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Olfaction and emotion: The quest for olfactory restoration in two speech communities

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ABSTRACT

Olfaction has been described as one of the least studied of the senses. This has certainly proven true in Communication. This project applies Ethnography of Communication and Cultural Discourse Analysis to examine the role that olfaction plays in the cultural meaning systems of two speech communities: residents surrounding the Gowanus Canal and bereaved parents. The cultural hub used to explore the cultural significance of olfaction in both speech communities is feeling. The analyses illustrate how emotions are tied to associated sensations and further become activated through radiants of dwelling, relating and acting. The analysis also shows how olfaction may serve to unify and separate members of a community. The significance of this research encourages stretching the boundaries of communication studies by examining the less studied physical senses and the boundaries of Cultural Discourse Analysis by providing distinctions that others can incorporate when examining feelings.

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In this essay, we turn attention to ways in which cultural communication scholars may more deeply attend to embodied elements of human communication. We invite enhanced consideration of how sensory information may be examined and interrogated for meanings. Carbaugh, Gibson, and Milburn (1997) suggest three guiding assumptions of their approach to cultural communication: that communicative practice demonstrates the systemic and patterned culture that performs it, that it is shaped by social organization and cultural meaning systems, and that it is "constitutive of sociocultural life" (p. 3). Although sense-based forms of communication may differ dramatically in form from verbal communication practice, the research presented below demonstrates that they meet the above criteria of cultural communication.

To demonstrate the potent role that sensory experience plays in cultural life, two very distinct American co-cultures will be examined: residents neighboring the Gowanus Canal and bereaved parents. Residents neighboring the Gowanus Canal experience the presence of unappealing sensory data that they would like to eliminate. Bereaved parents have lost a cherished sensory experience in the form of their deceased children that they yearn to

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recapture. Both seek sensory restoration due to unfulfilled desires that get linked to emotions and communicative action central to a sense of cultural identity.

Our interest in "stretching the boundaries of international and intercultural communication scholarship" invites a stretch of mere inches. We invite scholars to shift their focus away from sight, sound and speech and journey away from the eyes, ears, and mouth to explore the cultural significance of the sensory/communicative data available *vis a vis* the nose. We will explore how the stretch of mere inches in physical geography of study moves us in substantive directions in our approach to studying international and intercultural communication. We begin by briefly scanning the terrain of Ethnography of Communication and Cultural Discourse Analysis. Next, we examine literature supporting the movement toward studying olfaction as important and culturally meaningful. We then move to review literature on emotion, identifying "feeling" as the "hub" of focus. Throughout, we invite cultural communication scholars to stretch their understanding of the concept of feeling.

Cultural approaches to communication

Hymes (1962, 1972) launched a program of study, currently called Ethnography of Communication (EoC), when he acknowledged that groups form a "speech community"[1] or have shared codes and understandings for "speaking." Labeling the focal unit within ethnography of communication as cohering around "speech" may have unintentionally promoted the reification of focusing on sound (described below). Hymes also provided a heuristic for looking at cultures through the SPEAKING mnemonic, wherein each letter in the term represents a cultural component that could set the stage for comparative studies along similar dimensions (Setting; Participants; Ends/Goals; Act Sequence; Key; Instrumentality; Norms; Genre).

Carbaugh (2005, 2007, 2017) built upon Hymes's foundation in developing Cultural Discourse Analysis (CuDA) where certain domains (being/identity; acting; relating; feeling; and dwelling) provide focal points for analysis. Later articulations of the theory used the metaphor of "hub" as a means of focusing on a central domain. The remaining categories form radiants from the hub to illuminate cultural meanings embedded within a cultural system. Carbaugh's approach provides a way of examining culture systemically, inviting exploration of interconnectedness as well as interrogation of communication practices for the cultural assumptions embedded therein. Carbaugh and Lie (2014) suggest that this complex understanding of culture is necessary to achieve competence. Understanding of the cultural meaning system may be further clarified through comparative studies as they enhance "understanding of social interactions" (Carbaugh, 2017, p. 23).

Of concern to the studies herein is the hub of feeling. When describing this hub, Carbaugh notes drawing upon Hymes (1972). Although not explicitly stated, within Hymes' framework, "key" directed researchers to learn more about participants' feelings from the tone of a conversation. By layering one's analysis to include Hymes' "speech acts," such as winks, posture or paralinguistic features, a researcher can more clearly notice how physical signals of emotion are examined by those witnessing a culturally informed emotion display.

Further descriptive work on emotion and its display were detailed by Lutz and White (1986) who describe the growth in scholarship about personal and social emotions.

