

# Progressive Political Leadership Through an Orientation of Invitational Rhetoric: An Analysis of the Twittersphere of “The Squad”

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*Our analysis of “The Squad’s” 2021 Twittersphere demonstrates how, individually and collectively, the six BIPOC congressional members embrace the values of invitational rhetoric. An invitational rhetorical orientation is apparent in the ways in which their verified Twitter accounts invite others in their worlds, demonstrate relational-communal support, and extend a sense of solidarity to others, as a means to cultivate the same for others. Further, our paper highlights the various ways in which “The Squad” utilized this social media platform to negotiate interactions-both in-person and virtually-with others who aggressively attacked their personal, cultural, and political identities: (1) Taking the high road, (2) speaking truth to power, and (3) defending themselves and their right to safety. In doing so, we provide significant insight in how invitational rhetoric theory and practice functions as a foundation to enact social change within a divisively partisan political world.*

**Keywords:** Invitational rhetoric, BIPOC politicians, The Squad, U.S. politics, Twitter, Social media

This paper presents a rhetorical analysis focused on the social media accounts of BIPOC progressive congressional members, self-designated as “The Squad.” Within the essay, we utilize an invitational rhetoric framework<sup>1</sup> to explore the complex ways in which politicians of color in the U.S. navigate a world rooted in traditional conceptualizations of rhetoric. In doing so, we build upon existing research that has wrestled with the ways in which “invitational rhetoric cannot be separated easily from typical persuasive efforts to transform society” by engaging the question posed by Sonja Foss and Cindy Griffin: “in what ways might the theory and practice of invitational rhetoric inform and intersect with efforts to enact social change?”<sup>2</sup> We begin the paper with a brief description of invitational rhetoric, and then shift our focus on the 2021 Twitter accounts of “The Squad.”

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<sup>1</sup> Sonja K. Foss and Cindy L. Griffin, “Beyond Persuasion: A Proposal for An Invitational Rhetoric,” *Communication Monographs* 62 (1995): 2, <https://doi.10.1080/03637759509376345>

<sup>2</sup> Sonja K. Foss and Cindy L. Griffin, “The Theory of Invitational Rhetoric: Anticipating Future Scholarship.” In *Inviting Understanding: A Portrait of Invitational Rhetoric*, eds. Sonja K. Foss and Cindy L. Griffin (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020), 359.

## Invitational Rhetoric: Communicative Means to Relational Understanding

Rhetoric, from a traditionally masculine perspective, focuses on explicit and intentional attempts to change others with little attention to the agency of others.<sup>3</sup> Consistent with feminist ideologies, invitational rhetoric presents a counter-narrative to traditional conceptualizations of rhetoric by framing communicative meaning-making as “an invitation to understanding as a means to create a relationship rooted in equality, immanent value, and self-determination.”<sup>4</sup> Embracing principles of equality (a desire for relationships steeped in intimacy, mutuality, and camaraderie), immanent value (an acknowledgement that all human beings have intrinsic worth) and self-determination (a commitment to allow individuals to make their own decisions), invitational rhetoric prioritizes offering perspectives within relational communication contexts that feature external conditions of safety, value, and freedom.<sup>5</sup>

Invitational rhetoric is a “model for cooperative, non-adversarial, and ethical communication” within democratic societies.<sup>6</sup> While invitational rhetoric may result in a shift of opinion, perspective, or understanding, its purpose is not rooted in a desire for change.<sup>7</sup> Since its inception in 1995, scholars productively have applied, extended, and critiqued an invitational rhetoric framework in various contexts.<sup>8</sup> The result of this growing body of work has been a nuanced understanding of how “invitational rhetoric is one of the many useful and legitimate rhetorics...in which rhetors will want to be skilled.”<sup>9</sup> In particular, this rhetorical analysis draws from existing work that has explored invitational rhetoric within politically-charged social justice contexts, including Roberta Chevrette and Joshua Hendricks’ work on the social justice organizing of Murfreesboro Loves,<sup>10</sup> Kristen Hungerford’s analysis of high school football players kneeling during the national anthem,<sup>11</sup> and Marilyn Bordwell’s research on civil rights activist Ella Baker.<sup>12</sup> Bordwell’s work is especially meaningful to our invitational rhetorical analysis given how she argued that Baker’s civil rights work framed change and changing others—not as an act of control, power, or violence akin to traditional forms of rhetoric but—as an act of freedom and empowerment.

<sup>3</sup> Foss and Griffin, “Beyond Persuasion,” 3.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>5</sup> Jennifer Emerling Bone, Cindy L. Griffin, and T. M. Linda Scholz, “Beyond Traditional Conceptualizations of Rhetoric: Invitational Rhetoric and a Move Toward Civility,” *Western Journal of Communication* 72, no. 4 (2008): 446, <https://doi.10/1080/10570310802446098>

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>7</sup> Foss and Griffin, “Beyond Persuasion,” 11.

<sup>8</sup> Benjamin R. Bates, “Participatory Graffiti as Invitational Rhetoric: The Case Of O Machismo,” *Qualitative Research Reports in Communication* 18, no. 1 (2017): 64-72; Bone, Griffin, and Scholz, “Beyond Traditional Conceptualizations,” 446; Nina M. Lozano-Reich and Dana L. Cloud, “The Uncivil Tongue: Invitational Rhetoric and the Problem of Inequality,” *Western Journal of Communication* 73, no. 2 (2009): 220-226.

<sup>9</sup> Foss and Griffin, “Beyond Persuasion,” 17.

<sup>10</sup> Chevrette, Roberta and Joshua Hendricks, “Love as a Strategy for Community and Social Justice Organizing: Invitational Rhetoric in Murfreesboro Loves.” In *Inviting Understanding: A Portrait of Invitational Rhetoric*, eds. Sonja K. Foss and Cindy L. Griffin (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020), 183-194.

<sup>11</sup> Kristen Hungerford, “Discussions on Kneeling During the National Anthem: An Analysis of High School Football Players Employing Invitational Rhetoric.” In *Inviting Understanding: A Portrait of Invitational Rhetoric*, eds. Sonja K. Foss and Cindy L. Griffin (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020), 215-225.

<sup>12</sup> Marilyn DeLaure Bordwell, “Planting Seeds of Change: Ella Baker’s Radical Rhetoric.” In *Inviting Understanding: A Portrait of Invitational Rhetoric*, eds. Sonja K. Foss and Cindy L. Griffin (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020), 107-121.

