to diversify the pool of spokespeople today. [W]e are better then [sic] this. [B]uilding a multi-racial, multi-class movement requires strategic and deliberate movements.

This plea to the group was grounded by a definition of community that not only included a larger sense of people of color as an affinity group, but also particular activists in Occupy New York who had expressed frustrations about the lack of diversity being represented. Although OWS was predominantly white, a People of Color Working Group was active in New York. According to multiple accounts, the Press WG already had a "diversity list" to activate in just this kind of situation, but it clearly was not well publicized, ironically, internally and as will become clear, one or two members made the final decision on the *Colbert Report* guests without consensus.

Another practitioner said she agreed with the above plea for diversity and pushed for the black woman. This was followed by another member email shouting, "SPARKLE KETCHUP." (Sparkle referring to the twinkling of fingers upward, a sign of approval within new social movements.) At 12:29 p.m., it is revealed that the practitioners at the press table were unaware of the email chain because they lacked Internet access. Five minutes later, the group is informed, "Ketchup got tapped [for the *Colbert Report* interview] earlier today."

A smaller flurry of emails followed complaining about the breakdown of consensus in the process and lack of clear protocols. One practitioner wrote, "If given the chance, I would have blocked Ketchup for all the reasons previously mentioned." Blocking is a serious point of process within consensus-based-decision making, one not taken lightly. A block essentially stops any given action and is to be used sparingly. According to one practitioner, the behind-the-scenes wrangling regarding the *Colbert Report* captured "what goes wrong when representational decisions are made in a

unrepresentative way." Possible meanings of this struggle will be explored in much greater detail in the following chapters.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the major themes and corresponding findings that emerged from interviews with informants and relevant documents. I documented at least 13 different, recognized practices of public relations with most falling under the category of media relations. Despite uncertainty within the group, all identified economic justice as the primary message of OWS. The lack of infrastructure and processes, coupled with a commitment to horizontal, consensus-based decision-making, contributed to ad hoc practices. On a related note, technology use was often limited to old-fashioned tools such as notebooks because there was no Internet access at the press table in the park.

The use of social media in a coordinated manner by the Press Group was limited to only two of the 16 informants. Most Press WG members recognized the Media WG as the area most responsible for coordinated social media activity. This finding is somewhat surprising given the emphasis placed on social media in other contexts of public relations, as well as the media spotlight cast on social media as a driver of contemporary social movement mobilization. Social media use will be further explored in the next chapter.

Another surprising finding involved the nearly unanimous concern about the lack of diversity in representation among Press WG practitioners. Despite attempts to set up systems to address this problem, white men continued to dominate both the interviews and the media coverage of OWS. This disconnect will also be discussed in the following chapter.

Finally, findings from the documents complicated the information from the interviews and offered rich detail to further explain some of the tensions, advantages, and disadvantages of having a mix of amateurs and professionals working to help journalists. Two practitioners, although still helpful to journalists, viewed the press as the enemy. Friend or foe, it was clear that the practitioners helped to shape the media coverage of the movement and the coverage, in turn, shaped the practitioners' practices.

CHAPTER 6. ANALYSIS THROUGH THE CIRCUIT OF CULTURE

An American television reporter asked Skylar "a silly question." She wanted her to comment on the assertion that "nearby businesses are angry for the drumming sounds." "Like, oh, come on! Nobody likes drum circles. That's not what this [OWS] is about," said Skylar. "That's like saying you don't want to go to college because you don't want to see Bob Marley posters. It's just going to be there. You have to move through it to do important work." The important work performed through communication—be it public relations or journalism—was complicated and messy.

Skylar, Mike, and many other mostly amateur Press WG members expected more from the journalists they encountered covering OWS. In contrast, Pam, a former journalist and public relations professional, expected more of herself. "You don't just write stories; if you want your side of the story told, don't expect them to come find you," Pam said. Pam's knowledge of the protocols and deadline-driven environments of the press proved useful in turning attention away from the drum circles and towards the issue of economic justice. However, the public relations practices within the case study were not simple transmissions to be picked up by a handful of harried journalists. In fact, the processes are best understood through a model that considers the context of the media system and the social movement in question, a model that filters an array of cultural articulations. The circuit of culture is one such model; the five moments of the circuit of culture—regulation, production, representation, consumption, and identity—help to characterize the deeply contextual practices of the Press WG.

The Press WG and their practices of public relations were central in the co-construction of OWS. To put it another way, as the practitioners fixed interviews, crafted messages, built relationships, etc., they were also building, along with other stakeholders, a discourse about OWS and social justice. These processes of construction were often contentious. In this chapter, I trace many of the conditions and processes of this co-construction using the circuit of culture: first, through the concept of regulation which outlines the constraints that hampered their efforts more often than not. Next, I examine production, where the tactics used by the informants were so often complicated by the desired horizontal structure of the movement and by the fractious quality of some inter-group relations. Then, I move to representation, theorized here as the encoded/decoded artifacts of various articulations. It is in the moment of representation when the discursive nature of the reality of OWS is explored in-depth. Next, through the lens of the moment of consumption, I address select examples of responses to OWS from the public and the press. Finally, I move to the moment of identity, where the public relations practitioners of the case study are conceived as historically constructed subjects (Foucault, 1980). In total, the circuit of culture provides a way of understanding the contentious conditions shaping what it meant to do public relations in the context of the case study. Again, this understanding is important because, as King argued, public relations is a vital means of engaging with the public, and public opinion is the place to find justice when violent and legal remedies are foreclosed.

Throughout this work, I am building an argument about a surprisingly traditional way of doing public relations in a new social movement or what I term, the people's pr. While meaning and power in public relations are always contested and dynamic, the

articulations of public relations practice in this case study complicate broader

characterizations of so called new social movements such as OWS. Far from being the

Twitter revolution, the Press WG paid scant attention to social media and new(er)

technologies such as live streaming, while other parts of the movement, especially the

Media WG embraced them. On the other hand, the Media WG largely rejected the idea

of directly working with professional journalists—the reason d'être of the Press WG.

The mostly analog practices of the Press WG were messy at best, but the professionals

and amateurs of the group defied expectations and met a flood of media attention with

abundance of skill and without monetary compensation. A better understanding of how

this 'working-group-that-could' co-constructed discourses about OWS with a host of

other influencers follows.

Regulation

Regulation refers to the moment in the circuit of culture wherein every day

activities are constrained in both explicit (e.g. censorship) and implicit (e.g. cultural

norms) ways. Both types of regulation have enforcement mechanisms, however as with

codes of ethics for public relations (Curtin and Gaither, 2007), enforcement was largely

absent in the context of the Press WG. In other words, there were no easily discernable,

direct consequences when the informal rules were broken. That being said, violations of

norms certainly took a toll in the form of group morale. Many informants discussed

fatigue dealing with people who wanted to bask in the media spotlight or from people

who wished to repeatedly challenge actions when there had been a previous consensus.

To understand the regulation of public relations within the case study, it is useful

to ask what could *not* be said? After all, the anything goes spirit of OWS might give the

appearance of an environment without rules. However, this was far from the norm. For example, the activists who wanted a web site headline to read, "Fuck you, Mayor Quan" were effectively censored by practitioners within the Press WG. Cultural norms of the mainstream, global press--norms that arguably reflect the civility of their audiences— dictate that certain words are offensive. The passion over the treatment of protestors in Oakland at the hands of the mayor's police force was tempered in this instance, however there was no formal enforcement, only persuasion on the part of the practitioners. That being said, the horizontal quality of the movement made any type of enforcement challenging. In the first few months of the movement, the Press WG, for example, lacked any formal way to remove someone from the group, much less enforce censorship.

Even when a group member wanted to activate the enforcement mechanism of the block, as in the previously described issue of whether or not to recommend Ketchup as a spokesperson for the *Colbert Report*, he was denied that opportunity due to a lack of protocol for making such decisions. This is but one example of the way that practices of public relations within OWS were largely individual with little to no accountability to the group or to the larger movement. The practitioners were at once constrained by the horizontal form of government in the sense that they had no real recourse to handle disagreements and at the same time freed to do largely what they wished as individuals.

Spokesperson is a four-letter word.

That being said, subtle regulations were operating in the background. For example, although the practitioners were either actively serving as spokespeople for the media and/or fixing interviews behind-the-scenes, several group members strongly objected to the use of the word 'spokesperson' in the context of their public relations

activities. Rachel was emphatic when she said, "There is no list of spokespeople. There is a discussion over the list about who we should… There are no spokespeople. There is only the unofficial list of spokespeople in the sense that there were preferences around certain people [speaking to the media]."

Later, during the same interview, Rachel contradicted herself when she said that the media decided who was a spokesperson and that was okay as long as the person being quoted was articulate; when the person was deemed incoherent, Rachel felt that it was out of their hands. Her justification erased the numerous times when specific people from a specific list were pushed forward to media outlets, "unofficial" though it may have been. Meanwhile, several other group members also contradicted themselves, saying there were no spokespeople, but then adopting the use of the term throughout the remainder of the interview. For example, Dana said there were no spokespeople, but when describing the day-to-day practice, she said:

> We hadn't been like elected to be the voices of the movement, right, but there would be moments where you're just asked spot on like okay, what are you doing here and you have to just perform and respond [to the media]. There's not always time to go like, 'Hold on, let me get you a spokesperson from the da da da who represents whatever.'

Here Dana is providing a picture of the hectic pace in the park when one might be called upon to go on camera or talk to a journalist at any moment. She also touches upon the tension of speaking for the movement when the movement is not supposed to have any leaders. In short, she does not see the contradiction. In the same way as many of her peers, Dana felt the work (of being a spokesperson) had to get done, regardless of the terminology. Yet the terminology and practice get at the root of cultural regulation within OWS.

In a study of OWS that included interviews with members of the Press and Media Working Groups largely in London and New York, Kavada (2015) also found a similar discomfort concerning the idea of a spokesperson. Unlike this study, however, most of Kavada's (2015) informants said they would try to use only first names when speaking to the media. I account for the difference here in two ways. One, the interviewees may have *attempted* to use first names only, but that does not mean their full names were not used in the final product. For example, a Google search of "Bill Dobbs Occupy" returned 252,000 results as of September 17, 2015. (Dobbs was a member of the Press WG and a frequent spokesperson.) Two, Kavada's (2015) inquiry concerns almost exclusively the use of social media. Therefore, she did not seek detailed stories concerning the interactions themselves, and importantly what type of media the interviewer belonged to. This distinction is important because, I would argue based on my extensive reading, the *mainstream* media typically used the full names of all spokespeople following journalistic convention. In other words, once again, we find the desire for a leaderless movement rubbing uncomfortably against a differently ordered, and more powerful mainstream media system—a bastion of the status quo.

What are the possible reasons for this disconnect—this insistence that there are no spokespeople juxtaposed with use of the word throughout the group and the act of serving in the capacity of a spokesperson almost by definition? At one level, the governing structure does not allow for formal organizational hierarchy, yet informal hierarchies were plentiful. The members of the Press WG exercised a great deal of power through such informal hierarchies, including, but not limited to serving as spokespeople. Although Rachel was one of the members who did not like the term 'spokesperson,' she

nevertheless recognized the power dynamics and potential misuse of that power within the Press WG. She said,

> We were a very powerful working group and I don't know what would have happened if we had been more powerful than we were. I don't think that would have been a good thing at all. So I think we had too much power as it was. […] You know, you become a conduit, people see you as connected to power and then they want to know you because you know journalists and they want to get to the journalists. I just, it felt dirty to me, all that. (Rachel)

Rachel is locating the source of the group's considerable power in its connections to journalists. The idea of a spokesperson, no matter how many times a person insists they do not speak for the whole, becomes uncomfortable because that power in the moment of regulation becomes visible in the practice of being a spokesperson or when connecting a journalist to one. The amplification of a single voice through the media megaphone designates leaders in a so-called leaderless movement. This is an inconvenient truth for some of the practitioners.

Speaking for the MIA.

The tensions around the term for and the act of being a spokesperson are hardly unique to the OWS Press WG. In *Bearing the Cross*, Garrow (1986) detailed the concerns about the role of a spokesperson in the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA), among other Civil Rights Movement organizations. Whereas the tensions with the OWS Press WG were largely the result of friction between public relations work and the larger movement's ideal of horizontalism, the MIA articulated arguments about the role of spokesperson differently. The MIA did not object to the role per se—as some sort of inappropriate use of power. On the contrary, spokespeople were seen as vital to speak truth to power. This does not mean, however, that there were not tensions.

For example, not everyone was on board with Martin Luther King as the primary spokesperson of the MIA and the bus boycotts from 1955-56 (Garrow, 1986). Many long-time residents of Montgomery resented the relative newcomer who had just become the young minister of a local church (Garrow, 1986). According to Garrow (1986), King himself was a reluctant leader at first, knowing that he was a relative outsider and that the spotlight of publicity would put a strain on him and his family. But the leaders of the MIA chose King and he accepted the call.

King was chosen in part because of his exceptional oratory skills and an education that "would appeal strongly to the wealthier, professional segment of the black community, people who otherwise might be ambivalent about conditions on public buses that they rarely patronized" (Garrow, 1986, p. 20). By the same token, his position as a minister would "draw more conservative clergy into what had begun as a secularly led effort" (Garrow, 1986, p. 20). But the strategic selection of King would not only unify classes and worldviews within the black community.

Through press releases, press conferences, interviews, speeches at rallies, paid advertisements in newspapers and a variety of other tactics wherein King was the prominent spokesperson, the MIA sought to make their demands clear to the city, and as the stalemate wore on, the nation. According to Garrow (1986), "By the third week of January [1956], the press began to focus upon King as the principal spokesman for the movement" (p. 53). It is interesting that King was reluctantly thrust into the spotlight in both the black and the white communities. The black leaders of the MIA elected King into his leadership role, while the white community recognized King as the leader mostly through the press. Garrow (1986) wrote that it was the white people of Montgomery who

"focused upon King as the effort's principal spokesman" (p. 51). The pressure on King was great and the publicity focus created more internal tensions and jealousies among the MIA leaders (Garrow, 1986). Although over time, most would come to find King an apt leader (Garrow, 1986).

