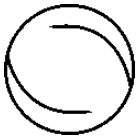

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(Dis)embodied Job Search Communication Training: Comparative critical ethnographic analysis of materiality and discourse during the unequal search for work

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Abstract

Unemployment can be extremely challenging to manage. Depending on an individual's social status, unemployment experiences can differ greatly. The longer people grapple with unemployment the more likely they are to seek help from unemployment support organizations. This study takes a comparative, critical ethnographic approach to the study of job search communication training at two separate unemployment support organizations considering intersections of social class and race. The analysis uses a communication lens in order to unpack communication expectations and assumptions embedded into the culture of unemployment support organizations that are tailored to different social class and racial groups. The findings reveal that the job search communication trainings are communicatively biased and divergent. Inequality molds and shapes the process of job search communication training and the progress of job searches. Working-class job seekers are required to communicatively assimilate during training while they manage material reality to survive. Upper-middle-class job seekers refine existing communication skill sets in order to search for work and rarely struggle to manage material needs. The findings point to important implications and areas for future research in workforce studies.

Keywords

ethnography, job search, qualitative comparative analysis, race, social class, unemployment

Unemployment has been a disruptive, disorganizing, and disorienting experience for many Americans. However, United States (US) unemployment trends have revealed that workforce inequality has disrupted the lives of some disproportionately. For example, the 2008–2009 US recession affected blue-collar workers more severely than white-collar in what has been called the "Blue

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Table 1. Comparison of Average US Annual Unemployment Statistics by Industry, 2008 through 2016.

Industry	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Avg
Mining, quarrying, oil and gas extraction	3.1	11.7	9.4	6.1	6.1	5.8	4.6	8.7	7.8	7.0
Construction	10.6	19.1	20.6	16.4	13.8	11.3	8.9	7.3	6.3	12.7
Manufacturing	5.8	12.1	10.6	9.0	7.3	6.6	4.9	4.3	4.3	7.2
Transportation and utilities	5.1	8.9	8.4	8.2	6.9	6.6	5.7	4.4	4.2	6.5
Agricultural, forestry, fishing, hunting	9.3	14.4	13.9	12.7	12.6	10.2	9.6	9.5	8.5	11.2
Information	5.0	9.2	9.7	7.3	7.6	6.2	5.2	3.9	4.6	6.5
Financial activities	4.0	6.4	6.9	6.4	5.1	4.5	4.0	2.6	2.7	4.7
Professional and business services	6.6	10.8	10.9	9.6	8.9	8.3	6.9	5.6	5.1	8.1
Annual average	6.19	11.58	11.30	9.46	8.54	7.44	6.23	5.79	5.44	8.00

Note: Data compiled from Bureau of Labor (2017) statistics database.

Table 2. Average US Annual Unemployment Statistics by Race/Ethnicity, 2008 through 2016.

Race/Ethnicity	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Avg
Asian	4.0	7.3	7.5	7.0	5.9	5.2	5.0	3.8	3.7	5.5
White	5.2	8.5	8.7	7.9	7.2	6.5	5.3	4.6	4.3	6.5
Hispanic/Latino	7.6	12.1	12.5	11.5	10.3	9.1	7.4	6.6	5.8	9.2
Black/African American	10.1	14.8	16.0	15.8	13.8	13.1	11.4	9.5	8.4	12.5

Note: Data compiled from Bureau of Labor (2017) statistics database.

Collar Great Depression" (Nittoli, 2010; Sum, Khatiwada, McLaughlin, & Palma, 2010). This reality has left the working-class unemployed in a dire situation since their jobs will not likely be recouped (Sum et al., 2010). Due to the stark decline in US working-class positions, unemployment rates have remained higher for blue-collar industries (see Table 1). During the recession, industries that accounted for approximately two-thirds of all blue-collar workers (i.e., mining, construction, transportation, warehousing, and manufacturing) lost 52.9–73.2 percent of jobs available prior to the recession (Sum et al., 2010). In contrast, white-collar industries (i.e., financial services, education, business services and public administration) lost 2.2–8.6 percent of jobs across industries (Sum et al., 2010). In essence, systematic inequality has been evident in the structure of workforce dynamics.

American statistics showed that high unemployment rates correlated not only with blue-collar occupations, but also with lower levels of educational attainment and certain racial/ethnic minority groups (see Tables 2 and 3). Disproportionately, high levels of US unemployment have consistently aligned with demographic markers of race (Bureau of Labor, 2012) and social class. Arguably, these trends have illustrated systematic, widespread, intersecting, and historically persistent structures of inequality within the US workforce. Scholars have argued that institutionalized racism was one way in which social class was constructed and perpetuated in society (Massey & Denton, 1993). Comparably, others maintained that race was often a marker for social class, masking the power of classed inequality in society (Dougherty, 2011). The intersection of social class and race has been structural. Structural intersectionality, a concept introduced by Crenshaw (1991, p. 1245), explained how the nexus of identities have shaped lived experience materially and discursively in

Table 3. Average US Annual Unemployment Statistics by Educational Attainment, 2008 through 2016.

Educational attainment	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Avg
Less than high school diploma	9.0	14.7	14.8	14.1	12.4	11.0	9.0	7.9	7.5	11.2
High school graduates, no college	5.7	9.7	10.3	9.4	8.3	7.5	6.0	5.4	5.2	7.5
Some college or associates degree	4.6	8.0	8.4	8.0	7.1	6.4	5.4	4.5	4.1	6.3
Bachelor degree or higher	2.6	4.6	4.7	4.3	4.0	3.7	3.2	2.6	2.5	3.6

Note: Data compiled from Bureau of Labor (2017) statistics database.

complex ways constituted by societal structures. While critical to consider macro-level classism and racism by analyzing statistical trends, it was also important to consider how inequality was manifest at the micro level by analyzing lived experience. This study provided a compelling vantage point to explore inequality in greater contextualized detail during job search training for the blue- and white-collar unemployed.

During joblessness, many have sought support from organizational resources, which I have referred to as unemployment support organizations (USOs). USOs have aided in the reorganization of life after disruptive job loss by providing reemployment training that cultivated coping strategies and job search communication skills (i.e., résumé and cover letter writing, interviewing, networking). A communication lens provided a fruitful approach to analysis because not only were job searches primarily executed through communication (i.e., writing, speaking, listening, and reading), but communication behaviors and organizations were inherently classed and raced (Allen, 2011). This research was a comparative, critical ethnography of job search communication training for blue- and white-collar job seekers at two USOs.

Literature Review

This comparative critical ethnography was situated in literature regarding USOs, inequality, communication, work, and critical theory.

Unemployment support via organizational resources

Organizational resources, training, and programming may positively influence job search frequency, intensity, and job placement success. Job search intensity and frequency have been identified as significant predictors of reemployment (Wanberg, Glomb, Song, & Sorenson, 2005). Unfortunately, literature has shown mixed results regarding the success of USOs (Jacobson, 2009; Rangarajan & Novak, 1999). Given the potential benefits of organizational support in job seeking and the challenges faced by service recipients, such organizations were an interesting site of analysis.

The US has offered support to jobless citizens dating as far back as 1907 (Lane, 2011). USOs of various types have reported serving approximately 15 million US people annually (Jacobson, 2009). During the height of the 2009 recession, one USO reported their average daily submissions increased from 15–20 to 88–100 claims (Bednar, 2009). Public USOs are inundated during economic downturns, yet not all job seekers use publicly-accessible resources to manage unemployment. In the US, white-collar job seekers have never flocked to public USOs in the way that working-class job seekers have (Kaufman, 1982; Lane, 2011). Further, American white-collar

unemployed have gravitated towards USOs tailored to upper/middle-class job seekers (Allan, 1990; Lane, 2011; Newman, 1999). For example, 40Plus Clubs, a nationwide USO, established membership criteria based on classed expectations such as baseline minimums for previous salary (Allan, 1990; Newman, 1999). This segregation of support services contributed to systematic inequality because it was structured into organizational resources available to the unemployed. I was curious about the way communication was organized in these organizational spaces.

