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Residents and Activists

Membership Categorization Analysis as a Critical Tool

Abstract. This article uses Membership Categorization Analysis (MCA) (Sacks 1992) to offer an example of concrete tools that can be used by teachers who wish to develop critical media literacy skills with their students. Specifically, the article suggests that MCA can be a way to deal with the societal silence that often accompanies discrimination. As an example, three texts that implicitly reference Race in the United States are examined. The texts, all authored during Summer, 2020, offer accounts for a situation where a person carried, pointed, or fired a gun. In each case, those with the gun are characterized as residents or property owners, and are put in opposition with a group of people termed as activists, or members of a mob. Thus, the article shows how category terms and their associated actions and descriptors can be used to set up racist inferences, including inferring the presence of people who were not actually present in a given situation, or actions which did not occur. The study's findings also offer a pathway for teachers by suggesting: 1) that putting local texts in conversation with national ones can help students uncover societal patterns that relate to their own lives; and 2) that MCA is a tool that teachers can use to find concrete examples of the silences that often surround discrimination.

Keywords. Membership Categorization Analysis (MCA), text analysis, tools for teachers, conversation, race, discrimination, silence.

Anwohner:innen und Aktivist:innen

Die Analyse der Mitgliedschaftskategorisierung als kritisches Instrument

Zusammenfassung. In diesem Beitrag wird die Membership Categorization Analysis (MCA) (Sacks 1992) verwendet, um ein Beispiel für konkrete Inst-

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rumente zu geben, die von Lehrer:innen eingesetzt werden können, die mit ihren Schülern Critical Media Literacy entwickeln wollen. Insbesondere schlägt der Artikel vor, dass MCA ein Weg sein kann, um mit dem gesellschaftlichen Schweigen umzugehen, das oft mit Diskriminierung einhergeht. Beispielhaft werden drei Texte untersucht, die sich implizit auf die Kategorie Rasse in den Vereinigten Staaten beziehen. Die Texte, die alle im Sommer 2020 verfasst wurden, schildern jeweils eine Situation, in der eine Person eine Waffe trägt, damit ein Ziel anvisiert oder sie abfeuert. In jedem Fall werden die Personen mit der Waffe als Anwohner:innen oder Immobilienbesitzer:innen charakterisiert und einer Gruppe von Menschen gegenübergestellt, die als Aktivist:innen oder Mitglieder eines Mobs bezeichnet werden. Der Artikel zeigt also, wie Kategoriebegriffe und die damit verbundenen Handlungen und Deskriptoren dazu verwendet werden können, rassistische Schlussfolgerungen zu ziehen, einschließlich der Schlussfolgerung, dass Personen anwesend waren, die in einer bestimmten Situation gar nicht zugegen waren, oder dass es zu Handlungen kam, die nicht stattfanden. Die Ergebnisse der Untersuchung bieten auch einen Weg für Lehrkräfte, indem sie nahelegen: 1) dass die Gegenüberstellung lokaler und nationaler Texte Schüler:innen helfen kann, gesellschaftliche Muster aufzudecken, die sich auf ihr eigenes Leben beziehen; und 2) dass MCA ein Instrument ist, das Lehrer:innen nutzen können, um konkrete Beispiele für das Schweigen zu finden, das Diskriminierung oft umgibt.

Schlüsselwörter. Membership Categorization Analysis (MCA), Textanalyse, Tools für Lehrkräfte, Diskurs, Ethnizität, Diskriminierung, Schweigen

1 Introduction

When we teach critical media literacy (CML), we ask our students to explore the media they consume (and create), focusing on questions of power and discrimination in their daily lives. In other words, we try to build connections – among different texts; among texts and societal patterns; and between texts and our students' own experiences. Most teachers agree that this kind of work is crucial for today's young people, particularly given the ever-increasing rise in social media as a powerful force for both dividing communities and bringing them together – for propagating lies and conspiracies *and* for sharing hidden truths and realities. However, it is not enough to simply ask teachers to explore texts with their students. Those of us who study CML must offer tools for exploration, and examples of what that exploration might look like. This article is an attempt to do just that, via a case study exploring three different, but related texts.

