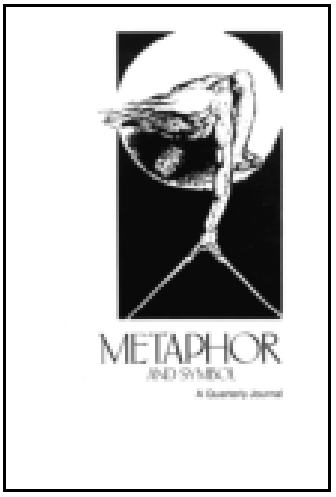

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Open Hearts or Smoke and Mirrors: Metaphorical Framing and Frame Conflicts in a Public Meeting

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Open Hearts or Smoke and Mirrors: Metaphorical Framing and Frame Conflicts in a Public Meeting

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The concept of *framing* has been widely used to help understand how aspects of messages can shape people's expectations and consequently influence the outcomes of communicative interactions. In this study we examine transcripts of a contentious and ultimately unsuccessful public meeting between police officials and members of the African American community following the fatal shooting of a young African American woman by police officers. We show how contradictory framing *between* public officials and members of the community as well as *within* each group may have contributed to unintended and asymmetrical ironies, and ultimately to the failure of the meeting to achieve the objectives of either group. We suggest steps that might lead to better outcomes in similar situations in the future.

"It's for all of us to open up[1] our minds and our hearts, and to accept each other by communicating, by understanding, and by developing mutual trust between the police and the community. —Vera Katz, Mayor of Portland, Oregon, July 3, 2003

"I'm irritated with the double talk, the smoke and the mirrors, the perception that we are in agreement with the performance, the process, and the proceedings that have brought us here tonight." —Pastor W. C. Hardy, Jr., Highland Christian Center, Portland, Oregon, July 3, 2003

Central to democratic self-government is the accountability of public officials to the citizens they serve. Frequently, and especially at times of crisis, this accountability includes public meetings that attempt to open up dialogue and deliberation between authorities and public. Often at such meetings, officials explain their policies and citizens ask questions and express their concerns

[1]In this essay, metaphor vehicles are marked by underlining. "Conceptual metaphors" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) are indicated by small capital letters, and "systematic metaphors" (Cameron, 2007) are indicated by italicized small capital letters. Note that vehicle is itself a metaphor, expressing the idea that it carries meaning associated with the topic. The conceptual or systematic metaphor underlying both *vehicle* and *carry* can be identified as something like MEANINGS ARE OBJECTS and WORDS ARE CONTAINERS (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

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about these policies. There will often be disagreements, but when things are going well, all parties will leave the encounter with the feeling that they have at least been heard and understood, even if they have not achieved their objectives. Often things do not go well, and participants leave a meeting feeling more frustrated and angry than before.

In the United States, particularly in large cities, the operations of police agencies within minority communities and police treatment of members of ethnic minorities have frequently led to angry confrontation, hostility, and an increase rather than amelioration of tension. Even when both community leaders and police officials enter such an encounter with the best of intentions, a meeting may slip into a familiar *conflict* script, the good intentions unravel, and participants fall back on comfortable but unfruitful rhetoric of justifying their own actions, denying responsibility for adverse outcomes, and focusing blame on others.

In this article we examine one such meeting between city and police department officials and members of the community following the shooting death of an unarmed African American woman during a routine traffic stop. It appears from the transcript of the meeting that both the public officials and the leaders of the community entered the dialogue with the intention of reducing the distrust and suspicion between community and police that had accumulated over many decades. However, these benign intentions were not realized, and the meeting eventually dissolved in turmoil, leaving police–community relations, if anything, worse than before. We examine the metaphors, ironies, and other communication elements used by community leaders and community members on the one hand, and by police and city officials on the other. We analyze these communication elements in terms of how they contribute to *framing* the shooting itself as well as the public meeting in very different, contradictory, and ironic ways. We show that contradictions existed not merely between the way citizens and public officials framed the meeting, but also among the frames advanced within each set of participants. We argue that these multiple conflicting frames—which were not acknowledged, much less addressed by participants or organizers of the meeting—contributed substantially to its failure. We further argue that the difference in framing is partly the result of the need for both public officials and community leaders, while constructing their utterances, to consider multiple audiences, audiences with very different expectations about how the events should be understood and how the meeting should proceed.

FRAMING

The idea that secondary features of language can affect the way people respond to messages, and more generally how they treat a communicative interaction, has been considered and researched from a variety of perspectives over the past 50 years. Of particular relevance to this study is a body of research using the "*frame*" metaphor introduced by Bateson (1972) and Goffman (1974). A *frame* can be generally thought of as a set of expectations participants bring to an occasion (Tracy, 1997), where *occasion* can mean a social or political event, a conversation, or media content. Three inter-related approaches to framing, which have developed in three distinct research traditions but are all consistent with this rather broad definition, are particularly relevant to this study: *story frames* (Gamson, 1992; Iyengar, 1991), *interaction frames* (Tracy, 1997), and *issue frames* (Schön, 1993).

Gamson (1992) showed that journalists present issues within certain *story frames* that reflect journalistic news values. In one version of story framing, Iyengar (1991) showed that news organizations tend to frame stories as *episodes*, for example by focusing on the stories of individuals who are injured or killed in confrontations with police officers, and de-emphasize *thematic* issues such as the institutional policies and procedures that may exacerbate these confrontations and the underlying social and political conditions. Other researchers have emphasized framing in terms of relevant *values* such as human interest vs. financial impact in a story about retirement of a university budget official (Price, Tewksbury, & Powers, 1997).

Emphasizing expectations about how an interaction will proceed and how participants will respond to one another, Tracy (1997) showed that communication failures between emergency calling center call-takers and callers can often be traced to contradictory *interaction frames*. Callers often approach the emergency call within a *customer service* frame, in which the caller's role is to explain the nature of the emergency and the call-taker's role is to expedite delivery of the requested help. Call-takers often approach the emergency call within a *public service* frame, in which their own role is to assist dispatchers and emergency responders in the efficient allocation of scarce emergency services by obtaining all information that will be needed, and the caller's role includes providing the needed information by responding to the call-taker's questions. When a caller approaches the emergency call from a "customer service" frame and call-takers from a "public service" frame, the contradictory expectations about how the call should proceed may lead to conflict and occasionally results in failure to achieve either person's objectives.