Sharone's comparative ethnography of unemployed white- and blue-collar job seekers revealed fundamental differences across USOs. Sharone (2013, p. 149) described AmeriSupport, a white-collar USO, as an environment with "corporate-like ambiance" where job seekers participated in intensive workshops, expert seminars, success team meetings, and volunteering (e.g., maintaining website, recruiting). Sharone described how US white-collar unemployed strategically approached their job search as a *chemistry game* seeking fit between candidate and employer. Working-class job seekers in Sharone's (2013) study were primarily members of WorkSource, a public One-Stop Career Center. Sharone (2013, p. 149) described WorkSource's atmosphere as a "high school classroom" where job seekers bantered and joked and the training as limited one-time workshops. Sharone interpreted jobless blue-collar individuals playing the *diligence game*, which promoted compliance, discipline, devotion, and hard work. The objective of the diligence game was undergirded by a numbers rationale (i.e., the more applications submitted, the more likely working-class candidates were to find work). Sharone's scholarship pointed to inequality manifested in USOs across occupational type.

In another notable example, Trethewey (1997) conducted a postmodern feminist analysis of clients in a women's social service organization (WSSO), which served low-income, single mothers seeking to become independent from welfare through education and/or job training. Trethewey's (1997) analysis revealed how WSSO clients struggled against the power of organizational discourse manifest in WSSO's daily talk, written policy, and hegemonic framing of service work and clients. Trethewey (1997) argued that the power struggles which participants experienced were directly connected to their marginalized social class status.

The presence of communication training, behaviors, and practices were documented in job-seeking literature. For example, in Sharone's work, communication job search training was described (i.e., networking, writing resumes, cover letters, and online profiles) across both blue-collar and white-collar USOs, although most analyses have not explicitly used a communicative lens. The current study aimed to contribute to literature through critical analyses of inequality at similar USO sites via a communicative lens.

Inequality and communication

I argue that inequality has historically organized communication behaviors. In essence, systematic and structural (dis)advantages have influenced individual life by molding patterns of social interaction, communication norms, and language use. For example, individuals who come from socially marginalized backgrounds have communicated in ways particular to their cultural milieu. Lareau (2003) noted that lower-class participants rarely made eye contact with authority figures and were more uncomfortable speaking with strangers. In contrast, those from socially privileged backgrounds spoke more assertively to authority figures, engaged more with non-familial individuals, and used communicative skills such as summarizing (Lareau, 2003). Such communication differences were not value-neutral and were well-documented in literature regarding classed and raced communication behaviors.

Communicative differences and discrimination have emerged at the intersection of race and social class and carried important implications for job search training and reemployment. Differences in amounts of verbosity (Dougherty, 2011), identity negotiation (Callahan, 2008), language use (Macaulay, 2002; Rushton & Young, 1975), politeness norms (Mills, 2004), silence (Clair, 1998;

Covarrubias, 2007), volume (Morris, 2007), emotion (Lareau, 2003), (non)familial social interaction partners (Lareau, 2003), speech style stereotypes (Popp, Donovan, Crawford, Marsh, & Peele, 2003), value of talking (Philipsen, 1975), and computer literacy were elements that contributed to and reflected differing communication behaviors and expectations across social class and racial lines. Popp and colleagues (2003) examined White individuals' perceptions of Black communicators, who were consistently judged to be more emotional, more playful, and less appropriate than White speakers. "Beliefs about speech and communication style are important because they have functioned not only to describe 'what is' but have prescribed 'what should be' in social interaction" (Popp et al., 2003). In the US context, job seeking has historically required the use of specific communication norms for success.

Inequality and work

Communication scholar Carolyn Marvin (2006) argued that body and text were instruments of communication that differed across social classes according to type of labor. Marvin (2006) referred to the body as the corporeal, biological manifestation that all humans inhabit. Text was the means by which a message was uncoupled from the body and symbolically displaced into visual representation. The use of text as a communication instrument ultimately concealed the body from which the message comes. Marvin argued that use of text and body as communicative instruments correlated with class status and were inherently tied to work.

As America has moved to a post-industrial, service-oriented, and now knowledge-based workforce, textual skills have been privileged (Marvin, 1994). Privileging text-based occupations occurred because textualization was presented as "overcoming the material and moral limitations of the human body" (Marvin, 2006). This shift constructed what Marvin (1994) dubbed the text class and the body class, "a principle organizing dynamic in society" (Marvin 1994, p. 131). Dougherty (2011) explained, "it is productive to think of text workers as the new 'middle/upper class' and the body workers as the new 'working/lower class'," both in terms of pay and stigma (Dougherty, 2011, p. 178). These types of labor have not been equally valued in the US.

Due in part to the (de)valuation of certain types of work, race and class relations in the US were strained. Lamont's (2000) study examined the boundary work Black and White working-class men performed to construct a positive identity. Boundary work was used to differentiate oneself and one's social identity group on the basis of moral evaluation. White working-class men valued the "disciplined" self, while Black working-class men valued the "caring" self. Each group placed its own group on moral high ground in comparison to others. Gorman (2000) highlighted tensions in cross-class perceptions, explaining that many working-class people perceived middle-class people as looking down on them. Cross-class perceptions (Gorman, 2000) and the boundary work performed across social class/racial lines (Lamont, 2000) have reflected inequality embedded in the US workforce.

It was essential to avoid seeing body and text as dichotomous and instead conceptualize how text and body coexist (Dougherty, 2011). Scholars should extend thinking by considering dynamics between text and body. Text and body coexist (Dougherty, 2011), yet are also mutually influential and constitutive. The dynamism between text and body as communicative labor could be manifest in inequality, through classism and racism. Additional research was needed to better understand this dynamic as it was demonstrated in job seeking.

Theoretical framework: Critical theory

Organizations have never been power neutral (Alvesson, 2013). Part of the power of USOs has resided in their ability to enable, maintain, and/or constrain job-seeking behaviors. Critical theory was vital to this project because organizations, social class, race, and unemployment were all

power-laden phenomena. Critical theory was used to analyze the organizational experiences of blue- and white-collar job seekers and unemployment practitioners to better understand the way classed and raced inequality was communicatively manifest. Critical theory has historically used critique to seek positive change and emancipation for the oppressed (Carr, 2000, p. 208) through consciousness raising and ideological distortion.

Critical theorists have critiqued inequality and class relations by taking an advocate/activist stance. Given the persistent, powerful relationship between structures of social class and race in the US (Dougherty, 2011), critical theory was well-suited to examine unemployment and inequality. Morrow (1994) identified historical shifts in critical theory connected to social class. Marx's notion of "materialism" accounted for possibilities of working-class revolution. However, when the revolution did not happen, critical theorists critiqued the destructive outcomes of capitalism and unpacked dynamics that systematically sustained capitalism and prevented revolution. Critical theory evolved to explore dominating aspects of society constructed to appear "normal" and "natural." Finally, new leadership led to a desire to create positive change (Morrow, 1994). Hence, a theme of emancipation has cross-cut critical scholarship.

