Critical Rhetoric in the Age of the (First) Reality TV President:
A Critique of Freedom and Domination

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The purpose of this article is to examine Donald Trump's tweets from a critical rhetorical orientation. This article suggests that the identity constructed in Trump's tweets extends the persona he developed on the reality television series *The Apprentice* to construct a vision of a reality TV president. Therefore, the logics of reality television serve as criteria to evaluate how his tweets construct his "rhetorical authenticity" or strategically constructed "real-ness" as a reality TV president. Drawing from McKerrow's essay on critical rhetoric, the critique of freedom in the essay shows how his tweets reflect the logics of reality television to transform the possibilities of presidential communication, and the critique of domination suggests how these tweets function to exert power over others.

Keywords: critical rhetoric, reality television, Twitter, Trump, presidential rhetoric

Presidents have always attempted to use new media technologies to present messages more directly to the American people—from Franklin Roosevelt's fireside chats, broadcast on radio and television, to Ronald Reagan's prime-time press conferences, and from Bill Clinton's appearances on late night television talk shows to Barack Obama's appearance on Zach Galifianakis's online series, "Between Two Ferns" (Keith, 2016). Donald Trump most frequently communicates with the American people via Twitter. His tweets are posted in real time, on full public display of his followers, including those who retweet his messages, and the broader public who reads them via news outlets. While campaigning, political operative Mike Berland said Trump's use of Twitter was "a continuous Trump rally that happens on Twitter at all hours . . . every day" (Barbaro, 2015, para. 21). His Twitter rally has now continued through his first two years as president.

Trump claims 53.4 million[2] followers on Twitter as of July 12, 2018, and he asserts that his presence on Twitter earned him the U.S. presidency. Although he said at one time that he would limit his tweeting after he became president, he later declared that he would continue using Twitter because he's "covered so dishonestly by the press" and that he finds tweeting "very accurate" (Gove & Diekmann, 2017, para. 60). He proclaimed multiple times that Twitter is how he "can get the honest and unfiltered message out" (Trump, 2017h), and his proponents allege it is the best way for him to maintain a real connection with the American people (Calfas, 2017).

Despite his assertions, Twitter operates as a mediated form of communication and therefore does not provide direct access between Trump and the public. To date, Trump's interactions with the public have most often been mediated. His public persona was constructed primarily through the reality television series *The Apprentice* and *Celebrity Apprentice* (2004–15), until he declared his candidacy for president. His business failures and improprieties are so well documented (Guthey, 2016), it is surprising he won the election. Some claim that Donald Trump's appearance on *The Apprentice* was what actually led to his successful bid for the presidency (Hearn, 2016). The celebrity status he cultivated using tactics such as these ultimately gave him campaign strategies to promote his "perceived authenticity" as a candidate and now president (Fisher, 2017, para. 4). As such, some have suggested that Trump should be viewed through the lens of celebrity culture (Petersen, 2016) or power politics (Kreis, 2017). I suggest that examining his authenticity requires seeing him through the lens of the medium and form his image was created for and in: reality TV. Viewing his tweets through this lens allows an examination of a new medium of communication used by a president and to consider its implications for the presidency, American people, and what constitutes presidential rhetoric.

The purpose of this article is to take on a critical rhetorical orientation to examine Trump's tweets as "*that symbolism which addresses publics*" (emphasis in original; McKerrow, 1989, p. 101). I contend that the ways he communicates via his tweets use symbolic strategies from reality television. Using a critical rhetorical orientation to examine his tweets through the lens of reality television allows the critic to place symbols at the center of the critical practice. McKerrow (1989) explains:

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[2] Despite this number of followers reported on Twitter, a Twitter audit shows that nearly half of those followers are fake (Dupuy, 2017).

As theory, a critical rhetoric examines the dimensions of domination and freedom as these are exercised in a relativized world. The critique of domination has an emancipatory purpose—a telos toward which it aims in the process of demystifying the conditions of domination. The critique of freedom, premised on Michel Foucault's treatment of power relations, has as its telos the prospect of permanent criticism—a self-reflexive critique that turns back on itself even as it promotes a realignment in the forces of power that construct social relations. (p. 91)

The critique of domination is the simpler task as Trump is president. Consequently, examining his use of Twitter can help to demystify how he is exercising state power. However, his tweets demonstrate where he exerts his power through the publicly accessible, participatory social medium of Twitter, which allows questioning of what kind of power is being performed. Additionally, examining his tweets through the lens of reality television provides a means of recursive critique in which the criteria that shaped his public (now, presidential) persona can be applied.