Specifically, I hope to suggest two tools that could be used by teachers in their own classrooms. First, I show how examining texts from local *and* national media outlets is a powerful way to connect students' lived experiences with societal issues. By examining similarities between the language used to describe issues in their local communities and that used to describe events on the national scale, students can begin to understand the cultural patterns which shape our views and actions. Secondly, I suggest that *membership categorization analysis* (MCA) (Sacks 1992) –a method for understanding how speakers and authors use categorical terms – can be a powerful tool for uncovering hidden "stereotypes, values, and ideologies" (Kellner, Share 2019, p. 5). One of the difficulties entailed in teaching CML is that societal discrimination is almost always accompanied by societal denial. Because denial usually leads to resistance towards uncovering societal discrimination, it is particularly important for teachers to use concrete, real-life examples. The catch-22, however, is that because discriminatory ideologies are often hidden rather than being explicit, it can be difficult to find concrete examples with which to start classroom conversations.

As I will discuss, the history and current reality of racism in the United States offers an incredibly potent example of this pattern (Baldwin 1992; Rawls, Duck 2020). At the same time as a shared legacy of racism impacts almost every aspect of daily life in the United States, denial of this reality is an ever-growing phenomenon. Thus, this article uses three texts related to Race[1] and racism in the United States as an example of one kind of critical media critique that might be appropriate for teachers grappling with both discrimination and denial in their own contexts. Each of the texts I explore below was written during the summer of 2020, and all three relate to a nationwide reckoning with Race and racism which grew out of protests following the murder of George Floyd. My focus in analyzing the texts will be on the quiet, or implicit ways that the texts' authors reference societal constructs related to Race.

Below, I start with a brief explanation of membership categorization analysis and then describe the three texts and their contexts. Next, I use MCA to look at how the authors of the texts use categorization to account for their own actions and those of others in their communities. I suggest that each text uses two opposing categories, which I am calling 'residents' and 'activists'.

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1   In this article, I follow the work of Rawls and Duck (2020) in capitalizing the words "Race," "White," and "Black." I do so in order to emphasize the fact that these words are not based on biological reality, but are social constructions, or as Rawls and Duck write, "social facts."

Additionally, I reflect on how the "apparatus" (Sacks 1992, p. 237) of categorization allows speakers and writers to imply people, actions, and results that may or may not have counterpoints in the physical world. In other words, I attempt to show how MCA offers a tool for uncovering textual silences and gaps – in this case, those related to Race and racism. I conclude with a discussion of how this case study offers a set of procedures that could be used by teachers and students to critically engage with a variety of texts.

2   Method and Data

In this section, I start with a discussion of Membership Categorization Analysis and how it is used in this project. I then offer background on MCA as a method, and on the context for two of the texts described here. Finally, I present the three texts I will analyze in this article.

2.1   Membership Categorization Analysis

Membership categorization refers to the way ordinary people use categories of people to account for their actions, and the actions of those around them. Harvey Sacks (1992), the sociologist who first used the term, wrote that "there's a collection of categories […] and (people) apply them to populations to say things about them" (p. 238). One extremely important point about these categories is that, although Sacks writes about them as if they already exist, somewhere in the world (i.e. "there's a collection […]") – he was, in fact, very clear that these categories are created by those who use them. In a sense, the word 'membership' in the phrase "membership categorization" can have dual meanings. On the one hand, we can ask how and when people are assigned membership to certain categories, such as 'woman', or 'citizen', or 'mother'. But we can also ask how members – by which Sacks basically meant members of a given society or culture (Sacks 1992, p. 237) – build and use the categories in question. Thus, rather than inserting people into predetermined categories, MCA asks researchers to look closely at how categories are constructed and used by members.

