ABSTRACT

Title of thesis: UTILIZING NARRATIVE TO UNDERSTAND ACTIVISM: A
                     CASE STUDY OF INVISIBLE CHILDREN

                     Stephanie Lynne Madden, Master of Arts, 2011

Thesis directed by: Professor Elizabeth Toth
                      Department of Communication

The purpose of this study was to understand how active and inactive publics made meaning of narrative discourse from the organization Invisible Children. Individual interviews were conducted with activists from across the country who demonstrated a high involvement with the organization. Qualitative focus groups were conducted with inactive publics at a large university to understand their meaning making of the narrative from the organization. Findings revealed that active and inactive publics made meaning of the narrative in similar and different ways. Findings also suggested that the narrative of the organization itself was important for involvement with the organization, contributing to activism and identity with the organization. Additionally, the concept of an activist storytelling organization was introduced and a new definition of activist was proposed. Practical implications include a better understanding of how narrative discourse can be utilized for activist organizations' messaging strategies for both active and inactive publics.

UTILIZING NARRATIVE TO UNDERSTAND ACTIVISM: A CASE STUDY OF

INVISIBLE CHILDREN

By

Stephanie Lynne Madden

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Advisory Committee:
    Professor Elizabeth Toth, Chair
    Assistant Professor Sahar Khamis
    Assistant Professor Brooke Liu

DEDICATION

To the youth around the world who are making a difference

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Chapter 1- Introduction

A war has been waging in northern Uganda for more than 20 years. It is the longest running conflict in Africa; yet, it had remained invisible from widespread international attention. The war, forgotten or unknown by so many, has had the greatest impact on the children of the region, many of whom are forced to be soldiers in Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). The world may have continued to forget about these children if it had not been for a series of events in 2003 that led to the creation of Invisible Children, at first only a single documentary, but in a few short years, a worldwide movement to tell the stories of the child soldiers of northern Uganda and seek ways to end the conflict. Invisible Children defines itself as a "social, political, and global movement using the transformative power of story to change lives" and views itself as a storytelling movement that focuses on youth, using "the power of media to inspire young people to help end the longest running war in Africa" (Invisible Children, 2010). This study seeks to understand the role that storytelling and narrative plays in successful activism by focusing on Invisible Children as an exemplar of an activist storytelling organization.

Activist groups are an important part of democratic society that serve a variety of purposes, from raising awareness about issues, advocating for change, and holding governments and organizations accountable for their actions. While activist groups are important, organizations often struggle to reach particular groups and grow their activist base, having to compete with apathy and sometimes each other for support. It is imperative for activist organizations to make their issue and message resonate with people, and research has shown that stories and narrative are an integral part of human

communication and experience (Fisher, 1984; Herman, 2003; Jasinski, 2001). While a significant body of research has focused on organization's use of narrative and the importance of stories, this research has largely been focused on corporation's internal employee publics (Boje, 1991; Boyce, 1995). Little research has focused on interpretation of narrative discourse from the organization and the importance of narrative to influencing activism and creating identity. The narrative paradigm has a long and rich history in the field of communication, but public relations scholars have yet to embrace it. Popularized by Fisher (1984), the narrative paradigm views human communication as a series of competing stories. Narratives function to help organize different aspects of human existence (Jasinski, 2001). Discourse can help us to understand how publics develop, build identity, and influence organizations (Curtin & Gaither, 2006; Edwards, 2006) and narratives are one of the most common forms of discourse. Taking a discursive approach to the study of publics allows for more agency on the part of the publics (Leitch & Neilson, 2001). The success that Invisible Children has had in the past few years as an organization may be attributable to its focus on being a storytelling organization. By using Invisible Children as a best practice case study, I will engage activist publics in the role that the stories of the organization have played in their involvement. Additionally, I will also compare the activist public's understanding of the stories with inactive publics to see where meaning making converges and diverges. This comparative process may help to provide greater insight into finding ways to turn inactive publics into active publics. My hope is that this thesis can provide valuable information to activist groups and activist publics on how to maximize their ability to increase involvement and raise awareness about causes through particular types of

discourse that will contribute to positive changes in local communities and even the national and international arena.

The focus on interpretation of narrative discourse first requires a rhetorical worldview. Public relations knowledge can be strengthened through research focused on a rhetorical worldview concerned with "meaning-making between organizations and publics" (Toth, 2009, p. 48). According to Botan and Hazleton (2006), public relations theory is moving towards a co-creational perspective and away from a functional perspective. A functional perspective "sees publics and communication as mere tools to achieve some corporate interest" (Botan & Hazleton, 2006, p. 7). In comparison, a co-creational perspective "focuses on publics as co-creators of meaning and emphasizes the building of relationships with publics" (Botan & Hazleton, 2006, p. 7). Heath (2006) wrote that "a rhetorical perspective is vital…because we must have a theory-based systematic way to understand, research, and critique the role of public relations in forming and responding to ideas—competing and convergent shared social realities that can broadly be interpreted as zones of meaning" (p. 93-94). In addition to filling the gap in public relations literature between narrative discourse and activism and providing activist organizations with practical information about how certain messaging resonates with activist publics, this study also seeks to add depth to rhetorically framed public relations theory. It is my firm belief that as a profession and academic study dedicated to communication, discourse is foundational to understanding how to improve the field.

Purpose of the study

To summarize, the central purpose of this study was to understand how activist publics and inactive publics make meaning of narrative discourse from an activist

organization and how this meaning making shapes their involvement with the organization. The activists studied were associated with the same organization and have high levels of involvement. The inactive publics had little knowledge and little involvement with the activist organization. Using a qualitative approach, I examined activist and inactive publics' meaning making of narrative discourse from an organization to compare and contrast how that form of discourse influences activism for both publics.

Organization of thesis:

This thesis includes a literature review of (a) activist/inactive publics and activist organization and how past research in public relations has studied these groups; (b) organizations as storytellers; (c) relevant literature on narrative and an overview of studies conducted in public relations involving narrative; and (d) the emerging scholarship of identity in public relations. I then list my research questions and describe the qualitative methodology proposed. After describing the methodology I then further discuss the focal organization of this study and how it is an exemplar case for understanding narrative, stories, and activism. Finally, the results, theoretical and practical contributions, and limitations and future directions for the research conclude this paper.

Chapter 2—Literature Review

Narrative and activism as separate entities in the field of communication have been heavily researched, but the intersection of the two, especially in public relations, has been limited. In this literature review, I explained what has been written about activist organizations, activist publics and inactive publics, providing an overview of public relations research conducted in this area. Secondly, I summarized the body of knowledge written in organizational communication and public relations about organizations as storytelling entities. Furthermore, I reviewed relevant literature on narratives for this study. Lastly, I explored the emerging scholarship of identity in public relations.

Activist publics and activist organizations: Activist publics have been defined in public relations in various ways. L. Grunig et al. (2002) defined an activist public as "a group of two or more individuals who organize in order to influence another public or publics through action that may include education, compromise, persuasion, pressure tactics, or force" (p. 446). Barry (1984) highlighted organization around a common goal and attempt to influence public policy as defining features of activist groups. Other terms used to describe activist publics include pressure, issue, or special interest groups; grassroots organizations; and social movements (McCown, 2007). In the past, activist publics were viewed as forces fighting against an organization. However, activist publics are being re-conceptualized from a disruptive force for organizations to an integral part of organizational success and change agents for society. Activist publics can advocate for an organization, support its policies, adopt behavior encouraged by the organization, and organize to influence other publics (Crable & Vibbert, 1985; Grunig & Repper, 1992). The importance and role of activist publics has been recognized in public relations

through a growing body of research that is focusing on the relationship between activist

publics and organizations (Anderson, 1992; Dougall, 2005; Walker, 2004). In order to

understand what makes activist publics different from other publics, it is important to

briefly address Grunig's situational theory of publics, one of the foundational

understandings of publics in public relations.

Grunig's (1997) situational theory of publics developed from principles of

marketing segmentation. The idea behind segmentation is to divide a particular

population into groups whose members have the most in common. Building upon the

ideas from different scholars (Freeman, 1984; Ferguson, 1984; Grunig & Hunt, 1984;

Grunig & Repper, 1992), Grunig developed his situational theory of publics, positing that

three independent variables created different publics: problem recognition, constraint

recognition, and level of involvement. Problem recognition is conceptualized as when

"people detect that something should be done about a situation and stop to think about

what to do" (Grunig, 1997, p. 110). Constraint recognition is conceptualized as when

"people perceive that there are obstacles in a situation that limit their ability to do

anything about the situation" (Grunig, 1997, p. 110). Level of involvement is the "extent

to which people connect themselves with a situation" (Grunig, 1997, p. 110). These

variables influence a public's information seeking and information processing behaviors.

The higher a public's problem recognition and level of involvement, and the lower the

constraint recognition, the more actively that public will seek information. Grunig and

Hunt (1984) suggested that publics could be non-publics, latent, aware, or active. Grunig

and his colleagues found that four types of active publics consistently emerge when

examining quantitative data (Grunig and Repper, 1992). An all-issue public is active on

all issues, whereas an apathetic public is active on none. A single-issue public is active on one or a small subset of issues that concerns only a small part of the population. A hot-issue public is actively involved on a single issue that involves a large portion of the population (Grunig and Repper, 1992). While Grunig's situational theory of publics has remained important in public relations theory and practice, it has also been challenged and extended.

Various scholars have offered their own conceptualizations of publics. The idea of a public as being active in its relationship with an organization is explicated by Hausen (2007) who wrote that a public is "an emergent body of those who are tending to an issue through active participation in the deliberative processes that bear on it" (p. 335). Additionally, publics arise when individuals "form a community, deliberating about common aims and values" (Monberg, 1998, p. 430). In addition to forming a community around common values, "[p]ublics…organize around issues and seek out organizations that create those issues—to gain information, seek redress of grievances, pressure the organizations, or ask governments to regulate them" (Grunig and Repper, 1992, p. 128). Rawlins (2006) adds further depth to the definition of publics by noting that publics are identified "according to their relationship to messages" (p. 1). Publics are therefore formed when individuals believe they have agency to create change for an issue and band together with others who share those beliefs to create discourse to enact that change.

Many times the literature on activists conceptualizes this public as external to the organization, but activists can also be found within an organization (Holtzhausen & Voto, 2002; McCown, 2007). Through a qualitative case study of a small liberal arts college, McCown (2007) investigated the role that public relations plays with internal activists

and found that employees utilized activist strategies such as organizing and mobilizing support through email communication, crafting a formal letter to the board of trustees from the faculty council, and speaking out at open forums with organizational leadership when communication gaps were perceived. Holtzhausen and Voto (2002) posited that a postmodern view of public relations practice meant that practitioners would act as organizational activists. In their qualitative study of the discourse of practioners from 16 in-depth interviews, they found organizational activism displayed through a desire for change, practice of dissensus, and ethical decision-making. Berger (2005) encouraged public relations academics as well as professionals to embrace an activist role in order to better serve society. An activist public relations role may serve to alter relations of power inside the dominant coalition, as well as influence perceptions of the practice in general. Dozier and Lauzen (2000) also cite the role of the public relations scholar as important to activism. They asked scholars to move past nomothetic models of public relations and to study activism and activist publics utilizing critical theory.

While the focus of this thesis is on activism, it is also important to develop a basic understanding of inactive publics as activist causes and organizations not only communicate with those who support the cause but also seek to raise awareness and increase involvement among publics who were previously unaware or uninvolved. As defined by Hallahan (2000), inactive publics are "groups composed of individuals who, as a whole, possess comparatively low levels of knowledge about an organization and low levels of involvement in its operations" (p. 504). Inactivity on the part of these groups should not be viewed as a lack of capability or desire to enact change in society, but rather may be caused by not recognizing the consequences of the organization's

behavior, satisfaction with the relationship, apathy towards the organization, or a belief that a situation cannot be altered (Hallahan, 2000). From a psychological perspective, inactive publics exist because people can only cope with a certain number of problems or situations at one time causing people to be selective as to where they invest their time and energy (Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988). While little research has been done on inactive publics, they are an important area for further research because they compromise the majority of people at-large.

While activists are described as being vocal and advocating for issues, oftentimes in public relations literature the activist groups are given voice by the organizations instead of being allowed to speak for themselves. However, some have noted the need to add to the body of public-centered research that seeks to understand a situation from the perspective of the people engaged in it (Leitch & Nelson, 2001). Edwards (2006) wrote that "[t]he public-centered tactic exposes the links as well as the disconnects between organization and public values, underscoring the importance for practitioners to provide meaningful contributions to the public-organization dialogue, creating, negotiating, and codefining meaning with publics" (p. 856). Smith and Ferguson (2001) stressed the need for more public relations research into activism and called for "greater methodological diversity in studying the interaction between activists and other organizations" (p. 299). Smith and Ferguson (2001) explained the importance of multiple methods in understanding this interaction:

> Multiple methods are especially helpful in examining a group's communication processes, ideology, motivations, and the relationships among these aspects and others involving strategic communication outside the organization (p. 300).

Smith and Ferguson (2001) suggested multivocal case studies as a way to create this greater methodological diversity and to also explicate the interaction between activists and organizations.

Previous research on activist organizations informs this study. Activist organizations face special challenges that necessitate strong public relations functions but that can also limit their abilities to exercise these functions (Smith & Ferguson, 2001; Taylor et al. 2001). Smith and Ferguson (2001) explained that activist organizations "must maintain membership, thrive in what might be described as a competitive marketplace of ideas and issues, and adjust to changes in their environment" (p. 295). Many times non-profit and advocacy organizations rely on the grassroots support of volunteers and members. These groups are often ambassadors for the organization on a person-to-person level, meaning that keeping these groups engaged, interested, and inspired is often key to an activist organization's success (Reber, B., Petersone, B., & Berger, B., 2010). Taylor et al. (2001) continued to describe the unique challenges that many activist organizations face, such as operating on minimal budgets, lack of public relations expertise within the organization, and competing with other activist groups focused on similar issues for activist support. Taylor et al. (2001) argued that activist organizations are important to study in public relations because of their unique relationship-building and communication needs.

Activist organizations have been described as performing a dual role (Aldoory & Sha, 2006; Jiang and Ni, 2007). Aldoory and Sha (2007) conceptualized the dual role as being "public" in communicating with its target organizations and being "public communicator" when communicating with its own publics (p. 352). Aldoory and Sha

(2006) continued that "[a]ctivists are not just publics of an organization; they are frequently organizations themselves who often know sophisticated public relations strategies and theory" (p. 352). Jiang and Ni (2007) explicated three lines of thought in past research to explain this dual role. First, activist organizations must manage multiple identities in response to target organizations and its own publics (Curtin & Gaither, 2005; Henderson, 2005; Roper, 2005). Secondly, activist organizations must interact with other organizations and publics, meaning this interaction shapes the character of the dual role being enacted (Cote & Levine, 2002; Sha, 2006). Thirdly, in managing this dual role, activist organizations must create an overlap in meaning for both their target organizations as well as their multiple publics (Heath & Palenchar, 2000; Henderson, 2005). In the next section I expand the notion of an activist organization by highlighting academic understandings of storytelling organizations, paving the way for this study of an exemplar case of Invisible Children and ultimately understanding how activist and inactive publics make meaning of this storytelling function.

Organizations as storytellers: As interest in organizational culture has grown over the past three decades, there has been an increase of research on the importance of stories to organizations, although this research has largely neglected activist organizations. Past research on organizations has uncovered that organizations are essentially narrative, and that organizations "work hard to enact the persona that they are in charge of their destinies and aware of the interests and concerns of the other characters…in the narrative" (Heath, 1997, p. 317). Boje (1991) defined a storytelling organization as a "collective storytelling system in which the performance of stories is a key part of members' sense-making and a means to allow them to supplement individual memories

with institutional memory" (p. 106). The process of sense-making is a vehicle for constructing shared meaning and developing shared purpose (Boyce, 1995). Adorisio (2009) explained the importance of narrative to organizations in this way:

> The power of narratives stands in the legitimation of an alternative paradigm for conceiving order and organization. Narrative is, following this acceptation, a way to make sense, to organize, to know, or a way to understand how sense-making is reproduced in organizations (p. 35).

