Mapping the Affect of Public Health and Addressing Racial Health Inequities: New Possibilities for Working and Organizing

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Abstract

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Mapping the Affect of Public Health and Addressing Racial Health Inequities: New Possibilities for Working and Organizing

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This dissertation is interested in affect, or the aspects of social life that make a difference because of the ways we feel them. The happenings of a group working in public health are interpreted using affect theory to trace how disruptions to typical organizing processes happen. Because of its role in shaping social scenes, understanding affect's operation is a potential route towards change, even in situations that seem to be solidly set in one particular form. Instances of the group reworking understandings of their role in addressing health equity and disparities are presented to highlight affect's operations--a force that can lead to positive, negative, or ambiguous change. Feminism informs this research both theoretically and in its commitments to considering the practical implications of learning from this group. Feminist formations of affect are foregrounded by thinking about how bodies are involved in sensing the world as well as the role of love and support in the collectivities of our organizing efforts. The affective movements of the group are traced by sensing the trajectories of the way things are heading, identifying patterns, and accounting for power's role. Implications for communication and organizing in public health theory and practice are offered, calling

for public health to engage affective analysis by developing capacities for self, group, and structural reflection on the sociocultural underpinnings of population health.

Dedication

For Arwyn, Brian, and my friends without whose help I certainly could not get by.

Acknowledgments

My dad, Allen Woody, passed away unexpectedly in 2015, likely from a heart attack in his sleep. He was a highly accomplished, admired, generous, driven man—he worked a lot, he made a lot of money, and he provided for me. To put it mildly, we did not always see eye-to-eye, but I think a kernel of his advice is prominent in this dissertation. Sometime in my 20s, after another bad breakup, I asked him what was most important in a life partner—looks, smarts, kindness, humor, success? And he said, "All of it—it's all important." I did not like that answer because it was harder than having just one thing to focus on. Like my dismay at his answer, I had some struggles in this research, seeking to figure out what the most important things are. But eventually, I gave in to grappling with what "all of it" involves and how to pay attention to everything, accept that my perspective will give uneven attention to different aspects of the world, and acknowledge that there is never going to be a set of fixed things that can get us the best answer and decision in the complexities of living.

The complexities of living got turbocharged 2020 and 2021 as I was writing this dissertation. I am so thankful for the incredible, brilliant, inspiring, models I've had the honor of learning with over the past six years at Ohio University. Laura Black, my chair, has provided invaluable guidance throughout the processes of graduate school, but more valuably is the world of dialogue and group communication that she opened up to me through her teaching and mentorship. Laura's way of being in the world is a model I aspire to—particularly because she is what she seems to be and practices what she preaches. I owe a million thankyous to Laura for making this dissertation relatively

painless, and at times even an enjoyable process. So many of the things Myrna Sheldon has introduced to me through her class, the post-humanist reading group she organized, or just talking with her have been monumental for my thinking. In a conference she organized in the summer of 2019, she brought up the concept of "needing to know" and how it can be a source of struggle and difficulty. That idea propelled a variety of avenues of thinking, and a few that significantly shaped this dissertation. Brittany Peterson is a shining light in the world that makes it unsurprising that so many folks want to be around her, making her so connected and in-touch with the happenings of the world of organizational communication. She always highlights the people behind the research we learn about and helped me see where I might fit in. Not to mention that she is aces at methods, giving me much needed perspective and guidance to make doing research possible. Finally, Lynn Harter's approach to scholarship and teaching is best described as expansive. From Lynn I am so thankful for her advice to do what I love, what interests me, or what is calling to me--she is 100% right that it will not happen without a strong internal motivation. I also thank Lynn for encouraging me in my more fanciful flights of scholarship and writing, for emboldening me to be me.

Austin Babrow, prior to Laura, was my committee chair, but his retirement was much-deserved, even if I'm left missing him. I was lucky to have an independent study with him in 2019 where we met at the Village Bakery every Wednesday to talk methods—not his favorite subject, but one he gamely engaged. But of course, the real greatness of Austin is hard to put into words—Austin is not going to leave you guessing where you stand or what he's thinking. I love that about him. I also must mention two

scholars not on my committee: Judith Lee and Risa Whitson. Dr. Lee taught my first theory class—the first class that really threw me into the deep end of academia. Her excellence is legendary, and even though I floundered that semester, figuring out how to read a book a week of material I could barely understand, she was such an exceptional model of how to be a scholar that I was moved to push myself—and I grew--a lot. Dr. Whitson is one of the most wonderful, warm, effective, and fun teachers I've ever had. She took qualitative methods from theoretical to the very concrete steps needed to make it happen through teaching that was imbued with care and love for all her students—learning at its best, as far as I'm concerned.

The order of these acknowledgments in no way corresponds to the level of fondness for any of the people I mention on this list, something I have to emphasize because of the incalculable impact that my friend Shakiyla Smith has had on my life before, during, and I'm sure for many years after my dissertating process. The first time we met at a professional meeting, she helped me kill time in Atlanta before my flight by taking me to check out her co-housing community. She had a pair of roller-skates with fuzzy pom poms on the laces on the back floorboard of her beat-up Honda that instantly made me think she was my people. We've had some of the most inspiring, generative, and deep conversations over the years—one of the few people I will happily talk to for hours on the phone. Shakiyla and I made the AIG happen together—the catalyst that brought all of the other incredibly sparkly loves in this group together. Nidhi taught me tell my friends I love them and to be a fully human at work. Mariana is so wildly brilliant, open, and loving I wish we were together every day. Claire is a thoughtful, complex, and

interesting thinker who awes me with her devotion to helping and caring in the world. Sharon is hilarious, unstoppable, and fully ride-or-die. Shelli, too, is never going to leave you hanging, and is always doing something astonishing that leaves you excited to keep going forward, trying hard, and doing excellent work—particularly the hard stuff of looking critically at yourself. Getting to know Courtney over these past two years is a gift, as she has taught me that I don't always have to be looking at the dark side, and even that some of the light side has interesting and complicated things to show us. Stephanie sent our group a picture of her jumping in a frozen lake once, is an EMT, going to grad school, runs at least five programs on a statewide level, and is the energy bomb I always am so proud to know.

Rebekah Crawford has been a rock and a guide through this whole crazy mess of grad school. Newly pregnant with my daughter in 2014, I went to her office in Lassiter hall to talk about maybe applying to the COMS program. She encouraged me to do it…and for the most part I'm glad she did. ☺ Our trips to OSCLG, "theory hikes™" in Sells or at the Ridges, and the effusive praise and compliments she always lobs my way, while maybe not quite deserved, were so appreciated and often boosted me out of a slump of self-doubt. My other friends in the COMS program, Luis, Shariq, Jason, Carson, Elizabeth, and Ritika, and their solidarity made grad school doable, and even fun from time to time. I also have to give a special mention to Sarah Parsloe for being the first person in my first class to become my friend, collaborator, conference roommate,

advisor-sibling, and general positive presence in life. Thanks to all of you for being there, listening, and helping me figure out this grad school thing.

I'm sitting in Sushi Gawande's house as I type this, as she has let me and my friend Rebecca Onion squat here for more than a year while she enjoys her retirement life in Boston. Sushi and her family are the reason I am in Athens, and her nearly unbelievable generosity in letting us use her house—not to mention pool—in a pandemic, is another time the magical people in my life have shown me how to make life better for others. Also, my friend Rebecca Onion is such a dear-confidant-advisor-and intellectual inspiration that I hope to be a little more like someday--let's be sure to sneak away from our kids into the woods on as many Sunday afternoons as we can muster! All the Sunday Morning Adventure Club/Germ Schoolers: David, Melissa, Matt, Lucy, Rachel, Adam, and Rachel helped me make it through this pandemic/grad school/dissertation without giving up completely. I'll never be as brilliant as Sally and Julia, but I have endless gratitude for y'all being my pals. Katrina, your Aries energy has turned my Sagittarian ruminating around in the right direction more than once. And Brian Lips, thanks for calling out my racism publicly—it was a needed kick in the pants that I'm trying not to, but probably will need again someday—but let's talk about it while driving on a country road on a sunny day listening to some jams. Annie, you're my best friend forever, and I thank you for you, particularly, for your prescient Tarot readings and stratospheric levels of kindness.

Back in North Carolina, all my public health people are always in my heart, but I have to especially mention Alan Dellapenna, who taught me everything I know about

public health theory, being a true leader, and great human being. I hope you get to ride your bike in some mountains, bake some brick oven pizza, and whittle some wood in your retirement.

Also, in North Carolina, my budding capacities for reflection, stillness, and appreciation for the beauty of working hard with no anticipation of reward started with Jill Sockman's Thursday night 7:00-8:30 yoga class, and grew as I studied to become a yoga teacher with her. Further, the teachings of llamas and lay leaders at the Kadampa Center in Raleigh forever changed me because I know it's possible to shift your perception in an instant and love even the people who harm you grievously, and in fact, to see them as a precious jewel for the opportunity to practice loving kindness.

I save the very best, my family, for last. My mother Patricia Miles passed away when I was five, but I know she was a revolutionary and an intellectual—who else has a master's in library science, wears Nietzsche t-shirts, puts posters on the wall that say "Give a Damn, Mend America," and always has at least five cats? And my stepmother, Dianne and father Allen, have always been supportive cheerleaders for me, making me know without a doubt that they are there for me always and no matter what. My in-laws Darrow and Jean are truly heaven-sent angels that have shown me new ways to be a loving family, and are the most magical Grammie and Grandaddy for my daughter Arwyn that I could ever dream of. Of course, they raised my brilliant, hilarious, beautiful, weird-o, easygoing, solid, manifestor of strange ideas, and love of my life Brian Collins. All these folks in my family have taken care of the business of living for me in countless ways to enable me to do this work. I would have had zero chance of getting to this place

without them. The shining star of my heart, Arwyn, had me rushing home to nurse after the first of many three-hour seminars that I thought were a good idea to start when she was four months old. She was the inspiration for my first published paper, and the main reason I want to keep trying to put out some good into the world. Arwyn has been responsible for me rediscovering, wonder, silliness, and just having fun for no reason. Last but not least, on the eve of her 11th birthday, I have to thank my cat Ruth—the kind and loyal friend who jumped on my keyboard while writing this dissertation so many times she may deserve a co-author credit. So, still, it's all of it—the endless tiny and huge ways people impress on me to create my world and life. I love you all and count my luck stars to know you.

Table of Contents

Page

List of Figures

Page

Chapter 1. Letting the Light In

In 2021, it would be hard to find anyone on earth who has not been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, yet public health professionals who are trained to address such situations have been stymied, reviled, blocked, ignored, vilified, mocked, and threatened. Public health *did* put its knowledge into practice early on to stop the spread of this virus by enacting widespread lockdowns and quarantines—but by now we have lived through the shortcomings of this approach, one that used a classical host-agent-environment public health model for thinking through the prevention of infectious disease. The hosts, or people (and animals) could be cut off from the agent (the virus) through modifying our environments (physical distancing). This is proven public health science that should, logically, stop the spread of the disease. However, the assurances of scientific knowledge met fierce resistance, ultimately being unable to accommodate the complexities of the social world it was trying to impact.

This dissertation is about public health experts and the ways they figure out what should be done to improve population health. It is specifically focused on a group of professionals who came together to learn new approaches to public health practice in pursuit of better outcomes. Over time, the group's talk collected around the theme of how to address racial equity in their work. The group was conceived in 2018, pre-COVID, but in the midst of ongoing struggles with issues such as child abuse and neglect, teen suicide, gun violence, and the opioid overdose epidemic--all of which need to be considered in terms of intersections with racial health disparities. All of these issues, like population health in general, were and are characterized by worse outcomes for

minoritized populations. That race has something to do with population health outcomes has long been known in public health. However, the complexity of the sociocultural forces involved in creating racial health disparities is not accommodated by standard public health organizing practices. In public health, as I shall discuss, the courses of action that are authorized and respected are characterized by rationality, efficiency, and certainty. In contrast, I argue that the ways social scenes feel, the emotions involved, and the possibilities these sensibilities enable or dissuade, need to be a part of organizing in public health. In this dissertation, my interest is in the ways *affect* is involved in (re)shaping what arises as a priority, how understandings of what matters are formulated, and what comes to be seen as impactful. As a research question, I am asking what is affect doing in this group?

My friend Renee and I formed and structured the Action Inquiry Group (AIG) because as Renee explained to the members:

> …I think [we need] a different way of thinking about how things happen. You know, like this notion of like a single actor or a single cause [doing] something is just not appropriate, I think, for social things or complex challenges. …I've been using the word colonization--It's really colonized our thinking in terms of how we even think about our work and who we are in it and how we take action.

This excerpt from Renee was part of her telling the group "what we were up to," one of her often-used expressions. The AIG is attempting to find ways to do public health work differently, and Renee is pointing to some of the reasons why this is needed and drawing out the fact that finding single causes for complex issues is not "how life works

or how deep change happens at a systemic level." The group is in search of new ways of organizing that are more attuned to the complexities and contingencies of engaging in work that hopes to improve health at a population level.

Renee and I co-created and organized the structure of the AIG. Having both worked in public health for over a decade is part of the foundation of our friendship, but our deep connection to one another is better explained by our shared interest in, and long-time practice of contemplative and embodied practices such as meditation and yoga. We set out on this project thinking that building capacity for public health practitioners to establish regular reflective practices would be of benefit for individual participants, as well as their work and the people who are impacted by that work. While our original hope was met, it is how the group soared far past our initial expectations that makes it important and interesting.

Over time, the group became interested in how they could use their capacities for reflection to help them approach long-standing concerns about disparities in in the health of populations. Disparities in health are attributed to social factors such as class, race, gender, ability, air and water quality, occupational hazards, circumstances in early childhood, and many more things that make up the facets of our social environments. This list does not mention medicine or medical care, as public health, while interested in access to healthcare, is better understood as engaged in creating the social conditions that enable health. Further, an important outcome of the group's time together was a blossoming understanding of their individual positions within larger systems and how

what they do in their work creates the threads that weave together our larger social structures.

This dissertation illustrates (pieces of) the processes involved in becoming more critically conscious, and how particular repeated practices of group communication can scaffold this development. The group's interactions amounted to more than each individual's developmental changes, instead providing an example of what Bennett (2013) describes as a shift in "mind-body-environmental assemblages" (p. 12). That is, in using affect to look at this group, I present how different arrangements of knowledge, bodies, relations, feeling, discourse, and more come to be and what they may enable for changing what sometimes seems unshakable.

To make sense of the group's interactions, I use affect theory with my central question considering affect's role in the trajectory of the group's thinking, feeling, and action over time. Looking at affect can help understand, to paraphrase Leonard Cohen, how we find the cracks that can let the light in. In other words, in the face of a seemingly settled ways of doing public health, this group felt (and saw in the data) a need for something different and set out to figure out what that was. This research looks at the particularities of this situation to consider the role of affect in a group and trace its movements towards a sense of expanded capacity for working with the tangled, knotty issues related to health disparities.

As I worked towards making sense of what happened in the group over 12 months of its meetings, the thing that kept pulling at me was that it did not *feel* like other public health contexts. At first this sense only registered as a subtle flicker, but over time, the

uncommon feeling of this group became obviously relevant to what was happening. Through the uncommon affect, or feelings, circulating in this group, it found cracks in standard public health practice and incrementally wedged them open wider. Affect theory offers a way to trace the locating and opening of those cracks, because "feelings are the daily medium in which concepts come to matter and organizing efforts are lived" (Hennessey, 2013, xii).

Grossberg (2018) explains that "[a]ffect encompasses a variety of ways in which we 'feel' the world in our experience, including moods, emotions, maps of what matters and of what one cares about, pleasures and desires, passions, sentiments, etc." (p. 11). Another way to think about affect is as force, according to Deleuze (1988), a foundational philosopher in affect theory. Deleuze defines affect as the "capacity to affect and be affected" (p. 71). Combining Grossberg's notion of affect as a collection of ways in which we feel the world and Deleuze's idea of affect as force is a good starting place for considering what affect is and what impact it has on social scenes.

Grossberg's concept of "a map of what matters" is especially helpful because it points to the way affect influences what we care about or what is available to our view, determining what is and is not included in our "mattering maps" (Grossberg, 1992). Mattering maps illustrate an entity's *capacity to affect* because whatever appears on our mattering maps has an affective capacity by definition. For example, something that mattered to this group was showing—to ourselves, as well as outside audiences--that our work had a positive impact on public health practice. "Showing impact" had the capacity to affect and be affected in the various forms that it took throughout the group's

discussion. At first the AIG wanted to come up with metrics that enumerated how what we were doing in the AIG led to public health improvement. However, over time, this approach to showing impact evolved because the group's interactions affected our understanding of impact--what it looks like, and how it can be detected. Showing impact popped onto our mattering maps in various formations, fluctuating from movements of affective force as well as exerting forces that affected those fluctuations. In this dissertation, I engage affect as a way to understand how and why things appear on, or disappear from, a map of what matters.

The example of showing impact also highlights how this study connects the micro practices of group interaction to the macro issue of the disciplinary power of public health. In the macro context, affect shapes what matters, and in what way. Public health is a field involving both health and social science and often, in the United States (U.S.) is carried out by governmental organizations that are required to show the impact of their projects to their funders--often the federal government. However, there is more than one way to show impact as well as many definitions of what counts as impact. How impact is thought to be appropriately shown is affectively formed at the macro level through particular formations of power, culture, ideology, governmental practices, and more. At the level of the group, its micro discourses interrelate with the macro discourses to (re)define what is an appropriate and valid way of showing impact. Again, this

dissertation considers how that happens through affect's role in propelling particular arrangements of reality.

While what I have presented so far has taken on a tone of authority about what affect theory is, it is far from the only way affect is understood and used. I will get into more detail in chapter two about the varieties of affect theory across disciplinary contexts, as well as in communication studies specifically. However, one example of an affective flow that stands out throughout the group's existence is happiness and a sense of potential—a feeling the group came to label "sparkly." Although the feeling of sparkliness had not yet been articulated at this point, Stella, when asked about her reflections at the end of our first meeting said:

> It's particularly exciting to me that this is such a wonderful group of strong, smart people working to do good. That feels really energizing and engaging. …. You never know how these big group calls are going to go, and I feel like I just had a big cup of coffee. I feel wide awake, and I feel excited, and I'm like, I want to go do something now.

While the general sense of joy in the group is wonderful, what this dissertation is interested in is "figuring out how such feelings are made, organized and changed" (Grossberg, 2018, p. 92). I'm interested in thinking about how this good mood and excitement came to be. A question guiding this research is how was affect operating in the group? What elements are identifiable as joining forces to create this group's happy

mood as opposed to the innumerable other potentialities that could emerge from the same set of circumstances?

Affect theorists argue that in order to change something that is not how we would like it to be, we need to understand the existing affective dimensions of the situation. In other words, affect is another tool that we can use to understand what is going on--another approach to understanding the social world. A more familiar approach to understanding what is going on for communication scholars is meaning making, which involves how we make sense of a situation. Meaning is about interpretation while "affect is the energy that permeates all our experiences and defines what it feels like to live in a moment" (Grossberg, 2018, p. 11). As such, this project foregrounds "the conditions and forms of meaning-constitution" (Gumbrecht & Pfeiffer, 1994, p. xviii). Considering the role of affect in this group can show what mattered for them at first and then think through the rearrangements that happened over time and the nudges, jolts, and sentiments involved in the creation of different mattering maps on a trajectory towards otherwise.

Affect theory involves the study of the formation of scenes, situations, and atmospheres, making it a good match for the question I am asking: How is affect operating in this group? Contouring this broad question are my questions about the elements of the micro-group practices and the macro context of public health that are a part of the affective forces both creating and being created in the group over time. Additionally, I want to think about movement and trajectory—where did the group start and where was it after 12 months? How did that happen? And what was important, exciting, or as the group would say—sparkly--about what happened? Answering these

questions will involve describing the group's processes and practices to share bracketed instances of affectively-shaped situations in order to present outlines of its paths of becoming. I join scholars interested in affect's potential for changing social scenes in calling for the need to consider how particular affects come to be and what they are doing. In this dissertation, I think about how affect is involved in shaping the potentials of public health practice and its possibilities for something different.

So far, I have briefly introduced the concept of affect and for now it works to go forward with the understanding that affect is involved in creating maps of what matters through the capacity to affect and be affected. Another commitment of this project is that my uses of affect theory in this dissertation are aligned with feminism's engagements with these concepts.

Affect Theory and Feminism in this Dissertation

Feminism questions why the world is the way it is, and with the impulse to question, seeks to name and challenge the oppressive conditions of our world. At the same time, the practices of naming and challenging oppressive conditions are also up for feminist scrutiny, a project carried out by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. Sedgwick (1997) questioned feminism's ingrained tendency towards what Paul Ricoeur dubbed a hermeneutics of suspicion because she felt these modes of interpretation were becoming ridged. She called out this rigidity in readings that were always suspicious, aggressively ferreting out all bits of the negative and oppressive. As an alternative to this suspicion, or what she called paranoid reading, Sedgwick formulated reparative reading "to assemble and confer plenitude on an object that will then have resources to offer to an inchoate

self" (1997, p. 28). Importantly, Sedgick's foundational work spurred interest in alternative modes of critique, one of which developed into thinking about affect.

While my analysis of the AIG began with a lean towards suspicion, looking for the nefarious operating in the regular business of public health, drawing on Sedgwick has enabled a move towards a more reparative reading. Reparative reading offers an attractive alternative to my standard mode of suspicious interpretation because it vibes with the expansive, hopeful, and happy mood of the AIG. I was sensing a sort of heaviness in my work when I was trying to "reveal" only the things that are problematic, a feeling I was able to make sense of with Sedgwick's theorization that suspicious feminist critique is often motivated by negative affect.

In this dissertation I commit to a reparative reading in the sense that I am looking "to assemble and confer plenitude" in my analysis. That is, I try to stay attuned to everything going on—not merely trying to catch people in their acts of complicity with oppression, but to acknowledge that, indeed, oppression happens—but also, that it is not everything. Everything means I have to stay facing towards multiplicity, contingency, and surprise. Another benefit is that reparative reading is thought to offer approaches that are better aligned with doings outside of academia (Liljeström & Peltonen, 2017). That is, cataloging all the ills of the world in a well-crafted manuscript does not pass muster in many settings, including public health practice, as a useful way to figure how to get on

with living. My analysis has been vigilant about staying open to both the good and the bad and the ways they play together nicely or fight.

Public health is ripe for thinking through multiplicity and ambiguity about its liberatory and/or repressive tendencies. The people doing public health work are almost always interested in and motivated by helping--in doing something good and positive for the world. And from some viewpoints, public health *has* done a lot of good. At the same time, there is much to critique, for instance, neoliberal ideologies that put the onus of achieving health on individuals amidst a social world of decimated social structures and out-of-reach resources that might make health possible. My entry point to thinking these things through is to engage the role of affect in shaping the organizing practices of public health professionals. This research setting is a good match for reparative reading because what happens in this story vacillates, moves in spirals, and is generally zigzaggy—cresting with exciting, liberatory potential, but then quickly falling into dark holes dug by hegemonic powers that makes potential seem a sham.

From this commitment to reparative reading, I also emphasize feminism's orientation towards the political and practical implications of affective formations. As such, I involve feminism in this dissertation as an epistemology as well as an example of feminist organizing praxis. I am talking about what affect is doing in this group, how it shapes working practices, and what this might all mean for population health. Part of how

I am doing this is through explicit inclusion of the body and emotion, or the notion of how there is no separation in an emotionalbody.

Drawing on a feminist conception of affect requires considering what it feels like to be in our (gendered) bodies, and thinking about how and why those feelings are produced and moderated through the interactions of body and society (Åhäll, 2018). Affect, for feminist scholars Pedwell and Whitehead (2012) is "a material intensity" (p. 116) that draws on a renewed interest and attention to "the substance and significance of matter, materiality and the body" (p. 117).

Further, feminist conceptions of affect give attention to the substance and significance of matter, which works well with my interest in the local and particular. As Atkinson and Richardson (2013) put it, affect is "the singularity within the multiplicity that is moved by an encounter—with a text, with an other, with art or culture, politics or experience" (p. 7). Feminism's commitments cohere with affect theory's interest in the singular and with the experience of individuals within larger social contexts. The famous slogan the "personal is political," helps support this point, and also extends it to showcase a commitment to relationality. In thinking relationally, part of understanding experience is to stay cognizant about how we are a product of our relations to all of the people and things in our daily life, as well as the larger systems in which we exist. Nothing exists independently, instead everything is always implicated in shaping the world as well as being shaped by it.

The role of emotion in our experiences is a feminist concern because it underscores that we are mutually implicated, embodied, feeling people. As subjects, we

are affected by and affect one another, a way of thinking that contrasts with epistemologies that cast bodies as bounded and autonomous. For example, each time the group met, we spent time at the beginning doing "weather checks" as a way to share what is happening with us internally, as well as the outside weather wherever we were.

At one meeting, Jean shared that she had received some really difficult, bad news about one of her family members, haltingly recounting to us what a dark place she was in. The next person to give their weather report was Stella, who said to Jean, "I am feeling your emotions." Stella added that she changed what she was going to say because hearing what Jean said, "puts things in perspective really quickly, what matters and what doesn't." This exchange exemplifies feminist and affect theory's assertion that we are affecting and affected by one another, and that the force of affect arranges our perceptions of what matters.

As far as feminist praxis, this dissertation shares the story of a group that foregrounded care, love, and the wellbeing of the people in the group. It did this through a group structure that allowed time to cultivate a reflective orientation to living and helped participants hone these practices by repeating them. Feminist praxis is also evidenced in the AIG's pace where slowness and taking time to notice feeling, bodily sensation, emotion, and the movements and moods surfacing within ourselves as well as between ourselves and others in the group was thought to be an important source of information. Most of all, there was always the presence of love—particularly for one another. Still, I remain a little suspicious, and in terms of love, it had a quality of an overly glossy sheen that may have obscured differences between group members that

could lead to unrecognized marginalizations of some participants—a suspicion I see in the overarching force that whiteness may be exerting in this group.

Sorting out and thinking about this group also requires attention to the external contexts surrounding it—both what is happening in the personal lives of the individual group members, within their organizations, and larger cultural movements such as the uprisings for racial justice swelling in the U.S. Further, the macro-Discourses of the field of public health are also part of my analysis, as they too shaped the group's interactions.

The Affect of Public Health

Presenting what might be described as "typical" in terms of an affect of public health organizing is part of the contribution of this dissertation, as I found scant literature addressing this question. Or as Petersen and Lupton (2000) put it, "Little attention has been paid to analysing the fundamental principles, discourses and practices of public health from an epistemological position, or to exploring public health as a sociocultural practice and a set of contingent knowledges" (p. x). Since this research centers on the experiences of one group, it is difficult to make claims about the affective character of public health as a whole based on this study alone. Rather, my assertions about the affect circulating in and around public health organizing draw on this group's experience and combine it with accounts from the literature that describe the discipline and/or analyze it as a sociocultural practice.

Public health is a modernist project arising in the 20th century, continuing into present day with allegiance to values such as "prevention, efficiency, and progress," where "prevention and efficiency joined progress [and] a general faith in the ability of

human ingenuity to design and manage a better world, where social problems would eventually be conquered" (Lombardo, 2019, p. 3). Additionally, there is a sense of certainty characterizing public health's approaches that identifies strongly with being a "scientific [discipline], built upon an objective knowledge base unsullied by questions of power" (Petersen & Lupton, 2000, p. xi). Lombardo's (2019) description of public health being concerned with prevention, efficiency, and progress is congruent with the talk of group members who would reference typical ways of organizing that involved public health interventions based on scientific knowledge formulated in specifically authorized ways, practices I will discuss in chapter four.

Further, the approaches group members learned from explicit and implicit communication throughout their careers rarely, if ever, included or considered the existence of different knowledges and their potential impact on their work practices. For instance, the long tradition in feminism of thinking about health as an embodied experience has hardly been engaged in public health. Petersen and Lupton explain that public health training encourages a shift away from thinking "the human body as a single entity to human bodies in groups…" (p. xi). Moreover, public health education has traditionally focused on the "rationalised, quantifiable techniques of epidemiology, biostatistics, health promotion, health economics and demography" (p. xi). Because of this focus, rather than attention to the specificity of individual bodily health experiences, public health considers whole populations, seeking to find ways to improve or even surmount social problems in bulk.

In contrast to public health's preference for the rational and quantifiable, affect theory is not involved in providing the definitive word or having a final say. Affect has to do with movement, and being moved through encounter, highlighting how affect is never still enough to grab ahold of with a single definition. Because of this, the descriptions I provide of the affect of public health offer only a pencil sketch that is open to revision. Each arrangement of particular forms of encounter between people, groups, or organizations contains a fleeting arrangement temporarily presenting a piece of the affect of public health.

This project has a backdrop that helps bring its context into relief, as well as the beginning of an outline of how affect, while evidently mattering, is not an explicit or typically recognized part of public health scholarship. The group studied in this dissertation was formed in response to grant funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The CDC funded the group to explore ways of organizing differently in public health that may achieve better outcomes than the standard public health model. The motivation for this project came from data showing stagnating improvements or even reversals in key health metrics at the national level in the U.S. CDC staff felt something should be done, but also, knew improvement was *required* to ensure further appropriations from Congress.

The traditional four-step public health model includes: (a) defining the problem, (b) identifying risk and protective factors, (c) developing and testing prevention strategies, and (d) ensuring widespread adoption (Hanson et al., 2012; Mercy et al., 1993). The step-wise model of public health relies on the assumption that research will

produce scientific evidence that can be applied to the problem in the right ways (Smith et al., 2020). The project that eventually became the group I am studying was sparked by thinking and discussions from staff and leadership at the CDC who, from their collective years of experience in national and international public health work, had all lived through the shortcomings of the four-step model in practice.

The problems Smith et al. (2020) see with the linear four-step approach to public health has to do with the gap between development of an effective intervention and its widespread dissemination and adoption. Involving the people impacted by an intervention in its design has been established by health communication scholarship as an essential practice for developing culturally-sensitive and equitable health campaigns (Dutta, 2008). However, while public health professionals are somewhat aware of the benefits of participant input, they often do not have the capacities, financial resources, political will, or time to meaningfully engage the populations they are trying to impact (Collins, 2019).

When the CDC is tasked to address a public health problem, such as the opioid epidemic, its role is frequently centered in collecting epidemiological data that is used to inform research. As epidemiological data is used to conduct research and that research produces interventions found to be effective, the next thing to do is have public health workers across the country implement the research-based program in communities. In the case of opioids, an example of a proven intervention is to make naloxone, a rescue drug that can reverse an overdose, widely available. I do not mean to suggest that public health is naïve of the politics of freely distributing a drug that can save people perceived to be

misusing opioids, but I do emphasize that its concern is with finding what works according to authorized standards of validity—particularly randomized controlled trials--and proceeding as if research proof of efficacy is sufficient for success in practice. In this process, there is little room for equivocation, uncertainty, or significant consideration of the sociocultural aspects involved in applying a research-based intervention to real world contexts. In the case of naloxone, there have been years of struggle to overcome the stigma of addiction, hurdles to access to treatment, and all the rest. But all that mess is often minimized in pursuit of promotion of "the science," that *should* save us if practitioners implemented the programs with fidelity, and recipients would only listen. In another example that is all too real during COVID-19, public health can get hung up with insisting on what they know is right--"Why can't people just wear a mask?" or "The evidence is clear that the vaccine is safe."

While having an understanding of where the group is situated is helpful, the emphasis in this dissertation is not on what they did or did not accomplish in terms of public health interventions or programs. Instead, the focus is on *what affect did in a group of public health practitioner's endeavoring to go about their work differently*. That is where my analysis concentrates, and what I hope to offer with this research. Within that broad goal, there are other aspects that I hope to draw out that I think are also relevant and important.

Affect's Role in Groups

In a funhouse mirror sort of way, I am responding to a stated need for additional research identified by scholars who study affect in groups. Currently, this research is all

quantitative, though has repeatedly indicated a need to consider "context" to better situate existing findings (Barsade & Knight, 2015). Barsade and Knight, in their review of research on group affect saw a need for "Real-time, process-oriented research," that looks at, "the ebb and flow of affect, moods, and emotions within groups and teams over time," as well as studies that look at cultural influences on groups or generally "overarching societal factors" (p. 38). Generally, the research on affect in groups finds that it is a topic worthy of investigation because it makes a notable difference in group performance (Barsade & Knight, 2015). Engaging a feminist epistemology enables thinking through many of the issues identified in extant group research because of its emphasis on both the local, particular movements of affect in the group, as well as its interest in how affect arranges sociocultural knowledge practices.

Habit Formation in Groups and Affect

I am also interested in affect's role in group communication, as well as how communication processes and structures influence the movements of affect. Groups and the ways they are set up are shaped by the affects surrounding their formation. In turn, the form of a group impacts communication within the group. Affect theory is often taken up because it is an avenue for understanding existing social formations, as well as how the fixed and seemingly impenetrable facts of our existence do sometimes transform—or at least get a little shaken. In thinking affect as a way to understand, trace, and shape social

changes, there is optimism for affect theory's ability to help us make our imagined possibilities come into life through group communication practices.

Still, as Wetherell (2012) argues, it is unclear, and perhaps even mysterious, as to how to locate affect or know how it is operating, making it difficult to analyze. Affect theorists, such as Pedwell (2017), see a fruitful methodological path by considering affect in relation to habit because it "can provide different, and potentially generative, analytical tools for understanding the contemporary ethical and material complexities of social transformation" p. 93. Habit is something that groups can facilitate through their structures and processes—potentially showing through "*what specific material processes and mechanisms*--social transformation might actually happen" (Pedwell, 2017, p. 97, italics in original).

Engaging a feminism that emphasizes the local and particular in group relating and how this theorizing can inform practical action, my project highlights the dynamic processes involved in how affective forces are produced and how they shape the realities that come into being in a group. Additionally, I am interested in how iterations of group affect reflexively act back on and reform the potentialities coming into view for group members. The approach I take to thinking this through involves studying the talk and texts of the AIG with attention to affect's trajectories over time and how it relates to the group's habitual communicative structures and practices. In this endeavor, I seek to align with a positive, hopeful, and reparative reading that draws out the abundance and multiplicity of happenings in our ongoing present.

To summarize, in this dissertation I engage feminist articulations of affect and the ways it can be traced through specific, personal, bodily feelings of individuals, as well as the processes of producing feeling in relation to the constellation of objects and discourses that constitute individual subjects. Further, I consider how affect arises, changes, has an effect, and is affected through communication in a small group. The undulating movements of affect are involved in the development of collective moods, or the felt sense that contours what is allowable and possible in group contexts. Affect in groups is always moving and fluctuating, a force of instability contingent on the changing combinations of internal and external happenings at individual, interpersonal, and structural levels. Still, within this erratic flow, through habitual ways of being, particular ways of feeling, thinking, and doing calcify into "the way things are." Considering affect helps understand how the way things are came to be. Thinking with affect in this way, I consider what the normative habits of organizing in public health are, as well as the possibilities for their disruption and reorganization.

In the next chapter, I offer a review of the literature that is organized into four sections. The first section offers a broad overview of affect theory as it has been formulated in cultural studies—it's most identifiable place of origin--as well as call on organizational communication scholars to discuss relevant notions such as relational ontology that are necessary to ground this research. From there, I move on to look at feminism's engagement with affect theory and some of the ways it challenges the notions from the broader field of affect studies. The third part looks at how affect theory has been used in organizational communication, beginning with a review of all of Ashcraft and her

co-author's work because it is what originally sparked my interest in affect. From Ashcraft's work, I move on to reviewing literature from an array of authors in organizational communication who engage with affect to illustrate some of the different approaches and uptakes of this theory. In the fourth section I present the literature on affect in groups. As I explained, this research is quantitative, and not critically oriented. However, it does show how affect is considered to be important for group studies, as well as providing some general findings about affect's operations that can be helpful for this dissertation.

In chapter three I discuss methods. There are several approaches to studying affect, but generally I appreciate Stewart's (2010) description of the analysis of affect as involving "sensing modes of living as they come into being" (p. 310). To put this sensing into practice, in chapter three I include more details of the story of how the AIG came to be, incorporating relevant details of how it operates and who is involved. Next I share the data sources I have collected and how they contribute to understanding affect in this project. The chapter closes with a discussion of data analysis and interpretation.

