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"The Myth of Oneness ": Erasure of Indigenous and Ethnic Identities in Digital Feminist Discourse

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The advent of digital communication has enabled the wide and rapid spread of information, as well as the ability to more effectively organize wide groups of individuals under one cause in an online and/or physical space. This unprecedented affordance has resulted in a great deal of discussion regarding the power of these online gatherings to effect social change offline. Another relevant element to consider is the ways in which individual voices are being heard and/or represented in digital spaces, and how that translates to changes occurring in society. In some instances, the concentration of Western ideologies and perspectives invades the discourse, leaving individuals with a historical and infrastructural dearth of power and control. Often, indigenous and ethnic voices are systematically excluded. This pattern has increasingly been observed in global feminist discourse where the perspectives, actions, and representation of a handful of women with power and political influence enact changes that work to the detriment of indigenous women and women of color. One example of this is seen in the work of the V-Day/One Billion Rising Movement. The organization's activities and continued discourse on the "global feminist agenda" systematically leaves out the opinions, needs, and identities of indigenous and ethnic women, or appropriates them for publicity and to perpetuate supposed shared ideals.

These issues of power, control, and the prevalence of certain viewpoints are indicative of the types of discourses and actions that emerge from the myth of a global "oneness," a concept that assumes the existence of a shared group of ideals, goals, and representation between all individuals across the globe; often manifested through the power of online access or other digital mediums. Though at a surface level this might seem feasible, a closer look at the contradictions embedded within oneness, as well as the consequences of actions taken in alignment with it, reveal the many fundamental difficulties surrounding its implementation. This paper will discuss the inconsistencies embedded within the myth of oneness, issues of power and control entangled within the oneness ideal and the effects of the quest for efficiency in actions motivated by it. Using this concept as a central focal point, the paper ultimately argues that upholding the ideal of oneness in applied contexts contributes to subsequent erasure and exclusion of indigenous and ethnic identities attempting to be represented. The actions and criticisms of Eve Ensler's V-Day organization and associated One Billion Rising campaign will serve as a primary applied example for the ways in which the reach for oneness has affected perceptions and representations of global feminist ideals.

1. The concept of "oneness" and its history

The idea of oneness revolves around the assumption that there is a shared set of ideals, perspectives, and goals equally held and represented by all members of an international community. This belief is intertwined with the hopes of using

this oneness as a basis for the implementation of new policies and changes for societal global advancement. The One Billion Rising campaign pledges their dedication to showing the world “what one billion looks like,” referring to the one billion women who will be faced with violence in their lifetime, according to a United Nations statistic (One Billion Rising Revolution). As the self proclaimed “biggest mass action to end violence against women in human history,” the organization has garnered significant attention from popular print and broadcast media sources as well as support from a wide variety of popular American celebrities (Dominus, 2002, Horton, 2014, Wooten, 2014, Zerlina). For this reason The One Billion Rising campaign and their biggest annual event, V-Day, appear to have some of the strongest influence on the majority of popular feminist discourse. Eve Ensler’s play *The Vagina Monologues*, the work that inspired the movement, is performed annually in colleges and universities across the US, and has served as a point of entry for many young feminists. The organization’s social media presence is also very significant; they are among the first five search results in both Twitter and Facebook for One Billion Rising and V-Day and conduct a significant amount of their publicity and promotion practices through those mediums. Thus, the ideas presented by the organization regarding a shared understanding of violence against women and ways to combat it is steadily becoming the dominant view presented in popular or non-academic feminist discourse. These messages are sent through more traditional media sources as well as through more informal social media debate and discussion.

The idea and hope of a shared perspective and path for progress has extensive history in discussions of information communication technology (ICT) distribution. This concept seems to be the driving force in the call for providing information technologies and Internet access to underdeveloped and unwired parts of the world. Faye Ginsburg (2008) describes the perspective of many early advocates of global ICT initiatives as viewing parts of the world without ICTs as disadvantaged and excluded, resulting in their promotion of technological advancements for bridging the gap. She describes the Digital Divide as “the phrase invented to describe circumstances of inequality that characterize access (or lack of access) to resources, technical or otherwise, across much of the globe,” and further asserts that though potentially well-intentioned, terms such as this promote a conception of areas of the world without such technologically advanced amenities as “simply waiting, endlessly, to catch up to the privileged West” (Ginsburg, 2008, p.6). Terms like the Digital Divide further support and align with the goals of ICT distribution initiatives to “enable excluded people and countries to enter into a new era of the information society”, solidifying the notion of certain communities as excluded and left behind (From the Digital Divide, 2005).

