AUM and an Initial Test of Self-Interrogation: Translating the Effects of Anxiety, Uncertainty

and Powerlessness to Transform Information Seeking Strategies

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Abstract

An earlier study on ideological uncertainty and racist message composition specified self-interrogation, feelings of anxiety, ability to predict the situation, self and others and feelings of powerlessness as an expansion of Uncertainty Reduction Theory. This study presents an initial test of self-interrogation. Three hypotheses are deduced and tested. The results provide theoretical links between oppression and factors of influence to information seeking strategies. Self-interrogation, a new strategy, is strongly associated with feelings of anxiety. So in instances where anxiety was high, regardless of incident type, race or gender, self-interrogation is significantly used more than the other strategies. Interestingly, perpetrators race and gender are related to selection strategy choice.

Key words: powerlessness, uncertainty reduction strategies, anxiety, predictability, forms of oppression, self-interrogation.
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Response strategies for seeking information (managing uncertainty) and reducing tension (managing anxiety) are often found in situations where there is lack of information or where more information is desired (Ball-Rokeach, 1973). In situations where discriminatory forms of communication have frequently become more covert, disguised, ambiguous, nebulous, and consequently, difficult to identify and acknowledge, information seeking options are required (Ruggiero, Taylor & Lydon, 1997; Swim, Cohen & Heyers, 1998). In other words, when an oppressive act is identified by the receiver or has been symbolically received, disrupting the experience is a natural part of the process (Camara, 2002).

The word disrupt is used instead of resolve or reduce because uncertainty within a specific situational context often lead to complicated and unexplainable results (Brashers, 2001). Disruption allows you to connect with or disconnect from a situational act. The lack of opportunity or constraints (social or individual) limiting the ability to say something to or interact with the sender might increase uncertainty; however, the opportunity to interact might not reduce the uncertainty. In some instances, depending on how targets appraise their situation, uncertainty may not exist at all because individuals bring knowledge with them to the interaction that interrupt or disable the impact of the situation or to create certainty through other means (Berger, 1997; Brashers, 2001; Marris, 1996).

Response strategies have become a growing area of research and scholars are interested in the strategic performance of facilitating the empowerment of individuals to restore power and control their own lives (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; McWhirter, 1991;
Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT) developed by Berger and Calabrese in 1975, Uncertainty Management proffered by Dale Brashers in 2001, and Anxiety Uncertainty Management (AUM) developed by Gudykunst (1985) are the only communication theories that address strategies and options for managing anxiety/uncertainty. URT was served as the starting point to address uncertainty and communication. It views uncertainty as a cognitive process for understanding self and others. AUM emerged as a theoretical extension of URT to explain intercultural adaptation as a path toward effective communication. Uncertainty Management was later proposed as a broader theory that presents uncertainty as a form of empowerment and hope rather than a creation of anxiety. Of the three, URT is the only theory that employs specific strategies that predicts individual use of strategic response methods of understanding uncertain circumstances (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). However, all theories imply that communication is more effective when and if there is a necessity to disrupt anxiety and uncertainty.

This paper addresses anxiety (stress), uncertainty reduction (predictability) and powerlessness experienced in oppressive interactions because research demonstrates that these are significant sources related to responses to discrimination (Gutierrez, 1990; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Major, Quinton, & McCoy, 2002; Meyers, Stokes, & Speight, 1989). Therefore, our theoretical framework is AUM. We recognize that the strategies explored are specific to URT, but are used in this study because: (1) oppression does not necessarily enact feelings of uncertainty, but instead solicit feelings of certainty (e.g., “I know what this is”), which then influences specific strategy use (Berger, 1997) with self-interrogation emerging as a possible strategy choice (Camara, 2002); (2) there are no
specific studies that address the strategies that people use to manage anxiety and uncertainty generally and self-interrogation specifically; and (3) managing anxiety and uncertainty seems to be a better model for understanding responses to oppression rather than focusing on how uncertainty is reduced.

The purpose of this study is to understand what communication strategy choices individuals who experience oppression use to disrupt the interaction. The general question guiding this research is whether individuals are more likely to choose a specific selection strategy over another in an oppressive experience and whether self-interrogation is a significant strategy source. We begin with a brief overview of AUM and self-interrogation. Next, we highlight the work specific to information seeking strategies. During this discussion we branch out to other fields of inquiry that address specific strategies used in experiences of oppression. In doing so, we hope to circumnavigate types of questions individuals seek, how frequent information is sought and the tactics used, to revealing factors influencing which strategy is most likely to be selected.