By contrast, several decades and many movements later with OWS, the Press WG was perhaps less strategic in their selection of spokespeople from an internal communications standpoint. Although they would carefully fix interviews to match the story angles of journalists, the Press WG fought internally about issues of diversity and gender in terms of the non-spokesperson-spokesperson role. Unlike the MIA, the Press WG did not coalesce around a single leader, and it is doubtful they would have even if their movement's ideals had made such an affordance.

As mentioned, the Press WG had no real mechanism for removing people from the group or for censuring them—another contrast to MIA. For example, a MIA member went rogue in 1956 by sending an unauthorized letter to the *Montgomery Advertiser* saying that MIA would not compromise on the bus boycott and that the group should have demanded complete integration between blacks and whites. At this stage of the movement, MIA had worked hard to stress that an end to segregation was not a demand—this was for the courts. The thinking at the time was that situation on Montgomery buses would be remedied quickly and fairly by the white city leaders and the bus company. The rogue MIA member got ahead of the movement in a way and contradicted the early statements of King and others. According to Garrow (1986), the unauthorized spokesperson was "strongly reprimanded for speaking out of turn" (p. 52).

Regulation Through Stereotypes.

At another level, the discomfort around the spokesperson language connects to more serious misgivings, and some would argue misperceptions, about public relations work in general. Rachel contended that the 'PR' in the PR Working Group (a frequent abbreviation used by members and non-members alike) "definitely didn't mean public relations." She also said she did not think it meant that to anyone else either. She said it meant press relations, and unlike the professional consensus, she thought press relations was not a part of public relations. Setting aside the fact that others in the group did refer to their work as public relations, Rachel's definition of and subsequent rejection of public relations is revealing. She said,

> So there's a difference between trying to make the jobs of journalists easier as workers and as people trying to tell a good story and maybe getting them as close to the truth as you can, as somebody who hopefully has integrity and ethical backbone, helping them in that way, believing that they have the potential to do the right thing, treating them in that way. That's not how some people might have perceived what press work is about. They might have seen it as catering to or like a little bit of ass kissing. That's not what we did though. That's public relations, in my view. It's like when you're hungry for press, you're running after press, you're trying to speak to the public through the press and you feel like you're not going to get to the public unless you manage to wine and dine this reporter sufficiently. We didn't have a fucking instance of that. (Rachel)

It is interesting to note that Rachel had several years of experience in communications work prior to OWS. Somewhere along the line she began to define public relations work, as opposed to the "press work" of OWS, as dishonest, desperate "ass kissing." Her view of the press is not much better as indicated by their dubious "potential to do the right thing." It would seem she is doubtful about journalists' ethics, but not without hope that a press worker within OWS might push them in the right (her) direction.

Granted, this conception of public relations is common in popular culture (e.g. spin doctors). Popular opinion of journalism is also not high in the United States. The important aspect to seize upon here however is that such stereotypes of public relations and journalism regulate practices. If Rachel saw no difference between her press work, what one might call media relations, and the work of public relations, then she likely would not have volunteered for the Press WG. Along the same lines, if she had seen mainstream media journalists as being irrevocably tied to the status quo (as many of her peers within the larger movement thought), then she would not have been able to do the work either. Rachel's interpretation of public relations and journalism is a kind of negotiated reading (Hall, 1993) that infuses her practice. She is negotiating/reconciling the hierarchical characteristics of public relations and mainstream journalism with her political identity that resists all concentrations of power. The analysis now turns to the moment of production.

Production

The moment of production in the context of public relations relates to questions of how to define a target audience, and what channels to use to reach that target audience, as well as the content or message to employ. Although practitioners of public relations might wish for the production process to work in a simple transmitter/receiver system in the mode of Shannon and Weaver (Mattelart, 1998), in actuality, communication is more often ritualistic in character, following Carey (1989). Carey (1989) illustrated this characteristic when he argued that people read the news routinely-- the way they might attend mass, to confirm their beliefs. Extending his argument, it is clear that OWS was a co-constructed, ritualized news event in addition to being a social movement. People

consumed news about the movement as a matter of routine, as will be shown shortly using polling data. The audience, the press, and the public relations practitioners were all engaged in constructing narratives, often competing ones, about the purpose and quality of OWS.

From the practitioner's perspective, it follows that to know one's audience, one might want to have a clear understanding of their customs and values. The practitioners of the OWS Press WG, more often than not, had a high degree of understanding of how to craft a message that would resonate with their broad target audience, the press, but they had less explicit knowledge of the people consuming the press. They saw the press as a conduit to various audiences, broadly defined as young and old, liberal and/or conservative. Finer, more precise definitions of audiences and desired actions (e.g. awareness versus mobilization) were not uncovered from interviews and documents.

Working from such broad parameters, the practitioners interviewed for this study, unlike their typical institutional counterparts, did not undertake formal research to help define their targets; it is unclear why, but in all likelihood, they simply decided they did not have time. The pace of their public relations work at the height of the media scrutiny was unlike anything they had experienced before including in their activist and professional lives. Eric described it thusly,

> You would take one step and you would be looking at five texts, someone would be talking to you, you'd look over and see something else happening. Someone would yell out and then you'd take another step and the input and the intensity and the emotion and the…there were just lifetimes that were lived there. (Eric)

With such limited time, many drew heavily upon their established media literacy, or an understanding of the way the U.S. media system functions. Furthermore, some of the

professionals in the group had previous experience within international media systems—experience that likely proved useful given the high level of interest from international media outlets. For example, early on Pam began to take extensive notes on potential spokespeople, including who could speak certain languages; fellow members solicited this type of information over email and constructed a Google spreadsheet to serve as a repository or simple database. While such a practice might seem rudimentary, it would have been easy for the practitioners who were dealing with a tremendous volume of requests to say, for example, 'No, sorry; we don't know who speaks Hebrew.' They were prepared for a variety of international requests and by all accounts, they received them.

Occupying Gender.

In terms of message content, the practitioners rallied around the idea of economic justice. Despite this unity however, many group members identified tensions concerning the messaging. Gender, in particular, became problematic as the majority male group struggled to incorporate more inclusive perspectives. This problem was not structural, per se, because the group decided to form a sub-group devoted to an expansive, gender non-conformist idea open to everyone except cisgendered men—people with male biological sex who identify/feel comfortable as men, i.e. the already dominant majority of the larger group. This gendered subgroup would create content that explored economic justice through the lens of marginalized, feminist perspectives.

The trouble, according to Skylar, would begin when content was shared with the larger group for the purposes of producing materials for the press (press releases, sound bites, talking points, web content). The hope was that if, for example, there was "[…] a list of five things that are wrong with the economy, one of those five things needs to be

the wage gap or the expense of child care for working women." In practice, Skylar and

Rachel felt that the larger, male-dominated group shot down women's issues or other

important topics tied to the economy such as climate change. This power dynamic within

a supposedly inclusive, class-based movement such as OWS is surprising on the surface.

When asked to speculate about the larger group's reticence on women's issues, Skylar

said,

> You know, I think it would just come down to like oh we only have space for the
> really important stuff and then so often things would dissolve into: 'If you want to
> have your own gender movement and go like Occupy the gender, you can go do
> that.' You can't have a human conversation about intersectionality with a bunch
> of 19-year-olds. You can't do it. (Skylar)

For Skylar, the lack of sensitivity to the plight of people struggling with multiple kinds of

systemic inequalities, or what is known as intersectionality, was tied to the immaturity of

the other group members. She added, "So I felt like I ended up trying to convince people

that didn't respect me and that I didn't respect that I was there to talk about the economy

and that talking about women is talking about the economy." Of the members

interviewed for this study, the average age of the group was 32.5, considerably older than

she was at 24. Perhaps the meetings she attended skewed younger on those days, and/or

perhaps the younger (and male) people of the Press WG had more influence when it came

to high-profile decisions such as public talking points. Regardless, despite the best of

intentions, patriarchal power dynamics that exist in larger society were reified with the

Press WG to the detriment of the movement. This returns the discussion to the third

argument of the research, put simply as: public relations produced power for some, but

not all. Importantly, if the Press WG (re)produced oppression within their ranks for

some, it is difficult to imagine how a movement ostensibly designed to confront such oppression, could be sustained.

The Problem with Press Releases.

As the previous example illustrates, the members of the Press WG struggled to address power imbalances within a supposedly leaderless movement. "Once you get more than five or ten people together, the consensus process breaks down," Zane observed. The asymmetries of power infiltrated the production of messages, as well as other campaign tactics. One such tactic, the press release, became another site of contestation within the moment of production.

For some members of the group, writing press releases and editing press releases from other working groups formed the backbone of their work. Some members of the Press WG, deemed the sub-group of producers who wrote press releases too powerful, given their decision-making influence on other working groups. Although such decisions were not enforceable, the amount of collective experience with the press proved intimidating and/or persuasive to many.

Many members were somewhat ambivalent about the effectiveness of the press releases. Rachel described the tactic as "antiquated," although she did appreciate the initial tone of the pre-press release communiqués. She said, "They stood out from other press releases [in the business world] because they weren't boring. They had some strident language that was emotional and which is all completely against the rules in PR and that's why I think it worked." Sam lamented the lack of pitching at the expense of writing press releases. Likewise, Linda questioned the opportunity cost of the tactic,

saying, "We mostly wrote press releases. We didn't do any post-action stories. I just think we should have run our own stories about what happened, but that wasn't really the role that we took [.]"

As more professionals entered the group, the press releases became more formalized as described in the previous chapter. The "strident and emotional language" Rachel refers to above is evident in the early, daily communiqués written by Paul, but not in the press releases beginning in October of 2011. Readers may recall Rachel's negative feelings about public relations. In the last paragraph, she extends this idea to "the rules" that presumably dictate sober, controlled language. Although many would disagree with her earlier characterization of the profession of public relations, there is research to support her contention that passionate language, for example, delivers better results with the press.

In a study of multiple activist groups and journalists who covered the groups over a ten year period, Sobieraj (2011) found that authenticity was a key driver of media coverage. The less authentic a group was deemed to be by a journalist, the less coverage and/or sympathy would be given. The criteria for authenticity were varied, but language was certainly among them. Journalists perceived formality (of the kind on display after OWS became more professionalized) to be too slick (Sobieraj, 2011). In this way, formal press releases and other signs of organizational polish may have hurt the perception of OWS with the press.

On the other hand, the tremendous volume of coverage concerning OWS complicates these claims. The practices of public relations within the Press WG became

better organized and diverse, arguably providing better service in the form of information subsidies (Gandy, 1982), or information provided (in this case) to journalists at no cost and little work to them. By this rationale, economic pressures encourage journalists to use information subsidies in the form of public relations materials to fill the news hole leading to what McManus (1994, 1995) and Underwood (1993) called *market-driven journalism*, which holds that commercial interests represented in the public relations materials are usurping public service values in journalism.

Curtin (1999) applied the McManus (1994) model to print journalism based on the perceptions of a sample of managing editors and suggested that public relations materials/subsidies are not driving the news agenda, although they are heavily used in advertising/special sections. Important to this case study, the exception, where public relations subsidies *were* perceived to be used more heavily in news, came with government and nonprofit organizations, or types of organizations that managing editors perceived to have public service missions in harmony with those of journalism (Curtin, 1999). Furthermore, the media success of these types of organizations, was augmented by "those who adapt to media style and routines" (Curtin, 1999, p. 88). Although OWS as a social movement is neither a government entity, nor a nonprofit in the traditional sense, one could imagine a greater use of their public relations materials under economic constraints given the populist/anti-corporate spirit of the movement. In short, the increased polish, organization, and volume of the public relations materials and practices of the Press WG may have hurt them in terms of usage in the press per Sobieraj (2011), or conversely, it may have helped them given the intensified economic constraints of 2011, and the importance of motivating factors to power journalists (Curtin, 1999).

Judging from the somewhat positive shift in sympathies at one major news outlet (a case to be discussed), I lean towards the latter explanation.

Despite any gains in service to journalists, however, the press release tactic seemed one-size-fits-all, ignoring the nuances of both the press and audiences. In this sense, the Press WG missed an important lesson, namely that "public relations cannot afford to be become grounded in the system of production—tactics and strategies, for instance—without taking into account the fluidity of the communities, or audiences, that the production system is designed to reach" (Curtin and Gaither, 2005). The group members could have spent more time constructing desired audiences based on research and more effort to adjust to the actual responses of audiences. This is not to say that the Press WG should have favored public opinion over their mission, but a greater sensitivity to the consumption of their tactics might have reaped benefits. Again, power plays a role here. If members such as Linda had been allowed to assume a more formal leadership role with decision-making authority, she might have had greater weight to redeploy the resources devoted to press releases. Far from just being practical counsel for future social movements, this is important because it suggests as does so much of OWS that their social justice mission concerning economic justice lost ground to commitment to horizontal governance structures that did not work in practice.

The time spent producing press releases could have been better spent on other tactics such as story pitching. On those occasions when the practitioners did pitch stories, the construction was often skillful. For example, Mike offered the following story:

> So there was a space given to us by the AFT, the teacher's federation on
> Broadway, and we had our own mini Occupy warehouses with all the supplies, so

that generated a lot of interest in the journalists to go and see that. So we would schedule several trips a day walking journalists over there, camera crews, speaking to them and we would just be the people that would facilitate that.

