Diverse Dominant Group Responses to Contemporary Co-Cultural Concerns: U.S. Intergroup Dynamics in the Trump Era

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This essay explores the rhetoric associated with a Trump era of U.S politics, one that has been described as "divisive politics of identity" (Rodrik, 2016). In particular, we analyze on-line comments offered by self-identified majority group members (e.g., white, heterosexual, Christian and/or male) in response to the fears and concerns of certain co-cultural groups (e.g., immigrants, refugees, women, people of color, LGBT persons). Our analysis of dominant group rhetoric reveals both unsupportive (endorsing Trump's policy initiatives, ignoring one's societal privilege, focusing on one's own societal disadvantage, resisting majority group essentialization and dismissing and/or trivializing co-cultural concerns) and supportive messages (acknowledging the legitimacy of co-cultural concerns, recognizing one's own privilege, challenging other dominant group members, and embracing the role of co-cultural ally). The essay concludes with a discussion of our findings and implications for future research.

Keywords: dominant group, U.S. politics of identity, co-cultural theory, privilege, Donald Trump

The elections of the 44th and 45th presidents of the United States have been historic, fueled by socio-cultural-political movements that have been described as unpredictable, unbelievable, and unprecedented.[1] President Barack Obama (2008-2016) was the first U.S. president of African descent, supported by a diverse coalition of support across social and cultural groups. His faster-than-the-speed-of-light ascension from first term senator to president, according to some, ushered in a "post-racial" era across the U.S.[2] Quickly criticized by many[3], the problematic idea that race was no longer a salient issue in the U.S. became increasingly apparent as President Obama's tenure in office progressed. In April 2009, a national poll found that 66 percent believed race relations to be *generally good*; the same poll revealed that 69 percent believed that race relations were *mostly*

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[1] Sharon Cohen and Deepti Hajela, "On Race: Pride, Promise, Regret—and a Deep Rift,"
Kalamazoo (MI) Gazette, January 15, 2017, p. D2.
[2] Kent A. Ono, "Critical/cultural Approaches to Communication," in *21ˢᵗ Century Communication: A Reference Handbook*, edited by William F. Eadie, 74-81 (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2009).
[3] Mark Orbe, *Communication Realities in the 'Post-Racial' Society: What the U.S. Public Really Thinks about Barack Obama* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011).

bad in 2016.[4] This socio-cultural sentiment helped to contribute to a political climate that paved the way for the election of President Donald J. Trump in 2016. If President Obama's election was known for unifying diverse contingencies, President Trump's rise to political office was embedded within divisive rhetoric promoting a "us-versus-them" mentality. The juxtaposition of these two presidencies is strikingly apparent, with the latter invoking fears that basic human rights interwoven into U.S. liberal democracies will no longer be sustained.[5]

This essay explores the rhetoric reflecting the socio-political division associated with a Trump era of U.S politics, one that has been described as "divisive politics of identity."[6] In particular, we focus in on how majority group members (e.g., white heterosexual Christian men) respond to the fears and concerns of certain co-cultural groups (e.g., immigrants, refugees, women, people of color, LGBT persons). Our explicit objective is to reveal the diversity of dominant group responses in hopes to increase levels of understanding in terms of how the everyday rhetoric of individuals contributes to a socio-political climate that is steeped in multiple points on continuums of inclusion-exclusion, acceptance-rejection, and unity-division. Drawing from scholarship focused on co-cultural and dominant group communication, our essay continues with a brief literature review, description of our rhetorical methodological framework, and explication of thematic findings. We finish the piece by offering some concluding comments.

Co-Cultural—Dominant Group Communication

One scholarly framework that explores culture, power, and communication is co-cultural theory.[7] Based within the tenets of muted group and standpoint theories[8], the theory focuses on how traditionally underrepresented groups – people of color, women, people with disabilities, and members of the LGBT community – communicate in a society where their lived experiences are marginalized compared to those associated with dominant groups. In short, co-cultural theory is based on the idea that traditionally marginalized group members strategically enact certain practices based on the intersection of six factors: field of experience, perceived costs and rewards, ability, situational context, communication approach and preferred outcome. Understanding the saliency of these factors in co-cultural communication has proven invaluable in various studies focusing on diverse socio-cultural groups across a myriad of contexts. Over the past three decades, scholars have utilized the theory as a productive lens to reveal the complex ways in which co-cultural group members negotiate their societal marginalization in variety of communicative contexts.[9]

Two core assumptions of co-cultural theory[10] reflect its relevance to studying contemporary intergroup relations. First, different traditionally marginalized groups negotiate societal oppressions (e.g., racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism) through similar communicative behaviors.

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[4] Cohen and Hajela, "On Race," D2.

[5] Dani Rodrik, "What's the Biggest Fear of a Trump Presidency," *New York Times*, November 9, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/projects/cp/opinion/election-night-2016.

[6] Dani Rodrik, "What's the Biggest Fear."

[7] Mark Orbe, *Constructing Co-Cultural Theory: An Explication of Culture, Power, and Communication* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1998).

[8] Shirley Ardener, *Perceiving Women* (London: Malaby, 1975); Cheris Kramarae, *Women and Men Speaking* (Rowley, MA: Newbury House, 1981); Dorothy Smith, *The Everyday World As Problematic: A Feminist Sociology of Knowledge* (Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 1987).