In addition to serving a sense-making function, organizational stories can help inspire and motivate organizational members (James & Minnis, 2004). Narratives in organizations are a social and relational practice. The relationship created by narrative is between the teller and the listener, which can cause a sense of mutual belonging and sharing (Adorisio, 2009). Ultimately, though, storytelling organizations exist to tell and live out their collective stories and seek to accurately represent the stories of insiders and outsiders (Jones, 1991; Wilkins & Thompson, 1991).

There are at least three ways in which narrative has entered the organizational realm: the first is people telling stories in organizations; the second is viewing organizational phenomena as narrative; finally, organizational research can be understood as a form of narrative (Czarniawska, 1997). These different ways of understanding organizational narrative are not mutually exclusive. The most common way that storytelling organizations have been studied is through the stories told within organizations (Boje, 1991; Boje, 1995; Czarniawska, 1997). This study most closely represents the second way of understanding storytelling organizations, which is viewing

organizational phenomena, in this case the messaging strategy of Invisible Children, as narrative.

Gabriel (2004) explained how stories and narratives in organizations are different from stories and narratives in general. First, stories in organizations have to compete with other "sense-making devices," such as rationalistic explanations and bureaucratic rules and procedures. Oftentimes organizational communication comes in the form of manuals, rulebooks, instructions, and orders that do not require, though often invite, narrative elaboration. Secondly, there are often organizational controls on "time, movement, and space, and on what people are allowed to say often inhibit the delicate and time-consuming narrative process" (Gabriel, 2004, p. 24). While Gabriel (2004) argues that organizations are not storytelling communities-communities where stories are the main way of communication- "[t]he importance of stories and narratives in organizations lies precisely in their ability to create symbolic spaces where the hegemony of facts, information, and technical rationality can be challenged or sidestepped" (p. 25).

Research into organizations as storytellers has focused mainly on corporations, but there is an emerging line of research focusing on the use of stories within non-profit organizations. Ware (2007) investigated the use of testimonials on websites of award-winning non-profit organizations, finding that testimonials were frequently utilized and that organizations utilizing testimonials devoted significant space to the narratives on the website. The use of testimonials by non-profit organizations is an important part of campaigns because they are "a nice way to allow others to sing your praises" by "telling a story about just how your organization helped" (Feinglass, 2005, p. 128). In addition to the use of stories by non-profit organizations, research in the field has also sought to

understand narratives circulating within non-profit organizations. Lewis et al (2006) studied non-profit practitioners' stories of interorganizational collaboration, coining the phrase "collaboration narrative" and giving voice to the experiences of working in collaborative relationships between organizations. Isbel (2008) furthered the research on collaborative narrative by studying a coalition of organizations working to reduce teen pregnancy, placing the collaboration narratives in a historical pattern to understand patterns of discourse and how the collaborative narrative changes over time after encountering setbacks.

The prevalence of social media is changing the ways in which organizations tell stories. Social media is leading to increasingly participatory storytelling, meaning that organizations' publics are beginning to have more of a role in shaping, rather than just receiving, organizational stories (Deuze, 2005). Blogs in particular have become increasingly common for organizations to maintain, and Yang and Lim's (2009) model of blog-mediated public relations (BMPR) stressed narrative structure as a key component to building relational trust. Bloggers frame their experiences in the form of stories to help make their experiences accessible to readers (Bochner, Ellis, & Tillmann-Healy, 1997). Relational trust, built through the salience of narrative structure in blog posts, enhances a blog's transparency and integrity (Scoble & Israel, 2006). The informal style in which blogs are written is part of their unique narrative construction. As Doostdar (2004) stated, ''[b]logs in general adopt a much more informal and personal tone than what is customary in a newspaper, in part because of a perceived immediacy and intimacy in the relationship between the blogger and his or her visitors'' (p. 654). Oftentimes what makes a blog feel so intimate is that a discernible human character's is positioned in a

place that Kerby (1991) considered as the center of a narrative.

Narrative: It would be impossible to address all research surrounding narrative as a topic of inquiry as narratives are found everywhere, lending support to many practices and activities (Herman, 2003). This portion of the literature review focuses on highlighting the foundational perspectives of narrative in the field of communication and recent work involving narrative in public relations research that will help shape and provide an interpretive basis for this study.

The concept of narrative has been defined differently by a multitude of scholars. Two common themes in many definitions include narrative as representation and as a sequence of events (Abbott, 2002; Foss, 1996; Onega & Landa, 1996; Prince, 1982; Scholes, 1981). Rudrum (2005) challenged these commonly held views of narrative as limiting and that "such classifications as 'narrative' and 'non-narrative' are at best provisional, inconsistent, and not mutually exclusive" (p. 200). For the purposes of this study, I defined narrative as a form of discourse that is "the representation of an event or a series of events" (Abbott, 2002, p. 12). While abstract, this definition helps delimit the parameters of narrative discourse. It is important to address the difference between story and narrative, although the terms are often used interchangeably. Czarniawska (1997) argues that "a story consists of a plot comprising causally related episodes that culminate in a solution to a problem" (p. 78) whereas "for them to become a narrative, they require a plot, that is, some way to bring them into a meaningful whole" (Czarniawska, 1999, p. 2).

While a definition is a helpful starting point for understanding narrative, it is also important to examine the component parts of what makes a story. Rowland (2005) set

forth four characteristics inherent to all stories: characters, setting, plot, and theme. The

characters in a story can be like or unlike the reader. If the characters are different from

the reader, then the character is often portrayed as heroic in some fashion. If the

characters are similar to the readers, this sense of commonality may result in a strong

sense of identification. This process of identification is important because "one of the

most powerful functions of narrative is to generate in the reader/viewer/listener the

understanding that 'I'm like [a character in the narrative]" (Rowland, 2005, p. 138). The

setting of the story is another key component. The setting can "break down barriers to

understanding," allowing the audience to develop insight into another location, time-

period, or culture (Rowland, 2005, p. 138). The structure of a narrative—its plot—is the

third important component of a story. Jasinski (2001) explained that the plot "establishes

both wholeness and unity of action; the elements of the story are interconnected, and they

develop or progress toward a satisfying conclusion" (p. 390). Rowland (2005) added that

part of the function of the plot is also to "reinforce the theme or message of the story" (p.

135). Adorisio (2009) argued that without an organizing plot it would be impossible to

bring together different elements of the story that might otherwise seem distant and non-

continuous. The fourth important aspect is the theme or message of the story, which may

be explicitly stated or inferred by the audience. Themes often convey particular morals

or values that may elicit an emotional response in the reader (Rowland, 2005). Stories

with a persuasive intent must convey the theme convincingly to audiences so that they

can identify with the action or belief the narrative is promoting.

Fisher's (1984) narrative paradigm "insists that human communication should be

viewed as historical as well as situational, as stories competing with other stories

constituted by good reasons, as being rational when they satisfy the demands of narrative probability and narrative fidelity, and as inevitably moral inducement" (p. 2). In order to understand the narrative paradigm it is important to acknowledge Fisher's notion of narrative rationality, which stands in contrast to traditional models of rationality relying on formal logic. Fisher's narrative rationality relies on narrative probability, which is a story's coherence and integrity, and narrative fidelity, which deals with how well a narrative resonates with its recipients so that they can align a given narrative with other stories they have known to be true and meaningful (Fisher, 1987).

While this study is ultimately qualitatively based, an understanding of the different rhetorical functions available for narrative is important in understanding if the type of narrative employed by an activist organization influences activism differently. Three effects of rhetorical practice have been applied to narratives—the aesthetic, the instrumental, and the constitutive. Chatman (1990) defined "aesthetic rhetoric" to mean the author's effort to shape the audience's response (p. 188). Performing an aesthetic critique involves observing how specific functions, such as character dialogue, visual imagery, and sound, "contribute to the narrative's ability to create a world for the reader or audience" (Jasinski, 2001, p. 392). When narrative is effective, it "functions aesthetically to create a vivid, memorable, and compelling world for the reader or audience" (Jasinski, 2001, p. 393).

Narratives function instrumentally when responding to exigencies and manifesting arguments and persuasive appeals (Jasinski, 2001). Advocates can utilize narrative to vividly depict a current problem or possible consequences. Deliberative discourse, which relies on reason and arguments, often fits under the instrumental

function of narrative and remains unfinished. In deliberative narrative, choices must be made by key agents, usually the audience (Jasinski, 2001). In this way, the audience becomes key characters in the unfolding narrative (Lewis, 1987). This conceptualization of narrative illustrates Farrell's (1993) claim that "rhetoric helps to define and….constitute…a culture…by inviting audiences to think figuratively about their own place and conduct in unfolding historical episodes" (p. 213).

Constitutive rhetoric applies when narratives helps shape how "a community understands its world and when they offer inducements to create, recreate, or transform the social world" (Jasinski, 2001, p. 393). In this way, narratives ultimately implicate an ideology. Constitutive rhetoric can be seen as on a continuum with one end reinforcing the status quo and the other end challenging and subverting hegemonic ideological beliefs (Jasinski, 2001).   Narratives help shape individual identity as well as a community's identity and culture.

Narrative helps to bind together the facts of our experience and organize our existence, establishing relationships between or among things over time (Jasinski, 2001). Stories reflect values important to the social system in which they are told, and successful stories resonate with recipients because they reflect lived experiences of the recipients (Sillars & Gronbeck, 2001). Scholes and Kellogg (1966) believe that the distinguishing characteristic of narrative is that it has a narrator or storyteller, and that "in the relationship between the teller and the tale, and [in] that other relationship between the teller and the audience, lies the essence of narrative art" (p. 240). How narrative functions to build the relationship and identity between the teller, in this case the organization, and the audience, the activist and inactive publics, was examined in this study.

Narrative in public relations scholarship: The topic of narrative has not been solely

confined to rhetoricians, with a few public relations scholars taking on the task of moving

public relations research in a more rhetorical direction. In describing a rhetorical

enactment rationale for public relations, Heath (2001) addressed the importance of

narrative to public relations in the following way:

> Through co-authored narratives, each public achieves collective opinions,
>
> judgments, and actions that govern its behavior and public policy preferences.
>
> Organizations can adopt or seek to influence the narratives of society by what
>
> they say and do. Co-created meaning leads to a sense of community through
>
> shared narratives that supply people with knowable ways in which to act toward
>
> organizations and one another. Narratives voice expectations regarding how
>
> organizations should act toward one another and the people of society (p. 42).

Other public relations scholars have taken on the challenge of understanding narrative to

the field. Vasquez (1993) attempted to conceptualize a homo narrans paradigm for public

relations that viewed "the exchange of messages between an organization and its publics

as forms of stories" (p. 201). This paradigm sought to combine Bormann's (1985)

symbolic convergence theory, which views humans as social storytellers sharing

"fantasies" that build group consciousness and create a social reality, with Grunig's

(1997) situational theory of publics, which was previously discussed. This paradigm

views a public as a "rhetorical community," which is "an aggregation of individuals who

have developed a group consciousness around an issue…" (Vasquez & Taylor, 2001, p.

146**).** Terry (2001) utilized the homo narrans perspective to garner fantasy themes from

lobbyists about their job performance as public relations practitioners "to gain an

alternative perspective on traditional practitioner role enactment and meaning" (p. 236). While this paradigm has not gained ground in the field of public relations, it was an initial attempt to combine rhetorical theory with public relations theory.

Much of the scholarship focusing on narratives in public relations has been conducted through identifying narrative in standard public relations materials, such as annual reports, case studies, press releases, and news releases (Gilpin, 2008; Jameson, 2000; Pieczka, 2007; Tjernstrom & Tjernstrom, 2003). While shareholder reports, annual reports, and press releases are part of the general organization communication, risk and crisis communication are other areas in which narrative has been studied in public relations. Palenchar and Wright (2007) viewed a pitfall of public relations practice, especially in risk communication situations, as solely using organizational narratives to understand how publics and stakeholders develop a sense of self and identity. Instead, another way to study narrative is to examine the organization from outside sources, which in Palenchar and Wright's study was through narrative framing by the media. The authors concluded that it is important for public relations professionals to understand how journalists use narrative to fill gaps in communication from an organization caused by crisis and risk events. Risk and crisis communication create a need for sense-making, which has been shown to be something which narratives can address (Boyce, 1995).

The reason for providing an overview of the research on narrative in public relations is to show the limited research conducted with a publics-centered approach to understanding narrative in public relations. This study begins to fill that gap in and provide a new complexity to the study of narrative by providing a diversity of opinions as to the meaning of narrative and its importance to activist and inactive publics in the

context of a particular organization. In the next section, identity is explored as a guiding concept to begin shaping understandings of the influence of narrative discourse.

Identity: Identity is an emerging theoretical construct in public relations research (Balmer, 2002) and is becoming a central construct in forming "more active, fluid, and constructivist understanding[s] of publics to challenge more traditional segmentation approaches, particularly in regard to the formation of activist publics" (Curtin & Gaither, 2006, p. 67). One prevalent school of thought in identity research is symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism was a school of thought created in the 20th century by Blumer (1969) that examines how individuals and groups interact. This theoretical school of thought believes that humans communicate through symbols, the most common system of symbols being language (Berg, 2009). Symbolic interactionism focuses on "the creation of identity through interaction with others" (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1994, as cited by Zhang 2006, p. 27). Through this, meaning comes through interpretation, and the way people think about themselves tends to be a reflection of other's assessments (Zhang, 2006). Identity negotiation can occur through building an overlapping zone of meaning (Jiang & Ni, 2007). Taking the idea of identity negotiation, the activist group may develop its identity through the overlap of how the organization views the identity of the group and how the group views itself. For inactive publics, they may dissociate themselves from identifying with the organization in order to justify their lack of involvement. The use and understanding of narrative may play a part in this identity negotiation.

Cote and Levine (2002) proposed a social psychological model of identity formation that incorporates three levels, although the first level is the most relevant for

understanding activists. Ego identity is the first level and is the fundamental "subjective sense of continuity of being the same person over time and in different situations" (Cote & Levine, 2002, p. 121). The identity of the activists can be derived from their basic value systems and missions, and if that continuity is maintained in all situations or only when meeting other activists to help forward the mission and goals of the activist organization (Cote & Levine, 2002). Through studying a public relations campaign against genetic engineering in New Zealand, Henderson (2005) illustrated how the management of multiple identities through issues management strategies can provoke public activism.

Sha (2006) helped expand the notion of multiple identities through her work on "avowed" and "ascribed" cultural identities (p. 52). A person has an avowed cultural identity when "he or she identifies with a cultural group and asserts that membership" (p. 52). An ascribed cultural identity is "assigned to a person by another person and may not be the same as the person's avowed cultural identity" (p. 52). The distinction here is that the individual declares one identity and the other is assigned to the individual. As the world becomes more globalized, new identities are emerging that cannot be easily segmented.

Identity is a relational process that is dependent on situational contingencies, meaning that it is conditional and continually changes. Unsatisfied with singular categories of identity that essentialized a person, Somers (1994) argued for the study of identity formation through narrative:

> An energetic engagement with this new ontological narrativity provides an
> opportunity to infuse the study of identity formation with a relational and

historical approach that avoids categorical rigidities by emphasizing the

embeddedness of identity in overlapping networks of relations that shift over time

and space (p. 607).

Continuing with the idea of identity as relationally constituted, Fiol (2002) argued that

"[t]hrough identification processes, individual members come to understand who they are

as reflected in their organizational identity" (p. 653). However, a paradox exists in

identification. As individual and organizational identity becomes intertwined, it is useful

for bringing people together for collective change efforts. However, this identification

may undermine an outside perspective that could generate possibilities for positive

organizational change (Fiol, 2002).

Curtin and Gaither (2005) have argued for the circuit of culture model as a basis

for public relations theory because within this model "publics are understood in more

dynamic, relational terms as loosely grouped individuals who actively appropriate and

negotiate multiple identities" (p. 102). The circuit of culture model encompasses five

discursive moments: regulation, production, consumption, representation, and identity

(Curtin & Gaither, 2006). Identity is related to the other four discursive moments in that

"[identities] are produced, consumed, and regulated within culture—creating meanings

through symbolic systems of representation about the identity positions which we might

adopt" (Woodward, 1997, p. 8). In their case study of the World Health Organization's

(WHO's) campaign to eradicate smallpox, Curtin and Gaither (2006) utilized the circuit

of culture model to focus specifically on notions of identity both for the organization and

the issue. This study countered the argument that identities can be imposed from top

down and instead highlighted the conflicting and multiple identities that exist in

organizational and issue identities. Dougall (2004) recognized the importance of this approach in terms of how activist publics form and are empowered separately from organizational definitions and formulation. However, in the context of this study, it is also possible that activist publics are empowered in conjunction with organizational definitions and formulation as expressed through narrative.