Mike is somewhat modest in his description of the work involved in coordinating such a story. To begin, the collaboration with the union required stakeholder outreach, a time-consuming and diplomatic process of public relations. This concrete example of union support also had the added benefit of legitimizing both OWS and the unions in the press (for one of many examples, see Greenhouse, 2011). The warehouses also had the potential to provide excellent visuals to the media—of spaces packed with donations housed within a giant donation—another sign of legitimization and support. The location was convenient and spokespeople were readily available. Finally, the story as a whole easily fit the economic justice narrative with opportunities for a variety of angles. Stories such as these, however, take time to produce, and time was a scarce resource for the practitioners of public relations within OWS.

Old-School Channels.

The latter example illustrates the importance of proactive story pitching, however as Linda pointed out, the members of the Press WG could have written their own stories instead of or in addition to facilitating the stories created predominantly by journalists. Among many affordances, social media technology allows public relations practitioners to circumvent the middlemen, or journalists, and directly reach desired audiences. This is just one example of why the channel or medium is as significant as the message content in the public relations production process.

The study revealed a heavy reliance on traditional modes of communication— print, radio, and television—with the press positioned as mediators. The relative lack of

social media use on the part of the practitioners owes much to age (the older members

confessed they had little interest in learning it) and, perhaps most importantly, to a

division of labor within Occupy New York. As explained in Chapter Five, the Media

WG was most responsible for any coordinated social media activity during the early

phase of the movement. For example, Zane, a member of the Media WG and a

spokesperson for the movement, described a sub-group of the Media WG called Tweet

Boat. They met regularly to coordinate timing and discuss message content for a flurry

of tweets. Such activity, arguably an extension of public relations work, was not seen to

be a duplication of efforts to produce messages by the Press WG, likely because the

mediators/journalists were not as central to the social media channel. That being said,

Zane explained that the Media WG constructed multiple audiences for their

communications, including journalists. Regardless of the rationale for the division of

labor, the social media channel was largely a missed opportunity for the Press WG.

One practitioner within the Press WG, an amateur and one of the group's

founders, did include social media as one of two explicit components of his practice. The

first method he used to garner publicity for OWS has nothing to do with social media, but

it is useful to briefly consider given the compromising quality of the approach in the

moment of production. Paul explained, " One, I termed the sitcom strategy, which was a

fat, dopey-looking dude and a really hot girl, which worked--which is definitely like

riding on some patriarchal coattails, but…[trails off]." Paul's sitcom strategy

intentionally violates inclusive norms of social justice movements by relying on media

stereotypes, where the fat guy gets the girl, in order to receive favorable press coverage

for OWS. Paul is so in touch with this patriarchal double-standard (the fat girl seldom

gets the guy, much less the starring role) that he recognizes the trope as being popular on television (e.g. *King of Queens*), hence the name he gives to his strategy. He added, "Yeah, I knew it would be used. It creates a common touch."

Of course, any journalist could find any stereotype he or she might wish to exploit on display in the park, a frequent complaint from the study participants. The difference here is that Paul has more control—the dopey guy and the hot girl are likely to both be articulate speakers, carefully chosen by Paul. His relativist, some might say Machiavellian, approach joins a list of uncomfortable compromises made by the practitioners, such as serving as representatives/spokespeople of the movement without consensus. The strategy also confirms the frustrations concerning the oppression of women felt by other members. In other words, what good is it to have a gender sub-group, if other members are blatantly using gendered stereotypes, albeit to further movement goals? The added irony here is that Paul was questioning his gender identity at the time.

Paul's first strategy also highlights the co-constructed quality of the OWS discourse because the trope he employs comes from dominant meanings concerning gender in American society. His discomfort in exploiting the patriarchy is quieted by the effectiveness of the tactic in delivering a more inclusive message about economic justice. If Paul tires of being an unpaid, "freelance revolutionary", then he has a lucrative career waiting for him in reality television production.

Paul's second public relations strategy deals directly with social media. As previously explained, he engaged in a media "brown-out" wherein he would cut back on

efforts with mainstream journalists and spend more of his time using social media to

directly reach his less defined audience. He compared this tactic to what was being done

in 2014 with the #blacklivesmatter movement that gained momentum beginning with the

shooting death of a young, unarmed black man named Michael Brown in Ferguson,

Missouri. He made the comparison as follows:

> I mean it sort of followed the same pattern, you know, the brown-out and then social media explosion and then like very specifically targeted like press spectacles. And even stuff that we didn't have to do to get the attention of the press that they're doing in Ferguson, setting stuff on fire or whatnot. That's an effective tactic to get people to pay attention to you. So you know, just kind of making sure that their eyes stay on you and making sure that when they're on you that even if they're not repeating, like the media is not repeating your message, that you have like a social media network behind it that's repeating your message. That was our playbook and it seems to be the playbook worldwide that's being used now, so yeah, I think we did good. (Paul)

Although the Press WG accomplished important work on behalf of social justice, Paul's

comparison to #blacklivesmatter is flawed in at least one important way. The Press WG

was not coordinating much with the recognized social media arm, the Media WG of

Occupy New York. For example, there was no strategized movement hashtag produced

and used by both groups.

Furthermore, the "targeted press spectacles" were often unknown to members of

the Press WG and typically produced by the Direct Action WG. To the extent that

members overlapped between these groups, there was some degree of cross-knowledge

sharing, however this practice was far from systemic or organized. When journalists did

cover the press "spectacles" of Occupy New York, they usually found out about it,

according to Nathan, by asking contacts when and where a march, for example, was

going to take place. This was in part a practical decision on the part of many occupiers to

keep the element of surprise with police and in part a reflection of the disdain or apathy towards the mainstream press on the part of occupiers. In short, #blacklivesmatter looks more like a campaign, one heavily reliant on social media, right down to its name, whereas Occupy NY generated very little social media through its Press WG. To say that the brown-out was "our" playbook, much less the playbook used by subsequent social movements around the world is hyperbole to say the least.

That being said, Paul's use of social media, although unusual within the Press WG, demonstrates an important characteristic of the people's pr, contemporary public relations, and journalism in general. The old line between production and consumption no longer exists (if it ever did). "The people formerly known as the audience" (Rosen, 2006) are active participants filling roles that were once the exclusive terrain of professional journalists, public relations practitioners, and other connected, well-financed media makers. In a way reminiscent of Sony's introduction of the portable video camera in 1967 that arguably democratized video production by making the technology to make video affordable and transportable (Boyle, 1992), social media and the massive distribution platform of the Internet have enabled an unprecedented degree of participation in the production and dissemination of news.

Social Media and Flat Structures.

While new technologies certainly offer democratizing *potential*, in practice these possibilities are often foreclosed. For example, even the more coordinated users of social media in the Media WG could not escape the hierarchical characteristics built into the network. An informant told me that Justin Wedes, he of the *Colbert Report* interview, used his administrator rights to a main OWS Twitter account to block a member of the

Press WG from using the account because she was "too powerful." Coincidentally, the blocked member is a black woman, a fact that further hindered the Press WG's ability to realize diverse representation. Furthermore in an ironic twist, the informant told me that Wedes later began blocking members of his own working group for the same reason. Members of the Media WG even took Wedes to court over the matter, a fact confirmed by the *New York Times* (Moynihan, 2014). This incident is actually one of the *lesser* known examples of strife in the networks of hope when compared to the previously mentioned story of Justine Tunney. The important point to consider here is not so much the bad publicity of these incidents, but rather the friction between the desired flat governance structure and the reality on the ground. This conflict once again impeded public relations efforts and exposed factions within the movement.

It is strange, then, that Kavada (2015) in her study of social media usage in OWS, argues that "[t]he movement's rejection of spokespeople and leaders meant that individual activists shied away from speaking as representatives of Occupy. The movement's collective voice emerged instead on social media where it engaged in conversation with a variety of actors" (p. 884). I disagree with Kavada (2015) on both counts. One, many of the members of the Press WG felt ambivalent and uncomfortable about being *called* a spokesperson, but that certainly did not keep them from *acting* in the capacity of spokespeople, as discussed previously. Two, the power struggles concerning social media control taking place behind the scenes call into question the unity of that collective voice. Kavada (2015) acknowledged these struggles, but we differ on the significance of the disconnections between movement ideals and practices with regard to

social media's role. Where we do agree is the *potential* for social media to be an important platform for shaping a movement's collective identity.

That potential, I argue, would be realized more effectively with governance structures that are more in line with realities on the ground and with more coordinated efforts across stakeholders, by essentially treating social media as a coordinated subset of the public relations function. The first part of that recipe echoes the work of Gerbaudo (2012). "In fact, *despite their repeated claims to leaderlessness, contemporary social movements do have their own 'choreographers' and these choreographers are not identical with the 'dancers' or participants"* (Gerbaudo, 2012, p. 159, [italics Gerbaudo]). By recognizing these choreographers, I contend, movements could spend less time debating the quality of their prefigurative politics and more time promoting real social change.

Again, Gerbaudo (2012) was right when he said, "Internet communication and social media in particular are important only as the means towards facilitating [protest tactics in physical spaces]" (p. 160). A happy marriage of "tweets and streets" (Gerbaudo, 2012) would take advantage of so-called new media's potential to reach/mobilize diverse audiences directly and harness the power of traditional public relations practices including the kind enacted by the Press WG. I will return to some of these ideas about the role of technology in the section on consumption.

Changing the Order.

Before the analysis moves to consider the moment of consumption, the moment of representation will be discussed. Although this flow is different from the original

model, the positioning of representation after production is purposeful for two reasons. First, the specific case at hand demonstrates significant breakdowns in articulations of production and representation, warranting an alternative diagram from the original model. Such a change is not unprecedented--Curtin and Gaither (2005) changed the flow, too-- and Du Gay et al. (2013) emphasized the flexible and multi-directional flow of culture within the circuit. Second, the shift helps to answer a larger critique of the circuit's ability to explain new digital media.

As explained in the literature review, one critique of the circuit of culture holds that the model is neither dynamic, nor complex enough to account for new media technologies. I would counter, however, that this "fault" of the model lies in the application of the individual researcher(s). For example, if the researcher makes the mistake of being "productivist" (Agger, 1992), i.e. emphasizing the moment of production too much over the other moments in articulations, then it might appear that the model is not adequate to explain articulations of regulation and consumption. But this appearance is, in part, a result of the important act of breaking the moments apart in the initial analysis.

The circuit is not linear, but the initial analysis is. There can be no degree of line blurring in the circuit because it is a circle with intermingling moments (articulations) in circular flows based on context and contingent events. One would *expect* to find differences when comparing technologies built in different time periods and conditions. The Walkman is not Napster; Napster is not iTunes. Such critiques of the model mistake the artifact for the substance of the model; the model is a dynamic way of thinking about the conditions of culture that construct an artifact in a given context. By looking at

production, followed by representation, instead of consumption, I emphasize this point. In short, there is no hard line between production and consumption (nor any of the moments) so the critique that the model cannot handle the changing conditions of production and consumption does not hold. With the thought process explained thusly, the analysis considers the moment of representation.

Representation

An everyday understanding of representation is that it illustrates and stands in for something. Cultural Studies adds to this definition by recognizing the dynamic and political quality of representation. Importantly, representation is not a reflection of some capital 'T'ruth just waiting for the interpretative researcher to judge it in orientation to this Truth. Hall (2005) explained:

> Now, we're talking about representation, not as an after-the-event activity; it means something and then the presentation might change or distort the meaning. We're talking about the fact that it has no fixed meaning, no real meaning in the obvious sense, until it has been represented. And the representations – since they're likely to be very different as you move from one person to another, one group or another, one part of society or another, one historical moment and another – just as those forms of representation will change, so the meaning of the event will change. (p. 7)

Following Hall (1997), the subjectivities and historical specificities of an event, such as OWS, shape representations that are always already in flux. Therefore, the question of what it means to do public relations in the Press WG of OWS in New York City is a moving, open debate, as is the question of what the larger movement being promoted by the Press WG means.

This is not to say meaning is everything or its converse: nothing exists without meaning. Hall (2005) clarified this common slippage when he said, "Nothing meaningful

exists outside of discourse.' I think that statement is true. On the other hand, 'Nothing exists outside of discourse,' in my view, that statement is wrong" (p. 12). In this case, OWS existed and would have existed even if no one outside of the group mentioned it or the press had ignored the movement. In fact, it is the hidden or distant nature of marginalized discourses, and not their lack of reality, that calls into question their histories. In other words, struggles exist without representation, but corresponding meanings do not. The discourses, or per Hall (1997) "ways of […] constructing knowledge about a particular topic of practice" (p. 6), created through the representations of OWS connect to power in a variety of ways. "Who has the power, in what channels, to circulate which meanings to whom? Which is why the issue of power can never be bracketed out from the question of representation." (Hall, 2005, p. 14). The remainder of this section will interrogate power as expressed through representation.

In their examination of the Sony Walkman through the circuit of culture, Du Gay et al. (2013) posited the advertisements as representations of the co-constructed and often competing discourses in circulation at the time (e.g. the public/private dichotomy disturbed when a portable music player made personal music choices more public). The representations available in the context of the Press WG are distributed press releases, talking points delivered more or less on script, web site content, and editorials to name several. One editorial in particular, the one written by Press WG members and posted to *The Guardian's* web site on November 17, 2011, warrants particular attention as a site of struggle among competing discourses.