[9] Mark Orbe and Tabatha Roberts, "Co-Cultural Theorizing: Foundations, Applications, & Extensions," *Howard Journal of Communications* 23: 293-311.

[10] Mark Orbe, *Constructing Co-Cultural Theory*.

Second, these communicative behaviors vary significantly within and between different co-cultural groups. Taken together, these two core assumptions demonstrate how co-cultural fears regarding the Trump presidency are grounded in concerns about increased marginalization through new policies, legislation, and endorsed divisive attitudes. In this regard, the concerns and fears of women, immigrants and refugees (and their families), people of color, and members of the LGBT community are similarly situated in opposition to the institutionalized power of the dominant group.

Scholarship on dominant group communication is grounded in the concept of societal privilege. Defined as a general favored state or unearned entitlement[11] societal privilege reflects a largely invisible system that confers dominant status on certain U.S. groups such as European Americans, men, heterosexuals, and Christians.[12] According to Allan Johnson, greater attention has been given to the ways in which dominant group members have communicated in ways that reinforce their privilege.[13] More recently, scholars have begun to also write about the ways in which some individuals work to utilize their societal privilege to counter oppressive systems. Within the remainder of this section, we highlight two lines of research that demonstrate the diversity of dominant group communication.

Scholarship on microaggressions represents one significant body of research regarding dominant group communication. According to Derald Sue,[14] microaggressions are subtle everyday interactions where members of the dominant culture send denigrating messages to co-cultural group members. Often times, this form of dominant communicative behavior is not meant to be offensive and perpetuators are unaware that their comments are harmful. However, the effects associated with microaggressions – based on race, gender, class, sexuality, etc. – reinforce dominant culture as the norm and co-cultures as pathological or deviant. Microaggressions are enacted via three distinct forms: (1) *microinsults* ("subtle snubs, frequently unknown to the perpetrator, but clearly convey a hidden insulting message to the recipient of color"), (2) *microassaults* ("verbal or nonverbal attack meant to hurt the intended victim through name calling, avoidant behavior, or purposeful discriminatory actions"), and *microvalidations* (communication "that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality" others. In short, microaggressions as a form of dominant group communication ignore the power of societal privilege, reinforce stereotypes that demean outgroup members, and express disapproval of or discomfort with co-cultural group members.

Sara DeTurk's work on how some individuals utilize their agency to build alliances with others embodies another important line of dominant group communication scholarship.[15] Focusing on the communicative experiences of individuals who utilized their societal privilege in social justice work on behalf of others, ally communication research highlights a variety of verbal and nonverbal

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[11] Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to see Correspondences Through Work in Women's Studies," in *Race, Class and Gender: An Anthology*, edited by Margaret Anderson and Patricia Hill Collins, 78-86 (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1995).

[12] Mark Orbe, *Constructing Co-Cultural Theory*.

[13] Allan Johnson, *Privilege, Power, and Difference* (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2006).

[14] Derald Sue, *Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2010).

[15] Sara DeTurk, "The Power of Dialogue: Consequences of Intergroup Dialogue and Their Implications for Agency and Alliance Building," *Communication Quarterly* 54 (2006): 33-51; Sara DeTurk, "Allies in Action: The Communicative Experiences of People Who Challenge Social Injustice of Behalf of Others," *Communication Quarterly* 59 (2011): 569-590.

tactics that are designed to work against societal oppressions. According to DeTurk (2011), communicating as an ally involves four distinct themes. First, "being an ally is an identity achieved by acting on the moral imperatives of pursuing social justice and validating differences."[16] Second, "allies intentionally draw on various forms of social and cultural capital to influence others."[17] Third "as a result of their social capital, allies' responses to prejudicial/discriminatory rhetorical acts are different from those of their targets."[18] Fourth, and finally, "allies employ different tactics for different reasons."[19] Our study builds upon the literature of co-cultural and privileged forms of communication as we explore contemporary intergroup dynamics in the U.S. Next, we turn to our method of discovery.

Method of Discovery

In order to explore how self-identified majority group members (i.e., those who are white Christian, heterosexual, and/or male) respond to the fears and concerns of certain marginalized group members in the Trump era of U.S. politics, we completed an inductive thematic analysis of dominant group contemporary rhetoric. Several potential options exist to collect this type of data, however we prioritized certain issues such as timeliness, anonymity, and convenience in making a decision to work with naturalistic data free of researcher subjective bias. Given this, we decided to focus on reader comments posted online in response to post-election articles reporting on the concerns of various groups. Two particular on-line news sources were targeted: *The Washington Post* and *The Huffington Post*. Using the search engines for each respective news source, 19 articles were found published shortly after the November 8, 2016 election of President Trump (see Table 1). These articles generated thousands of public comments from readers – accessible throughout various threads of posts on each newspaper's website. The initial review of this large secondary data set was pared down to a more manageable size after self-identified non-majority group member comments, and comments from readers with no identifying markers, were eliminated. In the end, the contemporary dominant group rhetoric regarding socio-cultural concerns took the form of 57 pages of single-spaced data.