In addition, our paper continues the work of Sonja Foss and Jeanine Warisse Turner<sup>13</sup> who seek greater understanding how the unique characteristics of mobile communication technologies affect rhetorical choices. This appears especially important given both the positive (e.g., timeliness, scope, reach, etc.) and negative (limited content, competing messages, hostile attacks) of a multicomunicative context that has become normalized in contemporary times. Our intentional focus on verified social media accounts of BIPOC congressional members provides fertile ground to explore how digital communication can facilitate both meaningful relationships and social change within the realm of politics.<sup>14</sup> This is especially important given that some have argued that invitational rhetoric is impractical given its grounding in civility<sup>15</sup> and the ways in which current political structures privilege the status quo and disadvantage those promoting social change for oppressed peoples,<sup>16</sup> like members of “The Squad.”

### **The Brave New Voices of Progressive Politics: “The Squad”**

In 2018, Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a New York Puerto Rican native, became the youngest woman and Latinx person to be elected to Congress. Representing the 14<sup>th</sup> congressional district of New York, her election gained national attention when she—against all odds—defeated long-time incumbent and party favorite, Rep. Joseph Crowley, who hadn’t had a primary challenger since 2004.<sup>17</sup> Rep. Ocasio-Cortez’s 2018 election to Congress coincided with that of three other women of color: Somalia-born Rep. Ilhan Omar was elected to represent the 5<sup>th</sup> district in Minnesota (Minneapolis) which includes the largest Somali immigrant population in the U.S.; Rashida Tlaib, representing the 13<sup>th</sup> district of Michigan (Detroit), became the first Palestinian American woman to serve in Congress (she and Rep. Omar are also the first Muslim women in Congress); and Rep. Ayanna Pressley, an African American woman with a distinguished record of political activism and experience, was elected to represent Massachusetts’ 7<sup>th</sup> district (Boston). These four BIPOC women were self-designated as “The Squad” via an early 2019 Instagram post by Rep. Ocasio-Cortez. In 2020, two newly elected African American congressional members were added to the group: Rep. Cori Bush, a teacher, nurse, and minister who was motivated to run for office following the murder of Michael Brown, represents the 1<sup>st</sup> district of Missouri (St. Louis) and Rep. Jamaal Bowman, a former public school teacher and principal—and the only male member of “The Squad”—represents New York City’s 16<sup>th</sup> district.

“The Squad” represents the face for a new age of leadership—one that reflects the demographic diversity of a younger progressive political generation that has been crucial for Democratic victories in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Arguably, “Squad” members have electrified the progressive Democratic

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<sup>13</sup> Sonja K. Foss and Jeanine Warisse Turner, “Challenges to the enactment of invitational rhetoric in the age of mobile communication technologies.” In *Inviting Understanding: A Portrait of Invitational Rhetoric*, eds. Sonja K. Foss and Cindy L. Griffin (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020), 157-171.

<sup>14</sup> Mark Orbe, “Diverse Offerings for Understanding U.S. politics: Analyzing the Invitational Rhetoric of *Hamilton* and President Barack Obama.” In *Rhetoric, Politics, and Hamilton: An American Musical*, eds. J Drury and Sara Drury (New York: Peter Lang, 2021), 163-178.

<sup>15</sup> Bone, Griffin, and Scholz, “Beyond Traditional Conceptualizations of Rhetoric,” 434-462.

<sup>16</sup> Nina M. Lozano-Reich and Dana L. Cloud, “The Uncivil Tongue: Invitational Rhetoric and the Problem of Inequality,” *Western Journal of Communication* 73, no. 2 (2009): 220-226, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10570310902856105>

<sup>17</sup> Ocasio-Cortez’s election journey was featured in the 2019 documentary, *Knock down the house*. This film, available on Netflix, highlighted the campaigns of several women determined to challenge Democratic incumbents. Back by several grassroots organizations, they believed that everyday U.S. Americans deserve to be represented by everyday U.S. Americans uncontrolled by corrupt money. Cori Bush, another “Squad” member was also featured in this documentary.

base and transformed the current U.S political landscape. Noted as savvy digital practitioners,<sup>18</sup> the small group of progressive BIPOC politicians have garnered heightened visibility for their willingness to take on the Washington establishment, including both Republicans and fellow Democrats.<sup>19</sup> While some communication scholars have studied “Squad” members, the vast majority have focused on the ways in which problematic attacks made on them are dehumanizing, objectifying, and misogynistic.<sup>20</sup> The rhetorical analysis that we present in this essay is significant in that it situates BIPOC people as active innovators in their use of social media, as opposed to passive targets of politically-charged rhetoric. In addition, we utilize their collective Twitter accounts as a rich point of analysis for extending current research related to invitational rhetoric.

### “The Squad’s” Twittersphere as Invitational Rhetoric

As presented earlier, invitational rhetoric features practices that develop relationships based on mutual respect, equality, immanent value, and self-determination. An explicit goal of this form of relational-rhetorical communication is to invite others into new worlds to increase understanding of standpoints with which one might have little familiarity. As we began our analysis of the 2021 Twitter accounts of “Squad” members, invitational rhetoric emerged as a useful frame to understand their social media engagement.<sup>21</sup>

### An Orientation Toward Invitational Rhetoric

Both individually and collectively, the six BIPOC congressional members who comprise “The Squad” embrace the values of invitational rhetoric. This orientation is apparent in the ways in which their verified Twitter accounts invite others in their worlds, demonstrate relational-communal support, and extend a sense of solidarity to others, as a means to cultivate the same for others.

*Inviting others into their worlds.* Like the vast majority of Twitter accounts, this social media platform provided a venue through which others could obtain insight into the worlds of BIPOC

<sup>18</sup> Arshia Anwer. 2021. “Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez as a savvy digital practitioner: The opportunity of online community-building and interactive political communication.” Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Communication Association, Seattle, WA, November 18, 2021.