As mentioned in Chapter Five, the editorial for the *Guardian* coincidentally happened to be timed with the NYPD's forceful eviction of the encampment in Zuccotti

Park. From this editorial—a representation of the movement-- emerged a popular talking

point among the protestors and the press: "You can't evict an idea whose time has come"

(Smucker, et. al, 2011, p. 1). The consumption of this idea was mixed according to the

comment trail on the site with some, such as commenter Strummered, echoing the text,

saying, "This movement cannot be brushed under the carpet or suppressed by force - It's

here to stay as are the ideas. Some people (the 1% and their apologists) better get used to

that" (Smucker, et. al, 2011, p. 1). While others, such as AlbertaRabbit, disagreed,

commenting, "I would welcome an idea -- any idea. But I notice that there's no actual,

you know, IDEAS put forward in this article. They appear to be protesting for the sake of

protesting" (Smucker, et. al, 2011, p. 2). From the standpoint of the articulation between

production and representation, however, the representation harmonized with the primary

message of economic justice, even though the consumption generated some oppositional

and negotiated readings.

In contrast, the representation of the movement during the *Colbert Report*

episodes, arguably succeeded somewhat in hitting the economic justice message, but

failed to represent the sub-message of diversity wrestled with during the moment of

production. In the final chapter, a brief textual analysis of the *Colbert Report* episodes

will illustrate multiple articulations within the circuit. For now, it makes sense to

examine a potential meaning of this breakdown between production and representation—

for in it lies a key challenge of the people's pr—namely when breakdowns occur, they are

difficult to fix.

Communication Breakdown.

By every account except his own, Justin Wedes, a frequent spokesperson of the movement, was not supposed to be on the *Colbert Report*. The members of the Press WG had wanted at least one woman of color on the high-profile show to demonstrate the diversity of the movement. Wedes says that he was not notified of the group's feelings until the morning of the show, when he had no intention of backing out. He had initially been contacted by one of the show's producers after being spotted speaking to a group in Zuccotti Park. Wedes did the interview with Ketchup, and two white people represented the movement in front of potentially millions of viewers. According to Press WG members, this angered members of the People of Color WG. They longed to see themselves represented in the flood of media surrounding OWS, but instead they saw little color—only white faces—or a reification of the status quo in their supposedly different social movement.

The incident brings the internal struggles around race to the foreground and demonstrates what Hall (1997) considered a significant concept within representation, namely, "the acceptance of a degree of *cultural relativism* between one culture and another, a certain lack of equivalence, and hence the need for *translation* as we move from the mind-set or conceptual universe of one culture or another" (p. 61). On the *Colbert Report*, as just one of many examples, people of color were literally lost in translation, rendered invisible by their absence despite a stated commitment in the moment of production by the members of the Press WG to advance diversity within the movement. Of course, one could not attribute the breakdown as an effect of production because each moment of the circuit is constantly in flux and in articulation with the

others. In other words, diversity in representation was not the sole provenance of the Press WG or even the larger movement.

Diversity is a discursive formation articulated through multiple moments of the circuit of culture, including for example, journalistic discourses about diversity. The white-washed quality of much mainstream journalism is largely taken for granted by mostly white journalists and by white audiences. This assertion, while impossible to prove, certainly speaks to the power of the status quo and links to the argument about power in this case study. Speaking hypothetically, even if the group had followed a protocol and reached consensus to fix the interview with a person of color, it would not have necessarily resulted in a diverse representation. This is true because the final say in this co-constructed artifact of discourse rests with the producer of the *Colbert Report*. In other words, regardless of whether or not the producer would have allowed a person of color to join the interview (he or she probably would have), the structural control/power is concentrated in most of these press interactions with the media and not the activist practitioners. With that said, the analysis turns to examine the moment of consumption.

Consumption

Some of the key questions to consider when analyzing the moment of consumption within public relations are: How do audiences respond to the idea of a given campaign? Which audiences? What, if any, new meanings are generated through consumption? This section will address these sub-questions of the larger research questions.

The practitioners of the Press WG encoded at least two meanings in their campaign. The first, as discussed in the production section, is the idea is that OWS is

about economic justice. The second is that there is an alternative way from the status quo to go about getting economic justice, interchangeably called participatory democracy, prefigurative politics, and direct democracy. All of these terms have different nuances and histories, but for the purposes of the public relations efforts, the main idea was to offer OWS/direct action as an alternative to the status quo of bi-partisan politics and corporate hegemony.

This idea was encoded in the variety of ways that attempted to skirt the critique that OWS did not have a clear purpose. By not reducing the movement to a single demand, a variety of audiences could decode their own meanings to suit their desires— this was part of the success, however brief-lived, of OWS. The anarchist and the liberal reformer, although radically different, could inhabit the same movement built around the idea that the status quo is corrupt; direct action, and not, for example, forming another political party, is what is required. In practice, of course, the execution of this idea was fractious and the prefigurative utopia hoped for in Zuccotti Park, quickly devolved into a nightmarish scene of disharmony, crime, and violence (Writers for the 99%, 2013). Aside from the dynamic and troubling realities on the ground, the audiences of Occupy decoded the movement in polysemic fashion.

Despite the innumerable meanings generated through consumption, it is useful to tease out a few. Again, engaging with public opinion is arguably the reason for conducting public relations in a social movement committed to non-violence. Although an imperfect measure, public opinion polls offer a sense of the attitudes of the general public. Polls conducted by Pew and Gallup during the same week of October 2011 asked several questions pertaining to OWS. Gallup found that more than half of Americans

were paying attention to the topic, while both polls found that one in five Americans were following the OWS story very closely (Jones, 2011). The Gallup poll added context, writing, "The averages for more than 200 news events Gallup has tracked since the 1990s are 61% closely and 22% very closely" (Jones, 2011, p. 1). The Gallup poll (Jones, 2011) speculates that this "below average level of attention" (p. 1) might partially explain what it described as the public's lack of knowledge about OWS and its goals. This assertion seems overstated given the less than five percent gap over time on the criterion of "very closely." Furthermore, it does not consider alternative explanations including the media's own role in the production, representation, and consumption of narratives that add to the confusion around the goals of the movement, not to mention the movement's own internal, potentially confusing construction.

Looking more closely at polls from the Pew Research Center, one begins to grasp the quixotic quality of the attention paid to OWS. "Currently, 27% of those 50 and older say they followed news about the Occupy Wall Street protests very closely last week. That's up from 18% one week earlier. Interest among those younger than 50 is essentially unchanged (17% this week, 16% the week before)" (Pew Research Center, 2011, Oct. 19). Although OWS was predominantly made up of young people, the poll showed the fast rising nature of interest on the part of older Americans at the peak of the movement. Importantly, Pew (2011, Oct. 24) also established a relationship between interest and support, writing:

> Those following news about the Occupy Wall Street protests closely also tend to be more supportive than those following less closely. Six-in-ten (60%) among those who followed news about the protests very closely last week say they support the movement; 31% say they oppose it. Support drops to 33% among

those who say they have not followed this news too closely – and just 12% among those who say they have followed this news not at all closely. (p. 1)

If following the news about OWS generates more support for OWS, then creating and/or facilitating more news about OWS would be beneficial to the movement. The members of the Press WG believed this trend and, furthermore, hoped that messages delivered to and conveyed by the press about economic justice would be just as important as the volume of coverage and attention in terms of gaining support from the general public.

The opinion polls offer broad brushstrokes about the consumption of the movement by the general public, but what of the consumption or decoding of the messages of OWS by the press? In a separate study employing textual analysis of front page and opinion based articles concerning OWS in *The New York Times* (NYT), I identified three phases of coverage from September through November 2011: 1. dismissal through a generational frame similar to the one found by Gitlin (2003) in 1965, 2. legitimacy largely due to the attention of official sources outside of OWS, 3. quasi-legitimacy as the NYT sided with Mayor Bloomberg, yet continued to acknowledge the salience of income inequality (Reyes, 2013). All three phases, it was argued, reflected a degree of incommensurability between the NYT and OWS. The NYT conflated the movement's message with its partisan political efficacy, reflecting the struggle to reconcile institutional routines with the non-hierarchical, deliberative direct democracy hoped for by OWS (Reyes, 2013).

This was but one interpretation of the consumption of the main message of the Press WG from specific sections of a single outlet. The NYT was selected for the purposes of illustration because the newspaper frequently quoted members of the Press

WG and is considered the national paper of record. Although it is not meant to be representative of all of the meanings decoded by the press, this interpretation demonstrates the power of consumption in the circuit.

The members of the Press WG were hopeful that influential outlets such as the NYT would pick up the message of economic justice. As it stands, the path of the coverage outlined above, begins as an oppositional reading of the movement, one not in line with the dominant or intended meaning of economic justice. In the span of a few weeks, the coverage in the example shifts from oppositional to negotiated. This could be read as a public relations victory for OWS, however this new negotiated meaning of OWS likely has less to do with acts of production on the part of OWS and the Press WG and more to do with journalistic routines. At first glance, such an argument questions the effectiveness of public relations work in this context. In other words, if the process of legitimization works in a similar way to a social movement that happened more than four decades ago, then why bother spending precious time trying to influence the processes of news production and consumption? The answer has much to do with the co-construction of news.

The press do not simply consume stories; they produce them, too. As previously stated, in relation to public relations work, the process of news making is one of co-construction. It is important to recognize media relations as a form of what Schudson (2003) calls "parajournalism." Although most public relations practitioners are not also journalists, many have prior journalism experience, as did I, and they have historically had significant influence on news stories. Writing on the relationship between journalists and publicists in the 1920s, Schudson (2003) found, "Figures circulated among

journalists that 50 or 60 percent of stories, even in the venerable *New York Times*, were inspired by press agents" (p. 83). Simply put, the fields of public relations and journalism have long been in collaboration. Therefore, despite the heavy and traditional reliance upon routines in institutional journalism, public relations efforts are still influential and are in fact part of the routine. That being said, given that the Press WG did not, by their own admission, pitch many story ideas, one wonders how then, if at all, these practitioners influenced the stories of OWS?

This is where the important nuances of negotiated meanings of consumption come into play. OWS remained partially legitimate in the press, taking the NYT as one example, because the news was considering the issue of income inequality with more weight. Importantly, income inequality is not the same as economic justice, as previously discussed. However, from the standpoint of a negotiated reading, a focus on income inequality is a far more successful outcome from the point of view of the practitioners than is the original oppositional, dismissive view taken by the NYT and other outlets. Income inequality might be a limited spin on economic justice, but it is a vast improvement over articles about drum circles and hacky-sack players. Shelly, who had been closely monitoring the press coverage, observed,

> I felt like the tone of the press coverage, to me, was jumping on the – 'We are the 99 percent'- talking points. There's unemployment; there's inequality, and now look at what's happening, not just in New York, but all over the country. I felt like, 'Wow. It's everywhere.' This is a big deal. This is happening. They were covering stuff; they covered some random march that happened one day just because it was Occupy.

In other words, the talking points might have been breaking through the clutter and the initial oppositional readings. The Press WG contributed to the co-constructed narratives

of OWS in the press and the press, in turn, influenced the Press WG. The analysis will return to this co-construction and to relationships between the practitioners and journalists covering OWS in the section that considers the moment of identity in the circuit of culture.

Prior to this turn, it is useful to examine the articulation of two moments—production and consumption—through the role of social media in the polysemic meanings of OWS. In hierarchical models of production and consumption, the media would produce a story and the public would decode that narrative; it was a top-down affair with a distribution chain largely controlled by the media.

Skylar shared one story that illustrates the power of social media, as well as a collision and resistance to the old, top-down-only mass communication model. She explained that an OWS activist was speaking with a reporter from Fox News. "[T]hat interview never gets aired because she's cogent and reasonable," Skylar opined. "But a cell phone video of it is being shared all over the place as a morale booster […. .]" The cell phone video and the power to distribute that video on multiple platforms through the Internet exemplifies the power of digital technology and their attendant networks to disrupt the status quo.

OWS and other contemporary movements carry such digitally-inflected articulations of production and consumption in their DNA. Wolfson (2014) coined the term "Cyber Left" to describe the technologically infused logic of contemporary social movements, such as OWS, that use horizontal networks to flatten out struggles of resistance. He grounds this new logic in the Zapatista movement, a mostly Mayan

peasant community who joined together to resist the North American Free Trade

Agreement that posed a threat to their way of life beginning in 1994. Although the

Internet was still in an early phase of growth, characterized by bulletin boards and slow

connections, the Zapatistas recognized the potential for communication, using old (radio

stations) and new channels (Internet), to unite people all over the globe in what was

increasingly being understood as a threat not just to one community, but to everyone

touched by an interconnected web of capitalism where profit reigned supreme (Wolfson,

2014).

OWS, as part of the Cyber Left, bears the legacy of the Zapatistas and the ensuing

Global Social Justice Movement. That said, the majority of the Press WG within OWS

failed to adequately utilize the independent media tools readily available to them. This

provides an interesting contrast to the Indymedia Centers (IMC) emerging out of the

WTO protests in Seattle in 1999. The IMC, like OWS, was also committed to direct

democracy through a horizontal, consensus-based decision-making process, however

unlike OWS, it was a media activism movement and it "translated the practices of direct

democracy to the global scale" (Wolfson, 2014, p. 138) through the use of digital

technologies. OWS, of course, did use these same technologies and many more new to

the 21st century, however they did not achieve the same relative longevity. Additionally,

as demonstrated by the Press WG, social media and other digital tools were underutilized.

The Press WG offers another contrast to IMC, at least at the New York City

epicenter; the Press WG offered a hopeful connection to the so-called old media. This

arrangement might have provided for the best of both worlds, and in some cases, as with

Skylar's example of the Fox News interview distributed not by the news juggernaut, but rather YouTube, it did. However, according to Skylar, this moment was serendipitous.

Imagine the potential for meta-commentary on the mainstream media opened by a systemic program of social media infused public relations. Such a program could lead to more negotiated, nuanced meanings—a win for public relations, journalism, and the public. It might put into practice what Hall (1997) might have described as "an attempt to keep representation open […], a way of constantly wanting new kinds of knowledges to be produced in the world, new kinds of subjectivities to be explored, and new dimensions of meaning which have not been foreclosed by the systems of power which are in operation" (p. 22). As it was, the 'systems of power' in operation within and around the OWS Press WG were constructed in a way that closed some kinds of representation and consumption (diversity, more coordinated, strategic storytelling through social media) and opened others (class, participatory democracy).