Sacks started with two simple sentences, from a child's story: *The Baby Cried. The Mommy Picked It Up* (1992, p. 237). He argued that although the speaker of the two sentences does not explicitly describe a connection between the baby and the mommy in this miniature story, their connection is perfectly clear. As listeners or readers, we all understand that it is the baby's mommy who picked it up –

not some random mommy from the street. At first glance, this may seem so obvious as to be hardly worth discussing. However, as Sacks, and many researchers who use MCA have found, this simple observation turns out to be a powerful tool for understanding an "apparatus" (Sacks 1966, p. 237) we all use to both account for and create our worlds.

For the purposes of this article, it is worth highlighting three observations Sacks made about these two sentences, all related to the inferences we make when we hear the name of a given category. First, we can think in terms of "collections" (Sacks 1966, p. 238), or groups of categories that belong together. These sets are one reason that the relationship between the baby and mother is so apparent. Babies and mothers are part of a set we might call 'family' – along with, perhaps, father, sister, brother, aunt, grandmother, etc. The important point here is that pretty much any member of a given society will have the same understanding of what belongs in this collection. So, if I say 'mother', I am inferring many other categories, including those in the list above. To put it differently, 'mothers' have 'children' – and we do not need to say this explicitly. I can use the word mother to infer a host of other categories. The other kinds of inference Sacks describes has to do with actions and descriptors we connect with categories. For instance, the category 'mother', at least in some societies, might be related to actions such as 'teaching', 'loving', 'feeding', etc. and to descriptors which might range from caring to controlling. These "category-bound activities" (Sacks 1992, p. 241) and "category-tied predicates" (Stokoe 2012, p. 281) are, according to Sacks, a primary way that we understand and describe our world.

2.2 Method and Participants

In working with the texts described below, I started by simply looking closely at the terms used to describe people or groups of people. For each text, I then traced the category-bound activities that seemed to be associated with different groups. Finally, I looked across texts for similarities in categories and in category-bound activities. Text A is a transcription of a video that was found on YouTube. Texts B and C are part of a larger corpus of material, including Zoom interviews, video recordings of meetings, meeting notes, and published texts, such as Letters to the Editor and newspaper articles. All materials are related to the work of a group of community members from a rural area in the mid-Western United States[2]. The group has been meeting regularly since 2016, and they share a wish

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2   In the tradition of MCA, and its parent field of ethnomethodology, I have attempted to anonymize local texts and participants.

to build connections in their local community while also working to change what they see as racist and sexist policies and actions in their area. As is typical of MCA-related research, my goal in this project is not generalizability. Instead, I hope to use this case study to show a set of possible tools for further research of other contexts and other texts. MCA, at heart, focuses on an emic perspective. Our aim is to uncover the perspective of participants, as it is displayed in their verbal choices. That said, although my goal in this study was to stay with the concrete textual choices made by the writers I describe below, I must also note that this particular context is important to me personally. Two of the texts described below are from the county where I spent my childhood. Thus, my understanding of the clear racial undertones in these documents is based on both academic analysis and personal experience. Specifically, and to use my own set of category terms, I am a White woman and my family is Black. My insistence on the importance of seeing connections among texts, bodies, objects, and places stems from my own fear for family members who were threatened and targeted after these incidents I describe below. For this reason, and in the interest of triangulation, I have checked my understandings and analyses of all three texts with local community members.

2.3   The Texts

The following texts were all created between August 24 and August 30, 2020, in the United States. In order to clearly portray their contexts, I present the texts chronologically. Note: In order to preserve anonymity in texts B and C, references to specific people, places, and times are replaced by a general term in brackets. For instance, [place name] is used instead of the name of a town or county.

(A) McCloskey Speech (MS)

On August 24, 2020, at approximately 8:30pm, a prerecorded speech by Mark and Patricia McCloskey was presented as part of the nationally televised Republican National Convention. Prior to the convention, the couple had received considerable coverage in national news media after they were photographed and videotaped while aiming a handgun and semi-automatic rifle (CNN 2021) at protestors who were walking towards the house of the St. Louis mayor. The walkers' purpose was to protest the mayor's decision to read aloud the names of people who had written to her in favor of defunding the police. The following transcriptions are from the McCloskey's speech.

