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Uncovering Identities Through Performance Poetry

by

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Thesis

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Abstract

Research in the area of performance poetry is still relatively new to the field of communication.

Using Hecht's Communication Theory of Identity, this study explores performance poetry as a communicative tool for identity management. By observing the performances of five poets from six seasons of HBO's Def Poetry Jam, a thematic analysis of the communication practices that occurred during the performances was used to code the processes of identity management.

Additionally, this study explores how validation of enacted identity occurs between the poets and their audiences. Findings suggest that performance poetry could effectively be utilized as a tool in identity management that would offer both a macro and a micro evaluation of multiple identities on multiple levels; and validation occurred as either a natural or prompted response.

Overall, this study demonstrates the usefulness of performance poetry in not only self-expression but also as a valuable instrument in managing identity.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

*I am afraid to speak.
No really, when I open my mouth to flick my tongue the reaction I
receive is bleak,
It's weak,
Not my tone, but "my speak".
My thoughts are like lava-flows over mounds and mounds of heat,
But quickly turns to volcanic ashes on the sea of speak,
My voice?
It hides beneath me, I will not allow for my words to flow
Smoothly,
I suppress my voice from knocking on the doors of opportunity, so
instead my ethos hide between the
Corridors and will not be seen through my speak.
But these are words,
And these words are meant to be spoken.
The capability of artistic expression is the highest calling
Of the literate and word tech savvies;
Of the knowledgeable and street smart cabbies.
Be a vehicle carrying the syllables and rhetoric of the non-
noteworthy.
Commit vernacular vehicular homicide for any educated fool that
stands in your way.
Who's to say that those who are not written down in books are not
intellectual?
That we who speak from our minds are not profound.
A wise short woman with locks once said "do you".
So I do,
I Speak.*

The above piece was written for my undergraduate communication course at the University of Michigan-Flint in the Fall of 2007. At the time, it was a course called *Special Topics: Spoken Word as Art & Communication*. The first day of class, I recall sitting there thinking about how I never viewed performance poetry as an educational subject; for me, performance poetry was just something that I was good at doing. I wondered how the professor planned to take something as culturally-based, contemporary, and controversial as performance poetry and turn it into an academic course. The goal for the course was to have the class explore public speaking through the lens of performative content, delivery and purpose. Yet it did so

much more for us; it allowed us to evaluate ourselves and find relationships between each other and our place in this society. It was at this point in which I understood that words have power once they are spoken with the purpose of helping to provide greater meaning in our daily lives. When we speak these words, they not only show our perception of the world, but they also help us to make sense of it and those around us. They help us to reveal who we are internally; for when we speak, we are empowered to inspire others, and those words begin to serve as a catalyst for action and interaction. When we consciously speak of our thoughts, experiences, and circumstances, we create, transform, and re-create who we are at the core; we unconsciously reveal and manage our identities.

Identity is a complex concept, and as society becomes increasingly multidimensional through the advancements in technology and social networking, globalization, and the growth in interracial and intercultural marriage, mixed-race births, and immigration patterns, there will be greater complexities to personal identities in the twenty-first century, thus resulting in the evolution of new concepts of identity. As these issues increasingly characterize contemporary society, concern for identity and identity management can be expected to become increasingly challenging. And so, as people struggle to adapt to the dynamics of this modern social life, identity and communication are becoming important factors in not only how we live our lives, but more so how we make sense of and navigate our way through the different layers of our identities.

At the turn of the 20th century, communication scholars joined in the conquest for identity research in relation to communication in a number of ways. One example is rhetorician Kenneth Burke's (1966) work on how language functions as interaction between individuals and society resulting in identity construction in a continual process. Influenced by Burke, Carbaugh (1996)

studied how social identity was constructed by communication and cultural ethnography. Yet there has been only a limited amount of research into identity management and performance poetry. Most studies on performance poetry are based in the field of pedagogy and focus largely on literature and elements of composition and storytelling. Furthermore, the bulk of studies available in the field of communication on performance poetry focus largely on activism and are limited to marginalized identities. Perhaps the question of identity having been absent from communication studies on performance poetry is due in part to the ideology that identity is encompassed in communication as discussed in the next section. Therefore, expounding upon previous research on identity and communication, the purpose of this study is to explore performance poetry as a communicative tool for identity management.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Identity As Constituted by Communication

Identity is highly complex in its composition and its management. It is an abstract and multilayered concept that plays a significant role in all communication interactions, and identity management is considered a critical aspect to everyone's psychological well-being (Eadie, 2009). The classical view of identity is that it is located within the individual and is separated and discrete (Carbaugh, 1996). However, contrary to classical belief, identity is not static; it changes as a function of our life experiences and social interactions (Gergen, 2000; Eisenberg, 2001; Eadie, 2009). Identities can be based on memberships in demographic categories, roles we play, memberships in organizations, associations or vocations, or memberships in stigmatized groups (Eadie, 2009; Hecht et al., 2004). From a communication standpoint, we are constantly creating and recreating our identities through interacting with others (Goffman, 1963; Eadie, 2009). In fact, it is through communication that we are able to enact our identities and express our similarities and dissimilarities to others; therefore, these interactions may include conversations, commemorations of history, music, dance, ritual, ceremonial, and social drama and performances of all sorts (Hecht et al., 2004).

Performance Poetry

The topic of performance poetry, also referred to as spoken word poetry, is still very young, and research in the area is still fresh. In fact, studies on this topic date only as far back as mid to late 1990s with the bulk of the research in the 2000s. The limited amount of literature on performance poetry and identity in the field of communication prompted this study on how communication could be used as a lens to develop a deeper understanding of the process of identity management. Performance poetry, though literary in nature, requires that the poetry has

to be performed aloud and heard by others. I argue that it is through this exchange process that an individual goes through the internal process of identity negotiation.

According to the review of literature, performance poetry is essentially poetry written to be performed on stage to an audience. Performance poetry is best understood by evaluating its elements and discovering at what points they intersect. Based on a comprehensive review of the literature, there are at least three steps involved in the process of performance poetry: reflection and composition, performance, and validation.

Reflection and Composition. The composition process is highly important to the process of identity management and performance poetry. It is in this step that an individual reflects upon feelings, experiences, and circumstances and can begin to make sense of how it molds and changes them internally. Literacy is strategic, purposeful, and always linked to meaning (Fisher, 2005). The composition part of the process, poetry writing, can be described as a finely tuned, intensified language that translates thoughts and emotions into meaning through the use of figurative language such as metaphors, imagery, rhythm and sound (Grisham, 2006; Reyes, 2006; Hulse, Griffiths & Corr, 2007). Mahari & Sablo (1996) reports that when participants engage in literacy practices it helps them to understand both their lives and social worlds, and provides them with partial refuge from the harsh realities of their everyday experiences. In fact, many pieces written by participants involved the topics that plague their communities such as drugs, poverty, and violence (Mahari & Sablo 1996; Fisher 2003; Weinstein 2010). Other studies echoed similar findings and concluded that the value of writing poetry is in the process of providing structure for chaotic feelings and thought; the process helps to maintain and restore mental health balance (Philips et al., 1999; Hulse, Griffith, and Corr 2007; Alvarez 2011).