In this article, I argue that how Trump communicates with the public via Twitter was shaped by his persona constructed via reality TV; hence, examining his tweets through this lens provides a means of critiquing freedom. Often, critics focus on a critique of domination or of freedom. I focus on his tweets as a means to engage in a critique of freedom and of domination to show how he uses the logics of reality television to rhetorically construct an authentic vision of him as a "reality TV president" on Twitter.

Conducting Analysis of Trump's Tweets

McKerrow (1989) suggests approaching "mediated communication as rhetorical is to see it in its fragmented, unconnected, even contradictory or momentarily oppositional mode of presentation. The task is to construct addresses out of the fabric of mediated experience prior to passing judgment" (p. 101). Trump's tweets provide an exemplar for the fragmented and often contradictory qualities of Twitter. In this analysis, I chose his 2,060[3] tweets between his inauguration as president on January 20, 2017, through November 7, 2017, the date Twitter increased its character limit from 140 to 280 characters. I used the Trump Twitter Archive[4] to search Trump's tweets. Brendan Brown, who constructed the archive, has been monitoring Trump's Twitter feed in real time since January 27, 2017. Any tweets deleted and inaccessible on Twitter still appear in Brown's archive. I also included screen shots of the posts from Twitter for tweets between January 20 and 27. Taken together, these tweets serve as fragments to construct a text that reveals the rhetorical authenticity of his persona as the (first) "reality TV president."

Twitter is a medium through which people believe they can access the real Donald Trump (Gove & Diekmann, 2017; Hess, 2016; Kreis, 2017). Twitter is a social networking site where users post their own

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[3] Future research may want to focus on whether or not Trump's tweets changed with the character limit increase, but that is beyond the purview of this article.

[4] Trump Twitter Archive can be accessed at http://www.trumptwitterarchive.com/archive. Brown gives permission on the About page of the website for others to use his data. The advantage of using posts from Brown's site is that they are searchable by date and key words, and it is updated multiple times a day.

messages, called tweets, and can interact with others' posts. The format of the platform encourages democratic, participatory interaction among users, but also requires them to be succinct and unambiguous (Kreis, 2017). Trump's 53.4[5] million followers are only one audience that sees his tweets. He can also say that millions more see them from retweets and when the news media cover them. The character limit and ease with which users can post, like, reply, and retweet allows users to communicate frequently as well (Barbaro, 2015). The length, level of discourse, and frequency of interactions create a media environment that privileges pathos, or emotion (Boylan & Miller, 2017; Slaughter, 2016), and encourages increased feelings of immediacy between users (Hess, 2016; Higgins, 2017).

Twitter use has "begun to transform our televisual landscape, and, consequently, the character of public discourse" (Ott, 2017, p. 59), due in large part to the symbiotic relationship that creates cross-promotional opportunities between television and Twitter. In their study of Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump's campaign tweets, Lee and Lim (2016) suggest Trump's tweets promote fractured discourses, as they found one in 10 of Trump's tweets included uncivil wording. Ott (2017) further suggests that "Trump's natural style of speaking and Twitter's underlying logic are wholly homologous" (p. 63). This point is supported by Crockett's (2016) analysis of 2,500 of @realDonaldTrump's tweets from October 2015 to May 2016, where he found that Trump's lexicon is simple, tweets are overwhelmingly negative, and that he often uses exclamation points and all caps to heighten the emotional impact of his messages (Ott, 2017). Linguistic Professor Emeritus George Lakoff (2018) created a taxonomy of Trump's tweet strategies. He contends that Trump uses four strategies: preemptive framing, diversion, deflection, and as trial balloons to test public reactions. These insights provide a starting point from which to analyze Trump's tweets, but none include the crucial frame from which Trump's tweets must be understood: reality television.[6]

Constructing Rhetorical Authenticity on Reality Television

This article focuses on the "real" or authentic image Trump's tweets portray to the public, as he alleges Twitter allows him to by-pass the mediation of the press and communicate an authentic version of himself directly to the American people. A critical rhetorical orientation suggests a constantly recursive critique where "the criteria it presupposes in its inquiry are not different from the ones by which the object or phenomenon judges itself" (Benhabib, 1986, p. 33). Therefore, it is important to understand the characteristics of reality television that shape Trump's tweets to understand the construction of this "real" persona.