Chapter four looks at affective trajectories in the AIG and how they may matter, organized into in three parts. First, I share an articulation of the typical affect of public health organizing to provide a reference point illustrating how the affective formations arising in the AIG were different. In the next part, I use examples from the group's interactions to share the contours of the affective trajectories in the group. The last part of chapter four describes why the shift from typical ways of organizing in public health to the approaches enacted by the AIG are important and impactful. Three stories of AIG

participants related to issues of racism and diversity are presented as a way to think through how affect might be involved in public health organizing to address health disparities.

In chapter five, I entertain my suspicions about the seemingly generative interactions in the group and their potentials for working more productively on racial health equity. I work through my paranoias, that is, how rather than all wonder and light, there are some shadowy affective currents as well—particularly how whiteness may be an unnamed, yet powerful force in the group. I discuss the entanglements and vacillations of the repressive and liberatory affects circulating in the group by sharing member's discussions about the limits of reflective practice, the function of bad moods, and the ways I see whiteness as a force shaping the group's practices.

In the final chapter, I conclude by summarizing and reflecting on the full project considering Sedgwick's (2007) concept of the "middle ranges of agency" that help situate what we can make of affect's doings in groups wrestling with complex social problems with no set path forward. For Sedgwick, agency is both constrained and available, an apt description of the AIG's experiences of generative newness as well as encounters with as yet impenetrable obstructions. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the implications and applications of the AIG's experience for praxis.

Chapter 2. Literature Review: Affect, Feminisms, Organizing, and Groups

For communication studies, affect has had an uneven reception, though it is gaining attention throughout the discipline (Ashcraft, 2020). To me, affect was the piece of the social puzzle of what is going on in the AIG that made it sensible, so I agree with Hennessey (2013) who says, "we should pursue a more robust understanding of the investments in affect and their role in organized efforts to devise alternative ways of life" (p. 37). Affect offers ways to expand the study of communication in groups because it considers what it feels like to be part of a particular little world and how that sense functions to shape our frame of what is possible (Stewart, 2010). Further, the study of affect can assist with questions about how collaborative endeavors to work on complex social issues succeed or fail. But more accurately, affect helps consider the ongoing, ambiguous, and vacillating movements of living and working on issues without a clear and certain path forward. The instability of organizing in groups echoes recent organizational communication scholarship that affirms "both order and disorder tend to simultaneously arise in the course of organizing" (Vásquez et al., 2016, pp. 632–633). Despite assertions of the inherent instability of organizing, most analyses "favor either order or disorder and separate the two temporally in organizational function" (Mease, 2020, p. 5). I see affect theory as a productive way to think through the undulations of groups in terms of organizing communication. To do this, I further explain how affect is being used in this dissertation.

First off, it is important to note the variety of ways affect has been formulated because there is no universally (or even widely) accepted definition of what "it" is. For

this dissertation, out of the many strands of affect arising in the history of philosophy, I draw primarily on feminist theorists and the ways they have conceived of affect and its role in political and social life. Within feminist theory, affect is oriented towards thinking emotion and embodied sensation, and more broadly, how bodies are implicated in the ways we experience the world. Affect theory within feminism marks a path for thinking through the body-emotion connection, or more accurately, that we live in emotionalbodies that cannot be considered separately. Further, feminists have situated potential for changing self, organizations, and larger social structures through communicating in small groups, famously, in consciousness raising groups. Looking at the AIG through affect theory is a way to engage an empirical example of how feminism's theories of organizing may be productive for a group doing public health work. That is, approaching what went on in the group through affect theory offers a chance to consider how the feminist formulations of affect help reveal the shape of the ordinary practices of public health.

In this review I will also present literature from communication studies, particularly from the organizational and group subfields. While some of this literature has feminist commitments, its focus on organizing distinguishes it from the literature that deals with feminist theory and affect directly. Additionally, outside of organizational communication literature, there is a large body of research from the psychology of organizing and organizations on the role of affect in groups that I will also present. Because feminist conceptions of affect have been relatively underexamined in communication studies, considering how these ideas could be more present and to what

effect is a contribution of this dissertation. This literature review is organized like a funnel, with the broad ideas about affect at the top, followed by a gradual narrowing of the concept to how it is used in feminism, communication studies, and research on group function. To start, I offer a definition of affect—or perhaps more accurately, a sense of why defining affect is a difficult.

Defining Affect

When thinking with affect and its implications for helping us understand "what is going on," (Grossberg & Behrenshausen, 2016, p. 1003) in a group, a natural place to start is with a definition. However, affect is not easily fixed or stabilized because, as Gregg and Seigworth (2010) explain:

> There is no single, generalizable theory of affect: not yet, and (thankfully) there never will be. If anything, it is more tempting to imagine that there can only ever be infinitely multiple iterations of affect and theories of affect: theories as diverse and singularly delineated as their own highly particular encounters with bodies, affects, worlds. (pp. 3-4)

Staying with Gregg and Seigworth (2010), authors of the introduction to influential text, *The Affect Theory Reader*, those interested in understanding affect are encouraged to move away from a desire to fasten down what it *is*, and to consider what it *does.* Pointing to affect's doings, Williams (1977) wrote that affects "do not have to await definition, classification, or rationalization before they exert palpable pressures" (p. 132-133). From Williams and Gregg and Seigworth's emphasis, I focus on what affect is doing, and that what affect is doing is palpable—it can be felt.

But before moving on to more of what affect does, I provide more about what affect is and how different theorists from various scholarly traditions think about it. Wetherell (2012) offers an unusually plainspoken explanation:

> The turn to affect is mainly a stimulus to expand the scope of social investigation. It leads to a focus on embodiment, to attempts to understand how people are moved, and what attracts them, to an emphasis on repetitions, pains and pleasures, feelings and memories. How do social formations grab people? How do roller coasters of contempt, patriotism, hate and euphoria power public scenes? The advantage of affect is that it brings the dramatic and the everyday back into social analysis. (p. 2)

Wetherell's definition points to several ideas that inform my use of affect. Like Williams, Wetherell points to embodiment—or that affect is doing something and that its doings can be felt. Further, Wetherell encourages a focus on repetitions as a way to understand how people are moved…or affected. Repetition is important to my thinking around how affect is felt and identified—it is those things that repeat that help detect the direction of affective force.

Many of the definitions of affect can be hard to decipher at first read. For example, Ashcraft (2020), pithily states that affect involves "the fluctuating intensities of encounter" (p. 1). Fleshing out Ashcraft's summation a bit more, Cvetkovich (2012) writes that it "is a body of scholarship inspired by Deleuzian theories of affect as force, intensity, or the capacity to move and be moved" (p. 4). In another formulation, affect is

presented as earthly, common—something saturating daily life. As the title of Kathleen Stewart's book underscores, it is *ordinary*. Stewarts writes:

> Ordinary affects are the varied, surging capacities to affect and to be affected that give everyday life the quality of a continual motion of relations, scenes, contingencies, and emergences. They're things that happen. They happen in impulses, sensations, expectations, daydreams, encounters, and habits of relating, in strategies and their failures, in forms of persuasion, contagion, and compulsion, in modes of attention, attachment, and agency, and in publics and social worlds of all kinds that catch people up in something that feels like *some*thing. (p. 2, emphasis in original)

Stewart's description emphasizes that it "feels like *some*thing," indicating that our bodies are involved in affect because our bodies do the feeling of the force, or the intensity. For this project, Stewart's mention of "modes of attention, attachment, and agency…in public and social worlds" (p. 2) is pertinent, as the work of the AIG involved repeated practices designed to direct our attention, which became relevant to the attachments group members developed to people, things, and ideas within and outside of the group. This directing of attention and its resulting attachments influenced the group member's capacities for agency, particularly how they enacted their work in public health. In these different descriptions, some common terms stand out: force, intensity, repetition, and movement as sensation registered by the body.

These terms as a definition for affect may be unsatisfying or confusing for readers who are familiar with other ways it has been used in scholarship. The kind of affect I

refer to emerges from the “affective turn” that Clough (2010) coined as a way to distinguish it from the historical study of emotion and/or feeling that has been of interest in psychology and some branches of communication studies. Some social scientific traditions have positioned affect more in the realm of a natural science, but those approaches came to be challenged with the linguistic turn of the 1970s that remains with us through today (Greco & Stenner, 2013). With the linguistic turn, emotion was now open to analysis in terms of social constructivism, positing that it was a product of social and cultural structures rather than an innate, individual phenomenon. The affective turn is an extension, retreat, and critique of the linguistic turn—both indebted to social constructivists for laying the ground upon which it could find its feet, but also finding the fault lines that needed to be addressed (Greco & Stenner, 2013; Fischer, 2016).

It is important to emphasize that the affective turn is not a disavowal of the linguistic turn, but a call for greater attentiveness to “emotions, feelings, and affect” as the focus of “scholarly inquiry” (Cvetkovich, 2012, p. 133). Greco & Stenner (2013) write that “The constructivist notions of power, performativity and activity,” that installed discourse as supreme in the linguistic turn “have been extended beyond the socio-cultural domain to include pre-conscious and pre-discursive forms of existence, and the concept of 'affect' has become a marker of this extension” (p.10). The fault lines in the ground of the linguistic turn arise from “what is perceived as a linguistic imperialism that threatens to throw the babies of 'the body' and its 'affects' out with the bathwater of naively scientistic 'representational theory' (Greco & Stenner, 2013, p. 10). Keeping the constitutive power of language intact, affect theory asks us to think about what else is

going on, and that we cannot know what else there is without drawing on corporeal intensities and other bodily knowledges.

The context of the present research is public health, though the debates about the linguistic turn and the turn to affect have not been salient or prominent in public health research. Still, public health *is* interested in how culture shapes health outcomes, demonstrated through a concern with concepts such as the social determinants of health, health disparities, and the effects of race and gender on health (Baynard & Chsolm, 2008; Jones, 2000; Zoller 2005, 2010). However, while interested in health and how it is shaped by society, and affect is a part of the picture of social situations, public health has not had a significant engagement with the affective turn as it is presented in this dissertation. The field of public health is aligned with post-positivism that is associated with psychobiology, which sees emotion "as amenable to analysis in terms of measurable factors and variables, and hence to objective scientific observation and intervention. In the paradigms that undergird public health, emotions can, in principle, be described, predicted and controlled" (Greco & Stenner, 2013, p. 8). I highlight this point because the context of this research is public health, but the methods and paradigmatic commitments I use are not typical of that field.

Epistemology has to do with a paradigm's assertion of how we come to know the world. Some epistemologies see knowledge as coming through empirical observation, while others attribute worlding to language. Differing somewhat, affect is distinguished because it is not primarily understood through its definition of epistemology. Instead affect theory questions ontology, or what is thought to be the nature of existence and

what is "real." In the affective turn, ontology becomes radically social, or relational. Because of its different ontological ground, the methods, concerns, and aims of the affective turn differ from the ways affect has been studied in social constructivist and psychobiological traditions.

The shape of this literature review is molded by my particular interest in affect, which is aligned with feminism, rather than the vast galaxy of how the term has been used throughout time and across scholarly disciplines. In the following sections of the literature review, I provide a broad look at the ontological basis of affect theory, then discuss some of the unsettled debates within affect studies. From there I present feminist approaches to affect, followed by the research that engages affect in organizational and group communication.

The Ontology of Affect: Relationality and Agentic Matter

Considering the role of affect in social scenes requires reformulating what is generally thought of as constituting the real in communication studies. Traditionally, communication studies privileges language as the main show in constructing reality (Ashcraft, 2020). An engagement with affect compels an understanding of reality that is constituted out of language along with all of the material "stuff" of the world. With affect theory, rather than the primacy of language typically assumed in communication studies, the material is brought back onto the scene and given equal status (Ashcraft, 2020). Affect theory rests on a dissolution of ontological assumptions that cast language as being the main driver in constructing reality. To think about affect, what makes up the

real needs all entities—material and discursive—to be seen as being in the same plane, or flat field, of existence.

Flatness means that all entities exist on the same ontological level where a rock, a building, or an umbrella are just as "real" as a feeling of joy, the sound of birdsong, or small talk between neighbors. A flat ontology enables repairs to the splits in long bifurcated concepts like the body and mind and allows us to rethink what is involved in creating realties that come to be mutually agreed upon.

Critically, in a flat ontology, affect theory's attention to bodily sensations is considered as an equal contributor to social happenings—no more or less than our thoughts or words. The notion of embodiment, in affect theory, is not merely an additional source of information, or another ingredient to consider in meaning making processes, but enables a shift where communication "is not reducible to meaning making" (Mease, 2020, p. 7). This flattening of hierarchies of the real is required to get to a relational ontology which, not only challenges divides such as mind and body, but "[questions] the concept of ontologically independent entities with essential interiority all together." Rather, relational ontologies "suggest that relations constitute the seemingly stable entities we learn to depend on in life" (Mease, 2020 p. 4).

This discussion of a relational ontology connects to the present research because it is interested in affect, what it is doing in a group setting, how, and to what effect. Relational ontology offers a theoretical basis for how affect is involved in the formation of different realties, as well as how it can destabilize seemingly permanent or fixed ways of being, thinking, and acting. Mease (2020) interprets the concepts of the virtual and the

actual from Deleuzian philosophy for organizational communication scholars who are no longer starting with "communication as *the* constitutive force," but instead want to consider "what is the role of communication in relational constitution" (p. 7).

Mease (2020) explains that Deleuze asks that we give attention to "that which is not (yet) actualized as still *real"* (p. 9). *The real and the actualized differ in Deluzian philosophy. For Deleuze, "the real includes the potential from which the actualized reality emerges" (p. 9). Actualized reality refers to our "shared and relatively stable social realties" (p. 9) that we can more-or-less agree on as what exists*. The importance of this distinction is that those aspects of reality—Deluze's "real"—that are not yet actualized, are still present as *possibility*. Deleuze calls this possibility, or real that is not yet actualized, the *virtual*, and asserts that the virtual "is immanent to, not apart from, actualized realities" (p. 9). For the present project, affect is relevant because it is involved with the movement from the virtual into the actual. Affect shapes which of unlimited virtual possibilities become actualized. The virtual and its possibilities are already existing and embedded in the actual, but await a catalyst or push to actualize. This catalyst is the force of affect.

In the case of the AIG, this means that all possibilities for organizing are already present in the actualized, but unstable, phenomena that is the group. The virtual, or what could potentially become actualized, requires a view that the group, like all entities, are inherently unstable because "absolute stability eliminates the capacity for constitutive elements to mutually engage" (Mease, 2020, p. 23). Affect is the organizing force that orders constitutions of reality that bring the virtual into the actual. The real, virtual, and

actual are concepts needed to study the role of affect because it explains how affect—an ineffable force, exists and what it is doing, that is, shaping the actualizations that come into what we think of as reality.

Mease offers a way to study shifts from the virtual to the actual by analyzing what she calls techniques. In the case of the AIG, the techniques of interest are the group's communication processes, specifically, the use of action inquiry. Renee and I, as the group's creators, applied action inquiry in the group, a technique we adopted from Foster (2012). Techniques of articulation like action inquiry help bring into view "whether one force is adjusting, guiding, merging with, or negating another" (Mease, 2020, p. 17).

When working with affect, a relational ontology and its suppositions are necessary to allow for reconstitutions of reality through "novel articulations of force" (p. 25). Affect is a force harnessed by particular techniques and impacting the ways different elements—both material and linguistic--come into relation with one another. Always moving and shaping the continual unfolding of what "is," affect is often thought of as a sense of things that is beyond representation, but starts to become legible when tracing the emergence of different articulations of reality by considering how certain techniques brought the virtual into the actual. This dissertation contends that it is important to consider what affect is doing in group settings, as even if it is difficult to account for it, it can be a generative tool for sorting out social happenings—particularly how we get unstuck from apparently permanent ways of organizing and on to something otherwise.

In reviewing the literature on affect theory, I do not come to a final conclusion about, in any definitive way, what affect *is*, but have outlined its theoretical

underpinnings in an attempt to describe what this ineffable force is and how it exists. My analysis, in chapters four and five, is where I assert how I am thinking about affect and what it is doing in the group at the center of this research. Using a reparative reading, an idea stemming from Sedgwick's worry over feminism's habitually negative approaches to reading the social world, I consider the operations of affect in the particular setting of the AIG. Affect here is thought as an impersonal force that makes a personal difference in terms of our relations with the world around us, that has implications for organizing in public health. My analysis is focused on feminist concerns of what things feel like, and how they came to be that way, and what this might mean for practice in public health. In contrast, this literature review served to sensitize me to the full array of how affect theory is being used and the various potentials for analyzing these happenings. My presentation here of an array of conceptions of affect serves as an inventory and reference document, hence it is a broader outline of the concept more than a statement about my particular use of the idea. Again, I use a feminist reading that emphasizes attention to the operation of affect in the particular, situated, embodied experiences of the people in the AIG and the affectively arranged relations of the group to itself and its external contexts.

Sorting out Affect: Debates and Ideational Gradations

Providing a broad look at affect and some of the main theoretical tenants it draws on, perhaps unsurprisingly, runs into some difficulty because there are debates and nuanced differences involved in theorizing affect and how it can be known, the role of the (human) body, its transmission, and potentials for political change. The literature helps

draw out a variety of views on these questions, beginning with how to go about studying something that some see as beyond representation.

Differentiating Affect from Emotion

When affect is said to be a force, ineffable, a free-floating remainder, and that which escapes capture, where does that leave those interested in studying it? Affect theorists who align themselves with theorists like Deluze and Massumi "emphatically ground affect in corporeal matter or energy that is autonomous from history and social life" (Hennessey, 2013). The distinction made that separates affect from parts of the world that can be more readily represented comes out of a need to differentiate affect theory from psychoanalysis, the theoretical tradition that has historically dominated research that considers emotion and how it is experienced (Cvetkovich, 2012). Deluzian-inspired scholars place importance on the "distinction between affect and emotion, where the former signals precognitive sensory experience and relations to surroundings, and the latter cultural constructs and conscious processes that emerge from them, such as anger, fear, or joy" (Cvetkovich, 2012, p. 4). In this line of theorizing, affect is more associated with feeling—sensations that are separate from, but function as prompts for emotions. Emotion comes about when boundaries are placed around a feeling, halting the flow of feeling and fixing it in place with a label.

Locating and Representing Affect

Despite its characterization as being somewhat unreachable and mysterious, scholars have drawn on affect because it is generative for attempts at figuring out what is happening in the world. Still, scholars associated with the Deluze/Massumi tradition have

found methodological challenges because of the purported inaccessibility of affect. To stay with affect as ineffable and un-representable, but also talk about it and its importance in understanding the world, some scholars effect a shift in writing style pioneered by foundational thinkers in affect studies--particularly Kathleen Stewart. For Stewart, getting at the unknowable thing that is affect requires tracing the ordinary surfaces of being through detailed descriptions. This involves attempts to "slow the quick jump to representational thinking and evaluative critique" (Stewart, 2007, p. 4). Organizational communication scholars have approached the study of affect through their writing style. For example, in her paper "'Submission' to the rule of excellence: Ordinary affect and precarious resistance in the labor of organization and management studies," Ashcraft (2017) shifts into the style needed to convey affective force:

> If only the Rule of Excellence were a king we could strip of his crown, or a regime we could map, target, and overthrow. But somehow along the way, The Rule slipped off its robes and armor, slipped into our bed, and refused to leave in the morning. Now it stays on like a persistent wind that gusts in spurts and seasons. When it blows, managers inhale metrics and exhale value through our account-abilities. Who can keep up with the latest performance drill endorsed by the new Vice-Deputies of This and That? Watch us pretend to try, with backflips and cartwheels. (p. 48)

I want to draw attention here to the writing style more than the content, as it is an example of what I have come to see as "affected writing" that I have found is out of my ability to do well (thanks reviewer 2). Others wrangling with affect have felt the same

way—their writerly deftness is not up to the standard of style required for this kind of prose (Cvetkovich, 2012). In part due to my unsuccessful experiments with this style of writing, I question whether theorizing affect as extra-discursive and evasive is productive.

Not all theorists who think with affect agree with its characterization as hidden and hard to detect. Scholars like Wetherell (2012) question the "thick dividing line between bodies and talk and texts…" which "…block pragmatic approaches to the analysis of affect" (p. 21). Wetherell affirms that affect is relevant to our social worlds, but making it something that is "uncanny," is not necessary or helpful. Theorists like Wetherell, who do not think of affect as outside of representation, are also not as concerned with the distinctions between affect and emotion and tend to use the words more interchangeably.

Locating affect becomes more doable when it is conceptualized as material. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick is influential in the field of affect studies, particularly her book *Touching Feeling* (2002) which makes a strong case for the materiality of emotion. Sedgwick points to the heat in the body generated by emotion—particularly shame and anger--to show that affect has material manifestations.

In addition to her theorizing of affect as material, Sedgwick's thinking also furthered approaches to knowing and using affect by asserting that it is wild and erratic. Sedgwick's assertion of the unpredictability of affect led to her argument that affect's non-directedness means that change is possible even in the most seemingly entrenched

social formations. If affect is always potentially about to veer off in another direction, then there is a chance of changing what is oppressive in our present reality.

Taking up questions of both how we can find and know affect, as well as its function in shaking up our social world, Ahmed and Hemmings represent different, but associated, views. Hemmings and Ahmed are both feminist thinkers who do not see affect as wild and unpredictable, or as an unreachable mysterious force. Hemmings (2005) argued that rather than an erratically circulating intensity, affect is shaped and directed by already established social and cultural formations. Rather than being without pattern, Hemmings (2005) noted race, gender, and sex forming "subjects that are so over-associated with affect that they themselves are the object of affective transfer" (p. 561). Some bodies cannot escape their affective shaping, as there are deeply grooved paths that make particular kinds of affect stick to them.

Ahmed (2012) expands Hemming's thinking by clarifying how affect operates to demarcate the boundaries of bodies that come to be seen as an Other. Ahmed emphasizes that it is not the raced subject that is the "source" of an affective sensation. Further, it is not our emotional responses that shape what we think and know about others. Ahmed's model requires releasing concepts that cast emotion as circulating from the "inside-out," or the "outside-in." Instead of this type of movement, Ahmed explains that *emotion functions to produce the boundaries that determine* what is thought to be inside and what is thought to be out. Rather than out and in being a "natural" or obvious distinction, Ahmed argues that feeling and emotion (ideas she collapses into one another) are involved in the production of these differences. From Ahmed's assertions, affect's

circulation can be traced by observing the distinctions that exist between different subjects.

Ahmed explains that emotions function to associate certain subjects and objects with certain feelings that, through repetition, become sedimented or stuck together. Because it is productive for this dissertation, I elaborate on how Ahmed's conception of emotion can be used to trace affective circulation. Using a quote from a British National Front Poster Ahmed sets up her introduction to *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*:

> Every day of every year, swarms of illegal immigrants and bogus asylum seekers invade Britain by any means available to them . . .Why? They are only seeking the easy comforts and free benefits in Soft Touch Britain. All funded by YOU – The British Taxpayer! (p. 1)

This exhortation is used to explain how emotion comes to be associated with certain bodies—in this case, illegal immigrants and bogus asylum seekers. The immigrants are set up as Others who are seeking easy comforts afforded by "you." This "you" is the British tax payer, a subject that is associated with hard work and British-ness, that is--a good citizen. The emotion circulating in the rhetoric of this poster serves to define the differences between a British citizen and an illegal immigrant.

For Ahmed, the emotion roused here is not an intrinsic quality of the subject—either the British citizen or the illegal alien, but instead, through the cultural circulation and repetition of the signs of citizen and alien. Citizen, as a sign, has no meaning that positively resides within a person to position them as dignified and right. Likewise, alien, as a sign, has come to have the meaning of illegal, unwanted, and less-than-human, but a

person labeled alien is not intrinsically these things. Instead, the subject position of illegal alien collects around certain bodies through the circulation of signs that take on and reinforce those meanings through repetition. Signs are conceived by Ahmed as objects of emotion, and it is the signs that circulate and transform "others into objects of feeling" (2012, p. 11). The repetition of signs as attached to particular subjects is the process by which some subjects become associated with emotional responses that Ahmed argues, has political implications. Ahmed shows how affect's circulation implicates certain bodies with affective charge that has political consequence. To the question of whether and how to find and examine affect, Ahmed's analysis shows that we can analyze affect through signs and the ways they collect around certain subjects.

For the purposes of this dissertation, the grooves set by habituated repetition of affective feeling towards othered subjects is a productive way to consider how I can locate affect to use it in analysis of group processes. However, for my analysis, Ahmed's theorizing will not be used as a way to consider how some subjects become othered, but in the context of the group I studied, the same theory will be applied to consider how subjects come to be *included*, or the objects of happiness. Ahmed and Hemmings's assessment that cultural circulations of emotions that have developed the lines demarcating certain subjects and boundaries are important because they can help reveal the constructed nature of things like race, gender, insider, and outsider. But also, the emphasis on analyzing signs is a good fit for communication studies because there is an established toolbox for studying cultural and symbolic texts.

The Transmission of Affect

The literature on affect contains different conceptions about how affect transmits, spreads, or is communicated. For theorists who see affect as something that is transmitted among bodies (i.e. Brennan, 2004), affect comes to have an undeniable material character, as evidenced in biological responses that are measurable and observable. Another perspective to consider is one that sees material transmission as lacking in specificity and without grounding in scientific evidence (Wetherell, 2012). Each of these arguments will be taken in turn, beginning with Brennan.

Brennan's (2004) book *The Transmission of Affect* presents arguments that support the contention that "communication, defined affectively, can include transmission via material languages beyond human symbol systems, such as chemical and electrical communication" (Ashcraft & Kuhn, 2018, p. 190). Brennan opens her book by asking readers if they have ever walked into a space and "felt the atmosphere" (p. 16). She asserts that this experience appears "objective and certain," (p. 16) and then poses the central question of her book—how could that be? What is it that enables us to feel an atmosphere and know, usually with little doubt, what type of mood, affect, or emotion is present in the scene? Brennan contends that the transmission of affect "is social in origin but biological and physical in effect" (p. 18). A social origin means that affect can come from within a person, but can also come from one's environment. The interactions that happen between people as well as between people and their environments are the social sources of affect. Yet importantly, affects "have a physiological impact" (p. 18), that is, they can be felt and are palpable. Brennan summarizes her idea of the transmission of

affect, writing “the emotions or affects of one person, and the enhancing or depressing energies these affects entail, can enter into another” (p. 18).

Brennan elaborates on the specifics of how affects can transmit from person to person, introducing the idea of olfactory entrainment—"the process whereby human affective responses are linked and repeated” (p. 52). Though some formulations of affect theory rest on objects and things beyond the human having agency, Brennan’s transmission of affect focuses only on humans. This is an important distinction, for while affect may travel on a non-human entity like a pheromone, she does not assert that that pheromone is part of the agentic network creating effects in the scene.

Further, affect is not considered to be something that moves in a predictable, straightforward line from one person feeling angry and that being picked up by another. Brennan recognizes that each individual will sense and interpret affective forces differently. As she explains, “even if I am picking up on your affect…the meaning…I attach to that affect [remains] my own: they remain the product of the particular historical conjunction of words and experiences I represent” (p. 22). As an example, Brennan returns to her discussion of a room where an atmosphere is felt, and now gives it a label--anxiety. Perhaps it is a room full of people about to take the SATs. Brennan asserts that this process involves breathing in pheromones that are the carriers of this affective information. The stress and anxiety felt by the collective of test takers, Brennan theorizes, produces chemical changes in the body that can be picked up through smell by others.

Brennan discusses how her ideas of affective transmission could enhance or be countered by existing research on groups and crowds. She argues that research from the

19th century by theorists such as Le Bon and Blummer held that the existence of a group mind was taken for granted. Over time, Brennan explains, contemporary theorists have discredited this notion and reasserted the importance of the individual within the group, rather than the group as a whole. For Brennan's theory of affective transfer, this shift to seeing groups as a collection of rational individuals capable of making choices apart from the influence of a group does not align with how she theorizes affective transfer. Brennan rests her theorizing on a model of the individual as always immersed in and a part of their surroundings rather than bounded off and separated. Her analysis is critical of Euro-Western modernist conceptions of the liberal subject that she asserts limit the imaginary of how affect might work in groups because any body-to-body transfer is already written off as not plausible. Because of this misalignment between conceptions of what a subject is, Brennan's work does not fit with the corpus of group communication that considers affect in groups, as in that research, the liberal, contained subject is assumed and unquestioned.

A result of thinking of the human body as separate from its environment is that affect, for what Brennan positions as mainstream theorists, is thought to be shared mostly through symbolic and discursive mechanisms. In this system, our sensing of the world relies primarily on sight and hearing. For Brennan, the role of touch, taste, and smell are overlooked as possible ways affect can be transferred (conceding that some crowd theorist have considered touch, though not by considering the possibility of a process of entrainment).

Wetherell (2012) engages with Brennan's ideas and quibbles with them because she does not feel that an idea, that she frames as conjuring up a little packet of emotion that moves from one body to the next, is convincing or useful. Wetherell engages with the different understandings of transmission in a similar way to Brennan, in that she differentiates between a "self-contained, rational, liberal individual," but warns against a quick jump "to theories focused on contagion, suggestibility, mediums and telepathy," because they "[ignore] some of the particular history and implications of these ideas" (p. 141) involving historical and unresolved questions from psychology. Drawing on Blackman (2007a, 2007b), Wetherell contends that we need something more nuanced than "old models of suggestion and contagion" (p. 141) or the "20th century social psychologies of 'social influence,' based on distinctions between 'conformity' versus 'independence'…" (pp. 141-142). The nuance Wetherell desires comes from thinking affective transmission as "the rapid, implicit and explicit, negotiation process through which we jointly begin to figure the affective moment we are in, and what should happen next" (p .141).

The word, *jointly* here is key, as it implies that affect is co-created, rather than formed independently (from the inside or the outside). Also, Wetherell's offering that affect is a result of a negotiation shows its processual rather than prefabricated nature. And this emphasis on interaction, process, and negotiation aligns well with communication theory. Additionally, communication theory can find harmony with a theorist, Reicher, who Wetherell uses to discuss the role of social identity. Reicher suggests that social identity "is the clue to the limits of affective communication in

crowds and to understanding the forms and directions crowd action takes" (p. 148). With Reicher, we achieve Wetherell's goal of avoiding explaining affective transference as uncanny. Social identity, for Reicher is "a model of the self in social relations, along with the actions that are proper and possible given such a social position" (2001, p. 200). In Reicher's conception, affective transfer becomes organized and directed by the social structures that enable and constrain the ways we experience emotion.

Past theories that arrived at contagion as an answer for how groups started to feel similar emotions, Reicher points out, were frequently products of a particular historical and political context. For instance, a social researcher could have been tasked by the aristocracy to find out why the "mobs" are so "unruly." Reicher's empirical studies led him to argue that what appears to outsiders as irrational violence, when considered from an insider's perspective, is actually "tightly linked to the political meaning of the mobilization" (Wetherell, 2012, p. 157). Wetherell concludes that thinking of the transmission of affect requires an analysis that interweaves "identity, affect, legitimacy and social practice," by reconnecting "affect, meaning-making and cognition," (p. 148) rather than characterizing it as something covert and mysterious. This approach is productive because it helps show how affect is relevant to social and political action, for example by marking "out who we pay attention to, whose affect we are open to, and whose experience becomes our experience" (Wetherell, 2012, p. 159). The ways affect interfaces with political action is of primary interest for some scholars whose theorizing can assist this dissertation in connecting individual emotion to larger social structures.

Affect and Political Possibilities

This project is interested in the interimplications of affect and politics because it is through affect that not-yet-realized possibilities for living can begin to be sensed, shoot out tentative feelers, and potentially find fertile ground. Raymond Williams's (1977) theorized the structure of feelings, a concept used to recognize and explain the importance of the multiple ways of thinking striving for dominance and attention at any one point in time. There is a recognizable Gramscian hegemonic discourse at play in each epoch, but there are also an array of other ideas and sentiments circulating, even when these other ideas are only hinted at or not fully articulated. Williams tried "to describe how we come to agree on social or cultural conventions—the intuitive, pre-ideological sense a cohort has that one version of the future is feasible while another is not" (Hsu, 2019, para. 9). Williams's asserts that our sense of political possibility arises through feelings, offering a foundation for thinking about what affect is and its role in political change.

Flatley (2012) harnesses this line of thinking in his theorization of the importance of mood in social movements. Flately sees mood as "nothing less than the overall atmosphere or medium in which our thinking doing, and acting occurs" (2012, p. 503). Questions that Flatley considers include how might a movement such as Black Lives Matter materialize into a world where it previously did not exist? How do new ways of understanding and being in the world become manifest? For Flatley, mood determines whether or not we perceive things as "mattering to us" (p. 503). Without the right mood, "collective political action might not even enter one's consciousness except as something

impossible, futile, foolish, or obscure" (p. 503). Flatley sees shifts in mood as the spark that can make "organized political resistance all of a sudden seem obvious" (p. 503). Mood here is an aspect of affect that Flatley positions as crucial to understanding the processes by which political consciousness comes into being. Mood, used to describe the atmosphere or background surrounding our lived realities, is important in the present work because it can help theorize how new possibilities for organizing can emerge in situations where something different may seem impossible. Considering the affective mood in a group can help me think through shifts in mood that open up previously unimagined ways of doing public health work.

Another way of thinking affect in terms of its role in politics comes from The Public Feelings Network, a consortium interested in the emotional dimensions of political sentiment and what these feelings may be doing. Public Feelings hypothesizes that there are powerful implications for the ways emotion is harnessed into collective feeling that can make some political movements successful, while leaving others flagging.

Cvetkovich (2007) writes that The Public Feelings Network chapters serve as "stealth feminist [projects]…designed to incorporate the insights of feminism into a broad-based effort to reimagine political life and collectivity…" (p. 461). In addition to feminist concerns, such as how emotion enters into political life, some members of Public Feelings align with Queer theory and its interest in de-pathologizing emotion and feelings considered to be outside of the "norm." Cvetkovich writes:

> Queer theory contributes to the more expansive definition of political life that Public Feelings also seeks to foster—that political identities are implicit within

> structures of feeling, sensibilities, everyday forms of cultural expression and affiliation that may not take the form of recognizable organizations or institutions. (p. 461)

Meditating on how what we feel can be mixed up with, degraded, and amplified by the social contexts of our lives, Berlant (2010) developed the idea of Cruel Optimism. Cruel optimism is Berlant's commentary "on our attachment to dreams that we know are destined to be dashed" (Hsu, 2019, n.p.). Berlant uses the American Dream to show that the things we are affectively guided to want and strive for are actually blocking us from thriving. The idea of cruel optimism finds allegiance with feminism and Queer theory because all three question the necessity and rightness of mainstream, dominant social formations such as the nuclear family made of opposite-sex married parents and children. Most people do not fit into that imagined ideal, yet the striving towards, or comparing of our realities to that ideal, are a cause of shame, grief, and a sense of never being enough. Cruel optimism is also apparent when we feel we are not successful enough, lack material wealth, or our bodies do not look the "right" way. The affective climate of the American Dream sets us up to always feel unsure and insecure, as if we are in a relationship with someone who is blind to our struggles because for them everything is just fine. Affect as a theoretical tool can help us analyze the process of affective shifts that loosen seemingly sedimented ways of being and working. Cvetovich (2012) explains what affect can do: it enables us to name, recognize, and talk about the ineffable sensations and feelings that we are always immersed in, and to grant affect a status of mattering and making a difference in our lived experience.

Ahmed's (2004) work on the cultural politics of emotions also recognizes that there are affective climates surrounding political formations, but helps explain why change seems impossible in some circumstances. Ahmed verifies that some forces of power come to be seemingly entrenched and impervious to change, even in the face of organized resistance, because of the affective force that travels with and cements feelings around certain ideas and people. Ahmed makes the case for considering the emotional dimensions of political feelings because overlooking affect omits a powerful theoretical and practical tool. One reason for engaging emotion in politics is because it helps understand the entrenched investments people have to particular worlds that make changing hearts and minds such a difficult task.

The depth of emotional investment attached to one's politics, when threatened, can come to feel like mortal peril. Taking the power of emotional attachment into efforts for political change, Ahmed argues, may open new possibilities for how to approach these endeavors. In the vein of not counting on affect to cure all our societal ills, scholars in the Public Feelings Network explain that even when there is a collective shift in affect sparked by community organizing or widely shared sentiment about something being wrong, these conditions are frequently not enough for significant transformation. Despite these cautions and caveats, feminism does see affect as having potential to shake up sedimented realities.