Ironically, it might be argued through the aforementioned examples that the very notion of oneness is only gained through a recognition of “the other,” where the potential and belief in a shared formula for success and progress serves as the motivation for bringing advanced information technologies into underdeveloped areas of the globe that are currently seen only as “the other”; but that could be brought up to an equal level. The central issue in this viewpoint is that attaining a status of global balance often equals the adoption of a Western lifestyle. This is demonstrated in projects such as the One Laptop Per Child Initiative, part of the ICT for Development project, which is described by Philip et. al. (2010) as a prime example of Western techno-determinism that mistakenly predicted that bringing a laptop into a poor child’s life might lead to success and prosperity. Ginsburg (2008) mentions Bill Gates’ changed attitude toward these Digital Divide fueled projects through his criticism that they do not actually address the real conditions and problems that need immediate attention in developing countries, instead focusing on technology as an overarching answer. The issue at the heart of this criticism supports the argument that concepts of oneness are fused with those of “the other.” If technological advancement is seen as the overarching point of progress and solution for the Western world, the introduction of ICTs into parts of the globe now seen as marginal would logically change that “other” into “one,” thus leading to an exclusion of additional area-specific issues that may need to be addressed regarding health, food distribution, etc. This appears to be the exact issue revealed in the One Billion Rising/V-Day movement where a quest to bring women in all parts of the world up to the standards of Western feminist progress overlooks some of the individualized and unique issues facing the many varied sectors of global communities of women.

The idea of oneness relates in some ways to Verran’s (2002) idea of “sameness,” which she describes as a recognition of shared practices of learning and justifying knowledge and information within groups that are similar in an overarching sense, but have distinct individualities within communities when analyzed. She examines the idea of sameness in depth through an investigation of knowledge sharing practices in scientists and Aboriginal groups, and finds that though they have complementary structures for generalizing and justifying facts, there are distinct methods in each community regarding the details of the knowledge construction process; for example, the scientific method approach versus the adoption of historical tribe-based knowledge for informing ecological practices (Verran, 2002). Similarly, oneness stems from a recognition and/or hope for overarching correlations in the practices and ontologies of global beings, which informs the push for a singular global agenda or ideal driving the implementation of new widespread policies and practices like ICT initiatives. However, oneness does not appropriately consider the need to support the existence of varying voices, viewpoints, and knowledge practices, which can be

recognized concurrently with the similarities between them in various communities. Verran (2002) addresses this distinction through her assertion that sameness “is not a dominating universalizing” but instead “enables difference to be collectively enacted” (p. 730). While sameness uses the knowledge of similarities between groups to better inform and support an understanding and acceptance of differences, oneness uses discovered similarities to promote a shared ideology that attempts to blend all perspectives and ontologies. The comparisons and contrasts of sameness and oneness once again call attention to the instances of “one” and “other” infused and manifested in different ways.

Along with Verran’s (2002) concept of sameness, another notion that combats the founding perspectives of oneness is Srinivasan’s (2012) multiple ontologies, a recognition and acceptance of varying communities as consisting of present and active groups of voices with distinct knowledge practices; which is especially significant in the area of design for new media technologies and the adoption of new media policies. The theory of multiple ontologies is further supported by the idea of incommensurability, which Srinivasan (2012) describes as “a turn away from the many years of labeling, classification, and the reliance on databases as fixed, hierarchical ways of modeling knowledge” (p. 18). Incommensurability embraces local and multiple ontologies, and fundamentally recognizes the inability to combine them all under one overarching set of ideals, goals, lifestyles, or perspectives; essentially the antithesis to perspectives of oneness shown that attempt to align and represent all global individuals under a unified front. Incommensurability and the embrace of multiple and local ontologies also works to prevent instances where the differences and distinctions of ways of living in global communities are only recognized in an exoticized way, as existing in a state of other before being aided and brought up to the level of a unified progressive one. Instead, it proposes the idea that these varieties and differences can be accepted and respected to enable a beneficial coexistence. A quest for oneness attempts to take these unique features and blend them, but as will be discussed throughout this paper, this approach often enables the favoring and dominance of ideals within groups in existing positions of power.

2. Examples of oneness and its inconsistencies

As described in the previous section, the ideology of oneness attempts to blend and combine the ontologies and perspectives of many global communities to promote the achievement of progress and advancement for all. To account for all of the ideas and cultural differences to be included to promote a semblance of oneness, one mode of thought often naturally rises to the top as the dominant model, and it is in most cases Western ideology. This is observed in the One Billion Rising campaign where the ideals of freedom from oppression and ending violence against women take the shape of Western based comprehension and

perspectives of those concepts. All other experiences and cultural nuances are seen through a Western lens. The founders and organizers of One Billion Rising exist in the position of power by directing and disseminating the stories of women in other cultures with little consultation or opportunity for those communities to share their own narratives or promote and control parallel efforts. Additionally, unequal levels of representation are given to cultural nuances and lifestyle practices, and instead favor Western forms, as shown through the foundation of many basic elements in One Billion Rising to be described in the following sections.