Relevant Literature on Information Seeking Behavior

*Brief Overview of AUM*

AUM is suggested as a theory that describes uncertainty and anxiety management within intergroup interactions. It is a framework for research on intercultural adaptation (Gudykunst 1998, 1995, 1989; Hammer, Wiseman, Rasmussen & Bruschke, 1998), yet it lacks a means for examining selection strategy choices. One of the central tenets of AUM is that central to this study is that uncertainty and anxiety function within minimum and maximum thresholds that impacts the ability to predict accurately and control the outcome of the situation (Gudykunst 1991). The application of predicting accurately is
related to the information seeking strategy of restoring control (Fiske & Morling, 1996). The conceptualizing structure of AUM is if uncertainty and anxiety is above or below an individual’s minimum or maximum thresholds, communication becomes less effective between individuals. For uncertainty, the ability to and confidence in predicting the other’s behavior to become comfortable in the interaction is inhibited; for anxiety, the amount of anxiety experienced is partially due to the amount of power we feel we have in an interaction. Gudykunst (1995) notes that the less powerful one feels in an interaction, the more anxiety is endured.

**URT Categories of Information Seeking Behavior**

Drawing on the extensive work of Berger and Calabrese (1975) and Gudykunst (1985, 1985b), initial formulations did not consider strategies for reducing uncertainty; however, subsequent research (Berger, 1979; Berger & Bradac, 1982) outlined three strategies individual use when resolving ambiguous interactions that advanced a typology of information seeking behavior. First there are interactive strategies that occur directly between a communicator and a target where self-disclosure, interrogating the target by asking him or her questions and nonverbal expressiveness are critical information-seeking practices. Second, passive strategies use unobtrusive methods of acquiring information about another from a distance by observing how the person reacts to others generally, with others they know and when inhibitions are less impacted. Finally, active strategies rely on third parties without direct interaction with the target to manipulate the surroundings to observe how the target responds or as Albrecht and Adelman (1984) suggest, to gain support in facilitating uncertainty management.
Although these strategies have been highlighted in previous studies, results are not uniform. For example, Gudykunst and Nishida (1984) found no relationship between information seeking strategies and attributional confidence. Further research by Gudykunst (1985; and Gudykunst, Sodentani & Sonoda, 1987), which led to an axiomatic prediction to URT concluded that as attributional confidence increased, so did seeking information about the target. Douglas (1990) suggests that high uncertainty does not induce increased levels of information seeking. This is a logical conclusion since Berger and Bradac (1982) conclude that the context contributes to increased or decreased levels of uncertainty (see Tidwell & Walther, 2002). Although several factors motivating uncertainty reduction have been outlined, (e.g., deviance, future interactions, incentives) and new theorems have complemented new axioms, strategies managing uncertainty and anxiety have yet to be examined in the current context.

Consequently, much of the research has focused on the use of interactive strategies (Berger, 1987), with a collection of perspectives on other strategies and new developed strategies about uncertain interactions. For example, Berger and Kellerman (1983) found that interrogation, soothing the target, and self-disclosure practices associated with interactive strategies are used to acquire information in face-to-face interactions. Whatever information is being sought is influenced by altering one’s own behavior. More information sought didn’t necessarily mean more questions were asked. Subsequently, they found that information seekers use positive nonverbal expressiveness (Kellerman & Berger, 1984) than those not interested in acquiring information.

Research on culture indicates that American respondents, to a larger degree, are more likely to use interactive strategies than Japanese respondents (Gudykunst &
Nishida, 1984) and Korean students (Kim & Yoon, 1987). Additionally, Gudykunst, Yang and Nishida (1985) found that interactive strategies increase with attributional confidence. Berger (1997), on the other hand, found that when direct strategies are used they protect against face threats.

Pratt, et al. (1999) as well as Tidwell and Walther (2002) suggest that interrogation strategies for online exchanges do not fully support the original formulations of URT in face-to-face interactions. In face-to-face interactions, disclosures about personal information increase over a period of time; however, interrogation in computer mediated communication (CMC) consists of intimate and personal information in early stages rather than latter stages. The medium restricts nonverbal cues, thus interaction is intense and fast in initial interactions on-line. They discuss the ability to manipulate information online; however, what is not suggested is that there is a level of anonymity that exist in CMC than in face-to-face encounters so there is less of a risk in sharing personal information quickly online. Additionally, individuals on-line are less accountable for the information shared than individuals in face-to-face interactions.

