

Form, Function, and Figure: The Case of Meetings in Suicide Prevention Campaign

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MEETING FORM, FUNCTION, AND FIGURE

This thesis entitled:
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Scholars from different perspectives in communication and related fields have prolifically studied meetings. Since Schwartzman's (1989) seminal research on meetings, scholars have studied this communicative form to find insight on how this form is conducted and how identities, communities, and cultures are constituted through meetings. In my study I take two perspectives to examine meetings: the ethnography of communication and ventriloquism. I use each perspective to view the meetings of Suicide Prevention Campaign, a small nonprofit organization in Pennsylvania. With the ethnography of communication, I examine the cultural form and function of these meetings, with particular attention on how metacommunication reflects changing norms of interpretation. Then, using ventriloquism, I examine how meetings serve as a gatekeeping figure for the organization. The study contributes to both perspectives a new way of viewing meetings, suggests recommendations to practitioners, and proposes a potential combination between the ethnography of communication and ventriloquism.

Keywords: meetings, ethnography of communication, communicative constitution of organizations, ventriloquism, agency

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

In February 2013 my best friend, Mary, and I got into an argument. This wasn't your typical best friend argument over whether or not she looks good in the new outfit she just bought, what movie to watch next, or what food we should cook for dinner. Instead we got into an argument about meetings.

For the past year, Mary and I have worked together for the organization Suicide Prevention Campaign (SPC). We originally worked together as teenagers in a coffee shop located in a grocery store chain, but this organization is different. SPC is Mary's organizational child. In 2010 she was devastated by the news of five local teenagers' suicides and she decided to do something about it. That something turned into the "startup nonprofit" organization SPC. As founder and president, Mary invited her friends and acquaintances to join her in helping hurting teenagers in central Pennsylvania in 2012. As one of the invitees, I found the organization to be a place where I could use my knowledge of communication to at least help others organize, if not also to help potentially suicidal teenagers in my hometown. I joined initially in March 2012 as a member of the Fundraising and Community Resources committees, and quickly volunteered to chair the Community Resources committee. In June of 2012, Mary invited me to join the Board of Directors, working alongside her and eight other individuals.

In the summer of 2012, it had already been well established in the organizing documents that each committee would have a meeting once a month and the Board of Directors would meet once a year. In the fall of 2012 when I needed a research site for my qualitative research methods class, SPC seemed like the perfect fit. As a result of my research, I became engrossed in whatever literature coming out of the ethnography of communication on meetings I could find,

which centered largely around Schwartzman's (1989) book The Meeting. Theoretically, as a scholar, I found meetings to be fascinating. In SPC, as a participant, I found meetings to be lacking – both in frequency and in discussion.

Fast forward to February 2013 again. Mary and I were arguing about meetings. Not whether meetings should occur or not, their inevitability seemed to be paired with organizational life. Mary was arguing that we did not need to meet as often because meetings were only about making sure everyone knew the same information. This could be just as easily accomplished through the social networking site Wiggio that members of SPC were supposed to check for updates. By contrast, I advocated for meetings. Meetings, in my theoretically-informed opinion, are where discussion, brainstorming, and bonding between organizational members occur. While meetings are certainly informative for their members, they should also be used to hold lively discussions. We left the matter unresolved, and this argument raised questions for me related to my research in this organization. Was the theory only focusing on the “interesting” discussion-based meetings, rather than the “boring” informative ones? Do organizations have to evolve into such discussion-based meetings, or if meetings start off with a purely informative bent, will they remain that way for much of the life of the organization? Why were meetings such a contested topic between my best friend, armed with her common sense understanding, and me, armed with my theoretically based understanding of this practice?

This story describes the point where my thesis project became interesting to me. Not only did these two forms of meetings map somewhat neatly onto the metatheoretical views of communication as information and communication as constitutive (Deetz, 1994), I also realized that at some point in my research I became invested in a side of this debate. With a theoretical

understanding of meetings that at times wildly contradicted what I was actually seeing in some of SPC's early meetings, how could I begin to understand what meetings are "supposed" to be, both for SPC and in general? Meetings, as contested communicative practices for at least two of SPC's members, are shaped by members, other ways of speaking, and by the meetings themselves. With a peek into the organizational communication literature, I quickly became interested in how these communicative practices actually shape the organization itself, while the organization and its members simultaneously shape the communicative practices. Although there are other forms of communicative practices used by the members of SPC, such as Wiggio posts, Facebook chat, and informal conversation, meetings seem to be a point of contestation, for at least two members, and meetings also served as a point of discussion for the entire board of directors.

In conceiving this study, it seemed to me that meetings were an optimal site to join the concerns of a cultural perspective, informed by the ethnography of communication, and an organizing perspective, informed by ventriloquism, in order to examine this phenomenon. Scholars out of discursive, cultural, and organizing traditions have all turned their eyes toward meetings as a site for study and a phenomenon worth study itself. Meetings are comprised of communication, which Taylor and Van Every (2000) call the "site and surface" of organizing and organizations. Meetings also take on culturally particular forms and functions, as Schwartzman (1989) noted. With meetings as the object of my study, how would these two traditions face off on the same data set? What can using two perspectives to inform my research help me to understand better about meetings? Using theory as a lens, each perspective would illuminate and obscure different aspects of meetings, so presumably by using both my research would gain in breadth and depth of explanation. In the discussion section, I point toward the possibility of a

productive working relationship between these two traditions. However, there is much ground to cover between this introduction and the final chapter of this thesis. First, in this chapter, I will examine the research that has been done on meetings of all varieties. Then I will explicate the background of each tradition that I use in this thesis, the ethnography of communication and ventriloquism, and the kinds of questions or concepts that they orient toward. Each perspective informs one of the research questions that I will examine. In the second chapter I will explain my methods in this study related to data construction and analysis. In chapter three I use the ethnography of communication to analyze the culturally particular form and function of meetings in SPC. Chapter four analyzes the same meetings through a ventriloqual perspective for the figures that are voiced in metacommunication about meetings. After covering this ground, I discuss the similarities, differences, and possibly productive sites for using these two methodological frames together to study the various cultural processes of organizing, such as meetings.

Meetings

Meetings seem to be a fact of organizational life. As a ubiquitous feature of organizations, meetings have been used to study a variety of phenomena within organizations and community groups. Meetings have also been featured as the object of research as well. Much of the existing literature on meetings finds a home in institutional conversation analysis (Drew & Heritage, 1992), business communication, or organizational communication. Ethnographers of communication have also taken meetings as sites and objects for research to examine the cultural forms and functions of this speech event. I review many of these studies in the following chapter, as well as previous directions of research and findings. Before beginning this review, I first want to discuss a few prominently cited definitions of meetings, their

differences, and how I will refer to meetings throughout this study. Then I will continue to examine the use of the term, differentiate between organizational and public meetings, and discuss the features of a meeting as defined by Schwartzman (1989). In the next section, I discuss the differences between using a meeting as a site or tool for research and using a meeting as an object for research. Finally, I examine several of the findings of prior researchers, and situate my study among these topics.

Defining a Meeting

What is a meeting? Perhaps not an oft-asked question for organizational members, even in SPC, this is the question where my research begins. Throughout the analytic chapters, I will examine the particular meaning of “meeting” shared by participants in SPC, but I will start here with the meanings provided by prior literature. By doing so, I will examine what a meeting involves, and what a meeting precludes.

Schwartzman’s (1989) tome on meetings is one of the earliest treatments of the meeting as a phenomenon worthy of research. She defines a meeting as:

A communicative event involving three or more people who agree to assemble for a purpose ostensibly related to the functioning of an organization or a group, for example, to exchange ideas or opinions, to solve a problem, to make a decision or negotiate an agreement, to develop policy and procedures, to formulate recommendations, and so forth. A meeting is characterized by multiparty talk that is episodic in nature, and participants either develop or use specific conventions... for regulating this talk. Participants assume that this talk in some way relates to the ostensible purpose of the meeting and the meeting form frames the behavior

that occurs within it as concerning the “business” of the group or organization.

(p. 7)

A meeting, thus, for Schwartzman, requires at least three people who meet for a purpose related to a group or organization. As a communicative event, it can be compared to other communicative events studied by ethnographers of communication. She cites a few different purposes that a meeting could have, and a meeting seems to be required to have some kind of purpose. Talk in a meeting is not only from one person to an audience of at least two people, but rather talk between these people that is guided by some kind of convention, such as Robert’s Rules of Order. Finally, the meeting provides a frame for the ensuing talk as accomplishing some kind of “business”.

Boden (1994) studied workplace interactions, including meetings. Her definition of meetings varies slightly from the above, stating that a meeting is:

A planned gathering, whether internal or external to an organization, in which the participants have some perceived (if not guaranteed) role, have some forewarning (either longstanding or quite improvisational) of the event, which has itself some purpose or “reason,” a time, place, and, in some general sense, an organizational function. (p. 84)

Boden (1994) limited her definition to only those meetings that occur in organizations, whereas Schwartzman (1989) included groups as well. Perhaps by limiting her definition to only organizational meetings, Boden (1994) also emphasizes some different aspects of meetings that Schwartzman (1989) does not address. Boden (1994) does not specify a minimum number of participants required to hold a meeting, although she does include multiple participants who have roles in the meeting. Therefore, both scholars agree that one person cannot hold a meeting on

their own. If a meeting can be internal or external, then these participants can either be part of an organization or outsiders to an organization. Boden also emphasizes preparation for the meeting, including some forewarning of the event itself, as well as a time and place for the meeting. A meeting also requires some purpose to serve some organizational function, as Schwartzman (1989) also noted.

From these two definitions, I take a few features to define a meeting. A meeting must have multiple people attending, although the set minimum may differ among organizations and groups. Participants in a meeting must have either forewarning or agree to a meeting for it to occur. Meetings also must have some purpose to sustain them, and this purpose is typically related to the functioning of an organization or group. These features allow for a wide range of forms and functions of meetings that may be particular to groups, organizations, and communities.

Through turning my attention to meetings and meeting talk in this project, I examine both how members of an organization constitute different meeting forms and functions, as well as how these meetings can influence these members and the organization. As Schwartzman (1989) wrote:

Meetings are an important sense-making form for organizations and communities because they may define, represent, and also reproduce social entities and relationships. In this way, individuals may both use and be used by this form. As a sense-making form, meetings are significant because they are the organization or community writ small. (p. 39)

This quote from Schwartzman's work has intrigued me and inspired me to research how members use meetings to accomplish particular ends, such as creating a sense of the

organization, as well as how members may be “used by” meetings. Although organizational members can use meetings to discuss certain topics, make decisions, and (re)create their social realities of organizations and groups, how much does the form and function of a particular meeting enable them to do so? Armed with this curiosity and definition of meetings, I turn to how different kinds of meetings have been distinguished by prior researchers.

“A meeting” vs. “to meet”. Tracy and Dimock (2004) note a difference between using the verb “to meet” and the noun “a meeting” in conversation. The verb “to meet” could reference several actions, only one of which is holding “a meeting” with the features I detailed above. “To meet” someone could refer to making an acquaintance or grabbing a cup of coffee and chit-chatting with a friend. Neither of these meet the feature of meetings that requires some purpose related to the functioning of an organization or group. Using the noun form, “a meeting”, typically refers to the kind of meeting that I have defined above.

Different kinds of meetings. Several kinds of groups of people can and do hold meetings, and the features of some of these groups are not readily applicable to the kinds of meetings that I have observed and participated in with SPC. Although they use the same term, and share the same basic set of features, meetings of some types of groups have specific expectations that are not shared with organizational meetings. For example, the Quakers use the term “meeting” to refer to their worship service. A Quaker meeting does have multiple people in attendance, includes some talk, and has a spiritual purpose (Molina-Markham, 2012, 2014). However, the purpose of this meeting may or may not be related to the group itself functioning toward some end, and I suspect that participants in a Quaker meeting would hesitate to call this “business” or “work” in the same way that a for-profit or nonprofit organization would.

Another type of meeting that has the basic features of meetings that I outlined above, but may not be wholly comparable to the kinds of meetings that I discuss here, are public meetings. Karen Tracy has studied public meetings extensively, from school board meetings (Tracy 2007a, 2010; Tracy & Ashcraft, 2001) to court hearings (Tracy 2011, 2012). Tracy & Dimock (2004) point out some of the differences between organizational and public meetings. One of these differences is in who attends the meeting. Organizational meetings typically have a set list of participants, whereas public meetings leave the participant pool open-ended to anyone who is a part of a community or larger entity. One set of people form a meeting party, and another set of people form an audience for the meeting. Another difference is in topic progression. Organizational meetings many times have an agenda that guides the topics of discussion in meetings, whereas public meetings may leave some of the topics open for audience participants to introduce. Like with Quaker meetings, public meetings are not incomparable to organizational or group meetings as I have defined them, but there are still particular features that organizational meetings rarely share.

Features of an organizational meeting. With a focus particularly on organizational meetings, there are some features that have been defined as constitutive of this form. Schwartzman's (1989) seminal work *The Meeting* introduced these features, which are adapted from Hymes's (1972) SPEAKING framework from the ethnography of communication. Her work has been used as the foundation for other researchers' research into meetings, including Milburn's (2009) work on nonprofit organizations. Ethnographers of communication have made the case that her work can be used as the basis for studying meetings as culturally-bound events (Sprain & Boromisza-Habashi, 2012). Schwartzman's (1989) work sets up meetings as a site for investigation in their own right, as communication events that, while perhaps mundane, seem to

have influence on what happens within organizations. Her framework trains the analyst's eye to broader components of meetings that shape these practices rather than the particular forms of discourses that occur within them. The seven components of meetings that Schwartzman identified are: participants, channels and codes, frame, meeting talk (which includes the sub-components of topic and results, norms of speaking and interaction, oratorical genres and styles, and interest and participation), norms of interpretation, goals and outcomes, and meeting cycles and patterns. I used this framework as the basis for my analysis of meetings, which I will detail further in the methods chapter.

Meetings in Research

Just as meetings are almost a guaranteed part of organizational life, they are also an almost guaranteed part of research on organizations and communities. Schwartzman (1989) pointed out the exigency of her focus on meetings as an object of study because to that point, meetings had only been used as sites for studying other phenomena. To this day, meetings are an almost ubiquitous part of the research process, used as a tool for gathering data on other phenomena, rather than as an object of such research. Before expanding on the research done on meetings as an object of research, I first want to explore the difference between using meetings as a research tool and using meetings as a research object.

Meetings as research tool. Research in organizations and businesses can hardly avoid meetings, and thus meetings seem to be part of many methods sections. For example, Ashcraft (2001, 2006) used participant observation in meetings as one part of a methodology to uncover the constitution of the feminist-bureaucratic organizational form. Another example is Feldman and associates' (Feldman 2004; Pentland & Feldman, 2005, 2008; Rerup & Feldman, 2011) use of meetings as a site to study other organizational routines and how routines change. Pentland

and Feldman (2008) suggest that meetings themselves could be an organizational routine, but they do not explore this in depth. Meetings can also be used by the researcher as a tool for consultation on other matters, such as in May's (2011) use of meetings to share questionnaire results and spark discussion about the results. I suspect that many organizational and business communication scholars attend and observe meetings in the course of their research projects. However, only some of these scholars have focused on meetings themselves as the object of research.

Meetings as research object. Among those who have focused on the meeting as an object worthy of research itself are Barbour and Gill (in press), who used both grounded practical theory (Craig & Tracy, 1995) and design theory (Aakhus & Jackson, 2005) to study daily status meetings in a nuclear power plant. They took the meetings as a designed feature, and a feature that could be designed, and developed an expanded view of communication with the participants, in order to expand the usefulness and potential of these status meetings. This is only one example of what a researcher could do when focused on meetings as the object of research. Angouri and Marra (2010) proposed that corporate meetings are a genre of talk on their own, rather than a communication event that includes oratorical genres. Other researchers have attempted to develop a typology for meetings. Volkema and Niderman (1995) have a typology of six kinds of meetings, ranging on scales that include variations in focus (single-focus vs. multi-focus) and hierarchical format (egalitarian to hierarchy). Bilbow (2002) also developed a typology of meetings based on his empirical study. He found three types of meetings in his site: cross-departmental coordination, weekly department, and brainstorming meetings. Some researchers have even used single meetings as a case study for researching several communication styles and topics that constitute the form. Cooren's (2007) edited volume on a

videotaped meeting gathered chapters on leadership (Taylor & Robichaud, 2007; Pomerantz & Denvir, 2007; Fairhurst, 2007), emotion (Tracy, 2007b; Putnam, 2007; Fitch & Foley, 2007), and decision-making (McPhee, Corman, & Iverson, 2007; Sanders, 2007; Stohl, 2007). The following section of my thesis will expand on many of the topics that researchers have examined when taking the meeting as an object, rather than tool, of research.

Topics of Research

With meetings as the focus of research, many scholars have chosen to focus on various aspects of meetings. Some focus on the people, including the meeting chair, and how they establish and use their role. Research on power and leadership in meetings has also focused on the chair, because many times a person of authority will continue to establish their authority by chairing meetings. Other scholars have focused on the meeting frame, as Schwartzman (1989) terms opening and closing the meeting. Yet others focus on the talk within meetings, specifically on topic progression and turn-taking in meetings. A final area of research that I will examine is research on how meetings and meeting talk are used to establish individual and community identities and cultures.

Leading the meeting. Leadership is an important part of the literature on meetings. Although my study here is not focused on leadership per se, leadership and authority are aspects of the cultural milieu of any group, and thus are included throughout the analytic chapters. Many meetings are led by an appointed meeting chair. This chair serves as a “switchboard” for talk (Boden, 1994). The chair can be appointed for just one meeting, or could be a role that someone holds for a period of time, such as a chairperson of a board of directors. A person’s chairing style can be more or less formal. Sometimes switching chairs when the chairs have vastly different styles may signify a larger change in an organization (Holmes,

Schnurr, & Marra, 2007). Pomerantz and Denvir (2007) showed how a meeting chair may direct conversation, but still wait for the approval of other meeting participants before the conversation is directed. Their study shows that not all meeting chairs take on leadership roles as well, although many do take on leadership roles.

Studies of meeting chairs show how the leadership of a chair can establish hierarchy, egalitarianism, or both. In business communication, Van Praet (2008) analyzed meetings at a British embassy to show that the ambassador established his power in the embassy during meetings that were meant to form solidarity. This shows that multiple frames (Goffman, 1974) can apply to one particular kind of meeting within an organization. Cockett (2003) examined how one committee chair established herself as both the authority of the committee and as an egalitarian member of the committee through her fluctuation between “I” and “we” while speaking.

A leader’s chairing style has implications for the meeting participants beyond the relationship between a chair and the participants. A leader could be more concerned with either social relationships or problem-solving (Schmitt, 2006), which would have effects on the focus or purposes of meetings. A meeting chair also has the ability to fix the meaning of a discussion during the meeting. Clifton (2006) showed how a “gist” formation fixes the meaning of previous discussion in more or less accurate ways. The fixed meaning may not reflect the nuances and complexity of the prior discussion, thus privileging some ideas over others. Finally, a meeting chair also has an important role in conflict-handling. Holmes and Marra (2004) delineate between four kinds of conflict-handling measures that a chair could choose: avoidance, diversion, acknowledgment and management, and resolution by authority. Depending on which is chosen, a chair could ignore, move, address, or authoritatively resolve a conflict during a

meeting. Although the meeting chair's role could be challenged or negotiated by other members, meeting chairs do typically have a specialized role in meetings with leadership expectations. As the facilitator, a meeting chair also has influence on many of the other topics that researchers have studied in meetings. I address a few of these in the next sections.