Although more than 750 reality series now air on cable alone, not to mention broadcast networks and streaming services (VanDerWerff, 2016), series that premiered in the early 2000s, including *Survivor* (2000–present), *American Idol* (2002–16), and *The Apprentice*, popularized the reality competition show genre. Early reality series used inexpensive, low-end, fast production values to create a feeling of aesthetic realism (Raphael, 1997). Fundamental characteristics of reality TV that create this sense of realism include

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[5] See footnote 1.

[6] With such a current topic, new analyses of Trump's rhetoric appear frequently. Additional insights into his rhetoric can be found in the essays in Skinnell (2018). None in this volume use the reality television frame to examine his use of Twitter.

its use of remediation and narrative construction strategies to represent real people who are filmed in specific spaces as they compete, in the case of reality competition shows, with one another to win a prize.

New media, including reality television and the Internet, involve the double logic of remediation, or our culture's demand for both multiplication and erasure of said media (Bolter & Grusin, 1999). The two strategies that make up this double logic of remediation are hypermediacy and immediacy. Hypermediacy reminds the viewer of the medium, whereas immediacy attempts to make viewers "forget the presence of the medium" (pp. 272–273). Showing the audience the medium in reality television might include showing cameras filming participants or less polished, shaky, handheld camera shots. Both strategies imply that the cameras are following the participants' every move, depicting what they would do even without cameras. Likewise, not showing cameras or other technologies used to film the participants make the audience feel as if they are seeing the participants act as they would even if they were not on television. Although seemingly contradictory, both strategies increase audiences' feelings that what they are seeing is more real.

Reality television was founded on the idea that stories could be told using real people without being scripted. As the writers' strike in 1988 left television executives wondering what they would put on the air, producers borrowed another strategy already used in media production: editing. Instead of having a script, filming it, and then editing it to put the story together, reality television begins with participants, typically in the form of people who represent archetypal (or stereotypical) characters, put into a particular situation to interact with one another. Producers often talk to participants off-screen to instigate mini-dramas or contrive activities for participants to do on-screen. What contestants ultimately do or say comes out in the interaction itself. Later, producers edit raw footage to fit the space and time allotted to tell a story, creating protagonists and antagonists, generating dramas, and ultimately suggesting to viewers who they should root for and against (Fox, 2013). Such construction puts the power to drive the narrative in the hands of producers and editors.

Strategies of remediation and narrative construction work in tandem to construct reality television participants' rhetorical authenticity. Andrejevic (2004) suggests that authenticity in the context of reality television cannot be based on any objective definition because of the overwhelming levels of surveillance to which participants are subject. Therefore, participants' authenticity can only be evaluated against the "reality" they signed up for, as what they come to expect in a given context becomes "a surrogate for authentic experience" (p. 146). As a critique of freedom suggests the "*freedom to* pursue other power relations" (McKerrow, 1991, p. 75, emphasis in original) according to contextual criteria, the only fair way to evaluate their "real-ness" is through a "*rhetorical authenticity* or strategically constructed genuineness" (Dunn, 2016, p. 530, emphasis in original). From the perspective of critical rhetoric, rhetoric is understood as "public discourse directed toward the creation of concerted action" (Brower, 2016, p. 253). According to Dubrofsky (2011), "the barometer of authenticity in the space of RTV is in how well participants perform themselves in an obviously contrived (and surveilled) setting" (p. 117; see also Couldry, 2002; Gillespie, 2000). Taken together, rhetorical authenticity is how participants' selves are symbolically constructed in reality television.