Identity

In this moment of the circuit of culture, isolated only for the purposes of analysis, the study will move to address the professional and amateur make up of the members of the Press WG, as well as some of the ways the informants positioned themselves in relation to journalists. The interpretations presented here speak directly to the second research question: How did practices of public relations influence power dynamics among various stakeholders? Identities are contingent meanings formed through articulations of production and consumption that shape links to a multitude of subject positions (Woodward, 1997). Just as with representation (and the other moments), identity formation is not an after event phenomenon, but rather intrinsic to the meaning

itself. Questions of identity and power are central to the work. Turning specifically to

public relations scholarship, Curtin and Gaither (2005) wrote, "Identities are multiple,

fluid, and both assumed and imposed" (p. 183). The power to influence the internal and

external struggles of the movement in part through practices of public relations turned on

the dual agency and oppression of identity.

Roughly half of the informants interviewed for this study had some prior

professional experience in public relations and/or journalism. Professionals and amateurs

alike came together in the Press WG due to a shared interest in media, including

mainstream sources of media. At first glance, the dichotomy between professionals and

amateurs was straight-forward. The professionals formalized certain tactics (e.g. press

releases, media list management, talking points) and shared epistemologies of the media

system as it related to the movement. For example (first presented in Chapter Five), Sam,

a former professional practitioner, offered this account:

> So okay, this thing is happening tomorrow and who can go and talk to the press?
> Who do you know who's going to be taking part in that? We should come up
> with talking points, that kind of stuff. And then talking about like things that
> were going on in the park that we were anticipating would get press, positive or
> negative and then talking about specific journalists-- things they had said to kind
> of get a sense of what people were thinking. (Sam)

Here Sam describes a typical managerial and professional approach to doing public

relations work, although he does not exactly use textbook terms. His sketch more or less

follows managerial models that emphasize two-way symmetrical communication

(Grunig, 1984) wherein public relations practice is co-constructed, in this case by the

activists and the journalists covering OWS. What this model does not consider

adequately, however, are the power dynamics at play. The playing field in public

relations practice is seldom, if ever level, and this applies to the people's pr as well.

Ambivalence and Power.

The power dynamics between professional and amateur identities in OWS were

often in-line with a view that recognizes outside, institutional knowledge as a powerful,

sometimes corrupting characteristic. For example, Rachel said, "It's pretty clear to me

that the press team was really quite professional actually […], and this started to happen a

little too much." Rachel felt that there was a creeping imbalance of power that did not

harmonize with her political identity as an anarchist, despite her overlapping identity as a

former communications professional. That being said, she also had respect and pride for

the professionalism displayed within the group, as the following quotation illustrates:

> I don't want to give one person credit, but there were certain individuals who
> made a huge difference. Without them I don't know if we would have been as
> effective. But it's especially funny when people… that dismissiveness, as applied
> to the PR team, people don't know the composition of the PR team. They don't
> understand the skill sets that were represented […]; it's decades of experience.
> It's not possible to be a total mess, you know. And I really wish that some of the
> other working groups had like some seasoned old-timers. (Rachel)

Rachel was responding to the notion that the Press WG was ineffective, a view put forth

explicitly by members of other working groups as well as implicitly by some journalists

who characterized the message of OWS as inchoate—an indirect challenge to the public

relations work of the group. She invokes the power of professionalization—of skills and

experiences—that was integral to her perception of success and the superiority to many

other working groups. On the other hand, as an anarchist she was uncomfortable with the

uneven expression of power by the Press WG. Her ambivalence belies the complex

quality of power within the group.

This is an opportune juncture to remind the reader that power within the circuit of culture was not flowing only in one moment, or indeed only being exercised by the Press WG, the activists of the larger movement in New York, and the journalists. Articulations were also being co-constructed by other occupations throughout the country and the world, some with their own press working groups, as well as by systemic forces such as economic systems and globalization. At present, pausing on moments of identity formation within the case study illustrates the dynamic and contingent flow of power in a particular context.

Knowledge Sharing.

While the reach of professional influence may have been worrisome to Rachel and other informants, by most accounts, the professionals wanted to help the amateurs. Pam, the former co-owner of a global public relations agency, arrived with just such an intention. "I had thought to myself they're going to be overrun with press now [after the arrests on Brooklyn Bridge], shared Pam, "and they're going to need bodies like me, because I know what the media want. They want stories. So I'm like I can probably help."

Pam's professional intervention illustrates one way in which the practitioners—professional and amateur alike—served as cultural intermediaries. Bourdieu (1984) conceptualized the cultural intermediary as media workers engaged in what is now called the persuasion industries (public relations, advertising, branding, etc.). These intermediaries act as interpreters of symbols "who always sell themselves as models and as guarantors of the value of their products, who sell so well because they believe in what they sell (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 365). Through this process of selling, Bourdieu (1984)

examined the roles of such intermediaries in class divisions expressed through culture—
to help explain, for example, why it is that two people from different classes of society
could have similar cultural tastes gained in part through education and other kinds of
cultural mediation, but still be opposite from one another in terms of dress or food
customs, for example.

This work of translation was active in a variety of situations, including the passing
of knowledge internally from professional to amateurs. For instance, Sam mentioned
frequent errors when other working groups would first write press releases—they were
filled with jargon exclusive to activist communities. Sam counseled amateurs in other
working groups: "[S]o like national media is going to look at this, so we need to convey
the information you want to convey in a way that they'll be able to understand it and
receive it."

At times the knowledge sharing between professionals and amateurs was
discordant. Sam described having "drawn out conversations and sort of debates and
arguments with people and then halfway through them realize this is doing nobody any
fucking good. We still need to set up this press release at the end of this conversation
[…] ." He added that "the learning curve was steep." Other professionals in the group
echoed Sam's frustration. They perceived an opportunity cost to teaching others and in
honoring the consensus-based decision-making model of OWS.

Sometimes the professionals were not frustrated with the amateurs in the slightest.
In fact, in one example between Pam and Paul, the professional admired and learned from
the amateur. Paul, of the sitcom and brown-out strategy, was a "natural" public relations

practitioner according to Pam. "I couldn't teach him anything; he taught me," she explained. That being said, Pam did connect Paul and another group member to a powerful head of a global public relations agency, in order to receive training in how to speak with journalists. Her respect for Paul, however, demonstrates the power of certain amateurs within the group and also challenges the reductive nature of the categories as if to say, "At what point does one transition from amateur to professional?" Clearly, in this example, Paul's lack of previous professional experience did not hinder his practice of public relations, nor his power and status within the group.

When Belief Becomes a Problem.

In Chapter 5, the incident that unfolded over email between a Fox News reporter and a group member further complicated the directional flow of power in a top down manner from professional to amateur. To recap, Victor, the former professional, responded to reasonable questions from the Fox reporter with disdain and sarcasm. Thinking this a model way to engage with conservative media, Victor then shared his Q&A with the Press WG email list. When Nathan, a member of the group with decades less experience than Victor, responded to his media relations approach with dismay, Victor unleashed his professional credentials in a display of power meant to intimidate.

This display backfired, further weakening his position. Victor had been unprofessional first with the Fox News reporter because of his ideological opposition to the network; the reporter did nothing to provoke him. Victor failed as a cultural intermediary in this instance because his bias here prevented the possibility of a bridge between ideologies. The journalist, on the other hand, was successful in trying to engage with a source who was likely to be ideologically opposed to the slant of his outlet.

Victor then demonstrated a further lack of professionalism when he bullied his far-less experienced, yet knowledgeable peer. Nathan, the more amateur of the pair, demonstrated a media savvy that need not be gained through institutional experience. Nathan understood the wisdom of setting aside any ideological disputes with conservative media outlets such as Fox News, recognizing the power of Fox News to represent the movement and the opportunity, however unlikely, to persuade through a professional interaction.

These transgressions or departures from the assumption that professionalism is more powerful than amateurism highlight the fluid and contingent quality of power within the people's pr. They demonstrate that in some situations the inverse relationship was true, that amateurs within the Press WG had more power than the professionals, thereby complicating what began as a simple dichotomy.

Identity Crises.

The informants of the Press WG identified differently than the cultural intermediaries of institutional public relations. As previously stated, members such as Rachel felt they were not doing public relations at all, taking mild offense at the association or identity imposed upon her by the research study as explained in the description in the consent form. While most did identify their work as a kind of public relations, they recognized significant differences from institutional models (e.g. unpaid, horizontal organizational structure, amateurs and professionals co-mingling). The absence of explicit hierarchies (there were leaders despite claims to the contrary) made it difficult to rely on certain people and the ejection of someone from the group could be described as an HR nightmare from an institutional perspective.

While the members of the Press WG struggled internally with their commitment to consensus-based-decision making in terms of accountability and getting work done, there was another threat to their populist identity as practitioners of the People's PR; this one came from outside of the movement. As mentioned in Chapter Five, public relations executives from the firm Workhouse PR in New York City took it upon themselves to write and distribute press releases on behalf of OWS, among other activities. This sort of co-optation from the outside with well-meaning (one would assume) supporters was strictly policed in the articulation between identity and regulation when it came to financial contributions to the movement. For example, activists refused money from the well-known liberal founders of Ben & Jerry's because of the perception that there were strings attached (Hines, 2012). Even the appearance of buying influence was a severe violation of the movement's cultural norms concerning the desire to get money out of politics.

This same regulation however, did not prevent Workhouse PR from donating support in the form of free labor despite similar concerns about the perception that OWS was somehow corrupted by a capitalist public relations enterprise. Those informants who knew about the incident were less than pleased, and one member even claims to have told the executive that he could participate with everyone else, but in no uncertain terms was his firm to takeover any work. Another informant was unaware of the Workhorse intervention until the researcher asked him about it. Paul answered, "They [Workhouse PR] did fucking nothing ever." When he was furthered informed about the prestigious industry award they had received for their work on OWS, the self-described professional revolutionary added, "So I'll have to make sure to steal that from him at some point." The

various threats to identity, both internal and external, illustrate the struggle for power in terms of public relations practice.

Occupiers and Journalists: Friends and Foes.

Paying closer attention to the identities adopted by the practitioners in relation to journalists, the study found that all but two of the 16 informants wanted to be friendly with the press. The two exceptions explicitly viewed the press as their "enemy." This friend-or-foe conception matches well with approaches within institutional public relations practices, although it plays out differently. For example, the "foe approach" often entails explicit kinds of gate keeping, such as black lists, containing names of journalists who are banned from access to spokespeople within a given company. The journalists are usually placed on such lists for a perceived injustice (e.g. they published something inflammatory to the company).

In contrast, the two practitioners who adopted the antagonistic identities lacked the power to do much gate keeping of this kind. Access to interview subjects and information was not as controlled as in institutional public relations. In fact, during the encampment phase, a journalist sometimes had thousands of subjects to choose from, all milling about Zuccotti Park or on the move in a march through the Manhattan. Those journalists who wanted help and/or information included the press table as a part of their sourcing strategies. With control of "the enemy" thus hampered, Paul and Sam, expressed their counter-measures differently—in fact, Sam's resistance was mostly philosophical and grounded in the traditionally oppositional stances that corporate and government institutions take toward protestors.

Sam thought the press and OWS were *supposed* to be at odds. He compared the state of relations between the protestors and the press in OWS to his former occupation as a music publicist. Sam opined, "it's not like *Spin Magazine* is going to write a 2,000 word feature about how your band sucks and they're not going to interview anybody, whereas, that would happen in the *New York Post* [covering OWS]." For Sam, certain outlets were out to paint OWS in a negative light without careful input from the subject.

Meanwhile, Paul attempted to use his two strategies—the sitcom and the brown-out—to use the press against itself, playing upon American cultural stereotypes and the fears of irrelevance in the face of social media attributed to so-called traditional journalists. That being said, both Paul and Sam were helpful to the press as supported by numerous examples of interactions, and they were always truthful by their accounts. Paul was more frustrated than Sam, however, with the performance of the mainstream news media when covering the movement. Paul, an anarchist, was critical of even the most liberal of news pundits, such as Keith Olbermann, who Paul said, "was pulling some really shady shit and like putting out lists of demands for us and stuff like that, so yeah, I was always very wary of the media in dealing with us." It would seem for Paul that one of the most destructive weapons in the enemy's arsenal was co-optation, speaking for the group from the outside of the movement regardless of sympathies.

Paul echoed Sam's thoughts about the lack of sourcing on the part of some outlets, although he viewed the issue as more systemic as the following quote illustrates:

> The press were really bad at their jobs, […] like unbelievably bad at their jobs. Almost no one does any research. A lot of people who were writing articles about us never came and met with us […] They would base it off of someone else's

article and they would call me for a comment and that would be the extent of their [work]. (Paul)

Even Mike, who took a friendly approach to the press, agreed with Paul to a certain extent. According to Mike, "[W]e were asked the same questions over and over by everyone." He added that the press tended to write "in waves about certain issues--you know well, this week is where-do-you-take-a-shit-week. [T]hey're just sort of following along like lemmings." Mike noticed the patterns of OWS coverage and tried to bring the cyclical tide of the press back to the message of OWS: economic justice. His understanding of the way the U.S. media system works increased the power of the people's pr.