Openings and closings. One feature of meetings that the chair is typically responsible for is opening and closing the meeting. In Schwartzman's (1989) framework for studying meetings, she refers to this as the meeting frame. Boden (1994) points out that meetings are bounded events, and the opening and closing of meetings signifies the temporal boundaries of the meeting interaction. Opening and closing a meeting can happen in more or less formal ways. Asmuß and Svennevig (2009) found in their review of meeting research that a chair typically initiates the shift between pre-meeting and meeting talk with a proposal to start, a greeting, a comment on the attendance, or a simple topic transition such as "okay". Depperman, Mondada, & Schmitt (2010) pose that the meeting frame is an emergent, collective accomplishment rather than a meeting chair's sole accomplishment. A typical meeting closing involves a reopening of the conversational floor to discussion and then a thanking, greeting, or formal adjourning of the participants.

Topic progression. Once a meeting is opened, the topic progression is typically guided by a meeting agenda, created before the meeting occurs. The meeting chair is usually responsible for guiding discussion and focusing the talk on a particular topic. When meeting participants digress from the topic at hand, it is the chair's job to refocus the talk on the agenda topic (Holmes & Stubbe, 2003b). Participants may tie their contributions to the particular topic on the table (Asmuß & Svennevig, 2009). This is a feature of meetings that is unique from ordinary talk, because the central relevance of a turn is centered on the discussion topic rather

than a previous speaker's turn (Sacks, 1992; Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974). Ford (2008) found that some participants use prefaces to tie a contribution to a particular topic of concern, rather than just giving their contribution. This move might be a way of signaling the relevance of a contribution to a chair, even if it is perhaps only tangentially related.

Turn-taking. The talk in meetings is organized differently from the organization of turn-taking in ordinary conversation (Sacks et al., 1974). The meeting chair has the formal responsibility to manage interaction within a meeting (Asmuß & Svennevig, 2009). A group constitutes the actual turn-taking rules of a meeting, explicitly or implicitly, and these rules may be more or less formal. On the informal end of the scale, turn-taking can reflect that of ordinary conversation. More formal turn-taking rules in meetings will typically be guided by the meeting chair, who might serve as a hub of conversation. Ford (2008) notes that bids for turns can be nonverbally made to the meeting chair. She also points out that participants may "co-author" certain utterances, by repeating a phrase that another participant said to show support for an idea or perspective. The use of questions is also prevalent in turn-taking (Ford, 2013). Using questions may serve to critique a current direction of conversation, and in some forms also set up the questioner as an expert over the person the question is directed toward. The varieties of turn-taking systems used by groups and organizations to conduct meetings are just one way that meetings can reflect the identity or culture of a particular group. In the next section, I examine how the form and function of meetings varies across cultural groups.

Communities and identities. Several scholars have studied the variety of forms and functions of meetings across communities and cultures. Tracy and Dimock (2004) state that an important function of meetings is that they are "the arena in which organizational and community groups constitute who they are" (p. 140). Ethnographers of communication, the

scholarly heritage on which Schwartzman (1989) based her study, typically research the forms and functions of communicative events and practices, such as meetings. Meetings, thus, take on various forms and functions in order to help an organization or community group to constitute itself in a particular way. Meetings also serve as a site where culture, on local, organizational, and nation-state levels, affects how participants talk and position themselves.

Organizations and groups may constitute a particular organizational culture or identity in meetings. Schwartzman's (1989) study of Midwest Community MHC found that the organization sought to establish itself as an "alternative organization", with particular ideals that accorded with that vision. Meetings provided a unique site for the organization to practice and embody these ideals. Mirivel and Tracy (2005) studied another organization, Nutrition Corporation, whose members established an institutional identity of a "young" and "health conscious" organization. This occurred particularly in pre-meeting talk and through several objects serving the rhetorical purpose of reinforcing that identity, such as water bottles and nutrition bars. Another example, from anthropology, is the Xavante tribe of Brazil (Graham, 1993). Graham found that the tribe's political meetings used polyvocal speech performances to promote cohesion and egalitarian relationships among the elders.

Gender is a prevalent identity that is enacted through meetings. Holmes and her associates (Holmes, 2000, 2008; Holmes, Marra, & Burns, 2001; Holmes & Stubbe, 2003a, 2003b) have focused on how gender identities are constituted through meetings, and how these identities affect meetings. They have found that in meetings with a majority of female participants, small talk and humor are likely to occur more often. The small talk included in meetings, as well as before and after meetings, tends to be more personal than if the meeting participants were primarily male. Ford (2008, 2013) also studied the effects of gender on

meetings, noting that women tend to have different strategies for turn-taking and questioning than men. The gender identities of participants, and especially where the balance lies, may therefore affect the talk, form, and function of a meeting.

Meetings also vary across cultures. Linguists have been concerned with the differences between nation-state cultures in meetings and interactional moves (see Bargiella-Chiappini & Harris, 1997a, 1997b; Poncini, 2002). Yamada (1990, 1992, 1997) has detailed a number of ways that American and Japanese businesses conduct meetings differently. For example, Americans tend to value hearing everyone's input on an issue during a meeting, whereas the Japanese tend to see such a free exchange as chaotic, and thus favor the talk of business leaders over other participants. Similarly, Pan, Scollon, and Scollon (2002) examined Chinese meetings and they pose that in China and other Asian cultures, meetings are typically used as a ratification of a leader's position, rather than a site of decision-making and argumentation. Instead those functions are attributed more to pre- and post-meeting talk. These are only a few of the findings that these linguistic scholars interested in international meetings have found. The form and function of meetings, therefore, varies between nations-state cultures, which imbue their citizens with particular expectations of meetings.

Just as communities of people affect the form and function of meetings, meetings in turn can affect communities of people. US American employees reported that meetings affected their job attitudes and well-being (JAWB) (Rogelberg, Leach, Warr, & Burnfield, 2006). Rogelberg et al. found that when particular communities and organizations shape their meetings to be more productive and purpose-filled, then employees report higher satisfaction with their jobs and well-being. The same was true for the reverse, when meetings lack purpose and seem monotonous, then employees reported dissatisfaction with their jobs and well-being. The same group

attending meetings week after week could become collectively less satisfied, which would be reflected in their JAWB. Rogelberg et al.'s survey findings reflect Schwartzman's (1989) statement that organizational members use and are used by meetings, thus showing how meetings affect and perhaps "use" organizational members. This supports a reciprocal relationship between meetings, cultures, and identities.

Future Meeting Directions

From this review of meeting literature, a few themes have emerged. Meetings still tend to be used to study other topics, more or less related to the meeting itself. Issues of power are studied through how a meeting chair positions him- or herself in relation to the rest of the meeting participants. Conversation analysts have studied talk and the unique turn-taking structures of meetings. Identity work, community, and cultural aspects of meetings have all been studied by several researchers in meetings as well. These studies focus on the kinds of talk and structure of talk that occurs within meetings, and what such talk might constitute for an organization or group. However, these studies do not attend to metacommunication about meetings that participants may use and what purpose metacommunication about meetings might serve. As a potentially unique aspect of SPC's communication in meetings, or at least a unique aspect of my focus, I attended to the metacommunicative moments of meetings in particular to understand what such metacommunication about meetings might accomplish in meetings.

Ethnography of Communication

I approach this study from two perspectives, one of which is the ethnography of communication. This research perspective informed Schwartzman's (1989) study of meetings, and she drew heavily on Hymes's (1972) SPEAKING framework to develop her own framework for meetings as a specialized communicative event. I will first describe the background of this

theoretical and methodological perspective. Then I will examine a few ethnographies of communication that have been conducted in organizations, many of which use meetings as research tools rather than research objects.

Background

The ethnography of communication was originally developed by Hymes (1962, 1964, 1972) as the ethnography of speaking, and has been expanded on and developed by a group of communication scholars. Hymes (1964) developed this perspective to fill “the need for fresh kinds of data, the need to investigate directly the use of language in contexts of situation so as to discern patterns proper to speech activities” (p. 3). Thus, this perspective focuses on the cultural underpinnings of speech situations, speech events, and speech acts, as well as how these situations, events, and acts reify and construct sociocultural realities (Hymes, 1972). More specifically, Hymes wrote that “the interaction of language with social life is viewed as first of all a matter of human action, based on a knowledge, sometimes conscious, often unconscious, that enables persons to use language” (p. 53). Using this theoretical assumption, ethnographies of communication have been conducted in order to discover and interpret such knowledge that allows a person to use language that is considered comprehensible by interactional others in particular contexts. Although the link between communication and culture is central to ethnographers of communication, they are not the only group of scholars who cast this link. As Carey (1992) wrote, “there is no such thing as communication to be revealed in nature through some objective method free from the corruption of culture. We understand communication insofar as we are able to build models or representations of this process” (p. 31). Based on this characterization, communication can only be understood through discovering and describing the cultural underpinnings that make interaction possible. Although Carey focuses on culture as a

large-scale construction, I and other ethnographers of communication focus on the cultures constituted by smaller social groups, such as organizations, and use this basic theoretical and methodological orientation in order to do so.

Informed by this theoretical orientation, I looked at an organization's meetings as a communicative practice that is subject to cultural interpretation. By viewing meetings as a communicative practice, I turn my attention to a "pattern of situated, message endowed action, that is used in a scene" (Carbaugh, Gibson, & Milburn, 1997, p. 6). These communication practices are imbued with culture, which Carbaugh (1991) defined as "a socially interacted, and individually applied, system of symbols..., symbolic forms..., and their meanings" (p. 338). If communication practices, such as meetings, are imbued with cultural meaning, then it is necessary to consider the particular culture that social groups draw on and apply in these practices. To investigate such cultural meanings, Carbaugh (1991) posited that the ethnography of communication could engage in cultural interpretation. Carbaugh defined cultural interpretation as "an investigative mode the main objective of which is to render participants' communication practices coherent and intelligible, through an explication of a system of symbols, symbolic forms, and meanings which is creatively evoked in those practices" (p. 336). Such an investigation would focus on one or more of the communication practices of a group and attempt to uncover the underlying system of symbols and meanings attributed to and constitutive of such practice. For this project, I viewed meetings as a communicative practice in order to attend to the ways in which this practice is patterned and imbued with cultural meanings. Although the pattern of meetings could be considered to be static across time, I posit here instead that perhaps the pattern, like communication, is not static based on Sigman's (1998) critique of ethnographies. Communicative practices, like meetings, could be patterned, and yet this pattern

could also change with each iteration of the practice, or each meeting.

By taking meetings to be a changing communicative practice, I must also own my participation in the changes. As both participant and researcher, this placed me in a position to influence the changing of the communicative practice that I studied. Some ethnographers of communication have been wary of participating in such change, especially when approaching communities from an outsider's perspective. Philipsen (2008) discussed his own attempt, saying "Forty years ago I tried to change a culture. I failed" (p. 1). Philipsen tried and failed to change the racist talk in an afterschool program in inner city Chicago (see Philipsen 1975, 1976). This failure propelled him to change his goal "from trying to change a culture to working and living among people in a way that I might be useful to them, on their terms, yet without sacrificing altogether my ideals" (p. 2). Although this failure propelled him into this research tradition, which has been taken up by many other communication scholars after him, his failure also serves as a warning to ambitious scholars who believe in changing or altering the cultures with which they work. As a counterpoint to this warning tale, Carbaugh (2007) proposed that ethnographies of communication, especially those informed by cultural discourse analysis, can shift into a critical mode of inquiry to direct the analyst's audience, and perhaps also community members, to the ways in which their discourses advantage particular social groups over others. Such cultural critique (Carbaugh, 1989) could produce change in the community. Furthermore, as ethnographers of communication move into applied communication research projects, this "raises questions about how an ethnographer of communication can and should change communication practices" (Sprain & Boromisza-Habashi, 2013, p. 183). Far from ignoring these warnings and considerations, I tried to remain aware of the ways in which I, in my dual roles of researcher and participant, affected the changes in the communicative practice of SPC's

meetings. Part of this awareness included seeing how ethnographers have previously handled studies in organizations.

Ethnography of Communication in Organizations

Organizations have served as a site of study for ethnographers of communication since the 1980s. Carbaugh (1985) linked his study of a television studio to the organizational culture literature that was popular at the time. He provided a definition of organizational culture combining literature from the traditions of the ethnography of communication and organizational communication. At that time, organizational culture was a popular metaphor used by organizational communication researchers (Taylor, McDonald & Fortney, 2013). Carbaugh (1985) states that organizational culture is “a shared system of symbols and meanings, performed in speech, that constitutes and reveals a sense of work life; it is a particular way of speaking and meaning, a way of sense-making, that recurs in the oral activities surrounding common tasks” (p. 37). Taking this definition, I mean to examine the particular ways of speaking and sense-making that constitute and surround the common task of meetings. These particularities establish an aspect of the work life in SPC. The sense-making that Carbaugh refers to here is similar to the sense-making that Schwartzman’s (1989) framework category for norms of interpretation includes. Therefore, by explicating the norms of interpretation that SPC has for meetings, I am explicating a cultural view of meetings.

Since Carbaugh’s work on organizational culture, three ethnographers of communication have notably used the perspective to look at issues in organizations. The first of these is Baxter (1993), who conducted research in a small university. Baxter was a member of this university at the time of her research, and held a position as a faculty member and an appointed part-time position in the administration. She found two opposing codes at work in a task force group

appointed by the board of trustees to improve the governance of the organization. The first of these codes, called “talking things through”, favored verbal communication and collegiality between members, and was preferred by faculty members. The second code, called “putting it in writing”, favored written communication and professionalism between members, and was preferred by members of the administration. Baxter showed that these codes indexed different models of personhood, social relations, and beliefs about channel effectiveness and efficiency. In her conclusion, she wrote that the tension between the two groups accessing these different codes could also be due to competition over organizational resources, not just a tension between codes. This is an example of how limiting a study to only the ethnography of communication could limit the researcher’s potential understanding of the complexity of what is happening within a community.

Later, another ethnographer, Ruud (1995, 2000) found a similar situation in his research with a regional symphony. Viewing that group as a speech community allowed Ruud to find that the artists and administrators used two conflicting codes, or sets of rules and norms for speech. The study, thus, showed that one community could have multiple speech codes that are used by different members to achieve various ends. In that particular symphony, the codes were interdependent and competed with each other, which matched the tensions felt by symphony members. In Ruud’s (2000) applied research, he recommended that symphony members should attend to these competing codes and understand how the discourse (re)creates their social relationships and organizational life. While he did not explicitly state in his research report whether he gave this research and these recommendations to the symphony members, this is a move that I hope that my research will help me to make. As a researcher and participant, giving

such recommendations to SPC's members could prove fruitful as they continue to change and potentially improve meetings.

More recently, Milburn's (2009) study of two nonprofit organizations shows how members of nonprofit organizations organize, communicate with and about each other, and what particular speech acts constitute membership and the organization itself. An important communicative event for these organizations, as with SPC and my research in this project, is the meeting. In meetings, Milburn notes that speakers utilize certain ways of making arguments during decision-making in meetings that are associated with certain membership categories. By accessing the same membership categories through their speech, speakers established their membership in the organization and speech community. Milburn utilized membership categorization analysis along with the ethnography of communication in order to show how through membering this group developed a sense of community as an organization. Her focus of investigation more closely aligns with Schwartzman's (1989) call for research about meetings, and with the current literatures on meetings. However, unlike Schwartzman, Milburn (2009) did not examine the form and function of the meetings themselves.

Ventriloquism

The second perspective that I take in this research is ventriloquism, as informed by the Montreal School version of the communicative constitution of organizations (CCO). Like the ethnography of communication, this perspective relies on a social constructionist ontology. I will first situate the perspective within organizational discourse studies and the Montreal School. Then I will describe ventriloquism and its focus on agency as a major analytical concept.

Organizational Discourse Studies

A subdivision of organizational communication researchers has focused on organizations

as discursive constructions (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000a, 2000b; Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004; Putnam & Fairhurst, 2001). Taylor (2013) explains that this is part of the turn in organizational communication studies toward studying the process of organizing. Scholars in this subdivision use various discourse analytic methods to study the everyday talk between organizational members, and how this talk may reflect larger Discourses (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000b). Fairhurst and Putnam (2004) pose that there are three distinct traditions of research within this research area. Each perspective casts the discourse/Discourse to organization relationship differently. The first takes the organization as an object, and it serves as a container for discourse and talk. They pose the ethnography of communication as one of the methodologies that tends to take this perspective, citing Philipsen (1992) as an example. I would agree that the four studies that I examined in the previous section (Carbaugh, 1985; Baxter, 1993; Milburn, 2009; Ruud, 1995, 2000) also fit in this perspective as opposed to the other two. The second organizational discourse perspective sees discourse as existing prior to the organization, thus casting the organization in a constant state of becoming. Scholars conducting discourse studies informed by Foucault (1972, 1979) typically fall into this perspective. Finally, the third perspective that Fairhurst and Putnam (2004) describe is the grounded-in-action perspective. This encompasses structuration theory (Giddens, 1984), actor-network theory (Latour, 2005), and the Montreal School informed by Taylor and Van Every (2000). This perspective focuses on how discourse and organizations are mutually constitutive of each other.

The Montreal School

The Montreal School of CCO, especially Cooren's (2010; Cooren, Matte, Benoit-Barné, & Brummans, 2013) ventriloquism perspective, is heavily informed by Latour (1996, 2005), conversation analysis (Sacks, 1992; Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974), and speech act theory

(Austin 1962/2006). Taylor, Cooren, Giroux, and Robichaud's (1996) *Communication Theory* piece and Taylor and Van Every's (2000) tome are often cited as the foundation of the Montreal School perspective. This perspective focuses on how everyday talk, what they term "conversation", turns into more permanent "texts", both literally and figuratively. Literal texts may include meeting minutes, articles of incorporation, or memos, whereas figurative texts can include issues like authority, organizational identity, and agency. These texts then contextualize future conversations in organizations (Taylor & Robichaud, 2004; Taylor & Van Every, 2000). Scholars in this tradition thus reject the duality of structure and action, and instead emphasize that action yields structure (Ashcraft, Kuhn, & Cooren, 2009). This cyclical process renders the micro-macro divide and debate unnecessary to understanding the link between discourse and organizations (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004; Milburn, 2011). From this foundation, Cooren (2004, 2006, 2010) developed ventriloquism as a perspective for examining how objects and other nonhuman entities are constituted as part of the organizing process, which I examine further in the next section.

Ventriloquizing Agency

Cooren's (2004, 2006, 2010) work introduced nonhuman agents as an important part of the organizing process. Nonhuman agents do not possess such agency on their own; humans are still an essential part to their "hybrid agency" (Cooren, 2004). Humans, as *ventriloquists*, make these nonhuman agents, or *figures*, speak and act in their conversations (Cooren, 2010). Once given voice or animation, these figures, reified by human speakers, act on humans in particular ways, enabling and constraining their further actions. Cooren (2006) has defined agency as "making a difference", and thus an agent as "what or who makes a difference" for organizing (p. 82).¹ Such difference-making could include serving an essential function in an organization,

communicating with (and through) others, or acting on behalf of the human members of organizations.