In this context, I suggest that Donald Trump has the freedom to treat his presidency as an extension of his persona on *The Apprentice*. Trump's tweets reveal how he uses the medium of Twitter as a

continuation of his reality television experience to construct his rhetorical authenticity via strategies of remediation and narrative construction. Our reality TV president's Twitter persona supposes a freedom to interact with "the real" Trump, but ultimately reminds us of his power and dominance as a White, male president.

A Critique of Freedom and Domination

McKerrow (1989) states, "A critical rhetoric seeks to unmask or demystify the discourse of power. The aim is to understand the integration of power/knowledge in society," including "what possibilities for change the integration invites or inhibits and what intervention strategies might be considered appropriate to effect social change" (p. 91). One of the ways to demystify discourses of power is to search for truth. This "truth" is not an a priori, absolute Truth in the Platonic sense. Rather, it is a "critical rhetorical truth," or "a constellation of constitutive effects that produce truth within the public disclosure of relational speech and action" (Brower, 2016, p. 255). The critic's responsibility is to observe "how it is that truth is produced, maintained, and challenged within variable sociocultural arrangements that serve as the mechanisms that produce the very idea of truth" (Brower, 2016, p. 255). To discover this critical rhetorical truth, it is crucial to emphasize the "seen or unseen relational properties within which the agent—as agent—is contained and with which he or she must contend in the social world" (McKerrow, 2016, p. 257). In this case, I used the logics of reality television (as the seen and unseen relational properties) to examine how Donald Trump's tweets construct his "rhetorical authenticity" as, what I contend is, "a reality TV president." I (Dunn, 2016) previously proposed the concept of rhetorical authenticity in relation to sex workers depicted in the HBO docuporn[7] series, *Cathouse*. For these women, what was performed and depicted on reality TV represented an authentic part of their experience of living in the brothel setting of the series and being in *Cathouse*, even as it was rhetorically constructed (see also Dunn, 2010, 2012). In this case, I use the concept to examine how Trump's tweets construct his rhetorical authenticity and the implications of that construction. This perspective allowed me to conduct both a critique of freedom and of domination.

A Critique of Freedom

From a critical rhetorical orientation, a critique of freedom involves questioning the self-evident nature of "a form of experience, knowledge, or power" for the purpose of freeing it "to open new possibilities for thought and action" (Rajchman, 1985, p. 4). McKerrow (1991) further clarifies that it is the "*freedom to* pursue other power relations" that are "complementary, not incompatible, analyses of the discourse of power" (p. 75, emphasis in original). This freedom to reimagine power relations and freedom to "be other than what one is at the present moment" (McKerrow, 2016, p. 256) necessitates using contextual criteria that allows us to make sense of a rhetor's choices. In other words, instead of viewing power solely as oppressive, we can see it as productive and "a positive force which creates social relations and sustains them through the appropriation of a discourse that 'models' the relations through its expression" (McKerrow, 2016, p. 256). The truth or falsity of experience, knowledge, or power does not drive such analyses. Rather, questions focus on what truths are constructed in a particular context and to what effects? In this case, I

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[7] The term "docuporn" is borrowed from Arthurs (2004).

am using strategies employed by reality TV and *The Apprentice*, discussed earlier in this article, to interrogate how Trump's tweets construct his rhetorical authenticity and to what effects.

The most important effects of Trump's rhetorical authenticity relate to what his use of Twitter as a medium and the content of his tweets indicate about what it means to be the "real" president. As mediated communication, Twitter is always already fragmented (McGee, 1990). Twitter's short messages sent over, in this case, Trump's personal account, construct his persona as the "real" president through their form and content. Their content suggests Trump is the star and producer of the presidency, whereas their form suggests the rhetorical authenticity of an emotionally transparent, spontaneous, yet fallible president.

Trump's tweets construct a rhetorical authenticity in which he promotes himself as the "real president." This may not be surprising, given that studies of Twitter suggest that nearly 80% of activity is users tweets about themselves (Naaman, Boase, & Lai, 2010; Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013). Similar to Trump's starring role as producer and final judge on *The Apprentice*, Trump's tweets reveal strategies of remediation and narrative construction that center him in his starring role and suggest that this is his "real" role, given the seeming spontaneity with which he communicates.