As an example of the third approach, *issue framing*, Schön (1993) analyzed debates over urban renewal policy in the 1950s, in which deteriorating neighborhoods were framed as *"blighted* areas*"* or as *"natural communities"*; the first frame implied the need to cure or remove the *"blight"*; the alternative frame implied the need to strengthen and support the existing community. Similar contradictory frames are apparent in many other policy debates. Contemporary examples include "right to life" versus "right to choose"; and "estate tax" versus "death tax" (Coleman & Ritchie, 2011). Schön argues that the way an issue is framed can powerfully affect not only how the issue is understood but also what sort of solutions can be considered (see also Fausey & Boroditsky, 2010; Thibodeau & Boroditsky, 2011). We analyze all three types of framing.

Metaphorical Framing

Schön (1993) argued that issue framing in public policy debates often involves the choice of metaphors. In the example of urban renewal policy debates, the *"blight"* metaphor suggests something decayed and diseased that must be *"cured"*—or removed altogether, whereas the *"natural community"* metaphor suggests something organic that must be supported and strengthened.

Thibodeau and Boroditsky (2011) tested the capacity of familiar idiomatic metaphors to achieve issue framing effects through a series of experiments built around the metaphorical phrases "crime is a wild beast" and "crime is an infectious virus." They asked participants to read a short paragraph describing an increase in the frequency of crimes in a fictitious city that included one or the other of these metaphors along with crime rate statistics, which were identical in the two conditions. Participants were significantly more likely to search for more information and advocate solutions to the crime problem that were consistent with the metaphorical frame

to which they had been exposed than solutions consistent with the frame to which they had not been exposed. Those exposed to the phrase "crime is a wild beast" tended to advocate solutions consistent with capture and imprison; those exposed to the phrase "crime is an infectious virus tended to advocate solutions consistent with treat and apply preventative measures. Equally significant, when asked why they advocated these particular solutions almost all of the participants referred to the statistics, which could not account for differences because participants in the two conditions were given the same statistics. These results support Gibbs's (2006) claim that metaphor vehicles are processed, and influence responses, even when readers or hearers are not consciously aware of them, even for conventional metaphors. They also suggest that metaphor-activated frames may be even more influential than more overt framing devices, which are more likely to be noticed and lead to counter-argument.

Frame Conflicts or Contradictions

Implicit in each of the approaches to framing is the possibility that participants in a debate, casual conversation, or public meeting may offer competing or contradictory frames for the *stories* and *topics* under discussion and experience the encounter within contradictory *interaction frames*. Frame conflict is often only implicit; for example in Tracy's study of emergency call centers it appears that the participants were unaware that they framed the nature of the interaction differently, and this lack of awareness seems to have contributed to the failure of some calls. In other cases, such as debates over public policy, participants may deliberately choose language that will frame the issues in a way favorable to their own position (e.g., "pro-life" vs. "pro-choice"; "death tax" vs. "estate tax"). In more complex cases, participants may be aware and intentional about some aspects of the framing but quite unaware of other aspects. In these cases, bringing the implicit frames to the surface and making them explicit may be of benefit, both for understanding what went wrong in past interchanges and for improving the outcome of future interchanges.

In this article we examine one such instance, a public meeting between city and police officials and concerned members of the community following an incident in which a police officer shot and killed an unarmed motorist, Kendra James, during a routine traffic stop. All three types of framing—*story, interaction*, and *issue*—are apparent in the transcript of the James meeting. It appears that some of the framing metaphors used by both public officials and community leaders may have been intentional, but the framing effects of other rhetorical choices may have been neither understood nor intended by the speakers. In several respects, the language of both city and community leaders implied frames that were internally inconsistent, and neither the participants nor the meeting facilitators appeared to have been aware of the ironic contradictions. Based on subsequent accounts, the meeting does not appear to have fulfilled the expectations of any of the participants. On the contrary, the meeting seems to have sustained and reinforced the prior expectations of people on both sides. We argue that the failure by both city and community leaders to acknowledge and address the contradictory and conflicting frames contributed to this unsatisfactory outcome.

Irony

Irony is most commonly discussed in terms of saying something with the intention that hearers infer an opposite or contradictory meaning, as in a commonly discussed example, exclaiming

"what a lovely day for a picnic" when it is pouring down rain. Irony is also frequently discussed in terms of *situational ironies*, as when a person cancels a long-anticipated holiday in order to attend an important meeting, and the meeting is itself canceled at the last minute. A third class of frequently discussed ironies are *unintended ironies*, instances in which the speaker intends an utterance literally, not realizing that it is contrary to the actual situation. Gibbs et al. (1995) give the example of a student who does not realize his friend has copied his answers on a statistics exam and says, "*I would never be involved in any cheating*."

Giora (2003) claims that, when an ironic phrase is encountered, the salient interpretation is accessed first, and that the salient literal interpretation of irony precipitates an implicit assessment and criticism of the topic. Conversely, Shelley (2001) developed a theory of *bicoherence*, drawing on Koestler's (1964) concept of *bisociation*; Shelley argues that the incompatible schemas are activated simultaneously. The bicoherence approach also seems to permit a lesser degree of opposition between the contextually appropriate and ironic interpretations of an utterance or situation (Ritchie, 2005). Consistent with Shelley's approach, Gibbs, O'Brien, and Doolittle (1995) have shown that unintended ironies are often processed more quickly than similar statements spoken with intentional irony. Unintended ironies are also often judged to be more ironic. As we will show, the language used by participants in the Kendra James meeting produced several unintended ironies.

BACKGROUND

In Portland, Oregon on May 5, 2003, police officers stopped an automobile in which two passengers were wanted on outstanding warrants for possession of controlled substances; all occupants were unarmed. Apparently believing Ms. James was attempting to flee the scene, police officers attempted to restrain her; during the ensuing scuffle one of them shot Ms. James, who died before an ambulance arrived to take her to the hospital. A subsequent grand jury decided not to indict the police officer who fired the shot. Concerns in the community were increased by reports that the officers involved in the incident had met together in a restaurant on the morning after the shooting, giving them the opportunity to coordinate their accounts before they were questioned about the incident.