Cooren (2004) focused particularly on how texts are given agency and then subsequently act on humans. He pointed out that “these texts, especially when they become more autonomous (such as policies, contracts, forms), reaffirm the identity and existence of the organization” (Cooren, 2004, p. 380). Later Cooren (2010) added that other nonhuman figures could be given agency as well as texts. This agency can be seen in utterances such as a technician saying, “we thank you for the note... It has- it has been honored” (Cooren, 2010, p. 28), to show that the note detailed some instruction that he had to honor. The note was produced by a human agent, the “you” that he refers to, but once posted it took agency over the technician and the others implied by the “we” of this utterance. Other examples of nonhuman figures that have been studied are euthanasia documents (Brummans, 2007), attitudes (Van Vuuren & Cooren, 2010), and beliefs or values (Cooren et al., 2013). When speakers orient toward objects, they can attribute some agency to these objects, or they can also speak about how the object exerted its agency over their actions.

Cooren (2010) chose ventriloquism as a metaphor for communication in order to show that when people invoke interests, passions, or things in conversation, they act as a ventriloquist who gives life to a figure or “dummy”. Cooren et al. (2013) point out that it is also possible to consider “*the ventriloquist* as the one who is being ventriloquized” (p. 263, emphasis in original). The ventriloquist is needed to act as a voice for the figure, and the ventriloquist may make a conscious choice or decision to bring a figure into conversation, but once given a voice, the figure constrains what the ventriloquist can use it to say. For example, a figure of “safety” could not be used to advocate for recklessness or risk taking that would threaten safety. Thus, the

figure constrains the ventriloquist to particular actions that accord with the character of the figure.

In either case, whether the ventriloquist or the figure is ventriloquizing the other, ventriloquism becomes something distinct from the two (or more) people interacting with each other. Rather than wholly concerning themselves with each other, and with each other's thoughts, opinions, and actions, they are taking particular values or objects to have thoughts, opinions, and actions that are relevant to a central concern of the conversation. Seeing these figures as relevant to a conversation, a person may lend its voice to a figure, or have a figure lend its voice to them. A form of attachment to a figure is enacted when one ventriloquizes with that figure. This attachment may denote both constraint and care for a figure (Cooren et al., 2013), and thus invoking a figure is not only a speaking strategy or tactic toward some end. A person who speaks in the name of a particular value or communicative form could over time even become the recognized voice of that particular figure (Cooren et al., 2013).

Ventriloquial speech may be seen by others to merely personify inanimate objects and immaterial concerns. An argument could be made that this kind of speech is only a figurative way of speaking, and thus is part of a speaking style rather than a different phenomenon. Figures of speech, such as metaphors (Cornelissen, 2005) and tropes (Putnam, 2004; Oswick, Putnam, & Keenoy, 2004), have been shown to play a central role in the constitution of organizations and organizational life (Cooren et al., 2013). Thus, rather than be attributed as a mere speaking style of one person, ventriloquizing (and being ventriloquized by) figures should be taken more seriously.

Once a metaphor or other figure of speech loses its author, like a text might (Cooren, 2004), then it may take on a figure of its own. The figure would have its own history and

characteristics, which are brought out by different ventriloquists, just like any other human member of the organization. Cooren et al. (2013) even argue that such figures should be considered “*full-fledged participants* in the enactment of everyday situations” (p. 264, emphasis in original).

Cooren and colleagues’ notion of agency is distinct from the communicative agency that some ethnographers of communication have used. Hymes (1974) mentioned that certain inanimate objects or forces, if “listened to” by participants, could be studied. Carbaugh and Boromisza-Habashi (2011) take this notion in regards to Blackfeet forms of listening. The Blackfeet reported on conversations held with a raven and a stream, among other objects and animals. The authors use the term “agent” to refer to these non-human entities with which humans communicate. Cooren’s work with ventriloquism recognizes that texts can communicate with us (Cooren, 2004), and if these are stripped from authorship and stand on their own, they enforce that we must accomplish some action. However, in his later writing, Cooren (2010; Cooren et al., 2013) emphasizes how figures or agents can be brought into a present conversation through ventriloquism, as if it were interacting with the people conversing as well. This departs from Hymes (1974) communicative agency, and Carbaugh and Boromisza-Habashi’s (2011) illustration of such agency, because ethnographers of communication require a person to report on a conversation that they had in the past with a nonhuman agent. Ventriloquism focuses on how nonhuman agents or figures are present within conversations between people, as they are voiced by the people in conversation, and as they make a difference in organizations, rather than reports of conversations between a person and a figure.

Chapter Conclusion

Out of the rich literature on meetings and with two research perspectives, I analyze and

interpret SPC's meetings, using metacommunication about meetings as a particular window into the practice. As I have shown, most scholars who have used meetings in research have either used them as research tools, or as research objects through which they examine enactments power, talk, identity, community, and culture that are particular to meetings. None of the studies cited here have focused particularly on the metacommunication about meetings and what this talk reveals about the particular form and function of meetings in an organization and about the organization itself. The ethnography of communication has also taken a similar perspective on meetings, using them as resources or objects through which to study cultural codes (Baxter, 1993; Ruud, 1995, 2000; Milburn, 2009).

As Fairhurst and Putnam (2004) pointed out, the ethnography of communication and ventriloquism have different perspectives on what an organization is and how it comes to be. The assumptions inherent in these perspectives enable and constrain particular ways of seeing the phenomena under scrutiny. The ethnography of communication usually assumes the organization as a container for talk, including the talk of meetings, and thus examines how the talk is influenced by the organizational setting. Here in this study, then, I do tend to refer to SPC as an "organization", and how the members of this organization have constituted meetings, especially in chapter three where I primarily use this perspective. Ventriloquism takes a different view, seeing discourse, like meetings, and organizations as mutually constitutive of each other through interaction. This perspective then examines how people constitute agential figures, and how these agential figures in turn imbue people with particular concerns when ventriloquized.

By using two perspectives on one phenomena, I can uncover a more nuanced understanding of what is happening when the members of SPC metacommunicate about

meetings. In order to accommodate each perspective, I have two main research questions that guide this thesis. Each draws primarily from one of the perspectives. These research questions are:

RQ 1: What is the form and function of SPC's meetings, and what does metacommunication about meetings reveal about the norms of interpretation of meetings?

RQ 2: What kinds of agency are given to the meeting figure when members of SPC metacommunicate about meetings?

Chapter II

METHODS

In order to find the answers to my two research questions, I utilized three methods: participant observation, interviewing, and document collection. These methods resulted in a set of data including field notes, transcripts, and documents. After producing and collecting these documents, I analyzed them through coding and analytic units partly inspired by the ethnography of communication and Schwartzman's (1989) framework. I describe this analytic method below, as well as considerations of reflexivity. However, first I begin with a description of the scene.

Scene

The scene that I examined is the organization Suicide Prevention Campaign (SPC) and, more specifically, its meetings. SPC started as a one-woman suicide-prevention and mental health awareness campaign in 2010 after the founder, Mary, heard about five teens' suicides in central Pennsylvania in as many months. The founder worked on her own for this campaign with occasional help from friends and family members until the summer of 2012 when she started forming committees and the board of directors with people of various skill sets to help shape the present organization. Currently this organization has about twenty volunteers working through the different committees and the board of directors. As of April 2014, the necessary documents to file for official 501(c)(3) nonprofit status have been reviewed by the IRS, and some minor required changes were made and returned through an expedited process. The IRS representative who contacted us expects that we will have our 501(c)(3) status by mid-May 2014.

SPC is an organization that is constituted through two formal internal means of communication. The first of these is meetings, which is my primary focus in this study. Many

of these meetings are used to coordinate the actions of the members and organizers of SPC to meet specific goals that do not require the official 501(c)(3) status of being a non-profit organization. Some of these meetings, called “events”, are where the actual mission of SPC plays out, and members of SPC visit groups of teenagers at churches and schools in central Pennsylvania. In these events they present information to the general public about suicide awareness and prevention in addition to a few related mental health topics. Internal meetings, such as the annual board meeting and committee meetings, are held physically in a rented conference room, coffee shop, or more recently in the founder’s home and also virtually using video-conferencing software or conference phone calls. Except for one committee meeting, I have attended meetings through virtual means in this study.

Another way of communicating that SPC uses to constitute itself is the social networking site Wiggio. Wiggio is a group-based social networking site that allows members to post information and comments, schedule meetings, and upload documents and pictures. Any document that has been distributed to members of the organization is uploaded and stored to Wiggio as one virtual backup of these documents. This site hosts the five closed-membership groups that exist in the organization: the board of directors, the fundraising committee, the community relations committee (which was disbanded after the September 2013 meeting), the marketing committee, and the education committee. Many members of the organization are part of two or more of these groups at once. I am a member of the board of directors, I was chair of the now-disbanded community relations committee, and I am a member of the fundraising committee. In addition to posting information for other members to read and make comments, members use Wiggio to schedule meetings and post documents like meeting agendas and minutes. Although members use Wiggio more often than they hold meetings, meetings serve as

a frequent topic of discussion on this website. In this paper I focus on metacommunicative talk about meetings to analyze the form, function, and figure of meetings.

Participant Observation

In SPC there were two sites for my year and a half long observation. The first was meetings. In this project, meetings have been scheduled anywhere from three in one month to once every four months. I attended seven out of eleven meetings held between November 2012 and December 2013. Meetings that I attended included as few as two members and as many as nine members. The details on the eleven meetings, including date, meeting group, attendees, and the data that I have for each is included in the table in Appendix 1. At each meeting that was formally announced and occurred for one of the four committees or the board of directors, I attended virtually via webcam, recorded the meeting, and kept a field journal. After each meeting I transcribed the recordings verbatim and with some prosodic features. These transcripts allowed me to examine the form, function, and figure of meetings. Field notes taken of these meetings also provided the larger context of meetings as well as my particular attendance and sense-making during those meetings.

To supplement this, I also observed my participation in the other communicative practices of organizational members. This included checking Wiggio and speaking with members informally about what happened with the organization and committees. Although I position these other modes of communicating as similar and supplemental to my inquiry on meetings, this does not mean that these practices are supplemental for organizational members. These spaces that I engaged in as sense-making before and after meetings might be the more primary modes of communicating for the members of this organization. Using data from these

other communicative spaces provided me with different data through which to examine the metacommunication about meetings.

Interviews

I also conducted semi-structured informant and respondent interviews with three board members of the organization: Mary, Lisa, and Lise. Interview participation was elicited through announcements during the general discussion portion of meetings and through a posting on Wiggio. Informant interview questions were discussed to gather knowledge about the organization and its history. Respondent interview questions, instead, focused on the interviewee's personal opinions and views. These interviews allow me insight into the ways that each of these members makes sense of their participation in the organization as well as how they would potentially alter the future direction of the organization. Other questions focused specifically on the communication of organizational members to examine the norms and expectations for meetings. The interview guide in Table 1 is the guide that I used for these interviews, adapting certain questions for respondents as necessary, such as rephrasing a question when someone had already provided an answer in a previous turn. I collaborated with the founder and president, Mary, to design some of these questions in order to be better able to address the concerns she had about meetings and to aid in the ongoing discussion and improvement of meetings in SPC.

Table 1

Interview Guide

- What is your position in the organization?
- How did you first hear about the organization?
- When and why did you decide to volunteer?

- How do you view your role in the organization? What is your function or purpose in the organization?
- What are your expectations for a nonprofit organization? What goals should a nonprofit have?
- What are your expectations of interaction in an organization, generally? Should interaction happen at certain intervals, or through specific means?
- What are your expectations of interaction with other members of this organization? Should interaction happen at certain intervals, or through specific means?
- What do meetings allow people to do in SPC? What are meetings used for? What purpose do meetings have?
- What are the strengths of SPC'S meetings? What goes well in meetings?
- What are some of the drawbacks of SPC'S meetings? What could be improved?
- If you could change something about how the organization is run or its mission and vision, what would it be? Why?

Document Collection

In addition to writing fieldnotes and transcribing meetings and interviews, I also collected the documents that organizational members have access to. Among these documents are the official organizing documents of the organization, such as the application for the 501(c)(3) status, articles of incorporation, bylaws, and meeting minutes. I also included the online written communication that occurs between members on Wiggio. This platform is sometimes used to replace meetings, as well as to plan and make sense of meetings afterward. Although all of these documents are created, written, or adapted by organizational members, once made these

documents also constitute the organization and the relationship between SPC, its board of directors and various committees, and its members. These texts could provide insight into how meetings have been viewed in various ways since the beginning of the organization.

Considerations of Reflexivity

One of the hallmarks of qualitative research is reflexivity. Lindlof and Taylor (2011) called reflexivity "the heartbeat of a qualitative research project" (p.72). Butler-Kisber (2010) added that reflexivity is where researchers examine "what perspectives are brought to the work and why we see things the way we do" (p. 19). S. Tracy (2010) echoes this, placing self-reflexivity under sincerity as one of her eight big-tent criteria for excellent qualitative research. She wrote that "sincerity means that research is marked by honesty and transparency about the researcher's biases, goals, and foibles as well as about how these played a role in the methods, joys, and mistakes of the research" (p. 841). A rigorous accounting for reflexivity or sincerity in qualitative research aids readers in following the journey of research from theoretical set up to data collection to the interpretations that one researcher chooses to present. Agar (2008) calls for ethnographies that can respond to the question, "can you do something here given this amount of time and resources, what will the results be and, more importantly, what will they not be" (p. 39). Answering this question depends on an ethnographer's awareness of her relation with the community of focus, the assumptions that she brings with her to the field, and how engaging with this community alters and refines the assumptions and interpretations she makes. In order to account for reflexivity and to hold myself accountable to Agar's question, I want to take some space in this thesis to consider the relationship that I have had with SPC and its members, the multiple roles and identities that I assume in this research and how these enable and constrain me. I have elsewhere in this thesis discussed my theoretical assumptions informed by two

research perspectives and my goals in this research.

As I briefly mentioned above, I serve three roles in SPC's organization. I am a board member, originally appointed by Mary in the summer of 2012 to serve for a year and a half before the board voted again on members and officers in the annual meeting in December 2013, where I was reelected to the board for another year-long term. As a board member I attend meetings and I am expected to give my input in discussions during meetings and on Wiggio. I was also the chair of the community relations committee, which was disbanded by Mary shortly after the September 2013 meeting, and may possibly morph into an events committee in the future. In this role I scheduled and ran meetings with my committee. I also assigned tasks for committee members to complete. Many times I wrote meeting minutes after a meeting was completed to document the actions and interactions that occurred during the meeting.

In addition to these roles that I serve within the organization, I held (and still hold) many other roles in relation to the people of SPC. The most obvious one perhaps is that of researcher to the researched. This places me in a position of power over the narrative of these organizational members' lives and story that I produce in my research. This power position may have granted my voice, typically backed by some theory of communication, greater prevalence over other voices in making decisions or discussing the communication of SPC. However, even though I was the researcher in this setting, as a member of the organization I was also one of the researched. In the dual role of researcher-researched, I have had power over my own portrayal in my work, but I was also closer to the meanings created within the organization than a non-member researcher would be. This enabled me to access certain kinds of data and interpretations that a non-member might not have been able to negotiate, but it also constrained me from taking a complete outsider's view in this research.

Informally, I have relationships with many of the members of SPC outside of the context of the organization and my own research. I was privy to some of the details of the board members' private lives from being friends with them on Facebook. I knew all but three of the current board members prior to the organization's founding through church and through other friends. Mary, the current president and founder of SPC, and I worked together for almost five years at a coffee shop inside of a local grocery store, and quickly grew to become "best friends". I am the only board member with a relationship to Mary labeled as such, and this might have also granted me some privilege in the organizational context of which I could be unaware. After Mary, I am perhaps most acquainted with Lise, Mary's sister. This primarily comes through Mary's stories of her childhood with Lise and Mary's relaying newsworthy items of Lise's life to me. The three board members that I did not personally know before SPC was founded are Amanda, Doug, and Theresa. Sean, Lisa, Dan and I met through church and know each other through Mary's social network influence.

IRB Approval

I filed protocol number 12-0689 with the Institutional Review Board in early November 2012. On November 9, 2012 the reviewer determined that my project had exempt status. After designing new interview questions for the respondent interviews that I added for this thesis, I submitted an amendment including these changes and changes to my research questions and timeline on September 19, 2013. On September 25, the office contacted me to acknowledge my amendment and that my project still had exempt status.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data that I constructed and amassed throughout this project, I began by using a process of open coding similar to that suggested by Glaser and Strauss's (1967) grounded

theory method. In this stage, I marked when “meeting” or “to meet” was explicitly used or alluded to in the transcripts, field notes, and documents that I collected, in addition to other concepts and words that seemed to be important. After open coding each meeting transcript, I then used the etic framework developed by Schwartzman (1989) to analyze each meeting for the following analytic concepts: participants, channels and codes, frame, meeting talk (which includes the sub-components of topic and results, norms of speaking and interaction, oratorical genres and styles, and interest and participation), norms of interpretation, goals and outcomes, and meeting cycles and patterns. During these initial coding phases, I kept track of emerging patterns and relationships that I drew across different examples and components by writing memos. After these two initial coding phases, I used the entire body of data to compare and “test” these initial patterns and relationships.

After coding and drawing relationships and patterns out from my data, I began writing. The writing process is an extension of analytic work, and is a construction analogous to how I view the forms of communication that I study. This writing is informed by the work that has been produced by other researchers in the two perspectives that I study. In the form and function chapter, I construct a broad snapshot of SPC’s meetings utilizing Schwartzman’s (1989) framework, followed by three more focused snapshots to examine the norms of interpretation. The figure chapter follows more of a general discourse analytic approach (Gee, 1999), as researchers in ventriloquism might use (Cooren, 2010). In the final chapter, I compare the analyses and the research perspectives.

Chapter III

FORM AND FUNCTION

The ethnography of communication is best known for detailing the form and function of communication practices and events in relation to large-scale ways of speaking in particular communities. In this chapter, I will use Schwartzman's (1989) analytic framework as a guide for explicating the form and function of meetings in SPC. I outlined the parts of this framework in the introduction chapter. This analysis will address my first research question: What is the form and function of SPC's meetings, and what does metacommunication about meetings reveal about the norms of interpretation of meetings? Most of the framework is presented to examine the form and function of meetings and other points of interpretation of what talk about meetings might be doing for the participants. After explicating the rest of the framework, I will focus on norms of interpretation, because this part of the framework allows me to best look at how the metacommunication about meetings relates to the characterization of meetings that members hold. It also lends itself best to a concern with how meetings have been characterized over time, a concern that Sigman (1998) challenged ethnographers to use. At the end of the chapter I will summarize what this analysis says about the form and function of SPC's meetings, and why this might not be enough to understand the metacommunication about meetings from a more nuanced perspective.

Participants

The first component of Schwartzman's (1989) framework is the participants. Meetings include various subsets of the members of SPC. All meetings included in my data set include two members: Mary, the president and founder of SPC, and me. Other regular meeting attendees include the board of directors: Amanda, Dan, Lisa, Lise, and Sean. Two board members, Doug

and Theresa, only attended one meeting in this data set, the December 2013 board of directors meeting. Theresa is the newest board member, and she was voted onto the board during the December 2013 annual board meeting. The other board members have been on the board since June 2012 when Mary appointed the first board of directors. Only one of the original board members, Donna, has resigned from the board, and this happened before I began my study. All of the meetings in this data set include various subsets of the board of directors, and although there are organizational members that are also a part of various committees, they did not attend any of the meetings for which I have transcripts. Dustin and Nick, members of the marketing and educational committees are included in the meeting minutes for the meetings of those committees.