A possible source of the misalignment between an attempt to represent the ideals and desires of women across the globe and the actual outcome of emergent Western feminist ideology is reflected in what Appadurai (1990) describes as “the tension between cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization” (p. 295). He explains this tension as one of key importance in the new global cultural economy and the primary issue in global interactions, where the desire of certain parties to believe in the possibility of an equal blend, or homogenization, of culture is more of a widespread practice than cultural heterogenization. Appadurai (1990) depicts this as the indigenizing of influences brought in from other countries in respective varied communities. He characterizes this latter process as one indicative of the new global economy where it “has to be understood as a complex, disjunctive order which cannot be understood in terms of the existing center-periphery models (even those that might account for multiple centers and peripheries)” (p. 296). This latter point is especially applicable to the inconsistencies present in the ideology of the V-Day organization and One Billion Rising campaign. Though they claim as one of their core features to support grassroots organizations, they nonetheless exhibit a lack of willingness to relinquish control to these groups when hosting events in their local areas. Though one of the V-Day organization’s four core beliefs is that “local women best know what their communities need and can become unstoppable leaders,” in actuality there is a significant emphasis with aligning oneself with V-Day as a sponsoring organization; for example, through registering on the One Billion Rising campaign website as an official One Billion Rising local event (V-Day, One Billion Rising Revolution). Emphasizing and strongly encouraging an alignment and sponsorship of these events through the main organization, rather than celebrating the diverse and nuanced local movements, creates a more homogenized narrative of the struggle to end violence against women. An additional confluence with Western ideology in the various elements of the organization and campaign are demonstrated through the chosen date, activities, and medium of discourse.

The V-Day campaign chose Valentine’s Day as the global symbol of the struggle to end violence against women. Though celebrated in a large number of

countries, it is not considered a publicly recognized holiday in most and would logically have the highest amount of significance to individuals in areas of the globe with a strong Christian following, as the day originally celebrates St. Valentine. Though Christianity has the largest number of followers globally, choosing this day, as opposed to one without a pre-assigned set of celebrations, ideals, and history, potentially alienates those who do not attribute the same meaning and importance to the day, such as a group that is almost exclusively non-Western (The Global Religious Landscape). Similarly, the main objective of the One Billion Rising campaign is a choreographed dance to connect women across the globe and serve as a symbol of the strength and power of women. The promotion of this particular activity overlooks women who subscribe to religious or cultural beliefs that do not allow or believe in dance, such as 7-Day Adventists, certain iterations of Islam, and some Orthodox Jewish practices. In both of these cases, the ideals of the Western majority influence the decisions of the organization in how they will represent the fight for an end to justice against women worldwide, which results in the exclusion of specific distinct identities still purportedly represented in the global agenda. Though it is certainly very difficult to represent and voice all perspectives and allow for equal expression of all ontologies, an acknowledgement and discussion concerning those underrepresented parties would at least be one way to attempt to avoid a cultural homogenization.

As Appadurai (1990) argues, representing many voices through the lens of one becomes increasingly difficult considering global flows that “occur in and through the growing disjunctures between ethnoscaples, technoscaples, finanscaples, mediascaples, and ideoscaples” (p. 301), describing the constant movement in different arenas of global daily life that further nuance the individuation occurring worldwide. He notes in his conclusion a need for globalization where “the use of a variety of instruments of homogenization, which are absorbed into local and political and cultural economies, only to be repatriated as heterogeneous dialogues of national sovereignty, free enterprise, fundamentalism, etc...becom[ing] this repatriation of difference” (Appadurai, 1990, p.309). The same distinction between globalization and homogenization in some ways could parallel the differences between sameness and oneness, though Appadurai (1990) recognizes the more complicated nature of globalization and homogenization where the competition of each ideal to appear more relevant and victorious as applied to Enlightenment ideals can be wholly detrimental on either side.

An additional inconsistency and resulting disadvantage of the more homogenized representation of the global fight to end violence against women are the types of identities promoted at the forefront of the campaign, which are often more comprehensible to a Western viewer. The necessity to appeal to mass

amounts of followers in the origin country of the movement, the U.S., may contribute to a type of hybridity of identity in global participants such as that depicted by Shome (2006) in her revelation of hybrid identities displayed by Indian call workers. She describes the ways in which Indian call workers adopt alternate American identities that they perform when speaking with American customers during their shifts. They are trained to do so in order to establish a level of trust and connection with their customers, who have been shown to be disagreeable otherwise. Call workers with the most believable American identities are more successful in their work, as they succeed in not interrupting the dominant culture and geopolitical spaces, thus avoiding any “furious recogn[ition] that the agent is some third world tele-marketer” on the part of the customer (Shome, 2006, p. 111) A similar hybrid performance on the part of participants in V-Day and One Billion Rising is demonstrated most visibly through the use of language, where most speakers and writers featured in the promotional videos and posts on the website are English speakers. In the primary promotional video in particular, a snippet of one foreign language is included at the start of the video, paired with an exotic looking woman in tribal garb (One Billion Rising Revolution). This singling out of another language as exotic and other, juxtaposed against the rest of the video with news clips in English and other dancing scenes, might encourage participants to promote their own One Billion Rising events in English, a task already observable in many online event descriptions that provide English translations in addition to the native language. As Shome (2006) describes in the context of the Indian call workers, this practice of favoring English aligns with the regulated “transnational flows of (American-centric) legal regimes” (p. 111).