Following this work, Lutz and Abu-Lughod (1990) assert that social life may have greater impact on emotional displays than idiosyncratic personal experiences. Similarly, Wierzbicka (1999) distinguishes between biological feelings and cultural emotions, concluding that the sensation of *feeling* is universal, whereas *emotion* is culture-bound and specific (italics added). Emotion, "is not 'understood by all' because … it doesn't have exact equivalents in other languages" (Wierzbicka, p. 9). She describes the entanglement between using experience-near, local language and experience-far, generic or social scientific distinctions to describe emotion adequately. In sum, the way feelings are experienced (its sensations) and displayed (through language or communicative practices) are subjected to social and cultural influences. We rely upon this linguistic distinction in what follows.

Our analysis conforms to CuDA's search for elaborating the hub of feeling by exploring the radiants of acting, relating and dwelling in our data. Recently, there has been an upsurge of interest in examining communication in this way (Carbaugh, 2017; Scollo, 2011; Scollo & Milburn, 2019). In this article, however, we raise the question of whether these research traditions may replicate some of the shortcomings found in other studies of culture and nonverbal communication as the focus upon *speech* communities and cultural *discourse* reify the pervasive focus upon languaged (e.g., oral and written) communication.

Cultural communication scholars have begun exploring the link between communication and the senses. In discussing the hub of dwelling, Carbaugh and Cerulli (2013) briefly reference the importance of the senses in the interpretive process as they note, "one has access to multiple means or channels of communication in a context, including sight, sound, smell, and the feel of the thing or place" (p. 19). Recognition of the connection between place and the senses hints at a potential for more sensory exploration, however it does not vigorously assert the inevitability of embodied apprehension of the surrounding environment.

Some ethnographic scholars have adopted foci inviting a greater recognition of unspoken elements of communication. At a theoretical level, Hastings (2015) adopts an ethnographic approach in arguing for greater role for the senses in conceptualizing culture shock. At an applied level, several scholars have sought to shift the focus away from solely examining words. Braithwaite (1990), for example, explores the communicatively rich use of silence across cultures. Wiggins (2002) examines conversational sequences of gustatory *mmms* to appreciate how the embodied experience of enjoyment of food is expressed in shared dining experiences. Wilkins (2005) studies *asiallinen*, a nonverbal communication style associated with Finnish interactions, characterizing the nonverbal style associated with *asiallinen* as more modest and subdued. Such examples foreground modes of unspoken self-presentation as culturally rich, probing for parts of cultural interactions that transcend the verbal and purely visual.

Closest to the research program we promote here are two articles examining culturally-grounded, meaningful feelings and sensations. First, Ho (2006) discusses the role of *qi*, or the energy that one feels, in traditional Chinese medicine. Practitioners of acupuncture discuss how their work can affect a person's *qi*. This concept presents challenges when trying to capture it with words yet Ho argues for the important role that *qi* plays despite its "nonphysical and invisible nature" (p. 421). A second example is Ho, Lie, Ling Luk, and Dutta's (2019) exploration of the term *heatiness*. This term, commonly

used in Singapore, refers to bodily sensations associated with the consumption of particular foods. The body is treated as having an equilibrium that can be thrown askew by consuming certain foods in certain environments. While the physical states of *qi* and *heatiness* get assigned linguistic signifiers, the analyses primarily explicate ways that individuals use culturally informed beliefs and propositions to help maintain a sentient status. This attentiveness to sentience is at the heart of what cultural communication has yet to explore further.

Olfaction and culture

Although Simmel (1997/1907) offered an early perspective on understanding the importance of the senses in human interaction,[2] that program of research did not receive significant attention until recently. Instead, sight and sound have occupied privileged positions in the sensory study of human expression (Pearce, 1995) with sight occupying the top of the hierarchy (Low, 2012). In the last 25 years, sociologists (see for example, Synnott, 1993; Vannini, Waskul, & Gotschalk, 2012) and anthropologists (Classen, 1993; Howes, 2005; Stoller, 1997) have promoted the inclusion of the senses in contributing to our understanding of culture.

To date, communication scholars have not demonstrated a similar level of vigor in exploring the role of the senses. Instead, much of what is studied within the realm of nonverbal communication directs attention to the communicative value of nonverbal messages, treating them in much the same way as verbal messages. Examining a human sense in this way, however, does not explicate the unique dynamics embedded within that mode of communication. This inattention has, to some extent, been mirrored in EoC and CuDA, even though ethnographic approaches lend themselves well to attending to the senses (Pink, 2009). Among the senses receiving greater attention by scholars, olfaction occupies a place of lower status in sensory scholarship (Low, 2005; Synnott, 1993).

Despite its less focal role, smell conveys powerful messages about identity and helps to mediate interactions (Synnott, 1993). The sense of smell assumes a uniquely meaningful role because people are prone to tie an odor to its source (Wilson & Stevenson, 2006). Smell also occupies a unique role in communication due to its intimacy. As Porteous (2006) aptly describes:

> Vision clearly distances us from the object. We frame "views" in pictures and camera lenses; the likelihood of an intellectual response is considerable. By contrast, smells environ. They permeate the body and permeate the immediate environment, and thus one's response is much more likely to involve strong affect (p. 91).