Most of the board members and volunteers are in their mid-twenties. Amanda is the youngest member of the board at 21, and Doug is the oldest member at 57 years old. He is older by most other members of SPC by 30-35 years. Some of the board members hold titled positions, with certain responsibilities attached to their positions. Mary is the founder of SPC, and the current president, so she has some executive decision-making power. She is also the incorporator of the organization, so her name is tied to the legal documents that were sent to the state of Pennsylvania and the IRS. Mary is also the current chairwoman of the board of directors, which gives her tie-breaking power and she organizes and chairs the board meetings. Amanda had been the secretary of the board, and thus she kept meeting minutes. In 2014, this position will be split by Lise and Lisa as the board voted. Sean is the treasurer and he deals with the budget, receipts, and taxes for the organization. The chairs of all of the committees sit on the board as well. Amanda is the chair of the education committee, Sean is the chair of the fundraising committee, Lise is the chair of the marketing committee, and, until the committee

was recently disbanded, I was chair of the community resources committee. More specific information on each of the board members such as names, age, roles in the organization, and meetings attended are included in Appendix 2.

Many of the board members knew each other before joining the board. Dan, Lisa, Lise, Sean, Mary, and I all attended the same church between 2008 and 2012. While attending this church, Mary was inspired with the idea behind SPC and ran the campaign on her own for two years between 2010 and 2012 before asking many of us and others who attended the same church to volunteer and help her create an organization. Mary also knew Doug before he volunteered with the board. Doug had taught Mary and Lisa in a small private high school from 2006 to 2009. Some of the members of the board also have more informal relationships with each other. Dan and Lisa have been in a relationship for almost two years, and they got engaged at the end of 2013. Lise is Mary's older sister by two years. Although neither Dustin nor Nate is on the board, they are Lise's fiancé and Mary's husband, respectively. Sean is engaged to one of Mary's childhood friends. Mary and I call ourselves "best friends", which is not a relationship that any of the other board members share. Amanda and Theresa are the only current board members who did not know at least one other person before joining the organization. Amanda found out about the organization through its Facebook page and Theresa found the organization through a craigslist.org post for volunteers. A diagram of SPC's structure, both official and unofficial through these informal ties, is included in Appendix 3.

Channels and Codes

Schwartzman's (1989) conception of channels and codes is best akin to Hymes's (1972) instrumentalities component, rather than Philipsen's (1997; see also Philipsen, Coutu, & Covarrubias, 2005) speech codes. SPC's meetings primarily involve verbal, linguistic codes.

Most meetings take place in two channels or spaces. The first is face-to-face. Most of the organization's members live in central Pennsylvania, where SPC is located. These members meet one-on-one at local coffee shops or in each other's homes. Members who can attend the face-to-face space of a meeting convene at a local bookstore with a conference room or in Mary's home. However, not all of the members live in central Pennsylvania most of the year. Amanda attends college in western Pennsylvania, and has been for as long as she has been on the board of directors. Theresa recently accepted a job in Delaware. Each of them are about a four hour drive away from the physical location in central Pennsylvania. I live the furthest away while I am attending university in Colorado, which is at least a four hour plane ride, or 22 hours of driving. Thus, Amanda, Theresa, and I require a different meeting space for meeting with those who attend face-to-face.

The solution to the issue of physically distant members has been to include a virtual meeting channel. Members of SPC can use phone calls or video-conferencing software to attend meetings. Video-conferencing software, like Skype or Oovoo, has been used most often in these meetings. The video-conferencing software provides those meeting face-to-face with our virtual faces, as if we were also attending the meeting "face"-to-face. Usually the only person that virtual participants can see on the other end of the camera is Mary, and perhaps the side of one or two other members sitting at the table. Although most meetings take place in both of the face-to-face and virtual spaces, three meetings only occurred in the virtual space. Two meetings were of the community relations committee, and the last was a Facebook chat meeting between Mary and me.

Frame

Meetings typically begin with a meeting chair calling the meeting to order, sometimes in the exact phrase, “I’ll call this meeting to order” (Katie, community resources committee meeting, 4/12/13). This is typically coupled with the time that the statement was made. A few examples of this are included in excerpts 1-3 below. Some meetings were called to order by marking an official beginning, as in excerpts 1 and 2 below. Other meetings were called to order by acknowledging the attendees of the meeting, as in excerpt 3 below.

Excerpt 1 (December 2012, Community resources meeting, Line 12, Mary)

1 Oh I guess we officially call this to order it’s 12:59 call this to order

Excerpt 2 (December 2013, Board of directors meeting, Line 29, Mary)

1 Alright 2:09 we’re officially starting.

Excerpt 3 (September 2013, Board of directors meeting, Line 32, Mary)

1 Alright guys thanks for showing up. Alright so what time is it? It is exactly 2:02.

One meeting had a problematic opening. I had arranged and scheduled a meeting of the community resources committee in April 2013. Mary and I were the only committee members in attendance, but as two-thirds of the committee, we had a quorum to count the meeting as official according the committee’s rules. I had started to record the meeting when we switched channels from instant messenger to a Skype call, but about eleven minutes into the recording Mary told me that I should “officially declare the meeting”. After asking more about that rule, and why she thought that meetings needed an official declaration to begin them, I asked about what would happen if I did not start the meeting, which is the beginning of excerpt 4 below.

Excerpt 4 (April 2013, Community resources meeting, Lines 241-256, Katie and Mary)

1 K: ((laughter)) what if I never tell you that’s the meeting’s begun
 2 M: then this meeting will not have happened!
 3 ((laughter))
 4 M: and we will be at a loss

- 5 K: we'll be at a loss of a meeting ((laughing))
6 M: it will be this black hole where all of our ideas are getting sucked in
7 ((laughter))
8 M: wooh
9 K: uh so what would you call this if this isn't a meeting? if I never actually start this
10 meeting
11 M: I'm going to start the meeting if you don't start the meeting
12 ((laughter))
13 M: it will be officially called to order by Mary
14 K: ok I guess I'll call this meeting to order it is 6:32.
15 M: it is 8:32 where I am so I'll put parentheses 6:32 for you because I'm the
16 important one just kidding

The meeting's start seems to be inevitable. When I challenge that I might not start the meeting, Mary retorts that she will then start the meeting (lines 9-11). Without an official start, then Mary says that the "meeting will not have happened" (line 2), and our ideas will get "sucked in" by the "black hole" that would be the non-meeting. Perhaps this official frame to the meeting is required to mark the "business" that occurs in meetings, which runs according to an agenda, from the informal and more spontaneous conversations that Mary and I frequently have about SPC. The declaration of a meeting and its start time seems to be an important part of the act sequence of meetings for SPC members. As best friends, the conversation before this point had been about topics that she and I frequently talk about, like traveling and plans for the summer. To this point the talk had also been on relatively equal grounds. Once the meeting was mentioned, however, a hierarchical structure was placed on our conversation. Although I was the chair of this meeting, Mary enacted her organizational power in the conversation in lines 11-13 when she says that she will start the meeting. Therefore, the chair is not the only person who can call a meeting to order, supposedly the president could also call the meeting to order if need be because she outranks the other members in a way. I acquiesce to this force of power, perhaps begrudgingly, in order to remain chair of the meeting rather than Mary.

Meetings close in a similarly formal fashion to the typical opening. There is another reference to the time, and the closing phrase usually follows a check that there are no questions or topics of discussion that need to be included in the meeting. A few examples are included in excerpts 5 and 6 below. Excerpt 5 represents a more formal closing, where the meeting is actually declared “closed” (line 2). Excerpt 6 includes a check that there are no other topics to cover in the meeting before adjourning (line 1).

Excerpt 5 (December 2013, Board of directors meeting tape 3, Lines 763-764, Mary)

1 alright I think that is it so we went about 13 minutes over but it’s 3:13 we’re going to go
2 ahead and close the meeting thanks everyone for coming

Excerpt 6 (November 2012, Fundraising committee meeting, Lines 384-488, Mary and Katie)

1 M: That’s all I have so if you guys don’t have anything? Nothing? Okay. Meeting
2 adjourned.
3 K: Woohoo
4 M: Excellent so let’s see it’s 1:36 so that was what like 20 minutes?
5 K: 23:04

Many of the meetings also include some pronouncement of how long the meeting lasted, which I usually say because this corresponds with the length of the recording that I have made of the meeting, as exemplified in lines 4-5 of excerpt 6. In excerpt 5, Mary references that the meeting ran “13 minutes over”, which signals to the other members that the meeting lasted for about an hour and 13 minutes because it was scheduled to close at 3:00. Therefore, time seems to be an important factor in SPC’s meetings. Both the beginning and ending of the frame include some pronouncement of what time it is, and the ending includes how long the meeting lasted.

Meeting Talk

Meeting talk includes the four sub-categories of topics and results, norms of speaking and interaction, oratorical genres and styles, and interest and participation. SPC meeting talk includes five main topics of conversation, which usually revolves around the informational

purposes of meetings. Mary typically serves as not only the chair of the meeting, but also as the main speaker, with the most and longest turns of any participants. The chair, primarily Mary, also directs turn-taking procedures and decision-making, when decisions are involved during meetings. Meetings include informational and discussion-based styles of talk. Finally, the interest and participation of participants are encouraged through a few different strategies during meetings.

Topics and Results

There are five main topics that are present in most of the meetings. The first topic, which also usually occurs first in the meetings, is an overview and update of everything the committee or organization has accomplished since the last meeting or over the past year. This is usually a report on the activities that the organization or committee has accomplished and any decisions that were made outside of meetings. This topic usually has a document associated with it, with each month listed and the actions made during each month. Mary references the document in her talk, and uses the short descriptions of actions to prompt her talk about them.

The second topic that is covered in many of these meetings is an update on the organization's 501(c)(3) status as a legal nonprofit organization with the IRS. The update is usually followed by a comment on the pro bono lawyer used by SPC, Anthony, and how (in)adequate of a job he is doing. As of April 2014, the application has been officially reviewed by the IRS, seven months after submitting it, and the reviewer has requested more information from SPC before it will be approved. This legal status is sometimes included in the time overview, and sometimes discussed as its own separate topic.

A third prominent topic is fundraising efforts. Most of the meetings include at least a brief mention of the current budget or the fundraising efforts that are currently being planned or

happening. Grants are occasionally mentioned as part of this update, usually in connection with a mention about the 501(c)(3) that prevents SPC from applying for grants. This topic notably occurs in meetings of all groups in SPC, not just the fundraising committee and board of directors.

The fourth topic usually included in meetings is metacommunication about meetings. In the only meeting that occurred through instant messaging, this was the sole topic of conversation. This metacommunicative topic sometimes includes talk about the nature of meetings, what makes a meeting, or discussion and qualification about how often SPC has meetings. This topic is rarely listed on an agenda, unlike the first three topics, but was included on the September 2013 agenda. The documents prepared before the meeting included some questions for the board about meetings, how often they should occur, and when they should occur. The section on norms of interpretation looks into this topic more in-depth.

The final topic usually included in meetings is metacommunicative talk about Wiggio, the online communication platform that members use to share information and coordinate for meetings and other activities. Talk about Wiggio and talk about meetings usually occurs within the same section of talk, sometimes to contrast these communication forms with each other. At the September 2013 board meeting, Mary brought a concern to the board that this form of communication, which is used more often than any other, might prevent older volunteers or those less familiar with technology from volunteering. The following discussion focused on the use of technology in the organization, with a few board members putting forth training on Wiggio as an option to include these less technology-savvy members.²

Meetings usually result in Mary, or another member with a position in the organization, having informed the other members of the meeting party. The members of SPC rarely make

discernable and “official” decisions in meetings, which Boden (1994) notes is a typical feature of US American meetings. For example, in the April 2013 meeting of the community resources committee, Mary and Katie discussed the future of the committee. Mary said that the committee was not living up to the potential that she had hoped it would have, and Katie mentioned that the purpose of the committee had always been “vague”. After discussing options for close to half an hour, the meeting closed with the decision to put deciding the fate of the committee “on hold” until all of the members of the committee, including Amanda, could attend a meeting to discuss the future of the committee. However, Mary informed me in December 2013 that she had made the “executive decision” to disband the committee shortly after the September 2013 board of directors meeting. Therefore, even after deciding on the point that a decision would be made regarding the committee, Mary chose to make the decision herself outside of the context of a meeting.

Norms of Speaking and Interaction

Schwartzman (1989) mentions a concern with a few particular norms of speaking and interaction: who chairs meetings, how debate or discussion is regulated (including turn-taking), and what decision rule is used by members. In all but one meeting that I analyzed, Mary served as the meeting chair. In SPC, the meeting chair is usually responsible for scheduling the meeting, calling it to order and closing the meeting, and transitioning between topics and agenda items. The only meeting chaired by someone other than Mary was a community relations committee meeting that I called and chaired.

In all of the meetings in this data set, Mary spoke the most, accounting for at least half of the total talk within each meeting. This is probably due to her position in the organization and that she often chairs meetings. Even in the meeting that I organized and chaired, she still spoke

for over half of the total time of the meeting. Although she speaks longest and most often, she encourages others to “feel free to interrupt” her during meetings, as I discuss in the interest and participation section. Meeting participants rarely take up this invitation to interrupt, and discussion tends to occur when prompted by Mary.

When other members are trying to claim a turn, they will sometimes speak up and say what they want to, especially when they are meeting via technology rather than face to face with other members. Once recognized by Mary, they usually repeat their turn in order to have their contribution heard by all. Most times with those meeting face-to-face, Mary will recognize other members for a speaking turn and they will then take their turn. These turns are usually directed back to Mary in the form of questions for her to answer or suggestions that Mary either comments on or summarizes in relation to other suggestions.

As for the decision rule used by SPC’s members, the official bylaws and rules of the board of directors and committees require a simple majority vote for most issues. These official rules also allow for members to call a two-thirds majority vote on certain issues. However, as I have stated above, decisions are rarely made during meetings themselves. Mary gathers a sense of what the consensus might be and then makes decisions for the organization. The exception to this was in December 2013 when the board voted on a new member to add and to vote each other back for another term. In this case a vote was taken for each member after they stated their case for whether they wanted to stay on the board. Mary directed the vote by calling names or making eye contact with members and then they gave their yes or no vote. All of these voting decisions were unanimous, which is well over the simple majority needed for a decision to be considered made.

Oratorical Genres and Styles

Oratorical genres and styles describe the types of talk included in a speech event or meeting. Although several of these are mentioned throughout this data set, they typically follow two themes of purpose: talk as information-giving and talk as discussion. Information-giving is marked by one speaker providing updates on various aspects of meetings. Discussion is marked by multiparty talk with questions and responses by multiple members. I present one excerpt for each, both given by Mary, and discuss how meeting talk actually follows these.

As I have discussed throughout these meeting talk sections, meetings tend to follow an informational style rather than a discussion-based style. However, in the following excerpt, Mary's ideal for meetings is portrayed.

Excerpt 7 (September 2013, Board of directors meeting tape 4, Lines 290-292, Mary)

- 1 I want to be able to meet with people to, you know, show that we're a team so everyone
- 2 gets together, and we get to brainstorm together, we get to talk face to face or you know
- 3 webcam or whatever it is.

In this excerpt she poses that meetings include genres like "brainstorming" and "talking face-to-face". Although most meetings do not include this kind of talk, this was better exemplified in the most recent board meetings where she used discussion questions and points to guide part of each meeting. In the September 2013 board meeting she brought up questions about meetings themselves, which is where this excerpt came from. This excerpt is part of the larger excerpt 13 reproduced below in the norms of interpretation section. She also brought up questions about the organization's use of technology and whether that might bar older volunteers from contributing as much. This did spur discussion about these topics among those present. The December board meeting also included more moments of discussion about new members, goals for the following year, and additional topics. I will talk about these moments more in the interest and participation section below.

Although the most recent board meetings included more discussion than earlier meetings, the bulk of each meeting followed a more informational trend. This has been the trend of the majority of meetings. Mary characterized meetings as such in a conversation with me on instant messenger, presented in the excerpt below.

Excerpt 8 (February 2013, Facebook chat meeting, lines 57-58 & 62, Mary)

- 1 Mostly, for me, meetings are about seeing where everyone is at. forcing some
- 2 conversation. making things more personal.
- 3 ((3 turns omitted))
- 4 a normal meeting is supposed to be more informational

In this excerpt she marks the genres of talk included in meetings as “seeing where everyone is at”, “forcing some conversation”, and “making things more personal”. The last two genres might also fall under discussion-based purposes of meetings, but “forcing conversation” seems like this genre is either an unwanted part of meetings, hence reinforcing their informational purpose, or meetings are the only place that “conversation” happens in SPC, which would reinforce their discussion purpose. “Making things more personal” could be a genre related to either purpose. If related to information-giving, as Mary seems to imply these genres are related to by her statement in line 4, then this genre could mean that information-giving that happens face-to-face feels more personal than information-giving online. However, since Mary’s characterization of genres and styles changed between February and September 2013, and this change was partly reflected in the talk itself, perhaps meetings will become primarily discussion-based in the future.

Interest and Participation

In many of the early meetings, Mary would ask participants “is everyone still with me” to ensure that everyone present virtually was following along with the meeting talk. She would also encourage interruptions by saying something like, “If anyone wants to interrupt me, that-

that's fine" (Mary, board of directors meeting, 12/8/2012). Otherwise, Mary will gauge the opinion of the other members by asking questions. An example from the September 2013 board meeting shows the kinds of questions that she will ask to start a discussion.

Excerpt 9 (September 2013, Board of directors meeting, Lines 298-301, Mary)

- 1 What do you guys prefer, do you hate having meetings? Ha- are we having enough
- 2 meetings? Should we have less meetings? Should we not call them meetings? Should
- 3 we call them fiestas? Would that make it better?

Her series of questions in this excerpt request the meeting attendee's thoughts on the issue of meetings. After she finished this line of questions and paused for someone to take a turn, the resulting talk was more of a discussion than her other strategies to gauge interest and participation had inspired. Most of the questions use "should", indicating that Mary is searching for normative statements and thoughts on meetings. Questions that are particular like these draw more discussion than the other strategies that she uses, like asking for interruptions, and this more recent meeting in my data set includes the most discussion-like sections of talk. For a further explication of this, see the norms of interpretation section below and excerpt 13.

Since April 2013, meetings have included more frequent turn changes and more frequent side conversations. Rather than receiving information, some members of the board are beginning to speak for their committees or actions that they have taken on behalf of the organization. The following excerpt is an example of this from the September 2013 board meeting. When Mary talked about a situation that involved the marketing committee and an outside vendor, Lise joined in:

Excerpt 10 (September 2013, Board of directors meeting tape 2, lines 157-161, Mary and Lise)

- 1 M: um Lise and I had a panic attack breakdown whenever our printer stopped
- 2 workin- like the people that we were ordering tshirts from
- 3 Le: they miscommunicated
- 4 M: they miscommunicated with us it was like the day before we needed the shirts

In line 3 above, Lise coauthors Mary's tale about the printer. As one of the people involved in the problem, she clarified the issue as a problem of "miscommunication", which Mary repeated when she recounted the rest of the tale. Such a move might encourage others to make similar coauthoring turns, because Mary accepted the imposition rather than discouraging the interruption.