With a current population of over 580,000, Portland is the 30th largest city in the United States, but African Americans amount to well under 10% of the population, an unusually low proportion for a city of its size. As in other large U.S. cities, Portland has a history of tense relations between the Police Bureau and the African American community, marked by allegations of ethnic "profiling" and excessive use of force by police officers. Although the officers involved in shootings and other such incidents are routinely placed on suspension (usually with pay), few of the incidents have resulted in any further action against the officers by either the District Attorney or Police Bureau management. Ms. James's death and the following events heightened the community's concerns about police practices, and led to the formation by local community leaders of an "ad hoc committee for police and civil redress" to investigate the shooting. This ad hoc committee requested that Portland Mayor Vera Katz convene a formal inquest into the shooting; but she decided, instead of a formal inquest, to hold a public meeting open to all concerned members of the community. The transcript of this meeting, which is 33,000 words in length, is based on simultaneous close captioning, in which a typist prepared a transcript of everything that

was spoken as it occurred.[2] As far as we have been able to determine, no other record was made. Our analysis is based on the close-captioning transcription, with background information gleaned from newspaper accounts published at the time.

The meeting was held in the auditorium of a local church and presided over by Reverend Mr. Tate, pastor of the church. Scheduled to last two hours, the meeting actually lasted over five hours. Pastor Tate opened the meeting with some welcoming remarks, then introduced the city officials. Mayor Katz, Chief of Police Mark Kroeker, and District Attorney Mike Schrunk all addressed the crowd. Then Rev. Dr. W. G. Hardy, a member of the ad hoc committee, addressed the crowd, and another member of the committee read a list of specific questions for the police officials. Following these introductory remarks, two police detectives who had investigated the shooting presented a formal and detailed account of the investigation, complete with a PowerPoint presentation that lasted close to an hour. Following this presentation, members of the audience were allowed to ask questions and make comments, which continued for another two hours.

ANALYSIS

We employ a form of discourse analysis that includes metaphor analysis (Cameron & Maslen, 2010; Cameron et al., 2009; Ritchie, 2010). One reason for focusing on metaphor is that people draw on conventional figurative language, like "heart" and "accept," particularly when explaining troubled or abstract information. Metaphor as a research tool helpfully indicates how speakers think and feel about topics and, as Thibodeau and Boroditsky (2011) show, may indicate how speakers (deliberately or inadvertently) frame a topic. Attention to relationships among metaphors allows us to track the development of feelings and ideas about a topic and the explicit or implicit struggles over framing by tracking how metaphors are repeated or changed as the dialogue progresses (Cameron, 2011).

Two criteria must be met to identify a metaphor in the talk: (a) a word or phrase must be found in the talk that has some other different sense—called its basic meaning, usually more physical or more concrete than its contextual meaning, and (b) the basic meaning of the word or phrase must contribute to the meaning in context (Cameron, 2003; Pragglejaz Group, 2007). In the phrase "open up our minds and hearts," the term "open up" is identified as metaphorically used because it has more physical and concrete meaning of opening up something closed, such as a room or a package, which is different from its contextual meaning, something like listening and trying to understand each other (criterion a). The concrete meaning contributes to the contextual meaning by highlighting the change process that will be involved (criterion b). In identifying metaphorically used words or phrases, no assumption is made as to how these words or phrases are intended by speakers or how they are processed by listeners, since evidence is seldom available from discourse data.

Once metaphors have been identified, they are grouped together in terms of their basic meaning semantics to find possible systematic and framing metaphors. So, "open up" will be grouped with "open the door" and "close down," as metaphors of *connection/separation*. By examining

[2]The transcript of this meeting was downloaded by Yves Labissiere, Associate Professor of Psychology at Portland State University, in November, 2007 from the Portland Police Bureau web page, http://www.portlandonline.com/police/.

the metaphors used to talk about key discourse topics, we find out how participants use metaphor to frame ideas, in this case to give a sense of *understanding the Other as connecting*. Because metaphors are often used to imply affect—emotions, attitudes, values—framing metaphors also reveal how people feel about the topics. To describe *coming to understand* in terms of "opening up," for example, can connect into embodied perceptual simulations (Gibbs, 2006; Ritchie, 2006), in which being closed feels negative and the new "open" state of understanding feels free and positive.

The flow of discourse activity was first divided into segments to understand its structure. Four large segments of discourse activity comprise the meeting: the opening with introductions and preliminary remarks; a presentation from the chair of the ad hoc investigation committee; presentations by the police; and a session in which the audience posed questions or made points, with some responses from officials. Each segment was sub-divided by speakers, turns and topics. The flow of discourse activity was then examined within and across the sub-segments. The use of metaphors was examined for how participants frame key ideas, and for attitudes and values implied by metaphors and frames.

Metaphors and Frames

Participants in the meeting presented contradictory or conflicting frames about the shooting incident itself and about the subsequent investigation. They also presented contradictory or conflicting frames about the meeting, and about empathic understanding between public officials and members of the public. We discuss each of these in turn.

The Shooting and the Investigation: Episodic Versus Thematic Framing

All three public officials both explicitly and implicitly framed the shooting *episodically*, for example by referring to it as a "tragic event." Police Chief Kroeker referred to the "many perspectives on this event," ironically acknowledging the framing problem without seeming to recognize that the word "event" itself represents one particular "perspective" or frame.

Following the introductory speeches by the city officials, the meeting facilitators talked briefly about how the meeting would be conducted, then Pastor W. G. Hardy, a member of the ad hoc committee, was invited to speak. Pastor Hardy's comments were evidently intended as a response or rebuttal to the public officials, and were quite likely formulated extemporaneously. As seen in the following extract, Pastor Hardy implicitly recognized and emphatically rejected the episodic frame and proposed in its place a thematic frame. Hardy also raised or at least acknowledged a potential *racial* frame and explicitly rejected it in favor of a more general thematic frame of *human rights*.