The most obvious way his tweets center him in the construction of his rhetorical authenticity is through strategies of hypermediacy, or highlighting the medium, beginning with Trump's Twitter account and username: @realDonaldTrump. This has been his username on his verified account since he joined Twitter on May 4, 2009. He claims that after becoming president he kept the name, instead of using the official @POTUS, because of the number of followers he already had (Gove & Diekmann, 2017). Kreis (2017) asserts that the continued use of his username legitimates his Washington-outsider status. Additionally, his explicit use of "real" before his name suggests this account belongs to the actual Donald Trump and implies that what appears is "real." Contrasting his "real"-ness with the "fake news" he calls out 155 times during this period also adds to his rhetorical authenticity.

A second strategy of hypermediacy relates to how his tweets appear. On Twitter, users see his picture, username, post, date, and time in each tweet. This presents visual evidence of the real-time and public nature of his (and all Twitter users) posts. To further their credibility, when the press report on Trump's tweets, they often use screenshots of his actual tweets. Regardless of where they appear, his tweets usually resemble the formatting of the medium (Figure 1). Just as reprinting or reposting his actual tweets lends credibility to press that reports about them, Trump's posting from his personal account provides a level of ethos with followers, convincing them that @realDonaldTrump must be real.

The seeming spontaneity of his posts suggests a level of immediacy that also functions to authenticate the rhetorical construction of his persona and demonstrate that he directs and produces the political drama of the presidency behind the scenes. This spontaneity reveals itself in posts that display emotion, mistakes, contradictions, and even lies. As demonstrated in Figure 1, Trump calls the media "Fake News" and capitalizes the phrase, defends himself against collusion, demeans a former employee (George) by calling him a liar, and emphatically uses ALL CAPS to point the finger away from himself toward Democrats. The level of emotion comes through even without knowing the context in which these tweets were posted. His not only capitalizing "Fake News" and using it 118 times between January 20 and November

6, 2017, demonstrates how emphatic he is about it. Finally, use of ALL CAPS indicates yelling, in this case, at the Democratic Party. The mistakes in his tweets further support this rhetorical authenticity. Trump's (2017g) tweet on March 4, 2017, read: "How low has President Obama gone to tapp my phones during the very sacred election process. This is Nixon/Watergate. Bad (or sick) guy!" Although some media made fun of his spelling mistake, legitimate news and fact-checking sources refuted the charge against Obama (Sherman, 2018; "Trump Wiretapping Claim," 2017). For followers, it was easier to believe what he had to say because of the mistake. On Twitter, Trump appears real and accessible to his followers due to the privileging of his emotions, spontaneity, and even fallibility.

Figure 1. These tweets were posted after it was revealed that former Trump employee George Papadopoulos pled guilty to making false statements to the FBI and was not charged with more counts or more serious crimes in a likely deal to reveal what he knows about the Trump campaign's dealings with Russia during the 2016 Presidential campaign.

Seen through the logics of reality television, Trump's tweets suggest a president who has the freedom to become a different kind of president, one who does not adhere to traditional conventions and political correctness. These transgressions of expected presidential communication provide credibility for his authenticity as they reveal not his front stage self as president but his back stage "real" self (Goffman, 1959). As Fisher (2017) explains, "Trump seemingly willfully broke conventions for appropriate behavior for presidential candidates, just as the authentic reality star breaks the expectation of suitable behavior on screen . . . which may not fit with expectations of a presidential candidate, but fits with expectations of Trump" (para. 12). Constructing this rhetorically authentic version of not a president, but the (first) reality TV president "changes power relations and recreates a new 'normal' order" in which this "truth" is "supplanted by a newly articulated version that is accepted as the basis for the revised social relation"

(McKerrow, 1989, p. 100). In the context of our reality-television-saturated world, Trump's use of its characteristics in his use of Twitter normalizes this type of communication from a president to the public. Instead of being constrained by the predetermined expectations of how a president should communicate, he instead puts himself in the position to practice the freedoms the logics of reality television afford him when he uses them as president. He may center himself, instigate drama, be unpolished and "real," and still claim the title president, but the new relations his use of Twitter create are more accurately described as those of the (first) reality TV president.