Established qualitative thematic analytic processes were used to make sense of the diverse responses from majority group members. Modeled after the work of Grant McCracken,[20] the review began with an initial reading of data through which relevant commentary was sorted from irrelevant comments (e.g., those that were not related to the concerns raised by the articles). After this initial reduction of data was conducted, a second re-examination of data was conducted. The explicit goal of this level of review was to identify slices of data to reveal logical relationships and contradictions. William Owens' criterion of repetition (frequent use of specific words and phrases), recurrence (common meanings across different articulations), and forcefulness (certain comments were emphasized through the use of ALL CAPS, **bold**, italics, and/or punctuation) was productive in this process.[21] This step was crucial to highlight the similarities and differences across comments regarding Muslims, people of color, immigrants, women, and members of the LBGT community. A third review of the data was conducted to confirm or disconfirm emerging

[16] Sara DeTurk, "Allies in Action," 575.
[17] Sara DeTurk, "Allies in Action," 576.
[18] Sara DeTurk, "Allies in Action," 577.
[19] Sara DeTurk, "Allies in Action," 578.
[20] Grant McCracken, *The Long Interview* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1998).
[21] William Owens, "Interpretive Themes in Relational Communication," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 70 (1984): 274-287.

relationships among the data; the result of this step was the formulation of preliminary themes. Finally, we organized initial themes into an outline which facilitated a process through which the large number of potential themes were re-examined and subsequently separated out, combined, and/or deleted.[22] The next section explicates the thematic findings of this process of discovery.

Thematic Findings: Dominant Group Rhetorical Responses to Co-Cultural Concerns

Our analysis of dominant group responses to co-cultural concerns in the Trump era of U.S. politics revealed a variety of rhetorical devices. Within this section, we organize them into two general sections: Non-supportive and supportive responses.

Non-Supportive Responses

Our thematic analysis of dominant group responses to concerns raised by co-cultural group members about a Trump presidency featured several forms of rhetoric that were non-supportive or downright hostile. Within this section, we explicate how some dominant group rhetoric reflected five types of non-supportive messages: (1) endorsing Trump's policy initiatives, (2) ignoring one's societal privilege, (3) focusing on one's own societal disadvantage, (4) resisting majority group essentialization, and (5) dismissing and/or trivializing co-cultural concerns.

Endorsing Trump's policy initiatives. A significant number of reader comments to different articles describing co-cultural concerns focused primarily on defending proposed policies by the new administration while ignoring the legitimacy of others' concerns. For example, in response to a *Washington Post* article on building a wall on the U.S.-Mexican border, one reader wrote: "Well the thing is that anyone who walked over the border illegally or overstayed their visas have broken the law it's a federal offense and is a felony! So all of them are criminals!" This issue was given a higher priority compared to any concerns of how proposed policies would violate individual basic civil rights. Interestingly, one person didn't believe that Trump's proposals were enough and argued for an extension: "Once they [immigrants] are e-verified to be illegals, I propose that we make them wear an armband to identify them. It seemed to work during WW2 and what better way to make a point."

In similar ways, majority group comments also invoked rhetoric supporting proposals to enact a ban of Muslim immigrants. Within these comments, individuals articulated a real fear of Islam ("a religion that promotes the most murderous mayhem on the planet") and more specifically Muslims who are responsible for "all of the killing" that has occurred throughout the U.S. One reader asserted that "Islam itself is incompatible with Western civilization, its people, Christianity, and rational inquiry." This rhetoric promoted an ideal that immigrant concerns were based on a false assumption that any thing other than complete assimilation to U.S. culture was acceptable. As one writer penned, "The best way for Muslims to serve America is to merge with the mainstream America—no separate identity, no Sharia, no Caliphate. They must denounce terrorism and jihad unequivocally and unambiguously."

A similar sentiment was seen in male responses to an article on "What does President Trump mean for feminists?" Within this context, both female and male readers discussed the impact of President-Elect Trump's rhetoric regarding women in general, and women's issues more specifically. Several white heterosexual males argued that a rejection of traditional gendered roles was at

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[22] Grant McCracken, *The Long Interview*.

the core of current problems. One man, in particular, wrote about his wife who works in the trucking business. She "put up with a lot of male behavior," and "earned tons of respect through her skill and wit." He then draws on his Christian identity explaining,

> Men have led the world for thousands of years. For any woman to think that is wrong is unnatural and idiotic. My wife agrees with that too…I am a man. The head of the household. The one who has the final say. I am the spiritual leader of our family. It is my will. She knows and I know. THAT is why men lead the world. Its not because they are better. It is because THAT is the way GOD made it.

Ignoring one's societal privilege. Many of the unsupportive responses to co-cultural concerns were steeped in a lack of recognition of one's own societal privilege. This could be seen in heterosexuals' comments in an article highlighting LGBT concerns ("'Are we safe': The LGBT community wonders what the future holds") where several responses described new legislation as "special rights." Failing to recognize the needs for specific laws protecting hate crimes is steeped in an assumption that everyone is equally protected under current laws. A similar sentiment was seen in other comments reacting to the concerns about a potential backlash to civil rights. Within the comments section, one person wrote: "Any citizen of this country, no matter what color, has exactly the same civil rights as I, a white male." Within a societal position that is privileged, other dominant group members offered advice that was ignorant of the realities of many co-cultural group members. For instance, ignoring financial concerns and socially-sanctioned residential segregation, one white male suggested that people of color move to the suburbs to avoid inner-city problems. Another person offered some alternative advice, also steeped in societal privilege.