Extract 1:
we're not here to justify Kendra's actions. Let's be clear about that. As some folks would have us believe. We are here to find ways to prevent an incident of ever reoccurring again regardless of their race, economic status, or the area in our grand city of Portland that they may happen to live in. [cheers and applause] this is not a black issue. Some have said that. It's not black against white. It's a matter of human rights, quality of life and the pursuit of justice**.** [applause]

During the open question and answer and public comments part of the meeting, several members of the audience reported stories of feeling harassed by police officers, and two referred to previous incidents in which young African Americans had been shot by police officers. One young man expressed his own concerns in particularly poignant terms: "I'll be a new driver soon. If you pull me over and ask me for i.d., how can I be sure [inaudible] are you going to shoot me?" By relating a series of stories with the common theme of actual or potential police violence, these speakers echoed and reinforced the *thematic* frame introduced by Hardy, anchored the discussion of the Kendra James shooting in a broader historic context and shifted attention away from the specifics of this one *episode* and focused attention on the more general *theme*: community members' fear of police violence.

Another audience member made the *thematic* frame even more explicit by referring to a *series* of prior incidents in which African Americans had been killed during interactions with police, then to accusations about police officers harassing bicyclists. This speaker summed up by emphasizing the need for changes in policies and procedures:

> Extract 2:
> The question is, what actions are being taken to change the intimidation and harassment to the true protection and service of the community? What policies and procedures will be changed to stave off this public perception of an institutionalized tolerance of militarism and bigotry?

This speaker, like many other members of the audience, used highly emotional language ("intimidation and harassment") along with an ironic reference to the police department motto (*Protect and Serve*) to underscore the *thematic* frame. However, it is also important to note this speaker's use of the phrase "public perception"—he was not accusing the police of militarism and bigotry; rather he was asserting that police actions are *perceived* within that frame.

Although many members of the audience did ask questions about the specific details of the investigation into Kendra James's death (*episodic* frame), the majority of questions from the audience were directed at the need for changes in police policies and procedures emphasized by the speaker in Extract 2 (*thematic* frame).

Police framing of the shooting as an isolated and atypical incident (*episodic* frame) worked against the community members' apparent hopes of developing a shared understanding of the events as a basis for correcting perceived flaws in current police policies and practices (*thematic* frame). Conversely, framing the shooting *thematically* as part of a pattern of racially-motivated police violence worked against officials' expressed hopes of building on a shared understanding of the events as a basis for improving communication between police and community and increasing community members' involvement in policing the community.

Framing the Investigation

Beginning with the District Attorney's detailed report of his activities when he learned about the shooting, the public officials also framed the *investigation* of the shooting in *procedural, technical,* and *bureaucratic* terms. This frame was reinforced by the lengthy and detailed report by the investigating officers, organized as mentioned before around a series of PowerPoint slides. Pastor Hardy, immediately after the passage quoted above, offered a competing set of frames in a series of powerful metaphors.

Extract 3:
But let me flip the coin. I am frustrated [. . .] *I'm irritated with the double talk, the smoke and the mirrors, the perception that we are in agreement with the performance, the process, and the proceedings that have brought us here tonight.*

Double talk (Extract 3) refers to the deliberately ambiguous forms of speech often attributed to con artists (and politicians). *Smoke and mirrors* refers to tricks used by stage magicians, and is often used as a metaphor for obfuscation in documents such as the annual reports and other filings by large corporations. The phrase was repeated several times, first by Hardy then by other speakers. Here it seems to refer to and comment on both the investigation of Ms. James' death and the public officials' opening statements.

Extract 4:
Somebody said that "justice is blind," but we as Portland citizens, we need to know, or I need to know, that our elected and sworn officials are not taking advantage of her or us just because she's blind.

The phrase blind justice and the familiar statue of Justice as a goddess, wearing a blindfold and holding a scale, ordinarily implies that Justice is blind to the individual characteristics of those who come before her to be judged. In Extract 4, Hardy transformed this common idiom into a metaphorical story (Ritchie, 2010) and invested it with a different but equally familiar implication of ignoring or refusing to see obvious faults or crimes. The juxtaposition of these two metaphorical stories creates a heavy-handed irony that can only have been intentional. Pastor Hardy's "double talk," "smoke and mirrors," and "blind justice" metaphors directly challenged both the *episodic* and the *procedural/bureaucratic* frames and substituted *thematic, obstruction* and *cover-up* frames, which were reinforced by many remarks from the audience, for example: "When are you going to answer the questions that the community is asking and quit dancing around the issues?" (These remarks also provide indirect evidence that members of the audience were attentive to the contradictions and ironies within the public officials' remarks and between the stated purpose and the actual format of the meeting.)

Framing the Meeting: Open Conversation; Empathy

In his opening comments Pastor Tate presented the meeting as a "community forum . . . put on by Albina Ministerial ad hoc Committee for Police and Civil Redress." *Community forum* implies discussion, even debate, about issues of general concern. Identifying an ad hoc community organization as the sponsor frames the meeting as a *community* meeting (as compared to an *official* or government-presented meeting), and probably reinforced expectations of multi-directional discussion. The openness frame was also reinforced by Pastor Tate's use of a phrase common in African American religious communities: "Come on, show them some love." This phrase, as a call for applause, implies commonality and can be taken as an implication that the relationship among those present is one of mutual understanding and empathy.

The mayor reinforced the "give and take," "openness" frame in her own initial comments by presenting the meeting as an alternative to the requested public inquest, emphasizing metaphors such as "openness" and the opportunity for community members to get answers to their questions about the grand jury proceeding and other aspects of the incident. (These comments also reinforced the *episodic* frame for the shooting by focusing on this one incident.)

The mayor and police chief both described the meeting as an example of community policing, and the mayor linked this concept to the "open meeting" metaphor, presenting it as an occasion "to accept each other by communicating, by understanding, and by developing mutual trust between the police and the community. The mayor's characterization of the meeting in terms of "opening up our minds and hearts" implies a potential *thematic* metaphor frame, with an implication of mutual empathy, but locates it as part of *community policing*, not in terms of on-going concerns among the African American community about racial profiling and police violence.