Although this perspective respects the criteria provided by reality television to interpret Trump's tweets and the orientation required for a critique of freedom, it does not address the material implications of this construction of rhetorical authenticity. Seeing this vision of a reality TV president as authentically "the president" implies that we judge our politicians based on public perceptions of their authenticity. Showalter (2017) points out that this perspective is problematic because as president, Trump's "claims and actions carry a symbolic, diplomatic, and legal weight" (para. 17) that his tweets prior to becoming president did not. So, when he becomes the center of attention, the American people and our system of government in general become supporting players at best. When errors and seemingly random emotional outbursts become the stock in trade of the president via this participatory, democratic medium, the potential for international incidents increases, backlash against private citizens rises, and domination over Others becomes acceptable. These implications are not based on presidential use of Twitter in general. Rather, they are focused on the form and content of Trump's tweets in particular. For these reasons, it is essential to view Trump's tweets as the rhetoric of a reality TV president and not presidential rhetoric as he appears to be using strategies of reality TV rather than those for governance to guide them. Therefore, recognizing his strategies for what they are should help us to see who might end up dominated through his exercise of freedom.

A Critique of Domination

From a critical rhetorical orientation, a critique of domination requires investigation of how discourse legitimates the interests of hegemonic power. For U.S. presidents, this usually involves focus on inaugural addresses, formal speeches, and press conferences. It is therefore important not to critique Trump's tweets as nonpresidential merely because they do not take the form of previously accepted presidential discourse. Otherwise, we risk reifying dominant conceptions of "acceptable" presidential communication (Dubrofsky, 2016, p. 665). Instead, it is crucial to focus on what the tweets tell us about his attempts as the (first) reality TV president to regulate the discourse, knowledge, and power of others. The same tweet strategies that give Trump the freedom to be a reality TV president also exert power over others. These tactics include casting himself as the star and protagonist of his self-created presidential drama and defining anyone who opposes him as antagonists who are less than he proclaims to be.

Merely tweeting as president from his private account implies an exercise of power. It also suggests that his authority extends beyond his title and is granted him by the number of followers, similar to television ratings, he claims came with him into this role (and expanded exponentially after his inauguration). He further centers himself and his decision-making powers by teasing out his

announcements, as if they are about his tweets and not the subject at hand. Example tweets include announcements such as the "casting" decisions for his cabinet. He first teases his followers: "I have made my decision on who I will nominate for The United States Supreme Court. It will be announced live on Tuesday at 8:00 p.m. (W.H.)" (Trump, 2017a), and then builds anticipation: "Getting ready to deliver a VERY IMPORTANT DECISION! 8:00 P.M." (Trump, 2017b), links to the live stream of the announcement: "Join me live from the @WhiteHouse. https://t.co/LHOs4nAaG1" (Trump, 2017c), and finally suggests what his followers should think about his choice: "Hope you like my nomination of Judge Neil Gorsuch for the United States Supreme Court. He is a good and brilliant man, respected by all" (Trump, 2017d). His use of "I" and "me" center these tweets on him, rather than on what he is actually announcing, and knowing that he, personally, is tweeting these announcements about his actions contributes to the idea that what he posts represents his authentic point of view.

Beyond placing himself as the star of the reality TV presidency, naming himself the protagonist and his opponents as antagonists creates, maintains, and recreates conflicts. VanArendonk (2017) explains this ethos of reality television:

> The inevitable narrative corollary of characters built through interpersonal battles is that the battles *keep coming back. . . .* So in moments of stress . . . Trump leans heavily on this reality trope. Bring up Rosie O'Donnell, dredge up ancient Clinton scandals, and perpetually refight an election that's already finished. (para. 6, emphasis in original)