> Work hard and make something of yourself. Stay away from drugs. If you can't do that the USA might not be the best place for you…Some areas of the USA are a bit afraid and concerned about outsiders, try to stay in more cosmopolitan areas like New York, etc. Things will better, Work hard, Don't worry about Trump. He is one person and there are like 350 million more to talk and work with. He has his place ($$$) as do you have your unique place. Peace!

In some contexts, ignoring one's societal privilege (like the examples provided thus far) appeared to be steeped in a lack of awareness. However, other responses reflected an awareness and subsequent denial of one's privilege. These comments took a more aggressive tone in their reactions to articles highlight co-cultural concerns. In one response to "Civil rights activists grapple with new Trump reality," a person wrote:

> I am sick and tired of those "civil rights" activists whom are too lazy to find a real job and create a grievance movement based on the historically altered past. They blame people like me, just for being born white, for all real and imaginable misfortunates they have in their life.

Across the data, we found responses from dominant group members that articulated a rejection of co-cultural concerns that ignored the "racism" that whites in general, and white males more specifically, experienced in contemporary society. One article offered a call for greater compassion for young students facing racist comments (e.g., white students chanting "Build the wall!" in a middle school cafeteria where some Latinx students were also eating lunch). In response, one reader, self-identified as "ex-democrat" wrote:

> It was a call for compassion for SOME students, not ALL. Imagine had Hillary won, would it be OK for a schools supt [superintendent] to say "please show extra compassion for your white male students?"

[I]t's the same issue as "black lives matter." [I]f you can't say "be compassionate to ALL students," or "ALL lives matter," you're pushing a racist double standard.

Another reader, in a response to a different article ("Being a Muslim in Trump's America is frightening") criticized the author's call for co-cultural solidarity:

Notice how the last line of the piece says minorities need to band together. No mention of whites. Because that's what political correctness is about—minority supremacy. Sorry leftist bigots, but hating white people is just as much racism as any other kind.

Articulations of a "racist double standard" and "minority supremacy" fail to recognize how various forms of oppression are systemic, historical, and institutionalized. They are grounded in an outright denial of one's own societal privilege.

Focusing on one's own societal disadvantage. Intersectionality is an intercultural communication concept that calls for understanding how various aspects of one's identity simultaneously manifest.[23] Embracing this concept typically requires an understanding that any one individual has aspects of identity that reflect privilege while others place them in a position of disadvantage.[24] This idea was central to another theme that emerged from the data and highlights the way that dominant group members diverted attention away from their privileged status by pushing aspects of their marginalized identities to the forefront of the discussion.

This rhetorical response to co-cultural concerns resisted any criticism that seemingly ignored the trials and tribulations of majority group members. Across the data, a number of white readers enacted such rhetoric. In response to one article ("What does President Trump mean for feminists?"), white men offered a variety of comments describing their own disadvantage. One, for instance, wrote:

I'm a white man in America. I know that there is a thing as white privilege. But most of us are not rich. We work hard. We don't live in mansions. In parental custody actions we lose 85% of the time. 85% of all courts make father's visitors. Yet no one openly fights for us. We spoke yesterday [Election Day]. We will not be ignored any longer. I'm so tired being told how great I have it.

This set of comments responds to women's concerns about Trump's presidency by giving voice to how current policies discriminate against men. This rhetorical move questions the legitimacy of talking about white privilege without recognizing the complex ways in which other socio-cultural positions also come with disadvantage. Within this context, those positioned as majority group members resisted attempts by co-cultural group members to ignore aspects of disadvantage. Examples of this type of response were seen within the comments from white women throughout the data. One reader wrote: "I may be white, but I am a woman who has been victimized by sexism and threats of violence." In response to co-cultural fears about a Trump presidency, another asserted: "I too am terrified, and I am an old straight white female. Of course, since I'm not rich, I'm also of no value in TrumpWorld." In these examples, gender and class identities were recognized

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[23] Carrie Crenshaw, "Resisting Whiteness' Rhetorical Silence," *Western Journal of Communication* 61 (1997): 253-278; Gust Yep, "Privilege and Culture," in *Inter/Cultural Communication*, edited by Anastacia Kurlyo, 163-184 (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2013).

[24] Judith Martin and Tom Nayakama, "Thinking Dialectically about Culture and Communication," *Communication Theory* 9 (1999): 1-25.

along side of those associated with race. This form of rhetoric, as seen with the excerpt below, challenges the false dichotomy of privilege versus advantage.

> I am white, woman, and 65…what makes you think I am "white privileged?"…I had to fight off men to keep my job, told I could not have the job as a man could do it better…being white does not give you a leg up in today's society.