<sup>19</sup> Kate Sullivan, “Here are the 4 congresswomen known as ‘The Squad’ targeted by Trump’s racist tweets. CNN Politics, July 16, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/07/15/politics/who-are-the-squad/index.html>

<sup>20</sup> Mary Bresnahan, Alexa Roscizewski, Sarah Whitaker, S., and Hannah Cossman. “Online Public Responses to the ‘Send Her Back’ Chant at the 2019 Greenville Rally,” *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 50, no. 4 (2021): 338-351. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17475759.2021.1877177>; Edward C. Brewer and Chrys Egan, “Clear and Present Danger Standard 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary: Examining Donald J. Trump’s ‘Presidential’ Rhetoric as a Clear and Present Danger,” *First Amendment Studies*, 55, no. (2021): 44-58. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21689725.2021.1886967>; Jonathan J. Edwards. “Memes, Condensation Symbols, and the Changing Landscape of Political Rhetoric,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1080/15295036.2021.1985729>

<sup>21</sup> We began the project by compiling a reasonable rhetorical text with which to work. We chose to limit our analysis to one year, 2021, so that we could include newer “Squad” members elected in 2020 within a manageable context. The second author, a millennial active social media user who works professionally in social marketing, conducted the first review. This involved perusing all of the activity on the six different “Squad” member’s verified Twitter accounts and selecting representative tweets across the entire year. A second level of analysis was conducted by the first author (a baby boomer academician with little social media experience) and preliminary themes began to emerge. Our collaboration is grounded in the inherent value that diverse perspectives rooted in identity matters bring to research. As such, we bring similar viewpoints to the study as politically active people of color *and* divergent perspectives based on gender, age, educational status, and use of social media. This juxtaposition of these identities, across multiple dimensions, provides a productive means toward a well-balanced analysis.

progressive politicians. Many tweets were political in nature (e.g., promoting progressive initiatives, providing legislative or voting updates, educating the public), however, equal attention was paid to sharing personal, cultural, and social aspects of their lives. This was accomplished through a large number of tweets and retweets that highlighted personal photos of themselves engaged in everyday activities, as well as candid pictures of their partners, families, friends, and pets. Seemingly random posts about personal interests also provided a “close-up-and-personal” view of their lives. Some of these tweets were lighthearted, like a November 14, 2021 tweet by Rep. Ocasio-Cortez that highlighted her love for “sour patch kids—the watermelon ones specifically,” a March 7, 2021 post by Rep. Pressley where she asked “Did anyone else grow up with a grandmother or great grandmother who insisted you turn off the television during a storm because ‘God is speaking?’,” and another on December 28, 2021 where Rep. Bowman listed “10 TV shows to know me. Don’t really need 10. Just one: The Wire.” However, others were steeped in greater vulnerability leading to a greater sense of immediacy. Examples of these posts involved deaths in the family (Rep. Omar, September 13, 2021 and November 11, 2021), personal experiences with sexual assault, rape, and domestic abuse (Rep. Bush, April 30, 2021), memorable encounters as immigrants and refugees (Rep. Tlaib, March 18, 2021 and Rep. Omar, August 27, 2021), as well as personally meaningful events (Rep. Bowman, November 25, 2021; Rep. Tlaib, April 21, 2021; and Rep. Pressley, December 5, 2021). Taken as a whole, these exemplars reflect the type of access to “Squad” members’ lives that are steeped in openness, intimacy, and transparency. The authenticity and immediacy are not lost on many of the followers as evident in a July 12, 2021 when, in response to a tweet that said “I love this account! Not sure if it’s always you, or a team, but always so glad to see you in my TL,” Rep. Ocasio-Cortez responded, “It’s always me ☺ thanks!

*Demonstrating relational-communal support.* An analysis of tweets from “Squad” members revealed that prioritizing relationships, both personal and professional, was of great importance. In addition to highlighting relationships within their personal lives, they also spent considerable energy with posts that worked to define, sustain, and cement intragroup relationships within “The Squad.” This is accomplished through a constant stream of tweets that featured affirmative birthday greetings to one another, group pictures, and statements of solidarity. For example, one tweet included a group picture of Reps. Pressley, Bush, and Omar with the caption: “May we always have this circle, these hands to hold & righteous fights to take on together & with the rest of our movement family. Grateful for your life & the universe for aligning our paths my dear sisters” (October 4, 2021). At times, messages were both personal and political. This was the case when Rep. Pressley tweeted a Happy Birthday message to Rep. Tlaib which included: “You’re an incredible Mom to your boys but Mama Bear to us all. Thank you for the radical love, pure heart, contagious joy & righteousness you bring to the movement every day. Love you Sis” (July 24, 2021) and when Rep. Tlaib tweeted “Happy Birthday @IlhanMN! Thank you for making #good-trouble with me and being a source of strength when I needed it most. Love you sis!” (October 4, 2021). The analysis revealed an array of intragroup messages of love, support, and solidarity were frequent features on “Squad” members’ Twitter accounts. In addition to personal occasions, posts were created when individuals embarked on important initiatives (e.g., Rep. Bush’s successful overnight protest to extend the national eviction moratorium) and collaborative efforts (e.g., to impeach President Trump following his involvement in the January 6<sup>th</sup> insurrection). Twitter messaging regarding ingroup support were also glaringly apparent when “Squad” members were under attack, a topic that we explore in greater depth in a subsequent section.

*Extending a sense of solidarity to others.* The sense of camaraderie that was established within “Squad” members’ Twitter accounts was not limited to the six BIPOC congressional members.

Instead, it was extended to others—especially those who had made, and were making, positive contributions to the world. Across 2021, tweets highlighting the work of Senator Bernie Sanders (described by Rep. Bowman as “the triple OG himself”) and others (e.g., Angela Davis, John Lewis, Fred Hampton, Shirley Chisholm, Fannie Lou Hamer, Coretta Scott King, and bell hooks) appeared. In addition, “Squad” members posted affirming messages including those to Olympian Simone Biles regarding her decision to prioritize her mental health and members of the Texas State House who were working to protecting voting rights (Rep. Ocasio-Cortez, July 28, 2021 and June 16, 2021 respectively); Boston Mayor Kim Janey regarding her leadership (Rep. Pressley, November 11, 2021); Olympic hopeful Sha’Carri Richardson on her taking accountability for a positive drug test (Rep. Omar, July 2, 2021); and tennis champion Naomi Osaka’s stance on mental health (Rep. Bush, July 27, 2021). Tweets such as these extended a sense of solidarity to others, in essence inviting others into a collective reflected inclusive diversity. This was most evident through a variety of tweets by Rep. Bowman that celebrated the Holi Holiday observed by Hindus, Sikhs, and others (March 29, 2021), Coming Out Day (October 11, 2021), Indigenous People’s Day (October 11, 2021), and showing support for the Jewish community (June 15, 2021). Such rhetorical practices established a connection between the past, present, and future which was also reflected in a post during Women’s History Month (March 8, 2021) from Rep. Pressley:

To our Women & Girls: You are powerful. You are limitless. Your contributions to this world are brilliant, needed & uniquely yours. Your ideas are substantive. Your lived experiences belong at decision making tables. You deserve a life free from fear, filled with dignity & love.

