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Critical-Rhetorical Ethnography: Rethinking the Place and Process of Rhetoric

Aaron Hess

Rhetorical scholarship has relied upon textual criticism as a method of examining discourse. However, in the critical turn, rhetorical theory and praxis have been reconsidered, especially in regard to the types and locations worthy of rhetorical examination. Looking toward vernacular rhetorical discourses, rhetorical scholars examine locally situated discourses as they articulate against oppressive macrocontexts. In this essay, I offer critical-rhetorical ethnography as a method for exploring such discourses in the field of argumentation, using the concepts of invention, kairos, and phronesis. The method offers rhetorical scholars a set of theoretical and methodological guidelines for observing and participating within vernacular advocacy. Finally, I use my time with the health advocacy group, DanceSafe, as an exemplar of the method, illustrating its ability to gauge rhetorical effects, advocacy, and learned wisdom.

Keywords: Critical Rhetoric; Ethnography; Kairos; Phronesis; Vernacular Studies

Beginning with Wichelns' (1925/2005) call for the literary criticism of oratory and continued in present-day critical discussions (Greene, 1998; McGee, 1990; McKerrow, 1989), rhetoric has relied upon textual analysis as means for discovery, interpretation, and evaluation. Understood as judgment upon texts for their ability

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to persuade, narrative prowess, or ideological positioning, rhetorical criticism is a hallmark of the discipline. Yet, in recent scholarship, critical rhetorical scholars have argued that the aim of rhetoric has been predominantly focused on larger discourses, such as presidential rhetoric or massively disseminated messages, at the expense of the everyday discourses that circulate and compete. To counterbalance the privileging of the mainstream, scholars of rhetoric have developed investigations into “ordinary democracy” (Tracy, McDaniel, & Gronbeck, 2007), “everyday talk” (McCormick, 2003), and the vernacular (Hauser, 1999; Howard, 2008; Ono & Sloop, 1995, 2002; Sloop & Ono, 1997). In order to examine such discourses, new methodological innovations have been created. Tracy, McDaniel, and Gronbeck invited the consideration of discourse analysis and rhetorical analysis as two “complementary different” methods in the communication discipline (2007, p. 13). Aakhus (2007), in the same volume, contended that the combination of the two enables a “more discourse-oriented rhetorical analysis and a more rhetorically oriented discourse analysis” (p. 206). Similarly, Johnstone and Eisenhart’s (2008) volume also looked to discourse analysis and rhetorical analysis in order to “understand the rhetorical workings of discourse and context through the eyes and minds of those engaged in them” (p. 3). In other words, recent rhetorical scholarship has recognized the need for an expansion of rhetorical methods to incorporate new theoretical perspectives, especially those that are interested in the everydayness of rhetorical discourses.

In this essay, I argue that rhetoric should be augmented with a participatory sensibility and method, through which rhetoricians advocate alongside vernacular organizations, arguing for their causes. By combining two longstanding methodological traditions in the field of communication, I propose the method of *critical-rhetorical ethnography*. While the aforementioned scholarship provides analytic tools, critical-rhetorical ethnography supplies scholars of rhetoric with a locally situated and experiential approach to the process and production of rhetorical texts. The method is designed to give rhetoricians an insider perspective on the lived advocacy of individuals and organizations that struggle to persuade in public for changes in policy, social life, or other issues that affect them. The method is not mere observation of advocacy but rather an embodiment and enactment of advocacy through direct participation. Critical-rhetorical ethnographers engage in a vernacular organization’s ideals and events, traveling with them to picket, to protest, to petition, or to perform. The method draws from both critical rhetoric and qualitative traditions in communication. As a rhetorical method, it is understood as an inquiry into advocacy, argumentation, and deliberation. Given the longstanding tradition of rhetoric in these areas, critical-rhetorical ethnographers are well equipped to both evaluate and to enact arguments in service of the vernacular. As a qualitative method, it utilizes common tools of embodied data collection, such as participant observation (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002) and conversational interviewing (Fontana & Frey, 2005; Kvale, 1996). Together, the two complementary traditions offer scholars firsthand knowledge and experience in vernacular advocacy.

Studying vernacular and everyday rhetorical discourses poses unique challenges to rhetorical methodologies. Discussing his theory of “oratorical influence,” McCormick

(2003) recognized the challenges inherent to studying rhetoric within everyday speech. He briefly remarks on the tension between ethnography and discourse analysis, which can be assisted through the use of transcription of actual social interactions (p. 126). Critical-rhetorical ethnography, through its focus on fieldwork, alleviates such tensions by both offering recordings through fieldnotes and placing the rhetorician as a part of the field. In this way, critical-rhetorical ethnographers, through the value of *phronesis*, embrace a qualitative research tool: the self-as-instrument (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). While utilizing observational techniques, at its heart, the method is immersive and embodied. Observation of *kairos* in the field should lead to a more thorough ability to advocate. Such learning is imperative for the rhetorical ethnographer to be successful in becoming phronetic. In this way, rhetorical ethnography is set apart from a variety of methods in rhetoric. Long-standing traditions of textual analysis and after-the-fact criticism, while still useful, are not the primary focus of the method.¹ Rather, rhetorical ethnographers engage in direct participation *inside* invention and advocacy.

Embodied advocacy, as performed and witnessed under ethnographic conditions, provides critical rhetoricians with an opportunity to not only maintain a critical attitude toward discourse but also connect research practices with activism. Moving rhetoric toward participation in public advocacy will alter rhetoric's stance in social affairs, more in line with Brummett's (1984) understanding of rhetorical theory as heuristic, moral, and able to teach the public to be better civic actors. He remarked, "Rhetorical theory addresses, or should address, action in real life rather than the store of scholarly knowledge; and so the method for carrying it out or applying it is nothing more than the everyday real life actions of looking and hearing *with sensibilities sharpened by the theory*" (p. 105, emphasis in original). He continues, "rhetorical theory sensitizes and trains people to assemble message sets in future experience" (p. 105). I agree with the spirit of his comments and wish to push them further. If I may interpret him in this way, Brummett (1984) commented upon the relationship between theory and method and their potential for affecting society. In other words, teaching rhetoric can prepare students to evaluate rhetorical transactions effectively. Similarly, critical-rhetorical ethnography can also prepare individuals to evaluate messages more effectively; however, the method is aimed at a more public audience. Rather than seeing deliberation as it *occurred*, rhetorical ethnographers see deliberation as it *occurs*, and most importantly, participate in its action. In what follows, I briefly discuss the critical turn in rhetoric and traditional concepts in rhetorical theory that operate within rhetorical ethnography. Finally, I offer my work with the political and health advocacy organization, DanceSafe, to illustrate the potential of the method.