From a communication perspective, Deetz (2005) explained that critical studies' foci ranged from macro- to micro-level phenomena and were concerned with relations among power, language, social/cultural practices, conflict, negotiation of identities, knowledge, and decision-making. "Fundamentally, critical work encourages the exploration of alternative communication practices that allow greater democracy and more creative and productive cooperation among stakeholders through reconsidering organizational governance and decision-making processes" (Deetz, 2005, p. 85). Critical theory in this research was used to explore and critique power and inequality in the organizational lives of USO members.

Research questions

Inequality was a structural component of the workforce and experiences of joblessness. I sought to better understand how social class and race constrained and/or enabled the communicative search for work via USO membership experiences. The following research questions guided this study: (1) How did job search communication training reflect material and/or discursive inequality in relation to classism and racism? and (2) How were blue- and white-collar US job seekers constrained and/or enabled by the power of materiality and discourse via job search communication training?

Methodology and Methods

Critical ethnography has primarily used hermeneutic interpretation (Van Maanen, 1990) of a culture toward emancipatory goals (Thomas, 1993). Organizational cultures have served as metaphorical compasses, blinders, or social glue that enabled/constrained organizational life (Alvesson, 2013). Thus, critical ethnographies have not only accounted for cultural milieu through description and interpretation, but have also subjected culture to scrutiny aimed at exposing hidden power-laden assumptions (Thomas, 1993). My critical-interpretive orientation and axiological commitments guided this study.

Ethnographers have historically selected sites strategically where phenomena of interest were present. This critical ethnography took place within two organizations, providing analytical comparison/contrast as Miles and Huberman (1994) called for. The organizations' pseudonyms were Work Track (WT) and Executive Career Transitions (ECT).

In order to negotiate access, e-mails were sent to the leaders of each organization introducing myself, explaining my research interests, and asking to meet in person to discuss the proposed

study. I met with the leadership and provided an executive summary, which explained the research interests, risks, benefits, and design. WT was reticent and held two internal meetings before granting access. ECT granted access at the end of our initial meeting. I negotiated participant observation roles with each. The intersectionality of my own social identities likely played a role in the negotiation of access and data collection. My background growing up in a single-parent home, being a racial minority and academic scholar, and previously holding a corporate career, among other attributes, allowed me to carefully navigate the classed and racial differences between organizations. In essence, I was able to effectively and authentically code switch between organizational environments. As with all qualitative research, bias and subjectivity are acknowledged.

Work Track (WT), a non-profit organization founded in the mid-1960s, provided job development training, education, and job placement assistance to low-income individuals seeking work. WT served individuals who were underemployed or unemployed racial minorities, disabled or uneducated persons, and individuals with criminal convictions. Most participants observed were Black men between 20 and 35 years of age. WT provided an affordable housing program, disability services, job search services, work-related skills training, workforce re-entry services, and transportation assistance. Their funding came from different sources including governmental grants and private donations. There were several locations throughout the Midwest region. I observed the Westside (pseudonym) location in an urban part of a mid-sized Midwestern city. The dominant activity hub in the city this location operated Monday to Friday from 8:00 a.m. through 4:30 p.m. WT employed both full- and part-time staff.

I spent time with three of WT's busiest programs over an approximate six-month period. The Workforce Reunification (WR) program (pseudonym), lasting 10 business days, was designed to facilitate employment re-entry for individuals with criminal convictions. Between two and ten individuals participated at a time.

The second program, dubbed Restorative Justice (RJ), facilitated skill development through community service. Participants of this program aged out of the foster care system, were 18–21 years of age, and encountered the juvenile justice system. Approximately nine service recipients were enrolled in the six- to nine-month RJ program that integrated personal counseling, community service, internships, job search training, and adult education.

The third program, dubbed Community Construction (CC), was a nationally accredited construction trade training program, lasting six to nine months. If successfully completed, participants in CC earned their General Education Development (GED), a US high school equivalency, and achieved credentials in carpentry or heavy highway construction. Approximately 25 people were in the CC program during data collection. My participant observation across the various programs at WT included attending workshops, lectures, and job fairs. I also assisted in the development of cover letters/résumés, played the role of an interviewer in mock interviews, attended GED class sessions, participated in community service, engaged in group discussion, and cleaned up the organizational space.

Executive Career Transitions (ECT) was a non-profit, volunteer organization that served individuals who had previously held white-collar managerial or executive professional careers. ECT met in the basement of a church located in a suburb of a large US Midwestern metropolitan city. ECT offered the following services: practice interviews, résumé review, financial/personal/career/legal counseling, access to online/published job search resources, networking events, connections to job leads, and personal marketing plan development. ECT originated in the early 1970s as a small church support group for the unemployed and had evolved into a separate non-profit organization to support jobless professionals.

ECT was funded by several sources. There was a US$ 40 fee to join ECT, and returning members were charged a fee of $ 20. All meeting attendees had the option make a $10 Green Book

purchase, a resource manual reviewing job search best practices. In addition, there was typically an annual breakfast fundraiser, and fundraising letter campaign sent to alumni to raise money. The church where ECT was founded donated money annually.

Every Monday at 9:00 a.m. ECT members gathered to hear speakers address some aspect of the unemployment experience. Pro bono speakers addressed a variety of topics including personal branding, affordable healthcare options, interviewing strategies, negotiation techniques, coping with stress, and automation in the workforce. Some speakers were alumni who had become entrepreneurs; others were local career coaches or recruiters, some came from nearby mental health organizations, and others were financial advisors. These Monday morning rituals were the organization's staple activity. During data collection, attendance fluctuated around 20–30 persons; most participants observed were White men between the ages of 40 and 70.

I also conducted participant observation at three meetings that had become extensions of ECT. One was a chapter of Toastmasters, the global non-profit providing training about public speaking and leadership. The second was a weekly accountability meeting where job seekers reported progress and offered social support. The third was a Friday networking meeting. Participant observation at ECT included attending meetings/workshops/seminars, offering emotional support, engaging in small group discussion, participating in impromptu speeches, set up and clean up for meetings, attending networking events, and board of director meetings.

Given the demographic nature of job seekers in both organizations (see Appendix), it was futile to delineate the unique influence of race or social class on the jobless experiences of the participants. The intersection of race and social class, particularly in relation to unemployment, was tightly coupled.

Data collection

The fieldwork for this critical ethnography included 155.36 hours of participant observation. Participant observation was conducted at both organizations approximately weekly from 23 January to 16 August 2013, resulting in 681 pages of typed double-spaced field notes and analytic memos.

After approximately nine weeks of participant observation, I recruited two types of interview informants. Key informants were well-versed in the culture and willing to share cultural knowledge (Bernard, 2006); specialized informants had competence in a particular cultural niche and shed light on areas that needed to be researched more deeply (Bernard, 2006). These informants came from two groups of organizational members: staff/volunteers and service recipients. I used various criteria to select organizational members for semi-structured interviews. First, I interviewed ten volunteers/staff who worked for each organization. This provided a practitioner perspective because interviewees had experience with the organization's culture as workers. Second, I interviewed ten unemployed service recipients at each organization. Since participants' organizational tenure varied, I interviewed newcomer and veteran members. After conducting interviews, I asked interviewees for referrals for additional interview participants. The Appendix contains summarized demographic data of the interview participants.

Semi-structured interviews satisfied a need for in-depth information that I could not gain through participant observation. Unstructured ethnographic interviews were conducted during participant observation (Bernard, 2006). Accounts of unstructured interviews and reflections about them were captured in field notes. In total, 40 semi-structured interviews were conducted, including 10 service recipients and 10 volunteer/staff at each organization. On average, interviews lasted 50 minutes. All semi-structured interviews were transcribed prior to analysis, totaling 940 pages of single-spaced transcripts.