Whereas visual cues may be apprehended from a great distance, olfactory cues require a more immersive context. The inclusion of aromas as part of the very air breathed makes the act of smelling an intimate experience. As such, smells also play an important role in memory (Synnott, 1993). Willander and Larsson (2007) found that smell-invoked memories were more emotionally-laden and pleasant than verbally induced memories.

Research on smell and place has primarily involved studying cities and their associated smells (see, for example, Margolies, 2004; Rinck, Bensafi, & Rouby, 2011). Research on smellscapes has been heavily slanted toward examining malodorous conditions and "smellmarks" (Porteous, 2006). Pezzullo (2009) examines toxic tourism as a method to

raise awareness and promote environmental justice through acknowledging the profound impact of waste (mis)management. Dennis (2009) promotes enhanced understanding of how smells unite members of a community through the concept of "shared sensual citizenship."

The study of olfaction has focused upon human interaction as well. The divisiveness of smell can be seen through the tendency to judge unfamiliar smells negatively (Porteous, 2006). This propensity has been affirmed in literature examining interaction between people from different cultures (Hastings, Musambira, & Ayoub, 2011; Yilmaz, 2015). Hastings, Musambira and Ayoub found that Saudi Arabian interviewees consistently pointed to outgroup members when discussing those who smell badly. Conversely, smells may offer a source of attraction between people. Parents tested by smelling the amniotic fluid from their own child and that of an unfamiliar child were able to recognize the smell of their own child's amniotic fluid (Schaal & Marlier, 1998). The role of a child's natural smells, of central concern to the study of parental bereavement, has been addressed by Lundström et al. (2013) in their study of biological impacts of women smelling the scent of a newborn baby. They found that, in contrast with other smells, the smell of a two-day old baby strongly impacted women in the "reward" portion of the brains, but was particularly impactful for new mothers. This led them to note that olfaction may play a role in the bonding process. Although the study of olfaction has received limited attention, the existing research suggests that olfaction functions in important ways in relationships.

Methods

Embodied methods work in harmony with the study of senses, sensation and emotion. Low (2015) contends that research in the senses may involve a variety of data collection methods. For example, researchers may conduct narrative interviews "to engage with their olfactory formulations of selfhood and social others" (p. 302). He also recommends reviewing archival data, and using participant observation and breaching experiments. Obtaining participant accounts of their own experience of feelings is particularly important in our studies because individuals are best poised to define their feelings (Lutz, 1986). We used a variety of these approaches in our respective studies. Both involve participant observation and each study is autoethnographically informed. Both studies started with olfactory cues used among a speech community and began interrogating the cultural meanings of those cues starting from the hub of "feeling."

Gowanus canal data collection (Milburn)

Context

I moved into the Carroll Gardens neighborhood of Brooklyn, NY in 1997. When I returned to the area in 2010 (after a four-year absence), the local waterway had just been designated as an EPA Superfund site. Anyone living in these neighborhoods quickly notices a foul odor emanating from the canal on certain days. Because I had been writing about the sense of place felt among residents of Milltown, MT during the cleanup of their toxic rivers, I began a seven year participant-observation examining the cultural discourse surrounding this new EPA cleanup project. Uncertain whether or not

this neighborhood constituted a speech community in the traditional sense, I relished the opportunity to participate in talk about the cleanup and the pervasive odors.

Data collection/analysis

During the participant observation, I lived in two neighborhoods in the area (Park Slope and Carroll Gardens), walked across, smelled and viewed the canal frequently, and was elected a member of the Community Advisory Group (CAG) for the EPA. I took extensive notes, audio-recorded six of the two years of monthly meetings I attended, reviewed minutes and website updates, tracked local news articles and social media feeds about the cleanup and conducted five, hour-long interviews.

Bereaved parents data collection (Hastings)

Context

I became a bereaved parent on October 3, 1997 following the death of my first child, Evan, at four months old. Within a year of my son's death, I began attending local support group meetings held by the international bereavement organization, *The Compassionate Friends* (TCF), and I attended my first national TCF conference in 1998. After a few years of regular attendance at TCF meetings, my attendance became more sporadic. I maintain connection to the community through friendships with other bereaved parents and through ongoing reading by and about bereaved parents both for personal and academic purposes. After a long period of healing and reflection, I began attending national TCF conferences in 2010 as a workshop presenter.