Critical Rhetoric and the Turn toward the Vernacular

The critical turn in rhetorical studies challenged the privileging of dominant discourses. Indeed, the "ideological turn" in rhetorical criticism signaled a shift in

rhetorical theory and method: “Criticism takes an ideological turn when it recognizes the existence of powerful vested interests benefiting from and consistently urging policies and technology that threaten life on this planet, when it realizes that we search for alternatives” (Wander, 1983/2005, pp. 110–111). Central to the effort in finding alternatives, McKerrow (1989) challenged traditional rhetoric, calling for a critical rhetoric. “As theory, a critical rhetoric examines the dimensions of domination and freedom as these are exercised in a relativized world” (McKerrow, 1989, p. 91). The oft recognized mainstream discourses are interrogated to flush out the presence, function, and effect of power. Simultaneously, critical rhetoricians challenged the position of the critic, calling for examinations of local and contingent discourses. Indeed, a number of rhetorical scholars have looked into the role of place in everyday rhetorical affairs through “having been there” approaches (Blair, 2001), including memorial sites (Aden et al., 2009; Dickinson, Ott, & Aoki, 2006), consumer culture at coffee shops (Dickinson, 2002), and tourism (Clark, 2004). Brummett (2008) examined gun culture from a participatory and textual perspective, drawing from his attendance and membership at gun shows as well as listserv postings. McCormick (2003) looked into how localized “oratorical influences” are affected by historic and official discourses in order to “advance our understanding of how certain political strategies function, fall flat, and/or modify as they circulate through the channels of time and text” (p. 110). “Text,” in these cases, does not only constitute the recording of speech; rather, the text has become something living, breathing, and operating within unique spaces and received by particular audiences. In short, rhetorical scholars have turned toward *in situ* and everyday processes of textual production and reception. Adding to this discussion, I provide an inquiry into how rhetorical advocacy can be understood and examined within the localized spaces of discourse.

Additionally, the vernacular turn in critical rhetoric highlights the push for examining local populations. The turn can be traced largely to Ono and Sloop’s (1995) critique of vernacular discourse as well as Hauser’s (1999) vernacular rhetoric. Ono and Sloop (1995) criticized the limited purview of rhetoric, arguing that the focus on powerful texts has led to “missing out on, and writing ‘out of history,’ important texts that gird and influence local cultures first and . . . cultures at large” (p. 19). As an alternative, they named vernacular discourse as “discourse that resonates within and from historically oppressed communities” (Ono & Sloop, 1995, p. 20). In their extension of vernacular to outlaw discourses, Sloop and Ono (1997) contended that rhetoric is “uniquely positioned to address this line of research because the study of rhetoric implies the study of discourse and judgment on the level of everyday life; it implies, in short, a materialist conception of judgment” (p. 54). Hauser’s (1999) conception of vernacular rhetoric also engaged the everyday practices and functions of the public sphere. Locating vernacular as quotidian discourses that shape “our public lives as citizens, neighbors, and cultural agents” (1999, p. 11), Hauser committed rhetoric to the adoption of an “*empirical attitude* toward the ways publics, public spheres, and public opinion are manifested” (p. 275, emphasis in original). This attitude shifts rhetorical critics away from a focused textual approach

to a monitoring of “the social conversation within a reticulate public sphere to ascertain who is speaking to whom about what” (Hauser, 1999, p. 279). The approach “shares the concern of survey research to locate the responses people have to circumstances that call for their judgment” (Hauser, 1999, p. 278). In other words, new spaces of inquiry require new methods, especially ones that reflect the repositioning of the critic *among* the exigencies of public life.

Such an advance in critical rhetoric warrants a further examination of method and methodology of a “vernacular rhetorical criticism.” The method of critical-rhetorical ethnography continues the lineage of scholarship that attends to the process and production of locally situated discourse by adding a participatory sensibility to such approaches. In this way, a rhetorical scholar in the field would position him or herself within active advocacy. As McCormick (2003) argued, finding local discourses challenges our methodological assumptions of how everyday talk occurs and what would be the best way to witness it. In cases where critics engage vernacular voices, how does textual criticism function, if at all? Ono and Sloop (1995) believed that the turn in critical rhetoric toward the vernacular is “not a matter of simply adapting rhetorical criticism by focusing on vernacular cultures with the same methods we have used in the past, but rather that as a result of such studies, the entire rhetorical project may be reshaped” (p. 40). In their refinement of the critique, Sloop and Ono (1997) asserted that “the rise of contemporary ethnography allows for the radical possibility of the re-presentation of alternative systems of judgment in politically performative terms” (p. 65). They positioned critics as ethnographers who carry the outlaw judgments of discourse from the field into academia. Elsewhere, in a critique of rhetorical scholarship, Ono and Sloop (1999) called for an understanding of how marginal logics compete with dominant logics within public controversy, challenging the “after-the-fact” attitude of traditional rhetorical criticism in favor of engaging with the development of controversy: “Criticism should not only discuss the ways in which politics occurs in controversy and the ways in which various positions can work within existing structures; it can also, and should, investigate the *development of logics* and understandings that are incommensurable with current systems” (p. 536, emphasis added). It is at this theoretical juncture that I offer critical-rhetorical ethnography as the means to examine the socially and locally situated judgments of vernacular or outlaw discourses as they contribute to their own material and discursive realities. Through the method, critical rhetoricians gain a fuller sense of the advocacy inherent to competing comprehensions within political deliberation. To simply witness the creation of rhetorical texts would be insufficient in gaining a thorough understanding of how localized logics of justice are developed. Rather, such an investigation would require a participatory partnership between critical rhetoricians and outlaw or vernacular discourses as they self-articulate within the public sphere. Critics, following such a move, are thus repositioned to be within as well as a reaction to rhetorical production. Furthermore, through a participatory approach, criticism becomes enacted as advocacy; speaking and advocating alongside those who seek changes to status quo conditions.

Critical-Rhetorical Ethnography

Certainly, the critical turn toward localized discourses has invited a number of methodological innovations, including the use of discourse analysis and rhetorical analysis (Aakhus, 2007). Similarly, critical-rhetorical ethnography operates as a set of guidelines and methodological ideals for critical rhetoricians engaged in vernacular analysis. As a rhetorical method, it highlights elements of advocacy, identification, and persuasion, using theoretical concepts familiar to rhetoric. Simultaneously, as ethnography, it draws from a tradition of qualitative methods, including participant observation and interviewing, to assist in the research into vernacular advocacy.² Additionally, ethnography has long been understood as the examination and interpretation of culture through roles, rituals, and personhood (Carbaugh & Hastings, 1992; Philipsen, 1975). Such a perspective offers a close reading of cultural activities, which is necessary for gaining the participant or insider perspective for the examination of vernacular organizations or local publics. Furthermore, the tools of the ethnographer have also taken an *applied* turn, which offers useful applications of communication theory (Goodall, 2000, 2004). In speaking of the applied possibilities of ethnography, Goodall (2004) argued that “communication is shown to be the meaningful organizing locus for how our worlds are rendered visible, personal, and real” (p. 188). In other words, communication, as observed through ethnography, speaks to how we create and advocate our worlds and reality. The field of rhetoric recognizes that discourse inherently constructs worlds through the interpretive frame of the speaker as he or she attempts to persuade or identify with an audience. Together, the dual methodologies provide rhetorical scholars with an *application* of rhetorical theory and concepts through the direct observation of and participation with localized discourse and advocacy.