Hemmings (2012) writes, "in order to know differently we have to feel differently" (p. 150). That is, a political movement, change, or transformation cannot happen without shifts in affect. The word emotion, as Ahmed (2004) points out, "comes

from the Latin, *emovere*, referring to 'to move, to move out'" (p. 178). Therefore, affect is a vital part of moving us out of what is currently accepted as the norm. Hemmings (2012) points to *dissonance* as a certain kind of emotional experience that has the potential to move us and says that an affective, feminist methodology asks us to tune in to dissonance—a sense that something is not quite right.

This dissertation is inspired by a sense of dissonance--a feeling that something going on in the group I studied was off, queer, or out of alignment with what is typical in public health professional work. In the case of the AIG, the out-of-the-norm feeling that developed was an unmistakable sense of shared joy and acceptance of one another, emotions that shaped the group and enabled further exploration into new ways of thinking and organizing. Trying to understand this sense of mismatch between what I was expecting and what I was experiencing led me to an interest in affect and how it might be related to radical rupture, change and transformation" (Pedwell & Whitehead, p. 122). The noticing of these feelings of dissonance is what we can do to take affect's power into account.

Consider the insistence on propagating the scientific evidence that masks work to curb the spread of COVID-19, but then think of all the reasons why people do not want to or cannot wear a mask. Sometimes professional practice in public health marches forward, assured that their science is right, and therefore everyone should follow it. But other times, a crack in this certainty appears when we feel for the people who struggle, as well as the people who are tasked with rigidly promoting public health's way as the only right way because it does not feel good. However, there is usually very little space to

explore those emotions in "typical" public health organizing. When we encourage attention to feeling, such as how the role of affect has become so important for the group studied in this dissertation, that is where a movement to do things differently has a possibility to begin. In the case of the group I studied, looking at instances where space for new ways of thinking are opened up—outside of seemingly permanent ways of organizing—can help show the ways affect operates in groups as well as why it matters.

Feminism and Affect: Embodiment and Emotion

Feminism has long been invested in and attentive to emotion and the body, two concepts that also inform affect studies. Price and Shildrick (1999) explain that it is the category woman and bodily difference that marked out a need for feminism to begin with. Further, affect theory that does not engage feminism is easily cast as incomplete, as some theorists argue that "there is no feminism without affect" (Åhäll, 2018, p. 38). That is, feminists are always affected, or interested, in the world and how it might be better (Probyn, 2010). Nash (2013) points out that Black feminism has foregrounded the centrality of emotion, particularly love for ourselves and one-another in political change. Also, hooks (2000) writes that "all the great movements for social justice in our society have strongly emphasized a love ethic" (p. xvii). Because of this long history of attention to emotion and the body, many feminist theorists engaging with affect studies are hesitant to describe it as something new, as a movement or an affective "turn" (Ahmed, 2008; Cvetkovich, 2012).

In the 1970s, consciousness raising groups served to draw out the personal experiences of members, discuss their feelings about those experiences, and connect their

feelings and positionality to larger social structures. The famous feminist slogan "the personal is political" was operationalized in consciousness raising groups that provided a space to consider feelings and de-pathologize them. Feminism asserts that the rage, depression, or anger women feel is actually reasonable and appropriate in reaction to the systems of domination that materially constrain our possibilities for living. Feminism positions emotion as vital to political awakening--the first step to political change. Feminisms do not see emotion as illogical or irrational, rather, emotion is a potent tool for guiding ethical politics.

The body as it relates to emotion has also long been prominent in feminist thought. As Ahmed (2004) explains, feminist philosophy (i.e., Spelman 1989; Jaggar,1996) has established that "…the subordination of emotions also works to subordinate the feminine and the body" (p. 12). Feminism has long critiqued the masculine-centered hierarchy that positions mind in a more elevated place than bodies, as well as detached rationality as superior to affected emotionality. In the reason/emotion dichotomy, masculinity is associated with reason, while the feminine is linked with that which is bodily, emotional, feminine, and inferior (Åhäll, 2018; Ahmed, 2004; Grosz, 2005). It is important to not counter this tendency by claiming that emotion is actually rational, because this accepts "the very opposition between emotion and rational thought that is crucial to the subordination of femininity as well as feminism" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 179).

Feminist scholars have critiqued the project of differentiating affect from emotion. Åhäll (2018) explains that this question does not align with feminist approaches

to affect studies because it rests on the premise of a dichotomous conception where affect is identifiable as separate from emotion. This difference is summarized by Åhäll (2018) who writes "Affect is … often described as nonconscious, nonsubjective or prepersonal, and is contrasted with personal, conscious, emotional experiences often identified as "feelings'" (p. 39). Affect, for some theorists (i.e. Massumi, 2010; Thrift, 2008), has been presented as pre-personal, and apart from the human, which can have the impact of "prioritizing affect over emotion," and a feminized "'personal' epistemology [being] rejected" (pp. 39-40). Formulating affect as different from emotion "risks reinforcing a binary, gendered logic between a mobile, impersonal, masculinized affect and a contained, feminized, personal emotion" (Åhäll, 2018, p. 40).

The question of the role of emotion in organizing has been taken up from a feminist perspective, initially and influentially by Hochschild's work in the 1970s and 80s that interrogated how affect, particularly emotional labor in work settings, was a valuable capitalist commodity often provided by women. Because of emotion's association with femininity it has been dismissed, undervalued, and un-or-under-compensated. In feminist organizational communication, Hochschild's initial theorizing has been extended, notably by Mumby and Putnam (1992) in their article "The Politics of Emotion: A feminist Reading of Bounded Rationality." Mumby and Putnam deconstruct "the dichotomy between rationality and emotionality," in order to discredit "organizational efforts to reify certain experiences and behaviors as either masculine or feminine" (p. 480). Affect theory accepts Mumby and Putnam's argument as a starting place rather than rehashing debates about rationality and emotion being separate

phenomena. While thinking through emotionality in relation to rationality in organizing has offered important insights into these processes, affect theory warns against drawing on this dichotomy. Fundamentally, aside from the work in organizational communication that directly engages with affect theory, prior work considering the role of emotion in organizing stems from a different onto-epistemological standpoint, making it a bit out of step with the approaches of the present research.

Ahmed (2004) explains that differentiating between affect and emotion reinforces the assumptions that subtend the gender binary, undermining feminist theorizing working to question and reformulate how gender is understood. Rather than concern with differentiation of affect from emotion, or emotionality from rationality, Ahmed accepts feeling as a political force and considers the political effects of emotions and how they are involved in formulating our bodily relations to the world.

Ahmed (2004) explains that "feminism involves an emotional response to the world," (p. 179). For example, one may feel enraged when learning that women are paid less than men for the same work and that this is the status quo for gendered social relations. Ahmed goes on to explain that emotional responses to the conditions of the world "involve a reorientation of one's bodily relation to social norms" (p. 179). When we know that having a feminine body leads to being of less value in the workforce, as just one of many examples, this changes how we perceive both our bodies and the world.

In addition to refiguring the role of emotion and bodies, feminism questions what bodies are and how they come to be known. Debates about whether women's bodies are biologically "natural" or linguistically "constructed," and the attendant benefits and

drawbacks of each of these views have shaped feminist notions of the body. In affect theory and within a relational ontology, permanent, pre-determined categories are no longer used as a basis for defining bodies. The differences sometimes ascribed to the enfleshed, palpable body versus a wholly culturally constructed one no longer shapes this debate when engaging with affect.

In the relational ontology that subtends affect theory, predefined, bounded entities do not exist apart from their relation with other entities. As Probyn (2010) explains, “the body is defined by kinetic and dynamic relations. It helps to picture the body as composed of thousands of bits all whizzing around" (p. 77). Bodies come to be seen as bounded through the whizzing bits in relation—in their “speeds and slownesses,” or “motion and rest" (Deleuze, 1992, p. 625). All of this kinetic motion means that “A body affects other bodies, or is affected by other bodies; it is this capacity for affecting and being affected that also defines a body in its individuality" (Deleuze, 1992, 625). To put this somewhat more concretely, consider how consciousness raising groups took personal problems and connected them to structural oppressions.

Consciousness raising groups facilitated the process of “reading the relation between affect and structure, or between emotion and politics.” Further, individual bodies as discrete entities come into question because reading relations must happen, “in a way that undoes the separation of the individual from others” (Ahmed, 2004, p. 183). As Hennessey (2013) puts it:

> Because human existence is always social, the ontology of affect is radically social, too. It lies in organisms’ physiological states and the social relations…that

> sustain them: the energies and sensations that inform attention and interaction in care … that enables group survival. (p. 57)

Here is where affect's conception of the body connects to feminist imperatives for envisioning the world differently so that the oppressions that currently seem intractable are cracked open and made into something different. Spinoza is often quoted in affect studies for asserting that "No one has yet determined what the body can do" (1959, p. 87). When bodies are no longer limited by seemingly sedimented gender norms, but instead are viewed as always in a state of becoming, making them different in every encounter, this is where the possibility for getting from now to a better, or at least different, future arises. Feminism engages affect as something personal and social rather than as specific to historically situated contexts. Affects are sensed and interpreted through our bodies, as they leave impressions—a term Ahmed (2014) uses to stay away from theorizations of affect that separate out cognition from emotional or bodily feeling.

Affect Theory in Organizational and Group Communication

In this section I look at the existing literature in organizational and group communication scholarship that engages with affect theory in ways similar to, or at least adjacent, to my interest in affect for this research. I start with presenting organizational communication, as there is more research that applies affect theory in this field than group communication and the approaches it takes are more in-line with my conception of affect. Following the organizational communication literature, I present literature from other subfields of organizing research. I finish this section with an overview of group

communication and group studies more broadly in terms of how it has engaged or could be related to affect theory.

Organizational Communication and Affect Theory

In this section I share examples from existing literature to show how affect is used in organizational communication research. I begin the discussion with scholars from the Montreal School whose engagements with affect theory are subtended by their assertion that affect is material and grounded in a relational ontology. From this grounding, organizational communication scholars present the concept of communication as constitutive transmission that outlines how affect theory can enrich the study of communication, as well as how communication can contribute to affect theory. Next, I shift to a discussion of research from organizing studies more broadly, highlighting how this literature addresses questions about affect and embodiment in organizing that emphasize the need to attend to concrete bodies in relation to grasp

Among organizational communication scholars, those associated with the Montreal School (Cooren, 2000; Taylor & Van Every, 2000) stand out as having produced the most scholarship related to organizing and affect. Two pieces are notable for theorizing how affect is understood in organizing: Kuhn, Ashcraft, and Cooren's (2017) book *The Work of Communication: Relational Perspectives on Working and Organizing in Contemporary Capitalism* and Ashcraft's piece in *Communication Theory* released in May 2020 entitled "Communication as Constitutive Transmission? An Encounter with Affect."

In a move akin to staking your flag on the moon, Ashcraft (2020) calls for an increased engagement with affect theory across the subfields of communication studies and outlines how she feels this can be done, and to what effect. Situating her argument within the ontological turn, a philosophical movement that rethinks "the real," Ashcraft shares four premises that outline what "the ontological turn asks of communication" (p. 12) and how it relates to affect. The four premises include 1) relationality 2) sociomateriality, 3) compound agency = mutual causality and, 4) ontological practices = flat ontology. In the following subsections, the four premises are explained and connected to other work by Ashcraft and her co-authors to illustrate how the concepts are taken up in organizational communication research. The first of the four premises, relationality, is foundational for the rest, so here is where Ashcraft (2020) begins.

Relational Ontology and Affect in Organizational Communication

First, Ashcraft (2020) explains that relationality "hinges on the claim that self-evident things and the boundaries between them are effects, not causes, of the relations in which they find themselves" (p. 12). Ashcraft (2020) offers the example of when a man says a woman would be "prettier if she only smiled" (p. 4), and at this suggestion, the woman offers up the smile. A familiar analysis of this encounter may question the meaning each participant makes of it, but when using affect to look at the situation, there are different concerns. The questions become:

> How do bodies snap to attention as man and woman, compelled into a form of relating that is both ordinary and intimate to this moment? What histories and signals spark his irrepressible urge to make this "affable" suggestion, or flash the

> unwitting reflex across her face amid competing signs of irritation—a quickening heart, stiffening muscles? How does gender happen; how is it felt? (pp. 3-4)

This is a case of relational ontology because the players are not thought to have arrived in this scene as pre-formed, but they come into being in relation to one another. Bringing in the connection to affect and its ability to define subjectivities, Ashcraft writes, "how do such encounters, at once social and material, constitute bodies as man or woman? Heteronormativity, no longer a monolithic social structure, becomes a sensate force…" (p. 4). There are many possibilities for how this scene could unfold, but with affect theory, interest is in the "energetic rush that activates sexed people into unequal sexual relation…" Affect requires a relational ontology because it "enables the becoming of bodies" that are "always in relation and always indeterminate" (p. 4).

Ashcraft (2019) elaborates on the idea of things only coming to be through their relation with others by looking at the phenomenon of hoarding. In "Feeling things, making waste: The Dis/organization of affect," Ashcraft argues that "hoarding is a communicative practice which enacts and circulates the affective boundary between human and nonhuman bodies" (p. 100). She develops her argument by discussing the different ways the communicatively-constructed relation between the hoard and hoarder can be conceptualized, and in those different formations, the phenomenon of hoarding itself becomes different things.

Hoarding is engaged to illustrate how ideas only come into being through their relations. By presenting hoarding in relation to different explanatory discourses, Ashcraft illustrates the idea that ontology is multiple. That is, a thing, or concept like hoarding, is

not singular, discrete and permanent. Instead, hoarding becomes different things based on what it is in relation with.

The differing discursive and theoretical approaches used to address hoarding make a difference for how it comes to matter. For example, when hoarding is presented as "affect out of order" (p. 99), we perceive it as an individual problem where someone's feeling for their stuff is not "correct." Like any formation, what it produces is of consequence. In this case, perhaps the way to "fix" hoarding would be psychotherapy for the hoarder. In another formation, hoarding can be viewed as "[breaking] capitalist rules for allocating affect" (p. 100). The relation here points to a power imbalance. There is the forceful structural ideology of capitalism that affirms desire for material wealth as normal and good. Up against that notion is the hoarder who is powerless to resist the hegemony of this construct. Here hoarding is cast as a symptom of the glorification of overconsumption. Now the answer is not to fix the individual hoarder, but to focus on structural and cultural changes that could dismantle capitalism. The upshot of this piece is that we define what hoarding is through its relation with various narratives, so that hoarding becomes completely different things when we engage it through a variety of discourses. The point of Ashcraft's piece is not to tell us what, ultimately, hoarding "is," but that we come to know it—or any phenomena—through its relations with other things.

Sociomateriality

The second premise posits sociomateriality, which "is not just a revival of the material relative to the social; it is a refusal of their division altogether" (Ashcraft, 2020, p. 12). Importantly, "Affect theory treats the social as material and, thus, explores a

different kind of sense-making than that which usually occupies communication scholars" (p. 12). With sociomateriality, "Words and symbols are matter, carried on vocal chords and made by hands with tools…" so that "the negotiation of meaning happens through sensory contact" (p. 12). Through their discussion of occupational branding and affect, Kuhn et al. (2017) delve into how materiality is not merely an effect of discourse, but that discourse itself is material. Using argument as an example to make their case they explain:

> …relationality surfaces the material infrastructure of argument and shows how, through sociomaterial practice, argument becomes some*thing* with evolving form and trajectory, changing as it collides with others, running away from and acting back on its alleged author. **As communication, argument is constitutive not because it *makes* the world, but because it is *of* the world**, a vibrant participant in affective contact and transfer. (p. 171, emphasis in original)

Kuhn et al. (2017) argue that occupations take on a "brand" through affective economy—that sensate sociomaterial mix circulating with and around bodies that keeps discourse in the scene, but unseats it from being the only thing making a difference. The affective nature of occupational identity is also posited as a way to illustrate how the perceptions that build up around certain types of work lead to implications for how it is valued. Nursing is perceived as a feminine occupation, an overdetermined occupational identity that arose through the collection of affect around particular bodies. Even when male-sexed bodies are nurses, there is still a feminine affect associated with the occupation. Ashcraft (2020) points to the process of sociomateriality when she writes, "When human

bodies encounter the materiality of meaning, energies are propelled that affect other bodies. Affect theory takes interest in this transfer of shifting intensities, which exceeds discourse even when it happens through discourse" (p. 12-13). In sum, sociomateriality can be thought of as "materially felt sociality: how bodies become, in relation, through encounter" (p. 13).

Compound Agency = Mutual Causality

The third of Ashcraft's (2020) premises asserts that humans are not the only agentic players to consider. Also, compound agency refigures doing and action as "hybrid, interrupted, and dispersed" (p. 13). All entities—both human and not, are interimplicated, only coming into a distinguishable form through "the practices that realize their distinction" (p. 13). Hybridity means that no entity "exists, much less exerts force, on their own" (p. 13). When a person desires to make something happen, they must enlist a variety of objects to achieve the goal. Still, material objects do not always cooperate. The spinning rainbow wheel on your computer screen means you will not be finishing that email—your intention has been interrupted. In this situation, there is no *thing* that "has" agency on its own--human or otherwise. Action does not happen alone because "agency is … dispersed in relational practices that produce apparent entities "with" agency" (p. 13).

Ashcraft and Kuhn (2018) discuss agency as hybrid, interrupted and dispersed in the case of the North Carolina legislature's proposed bill (HB2) to require people to use the bathroom that corresponds to the sex listed on their birth certificate. In the article, Ashcraft and Kuhn illustrate how an analysis of agency as hybrid, dispersed and

interrupted can produce a different type of analysis than one focused mostly on discourse, power, or ideology. Rather than this being a case of Republican lawmakers oppressing transgender people, the analysis becomes more about what types of agential formations are coming into being through practice. Here it is not only the human actors involved that can take action and be the cause of an outcome, but the whole amalgam of ideas and things involved in the practice of public restrooms in the United States.

Door signage proclaims public bathrooms to be a gendered space, while the embodied people who enter those spaces do not fit into the sign's assumption of a choice between only two options. Lawmakers claim that men pretend to be women so they can go into women's bathrooms and harm them, and that they must have a law to stop this and protect the vulnerable ladies who may fall prey. In another "reality," transgender people have bodily urges to use the bathroom away from home, and they go about their business like anybody else. It's perfectly ordinary and there is nothing sinister or even notable happening. The cause of the need for HB2, depending on the relational matrices that is called up, can be articulated to be no cause at all or due to a clear and present danger.

When "agency is compound, cause too goes haywire" (Ashcraft, 2020, p. 13). Imagine sitting in a room full of people (and sharpened #2 pencils, Scantron sheets, and the screeches of chairs scooting across terrazzo floors) about to take the SAT. Your anxiety along with the stress of others around you produces an atmosphere of nervousness that is collectively felt. That collective sense reciprocally causes the tension you feel, so that you are part of the making of the scene, as well as a product of the scene

in the making. Ashcraft (2020) writes, “Creature effort collides with matter and energy, and these ongoing fusions stagger toward achievement, become distracted, or fizzle out. Indeed, affect is agency; it moves things in multiple senses: touches, alters, and stirs bodies; skips across scenes; and modulates feeling” (p. 13).

Ontological Practices = Flat Ontology

The fourth premise is that ontology is flat, or that everything exists on the same plane. There is no longer a hierarchy that marks out what is more “real” where a thought is considered abstract, while the sandwich on your plate is concrete. How something comes to be is only known through its enactment, or Ashcraft (2020) puts it, “the doing is all there is” (p. 14). Ontology is now on a horizontal or flat plane rather than a vertical or deep one, where finding meaning or explanation involves attention to practice (Ashcraft, 2020). In affect theory, ontology:

> …rejects the search for root causes or overarching structures driving action on the grounds that they do not exist. The task is not to find the wizard behind the curtain but to describe the ontological practices that produce durable effects. Heteronormativity is not an explanation; it is a placeholder for a better description of how “it” happens. (p. 14)

When Ashcraft says that heteronormativity is not an explanation, she is gesturing to affect theory’s rejection of ideology or Discourse as (complete) accounts of what is going on. In our search for how something happens—what is going on in a situation that we are researching, a flat ontology requires us to stay present in the ongoing flow of action to trace “how affect moves,” because “*there is nowhere else to be*” (p. 14, italics in

original). Ashcraft & Muhr (2018) consider what this looks like in terms of coding qualitative data and encourage researchers to avoid quick jumps to familiar interpretations. In their paper they explain how, going into interviews with senior military leaders, their expectation was to encounter further proof of the gendered nature of leadership. However, through staying attentive to the happenings in the moment, a different and unexpected outcome emerged where a male military commander expressed a need for feminine leadership approaches. He attributed his own success to a more collaborative style, as well as portrayed this way of being as essential to all leadership, perhaps even that it is an essential part of leading. While this commander's assessment is also not a "truth" about leadership, the point Ashcraft and Muhr draw out is that their careful attention to the happenings in the moment enabled a breaking free from preconceptions they had about what they would find. There is nothing outside of doing, so when in research settings, the advice for noticing affect and its effects is to be in the flow to find what something "is," at least in that moment.

In another piece, Ashcraft (2017) discusses how studying affect does not mean we no longer engage in representation, but now signifying is less about meaning, and more about "ontological mattering" (p. 50). This relates to the concept of a flat ontology because rather than positioning language as differentiated stuff from what it represents, language and what it signifies are on the same ontological plane. In this plane, there can be no distance between a thing and its representation, therefore, representation happens, but of interest is the ontologically discrete thing that emerges from representations joining with other entities. Things are not only different in a social constructivist sense

where difference is a matter of language or perspective, but instead, a thing is fully, ontologically, different.

This is why a flat ontology is necessary in affect theory—because affect is circulating and making a difference through sensed forces that direct certain formations of entities to come together. In these compositions, everything must be on an equal plane because it is only their joining together in performance that makes their existence. If one element was on some "higher" level that was more authoritative, affect theory's emphasis on doing as all there is no longer holds.

Communication as Constitutive Transmission

From the four premises presented by Ashcraft (2020), one potential of working with affect in communication studies comes into view. Ashcraft claims that not only can affect enrich the study of communication, but communication—if defined as constitutive transmission—can add to affect theory by providing additional perspectives on the question of how affect is transmitted. Constitutive transmission asserts that the older transmission models of communication may have something to offer in terms of how affect is transmitted. Kuhn et al. (2017) and Ashcraft (2020), make the point that taking up affect requires a view of affect as material force that is passed communicatively from entity to entity. Rather than a conception of communication as fully constitutive, where language is credited with calling the world into being, there is a return to and reimagining of the transmission model.

Early conceptions of communication (i.e. Shannon & Weaver, 1949; Schramm, 1954; Reddy, 1979), put forth a transmission model whereby interactants exchanged

messages from a sender to a receiver in a more-or-less linear and straightforward manner. The transmission model has been critiqued, and for the most part, left behind within communication scholarship where a constitutive model of communication is favored (Kuhn et al., 2017; Ashcraft, 2020). However, with affect theory, there is validation of "transmission as a constitutive process" (Kuhn et al., p. 86). That is, affects are material and transmit feelings within scenes. Through transmission of affect, reality is constituted—formed through the relation of various entities coming together and becoming what "is," in a particular situation. Constitutive transmission is presented as a necessary new way to define communication if it is to engage with affect because when we return to models that view communication as transmissive, it "can help affect theory address something of a black box: the how of affective transfer" (Kuhn et al., 2017, pp. 86-87).

Ashcraft (2020) draws on Brennan (2004) and her theory of affective transmission because she asserts that "the field of communication is an ideal site for cultivating knowledge about the transmission of affect, if only sign systems beyond human language were counted as (legitimate) communication" (p. 18). Ashcraft sees significant implications for communication studies and supports this claim by saying that Brennan's research shows that "the transmission of affect through varied modes of contact is all but incontrovertible" (p. 18). Brennan (2004) also thinks the most fruitful way forward for understanding affective transfer is by conceiving of it as communication. Ashcraft (2020) explains that to achieve the potentials she sees for an engagement between affect theory and communication studies, the field of communication will need to study "signification

as sense-sharing," and redefine communication "from the negotiation of meaning to the circulation of sense" (p. 20).

In sum, Ashcraft sees a need to revisit the ontological basis for communication studies to unseat the assumptions that put humans and their linguistic sign systems as the only agentic entities involved in shaping reality. With affect theory, Ashcraft makes the case for the materiality of communication and encourages scholars to consider the theoretical implications of communication as transmission. In this move, Ashcraft calls for the sensed and tangible to be vigorously reintegrated into communication research because it can enrich the possibilities for understanding the world. Ashcraft and other organizational communication scholars like Kuhn, Cooren, and Muhr have focused their scholarship on developing how and why affect theory can be relevant for communication studies. Outside of communication studies, other branches of organizing studies also take up affect in ways that can help inform this dissertation because it highlights the potential critical approaches to affect versus existing scholarship that has been prominent in "positivistic and normatively oriented strands of organizational behaviour…" (Fotaki, Kenny, & Vachhani, 2017, p. 4).

Organizational Studies and Affect

Fotaki et al.'s (2017) introduction to a special issue on affect in the journal *Organization* entitled, "Thinking critically about affect in organization studies: Why it matters," offers a summary of the uptake of affect in organizational studies broadly and points to research that also helps bring the role of affect in organizing more into view. In line with my own interests and sense of potential for affect theory, Fotaki et al. feel that

this line of research can "…elucidate the ethical, political and, indeed, elusive dimensions of organizations [that are] yet to be realized…" because, "Affect permeates organizations profoundly, influencing people's motivation, their political behaviour, decision-making and relationships with leaders and followers" (p. 4). Also aligning with this view, Fotaki and Harding's (2017) book, *Gender and the Organization: Women at Work in the 21st Century* makes the claim that organizations and their study must be grounded by the fact "that individuals are affected by others without whom the notions of collective life, and even subjectivity itself, are meaningless as we cannot exist but in relation to others" (p. 8).

Fotaki et al. (2017) note that critical approaches to affect studies are only recently emerging in organizational studies, but indicate that papers have been presented at conferences including Fotaki et al. (2013), looking at "affect and the psychosocial," "…affective ontologies," in performative organizations presented by Komporozos-Athanasiou, Fotaki, and Thompson (2014), and Van den Brink, Pullen, and Fotaki (2016) who consider "affect, embodiment and diversity" (p. 4).

Embodiment

Of interest to this project is how some existing work considers the corporeal experiences of bodies in organizations as a way to rethink organizational ethics—particularly about "relations of care in organizations and society" (p. 8). Pullen et al. (2017) explore the politics of affect, relational ontologies, and the ways these ideas interface with bodies. Pullen et al. (2017) emphasize feminist formations of affect through their calls for placing the body at the center of research and organizing interested

in affect's operation. Like Kuhn et al. (2017), this piece is grounded on a relational ontology that disrupts the constructed boundaries between linguistically represented emotion and embodied sensations. Connecting the materiality of bodies, politics and affect, Pullen et al. (2017) argue that "the body bridges everyday experience and political action," so that "the gendered organization becomes a site of affective engagement, possibility and experience which works through and between individual bodies" (p. 108).

Thanem and Wallenberg (2015) also engage with questions of affectivity, embodiment, and diversity and argue that in drawing on affect, the project they undertake is "Neither a moral rule system nor an infinite duty to recognize the other…" (p. 235). Drawing on Spinoza, who "offers a theory of the good, powerful and joyful life by asking what bodies can do" (p. 235), Thanem and Wallenberg (2015) resonate with other affect theorists that focus on doing (i.e. Ashcraft, 2020). The analysis looks at diversity and asserts that it should be reconceptualized in a way that does not foreground the importance of difference because this approach can reify subjects as individuals when affect theory argues against permanently and predefined subjectivities. Thanem and Wallenberg write "we enhance our capacities to affect and be affected by relating to a variety of different bodies" (p. 235). In this piece we see a call to concretize difference through attention to bodies in contact rather than abstracted, discursively created notions of race, ability, gender, and so forth. In the way Thanem and Wallenberg engage these notions, affect operates as a material agent through bodily sensation.

Additional theorizing related to embodiment and affect is presented by Pullen and Fotaki, who came together to create an edited volume in 2019. The book puts affect and

organizing into conversation with diversity to emphasize how difference is "lived through bodies" and that "the mobilized affect involved in sustaining [difference] can be used to disrupt the unequal regimes in organizations and society" (Fotaki & Pullen, 2019, p. vi). The book includes four chapters that look at the "affective constitution of organizational bodies, in their diversity" p. 7).

A chapter by Pors (2019) considers how decision making may be impacted when considering the trans-subjective exchange of bodily affect occurring in a scene. Rather than proposing organizational actors as discrete individuals who make decisions based on discursive constructions, Pors considers the implications for organizing when meaning "emerges between individual bodies rather than between decision-making individuals" (Fotaki & Pullen, p. 7). For the present project, this theorizing is relevant, as it considers the role of affect in decision-making groups and how bodily encounters play a role in these processes.

Just and Remke (2019) address an ongoing question within affect studies about how a pre-personal/pre-discursive intensity can be accessed for analysis. The authors consider how some bodies become visible as those that can access parental leave within an organization while others do not. Just and Remke use Ashcraft's (2011) work on theorizing difference at work (interestingly, not her work on affect as constitutive transmission), to see "the work-body relation as an indeterminate symbolic-material object constituted in communication" (Ashcraft, 2011, p. 17). Resonating with Ahmed's (2004) and Wetherell's (2012) contention that affect is grooved and patterned through habitual practice, Just and Remke (2019) argue that the shape of relations between

material bodies and discourses is formed, afforded, and constrained affectively. Embodied difference emerges from affectively-inflected discourses, which have material effects on bodies—in the case of their argument, the types of bodies that can(not) access parental leave in the workplace.

Dobush (2019) considers the lack of diversity, in terms of ability, in the types of bodies considered in research that centers corporeality. Arguing that organizing processes lead to the enablement and disablement of bodies, Dobush asks us to rethink our starting assumptions by considering what bodies can be considered real and valuable in organizing research. Ghin (2019) offers a chapter that interrogates the mostly unquestioned affective link between leadership and what a leader's body should be like. Pointing out that leadership studies have assumed healthy bodies as an almost essential characteristic of leadership, Ghin proposes the idea of a 'sick-bodied leader' to challenge hegemonic conceptions of bodily expectations for leaders.

Just et al. (2019) research diverse bodies clothed in undifferentiated uniforms in the Danish military. The authors argue that uniforms "affectively [relate] body possibilities of enacting profession with gendered identities" (Just et al., 2019, p. 114). While the uniforms are all the same, the embodied differences of individuals interface with their clothing to illustrate how bodily difference can lead to minority status even in contexts striving for visual conformity. This piece extends the argument that bodily diversity must be concretized in order to examine how it effects organizing. Michels and Steyaert's (2017) piece can be related to the ideas from Just et al. in that they question whether an affective atmosphere can be created purposefully, such as through uniforms,

or if affects only arise by accident—based on the particular combinations of elements and their doings in a scene?

Kuna and Nadiv (2019) look at the role of staffing agencies in creating diversity in the organizations for which they find workers. Highlighting the role of mediaries, such as job recruiters, in championing or hindering diversity Kuna and Nadiv show how otherness is discursively constructed through job placement practices. The chapter "shows the ways in which embodied discourses of otherness are contextual and deeply embedded in history…" (Fotaki & Pullen, 2019, p. 11), by pointing out how staffing agencies use contextual information, such as a factory already employing a large number of Black people, to guide their decisions on who to send to that organization as possible additional employees. Also looking at how mediators can use their power to constrain possibility for certain bodies, Poorhosseinzadeh et al. (2019) provide "a gendered reading of how senior men (re)construct the ideal candidate for managerial positions and how their own experiences shape this construction" (Fotaki & Pullen, 2019, p. 11). Like in Kuna and Nadiv, people in decision-making positions unreflexively use their own situated knowledge and conceptions of correct bodies to decide who is an "other," and what that means for their life in an organization.

Public Service Worker Identity

Valenzuela (2019) offers an analysis that is particularly relevant for this study because it considers public service workers striving to do good, thoughtful work in their organizations and for their communities—a situation similar to my study. The study, broadly, looks at "market-driven, patriarchal 'governmentalities', particularly those

which legitimize affective labour in the form of a 'diversified' responsiveness to citizens-customers" (Fotaki & Pullen, 2019, p. 12). Valenzuela challenges neoliberal presentations of diversity that underlay the identities of public servants who work amid the logics of neoliberalism. For this dissertation, a plausible argument could be that the members of the group I am studying are, ultimately, driven by a desire to be better workers who get better results for their various clients—whether community partners or funding agencies. As Valenzuela points out, neoliberal affectivity requires Public Servants to internalize the desires of their clients as their own as a way to perform their work well.

Valenzuela also discusses the idea of "consolation" offered to critical scholars who use neoliberalism as a lens to make sense of and "know" what is driving the affective realities of Public Service workers. Consolation refers to "the premise, shared by many post-Structuralist Foucauldian scholars, that there are strong symbolic guarantees for the 'truthfulness' of discourse analysis and its products" (Valenzuela, 2019, pp. 288-289). The consolation offered to critical scholars is that they have done a satisfactory analysis and demonstrated their solidarity with the plight of public sector workers when they agree that neoliberalism is merely a "…residual effect of hegemonic projects and/or governmental programmes of rule…" (p. 277). However, Valenzuela argues that this approach leads to "…under-theorizing the way in which neoliberalism is embodied into a plurality of differences at the concrete, everyday level" (p. 277).

To ensure attention to embodied experience, Valenzuela explains that researchers need to recognize their own embeddedness in neoliberal regimes of power, including how

neoliberal discourse already accounts for and binds how we can think of the body and emotion. In other words, researchers should accept that "both the bureaucracy of State administration and science as academic knowledge-making have been completely colonized by neoliberal logics, resulting in the total and irrevocable amalgamation between neoliberalism and discursivity itself" (p. 295). Valenzuela says that this leaves critical researchers "inconsolable" with the recognition that our work of interpreting discourse is actually embedded in neoliberal logics, rather than somehow outside of it. Further, the more we engage the neoliberally-saturated academic practice of discourse analysis, the more we solidify and trap ourselves within it. The problem with all this becomes apparent in the interest Valenzuela has in embodiment and affect.

In organization studies, Valenzuela explains, "…embodied affect has been often equated to the psychological idea of 'emotion' … and how neoliberalism as an organizational project has become a matter of 'emotion management'" (p. 295). When emotion is considered to be an underlying driver of neoliberal bureaucracy, this positions public servants as capable of "radical change from within, if they learn to recognize the specific emotions their served citizens and themselves have been set to feel" (p. 295). When there is a recognition of the emotional plane of organizational life, workers may feel that they can somehow get above or outside of performing the affective habits of neoliberal subjects. Playing along with this notion, social scientists have already taken up this supposed potential and created programs for "self-improvement…and emotional intelligence tools," so that "Public Servants [can] take the failures and excesses of neoliberalism into their own hands" (p. 295).

The problem with equating emotion with affect is that it diminishes "the concept of affect and its complex and diversified embodiment to a reified piece of discourse" (p. 295). To work towards analysis and critique that harnesses the potential of embodied affect, Valenzuela summarizes:

> The challenge is to insist, quite inconsolably, in the body as the partially unanalysable, negative foundation of discourse; to persist in intrusively incorporating our own affect to the analysis of discourse, rather than reducing affect to a catalogue of emotions, or any other map of discursive formations. (p. 296)

In the current project, I need to think through the potentials of accepting Valenzuela's proposal that as a researcher I, as well as the study participants, are totally encircled by neoliberal ideology that will distort attempts to use an embodied affective approach, particularly if I depend on or stumble back into reliance on a preset "catalogue of emotions." Is affect, theorized as an unassimilable remainder and excess beyond discursive capture, locatable in the communicative practices of the group I am studying? Or is it that the group's attention to their emotionalbodies at work are pre-shaped by neoliberal constraints? Or perhaps there are hints of both of these trajectories that can affirm that affect does not offer a definite explanation, but only enables looking at potentials for how we got to where we are? It is relevant to note that Valenzuela does not think that researcher self-reflexivity leads to more accurate or true analysis of "the emotions of interpreted subjects" (p. 296). Instead, interpretation is "like all other actions," that are "sustained by powerful unconscious, affective attachments" (p. 296).