### **Offering New Perspectives**

The rhetorical hallmark of “Squad” tweets was seen within the multiple ways in which they offered new perspectives into political discussions dominated by traditional ways of thinking/knowing. Within this section, we highlight three practices utilized by “Squad” members to speak truth to power through their Twitter accounts: Sharing experience-based evidence, facilitating others’ voices, and presenting counter-narratives. Through each of these devices, BIPOC congressional members were able to employ re-sourcement—drawing energy from new ways of understanding while challenging traditionally acceptable ideas.<sup>22</sup>

*Sharing experience-based evidence.* As discussed earlier, “Squad” members invited others into their worlds, oftentimes sharing how personal experiences informed their political ideas, approaches, and commitments. As such, they utilized experience-based evidence to offer new perspectives into established political discussions. Three particular exemplars capture the essence of this practice. First, Rep. Omar utilized multiple tweets to share her experiences as a refugee in order to humanize considerations of immigration policy. In one post on August 27, 2021, she articulated how her own experiences inform her current understanding of the issue:

So many former refugees like myself are proof of what can happen when America lives up to its ideals. There are countless others whose deaths are proof of what happens when we don’t. We can’t repeat the mistakes of the past.

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<sup>22</sup> Chevette and Hendricks, “Love is a Strategy,” 183.

Second, in a similarly powerful way, Rep. Bush's self-disclosures regarding her own personal experiences also provided a window in to the worlds of individuals impacted by political decisions. On April 30, 2021 (the close of Sexual Assault Awareness Month), she tweeted:

I'm a survivor of sexual assault and domestic abuse. To every survivor who has faced injustice, who has not been believed, who is on their journey to healing: I love you. I see you. I am fighting for you every day.

She continued to show great vulnerability when she took the opportunity, during a congressional committee hearing on abortion care, to testify on her experiences with rape, teenage pregnancy, and abortion. According to her September 29, 2021 post, this was the first time to "share a story I've never fully told publicly before."

The third example comes from Rep. Tlaib. On March 18, 2021, in preparation for a vote on an important legislative proposal regarding the children of undocumented parents, she offered the following tweet:

My high school friend found out she was undocumented before graduation. She was devastated and contemplated suicide. I felt so helpless. Today, I am her Congresswoman, and will vote to change her life forever. With tears in my eyes, I will vote yes for the Dream & Promise Act.

Each of these examples reflect "Squad" member's rhetoric designed to offer perspectives not formerly spoken about into political discussions. In addition to their own experiences, they utilized Twitter to facilitate others' voices as well.

*Facilitating others' voices.* Posts featured on Twitter accounts of "The Squad" were transparent in acknowledging that their experiences were not more valid or important than the experiences of others. Accordingly, a number of tweets were used to promote enhanced understanding through the voices of others. This often was accomplished through sharing different quotes from others and/or retweeting different posts from others. In some cases, it involved sharing particular voices that are typically silenced. A powerful example of this is seen in a March 26, 2021 tweet by Rep. Tlaib. In this post, she discussed her interactions with a young boy from Guatemala who was held at a border facility separated from his parents. When asked, "What is it that you want me to know?," he responded with a poignant, "That I'm a human being." In the tweet, she shared:

It gave me chills when he said it. Being able to see and hear directly from the children fleeing violence in their home countries will remain with me forever and inspire me to work harder for a just and humane immigration process.

Another example of "Squad" members featuring the experiences of others can be found in a February 9, 2021 tweet by Rep. Pressley. In this particular post, she highlighted the experiences of Preston Chaney:

A man died from COVID in a Houston jail cell last week because he couldn't afford the \$100 bail. He died for the crime of being poor, awaiting trial for the alleged crime of stealing food. His name was Preston Chaney. Mass incarceration is a public health crisis.

Her post generated over 1,000 replies, 25,000 retweets, and close to 100,000 likes.

Another rhetorical device employed to facilitate others' voices was represented by tweets that explicitly requested followers to share their experiences, thoughts, opinions, and resources. This

was demonstrated when Rep. Omar, after recognizing a void, tweeted: “My Twitter feed is lacking youth voices, tag yourself or a youth organizer fighting for change that I should be following on twitter.” Other “Squad” members modeled this rhetoric. For example, on October 11, 2021, Rep. Ocasio-Cortez reflected on the influence of her Taino ancestors and requested that followers provide additional resources and on February 7, 2021, Rep. Bowman acknowledged his own “US bias” and committed to “do [his] homework” when others offered resources on international achievements. In two additional posts, Rep. Bowman directly requested diverse perspectives from others. The first, on April 11, 2021, was designed to gain insight about what “Black freedom” meant to people. Specifically, he posted:

I want to have a discussion with you all about Black freedom. What does it mean to you? What can we build and create? What can we change? How can we get free—in mind and action? Please let me hear your thoughts.

In another Twitter post (October 7, 2021), he shared how he used his Instagram account to ask “followers what the Build Back Better Act’s universal child care would mean to them.” In both examples, Bowman utilized his Twitter account to provide a list of different answers—generated through hundreds of comments—which helped him to highlight different perspectives on the topics.

*Presenting counter-narratives.* Offering new perspectives through the presentation of counter-narratives was another key rhetorical element used by “Squad” members. In this regard, countless tweets—across individual accounts and oftentimes circulated within the “Squad” Twittersphere through retweets—were designed to re-frame dominant thinking and challenge existing ideas. Often times, these posts focused on significant political issues that largely were being understood through politicized framing of conservative perspectives. For example, Rep. Pressley re-framed the master narrative of regarding drug policies by inserting the relevancy of race:

Legalizing cannabis is a racial justice issue and the communities of color who have been decimated by the so-called War on Drugs must be the direct beneficiaries of legalization. Pass the #SafeBankingAct. Expunge records. Restore voting rights. (April 22, 2021)

In similar ways, Rep. Bowman confronted politically charged attempts to limit the ways that teachers could educate their students: “The Holocaust is a fact. Slavery is a fact. Native genocide is a fact. White supremacy is the reason for all three. Teach our kids the truth so that they may build a better world (October 15, 2021).