While stemming from diverse traditions, rhetoric and ethnography are not academic strangers. Conquergood (1992) acknowledged a “thriving alliance between ethnography and rhetoric” (p. 80). He noted that, given ethnography’s “long-standing interest in meaning-making cultural practices and the suatory function of symbols” (p. 80), the intersection between the two traditions may come as no surprise. Additionally, he added:

If ethnographers have enriched their practice with rhetorical insights and methods, rhetoricians likewise have much to gain from ethnography, particularly understanding of the cultural constructedness of key concepts such as “reason,” “the rational,” “the logical,” “argument,” “evidence,” and so forth. Further, ethnography can help unmask the ethnocentric underpinnings of the privileging of “reason” that has characterized rhetoric in the West from Plato to Perelman. (Conquergood, 1992, p. 80)

He recounts the similarity between early sophists and ethnographers, paying close attention to the nuance of local and adaptive performances. Elsewhere, he argued that the active “participatory nature of fieldwork is celebrated by ethnographers when they contrast their ‘open air’ research with the ‘arm chair’ research of more sedentary

and cerebral methods” (Conquergood, 1991, p. 180). Critical rhetoric can be realized as a parallel, where the body is positioned with the vernacular and outlaw. The critic must engage the field of argumentation, meaning-making, and judgment. However, while Conquergood (1991, 1992) offered a proscriptive account of the alliance between rhetoric and ethnography, he did not fully provide students of rhetoric with the necessary tools to engage fieldwork as *both* rhetoricians and ethnographers. He largely positioned the *product* of ethnography as the work of the rhetorician. Quoting Geertz, Conquergood concurred that rhetoric in ethnography is “the capacity to persuade readers . . . that what they are reading is an authentic account by someone personally acquainted with how life proceeds in some place, at some time, among some group” (Geertz, 1988, p. 191). Additionally, Van Maanen (1995) recognized the “rhetorical turn” in ethnography that looks “to define ethnography in terms of its rhetorical features such as the topical, stylistic, documentary, evidentiary, and argumentative choices made by an author and *displayed in a text*” (p. 5, emphasis added). The characterization of rhetoric as solely informing the production of ethnographic texts ignores the rich history of rhetoric as *praxis in advocacy*, not only as a style of writing.

While the product of scholarship certainly calls forth rhetoric, critical rhetoricians should also consider the nature of fieldwork as a site of rhetorical production. In so doing, critical rhetoricians engaging vernacular sites of discourse can utilize familiar concepts to the discipline. I offer the following elements of rhetorical theory as guiding principles of critical-rhetorical ethnography. First, rhetoricians should conceptualize themselves as advocates. Given rhetoric’s long-standing tradition of studying public deliberation, rhetorical scholars in the field have much to offer when participating in vernacular communities. Second, rhetoricians should consider their advocacy in the field as a form of invention through engagement with local logics of judgment. Similarly, and third, rhetorical ethnographers should consider the nature of fieldwork in terms of rhetorical timing, or *kairos*. The appropriateness of speaking, responding, and timing are essential features of the speech act as it is contextualized in the field. Finally, the value of *phronesis* provides rhetoricians with a set of practical and ethical guidelines while on site.

Positioning the Critic: The Rhetorical Scholar as Advocate

Recent theorizing in rhetoric has opened the field of analysis for rhetorical critics. Farrell (1991) believed that “rhetoric, in its most fully elaborated sense, helps to uncover instances of its practice in a great many of our unexamined activities; the discourse surrounding rituals of civic life: art, sports, entertainment; the more mundane practices of collecting and recollecting: diaries, scrapbooks, autobiographies, and memoirs” (pp. 191–192). Indeed, as critics approach local spaces and places to examine discourses, they must reconsider their position as researcher. Rhetorical theory has much to gain from qualitative inquiry with its history of self-reflexive methodology. As critical rhetorical analysts who construct the fragments (McGee, 1990) of discourse, special attention needs to be paid to what strategies exist to

engage a new audience. Ono and Sloop (1999) recognized the potential risks of approaching outlaw discourses and identified the privilege associated with being a critic (p. 535); yet, they did not prescribe the ontological functions of the critic *in situ*. Critical rhetorical theory is poised to approach fieldwork and to elaborate upon theories of the vernacular much in the same manner found in qualitative inquiry and ethnography.

Qualitative researchers have been attentive to the production and placement of the researcher within the field. Holmes and Marcus (2005) summed up the nature of critical ethnography as a type of advocacy:

Thus, since the 1980s, any critical anthropology worthy of the name not only tries to speak truth to power—truth as subaltern and understood within the closely observed everyday lives of ordinary subjects as the traditional milieu of fieldwork, power as conceptualized and theorized but not usually investigated by the strategies of fieldwork—but also tries to understand power and its agencies in the same ethnographically committed terms and in the same boundaries of fieldwork in which the subaltern is included. (p. 1101)

If critical rhetoric is to approach sites of vernacular discourse, a change in the notion of the critic is necessary toward one that attends to power as it is expressed and contested in spaces of advocacy. Holmes and Marcus (2005) continued, arguing that familiar concerns to the ethnographer include the emergence of “the economic, political, and/or environmental plights of subaltern subjects or indigenous peoples” (p. 1105). Ethnographers have complicated the function of fieldwork where such concerns are brought to the “courts and through legal proceedings, in government bureaus and scientific agencies, within universities and museums, in nongovernmental organizations and a diverse range of international forums as well as through our own anthropological practices of representation and advocacy” (p. 1105). In short, ethnographers have considered the role and power of the researcher as an advocate.

Other theorizing has located researchers alongside participants, learning their plight firsthand. Lincoln and Denzin (2005) see the future of qualitative inquiry as shaped by the growing concerns and influences of “postmodern perspectives, the critical turn . . . , the narrative or rhetorical turn, and the turn toward a rising tide of *voices*” (p. 1115, emphasis in original). As a part of this future, they envisioned researchers as working jointly with research participants to “help transform inquiry into praxis, or action. Research subjects become coparticipants and stakeholders in the process of inquiry. Research becomes praxis—practical, reflective, pragmatic action—directed toward solving the problems in the world” (Lincoln & Denzin, 2005, p. 34). Angrosino (2005) agreed, seeking to recontextualize the nature of participant observation. In his account, researchers should “be directly connected to the poor and marginalized . . . , should ask questions and search for answers . . . , [and] should become an advocate” (p. 739). In this formulation, the researcher’s “main aim is to work with the community to achieve shared goals” (Angrosino, 2005, p. 740). As such, qualitative inquiry carries a rich history and methodology of

engagement with marginalized voices and communities. So, too, has critical rhetoric. Indeed, drawing from critical methodologies of fieldwork, critical rhetoric is well suited to adapt its existing theoretical components to become more adept at approaching vernacular communities and discourses. But rather than simply adapting a qualitative skill set, rhetoric is also poised to utilize its tradition as the study of advocacy, argumentation, and deliberation in combination with such methods.

Rhetoric has a longstanding history of examining the nature of individual and social advocacy; however, under critical-rhetorical ethnography, the critic directly participates in such advocacy. Brummett (1976) argued that “while rhetoric may be defined in many ways and on many levels, it is in the deepest and most fundamental sense the *advocacy of realities*” (p. 31, emphasis in original). Critics of rhetorical acts evaluate persuasion and advocacy through quality of argumentation. Indeed, “rhetoric has been cast as an art of practical reason that functions to negotiate the course of communal belief and action where disagreement and chaos would otherwise reign” (Lucaites, Condit, & Caudill, 1999, p. 247). Similarly, Campbell (1973/1999) claimed that “feminist advocacy unearths tensions woven deep into the fabric of our society and provokes an unusually intense and profound ‘rhetoric of moral conflict’” (p. 398). Critical rhetoric inquiries into vernacular discourses have reflected upon their composition and strategies; however, critical-rhetorical ethnographers would have the ability to advocate on behalf of the vernacular and in support of the outlaw. A participatory approach to advocacy enables critical rhetoricians to engage not only with vernacular communities but *as* vernacular within the site of dialogue.