Summary of Affect in Organizing Research

Altogether, the literature on affect in organizational communication and organization studies provides a variety of theoretical approaches and examples of application in an array of organizational settings. The strands I see as most harmonious with my research are those that affirm non-human entities to be agentic and positioning affect as a material entity that shapes what comes to matter in organizing. Further, my research relies on a relational ontology that subtends many of the articles discussed where nothing exists as a pre-formed, permanent object with fixed boundaries. Instead, realities are continually performed through intra-actions (Barad, 2007), a term that directs us to remember that there are no distinct and separate entities before they come into being through relation with something else. Feminisms are drawn on throughout the literature reviewed, particularly in terms of the need to ground the analysis of affect in concrete corporality that keeps research always attentive to the ongoing formation of bodies in relation, rather than as permanently defined subjects. The articles discussed direct us to trace the relations that intra-act to form what comes to be seen as reality, and to consider the role of affect in these processes.

Group Scholarship and Affect

Moving now to look at affect in group research, I want to start with a discussion of why framing this study as a study of a group is important for this dissertation, and then move into a more detailed look at existing literature that may help inform the present research. As scholars have argued, groups are the fundamental unit of communication research (Poole, 1998). However, despite the strong case for the importance of groups

made by many prominent group communication scholars, the field has not developed a coherent and lasting identity. Group communication research often finds a home in related communication studies areas such as public dialogue and deliberation, organizing, or family studies which distributes the literature across the field rather than having it collect in one defined space. The present research is also drawing on more than just the group literature, but is also indebted to it for marking out and delineating the group as a unit for communicative analysis. Ultimately, this project looks at how a group forms and performs over time, and considers the role of affect in communicative practice as a way to trace what comes in and goes out of perceived reality. So, while this dissertation also draws on theory from a diversity of topic areas, its grounding in group research is vital to its conceptualization.

In particular, the bona fide group perspective (Putnam & Stohl, 1990) highlights the group's relation to its larger context. Additionally, the bona fide group perspective, according to Putnam, Stohl and Baker (2012) is concerned with the development of a sense of "groupness" that is relevant to this project, even if my approach is to examine affect's role rather than a more discourse-focused analysis that is favored by these authors. While I do align with research that emphasizes the group as an important site of communication research, I also see group communication as somewhat out of step with contemporary communication scholarship—particularly in its lack of engagement with critical perspectives.

Group communication has not, generally, been concerned with critical analysis that foregrounds questions about power, identity, and subjectivity. In a review of 50 years

of publications in the journal *Small Group Research*, questions concerned with critical engagement of social structures did not come up at all (Emich, et al., 2020). Further, group research using a feminist lens is scant. Meyers, a scholar who was working to develop this line of thinking (i.e., Meyers 1994; Meyers, et al., 2005) in group research, sadly died early in her career. Wyatt (1993) is another, example of feminist critique of small groups, though the citation dates tell the story that over a decade has passed with no new feminist analysis of group research. Whiles there are some exceptions to studying groups with an interest in feminist ideas (i.e., Black, 2019) there is a dearth of research that foregrounds feminism and affect theory while taking a specific interest in group communication.

Still, the term affect can certainly be found in group studies literature. All of the existing studies that consider affect use quantitative methods, indicating a reliance on a conception of affect as something discrete and bounded—a way of thinking that has little in common with the way organizational and feminist scholars define affect. Later in this section I will offer an overview of the literature that deals with affect because it can help link existing group research to this project. Still, there are some significant differences in paradigmatic commitments between the interests of this dissertation and existing research on affect and groups. Differences are particularly apparent in the motivation for doing research, the way questions are framed, and the way findings are thought to be relevant for practice.

Emich et al.'s (2020) 50-year review of work in the journal *Small Group Research* argues that there is a need to do research that connects themes in existing

research that are related. Existing research in group literature on topics such as cohesion, conflict, emotional intelligence, cooperation, creativity, diversity, development and intergroup relations are presented by Emich et al. as having threads that could and should be connected more clearly in future research. Though not emerging as major themes in Emich et al.'s review, I see affect as also related to concepts of interest in group research such as belonging, climate, or quality of relationships (Keyton and Beck, 2018). Emich et al. (2020) specifically note how affect fell through the cracks of their review explaining, "while several important emergent states such as cohesion, collective efficacy, task interdependence, transactive memory, and trust occupy key roles in our topic networks, terms such as 'group affect,' 'group mood,' and 'affective tone' do not appear in our analyses" (p. 687).

Examining affect in groups is interesting, particularly for the AIG, because there has been an ongoing sense--a constant presence of something *more* going on in the group. Rosemary Hennessy (2013) studied the affective dynamics subtending women maquiladora workers who organized for labor rights at the U.S./Mexico border. Hennessy based her research on the tacit knowledge that people join groups because they are "moved to do so," while recognizing that "we have only a limited conceptual vocabulary for what that moving means or how it works" (pp. xii-xiii). When I started reading about affect and encountered the idea of an unassimilable remainder (Massumi, 2002), a small scrap of the needed conceptual vocabulary entered into my understanding. It was buoying to find other scholars that have sensed that there is something more to consider as to why groups form, persist, and often ultimately create something other than what previously

existed. Hennessey (2013) explains that labor organizing is beleaguered by resistance from powerful forces that constantly thwart efforts at change in both obvious and subtle ways. Moreover, Hennessey asserts that feeling is a vital part of what motivates effort in the fight, and is evident "…in the ways people are moved to care for and collaborate with others…" (p. xv). While there is a palpable sense that this is a significant element of why groups come and stay together, "the feelings of affection and commonality that a collective campaign can generate are complicated" (p. xv). Sometimes the articulations of these feelings can be found in everyday talk, yet "narratives also convey the inadequacy of familiar categories to communicate the attachments that propel their journey" (xvi) through long, difficult, processes that exact a toll on those involved.

The present research explores a group (AIG) that is examining their current organizing practices in public health. Collectively they are moving through a process of reckoning with what is wrong in public health practice (or at least what could be better), and stepping into an unsettled space. The ways that feeling and reflection are involved in what the group experiences are of interest, because they are vital to understanding why the group found success, despite discomfort related to challenging the status quo within themselves, as well as their organizations and discipline. The affective climate in the AIG is characterized by love, friendship, vulnerability, and an imperative to tend to one another as humans first, which put getting work "done" in a secondary position. The AIG is relatively atypical of group research in professional work settings, because its primary concerns emerged to be about relationships rather than accomplishing a task directly related to work.

Attention to emotion and its function in working through challenging problems and creating a supportive atmosphere is often not the main focus of research in the corpus of group literature, especially groups in work settings. The assumption, not surprisingly, for work groups is that their primary purpose is getting the job done, and while emotion can be a part of that, the main concern is still task completion. In fact, there are criticisms of groups that are overly relationally-focused where "work" takes a backseat to "fun." (McGrath, 1984). In existing research on groups at work, when interpersonal relationships become primary, it is sometimes taken as a sign that the group is not functioning properly (i.e. Janis, 1982). From this broader discussion of why I see considering the group as the focus of communicative study, as well as how group literature relates to my dissertation, I will now present some of what group studies has found in relation to concepts that are associated with affect.

Starting with group communication, I review conceptual formations related to relational communication generally, as well as the relevance of the distinctions made between task and relational communication. I also share literature on the function of cohesiveness, as well as cohesiveness "gone wrong," such as in the case of groupthink. Moving to the organizational behavior literature, I will review how affect has been studied and some of the key findings that include a general consensus that group affect tends to converge over time, and how emotional contagion is thought to function in that phenomenon.

Topics in Group Communication and Connections to Affect Theory

Task and Relational Communication

As I discussed in the framing of this section, there is agreement, particularly in the field of organizational behavior, that affect is an important area for development in group studies (Barsade & Knight, 2015). There are discreet topics in group research that should be studied in terms of how they interact with related concepts because pursuit of these connections could expand and enrich current thinking (Emich et al., 2020). One area that is related to affect is group communication research's preoccupation with the distinction between task and relational communication. Affect theory does not support notions of separate, fixed, pre-existing categories such as one utterance being relational and another being task-focused, and group research has also come to agree that this separation is not valid, though through a different reasoning. Early debates (i.e. Benne & Sheats, 1948; Bales, 1950) about messages being categorized as task-oriented or relationally-oriented formulated these kinds of speech acts as separate and different. As research in this zone developed over time, communication scholars asserted that messages can have both task and relational functions. Notably, Walzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson (1967) found that relational and task content are a part of all messages. Now, there is wide agreement that a message can have both relational and task components (Keyton, 2000).

The thinking on task and relational messages in group scholarship to date aligns with social constructivists paradigms that posit that the same message can be interpreted by different people in different ways, depending on any number of individual or cultural differences. Affect theory asks us to avoid marking off and defining certain entities,

including whether a message is task or relationally focused, as permanently definable beings and instead focus on the always evolving flow of practice that contours how ideas emerge and recede in an ongoing stream of becoming. Affect theory's relational ontology proposes that totally different material realities come into being rather than merely different interpretations of one ultimate reality. In a relational ontology, the interest is in the different combinations of how things come together in various formations to create distinctly different material realities. For interpretivists, an utterance could be seen as task-focused by one person, or relationally focused by another—or a combination of both functions, yet the utterance is still the same thing no matter how it is interpreted. In a relational ontology the utterance itself becomes a different thing, depending on the composition of different elements that combined to form it.

Deleuze (1997) talks about these formations being like the outcomes of a dice roll—each roll produces a different combination and matters in a different way. One combination of dice may produce a cohesive group that enjoys working together, while another just as easily could lead to a group where everybody but one person feels like they belong. What is going on is not determined by the linguistic signs we use for representation, rather it comes about in the act of elements assembling into particular forms. Affect is the stuff that circulates around and directs the formations of these assemblies, offering an alternate explanation for how there was ever a conceptual separation of task and relational communication, and how later the perception came to be that task and relational communication coexist. Research that considers affect is interested in how certain formations of knowing come into, and go out of being, as well

as their implications for living. This differs from group communication's debates about the task/relational message integration or separation, as the purpose there is to find out what *is* and then use that as grounds for future research.

Relational Communication in Groups

Group communication scholars, notably, Keyton (1999, 2000), have strongly advocated for attention to relational communication, a term that is used differently in the context of group communication than affect studies as I have presented them. Contemporary scholars like Keyton are credited with complexifying and deepening the study of relational dimensions in group communication, but the concept can be traced back to mid-century scholars such as Bales (1950, 1953) as well as Benne and Sheats (1948). Relational communication in groups is interested in the role of emotion in groups, making it a possible point of connection to the study of affect. As Keyton and Beck (2018) put it, the relational dimension of group communication includes "the social and emotional interactions of group members from which roles and relationships emerge" (p. 25). Relational dimensions of communication are likely to be used in the present research as an empirical way to show the role of emotion in the group. However, in affect studies, sensed emotion is thought of as sort of a collecting point for various affective flows that intersect and produce a hotspot of intensity. The interest is in tracing the different affects that have produced that intensity, how they matter, and what we might understand about the group's structures of feeling that make this sensed force, at this moment, come into conscious awareness. Discursive expressions of emotion are relevant for my analysis, but in a way that differs from existing approaches.

Affect can also potentially rebalance the weight or importance given to emotion and relational communication as opposed to task messages, which typically are given more attention (Keyton, 1999, 2000). The group studied in this dissertation does foreground relational communication, in some instances, even explicitly stating that tending to people's emotional needs should come before accomplishing tasks—as attention to relations and emotion are seen as a vital part, or perhaps even the entire point of the group's existence. A feminist perspective, specifically in literature about consciousness raising groups, helps to argue that, despite the dominance of attention to task, relationships in groups are the primary ground from which any work can be done (Allen, 2000/1969). This type of thinking already exists in group scholarship, as Keyton (2000), explains, "our relationships with others in a group have a strong effect on our task motivation" (p. 389). However, it may be of interest to consider the importance of having groups at work that see relational communication as primary and as an end in itself, rather than only as a facilitator of better work performance. There are currents already apparent in the group studied in this dissertation that could help sketch out what this might look like and whether and to what extent this type of approach flourishes in work contexts.

Relational Development in Group Communication

Relational development was initially explored by group scholars like Bion (1961), Schutz (1958), and Stock and Thelen (1958). Relational development scholarship considers whether and how groups develop over time, and how various contexts, group member attributes, and the type of tasks the group is engaging with impact development

(Wheelen, 1999). The notion of development implies *movement and change*, and as characterized in this literature, the movement seems to be towards something better than what came before, enabling groups to function more effectively (i.e. Tuckman, 1965). For my purposes, the idea of development, or recognition of the always changing nature of a group, is helpful for theorizing affect in groups. Further, rather than assuming groups progress towards something better, an analysis of affective flow does not assume movement in any particular direction, and can encourage groups scholarship to attend to the continuous vacillations of progress, retreat, and stasis that happen in groups over time.

Group Cohesion

The idea of group cohesion, first articulated by Cartwright (1968), stands out as another zone of inquiry where relationships and their attendant emotions are of interest. Cohesion can be defined as "an attitude or feeling members have about their group, its task, or other members" (Keyton, 1999, p. 207). Cartwright (1968) set out five approaches to measuring cohesion, including interpersonal attraction among group members. That this early research considered attraction among members of the group makes me think that there is some harmony with affect studies and its interest in the forces or pulls that shape the formation of relationships. Again, this way of thinking has not been an explicit part of group cohesiveness research, yet is still a possible link between group communication and affect studies.

Groupthink

Cohesiveness in a group is related to the phenomena of groupthink (Janis, 1982), and illustrates another possible point of connection to affect. One aspect of groupthink involves highly cohesive groups that tend to settle into ways of thinking and behaving that go unquestioned because of an attitude of infallibility. With its interest in the formation of connections among group members that can strongly bind members to thinking in a certain way, there is resonance with the idea in affect studies to the notion of sedimentation where certain ways of being become seemingly fixed. Part of groupthink involves the connections forged between group members that Janis construed as *too* cohesive—or too strongly bonded. These bonds can lead to group members not questioning what is happening in a group, as presenting a different way of thinking amounts to tacit admission that the group, and the people you are strongly bonded to, are not always right. While affect is not mentioned in groupthink research, noting the pull between people shaped by relational and emotional connection hints at the role of affect in group communication.

Affect in Groups: Organizational Behavior Research

Shifting away from literature situated in group communication, I now move into the wider world of group research and work that has looked specifically at the role of affect in groups. Barsade stands out as the theorist who has shaped the study of affect in groups, a scholar whose academic home is in organizational behavior (i.e. Barsade, 2007; Barsade & Knight, 2015; Barsade, et al., 2011). While Barsade's work reveals an approach to affect that sees it as categorizable and discrete as well as having to do with

only human actors, this body of work is important for understanding where the study of affect and group scholarship may have a fruitful engagement. Barsade and Knight (2015) presented a broad look at affect in groups in the *The Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior.*

Barsade and Knight's (2015) review of group affect is informative for my research because it looks at affect at the group/collective level and specifically in organizational contexts. There are two ways to think about the study of affect according to Barsade and Knight: where group affect is viewed as "'a whole,'" with characteristics and properties of the group acting upon the emotions of the individuals within it…" or from the "'bottom-up,'" where group affect emerges from the 'sum of its parts'" (p. 22). Kelly and Barsade (2001) further developed the concept of group affect by forming a model that "identified both implicit and explicit affective transfer processes—including emotional contagion, behavioral entrainment, and vicarious affect—that can serve as conduits for transferring affect among group members" (Barsade & Knight, 2015, p. 22). Stemming from this notion of affect transferring in groups, Barsade and Knight (2015) explain that the most well-studied aspect of this phenomenon involves "an affective experience that is shared, or held in common, by the members of a group or team" (p. 23). In this zone of research, there is an assumption that "individual group members converge in their affective experiences at a given point in time," (p. 23) a happening which George (1990, 1996) established as "a necessary precondition for conceptualizing collective group affect" (Barsade & Knight, 2015, p. 23). With this groundwork in place, subsequent research assumes that affect transfers and travels within groups

George (1990) is also credited with the attraction-selection-attrition model that posits that, over time, group affect tends to congeal into "unique, homogenous collective affect" (Barsade & Knight, 2015, p. 23). Attraction-selection-attrition postulates that organizations or smaller groups within organizations tend to attract and select members with similar affective dispositions, and that those whose affects differ are likely to leave voluntarily or be removed from the group. This body of research helped establish support for the idea that longstanding groups tend to develop a shared affect.

Though most research has focused on and reported on affective convergence in groups, Barsade and Gibson (1998), Barsade et al. (2000), and Kelly and Barsade (2001) have done research that found divergence in group affect. Among the small body of research in this vein, of consequence is a finding by Kaplan et al. (2013) that diversity in group member affect was negatively associated with a group's effectiveness. Additional studies that have examined divergence in group affect manipulate variables to see how they do or do not impact group process outcome (see Barsdade & Knight, 2015 for full review). The key point is that affect can be divergent and may impact group performance, though this is an area in need of further study.

Emotional Contagion

A specific type of affective transfer, emotional contagion, stems from Weiss and Cropanzano's (1996) work, and rested on prior work that established the tendency of group affect to converge. Hatfield et al. (1993, 1994) also contributed to thinking on emotional contagion by using "theory and research on primitive emotional contagion…which involves the largely automatic and subconscious transfer of emotions

from person to person…" (Barsade & Knight, 2015, p. 23). Through mimicry of "facial expressions, voice, and body movements," people who are interacting with one another begin to "actually feel the emotion," of others, "effectively catching the emotion…" (Barsade & Knight, 2015, p. 24). Findings from group studies research on emotional contagion has been both affirmed (i.e. Brennan, 2004) and questioned (i.e. Wetherell, 2012) in the unresolved debates about affective transfer in critical affect studies. As I discussed in Section 1, there are various positions on whether affect is transferred, and by what mechanism. In the group literature, there is little interrogation of whether contagion happens, instead, research is based on established findings that support group affect convergence, leading to more concern with how it happens than questioning if it is possible.

Affective Culture

Another construct looking at affect in groups from the "top down," is emotional, or affective, culture. Barsade & O'Neill (2014) offer a comprehensive definition of affective culture as "behavioral norms, artifacts and underlying values and assumptions reflecting the actual expression or suppression of (the discrete emotions comprising the culture) and the degree of perceived appropriateness of these emotions, transmitted through feeling and normative mechanisms within a social unit" (p. 558). Emotional culture is associated with and draws from Hochschild's research in the 1980s on airline flight attendant's emotional labor that posited individual affect is something that was managed and controlled for the (economic) benefit of organizations. Barsade and O'Neill (2014) applied the concept of emotional culture per its definition above and found that

"An emotional culture of joviality…had an independent effect on team performance and was associated with increased coordination and also increased risk taking on the job" (Barsade & Knight, 2015, p. 26).

Dynamic Views of Affect

In contrast to research that demonstrates how affect converges in groups are findings that cast affect as dynamic and changing over time. In this view, affect is a product of both bottom up and top down affective dispositions (Kelly & Barsade, 2001). Related to this idea is that experiences of group affect feedback into the group and inform future assessments of the group's affective state (Hareli & Rafaeli 2008; Walter & Bruch 2008). Walter and Bruch (2008) developed a cyclical conceptual model of group positive affect. The cycle they proposed recognizes that there can be differing levels of affective convergence among group members, so they first assess the level of convergence in the group. Looking at the level of convergence around positive affect, Walter and Bruch found that with higher positive affect convergence there is higher quality to interpersonal relationships in the group. Further, Walter and Bruch assert that high quality relationships feed into the affective cycle of the group, leading to emotional contagion and convergence in group positive affect (Barsade & Knight, 2015). While the emphasis here was on positive affect, Walter and Bruch also created a model for how affect can be at differing levels and the ways in which it dynamically moves through groups. Also starting from a premise that affect is dynamic, Hareli and Rafaeli (2008) showed that group mood is a product of individual moods, and recognized that there can be divergence or convergence in mood between individuals and the group. Similar to the

feedback idea, whatever affect a group member brings into the group will "spiral through the group, contributing to an ebb and flow of affective responses across group members over time" (Barsade & Knight, 2015, p. 27).

Barsade and Knight (2015) explain that there is a significant lack of research into group affective dynamics over time, even though there is general recognition that there are fluctuations based on the dynamic interactions of group affect and group process. Because of the lack of research in this area, group affective history and its formation and fluctuations over time are an important area for future researchers to develop (Barsade & Knight, 2015). This dissertation will take up this task, though in a way that would likely not fit well with the existing body of group research.

Antecedents to Group Affect

The discussion so far has looked at research exploring the formation of affect at the collective level. Next, I present research that deals with the antecedents of collective group affect, which Barsade & Knight (2015) explain have been looked at primarily in terms of "a) group leadership, b) attributes and attitudes of group members, and c) relationships and interactions among group members" (p. 28).

In looking at group leadership, research has found that positive leader affect correlates with positive affect in the group overall (i.e. Chi et al., 2011; George, 1995; Johnson, 2009; Seong & Choi, 2014; Sy et al., 2005). Group member attitudes and attributes, such as personality traits and demographic profiles, are associated with affective convergence and divergence (Doherty, 1997; Ilies et al., 2007; Sy & Choi; 2013; Totterdell, 2000; Totterdel, et al., 1998). On the question of the impact of diversity

in groups, Hentschel et al. (2013) studied perceptions of team diversity "as an antecedent to group affect, proposing and finding that when group members see their team as highly diverse, they experience more shared negative feelings" (Barsade & Knight, 2015, p. 30). Research also supports affective convergence when members are highly committed and strongly identified with the group (Tanghe et al., 2010; Totterdell et al., 1998; Totterdell, 2000). The research that looks at relationship structures and patterns of interaction aligns with previous findings that provide evidence for a tendency for group affective convergence.

Having task and social interdependence as well as stable membership and norms around mood regulation increases affective convergence in groups (Bartel & Saavedra, 2000). Experimental interventions that manipulated affect at the group level had stronger effects than manipulating affects of individual members (Klep et al., 2011, 2013). Of relevance to my research, which involved a group that met totally online, Cheshin et al. (2011) studied the development of group mood convergence in a virtual work group, finding "both text-based and behavior-based cues lead to emotional contagion" (Barsade & Knight, 2015, p. 31). Summarizing the antecedents to group affective convergence, Barsade and Knight (2015) write, "The more interconnected a group member is with others in the group, the more likely it is that he or she will share affective experiences with others" (p. 31).

Affect's Role in Group Outcomes

There is some variation in the findings about how affect is associated with group outcomes. Barsade and Knight (2015) explain that there are four realms of group

outcomes and processes that have been studied in terms of the impact of group affect: "(a) attitudes, cognitions, and behavior toward the group; (b) member interactions, cooperation, and conflict; (c) group creativity and decision making; and (d) group effectiveness and performance" (p. 31).

Barsade and Knight (2015) explain that "…researchers studying groups have found a positive relationship between positively valenced affective constructs and the positive attitudes that members hold toward their groups" (p. 31) (i.e. Chi et al., 2011; Barsade & O'Neill, 2014; George, 1990; Mason & Griffin, 2003). Affect in groups impacts group dynamics, including levels of conflict, cooperation, and coordination (Barsade & Knight, 2015). Studies that explore and illustrate these connections include Barsade et al. (2000), Barsade (2002), and Choi & Cho, (2011). Overall, positive affect in groups is positively associated with increases in cooperation and coordination and lower levels of conflict (Knight & Eisenkraft, 2014). However, negative affect's role is not as clear because it has shown to result in varying group-level outcomes and to be more dependent on contextual factors (Barsade, 2002; Knight & Eisenkraft, 2014; McIntyre et al., 1991; Sy et al., 2005).

Turning towards the relationship between group affect and creativity shows that positive affect leads to more flexibility and broader cognition, innovation, and developing of solutions that best fit the issue under consideration (Fredrickson, 1998; Grawitch, et al., 2003; Isen, 2000). However, there is also research (i.e. Jones & Kelly, 2009; Tsai et al., 2012) that illustrates negative affect can lead to increased creativity. In terms of decision making, there is not as much agreement about the role of affect. Lab studies that

require participants to share information with one another to solve a murder mystery—a distributed information task--have shown positive affect increases decision-making quality (Bramesfeld & Gasper, 2008), but Kooiji-de Bode, et al. (2010) incited negative affect in their study participants and found enhanced decision-making quality in this group as compared with a group prompted towards positive affect. Here again, contextual factors are thought to impact group affect in regards to creativity and decision making (George, 2011).

Affect can also be related to group effectiveness and performance. For the most part, positive affect is associated with better performance and negative affect is associated with less effectiveness (Barsade & Knight, 2015). Still, in some limited circumstances, negative group affect may improve performance (Knight & Eisenkraft, 2014). Some studies also show that affect in groups can influence group performance indirectly by increasing commitment and helping behaviors (i.e. Chi et al., 2011, Knight, 2015).

Needs for Future Research

Barsade and Knight (2015) elaborate on the research needed in the study of group affect and their suggestions provide support for my project. One need is to continue research looking at divergence in emotional contagion, that is, where different individuals in a group have different affective dispositions (e.g., Elfenbein, 2014; Hess & Fischer, 2014; Moody et al., 2007; van der Schalk et al., 2011; Weisbuch & Ambady, 2008). If future research can better tease out the complexity in processes of emotional contagion, perhaps demonstrating that one person's good mood does not "rub off" on someone else

who is now also in a good mood, this would be in alignment with feminist affect theorists (i.e. Ahmed, 2004, 2014; Hemmings, 2012) who contest conceptions of affective transfer that do not consider the role of social contexts that they see as directing and shaping the ways affect moves.

Barsade and Knight (2015) also recommend "real-time, process-oriented research," that looks at "the ebb and flow of affect, moods, and emotions within groups and teams over time," as well as studies that look at cultural influences on groups or generally "overarching societal factors" (p. 38). Cultural studies and communication scholars have started working in this space, though not through post-positivistic, quantitative studies. There is not a single qualitative study mentioned in Barsade and Knight's review, and though they see the need for research into processes over time, their approach to doing this is to use "experience sampling techniques," (p. 38), rather than qualitative case studies. I am glad to see that I am working in a direction that this review indicates is necessary, though I am unsure of how open or receptive organizational behavior scholars would be to my work.

Summary and Questions at the Frontier

The takeaways from Barsade and Knight's (2015) review are that, generally, positive affect in groups will lead to better group-level outcomes. Also, revealing their managerialist orientation, Barsade and Knight encourage managers to consider individual affect when putting teams together, as this will likely lead to better outcomes for an organization. Looking at the frontiers of research on group affect, Barsade and Knight write that there is work needed in the area of emotional intelligence at the group level.

Rather than thinking of affect moving from the top down to individuals or from individuals up through the group, taking the group itself as having emotional capacity is a question of interest for group behavior researchers.

Barsade and Knight (2015) explain that "there are a few conceptual and empirical articles [suggesting] that groups themselves can vary with respect to emotional monitoring, regulation, and other affective competencies or skills" (p. 40). Research in this vein includes Côté (2007), Druskat & Wolff (2001), and Elfenbein (2006). Elfenbein (2007) has developed the concept of collective-level affective competency which includes "team emotion recognition accuracy" and Sanchez-Burkes and Huy (2009) articulated emotional aperture, which is "the ability of individuals to read collective emotions" (Barsade & Knight, 2015, p. 40). The notion that the group itself, rather than only the individual members, can have, monitor, and change its emotional tenor is something that may emerge in my analysis and could potentially contribute to the field of affect in groups because it would extend theorizing where emotion is something a group "has," potentially as more than the sum of its individual parts.

As it relates to my project, the literature on affect in groups is most relevant in its general finding that it matters and is something that should be taken into account. I am glad to see empirical evidence showing that affect vacillates over time, and for the potential of different people within a group to have different affective states. As this review shows, while most research points to a tendency for affective convergence, there is a need to trace that process over time, and to consider contextual factors. My project is

answering some of the stated research needs in the study of affect in groups, though from a different paradigmatic perch.

Summary of Literature Review

This review's intention is to present thinking related to affect in the scholarly fields this dissertation is associated with—feminism, organizational and group communication. I also sketched out some of the larger questions and debates that these more specific fields draw on to contextualize and sensitize this project to what it might be able to do as a contribution to the study of communication in groups and their potentials for organizing. I do see space in this literature for my study to make a contribution. Particularly, there is a need for foregrounding feminism in communication research using affect, as well as thinking about how affect operates in groups as related to their changing contextual scenes over time. I intend this review to serve as a catalogue of ways affect has been conceptualized and considered to make things matter, and as a resource that sensitized me sensitizing me to what might be happening as I engaged in analysis of the case. At the same time, affective analysis asks that I stay open to what is unfolding with each iteration and articulation of objects in relation. In the next chapter, I outline how I am thinking about approaching this study methodologically.

Chapter 3. Methods

Having an interest in affect, as Elsbeth Probyn (2010) explains, is itself imbued with an affective charge. Recognizing this matters because focusing on how affect operates in a group is already a methodological choice that makes a difference in what can emerge from this research. That is, this research must be understood in its relation to the constellation of ideas, people, places, and things I am emersed in. Notably, my choices around methods surface from my training, the discipline of communication studies, the expectations of my committee members, and my own personal goals and commitments--to name just a few. The methods of research applied in this dissertation are a result of affective forces that organized my mattering map, if only for a while, into something discernible and relatable to my readers.

Ashcraft (2019) reinforces the implications of nameable formations, such as the claims of research, by explaining that there are significant consequences to the affective boundaries that make the world. In the case of this dissertation, if the AIG is articulated as a productive training program the consequences are different than if it is viewed as a therapy group for whiney women. In terms of methods, I want to foreground that my approach and interpretation are shaped affectively, and have consequences for the ongoing flow of affect in the AIG as well as its surrounding context.

Considering how affect, feeling, or emotion is operating in the group is central to understanding why the group found success, despite discomfort related to challenging the status quo within themselves, as well as their organizations. There is a palpable affective climate in the group, characterized by love, friendship, vulnerability, and an imperative to

tend to one another as humans first, which put checking off items on an agenda in a secondary position. This dissertation goes about analysis of affect by focusing on the patterns and habits of the group as a way to trace the trajectories that led to what it became. The group's trajectory is notably different from most professional groups working in public health, and my interest is in how, why, and to what effect.

The group I have participated in, as of April 2021, for over two years is aptly described as "some little world you never knew was there" (Stewart, 2010, p. 340). Indeed, in this little world, "everything depends on the dense entanglement of affect, attention, the senses, and matter" that make the world of this group come into its form. This little world was formed affectively, as the endless variety of elements that could have gelled together to constitute the group became *this* group due to the affective currents shaping it. Densely entangled in this world is the physical stuff, like human bodies. And actually, the bodies are heads in small Zoom squares within the larger square of a computer monitor. The structures of the group directed attention towards relationships, care, and noticing our emotionalbody. The group worked intentionally on honing capacities for sensing—sensing our own experiences and response in our bodies, and the responses of those around us, as well as the impacts our actions had on the world around us. All of it was poked, moved, thrust, repressed, concealed, emboldened and/or crushed through affective forces. Our bodies and our words intermingle and shape what comes next, what comes to be important and subject to our attention. These interactions and attentions combine to shape an always evolving affective mood that in turn is part of the unfolding of the next articulations—of what happens.

Wetherell (2012) propelled my thinking about methodological choices in this research—specifically her critique of what she dubs "the uncanny" in affect studies. The presentation of affect as uncanny, Wetherell argues, is unproductive and makes thinking about affect's role in the happenings of social life lead to scholarship that is not accessible, practical, or relevant. Though she does not make this point directly, I read in her writing an assertion that if scholarship cannot do something in the world for people living in it, it is not aligned with a feminism that is concerned with how research relates to living.

Another influential thinker shaping this project is Grossberg who explains that in politics, those who prevail are the ones who attend to and take seriously feelings, moods, and atmospheres (Richardson, 2019). Tapping into and recognizing how and why feelings arise—particularly a collective or group feeling—is vital to understanding how worlds come to be. I include this preamble because it underscores that the approach to this research is affectively shaped, although it also unfolds in a fairly traditional manner.

First, I will share my version of the story of how the group I studied came to be, including some of the relevant aspects of how it is set up and who is involved. Next, I will describe the data sources I have collected. Lastly, I discuss how data analysis, in research that engages affect, has been conceptualized to provide a frame of reference for how I am approaching it. Broadly, based on the work of other scholars like Stewart (2010), I see the analysis of affect as involving "sensing modes of living as they come into being" (p. 340), a task that can be accomplished by tracing the ordinary surfaces of being through detailed descriptions.

Thinking with affect requires an intense noticing and cataloguing of the inventories of shimmers (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010) that can offer:

> …a more adequate description of how things make sense, fall apart, become something else, and leave their marks, scoring refrains on bodies of all kinds--atmospheres, landscapes, expectations, institutions, states of acclimation or endurance or pleasure or being stuck or moving on. (Stewart, 2010, p. 340)

Attuning to affect means rejecting totalizing accounts that can chalk happenings up to broad, generic critiques that assert problems are a product of limiting ideologies, such as in analyses that implicate things like "neoliberalism" or "late-stage capitalism." Stewart (2007) laments that these terms attempt to "index [the] emergent present, and the five or seven or ten characteristics used to summarize and define it in shorthand, do not in themselves begin to describe the situation we find ourselves in" (p. 12). To situate the situation the group found itself in, I will begin by describing how the AIG and this research came to be.

Description of the Case

Though other stories can be told, I will start with my friendship with Renee. Keep in mind that, from an affective lens, this description of how the study came to be is already engaging in analysis and putting guardrails around the path that this project can take. Notably, I feel strongly that positive relationships are a significant force shaping this group. Rene has been a shining light in my work and personal life for more than a decade, and we co-hatched this project after years of long conversations that sparked and shaped our mutual desire to change what we viewed as no longer working in public

health organizing. From the start there was feeling involved--both of us had dedicated over a decade of our lives to public health, and were deeply invested in our work doing some good in the world. We agreed current practice was falling short—and much of that stemmed from the ways public health practitioners approached different forms of knowledge. Research and expert-based knowledge, from our experience, are uncritically accepted as best. Additionally, the communicative considerations of working in multisectoral collaborative groups—the kind that characterize the daily work of public health practitioners--had not been sufficiently attended to.

Groups in public health, like in most workplaces, are a primary vehicle for getting work done. Work is done in both intra-organizational groups found in government agencies at the local, state, and federal levels, as well as inter-organizationally where multi-sectoral coalitions come together to address public health issues. These groups can involve individuals, the public sector in all its forms, corporations, nonprofits, advocacy groups and more. In the diverse collaborative groups required for public health work, there are mismatches of all sorts, from what each entity cares about and from that, what is important, to a sense of whose knowledge is valid, to who can be a leader. Renee and I agreed that there was a need for more attention to the ways communication in collaborative groups impacted public health work, particularly that there should be more attention given to power, relationships, acceptance and rejection of the existence of diverse worldviews, and beliefs about the (in)fallibility of public health science. At the time Renee and I were devising this project, I worked at a university research institution, funded by a grant from the state health department while also going to graduate school

part time. Renee was at the CDC National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (NCIPC), the source of the funding that the state health department had for this work. It was our positioning in these roles at this time that enabled the group to become a reality.

The AIG came to be in part due to Renee's influence at the NCIPC, as well as a sense at the CDC that the standard or traditional ways of organizing for public health were no longer achieving positive gains. Renee's close relationship to the director of the CDC NCIPC helped give momentum and attention to concerns with the state of public health practice. A more conventional factor in the growing interest in changing practice came when leadership at the CDC NCIPC saw data showing slowing or, in some cases, no improvements in rates of injuries and violence in the nation. Issues that fall under injury and violence prevention include opioid overdose, suicide, intimate partner violence, child abuse and neglect, gun violence, pedestrian and car-related injuries, and account for the leading causes of death in the first four decades of life. These are some of the elements that came together to form a legible backdrop, or precipitating affective movement, that enabled the AIG to come into being.

Responding to Poor Health Outcomes with New Organizing Practice

From the initial movements, over the course of 2018, a narrative developed at the CDC that explained the problems with the way public health interventions were being developed and applied. The sentiment was captured in a paper written by people working at the CDC at the time, including Renee and the NCIPC director. They stated that there is a need for "a shift from the 'top-down' or 'science push' applications of the public health model toward more substantial inclusion of practitioners, policymakers, and local

stakeholders as learning partners and 'owners' in the process" (Smith, et al., 2020, p. 2). The arguments presented by Smith et al. illustrate a debate within sociocultural analyses of public health around the emergence of a "new" public health. Scholars characterize the new public health as rejecting the notion of an ultimate truth, having more comfort with uncertainty and ambiguity, and being open to inclusion of diverse epistemes (Petersen & Lupton, 1996). In contrast to this, in 1996 Petersen and Lupton argued that public health "remains at heart a conventionally modernist enterprise," where "professional expertise remains privileged over lay expertise," and "social-scientific knowledge" is used to formulate "'truths' [that] construct public health 'problems'" (p. 8). Smith et al.'s 2020 arguments, grounded in lived practical experience, affirm Petersen and Lupton's 1996 claims that much of public health practice is still fundamentally modernist—a situation that resulted in Smith et al.'s call for something different.