The chief of police further supported the *openness/community forum* frame (a *conversation among equals*) with a comment about "people of good faith who have come together to learn from one another, to listen to each other—to listen to each other, to commit to working together to build a more solid and positive relationship." These phrases appear to promise that the city and police officials will listen to and work with community members at the same time that they appeal to community members to listen to and work with the police. In addition to supporting the frame of an *open meeting*, the chief's comments de-emphasized power relations, implicitly promising a *conversation among equals*. The metaphors used by both mayor and police chief imply that the relationship of police and members of the community is one of mutual understanding and empathy, consistent with Pastor Tate's suggestion to "show them some love."

The Chief acknowledged the possibility that "the people have a sense of fear," implicitly acknowledging the possibility of a *thematic* frame, as forcefully represented later by members of the community, including the previously quoted adolescent's question, "how can I be sure . . . are you going to shoot me?" This kind of acknowledgment presented an opportunity for addressing the nascent frame conflict early in the meeting, but the Chief did not develop this thought further, and his subsequent reference to the police organization's "*open hand of welcome*" negated the acknowledgment (and reinforced the ironic contrast with the actual format of the meeting). The Chief subsequently listed several police-initiated opportunities for citizen involvement, which implicitly contradicted the *openness* frame and reinstated the *hierarchical* frame (he did not invite members of the community to offer their suggestions for citizen involvement, nor did he offer to participate in community-initiated activities). The *openness* frame was also compromised by use of "we" to refer to police and city administrators and "you" to refer to members of the community.

The DA opened his remarks with a request to "just chat with you briefly," framing his presentation as *informal and casual*, consistent with the *openness* frame, but he proceeded with a business-like accounting of his actions immediately following the shooting in terms that would be more consistent with a formal *bureaucratic* frame. Thus, even in the introductory remarks by the city officials, the preferred and avowed *openness* frame was contradicted by several bits of language that seemed to emphasize *bureaucratic process* and *hierarchical relations* between police and community. There is no evidence that the public officials were aware of these contradictions.

The *openness* frame was even further undermined by the long and very detailed presentation by a team of detectives appointed to investigate the shooting. As noted before, this presentation was organized around a series of PowerPoint slides, more commonly associated with a carefully scripted one-way lecture than with an *open conversation*. The detectives' language was marked throughout by a "police report" style (Jönsson & Linell, 1991) including technical terms that would be familiar to members of the audience, if at all, only by way of televised police dramas, and it was characterized by gratuitous and confusing detail:

> Extract 3:
> We wanted to find out how far, if at all possible, or at least give us a ballpark figure, how far was the muzzle of officer McCollister's gun from Kendra James' body at the time of the incident. What the crime lab gave us was that the gun . . . correction—the muzzle of the gun—was no closer than 24 inches to her body. In other words, it had to be at least 24 inches away from her body. We got results back from the crime lab regarding the shell casing that was found at the scene. That shell casing matched Officer McCollister's firearm.

The ironic contrast between forensic detail and the claim of "openness" was reinforced later in the meeting when a member of the audience quoted the "at least 24 inches away" claim and asked about the *maximum* distance—raising the possibility that, if Officer McCollister fired the shot from a much greater distance, it was unlikely that he actually felt his own life to be endangered. The community had originally requested a legal inquest, and the mayor had refused that request in favor of an informal "conversation," but this use of prepared slides, police terminology, and precise, legalistic descriptions is more consistent with a legal proceeding such as an inquest or trial, and thereby contradicted the mayor's preferred *open meeting* frame and ironically reinforced the very *inquest* frame she had rejected.

Framing the Meeting: Police Accountability

In the same passage from which Extract 1 was taken, Pastor Hardy (apparently speaking for the ad hoc investigating committee) used a series of highly emotional metaphors to contradict both the *episodic* frame and the *empathic understanding* (Cameron, 2013) between police and community that was implied by the Mayor and Police Chief in their use of metaphors like "heart of gratitude." After a brief acknowledgment of the District Attorney's cooperation with the committee, qualified by criticism of the limitations on that cooperation, Rev. Hardy forcefully criticized and rejected the implications of the framing metaphors used by the previous speakers. A detailed analysis of this speech is included in Ritchie (2010); here we review the aspects that are most important from a framing perspective.

Hardy objected to "the proceedings that have brought us here" and accused city officials of using "smoke and mirrors" and "taking advantage of" Justice "because she's blind," contradicting the frame established by "open" and reframing the city officials' actions in terms of *deception* and *trickery*, as discussed in an earlier section. Hardy's series of rhetorical tricolons ending with: "we must press until the meetings reveal the truth that our system needs to be changed," emphatically establishes a *thematic* frame in opposition to the *episodic* frame established by the public officials' opening comments, as discussed in the preceding. Hardy's assertion that "We must not accept propaganda, misinformation," reinforce the implications of "double talk" and "smoke and mirrors" and frames the city officials' statements, in general and by implication in their opening statements, as deliberate political *deception*. Hardy's entire statement frames the meeting as *adversarial*, contradicting both Pastor Tate's opening remarks and the *collaborative, open meeting* frame established by the public officials.

"We're not here to justify Kendra's actions. Let's be clear about that. As some folks would have us believe. We are here to find ways to prevent an incident of ever reoccurring again." In this passage Hardy first alluded to an *episodic* frame based on James's criminal record that may have been introduced by news accounts and commentary ("some folks" is probably deliberately

vague) then rejected it in favor of a *thematic* frame linked to long-standing concerns about police profiling and excessive use of force, and the need to prevent future occurrences.

It appears that Pastor Hardy began with a legitimate objection to the public officials' *episodic* frame, and the implied failure to acknowledge the community's long-standing and on-going concerns about police policies and procedures (the *thematic* frame), as well as to their implied but unwarranted assumption that a state of empathic understanding already existed between police and community. However, Hardy appears to have been carried away by his own emotional rhetoric, and expressed his objections in metaphorical language that tapped into a long history of anti-police rhetoric and accusations of *police racism*. Hardy's remarks also activated an *argument* frame, in opposition to the *cooperation* theme implicit in the *open meeting* frame in the opening remarks by Pastor Tate, the mayor, and the Chief of Police. The *argument* frame was, perhaps inadvertently, subsequently reinforced by the detailed Power Point presentation by the investigating detectives as well as a series of comments from members of the audience.