How non-profit organizations construct their identities has implications for their structure, strategy, and survival (Brilliant & Young, 2004). Organizational identities for non-profits are important for a variety of reasons, including facilitating interactions amongst members (Golden-Biddle & Rao, 1997), contributing to membership pride (Quinlan, 1995), and contributing to stakeholder commitment (Boyle, 2003). Importantly, these identities are continually evolving to meet the needs of the organization (Brilliant & Young, 2004). Stewart (1999) made an important distinction between self-directed activist organizations where people's activism is directly tied to their identity (i.e., gender and race) whereas other-directed activist organizations help other people achieve rights (i.e., human rights and animal rights). Little research has focused on understanding the implications of this distinction in activist public relations.

Sha (2009) highlighted the importance of symmetrical communication for the creation, maintenance, and strengthening of organizational identities. Articulation of identity can be a rhetorical tool for activist organizations, such as PETA's advertising campaign that sought to create an identification between humans and animals, appealed to multiple identities to encourage questioning distinctions, and combined emotional and ethical arguments to encourage a questioning of identity (Atkins-Sayre, 2010). Derville (2005) argued that radical activist tactics, such as PETA's, can help activist organizations

redefine and embolden activist identities and also create more momentum for moderate activist organizations, who can identify as more reasonable by comparison.

Studies of identity have contributed to a greater understanding of social agency (Somers, 1994). The idea of collective identity has been important to the study of social movements. Polletta and Jasper (2001) define collective identity as "an individual's cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution" that is distinguished from personal identity and is a "perception of a shared status or relation" (p. 285). Collective identity offers a reason why people mobilize and participate in various causes, especially when there are no material incentives for many activists (Polletta & Jasper, 2001). However, Friedman and McAdam (1992) argued that the nature of collective identities changes over time. While the collective identity is initially rooted in existing organizations and networks, over time these collective identities may become available to everyone, causing them to lose their ability to compel participation. Melucci (1995) highlighted the connection between collective identity and action, where collective identity is the "process of constructing an action system" (p. 44). Identity in this sense goes beyond a feeling of togetherness and "enables social actors to act as unified and delimited subjects and to be in control of their own actions" (Melucci, 1995, p. 46). Collective action goes beyond responding to social and environmental constraints but "produces symbolic orientations and meanings that actors are able to recognize" (Melucci, 1995, p. 46). How activists create an identity with an activist storytelling organization will be explored through the concept of narrative.

Summary: Understanding how activist publics, inactive publics, activist organizations have been conceptualized and researched in public relations was the launching pad on

which to begin this study. In the case of Invisible Children, their screenings attract thousands of youth to attend; yet, after the viewing the film most people have no further engagement with the organization. Comparing an active public with an inactive public, particularly in relationship to how meaning is made of the key messaging strategy through stories of Invisible Children, may provide insight into ways to better engage inactive publics to become active publics. Additionally, not enough research has been conducted involving activist organizations that can also be described as storytelling organizations. The case organization for this study was chosen as an exemplar of an activist storytelling organization, with this storytelling capacity recognized both by the organization and externally. Due to Invisible Children's focus on storytelling and its success as an activist organization, the role that stories have played in achieving this success was explored to understand how and why stories are operating in this specific case and what larger implications can be drawn from it.

Given the connection between activist publics and their activist organizations, as explained earlier, understanding how the stories and narratives from Invisible Children are interpreted by activist publics can help examine further how this function of the activist organizations can influence activism and identity with the organization. By comparing the meaning making of activist publics with inactive publics, differences and similarities can be understood that may help organizations better learn how to use narrative to get inactive publics connected. Expanding the notion of the "storytelling organization" into activist organizations will hopefully both extend notions of stories in organizations, as well as the function of narrative more broadly.

Research Questions

Drawing upon the literature involving activist publics, inactive publics, and organizations, narrative and storytelling organizations, and identity, the following Research Questions are proposed to guide the data collection and data analysis of this thesis study:

RQ1: How do activist publics make meaning of narrative discourse from an activist organization?

RQ2: How do inactive publics make meaning of narrative discourse from an activist organization?

RQ3: How does interpretation of narrative discourse influence activism?

RQ4: How does narrative discourse create identity between an activist public and the activist organization?

Chapter 3-Method

The case study method used in this research incorporated a triangulation of data through in-depth interviews, focus groups, and participant observation. Through this exploratory study I investigated the role that narrative plays in activism in the particular context studied. Using a data analysis approach borrowed from grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), I identified themes that emerged through the data. While the results of this study are specific to the particular case analyzed, I was able to draw larger themes from this study that can help understand the meaning making behind narrative and activism in different contexts. I received Institutional Review Board approval for this study and adhered to the policies and procedures set forth when using human subjects for research purposes.

Case study methodology

The case study method allows for phenomenon to be understood more holistically rather than relying on specific variables (Yin, 2009), making it suited for a study focused on meaning making by activists. Berg (2009) defined the case study method as "involving systemically gathering enough information about a particular person, social setting, event, or group to permit the researcher to effectively understand how the subjects operates or functions" (p. 317). Case studies allow for in-depth research that tests contemporary events against theoretical propositions and can help to illustrate or build on existing theory, which leads to what Yin (2009) calls analytic generalization. Analytic generalization involves generalizing phenomenon to beyond the specific situation studied to provide greater applicability to other contexts. This helps mitigate a

perceived disadvantage of the case study method, which is that results only apply to a particular context (Yin, 2009).

When undertaking a case study, it is important to collect multiple sources of evidence. Yin (2009) argues that the most important reason to use multiple sources of evidence for a case study is the development of "converging lines of inquiry," which is a "process of triangulation and corroboration" (p. 115-116). Common sources of evidence for case studies include documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation, and physical artifacts. For this study I utilized in-depth interviews, focus groups, and participant observation to develop converging lines of inquiry. Each of these data collection methods is discussed more in-depth.

In-depth interviews

In-depth individual interviews formed the core of data collection for this study. Berg (2009) defined interviewing as "a conversation with a purpose" (p. 101). I conducted semi-structured interviews, meaning that questions were asked in a systematic way, but there was freedom to explore questions beyond the initial protocol (Berg, 2009). While time consuming, interviews are utilized when "depth, detail, and richness" are sought (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 13), and it is up to the interviewer to ensure that appropriate main questions, probes, and follow-ups are used to achieve this thick description (Geertz, 1973).

Rubin and Rubin (2005) discussed three characteristics of qualitative interviews: 1) they build on a naturalistic, interpretive philosophy, 2) they are extensions of ordinary conversations, 3) interviewees are partners in the research instead of subjects. While developing a partnership in the research process, Yin (2009) highlighted the importance

the interviewer to remain unbiased when asking questions. Interviews allow the

participants to frame and structure their responses, meaning researchers explore the topic

from the interviewee's perspective. Qualitative research is ideal for allowing activist

publics to have a voice in public relations research.

Focus groups

The focus group approach allows researchers to learn about "conscious,

semiconscious, and unconscious psychological and sociocultural characteristics and

processes among various groups" (Berg, 2009, p. 158). Morgan (1988) wrote that the

hallmark of focus groups is "the explicit use of the group interaction to produce data and

insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group" (p. 12).

The idea behind this method is to create a dynamic interaction amongst the participants

that stimulates discussion based on each other's comments and insights (Berg, 2009).

Focus groups can be used as "self-contained data" (Morgan & Spanish, 1984, p. 263),

meaning the focus groups can be used as stand-alone data, or they can be used as an

additional line of action for a study to offer corroboration or disagreement with other data

collected (Berg, 2009). Focus groups serve as a valuable way to gain a collectivist view

about an issue. In contrasting active publics with inactive publics, using a focus group of

inactive publics is appropriate because meaning is often in groups and understanding a

broader perspective of why narrative discourse influences activist behaviors for some

groups and not others.

A typical focus group set-up involves a small number of participants led by a

moderator who ensures the discussion stays focused to the research objectives (Berg,

2009). Krueger (1994) suggested that focus group size should be limited to no more than

seven participants. Focus groups are advantageous because they can allow the researcher to gather large amounts of data in relatively short periods of time. Additionally, focus groups also provide an understanding of how members of a public arrive at or change their conclusions based on interactions with other participants (Berg, 2009). There are also disadvantages to focus groups, including the variability of the group as a result of voluntary participation, social desirability factors, and the possibility of dominant personalities overpowering less dominant voices (Berg, 2009).

Participant Observation—Participant observation is different from direct observation because the researcher takes a more active role in the situation being studied. Participant observation is important because in some situations people may not be aware of or able to articulate their experiences with the phenomenon being studied (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). However, a potential drawback to participant observation is that the researcher may make meaning of an action or interaction that is not how participants would make meaning. To account for this drawback, this study also utilized in-depth interviews to ensure that the participants' meaning making is understood and not assumed. As a participant observer for this study, I attended four meetings of the University of Maryland Invisible Children chapter and attended the Invisible Children screening of the Go! documentary that was played on campus as part of the Roadie tour in the Fall 2010 semester. People at the meetings were aware of my role as researcher and the nature of the study I was conducting. I attended the Invisible Children screening in order to develop a fuller understanding of the main form of communicating the stories and narratives of the organization to activist and potential activist publics. It also allowed me to have a deeper knowledge of the organization to delve into greater depth with in-depth interviews with

activist publics rather than having to focus on the basics of what a screening entails.

Participant observation must be utilized with the awareness of potential biases that it may

produce. For advocacy organization in particular, the participant-observer may already be

or become a supporter of the organization, causing the observer to not be able to think

critically about the organization or issue being studied (Yin, 2009). Attempting to counter

any biases from participant-observation, I decided to ensure that the interview

participants for the study represented a variety of Invisible Children chapters from around

the country rather than just from the group being observed. This was designed to counter

any potential biases developed in favor or against the chapter observed and any biases

that may have developed amongst participants towards me.

Participants

　　　Recruitment: I used snowball sampling to recruit participants for in-depth

individual interviews (Berg, 2009). I identified Invisible Children activists through

student organization websites, attending Invisible Children events, the Invisible Children

organizational website, and known activists through informal contacts. People contacted

as activists initially held positions within Invisible Children chapters or were highly

involved members, had served as interns for Invisible Children, were currently employed

by the organization, or had participated in Invisible Children's Teacher Exchange

program. Using informants from these groups I then found additional individuals to

interview. Participants for in-depth interviews were not be limited to a specific

geographic region, meaning that combination of telephone and face-to-face interviews

was utilized based on the location of the activist. In recruiting participants for in-depth

interviews I sent out e-mails to contacts describing the purpose of the project and

attaching a scanned copy of the IRB-approved consent form. Interested participants then e-mailed me back if they consented to the terms of the study and a time was set for either an in-person or phone interview. The majority of the interviews were conducted via telephone. For the focus groups, I used SONA, a Department of Communication participant pool, to recruit undergraduate participants at the University of Maryland who had limited knowledge of and involvement with Invisible Children. Participants in the focus groups were given consent forms prior to participating in the focus group. Both focus groups were conducted in the conference room of the Communication Department at the University of Maryland. All interview and focus group participants agreed to be audio-recorded for the purposes of the study (see consent forms Appendices B and C).

Summary of participants: A total of 28 people participated in the study. All participants consented to being audio-recorded for the purposes of the research. Sixteen Invisible Children activists were interviewed: 11 females and five males; 11 Caucasian, one Native American, one Asian/Pacific Islander, one African-American, and two Hispanic participants. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 32-years-old and represented eight different states and one district: California, District of Columbia, Florida, Louisiana, Maryland, Missouri, Ohio, Tennessee, and Texas. The participants interviewed represented seven Invisible Children chapter presidents, three chapter vice-presidents, one Schools for Schools representative, one high school faculty advisor, one Invisible Children staff member, and three highly involved chapter members. Additionally, three of the participants also worked as Roadie interns for the organization, meaning they took a semester off of school in order to show an Invisible Children documentary around the United States. The number of years of involvement with

Invisible Children ranged from one to six years, with the average number of years of involvement being just over three years. The participants selected for in-depth interviews were chosen because they demonstrated the characteristics of activist publics described in public relations literature, which include advocating for an organization, adopting behavior encouraged by the organization, and organizing to influence other publics (Crable & Vibbert, 1985; Grunig & Repper, 1992). These participants had a demonstrated commitment to the organization Invisible Children through their involvement with the various campus chapters and work with the organization directly as interns and participants in their programs in Uganda.

Twelve University of Maryland undergraduate students participated in the two focus groups, with six participants in each focus group. Focus group participants ranged in age between 18-24 and all received extra credit in their communication courses for their participation. The first focus group consisted of three male and three female participants. Three of the participants identified as Caucasian, one as African-American, one as Middle Eastern, and one as Hispanic. The second focus group consisted of five females and one male. Three of the participants in this group identified as Caucasian, two as Hispanic, and one as African-American. Using the definition of inactive publics provided by Hallahan (2000), participants were selected as inactive publics because they demonstrated lower levels of knowledge about the organization and low levels of involvement in its operation. While participants may have known about Invisible Children before the focus group, they were not very familiar with the mission or work of the organization and were not involved with it. Both focus groups took place in the main conference room in the Department of Communication at the University of Maryland.

Traditional views of qualitative methods for research suggest that researchers should strive to attain a "saturation point" when collecting data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). However, Corbin and Strauss (2008) argue that it is impossible to attain total saturation. Therefore, they argue that sufficient sampling has occurred when major categories "show depth and variation in terms of their development" (p. 149). When each category attains a considerable breadth and depth the researcher can say sufficient sampling has occurred. While collecting data for this study, at a certain point answers were becoming similar and consistent and no new information was being obtained that significantly changed the emerging themes. When this breadth and depth to themes had been obtained I decided sufficient sampling had occurred for this study.

Procedure:

Interview protocol: Interview protocols are important to help guide the researcher to ensure main questions are addressed and provide a proposed structure for the interview, but they are flexible enough to allow for the researcher to explore different questions and themes depending on each participant. Rubin & Rubin (2005) describe such as protocol as "a free-hand map to the conversation, pointing out the general direction but not specifying which nooks and crannies will be explored" (p. 150). The first part of the interview protocol included "grand tour" questions that asked the activists about their involvement with Invisible Children and seek to understand how they came to be involved with the organization. The second part of the protocol focused on the activists' interpretation of narrative. The third part of the protocol focused on if activists believe the stories and narrative of the organization influence activism and how, leading into the final part of the protocol that focused on their identity to the organization and the

role that stories and narratives possibly play in building or enhancing that identity. A series of probes have been incorporated into the interview protocol because of the realization that some participants had less to say on certain topics than others, and this will provide a way to draw out more information on certain subjects if necessary (Berg, 2009). To ensure that the interview protocol was addressing the proposed research questions, I conducted four pilot interviews with Invisible Children activists to refine the protocol. After these initial interviews, I made changes to the protocol, with the revised protocol provided in Appendix A. These changes were made to ensure that the questions asked in the protocol were addressing the proposed research questions of the study.

Organizational narrative: While initially intending to show portions of organizational narrative to interview participants, such as parts of *The Rough Cut* documentary, this proved unnecessary after piloting this procedure in the initial interviews. Activist participants were able to recall and make meaning of organizational narrative without the assistance of the films. Additionally, relying on showing them one example of the organizational narrative seemed to limit the participants' thinking about narrative and resulted in responses too focused on the particular film rather than the larger idea of narrative from the organization. For focus groups, though, the organizational narrative selected to screen was the original documentary of Invisible Children called *The Rough Cut*. All focus group participants watched the 55-minute documentary during the focus group and the narrative and stories in the film were utilized as a springboard for discussion about narrative.

Interviews and focus groups summary: As previously mentioned, most individual interviews took place over the phone while both focus groups were conducted in person.

The average length of the focus groups was 90 minutes. Individual interviews ranged in length from 30-60 minutes. Due to the ease at which participants could be identified if their schools and titles in Invisible Children chapters were shared, all interview participants have been given aliases and the location of their schools will be described only in terms of geographic region. Participants were informed before the interviews that their names and school affiliations would not be divulged in the study results. Focus group participants were given the option to have aliases made for them, but all participants consented to having their first names associated with the study. Focus group participants were given extra credit for their participation in the study. Interview participants were made aware that they were receiving no personal benefit from participation in the study.