Data collection/analysis

This study started from an awareness of a shared olfactory trait among the speech community of bereaved parents: the desire to experience again the smell their child. I have talked to enough bereaved parents to know that there is a widespread desire to re-live the fragrance of their loved one, either through smelling their normal bodily scents or through smelling the fragrances worn by their child during life (perfumes, soaps, shampoos, etc.). From this starting point, I sought information available online regarding bereaved parents' desire to smell their child. To locate relevant data, I searched online magazines for bereaved parents, articles written by bereaved parents describing what it is like to lose a child, blogs, and stories shared on bereavement websites. Thirty instances of this very specific type of data were identified and examined for their significance. It bears noting that twenty-nine of the thirty texts used in this study were written by women. Using CuDA as a guiding premise, these specific instances were interrogated for the meanings explicit and implicit within the postings. Theoretical saturation was achieved quickly due to the strong similarities discernable across participants.

Data Analysis

Gowanus Canal

The New York City borough of Brooklyn includes the neighborhoods Boerum Hill, Carroll Gardens, Gowanus, Park Slope and Red Hook that surround the waterway known as the

Gowanus canal. This body of water bisects these neighborhoods of historic nineteenth century brownstone row-houses. Some have visible wide gardens that extend to the street with front stoops where neighbors sit and congregate on warm evenings.

This area traces its history from the Revolutionary War; known for the Battle of Brooklyn – the first major battle after the Declaration of Independence. Almost a century later, following the Civil War, the Gowanus Canal became a busy channel for barges and boats for the emerging industries in the area (Alexiou, 2015). Over the years, boating traffic and industry increased along with residential growth. Throughout the years, all historic accounts of the canal did not fail to include a description of the pervasive, unpleasant odor emanating from the body of water.

Using CuDA, I examine the strong, olfactory sensations within the feeling and emoting hub as it co-occurs along radiants of relating and dwelling. The descriptions below illustrate the residents' integration of their experiences and feelings about the place they choose to live.

Relating radiant

One feature that distinguishes the community surrounding the Gowanus Canal is the shared sense of community. This characterization is based on two demographic trends: generations of single families who lived in the same brownstone over time, and waves of immigrants moving in and out of the neighborhood as it evolved and endured different periods of gentrification. Today, the living areas surrounding the Gowanus are densely populated, whereby often three different families are housed in the same building and all buildings along a row share walls. Because the subways are the most common form of transportation, walking to and from the subway stations facilitates frequent contact between residents, engendering a pervasively positive feeling. The relationships one forms with neighbors is often based on talk about common occurrences within the neighborhood. Shared conversational topics, such as new businesses, school events, and local politics, serve to create and maintain relationships. References to the canal over the years have often focused on the way it impacts the senses. People often comment to one another on the way the water "smelled" on any particular day, much like commenting on the weather, on which the intensity of smells often rely. However, the sensation of a stench emanating from what some have recently called a "tsunami of poop" is not always acknowledged directly. When it is talked about, this common, unpleasant sensation forms the basis of ironic humor that connects residents.

The recent completion of even higher occupancy dwellings, apartment complexes housing up to seven or eight hundred families, prompted canal-related conversations. The toxicity of the canal provides the reason developers want to build (cheap land) and a sensible justification for current residents who oppose increased development. Those opposing new development argued that the canal should be cleaned of its historic waste and toxic substances before enabling more people to dwell upon its banks, whereas the developers argued that the current pollution would not impact new residents. Ultimately, developers won permits and were allowed to build before the canal was remediated.

Overall, neighbors experience common sensations as they dwell by and smell toxic waste in the canal. When large scale weather events, including heavy rain or hurricane-like storms occur, residents talk as if water in the canal has agent-like properties:

overflowing its banks, running off roofs, and invading basements. When neighbors are impacted by these common events, they bond together; lamenting their shared plight in an urban environment they chose to inhabit.

Olfactory sensations and related emotions

When examining the Gowanus Canal through the hub of emotion, we find a complex composition blending a positive sense of pride in an historic, industrial neighborhood with sensations of disgust in response to the level of pollution in their midst. Knowing that the canal is (and has been) a repository of sewage and toxic waste does not surprise those who comment on its odors. The smell of the Gowanus Canal is one of the least desirable features of this beloved neighborhood. Even as odors from the canal assault the senses, its impact is minimized in speech, "It smells on certain days" (Donna). Not everyone sees the canal when it is cloudy white or has pools of sewage and debris floating on its surface, but nearly everyone can smell it. Some react with disgust when recounting their experiences, but usually the descriptions are blended with humor, "it was horrible; it was too odorifish to paint" (local artist, Rebecca, who often sits by the canal to paint it).

Perhaps because the canal is experienced through the sense of smell, personal negative emotional responses are mediated by what can be shared. The foul smell, while undeniably unpleasant, is spoken of or incorporated into daily life with paradoxical affection and humor.