Patricia McCloskey (0:23):
01 America is such a great country that not only do you
02 have the right to own a gun and use it to defend yourself,
03 but thousands of Americans will offer you free advice on
04 how to use it. At least that's what we experienced. What
05 you saw happen to us could just as easily happen to
06 any of you who are watching from quiet neighborhoods
07 around our country …

Mark McCloskey (0:46):
08 It seems as if the Democrats no longer view the
09 government's job as protecting honest citizens from
10 criminals, but rather protecting criminals from honest
11 citizens. Not a single person [.] in the out-of-control mob
12 you saw at our house was charged with a crime, but you
13 know who was? We were. They've actually charged us
14 with felonies for daring to defend our home.

Mark McCloskey (1:28):
15 On top of that, consider this: The Marxist [.] liberal
16 activist leading the mob to our neighborhood stood
17 outside our home with a bull horn screaming, "You can't
18 stop the revolution." Just weeks later, that same [.] Marxist
19 [.] activist won the Democrat nomination to hold a seat in
20 the US House of Representatives in the city of St. Louis –
21 that's the same as winning the general election. That
22 Marxist [.] revolutionary is now going to be [.] the
23 congresswoman from the first district of Missouri.

(B) Police Press Releases (PR)

A few hours after the McCloskeys' speech, on August 24, 2020, at approximately 11:30pm, a man who lived in a rural, mid-Western area of the United States stood on his porch. His porch faced out onto a state highway, and across the highway were a garage and parking lot, both of which belonged to him. Standing on the other side of the road were a group of approximately 50 people, including men, women, and children, all of whom were walking across the country towards Washington, DC, where they planned to participate in a march celebrating Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. They later stated that they had parked their cars there in order to prepare for the next stage of their walk. The man standing on his porch shot his gun towards these people. One person was shot in the face and had to receive

medical care. After the shooting incident, the state police issued a series of press releases via Twitter and then held several press conferences. The texts below are from the initial Twitter press releases, and were both issued on August 25.

Press Release #1:
01 The [place name] State Police in [place name] is currently investigating a
02 shooting that took place on [place name] on 08/24/2020 at [time]. An area
03 residence (sic.) and a group of individuals engaged in an argument, which
04 culminated in gun fire. One person was struck and is being treated in
05 [place name] hospital. Two individuals are currently being questioned at the
06 [place name] Barracks.

Press Release #2:
01 The [place name] State Police in [place name] was contacted by a property
02 owner on Monday, August 24, 2020 regarding a group of people in a private
03 business parking lot. Troopers later learned that the group was composed of
04 approximately 30 activists who are travelling on foot from [place name] to
05 Washington, D.C. At [time] at the same location and before state
06 police arrival, the property owners confronted the activists. The
07 confrontation escalated and gun shots were exchanged between the property
08 owners and the activists.

(C) Letter to the Editor (LTE)

On the evening of August 26, 2020, a group of 250-300 people gathered in the town square of a small rural town. The town is the county seat (center of local government) in the county where the shooting had taken place. Most of people in the square were from that same county, and most of them carried rifles or assault weapons (open carry laws are in effect in this state.) According to witnesses, social media postings, and an article in the local newspaper, they stated that they were there to 'protect' the court house from Black Lives Matter marchers and to 'support' the local police force. Importantly, there is no credible evidence of any threat to the courthouse. There is also no evidence that any group of people, besides those who gathered with guns were (or had planned to be) in the town square that night. The third text, then, is a letter to the editor, written by someone who participated in the incident in the town square. The letter was published in the August 29/30 edition of the local newspaper.