Studies aimed at illuminating passive strategies (Baxter & Wilmot, 1984; Bell & Buerkel-Rothfuss, 1990; & Douglas, 1981) suggests the following: (1) asking secret questions of others as well as the partner serves to analyze the relationships future; (2) spying on the relationship can help characterize the relationship when its shelf life is in question; and (3) individuals rather monitor the other in communal situations because the public environment exposes greater information than studying the target in seclusion. In online chat rooms that are structured for interactions, lurking (logging in but not participating in the dialogue) is a common passive strategy (Utz, 2000).
The work on active strategies suggests that individuals receive information from a secondary source. There is very little research in communication in support of active strategy use; however, Hewes, Graham, Doelger and Pavitt (1985) contend that in obtaining information from a second party is often questioned by the receiver if the receiver believes he or she was intentionally mislead. Additionally, they found that second hand information is useful, but the message acquired is often reconstructed if perceived bias. Studies in computer mediated communication reveal that social networks online are not a utilized as face-to-face networks, so interactants are less likely to go to another party to seek information, but might go to other sources created by the target such as newsgroups, electronic postings and archives. This strategy is referred to as extractive and is unique to CMC (Ramirez, Walther, Burgoon, Sunnafrank, 2002).

These findings suggest that individuals might be motivated to employ a number of selection strategies for understanding the self and others; however, the strategies used are likely to vary across situation and contexts. We can best understand the condition under which a strategy is likely to be selected if we understand the context (Rubin, 1979). Additional studies, not specifically examining uncertainty reduction theory, have isolated strategies within the context of oppression. We acknowledge that individual experiences will render different experiences, multi-experiences and the use of various types of strategies to disrupt the oppression.

*Self-Interrogation as a NewResponse Strategy*

The initial formulation of self-interrogation was proposed by Camara (2002). The qualitative study proposed that uncertainty reduction theory was particularly useful in oppressive situations because the physiological symptoms and lack of power associated
with oppression is likely to lead to communicating selection strategies. Camara (2002) emphasized that individuals use self-interrogation as a strategy to make sense of their experiences when they are in self-doubt and experience high levels of anxiety. Self-interrogation is an intra-active method of self-knowledge acquisition that illustrates a pre-occupation with self to reflect on self-behavior (e.g., what did I do to deserve that?), shortcomings and inadequacies (e.g., was I not qualified enough) and the outcome of the situation (e.g., should I be offended?). According to Camara (2002):

Self-interrogation illustrates: (a) how individuals internally generate information about the self that is useful to them, (b) how individuals admit struggle safely and without repercussion, and (c) how they see their own complicitness on some level (p. 32).

Self-interrogation is not the same as blame and internalization. In blame, the receiver assumes that he or she created the incident and they feel a sense of guilt and shame (Foster, Matheson & Poole, 1994). In other words, the individual is partially or fully responsible for the emergence of the interaction. When internalizing the situation, the receiver fears his or her own power and difference and uses the tools of oppression to re-injure the self or another in-group/outgroup member. Internalization includes self-hatred and low self-esteem (Nicholson & Long, 1990). Camara (2002) went beyond this traditional thinking to suggest that self-interrogation as a strategy for seeking information allows for self and other appraisal for searching for answers and to perhaps understand specific occurrences in the interaction without becoming a victim and without internalizing it. Self-interrogation is best viewed as a meta-analytic perspective leading
to insights about interactions by examining the relationship between the actor and the situational context.

Forms of Oppression and Selection Strategy Use

Forms of oppression receive much attention in the fields of psychology and sociology, and relates to chronic stress and emotions (i.e., victimization, powerlessness, discrimination, anxiety, internalized views of the self). So when individuals feel a sense of powerlessness it shapes their strategy choice (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999; Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik & Lipkus, 1991). While individuals are exposed to forms of oppression across situations and contexts (Swim, Cohen & Heyers, 1998), the question of how they seek ways of disrupting the incident is addressed in a number of studies.

Although, studies on oppression site a variety of strategies, research conceptually comparable to passive strategies are often referred by different names including cognitive avoidance, blunting, denial or mental disengagement (see Ruggiero, Taylor & Lydon, 1997). Apparently, most of the studies on gender, racial and sexual discrimination site the use of passive and non-confrontational coping strategies (see Major, Quinton & McCoy, 2002, for a review of gender discrimination). For racism, avoidance (passive) strategy is a predictor of racism-related stress and is commonly used by black women (Utsey et al. 2000). For sexual related discrimination limited research exist on encounters with discrimination; however, passive strategies related to workplace vocational development site the use of silence, implicit and explicit closeting behavior to control disclosures about sexual orientation (Chung, 2001).