Multiple Audiences

The frame contradictions and conflicts, both within groups and between groups, appear to have been at least partially the result of the need to consider multiple audiences. The explicit audience for all of the utterances was the other persons present at the meeting. However, as is apparent from the contradictory frames themselves as well as from the history of conflict between police and public officials on the one hand and members of the African American community on the other hand, the audience present in the room included people with a variety of different perspectives (see Harris-Lacewell, 2004). More important, perhaps, are the audiences *not* present in the room, or rather, the audiences implicitly represented by news reporters and members of the general public who might later read accounts of the meeting.

For the public officials, the fact that a police officer shot and killed an unarmed citizen raised the probability that anything they might say could end up being quoted in a court of law (the city was in fact later sued by Kendra James's family) or in an administrative proceeding against one or more of the police officers involved in the shooting. This became apparent during the question and answer phase of the meeting, when Chief Kroeker was pressed by a questioner to justify the police officer's behavior during the scuffle that led to the shooting and the fact that the police officers involved met for breakfast the following morning. After first evading the question ("dancing around it," in the previously quoted phrase), the Chief finally pointed out that there was an investigation in process and according to the principle of "due process" he could not comment on these issues. It is very likely that the bureaucratic manner of the investigating detectives' presentation, with its heavy reliance on "police talk" that the audience obviously found annoying and evasive, was also partially a result of the investigating detectives' expectation that anything they said could end up as evidence in a subsequent trial, an expectation reinforced by their professional training.

It appears that for both the public officials and the community leaders, the need to consider the potential implications of their rhetorical choices for their implicit, hidden audiences influenced and constrained their language choices. The public officials were constrained to use language that would not undermine what they might subsequently wish to say to potential jurors in a court of law, officials of the Police Officer's Union, and voters. Community leaders were constrained to

use language consistent with the values and ideologies acceptable in their community (Harris-Lacewell, 2004). In principle it is possible to use language appropriate to these other audiences in a way that does not reinforce stereotypes and well-entrenched frames, but to do so would at the least require explicit awareness of how language can activate and reinforce frames.

Understanding *intentional* irony requires at least sufficient common ground between speaker and audience that approximately the same schemas or frames are activated by an utterance (Gibbs, 2000; Gibbs et al., 1995; Gibbs & Izett, 2005). But here is where another aspect of the situation becomes relevant. People in subordinate status positions in which they feel vulnerable often have a much clearer perception of how members of a dominant group understand things than the reverse. In other words, asymmetries of power and status may be reflected in asymmetries of common ground (see, e.g., Lull, 1995). This could lead to a situation in which members of a lower-status group (in this case audience members) would be quicker to recognize both situational and spoken ironies than members of the higher-status group (the public officials, and perhaps also the meeting organizers). There is some limited evidence of this sort of asymmetrical or one-sided irony in the transcript: comments from the audience in several places refer to ironies involving the police motto, *Protect and Serve* and the contradiction between the public officials' stated intention to hold an "open" meeting as between equals and the actual format of the meeting. On the other hand, if any of the public officials recognized these ironic contradictions, they gave no sign of it.

Summary: Contradictions, Ironies, and Frame Conflicts

The public meeting following the Kendra James shooting was marked by not just one conflicting frame but several. It appears that the community organizations involved in the meeting shared at least some hopes and expectations in common with the city and police officials involved, and these common expectations might have provided a foundation for a more successful outcome. However, the members of the community and the city officials approached the meeting from within very different, and contradictory, frames. In general, city and police officials approached the shooting *episodically* as an isolated "tragic event"; the community members approached the shooting *thematically* as only one in a series of events indicative of police racism. City and police officials addressed the meeting in terms that implied a common understanding between public officials and community members; community members framed it in terms of an opportunity to gain a common understanding, where one did not yet exist.

At least equally serious were the contradictions within each group in terms of how they understood the shooting itself, the subsequent investigation, and the purpose of the meeting. In particular, city officials initially presented an "open conversation among equals" frame through use of informal speaking style and metaphors implying intimacy, but they undermined their own preferred frame by presenting top-down community participation opportunities, use of "we/you" language in several places, and giving over a large portion of the meeting to a detailed PowerPoint presentation, shot through with technical details and "police talk" jargon.

Together, these contradictions led to unintended ironies, which in turn were the occasion for intentionally ironic speeches by community members, some of which are summarized in Figure 1. The apparent outcome was to reinforce prior oppositional rhetoric and activate familiar conflict scripts, thoroughly defeating any possibility of accomplishing the objectives of the meeting.