Reacting with humor

The canal is the butt of many jokes, but often in indirect ways. For instance, Lethem (2000) describes the canal as "The only body of water in the world … that was 90 percent guns"(p. 56). It is the common recognition of its pollution that makes these lighthearted references to the waste in the canal a shared communicative experience, or what Rinck et al. (2011) describe as, "shared objective discomfort" (p. 160), that creates a sense of a common code. All those who live near the canal (as well as those who visit) know that the Gowanus Canal is far from pristine, and as Lethem taunts, water seems to be its minor content. Instead, it is a deeply polluted place that many residents would prefer to have the national government dredge and clean so that it can fulfill its potential as a beautiful body of water. The resolution of these conflicting emotions is often displayed through shared humor. "The whole canal thing … God only knows how many bodies are [in] there" (Donna, local resident).

The known toxins and smells have led to a cottage industry of art, t-shirts, and other crafts. As the neighborhood has become more gentrified, newcomers embrace the canal with affectionate irony. Local stores have sold t-shirts with the tagline, "Gowanus Swim Team" for nearly 20 years. Bars too have embraced the humor. On a corner two blocks from the canal, one can buy a beer at the "Gowanus Yacht Club" (nearly 15 years old), or more closely adjacent to the canal, "Lavender Lake" (approximately six years old). This latter refers to what one blogger described as a Pepto-Bismol hue of the canal before the pumping station was built to circulate the water. However, given that lavender also refers to aromatic flowers, its dual irony serves the establishment and its patrons who poke fun with drinks and food named after the canal (e.g., Dirty Rat, Industrial Arts

Wrench, or Smashed Lake Burger), while sitting on the open-air patio actually enduring the stench.

Taking action and feeling hope

The New York City government promised to clean up the canal as a way to pacify residents' complaints. However, residents banded together to approach the federal government's Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), because they had reason to distrust that the local City agencies would make good on its promises to safely dredge and dispose of the waste. In 2010, the (EPA) designated the canal as a "Superfund" cleanup site. In doing so, the canal was added to the National Priorities List, which includes the "most serious sites identified for long-term cleanup" (EPA, 2009). With the federal government authorized to fine historic polluters of toxic substances, plans for remediation began. Residents I interviewed described the joy they felt about this decision.

TM: did you have any initial (.) emotional response that it would be good or bad, um to have it be designated as a superfund site in particular.
MM: Oh I thought it was very Good.
TM: Uh huh, and why? Can you explain
MM: ((throat cleared)) I mean, We went to the early EPA meetings. And I remember ((throat cleared)) when they told us that it had superfund designation a whole bunch of us stood up and cheered.
TM: mmm
MM: And the guy from the EPA said. "well I never had that response before"
((Laughter))

Residents were happy to have it designated as a Superfund site because they felt confident that in Federal hands the cleanup would occur and that it would be done correctly. The surprised reaction of the EPA official (above) was due to the reception to the news of Superfund designation in the rest of the country. In other places, knowledge of this designation can drive real-estate prices down. However, people continue to move into this Brooklyn area. As recently noted in a local paper, prices in the Brooklyn neighborhood have not abated. In fact, since that article, they continue to rise. Consider this opening from an online website,

> GOWANUS — That burning smell in Gowanus isn't the toxic canal, it's the neighborhood's red-hot real estate prices, which show no signs of cooling in 2017, real estate analysts say (DNA-Info.).

The presence of a polluted canal does not deter people from wanting to live nearby. Real estate hunting mobile applications summon additional residents by using this feature. For instance, "Streeteasy.com" posted subway ads in 2016 depicting the Gowanus neighborhood by showing a man in a small rowboat catching a fish with three eyes.

Different from other EPA clean-up projects, residents living adjacent to the Gowanus experience individual sensations of putrid air, but through joint action and shared humor they express a sense of hopefulness about continuing to dwell amidst promised-to-be-abated toxic fumes. Although some may suggest that these experiences only forge superficial connections by making light of serious concerns, as neighbors we know that our shared positive regard for one another through irony is only lost on outsiders.

Bereaved parents: Olfaction

Whereas Gowanus Canal residents hopefully await a change in an existing unpleasantly present olfactory experience, bereaved parents live in a sensory world where one of their most cherished scents has become achingly absent. Before exploring the shared olfactory desires that unite many bereaved parents, it appears fruitful to first establish them as a speech community, thereby making them an appropriate population to study culturally.

In addition to sharing the experience of a child predeceasing them, many bereaved parents share language cues. For example, walking among bereaved parents at a conference, one can repeatedly hear workshop presenters and attendees discussing their "grief journey" and the pursuit of a "new normal." Bereaved parents share the understanding that the death of a child requires a process whereby a person moves toward the acceptance of a new reality. Another common language cue involves references to bereaved parents themselves as "the club." This is shorthand for the longer phrase "the club that no one wants to join." Some elaborate on this further by acknowledging that "the dues are too high." Many people note that they meet some of the best people in the club, but they still regret membership. Regardless of its phrasing, references to the club are commonplace.