As advocacy, rhetoric can be positioned at the moment of deliberation. Frenz (1985) conceptualized human communication as rhetorical conversation, “a narrative episode in which a conflict over opposing moral viewpoints re-unites the agents with their own moral histories, with the moral traditions of which they are a part, and—perhaps most important—with an awareness of the virtues” (pp. 291–292). In such a characterization, rhetoric serves to guide participants through speaking, valuing the deliberation between opposing voices. Turning to critical-rhetorical ethnography, rhetoric offers a collaborative mapping for participants and the ethnographer who work together to advocate the position of the vernacular in accordance with the virtues of that community. Naturally, this position is not a given but learned through working closely with the community as a participant. Foley and Valenzuela (2005), in discussing critical ethnography, believed that “researchers who are involved directly in the political process are in a better position to understand and theorize about social change” (p. 231). Engaging this line of scholarship would allow critical rhetoricians to speak as advocates with the intricate knowledge of the process, production, and reflection upon deliberation. Advocacy, in this sense, would be considered and practiced in conjunction with the organization under investigation. Critical-rhetorical ethnographers would advocate for change by supporting the vernacular organization and its conception of a (new) political reality. In some cases, the vernacular organization might be advocating for radical changes in conceptions of justice; in other cases, the advocacy may be generative and maintain positive

practices of expression. In either case, the rhetorical ethnographer would engage in the process of advocacy to learn and perform it.³

Haiman (1967) observed the power of vernacular speech “in the streets” that problematizes rhetorical criticism (p. 99). In turn, the shift in rhetorical studies to examine the vernacular speech placed critics in local positions of observation. Pressing further, Farrell (1991) believed that rhetoricians should advocate alongside with those who fight against power disparities or for worthy causes, reminding us that “within the context of classical theory, rhetoric is an art of practice to be developed in *real-life settings*, where matters are in dispute and there are no fixed or final criteria for judgment” (p. 187, emphasis added). In real-life settings, critical-rhetorical ethnographers must take into account the nature of their advocacy as it is produced through their bodies, in localized spaces, and in particular temporal conditions (Conquergood, 1991). Issues related to space and time will be elaborated upon below, but the nature of embodied praxis challenges rhetoricians to enact or perform advocacy in the spaces of protest. Conquergood (1991) criticized rhetoric and communication studies for focusing too much attention on language, “particularly those aspects of language that can be spatialized on the page, or measured and counted, to the exclusion of embodied meanings that are accessible through ethnographic methods” (p. 188). Critical-rhetorical ethnography attends to such a concern by moving the production of texts from academic-speak to enactment in the streets. Indeed, in what better way can one comprehend the rhetorical advocacy of an organization than to defend it to strangers who approach and question it while in the field?

Reimagining Invention

When rhetoric is conceptualized ethnographically, it calls forth a reinvigoration of invention. As stated above, much of the literature that links rhetoric to ethnography sees the product of ethnography as a type of rhetorical invention, but not necessarily the process (although the two are intricately intertwined). However, recent scholarship has looked toward the *process* of rhetoric (Asen, 2004) and has turned to invention as an integral part in the discovery of meaning making (Johnstone & Eisenhart, 2008). Lucaites, Condit, and Caudill (1999) argued that “rhetorical invention should be restored to a position of centrality in theory and practice” (p. 10). Such a restorative call can be answered by reconceptualizing invention as both a textual and a performative practice. Invention as textual practice, according to McGee (1990), has been recognized as the means of producing or “inventing a text suitable for criticism” (p. 288). McKerrow (1989) noted that “the reversal of ‘public address’ to ‘discourse which addresses publics’ places the critic in the role of ‘inventor’” (p. 101). Additionally, he argued that when rhetoric is considered a performance, “the critic as inventor becomes arguer or advocate for an interpretation of the collected fragments” (p. 108). Certainly, critical-rhetorical ethnographers may (and should) engage in textual examinations that assemble fragments of discourse and analyze the extant discursive field of invention. However, *ethnographic* rhetorical

invention is the direct participation in advocacy within the scene of research as well as in the collection, preparation, and representation of data. In this way, the researcher learns of invention through enactment. As field researchers are pressed to perform the advocacy of their organization, social movement, or vernacular community, they discover and learn the process of inventing discourses as a means of making sense of their position.

The notion of invention could easily conjure a rational, privileged, and centered actor; however, following a poststructuralist and critical rhetoric, the ethnographic rhetorician becomes fragmented and localized as they perform various subjectivities in the field. Critical views of invention attend to notions of power and subjectivity. Murphy (2003) contended that invention can be situated as a social act, arguing that it is both constitutive and oppositional. "Practical arenas of action in which vernacular discourses of civil society compete with and complement more traditionally authorized speakers and registers of public opinion illustrate the inventive process by which publics are formed through rhetorical action" (Murphy, 2003, p. 3). Extending counterpublic theory, Murphy looked to localized actors, who "emerge through discursive action and the means for cultivating rhetorical invention on the specific issues and interests endemic to that collectivity" (2003, p. 3). Understood in this way, invention in critical-rhetorical ethnography is a performative act that attends to issues of power while in the field and in conjunction with the vernacular.

Rather than affirm the centrality of the researcher, rhetorical ethnographers work locally alongside participants, fulfilling multiple roles of researcher, advocate, and observer. Philips (2002) argued that under critical rhetoric, invention can be theorized in two ways.

There are two parallel processes of invention at work here: One that utilizes cultural commonplaces in the creation of discourse that is, largely, consistent with existing relations of knowledge/power/subjectivity and another that is displaced from the commonplaces of these existing relations. This second, more radical form of rhetorical invention not only occurs within the spaces of dissension/freedom/thought but may, conceivably, serve to further fracture the relations of knowledge/power/subjectivity and, in so doing, open wider the spaces of invention and transformation. The nature of this more radical form of invention, however, remains to be considered. (p. 341)

He continues, challenging readers to discover the nascent spaces where such a radical form of invention may exist. Methodologically, ethnography invites the rhetorician to theorize more specifically about how invention would operate within such spaces and, importantly, to *participate* with resistant peoples. In this way, invention works in a similar fashion to that of participant observation in traditional ethnography. Spradley (1980) argued that participation in local cultures and social behavior through ethnography "seeks to document the existence of *alternative* realities and to describe these realities in their own terms" (p. 14, emphasis in original). In other words, ethnography can elucidate the *process* of invention through its attention to local realities and their active construction by local agents. The active participant will have firsthand experience in the production of such discourse in the spaces and places of speaking.

Rethinking Context: Kairos and the Field of Argumentation

In rhetorical theory, *kairos* is traditionally considered to be timeliness of speech. “Clearly, the notion of *kairos* points out that speech exists in time; but more important, it constitutes a prompting toward speaking and a criterion of the value of speech. In short, *kairos* dictates that what is said must be said at the right time” (Poulakos, 1983, pp. 40–41). *Kairos* is also considered to be appropriateness as an accompaniment to timeliness, both of which are “vague in conceptualization and elastic in application” (Poulakos, 1983, p. 42). Beyond its traditional usage, *kairos* “may be understood as *situational context*, a more modern term, which can be used critically” (Kinneavy & Eskin, 2000, p. 433). Contemporary rhetorical scholars (Kinneavy & Eskin, 2000; Miller, 2002) have recognized that *kairos* can be thought of in two ways. First, *kairos* can be understood as the decorum or propriety of any given moment and speech act, implying a reliance on the given or known. Second, *kairos* can also be understood as the opportune, spontaneous, or timely. In this conception, “*kairos* encourages us to be creative in responding to the unforeseen, to the lack of order in human life” (Miller, 2002, p. xiii). While these appear at odds, both are useful in conceptualizing *kairos* for the critical-rhetorical ethnographer. Under the method, *kairos* is a consideration of the decorum of a situation along with the inventive goal of creative deliberation. It is both restrictive in its accordance with *doxa* and liberating in its challenge of advocacy through persuasion. To merely engage in either mode would limit the critical-rhetorical ethnographer to either argumentative stagnation in the scene or a radicalization tending toward alienation of the vernacular.