As seen in the ways in which individuals of different languages, dress, and other visually “disruptive” identifiers are portrayed in the video, non-English or non-Western identities are portrayed as the diverse and exoticized “other” represented as part of the whole “one.” Especially in video form, these women are subject to what Shome (2006) describes as the gaze, and can also be further described in the context of Srinivasan’s (2010) objects as specimen versus objects as embedded. As Shome (2006) states:

The gaze has always implicitly informed discussions of the diasporic subject. Traversing the world of the ‘host’ nation as well as the ‘nation’ left behind, the ethnic hybrid subject (as demonstrated in works of Anzaldúa, Gilroy, among others) is a split (*mestiza*) subject because s/he traverses dual worlds and the colliding gaze of those worlds.(p. 119).

The identities of foreign subjects in the One Billion Rising video were produced, digitized, and edited for consumption by the Western gaze through its promotion on the main website. Though it is posed as a call for the awareness and recognition of global female struggles and recruitment of individuals to aid in the

organization's mission, it nonetheless controls the narrative of the displayed subjects through the lens of the U.S. based video editing team without the inclusion of those subjects' distinct voices. In addition to placing these subjects in an opportunity for more one-sided gaze, the potential exoticizing of the subjects may lead them to be viewed as objects as specimens, described by Srinivasan et. al. (2010) as an object viewed as representative of its larger origin. The authors explain the concept and its counterpart as such:

We explain that the "object as specimen" paradigm considers the museum object as a representation of a larger body of knowledge, while the "object as embedded" paradigm presents the object as acting within a larger, dynamic cultural, and discursive system. Since the "object as specimen" is an embedded social practice, we argue that it remains important, though not sufficient. (p. 736).

Like the object as specimen described above, the foreign individuals and their identities as relayed in the One Billion Rising promotional video are taken out of context of their more embedded communities, associated narratives, and ontologies. They are meant to be representative of their origins and the bodies of knowledge associated with them for the easy consumption of viewers outside of their country in the form of a brief, nine-minute clip. The campaign wishes to relay the feelings and ontologies of these individuals especially in relation to their desire to end violence against women as blended with all of the other cultures included in the clip, combined and represented in one video and narrative. This semblance of oneness is observably undermined by a revelation of non-Western individuals and identities as "other" even within the proposed "one," through exclusion of distinct voices and embedded-ness replaced by a presentation of unique and exotic nature. Each of the examples of applied manifestations of oneness mentioned above in regards to the choices made in date, activity, video promotion, and other elements of the campaign are all enabled by the ownership of power in the hands of the V-Day and the One Billion Rising campaign through an analysis of displays and dynamics of power and discourse within the campaign.

2.1 Elements of discourse & power in oneness

Elements of power and discourse are demonstrated in nearly every aspect of the V-Day and One Billion Rising movement. As described in the section on examples and inconsistencies in oneness above, particular choices were made in the founding and development of various central elements of the One Billion Rising movement that affect the way in which it presents its own ideals, as well as the ways in which it represents and presents the individuals and groups of women it advocates for. Foucault's (1969) *The Archeology of Knowledge* provides a notable set of theoretical principles for identifying and dissecting the effects and

implications of power as it is seen in systems, policies, and regulations governing societal discourse. In his chapter, "The Discourse on Language," he states, "In every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized, and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures, whose role is to avert its powers and its dangers, to cope with chance events, to evade its ponderous, awesome materiality" (Foucault, 1969, p. 216). Foucault (1969) calls specific attention to the ways in which discourse is controlled by institutions by means of exclusion and prohibition, emphasizing the work of universities, governments, and other authoritative sectors for their work in this arena. Though the V-Day organization does not fit neatly into one of these categories, a parallel can be drawn in the ways its power as an authoritative institution directs its governance and guidance of related discourse. Foucault (1969) describes the institutions and systems of exclusion in particular as "a part of discourse that deals with power and desire" (p. 220), a concept that manifests itself in the desire of the V-Day organization and One Billion Rising campaign to direct its discourse to present an integrated oneness between all represented participants and involved individuals.