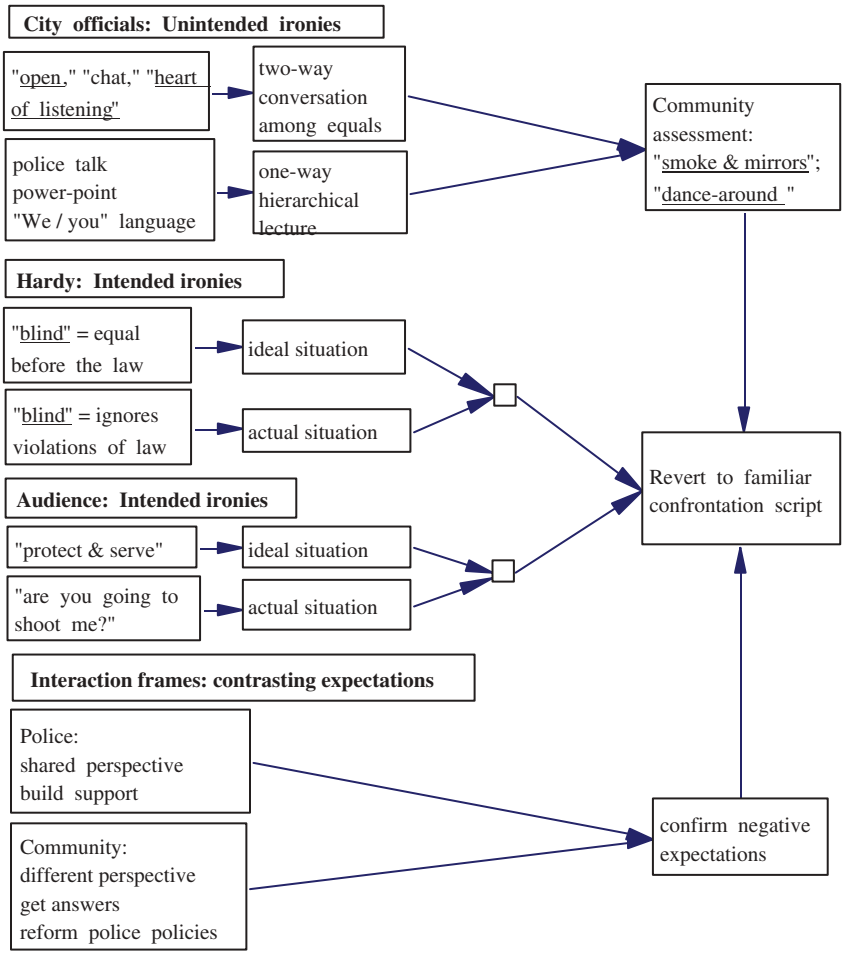

FIGURE 1 Ironies and contradictions.

DISCUSSION

Frames strongly influence how people think about issues. Frames influence people's judgments about what information is relevant, what solutions are appropriate, how agency and blame are to be allocated. Frames also influence how people think about and participate in social interactions and discourse. They influence expectations about roles, who will say what, what kinds of responses are appropriate or inappropriate, how to assess motives and intentions. Metaphorical frames are if anything even more powerful because the framing effects of metaphors are often hidden or unnoticed (Thibodeau & Boroditsky, 2011). Interaction frames can be established and reinforced by the way language is used ("community forum," "opening up our minds and hearts"). Interaction frames can also be established and reinforced by

incidental aspects of an interaction, as the use of PowerPoint slides in the Kendra James meeting undermined the *open meeting* frame and reinforced a competing *bureaucratic procedure* frame.

When speakers appear to use contradictory or incompatible frames within a conversation, at the least it can be confusing to their audiences, and it may also lead to perceptions of dishonesty or evasiveness. In the Kendra James meeting, this clearly happened as a result of the internal contradictions between the *open and informal meeting* frame implied by several of the metaphors used by the public officials in their opening remarks and the *bureaucratic, one-way lecture* frame implied by the use of PowerPoint and legalistic police terminology. The *open meeting* frame was also contradicted by the *hierarchical power* implications of much of the language used by the public officials, as when the police chief listed several activities, all planned and originated by the police bureau itself, and invited members of the public to participate in them – but not to help plan them.

On the other hand Pastor Hardy's use of highly emotional and accusatory metaphors (e.g., "smoke and mirrors" and his ironic transformation of "blind justice") in objecting to the contradictions within the public officials' presentations activated a *police as oppressor* frame that no doubt endeared him to the anti-police sentiments of many audience members, but at the same time contradicted his stated intention to collaborate with the city officials in reforming police policy and procedures.

It is apparent that the public officials on the one hand and the community leaders and community members on the other hand came to the meeting with contrasting frames and contradictory expectations. To the extent that city officials believed they had already addressed long-standing problems in the police bureau, and had already accomplished the needed policy and procedural reforms, the Kendra James shooting was an "incident," consistent with an *episodic* frame in which even the best policies cannot prevent an occasional mishap. To the members of the community, this one incident seemed to fit a long pattern of incidents, including overtly racist actions by (off-duty) police officers several decades earlier, referred to by a member of the audience:

> Extract 5:
> Portland Police Department has a major . . . has *had* major problems in the past, as well as current concerns. There is the distinct perception of violence and racism by the police. This is because of several incidents, for example, possums at the Burger Barn, the choke-hold death of Tony Stevenson, civil lawsuits with Debby Parker, and many others. It goes way back. Recent deaths include the shooting of Mr. Mejia-Poot and Ms. James.[3]

Community-members, aware of and concerned about this history, preferred to focus on correcting the continuing pattern and thus preferred for the meeting to proceed within a *thematic* frame. Upset as they were about the shooting of Kendra James, they were far more concerned about the overall pattern of incidents, and that is what they hoped the meeting would address.

It is also important to consider the attributions that the invocation of these frames, and the contradictions within frames, may have supported on each side. The metaphors used by Pastor Hardy and echoed by members of the audience ("smoke and mirrors," "dance around" suggest

[3]Burger Barn refers to an incident in which off-duty police officers left a dead opossum in front of a fast-food restaurant popular with African Americans. Tony Stevens attempted to restrain a white man who attempted to hold up a convenience store; when police arrived in response to the clerk's call, they assumed Stevens was the perpetrator and wrestled him to the floor with a choke-hold that ended in Stevens's death. See Ritchie (2010, 2011).

that they interpreted the frame contradictions within the public officials' discourse within a *thematic* frame of *police indifference*, part of an overall thematic frame of official indifference and possibly racism. It is likely that an unintended side-effect of introducing a frame of *open talk among equals*, but not following through with it, was to reinforce the resentment and suspicion already active in the audience. This may account in part for the angry tone of Pastor Hardy's response to the city officials' opening remarks.

By the same token, from the perspective of public officials the contradiction within Pastor Hardy's speech between his expressed desire to work with public officials to develop more effective police procedures on the one hand, and his use of emotional and accusatory language that reinforced long-standing *police racism and official indifference* frames on the other hand may well have reinforced an underlying cynicism along the familiar lines that "you can't talk to these people."