In traditional rhetoric, a speaker must be aware of when, where, and how to speak. She or he must account for the audience’s state of being and context in order to be persuasive. For the ethnographic rhetorician, *kairos* denotes recognition of the local or organizational knowledge that governs interaction. For qualitative researchers, contextualization “benefits from being aware, in the dialogic spirit, of local realities that may challenge general analyses as well as being self-reflexively conscious of the political nature of its analysis” (Saukko, 2005, p. 346). For the critical-rhetorical ethnographer, *kairos* is the development of a local and contextual knowledge through the constant interaction with participants in the research field. Similar to Blair’s (2001) attention to the effect of rhetorical space in memorial discourse, it is an analysis and awareness of the immediate context of speaking. Adding to her notion of “having been there,” rhetorical ethnographers must ask of the consequences of their own presence and advocacy. Thus, *kairos* entails an account of self-reflexivity. The researcher must locate him or herself within the existing worlds and identities, those of researcher, advocate, and participant. In other words, it is “paying attention to social discourses . . . [which] allows us to illuminate deep-seated belief systems that guide our thoughts and actions and shape our societies (Saukko, 2005, p. 351). Critical-rhetorical ethnographers abandon a sense of detachment in their observations and instead should become personally involved with the contextual and local advocacy.

Phronesis: *From Judgment to Action*

As a capstone to the construction of an ethnographic rhetorical method, *phronesis* calls forth the notions of advocacy, invention, and *kairos*. In so doing, the researcher is guided by the ideal of *phronesis* to open spaces for change. Farrell (1991) reminded us that “As near as we have been able to determine, the aim of rhetoric is to *practice* judgment (to enact *krisis*) where certain sorts of problematic materials are concerned” (p. 186, emphasis in original). Rhetorical action, then, is the expressed evaluation and enactment of discourse. As an ideal, Aristotle offered the notion of *phronesis* as “practical wisdom” to guide the exchange of words in *stasis* toward *krisis*; however, *phronesis* is not tantamount to an ultimate set of guidelines, a truth that guides rhetorical interplay. Rather, it follows *doxa* and *kairos* in order to enact invention. “Rhetorical *phronesis* cannot be enacted without at least a partial intuition of what the ‘appropriate’ *is* in each historically specific setting. And so, even the most powerful imposition of rhetorical advocacy must have a reciprocal interest in the justification of its own conduct” (Farrell, 1991, p. 194, emphasis in original). For critical rhetoric to turn to the vernacular, it must reflect upon its position within the academy and within the discursive field. To engage in dialogue about power, the rhetorician should witness its effects.

But in what ways does a phronetic researcher act? How does *phronesis* function in the field? Other scholars have recognized the importance of Aristotle’s notion of *phronesis*, theorizing its possibilities. Flyvbjerg (2001) conceptualized *phronesis* in relation to notions of power that he describes in six ways: as productive and positive as well as restrictive and negative; as a dense net of omnipresent relations; as “ultra-dynamic” and able to be appropriated and reappropriated; as analytically inseparable from knowledge; to be studied as it is exercised; and both contextually local and global (pp. 131–132). In the field, then, phronetic research is enacted through the engagement in the micropractices and micropolitics of power. Additionally, Smith (2003) intensified the notion of *phronesis* and described it as

an ethical comportment because it is a social “positioning” of oneself that enables a particular way of being concerned—*phronesis* is a *conscientious* orientation and *disposition* to/in the world. The *phronimos* is dis-posed toward the world in a particular way, an ethical way. Thus if *techne* is away of being concerned with things and principles of production and *theoria* a way of being concerned with eternal principles, then *phronesis* is a way of being concerned with one’s life (qua action) and with the lives of others—this is purview of praxis. (p. 88, emphasis in original)

In this account, *phronesis* encompasses notions of theory and praxis. For rhetorical ethnographers, “[t]o engage a world ‘phronetically’ is, therefore, an attempt to understand its *possibilities* for relations and actions...that comprise a world” (Smith, 2003, p. 89, emphasis added). Through the attention to both power and possibility, critical-rhetorical ethnographers find instances where spaces can be opened up. They advocate for change and engage in the incommensurable logics of outlaw discourses, reflecting upon the nature of dialogue and the adaptability

within disempowered or underrepresented communities, acting in accordance with the community, and learning the appropriate responses, tactics, and directions.

In critical-rhetorical ethnography, the researcher enters into vernacular communities to reflect upon their constitution, advocacy, and activism. In order to approach and operate within these communities, the method must examine the kairotic moment to identify timely and appropriate speech. Moving from the appropriate to the active, *phronesis* operates to guide the researcher as he or she continues to advocate. It is not enough to merely observe and describe vernacular rhetorical communities; critical rhetoricians should act alongside protesters, advocacy groups, and social movements. As they witness, participate, and learn, critical-rhetorical ethnographers progress as members (Adler & Adler, 1987) of the organization, gaining new insights into the nature of the controversy and advocacy at hand. If analyzing *kairos* entails an examination of the moment and space of speaking, *phronesis* is a self-reflexive measure of how the critical-rhetorical ethnographer develops and learns the practical wisdom of the organization. While Sloop and Ono (1999) called for examining the *phronesis* of outlaw and vernacular discourses,⁴ critical-rhetorical ethnographers can go further by learning to advocate alongside vernacular organizations. In this sense, vernacular advocacy is not merely a text to be observed and critiqued. Rather, learning to be phronetic places rhetorical praxis as performance (McKerrow, 1989) or as the assembling or inventing of a text (McGee, 1990). Through rhetorical ethnography, *phronesis* can be understood as both a textual production of advocacy in the vernacular scene, but it will also be appreciated as a performance of the ethnographer. It is not merely “member checking” but a reflection upon how deliberative intuition is gained through experience. In this regard, critical-rhetorical ethnographers can gather the appropriate judgment by working with peers and advocates within the movement.

Rhetorical Ethnography in the War on Drugs

Developing this method will require an in-depth investigation of a rhetorical problem or controversy that serves as an adequate case study of its use. To provide such an example, I offer my time spent in the field with the vernacular organization, DanceSafe. DanceSafe offers drug education to youth in the context of all-night dance parties, commonly known as raves. Rave culture is well known for its tolerance of drug use. Predominantly populated by youth ages 14–24, the late-night adventures in chemical indulgence feature music crafted by DJs, who “spin” the repetitive beats from a variety of subgenres of electronica (Reynolds, 1998). The music combines well with drug use, especially ecstasy (MDMA). Placed in a class of drugs called “empathogens,” ecstasy provides feelings of intense empathy, increased physical sensation, euphoria, and stimulation. The drug also carries negative side effects including excessive teeth clenching, neurotoxicity at high doses, depression after use, and possible death from heatstroke. In the midst of a pleasure-seeking and youthful population, DanceSafe presents a nonjudgmental message of reducing the harms associated with drug use, rather than using abstinence-based messages and fear

appeals. Its stance is commonly understood as “harm reduction”; a paradigm developed in opposition to the abstinence-only approaches of the so-called War on Drugs.