Cultural values and assumptions can be gleaned from the collection and analysis of organizational documents and artifacts (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 117). I obtained 122 documents/artifacts including e-mails, posters, memos, training, marketing materials, handouts, newsletters, board minutes, brochures, worksheets, reports, and policy documents, websites, social media pages, images, signage, and other objects. The triangulation of data collected through three methods (participant observation, interviews, and document/artifact compilation) increased the rigor and trustworthiness of the analysis.

Data analysis

The data analysis process was necessarily iterative, reflective, and messy. Data collection and analysis overlapped to some extent. The critical ethnography's focus became clearer throughout the data collection process as key concepts emerged from data (Thomas, 1993). As I experienced and noted cultural nuances, new questions arose, which led to sharper concepts and allowed me to conceptualize the critical components of analysis (Thomas, 1993). My iterative process of collection and analysis included constant reflexivity (Thomas, 1993), which meant I considered, critiqued, and examined the implications of my presence, actions, reaction, and involvement within the culture.

I engaged in a three-step analysis process: (1) data management, (2) data reduction, and (3) conceptual development. Microsoft® Word and QSR NVivo 7 (qualitative management software) were used to assist in the first and second rounds of coding due to the large quantity of data. Data was initially coded using the software by highlighting meaningful cultural elements, significant events, and communicative practices. The first effort at coding began the first pass at data reduction (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). In a second round of coding, I analyzed the codes and reduced them to categories. In this process codes were dismissed, combined, or connected.

In-process analytic memos reduced data from categories and facilitated articulation of emergent themes (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Memo writing was an interpretive effort that facilitated conceptual development and deeper understanding of meaning in the data (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). During memoing, the data confirmed, disconfirmed, and redirected analytical thought.

Analysis happened comparatively, becoming analytically nomadic by alternating vantage points, which "allows for views of different layers of social phenomena that are visible from some vantage points while hidden from others" (Brekhus, 1998, p. 47). Much literature that has addressed social identity differences (i.e., social class, gender, sexuality, race, etc.) has executed category-specific research and contributed to "epistemological asymmetry" (Brekhus, 1998, p. 34). I avoided this by comparing unemployment experiences across privileged and marginalized standpoints. According to Brekhus (1998, p. 38), researchers and theorizers unintentionally reinforce markedness through category-specific scholarship, which results in the creation of "epistemological ghettos." "Social markedness" refers to the ways social actors actively perceived one side of a contrast while ignoring the other as epistemologically unproblematic. Uneven coverage of certain populations has exploited marginalized groups and limited the transferability of research findings across contexts, which has reinforced dominant societal norms.

Findings

Superficially, there were similarities between the job search training across the organizations. Both ECT and WT trained job seekers to execute the job search by coaching the unemployed on communication skills. Each provided guidance on written communication skills such as development of résumés and cover letters. Additionally, each organization used techniques such as role play to

develop verbal communication skills like job interviewing. However, the communication training at *both* organizations specifically trained job seekers – regardless of social class – to follow middle-class communication norms, including speaking succinctly, talking with confidence, giving context, providing a framework, and speaking in concrete terms (Lareau, 2003; Schatzman & Strauss, 1955).

Over time, fundamental differences emerged in the data regarding the execution of training and support provided between the organizations. Differences across services were a response to social class and arguably the racial identity of service recipients. The white-collar unemployed executed job searches primarily by strategically using language in ways that emphasized discursive disembodiment of job searches. Blue-collar job seekers primarily embodied job searches physically, yet due to shifts in blue-collar workforce trends, they were also required to disembody job searches using middle-class communication norms. The dual use of material and discursive job-search tactics challenged the text/body classification proposed in communication literature.

Strategic discourse: White-collar job search communication

At its core, ECT trained white-collar job seekers to organize and execute job searches through two primary communicative actions: (1) strategic use of entrepreneurial discourse and (2) creation and manipulation of texts. Heavy emphases on language use during ECT's job search training was a logical extension of white-collar work practices. ECT members were previously employed as text workers (Dougherty, 2011), in positions such as human resources manager, senior financial analyst, sales manager, insurance adjuster, and marketing coordinator. Thus, using literate practices was a fundamental way in which they navigated work lives. It was logical that they would search for work similarly. One central feature of training was using entrepreneurial discourse. ECT training fostered strategic use of language to manage meaning during the employment search.

Strategic management of meaning: Entrepreneurial self. Middle-class job seekers were taught to strategically use entrepreneurial discourse through networking to leverage and increase social capital. Social capital (Bourdieu, 1987) describes the benefit and utility of one's network of social connections. Having access to larger networks provided advantages because many career opportunities are passed on through social contacts (Bolles, 2009). An elevator pitch was one example of ECT's communication training. For example, on 29 July, Rick, an unemployed human resources professional, volunteered to start the training:

> Rick: That's a great segue into networking. Just because a job opening hasn't been put up yet it doesn't mean there isn't a need. Good managers, who know what the business needs are, can move things around and create a position if they know a talented person is available. But they won't know about your available talent if you aren't out there networking. So we're going to try an exercise around the table with the elevator speech….If you run into someone at the grocery store you'll have 10 seconds to share your speech. If you go to a networking specific meeting you'll have more like 2 to 5 minutes. So we'll start with a 60-second elevator speech.

Pincus (2007, p. 1), described a good elevator speech as "the quick, succinct summation of what your company makes or does.…so named because it should last no longer than the average elevator ride." Elevator pitches reflected embodiment during networking communication. Being physically present in an elevator and discursively managing meaning challenged the text/body divide to some extent. ECT instructed job seekers to develop elevator pitches about themselves as job

candidates, which implied they should communicatively promote themselves on the job market like a business, or more specifically as an entrepreneurship.

ECT's use of the elevator pitch was relevant to communication literature that addressed the "entrepreneur of self" (e.g., du Gay, 1996; Holmer Nadesan & Trethewey, 2000; Miller & Rose, 1990). The ultimate goal of the entrepreneur of self was to add value to organizations (Holmer Nadesan & Trethewey, 2000). The elevator pitch promoted job seekers as solutions to business needs. Most ECT job seekers sought to serve corporations so, for them, networking was a communicative way to practice persuasively selling themselves on the job market.

Disembodied job search: Textual creation and word manipulation. White-collar job seekers used literate, discursive practices as a primary means to execute their search for work, specifically through creation and manipulation of texts. They documented job searches on accountability reports, intentionally used key words online and in job search documents, and gleaned information from word clouds to find employment. These types of communication permeated field notes. For example, every Thursday, Michael, an unemployed senior financial analyst, volunteered to run a job seeker accountability meeting. Figure 1 is a copy of the accountability report distributed to attendees:

Through this report, white-collar job search behaviors were disembodied into a text. Job seekers were given this document so they could update it weekly. On 15 August, Michael passed out the report with the following advice:

> Michael: Here's an accountability report you can use for the week. It'll help you to keep track of your job search. So here are some references. A book *301 Smart Answers to Tough Interview Questions*….Have stories you can share in a STAR format, Situation, Task, Action, Result. Now if you have a phone interview. Make sure you have your résumé and a job description in front of you. And if you can, pull up the person's LinkedIn profile so it's like you're looking at them and having a conversation.

Not only did Michael distribute the report, but he also recommended textual resources to organize one's job search. Former text workers (Dougherty, 2011) used literate, discursive skill sets to manage, prepare for, and execute job searches. Another way in which text workers facilitated the search for work was through online social networking.

Digital disembodiment. Professional online social networking was a primary way ECT's white-collar job seekers were empowered in their job searches. Digital resources were discussed in a number of conversations, meetings, and presentations.