The study by Swim and Heyers (1999), to identify passive strategies for coping with sexism, will serve as our example. Swim et al. (1999) found that when women are
confronted with unconcealed sexism, women do not confront the perpetrators of sexism nor report it to officials. They also conclude that responding directly to the perpetrator is risky. In the same study, the authors found that when women predict how they would respond to the incident, 1% reported that they would not confront the perpetrator, but in actuality 55% used a passive strategy. This finding supports Woodzicka and LaFrance (2001) argument that only a small percentage of women will confront a man who is perceived as being sexist.

Just as individuals use an avoidance strategy for dealing with discrimination, there is emerging research that suggests individuals disrupt and cope with discrimination by confronting it and finding social support (Miller & Kaiser, 2001; Utsey et al. 2000). Research by Billings and Moos (1981) evidences a link between social support and other coping strategies. Individuals with perceived social support are likely to use confronting strategies compared to those with no social support are likely to use passive strategies. Feagin (1991) suggest that the context determines whether confrontational strategies will be used. For instance, discrimination in public accommodations is often met with a verbal counter attack versus on the street which is met with passive choices. Broman (1997) suggest that in experiences of racism, social support is the best predict or life satisfaction.

Factors Influencing Strategy Selection

Powerlessness: According to Young (1990), powerlessness is a major feature of oppression that gives an individual complete control over another without the ability to affect his or her own reality. Thus, the logic of anxiety/uncertainty management (AUM) can be expanded to expressions of powerlessness, feelings that power has been exerted
and taken away (Lawler & Bacharach, 1987). Because we are concerned with oppression and its inherent relationship to selection strategies, AUM might accommodate the logic that powerlessness might influence the choice of selection strategy.

Power is recognized as an interpersonal dimension and perceptual measure in communication research (Miller & Rogers, 1987) with little to no reference to feelings of powerlessness. For example, in close relationships with powerful others individuals are less likely to confront others and use indirect/passive strategies to reduce retaliation (Cloven & Roloff, 1993; Knobloch & Solomon, 1999; Rubult et al. 1991). Individuals are only likely to confront when others lack punitive power. Fiske and Morling (1996) and subsequent studies (Fiske, Morling & Stevens, 1996) offer an explanation for powerlessness in the face of controls enacted by the dominant person. They argue that most people are aware of power differentials between themselves and others. The more power perceived in the interaction the more anxiety is experienced. Consequently, the lack of power leads to coping with anxiety to restore some form of control. Although research on the psychology of power is extensive, the information seeking strategies related to power have received little attention. We argue that one viable way of advancing research is integrating power and powerlessness into the information seeking framework. This explanation leads us to the following hypotheses:

H1: There will be a positive and significant correlation between powerlessness and strategy use.

Anxiety: The core logic of AUM is that “anxiety is the affective equivalent of uncertainty,” (Gudykunst, 2005, p. 287). Stephan and Stephan (1985) found that anxiety about interacting with members from other groups predicted attitudes toward them. The
idea that these interactions generate anxiety is supported by other theories (Gudykunst, 1995). Gudykunst’s application of AUM notes that when anxiety is above or below its minimum and maximum threshold, the desire and motivation to communicate is impacted and results in avoidant behavior or terminating the interaction quickly. Anxiety concerning oppression should be just as prevalent. Klonoff, Landrine, and Ullman (1999) found that anxiety was strongly related to experiences of racism, but confronting coping strategies are used to reduce anxiety (Nezu, 1987). For Albrecht and Adelman (1984) social support also reduces anxiety. Regardless of what strategy is used, research suggests that anxiety is not only associated with uncertain events, but oppressive ones. Results of the qualitative data from Camara’s (2002) study imply that an association may exist between anxiety and self-interrogation. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proffered:

H2: There will be a positive and significant correlation between anxiety and strategy use.

*Behavioral Uncertainty/Predictability:* Sunnafrank (1990) suggest that uncertainty involves two levels; (1) cognitive, which refers to attitudes and beliefs and (2) behavioral, which refers to predictability aspects. Marris (1996) posits that uncertainty is constituted by what we expect to predict, what we actually predict and how we enact it. Additionally, predictability is an assumption of uncertainty reduction theory (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). When individuals meet they not only want to reduce uncertainty, but increase predictability. Brashers (2001), research on communication and uncertainty management reveal that responses to uncertainty must be balanced and are often found within social networks used to help appraise uncertainty management. However,
uncertainty is multilayered, interconnected and temporal—there are different types of uncertainties, it can be integrated with other dilemmas, and range from ongoing to short lived. Moreover, management is often a by-product of increased or decreased certainty or uncertainty. Subsequent research on HIV illnesses and social support (Brashers, Neidig, & Goldsmith, 2004) suggest that uncertainty is often complicated by the nature and availability of the information.