Resisting majority group essentialism. "Not every white person has this [same] mindset." This idea was part of the comments posted in response to an article reporting on various hate crimes that occurred since Trump's election. This concise comment epitomizes a common response to co-cultural concerns: Do not generalize all majority group members. Rhetoric asserting that fact that individual differences exist within socio-cultural groups appeared across the data. White men, for instance, were quick to speak up and counter others' support for traditional paternalistic values (e.g., challenging "God-ordained gender roles" in contemporary society). In response to a different article discussing Christian responses to Trump's election, another reader took issue with the writer's lack of specificity. They wrote:

> I think that the heading of this article left out the word "evangelical." Not all Christians are the same. The author of this piece is an evangelical Christian in the Baptist denomination. It is a disservice to lump all denominations into one.

A similar sentiment was articulated by white women who wanted some clarification about their role in getting President Trump elected. In response to one article, "Dear Fellow White Women: We F**ked This Up," several readers resisted this broad sweeping generalization. "No not white women, you mean Republican white women" wrote one person. Another reader asserted: "Don't blame all of 'white women' I am an educated white woman and I voted for Hillary and did so proudly."

This specific rhetorical strategy was aimed at separating one's self from other dominant group members. In other words, such comments resisted any attempts to categorize people based on cultural markers with no recognition of their individuality. At times, majority group resistance assumed a defensive stance that demonstrated how co-cultural group concerns should not be applied universally. These comments, illustrative of a majority group rhetorical strategy, do not reject co-cultural concerns outright. Instead, they question their legitimacy in failing to recognize that exceptions to the rule exist. Several majority members criticized co-cultural group members who made claims that others were complicit in supporting problematic policies and failed to understand their perspective. In response to these assertions, several – including one whose comments are highlighted below – described the short-sightedness of such claims.

> I'm a straight, white, male person who is upset at the outcome. Don't start throwing accusations around that 'we don't understand.' Maybe we don't have the same direct fears as some others, but targeting people who at least sympathize with you is really dumb and a self-defeating road to take.

Dismissing and/or trivializing co-cultural concerns. A final form of rhetoric reflective of unsupportive responses to co-cultural concerns involved outright dismissal or trivialization. Outright dismissal was most apparent with a comment posted in response to an article discussing concerns of post-election safety within the LGBT community. "You were safe before and you are safe now. You don't need any special protection laws," wrote one reader. Another article, "Civil Rights

Activists Grapple with the New Trump Reality," prompted a similar dismissal of co-cultural concerns. Within the excerpt featured next, a reader rejects the legitimacy of concerns regarding threats to civil rights.

> I am sick and tired of those "civil rights" activists whom are too lazy to find a real job and create a grievance movement based on the historically altered past. They blame people like me, just for being born white, for all real or imaginable misfortunes they have in their life.

Other posts from readers commenting on selected articles described co-cultural concerns as unfounded, over-stated, and/or trivial. One reader who posted a comment to an article on Muslim fear of a Trump's presidency advised critics to "quit whining" and "quit ranting about Trump and blaming him." Instead he suggested that those who have concerns re-direct their energies to fighting acts of terrorism perpetuated by Muslims. "Basically how about you clean up you own mess?," he concluded.

On November 9, 2016, a *Washington Post* article describing the wide-spread fear that followed the surprise election of President Trump appeared online. The article reported on the large number of calls into suicide hotlines during the 24 hours following election day. One reader had some advice for those with concerns: "To those who are scared because Trump won the election, think about those children in Syria and Yemen who are getting blown to pieces by the friends of Hillary (ie, Saudi, Qatar, etc)." Another interpreted co-cultural concerns as reflective of a certain segment of society who, from their perspective, has opinions steeped in a "warped sense of reality."

> This is what happens when a spoiled, whiny, entitled segment of society does not get what they want after having every corrupt and deviant desire of their hearts fulfilled by Barack Obama and his Santa Claus Democrats…Hey lil' snowflakes, you don't always get what you want. This is called 'life.' Or in YOUR case, it's called 'harsh reality.' And if you ever leave mommy and daddy's basement and have to earn your own way in this world, you'll experience this frequently.

Supportive Responses

Explicating the ways in which dominant group responses to co-cultural concerns were unsupportive only highlights a part of the data. Another part reveals majority group rhetoric that was vehemently supportive. Within this section, we report on four such messages: (1) acknowledging the legitimacy of co-cultural concerns, (2) recognizing one's own privilege, (3) challenging other dominant group members, and (4) embracing the role of co-cultural ally.

Acknowledging the legitimacy of co-cultural concerns. Unlike some unsupportive dominant group rhetoric explicated earlier, our analysis revealed a variety of comments that acknowledged the legitimacy of concerns articulated by different co-cultural group members. In the previous section, we referenced an article on post-election suicide hotlines that prompted several individuals to reject co-cultural concerns related to safety. However, several dominant group members responded by defending the legitimacy of others' feelings, including one who said:

> They have every right to be afraid. Very, very dark times lie ahead. I think for millions of Americans, the mayhem and destruction that will be brought down upon their lives is a very real fear. They will be targets of discrimination in employment, housing, and accommodation…They will have to deal with deep hatred and violence directed at them. The threat is very real and the fear palpable.

Others offered similar affirming comments, in the context of this particular article as well as others with several readers sending direct messages to different co-cultural groups. "This is really scary stuff!," wrote one "straight 61-year old" who added "We need more love in the world, not less. I will stand with you all." Another reader, who described herself as "an old white woman who is terrified," offered the following support: "I can't even imagine the stress people of color feel for themselves and their families. Please do not lose hope. More than half the country is on your side."