Other members have begun bringing up new topics of discussion when Mary asks the clearinghouse question, like "any questions, comments. Anyone wanna talk about anything" (Mary, board of directors meeting, September 2013). After this question in September 2013, Lisa asked about the progress on the resource kit that was created by the education committee and designed by the marketing committee. After a similar question in December 2013 Doug brought up a concern with how he handled a person who had threatened suicide in a Facebook post after one of these questions. Mary responded to this and then asked again, and Amanda responded with details about a grief counseling training program coming up that she had read about. After a third "anything else" question, I responded with another request for interviews. The fourth request brought no response, so Mary closed the meeting.

Goals and Outcomes

The goals of many of these meetings are related to information dissemination. Mary, either prompted by herself as the meeting chair, or once prompted by me as the meeting chair, includes a report of what has been happening with SPC. Occasionally, committee meetings also serve as a deadline to collect or report on individual tasks and assignments. In most cases, Mary assigns these individual tasks, although Lise, the marketing committee chair, does delegate those tasks to the members of her committee. These goals reflect the primary purpose of meetings,

which is that meetings are meant to be informational. I explicate this purpose further in the norms of interpretation section below.

The outcomes of meetings typically meet the goals for each meeting. Those who attend the meeting supposedly become informed about what is happening with the committee or the entire organization, whichever Mary reports on. One outcome of meetings is not usually set in the stated goals of the meeting. When discussion or debate happens in meetings, Mary does gather the opinions and thoughts of the other members that weigh on decisions that she is considering or that might improve upcoming tasks. So although decisions are not typically made in meetings, except to vote in the board of directors at the required annual meeting, the discussion and opinions of members voiced during meetings do potentially influence the decisions that are made for the organization.

Meeting Cycles and Patterns

Meetings are an infrequent occurrence in SPC compared to other sites. During my study, meetings were scheduled anywhere from one per week to one per five months. Other communication channels are used more often than meetings, such as Wiggio, the online platform that members use to post information for others to read and then possibly comment on those posts. The official rules of each committee and the board of directors have rules related to the meeting cycles that should occur. Each committee's document with rules for the conduct of its members states that the committee will hold monthly meetings. The board of directors' rules are stated in the organization's bylaws. The bylaws state that the board of directors will hold one annual meeting at the end of December in order to (re-)elect board members and to discuss the financial status of SPC.

Although these rules seem clear, Mary has stated that meetings will actually be held when there is enough “information” to warrant holding a meeting. In practice, the committees meet less often than the board of directors. The board has met four times since it was established in July 2012, and three of these meetings are included in this data set: December 2012, September 2013, and December 2013. Committees meet on more of an “as needed” basis. The community relations committee, marketing committee, and education committee each have two meetings included in this timeframe, although I was only able to attend the community relations meetings so far. The fundraising committee only met once in November 2012. I have included a timeline of these meetings in Appendix 1. Some committee members have met more informally to accomplish some work of the organization, but I only have access to the informal meetings that Mary and I have held together throughout my research, such as the Facebook chat meeting in February 2013.

One meeting pattern happened at the end of 2012. Mary called “informal meetings” with all of the committees to review the committee’s progress since they were formed in March 2012. Each of these meetings included some talk about the progress of the organization as a whole, as well as the progress made toward the 501(c)(3) status. The same meeting pattern did not occur at the end of 2013 as a year-in-review for each committee, so this pattern might have been unique to the end of the first year of the organization.

Norms of Interpretation

Having explicated the form and function of meetings in SPC, I now turn my focus to the norms of interpretation. In the following section, I provide descriptions of, excerpts from, and interpretations of the metacommunicative talk in three meetings. The first is the earliest meeting that I have recorded in this research project, a fundraising committee meeting that happened in

November 2012. The second meeting is from the middle of my study, the instant-messaging meeting that happened in February 2013. The third meeting is one of the most recent meetings that SPC held, a board meeting in September 2013. I provide some context for each meeting, who is present, why the meeting was called, and some description of the talk prior to the excerpt. Then, after producing the excerpt from each meeting, I interpret the metacommunicative talk about meetings for the norms of interpretation that are reflected and constituted in that talk.

November 2012 Fundraising Committee Meeting

The fundraising committee meeting was called by Mary as one of the year-in-review meetings at the end of 2012. It was called an “informal meeting”, and attendance was not “required”. Therefore, only three members of the committee attended: Mary, who also chaired the meeting, Lise, her sister, and me. Mary began the meeting by recounting what the committee had accomplished so far during the year. Then she asked for Lise’s and my opinions, as committee chairs for other committees, about using Wiggio as a communicative platform. I put forward the observation that we seemed to be using Wiggio instead of holding meetings, which resulted in further talk about meetings. The exchange about meetings culminated in Mary’s lengthy turn in the following excerpt:

Excerpt 11 (November 2012, Fundraising committee meeting, 5:45, Mary, Katie, and Lise)

1 M: So the way that I’ve been using Wiggio is that right now since we’re a startup
 2 nonprofit we don’t have too many things that we really really need to meet about
 3 like in fundraising um you know the the biggest thing that we’ve done so far is
 4 I’ve kind of put together a really rough draft of a budget and that’s not something
 5 that we needed to sit down and meet with like that’s something that could be
 6 handled over the internet I didn’t want to break people out of their schedules I
 7 don’t want to burden people by trying to get to this meeting and write down
 8 minutes and make sure that we have a quorum present all that fun junk when you
 9 could literally just view it online and if there’s any issues you can just comment
 10 on it. Now if we were doing something like we have a big fundraising event
 11 coming up next week of course we would have a physical meeting where we
 12 would sit down and we would discuss all of the dynamics at that fundraising

- 13 meeting and what the event is going to be doing that that's a big goal that we
14 would need to meet physically for, but we just haven't had that yet so it's the
15 same way with the other meeting is that if you know obviously we can't do our
16 annual board meeting on Wiggio we actually have to be physical and go over
17 reports.
- 18 K: Yeah
- 19 M: And stuff like that so I we're going to be having more physical meetings as we
20 have more goals and more things happen with SPC
- 21 K: Yeah
- 22 M: So that will be coming up again like cause I know most of our committees
23 actually agreed that we would have a meeting like once a month or once every
24 other month unless we have nothing to talk about and we haven't had anything to
25 talk about so we haven't been meeting

Mary starts off by characterizing how meetings need “things... to meet about” in line 2. She delineates between tasks that can be accomplished individually and do not require a meeting, such as creating a budget for the following year, and more complex tasks that would require a meeting, such as a “big fundraising event”. In lines 5-6 she says that the first kind of task could just be handled over the internet. Meetings about menial tasks such as that are characterized as a “burden” on people, in line 7, because they interrupt people’s schedules, someone has to produce meeting minutes, and there must be a “quorum present”, which is a legal term used in the bylaws of the committee. However, when there is a large task or goal, like a fundraising committee, then meetings would be used to “sit down” and “discuss all of the dynamics” as Mary says in line 12. The annual board meeting is a meeting with a larger task associated with it, “going over reports” as she mentions in lines 16-17, and thus the meeting cannot happen on Wiggio, the board must “be physical”. Finally, in lines 24-25 she says that committees have not been meeting because they “haven’t had anything to talk about”.

Together, these statements start to paint a more nuanced picture of SPC’s meetings. Meetings require some threshold of talk that should be covered in order to justify holding a meeting, rather than handling some matter over the internet. Larger and complex tasks, such as a

“big fundraising event” or “going over reports” seem to require the face-to-face interaction in a meeting. However, it is unclear what Mary expects to happen in meetings. Discussion and reading are the two tasks associated with meetings in this interpretation. Although “discuss” indexes a different genre later in the excerpt, when in the phrase “discuss all of the dynamics”, this term seems to index more of an informational kind of discussion where those present would be informed about the dynamics of an event through discussion. While the distinction between discussion and posting comments on information posted to Wiggio seems to be clear to Mary, the only difference that she gives in this excerpt is the amount of information. Large amounts of information, perhaps amassed over time, require a meeting. Small amounts of information, such as a task being completed, require an internet posting and some comments. Lise and Katie do not state opposing viewpoints to this interpretation of the difference between Wiggio and meetings at this point of the organization, so they perhaps had similar opinions to Mary during this meeting.

February 2013 Mary and Katie Meeting

Meetings became a focal issue in this February 2013 meeting. This meeting is perhaps akin to many informal meetings that Mary holds on behalf of SPC that only involve one other person. Mary and I arranged to talk with each other on Facebook messenger, our typical channel for conversing about personal and professional matters while I reside in Colorado. We did not have an agenda for this meeting, but we primarily discussed meetings and how to improve them. In this conversation, I propose that I may consider conversations like this chat to be meetings (lines 21-22), and therefore I will treat this as a meeting for this analysis. Although there were no agenda or meeting minutes that preceded and followed this meeting, this conversation has become a form of text (Taylor and Robichaud, 2004) that is repeated and referenced or alluded to

by Mary and me in more recent meetings that do have these documents. Mary focused on trying to make meetings more efficient, while I focused on trying to make meetings more productive and generative of products. About halfway through our conversation, we explicate our opposing views of meetings, which is the beginning of the following excerpt. To mimic the look of the instant messenger, separate messages are produced on separate lines, which are choices made by the “speaker” while typing. Spelling and grammar is kept as it was typed.

Excerpt 12 (February 2013, Facebook messenger meeting, Lines 52-79, Mary and Katie)

1 M: Mostly, for me, meetings are about seeing where everyone is at. forcing some
 2 conversation. making things more personal.
 3 K: ah, see
 4 M: at least with SPC
 5 K: meetings for me are about doing
 6 M: a normal meeting is supposed to be more informational
 7 K: a normal meeting is supposed to be doing something or making something
 8 working on a team of people to write a grant, say, i would have a meeting
 9 where we would literally write the grant together
 10 not necessarily all together all the time, there might be some split up and write
 11 this section piece, but then we'd come back together and re-read, re-write, revise,
 12 approve
 13 Meetings, like communication, to me are all about doing
 14 Communication does something
 15 And actually, based on the kinds of things you tell me, you have meetings all the
 16 time
 17 during our interview you said you were going to meet with Lise at a coffee shop
 18 and go over the website design
 19 M: mhmm
 20 i do. i meet a lot. a lot lot lto ltotltotltotlot.
 21 K: all the conversations that you and i have about SPC, i would possibly (depending
 22 on the actual conversation) consider a meeting
 23 because we work things out
 24 yes, part of it is you or I filling each other in on what we've been doing
 25 but then we talk about it, make it better, consider alternatives
 26 that's doing
 27 In our board meetings, you could come in with a vague idea of a budget - some
 28 amount of revenue and what certain things might cost - and then we could literally
 29 make and finalize the budget together
 30 doing

Two opposing views of meetings are produced in this exchange between Mary and Katie. Mary puts forth the normative ideal that “a normal meeting is supposed to be more informational” in line 6. This kind of meeting includes “seeing where everyone is at”, which indexes the activity of reporting on completed tasks. As I wrote about in oratorical genres and styles, meetings are also said to “force conversation”, which correlates with the earlier characterization of meetings as a “burden”. However, Mary also says that meetings “make things more personal”. Therefore, it seems that while there is some burdensome aspect to meetings, there is a reward as well.

I put forth a different normative ideal in this exchange. I state in line 7 that “a normal meeting is supposed to be doing something or making something”. I provide an example in lines 8-12 of writing a grant with a group of people, where at least part of the work is completed together during a meeting. This view of meetings maps on to a similar view of communication generally. In this exchange, I was thinking of Deetz’s (1994) constitutive view of communication. Like his constitutive view, this view of meetings does not exclude the informational view of meetings, as I point out in line 24, but rather incorporates it as only part of the whole. This view privileges what meetings can accomplish in terms of decisions, discussion, and creating products.

September 2013 Board of Directors Meeting

The February 2013 meeting between Mary and I became a point of reference, or text, for us, and we brought this text to the board at the first board meeting that happened afterward. The September 2013 board meeting was called to get the board members together to review the organization’s activities since the annual board meeting in December 2012. Mary also added some topics for discussion, which included Wiggio, meetings, and how to recruit and retain more

experienced volunteers who might not be technologically inclined. The board members in attendance included Amanda, Lisa, Lise, Mary, Sean, and me. Dan and Doug were both absent. Amanda and I were present virtually on video-conferencing software. A few minutes before the excerpt, Mary mentioned that with my help she wanted to make meetings more effective and fun. Lisa interjected with a suggestion to have “fiestas” instead. After that, Mary reported on a few more topics, and then started the full discussion on meetings, which is the beginning of this excerpt:

Excerpt 13 (September 2013, Board of directors meeting, 13:58, Mary, Lisa, Lise, Sean, and Katie)

- 1 M: The first thing I want to talk about here um I do want to talk about our meetings a
 2 little bit. Um (1.0) cuz the biggest (3.0) fight that I have with myself with
 3 meetings is I want to be able to meet with people to, you know, show that we’re a
 4 team so everyone gets together, and we get to brainstorm together, we get to talk
 5 face to face or you know webcam or whatever it is. But I also know that everyone
 6 has very busy lives, and I don’t want to have meetings just for the sake of having
 7 a meeting. Because we do everything online, I can get information to you guys in
 8 an instant and not have to schedule a meeting. But I still want to be in
 9 communication with you guys. ((laughing)) And like have that face to face
 10 interaction. Because I want you guys to know that we are a team and that we’re
 11 all working together. So that’s kind of my biggest struggle and I just want to
 12 know some of your thoughts on it. What do you guys prefer, do you hate having
 13 meetings? Ha- are we having enough meetings? Should we have less meetings?
 14 Should we not call them meetings? Should we call them fiestas? Would that
 15 make it better?
- 16 La: Probably, yeah probably
 17 ((laugher))
- 18 M: Probably. Would you come to a SPC fiesta?
- 19 La: Who wouldn’t come to a [fiesta?
- 20 Le: [I feel like they’re more productive. I’m more
 21 productive.
- 22 S: Yeah there’s still something about ()
- 23 Le: Yeah then you’re focused. And when you’re online not everybody’s there at the
 24 same time and you’re meeting at different times, you don’t know what you’re speaking
 25 about.
- 26 M: Mhm
- 27 Le: And definitely () yeah
- 28 S: And you- you always send out like okay pick a time slot so we know that we can
 29 find the time. And this is one hour you know

- 30 M: Yeah
 31 La: Huh
 32 Le: Mhm
 33 S: If you don't have an hour there's something wrong
 34 (7 turns omitted)
 35 M: So we're more productive and the way that i do it it is fairly easy to fit a meeting
 36 into your schedule
 37 Le: Yeah
 38 S: Yeah
 39 K: Mhm
 40 La: And at least you have like an option () and then work it.
 41 (9 turns omitted)
 42 M: So like do you feel that we should have a set meeting schedule?
 43 La: No
 44 S: No
 45 Le: No
 46 La: Cause really you don't know when an issue's going to come up and when it's not
 47 S: [Because that oh sorry]
 48 M: [()]Go ahead
 49 S: Like that- that's when meetings become for the sake of meetings when things get
 50 scheduled
 51 M: Right like we have a meeting coming up so we might as well do it
 52 La: Yeah something to do besides eat tacos
 53 ((laughter))
 54 M: Yeah eat tacos, that's the agenda for our fiesta you know
 55 S: So now when we feel the work is () you bring us all back us all back in with a
 56 meeting again
 57 La: Purpose, purpose!
 58 M: Yes
 59 La: Yay
 60 M: That's good
 61 Le: () We don't really need to meet with people
 62 M: Right. And did you catch that Katie? What Sean said?
 63 K: Um only vaguely
 64 M: Uh he was just saying that he was just saying that um we don't need to have like
 65 sched- set like set meetings like once a month or anything like that because then
 66 it's just meetings for sake of meetings but whenever I'm looking at Wiggio and I
 67 feel like there's just disorganization, that people aren't on track that is when- that
 68 should be my key to schedule meetings and put us back on track

Meetings here are invoked as a more positive way of speaking. Mary associates meetings with “showing that we're a team” in lines 3-4 of her long opening turn. In this characterization of meetings, there is a connection to relational communication and being a whole together in

meetings, rather than scattered parts. Lise says in line 20-21 that she thinks meetings “are more productive” and she is also “more productive” in meetings. Online communication, via Wiggio, is characterized as less productive because people are “meeting at different times” and they “don’t know what [they’re] speaking about”. In line 57 Lisa associates meetings with “purpose”. And finally in line 68, Mary says that meetings can be used to “put us back on track” after feeling like there is “disorganization”. Meetings in this view are a productive communicative practice that has purpose, provides people with a sense of being a team, and can organize people when there is a sense of disorganization. This positive characterization of meetings, however, seems to be associated with a possible move away from the term “meeting”. In line 14 Mary returns to the re-casting of meetings as “fiestas” instead. The term fiesta is associated with “eating tacos”, as Lisa points out in line 52, and Mary puts eating tacos on the agenda for the fiesta in line 54. Fiestas seem to be associated with fun, whereas meetings still bring up some negative impressions.³

The term “meeting” is still associated with a burdensome or negative aspect in this excerpt. Mary states that she does not want to “have meetings for the sake of having a meeting” in lines 6-7. This opinion is taken up and repeated by Sean in line 49. He articulates this as the negative result of holding regularly scheduled meetings. Lisa and Lise also agree that meetings should not be scheduled, possibly for the same reason. The exact negative associations that this brings up are not explicated in this exchange, but their dread with meetings seems to be akin to a dread with a more bureaucratic way of holding meetings. That bureaucratic way of holding meetings might seem to be purposeless, more focused on information and tasks, and less focused on fun activities like “eating tacos” together. If this is the characterization that they are making

of the negative aspects of meetings, then perhaps the members of SPC are using Wiggi as a way to deal with bureaucratic tasks in a less burdensome manner.

The Evolution of Norms

The characterizations of meetings produced in these three meetings may at face value seem to be different, but there are traces of similarity throughout these characterizations. By tracing three themes through these meetings, I can show how the norms of interpretation changed over time. This kind of discussion might be a way of tracing change over time in communicative practices, as Sigman (1998) called for in ethnographic work. In the remainder of this section, I discuss three themes of metacommunicative talk about meetings as they evolve over time: “burden”, “purpose”, and “showing that we’re a team”.

The first theme is “burden”. This theme begins in the November 2012 meeting, where Mary characterizes meetings as a burden on people, perhaps especially when they are about menial tasks. Meetings have other tasks associated with them, such as writing meeting minutes to record what happened in the meeting, and making sure that there is a quorum present to hold a meeting in the first place. Thus, this meeting could be characterized as a burden because it includes a short amount of updates and still requires some of the more bureaucratic actions of meetings, which might be why it was an “informal meeting”. In the February 2013 meeting, Mary continues to speak about burdensome aspects of meetings by saying that meetings “force some conversation”. That phrase shows that meetings have a sense of unnatural conversation associated with them, which might be seen as burdensome to Mary. The emphasis in this meeting is less on the meeting itself as a burden; instead the meeting is the cause of a burden. In the most recent board meeting, “meeting for the sake of meetings” is the negative and burdensome characterization produced by Mary and Sean. This view is focused on when

meetings become a regularly scheduled event, rather than a spontaneous occurrence. Meetings themselves are no longer seen as burdensome, nor are they necessarily the cause of a burden. Now meetings can be burdensome if they become a regularly scheduled practice.