> Jonathan: I went to résumédojo.com. It's seven steps and the first four are free. The last three you have to pay for, but it's worth it. So employers are not waiting for people to come to them; they're preemptively searching. So this site helps you with key words and it'll help you with that kind of stuff so that you're coming up in their searches.
>
> Michael: Key words are important and you can use LinkedIn that way. Yeah, résumés and key words are different. You can change them up and differentiate them based on the position.

In this excerpt, manipulation of "key words" on LinkedIn® was suggested to increase social capital and capitalize on the power of "literate currencies." Marvin (1994, p. 130) explained

ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT
WEEK OF

How many people did you meet?			
Name of individuals			
How many networking events did you attend?			
Name of events			
How many one on one conversations did you have?			
Name of individuals and where			
Did you have any phone interview?			
Name of company and name of individuals			
Are there any phone interviews coming up?			
Name of company and name of individuals			
Did you have any face-to-face interviews?			
Name of company and name of individuals			
Are there any face-to-face interviews coming up?			
Name of company and name of individuals			
Did you prepare for any phone or face-to-face interview?			
Practice interview questions, STAR answers			
What type of research are using for interviews?			
Name of sources			
Did you add additional connections to your LinkedIn account?			
Name of individuals			
Are you aiming for a certain individual or company?			
Name of company			
Name of individuals			
Did you apply online for any companies?			
Name of company			
Name of company			
Did you send cover letter / resume to any companies?			
Name of company			
Name of company			
How many hours were you behind the computer?			
Job search hours - postings, research, applications, etc.			
Did you read any articles or books?			
Name of book or articles			
Did you exercise or any hobbies?			
Type of exercise or hobby			
Did you take a nap or rest?			
What was your most favorite part of this week?			

Figure 1. White-collar job-seekers disembodied their job searches by documenting their activity in reports.

the phrase "powerful literate currencies" to address the resources provided by literate skill sets to the text class. The classed expectation of payment for valuable information embedded into the online resource "resumedojo.com," structures inequality into job search support. Manipulation of words and creation of texts were addressed regularly at ECT. During an accountability meeting, Anna, explained her use of an online word cloud generator called Wordle.net.

Anna: What it is, is you can copy and paste a job description into Wordle.net and Wordle will tell you which words are popping up most frequently. It'll help you determine what's most important to them [looks at Rick] right?
Rick: Well, in theory.
Anna: Then you could put your résumé in Wordle to see if the same words that they're looking for are in your résumé and other documents.

Wordle.net was never intended to be used for job searching. In fact, the description on its website refers to it as a "toy" (Feinberg, 2013), yet ECT job seekers were intentional about using word clouds to create texts and manipulate words for job searching. This communicative exchange revealed the textual organizing practices dominant in the white-collar search for work. ECT members became increasingly creative in manipulating texts to succeed in job seeking. While their searches did not lack materiality, these were backgrounded to textual elements.

Summary. Former ECT text workers disembodied their search for work through the use of strategic discourse, text creation, and word manipulation. Networking communication was an ongoing, discursive, promotional practice done by the white-collar "entrepreneur of self" (du Gay, 1996) in the job market. Ultimately, networking, whether on- or offline, was the dominant way middle-class job seekers were trained to systematically produce opportunity for themselves and mobilize job search efforts.

It should be noted that white-collar interpersonal networking strategies were embodied. Attending networking events, physically approaching others, and speaking revealed elements of embodiment in the white-collar job search. It was impossible to have a job search completely devoid of the physical body; however, white-collar job seekers had the privilege of emphasizing discursive practices that disembodied language use. Networking and texts used to execute and organize job searching, such as résumés, cover letters, online profiles, key words, word clouds, and accountability reports, were used and shared technologically as a way to execute effective white-collar job searches. For former text workers, the job search was textually disembodied, mirroring previous occupational experiences and social class status in US society. The alignment of white-collar occupational skill sets with expectations for middle-class job search communication training allowed white-collar job seekers to *refine* existing communication behaviors. *Refinement* of existing communication skill sets structured communicative privilege into job search processes. That communication privilege empowered white-collar job seekers to use strategic discourse and enabled disembodied communication artifacts (e.g., LinkedIn profiles) to work on behalf of candidates despite temporal and spatial constraints. Furthermore, since the large majority of ECT job seekers were racially White, race never emerged in the data as an embodied barrier to employment. All but five of the ECT job seekers found work during participant observation.

Mechanics of communication: Blue-collar job search communication

The job search training programs at WT taught blue-collar job seekers the mechanics of middle-class communication, primarily through role play, communication coaching, and vocabulary lessons. In combination with training, as a response to the low-income status of WT job seekers, all WT programs provided material support for blue-collar job seekers.

Learning the language of privilege: Mechanics of middle-class communication. The blue-collar job seekers at WT were taught the basic mechanics of middle-class communication. Role play was used to coach clients to sound more like the middle class. Trainers told job seekers what words to say, with

whom they should talk, and how they should communicate. WT's working-class job seekers were also taught vocabulary words. The implicit goal of teaching working-class job seekers how to communicate in middle-class ways was to improve their chances of finding work. The emphasis on language during training revealed a privileging of middle-class communication norms and practices of disembodiment in blue-collar job search training. There was an important difference between the *refinement* of linguistic skill sets taught at ECT and the *fundamentals* of middle-class language mechanics taught at WT.

An example of role play to teach clients the mechanics of middle-class speech occurred on 30 January in the computer lab with the Workforce Reunification (WR) training class, which supported job seekers with criminal histories. Joe Brown, a former laborer, had many felonies on his record, which made his job search particularly challenging despite years of experience in construction and carpentry. I sat next to Joe as he searched for jobs online.

> The instructor, Tina Crawford, tells Joe he should call about a construction finisher job he found. She said when you call what are you going to say? Joe says, "I'ma call and tell them I want that job." The instructor replies, "No. Okay, pretend I'm the receptionist. Ring. Acme Construction, can I help you? Now what do you say?" Joe looks annoyed and says, "Hi I'm calling about the job you have open." Tina tells Joe that is incorrect. She explains that he needs to tell the receptionist who he is and he needs to be more specific. She then does a role play of what he should say, "Hi, my name is Tina Crawford and I'm interested in the construction finisher job that I found listed in the paper. Who should I speak to about applying for this position?" She looks at Joe and says, "Okay?" He looks annoyed. Tina says, "Okay, your turn. Ring. Acme Construction, can I help you?" Joe responds, "Hi my name is Joe I want to know more about the construction job I saw listed." The instructor retorts, "No, try again. You've got to be more specific. This receptionist isn't going to pass your information on if you can't clearly state who you are and what you're looking for." This role play continued for approximately 25 minutes. Over and over and over again until Joe got it "right." The rest of the class just listened in silence. Joe's face flushed red; he shifted his weight in the chair several times throughout this process. He was visibly agitated.

At WT, instructors commonly coached participants regarding how to communicate during the job search; however, the way training was conducted reinforced the privilege of middle-class communication. In this excerpt, the instructor used a simple declarative "no" to send the message that Joe's communication was, from her perspective, *wrong*. This illustrated how discursive power worked against the working class. The instructor admonished Joe by explaining that if he did not get it *right* by following middle-class communication norms, his information would not make it to the hiring manager. The instructor further reinforced middle-class communication privilege by requiring Joe to participate in role play until his speech more closely followed middle-class speech norms. This interaction happened in a room of working-class job seekers. Each job seeker in the room was exposed to messages that policed working-class communication and *corrected* working-class speech. This public display disempowered working-class job seekers by devaluing their communication behaviors. Interestingly, Joe was qualified for the position and his existing speech patterns would have been appropriate on the work site as a construction finisher. Yet, WT required him to learn how to speak in middle-class ways to move forward with employment programming.