Performance. The second step in the process is the performance. Identity according to communication scholars, is created, maintained, and transformed through social interaction, and this is the stage where that social interaction occurs for performance poets. Ervin Goffman (1959) refers to this concept of the presentation of identity as a performative act or “impression management.” His work emphasized that the self is located within the interaction with others as opposed to being located within the individual (Hecht, 2005; Eadie, 2009). Therefore, this is where the identity negotiation process is heightened and is also what differentiates performance poetry from literary or page poetry. “The mic and stage are an extension of the journal and pen” (Fisher, 2004, p. 302). In performance poetry, writings are expected to be shared publicly. “It was not just enough to write; orality was a way to breathe life into words and mobilize people...” (Fisher, 2004, p. 294). Performance poetry is more than merely reading a poem off a page. In order to fully realize a piece of work into performance poetry, what the poet does with the body on stage (*bodily text*) has to synchronize with the oral delivery of the poem (*oral text*) in order to convey meaning for the audience (Weinstein, 2010). In addition, the message must not only be spoken and enacted; it must be heard, which means it must be meaningful and should in turn incite thought and provoke action and interaction (Fisher, 2004; Desai & Marsh, 2005; Weinstein, 2010). A common theme that emerged from the literature suggested that because writing is a very personal process in which one writes about their individual experiences, in combination with sharing it in social situations that involves others in the process of critiquing and revising, then performance poetry creates a healing process that enables the participants to deal with deep-rooted psychological issues (Mahari & Sablo, 1996; Fisher, 2004; Desai & Marsh, 2005; Jocson, 2006). In sum, performance poetry is useful in relieving stress; provoking

action, and developing a literary identity centered on poetry, and prose while incorporating performance as well.

Validation. According to previous literature, we negotiate our identities through social interactions; therefore, identities have to be recognized and supported by others in order to be considered valid (Goffman, 1959, 1963; Carbaugh, 1996; Eadie, 2009). The last step in this process, prior to starting the cycle again, is the validation step. In receiving validation from others in regards to our identity, we then choose to accept that identity for ourselves. In other words, when people view us the same way that we view ourselves, then we accept that identity as salient. This concept echoes Goffman (1959) when he states "...as this mask represents the conception we have formed of ourselves—the role we are striving to live up to—this mask is our truer self, the self we would like to be" (p. 19). In performance poetry this is done through the responses received from the audience. The audience is the poet's community, and their relationship is embedded in honesty and integrity. Participation and feedback is a large part of the performance poetry experience, mainly due to the basic belief that everyone has something important to say that deserves active listening. By performing their poetry, participants open a forum to share ideas, personal experiences, political views, or any other issues they needed to discuss; everyone is encouraged to write and share their work (Fisher, 2003, Jocson, 2006; Chepp, 2012). Through poet/audience interaction, poets can tap into and relate to the experiences of their audience whose responses create validation for the performer by indicating a connection, agreement, disagreement, reflection, or inspiration.

Space. Although not mentioned as an element in the process of performance poetry, it should be noted that space is an important element embedded within the entire process. All of the above cannot take place unless a safe and proper space is created. The proper space is not

indicative of its physical aspects, but rather comprised of its aesthetic properties. The aesthetic space is what is encompassed within the physical space; it's the rules, behaviors, and feelings produced by the members within the physical space (Fisher, 2003, 2004, 2005; Reyes, 2006; Weinstein, 2010). The proper physical spaces are created to make participants feel comfortable to compose, express, and perform. It is in these spaces that the individual and the audience engage in a relationship resulting in a supportive culture with varying rules of engagement (Fisher, 2003; Reyes, 2006; Weinstein, 2010). The eternal mandate across this space is for the audience to listen with an open mind, and for everyone to "Keep It Real." The "Keep It Real" rule is carried from the beginning of the process until the end, and is imperative to this entire process because it encourages the participants to be themselves and perform with integrity and honesty (Fisher, 2003; Grisham, 2006; Weinstein & West, 2012). According to Desai & Marsh (2005), "Spoken word is a conversation not only among the audience but also of the self" (p. 87). It is within this conversation that poet is enabled to connect their individual realities with the world of the abstract and philosophical; once this phenomenon is realized, that is when performance poetry can act as the bond between the poet and the audience. Space is a vital element within performance poetry by serving as a forum to engage in meaningful dialogue, therefore, it's essential to the understanding and the negotiating of multiple identities. One of the valuable theories that lend itself to the study of communication and multiple identities will be discussed in the following section.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

Communication Theory of Identity

The Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) is rooted in two classic theories: Social Identity Theory and Identity Theory. Social Identity Theory emphasizes that individuals form social identities based on their membership in social categories (Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Hecht, 2004). In other words, individuals connect to their memberships in groups and these groups influence their behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs (Hecht, 2004). Identity Theory, a product of Symbolic Interactionism, suggests that identities are formed in opposition and in relation to the expectations of others and in demands of social contexts; furthermore, individuals then internalize these role identities (Schlenker, 1985; Hecht 2004).

CTI emerged from an anomaly discovered by Michael Hecht and colleagues while using the classical model of identity and communication that presented identity prior to communication. While researching the similarities and differences in communication between ethnicities, Hecht and colleagues discovered that identity and communication are lumped together and cannot exist independently of each other (Hecht, 1993, 2009; Hecht et. al., 2005; Eadie, 2009). CTI operates from a “layered” perspective in which presents identity as existing within for interpenetrating frames: personal frame, relational frame, communal frame, and enacted frame (Hecht, 1993, 2009; Hecht et. al., 2005; Eadie, 2009). The frames are defined as:

- *Personal Identity* – How we see ourselves; our feelings about ourselves, our spirituality, our self-concepts, and our self-images (Hecht, 1993, 2009; Jung & Hecht, 2004; Hecht et. al., 2005; Eadie, 2009).