Similar findings by Gudykunst, Yang and Nishida (1985) indicate that in individualistic cultures the context is important for predicting the other person’s behavior, but in collectivistic cultures knowing the context (information gaining) is essential to predicting the person’s behavior. Research further indicates that individuals in high context cultures have a need for predictive certainty (e.g., Gudykunst, 1983). Berger (1993) also noted that expectations are viewed as predictions and when the expectations are not met uncertainty increases. Given the importance of predictability to uncertainty reduction, it seems appropriate to consider whether it is related to strategy use in oppressive situations. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H3: There will be a positive and significant correlation between predictability and strategy use.

Methods

Participants

A total of 712 individuals from the southwest part of the United States participated in the study. Of the sample, 71.6% were female (n = 510) and 28.4% male (n = 212) students and community members in a large southwest state participated in the study. Regarding era of birth, 1.7% were born in pre-civil rights era between 1900 and
1935 (n = 12), 26.7% were born during civil rights era between 1938 and 1969 (n = 190), and 71.6% were post-civil rights era born between 1970 and 1985 (n = 510). Approximately, 24.4% of the sample self-identified as Hispanic (n = 174), 34% African American (n = 242), 22.8% Caucasian (n = 1629), 14.9 % Asian (n = 106), and 3.9% identified as other (n = 28).

Instrumentation

Selection Strategies. Items used to measure the information gathering strategies were borrowed from Berger’s (1979) description of selection strategies and Camara’s (2002) study on ideological uncertainty and the exploration of racism in communication research. In the present study, uncertainty reduction strategies were measured by using a five item scale with one item for each strategy and two for self-interrogation using a 7-point Likert scale wherein 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree. The four strategy categories were interactive, active, passive, and self-interrogation respectively. Respondents were asked “I asked the perpetrator questions directly about his or her behavior,” “I asked someone else questions about the perpetrator,” “I said nothing to the perpetrator verbally, but I observed them from afar,” and “I asked myself questions about my behavior.”

Powerlessness. Following the conceptualization of Neal and Seeman (1964) powerlessness is defined as the inability to counteract/control threats posed by the environment. The scale developed for powerlessness emerged from qualitative responses based on less comfort reactions to experiences with racism (Camara, 2002), dimensions of powerlessness (see Neal & Seeman, 1964; Ransford, 1968; Seeman, Seeman & Budros, 1988) and models of cultural oppression (Hanna, Talley, Guindon, 2000). The
five items dealt with lack of control both socially and personally. Respondents indicated to what degree they felt powerless during the interaction using a 7-point Likert scale. Respondents were asked to respond to the following questions: “I felt like I was being punished,” “the incident stopped or hindered me from getting what I wanted or needed,” and “I felt a sense of powerlessness.”

*Anxiety.* The measure for anxiety was a modified version of the Intergroup anxiety scale developed by Stephan and Stephan (1985). The measure consisted of four items that asked participants how the incident caused them to feel in terms of anger, stress, hurt or like they had a bad experience. The responses also employed a Likert-scale format (1= strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree).

*Behavioral Uncertainty.* The measure for behavioral uncertainty were questions related to predictability following the conceptualization of Berger and Calabrese (1975) that behavioral uncertainty is anticipating and expecting what might happen in a situation. Three items were used that asked respondents whether they expected this incident to happen to them because it usually happens using a Likert type scale (1= strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree).

*Procedures*

Ten classes and 25 sections were surveyed. In total, 950 surveys were disseminated with 730 returned surveys lending a 76% return rate. After deciding to eliminate incomplete surveys from the data set, 712 surveys were left to analyze. In order to understand how individuals self-defined their oppressive experience, subjects were asked to write a short story about an incident that impacted them the most that
represented one of the listed forms of oppression (e.g., racism, sexism, homophobia, disability and ageism).

Preliminary Analysis: Data Reduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between participants’ reported experiences as targets of oppression and their strategies for responding to the experience. Data reduction was accomplishing by exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation. All final factors have an eigenvalue greater than one and factor loadings of .60 or higher on one item and .40 or lower on all other factors. Three factors emerged, accounting for approximately 60% of the variance in the data (See Table 1).