Encouragement for blue-collar job seekers to assimilate to middle-class communication mechanics consistently emerged in data from WT. The rationale for middle-class language use was given by GED instructor, Lena, in the classroom on 24 April.

Lena: Get out paper. We're going to do some vocabulary and writing. We usually do vocab once a week and I haven't explained to the new guy why I do vocab….

Omarion: We learn vocabulary because young Black men use all this slang. Like swerve. You don't know what that mean? Huh, Ms. Lena?

Lena: Uh, no.
Keon: [mumbles quietly] Keeps me from sounding so Black.
Lena: It helps you read better too. Kids from lower-level income homes graduate high school knowing about 600 words. Kids from middle-income families know about 1200 words. That's twice as many. For example, if you were in a lower-income family's home a parent might say "Pick the fork up." If you were in a middle-income family's home the parent might say, "Could you please pick the fork up?" If you were in a high-income family's home you might say, "Could you please pick the fork up that fell on the floor under the table?" It all goes back to reading and communication. So we learn 8 words a week. Our first word is "appropriate."

The instructor articulated her perception of the link between communication, language, and social class. The rationale for incorporating vocabulary lessons drew from a numeric vocabulary threshold, which increased based on social class status. In essence, she explicitly encouraged WT job seekers to emulate higher social classes by learning vocabulary. This training illustrated the disempowering deficit model of communication commonly applied to working-class communication, marking blue-collar communication norms as deviant when compared to middle-class communication (Dougherty, 2011). Interestingly, Lena's rationale for teaching vocabulary did not explicitly mention objectives of earning a GED or finding work, yet the relationship between social class and language was explicitly articulated.

In the above exchange, the intersection of race and social class emerged. The two service recipients, Omarion and Keon, were Black males in their 20s. Keon referred to his race and language use from a deficit perspective, saying that one reason they learn vocabulary was so that he does not sound "so Black." "A key insight of intersectional theory holds that modes of inequality, such as race, class, and gender, can combine in ways that alter the meaning and effects of one another" (Morris, 2007, p. 491). While there was a class-based privileging of middle-class communication norms (Mills, 2004) at WT, there was also an implicit raced privileging of White communication norms (Popp et al., 2003). Keon internalized that sounding "so Black" was negative and needed correction by learning vocabulary. These were examples of internalized oppression (Rosenblum & Travis, 2008). Privilege marginalized the voices of non-dominant communicators within American culture (Rushton & Young, 1975) and created communicative barriers for working-class, minority job seekers.

Embodied job search: Physical endurance and material constraints. A large part of WT training provided material support for job seekers. Clothing, transportation, and food were provided to all WT job seekers enrolled in any program. Material provisions supported the job search and promoted success.

In contrast to the primarily text-based execution of the job search process at ECT, WT members primarily executed job searches in physical ways, which I called embodied job searches. WT job seekers embodied job searches by traveling to potential employers, walking door-to-door, and completing handwritten applications. In fact, blue-collar job seekers expressed preferences for embodied job searches. At times, WT required (dis)embodied job search strategies, such as the creation of texts (i.e., résumés, cover letters, etc.) and use of technology (i.e., online applications), but blue-collar job seekers resisted excessive use of texts and technologies.

During my time at the WR program, on "job development" days, job seekers physically left the premises and went into the community to find work. I documented the instructions given by the WT staff member to the job seekers on 6 February.

> Tina said, "When you walk in say hi my name is Tina Crawford. I'd like to speak to a hiring manager. Don't ask if they are a felon friendly employer. The local unemployment center was telling people to do that. Don't do that…Does everyone have their résumés?" Everyone nodded. "Use them to fill out your applications," said Tina. All of the job seekers left at 9:13 a.m. On his way out Brock told Tina he was taking the bus and that he wouldn't be able to come back until after 1:00 p.m. based on the bus schedule. Tina said okay and asked if he needed another bus voucher. She told Brock that she was working on getting him some gas cards too. He told Tina that he had bus vouchers, thanked her for working on the gas cards, and left.

During job development, WT's blue-collar unemployed left and searched for work from approximately 9:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m., taking a folder with copies of their résumé created during WT's program, a list of convictions, and a mock application they completed for WT. These texts represented disembodied textual elements of blue-collar job seeking. Although service recipients in all WT programs created a résumé and mock application, the job search at WT emphasized material reality. For example, bus vouchers and gas cards were provided, since the material reality of transportation was a critical part of one's ability to search for work. Not all WT members had personal transportation, and those who did struggled for fuel money. Conscious of material need, WT provided tangible support for transportation.

That same day, after most job seekers left, another job seeker, Jada, arrived late. She explained she overslept and tried to call.

> Jada pulls out her phone and shows it to her instructor, Tina. Jada says, "See" pointing to her mobile phone screen…I've been tryna call all morning." Tina says, "Okay, okay. Well, I wanted you to do job development today since it's supposed to rain tomorrow."

This passage highlighted another material aspect of embodied job searches: the weather. When searching on foot, it was necessary to consider environmental conditions. After job seekers got off the bus, they walked door-to-door and completed handwritten applications. Inclement weather could compromise job seekers' appearances, perhaps negatively affecting their ability to secure employment. Such material conditions affected individuals who relied on public transit for embodied job searches in ways that were distinct from white-collar disembodied job searches. ECT job seekers never mentioned transportation or weather as a barrier to their searches, revealing social class privilege. Other aspects of embodied job searches also manifested materially.

Physical effort, time, and space were inherently part of embodied job searches and manifested differently than they did in the primarily discursive white-collar job search. Later that afternoon I spoke with job seekers about their progress. Jada told me she set up an interview for the next day to be a cashier at a local bakery. Brock applied for three positions and was excited to report that he learned a plastic factory would be hiring in the next two weeks. Their reports from this day's job search drew attention to the material reality that embodied job seeking was restricted temporally and spatially, a systematic disadvantage. The number of jobs people physically applied for was limited because embodied job searches created demand on physical resources, constraining blue-collar job seekers' ability to increase social capital.

Importantly, there may also be benefits to an embodied search. Blue-collar job seekers made interpersonal impressions and connections with potential employers, which was unlikely in a primarily textual search for work. These connections were potentially more meaningful. In essence, the embodied search may have provided quality connections over quantity. The language blue-collar job seekers used to approach potential employers required networking, persuasion, and other linguistic skills, which revealed their negotiation of the text/body divide.

Textualizing the blue-collar search. While the job search for the blue-collar unemployed was *primarily* physical, all WT programs required participation in textual activities, including creating résumés, cover letters, and e-mail accounts for job searching. In contrast to the white-collar job search, an interplay between body and text was central to the blue-collar search for work. Sharone (2013) explained that the sharp decline in the blue-collar workforce and the high number of unemployed blue-collar job seekers led to a "paperization" of application processes for working-class jobs. Increasing numbers of blue-collar jobs were advertised online requiring e-mail accounts, résumés, and cover letters. On the surface, textualizing the blue-collar job search seemed to circumvent embodied job search constraints; however, the "paperization" (Sharone, 2013) of the blue-collar workforce was resisted by WT participants.

During my time with the WR program, I assisted job seekers individually as they created résumés in the computer lab. The level of assistance needed depended on computer literacy skills, which varied greatly. On 30 January, I assisted Joe Brown.