Smith et al. (2020) present the problem with existing public health practice as stemming from the traditional four-step public health model that includes: (a) defining the problem, (b) identifying risk and protective factors, (c) developing and testing prevention strategies, and (d) ensuring widespread adoption (Hanson et al., 2012; Mercy et al., 1993). Smith et al. (2020) explain that the second half of the model—development and testing of effective interventions and widespread adoption—has not been successfully achieved in "real world" contexts. The real world is invoked here to highlight the contrast between findings about what will work according to research done in controlled settings versus the complexity and contingency of public health interventions in community contexts. Further explaining the problem, Smith et al. (2020)

assert that the four-step model assumes—perhaps as a result of the rhetoric surrounding the "new" public health--that interventions are developed with significant input from those impacted by the health problem in question. Though the model rests on the assumption of stakeholder input, Smith et al. write "broad scale engagement is challenging and inconsistently applied" (2020, p. 2). Seeking ways to bridge the gap between problem definition and successful application and adoption of prevention practices led CDC leadership to seek out different way of working, a trajectory that led them to learn about and use systems approaches.

CDC staff explained how the traditional public health model differs from a systems approach by emphasizing that systems approaches are inherently inclusive of diverse views and voices. The present study recognizes that systems science has a long history of scholarship behind it, with attendant debates and varying implications for application. In this research I privilege the organizational actor's use of and understanding of systems science which primarily stems from systems dynamics (Forrester, 1969). Forrester's original work was expanded and popularized in management learning by Senge (1990) and is characterized by seeking "to apply general systems thinking principles to managerial and societal issues by looking to the patterns of cause-and-effect relationships within a system to explain system behavior" (Foster-Fishman et al., 2007, p. 200). The CDC operationalized these concepts for practitioners by presenting systems thinking as a way of viewing social problems holistically that seeks to understand the interrelationships between component parts. As Smith et al. (2020) point out, rather than assuming that people impacted by a health intervention are

meaningfully involved in the solutions to address it as the public health model does, a systems approach makes conferring with and including those voices an integral part of intervention development. Systems approaches employed by this group ask practitioners to adopt a systems "mindset" and apply systems "thinking" that entails viewing public health problems as made up of interconnected, interanimating parts that create a whole. In turn, that whole is viewed as a part within a larger system that impacts how it functions and what outcomes are produced.

Smith et al. (2020), again, writing about the adoption of these ideas at the CDC, explain that systems approaches "[represent] a different paradigm that actively engages complexity," and explains that public health problems, "cannot be solved effectively by isolating parts of a system (separated and decontextualized) from the whole" (p. 4). Helping public health practitioners use systems thinking to improve public health outcomes was the official purpose of the funding from the CDC that led to the formation of the AIG. However, this dissertation is not involved in assessing whether systems approaches are productive or effective for public health organizing. Rather, my interest is in affect, which indicates a need to trace some of the happenings that led to systems science arising as an attractive approach within the organization. The story of the adoption of systems science is one of the building blocks that led eventually to the actualization of the AIG.

In late 2018, the AIG became a possibility when the CDC directed $15,000 each to five state health departments. The grantees were tasked with forming and facilitating

groups that could engage with public health practitioners across the country to see whether systems approaches were a viable way forward for organizing.

The five groups all had a national scope, and four of them were to focus on applying a systems approach to the four priorities for prevention as defined by the CDC NCIPC: child maltreatment, intimate partner violence, sexual assault, and motor vehicle crashes. The fifth group was to be the laboratory for further defining, refining, and understanding systems science concepts and the barriers and facilitators for applying these ideas in the context of public health injury and violence prevention organizing. This fifth group was the one Renee and I set up and is the focus of this research. With an atypically loose leash on the expectations and outputs anticipated from this work, the CDC indicated that they wanted grantees to explore systems approaches and develop training or intervention programs that practitioner groups felt were necessary to facilitate this rather significant shift in practice.

Formation of the Action Inquiry Group

As the groups got started towards the end of 2018, staff from the CDC NCIPC were assigned to be a "subject matter expert" (SME), which is organizational lingo for someone who can be a resource on a particular topic for grantees. The SME for group five was my friend Renee, who had recently completed an EdD in human development. From her educational training she was excited to try out an action inquiry approach with the group because she had done prior research for her dissertation looking at processes of human development with a focus on personal growth through processes aimed at elevating consciousness. Her experience with action inquiry groups led her to think that it

could also help public health workers, so she suggested the group use it as a framework. She encouraged all of the group members to read Foster (2012) to understand how she was conceptualizing action inquiry. Action inquiry is the method informing how Renee and I structured the group, however, in the same way that this dissertation is not about the merits of systems thinking, it is also not about action inquiry. Still, to ground readers in what action inquiry is, I will summarize the materials that Renee used to explain it to the group.

Action Inquiry

Foster summarizes her approach writing, "all of our social actions are also inquiries and vice versa" (p. 1). That is to say that our actions are, in a way, questions that ask "what will happen?" or, "what am I learning from this?" She also asserts that inquiries can be viewed as a kind of action because they reflect a particular frame and approach to communication and, importantly, our inquiries result in effects on the world (Foster, 2012). Foster explains that linking action and inquiry leads to the question, "How can we simultaneously enhance the validity of the information upon which we act and the effectiveness and timeliness of our actions and inquiries?" (p. 1).

In the AIG, enhancing the validity of information we use to inform our actions translated into constant and purposeful attention to our thoughts and emotions. Seeking greater effectiveness and timeliness in our actions and inquiries involved attending to the group as a whole, as well as the larger context surrounding the group—this too required focused attention and attunement through cultivating moment-by-moment awareness. The AIG's approach is in harmony with Foster's formulation that claims, "attention and

self-awareness [are] core skills that need to be developed" (p. 1). The strong focus on developing capacities for "attention and personal development" (p. 1) encouraged by Foster were foundational to structuring the group and its practices.

As the project director, I worked with Renee in her role as the SME to outline the structure of the group. In our years of work together in various capacities, we had already co-facilitated an action inquiry group (AIG) with public health professionals a few years prior; however, the previous group was not focused on systems approaches. We agreed that that first group had been a success, particularly for learning about how action inquiry would be received in public health practice settings, but we did not formally research or document the experiences of that group. This time around, we agreed that we should document our work and processes from start to finish, obtaining IRB approval and informed consent from anyone interested in participating. A confluence of feeling confident in the importance of this project, strong mutual respect and trust for one another, as well as a bit of audacity came together to get this group off the ground, as it was (and is) outside of standard organizational and disciplinary norms.

As my friend Renee and I planned and organized this group's framework and outlined our commitments to what we hoped to do, we realized we needed another person to help us with the day-to-day organizing, data collection, and importantly, a new and different perspective from our own. We set out to hire a part time program organizer, and were fortunate to find our third co-organizer, a recent masters of public health grad, Jean. With our team in place, we crafted an invitation to apply to join the group and used our connections to various professional organizations to distribute it on national listservs

populated by injury and violence prevention public health professionals. Part of the recruitment email read:

The action inquiry group (AIG) for systems thinking is purposefully seeking to build capacities for practitioners to engage in their work in new ways. The group will serve as a space to develop individually as well as collectively through engaging in reflective practices. The skills and capacities that will be explored include, but are not limited to:

- Systems thinking
- Dialogue/conversational capacity
- Understanding of inquiry/action and reflection cycles/ongoing sense-making
- Action research (application of learning to practice)
- Ladder of inference
- Multiple perspectives: Four territories of awareness; 1st, 2nd, and 3rd person awareness, practice, and inquiry

As a reader, you are not expected to understand what all of this lingo means, and importantly, the people in the public health workforce receiving this invitation did not have familiarity with it either. As the organizers, we took a leap of faith that this different frame for understanding how to approach public health work would intrigue at least a few people enough to make them want to join us in this experiment. Even with these strange and unfamiliar concepts, 10 intrepid souls took us up on this invitation, and we formed and began meeting in March of 2019.

Group Members

The members of the original group all identified as female, though this was not a requirement for membership. At the beginning, there were 10 participants including myself. At the end of the project, there were eight participants, with two members leaving, both within the first two months, because of job changes to projects that were not related to the work of the AIG. The demographic descriptors provided here are of the eight members who stayed in the group for the full 12-month period. Characteristics of the group were collected by asking the participants to describe their identities in a short online survey. Members were asked to answer a written survey with open-ended questions about race and sexual orientation to which they provided the following responses. Five people identified as white; one Black, one Asian-American, and one multiracial: Middle Eastern and white. Seven members identified as heterosexual, while one identified as queer. The group ranged in age from 32 to 62 years, with an average age of 42.4 years. Members had different numbers of years of professional experience in public health, ranging from nine to 37, with an average of 18.2. The participants also varied in the type of jobs they do. Job roles included program management, program leadership, and research. The organizations involved include hospital-based injury prevention programs, state health departments, a national nonprofit organization, university-based research centers, and a national professional membership organization for injury and violence prevention.

Research Setting

From the beginning, the group met online via Zoom because the participants were located all across the U.S. including Texas, North Carolina, Maryland, Vermont, Ohio, and Florida. Having access to online video conferencing was a requirement for participation. Each meeting lasted 90 minutes. Additionally, in development of the group's norms, we agreed on participants having their cameras on during the meetings, and made full attention to the group an expected part of participation, that is, we explicitly agreed on avoiding multi-tasking during our meetings. Each meeting included a period of silent reflection we called Listening into the Dark that was designed to help transition and focus on the AIG and leave behind (or at least suspend) the demands of whatever was happening outside of our meeting. In a brief, guided session led by one of the co-facilitators, participants were invited to soften their gaze, connect with their breath and sense the groundedness of their bodies by sinking into the surfaces that supported them. This practice helped purposefully focus attention on the meeting and the other people participating with them, as well as recognize any thoughts, emotions, or bodily sensations that may be present.

Research Transparency and Positionality

Upon receipt of IRB approval from Ohio University and signed, written consent from each of the group members, I proceeded with data collection beginning in March of 2019. I use Adler and Adler's (1987) category of complete-member-researcher to describe my position in this research. Complete-member-researchers are investigators engaging with groups they are already a part of, rather than entering into the scene as an

unknown person. In fact, I had worked closely with Shelli, Renee, Mercedes, and Isabel in the past and considered them as friends prior to the group beginning. Courtney, Jean, Violet, and Stella were folks I did not know or not well, but Courtney was very close to Shelli, something she credited with her interest in joining. Jean and Violet came to be known by me and the others in the group entirely through their participation in the AIG. While there were some pre-existing relationships in the group, no one but Shelli and Courtney were aware of who was participating until the group's first meeting, meaning that knowing me or Renee may have influenced their decision to join, but it's also possible that they simply were intrigued and decided to jump in.

Because of the IRB and informed consent processes, all members were aware that I was researching this group as a part of a study looking at communication processes—not as an evaluation of whether systems thinking was productive, or if action inquiry was a generative model for training public health practitioners. Jean and I were both employed by UNC Chapel Hill at the beginning of this project, and because of interest in providing evaluation findings to UNC's funders (the state health department and the CDC), Jean submitted an IRB to UNC covering the process evaluation. Further, Renee's interest in researching the project was about speaking to the CDC about this kind of work in a language that they would find legible by providing quantitative measures of changes from members pre-and-post participation. Renee's past experiences led her to feel that action inquiry and initiatives to develop capacities for self-reflection were not viewed as rigorous science at the CDC, and she wanted to have a way to legitimate these approaches. To do this, Renee interviewed participants at the beginning and end of the

project using a method known as Subject Object Interviewing which provided a way to enumerate shifts in development and self-learning. I did not have access to Renee's raw interview transcripts as it was a separate research project from my own. Renee's data collection was covered under the UNC IRB. UNC exempted the research focused on evaluation, so there was not another consent process.

Data Sources and Analysis

In the group's meetings, I primarily engaged as a participant, relying on the meeting recordings and transcripts to capture most of the action rather than attempting to collect observational data during the meetings. At the beginning of the group's meetings, I was both a public health professional and a graduate student, but transitioned fulltime to school in August of 2019. The project was designed to have more frequent meetings at the beginning, to frontload relationship building and grounding in the concepts we were using to shape our group's processes. From March-May, 2019 the group met two times per month, but according to plan, shifted to meet once per month in June 2019. Data collection officially ended in March, 2020, but as of April 2021, the AIG is still meeting monthly. Renee, Jean and I have transferred the coordination and facilitation of the meeting to two members who volunteered to take on those roles.

Data Sources

This research draws on a variety of data sources, though having multiple sources is not motivated by trying to meet post-positivistic notions of validity (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011; Tracy, 2010). Rather, using multiple sources harmonizes with the spirit of Ellingson's (2009) concept of crystallization, where she champions a "rich and openly

partial account of a phenomena that problematizes its own construction, highlights researcher's vulnerabilities and positionality…and reveals the indeterminacy of knowledge claims even as it makes them" (p. 4). I draw on, but do not faithfully mimic, crystallization because of my alignment with interpretive paradigms that draw on participant voices in manifold ways to present a "nuanced, and ultimately more credible" analysis (Tracy, 2010, p. 278) The sources I gathered and draw on include meeting transcripts, text from the group's WhatsApp chat, participation, observation, document analysis, and interviews.

The data from participation comes from attending the group's 16, 90-minute Zoom video conference meetings. Another source of data from participation is the WhatsApp text chain that the group established in August, 2019 as a way to stay better connected in between meetings. The chat group's name is Feeling Sparkly AIG, based on a comment one of the members made about how the group makes them feel--sparkly. The icon I chose to use for Feeling Sparkly is a swoosh of golden glitter. There are hundreds of messages in this chat group that are part of the analysis. The name of the group describes its affective tone—it is full of encouraging, uplifting messages and resources that make us feel "sparkly."

Observations of the group are sometimes hard to distinguish from participation. For example, like other group members, I did written reflections after our meetings, which fall best into the category of participation since this was part of our group process. Nonetheless, there is a blurry line here, as I often approached my post-meeting reflections

as fieldnotes where I recorded my descriptions and interpretations of the action in the group (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011).

The meetings were video and audio recorded, and I have access to the recordings, a resource I use to supplement my observation and participation-based reflections. Transcripts of the discussions are also available, as each meeting is transcribed by a professional transcription agency. The transcripts, in total, make up 602 typed, double-spaced pages documenting talk during the meetings.

Document analysis involved looking at materials created by the group as well as texts related to the group's processes and commitments. Documents created by the group include post-meeting written reflections each member does via a Qualtrics survey and a mid-project narrative written by each member about a time being in the group was beneficial for them in a professional situation. Jean, Renee, and I drew on these post-meeting written reflections and mid-project narratives to write the evaluation report for the project funders in September, 2020. For the purposes of this study, the evaluation report serves as another document data source. Texts related include those the group talked about as relevant and important to what we were up to. Mostly these were contemporary popular books related to personal development and social change such as *Pleasure Activism* by Adrienne Maree Brown, and *Daring Greatly* by Brené Brown. Additionally, the framework and theoretical basis used by the group—action inquiry—required the group members to read several academic articles to ground them in what we were doing in the early stages of development. Charmaz (2012) explains that document analysis can be approached by asking questions about how a document is interpreted by

an audience and what kinds of action documents afford or constrain. Questions like these informed my data analysis process.

Interviews were conducted after the formal year-long period of group meetings to ask specific questions to participants about their experiences in the group. While I did have an interview guide (see Appendix A), the line of questioning in the interviews was open to evolution, as what I found in one interview guided and shaped the direction of the questions I asked in subsequent interviews. The process was similar to theoretical sampling in grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006, 2012) where each interview helped focus my line of questioning for subsequent interviews. As I conducted each interview, I analyzed them with an eye towards emerging themes that I wanted to dig deeper into with the next interviewees.

I engaged member reflections (Tracy, 2020) at various points in our regular meetings to "allow for sharing and dialoguing with participants about the study's findings, providing opportunities for questions, critique, feedback, affirmation and even collaboration" (Tracy, 2010, p. 844). And truly, the character of my relationship to the participants is one of co-collaborators as they are interested in me as a person, my successes, stresses, and emotional wellbeing. This research has been a big part of my life, so my friends in the AIG check in with me about how things are going. The support of the people in the AIG has been the main reason I have been able to get to this point—where I am writing up what happened with this research. The challenges of having a young child during COVID and trying to dissertate might be funny if I wasn't too preoccupied with work to have time for fun.

In our conversations, the group has given very little pushback or disagreement about my characterizations of what has happened. I created a presentation for the group to discuss some of what I offer in this dissertation in February 2021. The thing that I discussed with the group that was most "sparkly," that is, generated a great deal of discussion, was the concept of the affect of public health that I develop in the next chapter. Describing public health affectively was something the group had never encountered, yet the brief characterization I shared including that public health is: 1) unaware of its mental models or the concept of mental models 2) attached to certainty and avoids ambiguity, and 3) concerned with enumeration of results. These ideas resonated strongly with the group members, indicated by responses such as the one from Isabel who said something along the lines of "I have never thought about the field this way, but it is totally true."

Generally, member reflections have been naturally integrated into this research, For example, in September, 2020, Jean wrote up the evaluation report and asked me to give her feedback. As I was reviewing the evaluation report, a quote from Kathleen Stewart (2007) came to mind:

> There are uncertainties (to say the least) in the links between human action and complex systems. Notions of truth and expertise gain purchase in the gap, but sketchy connections also proliferate in the very effort to solidify some kind of order. (pp. 90-1)

I shared the quote in a text message, saying that it is not typical for an evaluation report to have an epigraph, but if one did, that quote would be a perfect one. Jean immediately agreed and did include it at the beginning of the evaluation report.

Data Analysis

Determining the best approach to analyzing data in this project was a puzzle that I worked out iteratively by drawing on my training in various qualitative research techniques, though had to forge a hybrid approach that best suited this project. Though I have sometimes been encouraged to "just pick something" that aligns with established ways of doing valid qualitative analysis, this did not feel quite right in this research. As I stated in the beginning of this chapter, my choice of methods is formulated affectively, that is, the possibilities are bounded to only a particular field of options based on the scholarship I am in conversation with, norms of communication studies as a discipline, and the material constraints such as what exists in my data sources, and even the limits of my physical stamina to read, sort, and make sense of what is there. I sought out scholarship that engaged questions of data analysis in studies using affect theory (i.e. Ashcraft 2017, 2019; Ashcraft & Muhr, 2018) and found Wetherell's (2012) approach data analysis to offer a workable and meaningful way to trace what happened in the AIG.

I started analysis by organizing my data through coding, but coding with what Wetherell (2012) asserts as compatible with affective analysis. Li (2015) distills three recommendations from Wetherell (2012) for studying affect which include: 1) reading the "direction of flowing activity" 2) identifying "patterns, habits and assemblages," and

3) considering “power, value and capital” (Li, 2015, p. 23). These guidelines sensitized my data analysis, but some explanation of how I actually went about that is needed.

Tracy (2020), offers guidance through her formulation of phronetic analysis that aligns well with what I am doing in this project. Phronetic analysis endeavors towards “use-inspired, practical research that not only builds theory, but also provides guidance on social practice and action” (p. 210). Phronetic analysis recognizes the iterations involved in qualitative analysis which look like engaging the data while remaining aware of the larger theoretical and contextual situation of its production. Because I was looking for, broadly, how affect—or feeling and emotion—was impacting processes of doing public health work, and I had Wetherell’s recommendations sensitizing my gaze, my coding process was not completely open to whatever emerged, but instead pre-focused by these guidelines. Practically, what this involved was, first, coding the meeting transcripts by watching the videos of the meetings while reading along with the transcripts. In this process, I directed my attention based on Wetherell’s recommendations, noticing the trajectories of conversations and the group’s movements; focusing on patterns, habits, and the emerging assemblages that resulted from these repetitions; and finally, looking at the impact of these flows and habitual practices in terms of how they shaped participants’ worlds, that is, what came about as valuable, what was created, and where did something otherwise come to be.

After coding the 602 pages of the transcripts while watching the videos, I detected some patterns in the data that I ended up grouping into three categories: 1) talk indicating the affect of public health 2) examples of group practices, norms, habits and structures

and 3) instances where the habits cultivated by the group were credited with a personal change in thinking and acting. These three categories could also be thought of as 1) describing the baseline or "regular" modes of organizing in public health 2) The practices that enabled a shift away from that regular mode, and 3) So what—or, what difference did these new ways of organizing, scaffolded by the group's practices, make for them? In addition to these three groupings, after completing my analysis, I reflected further on how and why these categories became my guides, particularly in terms of power. That is, what are the forces of power doing in this work, and what does this look like from different levels and angles? In my discussion in chapter five I consider the macro-Discourses surrounding the group, both within public health as well as from the larger cultural milieu. Additionally, I think about the influence of the habits and standards of academic research on how I investigated, analyzed, and presented this project. To bring power out for discussion and inspection, I reflect on my analysis to consider how and why I determined what should be selected as examples. This reflection is intended to richly contextualize the group and my research with it and to better explicate some of the moves I made as a writer and analyst that are sometimes obscured in qualitative work. Another reason for these reflections is that I hope to draw on the micro-discourses within the group as a way to point towards possibilities for change at a structural or system level. I revisit the concept of a mattering map to consider what is, after the group's interactions over more than two years, now in view, considered important, imperative, or relevant for the participants, and what has shifted from its original configurations.

In reflecting on my data analysis process, which was prompted by questions from my dissertation committee members, I will explicate the prominence and role the data sources to bring forth some of my behind-the-scenes thinking. First, I found the transcripts and their associated videos came to be the primary focus of my analysis due to a preference I have for "naturally"-occurring talk-in-interaction. I put "naturally" in quotation marks because the group talk was pre-shaped by the guiderails put in place by Renee, Jean, and I's agendas, selection of topics, and direction of the affective mood that emphasized care, collectivity, and reflection. Still, rather than an interview or other communicative encounters set up specifically to ask research questions, the group's meetings were of primary interest because they allowed eight people to engage in talk and interaction. Each person brought their own feelings and ideas to the meeting, frequently moving in directions I would not have expected if these encounters were solely directed by my own sensibilities.

Once I had these three broad categories from the meetings identified, I used them to code the text from the WhatsApp group chat and my interview notes. While the WhatsApp group chat had a similar character to the meetings in that it contained communication directed by the group members more than by me as the researcher, due to its medium, tended to be oriented towards quick notes—often of love and appreciation for one another—rather than conversations getting into the nuances of concepts, feelings, and ideas we would delve into during meetings. Further, the WhatsApp group chat contained emojis, images, GIFS, links to podcasts, websites, or other sources that participants wanted to share with one another. Additionally, in the group chat, there were

often references to conversations that had happened in our meetings—a follow up to send a link to a podcast, tweet, or a note to convey their appreciation for the group (see figure 1). Again, due to my preference for this less-researcher directed communication event, I found myself drawn to and valuing the text in these exchanges, though would characterize them as amplifiers to the meeting talk rather than as independent discussions. In other words, without the meetings, the WhatsApp group would not exist, and much of what is discussed in it would lack a context.

Figure 1

Image from Feeling Sparkly WhatsApp Chat

The third source of data, interviews with the members of the group, fall in the category of researcher-directed conversations. While my approach to interviewing was designed to create a conversational tone and to allow for the interviewee to direct the

flow of the talk, the design of an interview foregrounds the research questions in the discussion. Interviews have a clearer purpose to answer particular questions and cover particular topics. In this project, the meetings and WhatsApp conversations were guided by the work of the group—to learn about systems thinking and develop individual and collective capacities for reflection. Relatedly, the interviews, in part due to when they were conducted in April-June, 2020, also had an emphasis on the functioning of the group in terms of its progress towards learning about new approaches to public health. My interest in the role of affect in the group did not emerge until after the interviews had been conducted.

I provided the above details about the order of prominence of these data sources because I want to be clear that there were a variety of sources, but the meetings themselves, making up (by far) the bulk of time, text, and affectively-laden content, were where I drew most of my examples and focused most of my analysis. For example, while there were 602 pages of meeting transcripts, there were only about 25 pages of notes from the interviews, and 61 from the WhatsApp chat. From the ratios presented here, it follows that the meetings provided the majority of the data upon which I formed this analysis.

Over the course of the analysis process, I memmoed (Charmaz, 2006) about sections of text to clarify how they related to my three main categories using the comment function in Microsoft Word to capture the thoughts and ideas I was having to create a record of my conceptualization processes. Because affect theory requires additional consideration in the analysis process that emphasizes attention to how

activities and talk are collecting and moving through time, I looked closely, in category two, at the group's processes that impacted how relationships between people were established as well as how people began to discuss the habits encouraged by the group and how they were impacting their public health work. Category three focused on the impacts of these new habits for ways of thinking, doing, and acting in group member's public health work and beyond.

The first of Wetherell's recommendations involves reading flows of affective practice, which has to do with sensing the way things are heading or their overall trajectory, pointing "to the articulation of affect in broader social contexts" (Li, 2015, p. 23). Orienting to coding in this way located what was emerging and surging in the group, for example, connecting how the group connects trying out and establishing personal reflective practices to the capacities necessary to engage in the complexities of public health work at a system level. Identification of trajectories is one way that interpretation started within the coding process.

The second of Wetherell's recommendations directed me to look for patterns. Looking for patterns involved identification of habit and assemblages, or the way certain things are congregating together, and when collections came into view as comprehensible, nameable happenings.

Third, considering power requires that I pay attention to the interimplications of the personal, social, and political to suss out "how power interweaves and operates in social life" (Li, 2015, p. 23). Notably, movements in what has become known as the "new" public health emerging in the 1990s, rhetorically at least, are concerned with

social determinants of health and health inequity (Petersen & Lupton, 1996). These macro discourses shaping the political and social milieu of public health practice were evident in the micro discourses within the group, leading me to conceptualize the notion of power here as how group members talked about their experiences in addressing issues around health equity. Further, the concept of power re-emerged when reflecting on the analysis that emerged from this set of data. Taking a step back from the details of each story I shared, I recognized that these stories were all from white people, something that brought up questions for me—mostly just, why was that?

I also kept Stewart's (2007) idea of bloom spaces present as I worked with Wetherell's three guidelines. For me, bloom spaces are an intuitive and attractive way to think about affect in social scenes, offering a way to add some of the sensibilities of affect theory that are a bit obscured in Wetherell's guidelines. Particularly in terms of sensing affective flows and trajectories, bloom spaces helped orient me towards imprints or grooves creating paths for living to follow:

> A bloom space is pulled into being by the tracks of refrains that etch out a way of living in the face of everything. These refrains stretch across everything, linking things, sensing them out--a worlding. Every refrain has its gradients, valences, moods, sensations, tempos, elements, and life spans. (Stewart, 2010, p. 342)

Bloom spaces are small instances that *strike* us or what Stewart calls "nameable clarities" (p. 344). Something hilarious, another disgusting—recognition of the warmth of a friendship or the nagging ache of some longstanding animosity. Bloom spaces "are all

forms of attending to what's happening, sensing out, accreting attachments and detachments, differences and indifferences, losses and proliferating possibilities" (p. 342). Directing attention to the detection of bloom spaces in ordinary talk and interaction was another way my data analysis engaged affect.

With this project's interest in how group processes are involved in how affective forces are produced, sustained, and directing the shapes of reality, I engaged Wetherell's guidelines and bloom spaces as a way to remain open to the shifting norms and feelings in the group. With my encounter with affect in the AIG, I want to offer a reparative analysis that considers the always evolving, partial, and embodied aspects of affect's role. Of the unlimited realities that could have formed in the group, I engaged methods that helped weigh "seemingly incompatible relations," (p. 221) such as passionate, loving friendships mattering and making a difference in the ways doing public health work—a very different worlding than is typical in a usually techno-rational scientific environment.

The commitments I make are relevant to my analysis because of affect's concern with considering how discrete entities come to be known. My analysis engaged with texts because the circulation of signs and their collecting together is how things are marked off as coherent concepts, like "efficient," or "leader." Thinking the world in this way is relevant for methods, as it emphasizes the unfinalizability of ideas and objects, how concepts are continuously shifting because of their always reorganizing boundaries, and the recognition that an affect does not emanate *only* from inside of an entity, nor does it come *only* from some outside source assigning some particular affect to the entity. The identity of leader, for example, is not because of something she is "putting off," nor from

how others perceived her. Instead, a leader is formed because of the affectively moved joining of things—the relationships involved, a smart suit, a connection made at a conference, an award, a way of making people feel at ease, technical know-how and an ability to verbalize how daily tasks connect to the bigger picture.

The AIG (as any object) can be multiple things depending on how "it" is approached. The AIG could be a training program to help public health professionals learn about systems science. This is the ostensible purpose of the group, and what is presented to funders to give it a reason for existing. The AIG could also be an experiment in re-envisioning feminist organizing through cultivating deep emotional connection and support for personal reflective practice. This is another view of the group that could be successfully argued by foregrounding different parts of the assembly that make up the AIG. The methods I am using seek to identify what is surging forward and attracting attention for the group members while recognizing that this is the product of always pulsing, fluctuating, assemblies and disassemblies of relations.

Summary of Methods Chapter

In this chapter, I outlined the methods I used to address the questions posed in this research about the role of affect in a group of public health professionals. I drew out how research concerning affect doings is itself affectively charged—my choice of theoretical orientation matters because it is consequential to what this research puts forth in analysis and interpretation. Had I chosen a different theoretical lens, something different would result, so the methodological choices I am making must be presented as exactly that—choices among many possibilities that already start the process of guiding what can be

articulated from this context. Though affect requires an openness to contingency and evolution, I had to commit to some firm choices to make the research legible in my context of communication studies. Despite the haziness and focus on the evolutions of emergences that affect theory prioritizes, I have presented a fairly standard methods chapter where I explained the case, the members of the group, the ways I collected my data, and the approach to analysis I took.

When I arrived at how to do the analysis (coding and interpretation), I shared what shook out of my sifting through the possibilities offered in existing literature. I primarily used Wetherell's three guidelines to shape my data analysis and coding procedures, however, I also tended to the notion of Stewart's bloom spaces in the analysis process. Though the methods outlined, I hope to offer a textured, open, and partial answer to my question about how affect is operating in this group and to what effect.

Chapter 4. Individual and Collective Affective Trajectories Towards Racial Health Equity

In analysis of the group's trajectories over a year of meeting, some patterns of movement became legible, leading to this chapter's presentation of what happened in the group. Because of Renee's past experiences with action inquiry and similar groups, she really wanted to build opportunities to try out and deepen participant's abilities for reflection. This emphasis on reflection emerged as a notable driver for the trajectories of the group, as well as a framework for identifying instances of affective formations that bring these trajectories into view. In the period of meetings studied in this dissertation, there was a brewing interest in how our capacities for reflection related to the ways we engage work on racial equity. The group continues to meet monthly, as of this writing through June, 2021, and interest in racial equity continued to intensify through this time. Note that my interpretations of the group's happenings are tinted by the intensification of focus on racial equity, which in hindsight, indicate a significant shift in where the group began and where it lead.

To share what happened, I present the group's movements in three parts. First, I describe instances from the group's interactions that offer a sketch of what I label as the typical affect of public health organizing. A description of the typical affect of public health organizing is needed to see how the affective formations emerging in the AIG differed from this typical affect. In the second part, I use examples from the group's interactions to illustrate the trajectories present in the group's becoming. The third part of this chapter engages why the shift from typical ways of organizing in public health to the

approaches enacted by the AIG are important and impactful. Specifically, in the third, part I relate three instances where group members begin thinking about how race, racism, diversity, and health disparities are affectively shaped in public health, and how the experience of being in this group enabled members to have a clearer view of these forces, as well as ways to skillfully intervene through their work practices.

Further, I share how it is not only the professional aspects of the group member's lives that are impacted, but also shifts in their understandings and approaches to living as a whole. I discuss each of these developments in terms of their affective force, which I do by providing a bracketed description of the arrangements of ideas, objects, people, emotions, discourse and more in particular moments of the AIG's time together. In other words, I present what elements came together to form a mattering map of the affective situations that I describe.

This chapter presents the AIG's discussions, actions, and reflections to give a sense of what makes the work of this group interesting, important, and I think, full of potential for others interested in resisting and cracking up the status quo of their affective environments. The main contribution of this chapter is the analysis of the group's interactions, structure, and processes and how these elements formed the possibilities for group members to try on different habits of organizing and relating that sent the group on its trajectories. The path of the AIG differs from a typical professional workgroup in public health, a situation I attribute to the group's affective shifts. These shifts are traceable through the structures of group communication that facilitated the development of new communicative habits, propelling the potentialities for organizing differently.

Part 1: The Affect of Public Health Organizing

As the introduction discussed, there are characteristics of typical public health organizing that can be identified in the literature and used to broadly characterize the discipline as a modernist project. Flowing from its modernist roots, Lombardo's (2019) description of public health as engaged in effecting social progress through efficient, rational action adds a description that aligns well with the understanding of public health held by the members of the AIG—particularly when they first came to the group. While the habits of modernity are deeply ingrained in public health, I do not contend that this dooms this group to only operating within these ideological constraints. On the contrary, I follow Martinussen and Wetherell's (2019) analysis of Sedgwick's (1997, 2003) concept of reparative reading to assert that "the tectonic blocks of big theory [need] to be infused with studies of textures, gestures, mobilities and shape-shifting flexibilities" (p. 103). Put differently, in our local contexts, we have agentic capacities to affect and be affected--shifts that propel the reimagining of our mattering maps.

Systems Thinking and Public Health

The stated purpose of the AIG was to introduce the concept of systems thinking to its members, as well as to develop their capacities to approach public health problems using a systems thinking lens. While the group was trying to find ways to change their practice, I argue that the explicit approach—systems thinking—is not responsible for the changes that emerged from the group's interactions. Rather, systems thinking is oriented towards reformist, rather than transformative change because it affiliates with a worldview similar to that of public health's believing that complex social problems can

be resolved if only our methods are honed correctly. Still, the systems approach was seeking something different than the standard of doing public health work, so it is not surprising that the group developed different approaches. However, my argument and analysis are not about the shift from a standard public health approach to a systems approach, but more about how the transformations experienced by the group go beyond what would be expected from teaching people about systems approaches. That is, the micro-movements of individual and individuals-in-relation with other group members, developed in ways that, I argue, are the beginnings of a transformative movement towards reworking the structure of feeling in public health.

However, when emphasizing the purpose of the group to be a training program to learn systems approaches, it can be easy to miss the bloom spaces continually opening up trajectories that move away from the status quo. Systems approaches do not significantly challenge the affective climate of public health, and in fact, align easily with the existing norms and practices in the field. Systems thinking can be equated to public health projects that already use the social ecological model (See Appendix B). Incorporating social ecology requires consideration of problems and the impacts of interventions at the individual, interpersonal, community, and societal levels. While I do not assert that the social ecological model and systems approaches are the same thing, they do overlap in terms of requiring that health issues are considered within their larger social contexts. In addition to the similarities at the level of application, philosophically, both can be characterized as modernist because they involve “professional experts [that] justify their interventions in the name of objective, 'disinterested' science,” and engage in practices of

"selectively order[ing] knowledge in such a way that some categories and some utterances and actions are privileged above others, and therefore seem more natural and logical" (Petersen & Lupton, 1996, p. xii). Further, both public health and systems thinking hold a "belief in the powers of science, in progress through science, and in rational administrative solutions to problems," that are "central to the post-Enlightenment modernist tradition" (Petersen & Lupton, 1996, p. xii). Hence, it is the shifts in understanding, feeling, and ways of relating beyond what one would expect from trying out a systems approach that I highlight in this analysis.