The creation of Trump as protagonist and others as antagonists takes place primarily through a reality TV aesthetic of making the political personal (Showalter, 2017). Trump's tweets make media attacks on him personally the reason for lack of support for his policy proposals: "Any negative polls are fake news, just like the CNN, ABC, NBC polls in the election. Sorry, people want border security and extreme vetting" (Trump, 2017e). His tweets blame the Democrats for the lack of a full cast in his cabinet: "It is a disgrace that my full Cabinet is still not in place, the longest such delay in the history of our country. Obstruction by Democrats!" (Trump, 2017f). His tweets characterize him as the victim of Russian interference in the election: "In other words, Russia was against Trump in the 2016 election—and why not, I want strong military & low oil prices. Witch Hunt!" (Trump, 2017j). This last example also shows how Trump casts himself as both the victim of personal attacks as well as the "winner" *The Apprentice* constructed him to be. The implication is that if Russia was against him and he was still elected, people support him. VanArendonk (2017) explains that personal clashes are "never about the fight itself, but about defining who you are. . . . . The most commonly fought over reality-TV characteristics also line up nicely with the definition-through-difference Trump: He is always classier, wealthier, smarter, more honest, and more authentic" (para. 5). Such characterizations of Trump automatically imply that everyone else has less class, money, intelligence, honesty, and, therefore, less authenticity than he does. As such, Trump clearly defines himself as the protagonist attempting to overcome challenges from moving targets on every front from multiple antagonists while he defines everyone else as less than he is.

His explicit implications that all others are less than he is, taken along with the "mistakes" that appear on Twitter, have serious implications for everyone, but especially those different from him, particularly anyone who is not White. Kreis (2017) and Ott (2017) suggest that his use of capitalization

and exclamations do not just reinforce his messages but also promote a particular ethos. Dubrofsky (2016) explains this ethos as attached to the culture of surveillance cultivated in large part through reality television. The privileged ethic is "emotional transparency, with the implication that authentic emotions are visible on the body" (p. 665). When Trump tweets that "Mexico was just ranked the second deadliest country in the world, after only Syria. Drug trade is largely the cause. We will BUILD THE WALL!" (Trump, 2017i), his emotional commitment comes through in his broad claims, ALL CAPS, and exclamation point.

However, the emotional transparency assumed of Trump from these tweets is limited to White bodies. Dubrofsky (2016) and Hall (2015) suggest that visible White bodies are assumed to be transparent, whereas brown bodies are read as "opaque, unreadable" and require interrogation to reveal their "hidden recesses" (Dubrofsky, 2016, p. 665). The racial motivation of such a tweet is often uncritically accepted by his followers, and the emotional tenor overshadows such content to "reveal" his authenticity. As Guthey (2016) indicates,

> many of his supporters clearly feel that he is authentic, and that they have direct access to his very real emotions—specifically to his blind rage. . . . Trump detractors delude themselves every time they think he is (*sic*) gone too far with his next racist, sexist, mean-spirited, violent, or just plain ignorant outburst—all of this only fans the flames of support because it makes him seem more "real." (p. 668)

Trump's tweets then communicate his emotional transparency as president even while his ethos comes from violating "typical" expectations for a president by seeming spontaneous and emotionally transparent. These displays of emotion, spontaneity, and supposed transparency, however, serve to authenticate his racist, sexist, homophobic, and overall mean-spirited ideas about people who are different from him, including Americans he is supposed to represent.

When scandals break, politicians typically attempt to address them, be good, stay out of the limelight, and then let the next scandal garner the spotlight in the next news cycle. However, VanArendonk (2017) explains that this is not how reality TV storytelling operates:

> In the aftermath of scandal, good reality personalities (and just as importantly, good reality-show producers and editors) have to be already building toward the new fight. It doesn't matter *why* you're onscreen as long as you *are* onscreen. . . . So we get Trump calling out the cast of Hamilton, followed by brief gestures toward doing the country's business, followed by the reality-show unveiling of a secretary of State pick. (para. 9)

In the context of Donald Trump and Twitter, his tweets demonstrate how these reality television narrative strategies promote conflict and authenticate the drama he is producing: the "real presidency."

Using reality TV strategies to authenticate his "real presidency" exerts domination over others. Domination occurs through rituals where power is expressed, rulers are sanctioned, and those who fail to participate in and/or affirm the ruler are excommunicated. Restrictions imposed by rulers function to limit

discourse that challenges those who oppress others (McKerrow, 1989). Critiquing domination, then, requires that we reveal how the rhetoric of a ruler dominates and oppresses others. As suggested above, in Trump's use of Twitter, this reality TV president defines himself as winner, whereas anyone who does not support him, including Americans he is supposed to represent, are seen as losers. His main concern appears to be remaining the star of his own presidency at the expense of anyone who disagrees with him or is different from him. His attempts to direct the narrative and center his own actions in his tweets reveal his desire to define himself as star and producer of any dramas he creates, regardless of the impact of the dramas on the U.S., international relations, and real people.