Keep Your Friends Close…

Rather than positioning the press as the enemy, most of the practitioners interviewed had friendly relationships with most of the 'regulars' in the press. Mike explains, "I got to know a few of the guys from ABC local and one of them was like giving me advice, you guys should do this instead of that. Yeah, we would develop relationships with certain journalists." As the quote illustrates, the communication and service was often two-way, as journalists would share their inside knowledge of the media system with (sometimes) less informed practitioners. In return, the practitioners would do more than give and/or fix interviews for the journalists, they would grant them access to certain types of information that *could be* controlled such as the timing and direction of marches. Eric explains, "The Press Working Group wasn't a gatekeeper to the press. Laura Creighton from *Newsday* [for example] would say, 'where are you?' We'd be in the middle of a protest and Laura Creighton would text me."

The historical awareness on the part of some members helped to explain why they wanted to engage in media relations, specifically, when much of the movement did not. Mike, the historian, naturally knew that unions and movements past employed press people, but the question of press engagement in OWS was **"**more of like a quandary among the kind of younger, counter-cultural types who don't have that sort of big picture sense of what like left politics has been historically […] ." Armed with a big picture, Mike and the others tried to persuade journalists that OWS was not some anomaly, but rather part of a continuity on the Left that saw protest as an engine of social change. Their success with the press on this meta-point was limited perhaps by the very currency of the news as being of the present.

Indeed, their relationships with the press hold echoes of the kind of public relations work in social movements explored in Chapter Two, especially the SNCC in the Civil Rights Movement, but with notable differences to be addressed here. First, both SNCC and OWS Press WG utilized press releases as a primary tactic of media relations. However, OWS Press WG achieved comparatively less success with its press releases when compared with other tactics such as the use of a press table in Zuccotti Park. This difference in outcomes could be related to any number of variables including a more fragmented media environment in 2011 (making it more difficult to influence agendas with releases) and the spectacle of the happening at the park, the locus of all the OWS encampment activity throughout the United States combined with the city's position as a media capital of the world. In terms of achieving journalistic color, a press release would have been a poor substitute for the menagerie at the park.

In yet another contrast to the OWS Press WG, SNCC PR used press releases to advocate for "the inclusion of civil rights goals in the platforms of the Democratic and Republican parties" (Murphree, 2006, p. 4), a reformist position incongruent with the rejection of the status quo advocated by OWS. Interestingly however, both SNCC and OWS relied heavily upon direct action tactics to advance their differing methods for social justice suggesting that public relations tactics are highly contingent and not necessarily linked to particular ideologies. In other words, following Hall (1997), a press release issued by a social justice organization is not naturally tied to reformist policy change or revolution. This point was somewhat lost by the mainstream media's resistance to taking OWS seriously in the beginning perhaps due to a historically-driven, common-sense idea that social movements and demands (especially policy changes) are inextricably linked.

In terms of building relationships with journalists, the Press WG of OWS was more hopeful and optimistic than was SNCC PR about interacting with media outlets that would likely cast them in an unfavorable light (e.g. Fox News for OWS). However, when it came to third-party partnerships, the Press WG often failed to build bridges between classes, races, and genders. While SNCC PR was building unlikely coalitions between whites and blacks, middle and working classes, the OWS Press WG struggled with such unions -- with the most vulnerable portion of the 99%-- despite liaising with a People of Color working group.

From Murphree (2006), it is clear that the differences between SNCC PR and OWS PR, as managed by the Press WG, far outnumber any similarities. SNCC PR was centralized; OWS PR was decentralized. SNCC PR rejected outlets with oppositional

ideologies; OWS PR embraced such challenges by most accounts. SNCC PR deployed powerful leaders, such as the late Julian Bond, to further its agenda; OWS PR had reluctant spokespeople at best. Finally, SNCC contributed to significant policy gains, whereas OWS PR had no such aims.

Despite a willingness on the part of Press WG members to work with the press of all ideological stripes, there was also an abundance of ambivalence about the press within the group. Multiple practitioners expressed frustration with right-leaning outlets, in particular Fox News, but this dissatisfaction with the media coverage did not fall exclusively along ideological lines. For example, Eric relayed a story of an interview he did with two women journalists from CNN. In a moment of surprise vulnerability, Eric began to weep on camera. "And I saw that they were very emotional, too," Eric said, "and I apologized and they said, 'oh no, that was really wonderful.'" He felt a moment of connection with the reporters, but he had mixed feelings about crying on television. He said, "I thought maybe this will be included and I was worried in a way, but I was also glad. Of course, it wasn't [included]." One could speculate any number of reasons as to why Eric's emotional moment hit the cutting room floor, but the story illustrates another angle of the often ambivalent attitudes the practitioners had about the press.

Generally speaking, when asked to share stories about interactions with the press, the informants had an easier time remembering the rough ones. Perhaps this is simply human nature, yet in spite of all the disappointments and ambivalent encounters, the practitioners displayed a resilience and willingness to keep engaging with the journalists. Eric summed up the sentiment of many when he said,

> If I just shut them down and don't engage with them [journalists] at some level and yell at them or treat them with disdain, then there's no chance for that possible change in them or change in what message they're giving. [...] Again, it's the system that has placed them in a position where they can't say what they feel in their hearts and so I can't treat them poorly because of their choices. They have jobs. They have to pay their bills.

Eric grounded his understanding and relationships with the press in the larger culture. In contrast to Paul, who wanted to use the system against the press is order to make strategic gains for the movement, Eric and most of the others felt sympathetic about the journalists positions as part of the 99 percent on the one hand, but working for the 1 percent on the other. This was a sticky wicket for a political movement bent on challenging the status quo.

Political Identities.

> One has to dispense with the constituent subject, to get rid of the subject itself, that's to say, to arrive at an analysis which can account for the constitution of the subject within a historical framework (Foucault, 1980, p. 115).

As with the other moments of the circuit, identity is a constructive process in articulation. The aspects of identity discussed thus far were all in relation to discursive formations of public relations and journalism in a particular context. Foucault grounds context and the development of the subject within history. Any discussion of the constitutive role of political identities within the Press WG of OWS should also look to history for explanations.

This history begins at least as far back as the first half of the 20th century because there were many "Wobblies" or members of the International Workers of the World (IWW) among the protestors of OWS (Bray, 2013). From its founding in 1905, the IWW

has agitated for a social anarchist revolution summarized as follows: "Between these two classes [workers and capitalists] a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organize as a class, take possession of the means of production, abolish the wage system, and live in harmony with the Earth." (iww.org, 2015). These Wobblies made a sometimes uneasy peace with the other political identities teeming within OWS (Bray, 2013).

(Re)mixing Movements.

The Wobblies encountered children of the Feminist and Civil Rights movements, as well as members of more contemporary movements such as the Global Social Justice movement. Pam, the experienced public relations maven of the Press WG, cut her teeth learning from one of the leaders of the Civil Rights Movement and eventually used her experience to do public relations work on behalf of Nelson Mandela when the ANC was still considered a terrorist organization by the U.S. Although Pam melded her '60s style of speaking truth to power with the political realties of 1980s Apartheid, her shifting political identity was not the normative one of the group, or the movement for that matter. That being said, direct democracy of the kind practiced by OWS finds its roots in the direct democracy of the New Left with organizations such as the Students for Democratic Society Movement. Perhaps Pam recognized this connection because her identification changed from liberal to anarchist by the end of the encampment moment.

The mixture of political identities in the Press WG often made it challenging to accomplish work. Paul aptly summed up the tension between his anarchist identity and the left-leaning Democrats of the group when he said, "I want a revolution and these people want healthcare, you know?" Even the anarchists were not in agreement; Sam

observed a "dissonance around the horizontal stuff with Occupy." He described "childish" interpretations: "okay we're going to open up this bag of M&Ms and everyone gets the same amount of M&Ms or nobody gets any fucking M&Ms and it would reach moments of like where we get kind of farcical." On the whole however, Sam thought the majority of people in the Press WG "worked really well." In short, identity clearly played an important role in the construction of their public relations efforts.

The bulk of the political identities of the Press WG hovered somewhere between a New Social Movement identity and what Wolfson (2014) terms the *Cyber Left*. New Social Movement (NSM) theory, as explained by Touraine (1988), Melucci (1996), and others gained recognition starting in the late 1980s, and made important distinctions to older, more orthodox Marxist interpretations of social movements squarely based on the labor/capital binary (Edelman, 2001). "Participation in NSMs is itself a goal, apart from any instrumental objectives, because everyday movement practices embody in embryonic form the changes the movements seek" (Edelman, 2001). The encampment moment of OWS illustrates this practice side, also called prefigurative politics.

For example, OWS, attempted to practice a consensus based form of governance through both structural features such as the General Assembly and through informal, everyday (although no less significant) routines such as talking, eating, and walking in the park. It was a city-within-a-city—one sometimes far from the prefigurative ideals they had hoped to realize, but nevertheless a bold experiment in lower-Manhattan and in cities across the nation and the world. The NSM quality of OWS also carried forward the identity-based politics of old. In fact, one of the most active members of the Press WG

was a veteran communications professional from Act Up!, the non-violent, direct action

organization at the forefront of AIDS awareness that began in the late '80s.

The Cyber Left and The People's PR.

The NSM identifications within the movement were tempered and complemented

by what Wolfson (2014) described as a "sea change in the logic of activism" since the

early 1900s. Traces of the Cyber Left, as Wolfson (2014) calls the new logic, were

readily apparent within OWS and identifiable within many practitioners of the Press WG.

Building upon the strategies of the Zapatista and Global Social Justice Movements, the

new logic of the Cyber Left does not capture the "multiple irreducible fronts of struggle"

that resist neoliberal capitalism, but rather networks them through "strategy, structure,

and governance" to form a "discernable pattern of action" towards a "new world order

without hierarchy or entrenched forms of power" (Wolfson, 2014, p. 18-19). Within the

OWS Press WG, the tendencies to forward what looked like the identity politics of NSM

were sometimes squashed (e.g. "Go Occupy the Gender"), however those identities, those

"multiple irreducible fronts of struggle" were fighting together in the pattern Wolfson

(2014) describes.

This does not contradict the earlier assertion that the OWS Press WG took some

of the cyber out of the Cyber Left identity of the movement in that they had limited use of

social media. Rather, that "digital rebellion" (Wolfson, 2014) was taken up elsewhere in

the movement, and importantly did not define OWS, or any Cyber Left movement for

that matter. Importantly, social media alone have not changed social movements; social

media have co-regulated the shift (Wolfson, 2014). Said differently, in terms of the

circuit of culture, social media play a constitutive role in the creation of what it means to be a social movement in the new millennium.

Rowe and Carroll (2014) offer another, complementary way to view the tensions around identity formations in the Occupy movement. They examine what they call the "movement dynamism" between the more radical and the more reform-oriented segments of Left social movements. They define this movement dynamism as "contributions arising from different activist wings and productively interacting to increase overall movement power" (Rowe & Carroll, 2014, p. 149). Rowe and Carroll (2014) used radicalism interchangeably with revolution pointing out there has been no "Left revolution in an advanced capitalist society" (p. 150). Their primary argument is that the North American Left would do well to focus on the benefits of movement dynamism rather than dwelling on the movement in-fighting between reformation and radicalism.

Rowe and Carroll (2014) explained that "most movements involve political differentiation" (p. 151). Indeed, the tensions in the OWS Press WG between radicals such as Paul and the many reformist members reflect a similar dynamism between the organizations of the Civil Rights Movement. For example, Garrow (1986) argued that leaders of the NAACP, committed to a legal path to civil rights (the reformers following the metaphor), were often in conflict with members in the MIA, SCLC, and SNCC who were at varying levels and times much more devoted to radical direct action. Such direct actions (e.g. the Freedom Rides) helped to drive press coverage for the movement among other outcomes. Of course, these actions did not exist in a vacuum for the press to simply seize upon after a call from a public relations practitioner. The violence of the state, the

nonviolent response of the protestors, and the commitment to social justice—reformists and radicals alike—propelled change.

What were the benefits of the movement dynamism in Occupy as expressed by the Press WG? The ability of the practitioners to craft messages about economic inequality that were unabashedly anti-capitalist is one clear benefit. The gulf between reformers and radicals in the group was smaller thanks in part to what Rowe and Carroll (2014) called the "ideological convergence on the Left (p. 161). Another benefit could be read in the flexibility of the encampment space, as well as the roles of the group. The more radical members sometimes slept at the park, but it was not a requirement. Those who did camp there were able to find out more information about movement activities and culture that arguably contributed to richer stories to convey to the press among other publics. The flexibility of roles helped to ease communication bottlenecks that often occur in bureaucratic, hierarchical organizations. In short, Rowe and Carroll's (2014) argument proves true when applied to the people's pr—movement dynamism can be beneficial.

The final chapter explores the Press WG—its members and practices—this time bringing the moments of the circuit together now that the discussion of each moment is complete. Various articulations will be considered beginning with regulation and production.

CHAPTER 7. FULL CIRCUIT

"Subjects may produce particular texts, but they are operating within the limits of the *episteme*, the *discursive formation*, the r*egime of truth*, of a particular period and culture." (Hall, 1997, p. 55)

The 'regime of truth' in operation at the time and place of OWS was called neoliberalism. As such, it regulated vast swaths of the economic and social life of the West, and increasingly the globe. A neoliberal state exists primarily to generate capital at home and abroad. The government in the neoliberal period serves the interests of landowners, multinational corporations, businesses, and financial enterprises. Neoliberalism exists as two concepts at once: "a *utopian* project to realize a theoretical design for the reorganization of international capitalism or as a political project to re-establish the conditions for capital accumulation and to restore the power of economic elites" (Harvey, 2005, p. 19). Harvey (2005) argued that the second objective is what wins in practice.