Many tweets presented counter-narratives centered on issues of regarding classism: raising the minimum wage, tuition free state/public college, appropriate taxes on the wealthy, political campaign funding, etc. Within these posts, “Squad” members rhetorically challenge traditional thinking by offering new perspectives on the issues. For example, Rep. Omar posted the following facts and figures in a May 11, 2021 tweet:

McDonalds CEO pay: \$10.8 million, Median worker pay: \$9,124  
Walmart CEO pay: \$22.6 million, Median worker pay: \$20,942  
Nike CEO pay: \$54.5 million, Median worker pay: \$28,142  
We don’t suffer from scarcity. We suffer from greed.



Similar posts are consistently featured by all “Squad” members. All were intended to meet one objective: Provide alternative means to understanding how current financial systems work to benefit the wealthy and disadvantage others. This was evident in the October 25, 2021 post by Rep. Bowman who stated:

The wealthy of billionaires grew 70% during the pandemic. Taxing them to invest in our youth, schools, the elderly, people with disabilities, and the climate is a drop in the bucket considering their wealth comes from the people who need it the most.

In a subsequent post the same day, he reiterated his point and added: “Inflation is a real problem, but not one that government spending is causing.”

In other examples, the counter-narratives that were presented through tweets focused on seemingly inconsequential issues that “Squad” members were quick to identify as indicative of larger problematic concerns. Three language-based examples highlight this idea. The first example involves a tweet from Rep. Pressley (August 26, 2021) highlighting the biased ways in which media outlets were describing Kyle Rittenhouse:

A 17 year old white supremacist domestic terrorist drove across state lines, armed with an AR 15. He shot and killed 2 people who had assembled to affirm the value, dignity, and worth of Black lives. Fix your damn headlines.

Rep. Bowman provides a second example, challenging the causal use of “wasted” when describing trillions of dollars spent on the military.

It’s too generous to say we “wasted” \$2.26 trillion on the wars in Afghanistan. The reality is, military contractors got rich off of those wars. We didn’t just waste that money—we funneled it to the same people whose political donations will fund more pro-war candidates.

The final language-based example of a counter-narrative comes from Rep. Ocasio-Cortez’s Twitter feed. In a series of September 12, 2021 tweets, she draws attention to how some of her more veteran colleagues seemingly shift from referring to her as “Congresswoman,” and use “young lady instead” when her questions and arguments seem to speak truth to power. She insightfully offers a new perspective regarding such language when she posts:

Imagine if every time someone referred to someone as “young lady” they were responded to by being addressed with their age and gender? They’d be pretty upset if one responded with “the old man,” right? Why this kind of weird, patronizing behavior is so accepted is beyond me!”

### **Co-Creating External Conditions for Invitational Rhetoric**

As established in previous sections, “Squad” members utilized their Twitter accounts, individually and collectively, to share experience-based evidence, facilitate others’ voices, and present counter-narratives—efforts that reflected the ideals of invitational rhetoric. Their social media activity mirrored a desire for relationships steeped in mutual respect, intimacy, and camaraderie (equality), an acceptance that all individuals have intrinsic worth (immanent value), and an attentiveness to the ideal that individuals should be able to make their own decisions (self-determination).<sup>23</sup> In this

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<sup>23</sup> Foss and Griffin, “Beyond Persuasion,” 2.

regard, their Twitter feeds embraced a commitment to facilitate a communicative environment where everyone, especially including those with diverse perspectives, could participate in meaningful ways. In order to achieve this goal, per the tenets of invitational rhetoric scholarship, “The Squad” had to communicate in ways where others felt safe, valued, and free to ultimately make their own political choices.

“The Squad” was extremely effective in co-creating an online community where they and their followers and supporters were able to communicate in ways that embraced the core ideals of invitational rhetoric. This was evident in the community of progressive thinkers and activists who exchanged thoughts, ideas, opinions, experiences, hopes, and dreams through Twitter. However, each of “The Squad” members Twitter accounts is public so their activity and engagement — tweets, likes, and retweets—are accessible to both followers and non-followers, including individuals whose political ideals are counter to the progressive agenda. The result of this reality is that dual external conditions seemed to exist within the progressive community established by “Squad” followers and the larger Twitter on-line population that included individuals whose sensibilities spanned the political spectrum. In this regard, Twitter facilitated invitational rhetoric marked by a sense of personalization, vulnerability, and relational connection for some,<sup>24</sup> while others responded to this same form of messaging with aggressive, disparaging and offensive rhetoric. Research demonstrates that social media posts reflective of invitational rhetoric (e.g., personal disclosures that provide new perspectives) are evaluated more negatively for women<sup>25</sup> and that women are more heavily targeted with negative attacks on Twitter.<sup>26</sup> Cyber aggression, in the form of derogatory, insulting, and harmful messages, toward BIPOC women specifically has been well-documented over the year.<sup>27</sup> As highlighted by communication researchers,<sup>28</sup> female “Squad” members have been the explicit target of politically-charged rhetoric steeped in objectification, dehumanization, and misogyny. It is this larger context that informs our next point of analysis, one which explores how progressive BIPOC members of Congress negotiate an on-line platform marked by negative, harmful and dangerous attacks.

### **A Continuum of Invitational and Traditional Rhetoric**

Given the antagonistic nature of social media generally, and online attacks targeting BIPOC women more specifically, our rhetoric analysis of “Squad” member’s 2021 Twitter accounts shifts to their communication in contexts that lack the external conditions of equality, immanent value, and freedom. In the next section, we highlight the various ways in which “The Squad” utilized their Twitter accounts to negotiate interactions—both in-person and virtually—with others who aggressively attacked their personal, cultural, and political identities. Our analysis describes their

<sup>24</sup> Gunn Enli and Eli Skogerbo, “Personalized Campaigns in Party-centered Politics: Twitter and Facebook as Arenas for Political Communication,” *Information, Communication & Society*, 16, no. 5 (2013): 757-774, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2013.782330>

<sup>25</sup> Eun-Ju Lee, Soo Youn Oh, Jihye Lee, and Hyun Suk Kim, “Up Close and Personal on Social Media: When do Politicians’ Personal Disclosures Enhance Vote Intention?,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 95, no. 2 (2018): 381-403, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077699018754911>

<sup>26</sup> Ludovic Rheault, Erica Rayment, and Andreea Musulan, “Politicians in the Line of Fire: Incivility and the Treatment of Women on Social Media,” *Research & Politics*, 6, no. 1 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1177/2053168018816228>

<sup>27</sup> Diane Felmlee, Paulina Inara Rodis, & Sara Chari Francisco, “What a B!tch!: Cyber Aggression Toward Women of Color,” *Gender and the Media: Women’s Places*. In *Gender and the Media: Women’s Places (Advances in Gender Research, Vol. 26)*, edited by Marcia Texler Segal and Vasilikie Demos (Bingley: Emerald Publishing Limited, 2018), 105-123, <https://doi.org/10.1108/S1529-212620180000026008>

<sup>28</sup> Brewer and Egan, “Clear and Present Danger;” Edwards, “Memes, Condensational Symbols.”

tweets as framed by, but limited to, an invitational rhetoric orientation across three rhetorical devices: (1) Taking the high road, (2) speaking truth to power, and (3) defending themselves and their right to safety.