Foucault (1969) also discusses another system of discourse governance, one that relates more closely to the individuals and groups represented in the campaign rather than the organizers and authority figures: a group he calls internal rules. He describes this as a group where "discourse exercises its own control; rules concerned with the principles of classification, ordering, distribution" (p.220), which includes elements of commentary as seen in the theory of works uttered versus words spoken. The notion of commentary as he defines it is particularly applicable to potential motivation for hybrid existence individuals may face in an attempt to appeal to the desired discourse of sponsoring or authoritative institutions. Words uttered are identified as casual comments used fleetingly in daily conversation, in opposition to words spoken, moments of discourse that remain embedded and socially relevant as in religious or judicial texts (Foucault, 1969). Though uttered discourse may be fleeting and "disappears with the very act which gave rise to it" (p. 220), learning and maintaining these internal rules is a delicate balance for the Indian call workers discussed in Shome's (2006) piece, and is likely also a cause for concern for individuals in the One Billion Rising campaign that would like the publicity, funding, and resources to manage their own events (Foucault, 1969). This sense of the necessity of learning a certain set of internal rules to participate in such a project is further exacerbated by the third set of rules Foucault (1969) proposes as controlling discourse, this group regarding the conditions under which it may happen. He describes a system of rarefaction among speaking subjects:

None may enter into discourse on a specific subject unless he has satisfied certain conditions or if he is not, from the outset, qualified to do so. More

exactly, not all areas of discourse are equally open and penetrable; some are forbidden territory (differentiated and differentiating) while others are virtually open to the winds and stand, without any prior restrictions, open to all (Foucault, 1969, p. 224-225).

Though it would seem that the subject of ending violence against women would be an equally open and penetrable field of discourse, within the context of the V-Day organization and the One Billion Rising campaign it is not. Indeed, various global individuals being represented and advocated for through the promoted narrative cannot as equally infiltrating the discourse as founder Eve Ensler, high ranking organization members, associated celebrity figures, and other similarly high status individuals. This relates both to the fact that the organization is hierarchical in structure and the fact that those at the top of are more easily and willingly heard. Ensler is heavily promoted on both the V-Day and One Billion Rising sites as the central spokesperson for the organization, and media attention is highly driven toward the site and organization events through high profile celebrity collaborations. This leaves grassroots and local community organizational leaders in underrepresented parts of the world farther down in the hierarchy, and thus at more of a disadvantage in accessing global discourse.

The embrace of oneness promotes the idea that the head of the institution can speak for all included individuals, as Ensler demonstrates in her resolution “to stand by the we” (One Billion Rising). In the resulting conditions of controlled discourse, however, a division of one and other still exists. This is additionally present in the main mission/project promoted by the V-Day organization, which aids in the staging of Ensler’s play *The Vagina Monologues* in interested schools, communities, and groups. Though acclaimed for its inclusion of a varied range of women’s stories, the collection is ultimately still told through the writing, positioning, and perspective of the author, risking the same level of exoticism of foreign experiences as the promotional video. The facilitation of performances of this play in global communities strives to promote a sense of oneness between groups of women but may instead promote the perspective and power of discourse of one American writer in place of self-produced and presented personal narratives from grassroots and local communities and organizations. Thus through this hierarchical control of discourse and narrative, an eclipsing of varied non- Western voices in favor of a purportedly representative whole occurs, which is similar to the selection process of representative elements for the campaign described previously.

Added reinforcement of the author and organizational leaders as those holding the power of discourse is revealed through Foucault’s (1969) discussion in his chapter, “The Formation of Enunciative Modalities,” in which he explains the logics of how an individual speaks, is perceived, and is listened to in any

given exchange of discourse. Using the example of a doctor, Foucault (1969) explains the process of examining who is speaking, what institutional sites they are speaking from or on behalf of, and how they are positioned in relation to other involved entities, all of which factor in how the individual is allowed to speak and how they will be perceived and heard within a conversation. The question of who is speaking involves status, for example the status of a doctor involves an implied level of competence and knowledge, or the status of an author implies expertise and knowledge, which qualifies those individuals to speak in general as well as to speak on particular subjects. The question of who is speaking regarding institutional sites involves the origin of the speaker's qualifications, like a hospital or publisher, which legitimizes and reinforces the power of the speech and speaker. Lastly, the more complicated question of how the speaker is positioned in relation to other entities and within a network addresses the various contexts and instances in which a speaker may be more of listener, a speaker, a seer, etc. (Foucault, 1969). This set of explanations reveals another underlying process through which oneness is legitimized: the justification of the status of authorship of *The Vagina Monologues*, entrepreneur and founder of V-Day and One Billion Rising, Eve Ensler, and her organizations, and how they are portrayed as the most qualified and legitimate entities for holding the power of discourse,;as well as the most logical choice in representing the overarching needs of women globally. These are continually legitimized through the a high positioning in the network with the support of funders, high profile sponsors, and aligning governmental figures, which continues the cycle of local leaders kept at more of a listening or contributing information position within the network.