Several majority group members acknowledged co-cultural concerns through apologies. One form of rhetoric came from a "straight, white, male" who admitted that if he was "any kind of minority within the U.S., [he'd] be terrified right now." He went on to post his empathic support: "I'm sorry this is happening to you. I'm on your side, but can't pretend to know what it's like to be you. Just remember that the majority of Americans fully respect you, consider you equal and want you fully included." Across the board, apologetic rhetoric reflected heart-felt sentiments:

> I cannot, of course, know how, or perhaps better to say, what you feel, but I do know why you are fighting so hard. I am so sorry. I read an article today about white people not 'getting it.' Apparently I am one of those people. I cannot say what I need to say without sounding inflammatory, so I will just admit that I grossly under-estimated the level of intolerance that still exists. Please know that there are people like me who wish you the best; people who do not believe in white entitlement, or the great white way. Much love, and keep fighting the good fight. I'll be right there with you.

Recognizing one's own privilege. Unlike the unsupportive rhetoric by some dominant group members described earlier, one feature of more supportive rhetoric often times included an acknowledgement of one's own societal privilege. This was evident in the apologies highlighted in the previous sections where individuals explicitly articulated their empathy but lack of direct experience of oppression. Several also admitted that, while they supported co-cultural concerns, in the end they "would be somehow spared" as a member of the majority group. Other acknowledgements of privilege were evident in how some readers described different everyday experiences based on one's cultural location. According to one reader,

> The biggest problem with white privilege is that whites don't believe in it. I'm a 70-year old white male and in 55 years of driving I have never feared being pulled over by the police. I have always been treated respectfully by bureaucrats, both petty and great. I also live in an ethnically diverse area and this is not how my non-white male friends see things.

Several readers posted comments that pointed out instances where societal privilege involved one's perceptions of others. In response to comments that argued for a ban of Muslim immigrants into the U.S., several posts argued that the biggest terrorist threats in the U.S. have come from white men who have been "given the benefit of individuality." In an extended series of posts, this example of majority group privilege was clearly articulated as seen in the comments below offered by a white male who also provided a link to a news source supporting his arguments.

> When white males of the far right carry out violent attacks…Republicans typically describe them as lone-wolf extremists rather than people who are part of terrorist networks or well-organized terrorist movements. Yet many of the terrorist attacks in the United States have been carried out by people who had long histories of networking with other terrorists. In fact, most of the terrorist activity occurring in the United States in recent years has not come from Muslims, but from a combination of radical Christianists, white supremacists, and far-right militia groups.

In addition to recognizing one's societal privilege, some dominant group rhetoric included a commitment to utilizing their cultural locations to enact societal change in ways that co-cultural group members could not. As one person stated, "I will use my privilege—which as a white, currently-being-educated male, I have in spades—to elevate them in a time when oppression is running rampant." A common theme related to using one's societal privilege is that "whites…are the group that can help the most those that aren't white." However, some readers like the one whose comments are presented next, understood that the new political administration put all individuals – majority and minority group members – at risk.

> [A]s white people, we could not experience racism. I grew up in the 50s in Arkansas and was threatened as a teenager twice by the KKK for having black friends. It is not the same as living it every single day, every minute of the day, and I 100% agree with that, but we also are at risk—and furthermore MUST PUT OURSELVES at risk, to stop Trump and his racist followers.

Challenging other dominant group members. Another rhetorical strategy that demonstrated support for co-cultural concerns was challenging other dominant group members. In some instances, this took the form of "calling people out" when they made ignorant, hurtful, or discriminatory comments. Some challenges were educational; this was the case in a response to comments advocating for immigration bans.

> What would have the American Indians have thought?... We invaded their land. We stole their land. We forgot who we are and where we came from. Yes, this is our country but it is theirs too…We must not forget…I am proud to be an American and the good that we have done but I am disgusted of the horrific things that we have done as well.

Several dominant group members attempted to challenge majority group members when they made comments that appeared to mindlessly affirm traditional thinking. In response to comments that argued that more fluid gender roles were to blame for contemporary societal problems, one reader wrote:

> As a white male who is (barely) considered young enough to be a millennial, I hope to see the men of my generation be the leaders among men, and stand with women against misogynistic behavior by their male peers…Men, and women, need to stop excusing, apologizing for, dismissing, or changing the definition of (locker room talk, boys will be boys, etc.) the violation of women. It's the 21st century and enough is enough. It's time to treat women like people, not objects of sexual gratification whose value and existence is predicated on how sexually or visually appealing they are to men. No one has a 'pre-ordained' role in society, God has no bearing on this (and I rather think He wouldn't hesitate to condemn sexual assault or its enablers if He had anything to say).

In other contexts, challenges took a seemingly more assertive stance. The comments from one "old white woman" demonstrates her unapologetic approach:

> I will stand with BLM [#BlackLivesMatter] and proudly wear the emblems of the movement, because I support their work. I want White Supremacists to challenge this old white woman about why she's wearing a BLM shirt. I can deal with it, and I know how to call on others to provide support if I need it. I want to challenge more white people to start dealing with their own racism.