The first factor was comprised of four items associated with participants’ reported anxiety (e.g., this incident caused me to feel hurt/stressed/angry; α=.80). A second factor consisted of three items associated with participants’ reported feelings of powerlessness during the experience (e.g., I felt a sense of powerlessness/like I was being punished; α=.73). The third factor was comprised of three items associated with participants’ reported ability to predict that the event would happen to them (e.g., I expected/predicted/anticipated this would happen to me; α=.79). Correlations among the factors are reported in Table 2.

Tests of Hypotheses

The hypotheses and research question were analyzed using a series of Pearson product moment correlations. H1 predicts that a positive and significant correlation would be observed between participant reports of powerlessness during their experience with oppression and their information seeking strategy use. Results of the analysis support H1. As shown in table 3, there was a positive and significant correlation between
powerlessness and passive, active, and self-interrogation strategy choices. Additionally, post hoc analyses on the association between powerlessness and strategy use revealed several significant context specific findings.

Perpetrator gender was observed to moderate the association between powerlessness and strategy selection choice. Participants who reported the perpetrator of the oppressive behavior to be male, and who felt highly powerless also reported using the interactive strategy option more than the others $r = .26$, $p < .01$. However, when the perpetrator was reported to be female, participants who felt highly powerless used the passive strategy significantly more $r = .32$, $p < .05$.

Perpetrator race was also observed to moderate participants’ strategy choice when they perceived themselves to be highly powerless in the oppressive experience. Those participants who reported the perpetrator to be White also reported choosing the interactive $r = .24$, $p = .02$, or passive $r = .21$, $p = .05$ strategies significantly more than the other two. However, when the perpetrator was reported to be Black/African American participants who felt highly powerless also reported choosing the passive strategy significantly more $r = .51$, $p = .01$. It is also interesting to note that significant findings for perpetrator race were only observed for White and Black perpetrators.

Anxiety. H2 predicts that a positive and significant correlation would be observed between anxiety and information seeking strategy choices. This prediction was also supported by the data. As shown in table 4, participants who reported feeling highly anxious during their experience with oppression also reported responding with self-interrogation significantly more than the other options. In fact, anxiety appeared to be a dominate catalyst in strategy selection choice, appearing as a “main effect” during post
hoc analyses, such that it was not moderated by participant or perpetrator demographics (e.g., race, gender). Thus, in all cases where anxiety was high, so too was reported use of the four strategies as a significant response.

**Predictability.** H3 predicts that a positive and significant correlation would be observed between predictability and strategy choice. As shown in table 5, correlation analyses reveal that predictability is positively associated with the active strategy, yet not significantly related to the others. Post hoc analyses reveal a significant trend for Predictability by incident type (e.g., heterosexism) such that participants who experienced racism and reported high predictability that the event would occur also reported responding actively to the experience $r = .11, p = .02$. Additionally, participants who experienced heterosexism and reported high predictability also reported responding actively to the experience $r = .33, p = .01$.

**Discussion**

The focus of this study has been to explore and extend the literature by examining those who inhabit a social context characterized by perceived oppression and selection strategies. The study explored the potential impact of powerlessness, predictability and anxiety on selection strategies. There was overall support for the co-factors and their influence on the dependent variable. Further, the results from the study supported all hypotheses. The findings suggest that choice in strategy was directed by predictability, powerlessness and anxiety, which offers new insights into AUM. The present study, therefore, offers preliminary evidence of affective processes association to information seeking strategies.
Support was obtained for powerlessness and the type of strategy most likely to be used (hypothesis 1). When feelings of powerlessness are high individuals are more likely to choose the interactive strategy over any other strategy, which is inconsistent with previous research on strategy use in the face of powerlessness (see Billings & Moos, 1981; Cloven & Roloff, 1993; Knobloch & Solomon, 1999; Neal & Seeman, 1964; Ramirez et al., 2002; Rubult et al. 1991). Past research suggests that individuals are more likely to avoid the target and use passive strategies because of fear of retaliation. These current analyses indicate different strategy use that individuals might face the perpetrator directly suggesting that retaliation may not be a factor if situational factors are not salient to the target of oppression.