The second theme in the metacommunicative talk about meetings is “purpose”. This label was not used until the September 2013 meeting, but the theme can be seen in the other two meetings as well. In the November 2012 meeting, meetings were connected with large and complex tasks. These tasks serve as the purpose of holding a meeting, because they supposedly have enough information involved with them in order to justify holding a meeting. My characterization of meetings in the February 2013 meeting broadens the “purpose” of meetings to include more than just information. I then characterized meetings as “doing something or making something”. The purpose of meetings evolved into working together, perhaps on a task that requires more than one person’s attention. “Purpose” is now more closely tied with the oratorical genre of discussion-based meetings, rather than just a lot of information to share. Finally, in the September 2013 meeting, purpose evolves as a central theme for good or productive meetings. After discussing how scheduling meetings can be just “for the sake of meetings”, the alternative view that meetings could be used to put people “back on track” when there is “disorganization” seems to be tied to the purpose of meetings. Meetings create organization where there was previously disorganization. Now the purpose of meetings is to organize, perhaps in addition to being a site of discussion and needing to discuss large and complex tasks.

The final theme that I want to trace over these meetings is “showing that we’re a team”. This theme is closely tied to the relational aspect of meetings. In the November 2012 meeting, this aspect was all but ignored. Mary did not want to “break people out of their schedules” or

“burden” them with a meeting. In that meeting, information was given credence over any mention of being a team or a whole together. The February 2013 meeting had a different characterization. Mary conceded that meetings “make things more personal”. This differs from the purely informational channel for communication, Wiggio, which does not “make things more personal”. Mary attributes some relational aspect to meetings, rather than a purely task orientation (Keyton, 1999), but she has not yet fully developed what this relational aspect is or what it means for the organization. She accomplishes this by September 2013 in the board meeting. Meetings are now meant to “show that we’re a team”. Without meetings, one could assume that a certain feeling of togetherness is lost. Mary says that there is something different about face-to-face interaction, which can only happen in meetings and not on the text-based platform Wiggio. The shift toward a more relational characterization of meetings mirrors a shift away from characterizing meetings as burdens. Perhaps this signifies a shift in Mary’s, and perhaps other SPC members’, opinions about the usefulness or purpose of meetings.

Chapter Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I have provided a view of a few different aspects of the form and function of meetings in SPC. First, meeting beginnings and endings are marked by a definite frame. This frame includes the time that the meeting started or ended as well as a more or less formal calling the meeting to order and closing. This distinguishes the talk that happens in meetings, in the form of the oratorical genres and styles information-giving and discussion, from the same genres and styles that occur in what might be called informal conversation. Perhaps this formal frame is needed because many of the participants know each other personally and often talk informally before, after, and outside of meetings. This could also be due to the young ages of the board of directors, with most of the members in their twenties.

Once the meeting is enacted, the more bureaucratic form of meetings might be considered “burdensome” or inauthentic to the members who would usually speak freely to each other without formal turn-taking strategies conducted by a meeting chair. Perhaps also the amount of information included in meetings, and the nature of that information because it is primarily related to the organization’s progress, might be seen as inauthentic to participants. Although this is the primary goal of meetings for members of SPC, if this information-sharing seems to lack “purpose”, then the meeting might also be seen as a “meeting for the sake of a meeting”, which is related again to the burdensome nature of meetings. This might contribute to how frequently meetings are held. The cycle of meetings takes between one week to five months for the next meeting to occur. This is including all groups of the organization, not single groups themselves. For example, the fundraising committee has not had an official meeting since November 2012, which is well over seventeen months between meetings as of this writing in April 2014.

Perhaps the marked difference between meetings and more informal conversation might contribute to the frequency with which members metacommunicate about meetings. However, the meeting is beginning to take on a more relational interpretation as of September 2013. Mary expressed that meetings can be used for “showing we’re a team”. This goal might be related to the genres and styles related to discussion used in meetings and idealized for meetings. In the more recent board meetings in September 2013 and December 2013, the meetings had more discussion-like turns, with participants building ideas off of each other, as seen in excerpt 13 above. Mary began using questions in order to elicit more participation from members, and it seems to have worked so far. To further emphasize the relational aspect of meetings, participants typically attend face-to-face or via technology.⁴

This methodology, conceived by Hymes (1972) and adapted by Schwartzman (1989) seeks to understand the communicative forms and functions used by groups and communities, particularly in regard to meetings. Ethnographers of communication focus on how people speak, what speech does, and the comparable differences and similarities between ways of speaking. As Fairhurst and Putnam (2004) noted, many ethnographies of communication in organizations tend to take the organization as given, and Milburn (2004) points out that many ethnographies do the same with “speech communities”. By treating the organization as given, Fairhurst and Putnam (2004) show how this use of “organization” tends to treat it as an object, or a “black box” container. Thus, this use of organization allows researchers to examine the top-down way that organizations affect ways of speaking, such as meetings, and people. Similarly here, I have treated the organization as constitutive of a particular form and function of meetings, which fits the organization-as-object perspective.

Although this organization-as-object perspective enables me to make certain kinds of claims, it constrains me from others, and particularly constrains me from providing a fuller description and analysis of meetings in SPC. The unidirectional, top-down analysis of an organization-as-object perspective reveals only how the organization contributes to the constitution of meetings, and does not account for the ways in which meetings and the organization are mutually constitutive of each other. Fairhurst and Putnam (2004) pose that holding different perspectives together in tension can enlighten a more nuanced view of the link between discourse and organizations. In this study I want to understand more than how the organization and its members constitute and use meetings; I would like to show how this could be a mutually constitutive relationship. This requires a “grounded-in-action” approach (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004), which views communication as action that constitutes and is constituted by an

organizational structure. Taylor and Van Every (2000), and their colleagues who make up the Montreal School of CCO, use this perspective to show how everyday interactions, or conversations, produce lasting structures, or texts, and also how these texts then influence future conversations. Thus a perspective from this school, such as ventriloquism, might provide a more comprehensive lens through which to view meetings in SPC, and may complement the organization-as-object perspective that the ethnography of communication tends to take.

Analyses from this CCO perspective, including ventriloquism, take sentence grammars and other micro-discursive constructions in everyday conversation to be constitutive of and constituted by larger texts, in both literal and figurative forms. In Schwartzman's (1989) terms, these scholars would ask not only how the organization and organizational members "use" meetings, but would also ask how the organization and organizational members are "used by meetings" (p. 39). In this study, a perspective informed by ventriloquism would allow me to look deeper into the implications of organizational agency when I see members point out that meetings "put us back on track" (line 68, excerpt 13). How does a statement like this, giving the meeting an action, affect the organization? By turning to the grounded-in-action perspective of ventriloquism, I can more deeply and thoroughly account for what is happening when someone attributes an action to a meeting, and how this in turn affects future conversations and the organization at large. The addition of this kind of analysis to my ethnography of communication analysis will allow me to understand a more nuanced view of what is happening when the members of SPC metacommunicate about meetings.

Chapter IV

FIGURE

What can ventriloquism as a perspective contribute to an understanding of SPC's metacommunication about meetings? More fundamentally, what can it teach us about the local significance of meetings? In the previous chapter, I explicated the form and function of meetings, particularly the norms of interpretation, from a perspective informed by the ethnography of communication. In this chapter, I take ventriloquism as a perspective to further examine this metacommunication. By taking this perspective, I can further nuance a complex understanding of what the members of SPC are doing when they talk about meetings. This chapter, therefore, seeks to answer my second research question: What kinds of agency are given to the meeting figure when members of SPC metacommunicate about meetings? I start with an analysis of four excerpts that is informed by ventriloquism. Once again, ventriloquism defines agency as "making a difference" and an agent as "what or who appears to make a difference" (Cooren, 2006, p. 82). After this analysis, I interpret what this perspective means for SPC and its members, and explain the implications of the analysis.

The Meeting Usurper

In this section, I use ventriloquism as a lens through which to view the February 2103 disagreement between Mary and me. This disagreement occurred in the Facebook meeting where we posed two different interpretations of meetings that seemed to be in tension with each other, as I discussed in the last chapter. This meeting is one of the earliest conversations where the meeting served as a sustained topic of conversation between members of SPC. This excerpt is the same as excerpt 12 of the previous chapter with an addition of seven lines at the beginning and subtraction of four lines at the end.

Excerpt 14 (February 2013, Facebook messenger meeting, Lines 52-79, Mary and Katie)

- 1 K: it also might be why we aren't really having meetings
 2 the information gets out to everyone on Wiggio
 3 and since currently we're thinking of meetings as situations for getting
 4 information out
 5 we're overlapping
 6 so then meetings aren't happening because we already have the information out
 7 M: whiicchhh im fine with to be honest.
 8 M: Mostly, for me, meetings are about seeing where everyone is at. forcing some
 9 conversation. making things more personal.
 10 K: ah, see
 11 M: at least with SPC
 12 K: meetings for me are about doing
 13 M: a normal meeting is supposed to be more informational
 14 K: a normal meeting is supposed to be doing something or making something
 15 working on a team of people to write a grant, say, i would have a meeting
 16 where we would literally write the grant together
 17 not necessarily all together all the time, there might be some split up and write
 18 this section piece, but then we'd come back together and re-read, re-write, revise,
 19 approve
 20 Meetings, like communication, to me are all about doing
 21 Communication does something
 22 And actually, based on the kinds of things you tell me, you have meetings all the
 23 time
 24 during our interview you said you were going to meet with Lise at a coffee shop
 25 and go over the website design
 26 M: mhmm
 27 i do. i meet a lot. a lot lot lto ltotltotltotlot.
 28 K: all the conversations that you and i have about SPC, i would possibly (depending
 29 on the actual conversation) consider a meeting
 30 because we work things out
 31 yes, part of it is you or I filling each other in on what we've been doing
 32 but then we talk about it, make it better, consider alternatives
 33 that's doing

In lines 3-4 I point out that “meetings” are “situations for getting information out”, which “overlaps” with the function that Wiggio serves in SPC. Both Wiggio and meetings serve as spaces where members can inform each other. To put this another way, Wiggio and meetings both provide a communicative situation where members can talk about information. Without the presence of either of these forms, members might find it more difficult to inform each other or

may need to find another channel through which they can inform each other. In lines 8-9 Mary explicates what she believes meetings do. Meetings provide a space where members of SPC can “see where everyone is at”. They also “force some conversation” and “make things more personal”. Assuming that these are actions that cannot be achieved with Wiggi, one would call and organize a meeting if these three actions are desired. Members of SPC require meetings to be able to accomplish these actions with each other. Mary poses the meeting as a key ingredient to accomplishing these actions. What we see happening here is Mary saying that meetings can make a difference to how communication happens between the members of SPC, thus giving them agency.

However, I disagree with characterizing meetings as “informational”. In lines 12 and 14 I mention that meetings are “about doing”, and that a meeting is supposed to be “doing something or making something”. I even go so far to extrapolate this to a broader category of “communication” in line 21. Even assuming that all communication does something, I return to the subject “meeting”, and characterize our conversations as “meetings” because “we work things out”. “Working things out” and “doing”, thus, must be key elements of the meeting figure, and elements that “conversations” cannot claim. I could have similarly said that conversations are also about doing, because I had broadened this action to all of “communication”. Instead, I bring the meeting back in as a necessary frame for what is occurring in particular conversations about SPC. Meetings, not conversations or even the broader “communication” category, allow members of SPC to “work things out”. Calling some communication “a meeting” versus naming it something else seems to make a difference. The meeting itself is invoked as something that enables “working things out”, whereas

“conversation” typically may not enable the same action. If conversation makes a difference in SPC, it is not allowed to make this key difference of “working things out”.

In this excerpt, Mary and I suggest a few different organizational actions that the meeting plays a key role in enacting. First, Mary suggests that the meeting is about “seeing where everyone is at”, “forcing some conversation”, and “making things more personal”. This kind of characterization gives the meetings actions that it enacts, perhaps doing things to or for people, such as “forcing” or “making”. Meetings are given an action-agency in these formulations. Although another prominent form of communication in SPC, Wiggio, also gets information to the members of SPC, Wiggio is not said to be able to accomplish these additional actions. Meetings, therefore, make a difference for communication, and how information is communicated. Next, I propose that meetings provide space for members to “work things out”, which is not afforded to conversation. I also propose that a meeting could usurp a “conversation” because that conversation moves in a direction to “work things out”. Again, calling a kind of communication where people “work things out” a meeting seems to be important. The meeting makes a difference here as well, and might thus be called an agent. This kind of agency differs from the above action-agency. Meetings are said to provide the context for certain organizational actions to occur. This might be called context-agency.

In ventriloquizing this meeting figure in this excerpt, Mary and I both attribute an amount of difference-making to the meeting. A meeting could not accomplish this difference without the human actors in the scene. It is up to the human agents to “see where everyone is at”, to have a “conversation” that might be “forced” upon them, to “make things more personal”, and to “work things out”, but the meeting is posed as an important part of accomplishing these actions. The meeting is positioned as enabling these actions to take place. If meetings did not exist, and if

they were never called, then it follows that these actions would not take place in a coherent way. Another communicative form would have to be imagined and designed in order to accomplish these actions. Cooren (2006, 2010) discusses differences between upstream and downstream agency. Upstream from the agency of meetings, which enables these actions, someone must call or organize a meeting, recognizing it as a necessary event that should take place for these actions to be accomplished. This upstream recognition depends on and determines the context-agency. Downstream from the agency of meetings, people must actually get together, talk, and through that talk accomplish these actions. Although this could happen outside of meetings, the members of SPC here recognize meetings as necessary to accomplish the actions of “seeing where everyone is at”, “forcing some conversation”, “making things more personal”, and “working things out”. These are examples of the action-agency of meetings.

A Meeting About Meetings

Mary first had the idea for the September 2013 board meeting as a meeting to discuss meetings and whether or not SPC’s reliance on internet communication was precluding older, more experienced, yet less computer-savvy volunteers from joining and staying with the organization. The agenda had the typical topics of conversation that I detailed in the previous chapter, but the meeting and several questions about meetings for members to ponder before attending were included on the agenda. Prior to the following excerpt, which is about two-thirds through the meeting, Mary had said that she wanted to improve meetings with my help because I was researching meetings. Lisa had made the suggestion that SPC should have fiesta meetings, which would include tacos, and Mary suggested using a talking sombrero to indicate who had the floor in a fiesta meeting. The topic was dropped, and the meeting moved on to another topic of conversation for a few minutes before the start of this excerpt. Mary had concluded that

interlude, and then paused for a few seconds after a topic transition marker (“so”) just before this excerpt begins.

Excerpt 15 (September 2013, Board of directors meeting, 13:58 Mary, Lisa, Lise, Sean, and Katie)

- 1 M: The first thing I want to talk about here um I do want to talk about our meetings a
2 little bit. Um (1.0) cuz the biggest (3.0) fight that I have with myself with
3 meetings is I want to be able to meet with people to, you know, show that we're a
4 team so everyone gets together, and we get to brainstorm together, we get to talk
5 face to face or you know webcam or whatever it is. But I also know that everyone
6 has very busy lives, and I don't want to have meetings just for the sake of having
7 a meeting. Because we do everything online, I can get information to you guys in
8 an instant and not have to schedule a meeting. But I still want to be in
9 communication with you guys. ((laughing)) And like have that face to face
10 interaction. Because I want you guys to know that we are a team and that we're
11 all working together. So that's kind of my biggest struggle and I just want to
12 know some of your thoughts on it. What do you guys prefer, do you hate having
13 meetings? Ha- are we having enough meetings? Should we have less meetings?
14 Should we not call them meetings? Should we call them fiestas? Would that
15 make it better?
- 16 La: Probably, yeah probably
17 ((laugher))
- 18 M: Probably. Would you come to a SPC fiesta?
- 19 La: Who wouldn't come to a [fiesta?
- 20 Le: [I feel like they're more productive. I'm more
21 productive.
- 22 S: Yeah there's still something about ()
- 23 Le: Yeah then you're focused. And when you're online not everybody's there at the
24 same time and you're meeting at different times, you don't know what you're
25 speaking about.
- 26 M: Mhm
- 27 Le: And definitely () yeah
- 28 S: And you- you always send out like okay pick a time slot so we know that we can
29 find the time. And this is one hour you know
- 30 M: Yeah
- 31 La: Huh
- 32 Le: Mhm
- 33 S: If you don't have an hour there's something wrong
34 (7 turns omitted)
- 35 M: So we're more productive and the way that I do it it is fairly easy to fit a meeting
36 into your schedule
- 37 Le: Yeah
- 38 S: Yeah
- 39 K: Mhm

- 40 La: And at least you have like an option () and then work it.
 41 (9 turns omitted)
 42 M: So like do you feel that we should have a set meeting schedule?
 43 La: No
 44 S: No
 45 Le: No
 46 La: Cause really you don't know when an issue's going to come up and when it's not
 47 S: [Because that oh sorry]
 48 M: [()]Go ahead
 49 S: Like that- that's when meetings become for the sake of meetings when things get
 50 scheduled
 51 M: Right like we have a meeting coming up so we might as well do it
 52 La: Yeah something to do besides eat tacos
 53 ((laughter))
 54 M: Yeah eat tacos, that's the agenda for our fiesta you know
 55 S: So now when we feel the work is disorganized you bring us all back us all back in
 56 with a meeting again
 57 La: Purpose, purpose!
 58 M: Yes
 59 La: Yay
 60 M: That's good
 61 Le: () We don't really need to meet with people
 62 M: Right. And did you catch that Katie? What Sean said?
 63 K: Um only vaguely
 64 M: Uh he was just saying that he was just saying that um we don't need to have like
 65 sched- set like set meetings like once a month or anything like that because then
 66 it's just meetings for sake of meetings but whenever I'm looking at Wiggio and I
 67 feel like there's just disorganization, that people aren't on track that is when- that
 68 should be my key to schedule meetings and put us back on track
 69 K: yeah
 70 M: write that down ((laughter)) Amanda write that down in your minutes

Mary starts by saying that she has a “fight” with herself with regard to meetings. In order to “fight with herself” about this topic, something about meetings must have challenged her perception of meetings. Based on the analysis of the February 2013 conversation, Mary had been placing value on the informational aspect of meetings in the past. Here, she attributes efficient information exchange to SPC’s online communication in lines 7-8, thus meetings are not typically required for an informational purpose. However, as she points out in lines 8-9, meetings allow her to stay “in communication” with the members of SPC. Being “in

communication” involves actions such as “showing we’re a team”, “knowing that we’re working together”, and “face to face interaction”. These cannot be accomplished on Wiggio, and meetings are posed as the only other alternative. The character of meetings has then changed from centrally communicating information to centrally maintaining and fostering team relationships. This change of character might have challenged Mary’s views on meetings, thus precipitating a “fight”. The meeting itself did not change its own character; this change was produced through multiple instances of ventriloquizing the meeting figure in conversation between the members of SPC. Each conversation added more dimensions to the meeting figure.