Others were equally committed to speaking out in different settings. One post stated: "I've been really outspoken about the bigotry, hate & divisiveness of those that call themselves conservative

Christians." This person went on to describe how this "generally gets you shut out & marginalized," but expressed some joy in adding: "calling out [others] really lights up a cocktail party."

Some majority group challenges were more direct and aggressive. This form of rhetoric was seen in posts responding to the article entitled "Dear Fellow White Women." Within this context, a number of white women opening criticized any woman who supported President Trump.

> As a white woman, I did my part to speak out against this man's hateful rhetoric. I don't see how any woman—white, black, green, purple, or polka-dotted—could vote for him. To these 53% who betrayed the rest of us, you are not my sisters. You are not to be respected. You are a shame to your sex.

Other women enacted rhetorical attacks that forced "sex traitors" to recognize the consequences of their vote. One female commenter was the most direct in her message: "Women who voted for Trump: you own every black church burning, every KKK rally, every attack on Latinos and LBGTs, every restriction on women's rights for the next four years. YOU OWN IT.

Embracing the role of co-cultural ally. One clear and purposeful supportive response that was evident in dominant group responses to co-cultural concerns in the Trump era of U.S. politics was that of embracing the role of co-cultural ally. Based on the data, this most prevalently involved various forms of offering support. In most cases, like that of "SonOfAHisstoryProf" who posted a response to an article focusing on Muslim concerns, acknowledged that majority group members could utilize their privilege in ways that co-cultural group members could not. Other white women and men, reflecting on a heightened sense of empathy, also embraced the role of co-cultural ally. In several instances, their commitment was personal and symbolized by wearing a safety pin as a sign of support.

> I'm a white male and I [am an ally] because I have seen my black son-in-law ridiculed, because my gay friend is afraid to come out in public, because my wife is not paid as much as her male co-worker for doing the same job, and because any of my six daughters might be groped by someone who thinks he can get away with [it]. Should I carry a sign and shout from the street corner? Not if I want to keep my job working for a boss who is a Trump supporter, because my wife and I depend on our jobs to survive…I can only do what I can do, so I wear a pin.

For other readers, their support was physical, financial, and/or emotional. This was evident in dominant group responses to individuals who critiqued wearing a safety pin as problematic ("Safety pins: Solidarity symbol or emblem of 'white guilt?'"). Many asserted that their support involved much more than purely symbolic gestures. One asserted,

> I'm a white male. I voted for Hillary. I contributed to her campaign. I worked to convince others to support her and know several cases among my friends and family where I was successful. Several friendships ended…Post-election increased my support for the ACLU, Planned Parenthood and NARAL…I intend to do everything I can think of to oppose Trump and what he stands for. I [want to] announce to the world that I'm not going quietly into the background, that the new norm is unacceptable.

Assuming the role of co-cultural ally also involved a certain amount of advocacy. In some cases, this was reflected in personal commitments ("Those who feel as I do know they have an ally in their fight…I vote, I march, I volunteer, I sign petitions, I relentlessly pester my representatives, I donate, I raise my voice."). For others it meant creating diverse alliances to assert their agency

to counter the hate-filled rhetoric and discriminatory actions of some dominant group members. In this regard, one reader wanted to send a clear message to co-cultural group members:

> Folks, you have plenty (millions) of white, Protestant fellow citizens who are as shocked at and worried about these developments as you are. We all have to unite to push back at these forces of division and hate for the next few years.

In response to articles published immediately following President Trump's election comments, the theme of collective agency was clear and apparent. "I am fearful but am not frozen in place—I will do everything within my power of one to stop the hate," wrote one person. Others refused to see the election results as a sign of defeat, or as one majority group member argued, "This isn't over yet we have just begun to fight against this vile, crass man." As one white heterosexual man explained, co-cultural allies embraced a commitment to a unified approach to supporting one another:

> My ancestors came on the Mayflower. I was never more proud than the day Obama was elected. They will have to drag me off with you. Gay, straight, disabled, brown, black, documented, undocumented I stand with you. We find ourselves in the valley, stand together and we will climb out together. Cry now and hold each other. When the tears have passed start electing a democratic house in the midterm.

Discussion and Concluding Comments

This essay provides an analysis of dominant group rhetoric in direct response to public articulations of co-cultural concerns following the election of U.S. President Donald J. Trump. As explicated in our thematic findings section, several unsupportive (endorsing Trump's policy initiatives, ignoring one's societal privilege, focusing on one's own societal disadvantage, resisting majority group essentialization, and dismissing and/or trivializing co-cultural concerns) and supportive (acknowledging the legitimacy of co-cultural concerns, recognizing one's own privilege, challenging other dominant group members, and embracing the role of co-cultural ally) forms of rhetoric were revealed. These findings are based on a small secondary data set of responses found within two U.S. news outlets, however, we argue that are fairly representative of dominant group rhetoric across various means of expression. We look forward to additional scholarly studies that can replicate, counter, and/or extend our findings. These forthcoming insights notwithstanding, the remainder of this section discusses the contributions of our current study.