Post hoc analysis further revealed that if the perpetrator is male, the interactive strategy and passive strategy was selected and if female, the passive strategy was utilized. If the perpetrator was black, the passive strategy was selected and white, both interactive and passive. Across incident types, self-interrogation was likely to be used in experiences of racism and sexism. These findings were also partially inconsistent with existing literature. Research on women who confront sexism indicates that if you are not in a position of power you are likely to use an indirect strategy and blame yourself for the interaction (Dodd, Giuliano, Boutell, Moran, 2001) and research related to racism indicates a plethora of response options including confronting it (interactive) and finding support (active) (Miller & Kaiser, 2001; Utsey et al. 2000). Although self-interrogation is a type of indirect strategy it allows for empowerment and self-help options rather than blame. The current study draws attention away from direct impact that racism and sexism has on the target through self-interrogation.
However, these findings lend further support to the role of power in managing one’s willingness to speak up (Cloven et al. 1993) and predicting behavioral outcomes (Fiske & Morling, 1996). Power and powerlessness allows us to comprehend the connection between a situation and the distribution of power in society as a whole. Therefore, individuals might confront or approach the perpetrator when they perceive him to lack punitive power or is unthreatening. On the other hand, confronting reduces the chance that it will happen again with the perpetrator (Miller & Kaiser, 2001).

Identifying reasons for confronting white males leads to new insights because society place males high on the social hierarchy and white males higher. Therefore, confronting the perpetrator might be a challenge to his social position and the political system as a sign of resistance that he is not in control. Confronting might also translate into emasculating the privilege of males in general and white males in particular. Emasculating him takes away his power and deflates his male ego.

Responding passively to black males was an unexpected finding, but was not surprising. Using a less direct strategy relates to how one might be racially perceived, and fear retaliation, which is supported by Lawler and Bacharach (1987). Additionally, if confronting will not improve the relationship passive strategies are employed (Swim et al. 1999). In other words, one might experience backlash for acting outside of one’s socially sanctioned role, and there may not be expectations for future interactions, so passivity is understood as a general response.

The historical lore of our culture is that women and black men are not perceived as having lots of social power, responding passively could mean there is no perceived direct threat with women of black males, thus, the situation is not important enough to
respond to. Conversely, responses toward black males can go one step further and could be associated with the caricature of black male hyperaggressive and hypersexual behavior that saturate American popular culture (Collins, 2004). Representations create fear of the black male as African beast and the black Mandingo further develop ideas about black male sexuality, masculinity and violence.

Support was also found for anxiety and information seeking strategies (hypothesis 2). Anxiety had a significant positive effect on self-interrogation. This is inconsistent with previous research. Social support is expected to be used when individuals experience anxiety (Albrecht et al. 1984) and in other fields that pay attention to anxiety in oppressive interactions, individuals are expected to use an interactive strategy (Nezu, 1987). Current correlation analyses reveal that there is a direct relationship between self-interrogation and high levels of anxiety. In other words, targets that are highly anxious will use the self-interrogation strategy. Post hoc analysis reveals that regardless of the race or gender of the perpetrator self-interrogation was the strategy of choice. Across incidents, self-interrogation emerged in racism, sexism and heterosexist experiences.

Since self-interrogation is a new strategy, there are no assumptions guiding its use in communication research; thus, further research is warranted. Individuals might self-interrogate to use the experience as a point of reference for future interactions. Interrogating the self has its advantages and disadvantages. The advantage is that self-interrogation can generate useful communication capital and allow others to struggle without further punishment (Camara, 2002). The disadvantage is that one may lose the opportunity to confront the perpetrator or find support if it is used alone. Thus, rather than learning to effectively cope with forms of discrimination, it is conceivable that self-
interrogation may lead individuals to engage in self other appraisals to validate their own experiences or what Brashers (2001) might claim as a strategy for maintaining hope, optimism and self-improvement.

Investigating predictability generated some findings on selection strategy. Predictability was correlated with the active strategy (hypothesis 3). Post hoc analyses reveal that individuals reporting high predictability in heterosexist incidents reported using the active strategy. There is no support of this finding in the communication literature. Gudykunst et al. (1985) found that interactive/interrogation strategies are used to predict behavior. However, there is support for this finding in Chungs (2001) discrimination management model of gays in the workplace. Individuals might employ active strategies or engage in social support through sharing their experiences with friends and family. To assess the accounts in this study, the active strategy may be used to affirm their beliefs. In other words, targets may rely on others to make sure that what they perceived as real or imagined in evaluating the situation.

These results suggest that oppressive interactions can cause one to feel that they are being punished or hindered and makes a unique contribution to AUM research. Self-interrogation may be a means for managing anxiety/uncertainty and should be considered an important information seeking strategy for those who experience forms of oppression. Although the results are promising, it should be acknowledged that several limitations are noteworthy. First, the study overwhelmingly used post civil rights era born individuals. This may have been masked by the larger portion of post civil rights era born individuals. The findings were not generalizable to pre-civil rights and civil rights era born individuals. The experiences of a group when racial tension was high might render
different strategy use. Second, more than two thirds of the sample was female. The male experience was lost. Third, the sample composition was imbalanced. There was no equal distribution of people by race, gender, age, or incident type which caused a high sampling error and problems with reliability. We seek to balance the sampling error in future by continuing data collection.