Data analysis

For this study I transcribed all of my audio recordings, including all 16 interviews and both focus groups. Rubin and Rubin (2005) note that "[t]ranscribing interviews yourself forces you to pay attention to what interviewees said and helps you prepare for the next interview" (p. 204). Throughout the transcripts I included observer comments (OCs), which reflected on potential themes and connections between interviews, possible biases, and reactions to the interview (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The initial recognition themes occurred through a line-by-line analysis of the transcripts (Strauss, 1990). Reflecting throughout the transcription process began the process of developing themes to be used in the final analysis (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

While there are no set formulas for data analysis in qualitative research, Yin (2009) describes pattern-matching logic as a desirable technique for case studies. Pattern

matching involves comparing an accepted and tested pattern with a predicted one (Yin, 2009). The data analysis procedure I followed is adopted from Plowman's (1998) data analysis techniques. I began with an in-depth analysis of key issues and recurrent themes in individual interviews and focus group data. One of the most important parts of qualitative research is the analysis of the data, which should begin during the data-gathering phase of research to allow for the possibility of collecting new data during research and testing new hypotheses (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The second part of the data analysis involved a comparison of individual interviews with each other, as well as a comparison between focus groups. Additionally, interview and focus group data was compared to each other to uncover patterns (Plowman, 1998). Themes that emerged from new observations were compared and combined with previous observations (Potter, 1996). This model allowed for data to be compared across different methods consistently. The pattern-matching model addressed the difficulty of comparing two separate data sets. Individual interviews provide thick, rich description that provides insight into the individual's perspective and way of thinking and looking at the world. Focus group data is valuable because it provides insight into making meaning from a collective perspective to better understand how participants influence each other in meaning making.

Before explaining the data analysis procedure further, I must discuss the mechanics of the coding process I used. Data were coded by giving each theme a clear label. Data were color-coded the same way if they or the resulting categories represented the same theme. Each theme created the header in a separate Word document where key quotes and phrases from the transcripts were placed under the appropriate theme. I

continued to look through transcripts for themes and adding key quotes to the document as appropriate. When analyzing the data under each theme, I ensured that there was a consistency among participants, although varying perspectives and lone voices in the data were also considered.

After data collection and the emergence of patterns, I began searching for alternative explanations to challenge the patterns that I initially found. Yin (2009) cites considering alternative perspectives as a sign of an exemplary case study. Considering alternative explanation is important because even if the researcher is not purposefully biased, it is possible that different perspectives were not entertained throughout the data collection process.

Once all of the data was collected and alternative perspectives were considered, the patterns that developed throughout the study were compared to the theories discussed in the literature review to establish or discredit the specific model developed from the theory (Plowman, 1998). The concern of the case study analysis is to determine how well the overall pattern of results matches the predicted pattern developed through theory (Yin, 2009).

Validity and reliability- Taking steps to ensure the validity and reliability of a qualitative study is an important part of the research process. Four tests can be utilized as criteria for judging the quality of research design: construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability (Kidder & Judd, 1986). Construct validity involves identifying appropriate operational measures for the concepts in the study. Yin (2009) notes that this is especially challenging in case study design. Three ways to increase construct validity in case study research are to use multiple sources of evidence, establish a chain of

evidence, and perform member checks where key informants review drafts of the case study report to ensure their reality is being accurately represented (Yin, 2009; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). For this study I used multiple sources of evidence coming from in-depth interviews, focus groups, and participant observation to triangulate the data. Triangulation is important because each method used in research "reveals slightly different facets of the same symbolic reality," (Berg, 2009, p. 5). Researcher bias is also reduced through the use of multiple sources of evidence. I also performed routine member checks with participants to ensure that I accurately represented their viewpoints and did not allow my own biases to overshadow different interpretations.

In addition to construct validity, internal and external validity are concerns of the qualitative researcher. Internal validity is the degree to which the research instrument measures what it was intended to measure in the study (Wolcott, 1995). While tactics for achieving internal validity are hard to identify, Yin (2009) suggests pattern matching as a way to increase internal validity, which is the guiding analytic tactic for this study. External validity is concerned with the generalizability of results beyond the specific case studied (Yin, 2009). While small sample sizes and a focus on one organization make it difficult to achieve broad generalizability, in this study I will strive for analytical generalization. Yin (2009) defines analytical generalization as "striving to generalize a particular set of results to some broader theory. External validity will be achieved by a continual back and forth between the data collected and the literature reviewed to see in what ways the results of this study can extend or complicate existing theory.[1]

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[1] Kavle (1994) took an alternate approach and suggested that questions of validity are superfluous in a postmodern era. He argued that research is valid depending on the quality of the craftsmanship and the strength of the results. While in many ways I agree

Reliability deals with the replicability of a research project and if similar results would be achieved in different contexts. A study can be considered reliable if it "yields the same answer however and whenever it is carried out" (Kirk & Miller, 1986, p. 19). This is a particular challenging prospect for qualitative researchers who often study phenomenon and events for their uniqueness and seek out personal experiences and interpretations, making replicating conditions and participants difficult. However, one way to work towards reliability is to establish consistency through procedures. Yin (2009) suggests conducting research as if someone was auditing your study, making your research steps as operational as possible. To ensure reliability in this study I reported all procedures followed throughout the study through memos and detailed description in the data collection process.[2]

Reflexivity

In qualitative research, it is recognized that the researcher does not live in a vacuum and comes into each study with different perceptions and possibly biases. Reflexive researchers have "an ongoing conversation with [themselves]" (Berg, 2009, p. 198). Qualitative research is not simply about reporting findings as facts but instead construing interpretations of experiences and then questioning how the researcher came

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with Kavle, I also believe that Yin provides a model of research that helps the researcher obtain quality craftsmanship through case study methodology.

[2] While a discussion of a study's validity and reliability is often a crucial part of any social scientific methods section, I also recognize the debate within qualitative methodology that wants to resist replicating quantitative methodology and recognize qualitative research methods as their own. Qualitative researchers are moving away from the terms validity and reliability because, like Atkinson and Delamont (2006), they "are appalled by the absurd proposal that interpretive research should be made to conform to inappropriate definitions of scientific research…" (p. 751). As a recognized authority on the case study method, though, I have chosen to adopt the terms validity and reliability to work with the model of case study research set forth by Yin (2009).

to those interpretations (Berg, 2009). To begin the reflexive process, let me disclose a little information about myself to lead to a greater understanding of my own interest in studying activism. I am a Caucasian woman in my mid-20s who was raised in a predominantly White, middle class neighborhood in the suburbs of a Midwestern state. Growing up in a religious household, the values of charity and giving back to the community were instilled in me from an early age. After going to college and learning different ways to think and view the world, my political beliefs shifted and I became involved in more political causes. I am currently pursuing my master's degree in communication with plans to work for a non-governmental organization after graduation in the area of human rights. I have also traveled extensively, often in the developing world, and have been shaped by my experiences there with inequities and social injustices. My research focus for my graduate program has been on activist publics and activism, and I am hoping by building a greater theoretical understanding of activism this can be translated into practice to help activist organizations and publics have greater success in reaching their goals. I became interested in publics-centered research after a graduate school course focused on understanding publics. As a public relations scholar, I think that understanding publics is at the core of what we are striving to do, and the best way to do this is to actually ask and interview the publics we are interested in. I believe my background in journalism and experiences traveling the world have also made me eager to hear people's stories and their reasons for doing what they do. I also believe that public-centered research can help give voice to different groups, an important part of my own activism.

As a qualitative researcher, understanding and recognizing my own bias was important for this study in order to consider the ways my own conceptions and interpretation of the stories and organization studied may have affected the way I conducted the study. In order to address this, after each interview and focus group I wrote memos that addressed my feelings, impressions, concerns, potential themes, and areas for further inquiry in subsequent interviews. These *reflective memos* revealed "a more personal account of the course of the inquiry" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 123). These memos allowed me to address my personal biases and perceptions, and through addressing them I was able to put them aside through the course of the study and in my data analysis. The importance of this practice was to ensure that the participants' meaning making and understanding of narrative and activism accurately represented their experiences, rather than as possibly influenced by my background or preconceptions.

Chapter 4- Organization

Invisible Children defines itself as a "social, political, and global movement using the transformative power of story to change lives" and views itself as a storytelling movement that focuses on youth, using "the power of media to inspire young people to help end the longest running war in Africa" (Invisible Children, 2010). In order to understand the organization, it is important to have an understanding of the issue at the core of Invisible Children. A war has been waging in northern Uganda for more than 20 years. It is the longest running conflict in Africa; yet, it has remained invisible from widespread international attention. The war, forgotten or unknown by so many, has had the greatest impact on the children of the region, many of whom are forced to be soldiers in Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). Children have been the targets of LRA abductions since the beginning of the conflict in 1986 between the LRA and the Ugandan government (Human Rights Watch, 2003). The beginning of the LRA movement can be traced to Alice Lakwena, a woman who believed that the Holy Spirit spoke to her and told her to overthrow the Ugandan government because of its unjust treatment to the Acholi, an ethnic group in northern Uganda (Eichstaedt, 2009). Lakwena and her followers gained momentum, and when Lakwena was exiled, Joseph Kony, who claimed to be Lakwena's cousin, took over and transformed the rebel movement into the LRA (Invisible Children, 2010). Kony's LRA did not receive the same level of support, and with dwindling approval for the cause and increased government actions, had to resort to abducting and indoctrinating children. It is estimated that 90% of the LRA's troops were abducted as children (Invisible Children, 2010). Jackson (2009) wrote that "[t]he civilian population is both the key and the victim. The widespread internment of

civilians in camps and the abduction of children effectively leaves the population in a constant state of fear and insecurity" (p. 323). In recent years, more international attention has been directed towards the situation in northern Uganda. In 2001, the U.S. Patriot Act declared the LRA a terrorist organization and in 2004, Congress passed the Northern Uganda Crisis Response Act (Invisible Children, 2010). The next year, in 2005, the International Criminal Court issued warrants for Kony and his top four commanders (Invisible Children, 2010). While the U.S. and international political communities are paying more attention to the situation in northern Uganda, it is still an issue that is unknown to many who are not actively seeking information about it. In this way, the children who are the victims of this situation are still invisible to the world.

Invisible Children began in 2003 when three young filmmakers from Southern California, Jason Russell, Laren Poole, and Bobby Bailey, traveled to Africa to find a story. The story they found formed the foundation of a documentary that would spur a movement to help liberate the child soldiers of northern Uganda and bring peace to a forgotten region. The film originally premiered in July 2004 in front of 500 people in San Diego, mostly friends and family of the filmmakers. After the initial showing, it then spread virally via grassroots channels. Teams of volunteers, called "Roadies," drive around the country in RVs with film-screening equipment (Deneen, 2009). As of 2009, the film has been screened at 550 churches, 1,250 colleges, and 1,100 high schools, with more than five million people having seen the original film (Deneen, 2009). The documentary spurred the founding of the non-profit organization Invisible Children Inc., which has raised more than $17 million since its inception, mostly through donations and purchases from young people (Deneen, 2009).

In addition to making and showing documentaries about the war-affected children in east Africa, Invisible Children sponsors campaigns and programs working to improve the quality of life for the people of Uganda. For example, Invisible Children also offers Ugandan high-school students scholarships and mentors. A teacher exchange program has been implemented as part of the mission, as well as book drives that create competition between schools in the United States as to who can raise the most books for schools in Uganda. Invisible Children also coordinates lobbying events in D.C., and now select screenings of the film include having some of the former child soldiers talk to audiences (Invisible Children, 2010). It is clear that Invisible Children is now more than a documentary and constitutes an organization and broader movement to resolve the situation in northern Uganda. However, at the core of its existence is the use of documentary and film to tell stories to spur activism. Therefore, Invisible Children is an exemplar of an activist storytelling organization because of its reliance on stories to help create social change through raising awareness and inspiring further activism on the cause of child soldiers in northern Uganda, particularly among youth.

Chapter 5- Results

RQ1: How do activist publics make meaning of narrative discourse from an activist organization?

Overall, the activists interviewed made meaning of the stories and narratives of Invisible Children in a variety of ways. All participants were familiar with the original *Rough Cut* documentary that was the first and foundational story of the organization, although one participant had not seen the film. The stories of the organization discussed by participants mostly revolved around the documentaries of the organization, including *Rough Cut, The Rescue, Go!*, and the upcoming *Tony* documentary that is the focus of the spring 2011 screenings from the organization. In addition to the documentaries as focal stories discussed by the participants, the organization's website, blog, and Twitter were also sources for understanding the organization's narrative discourse, although to a lesser extent. Finally, several of the participants either worked as interns, volunteers, or staff for the organization and had the opportunity to meet many of the people featured in the documentaries and stories shared by Invisible Children, creating a deeper level of connection to the stories. Several themes emerged around the meaning making of the participants about the use of stories and narrative by the organization, including *connecting to the issue*; *appealing to emotion*; *representing reality; organization as story; focus on the individual; evolving; hope; and limitations of stories.*

Stories connect you to the issue: Activist discussed one of the major problems with any social issue or injustice is the feeling of hopeless. This hopelessness stems from the feeling of helplessness they feel as individuals in the sense that they alone cannot stop world hunger, war, poverty, or more specifically the war in northern Uganda that is the

focal issue of Invisible Children. However, activists felt that stories provide the ability to isolate specific instances from these larger tragedies to connect humanity. The connection to the issue that stories provide in the case of Invisible Children often comes in large part from showing children in Uganda behaving just like children in America. As Eric[3], a 20-year-old Caucasian student involved with Invisible Children for one year, said in regards to the connection he felt to the *Rough Cut* documentary:

> "I mean just the way that the kids, so it's so easy to identify with them even though it is so hard to identify with them. That they're so, even though what they're going through we could obviously never imagine for ourselves, they're still doing their homework. They're still, you know, making families where they can. They still have friends. They still listen to music and think that Tupac is still alive. Those are like the little things that make it really memorable and really easy to identify with them even though their narrative is so different than ours."

For many activists, the connection with the stories came on a more personal level. Given the age range of participants, many of them were in high school when the Invisible Children movement began. While the situation in northern Uganda was unknown to many of them, the focus on children within the stories made the issue salient to many because of their own families and having brothers and sisters the same age as many of the child soldiers in the LRA. As Jill, an 18-year-old Asian/Pacific Islander student, said, "I think it also just made me connect my own life and think about my brother who is young to be handling mass weapons. That was just insane to me, and I think that really made me, it made me hurt a little." Other participants with younger siblings discussed the

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[3] For a more detailed description of participants, please see Appendix D

implications of allowing children in other parts of the world to be victims of war like in Uganda, but in places like the United States such practices are unheard of. The stories serve to show how similar the children in Uganda are to the children in the United States, making it difficult to ignore the issue because of the connection felt to the children.

Activists discussed the limitation of feeling connected without actually having traveled to Uganda to see it with their own eyes. The stories are in many ways an intermediary between life in the United States and life in Uganda for the activists. However, for some, the stories are not fully satisfying until they travel to Africa to see the situation. Until that occurs, the stories help some, but a full connection cannot be made for others.

Susan, a 21-year-old Caucasian student, and Tiffany, a 24-year-old Caucasian school teacher were activists who were able to travel as part of the organization Invisible Children. Susan was one of the Roadies chosen to travel to Uganda to experience the situation first-hand and Tiffany participated in the organization's Teacher Exchange program for summer and intends on going back again this year. Each activist discussed how this experience made the stories of those they were advocating for more personal and changed the connection from feeling empathic towards the situation and feeling personally invested and connected with people they now consider friends. As Susan said, "These have become, like over the years, these have become more than just names and stories. In some cases I've met them. These have become my friends over the years."

Stories appeal to emotions: Activists discussed the emotional response associated with their viewing of the Invisible Children documentaries and short videos. Teresa, a 21-year-old Caucasian student involved with her campus chapter for a year, said that, "[t]he

recent screening made me cry, so it definitely affected me more than probably a news article would because it was a story." The initial emotional response from the stories for many activists is the reason they decided to learn more about Invisible Children and decided to become involved. For Julie, a 20-year-old Caucasian student, when she first watched the original *Rough Cut* documentary she said, "I cried for an hour, then I got really mad that this was happening and was really motivated to do something about it." Julie further discussed how the use of emotion can be strategic because it really requires a response from the audience because for her, "it is impossible to ignore the stories because you can't listen to that type of open emotion and not respond to it. I don't think you can."