- *Enacted Identity* – Is an extension of identity itself; therefore, it is embedded in how we perform or express ourselves (Hecht, 1993, 2009; Jung & Hecht, 2004; Hecht et. al., 2005; Eadie, 2009).
- *Relational Identity* – Has to be considered in conjunction with the enacted identity since through social interaction it is mutually social constructed. There are four levels to Relational Identity, (1) identity is partially shaped and developed by how others view them; (2) one identifies themselves through their role in their relationship (i.e., friend, spouse, parent, sibling, etc.); (3) identities exist in relationship to other identities (i.e., someone who is both a student and a teacher or a parent and a doctor); (4) a relationship itself can be a unit of identity. (Hecht, 1993, 2009; Jung & Hecht, 2004; Hecht et. al., 2005; Eadie, 2009)
- *Communal Identity* – Transcends the individual and is how a collective defines their identities.

Hecht's research suggested challenges in identity management including the tendency to see members of a group as homogeneous and the need for skillful negotiation to solve potential conflicts between competing identity enactments (Faulker & Hecht, 2010). In 2004, Jung & Hecht strengthened the theory by identifying disconnects among the various frames (personal identity, relational identity, and enacted identity) that challenge identity management (Eadie, 2009) and bolstered the theory's argument for interpenetrate aspect of the four identity frames (Jung & Hecht, 2004). Jung & Hecht identified three identity gaps: *Personal-Relational Identity Gap*, *Personal-Enacted Identity Gap* and *Enacted-Relational Identity Gap*. *Personal-Relational Identity Gap* refers to "discrepancies between how an individual views him/herself and his/her perception of how others view him/her" (Jung & Hecht, 2004; Jung, 2011). *Personal-Enacted*

Identity Gap is when individuals' expressed identities are different from their self-view (Jung & Hecht, 2004; Jung, 2011). *Enacted-Relational Identity Gap* is the discrepancy between how a person expresses his/her identity and how is it viewed by another person (Jung, 2011).

Although CTI has a basis in cultural studies and culture is often defined in terms of ethnicity, nationality and race, the theory provides a much broader definition in consideration of multiple frames of identity. The major strength of the theory is that it focuses on the dynamics of identity in being fluid and evolving; therefore, demonstrating its usefulness in identity management. Additionally, CTI related research examines the various ways in which identities are expressed and experienced (Eadie, 2009; Scholl et. al., 2011). It is for these reasons CTI is used as the analytical framework for this study.

CTI and The Narratives of Performance Poetry

An exploration of how performance poets use narratives to navigate their identities can contribute to our understanding of both communication as identity, as well as identity as a multiple and fluid concept. Bear in mind that the aim of the study is not to gain a deep understanding of one's identity; instead, the aim of the study is to gain insight on how performance poetry can be used to explore the frames and layers to an individual's identities and how it can be used as a tool to manage their multiple identities in order to shape meaning and make sense of their place in their society. This study does not pretend to generalize all members of a particular culture, as it should be noted that each individual's identity is unique to them and is shaped by not only their biological make-up and their culture, but also their circumstances and experiences. This study emphasizes the role played by communication in the organizing process of identity negotiation. In other words, Hecht's Communication Theory of Identity is used as an exploratory device to analyze how the narratives presented by participants in performance poetry

are used to negotiate their multiple identities. Towards this end the following research questions are posed:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): Based on the narratives that are presented by performance poets, how are identities negotiated using the personal, enacted, relational, and communal frames of identity?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): How does validation occur during the interaction between the poets and their audience?

Chapter 4: Method

Sample

Def Poetry Jam was an HBO television series produced by hip-hop music entrepreneur Russell Simmons that premiered on HBO in 2002 and lasted for six seasons with the final season ending in February 2007. The series presented performances by established performance poets as well as up-and-coming poets. Well-known actors and musicians often surprised the audience by showing up to recite their own original poems. The sample size derived from six full seasons of Def Poetry Jam; due to it being a mainstream television show the availability of the transcripts are easily obtained from the web and can be used without artist consent for research and educational purposes. The six seasons of Def Poetry Jam considered in this study began with the review of 43 episodes of the program, containing 7-8 featured poets airing over the course of 30 minutes for each episode. After initial review of the episodes, a list was comprised of each season and episode, containing each poet and the title of each poem. After review, the initial list was narrowed down by looking at poets who appeared four or more times. The second list generated a total of 10 poets. Of those poets, the sample size was narrowed to poets who appeared five or more times and of whom transcripts could be located for all of their poems, which resulted in a total of five poets and 21 poems. This sample size was most desired for purposes of time constraints; additionally, those with the most performances allowed for an increased probability of a higher number of identities for exploration. Therefore allowing a better chance of capturing the poets' sense of self. The sample size resulted in a small diverse group of poets; however, it should be noted that the sample size is not a true representation the poet population that appeared in the series:

- Beau Sia – a male poet from Oklahoma City who is of Chinese descent and appeared in all six seasons of Def Poetry Jam.
- Black Ice – an African-American male poet from Philadelphia who appeared in five seasons of Def Poetry Jam.
- Poetri Smith – an African-American male poet from Michigan who appeared in five seasons of Def Poetry Jam.
- Shihan – an African-American male poet from California who appeared in all six seasons of Def Poetry Jam.
- Suheir Hammad – a female poet from New York who is of Palestinian descent and appeared in five seasons of Def Poetry Jam.

Procedure

Utilizing the enacted frame of CTI as a lens in conjunction with the other three frames of CTI to explore the performance narratives, thematic analysis was used to determine themes pertaining to the processes of identity negotiation located within the performance narratives. By obtaining the name of the poet and the poem, transcripts of the poems were retrieved via internet search. For accuracy, there were multiple reviews of each performance in conjunction with the transcripts to correct any mistakes in verbiage. Beginning with open-coding, each poem was screened for emerging themes in its overall message of identity and the multiple messages of identities within the poem.

Next, axial coding was used to sort through each narrative and select important slices of information based on clear primary and secondary declarations of the poets' self-view of identity. Two frames of personal identity and relational identity as defined by Hecht were used to inform the definition of primary and secondary declaration of self-view of identity. Primary

declaration is defined as exclusive statements containing the keywords “I,” “me,” or referring to self in 3rd person followed by an explanation of their own expression of thought, emotion, interaction or action about themselves or with themselves. Secondary declaration statements are identified as use of inclusive terms such as “Us,” “We,” “My,” and “Ours,” followed by specified relationship in conjunction with explanations of how others view them, interactions with others, and/or explanations for roles in their relationships.

After narrowing the poems into smaller, more beneficial excerpts, narratives were sorted into categories based on similarities and relationships that resulted in approximately 20 different themes. From the initial categories a grid was created by once again combining themes based on their relationships to one another and excerpts were again coded, resulting in the four major themes.