Abstinence is historically and morally familiar to the United States’ drug policy (Warner & Riviere, 2007); although such policies have recently been questioned (Dejong & Wallack, 1999; Elwood, 1994; Fisher, 2006; Rosenbaum, 1996). In contrast to abstinence-based approaches, harm reduction offers a perspective that recognizes that drug use and intoxication is a normal element of human culture. Harm reduction proponents believe in treatment models that humanize instead of criminalize, rejecting claims that drug users are immoral and deviant (Marlatt, 1998). Syringe exchanges, ecstasy pill testing, and substitution therapies are hallmarks of harm reduction programs. Often run by those with drug histories, harm reduction campaigns meet users “where they’re at,” meaning both psychologically and on location. Harm reduction practitioners may seek out clients in places of use while they are on drugs, or in a frame of mind that is resistant to change. DanceSafe embodies each of the above tenets of harm reduction. Operating in the context of raves, the organization is designed to interact with youth who are in the epicenter of a drug-tolerant culture. The group provides an array of information and services including educational postcards of various drugs, fresh fruit, water, condoms, and ecstasy pill testing. Educational campaign materials range from drug facts to information about sexually transmitted infections to political pamphlets about ending the War on Drugs. DanceSafe also offers a pill-testing program at many of the local chapters across the country, which provides ravers with the on-the-spot testing of ecstasy pills for adulterants, a common problem with the street-quality of the drug.

DanceSafe’s advocacy in the rave scene offers an ideal case for critical-rhetorical ethnography. As a resistant vernacular group, DanceSafe’s advocacy challenges the direct governance (Greene, 1998) and logic (Sloop & Ono, 1997) of federal drug control policy. Their presence has caused a considerable amount of controversy. Scholars and law enforcement have questioned the efficacy of the campaign, arguing that users may gain a false sense of safety (Dundes, 2003; Winstock, Wolff, & Ramsey, 2001). While at raves, the group is cautiously approached by members of a resistant culture that often distrusts authority (Ott & Herman, 2003). Between these, DanceSafe continues to advocate on behalf of youth through adaptive strategies of invention. Additionally, DanceSafe’s unique style of advocacy, including a nonjudgmental approach to actively using drug users, requires an amount of practical wisdom and experience. Finally, using rhetorical criticism outside the context of advocacy would not provide the types of insights offered through a participatory framework, such as understanding the adaptive invention practices, the reception of the campaign, and other contextual judgments. The campaign is constructed through both interpersonal interaction *and* message strategies, which require direct participation and observation to understand. Interviews with members of the target audience provided insight into the rhetorical impact of the campaign. In sum, DanceSafe’s advocacy provides a challenging site for exploring the potential of rhetorical ethnography within the politics of health in the War on Drugs. As such, I ask the following questions about

DanceSafe's advocacy: How does DanceSafe construct arguments for safer drug use with its target audience of young drug users? How do they receive the campaign? And finally, what constitutes effective or veteran advocacy for DanceSafe volunteers?

Overview of the Method

Over a period of two years, I accompanied the local chapter DanceSafe in the southwest region of the United States to 20 raves. Organizationally, I was invited to take part in all planning and decision making, and my level of membership closely resembled that of full member (Adler & Adler, 1987). While at raves, I recorded my experience with scratch notes, which were expanded into field notes upon return from the event. My notes included extensive reflections upon the training and learning process of becoming a seasoned volunteer with the group. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) discussed participant observation as operating on two parallel paths: "(1) They [participant observers] become increasingly skilled at performing in ways that are honored by group members, and (2) they create increasingly sharp, detailed, and theoretically relevant descriptions" (p. 135). Adding to these notions of participant observation, critical-rhetorical ethnographers must also become increasingly aware of the complexity of advocacy in multiple forms and conditions. The complication of advocacy in participant observation arguably changes the method. Rhetorical ethnographers do not only participate and observe; they advocate. As such, participant observation becomes *participant advocacy* under the guise of critical-rhetorical ethnography.

Conducting fieldwork requires the collection of fieldnotes and writing of "thick descriptions" (Geertz, 1973) about the scene. Fieldnotes are a vital source of data for rhetorical ethnographers and should be developed over the course of a project. As accounts of the scene, fieldnotes provide the most direct connection between the researcher and his or her own advocacy. At first, in consideration and development of *kairos*, critical-rhetorical ethnographers should pay close attention to the moment, time, and space of speaking. Fieldnotes should record the field of argumentation, asking fundamental questions such as "What is going on here? How does advocacy occur in this space? How do advocates within the vernacular organization fit within the larger culture or audience?" Over time, field observations shift from *kairos* toward invention, as the rhetorical ethnographer becomes more comfortable in the scene and knowledgeable of the advocacy. Fieldnotes become both observations of interactions and reflections on *how* the advocacy is performed, working toward the accumulation of the practical wisdom.

Additionally, I engaged in two rounds of interviewing. Interviews offer direct insight through empathic conversations with interviewees (Fontana & Frey, 2005; Kvale, 1996) and should be directed at the rhetorical effect of the advocacy. As explorations into the cultural *kairos* and invention of the organization, interviews provide the critical-rhetorical ethnographer with firsthand and immediate interpretive accounts of how the message is received. First, I interviewed current DanceSafe volunteers, asking about the function of the group while at events (How does

DanceSafe interact with participants at raves? What strategies do you have when interacting with participants at a rave?). While providing a number of insights into *kairos* and argumentation strategies, the interviews with seasoned volunteers also gave clues into *phronesis*. Second, as I established relationships in the scene, I interviewed ravers who had witnessed the campaign. To solicit interviews, I monitored my interactions with particular ravers that would be preferable informants. After establishing a level of trust and rapport, I conducted interviews with 13 ravers. These interviews focused on the rhetorical effect of the campaign by inquiring into the kairotic moment (e.g., Describe your experiences with DanceSafe. Have you received information from DanceSafe?), inventive practices, (e.g., How would you characterize DanceSafe's central message? How is this message presented?), and reception of the campaign (e.g., What does DanceSafe want you as a raver to walk away with? How, if at all, have you used the information presented by DanceSafe?). Interviews were recorded in the scene and transcribed upon return. Interviewees ranged in age from 18 to approximately 24. Informed consent was gained through a letter given to the participant describing the project.

On the Kairos of the Rave

The context of raves as speaking environments for advocacy is challenging. Certainly, raves carry their own sense of culture (Ott & Herman, 2003) with a value system that surrounds a mantra of PLURR: peace, love, unity, respect, and responsibility. Yet, underneath the final "R" is a culture that is quite tolerant of drug use. To grasp the complicated rhetorical situation of the rave scene, I asked one simple question as I approached my research with DanceSafe: How does DanceSafe enact its drug advocacy within the context of raves? Recall that *kairos* carries a dual meaning under the guise of critical-rhetorical ethnography: decorum and opportunity. I analyzed DanceSafe's decorum through their use of cultural symbols, rituals, and performances. DanceSafe utilizes brightly colored drug education fliers that mimic promotions for other events, a direct reference to the overall scene. The table includes other tributes to the youthful culture, such as lights, glowsticks, and free candy. Dancing DanceSafe volunteers greet by asking for raver names and indicating that everything on the table is free. Many ravers would comment about how often they had seen DanceSafe in the local scene. Through such adaptation, DanceSafe becomes a natural function of rave culture.

Working from the adherence to decorum, DanceSafe's "fitting in" provides an opportune moment for advocacy. What makes the intervention more successful is the appreciation of the decorum and choices of the population coupled with being present in the moment of use. One interviewee, when asked about how DanceSafe constructs its message, indicated that "the fact that you're willing to, like, accept the people if they are on the drug, too, makes them probably feel significantly more comfortable coming up to the stand." She later elaborated,

Cause I'm not gonna lie, the first time I saw DanceSafe . . . I remember avoiding that place for a while and I was like, "Why are they here? There are these people,

anti-drugs at a drug party. I don't know how I feel about this." And now, eventually, I've talked with one of the people rolling balls. Ended up picking up the thing [ecstasy pamphlet], reading about it and was like, "Hey, this is kind of cool."