01 I just wanted to say how proud I was to be standing among
02 the patriots of [place name]. We all gathered to protect
03 our courthouse and monuments and to back our law

04 enforcement. All night long there were cars and trucks
05 driving by beeping their horns in show of support and
06 waving American flags. It's pretty amazing also how
07 clean it stayed down in the square. Early the next morning I
08 drove through and there was no trash that I could see.
09 There was no broken glass, no burnt out automobiles,
10 or burning buildings or looted businesses.
11 We all heard the call and we came down to defend our
12 town. Maybe more towns will start doing what we did.
13 I moved here a little over 21 years ago because I fell in love
14 with the area. I love [place name] even more now. Thank
15 you people of [place name] and God Bless America.

3   Analysis

In this analysis, I start by looking at the physical events for which these authors provide an account. Next, I look at how the people involved in these events are described using a similar set of categories in all three texts, with related category-bound activities and predicates.

Despite differences in genre and intended audience, all three texts include an account of an event where people stood outside while carrying, pointing, or firing a gun. On the surface, the McCloskey Speech can be seen as an attempt to unify Republican voters, or perhaps to persuade undecided voters to choose the Republican presidential candidate. However, at least part of the actual content of the speech was a description of the action that brought the speakers to the attention of national news media: pointing guns towards protestors. The Police Press Releases were written in response to an incident that included at least one person firing a gun. Finally, while the Letter to the Editor (LTE), does not mention firearms explicitly, witnesses, photographs, and the local newspaper all agree that most of the people described by the writer were, in fact, carrying guns (see also Text D, below).

Interestingly, all three texts use parallel categories to describe the person or people who carried, pointed, or fired guns. Below, I describe this category, which I call 'residents', in more detail. I then discuss another, related category, which I call 'activists', whose members are described in juxtaposition to 'residents'.

3.1   Residents

In these texts, one group of people is described in terms of their relationship to locations such as homes, towns, or countries. Below, I describe and give examples of that relationship. I then discuss the primary activity attributed to the category of 'resident', which is to 'protect' and/or 'defend'.

Although the actual word 'resident' only shows up in one text: PR#1 (line 03)[3], I use it as an overarching term in order to emphasize the connection between people and locations. This relationship is made explicit in the second press release, when the 'resident' from PR#1 is described as a 'property owner' (PR#2, lines 2, 6, 7–8). In the other two texts, the ownership and/or belonging is described implicitly, via the use of the plural possessive determiner ('our') plus a location, such as 'country' (MS, line 07); 'courthouse' (LTE, line 03), or 'home' (MS, line 14). In fact, throughout excerpts 2 and 3, the plural possessive pronoun is used in conjunction with a series of locations. I start with an extract from the McCloskey Speech:

(1) our country (MS)

04   What
05 you saw happen to us could just as easily happen to
06 any of you who are watching from quiet neighborhoods
07 around **our country**.

This extract, which is spoken by Patricia McCloskey, takes place at the very beginning of the recording. The speaker has just finished describing America as a "great country" (line 01), a phrase which is associated with "the right to own a gun and use it to defend yourself "(line 02). In these lines, McCloskey compares herself and her husband to those who are watching their speech, and then uses the phrase "our country" (line 07). Given this context, it seems likely that the country in question is the United States and that "our" references both the McCloskeys and their viewers. Most importantly, "our" is not the only possible word choice here. The speaker could easily have said *the country* or *this country*. By choosing a possessive pronoun, she emphasizes the fact of possession – the idea that the country belongs to her, and to those who are watching the Republican National Convention, and that they belong to and in the country.

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3   In fact, the text uses the word 'residence'. However, given the rest of the sentence, which describes the 'residence' (sic.) as engaged in an argument with another group of people, I assume that this is an error, and that the writers meant to use the word 'resident'.