To establish intercoder reliability, a second coder performed a content analysis. They were provided with the list of categories and sub-categories from the open-coding, defining each category for clarity. The second coder was also provided with the narrative excerpts from the axial coding and was instructed to sort the narratives separately from me. Surprisingly, regardless of the complexity of my coding system, the initial coding agreement percentage was in the range of 80% to 85%. In attempt to enhance reliability, we discussed any dissimilarity in coding to determine if a narrative fit a different category, if it needed a new one, or if it needed to be omitted for any reason. The final coding resulted in 90% agreement level.

Chapter 5: Findings

The analysis of performances and transcripts resulted in a number of themes regarding the identity management processes of the poets. Utilizing the four identity frames of CTI (Hecht, 1993) the findings were organized into two major sections. The first section describes the various ways that identities are negotiated through the performance. Three themes pertaining to identity negotiation emerged from the data: Negotiation of Self in Relation to Varying Self-Identities; Negotiation of Self identities in Relation to Community; and Negotiation of Self-Identities in Relation to Society. The second section explores identities and validation as it pertains to the performer and their audience: Validation in Performance Poetry.

Negotiation of Self in Relation to Varying Self-Identities

Utilizing the Enacted, Personal and Relational Frames of Identity I was able to identify primary declaration statements of self-identity and was then able to evaluate how the poets negotiate their own self-views and roles. Within this theme, five sub-themes were identified that communicated the processes of identity negotiation. The first sub-theme, *label usage*, was one of the most used processes in identity negotiation. The other four sub-themes are *stereotype embracing*, *stereotype contrasting*, *display of self-confidence*, and *display of insecurities*.

Label usage. The poets often used labels to express how they define themselves to their audiences. Labels included words that described their characteristics, genders, race, culture, religion, and relationship roles. In the following excerpt, Shihan explains to his audience the struggle of being a performance poet. The excerpt is an interpretation of how he manages the multiple layers to his identity: a black man who is a poet, expressing his view of his world.

“And I couldn't be more clever
Believe me, I tried
But this is not about poetry or sounding prolific
It's about a black man's pride in a world

Trying to make things harder than they already are for him
Trying to find beauty in the ugliness of it all
And we are all trying to escape that darkness or nothingness
In a never-ending story of the human condition
And you'll never hear me say I'm only human
Because saying it like that can make it sound like a bad thing
Because life as a poet is harder than it looks..."
(Shihan, Father's Day)

Through the Personal Frame of CTI, Shihan's narrative describes two different identities with the use of the labels "black man" and "poet." Through the Relational Frame of CTI we are able to see his view on his relationship with poetry and how it helps to negotiate these two identities. For Shihan, he views his position in this world as a black man to be one of hardships and "darkness"; therefore, being a poet is not just about making words sound good or simply performing poems; it also allows him to find beauty in his existence.

The next excerpt features a poem that the poet wrote shortly after 9/11. Suheir expresses her dismay and confusion with how someone could be so broken that they could hurt others. We are able to witness her identity management through how she contrasts her self-view with those who participated in this tragic event.

"I do not know how bad a life has to break in order to kill.
I have never been so hungry that I willed hunger
I have never been so angry as to want to tote a gun over a pen.
Not really.
Even as a woman, as a Palestinian,
Never this broken."
(Suheir Hammad, First Writing Since)

In Suheir's narrative she labels herself as a "woman" and a "Palestinian." She also describes her relationship to these two identities from the standpoint of never being so broken that she would want to kill, hurt, or threaten any one physically. And similar to Shihan's narrative, she inexplicitly insinuates that she is a writer/poet when she states, "I have never been

so angry as to want to tote a gun over a pen”. Within that same statement she implies that she would manage emotions such as “anger” with writing instead of violence.

Stereotype embracing. Some of the poets, in addition to using labels, would also embrace the negative stereotypes that society places on labels. The narratives in which this process occurred were often comedic in nature; this is more than likely to try to avoid offending the audience. In the following excerpt, Beau Sia expresses how he is willing to enact the negative stereotypes that the entertainment industry seeks in order to get a job in Hollywood.

“If there is anyone in the audience in the entertainment industry watching me perform,
I want you to keep in mind that if you are casting any films and need a
Korean grocery store owner,
a computer expert or the random thug of a yakuza gang, I’m your man.
If you’re making Jackie Chan knock-off films and need a stunt double,
that stunt double is me.
If you need a Chinese Jay-Z, a Japanese Eminem,
or a Vietnamese N’Sync, please consider me,
because I am all those things and more... I cannot stress how ready I am
to sell out, wear jiggy clothes, and yell from the top of my lungs
any hook I am told to sing.
If you want the caricature of a caricature, then I am that caricature.” (Beau Sia, Give Me A Chance)

In Beau Sia’s narrative, “Give Me A Chance,” he expresses his desire to be discovered by the entertainment industry. One interesting point about the labels that he uses within this narrative is the attention he draws to the Asian stereotypes within the media (i.e., Korean, Chinese, Japanese, and Vietnamese). He never explicitly states is actually any of these, but instead states that he is “all those things and more.” This statement reaches beyond the Personal Frame of CTI and incorporates the Relational Frame by explaining how he manages his identity in relationship to how others view him based on media representation of the Asian culture, which additionally encompasses elements of the Communal Frame of CTI.

Stereotype contrasting. Contrary to the previous point, there are also some poets who did not embrace such stereotypes. Some poets use the process of contrasting to negotiate their identities. In other words, they would describe characteristics, stereotypical views, or even mention labels and then would state that they are not those things. Therefore, the audience would have to presume that they are the opposite.

“Don’t wanna be your exotic; some delicate fragile colorful bird
imprisoned, caged in a land foreign to the stretch of her wings.
Don’t wanna be your exotic; women everywhere are just like me
some taller, darker, nicer than me, but like me just the same...”
“...I am dead to you; not your harem girl, geisha doll, banana picker,
pomp pomp girl, pum pum shorts, coffee maker, town whore, belly
dancer, private dancer, la malinche, venus hottentot, laundry girl;
your immaculate vessel, emasculating princess.
Don’t wanna be your erotic, not your exotic.”
(Suheir Hammad, Not Your Erotic, Not Your Exotic)

In Suheir Hammad’s piece, “Not Your Erotic, Not Your Exotic,” she uses labels and descriptions of things that some would consider as exotic such as “colorful bird,” “harem girl,” “geisha doll,” “belly dancer,” and “banana picker.” She also uses labels for things that some consider erotic, such as “pomp pomp girl,” “pum pum shorts,” “town whore,” and “private dancer.” The four labels that were most interesting in this piece was that of “coffee maker,” “laundry girl,” “la malinche,” and “venus hottentot.” A “coffee maker” and a “laundry girl” are both descriptions of servant jobs, and “la malinche” and “venus hottentot” were both women in Spanish and African history who were sold into slavery and viewed as sexual objects. Overall, by using the Personal Frame and Relational Frames of CTI, we are able to interpret Suheir’s narrative as one that assists with managing her identity against embracing objectification and sexualizing of women.