The need for our group arose only after the CDC had tried to train public health practitioners from across the U.S. in systems methods—an experience that those in the AIG who had participated in the trainings felt was unhelpful, confusing, and missing the mark on the kinds of questions and changes in practice that were necessary to make significant shifts in our work practices. Shelli was particularly vocal about how she was put off by the CDC-led training's emphasis on creating systems maps. Systems maps are meant to visualize all of the entities that are impacting a particular issue, as well as show the causal linkages between entities. For example, thinking about how to roll out a COVID vaccination program would lead to a map which could include things like supply, distribution, discourses of trust and skepticism, population risk factors, etc. Further, the map would show relationships, for example, that an increase in vaccine supply would require an increase in distribution capacity. I described to the AIG what I saw as the shortcomings of what we had been taught at the CDC training:

> So a lot of times I think we maybe will create a systems map and it's pretty incomplete because we haven't—people haven't felt comfortable saying what they think. We haven't gotten everybody at the table. There's power relationships… There's all kinds of stuff going on and we think we have put the system—visualized it--but we really haven't.

In this statement, I am emphasizing the difficulty of creating a system map that is fully representative of all of the entities involved in a system as well as the complexities of their interrelating because of issues familiar to group communication scholars—particularly those who study dialogue and deliberation. To offer just one example, Young (1996) argues that certain styles of speaking and relating are more suited to deliberative discussions—those who present their ideas in ways perceived of as rational and logical are perceived as more legitimate, and therefore, are more likely to have their ideas heard and included in the design of a systems map. Each step of creating a systems model is laden with affective forces that are shaping what arises as the final product, and recognition of these dynamics and considerations of their negotiation was not a part of the systems thinking training provided by the CDC. In contrast, the AIG did engage with the complexities of group relating in thinking about how to enact systems science. It was not the methods of systems science, but instead the processes of modified action inquiry that Renee and I used—particularly its emphasis on reflection--in conjunction with the developing affective climate of the group--that I see as a springboard to new ways of working and relating in the AIG, changes that could potentially catalyze larger shifts in the field of public health.

Examining Mental Models

While I do not think systems science alone would have led to the changes experienced in this group, some of its approaches did motor the AIG's evolutions, serving to shape and orient what grabbed our attention. Systems thinking requires uncovering and examining the mental models that are undergirding our beliefs and practices. This is an approach that differs from standard public health practice because a reflexive stance towards the constructed nature of public health science is not typical, rather "Cultural understandings of the body, health and the causes of disease are all integral to the epidemiological construction of facts." From this view, "diseases and illness themselves are culturally constructed categories rather than objective 'truths'," that is, they are "interpreted and experienced through lay, biomedical and epidemiological knowledges" (Petersen & Lupton, 1996, p. 35). Because there is little recognition of the cultural influences involved in creating "facts," introduction of the concept of mental models and their impact on our practices was seen as significant for the group's members.

At the group's third meeting where we were still doing a good bit of didactic presentation about the concepts central to what we were up to, Renee explained that mental models involve, "going beyond strategies and techniques and looking at the underlying assumptions that inform why you even chose those strategies and techniques which are your mental models and your rules and norms…" Moreover, the AIG's modified action inquiry approach provided tools for how exactly to go about examining one's mental models. As Renee explained in the group's third meeting, our attention can

be trained to consider underlying mental models by building a capacity to reflect and inquire at different levels of awareness, in the lingo of action inquiry, first, second, and third-person. I quote Renee extensively in this next passage because I want to highlight the ways these ideas were presented to the group, as I think they are relevant to the affective formations that eventually emerged.

> First person is the I, or the individual level, right? And then so if you were thinking about it in the context of this group, it would be, what's your personal experience of this group? How are you feeling now? What are you thinking now, and why do you feel that way? What are your assumptions? All of those things.
>
> Then you have the second-person inquiry and practice, and I think of that as the "we" space, or it's basically the relational space. So, it's the intersubjective or the interpersonal and there—or sometimes people talk about it as thinking about the other .... The question that we would be concerned with from that in thinking about the group is what is the quality of our interactions and functioning in this group? Right, like those are the types of questions that we might pay attention to. Like how are we—what's the space between us like? That's the second person.
>
> And then you have the third-person inquiry and practice, which is the objective or results-focus, and I put that as "it." That's basically what is happening in the external world… So, [it's] the outcome [of this group's work] in the external world. …An example of the question that we would hold for that is,

"What's the impact of the group [or] in your leadership in your system?" Those might be the types of questions that you ask there.

Renee's explanation of first, second, and third person awareness served as a guidepost for the rest of the group's engagements, forming the ground from which the future grew. Examining mental models and reflecting on interpersonal relating are two approaches adopted by this group that are not typical to public health practice. In fact, both of these approaches to organizing could be viewed as unnecessary or cumbersome, particularly in the pursuit of efficient, rational action and performances of expertise. However, this was essential groundwork that enabled group member's growth around successfully navigating and acting in situations of ambiguity and uncertainty--concepts that further challenge the typical affective climate of public health.

Ambiguity and Uncertainty

A significant departure from typical ways of working in public health that the AIG explicitly names and nurtures involves approaches to recognizing and dwelling in the inherent uncertainty involved in undertaking complex social change initiatives. As Brian Castrucci, president of the public health-focused de Beaumont Foundation, said when discussing messaging mistakes from public health authorities in the early days of COVID, being "too declarative" led to having to backtrack and change what had previously been presented as settled science (Gounder, 2021). Castrucci did not reflect on public health's tendency to perform expertise by declaratively stating truths, but did concede that it would have been better to say "we're not sure yet," and not "[underestimate] the American public" in terms of its ability to accept an admission of

uncertainty from public health experts (Gounder, 2021). In the AIG, rather than seeking to obscure, fix, or deny uncertainty, the group engaged in dialogues designed to help practitioners notice when they were feeling tension around uncertainty and to consider how and why they were responding to their situations.

An example shared by Violet helps elucidate how capacities built in the group enabled her to leave behind a more certain and approved path and move into a new way of working where effectiveness was uncertain. Violet's story involves a reformulation of the kind of numerical data that could be used to demonstrate programmatic success. Fan and Uretsky's (2017) critique of the ways that "empirically based quantitative evidence" has had a "profound impact on how we design and evaluate social policy and practice" (p. 157) chimes with Violet's experience. As she related:

> I think a very concrete example is I run our public naloxone distribution program, so working with basically whoever wants to get naloxone for opioid overdoses. And I could very easily say I run a successful program because we gave out 3,000 doses of naloxone to whatever 700 people. …But how much impact am I actually making?

Violet found that many of the doses she had given out to community partners had expired before they were used, a situation that illustrates how a funder and administrators would deem her program successful based on the number she had distributed, but that had not actually done what was intended—prevent opioid overdoses. Fan and Uretsky's (2017) explain that requirements for enumerative evidence orient practitioners to use measures that "match the logics of economic accountability more than community needs," (p. 157)

a condition that they claim has changed how we conceive of health and the interventions to improve it. Violet's experience aligns with Fan and Uretsky's analysis, because she realized that, though she could give her leadership and funders what they wanted to see, by looking beyond the accepted metrics of success, it became apparent that the program was not actually doing what it was intended to do. Violet went on to say, "So I have some conflicts often with my division director, where they're like, 'Oh, you should just give it out to whoever.' And I'm like, 'Let's actually look and see where it needs to go--who's using it.'"

This example illustrates the ways public health values quantifiable proof of its effectiveness above considerations of the actual impact of an intervention. I attribute this to an affective climate in public health that is undisturbed when the certainty of hard numbers is available. A standard affective mapping of what is important, understandable, and able to be seen is kept in place without disruption when there is numerical proof of a job well done. Involvement with the AIG and exposure to concepts like third person awareness—or the impact of an intervention out in the world—helped Violet shift her conceptualization and approach to this program. Further, Violet had to step out of an approved organizational process and apparently certain path to programmatic success, and into a less orderly one. One uncertainty Violet faced was whether her leaders would approve of her wanting to change how the program gave out naloxone. Another was in whether and how the community partners she worked with would get on board with her new approach. She expressed some of the ambiguity of going against the established pattern for this program:

> Like [Renee] was saying, we all work in these complex problems, complex systems, and we can very easily just say, "Oh, I'm giving out all of this—I'm doing X amount of trainings, X amount of doses, blah, blah, blah." But am I actually making an impact? In other words, we don't know yet.

Here Violet points out that while she has the ability to produce metrics that "prove" effectiveness, it is unclear whether what she is doing is having an impact, despite the illusion that it is effective based on the count of how many doses of naloxone were distributed, as she says, "we don't know yet." This admission of not knowing was, as in the case of COVID messaging, not an accessible option on a public health mattering map that centers certainty and expertise. Violet goes on to explain how her shift in thinking about showing outcomes produced some ambiguity in how she relates to her community partners:

> [I'm] having conversations with people, like, 'Be more mindful of it,' and having those hard conversations. Because I am like the bitch that is like…when they're like, 'We want 200 doses.' And I'm like, 'Do you actually need 200 doses? How about we give you 50, and when you're done with that, I'll give you 50 more?'

Violet points out that the conversations with her community partners are "hard" because she is "the bitch" telling them that they need to be "more mindful" with the doses of naloxone they are getting. Not only does this create a situation that could be construed as unnecessarily adversarial (since everything was going fine before), but Violet is still not even sure that her new approach will yield an increase in the prevention of overdose

deaths. However, she has recognized that moving towards greater impact means trying something other than what was thought to "work" before.

I see Violet's experience as an indication of a shift in the local affective climate of public health organizing that was mobilized by her participation in the AIG. Not only does she interrogate the mental model that approved types of quantitative evidence are enough to show that an intervention is effective, but she also realigns what she prioritizes in terms of being successful at her work. Now rather than merely meeting the requirements of administrators and funders—the current arbitrators of whether her work will continue to be supported--she is willing, because of skills learned in the group, to enter into uncomfortable interpersonal situations as well as experiment with different ways of doing public health. She does this with the awareness that trying a new way may not lead to a decrease in overdoses, and in fact, may make her relationships at work more difficult. Violet's openness to a departure from successful processes at the expense of her own personal comforts (both in terms of job security, as well as her interpersonal relationships), is an indication of how her mattering map has been rearranged. Said differently, the affective forces dictating what becomes visible as important and relevant shift into different configurations. Affective rearrangements came about in a dynamic interplay of consciousness about the workings of systems Violet gained from participation in the group, the material reality of expired doses of naloxone, and an assertion of her own agency in trying out a new way despite it causing some interpersonal friction.

The bloom space evident here is less about the potential for improved public health outcomes in Violet's particular project, and more about the affective rearrangements that allow for ambiguity and uncertainty that could transform the structures that dictate feeling right, movements that could potentially alter the foundational assumptions of the field. Violet's new approaches in this particular case may lead to more lives saved…or they may not. However, the affective shifts can make a lasting impression if she continues to cultivate her ability to act in uncertainty. The movement here is not from positioning the desire for certainty as the old, wrong way and finding comfort with ambiguity being the new, right way. Instead, it is an acceptance of not having a clear path towards success in every instance. Accepting this not knowing creates and affective climate that calls for experimentation, attunement, and iterative action based on information produced in always evolving situations.

The group understanding mental models and the need to challenge them is linked to the potential for the affective rearrangements I describe. Public health, as a discipline, it is largely unreflexive about its philosophical commitments, but practice with examining mental models opens doors into reflexivity—an opening that participants felt was meaningful. In her interview, Mercedes said that the concept of mental models was the most transformative part of being in the AIG because it was something that she "had never thought about before, but it makes *so much sense*." (italics added) The impact of examining mental models as well as operating in ambiguity and uncertainty is demonstrated in Violet's story. Further, Violet's story illustrated how public health's affective structures are reinforced through feelings of accomplishment when there is

numerical evidence that an intervention is effective. I offer a description of typical affective maps in public health as a provisional sketch, undergirded by discussion of the philosophical alignments between systems thinking and public health, the impact learning about the concept of mental models had on the group members, and the disruption of the apparent certainty provided by numerical proof of effectiveness. This discussion of what is typical provides a backdrop that highlights the contrasts apparent in the AIG's trajectories.

Part 2: Shifting Affect

In the last section, Violet's story offered one example of how affect has been rearranged in her work in ways that distinguish it from what would be typical of public health practice. In this section, I focus on group members' experiences that are indicative of the deeper changes—things beyond challenges to public health practice, and more into ways of relating and being that impact their whole identities. The changes AIG members experienced were scaffolded by the group's structure, which was a caring space that nurtured embodied being, action, inquiry, and reflection. Affectively, the modified action inquiry method that Renee and I used to design this group involved a balancing act between radical openness/anything goes and purposeful structuring that provided gentle direction.

The purposeful structuring was important for the shifts in the group, an assertion that echoes Pedwell's (2017) argument that habit may be key to demystifying some of what is going on in relation to how affect is involved in the "radical social and political [changes]" (p. 93) promised by affect theorists are taking place. Pedwell (2017) explains

that “scholarly work has explored the vital role affect, emotion and feeling might play in catalysing radical social and political change,” (p. 93) but she feels that “some of these analyses may actually do more to obscure than to enrich our understanding of how ‘progressive’ change might occur and endure in a given context” (p. 93). Further, Pedwell sees a challenge for affect theorists because there is little written about “how to evaluate progress itself in the current socio-political landscape” (p. 93). The AIG used a repeating structure for its meetings that can explain some of the “how” of the affective shifts in being and relating that the group members experienced.

Each meeting involved four standard parts including 1) weather checks, 2) listening into the dark, 3) meeting content (either group discussion or didactic presentation), and 4) reflection about the meeting (See Appendix C & D). Additionally, a survey was sent to each person immediately after the meetings to solicit written reflections about the meeting, a practice designed to give time for people who process more slowly or who prefer writing over speaking a chance to engage their experience. This meeting structure was something that took the group time to settle into, but eventually became a source of stability that enabled discussions and feelings to emerge that may have felt unsupported or out of place in other contexts. Central to everything emerging from the AIG was the happiness that blanketed and emanated from it--a good feeling that was crucial for establishing the paths that the group took.

Feeling Good Together

Hennessy (2013) argues that the glue and catalyst of collaborative movements for change is often our attachments to one another because they can “open the possibility of

affective mapping and alternative ways to be" (p. 218). In other words, the positive relationships formed in the AIG are a vital affective force in its success. From the beginning, there has been a shared, energetic and joyful feeling pervading the group. As I wrote in the introduction, Stella said she "[felt] like I just had a big cup of coffee" at the end of our first meeting. Mercedes once commented "I look forward to these meetings like nothing else. I can't even begin to describe how much I look forward to these meetings." In August 2019, four months after the group began, we decided that we wanted to stay in touch more frequently, as Isabell said "I do like the idea of having you all in my life on a more regular basis." To do this, we created a WhatsApp group so that we could communicate with one another as we thought of something and stay more connected in between official meetings.

Stella said she liked the idea of a WhatsApp group because we could name it, leading to a discussion of what the name should be. We often talk in the group about noticing what is live, juicy, or active for us and positioning those feelings as useful information for understanding our experience. Thinking about this, we tried to recall some of the words we had used in the past and Isabel said, "like glittery or sparkly? What was it?" And Shelli said "It was the idea, I think, that was sparkly." And Isabel said, "Yeah! We're feeling sparkly!" And from that the group was born. By November, Feeling Sparkly was in regular use, extending the positive feelings we all had about the group beyond our scheduled monthly meetings:

Violet: I have to say, I feel so much more chill after today's call.

Renee: 😍

Violet: It was a great opportunity to sit be present, and also reflective

Shelli: Me too (in the beat [sic] possible way)!

Violet: ⁉️

Renee: It was energizing for me too! So honored to be in relationship with you all!

Violet: ❤️❤️

Shelli: Ditto

Stella: Much love to all of you 😘 Thanks for being the insightful, real, and only occasionally whiny (😂😂) people you all are

Violet: Oh, I can whine more...

Stella: Haha Violet 😂

Jennifer: It was the highlight of my week. Thank you all for being the amazing people you are—I'm honored to know you!

Mercedes: Yes yes yes!!!. Thanks to each one of you. 🌞

Jean: Morning from the Smokies! What sweet messages to see this morning. Thank you all for creating such a nice container for reflection and care. Hope you have a weekend weekend [sic].

This WhatsApp conversation shows the affection, humor, grace, care, and admiration that we have developed for and with one another, as well as our regular expression of these feelings. One of the most beautiful things I noticed being a part of the group, was that Isabel started saying "I love you" as we ended our Zoom calls in meeting four and has never stopped. Renee and I had spoken about, in other contexts, how it is so

important to recognize love in our friendships and to express it regularly and to normalize saying it out loud, a concept we had learned from reading Black feminists such as bell hooks (2000) and Audre Lorde (1978). However, neither Renee nor I was the first to say "I love you" in the AIG. I did respond "Love you too," the first time Isabel said it. Others began doing it over time as well. In my 12 years of public health work, through hundreds--if not thousands of meetings--I have never been part of another group that regularly ended with people saying "I love you." It is not only my experience, but supported by Petersen and Lupton (1996) who explain that public health tends to cast emotionality as the opposite of rationality, and see the appropriate enactment of public health work through "rational administrative control" (xiv). Because love is atypical in public health, but prominent in this group, the AIG chimes with Hennessey (2013) who says:

> The positive social bonds that love conjures may be necessary to survival, tied to a fundamental condition of dependency on relations of care that sustain life and to the passions that motivate action on behalf of others and for a better world. (p. 205)

Love, caring, friendship, and feeling good together are strong affective forces within this group, and ones that established and cemented member's desires to keep participating. Additionally, as Hennessey theorizes, love is vital for moving people to do work that benefits others. Love emerged in the AIG due to an affective structure that had space for it on a steadily rearranging map.

The Importance of Habit and Practice: Slowing Down and Feeling

An overarching shift in experience that the AIG's structure provided was a reworking of time and pacing. The weather checks that kicked off meetings involved each participant sharing their internal and external weather—where the external weather was whether it is hot/cold, wet or dry, and the internal weather was about how each person was feeling—emotionally and physically--as they entered into the meeting. Sometimes weather checks were quick, taking only five or 10 minutes. However, the weather checks extended to take up more time—frequently as much as 45 of our 90 minutes. Notably, the meeting the group held on March 20, 2020, the end of the first full week when the global COVID-19 pandemic had become a major disruption to our daily lives, the weather check lasted the entire meeting. This is just one example of how the group explicitly valued interpersonal connections and tending to emotion and feeling over getting through agenda items.

Further, with listening into the dark, an emphasis on connecting with and listening to our bodies became a standard part of how we related. In the first meeting, while checking in with folks about the listening into the dark session, Alex said "It was pretty surprising for me how, like, outside of my body I was until we started this activity," a statement showing how this meeting practice provided an opportunity to explore the sensations of bodily presence within the scene. An emphasis on bodily presence was purposefully encouraged in the listening into the dark sessions, with the following being typical of the guidance given to the group, in this case, when I was the leader:

> We'll take just about two-ish minutes to sit quietly, just getting started by finding your body in your seat. If you're feet are on the floor maybe just really connecting down into what's below you. You can either close the eyes or just gaze down. Connect in with your breath, noticing the abdomen rise and fall with your breath. Just stay in presence for a few moments.

Offering just these few, and rather sparse, verbal prompts, I (or whoever was leading that day) had the group sit in silence for about two minutes. Since we included this in each of our meetings, it served to encourage an orientation towards bodily awareness and attention to bodily reactions that arise during the group's discussions.

Bodily awareness informing action occurred in a meeting when the group was considering what its next inquiry should be. Inquiries are questions that the group decides on collectively to pursue together and are based on what is relevant, live, or in the group's lingo "sparkly" for daily living and working. In the discussion, Isabel suggested that we form an inquiry about how to improve our skills in making systems maps. Shelli's response to this suggestion references how her body was involved in her response: "I'm paying attention to my body reactions and things like that. And when I first heard Isabel say that …. there was just a clenching in my stomach that I thought, 'Oh, no.'"

Not only does Shelli's statement illustrate how group members are recognizing the body as part of their experience, but it is also an example of having permission to take the time necessary to explore feelings and reflect on what they might mean for deciding on where the group should focus. Shelli went on to say:

> And then I just kind of sat with it for a minute and listened to what she was saying and then…suddenly, it became—I think I was more fearful of it because the last time we had our group—which I loved the last group. …. But then we got into the mapping and I just got lost and I confided that to Renee. But now it feels like I am more ready to learn more about that.
>
> I guess I feel safer in saying, "Wait a minute. I don't understand what you're saying" to you all, and "can we slow this? I need remedial help here," and things like that. And so, I'm not as fearful of it as I was before, and I can kind of see some value in it long-term. If I'm trying to make the case for this kind of work with my hospital system or whatever. I think I can feel sparkly about any of the things that we've talked about so far.

Here Shelli states more specifically what it was about systems mapping that made her stomach clench—that she felt "lost." She also articulates that, though her immediate reaction was negative, as she let the feelings develop, because of becoming more comfortable with asking for help when she feels like she isn't understanding something, that going forward with learning more about systems mapping would be doable for her. Not only does she feel okay about being vulnerable and saying she does not understand something, but she also can see how knowing about systems maps could be beneficial for making the case to her organization.

Shelli shared this at the 14th meeting of the group, and it illustrates how the structured, habitual group processes have created a kind of permission for members to go slowly, allowing time and space for awareness of their bodies, as well as an

understanding of the role of waiting and observing how feelings shift from an initial jolt felt in the body to a different conclusion once that jolt is mediated by reflection, discussion, and the passage of time. Shelli's experience underscores that affect is always moving, and in its undulations, it (re)organizes what becomes important to us—what we can see and articulate as our truth in a particular moment.

In her statements, Shelli also illustrates how what appears on a mattering map is not limited to what sometimes is dichotomized as either bodily or discursive, but that all of these elements are present—in this case, bodily sensation, communication with others, as well as considerations about the strategic and practical aspects of gaining knowledge about systems maps would have for her work. All of these elements exist together, simultaneously, exerting variable forces that make some things rise to the level of sense while others recede into the background. This conglomeration of the discursive and material all existing on the same level of signification provides an empirical example of a relational ontology. That is, only through the intra-actions (Barad, 2007) of the various elements in the scene does a particular reality emerge as legible. All of what Shelli said should be held as a temporary bracketing of the flow of affective movement, an example of how we can discuss how affect may be operating in a particular scene…before it moves on again to some other arrangement.

There are several instances where the group underscores how our capacities for sensing will never arrive at a place where they are "done" or mastered, which I see arising in talk about how this group offers a supportive space to take the time to practice. As Renee explained in our first meeting:

> So this really is a practice that one can be in their whole life. To be quite frank, if I can do this 10% of the time, I'm really jazzed. Most of the times, I've gotten to the point where I can have awareness of what's happening in the moment. I'm not always able or skillful, depending on how triggered I am, of taking action differently in the moment. But again, we have to have aspirations around this (LAUGHS), and it's a practice.

From this presentation given early in the group's history, a point in time where the members had no prior knowledge of these concepts, to meeting 14 where Shelli began to apply the concepts in her daily life, I argue that the habits supported by the group's repetitive structure enabled the creation of an affective atmosphere that differs from what would be found in other professional public health meetings. In the new mappings of affective force arising over time in the group, different possibilities for making sense of experience and decisions for action were actualized.

Pedwell (2017) argues that repetition and habit development are a way to think about what affect is doing, how affect is shifting, and why. To build her argument, Pedwell critiques the notion that lasting progressive social change comes (only) out of a sense of empathy for others. For example, when students are assigned literature vividly describing the horrors experienced by Black slaves in the U.S. American South, it is thought that the feelings of empathy these narratives spark will lead to action to improve social conditions. As an awareness of the problems faced by different people grows, the thinking goes, knowledge and feelings of empathy will motivate people to do something about these injustices. In contrast to this, Pedwell (2017) argues that knowing is not

enough—that while feeling empathy can be a spark, it is insufficient to hammer out new grooves to guide our unreflexive, habitual ways of living.

Rather, it is habit itself that can "help reorient theories of affective transformation," to understand "how new modes of socio-political engagement and responsivity might be actualized and sustained" (Pedwell, 2017, p. 100). Pedwell goes on to say that affect theory's grounding in relational, flat ontologies is harmonious because habit can potentially also "refigure dominant binaries of cognition and embodiment, individual and environment, and human and non-human, while troubling linear notions of time and progress" (p. 100). The experiences of AIG participants illustrate how some of the binaries Pedwell identifies can be remixed. The shifts group members found in their capacities to sense their individual experience from moment to moment, as well as give attention to the relational experiences between themselves and other group members shows how it was necessary to be taught about present moment awareness, mental models, and slowing down, but the knowledge alone was not sufficient for significantly shifting action. Instead, it was the repetitive engagement with these practices that enabled this knowledge to sink into an embodied habit.

Renee is explicit about habit formation being part of the design and goal of what we are up to with the AIG and the reason she is introducing the group to the ideas and practices that she is. It is hoped that, with time and practice, these ways of being can become automatic, or as Ellingson (2017) puts it, creating a situation where embodiment is mutually constitutive with the world around us" (p. 3). Renee explains:

> I was also thinking about this metaphor of people who learn sports, or experts. You know, how they talk about how they have to practice over and over and over and over again. Like Michael Jordan talks about just shooting all of these, like, shots, and probably a lot of them he misses, but then he's doing that because when he's in that field, you know, you don't have time to think through the mechanics of, "Okay, I got to have my hand just like this, and then you, like, shoot this way, and I…" It's like you have to have that in your body already when you're actually practicing or enacting whatever the thing is.

She goes on to discuss how she feels building this type of capacity can, with practice, become "second nature," and be the response that surfaces first for you, even in high-stress situations:

> I think our dream about this group, or with these inquiry groups, or these spaces of practice for people is that you get to practice these skills that are very, kind of like, subtle. But then, again, when you get them and you automatically can start thinking at all these different levels when you're, like, in the middle of some crazy conflict (LAUGHS)… You know, that's happening [around you], and you're upset and stressed about it. [But now] it's second nature.

In this group, skills are being developed through the enactment of habitual practices, which is a move towards finding entry points in the sedimented ways of living, or "dispositions" in Bourdieu's (1990) usage. The group is working towards reforming the

"seemingly non-negotiable, conventional and habitual ways of acting" (Martinussen & Wetherell, 2019, p. 106)

Supporting Habit Formation

While the group meetings themselves are structured in a way to support development of habits through always having weather checks, listening into the dark, and time at the end of the meetings to reflect on the group's experiences, there was also a requirement for group members to establish a personal practice that would support building of their self-reflexive "muscles" over time. This too was a new way to approach living and working for the group members, but Renee and I agreed that it was essential for moving into new ways of acting and relating in public health organizing. As Renee explained:

> And part of the justification for why would you even want to spend time doing inner work or your first-person work or relational work is, again, to bring us back to working with adaptive change and adaptive challenges really requires us to be able to move back and forth between the balcony and the field of action here. And you can't move to the balcony and have this big, wide perspective and this deep perspective if you don't build those muscles. So, what we're doing is really building our ability to notice and pay attention.

Here Renee incorporates some systems science-specific lingo, such as “the balcony” and the “field of action” which reference the necessity of keeping the big picture of the whole system in mind while going about our daily work.

This concept was plausible to the group members, but despite their buy-in to the reasoning behind why we needed to intentionally build our self-reflection muscles, everyone struggled with establishing and maintaining a consistent practice. It was not until the ninth meeting, after we had discussed the reasoning behind developing a personal practice, as well as providing brief experiences with quiet contemplation in our listening into the dark sessions, that we checked in with folks about how they were doing. There was no requirement to do a specific kind of practice, though we did repeatedly remind members try something. We suggested various options, such as meditation, yoga, journaling, or coloring. The emphasis was on finding something that worked and was sustainable as a long-term habit that could ideally be integrated into everyone’s daily life.

In the ninth meeting, as we checked in with each person, it became clear that folks were struggling with finding something, or even remembering to try something once they were out of the group context and back to their busy lives. As Shelli said, “I had every intention of doing something. And then I left on multiple trips and things like that and just completely forgot about it until you mentioned it right this second.” For Stella, she started off strong but then “fell off the wagon”:

> I think I might have tried like five or six. [LAUGHTER] This is relatively new to me. So I tried some guided meditation. I tried my own listening into the dark. I tried some yoga. I think those were the big ones. Oh, and I tried journaling. And

> I'd say for like the first two weeks after our meeting, I did really well at that, and then I went out of town for work, and I feel like I fell off the wagon a little bit.

Stella and Shelli both mentioned disruptions in their daily habits (travel) that they saw as thwarting attempts at establishing a reflective practice. In fact, all of the group members reported various levels of trying and being faced with the constraints of worldly experience. Courtney reported a degree of success as she incorporated her practice into her daily routine:

> When I get to work now, I park my car and I try to do the meditation app for 60 seconds—little baby steps—before I get out of my car and go into work for the day. And that seems to be working most of the time. I only skipped it a couple times when I was running late.

When considering the role of affect in transformative social change, affect theorists explain that it is small moments of affective adjustment that often enable a cracking open of the seemingly fixed structures of our worlds. However, this is frequently not enough, as the cracks can easily be plastered over by the dominant affect that had been holding it together in its regular form.

In Seigworth and Gregg's (2010) co-authored chapter, Seigworth shares his personal and scholarly movements towards affect theory to explain that the promises emerging from affective ruptures cannot develop without nurturing. The affective rupture happening for members of the AIG is a recognition of the role of self-reflection in their enactment of public health work—a new way of approaching their professional endeavors. This nurturing involves harnessing the feelings emanating from affective

ruptures and incorporating them "into lived practices of the everyday as perpetually finer-grained postures for collective inhabitation" (p. 21). The affective ruptures generated in the AIG, and the AIG's attempts at nurturing what is coming up as new ways of living and feeling echo Seigworth's assertion that they "frequently [reveal] themselves in the clumsiness of bodily adjustments and in worldly accommodations barely underway" (p. 21). As the group members experimented with new habits, the awkwardness described by Seigworth was experienced by the group members, that is, there was a period of adjustment as new bodily habits were integrating into their existing material surroundings. As Stella described it:

> The yoga was the most helpful because it kind of forced me to stay present in a way that just relying on my mind didn't. My mind wandered a little too easily doing the meditations, but when I added movement to that, it kind of helped me stay engaged.

Stella and the other group members were involved in finding a personal reflective practice that could be incorporated into their daily living, as well as one that would get them to a space they felt was "working" in terms of how they are making sense of what they were learning in the AIG. However, at this early stage, their worldly accommodations were still only barely underway, that is, the shift in habit they are trying to pursue needs cultivation, a role the AIG's repetitive structure helped fulfill.

In addition to encouraging people to find their own reflective practice and install it as part of their daily lives, Renee and I took the struggles of the group members to heart and decided that sharing a variety of practices during the group meetings would be

potentially beneficial. This move shows how the AIG attended to the need to nurture and take time to enact new ways of living that were rather foreign for the participants. The group was presented with eight different practices and information describing what was involved. After discussion, the group decided to try out a secular version of Examen of Consciousness practice (See Appendix E). In the following meeting, Renee led us through the Examen of Consciousness practice.

As she described it, Examen is "a five-step contemplative prayer," developed by Jesuit priests in the 16th century. Leading the group through the practice, Renee began by sharing a group intention to ground us:

> I seek the disposition of gratitude, freedom from any fears and attachments that are obstacles to my growth and loving kindness, and I intend that I might become more and more open to growth and generous and skillful in my service of others.

It is noteworthy that doing this together as a group of public health professionals is quite far from anything that would be typically part of a work-related meeting. Further, engaging in this type of deep reflexive work in a group setting is only possible because of the development of an affective environment that fostered a high level of mutual trust and a sense of safety that allowed for vulnerability.

After Renee led the group through the full practice, we split the group into pairs to discuss what going through the Examen practice was like. When we returned to the whole group, Stella said:

> This was an incredibly moving experience for me. And I'm not sure I'm ready to process it all collectively, but Shelli and I just had a wonderful conversation.

Tears came out of my eyes. It was just a really powerful experience. So, thank you for the opportunity to do that, and thank you all for your love and support.

It is through the structure put in place by the AIG—practical guidance on how to go about reflection, fostering an environment to develop trust, and a focus on nurturing and tending new habits--that created an environment for the transformative impacts of this group to flourish.

The group's practices enabled habit formations, a necessary ingredient for directing forces towards arrangements of what matters that differ from what is already established. In addition to regularly sitting quietly to "listen into the dark," through an emphasis on relationships and tending to feelings and emotions

Part 3: Affect's Possibilities for Racial Health Equity

There are three instances that stand out from the AIG as illustrative of the possibilities I see for the structures that direct communicative practices in groups and foster transformative change. The stories I will share illustrate the coming together of many of the elements I have already discussed: shifting mental models, slowing down, and committing to practices of self-reflection in hopes that they can become automatic bodily responses. Specifically, these stories have to do with movements in the ways the tellers grapple with discussions about racial health equity. As discussed and supported in the literature on affect theory, rearranging affective maps requires an initial rupture, but more durable shifts require ongoing attention and accommodation from all that surrounds us. The stories I share represent those initial ruptures, as well as some of the ways worldly accommodation are coming into being. While reading, stay present with the

happenings in these stories, perhaps trying to imagine yourself in the situation. The power of these instances comes from the affective force involved—things that impressed on their tellers. These stories are examples of the cracks that let the light in. The first story is one that I shared with the group at our eighth meeting as an example of applying reflection in the midst of living and working in public health.

Jennifer: Working with Feeling-in-Action

My story marks the first notable discussion of negotiating issues of difference, in this instance, a comment about diversity within the field of public health. The story is an example of the fledgling stages of cultivating awareness and understanding of the problematic aspects of constructions of racial diversity in the workplace. I point out how I came to the realization of my feelings through self-reflection and present moment awareness. Additionally, it illustrates how reflecting about what has already transpired, even when it is less than ideal, is a vital part of nourishing and nudging the small cracks in seemingly sedimented realities. In a meeting of the AIG I explained:

> I was in a meeting, and I don't remember how, but the concept of diversity came up. And one of the people in the meeting made the joke, "Well, I know what we need is more white males for diversity." And I was like, "that is not good. That is not cool. I do not like that." But then, at the same time, I was like, "I feel like I'm not in a position to challenge this person who was a superior to me." You know,

all these things. I recognized it, but then I also was like, "I can't say anything about that right now."

This excerpt shows that I identified, in the moment, how the comment about needing more white males in public health to achieve diversity made me feel—and it was a negative feeling. However, in telling this story to the group, I named another affective force, that of feeling like it was not appropriate in that moment to challenge this comment because it was uttered by my boss. I went on to explain:

> So that is how this work is coming up for me, that I am becoming more [consciously] aware of, like, "I don't feel comfortable here. I don't like this." But I'm also recognizing that I'm not yet jumping right into saying what I feel in the moment, or ever, except to you all. I'll say it to you all, eventually. (LAUGHS) Then I can say to myself, "Well, that was a situation where I didn't feel like I was—there was a power differential…"

Here, I more explicitly point out the feelings I was having in the moment, doing so as an example to the group of how what we are learning has potential to shift the ways we respond in action. At the same time, I offer this story as an example of not following through on my feelings in the moment because I want to normalize and highlight how this is a skill that takes practice and time. In the scene I described, I considered more than just my own feelings, particularly the surrounding affective mood. The affect of the scene was part of what inhibited my speaking up. The affect of the scene I described included the power differential between my boss and me, the unstated assumption that we were all in agreement about how the comment was "funny," or at least harmless, and pressure to

maintain harmonious relations in the team in order to move forward smoothly with our work. The force supporting the rightness of what the boss said, in part, derived from his title, experience, and expertise in the field. Moreover, the norm of working in ways considered efficient discouraged disruption or questioning of this high-in-the-hierarchy person's words. In contrast, the AIG's affective climate provided a setting where I could talk through a situation where I had an ambivalent "success." That is, I was able to notice my feeling in the moment, however, I did not act on them in the way that aligned with my values or sense of what was correct.

As I am writing this, I continue to reflect on this scene, as well as how I related it to the group, and recognize that, while I was in a position of lesser power than my boss, and that is how I justified not speaking up in the moment, I also now see that, as a white person, I experienced some mild discomfort, but it was not sensed as a visceral threat. As Cetinić and Diamanti (2019) write, "White bodies may very well experience a kind of rage in solidarity, yet the same repetition of fear and rage that disproportionately policed Black bodies does not contour the privilege of whiteness" (p. 305). The affective climate of the context—a meeting in a public health organization--was one that supported norms of white supremacy, and worked to restrict any challenges to that supremacy. I went on:

> I also didn't feel like what I would say about what the problem [would be heard and understood in that setting]. Making a joke that we need more white men—my explanation for why that was a problem [would not] be heard as a real thing, and I would be dismissed as making something up that's not really a problem. [They

would ask] why are you making problems? So that was all that was going on in my mind.