Implications

Using a critical rhetorical orientation to conduct an analysis of Trump's tweets has implications for what constitutes presidential rhetoric, the presidency, and real people in the U.S. and the world. Before Trump's election, tweets were not typically considered presidential rhetoric,[8] which privileges what we think of as "presidential." Given his role as president, we could critique his tweets as presidential rhetoric. However, the fragmented nature of the medium as well as Trump's use of the logics of reality television in his tweets would likely result in dismissal of his rhetoric as "not presidential." For this reason, studying his tweets from this perspective would merely reify the dominance of traditional modes of analyzing presidential rhetoric and conventions of presidential rhetoric.

Merely dismissing his tweets as "Trump being Trump" subsumes the medium, form, and content of these messages as part of presidential rhetoric without considering how they change the presidency, let alone the criteria necessary for evaluating presidential rhetoric. Hearn (2016) suggests the real problem then "is not just that he honed his persona on reality television and knows how to play the press, but, rather, that he demonstrates and embodies what many people are now doing daily" (p. 658). This is not to suggest that Trump invented, on *The Apprentice* or on Twitter, the logics of reality television nor that his election led to their use by the American people. Rather, using the conventions from which the rhetor communicates allows us to see Trump's tweets as the authentic rhetoric of a reality TV president.

Using the logics of reality television, Trump's tweets give him the freedom to communicate in ways unexpected for an American President. McKerrow (1989) notes:

> The analysis of the discourse of power focuses on the "normalization" of language intended to maintain the status quo. By producing a description of "what is," unfettered by predetermined notions of what "should be," the critic is in a position to posit the possibilities of freedom. (p. 100)

Trump's tweets normalize his discourses as a reality TV president and further normalize reality television logics in society. The implications of this characterization for the presidency include the necessity of putting oneself

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[8] Twitter became accessible to the public in 2006. George W. Bush did not use it as president and, as noted earlier in the article, Obama only started using Twitter from @POTUS44 in 2015. His last tweet from this account was on Trump's inauguration day, January 20, 2017.

in the starring role (often at the expense of the American people), needing to produce drama, defining protagonists and antagonists, and acting as the final judge for all people and ideas. The normalization of reality TV strategies in communication by a president also creates the possibility that Trump may not be the last reality TV president.

After examining this "new normal," the critique of power must continue based on the newly articulated order (McKerrow, 1989). This critique of domination related to Trump's tweets does not criticize his use of common language, improper grammar, or even emotional posts as president. Rather, it focuses on his placing himself (instead of the American people) at the center, communicating ever-shifting positions, and creating drama where he is always the protagonist and anyone contrary to him the antagonist. Although all are normal in the context of reality television, they are not normal for presidential rhetoric. So, in this critique of domination, I also demonstrated how his exercise of power as a reality TV president impacted those he Others.

Normalizing reality TV aesthetics in presidential communication, especially on the participatory and fragmented medium of Twitter, may make it seem as if the president is more accessible to the people, especially his followers, but it also puts the president on a pedestal as "star" of all his communication and allows Trump to "produce" dramas in our society. His tweets tell all who see them who to root for and against. Ultimately, what makes reality TV compelling—the drama—as presidential tweets, creates a country where the president becomes immune from criticism from his followers and the conflict and constructed hierarchies he creates become shorthand for who we are supposed to support and who we are meant to oppress.

Had I merely conducted a critique of freedom, I would have shown how the conventions of reality TV, including his construction as a rhetorically authentic president, afforded Trump the freedom to communicate more casually, spontaneously, contradictorily, and seemingly more directly with the American people in a language many of us are familiar with because of the ubiquity of reality television today. However, the negative implications for the people he casts as enemies and the dramas he attempts to instigate were revealed in the critique of domination. Future studies of presidential rhetoric should consider using criteria appropriate to the context (and medium) through which presidents communicate to reveal how they used conventions of the day as well as then engaging in the recursive critique that requires examination of the exercises of power implicated in such communication.

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