Another related 'regime of truth' in the background of the Press WG was the concept of the patriarchy. The patriarchy is a system older than neoliberalism, but certainly inter-related and covering just as much of the globe. At the risk of oversimplification, men tend to dominate women within a patriarchal system. As part of a movement devoted to a radically different form of democracy than present in the status quo, the Press WG could not escape neoliberalism and the patriarchy—in fact no group could and still be a part of present-day society. This is to say that these systems are pervasive regulators within the circuit of contemporary culture for much of the world. There are, of course, nuances in their expressions throughout nations and institutions,

individuals and social movements, but it is important to emphasize that although the Press WG and OWS resisted these systems and offered alternatives to the status quo, they did not exist outside of them.

This tension caused much friction when the aims of production failed to align with representation. The behind-the-scenes struggle for who would represent or circulate meanings of OWS through the mass media to reach the general public was, by most internal accounts, intense. As previously described, tensions concerning the underrepresentation of people of color and/or women reified the oppression of these same groups through neoliberal capitalism—the very system all occupiers hoped to change. The numerous, mostly white male faces that dominated the images of OWS carried visible and invisible meanings. Hall said, "Every image that we see is being read in part against what isn't there" (Hall, 2005, p. 15).

It follows that when one is confronted with images of OWS, the majority of which feature white men, one also, to some degree, recognizes the absence of people of color and/or women. Now, it so happens that statistically speaking OWS was, in fact, majority white (Captain, 2011). Is the effort and desire to include more representations of the movement through people of color/women therefore disingenuous? Was this desire for inclusion a kind of tokenism that one might see in a brochure for a college teeming with minority students when in fact the university is majority white? This line of questioning hearkens back to a less useful definition of representation that sees images as standing in for some actual reality. A critical-cultural approach would interrogate the conditions that made the diversity question salient, recognizing the realities on the ground (OWS was majority white and male) as but one component of the discourse concerning

diversity. What were the meanings of diversity within the case study? Who decided which faces to broadcast? How did media outlets represent the idea diversity, if at all? Why? Why not?

Unpacking Diversity

The brief textual analysis that follows of *The Colbert Report's* two-part package covering OWS in New York City provides an illustration of potential answers to these questions. First, some set up is in order. In Chapter Five, I presented the struggles around choosing the spokespeople to represent OWS on the show. The group was divided roughly into two camps with one side wanting a woman of color (name withheld) and the other side preferring a white woman and performance artist by the name of Ketchup. Attempts to have both women appear on the show were thwarted. The interview took place between the host, Stephen Colbert, Ketchup and an OWS spokesperson named Justin Wedes, a white male whom no one in the Press WG appeared to want on the show. According to Press WG member Mike, the producers of *Colbert* approached Justin after seeing him in the park, and Justin subsequently contacted the Press WG. Accounts diverge about what happened next, however it is clear that Justin did the interview without the consent of the Press WG.

The Colbert Show was a parody of a conservative talk show host who lampoons his guests and often satirizes right wing positions. Multiple studies have argued that entertainment such as *The Colbert Show* and its Comedy Central channel progenitor, *The Daily Show*, circumvented the constraints of normal journalistic practice to the benefit of the public interest by providing an informed, if comedic, critique and by speaking truth to power (e.g. Feldman, 2012; Baym, 2010; Jones, 2009). With this in mind, the

participants from OWS on *The Colbert Report* likely expected to be made fun of, and this was part of the rationale for the pro-Ketchup faction. They recognized the comedic potential in poking fun at Ketchup's nome de guerre and her hipster fashion sense as both of these symbolized stereotypes about young activists circa 2011.

On the other hand, the pro-woman-of-color side challenged assumptions about the youthful demographic of *The Colbert Show's* audience, citing research and second-hand information from producers that highlighted the large concentration of people 40 and older who watch the show. The thinking was that an older audience, steeped in the legacy of the Civil Rights Movement, could be more responsive to an articulate black woman. Furthermore, having a woman of color interviewed on such a high profile outlet would increase the level of identification among potential and existing people of color in the movement.

The absence of people of color on *The Colbert Report* is one part of representation, however another facet of diversity, namely gender, produced visible meanings that may also be read. The first segment, lasting 7 minutes and 19 seconds, devotes time to explain the processes of the General Assembly with its various hand signals that provide fodder for physical comedy on the part of Colbert. The first contested meaning of gender occurs near the middle of the segment when Ketchup refers to herself in passing, it seems, as a "female-bodied" person. Colbert repeatedly mocks this statement such that Ketchup is not allowed to speak further. While Ketchup's meaning concerning "female-bodied" was likely to be inclusive of all expressions of gender, this meaning collides with a normative meaning of gender as a binary male/female split. It is this violation of American societal norms that gives Colbert the

comedic material to lampoon Ketchup, and by extension the movement she and Justin

had hoped would be represented on the show as being about economic justice.

With the "female-bodied" reference, Ketchup (and by extension the movement)

also encounters a competing discourse about gender among marginalized communities—

the very communities that OWS ostensibly wanted to help with the message of economic

justice. This discourse has the political consequence of critiquing OWS for not including

a person of color, the subgroup of the 99% most affected by the economic injustices of

the corporate state, and for the luxury of questioning gender in the first place. In other

words, a black man working three jobs to make ends meet likely does not have the

privilege, in the form of time and awareness, to consider with what gender expression he

most identifies. Ketchup, as a white, college-educated person of some means has the

privilege to make such decisions. Furthermore, she is less likely to be ostracized socially

and by employers, for example.

While identifying as a female-bodied person on national cable television might

have been an effective public relations strategy for certain groups within, for example the

LGBT movement, Ketchup did not connect her gender identification to the dominant

message of the campaign (economic justice) nor to a secondary message (diversity).

Furthermore, the disconnection that occurred between production ('we want diverse

representation') and representation ('we put two white people on the *Colbert Report'*)

becomes a connection or articulation between representation and identity for Ketchup and

those who share her politics. These articulations in turn collide with the genre and the

conceit of the show, representing a competing discourse bound by the rules of how a

character playing a right-wing Republican must respond when confronted by

unauthorized language, i.e. a "female-bodied" person. As Du Gay et al. (2013) noted, "It is difference which signifies" (p. 17); it does so by creating binary oppositions: We know what black is because we know it is not white. Within this dichotomized relationship one pole always tends to dominate (e.g., male over female, us over them, high over low; Woodward, 1997b), bringing issues of difference and power to the fore within a representation.

In the second segment of roughly the same length airing on November 1, 2011, Colbert playfully attempted to persuade Justin and Ketchup to allow Colbert to "co-occupy" OWS through his PAC-- an actual political action committee that Colbert established in March of 2011 (thecolbertreportcc.com). This time the interviewees fight through Colbert's persistent, comedic interruptions to deliver a unified talking point in keeping with the primary, encoded meaning; they both give answers that reject Colbert's comedic premise on the grounds that such a political takeover would violate the movement's desire to make politics independent from moneyed influencers. The articulation of production and representation in the second segment is thus more in line with the primary message of economic justice, however the consumption of it by Colbert has a double-meaning. On the one hand, he stays in character to uphold the discourse of the status quo, in this case that power is achieved through co-optation or buying his way into the movement because he needs one to further his political aims. On the other hand, for those who are in on the joke, his parody is also a harmonious consumption of a representation that fits well with the discourse of democracy as encoded by the practitioners.

Competing Discourses and Strategic Ambiguity

Having traced one contentious media engagement within the case study, I will now build upon the full circuit through a deeper consideration of power as expressed through competing discourses. Specifically, I will revisit the varied definitions of public relations as discussed in the moment of regulation, only this time I will add the theoretical lens of strategic ambiguity (Eisenberg, 1984) to be defined. Throughout the exploration, I will attempt to make "all these discourses visible in their strategic connections" as opposed to "constituting them as unities, to the exclusion of all other forms of discourse" (Foucault, 1980, p. 38). In other words, it is not my intention to put forward a grand unified theory of public relations in social movements, or even within the case study. Such efforts at unity, following Foucault, miss the effects of power. Rather, I intend to trace the way power worked through many discourses within the Press WG. Ironically, power within the group often flowed through the *appearance* of unity.

Strategic ambiguity is a concept developed by Eisenberg (1984) and subsequently used in the public relations literature to explain how it is that people in organizations are able to rally around one particular goal often despite having conflicting views. "Ambiguity is used strategically to foster agreement on abstractions without limiting specific interpretations" (Eisenberg, 1984, p. 231). Such ambiguity was on display throughout the discourses within and about OWS, perhaps most clearly in the slogan: We are the 99%. As discussed, the abstract quality of the message opened connections to many political identities. Yet this abstraction is not endemic to the message per se. According to Eisenberg (1984), "Clarity (and conversely, ambiguity) is not an attribute of messages; it is a *relational* variable which arises through a combination of source,

message, and receiver factors" (p. 229). I would further complicate Eisenberg's definition by challenging the integrity of the subject/source as a category, viewing instead the relations through the constitution of discourses.

As detailed in Chapter Two, the discourses concerning the role of public relations position it from one extreme to another, from anti-democratic (Stauber and Rampton, 1995) spin to democratic change agent tightly connected to journalism (Gower, 2007). It is arguably the former, pejorative discourse of public relations that created the conditions for Rachel's strategic ambiguity when it came to doing public relations on behalf of OWS. Recall that Rachel insisted on a distinction between public relations and press relations. Or perhaps there is nothing ambiguous about Rachel's definition of public relations. Public relations, as a popular discourse, is "ass-kissing" and there was not a "fucking instance of that," according to Rachel. I contend the ambiguity exists here not as a relation between a source (Rachel), a message (the definition of public relations), and the receiver (the researcher), but rather as relations between competing discourses. Rachel draws from a competing discourse of public relations that is ironically more in tune with professional discourses of public relations than with popular discourses. She insists she is not doing public relations and this is true if one's definition is based on a popular, pejorative discourse of public relations. What Rachel *actually* does, and this is manifest in the strategies and tactics she performs (i.e. the stuff of power), is help journalists tell stories about OWS. The rub is that she sees public relations as being unethical, and she is an ethical actor.

Generally speaking, the professional discourses of public relations emphasize building relationships in ethical ways (e.g. Newsom & Haynes, 2014). These ethics are

themselves strategically ambiguous, defined as honoring values such as truth and accuracy in communication, but purposefully being vague when it comes to subject positions. For example, the PRSA code of ethics, updated in 2011, repeatedly shifts emphasis between the practitioner's client and the practitioner's duty to the "public interest," a discourse itself that is strategically ambiguous across public relations, law, and society. Such strategic ambiguity is another point of overlap between the public relations industry and the work of the OWS Press WG.

Extending Eisenberg (1984) to public relations and the OWS Press WG, the ethical dance of the practitioner is strategically ambiguous and highly dependent on one's position within and on the discourses of public relations. "It is easy to imagine the ethical problems that might result from the misuse of ambiguity. In the final analysis, however, both the effectiveness and the ethics of any particular communicative strategy are relative to the goals and values of the communicators in the situation" (Eisenberg, 1984, p. 239). Beth, for example, is accustomed to a professional discourse of public relations where strategies are used to communicate on behalf of clients and organizations that she deems to be just. Although Beth is no doubt aware of the anti-democratic discourses of public relations, she sees no conflict between the goals of OWS and a professional discourse of public relations. In fact, she recognizes her professional expertise as being helpful to advancing the goals of the movement. Yet she becomes immediately aware of the perceptions of public relations within OWS on her first day of volunteering when she is redirected from the Media WG, that wants nothing to do with the mainstream media or the status quo, to the Press WG. Yet as Rachel illustrates, even within the Press WG, the meaning of public relations is highly contingent.

Here the reader may recall the internal power struggle concerning the role of gender in message production strategies within the Press WG. In an effort to incorporate diversity and to demonstrate consensus-building in action, several practitioners formed a sub-group devoted to creating messages that expressed the over-arching goal of economic justice and at the same time forwarded a certain liberal discourse about the particular oppression of women. However, the main group largely rejected these efforts when it came time to deploy such messages to the public. Here we come to the thrust of Eisenberg's (1984) argument:

> The use of more or less ambiguity is in itself not good or bad, effective or ineffective; whether a strategy is ethical depends upon the ends to which it is used, and whether it is effective depends upon the goals of the individual communicators (p. 239).

So that rejection by the larger group is not inherently bad from this perspective. Furthermore, if one considers the use of strategic ambiguity as a process of power, then the ethics and success of a public relations strategy depend not only on the results and the objectives, but also on the struggle itself. In other words, the type of question being asked of power shifts depending upon the lens being used. For Eisenberg, there is no normative essence to ambiguity. When Foucault is added more overtly to this understanding, the *processes* of power dominate the query. In this case, the question turns from did the feminist sub-group have more or less power to what were the effects of a particular articulation of power? "Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization. […I]ndivduals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application"

(Foucault, 1980, p. 98). Thus power flows through competing discourses about the way(s) to communicate within and beyond the Press WG.

In order to trace the effects of a particular articulation of power, it is useful to consider Hall's (1980, quoted in Hanczor, 1997) point that with any given articulation in a historical context there is no "necessary correspondence" between relationships. In other words, there is no natural link between "Christian fundamentalism and the conservative political parties" to use Hanczor's (1997) example. In this case, articulation theory reveals in kind that there is no necessary link between economic justice and women's rights, although the sub-working group might object. The debate over how to communicate about economic justice to the public is however imbricated with hegemonic forces, with neoliberalism and the patriarchy circa 2011. These relationships of power combined to form contested meanings of economic justice, gender, public relations, democracy and all manner of topics within a relatively homogenous group. These contestations point to different ways of understanding public relations.