Another shared linguistic cue involves references to the child's date of death. That dreadful date demarcates the juncture between life as it was previously known and entry to the club no one wants to join. The date is one that will be forever remembered and faced with some trepidation in the years that follow. The return to this date in later years most commonly gets assigned names geared toward making it sound more positive ("angel date" or "angelversary"). Some, however, apply a term that reflects the more common sentiment toward the day ("crapversary"). Another linguistic pattern that provided the focus for this study involves the common use of references by bereaved parents to their desire to smell their child again.

While the desire to smell a deceased loved one, whether a parent, grandparent, or pet gets voiced in various bereavement contexts, the desire seems particularly intense among bereaved parents. The desire to smell one's child again is mentioned in academic literature (Arnold & Gemma, 2008; Hunt & Greeff, 2011–2012). Arnold and Gemma (2008) provided a list of seventeen bullet points regarding themes they identified in their study of bereaved parents. The second bullet point reads, "Parents find a multitude of ways to remain connected to their dead child, including using the senses like smell and sight, images, and rituals" (p. 670). Although this pattern has been noted, it typically receives only a sentence or two or a bullet point. The literature has established that a pattern exists but does little to explore ways of talking about this pattern or the pattern's culturally distinct meanings.

Desired olfactory sensations and emotions

Feeling provides the hub for analyzing the activity of desiring the child's smell. The strong emotional connection to the child appears to be associated to, among other things, the smells associated with the child. "There seemed to be a lack of words with which to explain the sense of *yearning* and *loss*" (Hunt & Greeff, 2011–2012, p. 54, emphasis in original). Their conclusion parallels that of bereaved parents writing about their own

experience. Comiskey (2015) wrote commentaries on child loss and a series of letters to her deceased daughter, Kate. In one excerpt she states,

> The sorrow and anger that followed Kate's death, however, pale next to the terrible yearning. "Sometimes I feel panic sweeping over me," I wrote to a friend, "and I'm so overwhelmed with yearning for Kate that I don't know how I'll manage." A search for "yearning" and "grief" on the internet revealed a Harvard Medical School study that concluded, yearning after a loss is far more debilitating than sadness or depression. The study included people who had lost a husband or wife, a parent, or a brother or sister. I wrote the author, Dr. Holly Prigerson at Boston's Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, to ask why parents who had lost children weren't included. Losing a child, she told me, is so many "orders of magnitude worse" that it couldn't be meaningfully compared to other losses.

The terms longing or missing were also used repeatedly by other parents, however yearning seems, for many, to best capture the intensity. The desire for the child's smell creates an awareness and need that is described as something that a parent experiences bodily. It can be associated with other physical sensations, such as the panic that Comiskey describes.

The nature of the smell that parents miss often depends upon the stage of life at which the parent lost the child, and memories associated with those smells can be powerful. Parents of babies tend to refer to missing that "baby smell" or the "milky smell" of their breath. One grieving mother, Ashley Grimm, posted on Facebook her desire for readers to, "Go hug your babies right now. Soak in their smell, look at the innocent sparkle in their eyes that is lost somewhere between childhood and adulthood. Really feel how they squeeze you." As they grow older, young adults begin to carefully mask their natural scent, so their parents come to associate specific fragranced products with the child. Johns (2016) said of her son, "Christopher was handsome – he looked and smelled like an Abercrombie model." The important connection between olfaction and memory suggest that these smells are more than merely pleasant: they are evocative of cherished memories.

"Stuff," scents, and acting

People leave traces of their scents on specific household items, such as blankets, pillows, and clothing. Those lingering smells can become a source of focus for the grieving parent. Lagerman (2010) describes the desire for the smell of her young adult daughter saying,

> Imagine missing them so much that you are twisted up inside and the pain stays with you 24/7. You smell your child's pillow, clothes, you look at her pictures and can only cry. You have never felt longing like this in your life!

Children's natural smells pervade the items that they use regularly and become a scent marker for parents craving that smell. Comiskey, in a letter to her daughter, described the process of packing away her daughter's clothing, choosing to wear the items that fit (just as many parents do) and to keep some that still smelled of her perfume. She explained,

> I couldn't bring myself to wash a few items that still had a trace of your scent, and it struck me that I can't see you or touch you or hear you on earth, but I can still smell your scent. What a powerful idea!

The parents who have a perfume or cologne tend to be able to enjoy the smell longer or, in some cases, as mentioned in a post in one bereavement website, even go to buy that fragrance. This description of the feeling hub of yearning also links to the radiant of acting. The action of smelling the clothes assumes meaning and importance because it connects the parent to the missing child, thereby alleviating some of the sensations of separation.