Display of self-confidence. Primary declaration statements that explicitly states how a person views themselves (i.e., “I am,” “I like,” “I feel,” etc.) without the

consideration of others' views (which would involve the Relational Frame of CTI), were viewed from the Enacted and Personal Frames only.

“I am completely happy with myself
I like myself. I think I'm attractive.
Plan to be with myself 'til the very end
Or until someone better comes along.”
(Poetri Smith, Dating Myself)

In the above narrative, Poetri clearly displays self-confidence by using definitive statements such as “I am completely happy,” “I like myself,” and “I think I'm attractive” to explain how he feels about himself despite the opinions or the company of others.

“Black Ice been destined to touch the world ever since I was born
To be real, fuck a record deal, God gives me what I'm worth.”
(Black Ice, Truth Is)

Black Ice's narrative is slightly different from Poetri's. Here he refers to himself in third person; however, he uses definitive words such as “destined” and definitive statements such as “to be real.” There is further evidence of Personal Frame of CTI being used when he incorporates his views of spirituality by stating “God gives me what I'm worth.” In other words, there is no person who is higher than God; therefore, his self-view of being a person sent to inspire others is valid because it is “destined” by “God.”

Display of insecurities. Primary declaration statements are not always as directly explicit like in the previous examples. Sometimes the poets will reveal insecurities in self-views more implicitly. In the following statements Shihan reveals that he sometimes feels invisible.

“So I tell you a blind man once told me the true meaning of love at first
sight
So I close my eyes and I recited this poem
To an audience of one that found total gratification and my undivided
attention
And when I opened my eyes I found myself standing before a mirror
Staring into the eyes of an invisible man until my pupils became pupils

And I could teach myself to live a better life.”
(Shihan, Flashy Words)

In the above narrative he gives primary declaration statements such as “ I tell you,” “I close my eyes,” and “I recited this poem” in order to place the audience into his shoes so that he can walk the audience through a visual prior to embedding his insecurity into the poem. The actual self-view of insecurity is included in the statement “And when I opened my eyes I found myself standing before a mirror staring into the eyes of an invisible man.”

“And I’m sick of being an invisible man to everyone except the cops...”
(Shihan, Sick & Tired)

Echoing his earlier sentiment, in a different narrative Shihan more explicitly states his insecurity by directly telling the audience “I’m sick of being an invisible man...” However, in contrast to the previous excerpt Shihan did not express a resolution to managing this insecurity. Performances of *Negotiation of self in Relation to Varying Self-Identities* highlighted how poets manage identities within the context of self to self; the next section will highlight how poets manage their identities within the context of community and community membership.

Negotiation of Self Identities in Relation to Community

In reviewing the narratives through the Personal, Relational, and Communal Frames of CTI simultaneously, it was discovered that a lot of identity negotiation was taking place from a micro view of an individual’s community. There was a lot of identity management from the standpoint of explaining one’s relationship between self-concept and views of community. Community from this standpoint encompasses members of the community, the physical environment, norms and standards that exist in their community, and how the community is viewed by the society as a whole.

The black community of identity.

“How the fuck you figure your shit is bigger than mine?” “...You continue to hide your true self behind Gangsta movie disguises oblivious to what life's true prize is
Equating your stupidity with the length you think your dick size is the truth in your eyes is
Falsified, fabricated while you sit and wait for your fate to be debated by judges and juries who've held over four hundred and fifty years' worth of grudges
Nigga get back, sit back and rediscover how to be an honest father, loyal lover, righteous brother, and not just another motherfucking nigga.”
(Black Ice, Bigger Than Mine)

In the above narrative, Black Ice discusses the plight of most black men in his community. He refers to them as “niggas” a term that historically have plagued black people since the time of slavery. His definition of the term in this narrative insinuates that he is speaking of black men who engage in criminal activity and neglect the duties of a real man such as working and taking care of his family. Beyond this excerpt of narrative, he actually echoes variations of the statement, “how you figure, your shit is bigger than mine?” throughout the entire poem. This one statement can give us a look into his identity negotiation between how he sees himself in relation to others in his community. Black Ice lists labels at the end of the narrative that suggests how a black man should behave in his community, “an honest father, loyal lover, righteous brother, and not just another motherfucking nigga.” This indicates that he tries to be those things instead of the community norm.

“But, young black men have been trained to chase money
And pussy, so we fall victim to our own erection
And begin to convince ourselves we're on our way somewhere where we're not goin
But ignorance is bliss and niggas love this so, niggas take pride in not knowin.”
(Black Ice, Truth Is)

In this narrative, Black Ice, uses secondary statements of declaration such as “we” and “our,” including himself in the community about which he is speaking. Additionally, this narrative presents identity management issues that involve the separation of the black community. He states the term “young black men” before he uses the secondary statements of declaration, which is an indication that he is correlating being considered a young black man who is trained to chase money and women with many of the downfalls of black men. This is in opposition to the second part of the narrative when he switches from using the term “young black men” to using the term “niggas” in reference to words such as “ignorance” and “pride.” This is an indication that black men who are considered “niggas” are those who choose to be blind to the world around them so they take pride in their current circumstances because they don’t wish to venture into anything other than what they perceive to be life.

“...this negro will caricature the entire race until no one expects anything from the blacks except niggas...”
(Shihan, The Auction Network)

Similar to Black Ice’s narratives, Shihan also addresses the separation in the black identity and identity management in the above narrative when he uses the term “negro,” “blacks,” and “niggas.” A “negro” according to the narrative is a “caricature” or distortion of the black race, and because he is so noticeable and outrageous, he will set the norm for consideration whenever society encounters members of the black community.

“The deconstruction of the black family has been in perpetuation ever since Willy Lynch set his theory in motion...See most of our families are fatherless and quite poor
So we miss out on meals as well as kisses and hugs
You’ve got the audacity to cut the funding for the facilities that keep us off the streets
Then ask us why we sell drugs...”
(Black Ice, Imagine)

Black Ice addresses other issues that play a role in identity negotiation for members of the black community such as physical environments and circumstances. For instance, in the above narrative he discusses the “deconstruction of the black family” and he again uses secondary statements of declaration such as “most of *our* families are fatherless and quite poor.” From the narrative we can see that he is speaking on behalf of those in the black community who come from broken homes. In the next few lines of the narrative we can see the identity negotiation issues for members of the black community who turn to life in the streets due to a lack of family support and resources that could help provide them with a better life.

The Asian community of identity.