Other examples of plural possessive pronouns modifying locations in the McCloskey speech and the Letter to the Editor follow:

(2) *our* plus noun (MS and LTE)

<u>our</u> country (MS, line 07)
<u>our</u> house (MS, line 12)
<u>our</u> home (MS, lines 14 and 17)
<u>our</u> neighborhood (MS, line 16)
<u>our</u> courthouse and monuments (LTE, line 03)
<u>our</u> town (LTE, lines 11 and 12)

Finally, it is interesting to note a moment where the writer of the letter to the editor uses personification to suggest that 'residents' of a town and the town itself are, in fact, the same. The writer first describes the actions she and her group took, and then goes on to say that "maybe more towns will start doing what we did" (line 12). Here, it is as if the town does not just belong to the people, but that they are in fact the town.

Two related categories are 'citizen' (MC, lines 9 and 11) and 'patriot' (LTE, line 2). Of course, not all citizens are residents of their countries. In the McCloskey's speech, however, the term is used in a general statement that contrasts citizens with criminals, and then goes on to contrast Mark and Patricia McCloskey with members of an 'out-of-control' mob (MS, line 11). Thus, the implication seems to be that the McCloskeys (who live in the United States) are members of the group 'citizen'. Similarly, the writer of the Letter to the Editor names herself as being a member of the group 'patriots', and then goes on to explicitly describe herself as living in the town she is describing. Indeed, one category-bound predicate, for the writers of the MS and the LTE, seems to be 'patriotic'. We notice this in a mention of American flags (LTE, line 06), and in the phrase "God Bless America" (LTE, line 15), as well as in the reference to "America" as a "great country" (MS, line 01).

Thus far, we have seen that 'residents' are also 'property owners' and 'home owners', as well as citizens of 'towns', and that they are also patriotic citizens of 'America'. The relationship between 'citizens'/'residents'/'patriots' and property is particularly important because of a key category bound activity in these texts: namely, 'protect' and 'defend'. Importantly, both defend and protect are transitive verbs requiring a direct object – something that is protected or defended. For

these authors, that object is a location[4]. Below, I show the uses of the verbs 'protect' and 'defend' in the McCloskey's Speech and the Letter to the Editor, along with the direct object for each use of these verbs.

(3) defend and protect

defend *our home* (MS, line 14)
protect *our courthouse and monuments* (LTE, lines 02 and 03)
defend *our town* (LTE, lines 11 and 12)

In the McCloskey speech, Mark McCloskey claims that "they" (the government) charged him and his wife with felonies for "daring to defend our home" (line 14). Although firearms are not mentioned in this portion of the speech, given the reference to legal proceedings which resulted from the actions the pair took during a protest (aiming their guns at protestors), it seems clear that the phrase "defend our home" is used to describe the action of pointing a gun at a person. It is also interesting that this phrase is used directly after the reference to 'citizens' (lines 9 and 11). The implication seems to be that Mark and Patricia McCloskey are 'citizens', and that, as such, they 'defend' (their) 'home'.

In the letter to the editor, 'defend' is used in a similar manner, with the difference being that the location being defended is 'our town' (lines 11–12). Additionally, the letter begins with the author noting that one purpose of the 'gather'(ing) she describes was to "protect our courthouse and monuments" (lines 02–03). And, in this case, the sentence using 'protect' is preceded by a sentence that designates those doing the protection as 'patriots' (line 02). Thus, we see a pattern where the action of carrying or pointing a gun is described as defending or protecting. Those doing the protecting and defending are 'citizens' and 'patriots', and they are defending places or locations which belong to them.

3.2 Activists

Along with possession, the category of 'resident' seems to be associated with danger from another, opposing group of people. To put it differently, not only do

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4 Note: I do not include three other uses of 'defend' and 'protect' in the McCloskey speech (lines 02, 09 and 10), all of which are references to generalized events with no specific human actor, rather than descriptions of the speaker's own actions. The movement from descriptions of specific actions to generalized events that might occur (or might need to occur) is fascinating in and of itself – but this is outside the scope of this article.

residents need to protect and defend their property, towns, etc. – they protect these locations from a specific category of people. Below, I discuss this category, and its explicit and implicit appearance in these texts.