Activists also discussed the power that emotions have in the recall of the stories. While the individual details of the situation and the details of the documentary may be forgotten, the feelings they evoke are often longer lasting. Justin, a 19-year-old Native American student, described it this way:

> "You might not remember every fact you hear from the IC documentary, but you'll remember the time that it almost moved you to tears. You'll remember the time when you were feeling that sense of connection with the people. And those moments, I think, stand out really visibly in our memories, and I think that those are the moments that propel people to become activists."

Stories represent reality: The documentary format and style of storytelling used by Invisible Children lends itself to legitimacy for the activists because the stories they are telling are seen as an accurate representation of reality. Activists focused on the use of "actual video footage," the "actual raw depiction" of the situation, and the films "not

really being edited" as making it real. Teresa added that "[t]hey're using actual video footage. It's like, you can't really make that up."

The ability to see the situation directly contributed to the interpretation of reality, highlighting the importance of images and visual representation with stories. The videos were seen as an important channel for the organization to communicate with for various publics. Visuality was important for the activists who appreciated being able to see what was going on versus just hearing or reading a story. The combination of effects was key, especially for people who have not witnessed the situation firsthand. Julie referred to the documentaries as "damaging visual representations," meaning that the visual representations damage a sense of complacency and shatter the silence surrounding the situation. Justin described the screenings held by Invisible Children as the most visual and impacting representations of what the organization does.

This feeling of reality stems in part because the documentaries and films are not overdone or part of a large production company. As Keisha, a 22-year-old African-American student involved with her campus chapter said, "[w]hen I watch the movies I don't think of Hollywood production or something that's removed. I think of just, there's almost a home video and there's a person talking as if they're just telling me a story." Part of the reality comes from the belief by many of the activists that they too could make something similar if they tried.

While the reality of the stories was unquestioned by all activists, some did view the stories and documentaries as inherently biased in their depictions but still felt strongly that the situation is being accurately represented by the organization. The idea of the stories being biased comes from the realization that not all stories can be told by the

organization and there is a process of selection to pick different stories for varying motivations to reach different audiences. Justin said:

> " I think that the danger you run into is the danger of editorializing and hyperbole because with an organization that looks at however many thousands of people live in Uganda, they have to pick six people out of that. You know it's difficult to get an accurate representation of what the conflict is like and what the country is like."

Additionally, activists such as Justin felt that the stories had to be "sanitized" for the younger high school audiences that Invisible Children targets. Stories have to be simplified in order to make it less "messy" and ultimate sell better. Therefore, with this in mind, Invisible Children cannot tell the whole story of the situation although it does a good job of representing key portions of the situation.

While the motives and intentions of the organization in telling specific stories were seen as positive by the activists, the ability of stories to lead to interpretation and misrepresentation was something activists were wary of with the use of stories for activist causes. Julie thought "the one flaw in this approach to activism is that words can always be turned; they can always be misrepresented and made up in some cases."

Organization as story: Activists were quick to highlight the unique use of stories by Invisible Children in that so much of their activism and what they do is based around stories. Additionally, activists were able to tell the story of how the organization was founded and begun, seeing the history of the organization itself as one of the most important stories of the organization. Justin said "Invisible Children is unique in that they use stories almost like the totality of their mission, and I think that they pretty uniquely

use the storytelling experience for that." Based on how the organization was founded, Susan highlighted that "Invisible Children is first and foremost a media company, so they are storytellers before they are activists." Teresa summarized this simply as "the whole organization is kind of a story."

Stories focus on the individual: Activists discussed Invisible Children's focus on the individual in much of their storytelling, which creates an immediate connection between the audience and the one person whose story is being told. Mike, a 32-year-old Caucasian student, discussed the focus on the individual in this way:

"So I think they do really try to focus on the story of a particular individual, which I think is really effective because it's, if you look at the news about a particular conflict or war you get more of a broad sense of it and it's easier to not really, you don't really get a sense of what's going on there as you would by seeing an individual. You put a face to something like that I think it makes it more personable and makes it easier to kind of think about how it is affecting those people. So I think Invisible Children has been pretty effective with taking that approach to telling those personal stories."

In particular, Invisible Children's Bracelet Campaign was discussed as some of the most impactful stories of the organization because of the focus on the individual. The Bracelet Campaign was the first economic incentive program facilitated by the organization that provided Internally Displaced Persons with employment opportunities through making culturally unique bracelets to sell. There are five different colored bracelets that can be purchased through the Invisible Children website. Each color represents a different person, for example Green is for Grace, whose personal story is told on a DVD that is

mailed with the bracelet purchased (Invisible Children, 2011). Several activists brought up the names of individuals stories of the bracelet campaign when discussing which stories they associate most with the organization. In some cases, activists even had a chance to meet the individuals from these DVDs in person through screenings at their universities, creating an even deeper personal connection to the stories. In discussing her experience with the bracelet campaign videos, Maureen, a 19-year-old Caucasian student, said, **"the first time I saw one of the individual videos of someone telling their own story that was extremely moving, especially like the people from Uganda who have experienced things firsthand."

Stories are evolving: Activists appreciated that the stories of Invisible Children are constantly evolving and adapting to the changing situations. New documentaries are released each semester that comprise the larger focus of the organization and activist chapters, and the organization's website and social media, including Facebook and Twitter, are updated daily to keep the issue fresh and relevant for their audience and activists. Erin, a 22-year-old Caucasian student, appreciated that Invisible Children is "not really a static organization" and that "[t]hey're very much interested in updating their films, updating their website, reaching out to people. Not just telling the stories about the children in Uganda that are being affected, but they talk about the Roadies too." Other activists also enjoyed the focus on the activist youth from America as complimentary to the stories of those in Uganda, making the organization and the cause seem more relatable to people who may not have experience with conditions like those portrayed in the developing world. Mary, a 19-year-old student, said that Invisible Children also "utilizes the stories of individuals throughout the U.S., especially the

youth…to get a point across and make people feel really welcome and really driven to become involved with the organization."

However, while activists appreciated that the stories of Invisible Children change and have adopted different focuses throughout its existence, not all activists agreed that the shift away from telling the stories of kids in Uganda in favor of focusing on young American activists is a positive step for the organization. Keisha, a 21-year-old African-American student involved with her campus chapter of Invisible Children since the beginning, felt that the stories were more impactful for her at the beginning than they are currently:

"But for me as someone who has been in the organization for a few years now I don't, the stories that they tell, there's obviously an impact but I feel like it was so much more successful in the beginning because it was all about the kids. It was all about what the kids were doing, what was going on for these children, what their lives were like. And now I think it's more of what our American youth experience is in Uganda."

Invisible Children also provides some sort of update at all of the screenings, and website and social media continue to describe the current situation in the country, for example, recent elections in Uganda were discussed heavily on the website and social media.

Hope: Activists highlighted an important component of the narrative of Invisible Children is the theme of hope throughout their documentaries, films, websites, social media, and all other forms of storytelling communication. In particular reference to the documentary, activists discussed how Invisible Children does not dwell on the negative in their documentaries. While representing the tragedy of the situation, the documentaries

and stories always show some element of the people making the situation as positive as possible and also working to make connections between Americans and Ugandans. Megan, a 19-year-old Caucasian student involved for two years, discussed how hope was important for her because if people did not think anything could change, then nobody would be involved. For her, "there is a very hopeful element to it, but there are really depressing stories." Mike explained why this sense of hope was important to him:

"And the other aspect I like is that it presents some kind of hope to see a resolution for that. Where sometimes you might watch a documentary or whatever and it presents a bad situation, but it doesn't really come around to a possibility for a solution. I think with Invisible Children they always wrap up the films by saying here is how you can help. Here's how we can see an end to this conflict. So that sense of hope I think is really important."

Limitations of stories: Finally, while activists generally agreed that stories are an effective way to share activism, in the end there are several limitations to focusing almost exclusively on the use of stories. All participants had been exposed to the organization through a screening of one of the documentaries, so there is a limited way in which people begin to be involved with the organization. Relying on this means that it is limited to people who come out to the initial film, which is often a struggle to get youth, especially college-aged youth, to attend.

Additionally, activists who have been involved with the organization for a longer period of time expressed some frustration in the overreliance on the films to tell stories. They described the film as exciting at first, but after several years Keisha described the films as starting to become "boring." She further explains that "no matter how passionate

you are about the organization, there's no way you're going to be as excited about the film the fifth time as you are the first time."

While activists believe you cannot really have effective advocacy or activism without stories, they also highlight that without statistics and straight facts the movement can have no base and the individual experiences of one can be dismissed as an anomaly if the larger effect of the problem cannot be represented. The scale of the disaster cannot be known if the focus is only on the individual story. As Justin said, "I think you would miss a lot if you only depended on stories."

RQ2: How do inactive publics make meaning of narrative discourse from an activist organization?

The inactive publics made meaning of the narrative discourse from Invisible Children shown during the focus group in various ways. Invisible Children screens many of its documentaries in high schools, so four of the twelve participants in the focus groups had seen the *Invisible Children: Rough Cut* documentary previously. Those participants expressed recognition of the documentary, but that they had not been able to remember the specific details of the documentary until seeing it for a second time. As an organization targeted towards youth, all but two of the participants had heard the name of the organization before, but the majority did not know what the purpose or the ultimate goal of the organization was previous to the focus group. Several similar themes emerged in the meaning making of the narrative discourse from Invisible Children between active and inactive publics. Similar themes emerging included *stories are emotional* and *stories are reality*. However, there were themes that emerged uniquely to the inactive public

studied. These themes include *stories are relatable; stories are not relatable; stories provide perspective; stories are inspiring;* and *stories make you feel helpless*.

Stories are emotional: When inactive publics were asked their first reaction to viewing the *Rough Cut* documentary, the most common response immediately after the film was that it was "sad," "shocking," and "stark." Natalia, an 18-year-old Hispanic student who had not heard of Invisible Children before seeing the film during the focus group but is involved in other causes said:

> "And then seeing as I am in non-profit organizations and I really like that, like
>
> Collegians Against Cancer Relay, Relay for Life, Habitat for Humanity, and not
>
> knowing about something like that, like I literally just wanted to sit here and cry."

The use of emotional stories was seen by participants as a way to get people invested in the issue because seeing people get emotional on screen and feeling an internal emotional pull would compel people to want to do something about the issue. Helen, 21-year-old African-American student who had friends deeply involved with Invisible Children, said "I mean like when you target people emotionally, people tend to want to really do something about it."

Stories are reality: As with the activist publics, the use of the documentary format lent legitimacy to the veracity of the stories. Participants in the focus group felt like the *Rough Cut* video was not organizational propaganda designed to manipulate the viewer into action. Instead, participants felt the film was meant to show the situation and allow the viewer to make the decision about what action to take, as there was not a clear action required at the end of the film. Part of the view of the video as representing reality was the fact it was not produced by a big company. Claire, an 18-year-old Caucasian student

said, "I liked that it was very real. It was these guys shooting video. It wasn't some big company coming in and trying to get all of these great shots. It was very just real in how it is." Helen also agreed that knowing who was telling the stories reinforced the reality of the stories.

> Helen: "Also the fact that like they didn't go with any group or any producers or whatever so it's just like the real same people who up and went. So it wasn't none of the staged or whatever. I thought that kind of put into the fact that it seemed more real."

While expressing an understanding that videos are often edited in ways that may not actually represent realities, participants did not feel like Invisible Children utilized the videos in a way that did not accurately reflect the situation. Emily, an 18-year-old Caucasian student, felt like the footage was "really stark and it was just, like, I felt like they weren't really sugar coating anything." Kate, an 18-year-old Caucasian student, was also deeply impacted by the footage:

> "I don't know, just all of the footage. It didn't seem like very tainted. Like yeah, it was put together, but it was still all like original footage. I thought it was powerful, just because it was like so graphic and all of the footage was so straight forward and real."

Stories are relatable: One of the main reasons participants felt that the stories were relatable to them was because of the focus at the beginning of the film on the three young, American males who are the storytellers for the film. The representation of youth being a part of the story was important. Nafisah, a 22-year-old Middle Eastern students,

said that "I just feel like it was sort of like, oh, it seems like he's my age and he's doing it so it's more like a connecting thing rather than somebody who is older than me."

Some participants were able to relate to the stories in the film because of their familiarity with developing countries, either having grown-up there or visited, particularly the scenes of devastation and poverty shown in the documentary. Helen, who was born in Ethiopia, and Natalia, who was born in Colombia, while not experiencing poverty firsthand, both had experiences growing up in countries where the poverty they saw everyday was similar to that shown in the Invisible Children documentaries. They were not as shocked by the stories they heard because the stories were more familiar to how they grew up, but having grown-up in wealth in those countries they felt the Invisible Children documentary was compelling and relatable to them on a more personal level.

The small details included in the stories of those affected by the war also provided a way for participants to relate to the stories because it provided a commonality between the experiences of the children in Uganda and the experiences of the children in the United States. Emily, who had the most familiarity with Invisible Children of everyone in the focus group, was able to see how some of the stories that related to an American audience through the small details they brought up:

> "I feel like some parts of it were more relatable than people would think. Like when he asking, oh, what kind of music do you like and he was like oh, Tupac, I think he's still alive. It's just like, I mean like, it would probably make people think, oh, wow, they actually know about American music and he's like, oh, it's kind of like how America's so good because of what I've seen in the movies and

like on video. I don't know, I guess it would just make people think, wow, we

actually know two things in common type thing."

The final way in which participants were able to relate to the stories was through

the naivety of the filmmakers. Stories were relatable for those who maybe do not know

about the issue because it tells the story in a way that does not make it seem as if this is

something people would or should know about. Therefore, there is not a feeling of guilt

for being unaware of the issue. For Helen, "it seems to me that it helps relate to people

who are naïve about what's happening out there. Like it shows that you can go from not

really knowing what's happening to actually making a difference, so that sort of seemed

like it was kind of portraying."

Stories are not relatable: A contradictory, but equally strong, theme also emerged

amongst focus group participants that the stories of Invisible Children were in fact not

relatable to them. Some participants were hesitant about feeling a connected to the stories

because they could not relate to the ability of the filmmakers to simply decide to travel to

Africa to try to find a story. For some, there was a strong distancing from the three

young, white, male storytellers. Ivania, an 18-year-old Latina student, said:

> "From the very beginning of the movie I still though they were pretty idiotic
>
> skater boys. They just seemed kind of much more carefree, I don't know, maybe
>
> because of my background that I've always lived a life where I've always had
>
> responsibilities, so it seems different to me."

In addition to feeling the story of the founders is not relatable, some participants felt that

the stories of the children themselves were not relatable because trying to relate

experiences from the United States to their experience would be like negating or belittling the challenges they are going through. As Kate described:

> "I don't know if there's anything I can really relate to. I mean, I don't know if I would even want to just because I feel like their stories are just so much worse than mine, I wouldn't want to try to relate because I feel like theirs would be just like worse."

However, stories can make one feel empathetic and understanding, even if he or she cannot relate to it directly. Ivania, who expressed the most dislike of the stories of Invisible Children, finds that stories in general are a good strategy to use to create understanding and empathy amongst different groups:

> "I like stories because in a way you can see how people are thinking. And I guess even though you can't personally relate to them you can understand and be empathetic to their views and in a way kind of be a part of who they are like imagining yourself in their place and actually doing something about it because you can feel."

Stories provide perspective: Participants felt the stories of Invisible Children provided perspective for their own lives in regards to larger issues occurring around the world. In this way, the stories served as both a source of information of global issues, as well as a comparative tool to gauge problems in their own lives. Participants described the film and focus of Invisible Children as a "reality check." The participants in both focus groups, all students at the University of Maryland, discussed time constraints from a college schedule as problematic to being involved more with activist organizations on campus. However, seeing the *Rough Cut* documentary and similar films during college

reminded them that, as Kate said, "you should be lucky or feel appreciate toward the things you have because people in other countries have it so much worse than you." Claire, an 18-year-old Caucasian student, added that, "We're so consumed with our lives and are busy and stuff and this is like a pause break to think about things that are happening in other places."