Towards a Polemology of PR

The analysis will shift now to consider other points of application within the case study in an effort to further trace the effects of power. Specifically, we will consider the intersections of the practices employed by Paul (but one "vehicle of power") and the discourses circulating through and around such practices merit a second look. The importance of struggle to the notion of a people's pr is highlighted by the idea of public relations as war. As will be argued, Paul's practices are emblematic of what De Certeau (1984) called a "polemology of the weak" (p. 39). To be clear, this is not a value judgment. On the contrary, Paul's use of tactics represent a strong rejection of

institutional norms of public relations from his brown out strategy (not unheard of in professional practice, but certainly not typical) to his poaching and re-imagining of press releases. The "weakness" of Paul's strategy and in fact the entirety of what I term the people's pr comes from a lack of place, or an established fortress from which to wage pr warfare. In this sense, Paul and a few other members of the group who practiced public relations in a markedly different way, extend the logics of Wolfson's (2014) Cyber Left, in that they take their "multiple, irreducible fronts of struggle" and attack in a distributed network, so-to-speak. When the strategic communication (including public relations work) of activists is dispersed in myriad and sometimes unexpected ways, it becomes harder for the status quo to flip a switch or shut it down.

Public relations as a form of warfare seems fitting. The history of war in the 20th century is associated with media, i.e. mass communication—and an entire field of war is born out of communications. The capturing of publics to mobilize them or immobilize them, as the case may be, move warfare from something that happens elsewhere to the ongoing process of being a part of everyday life. The Cold War, for example, heightened fears and re-organized everyday life for everyone; think bomb shelters and hiding under desks during drills at school, not to mention the panoptic, anti-Communist gaze of McCarthy era politics. There was no specific threat; no declared war much like the War on Terror.

In terms of social movements, the field of public relations meets polemology in the form of the tactic or an assemblage of tactics. A tactic, according to De Certeau (1984) is "a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus. No delimitation of an exteriority, then, provides it with the condition necessary for

autonomy. The space of the tactic is the space of the other" (p. 37). The people's pr,

subsisting within the status quo of late capitalism, has no beachhead or bulwark to

defend, no place from which to strategize. Place is the realm of the proper, the

appearance of stability, the dominant order of things, the institution. Space, on the other

hand, is action and assemblage—a performance of sorts without the "univocity or

stability of a 'proper'" (De Certeau, 1984, p. 117).

To this point, much has been made of the similarities between professional and

amateur public relations in the case of the Press WG. Those similarities stand as

findings, largely the result of former professional practitioners joining the cause and

teaching others certain ways of doing public relations. Of course, within those

similarities, we find difference, as demonstrated in the competing discourses at play with

regard to definitions of public relations, to name but one. However, here we flank

difference from another angle. Paul's tactics were intended to "weaponize" the press

against itself. For example, by poaching common tropes used by the mainstream media,

such as the "fat guy and the hot girl," Paul actively sought to use that patriarchal

discourse against itself in an attempt to assure that the attractive woman, typically

dismissed as anti-intellectual by the status quo, was actually heard.

The differences of practice between professional and amateur are not limited to

such textual poaching or, in fact, to Paul, a vehicle of power. Although there are many

previously detailed similarities to professional practices, the assemblage of tactics used

by the Press WG in its entirety could be characterized as anti-institutional. In other

words, the traces of professional public relations do not solidify, at least in the early days

of the movement, to the kind of institutional knowledge power one finds at a public relations agency.

At the typical agency, large proprietary storehouses of knowledge are built over time, including painstakingly detailed information about specific journalists, so as to better influence and target them. Briefing books are developed prior to media engagements to prepare spokespeople and arm them with answers to difficult or "rude" questions. PR strategists retreat to "war rooms" in advance of campaigns to plot a product launch. This is not meant to sound sinister, rather to express the language of the profession, or the panoptic quality of power through institutional public relations practice. When speaking about the local dispersion of panoptic power through schools, hospitals, and the like, Foucault (1980) explained, "People learned how to establish dossiers, systems of marking and classifying, the integrated accountancy of individual records" (p. 71). Such institutional knowledge within public relations was not found within the people's pr. Perhaps such knowledge power of the kind associated with the status quo would have calcified eventually, but in the waning months of 2011, the members of the Press WG disrupted public relations as usual if only through their articulations of social justice power, however contested, however challenged from within and from without.

In the polemology of pr, the space of the other represents shifting sands. Within this struggle for purchase "strategies are able to produce, tabulate, and impose these spaces, when those operations take place, whereas tactics can only use, manipulate, and divert these spaces" (De Certeau, 1984, p. 30). Using the credibility of institutions, oppositional discourses crafted by mainstream newspapers, for example, attempted to

dismiss OWS. Paul, in particular, represented a different sort of public relations practice

that often ran counter to long established protocols between journalists and public

relations practitioners. Although competing epistemologies and ways of doing

sometimes overshadowed his individual efforts, he was nothing if not nimble. "By an art

of being in between, he draws unexpected results from his situation." (De Certeau, 1984,

p. 30) He and his cohort were practicing public relations by the people and for the people

in an attempt to disrupt the status quo. Although the Press WG chapter of this war is

closed, the larger battle continues.

CONCLUSION

Opportunities for Future Research

The idea of examining practices of public relations performed in the public

interest makes for a robust research agenda. Scholars could choose to further filter

questions of power through lenses of gender, race, and class, to name a few large

categories. In addition, as a case study, the dissertation is limited by not being able to

make general claims about public relations. This could be remedied in a number of ways,

including more case studies to offer cross-comparisons and/or quantitative approaches to

different, but related data sets.

For example, it would be interesting to read a study that scraped large volumes of

tweets concerning OWS to do a time-series analysis or a linguistic analysis. Such

perspectives would add more insight than does this dissertation into the roles of social

media in constructing discourses about OWS and perhaps other current social

movements, such as #BlackLivesMatter. It would also be interesting to learn more about

relationships between public relations practitioners and journalists from the journalism

side as it relates to issues of social justice. Finally, more ethnographies of public

relations practitioners would help to address the paucity of this important methodology in

public relations scholarship (L'Etang, 2008).

Public relations and "Regimes of Truth"

> If public relations theory adopts a commitment to examining how public relations
> practice is implicated in relations of power, it will be able to articulate its project
> as being of equal relevance to the disempowered as it is to those already
> empowered in, and by, the new economy. (Weaver, 2001, p. 288)

At first, the underlying assumption of this dissertation was that public relations in social

justice contexts is a source of power for the marginalized. This assertion pushes public

relations theory and practice toward more equitable relationships concerning notions of

profit, well being, and freedom. In the United States, this means that public relations

work, practitioners, and scholars should be interrogated as much more than a

technocratic, somehow neutral way of being persuasive in a world that somehow exists

outside of current regimes, i.e. neoliberalism. Scholars and practitioners, alike, myself

included, have been complicit in furthering the status quo through work that does not

adequately address the marginalized. The case study at the center of this dissertation, the

people's pr, is but one attempt to counter the status quo, a project shared by the

practitioners of the Press WG. This is not to reduce public relations work to a simple

"corporate pr = bad/ social justice pr = good" formula. Would that solving ethical

challenges in public relations, much less the world, were that easy. Rather, this is to say

that the study of public relations in social justice contexts provides lessons to

practitioners and scholars alike.

But those lessons are not as simple as the initial assumption belies. The Press WG proved that public relations is a source of power for the marginalized, but it was a particular, discursive power that found cohesion around the message of economic justice/income inequality as co-constructed by public relations practitioners and journalists. The practices of public relations within the group, then, on the large stage of the mainstream media found a degree of success, but behind-the-scenes key members were ironically marginalizing women and people of color. The articulations of power were contingent even within a relatively homogonous group.

Most of the members interviewed for this study will be the first to acknowledge their shortcomings, especially concerning diversity. The people's pr failed in terms of reaching their goal of diverse representation, but they did not construct this failure alone. The media, already primed to deliver white male faces to the masses, certainly played a role in further marginalizing women and people of color in the movement. And what of the 'people' the public relations work studied here was supposedly for? They, too, were complicit in advancing the status quo, feeding into the hegemony of the media system. Some, of course, were more involved than others. This is not to say that those who disagreed with or were confused by OWS were somehow in the wrong, or that the OWS message of economic justice was somehow infallible; they were not and it was not. Rather, the power dynamics of the movement were expressed in articulations that sometimes furthered inequality and sometimes challenged it. This dissertation is but one attempt to trace the how and the why of the struggle for social change at a particular moment in time through the work of public relations.

Here at the intersection of public relations practice/theory, social movements, politics, ideology, society, and journalism, the case study supports the argument that in light of social media, the so-called old media system still matters. The Press WG wielded a great deal of power using old-fashioned media relations tactics and relationships with journalistic institutions, most with digital facets of their own. Social movements have changed over time, but some aspects have not changed. Horizontal structures, networks, user generated content are important, but not sufficient to the push for equitable change in the 21st century. I say this with some surprise after studying the Press WG because as a former practitioner active at the birth of platforms such as Twitter, I made social media central to my practice of public relations. In this case, coordinated social media strategies were not keys to the successes and failures of the Press WG.

Horizontalism, on the other hand, was key. The attempts at horizontal governance were successful in that they provided the space for the individual practitioner to hone his or her craft as demonstrated, for example, by the shrewd amateur/professional duo of Paul and Pam. However, the disconnections between consensus rhetoric and consensus building in practice were at the core of the failures, too. They made valiant attempts to address diverse representation with people of color spokesperson lists, connections with the people of color working group, and a sub-group within the Press WG to work on gender issues. But more often than not, they failed to put these resources into practice. Even if they had fully utilized them, the Press WG would have encountered a media system dominated by the status quo, begging the question of the efficacy of horizontal media relations as a concept.

Let me be clear, if this case study is any indication, horizontal public relations is impossible. That being said, the overall impression I had of the Press WG was of strategic public relations practitioners dedicated to equitable change. They volunteered thousands of hours and worked under difficult conditions with limited resources to promote an idea; they performed public relations for the public good. These are the qualities that characterize the people's pr, and not any kind of realization of participatory democracy. By unpacking some of the differences between managerial approaches to public relations and some of the practices of the Press WG, a tactical, disruptive force emerges. Although they could not escape the status quo, their practices of public relations point to new ways of understanding relations of power.

APPENDIX A

Sample Interview Questions

1. How did you get involved as an organizer for Occupy Wall Street (OWS)?

    a. Why did you choose the press working group (PRWG)?

    b. Were you employed during the early phase of the movement? If so, what kind of work did you do? And now?

    c. How old are you?

2. Will you describe your day-to-day activities as part of the PRWG?

    a. Were any skills gained in any employment/volunteer work outside of OWS useful as an organizer?

    b. How much time would you spend on a daily/weekly basis organizing for the movement?

3. Please tell me a story about an interaction with the press that did not go according to plan.

    a. Please tell me a story about a press interaction that did go according to plan.

    b. What impressions do you have about the press coverage of OWS in relation to your work with journalists?

    c. How would you describe the goal(s) of your public communication?

    d. To what extent were these goals realized? How do you measure this?

4. Could you tell me about a meeting or interaction related to the PRWG that you found significant?

    a. Were there any surprises in your work?

      b.   What were the challenges, if any, in your work?

5. How did you use technology, if at all, in your work for the PRWG?

      a.   How was this work coordinated with the others, if at all?

      b.   What were the affordances and limitations of technology in your work?

6. Are there any other experiences you want to mention about your involvement?

APPENDIX B

Data Summary Table: PR Tactics Used by OWS Press WG

	Alias	Fixing	Web Site Content	Monitoring	Press Releases	Media Training	Editorials	Press Email Mgmt	Strategy Meetings	Spokes-person	Press Table	Presen-tation	Stake-holder Out-reach	Social Media
1	Byron								X					
2	Emma	X			X	X			X		X			
3	Eric								X	X	X			
4	Jacob					X				X			X	
5	Linda	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
6	Mike		X	X	X				X	X	X			
7	Nathan	X		X	X	X			X	X	X			
8	Pam	X		X		X			X		X		X	
9	Paul		X	X	X	X			X	X	X			X
10	Rachel		X	X	X		X		X	X				
11	Sam			X				X	X					
12	Shelly	X		X		X		X	X					
13	Skylar					X			X	X	X		X	
14	Theresa				X									
15	Victor	X					X		X	X	X			
16	Zane									X				X
Totals		6	3	7	7	8	3		13	10	9	1	4	2

APPENDIX C

Data Summary Table: Technology Used by OWS Press WG

	Alias	Email	Spread-sheet	Google Hangout	Twitter	FaceBook	Livestream	Blog/Web Site	SMS	Phone	Table
1	Byron	X									
2	Emma	X	X		X			X	X	X	X
3	Eric								X		X
4	Jacob						X			X	
5	Linda	X	X	X	X				X	X	X
6	Mike	X								X	X
7	Nathan	X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X
8	Pam	X								X	X
9	Paul	X			X			X	X	X	X
10	Rachel	X								X	
11	Sam	X			X		X			X	
12	Shelly	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	
13	Skylar	X		X							X
14	Theresa	X									X
15	Victor	X		X						X	X
16	Zane	X			X	X			X	X	
Totals		14	4	5	6	3	3	3	6	12	10

| | | ▨ | = | used as a promotional tool versus solely as a monitoring tool | |

APPENDIX D

Data Summary Table: Tensions within the OWS Press WG

	Alias	Diversity	Pro/Am	Speaking for movement	PR at all?	Accountability/ Trust	Messaging: Provoke or Persuade	Infrastructure/ Process	Budget/ Money
1	Byron						X		
2	Emma	X	X	X		X	X	X	
3	Eric	X		X		X		X	
4	Jacob								
5	Linda	X				X	X	X	X
6	Mike	X				X	X		
7	Nathan	X		X			X	X	
8	Pam	X	X						
9	Paul	X		X	X				
10	Rachel	X	X		X	X		X	X
11	Sam	X	X				X		
12	Shelly	X		X	X	X	X		
13	Skylar	X							
14	Theresa	X		X			X		
15	Victor	X	X					X	
16	Zane	X		X				X	
Totals		14	5	7	3	6	8	7	2

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