This conversation also adds new dimensions to the figure. Mary poses more ways that meetings are associated with context-agency. She says that meetings enable “showing we’re a team”, “brainstorming”, “talking face to face”, and “being in communication”. The meeting is positioned as a contributing factor to their accomplishment. Mary poses the meeting as an integral part of completing these four actions as an organizational group. Without meetings, the online communication via Wiggio is not enough to accomplish these seemingly key features of organizing together. Once again, the meeting provides the context for these actions to take place between the members.

Two more aspects of meetings come out from the ensuing talk between members in this meeting. First, Lise says that she “feels like they’re more productive”, and that she is even “more productive” in lines 20-21. Although the previous turns are about having a “fiesta”, the “fiesta” was only a proposed meeting replacement, so Lise could not speak to whether she feels more productive in a “fiesta”. Instead, she is saying that she feels like meetings are “more productive”, in response to the topic that Mary has put on the table. Sean interjects and says that “there’s something about” that. Lise agrees, elaborating that “you’re focused” in meetings, as

compared to communicating online, presumably through Wiggio. Lise points out that when members are communicating online everyone is not there “at the same time”, and the danger of this is that people “don’t know what they’re speaking about”. The negative comparison here points to some important things that are only associated with meetings and not online communication. Meetings allow multiple members to meet at the same time, providing a more focused gathering space, thus making a more productive type of interaction. Mary echoes and solidifies this productive interpretation in line 35 through a gist formation.

For a meeting to be considered a desired part of organizing, it must have “purpose”, as Lisa shouts in line 57. Sean provides an interpretation in lines 55-56 that provides justification for when meetings should occur so that they do have purpose. When “the work” becomes “disorganized”, then Sean poses that Mary “could bring us all back in with a meeting”. “Bringing us all back in”, which could be characterized as re-organizing, provides the “purpose” for meetings that Lisa is excited about in lines 57 and 59. Therefore a meeting is given purpose by the human members, an upstream form of agency, just as the meeting brings the members of SPC “back in” in the downstream form of agency and as another version of action-agency. Human agents make a difference for meetings, giving them purpose, and in turn meetings make a difference for humans, giving them a space to re-organize and bring members “back in”.

As Mary notes in lines 67-69, when she feels that there is “just disorganization” on the platform Wiggio, then she will take that as her cue to “schedule meetings and put us back on track”. To pull apart the agencies enacted in this short utterance, first, to create “just disorganization” on Wiggio, members will have to have not posted for a while. When members are not posting on Wiggio, then Wiggio may not be serving to inform the members of what is happening with SPC. When members do not check in on Wiggio, Mary cannot be sure if they

are reading the updates. This may, then, create the sense of “just disorganization” that Mary refers to in her utterance. A disorganized organization is, simply, an oxymoron. Mary, wanting to organize the organization again, says that she will “schedule meetings”. This action, scheduling a meeting, is linked with the action of “put[ting] us back on track”. The meeting, then, takes a key role in “putting us back on track”. Without a meeting, or perhaps multiple meetings, and the communication inherent to the practice, there is no clear alternative to how SPC would reorganize. The meeting, thus, could be said to take at least a partial role in organizing SPC. If meetings organize people, actions, and the organization itself, then meetings should take a place among the other agents in SPC, including the human agents. Through the joint production of ventriloquism, Mary speaks the meeting into being an agential figure, by attributing this organizing aspect of “making a difference” to it.

Finally, one phrase that is repeated throughout this meeting presents an interesting case for ventriloquism. Mary begins this pattern in lines 6-7, mentioning that she does not “want to have meetings just for the sake of having a meeting”. How can a meeting happen for its own sake? Sean elaborates on this phrase in lines 49-50, saying that “meetings become for the sake of meetings when things get scheduled”. A regularly scheduled meeting would be held for its own sake, perhaps because there is no “purpose” around which to organize. Mary then agrees with this, expanding that members might think “we have a meeting coming up so we might as well do it”. In lines 65-66, she reformulates Sean’s assertion by saying that SPC does not need to have “set meetings” at regularly scheduled intervals, because that would be holding “meetings for the sake of meetings”. What is interesting in this exchange and interpretation of “meetings for the sake of meetings” is that the human influence on holding meetings is hardly recognized. Mary recognizes the human influence, because humans “have meetings”, which may be “for the

sake of meetings”. She also says that “we don’t need” scheduled meetings in line 64-65. Sean, however, erases the human influence on these overly-scheduled meetings. He does not use “have”, as Mary does. In lines 49-50 he says that “meetings become for the sake of meetings”, as if once something becomes scheduled, then meetings may perpetuate themselves. A meeting cannot happen without humans to arrange it beforehand and to show up at the appointed time. If humans need to arrange meetings that might happen for their own sake, why is it not a human’s responsibility that the meeting feels obligatory or is an undesired part of organizing? This responsibility has been shifted to the meeting, as if this figure can act in its own right without a human ventriloquist.

Throughout this excerpt, the participants in this discussion are ventriloquizing the meeting for various purposes. Like the February 2013 excerpt, the meeting is again said to enable or allow several actions to occur, including “showing we’re a team”, “brainstorming”, “talking face to face”, and being “in communication”, thus showing context-agency. The meeting figure is also given different agential actions. First, Mary fought with herself about meetings, because their character challenged her initial thoughts about their purpose and usefulness. Then Lise admitted that she feels more focused and productive when the meeting is around. The meeting is also purported to (re-)organize members. However, if meetings became regularly scheduled occurrences in SPC, then the meeting would shoulder the responsibility for being unnecessary, unwanted, and perhaps even boring. Through this shouldering of responsibility, the meeting would take the blame instead of the human agents who would have to call and regularly schedule these meetings in the upstream.

(Inter)views of Meetings

Other interactions where meetings were often discussed were in the interviews that I conducted with some of the board members. Below, I include two excerpts from these interviews and analyze each of them with a ventriloquism perspective. The first interview excerpt is from one of the interviews that I conducted with Mary. For this interview we were on Facebook chat, like the February 2013 excerpt above, and I was asking her about the possible reformulation of the community resources committee into an event committee. Before the excerpt we were talking about how Doug, who is less computer-savvy than the other members, seems to be confused about what is happening in the online communication on Wiggio and therefore Mary found him less trustworthy to represent SPC in public. Mary had emphasized her dislike of having “meetings for the sake of having meetings” because Wiggio is a faster and more efficient means of communicating information. This interview was prior to the September meeting that I analyzed above, and later in the interview Mary suggests that she will schedule that meeting in September 2013 to bring the matter of meetings and Wiggio to the board.

Excerpt 16 (August 2013, Interview, Lines 143-157, Katie and Mary)

- 1 K: like, I totally understand not wanting to have meetings for the sake of having
 2 meetings
 3 but I think meetings do something more than just people sitting around in a room
 4 telling each other what’s going on.
 5 Like, I’ve never met Theresa or Heather or some of these other people.
 6 M: well youre kind of at a disadvantage haha
 7 K: And I know that I’m halfway across the country most of the year and stuff, yeah.
 8 But there’s a sort of sense of community and immediacy that meetings bring with
 9 them.
 10 Like, Lise put out those mockups like a month ago or something
 11 And I’m assuming you’re still waiting for feedback from some people, because
 12 I’ve seen only a few comments.
 13 M: Well we’re moving into the next round of mock ups here soon, once Lise designs
 14 them.
 15 K: In a meeting you’d get all of that from everyone, and then you’d have a
 16 conversation about what different people’s ideas are, rather than waiting
 17 days/weeks/a month to find out.
 18 M: we also have the luxury of time right now, though. Once we get our 501(c)(3) im

19 sure we'll have more meetings because Im not going to want to wait weeks for
20 feedback.

In the above excerpt, I began by acknowledging in line 1 that Mary did not want “to have meetings for the sake of having meetings”. Mary had used this phrase a few minutes prior to this excerpt. The use of this phrase in this interview was not explained well by either of us, and it is the first documented instance that I have of a member of SPC using it. In line 3-5, I used the meeting to critique Mary’s current meeting-hate, taking her phrase “meeting for the sake of meetings” to mean that meetings and Wiggio both have the same purpose to inform the members of SPC. Meetings also allow members to meet each other, which was what I noted when I said that I have not met Theresa or Heather, who were newer and promising volunteers at the time. Mary posed my location as the disadvantage, rather than the lack of meetings in line 6. However, I ventriloquized the meeting to say that it brings a “sense of community and immediacy”. This sense was lacking from a current discussion on Wiggio about the mockups for a resource kit that Lise made and posted. At that point, there were “few comments”, whereas if a meeting had been held for this purpose, Mary could have gotten an immediate “conversation” about these mockups. I was advocating for the usefulness of the meeting, however Mary did not see the advantage at that moment because “we have the luxury of time”. This time was provided by the lack of 501(c)(3) status, therefore this legal status seems to make a difference for the frequency of meetings.

The next interview excerpt below occurred between Lise and I online. The interview happened in March 2014, almost six months after the September 2013 meeting excerpt, and three months after the last meeting held by any group in the organization. I used the interview guide detailed in the methods chapter to structure the topics of the interview. This excerpt is about halfway through our conversation. Prior to the excerpt, I had asked about “what meetings do”,

and she had provided me a list of functions that meetings serve. Continuing on, I asked about the strengths of SPC's meetings in line 1.

Excerpt 17 (March 2014, Interview, Lines 60-65, Katie and Lise)

- 1 K: What are the strengths of SPC's meetings? What goes well?
 2 Le: Our president is great at leading our meetings. She keeps things moving along and
 3 is always looking for ways to improve how our meetings run.
 4 Our meetings always have agendas to follow that have been prepared before hand
 5 and they are always very productive in achieving what we set out to talk about.

Lise starts in this excerpt by associating meetings with Mary ("our president"). Mary is said to "keep things moving" and to "look for ways to improve how our meetings are run". From a ventriloquial perspective, Lise might associate meetings with Mary because Mary has become the voice of meetings. Mary decides when they are scheduled and when they are unnecessary. Mary brought the topic of meetings to the board for discussion to find a way to improve them. Mary chairs the meetings. Mary prepares the agendas for meetings. Mary's influence on meetings is inextricable from the meetings themselves. Lise started her answer to a question about meetings by talking about Mary. She ends her answer about meetings by not explicitly talking about Mary, but rather implicitly applying this connection to the "productive" nature of meetings. Lise's previous talk did not connect Mary and meetings so closely, but Mary's influence on meetings seems to be tied to the success and productivity of meetings.

Interpretation

Out of this analysis I now wish to conduct some interpretation of this meeting data from a ventriloquism perspective. I have shown how the members of SPC invoke, incarnate, and enact a meeting figure when they metacommunicate about meetings. In the following section, I first discuss the voice of the meeting, Mary, and the role that she plays in the incarnation of the meeting figure. Then I discuss the upstream and downstream forms of agency emanating to and

from the meeting figure as constructed by the members of SPC. Finally, I discuss what this ventriloqual metacommunication means for the structure of the organization.

As I have shown throughout this analysis, meetings make a difference. However, they do not do so of their own accord. These meetings are given agency, constituted through communication, by the human members of SPC. One particular member became the voice of the meeting figure. Although I had begun the discussion on meetings, and I even advocated for them to the president of SPC, Mary became the recognized voice of the meeting. As the chair of most meetings, Mary decided when meetings were necessary, and even made meetings a topic of conversation on the agenda of the September 2013 meeting. Until the matter was discussed in that meeting, Mary may have been attached to the figure. She was certainly attached to it throughout our conversations, although her attachment was probably also affected by my research interest. Mary “fought” with herself about meetings, she proclaimed them to happen, and she would have also been the human agent that could have been held responsible if meetings were held “for the sake of meetings”. Other members, including Lise, attached Mary to meetings, so much so that when I asked about meetings, Lise answered about Mary. Through this attachment to meetings, Mary was enabled and constrained to using the meeting figure in particular ways. A meeting, in SPC, is seen as a relatively formalized practice, which differentiates this practice from more informal, ordinary conversation. The formality of a meeting may be seen by these people as undesirable in many circumstances, but in the case of disorganization the formalities might be welcome. Mary is more likely to invoke the meeting figure to use its formal or organizing properties, rather than to try to invoke this form when informality or dis-organization is needed. For example, there is an upcoming event in May before which many members have agreed to attend a celebratory lunch. This is an informal,

celebratory gathering, and thus has not been called a meeting because there is no organizing required.

So if the meeting figure acts and is enacted by humans, how is this done in action? In order for the meeting to have agency, there must first be an agential move upstream. In SPC, the upstream agency is primarily accomplished by Mary or the meeting chair with some cooperation of other members. First, a meeting must have some motivation or “purpose”, as determined by the organizer. Then the meeting party must find a common time for the meeting to occur. Finally the meeting chair, usually Mary, will determine the topics of conversation to be outlined on a meeting agenda. With all of these moves made, then the meeting can enact its context-agency.

After all of this work prior to the meeting, a meeting can only occur if certain downstream contingencies are met. First, people must actually attend the meeting at the appointed time. Then talk or some form of communication must be able to occur, so participants must be able to communicate and understand each other. For SPC, someone must also serve as chair to guide the discussion and keep it on track. Then, for the meeting to successfully accomplish its agential move, the talk within a meeting must accomplish the actions that are associated with having a meeting. These include: “seeing where everyone is at”, “forcing some conversation”, “making things more personal”, “working things out”, “showing we’re a team”, “brainstorming”, “talking face to face”, and “being in communication”. Through these actions the meeting is said to organize the members of SPC, enacting an action-agency.

It seems to me that some of the actions that meetings accomplish – allow, provide, enable – show that the meeting is seen as playing a gatekeeping role for SPC. The meeting as a gatekeeper enables the work of SPC to happen. It serves as a “boundary monitor” (cf. Holmes,

2007) for work. Without meetings, the only official organizing activity would be postings on Wiggio. These postings are slow to happen, and are more or less “pure” information that might limit the kinds of work that can occur through this form. Meetings, instead, allow “communication” to take place with a sense of “immediacy”, and they enable “working things out” and “showing we’re a team” in ways that Wiggio cannot compare. A meeting can enable members to work together productively, but, for example, it cannot enable therapeutic talk. As an illustration of this, in one meeting Doug brought up an emotional tale about handling a former student’s suicide threat on Facebook. Mary, who is trained in therapeutic strategies, addressed that he did the correct action, but then said that she would save the rest of the discussion with him about that topic for after the meeting because it did not have much to do with the organizing that the meeting was accomplishing. The meeting figure constrained the therapeutic kind of talk, forcing it to another kind of communication, because this is not necessary for accomplishing work. The meeting acts in a gatekeeping capacity to enable productive work and community-building to occur through interaction, as long as all of the upstream agency requirements are also met. Once met, and once the members of SPC show up for a meeting, then the meeting can do its job to enable the kinds of interaction that are needed to organize. A meeting has accomplished a “productive” job when the talk between members is considered “productive” by staying on topic and not straying too far from the purpose that the meeting was called to accomplish in the first place.

The meeting will even usurp ordinary conversation when it turns to organizational talk that “works things out”. If this re-characterization is not just a proposed one, as I stated in February 2013, then the meeting-as-gatekeeper is also constantly on the sidelines of these members’ organizational lives. The meeting awaits its turn to accomplish its job of enabling

“productive” interaction to occur, thus keeping the boundary between work and informality. The meeting is the only type of communication that is concerned with work and helping the members of SPC to accomplish work. Meetings should take their place among the other agents of the organization, including the human members, within the structure of SPC. This puts the meeting, this nonhuman figure with agency that is constructed by humans, attributed to meetings, and then spoken into action like narrating a character in a story, on the same field as the humans who voice this figure. The meeting may have different attributes, like human agents, and when we put these together to form a figure, this allows us to notice the multiplicity of ways that the figure can act and contribute to the organization through both action-agency and context-agency. The members of SPC pose this figure as a key agent in accomplishing the work of SPC productively and successfully. As an ethnographer, it is important to note that this part of a native point of view on meetings, and thus other organizations and sites might position meetings to serve different agential functions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the ventriloquism perspective allows researchers to examine how the everyday objects of our organizational worlds may make as much or more of a difference than the human agents in the scene. Our texts, documents, technologies, spaces, and communication practices certainly affect how work and organizing is accomplished in spaces that are termed “organizations”. For SPC, a nonhuman figure that shapes organizing is the meeting. Meetings help and allow members to work together simultaneously and effectively, both on task and relational components of communication (Keyton, 1999). Although online communication is used more often by this organization to organize, the members of SPC still speak about and hold meetings because they allow different communicative actions to occur.

In the “plenum of agencies” (Cooren, 2006) within SPC, meetings are not sole actors without ventriloquists. The human members of SPC must voice and wield the figure in order to accomplish these important aspects of organizing. Mary, the typical voice of meetings, must coordinate, plan, and then execute meetings before the meeting can be said to have done its job. The other members of the organization must likewise attend the meeting and participate in the actions that it has allowed. Outside of meetings, the figure still waits on the sidelines, as if it could be called at any moment to participate and to reorganize the organization. Ventriloquism allows me to examine “the meeting” and, as Schwartzman (1989) put it, how members “use and are used by” this figure. The meeting figure “uses” members in a gatekeeping role in order to help them accomplish certain aspects of organizational work and organizational life. Members “use” the meeting figure, invoking and enacting it, in order to access the kinds of talk and action that this gatekeeper allows to occur.

Chapter V

DISCUSSION

In the previous chapters I have examined the form, function, and figure of meetings by using two analytic perspectives. First, I reviewed some of the literature on and using meetings. Then I presented the theoretical background of my two perspectives: the ethnography of communication and ventriloquism. In the second chapter I described the organization that I studied, Suicide Prevention Campaign (SPC), and my methods of data collection and analysis. In the third chapter I employed my first perspective, the ethnography of communication, to answer my first research question: What is the form and function of SPC's meetings, and what does metacommunication about meetings reveal about the norms of interpretation of meetings? Through this analysis I examined the form and function of SPC's meetings, and then explicated three themes in the norms of interpretation: meetings as "burdens", "purpose", and "showing we're a team". In the fourth chapter I employed my second perspective, ventriloquism, to answer my second research question: What kinds of agency are given to the meeting figure when members of SPC metacommunicate about meetings? Throughout this analysis, I examined how participants enacted and invoked a meeting figure, ventriloquizing it as a gatekeeper to organizational functions. In this chapter, I summarize my findings from these two perspectives and relate them to each other in order to form a fuller picture of what the members of SPC are doing when they metacommunicate about meetings. Following this, I discuss the compatibility and tensions between the two perspectives that I used. I then detail my study's contribution and limitations. Finally, I propose some future directions for research in each perspective, their potential combination, and for practitioners.

Form, Function, and Figure

As I have shown throughout my thesis, meetings in SPC have a particular form, serve various functions, and can be enacted as a figure. In my study of meetings, the ethnography of communication as a research approach shed light on the culturally particular form and function of this communication practice in the organization SPC. As Schwartzman (1989) defines meetings, they take on particular forms and functions in various groups. The theory of ventriloquism helped me examine the way in which nonhuman objects, or figures, are invoked, incarnated, and enacted in organizing practices. As a ventriloquized figure, the meeting is attributed and enacts agency in SPC. Together, these two perspectives shed light on the three Fs: form, function, and figure.