Foucault (1969) further speaks to the clash between the concepts of a unified one and dispersed others in his discussion of the ever-changing pieces within one speaking subject as a result of varied positions and contexts. He concludes:

In the proposed analysis, instead of referring back to the synthesis or the unifying function of a subject, the various enunciative modalities manifest in his dispersion. To the various statuses, the various sites, the various positions that he can occupy or be given when making a discourse. To the discontinuity of the planes from which he speaks. And if these planes are linked by a system of relations, this system is not established by the synthetic activity of a consciousness identical with itself, dumb and anterior to all speech, but by the specificity of a discursive practice... Thus conceived, discourse is not the majestically unfolding manifestation of a thinking, knowing, being subject, but, on the contrary, a totality, in which the dispersion of the subject and his discontinuity with himself may be determined (p. 54-55).

Here Foucault speaks to the difficulty in the unification of even a single subject, which must certainly raise questions for the consolidation of ideas and ideologies of many subjects as attempted in the pursuit of oneness. The challenges in handling dynamics of power and discourse within an institution and associated relations described in this section serve as support for the tendency of ideas of oneness to more often than not fall into favoring one authoritative ideal over others, even if such an outcome is not originally sought. This process is the basis for the exclusion of ethnic and indigenous voices in quests for oneness when Western ideals possess the power of discourse and narrative creation and dissemination. In support of the ideals in the Digital Divide mentioned earlier, the pursuit of oneness is further fueled by the popular Western desire for constant progression and futuristic advancement, as analyzed in the discussion of efficiency in oneness.

2.2 The quest for efficiency in oneness

The underlying quest for efficiency present in the push for technological advancement and connecting of the unwired world is in agreement with the idea of and belief in oneness. Rather than pursuing more labor intensive and decentralized methods of representing multiple ontologies in discourses of global causes, attempting to unify the goals and experiences of all affected individuals under one voice is seen as more efficient in disseminating the message, gathering willing volunteers and enactors of change, and ultimately achieving group goals. In the context of the V-Day organization and One Billion Rising Campaign, head organizers believe that combining the powers of all women will more immediately and efficiently bring about global change, despite the issues this may pose in defining and expressing individualized struggles, needs, and narratives. As seen in Sawhney & Suri's (2008) analysis of lateral connectivity on Aboriginal networks, this ideology often results in the favoring of one mode of communication or method of discourse that could serve to the detriment of certain individual communities.

Sawhney & Suri (2008) discuss the idea of ritual communication that has been heavily overshadowed by the transmission model in the name of heightened efficiency. They explain through the work of Carey (1989) that the transmission model focuses on sending packets of information through space, with an emphasis on new information (Sawhney & Suri, 2008). Conversely, ritual communication places a greater focus on maintaining a community or society within a given moment in time through an expression of communal values (Sawhney & Suri, 2008). Rather than placing importance on the act of getting information from one place to another in a direct and simple way, ritual communication places an emphasis on the maintenance of what is being communicated. In terms of getting information from one place to another using the standard of efficiency, the

transmission model seems to be the logical choice, which was shown through its mass adoption as a chosen mode of communication especially following the genesis of the telegraph (Sawhney, & Suri, 2008).

Sawhney & Suri (2008) further reveal that ritual communication, though perhaps not immediately or visibly the most efficient means for building social networks, serves a very functional role in a given society. Their discussions seem to call for coexistence between these two ideals of ritual versus transmission communication, rather than a clear favoring of one over another. Sawhney & Suri (2008) express that though the newer focus on transmission and other new models of communication have their merits, “it is disturbing that the elimination of “inefficient” and “expensive” interactions has almost become a goal by itself” (p. 360). This move toward erasing the practice of ritual communication also ignores the need for maintenance and stability, two elements that will likely affect the quality of future modes of communication if completely abandoned. In the context of V-Day and One Billion Rising, ritual communication may be seen as the maintenance and community specific discourse and communication models used in local and smaller grassroots communities, modes that are expressed lower down in the organizational and campaign hierarchy. In line with a more efficient method of communicating the needs and struggles of represented individuals and groups, their stories and identities are funneled through one campaign narrative in favor of several local narratives.

The quest for efficiency appears to have a history in the feminist struggle as well, with many scholarly arguments from the 1980s to the 2000s predicting that the increase in popularity of the Internet and subsequent modes of online communication could create a more balanced and equalizing atmosphere for women from the inherent democracy and efficient ease of access provided. Herring (2003) lays out a few of the major arguments promoting the notion that the democratic nature of the Internet will enable greater gender equality, including the claims that text-based computer-mediated communication erase gender (Danet, 1998; Graddol & Swann, 1989), that the Internet will empower women through the ability to form communities and possibilities for political organization (Balka, 1993), and that the web will close the entrepreneurial gap between men and women through self-publishing opportunities (Rickert & Sacharow, 2000).