The forces of affective flows can be felt in situations where we feel like something is off—like we are out-of-step with what is going on around us. Ahmed (2017) describes this phenomenon as being an "affect alien," that is, the affect you pick up on seems to be from a different planet than the one everyone else is sensing. To be sure, the sensation of feeling like an alien because of being so seemingly out of step with what those surrounding you feel is "normal," is something experienced by all of us, but can be a nearly permanent part of living for people who do not align with the hegemonic structures that dictate the forms of dominant affective climates. Ahmed asserts, as the title of her book evidences, *Living a Feminist Life* is to be in a perpetual state of feeling like you are somehow wrong or even crazy for challenging what everyone else accepts without question. To survive and thrive in situations like this, Ahmed (2017) argues that we need to keep close the people that enable and support our continued resistance to those things that are wrong, even when the world around us is seeming to say all is well. Rather than the silencing forces I sensed in the meeting I talked about to the group, the affect of the AIG was one that encouraged my sharing and reflection of an instance where I had mixed feelings about my actions.

The scene I described was alienating, while the response of the AIG was affirming. To enable feeling-in-action, affect shifts in public health are needed not only at the interpersonal or group level, but also at a structural level. Unexamined norms that encourage keeping feelings concealed in the name of efficient operating and not causing

conflict within a work team are micro practices with macro implications. That is, particularly in terms of addressing racial equity, affective maps that do not have space or time for questioning authority or the dominance of white supremacy cannot accommodate the types of shifts necessary for public health to have a meaningful impact on health disparities based on race.

Stella: Affective Openings for Critique

In another instance of how the group serves a source of potential for affective transformation, Stella, a white woman, related a story about an exchange she had with someone she held in "extremely high esteem." Stella's story is not related to public health work, however, it is an example of how she has strengthened her abilities and confidence in intervening in a potentially contentious conversation about race. Further, Stella feels that this is an important development for her, personally, that will scaffold engaging in discussion about race in her work. Stella began by saying that this woman "made a comment," and continued:

> It was so out of character, and it was just one of those comments where, like, your head snaps up and you're like, "Did?" …and I said—in the moment, "Did you just say…?". And she said, "Yes." And I mean, like, my jaw hit the floor. And the other person responded. We had a little conversation about it then. And I think had it not been for this group, that would have kind of been the end of it.
>
> And then later on that evening, it was just the two of us, and I brought it back up. I said, "What made you say that?" And we had this whole conversation, and I used the framework of the four parts of speech from that article from our

first week and brought it up in multiple ways, and it was like a whole different way of engaging around something that could have very easily just been this like off-color comment that totally went under the radar that nobody said anything about, and it would have created this whole norm.

And once I shared why it felt like such a big deal, especially in the political context and everything like that, my friend was seriously taken aback and said, like, "Okay, I really—I'm going to be thinking about this." And it felt like such a freaking victory. Like, I cannot tell you. Now, I mean, that was one tiny, little interpersonal exchange, but it made me realize how these tools could be used beyond that… And it helped that this person was very receptive, right? It wasn't someone who, like, immediately got angry and said, "Screw you." But I did a little happy dance. [LAUGHTER] It was really cool.

Stella's story shows how tools she learned in the group, such as an article we read about the four parts of speech, (See Appendix F) provided a concrete way to approach a person who had said something so vile that it made her "jaw hit the floor." In such instances, we have a variety of choices about how to respond, and Stella feels that without her experience and learning in the AIG, she would not have been able to successfully negotiate the conversation. The comment her friend made resulted in a bodily response where her "head snaps up" and you spontaneously react before consciously thinking about what would be strategic. However, after the moment, where she did express her revulsion to her friend, she was able to later revisit the comment and

explain more about why it was a problem, to recognize and express what it was that affected her so strongly.

In contrast to my experience, Stella did verbalize her feelings, and in this instance her friend responded positively. This woman's comment pierced Stella's affective world—a comment that, for her friend, was unremarkable—just part of everyday talk. However, in their exchange, Stella felt she was able to shift her friend's awareness, something that made her gleeful. Her joy was not only the result of making another person consider the impact of their words, but the realization of her capacity and confidence to have this conversation. The repeated practices fostered by the AIG were part of Stella's ability to recognize what was happening in the moment, as well as take action. Though there was an interval between her immediate bodily response and when she broached the topic again with her friend, the AIG, according to Stella, helped her stay with her feelings and let them shape her actions.

While this was not a public health setting, Stella felt that she could apply what she learned through this experience to her relationships at work. Looking at the affect surrounding Stella's encounter with her friend provides clues to what might facilitate this transfer of action from this setting to a professional one. First, this conversation happened with someone she considered to be a friend, which could facilitate having difficult conversations. We can and do have friends in work settings. Or, at least we typically work towards building relationships that generate mutual positive feelings. Additionally, Stella mentioned her friend's receptivity to her questioning. Unlike in the scenario I described with my boss, there was space on this affective map to hear critique about a

racist comment. Further, there was also room to accept critique and make changes based on feedback. Translating the affects that enabled Stella's conversation to the broader field of public health would require unsettling efficiency, progress, and certainty.

First, bringing up the harm done by something said would be a disruption to efficiency and a detour to progress, similar to what I described in the scenario with my boss. Rather than setting out a logical course of action and following the steps necessary to arrive at a destination, there would need to be pauses and possibly backtracking to address critique. The difficulties of doing this were explored in Violet's story about distributing naloxone—questioning what is going on and then potentially making changes to the existing ways of working open one up to interpersonal strife, as well as the chance you will not achieve what you set out to do.

Further, changing a course of action requires an admission of uncertainty, or that what was previously agreed upon was actually not the right direction. Stella's friend did not see anything wrong with what she said until it was pointed out to her. Likewise, operating based on existing knowledge about what is correct is typical in public health there is little chance that someone will question a plan of action that is based on what is proven and accepted. In fact, views from outside of authorized forms of expertise have difficulty being heard in public health (Wynne, 1996). Stella felt that the practice run she had with her friend built her abilities to challenge situations she may encounter in her work. Bringing attention to something problematic in normalized practices is, as Stella shows, helped when one acquires skills for negotiating these interactions. However, if Stella's efforts are not met with openness in a professional setting, it should not be

thought of as her individual failure. Rather, for individuals to be able to critique public health practice, there needs to be a shift towards a spirit of friendly exchange where ideas not currently marked on an affective map can stake some ground.

Mercedes: Making Room on our Affective Maps for New Perspectives

The third example of the possibilities for engaging racial equity in public health work was shared by Mercedes. Mercedes, a white woman, explained that she has been contemplating her individual role and actions in relation to disparities and issues of equity in public health. As she explains:

> My growth around race and diversity and equity inclusion over the last—I would say four to five years has been *steep,* right? …. Like steep and not in fantastic and exhilarating ways, right? And I do feel like this [AIG] process has really helped me sort of—I don't know… process that enough so that I can bring it into my work a little bit more gracefully.

For Mercedes, the AIG is only one part of how she has sought out or been thrust into personal growth around issues of race and racism, but she does feel that it has had a notable effect in terms of finding ways to translate her desire to improve health disparities into action. One instance she shared in her interview involved a change in how she responded to a situation related to reception of an idea she had about addressing racism. First, she noted that the work she did in the AIG had "given her confidence to even bring it up." Mercedes explained that how to enact anti-racist projects came up in a discussion with some of her Black colleagues.

Mercedes told them that she thought the organization should create a program that provided a space for white people to talk about race and racism. Rebuffing the idea, her colleagues said that it was definitely not a role the organization should be taking on because their priorities and mission demanded that the voices of people of color be at the center of all of their work. In other words, spending time on helping white people get better at talking about race was not in line with what they were trying to do as an organization. Further, developing a program that focused on white people's allyship development would take time away from the work that was more salient for their goals.

Reflecting on this scene, Mercedes said that she noticed a change in the way she responded to their rejection of her idea. Rather than getting defensive—a reaction she says would have been likely for her in the past—she was able to just sit and listen to what her colleagues were saying. This is an example of an affective movement from assuredness about the rightness of our ways to a space welcoming of different perspectives. Despite her thinking that she had come up with a good idea—working with white people and putting the onus on them to address racism--she was able to feel the blow when they rejected her idea, but rather than continue making her case for why she was right, she just let the conversation be. Mercedes said:

> Specifically, what I got from [the AIG] was the not needing to get to the result *immediately*. What needed to happen in that meeting right then was for me to just listen. To just listen and not say anything more in that moment—even though I felt a little defensive and a little uncomfortable.

Mercedes identified the value of slowing down and cultivating a moment-by-moment awareness of how she was relating with others. From there, Mercedes went on to say:

> And so, I feel like—I don't know. I feel like this group—it's not like this group has moved me in that direction [of working on racial justice], but this group has facilitated my capacity to incorporate it more fully and wholly in my life, in my work life and in my personal life. And that has just felt like such a gift. Yeah. It's just sad for me to—or frustrating or something that it's hard to convey the power of what this experience is to other people because it's pretty real.

The power of this group comes from creating a space, or a crack, where the light of some other way of being can come in. Once there is an entry point, the group nurtures and tends to the new ways of knowing, making sense, and feeling that shine out from those initial cracks. With her existing desire for growth and learning, Mercedes found tools, structures, and support in the AIG. She feels strongly about this, and wants to underscore to people outside of our group that what we have done is powerful and meaningful, but that it escapes capture through words.

Considering how Mercedes's experiences illustrate larger affective movements in public health gets us to some of the possibilities for putting the skills learned in the AIG into action in a situation of addressing racial equity. Mercedes's story illustrates shakeups of affective maps rerouting what is towards greater openness to non-dominant knowledge holders. I make this connection by noting that, like frequently happens in public health, Mercedes had a well-intentioned idea that she thought would improve the lives of a group of people—in this case, people of color and racial health disparities. However, her

colleagues, when presented with this idea, did not think it would be helpful, and in fact, thought that it would detract from efforts to foreground people of color's ideas and experiences. As discussed in Stella's story, public health can be deaf to those who question what has been pre-determined as a good and right idea. Although there is evidence, in the form of popular discourses and critique saying that racial justice work should not be the responsibility of people of color, Mercedes did not call on these arguments to support her case. Instead of drawing on knowledge from outside of the situation at hand, she listened to what the people in front of her were saying. By tuning in to the particular context of this scenario, Mercedes heard what was being said to her and she accepted that there was value and legitimacy there. Even though, in her thinking, not pursuing her idea might delay arrival to a desired destination, she was able to hear and accept a different approach.

Mercedes's story represents a disruption to public health's emphasis on thinking about problems at a population-level rather than considering the particularities of individual bodies. At an abstracted, population level, white people doing racial equity work is theorized to be necessary and positive. However, concretely, for the people present in this particular context, that idea was not a good fit. A parallel can be drawn when considering COVID guidelines. They were put forth with population health in mind--everyone was to mask and get vaccinated. However, at the individual level, these universalized recommendations have thousands of exceptions and particularities that have to be considered. On existing public health mattering maps, there are no visible

locales for the "special cases." Rather, interventions are one-size-fits all—frequently presented as what would be best for the greater good.

Historically, this thinking of applying interventions to whole populations has equated to what is good as determined by the dominant groups in society—typically wealthy white males. In Mercedes's story, however, the voice of the people who would be either tasked with carrying out or personally impacted by racial equity work were heard and heeded. Mercedes's story implies an opening to polyvocality, a change that was made possible, in her accounting, by skills she learned by participating in the AIG. Mercedes, as an individual, was able to identify a change in her habituated ways of interacting—from defensive and argumentative to receptive and dialogic. As she noted, this was not a comfortable posture for her, yet she was glad she was able to notice this shift. Further, she noted that she had become more okay with how this mismatch in ideas would mean a delay in getting to a desired goal. Unlike in typical public health practice, she was able to accept the slowness and detours that accompany accounting for multiple perspectives. Mercedes's story showcases another way that the habits and postures of relating cultivated in the AIG are planting seeds that could grow into rearranged affective maps.

Jennifer, Stella and Mercedes: Disrupting the Typical Affects of Public Health

The three examples shared what the group members felt was significant in terms of their learning and development, particularly around issues related to race and diversity at work. Each story added additional texture to my description of the typical affect of public health, particularly in terms of the ways power, expertise, and accepted ways of

knowing can or cannot be challenged. In my story, the affective tone of a public health setting served to silence a criticism of someone higher in the formal hierarchy of the organization. In Stella's story, she was able to speak out against something she felt was wrong, but it required an affect of friendly openness. Stella pointed out how something thought to be acceptable and unremarkable was actually harmful and wrong, and her critique was amicably accepted. For Mercedes, she had to stop herself from arguing in support of an idea she felt was correct, instead recognizing the validity and relevance of a different perspective. In each of these stories, the feelings of being accepted, loved, and supported—whether absent or present--made a difference in what was possible. Further, the encouragement to practice noticing and naming, and authorization to move slowly to facilitate noticing was essential to what unfolded. In contrast to the affect of public health, the affect of the AIG, first, created a setting where talking about racism and how we were working towards dismantling it was welcome. The stories shared by members of the AIG show how the group's interactions formed and propelled bloomspaces that created an alternative map to the ways public health organizing is typically arranged.

Chapter 5. Rousing Suspicions

The alternate trajectories, or bloomspaces, for thinking about and approaching public health that emerged in the AIG illustrate potential, but not a guarantee of transformation or progress. Much of what unfolded, I have argued, was tended and nurtured by the group's communication structures—structures that created an affective tone supportive of reflection, questioning, and critique. As Mercedes expressed, participating in the group was involved with recognizable shifts in their approaches to the world that they attribute to what they learned in the group. These shifts show what Stewart (2007) describes as fleeting glimpses of "the lived and the potential hidden in it" (p. 98), however, the group's structure and methods do not provide a smooth fast track leading quickly or easily to reorganized public health maps, nor to the larger goal of improvements in the health of populations.

I find myself pulled by another affective flow, drawing me away from presenting the AIG as wholly sparkly, joyful, and climbing towards new heights of health justice. Emanating from critical academic perspectives, I feel a need to interrogate what appears to be wonderful and dive back in to sort out oppressions lurking just below the surface. My tendency to look for "hidden" oppressions is what Sedwick (1997, 2003) called paranoid reading. In contrast to paranoid reading, Sedgwick also offers the concept of reparative reading that questions the labeling of phenomena as either entirely good or totally bad—instead allowing interpretations to stay open to vacillations, undulations, and possibilities forming from the muddling staggers that step forward and fall back as we work with what is at hand to enact our realities.

The pull to look critically at this group has already led me to consider the limitations put on public health practice by its embeddedness in modernity's rationalism and administrative efficiency. I presented some of the ways the AIG has resisted these ideologies, by attending to emotional relating, embodied feeling, and slowness. This discussion, I feel, may have left readers with an overstated sense of optimism for what the AIG or other groups following its lead could do—something I want to guard against from my critical academic perch. In addition to its modernist roots, there are two other aspects of the AIG that stand out to me as in need of critical examination.

First is a nagging feeling that the group is glossing over negative feelings or the real difficulties of changing entrenched ways of being—and the tolls trying to make these changes can take on the individuals involved. Relatedly, readers could be wary of the AIG being another "trendy" anti-racist project that centers on individuals doing self-work, distracting from efforts to dismantle the capitalist, heterosexist, patriarchy that, some argue, only allows self-work on terms that keep these systems intact and thriving (Hudson, 2020). The second tension came with the realization that the stories featured in this dissertation are all coming from white women, making me question why significant shifts were not as visible, verbalized, or generally present for the people of color in the group. First, I will look at how negativity, difficulties, and a potential over-emphasis on self-work were thought about and approached in the group.

Hopefulness and Habits

At the March, 2020 meeting, as we all shared our feelings and current situations with the sudden closure of the world due to COVID-19, I said, "We do all of this work on

ourselves and it's not enough to deal with this life." Renee responded, "I say that all the time… 'How do people function when they aren't doing this?' …I've done years…of meditation practice…and it's not like my life is any easier than anybody else's, but it's workable at least." I replied "Um-hum. (LAUGHS) At least we started out. We're moving. It's going. It's going. The river is flowing." And Courtney said, "We're just more graceful with it." The movements towards a different way of being required, for the group members, a year-long exploration of self, surrounded by supportive community and encouragement to repeatedly engage in practices to hone awareness and attention. For Renee and I, with decades of regular reflective practice between us, there was an understanding that these practices were not a ticket to easy street.

Pedwell (2017) argues that the promises of social transformation sometimes espoused by affect theorists are likely to fall short of their claims because shifting affect alone, while often sparking a brightly burning first flame, tends to dwindle into dimness over time. Drawing on Dewey, Pedwell (2017) explains that rather than shifts in affect alone, progressive social change can actually happen through "critical [interventions] that [address] thought *and* embodied action, the conscious *and* the non-or-less than conscious, the individual *and* environmental conditions at once" (p. 117). Pedwell collects all of these approaches together under the heading of habit and says that it is through practices that train the mind, body, and postures of relating to and with our contexts that can, in combination, effectuate progressive change. In the context of the AIG and public health, for example, the progress we are seeking requires much more than individual affective shifts, or even movements in coalitions and groups. In public health, the present context

is shaped by forces that create seemingly unscalable walls that have led, in just the case of COVID-19, to severe and stark health consequences. After 2020, life expectancy for all Americans is projected to decrease by 1.13 years, but "for Blacks…life expectancy would shorten by 2.10 years…and for Latinos, by 3.05" (Miller, 2021, n.p.).

As I hold these grim facts, affect theory does give cause to not jump right to despair. As Pedwell (2017) emphasizes, Dewey warned against "predictive modes of behaviour modification that fixate on already known end points" (p. 117). From this, I take some hope that the long history of disparities in health based on race could be interrupted and rerouted rather than something to accept with resignation. The work of the AIG reflected a sense of hope, as it sought some type of "better" way of doing public health work—a better that was undefined and open to emergence. So, while there was a motivation towards good in the group that gave it direction, "with each new embodied intervention or modification at the level of habit this imagined outcome itself is re-configured" (p. 117). That is, progress was iteratively defined and created through the ripples of affective flows directing configurations of bodies, thoughts, ideas, and possibilities. Importantly, all of this comes into view not as some imagined future, but in the maps forming in the evolving *present*.

The actions we take in the present moment are what is shaping the realities we experience now. While repetition of habits may eventually produce durable alterations that define the ongoing present, it is important to note the gains, however fleeting, happening right now. I hold the AIG in a balance between the very real struggles that paranoid readings draw out and a hope for the potentials of habit and practice to reform

and shape trajectories towards an as yet unknown otherwise. It is not all good, and it is not all bad—but it is variably good, bad, neutral, hopeless, hopeful, and always stiving to notice and stay in the present without too much reaching towards paranoia or Pollyannaism.

In Praise of Crankiness

Another thing that has nagged at me about the AIG is how it could be associated with new-age or self-help movements that have rightfully been critiqued for glossing over the emotional, psychological, and material struggles that characterize movements that resist the status quo. Part of the problem with relentless positivity or an assumption that we can use our minds to overpower matter can be explained through the concept of spiritual bypassing or the "tendency to try to avoid or prematurely transcend basic human needs, feelings, and developmental tasks (Welwood, 1984, p. 64). Encouragingly, I do not see evidence of these tendencies in the AIG, and in fact, I see a guardedness *against* superficial positivity. As Shelli put it:

> One of the things that I've noticed is just how I show up with my team, and it's not just, you know, "Everything's rosy, I'm a team player, let's keep doing everything. Everything's going to be fine," which is probably my knee-jerk reaction--it is the way that I would have led before.

Rather than glossing over stressors, pain, and difficulty, Shelli says:

> Now I'm showing up in, "yes, this is frustrating, but I don't want us to be part of the problem. I don't want us to be whiny, and bitchy, and just gossiping about it,

and having destructive behavior." [I recognize] this is the way I'm feeling. I'm holding space for my team, their tension, and anxiety, and things like that.

Here Shelli indicates how she is more able to recognize and accept negative emotions from her staff and allow it to just be—at least for a time—before moving on to finding solutions. In contrast to my story where I felt pressure not to bring up something that would be considered "negative" with my boss, Shelli draws on her experience in the AIG to reorganize the affective map in such a way that critique would be more welcome. Shelli notes that this is a change from her past approaches that did not allow for any recognition of negative feeling, instead quickly jumping back into the tasks at hand rather than taking time to acknowledge the team's mood. Jean also shared how she recognized a shift in how she understood her feelings of crankiness and what they might be doing.

> Last meeting, I shared that I was feeling really cranky. And I think now that I'm not—I'm not really cranky so much right now. (LAUGHS) But I think as I got further away from that feeling, I started to realize, one, I had been putting a lot of work in trying to develop these [reflection] skills. And it was like I got tired, and I didn't give myself space to do what Renee said--kind of just have compassion with myself and just figure out what I needed to come back to be in a positive—or more of a generative space.

Here Jean is talking about how she got cranky when she felt like her efforts at practicing self-reflection and awareness were not yielding the kinds of results she was expecting, frustration that arose, in part, from reaching towards an imagined better future. Jean became stuck in her crankiness for a time—forgetting to have compassion for

herself and losing perspective about how this is hard and often circuitous, slow work. Jean went on:

> But then I kind of allowed myself just to, like, get cranky. And I think now that I'm here, I'm realizing that I was cranky because I could see the misalignment where I wasn't acting or saying things that were in line with my hopes for how I would show up in those spaces, and I couldn't intervene fast enough in that, and I just kind of stayed cycling through it.

Jean noted that her crankiness was stemming from an inability to behave in ways she thought she should be able to after working towards developing the skills she learned in the AIG. However, continuing to stay present and reflective about this situation, Jean sees how she actually was making some progress and using her reflection skills, "I was seeing the misalignment in my action and values, which is part of this whole practice, right?" She goes on to say:

> But it was hard for me to see it when I was so deeply cranky and just kind of frustrated that I was pouring a ton of emotional energy into improving my relationship with my boss and not feeling like it was working. …. I don't know if I would have had that perspective a year ago around that.

This scenario shows how Jean was able to see how crankiness was both limiting and generative, or like Sedgwick's reparative reading--not all bad, or all good. On the one hand, her crankiness kept her from seeing the "win" she was having in her reflective practice, but on the other, once she allowed and began inquiring into the source of her

mood, she was able to see how her response was an indication of her growth around sensing misalignments between how she wants to behave and how she was behaving.

When she allowed some time and space around her crankiness, Jean noticed the different ways her mood was operating in her experience and how she was able to see it from different perspectives. Jean draws on a story Renee had just shared about the need for self-compassion around our expectations for what is possible with reflective practice, using her process of sorting through emotions around being offered a promotion at work:

> As I go into this new role, my intention is I don't want to hold this role or this notion that I'm going to be like this heroic leader and I'm, like, saving the day, and I, you know, know all things, and say the right things all the time, and react well. (LAUGHS) And I don't know, and how do we actually not expect that from ourselves and each other? Because I find myself getting caught in that all the time.

Renee's reflection on how she gets caught up in high expectations for herself and the ways she shows up in the world helped Jean come to a deeper understanding of her own struggle around the gap in where she thought she should be and where she actually was. This is an example of how the group's communication can serve to ground, extend, and attenuate the expectations we have for our practices and habits of reflection. Not only does this example show an acknowledgement that there may be some less than blissful moments involved in this type of work, but that it is ok to be cranky, feel exhausted and depleted—but importantly, that there needs to be acceptance of these feeling as normal and expected rather than as a sign of failure.

The AIG does emanate a hopeful, happy, and positive aura, along with a sense of the possibilities of personal, professional, and systemic progress that could improve public health outcomes. At the same time, there was a blooming acceptance and capacity for working with negative feelings, disappointment, and feelings of being stalled out. Importantly, the group provided a space to let these feeling and concepts iterate through communicative exchanges that provided a space of commiseration and solidarity.

Rather than a project of self-responsibility, there are many aspects of the AIG that subvert tendencies to go-it-alone or to throw up our hands when we, as individuals, do not get things right. I see the happiness, love, and care permeating the group as a strong affective force keeping these dips into depression or despair from stagnating. Reparative readings, as theorized by Sedgwick, helped me stay with a view towards abundance when considering what was going on, and Pedwell's pragmatist look at the limits and capacities of affect and the need to consider the full range of actors in a scene inflected my interpretations of the "negative" in this group.

Still, upon reflection on what was legible to me as impactful and important, that is, what I highlighted in my analysis, I had a sense of uneasiness about how my analysis foregrounded three white women's stories. One way I think about the selection of my, Stella, and Mercedes's stories is that they were barometers of where the group's trajectory eventually focused—that is, on racial equity. After the official data collection period in March of 2020, the group continued to talk about racial equity and as of June of 2021 was an ongoing theme of the group's work together. While there were stories told by the people of color in the group, they were not specifically about racial equity, and,

perhaps for that reason, did not have quite as much affective pull (on me) or intensity as the stories about white women's challenges to racism and their own personal growth. I feel a need to think through these affective pulls, and how, as a white woman, I am more able to read, feel, and understand the stories I highlighted because of the tenor of their provocation. That is, harmonizing with these stories may have been automatic.

Whiteness and Feeling Right

To think through how my analysis came to highlight the transformations in consciousness for the particular participants that I did, I reiterate that affect plays a social and political role that is shaped historically. That is, affect here is not wild, free, and unpredictable, but instead is contoured and guided by the forces of hegemonic social relations, with the one I am interested in presently—that of whiteness. This approach to analyzing affect in the AIG arises from my uneasiness at the realization that the most discernable or obviously changed participants all identify as white. Of the eight members of the group who participated for the full year all are women, and five identify as white, one as Black, one as Iranian-American, and one as Asian-American. So, while the composition of the group makes the odds of the experiences of white women somewhat more likely to show up, I do not think this accounts for the whole story.

Isabel, who is Asian-American, noted that Mercedes, who is white, might have "just [come] in with a more advanced skill set than some of us." Isabel attributes Mercedes's "advanced skill set" to her being Quaker. The connection between being Quaker and having a head start in what the group is trying to do is explained by Mercedes who says her spiritual community is focused on "group communication [and] group

decision-making and facilitation of space in which you can bring your emotions to the table," and that "has been probably the norm for more of my life than a lot of people." In reference to Mercedes, Isabel also says, "I think most white people never get to this point. …. You had an openness and a readiness to do it, and I appreciate you putting in the work on these things." Considered historically and in the entangled mix of macro-Discourses in public health around race, diversity, and health equity, alongside the scene unfolding in the ongoing present moment, this is a mostly generative interaction. However, it is not so idyllic that it doesn't set off my critical paranoia radar.

Mercedes has just articulated some of what has made the AIG so helpful and productive for her, but in contrast, Isabel expresses that she is less clear about the AIG's impact. Potentially, this uneven experience could be a result of a world made for whiteness, and for whiteness to mesh seamlessly and with little friction into social situations—including those, such as the AIG, that are involved in challenging whiteness and its operations. The AIG, while resisting and edging towards new territories, was still formed within an existing affective map. Considering how the minoritized people in the group experience the AIG can help draw out how the AIG is perpetuating the whiteness dominant in public health organizing practices.

Ashcraft (2019) formulated the Organizational Killjoy—a person in an organization who does not go along with the flow of business as usual, often behaving in ways that make other people feel uncomfortable. Organizational Killjoys produce discomfort by showing how that which seems well-organized and smooth is actually *dis*organized and rocky—particularly in instances when the Killjoy senses, names, and

acts out the ways she is out of step. Here, Isabell notices she hasn't experienced a commensurate amount of growth to Mercedes—but also, she expresses gratitude for a white person who is willing to work on "these things."

Isabell's words align with what Ashcraft (2019) calls the "Organizational Killjoy," who "feels things differently" (p. 122) and experiences friction with what is considered to be accolade-worthy movements towards growth. Ashcraft is interested in what arises in the places where organizing begins to fall apart because it is here that Organizational Killjoys are no longer a problem or a nuisance, but a vital indicator that can help "*trace more carefully how and which bodies get burned in the act of feeling right*" (p. 123, italics added). Isabel expressed how it was hard for her to identify the benefits she has received from participating in the group while Mercedes was emphatic about the benefits of her participation. Further, Mercedes was challenged, but the group enabled her to stay just hot enough without getting burned: "It's a bit hard for me to think about what this group has done for me because it has felt so organic and easy--not easy in that it's not challenging, but natural and comfortable even in its discomfort." White participants viewed the AIG as a space where they were able to have comfort even in their discomfort, an indicator that whiteness may be shaping the group's activities.

Like Mercedes, my story and that of Stella's position us as in sync with the affective movements of the AIG. The organizing methods used by the group are good fits for us and we are benefiting from them and sailing along with little turbulence—even when doing deep reflection on the ways we may be perpetuating white supremacy. It is not that Isabell expresses any major tumult, but there is something a bit bumpier in her

journey as she tries to sort out what she has gotten out of the AIG. I do not think it is overly paranoid to interrogate how whiteness is operating in this group, as by the group member's own admissions, we all have quite a bit to learn about the operations of racism and our positions in those structures. Contextually, the dominance of whiteness and its shaping of public health practice is only starting to be directly called out. What to do about the dominance of whiteness is an open question that this research has taken a step towards sorting out by looking at affective movements.

For all of the positive aspects of the AIG, it is not perfect, and I did not expect it to be. In fact, one of the places the AIG should critically interrogate is whether and how its close-knit and loving relationships may hinder critique directed at the group itself or its individual members. As discussed, self-critique is supported and welcome in the group, and there is also reception for looking critically at racism or other structural hegemonic ideologies that may be impacting public health practice. However, there is a need for more critical and reflective interrogation of the ways we are relating within the group itself. Love and good feelings can sometimes be disciplining—where we do not want to disrupt the happy mood that the group appears to agree is wonderful. Identifying whose experiences are thought to be interesting and meaningful, and how that came to be the case, can help the group members look more deeply at the binding forces of positivity and whiteness and how they are functioning in the AIG.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Implications for Theory and Practice

By looking at affective trajectories in this group, I have offered a provisional take on the typical affect of public health organizing. Additionally, I highlighted how the AIG used feminist organizing commitments, habit, and practice to shake up and rearticulate those affective arrangements, particularly in terms of changes in how participants approached racial equity. I used Grossberg's (1992) mattering maps as a way to think about visualizing arrangements of affect. Mattering maps show what comes to be included in our field of vision, a field formed through affective forces. The mattering maps of participants in the AIG were altered by shifts in affective force—particularly love, and the repetition of care and support that made this love a palpable presence in the group. Feminism inflects this research both theoretically and in terms of the values for organizing practice foregrounded by the group. This chapter discusses the implications of this research both theoretically and practically.

I begin by revisiting the concept of the middle ranges of agency and reparative readings because it helps situate the practical and theoretical implications of this research. While I argue that affect can be generative and important for practical and theoretical application in public health, the path towards its uptake is anything but straightforward. Therefore, I outline the ways that the AIG was successful, as well as its struggles, and consider the affective forces involved in these happenings through reparative reading because of its emphasis on wholeness and its complexities.

The Middle Ranges of Agency

Theoretically, I have engaged with conceptions of affect that look at what is going on in our worlds culturally, socially, and in terms of political and practical impact. Affect has been taken up in its feminist theorizations which assert that it is a material, felt, and sensed force that presses on our bodies. In other words, feminist affect has to do with what comes to matter and how. Further, feminist affect asks the question: "so why does this matter for our lives?" Our bodies and emotions become unified in feminist formations of affect, putting bodily sensation on the same level of other elements of experience, such as talk, that make up a social scene.

Feminist formations of affect, particularly in terms of the modes of relating involved in collaborative projects meant to disrupt normalized ways of organizing, underscore the force of love and its ability to draw and keep people together to do uncomfortable, hard, and potentially transformative work (Gould, 2009; Hennessey, 2013). Opening up to and staying present to love in collaborative organizing efforts is assisted by slowing down, cultivating moment-by-moment awareness, and directing attention towards how our feelings shape our experience in group contexts. I have also reflected on the moods and feelings I brought to the interpretation of this research, noting my first tendency was towards a paranoid or suspicious reading. However, due to engagements with Sedgwick's (1997, 2003) approach to criticism and her encouragement to move away from a sense of aggression and negativity in interpretation processes, I have moved towards a reading where phenomena are both "good" and "bad" rather than strongly polarized to one side or another.

Sedgwick points out that scholars have adeptly critiqued the shortcomings of binary thinking, yet continue to breed analyses grounded in "all or nothing understandings" (2007, p. 631). All or nothing thinking limits agency because it stymies actors in the unsubvertible power of all-encompassing hegemonic ideologies. There is a puppet master controlling our strings, leaving little hope for our endeavors leading to anything meaningfully different. Sedgwick encourages a rethinking of the possibilities of agency calling for

> … a form of relationality that deals in, for example, negotiations (including win–win negotiations), the exchange of affect, and other small differentials, the middle ranges of agency—the notion that you can be relatively empowered or disempowered. (Sedgwick 2007, pp. 631-632)

Considering the movements of affect and how it was involved in the group's trajectories provides examples of Sedgwick's notion of the middle ranges of agency. The bodies, minds, and actions of the group members are influenced by Discourses, such as the modernist ideals guiding public health's typical concern with progress and efficiency alongside a burgeoning desire to end racial health inequities. In contrast, the interactions in the group illustrated small movements, showing the potential for rearrangements of affect. The sense of potential was particularly strong in terms of the mutual support felt by the AIG members. Capacities to acknowledge, feel through, and take action on issues of race, racism, and whiteness increased for (some of) the group members. The habitual practices instilled by the group processes of the AIG, including time for grounding in

bodily presences, reflection, slowing down, and questioning mental models shows how group structure can nurture agentic potentials.

Interrogation of mental models took place by thinking through how our underlying beliefs and assumptions impacted thought and action at the individual, group, and structural levels (or first, second, and third person awareness in the group's parlance). This process provided the AIG members with tools that facilitated the development of an embodied, "second nature." The more deeply embodied these practices of awareness became, the group members noticed these different levels while simultaneously taking action based on this expanded awareness. As our abilities to see, feel, and interpret the world grow, enabling an accounting for action in terms of its impacts for us as individuals, our communities, and the structural forces shaped by and shaping our lives, there is potential for more skillful action that can significantly change existing realities. Still, nobody in the AIG, not even Renee, who has been working on these specific skills for many years, is able to bring her heightened awareness into immediate action at all times. However, there have been small movements, affective shifts that have cracked open previously accepted ways of thinking and being—allowing light to reach previously obscured worlds and enable different understandings of reality.

The small movements experienced by the AIG participants are examples of Sedgwick's concept of the middle ranges of agency—the places where we do take action affecting the world, all while the world is also affecting us. Stella shared that she was feeling "icky" one day because the CDC had put out a large sum of money to address a

particular public health issue that she felt was the result of someone's pet project or political powerplay. Stella said:

> I just feel like—it feels icky to me, a little bit. Like, all of a sudden because it's something that they want and that they see is going to be a priority for them, they're willing to magically funnel a significant amount of money when there are so many other needs.

In a paranoid mode, we can see here how Stella's desire to make positive public health impacts is thwarted by the larger structures encasing her possibilities for action. She lamented, "It is double the amount of money that they normally give us, and it is basically for us to be their pawns." The term pawn that Stella uses, calls up a connotation of the pointlessness of our efforts because in a chess game, pawns are moved about only in service of protecting the more important and powerful pieces. Further, it is not too much of a loss to sacrifice one or two pawns so long as the king remains protected.

However, the forces moving Stella are not exclusively controlled by the powerful players on their turf. Rather, Stella has awareness of her plight, and she protests against it by using her voice to express how it makes her feel. "So I just—I feel very kerfluffled about it all….I got a little storm going inside right now about this." Rather than playing her part in accordance with the funder's wishes, she notes her discomfort and questions what is going on. Additionally, her agency is bolstered and affirmed by the solidarity and support from the group. The AIG provides Stella her own arena where her perceptions of the situation are welcomed and taken seriously. To conclude her story, she said, "Thank

you for letting me spill out [my] feelings." The AIG provided a capacious receptacle for Stella's feelings—feelings that likely would have remained bottled up without this venue.

Like Stella's situation, the middle ranges of agency are frequently small acts—the things we can easily overlook or dismiss as not really having any effect. In Stella's case, the affective formation that arose in this context was one where she was "kerfluffled," a term I take to mean torn or mixed about how she was feeling. Without the group she may not have had anywhere for her voice to be heard and validated, never interjecting her sense of things into the world. Questioning, lamenting, and being met with support are all ways of asserting agency in this predicament that a paranoid reading might paint as totally confining.