“And we're not just Chinese.
And most of the Chinese are reading the subtitles, too, 'cuz it's in
Mandarin.
And we're not just kissing other Asians.
Our mad sexy asses are getting play all over the ethnic spectrum.
How the fuck do you think Tiger Woods, Rob Schneider, and Keanu
Reeves were made? And you know what?
It's never gonna stop.”
(Beau Sia, Asian Invasion)

In the above narrative, Beau Sia addresses the issue of American views of the Asian community. Using secondary statements of declaration, we are able to see that Beau Sia identifies as Chinese-American when he states “we’re not just Chinese;” furthermore, he may be alluding to the point that all Asians are not Chinese. We are able to see identity negotiation arise when he combines the previous statement with the statement, “And most of the Chinese are reading the subtitles, too, 'cuz it's in Mandarin.” This statement defends that fact that he and a lot of the people in his community may look the same, but they are indeed different as they have to read the subtitles in the movies since Mandarin is only spoken in certain parts of China and other

parts of China speak other Chinese dialects; additionally, some Asians born in America may primarily only know English.

“My fellow chinks, formerly known as *Asians*, these offensive terms
aren’t *ratings*,
aren’t *economic frustrations misguided*
and William Hung is not a joke, so don’t be offended!”
(Beau Sia, Hip Hop)

In this narrative, Beau Sia addresses society’s usage of racial terms, in particular pertaining to the label “chink.” He again identifies himself with the community by using the secondary declaration statement, “My fellow chinks, formerly known as Asians...” He expresses confusion for the need to use the term and in his statement, “William Hung is not a joke, so don’t be offended,” he insinuates that the caricature representation of the Asian race in America is not as offensive as the usage of this term.

The Arabic/Muslim Community of identity.

“One more person ask me if I knew the hijackers.
One more motherfucker ask me what navy my brother is in.
One more person assume no Arabs or Muslims were killed.
Assume they know me, or that I represent a people.
Or that a people represent an evil...”
(Suheir Hammad, First Writing Since)

Suheir used primary statements of declaration to convey her experiences as a member of the Arab and Muslim communities in America after the events of 9/11. This excerpt of narrative does not separate her from the identity of her community, but rather separates the identity of the Arab and Muslim communities from the perception of them being terrorists. She continues the same sentiment in the narrative below as she explains her experience of going through the security checkpoint at the airport.

“Mike checked my bags at the airport in a random
routine check
I understand mike, I do

you too [sic] were altered that day and most days most folks operate on
fear,
often hate this is, mic check,
your job and I am always random
I understand it was folks who looked, smelled, maybe prayed like me..."
(Suheir Hammad, Mic Check)

In the above excerpt, Suheir uses hip hop influences inserting the term "mic check" throughout the poem. A mic check is the way performers check to see if sound is configured properly and also used as a way to gain attention from the audience. She also uses homophone on the word "mic" and the name "Mike". Mike is the faceless character given to the societal fear towards Muslim and Arabic people in America post 9/11. The excerpt gives an explanation of the "check" or hate and prejudice that her community faces on a regular basis.

Negotiation of Self-Identities in Relation to Society

Narratives pertaining to *Negotiation of Self-Identities in Relation to Society*, relayed messages of a person's identity that often conflicted with American norms and standards. Similar to the theme of *Negotiation of Self-Identities in Relation to Community*, narratives under this theme appear to be primarily communal; this theme emerged while reviewing narratives through the Personal, Relational, and Communal frames of identity simultaneously. However, in contrast to the previous them, this theme poses as a macro view of the communal frame. It is essentially the negotiation between being a citizen in America and belonging to various subgroups (communities) within America as well.

Marginalized identities. Some of the narratives expressed desperation to be a part of a high social class resulting in thoughts, actions and interactions that would be a compromise to a person's ability to behave with a positive character. In other words, the poets convey that America is driven by money, and therefore, true identities are being compromised or constantly

changing in order to be accepted by appearing wealthy. Many of the poets share the sentiment of not being accepted by society when they or others like them do not have money.

Although presented in a comedic style, Poetri presents a narrative metaphorically speaking of not belonging and losing relationships from having a lack of funds.

“My money’s been acting funny lately,
I can’t even call out her name when I’m shootin’ ball!
Oh, I saw her the other day in Beverly Hills;
She ain’t even acknowledge me!
She looked at me like, “How you get in Beverly Hills?”
Like I don’t belong.
Ever since money hasn’t been around
I feel like I’m losing my other friends too
American Express, Visa, Discover...”
(Poetri, Money)

Other poets’ narratives speak on America’s use of wealth to marginalize groups of people who lack resources and access to good educational systems. Identities are being negotiated between wanting to do the right thing; however, not being able to make ends meet because of the lack of opportunity for those who identify with marginalized groups. This in turn, forces them to rob, steal, cheat, and kill because they are taught to value money through the media.

“External blingers is all we can be cause on the inside we been
given nothin’ to shine on,
And a record deal's harder to get than coke, so my niggas get they
grind on.
Cause the TV tells us, “aim high nigga; make all goals lateral”;
But see that takes paper that we don’t have so, niggas put they
souls up as collateral.
Now, some niggas reclaim 'em, some blame 'em, make an excuse
to sell 'em;
But when a nigga goes from not doin to doin, what can you tell
him?
Not to be a nigga? Shit I gots to be a nigga, that's how I pay the
bills;
And I'mma do that whether I got to slang this coke or exploit these
rhyme skills.
See America makes you an opportunist, and at the same time they
institutionalize you.”

(Black Ice, Truth Is)

Black Ice's narrative focuses on the struggle of black men to make a way for themselves through hopelessness and despair. We can see a negotiation of identity in this piece that differs tremendously from his narrative in the poem *Bigger Than Mine*; as he states "Shit I gotta be a nigga, that's how I pay the bills", he actually identifies himself as one of the "niggas" that he spoke against in the *Bigger Than Mine* narrative.

Activist identities. Different from the previous perspectives, other poets took on the identity of activist in order to negotiate their marginalized identities. These types of narratives pointed out and spoke against the social injustice in American society such as poverty, poor political policies, and even pointing out the flaws in this country's founding principles. They negotiated their identities as American citizens and their racial subgroups; hence, not denying their citizenship but encouraging a fight against marginalization. For instance, in her narrative piece *First Writing Since*, Suheir Hammad states:

"People saying, "this was bound to happen; let's not forget U.S. transgressions".
Hold up! I live here! These are my friends and fam,
Me in those buildings, and we are not bad people!
Do not support America's bullying."

Sharing in her sentiment, in his piece entitled *Sick & Tired*, Shihan states:

"And I'm sick of people acting like slavery doesn't affect the present state of blacks in this country,
When slavery was a race with a 450-year head start for everyone else,
Plus, truth be told, my grandmother's grandmother was a slave
So it wasn't that far back,
But I'm sick of us still using it as an excuse."