Sadly, natural bodily odors do not last forever, thus prompting efforts to preserve it. For the smaller children with smaller clothing and accessories, the parents often use a Ziploc bag. Rafael (n.d.) describes the importance of these keepsakes,

> Child loss … means having Tupperware and Ziplock [*sic*] bags neatly lined up in the bottom drawer in your nightstand. Inside the bags you have the pajamas she slept in the night before she died, and the sheets you pulled off her mattress, hoping that one day you'll take them out and they might still smell like her. It's being too afraid to ever actually open up those Ziplock [*sic*] bags for fear of being broken when they don't smell like her.

The desire for the smell continues far longer than the actual smell does. Many parents mentioned the "Ziploc bag" strategy. After twenty years, the last outfit my son was wearing remains in one.

Given the tendency for the passage of time to rob natural aromas from the fibers of clothing and blankets, parents seek ways to challenge the laws of nature. A mother with the screen name Claricemomtobe (2010) posted the below question to a discussion board,

> I have taken home the clothes and blanket my son had on the day he passed away. I have taken the opportunity to take them out to smell them when I have panic attacks because I wanted to see him badly. I am worried that the smell will not last. I have placed it in a double "space bags." I do not know how long the smell will last but my husband says, "NOT FOREVER." Does anybody done this? [*sic*] If so anybody have any idea how to preserve the smell longer? I know this sounds crazy but this is the closest I can get to my Michael.

RNmomboys (2010) was the first to respond, assuring her that her question was not crazy and offering a suggestion to try to handle the inevitable loss of the smell,

> It was suggested to me by another angel momma to put a sachet of my favorite "flavor," that would remind me of her instead of the smell of the cardboard box. I am so glad she suggested it to me, because it is nice to at lease [*sic*] smell something again!

Other parents have posted similar suggestions. The act of preserving the child's smell gains importance as parents seek to stop the loss process. The parent has already lost the child, losing the smell associated with them compounds the loss. A final observation regarding the "acting" radiant and its correspondence to the "relating" radiant: The actions described are often solitary. The relating that occurs or gets described is relating among other bereaved parents. Many in their social circle may remain completely unaware of their craving for the child's scent.

Smelling and dwelling

The "hub" of feeling has received the bulk of the attention, yet it is also worth noting the importance of the radiant of "dwelling." If one considers where babies and young children "dwell" much of their early lives, it is directly underneath the parents' noses. Books and articles on bereavement have referenced "empty arms" as conveying they ache of losing

a small child, however "empty nostrils" also are integral to the experience. Certainly, when each of my children were small, their little fingers managed to find their way into every orifice in my head. The same cannot be said of friends and acquaintances. As noted in the olfaction literature, the sense of smell is governed by geography. We must occupy a space in physical closeness with the smell's source in order to achieve an olfactory experience. This makes the close relationship of the parent and child uniquely intimate as the parent physically takes in the smell of the child into the body.

The findings in this study also help to clarify a source of misunderstanding between bereaved parents and their non-bereaved counterparts. Those who have not lost a child often become distressed when a bereaved parent elects to maintain the child's room exactly as it was while the child was alive. This is often seen as an unhealthy response to grief. In addition to the literature that suggests that maintaining continuing bonds with the child can provide a "linking object" connecting the parent and child (Wheeler, 1999), the maintenance of a room can have an olfactory benefit. Meyer (2014) interviewed a bereaved mother about her son, quoting her as saying of his room, "I haven't touched it,' Sue says … . Evan's clothes are still on the floor, the bed is unmade, sheets and pillowcases unchanged. She says the room still smells like her son." Given the powerful yearning for smells and the sensation of absence described herein, her maintenance of the room makes perfect sense.

Conclusion

At first glance, comparing residents around the Gowanus Canal with bereaved parents may seem like a set-up for a bad joke. Upon deeper examination, however, we see important parallels that encourage consideration of how olfaction can play a meaningful role in relating within a speech community and how shared ideas about scents play a role in cultural systems of sense. Our notions of common sense sometimes cohere about common understandings of our senses. We conclude by tackling two tasks. First, we draw a contrast between the two speech communities described. Second, we examine the potential for incorporating this focus more explicitly within the context of CuDA by more clearly distinguishing between emotions and sensations as components of *feeling*.

Olfactory change and emotion

Examination of olfaction among Gowanus canal residents and bereaved parents demonstrates how this sense powerfully infuses cultural meaning systems. Carbaugh (2017) notes the important role that comparative studies can play in increasing understanding of diverse cultural meaning systems. To explicate the two focal speech communities examined herein, we examine emotion and feeling as the hub and consider the role of dwelling, acting and relating in unraveling some of the cultural meanings surrounding smell for each.