Asymmetrical Ironies

According to Gibbs and Izett (2005), irony divides its audience between those who recognize the irony (whom Gibbs & Izett, 2005, label "wolves") and those who do not ("sheep") as well as between those who agree with the intended meaning ("confederates") and those who do not ("victims").[4] Irony can have the effect of emphasizing intra-group solidarity, as Gibbs and Izett note—but it can also emphasize inter-group differences. Historically, when irony was primarily used as a clever rhetorical device, it had the effect of separating the elite (who understood and used irony) from the masses (who did not). But the apparently asymmetrical ironies in the Kendra James meeting subverted and reversed this usual order, putting the "masses" (the audience) in the position of perceiving and understanding ironies that did not seem to be apparent to the "elite" (the public officials).

The deliberate ironies created by Pastor Hardy put the police department and the system of justice generally in the role of "victims" and the members of the audience in the role of "confederates"—but the irony was sufficiently transparent that the "victims" were also "wolves," in that they presumably recognized (although they did not respond to) the ironies. On the other hand, the unintended ironies generated by the contrast between the public officials' informal and welcoming language and the format of the meeting, as well as the intended irony of the contrast, made by more than one member of the audience, between the motto *Protect and Serve* and perceived abuses of police power, created a series of *asymmetrical* ironies in which the public officials were cast in the role of both "sheep" and "victims." Irony is likely under any circumstances to increase intra-group solidarity as well as inter-group distance, which facilitates the kind of depersonalization that is antithetical to the achievement of empathy (Cameron, 2012, 2013).

To our knowledge, what we have called *asymmetrical common ground*, and the resulting potential for *asymmetrical irony* has received little if any attention in the research literature, although it is probably fairly common in encounters characterized by great disparities of power and status. Nor has the potential polarizing effect of irony in a situation of conflict received the attention it deserves.

[4]Gibbs and Izett (2005) adapted this terminology from Kaufer (1977).

Frame Conflicts, Irony, and Empathy

Necessary preconditions to achieving mutual empathy include recognizing that the Other may have a different experiential world, and clearly communicating a willingness to "enter into" the experiential world of the Other (Cameron, 2011). It does appear that at least some members of the community did recognize the different experiential world of the public officials, but most members of the community, along with all of the public officials present at the meeting, failed to take this vital first step. It appears that the failure of the public officials to recognize and directly address the different experiential world of the community members led directly to the asymmetrical ironies that contributed to the inter-group polarization and the breakdown of the meeting.

Irony is not necessarily antithetical to the development of empathy. Self-directed irony can probably contribute to the preconditions for empathy—some of the discussion in Cameron's (2007) analysis of reconciliation conversations suggests that Pat Magee made effective use of self-directed irony. Other-directed irony (like Pastor Hardy's "blind justice" tropes) seems almost certain to have the opposite effect. If, as we suspect, encounters between groups with marked differences in power and status are frequently characterized by asymmetrical common ground, the resulting asymmetrical ironies are also almost certain to reinforce inter-group distance and block the mutual recognition that is essential to the development of empathy. The effect of each type of irony on people's ability to acknowledge and enter into the experiential worlds of the Other merits further examination.

CONCLUSION

Leaders on both sides share responsibility for the failure of the Kendra James meeting. Public officials and community leaders alike seem to have been unaware of the frame contradictions within their own discourse. Both sets of leaders seem to have been equally unaware of the radically different ways in which the shooting, the subsequent investigation, and the meeting itself were framed. These differences led not only to contrasting expectations, but also to contradictory interpretations. Without deliberate and careful attention to these frame conflicts, there was little hope that the meeting would lead to mutual understanding much less agreement.

Here is where responsibility lies with the meeting facilitators. Two professional facilitators were hired to organize and run the meeting. These facilitators laid out ground rules immediately after the welcoming remarks by city officials, but beyond that they do not appear to have done much to control the tone or progress of the meeting. It was arguably part of the facilitators' role to identify the contradictory frames, to call attention to the contradictions, and to devise ways for members of each group to acknowledge, if not actually enter into, the other group's framing. Without that basic act of empathizing, given the long history of mutual suspicion and conflict between police and ethnic minorities in Portland, there was little hope for the meeting to accomplish anything useful.

This leads to the topic of empathy, which we address in a separate article. Part of what empathic communication requires is to be willing to "enter into" the experiential world of

the Other. A necessary first step is to recognize that the Other may actually have a different experiential world, and that this different experiential world may lead them to frame both events and interactions differently.

The Kendra James meeting took place in a context that included highly emotional reactions to the particular shooting itself (*episodic*) but it also took place in a context of a long-standing history of misunderstanding and mutual distrust (*thematic*). The findings of this study suggest several steps that might be taken by participants, community leaders, and meeting facilitators in preparation for future meetings.

1. Anticipate or find out the frames other participants are likely to bring to the meeting, along with the language in which those frames are likely to be expressed.
2. Clearly identify the objectives of the meeting, and how the topic as well as the meeting itself is to be framed in order to advance those objectives. Make sure that both the language and stylistic elements used in the meeting are consistent with the preferred frame.
3. Anticipate potential contradictions between different frames both for the topic and for the meeting, and prepare strategies to bring these contradictions to the surface and resolve them. In the instance of the Kendra James meeting, it should have been evident from the outset that members of the community would understand the shooting at least in part through a *thematic* frame, and that their expectations for the meeting would be formulated within an *accountability* frame. Indeed, the *accountability* frame had been raised repeatedly by community leaders prior to the meeting, as some of their opening comments make clear; the *accountability* frame had also figured prominently in news coverage of the events leading up to the meeting. Although conflict between the African American community and the police bureau is well-entrenched in Portland (as in most other major American cities), it is at least possible that the meeting might have been more fruitful had these differences in frames been explicitly acknowledged and addressed at the outset and throughout the meeting.
4. Meeting facilitators need to be particularly aware of contradictory and conflicting frames, and of the framing effects of language, and prepare strategies to bring these to the surface and help the participants deal with them.

In summary, we have shown that attention to the way language, including metaphor, and other elements of a communicative interaction frame both topics and the interaction itself, can lead to insights about why interactions sometimes fail. We believe that these insights, if followed up on in a systematic way, can be used to alter how future interactions are approached, and eventually to achieve more satisfactory outcomes.

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