These arguments compare fairly easily to those supporting the Digital Divide, where the efficiency and futuristic progressiveness of new communication technologies were thought to be a strong resolution for inequality. However, like the criticisms posed against proposed solutions to the Digital Divide, Herring (2003) calls attention to the fact many of these technologies did not actually aid in significantly addressing the original concerns. The body of evidence she discusses throughout her paper “as a whole runs counter to the claim that gender is invisible or irrelevant on the Internet, or that the Internet equalizes gender-based power and

status differentials” (Herring, 2003, p. 203). Baker (2010) comes to comparable conclusions in the context of claims that industrial and economic changes associated with modernity resulted in greater gender equality. She explains that such claims and accompanying stories of unhindered female success “are conveniently unhinged from other social indicators which point to a continuing power asymmetry between men and women” (Baker, 2010, p.2-3).

Considering these findings, it seems even more surprising that the V-Day and the One Billion Rising campaign would rely so heavily on the use of social media and other methods of online communication and digital media to help bridge the gap between global women, and provide a space for them to share their stories and organize events. Promoting the strong social media presence of the organization and its successes in reaching individuals and inspiring movements in a wide range of geographical areas quickly and efficiently ties in well with the idea of oneness in using social media for global reach, but may not actually succeed in gathering the unheard communities they wish to represent. This is especially pertinent in light of the changes in social media use in areas outside of the U.S., where the pervasive use of mobile devices often in favor of personal computers has led to more global use of applications like WhatsApp over the American populated Facebook or Twitter (Woodruff, 2014). The influence of Western modes of efficient communication and attempting to channel many voices through one source seems to play a large role here in the perpetuation of communicating oneness and representing the ideas of all women through the communication models of the West. Building on the discussions of inconsistencies, power, and discourse in oneness relayed so far, the embrace of certain Western centered modes of communicative efficiency further demonstrate ways in which the perpetuation of oneness can lead to the exclusion of voices and perspectives thought to be non-central.

2.3 The clash of oneness in theory and practice

As demonstrated in the discussions of inconsistencies, power, discourse, and efficiency within the concept of oneness thus far, several factors embedded in the fundamental nature of oneness result in the favoring or dominance of a Western, and in many cases specifically American, ideal, resulting in an inability to present a contextual, and more accurate inclusion of the global voices the concept attempts to envelop. The theory of oneness has been analyzed in an applied way using the case of the V-Day organization and its associated One Billion Rising campaign, showcasing the ways in which specific actions, conditions, and perceptions of both these entities are very representative of the oneness cause and the dangers and failures that accompany it. Perhaps the most immediately negative and impactful effects of the organization, and their attempt to promote the oneness of global women, is in their partnership with government

officials and legislative bodies to enact legal changes in accordance with their particular feminist agenda. As described in a number of community writings and critiques, these actions serve to the detriment of Indigenous women and women of color.

Lauren Chief Elk, leader of the Save Wiyabi Project, describes in particular the negative effects of legislatures like the Violence Against Women Act and the International Violence Against Women Act. Both proposals, heavily supported and aided by Ensler and the One Billion Rising campaign, enforce the use of official reporting of sexual assault and related incidents to the police or other authority figures. Though this may seem to be a logical step toward decreasing instances of targeted violence against women, Chief Elk reveals that acts such as this in actuality increase the incidents of incarceration of Indigenous women and women of color (Chief Elk, 2014). The current legal infrastructure is still working against Indigenous and ethnic women, and this fact does not change even if they are the clear victims in a sexual assault reporting context. In these circumstances the myth of oneness, of one collective struggle to end violence against women across the globe, quickly crumbles. The changes enacted on behalf of “the one” benefit only a portion of the supposed represented group, the white females that are not subject to the embedded bias within the legal system. The Save Wiyabi Project promotes an alternative, by working toward the development of community based response efforts and regulations for handling local incidents of sexual assault and violence. By attending to and accepting the individuation of each community context and the ways in which victims may be affected differently, they are attempting to distance themselves from the current governmental system to reach the most effective solutions. This approach, however, does not fit into the elements of efficiency and collectiveness essential to oneness as discussed in previous sections, and is thus left to be part of the dispersed local efforts rather than introduced widely within the organization and to others as a viable method for communities.