### **Taking the High Road**

Rep. Pressley provides an excellent point of analysis of embracing the spirit of invitational rhetoric in her communication with those who virtually attack her. Politics aside, her public identification as a person with alopecia who has decided to embrace a beautifully bald presence attracted a number of personal attacks on Twitter in 2021. Negative comments, insults, and offensive remarks were posted on her Twitter account whenever she posted a picture. Interestingly, some tweets questioned why she posted pictures; this was the case in a June 16, 2021 post by @Caesar63BC who wrote: “Is sharing photos of yourself to Twitter trolls part of your congressional duties or just something you like to do for fun because you have so much time to spare?” Rep. Pressley’s reply on the same day was respectfully unapologetic:

I am a multitasker. Further, when I am mocked for my alopecia representation, the entire traumatic hair loss community is being disrespectful too, & for that, I will not stand. Let’s normalize without negatively commenting on the physicality of someone.

As similar personal attacks on her physical appearance continued, some were interwoven with criticisms of her political commitments. A September 28, 2021 post (accompanied with another beautiful picture) responds by stating:

The ignorance of the trolls on my TL. No. Hair is not infrastructure. But childcare, paid leave, home & community based svcs, housing, climate resiliency & a pathway to citizenship for our immigrant neighbors IS human infra[structure]. I’ll keep holding the line as tight as these cheekbones.

The positive, affirming nature of her posts were not lost on some. For example, on February 10, 2021, @sarahkhenry33 tweeted:

Ayanna Pressley your bravery in paving the way for others with alopecia to see themselves as powerful leaders makes you a super hero in our house. My son was recently diagnosed and having you as a role model has been invaluable.

Rep. Pressley’s reply was: “DM me if I can ever reach out to say hello or to offer a word of encouragement.”

Part of maintaining an inviting, positive communicative approach on Twitter included the use of humor. For example, on November 18, 2021, for example, someone tweeted “You look like Mr. Potato Head” to Rep. Pressley’s account. Her response was a simple, “Thank you, my daughter loves him!” Another example was seen on September 14, 2021 when @thehill tweeted a video of Sen. Josh Hawley’s comments along with a quote: “This president [Biden] is a disgrace. His behavior is disgraceful. He has dishonored this country with his shameful leadership in this crisis and it is time for him to resign.” Rep. Pressley retweeted the post, adding, “I’ll take ironic statements by insurrectionists for \$500.” Other Squad members also use humor, and at times sarcasm, to address political issues. This was the case when Rep. Bowman, on February 3, 2021, retweeted a @PalmerReport post, that read:

Hey Republicans, Ilhan Omar didn't incite a deadly insurrection. Ilhan didn't call for the assassination of U.S. leaders. Ilhan Omar didn't harass school shooting victims. You're thinking of Majorie Taylor Greene."

In another example, Rep. Omar replied to a tweet by Rep. Majorie Taylor Greene ("By the time I'm done @IlhanMN, I'll be sitting in your seat on the Foreign Affairs Committee. It will be all America First policies.") with a meme of cultural icon Beyonce with two words, "GIRL, BYE." (September 18, 2021). A final example comes from Rep. Tlaib who, in response to a January 7, 2021 @MikeElk tweet ("Flight attendants unions want pro-Trump rioters banned from flights home from DC over safety concerns"), tweeted: "Pretend they have Arabic sounding names."

### **Speaking Truth to Power**

A key feature of Twitter accounts of "The Squad" was to provide information regarding, and promoting, progressive politics. In this vein, the six progressive BIPOC congressional members used their social media platforms to speak truth to power—in essence to "call out" other politicians who, from their perspective, were advocating for problematic positions. Republican politicians represented the most frequent target of such tweets. As illustrated by the examples provided below from Reps. Ocasio-Cortez and Tlaib, multiple 2021 posts addressed a variety of issues.

Martin Luther King, Jr was murdered for confronting white supremacy. Today GOP who are gutting the very Voting Rights Act King worked for want you to believe he'd support mass disenfranchisement and teaching of racial ignorance. They should read the books they're trying to ban. (Rep. Ocasio-Cortez, July 12, 2021)

It's 10 a.m. and 145 Republican colleagues voted yes to adjourn. If they don't want to work then they shouldn't be here. The rest of us have serious work to do to get resources to our residents, schools, and communities. (Rep. Tlaib, March 10, 2021)

Just had to go through a metal detector before entering the House floor. Some colleagues are frustrated (guess which ones) by this requirement. Now they know how [high school] students in my district feel. Suck it up buttercups. Y'all brought this on yourselves. (Rep. Tlaib, January 12, 2021)

This [a report that three House Republicans stated their desire to hire Kyle Rittenhouse as an intern] comes just one day after @GOPLeader announced his intent to reward white supremacist members of Congress who incite violence. Same party who just appointed 200+ judges, many unqualified, to federal courts—70% of whom are white men. (Rep. Ocasio-Cortez, November 19, 2021)

In some instances, speaking truth to power took the form of "fighting fire with fire," responding to attacking posts in a similar vein. For example, on October 27, 2021, Senator Ted Cruz used his verified Twitter account to call out Rep. Ilhan asserting:

You are frequently a liar (and often spewing anti-Semitism). But here, you're [sic] lie is exactly 180 degrees false. I was defending the right of citizens to denounce authoritarian policies. In other words, to OPPOSE Nazis (or petty tyrants), not to support them.

The response of Rep. Omar was direct and to the point:

Oh, Ted, I hope you didn't strain yourself in coming up with this level of infinite projection. Insurrectionists like yourself who surround themselves with domestic terrorists aren't fighting authoritarianism but encourage it. You aren't fooling anyone, resign.