Over the past several decades, scholars have spent consider time and energy revealing the ways in which underrepresented groups communicate in contexts where their lived experiences are marginalized by societal structures created and maintained by dominant group members. Interdisciplinary theories, such as muted group theory,[25] standpoint theory,[26] and co-cultural theory[27] have emerged from this work and collectively generated significant insight into this constantly expanding area of study.[28] Studies that focus on the communication of dominant group members – as a privileged communicative socio-cultural group – is significantly less abundant. The research that does exist appears to reveal the ways in which majority group rhetoric contributes to, and/or resists,

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[25] Shirley Ardener, *Perceiving Women*; Cheris Kramarae, *Women and Men Speaking*.
[26] Dorothy Smith, *The Everyday World as Problematic*.
[27] Mark Orbe, *Constructing Co-Cultural Theory*.
[28] Mark Orbe and Tabatha Roberts, "Co-Cultural Theorizing."

prejudice and discrimination informed by larger institutionalized systems of oppression[29] Our analysis extends this scholarship by providing in-depth descriptions of majority group rhetorical moves when confronted with concerns from various socio-cultural groups. Additional research can further explore how the specific messages are aligned with rhetorical dimensions of dominant group status – something that Mark McPhail[30] argues is not a fixed state but constantly negotiated within ever-changing shifting politics of difference. While our analysis focused specifically on messages generated through on-line comment boards, we also acknowledge the utility of engaging ideological perspectives that are reinforced rhetorically through majority group silence on socio-political issues of our time. As such scholars must continue to engage critically those discursive spaces where dominant group power is invoked without any words, or the use of explicit terminology.[31]

Co-cultural theory[32] functioned as a useful theory for this analysis given that its focus was on responses to concerns voiced by those on the margins of U.S. society. As such, it continued to serve as a practical framework to highlight the similarities among groups whose lived experiences are diverse but situated in parallel forms of oppression when juxtapositioned against dominant societal structures. Interestingly, as evidenced by some of the rhetoric analyzed in our study, some individuals who are seen by others as privileged report experiencing contemporary socio-political times as the new disenfranchised and disadvantaged. A co-cultural theoretical framework, as such, can provide an understanding of why certain communicative practices are enacted over others (e.g., explaining how one's *field of experience* and current *situational context* lead a majority group member to communicate in ways that have consciously weighed the *perceived costs and rewards* of their comments). While some might critique such theoretical applications of co-cultural theory, such a move may facilitate a theoretical innovation: the creation of a *dominant group theory*. One of the limitations of co-cultural theoretical studies is that they – almost without exception – focus exclusively on the perspectives of underrepresented group members.[33] A more nuanced approach would offer explorations of the dynamics at the intersection of co-cultural/dominant group communication. In other words, engaging in scholarly inquiries that analyze how certain messages function as a communicative response to other messages within a specific discursive interaction. Focusing on dominant group rhetoric, like that which was implemented in the analysis reported on within this essay, allows for in-depth understanding that is only possible through scholarship that continues to stretch the boundaries of earlier work.

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[29] Sara DeTurk, "Allies in Action;" Derald Sue, *Microaggressions in Everyday Life*.

[30] Mark McPhail, *Zen in the Art of Rhetoric: An Inquiry into Coherence* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).

[31] Carrie Crenshaw, "Resisting Whiteness' Rhetorical Silence."

[32] Mark Orbe, *Constructing Co-Cultural Theory*.

[33] Mark Orbe and Tabatha Roberts, "Co-Cultural Theorizing."

Table 1: Data-Driven Newspaper Articles

Title of Article	Newspaper	Date of Publication On-line
"Being a Muslim in Trump's America is frightening. Here's what we can do in response."	*The Washington Post*	November 9, 2016
"Why Christians should not succumb to the apocalyptic language of the election"	*The Washington Post*	November 9, 2016
"What it will take for President Trump to deport millions and build the wall"	*The Washington Post*	November 9, 2016
"What does President Trump mean for feminists?"	*The Washington Post*	November 9, 2016
"With Trump victory, Mexico's worse fears are realized"	*The Washington Post*	November 9, 2016
"Civil rights activists grapple with the new Trump reality"	*The Washington Post*	November 9, 2016
"Safety pins: Solidarity symbol or emblem of 'white guilt'?	*The Washington Post*	November 15, 2016
"Why millions fear the looming Trump presidency"	*The Washington Post*	November 14, 2016
"Social media erupts over message to show love for Muslim, Black, Latino, Nonwhite students"	*The Washington Post*	November 11, 2106
"'Are we safe?' The LGBT community wonders what the future holds"	*The Washington Post*	November 11, 2106
"At suicide hotlines, the first 24 hours of Trump's America have been full of fear"	*The Washington Post*	November 10, 2016
"Dear fellow white women: We f**ked this up"	*The Huffington Post*	November 9, 2016
"Dear white people, your safety pins are embarrassing"	*The Huffington Post*	November 12, 2016
"Countless acts of hate carried out since Trump's win"	*The Huffington Post*	November 11, 2016
"Mourn. Then organize."	*The Huffington Post*	November 9, 2016
"An open letter to my friends who voted for Trump"	*The Huffington Post*	November 9, 2016
"Muslims in America wonder if President Trump will force them to leave"	*The Huffington Post*	November 9, 2016
"If you're a minority in America, the terror of this moment is overwhelming"	*The Huffington Post*	November 9, 2016
"Trump's election raises fears of increased violence against women"	*The Huffington Post*	November 15, 2016