Stories are inspiring: Participants agreed that another important aspect of Invisible Children's stories and storytelling strategy is to balance the negative aspects of the situation with showing the resilience of the kids and the ways in which they are able to find the positive in the situation. Participants discussed other documentaries and commercials they had seen that focus so much on the negative that they turn it off because they cannot deal with it. However, Invisible Children balances the images and footage of the worst pars of the situation with how people cope with what is going on and live day-to-day. As Claire explained:

> "I think when they were talking about the resilience of the children I was just
> thinking, you know, we all have bad times and we kind of have to bounce back
> and you know this is more of an extreme situation, but I like really admired how
> these kids bounced back and it's kind of like inspiration in my life to bounce back
> after things and be resilient."

Participants were aware of different layers of stories in the documentary, viewing the story of the three American youth who decided to go to Africa to find a story and ending up documenting the night commuters and former child soldiers in northern Uganda as also an inspiring story. Opinions on the inspirational quality of the story also depended on how much participants related to the three young males themselves. Conor, an 18-

year-old male Caucasian student, said that "I'd say inspirational because like the American perspective like three guys. It's pretty inspiring that they would just go out of their way to do this." However, as described before, participants such as Ivania did not relate to the narrators, ultimately expressing being less affected by the story than others.

Stories make you feel helpless: While the documentary was seen as inspiring by many participants, a very different theme also emerged that the stories of Invisible Children also caused the audience to feel helpless. By being shown a situation that is so overwhelming and foreign to understand, some participants felt like there was little they could do for the situation, even through becoming involved with the organization. In these situations, there was a distancing from the stories versus feeling connected to them. Nafiseh expressed a general frustration with being told stories of suffering and oppression because there will always be such stories to be told:

> "I'm always hearing about these awful things happening and like I just feel like, I feel like helpless when I see more and more because I don't know what I can do. I mean, I know there's stuff you can do, but I just feel like it's never ending.
> There's always something happening around the world and it's never ending."

While participants expressed a general frustration with stories causing a sense of helplessness, Claire discussed why Invisible Children caused these feelings specifically: "To go to Africa and help, especially when the problem is so big and it's a whole political war thing it's not an easy solve. That makes it a little hard to get involved with this I think." In this case, it may not be clear to people watching or interacting with the Invisible Children stories to understand what they can do to help with the situation, leading to feelings of helpless and a dissociation with the stories.

RQ3: How does interpretation of narrative discourse influence activism?

In addition to making meaning of the narrative and stories of Invisible Children, both active and inactive publics made a connection to how the stories did or did not influence their activism with the organization. Several themes emerged to help explain how narrative does and does not work to provide motivation for involvement with Invisible Children. These themes were *youth involvement; stories are the building blocks for activism; stories lack a clear personal connection; just like you and me;* and *continuing the story;*

Youth involvement: Activists viewed stories as vital to getting young people involved with various causes. For Invisible Children in particular, activists felt as if the stories were directly targeted towards youth because of the focus on youth founding the organization, benefiting from the organization, and creating change for the organization. The ownership of the organizational stories and narrative by the activist publics was part of the reason many activists became involved with the issue. Amber, a 25-year-old Caucasian employee of Invisible Children, said that, "It's been the younger generation that has really rallied around the issue. I think the way we present our stories and the fact that we are media-based has kind of rallied the younger generation around this." The stories themselves combined with the particular way that Invisible Children presents them by being abreast of new technology and media has made it one of the most recognizable organizations for youth activism.

Some activists questioned the effectiveness of using stories, especially in a documentary format, because of their own experiences trying to get other youth involved. The initial time commitment required to watch an approximately hour long video was

seen by some as working against the organization. It was through seeing the initial screening that all activists had become involved with the organization, but activists did see this limited approach to getting people involved with the organization as problematic because it also takes some sort of interest or initial motivation to commit to the first showing. Activist leaders discussed the difficulty of getting college students to invest time to watch the film because of the other activities and obligations. Some chapters incentivized the screenings for inactive publics by offering free food, coffee, or extra credit from professors. Erin, the chapter president for the Invisible Children chapter at a small, private university in the south, said that, "We don't just provide incentive for those who are pumped about the Roadies coming or anything. We give kind of a broad spectrum of incentives for multiple people who can benefit the organization." This issue also was discussed amongst inactive publics who found they did not have enough time to go to events such as the Invisible Children screenings because of other commitments on their time.

One member of the inactive public represented by the focus group found the use of stories targeted to younger audiences as in some ways manipulative. The targeted focus, especially on high school youth, was questioned by her:

> Ivania: "High schoolers are more impressionable just like child soldiers. I wouldn't say it's brainwashing, but it kind of is. They're trying to get them to help into supporting this cause it's just like their brainwashing these children into killing. And so it might be easier on high schoolers because they haven't learned as much abstract views of the world as college students have. That's probably why they would target them more."

Other focus group participants felt that college students would more effective groups to target than high school students because college students have more control over their own time and schedules to decide to get involved. However, activist participants, many of them in leadership positions in both high school and college chapters, found the stories and organization functioned better at the high school level. Mike, the president of a campus chapter at a large university in the south, feels that "It's just a different ball game as far as college because in a high school setting it's easier to get people involved versus college where you have so many other things competing for people's attention and involvement."

Stories are the building blocks for activism: Stories seem important for mobilization of activism around an issue, but the issue of sustainability of this model arose. Activists discussed the importance of stories for "sparking your interest" in the cause. Activists discussed how it "draws you in and makes you want to get involved" and how Invisible Children documentaries are "fantastic for getting a base mobilized." The documentaries were seen as the most powerful tool for building an activist base. While activists discussed periodically checking the organization's website, Facebook, blog, and Twitter, those channels were seen more as ways to gather news and information about the situation, but not as ways to become invested in the cause. The media functions to develop a support base, providing the resources to cultivate a youth following.

Stories provide the inspiration for activism. Inspiration seemed foundational to involvement because of stories' ability to "call you out in a way that makes it impossible to ignore." Stories told well make it harder to remain complacent or turn a shoulder, and the connection with the story creates a personal link that may not have previously been

there or obvious to the audience. Justin discussed the inspiration that the stories have been to his involvement:

> "Stories were definitely my groundbreaking point for getting involved with the organization. They're what inspired me and going back to hear stories continues to inspire me. The stories are what are going to, what have inspired people to take action, and they're going to be what continues to inspire to stay active for a long time. So I would never discount the power of storytelling."

> *Stories lack a clear personal connection:* Focus group participants discussed their desire to share the stories of Invisible Children, but there was little interest in becoming involved with the activities of the organization or a campus chapter. The stories were seen as a "great conversation starter" and something the participants were willing to share with other people, but the lack of personal connection they felt with the cause unlike other causes they were involved with such as organizations dealing with cancer. Ryan, an 18-year-old Caucasian student, said that:

> "It's mainly the connection that you feel. The reason why we kind of turned away from Invisible Children so much in high school was because, and more towards Relay for Life, was because most people connect with that. Like my mom, she had cancer, so that was a strong connection for me. It's a reason to advocate."

It was less clear for the inactive publics the reasons to advocate for Invisible Children, other than the reason that it represents suffering of other people, which they recognized as a powerful motivator, but with so many competing interests for their times, it was easier to get involved in an organization that was directly applicable to their lives and experiences. However, inactive publics in particular discussed the difficulty they have

with having to "rank" people's suffering in terms of which organizations they want to support. For Claire, she thinks that it's hard to "care more about these people suffering than these because they're all like important things to be aware of and take action about, so it makes it like a hard choice to pick one over the other." Therefore, action is not tied directly to the impact or emotional appeal of the stories, but also the personal connection felt.

Just like you and me: The story of founding of the organization was marked as a key narrative of many activists' involvement with the organization. Going back to the meaning made by activists about the stories, the connection of the founders of the organization to many youth seems to be a key component in the organization's success. The story of the actual organization seems just as powerful as the stories of the child soldiers and the victims of the war the organization is trying to help, especially for those who have not had a chance to go to Africa or interact firsthand with the people. The story of the founder's made Teresa "feel like, okay, I can actually make a difference like these people did." Keisha said that "They just seemed like such relatable people, and so I didn't really get the excuse that I usually get which is like this is not something I could be a part of because anyone can be a part of it." Heather, a 24-year-old Caucasian school teacher who participated in Invisible Children's Teacher Exchange program, felt that the stories of the three founder's was uniquely impactful on her involvement with the organization:

> "The *Rough Cut* edition of Invisible Children is like three goofballs going over
> there with cameras from Ebay and bringing back this story that's motivated
> thousands of people to do something and to me, stories like that I think really
> reflect the power of an individual."

However, activist publics were also clear that there is a limit to how well this approach can work. Some activists described these stories as "self-centered," meaning that the focus on the narrators may deflect too much from the actual issue and more on their personal adventure of growth. This more "self-centered" approach was thought to possibly be strategic in that the organization focuses a lot on high school students' participation, which may be facilitated by a more self-centered mentality of what they can gain by participating in the organization rather than a broader world perspective.

Continuing the story: Participants seemed to associate stories with happy endings. In the case of Invisible Children, the story is still waiting on its happy ending, which for many of the activists inspired their activism so that they could continue to help write the story and have a bearing on how it ends. George, an 18-year-old El Salvadorian student who is vice-president of his Invisible Children chapter, believes that the stories of Invisible Children show what the children have gone through and how they have persisted, but that they are waiting for us to do something. Narrativity embraces the entire Invisible Children movement. The reliance on storytelling by Invisible Children creates a situation where the activists in many ways become characters in the organizational narrative, making the ending of the story dependent on the actions taken by those who hear it. As Teresa said, "I feel like being a part of the group and doing my best to promote it, it's helping the kids kind of carry on their story." Keisha echoed the idea that "When you're involved in an Invisible Children activity you become a part of the story. And you are then active in what exactly is going on." Eric discussed the idea of a hero being important for a story:

"Well there was no, something when I hear story I think there's going to be like a

hero or some type of savior, but there isn't in this case. I mean, the savior is

hopefully the viewer, but there is no like clear, identifiable hero or heroine in this

story."

For activists interviewed who interned or worked at Invisible Children, they felt that their

experiences intimately tied them to the narrative of Invisible Children. They became a

part of the story and were able to share their own experiences to inspire others.

Participants who served as Roadies traveled around certain sections of the country

sharing the Invisible Children documentaries and their personal experiences with the

organization. Susan served as a Roadie for the Invisible Children organization and was

chosen as the person from her group to travel to Uganda beforehand for two weeks to

"meet the people who were affected and to…really interact with the culture and

population then come back and bring those stories on the road with me."

RQ4: How does narrative discourse create identity between an activist public and the

activist organization?

There were different levels of identity recognized by Invisible Children activists.

While some activists did not directly recognize a relationship with the organization, only

with the stories, others felt a relationship with their Invisible Children chapter while only

a few activists identified with the overarching Invisible Children organization. While

different levels of identity were expressed, several themes did emerge including *media-

based non-profit*; *genuine organization; well marketed; identifying with characters;

family;* and *phasing out.* In order to understand the identification between the activist

public and activist organization, activists were also asked to define what an activist is for this study. In this section the theme of *redefining activist* also emerged.

Media-based non-profit: There was a recognition amongst activists that the approach Invisible Children takes to its activism is unique compared to many other similar organizations. Invisible Children's unique use of media is one reason the activists appreciate the organization and identify with it because it speaks to them in the way they want to communicate. As Dan, a 30-year-old Hispanic professor, said:

> "They used media in a very creative way to inspire, touch, and move people. I think what they've done is very special. Like for me they're the best example that I know of in terms of non-profits that use media to relay the message of the plight of the kids and the difficult circumstances in that place."

For other activists, they identified with Invisible Children first as a media company and secondly as a non-profit organization, suggesting that with an identification as an activist for the organization also comes the recognition as the member of an audience for the film. Linda, a 19-year-old Caucasian student who served as the president of her Invisible Children chapter, expressed concerned that the role of the media may play too large of a role for the organization, wanting her to dissociate from the "fan girl" culture she saw forming where younger students watching the films view the characters and founders as more movie star characters than activists. Linda said that some people who came to the screenings seemed "obsessed with the characters and stories" to the end that the medium may obscure the message behind the cult of celebrity that is developing. The stories and characters may in some ways obscure the larger issues and create more identification with the stories and characters themselves than the larger organization and cause.

Genuine organization: The documentaries help to facilitate an identity with the activists of Invisible Children as a genuine organization. As discussed earlier in activists' meaning making of the storytelling of the organization, the documentary and raw footage provide a way for people to see directly what is going on, what they are doing, creating an understanding of the organization as "real" and "genuine." Mary "feels like it's always been such a genuine organization. That might be a naïve perspective, but that's the way I've always viewed it and feel like will continue to view it." Another part of the reason the organization was viewed as genuine by activists is because people are able to clearly see what is going on because of the reliance on videos and the evolution of the stories and continual updating of the situation through their website and blogs. This provides a credibility that what the organization is doing is helping because they are documenting every step. As Mary suggested, "Something Invisible Children does very well is make it very clear what they're doing, why they're doing it, how they're doing it, who they're helping, and that these people really do want help."

Another part of the conceptualization of the organization as genuine comes from the lack of professional training on the part of the founders. Unlike many other non-profit organization participants were familiar with, Invisible Children started from the ground up in the lifetime of those involved. Activists feel a real connection with helping this new organization progress, in many ways learning and growing along with the organization as activists. To Dan, the pure motivations of the founders and lack of training is part of the reason the organization is so special to him: "I realized, for example, that they're not professionally trained non-profit people. The way they started was just being kind of like

journalists trained students who witnessed something terrible and wanted to do something about it."

Well marketed: Activists also identified with Invisible Children as a brand with a marketed image that revolves around the stories, but also includes merchandise and other items sold by the organization. It is not just the stories, but there is also an image to the organization that is recognizable and appeals to young people. Mike believed that the organization has done a good job of marketing itself to young people:

> "They've just done a good job I think of targeting young people with their films and with their merchandise, their clothing, their shirts. It really has a kind of, the shirts and what not, the designs, have a look that's pretty modern and I think appealing to young people."

Keisha agrees that everything associated with Invisible Children has a "strong theme" to it that makes youth feel a part of something and have the ability to brand themselves through Invisible Children merchandise and events. However, Keisha felt that the most recent screening her university hosted had too much of a marketing focus by Invisible Children who seemed to be using the event just to sell a sponsorship program for the organization rather than trying to connect with the people in the audience on a deeper level. While Invisible Children has done a good job of branding and selling an image, activists such as Keisha worry that it may be moving too far away from its origins and ultimately turn away youth who cannot afford to finance being a part of the Invisible Children brand without other activities to participate in that do not require donations or money.

Identifying with characters: Activists cited the connection they felt with the characters in the documentaries as their main identification with the organization. Throughout the interviews activists mentioned certain stories and people who made a strong impact on them. Many activists highlighted the story of Jacob, one of the main children followed in the first documentary, as one of the most memorable stories from the organization. Some activists even had the opportunity to meet Jacob in person, causing even greater identification with him. Susan, one of the activists who had the opportunity to intern with Invisible Children, had this to say about the memorableness of the characters and stories of the organization:

> "They're memorable to the point where I'm able to talk to people about Innocence and they know immediately who I am talking about. I can mention Jacob and they know who Jacob is. I can talk about even the founders and the staff of Invisible Children and they know who I'm talking about. Because these have become, like over the years, these have become more than just names and stories. In some cases I've met them. These have become my friends over the years."

The connection with the characters was particularly powerful for one activist who even began crying during the interview when describing what a particular story of the organization meant to her. The identities and individualities of the characters carried through the movement, and the individual people focused on in Invisible Children documentaries were whom many of the activists identified with instead of Invisible Children as an organization.

Family: Activists who served as Roadies or staff for Invisible Children felt the most identification with the organization. Susan, a former Roadie and recipient of a trip to Uganda through Invisible Children, said, "We are a huge, huge family and we were all brought together by these stories." Mike, another former Roadie for the organization, reiterate his identification with Invisible Children as a family: "It's definitely a big family. It's cool because now, you know, we're able to go all around the country and there's somebody, pretty much everywhere, from Invisible Children." Activists like Susan and Mike felt a deep connection with other activists and the organization, who were all brought together by the narrative of Invisible Children. Activists discussed the various networking opportunities of Invisible Children, and how joint projects and initiatives show them just how many people are involved with the organization. Susan added that Invisible Children " love[s] to be fully connected with their supporters all over the US, all over the world, and the kids like to feel like they're a part of something." There is a sense of camaraderie was also a motivating factor for many activists to create Invisible Children chapters on their campuses and in their high schools.