Speaking truth to power was not limited to Republican politicians as "Squad" members also utilized Twitter to call out fellow Democrats on a variety of issues including abolishing the filibuster, opposing "Big Pharma," and addressing corporate greed. While many of these tweets were sent out generally, others were directed to specific Democrat leaders. For example, Rep. Bush posted the following on October 13, 2021:

President Biden promised he'd stand up for Black lives. We mobilized in record numbers to deliver him the White House. We're still waiting for him to step up on ending police violence. On protecting our right to vote. On protecting Black migrants. Keep your promises, @POTUS.

Another example of this appeared on December 19, 2021. Rep. Bowman, in responding to news that Senator Joe Manchin was not supporting the Build Back Better proposal, tweeted:

Wow @Sen\_JoeMachin, with all due respect, when you say you're a no on Build Back Better – is it you? Or is it the special interest that powers you? I'm inviting you to my district to see just how badly we need this bill. Will you tell my community "No" to our face?

Shortly thereafter, he added a follow-up post illustrating the impact of a "NO" vote on child tax credit payments, affordable childcare, paid leave, immigration protections, community violence and trauma intervention funding, down payment assistance, housing vouchers, etc.

### **Defending Themselves and Their Right for Safety**

"Squad" members were targets of multiple examples of abuse, threats, and attacks, virtually and/or in-person. These included, but were not limited to Islamophobic verbal attacks and death threats targeting Reps. Omar and Tliab, racially-charged threats directed at Rep. Bush, as well as a well-known incident where congressional colleague Rep. Gosar (R-AZ) tweeted a photoshopped, animated video that depicts him killing Rep. Ocasio-Cortez. Within this section, we will draw from two of these incidents to demonstrate how "Squad" members used their Twitter accounts to address them.

On November 8, 2021, *The Washington Post* twitter account posted a report that Rep. Paul Gosar (R-AZ) "tweeted a photoshopped, animated video that depicts him killing Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-N.Y.) and swinging two swords at President Biden." Immediately, an outcry of condemnation exploded across social media. This included posts by different "Squad" members including Rep. Tlaib who tweeted "His party must reign him in. Fantasizing about killing a colleague is dangerous, deranged, and promotes violence." Rep. Pressley tweeted her support by stating "Heinous attacks like these leveled at my sister, @AOC, perpetuate and normalize violence against women—a reality far too common for WOC [women of color]." In response to Rep. Gosar's subsequent post of a meme that downplayed the seriousness of the video ("It's a cartoon. Relax."), Rep. Bowman tweeted "Cartoons normalized fascism. Cartoons normalized lynching. Cartoons normalized anti-Semitism. You normalize violence against women and laugh. There's no place for you in government" (November 9, 2021). Ocasio-Cortez replied to the tweet with:

This dude is just a collection of wet toothpicks anyway. White supremacy is for extremely fragile people & sad men like him, whose self concept relies on the myth that he was born superior because deep down he knows he couldn't open a pickle jar or read a whole book by himself.

This post was liked by over 100,000 Twitter users. Later the same day, she added:

So while I was en route to Glasgow, a creepy member I work with who fundraises for Neo-Nazi groups shared a fantasy video of him killing me. And he'll face no consequences [because] @GOPLeader cheers him on with excuses. Fun Monday! Well, back to work [because] institutions don't protect [women of color.]

The following day, she used Twitter to reiterate her focus on pressing forward on a progressive political agenda and reminded people that "You can cut down all the flowers, but you cannot stop the coming of Spring."

Rep. Omar also has been a frequent target of abuse and threats at the hands of political opponents. As a hijab-wearing Muslim Black woman in Congress, her appearance alone appears to be enough to trigger the insecurities of others. This seems to be the case in one incident tweeted about by @patriottakes on November 25, 2021:

Over the Thanksgiving break, Lauren Boebert said she was recently in a Capitol elevator with Ilhan Omar when a fretful Capitol police officer ran up. Lauren Boebert said: 'Well, she doesn't have a backpack. We should be fine.' Boebert then called Ilhan Omar, 'jihad squad.'

Immediately, Rep. Pressley retweeted the post and condemned Rep. Boebert's comments:

Shameful, deeply offensive & dangerous. Yet another blatant display of Islamophobia targeting @IlhanMN. These comments are personally hurtful, legitimately endanger her & the broader Muslim community. Rhetoric like this must be denounced & anyone spewing it held to account.

On the next day, Rep. Omar tweeted:

Saying I am a suicide bomber is no laughing matter. @GOPLeader and @SpeakerPelosi need to take appropriate action, normalizing this bigotry not only endangers my life but the lives of all Muslims. Anti-Muslim bigotry has no place in Congress.

Anti-Muslim bigotry is central to rhetoric attacking Rep. Omar across social media. This included paid ads, like those sponsored by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, that smeared, vilified, and targeted Rep. Omar based on her religious beliefs. Some Twitter users, like @jeremyslevin, highlighted the ways in which the ads content was "virtually identical to the language used in death threats [Omar] gets" and added "Make no mistake: AIPAC is putting Rep. Omar's life at risk with repeated Islamophobic attack ads" (August 11, 2021). Rep. Tlaib retweeted this particular post, adding "I'm so sick of this shit."

The "shit" that Rep. Tlaib was referring to was the barrage of attacks on Rep. Omar that began shortly after her 2016 election to Congress. As addressed by Rep. Bush (via a June 10, 2021 tweet) these assaults were commonplace for different "Squad" members, and were not only done by Republicans:

Stop attacking @IlhanMN. Stop attacking us. I'm not surprised when Republicans attack Black women for standing up for human rights. But when it's Democrats, it's especially hurtful. We're your colleagues. Talk to us directly. Enough with the anti-Blackness and Islamophobia.

The trauma of these attacks—verbal assaults, threats, and aggressive violations of personal safety—were consistently highlighted by “Squad” members. In the words of Rep. Bush,

You should never have to fear for your life at work. You should never have to be constantly retraumatized at work. You should never have to beg for accountability at work. All of that must be true in Congress too.

While this post was prompted by the January 6<sup>th</sup> attacks on the U.S. Capitol (February 2, 2021), they efficiently capture the ongoing tension and struggle for “Squad” members’ ability to participate in U.S. politics without trauma or fearing for their lives.