In the McCloskey speech, we can note that 'neighborhood' (line 06) is used to describe the make-up of the United States, which seems to consist of a series of 'quiet neighborhoods' where people are watching the Republican National Convention (lines 06 and 07). Thus, one attribute of Americans is that they live in 'quiet neighborhoods'. However, these neighborhoods are in danger. Thus, the quiet described by Patricia McCloskey can be contrasted with a 'mob' of 'activists', 'screaming' into 'bull horns', about 'revolution' (lines 15–18). Notably, this group of people is described as being led into 'our neighborhood' (line 16). We see a similar juxtaposition in lines 8–12. Here, Mark McCloskey sets up a direct contrast between 'citizens' (that is, Americans) and 'criminals'. The 'criminals' in this case are members of an 'out of control mob', and the 'citizens' are 'honest'. In a sense, then, this speech implies a set of categories, or membership categorization device (Sacks 1992, p. 40), that consists of two connected groups: citizens and criminals.

(4) two groups, MS

honest citizens (line 09)	vs.	criminals (line 10)
home-owner ("our house," line 14)	vs.	out of control mob (line 11)
residents of "quiet neighborhoods" (line 06)	vs.	Marxist liberal activist … leading a mob … bull horn … screaming … (lines 15–22)

Interestingly, despite their theoretically objective genre, and despite being written in the 3rd person, the press releases juxtapose two groups of people in a similar way. In the first press release, 'an area resident' (sic) is juxtaposed against 'a group of individuals' (lines 02 and 03). Thus, one person is defined in terms of his location – his residence in the area – and, on the other hand, we have a nameless, unlocated "group." This juxtaposition becomes even clearer in the second press release, when the 'resident' becomes a 'property owner' and the 'group' becomes '30 activists' who were on a 'private parking lot' (lines 02, 03 and 04). Thus, we see again the pattern of referring to those who carry – and, in this case fire – guns in terms of their ownership of property, and in juxtaposition to groups of activists. It is also interesting to note that the term 'activist', in the McCloskey speech, is associated with being a 'Marxist revolutionary' and 'leading a mob' (lines 15–22).

In the Letter to the Editor, those who might commit dangerous acts are only implied. This makes sense, given the fact that there was no group of people to commit such acts. In this text, what is explicit are the dangerous (imaginary) results of a series of dangerous (imaginary) actions. In lines 09 and 10, the writer describes coming back to the square and seeing "no burnt out automobiles, or burning buildings or looted businesses." It is not clear whether or not the writer is suggesting that members of his/her group did not commit these actions, or that they prevented others from committing them. In either case, he/she is clearly implying a group of people who do or would commit the actions that lead to such results. That is, automobiles are set on fire by someone, stores are looted by someone or some ones, etc. Thus, the letter implies a group of actors – actors who engage in actions strikingly similar to those implied by the "out of control mob" in the McCloskey Speech. Figure one, below, shows the categories of people and place associated with protection and defense in these two texts:

Someone	<u>protects</u> or <u>defends</u>	*a location*	from	*someone.*
American		*Neighborhood*		*mob*
Patriot		*Town*		*activist*
Citizen		*Home / House*		*criminal*
Resident (of town)		*Monuments & Courthouse*		*Marxist / revolutionary*
Home-owner				*[people who] burn, loot, break glass, etc.*

Figure 1: Protect and Defend

In sum, each of these texts includes a category which I am calling 'resident'. This category is associated with possession and belonging related to specific locations: country, town, neighborhood, and home. It is also associated with the category bound action of defending and protecting said locations. Based on the real-life actions of these authors, we can suggest that this protection also involves the possession of a firearm. In addition, we see the opposing category of 'activist'. This category is defined in terms of actions rather than location, belonging, or possession. Category-bound activities for this category involve the destruction of property, such as burning cars and buildings, and looting businesses.

4   Discussion and Conclusion

In this article, I have tried to show how three texts, all created within a few days of each other, use membership categorization devices in similar ways. Below, I sum-

marize the findings described above, with a focus on how teachers and students might look at texts such as these.