Phasing out: In terms of identity, many activists felt like as you get older, you in many ways get "phased-out" of Invisible Children. Most activists thought the current model of the organization works best for high school students, who are more a part of a community and have that support for the organization's fundraising endeavors. In college, there is less community and people oftentimes lack financial resources to support many causes. Activists discussed wanting to stay involved with the organization after college if they could figure out a way because the organization seems so focused on youth involvement. For activists interviewed who were interested in becoming educators,

they planned on either helping with or starting Invisible Children chapters at the schools

they would work at, perpetuating the circle of supporting the activism of high school

students for the cause.

As the organization has expanded and changed throughout its existence, some

activists who have been involved with it the longest are concerned that the organization

itself is losing what made it unique to begin with and that it is following a model that is

too similar to most other non-profits. Mary discussed how the "intimacy" of the

organization "has kind of gone away, but it's going to happen as an organization grows.

It's going to become harder." Expressing a concern about the newly concentrated focus

on fundraising over raising awareness that once was the main objective, Keisha wondered

how sustainable Invisible Children is in the long run as an organization focused on youth

activism:

> "So I don't know how much of a young, core group that it's going to attract, or a
>
> young core group that it's going to sustain. I realize the importance of it for sure
>
> but I don't know if there's going to be the same kind of person that's attracted to
>
> the organization."

The direction of the organization to focus on the sponsorship program was seen as some

activists as "gimmicky," particularly in the way they advertise the sponsorship program

after screenings by having people affected by the war in Uganda directly on tour. There is

a concern amongst activists that the direction Invisible Children is headed may lose what

made it unique and so successful amongst youth in the beginning.

Redefining activist: There were mixed responses amongst activists as to if they

defined themselves as activists for Invisible Children. Some participants felt as if they

were not activists for Invisible Children, but defined themselves as activists in general for the larger issue of ending child soldiering and ending injustices in all areas of the world. Some participants defined themselves as moderate activists meaning that their involvement with the organization fluctuated throughout the year in terms of commitment and identification. Finally, other activists were quick to label themselves as Invisible Children activists. The reason for the varying responses to whether or not they identify as Invisible Children activists comes in large part because of varying definitions of what being an activist means and requires. One of the most frequent responses to defining an activist included the idea of "taking action on an issue." However, there was disagreement as to what taking action entails. For some, donating money or telling other people about the organization were actions that could cause one to be described as an activists. Other participants, though, felt that doing more was necessary to be considered an activist, including a significant investment of time into the cause. Along with the idea of a significant investment of time with the cause, the idea of "sacrifice" was also important for many to be considered an activist. This sacrifice may manifest itself as less free time on the part of the activist for other activities or spending less time with friends and family in order to work for the cause.

For many participants, activism was seen as the process of taking the next step for a cause and also recognizing the power of the individual to make a difference. As Justin said, "Being an activist is really about taking that next step and asking how can I get more involved, what can I do, I know I'm on person, but I know I can have an effect." Keisha echoed this point in that an activist is "just somebody who realizes that it's each individual's responsibility to take some initiative." In addition to realizing individual

responsibility, Julie believed that "part of being an activist is knowing your audience and letting people know that this is everybody's issue and making it a commonality." Being able to communicate the importance of the cause to others and get others' involve through raising awareness of the situation was also cited as a key component of an activist.

Activists were also associated with having strong feelings, which included being "passionate" about an issue. Importantly, the end result of someone's work was not the defining feature of being an activist. Participants felt the process and work towards a goal were what defined an activist, not the actual outcome of the efforts. Heather, however, believed that the term activist should not be used lightly and should instead define a person who "puts their whole life and their whole heart towards a cause that they believe in and they just go for it. So, they see that cause through." Again, while some believe that an activist is someone who devote their entire life to a cause, there were varying degrees of involvement expressed by participants as to what makes an activist and what an activist must do.

Chapter 6- Discussion and Conclusion

This study utilized qualitative methods to understand how activist and inactive publics for the organization Invisible Children made meaning of the organization's narrative and how this meaning making did or did not influence their activism for and identity with the Invisible Children. Sixteen members of the activist public and twelve members of the inactive public were interviewed, ranging in age from 18 to 32. Members of the activist public were interviewed individually and the inactive publics were interviewed in two groups. Taking a rhetorical worldview, narrative was used as a framework to understand how activist and inactive publics made meaning of Invisible Children as an activist storytelling organization.

Results revealed that there were distinct similarities and differences between how activist and inactive publics made meaning of the narrative discourse of Invisible Children within the context of it as an activist storytelling organization. Activist and inactive publics agreed that the stories of Invisible Children appealed to their emotions and the documentary format made it clear that the stories were representing reality. However, activists and inactive publics did make meaning of the narrative in differing ways as well. Activists were also very attuned to the story of how the organization was founded, citing this as one of the most important narratives of the organization. Additionally, activists felt the stories connected them to the issue by focusing on individual's stories and continually evolving to show the progress being made in Uganda. The meaning made by inactive publics at times lead to contradictory themes, which will be discussed further in the limitations section. Inactive publics were able to relate to the stories in some ways, but in other ways did not feel any connection to the stories or issue.

Additionally, inactive publics also viewed the stories as inspiring, but at the same time also felt that showing these stories could make the people watching the videos feel helpless.

Through understanding the meaning made of the narrative by activist and inactive publics, the way that narrative influences activism could be better understood. There was disagreement as to how influential narrative discourse is to activism. For those active with the organization, there was a consensus that the stories of Invisible Children had directly influenced their activism with the organization as an initial building block for involvement. However, for many members of the inactive public, they had a hard time seeing the connection between child soldiers in Uganda and their own lives in America, making them more inclined to work for activist causes such as raising money for cancer research which felt more important to their own lives. Narrative was important for creating a sense of identity amongst activist publics, with those who had worked most directly with the organization seeing it as a family. Activists also seemed aware of the marketing strategy of Invisible Children to create merchandising and an image to go with the stories, further creating a recognizable identity that many youth could feel a part of. Activists identified with Invisible Children because of its focus on being a media-based non-profit organization, setting it apart from other non-profit organizations and the unique use of storytelling and narrative is what keeps them involved with the organization.

Theoretical Implications

Narrative: This study supported and complicated narrative theory in several ways. In general, the results of this study supported the existing literature on narrative. In

particular, the relationship between the storytellers and audience seemed to be a key portion of the Invisible Children narrative, and supported Rowland's (2005) assertion that if an audience can relate to the characters of the story, there will be a strong identification between the audience and the story. Additionally, Scholes and Kellogg (1966) argued that the distinguishing characteristic of narrative is the narrator or storyteller, making the relationship between the teller and the tale important. The results of this study also reinforce the research that effective narratives appeal to emotion and are able to connect in some way with an audience (Rowland, 2005; Sillars & Gronbeck, 2001).

The importance of the three key rhetorical functions of narrative—aesthetic, instrumental, and constitutive—were also supported by this study. The results of the study suggest that narrative is most effective for activism when all three rhetorical functions work together. To recap, aesthetic rhetoric involves the author's effort to shape an audience's response through visual imagery, sound, music, and dialogue (Chatman, 1990; Jasinksi, 2001). Instrumental rhetoric responds to specific exigencies, depicting a problem and in the case of activism involving the audience in the solution (Jasinski, 2001; Lewis, 1987). Constitutive rhetoric is about shaping and transforming identity and the social world, and narratives that fall under this style can implicate an ideology (Jasinski, 2001). Participants discussed the importance of the documentary format to the telling of the stories of Invisible Children because of its use of visual imagery, contemporary music, and the actual interviews with the children affected by the conflict. Additionally, Invisible Children shows a specific problem, the war in northern Uganda, with a clear mission that they are raising awareness through their stories to end the conflict, and as the study suggested, incorporating the audience into the solution and into

ending the story of the conflict is key. Finally, Invisible Children's stories also have a constitutive element to them based on the results of this study in wanting to change how children in Africa are viewed and ending a war often ignored because it does not directly affect much of the developed world. Additionally, Invisible Children, through its stories, is also trying to change the idea that youth cannot make a difference, and through the organization and its narratives activists felt empowered to work towards the cause in large part because of the stories.

While the ways in which stories are effective, such as being relatable and emotional, were certainly supported by this study, I think a key theoretical contribution to narrative as a result of this study revolves around the limits of narrative. In particular for activist organizations that deal with emotional issues, such as Invisible Children, narrative has a greater chance of leading to sentamentalism, which may help to provide further explanation for why some publics remain inactive while others become active publics in part because of exposure to organizational narratives. Browne (2006) provided a definition for the sentimental style:

> "As a rhetorical style, sentimentalism is inexplicable without reference to the response it is designed to evoke. The range of appropriate responses is usually limited to familiar emotions linked vicariously with sorrow, pity, sympathy, nostalgia, and their diminutives. Whatever the individual expression of sentiment understood in this way, there remains one constant: as a response, sentimentalism extends no further than its own exhaustion. This exhaustion indeed, defines precisely sentimentalism's dangerous pleasures: once consummated, it dies. Sentimentalism does not, for this reason, actually entail anything. When,

therefore, the sentimental style is deployed in service of a reform movement, its

effect is apt to be paradoxical: the greater the intensity of the response, the less

likely is the respondent moved to action." (p. 210)

Browne's understanding of the sentimental style suggests that while emotional narrative

is often the cornerstone of many reform movements, such as Invisible Children, the use

of narrative has to be used in such a way that the stories and narrative themselves do not

lead to moral exhaustion. Based on the responses of the participants, it seems as if

Invisible Children addresses this issue in some ways through its use of humor and making

documentaries that are ultimately entertaining to the target audience. As an exemplar

example of the use of narrative for activism, it is important that narrative not lead to

moral exhaustion and consummation with the issue before those in the audience actually

have the opportunity to do something.

Redefining activist: The results of this study suggest that the definition of activists

commonly used in public relations literature are too limiting and do not address the

intrinsic motivations of activists that were found important by the activists in this study.

The definition offered by L. Grunig (1992) is commonly used to explain what activist

publics are, but it does so in a functional way that avoids understanding the identity of

activists, an important component of activism as found in this study. L. Grunig's (1992)

definition focuses more on the tactics that activists may choose to use rather than their

actual identity as activist publics. As the results of this study suggest, activists feel a

responsibility to act on the issues they take on in order to create a positive impact. Also,

the passion mentioned as important to activism and activist publics as discussed by the

participants in this study is noticeably absent from common definitions of activist publics

in public relations. The definition of activist publics needs to be redefined in the field of public relations to account for issues of identity of activist publics. With this in mind, I propose a new definition of activist for public relations that addresses more of the intrinsic motivations of activists versus specific tactics used. Based off of the results of this study, I would define an activist as someone who feels a responsibility and passion to create social change by working independently or as part of an organization on an issue, often resulting in personal sacrifice.

Inactive publics: Based on the results of this study, while inactive and activist publics are theoretically opposites of each other, there was some overlap between these publics in the meaning made of the narratives of Invisible Children suggesting that the theoretical divide between the two publics may currently be viewed as more diametric than necessary. Hallahan (2002) suggested that inactive publics may result from not recognizing the consequences of an organization's behavior, satisfaction with the relationship, apathy towards the organization, or a belief that a certain situation cannot be altered. While the results of this study support Hallahan's understanding of inactive publics, I believe that the comparative aspect of this study between activist publics and inactive publics demonstrates the importance of publics feeling connected to an organization, either because they can relate to the organization or have specific experience with the main issue of the organization. While the demographic information of the inactive and activist publics studied were similar, the key difference between why one group had become active on the issue and the other group had not become active stems from the activist public relating to the cause and organization more easily than the inactive public. The results of this study and existing literature suggest that stories and

narrative discourse can be effective in connecting people to an issue or a cause. Therefore, narrative and effective use of storytelling by activist organizations may help to overcome to barriers to activism that many inactive publics feel. While inactive publics have not often been considered a strategic focus of public relations practitioners, especially in organizations with limited resources such as non-profits, this study suggest that inactive publics are important groups for organizations to consider in messaging strategies. By sharing stories that connect with people on various levels, organizations may have more success in turning inactive publics into activist publics.

Activist storytelling organization: While Gabriel (2004) argued that organizations are not storytelling communities, the results of this study suggest that when conceptualizing activist storytelling organizations, organizations can indeed serve as storytelling communities. The results of this study have clearly suggested that Invisible Children as an exemplar activist storytelling organization has been able to create a community from its stories and that the sharing of the organization's message and activism primarily through documentaries and other forms of storytelling has revolved around the identity of a community. I believe that this study, by focusing on Invisible Children as an exemplar of an activist storytelling organization, can help expand the definition offered by Boje (1991). Boje defined a storytelling organization as a "collective storytelling system in which the performance of stories is a key part of members' sense-making and a means to allow them to supplement individual memories with institutional memory" (p. 106). A definition of an activist storytelling organization must account the mission and purpose of activism, which is to create positive social change. An activist storytelling organization is one that uses stories to create this positive

social change. Therefore, to offer a definition, an activist storytelling organization is a collective storytelling system that uses stories to raise awareness of issues and encourage action as part of the organization to create positive social change for the key issue of the organization.

In addition to offering a new conceptualization of storytelling organizations, this study also demonstrated the importance of participatory storytelling for activists with the organization. Activists felt more of an identity with the organization when they felt tied to helping create the story of the organization. However, there were different levels of identity expressed amongst activists, with some identifying more with the individual chapter of Invisible Children rather than the overarching organization. When people were limited to interacting with Invisible Children only once a semester during screenings, the connection to the organization as an activist storytelling organization was weaker. While social media did not play a major role for many activist studied, its importance was clearly emerging based on the results of this study and how Invisible Children has a constant presence on various social media outlets. As Deuze (2005) suggested, social media is important for the participatory storytelling that many activists highlighted as important to their activism. This study suggests that translating stories more into the various social media may help to further the participatory storytelling. While the focus of Invisible Children remains on the campus screenings, the maintenance work in keeping activists involved and trying to get inactive publics involved can be furthered through continuing the storytelling of the films into social media. There seemed to be a disconnect with participants in the study that the stories were associated with the documentaries and the other channels the organizations use to tell stories are not as

effective. The potential of social media for activist storytelling organizations seems to be the key to sustainability for this model.

Research on Narrative and Public Relations

This study contributes to narrative literature by expanding upon past research about the use of narrative by organizations. It adds to the literature of narrative research with a public relations focus by using narrative to understand its influence on active and inactive publics. The majority of previous studies looking at narrative from a public relations perspective has focused on understanding the narrativity of public relations materials such as press releases and stakeholder reports (Gilpin, 2008; Jameson, 2000; Pieczka, 2007; Tjernstrom & Tjernstrom, 2003). In contrast, this study delved deeper into the meaning making surrounding narrative by taking a qualitative approach to understanding both active and inactive publics' meaning making. This study added a publics-centered perspective to narrative research, which has often been studied from a rhetorical perspective. It is important to study how an audience understands stories and narrative, particularly when narratives are designed to elicit action. This study provided perspective on the ways in which narrative does and does not work to inspire activism.

Practical Implications

Activist organizations: There are also practical implications as a result of this study for activist organizations to consider. Activist organizations are often dependent on the support of activist publics, so understanding ways to further mobilize activist publics and possibly obtain the support of inactive publics is highly important. While not all activist organizations have to adopt the activist storytelling organization model that Invisible Children has, the results of this study do suggest that stories are an effective

way for activist organizations to mobilize action. What makes Invisible Children unique,

though, and what other activist organization's may want to try to incorporate into their

messaging is the story of the organization's founding. More than the actual stories of the

child soldiers and people in Uganda, the story of three young, white, American males

starting an international non-profit organization in their 20s created a connection with

many young activists that their involvement can actually lead to change. By providing a

concrete example of how a group of motivated young people started something larger

than themselves, activists felt inspired to work with the organization. For other

organizations, providing narratives of those working on behalf of the organization or

activists involved could be a potentially powerful messaging strategy utilizing stories.

Another key finding to this study that relates to activist organizations is how Invisible

Children was viewed as a media-based non-profit organization. This unique characteristic

was what resonated most with the young activists, who felt that Invisible Children as an

organization could communicate most effectively with them because it understood which

channels work best for young people.