> I ask him what he did before the last job listed. He said he was a meat cutter and a detailer. So I tell him, "Okay let's add those." Joe starts to type them in one l-e-t-t-e-r at a time very slowly with his index finger looking down at the keyboard and then up at the screen after almost every letter typed. He notices that the format of his new content doesn't match the other entries and tries to fix it, but can't figure out how to change the font. Joe kept moving the mouse and clicking on various parts of the document unable to revise the font. I say, "Here let me show you." I put my hand on the mouse and Tina jumps up and shouts, "No! He can do it, but he doesn't know how so you have to explain it slowly." I let go of the mouse quickly and say, "Okay." I felt as if I'd overstepped my bounds. Joe looks annoyed and shoots Tina daggers with his eyes. She yells, "Oh no, you didn't look at me with that tone! You can do this. You'd better fix your face." Joe retorts back, "I don't work on computers. I don't know this stuff. I work with my hands." Tina replies, "Do you want a job? Then this is what you need to do."

Working with words and word-processing technology was an uncommon experience for many former blue-collar workers at WT. After all, their livelihoods were primarily earned through physical labor. Working with words on a computer seemed unfamiliar and disconcerting. Many WT service recipients complained about the amount time in the computer lab, arguing that using technology was wasted time when they could be out physically searching for work.

Summary. WT's service recipients were trained to change their vocal/written communication behaviors as they searched for work. The blue-collar job search was far from void of text. Despite their resistance, working-class job seekers were required to textualize their job searches, yielding to privileged workforce trends. The "paperization" (Sharone, 2013) of the blue-collar job search and the requirement to mimic upper/middle-class communication practices pointed to a tension. The divergence between working-class communication norms (which have historically been accepted in working-class hiring practices) and the emerging classed expectations that blue-collar applicants assimilate to a more text-based job search reflected middle-class privilege. Privileging texts and middle-class language norms required marginalized blue-collar job seekers to adapt to dominant structures by learning to negotiate the text/body divide, ultimately challenging the dichotomy constructed between text and body.

Along with class, race emerged in the analysis for WT. The young men of color who attend WT programs navigated racialized assumptions regarding appropriate communication. Trainers' constant language correction, application of a deficit model of communication, and negative reinforcement fostered internalized oppression. This may be linked to the reality that the majority of WT job seekers were unable to find full-time positions.

Discussion

A major contribution of this research was its focus on communication in job search training. The first research question asked how material and discursive inequality was reflected in job search communication training. This research question was addressed by critically analyzing data from training at a blue-collar and white-collar USO that primarily served racial minority and majority populations, respectively. Findings revealed that privileging White middle-class communication norms negatively marked non-dominant communication behaviors in the job search process, which led to inequality. Trainings at WT taught the mechanics of White middle-class communication. This approach to training socially constructed White middle-class communication norms as *the* legitimate form of communication for job searches and attempted to assimilate communication of minority, blue-collar job seekers. WT job seekers were systematically disadvantaged even though they were exclusively seeking working-class occupations. The communicative marginalization via training and the "paperization" of the blue-collar job search (Sharone, 2013) intersected to communicatively reinforce classism and racism.

WT faced a dilemma regarding their approach to training. Their methods taught working-class job seekers to navigate a biased structure, one that privileged White middle-class communication norms. Yet, even as service recipients learned how to effectively navigate the structure via communicative assimilation, WT reinforced inequality. Based on the analysis, it appeared that unemployment practitioners implementing training programs tailored to marginalized populations were unaware of the inequality they reproduced. Unknowingly, WT perpetuated an unequal workforce structure that functioned against the very job seekers they served; this was an unintended consequence. This research has nuanced understanding of the ways in which well-meaning social service programs reproduced the inequality they aimed to mitigate.

The type of communicative training that occurred within ECT did not cover the mechanics of speaking nor did it focus on communicative assimilation. ECT communication training taught middle-class job seekers how to navigate the job market by *refining* existing communication skills to more strategically draw on discourse (i.e., entrepreneur of self, see du Gay, 1996). ECT job seekers were able to network and boost social capital because they learned how to communicatively pitch and persuasively promote themselves. However, their training was insular; exclusively developing social capital primarily with other White white-collar workers neglected opportunities to diversify networks. Insular networking reified racism and classism. Conceptualizing oneself as an "entrepreneur" empowered job seekers with roadmaps for creating opportunity and increasing social capital, which for many also increased economic capital. The comparative analysis revealed divergent communication training for unemployed individuals across classed and raced lines, which communicatively maintained workforce inequality in the job search process.

The second research question asked how US job seekers were constrained or enabled materially and/or discursively by job search communication training. The findings answered this question by pointing to the relationship between text and body. White-collar job seekers were privileged to focus on discursive reality more than material reality. Disembodied job seekers' refinement of discursive practices advantageously allowed them to mobilize job search progress with asynchronous communication across geographical space. Job search empowerment for ECT candidates was possible because of the dynamic relationship between text and body. Because ECT job candidates' bodies were taken care of (i.e., clean, fed, clothed, sheltered), these job seekers had the privilege of primarily concerning themselves with strategic discourse. The urgency of job searches resided in discursive reality and mainly a textual execution of job seeking. Disembodied job seekers experienced little discursive struggle or material constraints; ECT members made meaningful progress during job search training. However, ECT job searches were not absent of the material body. ECT

job seekers physically attended meetings, used their bodies to perform middle-class identities during networking, used private transportation to attend job interviews, and were financially able to pay for resources. This did not mean their experiences of joblessness were not distressing, but rather that they were qualitatively different due to privilege. Race was constructed as a non-issue within ECT. The privilege of Whiteness was an embodied norm at ECT and was absent as part of job search training, which explains why Whiteness never explicitly emerged in the data. The material attributes of ECT job searches were co-present, yet demonstrated a foregrounding of discourse and a backgrounding of materiality. Furthermore, the dominant privileging of discourse in US society likely contributed to ECT job seekers' success. At ECT, all but five job seekers located employment during my period of participant observation.

Members with lower social class status, even in first-world nations, did not have the privilege of primarily focusing on discursive reality; instead lower classes juggled the demands of both material and discursive reality. The mutually constitutive nature of text and body required minority working-class candidates to put a considerable amount of time into caring for materiality and assimilating to a discourse dominant society. The urgency for WT job seekers to manage *both* body and text during job seeking was high. I observed job searches that were primarily executed through material, embodied actions. Embodied job searches were more demanding on physical resources and hence constrained by material conditions. Embodied job searches were more likely to be bound temporally/spatially, frequently requiring spatial co-location and synchronous communication. There were also discursive constraints on minority working-class job searching. There was an urgent need for WT job seekers to navigate a text-biased job market. WT's training met this need by teaching job candidates communication assimilation. When job seekers physically appeared at potential employers or called about job openings they were instructed that they must also have the *right* words to say. In addition, the job market was moved to digital formats, which required online application processes for blue-collar positions (Sharone, 2013; Suvankulov, Lau, & Chau, 2012). Former body workers with dwindling job opportunities, less access to technology, and lower computer literacy were learning how to manipulate text as a mechanism of survival. Yet, WT job seekers were presented with systematic disadvantage. They were not *refining* discursive skill sets; they were assimilating them by learning the *fundamentals* of middle-class communication, which constrained job search success. During participant observation, the majority of the job seekers at WT were unable to successfully find work.