Validation in Performance Poetry

Determining the interactions that constitutes validation for the poets' identities was a bit of a challenge especially since the rules of engagement within the poetry spaces consists of respect, support, and participation (Fisher, 2003, 2004, 2005; Reyes, 2006; Weinstein, 2010). To answer the research question of what types of interactions occur to provide validation for the poets, a close evaluation of the interactions between the audience and the poets occurred to first rule out what were not interactions of validation. It is important to note that applause after performances are over are not considered interactions of identity validation because it is part of the rules to show respect and support for the poets; therefore, a round of applause at the end of the performance is more support than validation. Secondly, it is extremely hard to identify validation in comedic pieces since they are created for entertainment purposes; therefore, researching interactions for the purposes of identity validation cannot be simply observed and these interactions are excluded from this study.

Once the interactions that did not qualify as validation were identified, a determination was made of which interactions did qualify. Research data resulted in two emergent themes in regards to validation; *Identity Validation-Seeking* and *Audience Validation-Response*.

Identity validation-seeking. Identity validation-seeking is when the poet makes a statement or asks a question regarding their identity during their performance narratives that could prompt a response from the audience. For instance, in his piece entitled *Truth Is*, Black Ice asks:

“Let me ask you a question. When you look at me and my brothers, what’s your first impression? Does the sight of us leave you guessin or do you understand the stressin?”

Although the statement is meant to be rhetorical, it prompted subtle responses from the audience such as a head nodding which could indicate agreement and head tilts, which could

indicate thought processing. Some poets make statements or ask questions that prompt more of a blatant response. In Shihan's poem, *Father's Day*, he states:

“And I breakdown later in areas of my house I keep my secrets in and even later I whisper things to them all in their sleep. I only wish I had the courage to tell them when they were awake. And that's what makes this stage so safe; all the comfort of a fourth wall and a three dimensional world. All the trappings I could ask for. See I sacrifice every time I step to the mic, so you tell me if what I'm saying worth missing my family for.”

It is important to note that this excerpt of narrative came at the end of the performance so some of the applause has to be considered a show of support; however, the validation piece was shown in those members of the audience who choose to stand, applaud, and yell “woo.”

Audience validation-response. As previously stated, when an audience response serves as validation they can interact subtly or blatantly. The most important part of this validation-response is that the audience is authentic in its response to the poets' enacted identity. My biggest challenge was to determine how I could observe authentication in the audience's reactions. The most authentic interactions occurred in the middle of the performance where the poet was not seeking validation but rather just telling his or her narrative. In both of the examples below the excerpt came in the middle of the poem and the audience responded with applause and calling out “woo” at the end of both statements.

“You see most of these guys do have raw talent, just an infantile education. So the business feed you all the weed and ecstasy and a little bit of paper to provide some pacification...” (Black Ice, Truth Is)

However, the issue of authentication of validation occurred in the following excerpt. It is hard to determine rather the audience was validating an identity or the clever usage of words in the following excerpt:

“And I’m half the man I used to be and one fourth the person I should be or could be. Cause I sacrificed freeDOM for starDOM after being fucked out of my freeDOM without a conDOM; now how DUMB was I?”
(Shihan, Flashy Words)

Within the same poem by Shihan, an excerpt of a narrative that was mentioned earlier in this study, there was an interesting interaction exchange between him and the audience that is important to note. As he stated:

“So I tell you a blind man once told me the true meaning of love at first sight. So I close my eyes and I recited this poem to an audience of one that found total gratification and my undivided attention. And when I open my eyes I found myself standing before a mirror, staring into the eyes of an invisible man until my pupils became pupils and I could teach myself to live a better life.”

A large portion of the audience responded with “ooohs” and “aaahhs” and in return we can actually see Shihan respond to them by pausing, shaking his head, and given them a big smile. This interaction was an intriguing look into the validation process between the audience and the poet. We were able to witness the audience validate the identity negotiation between the poet and himself, and in return we could see his acceptance of the validation, therefore making that piece of his identity relevant for himself.

Chapter 6: Discussion

The study explored performance poetry as a tool for identity management through the lens of Communication Theory of Identity (CTI). Overall, findings support the claim that performance poetry can be used as a communicative tool to explore the multiple layers to an individual's identity. Based on the findings, identity layers are revealed on both a micro and macro level; furthermore, the evaluation and negotiation of the poets' identities are communicated to and validated by an audience.

The first research question asks how identities are negotiated using the personal, enacted, relational, and communal frames of identity. The findings here show the frames are consistent with CTI's claim that they are used interdependently and interchangeably, thus resulting in two major emerging themes pertaining to identity negotiation from a micro perspective - *Negotiation of Self in Relation to Varying Self-Identities* and *Negotiation of Self in Relation to Community*, and a third theme - *Negotiation of Self-Identities in Relation to Society*, from a macro perspective. Both of the themes pertaining to the micro perspectives of the poets' identities provided an internal view of how the poets' felt about themselves in addition to relationships with others on an intimate level or a communal level.

The narratives pertaining to the first two themes often displayed the internal conflict and/or peace among the poets' varying self-identities. For example, Shihan expresses an internal conflict that both displayed his insecurity as well as how he manages it. He narrates that he feels invisible, so he negotiates this insecurity and finds "total gratification" through poetry because it allows him to give his self "undivided attention" and teach himself how "to live a better life." From a self in relation to community outlook, Black Ice often expressed struggle in being a black man; he expressed how hard it is to be a father and make a living for his family in a system that

is designed to watch him and others like him fail. He narrates that the opportunities and preparation for the black community is limited and often times black men find themselves being institutionalized because they would turn to a life a crime in order to survive.

Narratives surrounding the macro perspective are a bit more complex, as they view self-identities that are based in community membership in relation to society, or the world as a whole which resulted in two subthemes – marginalized identities and activist identities. Marginalized identity narratives expressed the need to be a part of the larger society to the point where a positive character may be compromised. For example, Poetri and Black Ice both expressed the value of money in American society and how some people feel like they don't belong unless they have money. Black Ice goes further into expressing how this value is marketed to the masses and how some of the people will do whatever it takes to obtain money. He ends his narrative with a strong declarative statement: "America makes you an opportunist, and at the same time they institutionalize you." In contrast, the activist identity narratives display standing against societal standards and exposes social injustices. For instance, Suheir speaks against marginalization by expressing how America has also done wrong and it is not the mecca of peace it portrays itself to be. She goes on to imply as citizens of this country she and her family belongs here as much as any other citizen. She further goes on to invoke action by stating "Do not support America's bullying." It should be noted that the poets didn't privilege one identity over the other; in fact, throughout many of their poems the poets moved between the two identities simultaneously, sometimes at various moments within the same poem.