In other words, DanceSafe's appreciation of the choices of the user is bolstered by volunteers' presence in the scene. Being a fixture of the scene provides a foundation for gaining acceptance and access to the population. That DanceSafe volunteers will actively seek out visibly high users and have honest conversations with them provides a strong point of entry for the campaign.

Taken together, the two elements of *kairos* work to position DanceSafe as a legitimate authority in the rave scene. Youth subcultures are hesitant to engage with traditional authorities, preferring a "folk model" approach to risk (Kelly, 2005). DanceSafe offers a campaign that mixes professional material with personal experience in the place of drug use. One interviewee positioned DanceSafe as providing "a good solid foundation" of knowledge for new drug users attending the event. In contrast to other drug authorities, DanceSafe volunteers are forthcoming about their personal drug use. In my observations and interviews, youth would comment about reasons for not trusting sources in the War on Drugs. In one case, a raver told me that she refused to listen to drug education while in school, saying "If you haven't done it, don't talk to me about it." Arguably, the context of witnessing drug education in school fed her disbelief. This attitude is challenged through DanceSafe's campaign; drug users find a drug education table surrounded by people actively using drugs with sober volunteers who appear to be having just as much fun. DanceSafe's kairotic moment, then, is built through the respect of rave culture, the opportunity for interventions on actual behavior, and the participatory ethos of the vernacular organization.

Constructing Arguments in the Rave Scene

To understand the inventive practices of DanceSafe, I conducted two types of analysis. My orientation toward invention, as articulated above, carries the dual notions of existing deliberations as well as future discursive opportunities. First, in order to gain insight into the types of messages that DanceSafe was working *against*, I engaged in an upfront textual analysis of existing messages in the War on Drugs. I found that drug users are often portrayed as dupes of culture, victims of peer pressures that dominate their lives. Messages relied on strong fear appeals and rarely provide treatment information or assistance. In short, the message is: Drug users are bad people who are trapped in their use. Such judgment combined with a dismissal of agency became an inventive strategy of argumentation for DanceSafe volunteers, who spoke out against the "Just Say No" policies of governance. The upfront analysis of the current antidrug campaign provides insight into the types of messages that youth are already seeing. It operates as an inventory of invention, a snapshot of the field of argumentation before I arrive and interact.

As I continued to work in the scene with the knowledge of federal antidrug programs, I also took stock of the forms of argument that DanceSafe members

articulated. In my initial interviews with DanceSafe volunteers, I asked about the political nature of raving. They described raving as “against the mainstream” or “counterculture.” Because of this, any mention of mainstream arguments regarding the logic of drug use or users were ineffective. Instead, DanceSafe members recall strategies of connection with ravers, being able to meet them where they are at as *people* and as ravers before they were considered drug users. When it comes to advocating about drug use, DanceSafe members strive to disconnect the use of drugs from the people who use them. One volunteer interviewee characterized the information as not saying “anything about if it’s bad for you or bad socially” and that, instead, ravers were able to do a “risk analysis themselves.”

Looking further into the advocacy of DanceSafe, I discovered that being a DanceSafe volunteer requires a set of rhetorical foils that effectively position the group and identify who they *are not* rather than who they *are*. To do so, DanceSafe strategically situates itself between two populations. Certainly, DanceSafe constructs itself as a part of the rave community and its youthful population; however, the group simultaneously operates as a health promotion organization seeking to minimize the harms associated with drug use. While the latter association is often an unvalued marker of institutional authority, the former alignment assists DanceSafe’s ability to advocate effectively. As such, DanceSafe often constructs its message in *opposition* of commonly understood message campaigns or governmental programs that fail to persuade drug-using youth. For example, DanceSafe volunteers utilized the phrasing of “we’re not anti-drug, we’re pro-choice, as in pro-informed-decision-making” in direct opposition to the common governmental abstinence-only stance. Such rhetorical juxtaposition is crucial as a first step in establishing rapport. In return, ravers often commented about the failures of the federal message campaigns saying, “They are bad,” “They aren’t realistic,” or that “The normal messages don’t work. Cops and drug counselors don’t know about drugs. They’ve never experienced them. They don’t know what it’s like.” For DanceSafe to advocate effectively, it is imperative that volunteers do not appear as such authorities and answer questions about drug use, even personal use, honestly.

Through my interviews with ravers, the importance of DanceSafe’s rhetorical self-construction of antigovernment became increasingly clear. One interviewee expressed that the governmental messages of abstinence-only and the criminalization of drugs have led to the marginalization of drug users: “I have read several governmental sites about drugs but I’m usually more skeptical about them because of the government’s modern stance on drugs—and how it treats people that use drugs . . . they’re going to cast everything in a negative light to the greatest degree possible.” This belief was commonly expressed in the rave community, and, if DanceSafe is to advocate effectively, volunteers must differentiate themselves from the widely disseminated messages from such sources. In turn, DanceSafe members often picked apart federal messages for ravers, explaining their differences with harm reduction. Additionally, DanceSafe volunteers educate youth about their rights in regard to law enforcement. One rave that I attended was shut down by a local police department. In response, DanceSafe members quickly distributed wallet-sized cards that

explained a citizen's civil rights regarding illegal search and seizure. Finally, DanceSafe aligns itself alongside the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML), Students for Sensible Drug Policy (SSDP), and the Marijuana Policy Project (MPP), all of which advocate for substantial changes to status quo drug policy, including decriminalization and legalization. Such vernacular coalition building strengthens the distinction between DanceSafe and law enforcement.

Another rhetorical and metaphorical strategy of differentiation positions DanceSafe as an authority, but not as "parents" in the rave scene. Given the young age of many ravers, parents still operate as roadblocks on the path of youthful experimentation. One interviewee reflected on DanceSafe in relation to the family:

You know, it's really like that whole parent-child thing. You know, "DON'T do this" or like "I prefer that you didn't." Which one is going to be more accepted or listened to? And because you guys [DanceSafe] don't condemn, more people are going to be willing to come up to the stand and say if they are on something to pick up that. And I think if it was more hostile like, "don't do drugs," less people would come by and pick them up.

Instead of being construed as "Mom and Dad," DanceSafe operates as the "cool yet caring older brother or sister" that will impart valuable knowledge that parents dare not speak. Such a characterization fosters a nonjudgmental atmosphere of the information booth, an important step in reaching young drug users. Parents, for many ravers, are only a source of judgment rather than education. Interestingly, parents are not afforded the same space as DanceSafe members. If parents use drugs and pass judgment upon their children, they are perceived as hypocritical. As one interviewee explained about parents who use drugs, "You can't do something and say 'No, you can't do it, too.' I just don't think it's right." DanceSafe, however, is respected for its honesty in regard to drug experiences. From this attitude, DanceSafe constructs its "I'm not your parents" image through its verbal differentiation and its literature. In this way, it can connect with youth in a remarkably effective manner. One interviewee summed up this ability:

I think they [DanceSafe] are giving them a viewpoint that's not from their "parents" so to speak . . . I think that's what they walk away with, you know, they are more inclined to be conscientious about being safer about it because if their parents come up and just are all, "don't do drugs, drugs are bad." It gets that like DARE education stigma to it, and it's like this is bullshit. So with this [DanceSafe] it's like, they are more inclined to listen.

Phronesis and Dancesafe

For the critical-rhetorical ethnographer, an analysis of invention identifies strategies of argumentation, and an analysis of *kairos* provides a necessary understanding of the context of speaking. *Phronesis* builds upon both concepts by articulating space, time, and experience toward the wisdom gained through the practice of advocacy.