### **Concluding Discussion**

Our analysis demonstrates how, individually and collectively, the six BIPOC congressional members embrace the values of invitational rhetoric. This orientation is apparent in the ways in which their verified Twitter accounts invite others in their worlds, demonstrate relational-communal support, and extend a sense of solidarity to others, as a means to cultivate the same for others. Further, our paper highlights the various ways in which “The Squad” utilized this social media platform to negotiate interactions—both in-person and virtually—with others who aggressively attacked their personal, cultural, and political identities: (1) Taking the high road, (2) speaking truth to power, and (3) defending themselves and their right to safety. In doing so, we provide significant insight in how invitational rhetoric theory and practice functions to enact social change within a divisively partisan political world.

Our rhetorical analysis of “The Squad’s” 2021 Twittersphere, situated with existing research on invitational rhetoric, adds to the communication field’s “ongoing conversations about rhetoric, feminism, and social change.”<sup>29</sup> It is significant in that it centers the agency of BIPOC social media rhetoric generally, and BIPOC women more specifically. By analyzing the rhetoric of “The Squad,” our analysis demonstrates how traditionally underrepresented group members are utilizing social media to communicate messages consistent with their politically progressive brand. Furthermore, it exemplifies how the dual nature of their rhetoric—grounded in an orientation a rhetoric approach that is both inviting and also rooted in a desire for change—within a socio-political climate where personal safety, immanent value, and freedom are not valued by all. In no certain terms, the social media messaging of “The Squad” illustrates how the core purposes of traditional and invitational rhetoric are not oppositional, mutually exclusive, antithetical, or contradictory. This is true in looking at the different members of this progressive coalition and their own rhetoric at different times across 2021.

The larger reminder here is that invitational rhetoric, as initially conceptualized, may not be suitable for all contexts; instead it is “one of the many useful and legitimate rhetorics.”<sup>30</sup> As an ontological orientation, it represents a valuable alternative to traditional forms of persuasion

<sup>29</sup> Lozano-Reich and Cloud, “The Uncivil Tongue,” 221.

<sup>30</sup> Foss and Griffin, “Beyond Persuasion,” 17.

grounded in power, control, and manipulation.<sup>31</sup> This approach is grounded in an acknowledgment that political disagreements are inevitable and that conflicts can be engaged within external conditions that facilitate invitational rhetoric. A more civil outlook, both in terms of concept and practice, can be achieved by inviting others from diverse racial, religious, socioeconomic and political backgrounds into conversation situated within core values of inclusion and acceptance.<sup>32</sup> Still, invitational rhetoricians have been quick to oppose “normative models of civility and deliberation as a political fix-all,”<sup>33</sup> asserting how calls for civil discourse can represent a historical power move to disenfranchise those looking to challenge/overturn the status quo?<sup>34</sup> Maybe not surprisingly then, members of “The Squad”—especially the BIPOC women members—are typically held to a double standard where they are pressured to maintain a sense of composure and civility amidst attacks from others while their white male peers can respond in angry, aggressive, and less than civil ways without criticism.<sup>35</sup>

Despite larger external conditions that fall short of the requirements for civil discourse, offering of new perspectives within a relational context of equality, respect, and self-determination can represent a crucial building block toward sustained social change. This seemingly was true in the case of African American civil rights leader, Ella Baker, who utilized invitational rhetoric to create a foundation for relational understanding and then when certain situational contexts required, adopted more traditional forms of rhetoric.<sup>36</sup> Marilyn DeLaure Bordwell’s work on Baker’s civil rights activism appears especially relevant to the discussion here.<sup>37</sup> According to Bordwell, Baker was known to be patient, tolerate, and willing to work with individuals across the political spectrum. She also spoke her mind forcefully, ruffled the feathers of others, and at times, risked offending powerful leaders of the same and different political parties. The Twitter accounts of “Squad” members seem to mirror Baker’s mindset in strikingly similar ways: illustrating “how a generally invitational attitude should not foreclose the possibility of judiciously using persuasion, posing difficult questions, and even engaging in confrontation when necessary.”<sup>38</sup> In highly productive ways, Baker was both nurturing and militant, and as demonstrated throughout our analysis, “Squad” members can be described in a similar manner. In many ways, both Baker—as an African American woman—and the (largely female) BIPOC members of “The Squad” embrace an invitational rhetoric orientation to engaging others that re-frames traditional persuasive attempts. Thus, while at times their rhetorical choices may include messages more akin to that which reflects traditional rhetors, their approach remains rooted in an empowering (power to) rather than a domineering (power over) sensibility. Bordwell summarizes this rhetorical stance nicely:

Ella Baker’s goal was not to force change on others, but to enable them to seek change for themselves. Baker’s rhetorical approach to organizing varied according to specific occasion, and her flexible praxis

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<sup>31</sup> Orbe, “Diverse Offerings,” 163.

<sup>32</sup> Chevrette and Hendricks, “Love is a Strategy,” 183.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

<sup>34</sup> Brian Keith Alexander and Michele and Hammers, Michele, “An Invitation to Rhetoric: A Generative Dialogue on Performance, Possibility, and Feminist Potentialities in Invitational Rhetoric.” In *Inviting Understanding: A Portrait of Invitational Rhetoric*, eds. Sonja K. Foss and Cindy L. Griffin (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020), 233-242; Lozano-Reich and Cloud, “The Uncivil Tongue,” 221.

<sup>35</sup> Crystal Marie Fleming, “The composure and civility of “the Squad” against Trump’s attacks,” Vox, July 22, 2019, <https://www.vox.com/first-person/2019/7/22/20792711/the-squad-women-of-color-composure>

<sup>36</sup> Mittie K. Carey, “The Parallel Rhetorics of Ella Baker.”

<sup>37</sup> Bordwell, “Planting Seeds of Change,” 107.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.



made use of a range of strategies including listening and provoking, offering and confronting, and questioning and creating conditions to empower others.<sup>39</sup>

Baker's rhetorical nuances, as mirrored in the 21<sup>st</sup> century social media messaging of "The Squad," speaks volumes to the ways in which the intersectional nature of identity politics impacts efforts toward social change. While not always ideal in all contexts, an invitational orientation to rhetoric grounded in equality, immanent value and self-determination remains a viable pathway for political activism aimed at "providing the potential to nourish individuals, relationships, and communities."<sup>40</sup> In this context, our analysis highlights the productive ways in which rhetorical theory and practice unites the past with the present, both of which collectively can inform the future.

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<sup>39</sup>*Ibid*, 120.

<sup>40</sup> Chevrette and Hendricks, "Love is a Strategy," 195.