Implications, limitations, and future directions

In the spirit of critical, engaged scholarship, I offer communication alternatives. Training minority working-class job seekers can be achieved without devaluing their communication. Practitioners have an opportunity to call attention to the biased workforce structures operating against marginalized populations. Articulating bias in the social structure would discursively shift blame from the way individuals communicate to the way society privileges particular forms of communication. This shift could potentially increase confidence and self-efficacy for marginalized job seekers, which have been identified as strong predictors of job search success (Eden & Aviram, 1993). Hiring managers can be empowered to accept non-dominant communication without a deficit perspective, which carries policy implications. Over time this type of subtle shift can create micro-emancipation (Clegg, Courpasson, & Phillips, 2006) and lead to incremental change, potentially scaffolding into larger structural change.

The findings of this study and other analyses of USOs could reform social service policy. Many USOs are funded by grants or funds for the US welfare-to-work policy and, for example, could be restructured in a way that rewards non-biased hiring practices. First, ongoing training for both

employers and unemployment practitioners should be implemented to call attention to classed and raced biases. This training would not only increase awareness, but also present strategies to counteract the effects of communicative bias (particularly those that manifest in interviewing). Second, a system of assessment, enforcement, and evaluation for employers and USOs should be implemented to mitigate the presence of inequality (bias, prejudice, and discrimination) in US workforce hiring. Participation in training, assessment, evaluation, and enforcement must be positively reinforced through policy to facilitate employer and social service buy-in.

Despite the contributions, it is important to highlight limitations of this study. First, this research focuses on first-world capitalist experiences of joblessness in the US. A study of unemployment in other countries, cultures, and economic structures (e.g., socialism, communism) would likely yield different insights.

A second limitation reflects the nature of blue-collar work being pursued by the study's participants. Most participants previously held low-wage hourly positions. Many high-paying blue-collar occupations provide a different lived experience, likely leading to upward mobility and financial stability. Studying highly compensated body workers and job seekers was outside the scope of this study and is an acknowledged limitation of the comparative analysis. These limitations suggest promising areas for future research.

The presence of communicative bias also needs to be examined in other facets of labor and organizing. Analysis of the way communicative bias is implicitly woven into work practices such as hiring, negotiation, collaboration, decision-making, and meeting execution, should be explored in relation to classism and racism. Studying high-paying blue-collar occupations would contribute to scholarly knowledge regarding the manifestation and implications of communicative bias. Organizational instances where cross-class and interracial communication co-occur would be a fruitful context for such research. In addition, future studies should begin to further unpack the intersections of different types of inequality in the workforce and their communicative manifestations. Explicating the way communication bias is manifest at the intersection of class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, ability, and age, among other social identities, could complicate knowledge regarding the subtle but powerful ways in which biased communication expectations have functioned to (dis)empower certain people.

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Author biography

Angela N. Gist-Mackey (PhD, University of Missouri) is Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication Studies at the University of Kansas with expertise in organizational communication. She is an interpretive critical scholar who largely researches issues of social mobility and power in organized contexts. Her program of research frequently combines three areas of interest: social class, social identity, and organizational culture. She also examines the identity work and negotiation of individuals with stigmatized identities and experiences.

Appendix: Interview Demographics

Tables providing demographic information for the semi-structured interview participants. It was not feasible to collect demographic data for each person observed during the period of data collection.

Table A1. Work Track Staff.

Pseudonym	Organization and role	Title	Length of membership	Age	Gender	Race
Charles Phillips	WT Paid Staff	Adult Education Literacy (AEL) Instructor	1 month	33	M	Black
Eddie Kane	WT Paid Staff	Assistant Director of RJ	1 year and 7 months	29	M	Black
Bo	WT Paid Staff	Assistant Director of CC	3 months	40	M	Black
Gordon	WT Paid Staff	Director	13 years	48	M	Black
Wanfeather	WT Paid Staff	Career Advisor	20 months	39	M	African/Kenyan
Hammer	WT Paid Staff	Job Developer/ Business Consultant	off and on for 8 yrs	32	M	White
Sara	WT Paid Staff	Vice President	27 years	59	F	White
Lena McGee	WT Paid Staff	AEL Instructor/ Curriculum Specialist	17 months	60	F	White
Maximus Constructionist	WT Paid Staff	Construction Instruction	3 years	54	M	White
Harper	WT Paid Staff	Transformation Specialist	3 months	31	F	Black
Averages/Totals:			5.625 years	42.5	Men:7 Women:3	Black:5 White:4 Kenyan:1

Table A2. Work Track Service Recipients.

Pseudonym	Previous position	Length of unemployment	Previous wage	Age	Gender	Race
Brianna	Public Library	4 months	$7.25 hourly	18	F	White
Rasheeda	Receptionist	1 month	$6.35 hourly	21	F	Biracial: Black and Native American
Omarion	Construction/ Janitorial	6 months	$7.25 hourly	25	M	Black
Rico	Cleaning out Debris	1 month	$10.00 hourly	21	M	Black
Keon	Hotel Houseman	12 months	$8.00 hourly	22	M	Black
Carlos	Food Handler	18 months	$7.35 hourly	21	M	Black

(Continued)

Table A2. (Continued)

Pseudonym	Previous position	Length of unemployment	Previous wage	Age	Gender	Race
Shawn	Under the table jobs, Remodeling	30 months	unanswered	21	M	Biracial: Black and White
Paris	Cashier	3 months	$7.50 hourly	19	F	Black
Steve	Cook	3 months	$7.35 hourly	49	M	White
Cherry Pie	Data Entry	36 months	$7.25 hourly	67	F	Black
Averages/Totals:		11.4 months	$7.59 hourly	28.4	Men:6 Women:4	Black: 6 White:2 Biracial:2

Table A3. Executive Career Transitions Staff.

Pseudonym	Organization and role	Title	Length of membership	Age	Gender	Race
Ralph	ECT Volunteer Staff	Former President and Board Member	9 years	70	M	White
Kelly	ECT Paid Staff	Administrative Assistant	12 years	58	F	White
Bob Wilson	ECT Volunteer Staff	President	3 years	73	M	White
Scott	ECT Volunteer Staff	Executive Director	2 years	66	M	White
Jerry	ECT Volunteer Staff	Board Member	17 years	unanswered	M	White
Aaron	ECT Volunteer Staff	Legal Advisor	6 years	62	M	White
Kat	ECT Volunteer Staff	Personal Advisor	2.5 years	48	F	White
Larry	ECT Volunteer Staff	Financial Advisor	4 years	54	M	White
Horseman	ECT Volunteer Staff	Entrepreneur Committee Leader	8+ years	68	M	White
Jack	ECT Volunteer Staff	Board Member	8+ years	77	M	White
Averages/Totals:			8.58 years	64	Men:8 Women:2	White:10

Table A4. Executive Career Transitions Service Recipients.

Pseudonym	Previous position	Length of unemployment	Previous wage	Age	Gender	Race
Michael	Senior Financial Analyst	15 months	$65,000	57	M	White
Rick	HR Management	30 months	$45,000	54	M	White
Seema	Pharmacist	4.5 months	$100,000	49	F	Indian
Suzie Smith	Sales Manager	5 months	$90,000	44	F	White

Table A4. (Continued)

Pseudonym	Previous position	Length of unemployment	Previous wage	Age	Gender	Race
Erwin W. Schottlehaus	Subcontractor Manager and Procurement Specialist	18 months	$95,000	64	M	White
Barbara	Vice President of HR	48 months	$140,000	64	F	White
Johnny Slowhand	Insurance Adjuster	18 months	$55,000	59	M	White
Grant	Public Relations	7 months	$80,000	54	M	White
Sandy Wilson	Marketing Coordinator	5 months	$50,000	50	F	White
Lauren	Retail Store Manager/Buyer	4 months	$60,000 + bonus	51	F	White
Averages/Totals:		15.45 months	$78,000 annually	54.6	Men:5 Women:5	White:9 Indian:1