What seems apparent amongst the three major themes is the poets' awareness of their identities; how those identities are negotiated in relation to their circumstances (whether directly or indirectly); and relationships within themselves and amongst others. Interestingly, as opposed

to the initial thought that poets unconsciously manage identities through the process of reflection and composition, the poets' appear to have, at minimal, a slight awareness of the ability poetry provides to negotiate their identities communicatively. For instance, Shihan expressed his realization that performance poetry is not about poetry itself or "sounding prolific," but rather it's about helping him navigate himself as a black man through a world that he perceives as difficult and "trying to find beauty in the ugliness of it all." Suheir expressed similar sentiments in that she uses poetry to make sense of her feelings of anger, confusion and despair as a Palestinian woman living in America. These examples illustrate not only the presence of personal awareness and the fluidity of the identity frames, but also the effectiveness and value of poetry in the process of sense making and identity management.

The second research question asked how validation is achieved in the performance space through poet/audience interaction. Findings suggest that first, validation can be detected during a performance based on the audiences' response to the poet and in turn how the poet responds to their audience; secondly, validation can be either a natural response from the audience or a prompted response. Findings were not able to determine exactly how important of an aspect validation is to the process of identity negotiation for poets. However, it does appear to affect the poets desire and level of passion they used to communicate with their audience. It is important to note that the authentic response from the audience, as opposed to the response that is prompted, would be most useful in the study of the effects of validation on identity negotiation of performance poets.

In sum, findings inform the examination of performance poetry as a communicative tool for identity negotiation offering further insight into how the communication process serves in identity management that helps lead to self-acceptance. The process of reflection, composition,

and verbal expression can lend itself to allowing people to genuinely evaluate and define who they are and make sense of how to navigate themselves through their lives. Furthermore, drawing attention to the interaction between the poets and the audience strengthens the claim that the validation piece of performance poetry does play a role in managing identity as well.

Limitations

The method used for the study was based on observation only. The findings are limited to interpretation of data as presenting in the narratives with no supplementary information that could lead to in-depth exploration or confirmation of thoughts, expectations, or beliefs. For these same reasons, the observational method also limited the ability to explore the validation aspect in detailed terms of its importance on identity negotiation. However, it should be noted that this study did not aim to answer questions for purposes of generalization or comprehensive analysis of an individual's or group's identity; nor did it aim to provide an in-depth analysis of validation, but rather to explore what validating interactions look like between the poets and their audience.

Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

The Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) attempts to explore identity beyond individual and social constructions by focusing on identity from a communicative and relational aspect (Hecht, 2009; Hecht et. al., 2004). The findings in this study support Hecht's CTI and provides further evidence that the enacted, personal, relational, and communal layers that comprise the theory are indeed interdependent of each other. The study expounded upon the idea that this theory can be used to manage the various levels of identity as opposed to the negotiation of only specific attributes of an identity (such as racial identity, gender identity, sexual identity, ascribed identity, etc). Consequently, the study also supports the symbolic interactionism perspective that identity is a multiple and fluid concept that is negotiated and managed through

communication interactions. Furthermore, the study adds to the current literature on CTI and supports the claim that CTI continues to demonstrate great utility and flexibility for exploring the processes of identity negotiation and management in the field of communication.

Previous studies that used CTI as a theoretical foundation exposed the issue of the effects prejudices and/or judgments of others have on the inability to genuinely express one's self-views (e.g. Jung & Hecht, 2008; Wadsworth, Hecht, & Jung, 2008). The interpretive method offered by this study can serve as an influence for further study that could potentially lead to a resolve for such issues through the utility of performance poetry. Other suggestions for future research include a longitudinal study that could provide further insight into the identity negotiation process provided by performance poetry, as well as a more in-depth exploration of the importance and effect of validation on the identity negation process for performance poets.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The aim of this study was to explore the process of identity negotiation in performance poetry through the lens of CTI in order to add to existing knowledge in understanding how identity can be managed through communication. The study also explored whether validation could occur between poet and audience, as well as what that interaction looks like between performance and feedback. Through the use of thematic analysis, the theoretical framework that comprises Communication Theory of Identity is supported by the findings of this study. Moreover, it is proposed that performance poetry is a process combining critical literary aspects with performance elements, thus creating a forum that allows for individuals to explore their own identity. This process has effective usefulness in making genuine connections between identity and interaction within the world around an individual through meaning creation.

Although the study of performance poetry is still quite fresh, it has already found great utility in the fields of psychology (Hilse, Griffiths, & Corr 2007), literacy (Fisher, 2003, 2004, 2005), and pedagogy (Desai & Marsh, 2005). The objective here was not only to add to the pre-existing knowledge of identity as constituted by communication, but to also draw attention to performance poetry as a subject to be studied by communication scholars. This study on identity negotiation is only one avenue, but there is still much to investigate with regard to performance poetry that could yield insightful and intriguing knowledge for the field of communication.

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Appendix

Russell Simmons Presents: Def Poetry - Season 1 (2002)

Episode 1: Black Ice “Bigger Than Mine?”; Suheir Hammad “First Writing Since”; Poetri Smith “Money”

Episode 2: Shihan “This Type Love”

Episode 3: Beau Sia “Give Me A Chance”

Russell Simmons Presents: Def Poetry - Season 2 (2003)

Episode 1: Beau Sia “Asian Invasion”

Episode 2: Black Ice “Truth Is”

Episode 4: Shihan “Flashy Words”; Suheir Hammad “Not Your Erotic, Not Your Exotic”

Russell Simmons Presents: Def Poetry - Season 3 (2004)

Episode 1: Black Ice “Lone Soldier”; Suheir Hammad “We Spent the 4th of July in Bed”

Episode 3: Poetri Smith “Krispy Kreme”

Episode 5: Beau Sia “Love”

Episode 6: Shihan “Sick and Tired”

Russell Simmons Presents: Def Poetry - Season 4 (2005)

Episode 1: Black Ice “Exodus”

Episode 2: Suheir Hammad “What I Will”

Episode 4: Poetri Smith “Dating Myself”

Episode 9: Beau Sia “I’m So Deep”; Shihan “The Auction Network”

Russell Simmons Presents: Def Poetry - Season 5 (2006)

Episode 1: Black Ice “Imagine”

Episode 7: Beau Sia “Hip Hop”

Episode 9: Suheir Hammad “Mic Check”

Russell Simmons Presents: Def Poetry - Season 6 (2007)

Episode 3: Shihan "Father's Day"

Episode 6: Black Ice "The Ugly Show"; Poetri Smith "Monsters in My Stomach"