Additional limitations include no consideration of relationship composition between interactants. Knowing the situational context of the interaction--whether the initiator was a stranger versus a family member or other ongoing relationship is an important concern for communication because we employ a variety of tactics to different contexts (Brashers, 2001) to acquire information. We were not sure what types of power were operating and whether they were operating in the same way. The form of power can dictate the selection strategy. Self-interrogation is a new strategy that is specific to oppressive interaction, thus interpretation should be made with some degree of caution as further test are needed. Finally, given the correlational design of the study causality must be made with caution. Given the limitations and foundations of this study, future research can benefit from incorporating a qualitative research design.

**Future Research.** First, co-cultural theory is one of the few intercultural theories that centralize power differences within its framework. Second, this study is consistent with the premise of co-cultural theory that states that people across marginalized groups resist oppression in similar ways. Third, co-cultural theory includes 26+ inductively generated practices that are used by co-cultural group members to negotiate their powerlessness. These are organized into 9 different communication orientations – something that is much more developed than Berger’s conceptualization of URT.
strategies or Gudykunst’s conceptualization of AUM. Furthermore, co-cultural theory begins to offer an explication as to why people enact different practices via six factors (preferred outcome, abilities, field of experience, communication approach, situational context, and perceived costs and rewards). As a whole, this represents a fairly comprehensive theoretical frame in comparison to URT or AUM, which seemingly is not fully equipped for such explorations. One might argue that within this framework of theorizing that self-interrogation is an example of a nonassertive assimilation practice (akin to censoring self).

To conclude, work on AUM has overlooked selection strategy choices within the context of oppression and its relevance to the field of communication. This study is a call for more attention to the strategy of self-interrogation as a promising strategy for conceptualizing information seeking options, particularly as it relates to issues of marginalization and anxious situations. People who lack the ability to self-appraise are least likely to use this response strategy. Nevertheless, this study is one small step in expanding the scope of AUM and points to the need for more examination. Those who risk confronting oppression might cause perpetrators to think twice about the next time, but those who self-interrogate will think twice about the situation in order to deflect the impact of it the next time.
References


Bell, R. A., & Buerkel-Rothfuss, N. L. 1990. S(he) loves me s(he) loves me not; Predictors of relational information-seeking in courtship and beyond. *Communication Quarterly, 38*, 64-82.


Berger, C. R., & Bradac, J. J. 1982. Language and social psychology: Uncertainty in
interpersonal relations. London: Arnold.


Ruggiero, K. M., Taylor, D. M., & Lydon, J. E. 1997. How disadvantaged group members cope with discrimination when they perceive that social support is


Table 1

Scale Reliabilities (Cronbach’s Alpha)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anxiety</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This incident caused me to feel hurt.</td>
<td>.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This incident caused me to feel stressed.</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This incident caused me to feel angry.</td>
<td>.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This incident caused me to feel like I had a bad experience.</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Powerlessness</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I felt a sense of powerlessness.</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This incident stopped or hindered me from getting what I wanted or needed.</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt like I was being punished.</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictability</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I expected this to happen to me because it usually happens to me.</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I could predict that this incident would happen before it happened.</td>
<td>.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I anticipated that this incident would happen to me.</td>
<td>.87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2

Correlations between Anxiety, Powerlessness, and Predictability Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Anxiety</th>
<th>Powerlessness</th>
<th>Predictability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>.44**</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powerlessness</td>
<td>.055</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predictability</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** indicates correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).
### Table 3

Correlations between Powerlessness and Strategy Selection Choices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Correlation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interactive Strategy</td>
<td>.009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive Strategy</td>
<td>.094*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active Strategy</td>
<td>.134**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-interrogation</td>
<td>.228**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** p<.01  
*  p<.05  
N=694
Table 4

Correlations between Predictability and Strategy Selection Choices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Correlation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interactive Strategy</td>
<td>.045</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive Strategy</td>
<td>.027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active Strategy</td>
<td>.087*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-interrogation</td>
<td>-.012</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p<.05

N=708
Table 5

Correlations between Anxiety and Strategy Selection Choices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy Selection</th>
<th>Correlation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interactive Strategy</td>
<td>.113**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive Strategy</td>
<td>.239**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active Strategy</td>
<td>.076*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-interrogation</td>
<td>.453**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** p<.01
* p<.05

N=709