The first F that I examined is the form of SPC's meetings. In Schwartzman's (1989) framework, much of the form of meetings is explicated through the categories that deal with structure and meeting talk. SPC's meetings are framed with an official opening and closing of the meeting, and both of these include a reference to the time that the statement is made. Talk within meetings typically relates to five main topics – an overview of what has happened, the status of the 501(c)(3), recent fundraising efforts and the budget, metacommunication about meetings, and metacommunication about Wiggio – and results in shared information on those topics. Decisions are rarely made in these meetings; rather the discussion provides Mary with a sense of the members' opinions, which may then affect her final decision. The more recent meetings include less formal turn taking structures, with many meetings including side conversations and interruptions, although Mary still recognizes the speakers before their turns in the primary meeting conversation. The genres and styles of talk included in meetings are informational and discussion-based. Participants in meetings can attend either in person or

through video-conferencing software. All meetings are guided by a meeting chair, and with one exception in this data set, this chair is typically Mary.

The second F that I examined is the function of SPC's meetings. Meetings in SPC serve the functions of information dissemination and occasionally serve as deadlines for tasks. Another function is for Mary to gather the opinions of other members on a decision that she is considering for the organization. The functions attributed to meetings are not seen as typically exclusive to this practice, and some functions of the meeting, particularly information dissemination, are also accomplished through online postings on Wiggiio. Thus, meetings are an infrequent occurrence in SPC, and rarely is there a regular pattern to when meetings occur. Finally, the norms of interpretation also provide insight into the function of SPC's meetings. Early in the organization's lifetime meetings were associated with being a burden on the organization and its members, which may have contributed to the infrequency with which meetings occur. Meetings were still seen as being called for and fulfilling some purpose associated with them. Finally, meetings also served the function of "showing we're a team" to the members of SPC. Together, this paints the picture of a purposeful, community-building, yet perhaps burdensome function of meetings in SPC.

The final F that I examined in this thesis related to meetings is the meeting figure. From a ventriloquism perspective, a figure is a nonhuman agent that is incarnated by a speaker and then is said to make a difference. Examining a meeting as an agent is new to both of the research perspectives that I take here. The ethnography of communication focuses on the communicative agency of nonhuman objects, such as thunder that speaks (Hymes, 1974) or the wind and water to which people in the Blackfeet tribe listen (Carbaugh & Boromisza-Habashi, 2011). Ventriloquism has traditionally oriented to the agency of texts and documents (Cooren, 2004,

2006), but has expanded outward to other objects (Cooren, 2010), beliefs and values (Cooren et al., 2013), and attitudes (Van Vuuren & Cooren, 2010). In the case of SPC, the meeting figure acts as a gatekeeper, allowing and enabling certain kinds of talk and actions to happen between the members of SPC that are necessary for organizing and accomplishing work. These kinds of actions include “showing we’re a team” and “working things out”. As a gatekeeper, the meeting serves a purpose in organizing that is akin to the purposes of human members. Thus, the meeting figure can be considered one of the essential players in SPC.

How do all of these Fs work together to provide a relatively holistic view of SPC’s meetings? Form, function, and figure are categories that are only theoretically distinct. For the members of SPC there are simply “meetings” and the various implications of what kind of interaction holding a meeting entails. The form of meetings is related to how meetings can function. For example, the topics and results that are usually involved in meetings implicate an informational function of meetings, and vice versa the informational function of meetings implicates certain topics and results that a meeting will include. Likewise, both form and function are related to the figure of meetings. The meeting figure acts as a gatekeeper in SPC, and when it is invoked by human actors, then it can function in certain ways to foster the kinds of talk that may be then associated with the meeting form. The form and function of meetings likewise constrains the meeting figure to certain kinds of gatekeeping actions.

Compatible Perspectives

If theory provides us with a lens through which to view our world, then one theory clarifies certain aspects of a phenomenon while obscuring others. In this research, I have used two theoretical (and methodological) perspectives to clarify my focus on SPC’s meetings. The first, the ethnography of communication, tends to focus on the cultural underpinnings of the

communication events, practices, and codes of groups, communities, and organizations. This theoretical perspective works to clarify the culturally particular forms and functions of communication, and how communicative practices are mutually constitutive with the cultural world in which participants inhabit. This perspective excels at revealing patterns of the local and particular. Thus, it is perhaps less invested in discussing the general, the universal, and the anomalous. Except for a few exceptional cases, this perspective tends not to be sensitive to the influence that nonhuman objects have on human actors and communication.

The second perspective, ventriloquism, excels in revealing how our organizational worlds are comprised of both human and nonhuman agents that act in the process of organizing. Ventriloquism also purports itself to address both the local and the general levels, albeit rejecting the dichotomy between these. The general, such as structures, organizations, and dominating forces, are examined as they are invoked, incarnated, and enacted in the local, everyday conversations between organizational members. This perspective is less interested in how our ways of communicating with each other are founded in local culture. Ventriloquism assigns marginal significance to the form and function of talk, rather taking it as a resource for examining how agency and action is constructed through talk.

Although seemingly opposite in what these perspectives reveal and neglect, they are not insurmountably incompatible. Both perspectives take communication as constitutive of our social and organizational worlds. Both perspectives also use microanalytic methods of discourse to examine how our worlds are constituted. Organizations and organizing practices are topics of interest for both perspectives, although more so for ventriloquism than the ethnography of communication. On the foundational levels, these theoretical perspectives are compatible. Both perspectives would also agree that researchers should take communication seriously in order to

study it. They do diverge from there. The ethnography of communication tends to focus on the form and function of communication in groups, examining the cultural patterns behind our communication. Ventriloquism has been uninterested in this focus on form and function, except for the differences between talk and text (Cooren, 2004). Instead, ventriloquism tends to focus on the nonhuman figures that are enacted as agents in organizational scenes, including, as I propose here, communicative forms like meetings. The ethnography of communication has been uninterested in nonhuman agency unless the nonhuman agents are said to communicate with the human actors in a cultural scene (cf. Carbaugh & Boromisza-Habashi, 2011; Hymes, 1974).

These perspectives diverge and congregate around their own core concepts. The ethnography of communication congregates around culture, whereas ventriloquism congregates around agency. These concepts are not mutually exclusive, and each perspective, as I demonstrate in this thesis, can benefit from expanding toward the other. The ethnography of communication perspective benefits from expanding its conception of agency to include how nonhuman objects act in communities and organizations. Certainly we use objects such as a laptop with a webcam in order to hold meetings, as in SPC, but ethnographers of communication have not examined how that laptop enables and constrains action, and how it might also act in these meetings. As in the case of my thesis here, we also certainly use meetings, but rarely examine how meetings enable and constrain action like gatekeepers. Ventriloquism was founded on a belief that communication acts, which is compatible with the constitutive view of communication that the ethnography of communication takes. By asking ourselves how communication enacts objects, and how actions attributed to objects might be communicative, the leap to nonhuman agency as conceptualized by ventriloquism is no longer an insurmountable distance away.

Likewise, ventriloquism benefits from expanding its view of communication and action to include how these are culturally constituted. Objects and figures do not arise from a vacuum of time and space, but rather they have been constituted by people for specific purposes, and thus have histories. Communicative forms, like meetings, also have such histories (see van Vree, 1999). Objects, communicative forms, beliefs, values, and attitudes have all been shaped by culture on a local level. These are all symbolic objects, and they are all part of our worlds. Ventriloquism has recognized that figures are shaped by the human actors that ventriloquize them. It has also recognized that these figures are part of our organizations, existing among rather than beneath the human actors in a scene. To include culture in this perspective, a researcher would need to recognize the particularity of the ventriloquized objects. For example, the meeting figure would not act the same way in another organization as it does in SPC, because the form and function of meetings vary between organizations and groups. From the ethnography of communication's view, to call this figure cultural is almost simply a substitute for calling this figure particular to a group of people.

Contribution

This thesis makes contributions to the field through the two perspectives that I took in this research. First, to the ethnography of communication, I have contributed to the cataloguing and analysis of the forms and functions of various communicative events and practices. The form and function of SPC's meetings are unique and based on a budding organizational culture. In the future a researcher could use this catalogue entry, so to speak, to compare SPC's meetings to other communicative events and practices. I have also introduced one possibility for using time to study how meetings and other communication practices change, rather than reproducing this communicative practice as representative of a stagnant pattern. I used this strategy to

address norms of interpretation, but other categories could be studied through a similar means of detailing a snapshot of the strategies used in one meeting, and then comparing snapshots to find themes that can be traced across time.

I have also made a contribution to ventriloquism. So far, the perspective has ignored how types of communication may be invoked as figures, and how these types even have agency in our organizations. As I have shown here, meetings in SPC served a gatekeeping role in the organization. In order for certain kinds of communication and action to occur, the meeting figure had to be invoked in the scene. The nature of the gatekeeping role of meetings was often discussed in SPC's meetings through metacommunicative talk. Metacommunicative talk, therefore, could serve as a resource for ventriloquism to examine how our communicative forms (are said to) act.

A final contribution of my work is the comparison between the ethnography of communication and ventriloquism, and a proposed working relationship between them, as I detailed in the previous section. The working relationship between the ethnography of communication and ventriloquism could work for scholars who primarily associate with either area. As I have shown in this thesis, one way to use both perspectives is to first address how one perspective would view a phenomenon and then address how the other would view the same or similar phenomenon. Using both perspectives widens the area of focus for each, allowing a researcher to provide a more holistic view of the phenomenon of focus, as I have done in this thesis.

Limitations of the Present Study

There are a few limitations of my present study. First, it is limited by the amount of data. Although I have been participant-observing SPC for a year and a half, only eleven meetings were

held during this time, and I was able to attend seven of them. Additionally, only three out of the eight board members were able to schedule interviews with me, and only one person, Mary, scheduled several of them with me throughout the length of my study.

This study was, secondly, limited by my ability to participate only through virtual means. Although I was in Pennsylvania for a total of three months out of the eighteen months of my study, most of the meetings and other activities that SPC conducted were held during the fifteen months while I was living and attending school in Colorado. By virtually attending meetings, as I discussed in chapter three, my field of sight was limited primarily to Mary and one or two other members of a meeting party. Thus, I missed potentially useful and insightful nonverbal behaviors exhibited by the members not in frame. I also usually missed pre-meeting and post-meeting talk, and could not participate in any of the informal side conversations that occasionally happened in the more recent meetings. As I addressed in chapter four, my physical location in Colorado has also prevented me from becoming acquainted with some of the new volunteers who have recently joined SPC.

Finally, the organization's state affected my study. Mary had related the lack of a 501(c)(3) certification to a luxury of time that allows for fewer meetings to occur and less often. An organization with this status may have meetings more often, which would have provided me with more data with which to work. SPC is also still in a budding phase of its organizational culture, which might mean that the form, function, and figure of meetings are still changing and altering, and therefore have not yet settled into a set pattern. More mature organizations that have had held more meetings may have developed a definite pattern for their form, function, and potential figure.

Future Directions

On its own, the ethnography of communication has some interesting future directions that it could take in studying meetings. First, what are the forms and functions of various kinds of meetings, within and outside of organizations? Future studies could catalogue a variety of forms and functions to be compared across cases. Differences could be found between community meetings and organizational meetings, for example, to expand upon the initial findings of Tracy and Dimock (2004). Similarities and differences could be found across organizations to examine why certain aspects of meetings change to meet the needs of certain kinds of organizations. Do nonprofit organizations hold meetings in a different way than for-profit organizations? Issues of power could also be examined, using Carbaugh's (2007) critical mode of inquiry. Who usually has power in meetings? What privilege does this grant them? My study in particular challenges ethnographers who study meetings to examine how members of organizations and communities may treat meetings as agents or gatekeepers. Such examination would address the reciprocal relationship that Schwartzman (1989) posed, that members use and are used by meetings. These are all questions and issues that the ethnography of communication, on its own terms, could address. However, to productively engage with audiences outside of our small community of scholars, we need to engage in their conversations. If ethnographers of communication only focus on form and function, what are they (we) leaving out?

Ventriloquism could also take some interesting future directions based on my findings. First, it could examine how communication practices act and are enacted as figures in organizations. Language, talk, and its various forms, like meetings, are technologies that have been created for use by particular groups. Meetings have been shaped for organizational use, and thus can be ventriloquized in particular ways like memos or documents, which are other kinds of communication. Other oral communicative forms, like meetings, could be examined for

how they enable and constrain certain kinds of action to occur, whether in a gatekeeping role or as an agent of some other kind. Meetings could also be researched as an agent in other organizations to find whether there are certain generalized ways of ventriloquizing meetings or if these are only particular.

There are also future directions that research using both of these perspectives could take, in perhaps a dissertation. Further theoretical work could be done to determine whether these perspectives could be combined to form a unique perspective drawing from the strengths of each. More empirical work could be completed to examine meetings as this unique perspective emerges from the combination of both the ethnography of communication and ventriloquism. However, even without this merging, a possible future direction would be to expand from meetings to examine other organizing practices from both lenses. Such work would further illuminate the strengths, weaknesses, and idiosyncrasies of using both of these perspectives together to examine the same phenomena.

Finally, out of this research, there are a few directions that SPC could consider regarding its meetings. The specific form and function of meetings may allow insight into aspects of meetings that may be changed to make them better. For example, positioning the webcam so that members virtually attending meetings can see more members attending in-person might better foster “showing we’re a team”. The members of SPC may also more closely consider how they interpret meetings. By noticing the changes between early interpretations and more recent interpretations, then the members of SPC may better recognize that meetings are less of a burden and more about “showing we’re a team”. The members of SPC could also consider some of the implications of the meeting as a gatekeeper for the organization. Without meetings, then the members would need to develop another communicative practice through which work would be

accomplished and (re-)organization could be ensured. Currently, this is the key role that meetings play for SPC. Recognizing this gatekeeping role may strengthen the position of meetings in SPC, perhaps giving them a stronger purpose and leading to better productivity and relationships between organizational members.

Endnotes

¹ Although those taking the ventriloquism perspective in research accept this definition of agency, agency is a hotly debated term among organizational communication scholars. The journal, *Organization*, published an issue on defining text and agency from several perspectives, including Cooren's (2004) and Taylor and Robichaud's (2004) pieces that are cited here. One of the staunchest critics of the ventriloquism definition of agency is McPhee (2004), who, based on structuration theory, defends agency as a means of engaging with texts, which he also defined differently than the Montreal School defined texts. Other conceptualizations of agency in this issue are provided by Conrad (2004), Fairhurst (2004), Hardy (2004), and Putnam and Cooren (2004). This is to say that although the definition of agency provided here is true for those using ventriloquism, as I do in this study, this is not generalizable to other organizational scholars.

² When discussing how to accommodate potential volunteers who are not very computer savvy, members still made assumptions that anyone who volunteers would have an email address and at least know how to use email.

³ The December 2013 meeting did include burritos, chips, guacamole, and salsa purchased by Mary for the board to eat during the meeting. When asked about the food, she said that we, the board, had asked for a "fiesta meeting", so she brought the food for it. Interestingly, this "fiesta meeting" did not include much metacommunication about meetings or Wiggio, which are two out of the five normal topics included in a meeting.

⁴ I do wonder if the use of technology does emphasize this team aspect of SPC, or if instead it reinforces Mary's importance to the meeting ritual, because she is usually the only full person that the virtual attendees can see.

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Appendix I

Meeting timeline by date, group, participants, and data included in the study.

Date	Group	Participants	Data
November 24, 2012	Fundraising committee	Mary, Katie, Lise	Minutes, transcript
December 1, 2012	Education committee	Unsure	Minutes
December 8, 2012	Board of directors	Mary, Katie, Lise, Sean, Amanda, Dan, Lisa	Minutes, transcript
December 15, 2012	Marketing committee	Unsure	Wiggio post
December 22, 2012	Community resources committee	Mary, Katie, Amanda	Transcript
February 13, 2013	Mary and Katie	Mary and Katie	Transcript
February 24, 2013	Marketing committee	Lise, Mary, Theresa, Dustin, Nick	Minutes
April 12, 2013	Community resources committee	Mary and Katie	Minutes, Transcript
April 28, 2013	Education committee	Mary, Lise, Lisa, Dan, Dustin, Nick	Minutes
September 28, 2013	Board of directors	Mary, Lise, Lisa, Sean, Katie, Amanda	Minutes, Transcript
December 15, 2013	Board of directors	Mary, Lise, Lisa, Dan, Doug, Katie, Amanda, Theresa	Minutes, Transcript

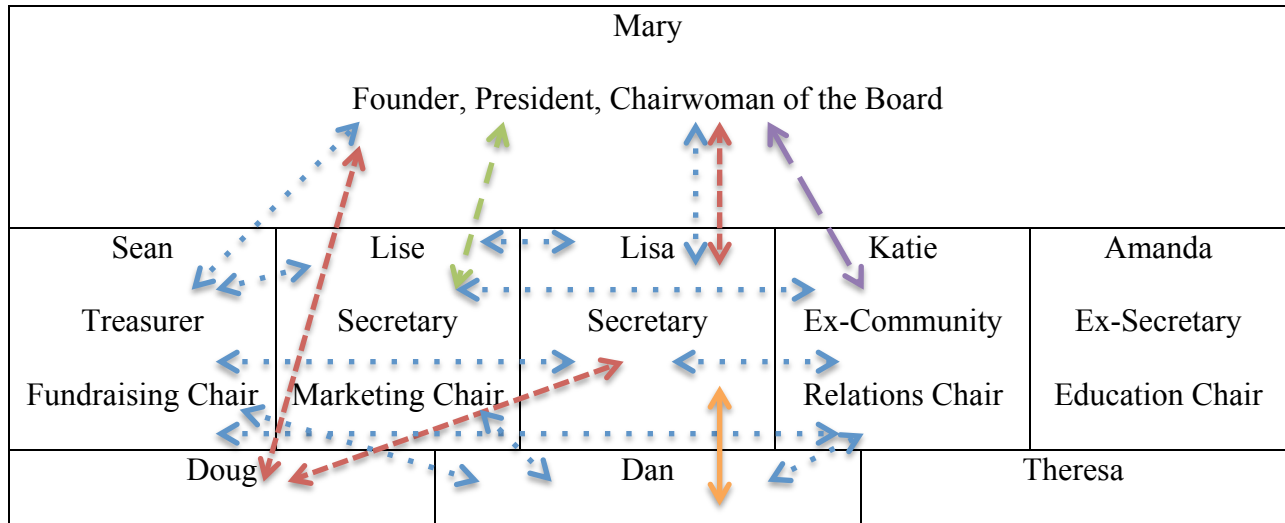
Appendix II

Participants by name, age, organizational roles, and meetings attended.

Name	Age	Organizational Roles	Meetings Attended
Amanda	21	Secretary 2012-2013, Chair of education committee, member of CR committee	All Board meetings
Dan	26	Board Member, member of education committee	December 2012 and December 2013
Doug	57	Board Member, member of education committee	Only December 2013
Katie	24	Chair of community resources (CR) committee, member of other 3 committees	All transcribed meetings
Lisa	25	2014 Secretary (post-May), member of education committee	All Board meetings
Lise	24	Chair of marketing committee, 2014 Secretary (pre-May), member of fundraising committee	All Finance Committee and Board meetings
Mary	23	Founder, President, Chair of the board, Member of all 4 committees	All
Sean	27	Treasurer, Chair of fundraising committee	December 2012 and September 2013
Theresa	24	Board Member, member of marketing committee	Only December 2013

Appendix III

The official structure and unofficial ties between the board members of SPC.



Key:

- Known through church
- Known through school (as teacher or students)
- - - - Family relationship
- — — — "Best friends"
- Engaged