(Im)Practical Application: The Limits of Translation

When I talk about this group to public health professionals who are not a part of it, there is immediate interest in what happened in terms of how we negotiated conversations about race, health equity and disparities. There is a desire in public health as a field—as there are in many segments of society—to figure out what to do about the horrific injustices experienced by people of color as a seemingly unalterable part of life. While the stories shared, such as those of Mercedes and Stella, could be framed as a "result" of this initiative, I am wary of offering this in a way that could be construed as something to be "translated" from "research to practice," a common refrain in public health research. Public health has a tendency to think "that an abstract set of principles can be developed and applied across a range of settings irrespective of cultural practices, existing political structures and values, and the personal commitments and positions of

those involved" (Peterson & Lupton, 1996, p. 159). In contrast to this tendency, feminism guides attention to the radical specificity of experience, which in the case of the AIG, means that it is the nuances, negotiations, affective forces and exchanges of *this* group in its context and time that I am speaking about.

In terms of wanting to find approaches that facilitate work on health inequities, this talk emerged in the group as relevant, per the member's perceptions, but was not the original purpose of our work together. Rather, the group's purpose was to build capacities for working on issues where there is no clear direction forward by learning about and employing methods that would enable capacities to have awareness-in-action. Doing this involved purposefully building relationships among group members, taking a couple of months at the beginning to have folks meet and talk with each other one-on-one—particularly those members who did not know one another prior to the group.

We also explicitly valued care and support over getting through agenda items, as evidenced in the amount of time we devoted to weather checks at the beginning of each meeting. In addition to helping the group know one another, the weather checks were one of the ways this group practiced awareness of our relations. By checking in with the self and sharing our feelings with others, and then listening to what others say, the group built capacities to notice the feelings arising from the self and self-in-relation to others. Further, the AIG's emphasis on embodiment, enacted through its listening into the dark process, was another way that awareness of self and self-in-relation to others was developed. While replicating these processes in other groups likely will be beneficial, and

even, potentially, for examining racism in public health, the present research is not designed in such a way to create a replicable model.

However, with the caveats that the AIG's processes cannot be picked up and dropped into another setting or group interested in addressing racial equity, there are aspects of the group that I think can benefit public health's desire to improve health disparities. Further, it is not only health disparities that could be more generatively engaged, but any public health challenge where existing evidence and proven scientific research has not been able to successfully grapple with the problem. I am compelled to emphasize the stipulations around applying this dissertation's assertions more broadly applied because of how it has been received by the project's funders—specifically at the University of North Carolina (UNC) and the CDC.

In addition to the arc of what occurred in the group itself, there were backstage happenings that support my hesitancy and caution with recommending this type of approach be offered up to general public health practice without a lot of learning, careful structuring, and an openness to different ways of organizing that are, currently, not typical. Midway through the 12-months that the AIG met, in the Fall of 2019, the project, and myself, suddenly became scrutinized more heavily by the leadership at UNC. I had left my job at UNC in August of 2019, and a new project manager had taken my position. The new manager was tasked with administering the CDC project, as I had been, and wanted to join the AIG in order to have a sense of ownership or control over what the program was doing. Jean was still employed at UNC, covered by our funding for 8 hours a week, but she worked in a different department than the new manager. We offered Jean

as a UNC-connected person who could handle the necessary reporting for the grant, and any other administrative tasks that needed to happen—especially the evaluation report promised as a final product.

Six months into the project, adding the new project manager to the group was not feasible because of all of the background information and learning we had done, but even more importantly, the trust and relationships the group members had established. Upon sharing the program design, IRB, and other documents describing the group, the new project director was not satisfied that it was sufficient for how she envisioned offering training around systems thinking to public health practitioners. She had concern that the AIG did not reach enough people with our group consisting of 11 participants. At this point, the director of the UNC program managing the funding decided that the AIG's funding would be rerouted to the new staff person's program budget so that she could establish a different project directed towards systems thinking. However, his belief in the work, or perhaps the fact that we only needed $10,000 to complete what we had started, led to him helping us obtain internal UNC research funding.

Out of curiosity, I looked up the project enacted by the new program manager and found evidence of what UNC had done as an alternative to the AIG. I found two webinars, one presenting the "5-Rs" of systems approaches, and another about applying the "PETAL framework," which is described as "a tool [to apply] to your Injury and Violence Prevention work" (Southeastern & Southwestern Injury Prevention Network, 2021). Renee and my approach to systems had been explicitly formulated in response to feedback from public health practitioners that felt prior systems thinking trainings, ones

shaped and presented in a way similar to what the new program manager had done, were off-putting and unhelpful. For example, one of the 5-Rs is "relationships," which involves creating systems maps, something members of the AIG, as well as many other folks at previous trainings said made them want to disengage from doing this kind of work. Another of the Rs is "rules," which involves thinking through the explicit and implicit rules of a system context. These Rs, along with the other three, are presented as being straight-forward steps toward doing systems thinking. Questions such as who makes the rules or who has the authority to decide what the rules are, are not a part of this discussion.

In other words, the direction taken was in-line with standard public health organizing practice that is undisturbed and unchallenged when there is a formula or list of steps to follow (such as the standard public health model described earlier). Further, the presenters on these webinars were PhD researchers, the same type of knowledge holders who had done the earlier trainings, and that practitioners felt were not relatable or helpful.

Admittedly, I am typing this with rage in my fingers, as I see so many of the same mistakes repeated in this type of approach that I had worked hard to avoid and, along with Renee, had put a lot of thought and effort into developing something different. Specifically, the disregard of specific feedback from practitioners about how this type of training was not helpful makes me mad, but also leaves me with a profound sense of defeat at how difficult these practices are going to be to disrupt. Further, I am certain that the workshops put together by the new program director passed muster for the CDC because they could report engaging however many people logged on to the webinars--

likely more than eleven. Therefore, in the normalized ways of accessing success, the program was a winner with a solid case for why it should continue to be funded. But like Isabell's questioning of her naloxone distribution program—I wonder if it really made a difference? The alternative approach the AIG took required going against a lot of firmly sown grains, and when I was no longer involved, the person who took over the project set it back on a more standard trajectory. But luckily, my work was not nixed—it just got a different source of funding.

The AIG is still meeting and has no plans to disband, and the spring of 2021 has focused on sharing what has happened in the group with others. One webinar was presented in March, 2021 to UNC masters of public health students and faculty, as well as CDC staff who had originally formulated the systems thinking funding. In this webinar—a format appropriate for our goal of conveying information, not training people on how to do systems work, Jean, Renee, and I presented the evaluation design and results and Shelli and Isabel shared examples of how the work had directly impacted their public health practice, focusing on their experiences with negotiating conflict in the workplace and addressing health equity through their programs. Further, Jean, Stella, Mercedes, and I had a pre-conference workshop accepted at the Society for the Advancement of Injury and Violence Research to be presented in April 2021.

So far, in our planning for the pre-conference workshop, my co-presenters have discussed how nervous they are to bring our work to a group of, as Stella put it, "hardcore researchers." There has been concern about presenting something too "touchy-feely," because it might not be considered legitimate. Personally, I am not apprehensive about

the hardcore researchers not appreciating or "getting" the AIG processes. I think part of why I am able to be somewhat secure about presenting it is because I accept that it is a challenge to participants' mental models, and a 90-minute workshop is unlikely to significantly shift people's ingrained beliefs and approaches—and that is ok.

This is important work, and amidst the uncertainty about its reception, I have a sureness that it needs to be shared and sharing has to start somewhere. Significantly changing public health practice will be a long and ongoing effort. As the AIG illustrated, cognitively grasping theoretical concepts undergirding these processes is not enough. Rather, they need to become habituated into our bodily and mental processes through consistent practice over time. Lasting change requires a move from conscious effort to the automaticity, like Renee described, of an expert like Michael Jordan and his ability to intuitively move in ways that more often than not gets basketballs through hoops. Creating the conditions for developing these capacities means developing group contexts that nurture these new skills through repeated practice. Rearranging the affective map of public health requires group practices that foreground care and support, comfort with ambiguity, and an awareness of how our individual selves and embodied actions are involved in creating and disrupting the structures and systems surrounding, binding, and controlling our efforts.

The kind of learning I hope public health will take on does not have to be connected to systems thinking, as indeed, systems approaches have already lost momentum at the CDC due to changes in leadership and staff being reassigned to different divisions and other projects. My sincere hope is that the scaffolds needed to

support the kinds of changes needed in public health practice to achieve significant, lasting change, can be taken up as a long term, collective project of self, relational, and systems reckoning about what feels right and why, and how and why alternate ways of acting, being, and relating (such as being too "touchy-feely") feel wrong, or at least uncomfortable. In my ideal, this imagined project would be undertaken knowing it would never be finished or accomplished, but a project of continuous fluctuation, stumbles, setbacks, and of course a little bit of success.

Why would anyone want to get into all of this when it is a project that could seem like a lot of trouble for an unknown benefit? There are the quantitative facts that show population health numbers are stagnating, people are suffering unequally, along racial lines among other factors, and living shorter, more painful lives. In addition to being motivated by these grim realities, it is important to know that it does not have to be this way. Affect theory offers an additional way to think through the why and how of the practical approaches to change, of which the AIG is one example. In the following section, I consider the ways affect is extended, complicated, and articulated based on what unfolded with the AIG.

Theorizing Public Health with Feminist Affect

The first and most important thing that thinking with affect could contribute to organizing in public health is to recognize its impact and think seriously about what affect is doing. A recognition of relationally constituted, but individual embodied feelings that modulate with context should be taken as meaningful and necessary in thinking through how public health is enacted, and in what ways it could be bettered. Identifying

the existing affective maps within a group as a way to think through what is and is not considered feasible, effective, and proper can help broaden the scope of possibility. For example, as Isabell explained, bringing Listening into the Dark into her organization's meetings made her feel "really self-conscious." However, the staff she manages responded positively: "They were like, 'Cool. You've already established an environment where we can test out kooky ideas.' And I was like, 'Cool. This is my kooky idea. Let's try it.'" Here Isabell recognizes that her idea is "kooky," that is, outside of what would normally appear on an affective map of what is acceptable practice within her organization. Still, with this recognition, she is able to find a way of organizing that is different, and based on her experiences with the AIG, feels it is worth trying. As she summarizes, "I've been like, 'I want to do things differently. I want to try to shake it up.'" These small interventions to shake up standard ways of organizing in public health require inventorying what currently is so that what is not allowable can be identified and questioned.

Further, while this dissertation focuses on individuals considering their work practices, their positions in their organizations mean that their actions can impact how public health is done at national, state, and local levels. Most of the participants manage large-scale projects, including setting out their goals, objectives, and measures for success. Not only is it likely that the individuals in this group will have influence beyond their immediate organizations because of the nature of their roles, but group members verbalized how their personal development of embodied awareness-in-action relates to the functioning of larger social systems. For instance, when Mercedes was able to accept

her colleague's rejection of her idea, rather than insisting on the superiority of her way of doing things, she recognized how this was a different way of being for her, as well as others she had observed in her professional life. Through the AIG, she built her capacities for reflection-in-action, noting this small moment as one that would ripple out to reinforce or disrupt existing norms about whose ideas are valuable. The AIG's emphasis on developing awareness of embodied sensation-in-action helps individuals in practice, but also provides a framework to recognize and trace shifts from one way of being to another.

Material Affects and Bodies in Public Health

Affect theory is deeply interested in the body and its doings in life, serving to strengthen poststructuralism by giving more attention to materiality—of both the body, as well as the full constellation of extra-discursive objects that surround us (Ellingson, 2017; Gregg & Seigworth, 2010; Perry & Medina, 2015). Where affect theory's engagement with bodies and materiality can benefit public health is similar to what it has done for poststructuralism. That is, considering bodies is relevant, and matters to the ways we conceptualize, enact, and understand public health organizing. Luckily, there is already groundwork in public health that makes serious consideration of matter's agentic capacity somewhat intuitive. Particularly in the field of injury and violence prevention, interventions frequently involve a change to the physical environment to achieve desired health impacts. For instance, my former boss once eliminated pedestrian deaths by having a streetlight installed at the point in the road where people frequently left a bar late at night and crossed the street to get home. There was no persuasive health communication

campaign involved or need to change human behavior--the light's shine alone served to significantly improve the mortality rate in this particular community.

Still, installing a streetlight is a somewhat over-simplified example of the potentials of affective and material shifts in our worlds, as I see affect theory's real promise in accounting for subtle, nonlinear moves in the ongoing relational arrangements between bodies, discourses, and the material world. Affect is the force propelling small changes in thought and action that can add nuance, empathy, and understanding when intervening in people's health behaviors. Ironically, public health, with its emphasis on creating bodily health, pays scant attention to the concept of embodiment in its work. This is a fruitful direction for analysis of public health, in terms of analysis of its mattering maps, as well as its potentials for making concrete improvements in people's health.

Take the example of Good Samaritan laws related to calling 911 when someone you are with has overdosed on illegal drugs. It was a long and difficult process in some states to have laws amended to make prosecution of bystanders in these situations unlawful, that is, if you call for help, even if you are in possession of illegal drugs, you will not be charged with drug possession. Emphasizing the embodied reality of actually being present in that scene, one in which you may have harmed the other bodies present by supplying them drugs. Even if you know the law says you cannot get in trouble if you call for help, it is likely that your bodily responses would be quite dramatic—perhaps panic, sweat, a racing heart and the desire to run. Thinking through the role of embodied emotion when designing public health interventions can deepen and interject needed

empathy for the experiences of people doing something thought to be unhealthy. Affect can enhance the approaches public health already engages to change environments and behaviors by considering the feelings and movements sensed by bodies in fluctuating relations. In addition to considerations of the indeterminacy of affect, feminist theorists like Ahmed and Hemmings offer a different argument, claiming that affect's irregularity can and often is channeled to congeal around certain bodies, leaving them saturated with affects that are sometimes hard to shake—another important consideration when mapping out the affective environments surrounding certain public health issues.

The theorization that affect can amass around some bodies is potentially useful in public health theory and practice. In particular, because of the ways affect can slide around, influencing doings throughout the continuum of public health organizing--from identification of problems, research and development of interventions, program implementation, and assessments of program effectiveness. The concept of affectively saturated bodies is brought to light with the example of the uneven public health response to the opioid epidemic in comparison to the crack epidemic of the 1980s. The attention, resources, and general social awareness about the opioid epidemic is said to be a result of which bodies are dying—white bodies (Shachar et al., 2020). The public health mattering map affectively arranges in ways that brought opioids to the center of our collective attention, however, the affects attached to Black bodies meant that the crack epidemic did not attract the same attention, care, or urgent response. The ways affect sticks to certain bodies informs how public health problems and interventions are conceived. The relationship between what is thought to be a proper public health response and the affects

attached to the bodies associated with an issue is part of charting an affective map. What bodies are foregrounded? Which are forgotten entirely? Which bodies generate interest, effort, and funding for their care—which do not?

The dynamics of small groups, such as the AIG, should be analyzed in terms of the arrangement of affective maps. Small groups, like in most organizations, are where most work happens in public health. How does the affective saturation of the bodies in a group relate to the ways groups function? This is a question that can be considered in terms of decision making, perceptions of effectiveness, and feelings of belonging. In my analysis, I focused on how whiteness may function to bolster the self-development of white people in the group. That is, the norms, ways of relating, pace, and the general structure of the group were likely pre-defined by whiteness. Within this accommodating atmosphere, the white-identifying participants experienced shifts in awareness and feeling that they labeled as significant, particularly in terms of their understanding and ability to engage with racism. The people of color in the group also felt, vaguely, that the group was a positive experience for them, but as I discussed, it was not as easy or clear for them to see how the process benefited them. With whiteness being the unremarkable atmosphere surrounding lives that go smoothly, perhaps the AIG found a way to stimulate different ways of thinking, but also avoided going out of whiteness's bounds? The group itself did not notice that some of the most significant shifts happening were experienced and expressed by its white members, again, a potential indicator of how whiteness encased the total mood of the group. In groups, analyzing talk and interaction affectively can enrich our understanding of what is going on. My example of the AIG and

whiteness, is only a beginning foray into these types of questions and what they may help explain in group communication.

Feminist organizing scholarship has already provided analyses illustrating how affect coheres around bodies, as I outlined in depth in chapter two. Two examples that I think bring my argument into relief are, first, Just and Remke's (2019) discussion about how only certain bodies in organizations can partake in parental leave programs, with some others—typically lower waged, non-salaried employees—being excluded from accessing these programs. Second, Kuna and Nadiv (2019) showed how historically othered groups become further grooved into their existing trajectories through the practices of job-placement mediaries. Staffing agencies unreflexively make decisions on who should be sent to which job locations based on what types of people had been there before. This resulted in certain kinds of work seeming to be "naturally" the domain of particularly raced, sexed, and gendered bodies--movements that also hinder attempts to diversify workplaces. My analysis of a small group engaging in public health organizing extends the line of theory on affect and bodies by drawing out the ways whiteness may be operating, along with its potential implications for the ways public health is practiced. In addition to affect theorizing the ways bodies are approached in public health, the AIG's organizing practices highlight how affect can help identify and trace the movements of affective shifts in work groups over time. One line I traced was the group's fluctuating feelings about uncertainty.

Organizing Practices for Working with Affects of Uncertainty

A common topic of discussion in the AIG was uncertainty. My sense of the direction of this talk was that it both recognized the pervasiveness of uncertainty in social change efforts as well as how the modernist enterprise of public health repels states of not knowing. As group members began to accept not knowing as an inescapable part of working in public health, despite their surrounding contexts that highly valued and sought certainty, the group served as a supportive space that foregrounded love and care so that members could explore the feelings that came up as they iterated through the waves involved in their acceptance of ambiguity and what it might mean for practice. The process of shifting affect can be facilitated and nurtured by the ways groups relate, and feminist organizing, particularly love and its associated ways of doing, offers tools that help. The affective shift of accepting uncertainty involved allowing ourselves to not know, loosening our grip on expertise, and trying out ways to find harmony in embracing contingency and emergence.

Affect theory provides a path to altering the standard ways of operating in public health in its authorization and recognition of indeterminacy. That is, it is allowable, even expected, that we will not find guaranteed, direct ways to get to our preferred public health outcomes. Further, affect theory and its application to group organizing provides space and acceptance for not having all the answers. It is, currently, truly radical to imagine an approach to public health where experts arrive in a scene *fully* open to what might be needed to ameliorate a health issue. No longer would the discourse be pre-defined by expert-developed solutions, for example, by starting with an assumption such

as everyone must get a vaccine, or that the causes of an issue are already known based on public health research. Instead, public health professionals could arrive with questions like “What should we do about COVID?” or “What are the problems here?”

With affect, the ways we engage the answers around these questions is also altered, because we need to get a feel for the way things are going, what types of ideas, objects, and people are hanging together to develop shared meanings, and how power is influencing these relations and trajectories. Attention to affect enables things not currently on our mattering map to get there—shaking up our habits of attention and illuminating what is restricted when we stay tethered to our ingrained, unreflexive patterns.

Relating this to a current public health problem, think about how an affect disallowing uncertainty collects around the issue of vaccine hesitancy. There are already, in the spring of 2021, narratives forming about who is hesitant, such as republican men, rural people, and Black people. I argue that this is an example of public health’s affective imperative to quickly find solutions to what has already been set as certain--that everyone must vaccinated. The response to a suggestion of slowing down, truly caring and listening with love to people about their feelings around the vaccine is almost blasphemy. Public health practitioners can learn about the affects shaping what is acceptable attention to people’s responses-- to the affective moods arising in a scene where we are, so to say,

causing a scene by disrupting the normal flow of things, helps us know how affect is circulating, marking, and dissolving boundaries (Ahmed, 2017; WheelerCentre, 2018).

Through building capacities for noticing and feeling the modulations of affect, there are possibilities for opening up different articulations of our mattering maps. An affective mood in a group that is supportive, loving, and accepting of contingency, uncertainty, and ambiguity was developed in the AIG, and I see this as foundational for trying out radically or even only marginally different ways of organizing. The AIG provides an example of how to promote openness in group processes through creating a positive affective mood. The group was designed to allow for emergence rather than starting out with a pre-defined endpoint. One way this was done was how Renee and I did not facilitate the group by telling participants what to do or how to do it. After the initial sharing of a broad overview of systems thinking and what action inquiry was about, we left it up to the group to figure out what questions felt "sparkly" for them.

Renee and I's frequent refrain was "I don't know," when asked what would be the best direction for the group to go and what types of inquiries to pursue. When the group wanted to know how best to figure out the most sparkly questions, this too was greeted with "I don't know." There were awkward moments when the group looked to us to lead them, to tell them what to do next, or to affirm that they had made the "right" choice. In these moments, we had to sit silently and wait for something to emerge. As the group went on, there was more comfort with acting amidst uncertainty—if only in the controlled, supportive context of our group. Eventually there was more comfort with not

knowing the exact best route, instead, sensing and feeling collectively what the next right move would be.

Our approach to facilitation functioned as an intervention into the grasping for certainty that characterizes public health practice. While the group was used to having a guide (such as an evidence-based program) that provided assurance of efficient movement towards pre-defined outcomes, Renee and I wanted to help the group feel into the uncertainty and complexity that pervades public health practice. Over the course of our year together, we came to no concrete answers about how to alleviate the impacts of, for instance, racism on health. However, what did emerge was greater comfort with and acceptance of uncertainty and its attendant discomforts. Importantly, the prominence of care and support, as well as acceptance of slowness, confusion, bad moods, doubt, and generally the whole enchilada that people in the group brought with them, helps explain why the AIG unfolded in the ways it did.

Conclusion

My hope for this group's learning is that it catalyzes more disciplinary reflection and recognition of the affective, cultural, and ideological forces shaping public health. And from this reflection, I hope that, as the AIG member did, different, more loving and generative ways of relating can become more prevalent. From this, I see possibilities for the field to grapple with the complexities, uncertainty, and messiness of issues like racial health equity. Feminism, affect, and agency are not required for these shifts, as there are practical lessons to be gained from the experience of the AIG. Still, the theoretical concepts used in this dissertation can draw needed attention to the formation of scenes,

situations, and atmospheres within professional public health practitioner groups—movements that could open up productive new trajectories for both theory and practice. Questioning the norms and assumptions undergirding typical ways of operating could begin a broader discussion of the ways public health practice is complicit in the systems of oppression it purportedly seeks to disrupt. It is difficult to argue that public health practice has not contributed to the disparities that currently exist, simply because of their pervasiveness. The result of existing systems in public health are, as they say, getting us exactly what they were designed to do. Public health practice and its outcomes have extended into our total environment because "there are few aspects" of life "that do not in some way or other have an impact on health status and hence are not relevant to human control or 'management'" (Petersen & Lupton, 1996, p. 16).

Public health's reach has the potential to significantly impact social structures and systems, but for it to be beneficial, there needs to be relational work done to create environments that enable questioning deeply held mental models. That is, critique of the typical affects of public health that value efficiency, rationality, and liberal freedoms will (as this project already has) face resistance and dismissal—challenges that people can better weather when they have the support of loving collectivities. The AIG provides an example of the potentials for creating communities that foreground love and care where intelligence from our emotionalbodies is nurtured and given space to emerge. Further, the AIG, while full of sparkle and happiness, was also limited by potent ambient affects--like whiteness. Recognizing and accounting for everything happening in a social scene requires an openness to and comfort with the ambiguous trajectories characterizing

working on complex social issues. Questioning how and why public health is done, through attention to affective movements, is a challenge worthy of uptake because of its encouragement of capacious acceptance of the uncertainties involved in creating a fully healthy social body.

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Appendix A Individual AIG Member Interview Guide

Opening script:

The purpose of this conversation is to understand how and what parts of the action inquiry group had the biggest impact on you and your professional life. We would also like to learn about your thoughts to strengthen this approach for other public health practitioners to deepen their understanding and enactment of systems thinking.

The overall goal of this interview is to understand your experience participating in and the impact of the action inquiry group and learn how to improve and share this model with other public health practitioners in the future. So, please be as honest and detailed as possible.

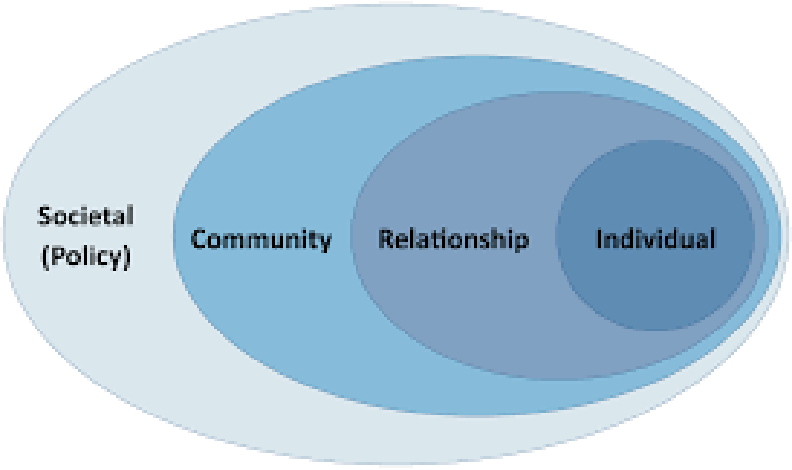
We will ask you a series of four main questions; we may ask follow-up questions, as needed, depending on your responses. We will be recording this conversation and taking notes to make sure we capture your responses accurately; however, this interview is completely confidential. No one from UNC-CH, CDC, the action inquiry group, or your organization will hear or see your responses. We will combine and analyze all

participant responses together and present overall themes and learnings. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Questions:

1. To start, tell me about your general impressions of and experience with the action inquiry group to enact systems thinking.
2. What was the most impactful or meaningful learning moment for you during the action inquiry group?
    a. What was so impactful or meaningful about that experience/moment?
    b. What actions of the co-facilitators contributed to this experience being meaningful? Format of the meetings? Other co-inquirers?
    c. How has it changed you personally?
    d. How has it impacted your ability to enact systems thinking within your organization?
3. What aspect(s) of the action inquiry group contributed to the greatest learning for you?
    a. *Probes: Post-meeting reflections, bi-weekly/monthly sessions, Subject Object Interviews, etc.*
4. What are one or two key things that we could do to strengthen this approach to learn about systems thinking to other public health practitioners?

Appendix B Social Ecological Model



Appendix C Example Meeting Agenda

Action Inquiry Group for Systems Thinking for Public Health

Meeting Twelve

October 18, 2019 1:30 – _3 PM EST/12:30 – _2 P CST

Zoom Information: Video: https://[link]

Phone: [phone];

Meeting ID: [ID number]

Please connect your audio to either your computer OR phone. Connecting with both will create feedback. If possible, use a headset when you call into the meeting.

Meeting Goal: Complete the U-Journaling activity as a first-person reflection practice.

Agenda:

1. Coming Together (5 minutes)

2. Listening into the Dark (5 minutes)

3. U-Journaling (70 minutes) a. Guided facilitation of u-journaling steps using silent freewriting. (40 minutes)

b. Pair share to discuss experience. (20 minutes (10 minutes per person))

c. Group share and reflection on experience. (10 minutes)

4. Reflection & Feedback (10 minutes) a. We will use this time to provide feedback on the meeting and/or share any other thoughts.

b. Each person will complete a reflection after the meeting:

https://unc.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_5zkjYo2rlkNZskl

Appendix D Participant Post-Meeting Reflection Survey

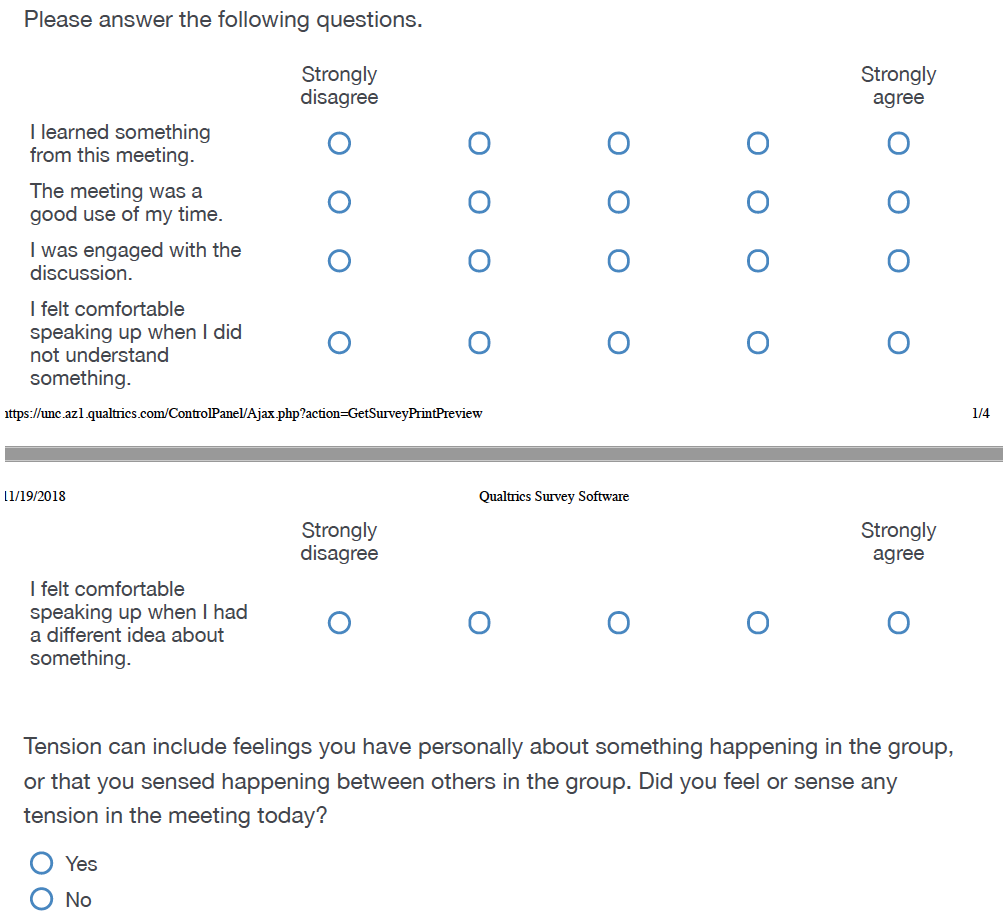
Name (optional)

Jot a few notes down about something that happened in the meeting that was particularly notable or charged or had some sort of effect on you.

Consider responding to these questions in your notes:

a. What types of judgment or inferences did you make about that occurrence?

b. What conclusions did you come to?



Please answer the following questions.

	Strongly disagree				Strongly agree
I learned something from this meeting.	○	○	○	○	○
The meeting was a good use of my time.	○	○	○	○	○
I was engaged with the discussion.	○	○	○	○	○
I felt comfortable speaking up when I did not understand something.	○	○	○	○	○

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ı1/19/2018 Qualtrics Survey Software

	Strongly disagree				Strongly agree
I felt comfortable speaking up when I had a different idea about something.	○	○	○	○	○

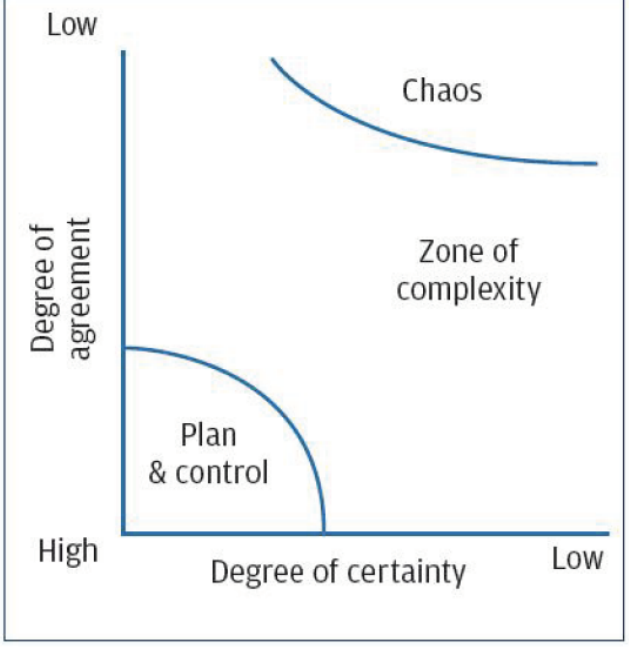
Tension can include feelings you have personally about something happening in the group, or that you sensed happening between others in the group. Did you feel or sense any tension in the meeting today?

○ Yes
○ No

Figure 1 displays a graphic visualizing where one may feel they are working with an idea or project. The upper right of the diagram indicates working with low agreement and chaos, while the lower left side indicates high certainty and low disagreement. In the

middle of the diagram one finds the “zone of complexity,” where there is a balanced mix of agreement, certainty, and control.

Figure 1: Certainty -agreement diagram



Referencing Figure 1, please answer the following questions. Where did the group spend most of its time in this meeting from your perspective?

Agreement	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Disagreement
Certainty	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Uncertainty
Controlled	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Chaos

Please add any additional thoughts or note you have about the meeting.

Appendix E Secular Examen Practice

Intention

I seek the disposition of gratitude, freedom from any fears and attachments that are obstacles to my growth and loving kindness, and I intend that I might become more and more open to growth and generous and skillful in my service of others.

Entering the practice

So just begin coming into your body fully. And you can do that by taking deep breaths in and out through your nose. And even doing a body scan, if you want, starting at the feet and then moving up the legs and the torso. And just continuing to move up the body slowly, at your own pace, noticing nonjudgmentally whatever sensations might be in your body right now. And then as you're grounded in your body, you can even begin to think about how you are mentally, or what kind of feelings you're having at this moment. Again, with curiosity and compassion. Just noticing.

Movement 1. Review your day

And then I'd like to invite you to just begin reviewing your day so far, everything that came before this time together, large and small. From that amazing apple you might have had for breakfast, to a deep interaction you may have had with somebody. Large and small, everything. Just review the day.

Movement 2. Lights of your day

And as you think about the day, again, from the time you woke up until this moment, just begin to focus in a bit more on what were the lights of your experience today. Something that you might have gratitude for. When were you charged with energy, excitement, and

light today? Sometimes I like to think about, when did I love, and when was I loved today?

Movement 3. Shadows of your day

And then next, I'm going to ask you to think about the shadows of the day so far. And again, to remind you to do that with curiosity and compassion and without judgment. All of this is for the purpose of self-knowledge and compassion**.** So where, today, did you experience a sense of diminished faith in the future or hopelessness or love? Where did you feel out of step or in disharmony with your highest intentions?

Movement 4. **Obstacles to seeing more clearly**

So now bring your awareness to what are the obstacles to your seeing more clearly, feeling more deeply, and acting with greater compassion?

Movement 5. **Needs for growth**

Now then moving into the next movement, think about where you need to grow, especially in light of the obstacles that you just thought about. And then, what can you

do, practically speaking, to develop greater awareness and freedom on behalf of this area of growth?

Movement 6. **Intention for action**

Set an intention to do something concrete around that, and pay attention to what happens as a result as you move through the rest of your days—tomorrow, or the weekend, or the weeks.

And on behalf of you and all of us, may it be so.

Closing

So just spend a few moments in stillness now, closing out the practice, and set your intentions for the rest of the day. Or just surrender into all that is left undone today for tomorrow, or Monday—another time. There's always another day. And just rest in stillness for a couple minutes, and I'll ring a bell to come to the end of our practice.

Appendix F The Four Parts of Speech

1. Framing
2. Advocating
3. Illustrating
4. Inquiring (and listening)

Framing: Explicitly stating the purpose of the conversation or meeting and any personal or shared assumptions that you perceive.

Ex. “I wanted to talk to you about the disagreement we had last week because I wanted to clear the air and make sure that there was nothing left to be resolved…”

Note: also can include reframing if you are in the middle of a conversation that may be “off track” or becoming difficult.

Advocating: explicitly asserting an option, perception, feeling, or strategy for action

Ex. “I am feeling irritated and disappointed about what I perceive as your avoidance of this issue.”

Note: oftentimes people have tendencies towards overadvocating or rarely advocating.

Illustrating: Putting “meat on the bones” of your advocacy or giving concrete examples that support your advocacy or assumptions.

Ex. “We agreed to table our discussion until a later, agreed upon date and time and each time I suggested a new date you said that you would get back to me and never did”

Inquiring: Explicitly asking a question to understand another's perspective, feeling, or suggested strategy. Ex. I'm wondering what your perception or experience of this situation between us is?

Note: Must be a genuine inquiry

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