The Gowanus Canal residents had long experienced an undesirable smell in their midst. Residents formulated ways of acting by joking and creating cottage industries, to enhance their relating with one another and mitigate the negative olfactory cues. Cultural competence gets demonstrated as insiders have a shared understanding of the "inside jokes." They also relate to one another through discoursing the Superfund designation as a

source of hope for a brighter, less "odorifish" future. Relating among residents is facilitated through shared sensations associated with dwelling amidst a polluted waterway. Shared emotions in response to that feature of their dwelling coordinates residents to shared humor and local myths about their home. The Gowanus Canal residents enhance their sense of community through their response to the unpleasant odors.

Bereaved parents express a yearning for their deceased child's smell. Unlike the Gowanus Canal residents, however, they lack the ability to make light of its absence through humor. The smell remains closely tied to the child they long for. That smell had dwelled both literally and figuratively near their hearts during the child's early years of life. The child's death triggered physical sensations of an agonizing absence of the beloved child and the attendant painful, yearning emotions. Their feeling state gets addressed through acts such as physically sniffing personal effects carrying the child's scent and actively working to preserve the child's smell. For the bereaved parents, the desire to cling to any part of their child isolates them from their larger social network. Bereaved parents often come together for support because of the lack of understanding experienced among those surrounding them (Grinyer, 2012). That which is "common sense" among bereaved parents may appear strange to outsiders. Gowanus Canal residents collectively experience and form communication practices regarding the smells whereas bereaved parents experience the absence of smell which can function to separate them from their pre-existing social network.

Feeling and relating

In addition to elaborating upon the cultural meaningfulness of olfaction, we have also sought to differentiate between unique aspects of the hub of *feeling*. Carbaugh has described the notion of feeling in various ways. For example, Carbaugh's (1988) early work identified "feelings" as a prominent term Americans use to talk about emotional states. That term subsequently was employed as a covering term within the development of Cultural Discourse Analysis. Carbaugh (2007) describes an example of "sharing feelings" within the Act hub, but then recounts the three areas of cultural discourse itself as referring to, "people, actions, emotions" (p. 170). More recently, Carbaugh and Cerulli (2017) similarly use terms interchangeably when they define, "a hub of feeling, what do we feel, and how should we feel, through terms about emotions" (p. 1). We believe that the differing ways feeling is defined in these papers exemplifies an inclusiveness of a range of cultural experiences. Yet, to aid future research, our analysis suggests two different ways to treat feeling in a manner accordant to Lutz's (1986) distinction of the physical experience and the languaged aspect of emotion. We discuss in each of our analyses the sensations experienced and the culturally defined emotions that get assigned to the sensations.

Evidence for the importance of this distinction became prominent for both the Gowanus Canal and bereaved parent speech communities. For bereaved parents, Klein and Alexander (2003) distinguish between bereavement as "the objective reality of a loss" and grief as "the psychological response to that loss" and the emotions that coincide (p. 261). A changed reality has a different set of sensations associated with it. Many parents describe the loss of a child as having a "hole in your heart," as though "part of you is missing" or as a form of "amputation." None of these common descriptors are emotions,

per se, yet they are sensed and communicated. A parallel, but strikingly opposite experience of Gowanus residents is the overwhelming presence of a sensation in the midst of a place they purposefully and happily choose to live. Although one does not always smell the canal, it is among the many urban, industrial smells one chooses to live with on a daily basis.

When Synnott (1993) asked 182 of his students to choose which sense they would forfeit if they had to lose one sense, 57 percent chose smell (p. 183). His students' devaluing of olfaction parallels the level of concern much of Communication scholarship has shown regarding this sense. While we do not expect olfactory cues to become a dominant theme in cultural communication research, we would like to see them receive greater acknowledgement as an important part of a larger cultural system of sensemaking. In both speech communities, smells play a role in the sensations experienced. More significantly however, they provide one point through which people define their emotions, engage in collective action, and generate instructions for managing the smell preferences. It is not only the discursive references to smell that hold importance for the participants, but the ways in which smell itself is seen as locally meaningful and experienced uniquely within a specific community. We have offered two examples of olfaction playing an important role within different speech communities or, in the above cases, "sensory communities," however opportunities abound to advance understanding about the interaction between embodiment and speech communities. Because we make sense of our olfactory experience within our communities and collectively learn to manage unsatisfactory experiences; we should incorporate our scholarship with the unsayable sensations that communities find significant. Olfaction is a sense that is experientially intimate, deeply meaningful, and correspondent with memory, making it worth stretching our boundaries to include.

Notes

1. According to Milburn (2004, 2015), speech communities may refer to the patterned practices of a group of people, who may or may not be physically co-present, or geographically bound people who share a common way of speaking. Carbaugh's (2017) conception of dwelling is another way to consider the way shared geographic places can be culturally meaningful by members of the culture themselves. When used as a radiant it may inform the way a primary hub of feeling is localized by a particular group.
2. Notwithstanding Freud's (1893) description of an early case of smells and affect in an individual patient. His focus on intrapsychic experiences, similar to psychology, literature generally does not represent our interest in the interaction and culture.

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