First, teachers can help students understand how membership categorization is used as an ideological tool by looking at which terms are not chosen in a particular text. That is, a close analysis of category terms asks us to wonder why any one category (or set of categories) was chosen to be highlighted in a given context. For instance, if someone is described as a 'woman', students might be asked to think about why the author chose gender over nationality, profession, familial role, or even hobby. In the texts described here, participants could have been described in terms of their age, gender, political affiliation, Race, familial role, profession, educational background, hobby (such as "gun owner"), etc. (Sacks 1992, p. 41). For instance, the people described as 'activists' in the Police Press Releases were also men, women, children, ministers, home-owners, parents, etc. Similarly, those described in the Letter to the Editor as 'patriots' were also men, women, parents, home-owners, gun-owners – and presumably also teachers, doctors, business-owners, etc. Thus, the choice to use terms such as 'activist', 'resident', and 'patriot' can be seen as salient, in the sense that it sets up a specific set of inferences, as I have attempted to describe above.

A next step, after asking what inferences and relationships are set up by the terms that are used, is to look outwards for societal patterns, both vis-à-vis terms that are found in given text, and vis-à-vis terms that seem to be avoided. As I mentioned above, CML asks us to look beyond texts themselves, to connect texts to the societies from which – and for which – they are created. In this case, we can note a set of categories that is unspoken in all three texts presented here – namely, categories related to Race. The situations described in the convention speech, and in the letter to the editor and police report were both bound up with a nationwide conversation regarding Race and racism which took place in the summer of 2020 across the United States. As I note above, Mark and Patricia McCloskey pointed their guns towards a group of people marching to protest a mayor's decision regarding publicizing the names of those who supported defunding the local police department (defunding the police is an important part of the platform of protestors associated with the Black Lives Matter movement.) In the case of the other texts, many of the people standing across the road from the man on the porch were African American, and all were on their way to an event celebrating the civil rights activist Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and, the people with guns on the town square were responding to social media postings falsely suggesting that Black Lives Matter protestors planned to come to the town (personal communication and interview data). In a sense, then, the category of 'resident' (with the associated 'citizen', 'patriot', 'property owner', etc.) seems to

be a code for 'White', while that of 'activist' (with the associated 'mob', 'looter', etc.) is code for 'Black'. Thus, by choosing a set of two connected categories ('resident' and 'activist'), these authors manage to silently suggest another set of two opposing categories: 'Black' and 'White'. Indeed, as many writers have suggested, the category-bound activity of 'looting' was used throughout that time period in a variety of contexts in order to discredit those associated with Black Lives Matter protests (Kelley 2020).

In fact, as I mention above, silence related to Race is, in and of itself a cultural pattern, related to a long history of silence around racism in the United States (Baldwin 1992; Rawls, Duck 2020). As many writers and scholars have shown us, racism is intertwined with all aspects of the United States, historical and present-day (Baldwin 1992; Essed 1991; Rawls, Duck 2020). At the same time, a denial of racism can be found in a multitude of interactions: from current attempts to prevent teachers from talking about slavery (Hannah-Jones 2021) to everyday conversations that do – and do not – occur in communities across the United States.

That said, the point of describing coded language found in these texts is not to prove that the speakers and writers of these texts are racist. Nor is it particularly fruitful to ask if the choices involved in creating the texts were made consciously. Instead, this kind of analysis can allow us to uncover patterns, and to notice how those patterns play themselves out, across texts and across contexts. In other words, I hope to have shown how MCA can offer information regarding the apparatus of denial – the specific methods with which silence around racism may be perpetuated.

For teachers, then, I hope that this study suggests two questions that can be useful starting points for a critical textual analysis: 1) What societal patterns do we see across related texts? and 2) What is accomplished via the authors' categorical choices? By applying these questions to local, national, and global texts, teachers can provide a concrete basis for conversations about the silences that so often surround discrimination and domination.

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