Phronesis in critical-rhetorical ethnography operates as a guiding principle for the researcher and combines an analysis of argumentation strategy with self-reflexivity. As a rhetorician, I constantly sought out ways to improve my ability to conduct DanceSafe's advocacy; as an ethnographer, I was attentive to the learning process through self-reflexive examination. To illustrate the concept, I examined key strategies that became apparent through my time with DanceSafe. Drawing from Aristotle's original conception of the term as "practical wisdom" or "prudence," I conceptualize *phronesis* as a process-oriented ontology and contextualized self-reflexive positioning. In this sense, *phronesis* is actively performed by those who display wisdom in deliberation and advocacy. However, the explicit articulation of *phronesis* in analysis is difficult, given that the virtue is understood as intuition that is built and performed in a particular context. Hariman (1991) explained this complication with *phronesis*: "Prudence [*phronesis*] is a performative concept to the extent that prudential thinking typically assumes a performative context. This context often is implicit, since prudence also denotes practical action by ordinary decision-makers possessing common knowledge and conventional skills" (p. 27). Yet, in what follows, I study *phronesis* as it was exercised (Flyvberg, 2001) through my own learning and role within the organization.

First, as a member of the organization, I strived to not just become an insider but to become an expert or veteran advocate through the active performance of argumentation in the campaign. Early on, I realized the large amount of baseline information necessary to be an effective volunteer. However, drug use wisdom is not merely gained by the mental "databasing" of drug effects and contraindications; one must learn to interact with intoxicated youth and to advocate with their ideals in mind. Through an interview with one volunteer, I learned that DanceSafe members must be able to quickly detect the attitudes of their audience by carefully tending to their questions and behaviors. Also, DanceSafe members constantly share their drug experiences, which range from heavier recreational use to never having done a "harder" drug than alcohol. Personalizing the message was a primary manner of effective advocacy. One volunteer indicated that she tries to make personal connections with ravers by first asking their names and properly introducing herself. Another volunteer, in recounting a conversation with a drug user, offered his own drug history to "kinda use that experience to tell him where I come from." As I continued to work with the group, I realized that the personalization of the message, focusing on the relational and experiential qualities of drug use, was a requisite component of the campaign. To become a veteran advocate, I had to learn the means of positioning *myself* within the organization, sharing knowledge and experience through the relationships that I built in the scene. To that end, I focused my energy and attention to the relational character of the campaign, memorizing names and faces, all the while providing information through the pamphlets, posters, and educational cards.

Second, *phronesis* requires critical-rhetorical ethnographers to build wisdom through continued engagement with the practices, politics, and policies of the campaign and its advocacy.⁵ I became involved with DanceSafe's organizational planning

and recruitment of future volunteers to take over as current members “retired.” During recruitment, I was asked by the organizational leadership to train new members in both the personal “databasing” of drug information but also in those practical strategies that accompany the group. The trust instilled to me by seasoned members of the organization to train new recruits indicated that I had progressed toward an appreciated level of practical wisdom. In my training of the two recruits, I offered my experiences through stories of interactions and adaptive invention, including those moments of learning through failure. Such training offered a moment of realization; my progress in the organization had led me toward a unique disposition of personal involvement with the campaign and concern for its target audience. I strived in my training to dispel both the myths of drug use and the false constructions of ravers as irresponsible, offering instead tales of genuine care by drug users I had witnessed. In rhetorically and reflexively constructing the campaign for the recruits, I underscored the political nature of drug war governance, the personal trials of youth leading to decisions to use drugs, and the ethics of harm reduction as a drug policy.

Conclusion

In the case of DanceSafe, active advocacy requires knowledge of the culture and *doxa* of youth. Certainly, to approach youth with messages about drug safety while they are actively using is a difficult and ethically challenging task. Yet, via critical-rhetorical ethnography and developing *phronesis* in the scene, I learned from the practical actions of existing members how such complex vernacular advocacy is performed. During my time in the field, I had to learn to personally advocate against perceived governmental or parental sources, adopting the adaptive invention of the group toward its target audience. Simultaneously, harm reduction meets users on a cultural and interpersonal level that respects the choices of the individual, requiring travel to the location of use. Learning to articulate DanceSafe’s message as “pro-choice” rather than “anti-drug” in the context of raves was a long and difficult process. To complete such a journey comes with considerable rewards, both in terms of helping an at-risk population as well as gaining a valuable insider perspective that is difficult to be gained from only a textual purview. Critical-rhetorical ethnography as collaborative research offers a space of learning for all parties involved, and my time with DanceSafe illustrates the lessons of practicing vernacular advocacy.

Critical-rhetorical ethnography offers rhetorical scholars a method for seeking out and working within local and vernacular discourses. As an approach, it is useful to examine how counterpublic or protest groups gather; or to be a part of an organization seeking social change regarding issues of race, class, sexuality, or gender; or in witnessing firsthand how other grassroots political organizations convene. As a rhetorical method, it equips scholars to attend to and engage in a variety of speaking contexts, learning the process of advocacy by actively performing its textual product. Certainly, further discussion, including researcher ethics and problems of access, is warranted and necessary if the method is to expand our understanding of advocacy. However, through the concepts of invention, *kairos*, and *phronesis*, critical-rhetorical

ethnography provides a dynamic approach for those who are interested in studying the everyday discourse of vernacular organizations, augmenting and articulating an already robust set of textually situated and “having been there” approaches in critical rhetoric.

Notes

- [1] In this sense, rhetorical ethnography reaches back into its ancient Greek roots. Sophists, as some of the earliest practitioners of rhetoric, spent considerable time in practicing their advocacy, learning firsthand knowledge about society (Bizzell & Herzberg, 2001, pp. 22–26). Isocrates was known for applying the lessons of rhetoric in both everyday and government affairs, extolling the application of rhetoric in actual situations (Benoit, 1984; Gronbeck, 2004).
- [2] Of course, qualitative research and ethnography are not exactly the same activities. However, the tools of participant observation, interviewing, and ethnography are closely related. For a discussion of the differences and similarities of qualitative methods and ethnography, see Lindlof and Taylor (2002) or Denzin and Lincoln (2005).
- [3] This brings up one concern regarding rhetorical ethnography: Must the rhetorical ethnographer engage in an advocacy of change? The theoretical origin of this method is that of critical rhetoric, which has spent considerable amount of time locating discourses of change. As such, the method is primarily catered to that aim. In cases where a political organization supports maintaining a political reality or form of activism, the rhetorical ethnographer can still engage in the method to understand how that practice continues. However, further theorizing about how the method changes, if at all, are necessary. Looking even further, larger questions of ethics and reflexivity emerge from this discussion, especially about political activity from groups seeking to promote hate. While pertinent, they are beyond the scope and space of this article.
- [4] Phillips (1999) questions the study of outlaw discourses, and especially the idea of bringing them forth in concert with academia, which may infringe their outlaw or hidden status. *Phronesis*, as practical judgment from within the vernacular community in rhetorical ethnography, would assist in overcoming such a dilemma.
- [5] Such advocacy is parallel to many of the concerns of qualitative researchers in regard to ethics and reflexivity. Guillemin and Gillam (2004) see reflexivity in research as an ethical guide for practice to help navigate ethics-in-practice. They argue that reflexivity “involves critical reflection of how the researcher constructs knowledge from the research process—what sorts of factors influence the researcher’s construction of knowledge and how these influences are revealed in the planning, conduct, and writing up of the research” (p. 275). Additionally, they argue that ethics in practice is distinct from rule-governed ethics, similar to the dispute between *techné* and *phronesis*. When considered in the context of rhetoric, the ethics of effective and appropriate advocacy are built through *phronesis*.

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