What is instead promoted in mainstream promotional videos and messages on behalf of V-Day and One Billion Rising are the stories of these communities, for the purpose of “the cause.” Elk (2014) describes the ways in which her community’s celebration of the 23rd Women’s Memorial March in Vancouver was overshadowed by the One Billion Rising agenda in an attempt to spotlight the community’s stories and struggles. The march was formed as an awareness event to protest the indifference shown to Indigenous women, and to mourn the disappeared and murdered. The V-Day event gathered significantly more press and attention than the parallel February 14th Women’s Memorial March event, effectively overshadowing it (Chief Elk, 2014). Dissenting comments in protest of the event in light of this were deleted from the One Billion Rising Facebook thread, but Indigenous women continued to be appropriated as a symbol of the

struggle the organization claims it is globally representing (Chief Elk, 2014). The instance of sentiments and concerns regarding feminist issues specific to racial identity being ignored, silenced, or appropriated are echoed by Gillian Schute, a former One Billion Rising coordinator in South Africa, as well as a group of Congolese women protesting Ensler's portrayal of Congolese struggles in the media (Schute, 2013, Eve Ensler and "Congo Stigmata"). Here the use of Indigenous identities as objects, as specimens, is demonstrated in full force, as the struggles and narratives of these Vancouver Indigenous communities are taken from their origins and associated community projects, and assimilated into a collective feminist struggle. The power of Ensler and the organizations' status and effects on the promoted and widespread discourse surrounding the event is also apparent through their ability to erase dissenting voices and their position of greater influence in promoting the communities' stories. As Chief Elk puts it succinctly:

Ultimately, there is no "just turn to the system to have some order in addressing sexualized violence" because the system does not operate to help us.

There is no "we."

There is no "all rape victims."

...There is no "we," because this approach is at the expense of us. Women of color become collateral damage in the continued quest to uphold and protect white womanhood...The problem with the framing of sexualized violence as an issue that hurts all women equally is that it erases many of the historical and current experiences for Indigenous women." (Elk, 2014).

3. Conclusion & alternative options

As seen in each of the discussions above, the concept of oneness, the idea that the ideologies and identities of varied global individuals can be expressed and represented through a single organization or agenda, does not succeed in representing the needs and narratives of global identities in the way that it hopes or purports to, and instead contributes to the exclusion of non-majority voices. The deep entanglements of oneness with Western ideals of progress and efficiency, trust in governmental and legislative systems for solutions, and historical and systemic advantages in power, status, and control of discourse all contribute to the eventual erasure, exclusion, appropriation and homogenization of indigenous and ethnic identities in the course of attempting to promote their narratives and selves as part of the collective struggle. As demonstrated through the case of V-Day and the One Billion Rising campaign, the Western, white feminist struggle increasingly becomes the model by which all agenda items are measured, with that perspective remaining at the forefront of discourse and media focus and all others more loosely connected in their respective global corners.

The historical and theoretical basis for this centralized approach is demonstrated through discussions of the Digital Divide as supported by Ginsburg's (2008) work, where parallels can be made between the idea of global oneness motivating the implementation of information communication technologies to the unwired world as an all-encompassing solution. Verran (2002) offers an additional perspective of a similar theoretical idea of sameness, calling attention to the shared attributes in group ontologies that influence the concept of oneness, a discussion supported by Srivivasan's (2012) concept of multiple ontologies. Appadurai (1990) & Shome's (2006) work guide the revelation of contradictions and inconsistencies demonstrated in tangible examples of manifested oneness, revealing the potential for homogenization of cultures or the impetus for hybrid identities for the sake of the collective ideals. The clear complications regarding power relations and control of discourse are analyzed using the works of Foucault, unpacking the effects of the Western based origin of oneness ideals on status and legitimization of participation in discourse. Finally, Sawhney & Suri's (2008) work on lateral connectivity highlight the prevalence of efficiency in the communication of oneness which undermines community based communication, leading into a final analysis of clashes between ideals within the abstract theoretical concept of oneness and its manifested applied consequences shown in the legislative and media based actions of the One Billion Rising campaign.

An appropriate next step to an acceptance of this theoretical analysis of oneness is to ask, what's next? How do we combat the dominantly Western ideal of oneness in organizations that are attempting to represent global citizens? Is it even possible to promote a "global cause"? As seen throughout this paper, the effects and goals of supposed global struggles vary widely based on context. There are specificities unique to communities that seem to bar the ability to collectively promote one overarching issue at all. Though it may be a less beneficial approach to work toward solutions for worldwide issues through a traditional hierarchical organization, an umbrella-like organization model may not have to be completely abandoned. The power of large numbers of individuals gathered together to promote the same cause can still be more powerful than a scattered collection of smaller groups, but it is essential to use an awareness of one's global positioning and its associated ideals, perceptions, and general benefits or disadvantages to inform and guide interactions with others. A vocal goal and pervasive policy within any geographically widespread organization should be to use the expression of individualized identities and narratives as a prioritized factor in planning or organizing solutions to issues like sexual assault and violence against women. Rather than force many voices into one collective narrative, a solution may lie in many narratives supported by a collective network of resources and conversation, without hierarchical infrastructure or primary

media outlets. Such an approach will respect and maintain what Srinivasan (2012) describes as multiple ontologies, to allow for the most effective solutions for each space and set of identities, enacting change in a way that makes sense to each individual affected.

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