 Entertainment as activism: The results of this study clearly suggest that stories

can serve as an important messaging strategy for activist organizations by providing more

personal connections between an audience and the issue. However, activists can become

bombarded by stories of suffering and hopelessness, causing them to disengage with

issues as a mechanism to deal with the suffering. This study suggests, though, that when

the stories and the presentation of the stories are entertaining to publics, whether active or

inactive, it becomes enjoyable to watch the films and learn about the issue without the

same level of guilt that organizations who tell stories that do not focus on the positive

cause both active and inactive to feel. The creative and professional use of media, mainly through the documentary screenings, attracted activists to Invisible Children because they were not bored by the documentary. Everything from the music to the images seemed youthful and resonated with them. Even for organizations dealing with difficult issues, messaging that is also entertaining helps to lighten difficult situations and motivate people to help. Striking the balance between entertainment, education, and strong emotional appeals is key.

Public relations: For public relations professionals, a key component to take away from this study is that knowing your audience is incredibly important to effective messaging and motivating activism. Invisible Children was chosen as an exemplar activist storytelling organization because it has been incredibly effective in mobilizing youth, its target audience, on the issue of child soldiers in northern Uganda. Public relations professionals also need to be open to the evolution of communication and the organizations they are working for. Invisible Children, while having a developed a clearly marketable identity, is not afraid to evolve with the times or the newest ways of communicating because it appeals to an audience that communicates in this way. However, public relations professionals should not adopt communication strategies simply because they are trendy. Only after formative research is conducted on the target audiences should changes be made. Activists for Invisible Children appreciated being a part of the organization's story and narrative because it made them feel important and as if their contributions mattered. This finding can be important to public relations professionals, who may want to ensure that activists for the organization are recognized and feel like key components of the organization. This study also suggests that a key way

to attempt to turn inactive publics into activist publics is to ensure that the stories and messages of the organization can find ways to resonate with a diverse group of people to maximize the number of people who feel a connection with the organization.

Limitations of Study

There are certain limitations to this particular case study that need to be addressed. In terms of recruitment, I had difficulty finding key informants for the individual interviews. While I believe contacting Invisible Children activists from around the country was beneficial to the study, contacting potential informants proved challenging in terms of getting initial responses back for participation. This may be attributable to the initial e-mails being sent to spam filters or the impersonal character of an e-mail that caused participants to not respond. I would have liked to have diversified my interview sample more by gender and had a greater race distribution, but it proved challenging to get initial responses without looking for particular demographic information. Additionally, in terms of recruitment for the focus groups I believe that there should have been more criteria in place to screen appropriate participants. In many ways, the focus group was too diverse and would have benefited from a similar pool of people in each focus group. I believe this diversity in the focus group led to many of the contradictory themes that emerged because for some participants the stories resonated and for others, based on background, they did not. In a more structured recruitment, I could have separated participants according to different demographic factors, such as race and gender, to see if more consensus of meaning could be made in each group if the groups were more homogenous.

Another limitation of this study was the lack of discussion of socioeconomic status or obtaining participants' demographic information in terms of socioeconomic status as part of the study. Socioeconomic status seemed to place an important role, particularly with the focus group participants. Many focus group participants dissociated from the documentary shown in the focus group immediately because they could not relate to the founding story of three young men going abroad to Africa for an adventure. There are underlying economic assumptions in the ability to fly to Africa and take time off of paid work to be an activist in this way. Additionally, some focus group participants discussed having to work multiple jobs to support themselves through college, leaving little or no time to participate in groups such as Invisible Children. Invisible Children has been criticized by some for targeting mainly white, middle to upper class youth. Additionally, oftentimes in the stories of Invisible Children a socioeconomic bias is reflected and felt through the key activist activity or raising and donating money, which many people cannot afford to do. It was clear that socioeconomic status played a key role for some participants, and I think it would have been beneficial to the study to have a better understanding of the socioeconomic background of participants to more thoroughly analyze how this influenced meaning making of the narratives.

For this study, another limitation that may have arisen was through telling interview participants that one of the goals of this study was to understand how activist publics make meaning of narrative discourse. By doing this, I may have inadvertently ascribed the identity of activist to the participants, which may have influenced their avowed identity (Sha, 2006). While I wanted to ensure that I disclosed the purpose of the study to those who participated, it may have been better to simply say this study was

hoping to understand how people involved with Invisible Children made meaning of the narrative rather than utilizing the term activist from the beginning without the participants initially describing themselves with the term.

Lastly, a final limitation may have been my own personal bias towards the issue and organization Invisible Children. While I have never been involved with the organization, I have traveled to Uganda and witnessed the situation first-hand, which certainly predispositions me favorably towards an organization working to improve a horrific situation for many. Additionally, participants may have assumed that my focus on this particular organization meant that I had certain affiliations or ties with it, causing them to respond more favorably to the stories than they actually felt. I have also written a separate paper conducting a rhetorical analysis on the *Rough Cut* documentary, so I have been thinking critically about the stories of Invisible Children myself, which may have caused me to ask questions that leading questions about the stories based on my own observations and insights.

Future Research

While this study showed that stories are important for mobilization around an issue, it is not clear from the results how sustainable a narrative-focused activism model is for continued involvement by activists. As a relatively new organization, Invisible Children's ability to sustain its momentum would be interesting to study to better understand this sustainability. In order to ascertain if a focus on storytelling does enough to engage activists past college or the initial excitement after joining, a longitudinal study would be informative to better understand how activists meaning making of narrative changes throughout their involvement with an organization.

Additionally, while I took a publics-centered approach and interviewed activist and inactive publics, a way to further understand the narrative function of the organization would be to interview individuals involved with the production side of Invisible Children narratives. This would provide a comparison as to if their goals for the films and documentaries are similar to how audiences are actually making meaning of the film. Particularly for activist causes, understanding if there is a divide or misunderstanding from the production of the narrative to the reception would provide a key insight into the effectiveness of narrative for activism.

This case study also suggests that the future of activism will revolve around the creative and professional use of new technologies, such as social media. The world is beginning to understand the power of youth and the power of social media to actually help facilitate activist change, as was witnessed in the recent revolutions in Egypt. As public scholars continue to research social media, the use of narrative with these tools should also be further researched. Deuze's (2005) research into the narrative function of blogs can be further expanded to understand how social media such as Facebook and Twitter also utilizes narrativity, if at all.

Finally, other case studies should be done to expand upon looking only at one organization's use of narrative and the particular meaning making of active and inactive publics around this particular cause. As suggested by the inactive publics, the issue of child soldiers in northern Uganda may be an issue that many people have a hard time relating to because it seems so distant. A future case study of narrative and activism could focus on an organization with a focal issue that more people in the United States are affected by, such as cancer. By conducting more case studies, more can be understood

about the use of narrative and activism that move beyond the particular considerations of one organization.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to understand how active and inactive publics for the organization Invisible Children made meaning of the narrative coming from the organization and how the narrative did or did not influence activism. Taking a rhetoric worldview, I conducted a qualitative study to learn about how active and inactive publics make meaning of narrative, adding a publics perspective to narrative research. Invisible Children was chosen as the focal organization for this study because it represents an exemplar activist storytelling organization. As an organization focused on getting youth involved in this activist cause and its use of new technology and media, it may provide a glimpse into what the future of activism will look like. For activist organizations, learning how to use stories and narrative more effectively may help mobilize further support from activist already involved and it may help turn inactive publics into active publics.

The results of this study suggest that narrative and stories have an important role to play in activism because stories and narrative are what connect people to an issue and make the issue salient to their own lives. What appeared to make Invisible Children stand out from other activist organizations in the minds of those involved and those not involved was the organization's use of media and sole focus as a media-based non-profit to end the conflict in northern Uganda. For youth, this understanding of the importance of media created a connection with the organization as something for youth and made by youth. This study also suggested that the story of the organization itself may be as

important as the stories told about the issue the organization is fighting for because it also creates a connection with active and inactive publics who begin to realize that their actions for the organization can make a difference. By understanding how active and inactive publics made meaning of narrative from Invisible Children, communicators for activist organizations can take parts of what Invisible Children is doing to develop messaging that better resonates with a young audience, such as focusing on entertainment as activism, using new technologies effectively, and providing concrete examples of the power youth have to create change in the world.

Appendix A: Interview Guide

Interview Protocol: Utilizing Narrative to Understand Activist Publics: A Case Study of Invisible Children

Name of Participant:

Title:

Date of Interview:

Time Started:

Time Stopped:

Pre Brief:

_____Thank the informant for participating
_____Introduce the study
_____Ask activist to sign confidentiality agreement
_____Reconfirm audiotape permission

1. What is your occupation?
     a. If student, what is your year and school? Major?

2. How long have you been involved with Invisible Children?

3. Why did you become involved?

4. What do you do/have you done with Invisible Children?

5. How would you describe your involvement with Invisible Children?

     a. Are you involved in any leadership roles?

6. How important to you is your work with Invisible Children?

7. Would you consider yourself an activist for Invisible Children?

8. How do you define an activist?

   Now that we've discussed your involvement with Invisible Children, I'd like to broaden the scope of my questions to discuss the use of stories and narratives by Invisible Children.

9.   In what ways do you think Invisible Children tells stories?
10. How well do you think Invisible Children utilizes stories for its activism?

11. Is there any way that Invisible Children could improve its storytelling?

11. How do you think Invisible Children compares to other advocacy organizations in its use of stories?

12. What do you like and dislike about stories used by Invisible Children?

13. How memorable are the stories of Invisible Children?

14. How effective are the stories of Invisible Children?

15. What stories do you associate with Invisible Children?
    a.   Is there more than one story?
    b.   Which story do you relate to the most?
    c.   Has this story played a role in your involvement?

16. How connected do you feel to the stories of Invisible Children?

17. Do the stories help make you feel connected to the organization? If so, why? If not, why not?

18. Do you think the stories of Invisible Children have influenced your own involvement with the organization? If so, how? If not, why not?

19. What do you think the most successful channel is for telling stories for an activist cause?

Demographic information: Age, race, sex

Closing:

Are there any questions that I didn't ask that you think might be important to my research or understanding of how stories influence activism?

Thanks for agreeing to this interview. If you would like to see a copy of my final report, let me know and I can email or mail it to you.

Appendix B: Focus Group Guide

Utilizing Narrative to Understand Activist Publics: A Case Study of Invisible Children
Focus Group Guide

Disclosure Statement: *Before we start, I would like to remind you that there are no right or wrong answers in our talk today. We are interested in knowing what each of you think, so please feel free to be honest and to share your point of view, regardless of whether you agree or disagree with what you hear. It is very important that we hear all your opinions and that you share what is on your mind.*

There are going to be a few rules in today's discussion. First, there may be times when you do not want your comments repeated to people outside of this group. Please treat others in the group as you want to be treated by not telling anyone about what you hear in this discussion today. Please be careful in sharing information that you would not want others to know. And let's be respectful of each other. Before we begin our discussion, I want to ensure that everybody has read and understands the consent form I gave you when you walked in. Importantly, is everybody okay with me audio-recording our discussion today?

Let's start off by going around the room an introducing ourselves. Let's each say our name, year in school, and tell us anything you know about Invisible Children. I'll start… Now that we've gotten to know each other a little better, I'd like to go ahead and tell you more about today's study.

The way our time is going to work today is that during our 2 hour time, for the first hour we're going to watch the first documentary put out by Invisible Children called Rough Cut. You may or may not have seen it before, and either way is fine. I want you to watch the movie closely and jot down anything about it that strikes you as interesting. Feel free to have some snacks while you watch. Afterwards, I'm going to ask you some questions regarding the documentary and the use of stories.

1. What are your first impressions of the documentary?
    a. If you have seen it before, did you have a different reaction this time around?

2. In your own words, what is the story being told?

3. What did you like and dislike about the documentary?
    a. Is there anything that you think would make it better?

4. Is there a story that you related to the most?

5. How did the stories make you feel?

6.How do the images affect the story?

7. How connected do you feel to the stories?

8. What are the best channels to use to tell stories?

9. How effective do you think these stories are to talk about the issue?
    a. In what ways is it effective?
    b. Are there better ways? If so, what?

10. How does the documentary make you feel about the organization?

11. Do you think this documentary would be effective in getting people involved with the organization? If so, in what ways? If not, why not?

12. Did seeing this documentary make you want to be more involved with the organization?
 a. If so, why?
 b. If not, what about organizations makes you want to get involved?

13. Oftentimes the term activist is used when people are highly involved with an organization. How would you define an activist?

Before we finish our discussion for today, I want to give you an opportunity to discuss anything that we haven't addressed yet that you think is important to understanding why people participate in Invisible Children and how effective the stories are. I'd also like to thank you all for participating in today's focus group. You will be receiving 2 hours credit for your participation via Sona.

Appendix C: In-depth Interview Consent Form

CONSENT FORM: IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Project Title	Utilizing Narrative to Understand Activist Publics: A Case Study of Invisible Children
Purpose of the Study	*This is a research project being conducted by Dr. Elizabeth Toth and Ms. Stephanie Madden in the Department of Communication at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you are involved, or have been involved, with Invisible Children. The purpose of this research project is to investigate how activist publics interpret narrative discourse from an activist organization to understand how this influences activism.*
Procedures	*The procedures involve interviewing several Invisible Children activists. Interviews will last approximately one hour and will be audiotaped. You may decline to be audiotaped and still participate in the study. Questions will focus on describing your ideas of narrative, interpreting narrative discourse from the organization, your identity as an activist, and a discussion of how narrative influences activism. Questions include: How do you define narrative/stories? How do you view your identity as an activist? How do the stories of Invisible Children influence your involvement?*
Potential Risks and Discomforts	*There may be some risk, in terms of identification, from participating in this research study and being audiotaped. However, all information will be kept confidential. Your organization's name and your name will not be identified or linked to the data you provide at any time unless you give your express consent to reveal these identities. If the organizational leader provides written permission to release the organization's name, the researcher will distribute copies of this written consent directly to all research participants prior to conducting an interview. In addition, you as an individual study participant should initial the appropriate statement below regarding your desire to remain confidential or have your name associated with your responses.* _____I agree to have my name associated with my responses in study publications and documents. _____I do not agree to have my name associated with my responses in study publications and documents.
Potential Benefits	*This research is not designed to help you personally, but the results may help the investigator learn more about messaging strategies from an activist organization to an activist public. We hope that, in the future, other people and organizations might benefit from this study through improved understanding of these phenomena.*

Confidentiality	*This research project involves making audiotapes of you for purposes of accuracy in data collection. You may decline to be audiotaped and still participate in the study. We will do our best to keep your personal information confidential Should you choose not to participate in the study, information on your refusal to participate in the study will not be released to the organization and/or your supervisor.* * In addition, your name and your organization's name will not be identified or linked to the data at any time. The data you provide through your responses will not be shared with your employer except in aggregate form, grouped with data others provide for reporting and presentation. Only the principal and student investigators will have access to the names of the participants.* * Data will be securely stored on the investigators' password protected computers, several hard disks, and audiotapes. Hard copies and audiotapes. Hard copies and audiotapes of the data will remain in the possession of the student investigator at her locked office. Informed consent forms will be stored separately from any and all data. All data including audiotapes will be destroyed (i.e., shredded or erased) when their use is no longer needed but not before minimum of five years after data collection. If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.* *Please initial:* ___ I agree to be audiotaped during my participation in this study ___ I do not agree to be audiotaped during my participation in this study
Right to Withdraw and Questions	*Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.* *If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the investigator, Dr. Elizabeth Toth at 301-405-8077 or eltoth@umd.edu.*
Participant Rights	*If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to*

	report a research-related injury, please contact: **University of Maryland College Park** **Institutional Review Board Office** **0101 Lee Building** **College Park, Maryland, 20742** **E-mail: irb@umd.edu** **Telephone: 301-405-0678** *This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.*
Statement of Consent	*Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form.* *If you agree to participate, please sign your name below.*
Signature and Date	**NAME OF SUBJECT** **[Please Print]**
	SIGNATURE OF SUBJECT	
	DATE	

Appendix D: Focus Group Consent Form

CONSENT FORM: FOCUS GROUPS

Project Title	Utilizing Narrative to Understand Activist Publics: A Case Study of Invisible Children
Purpose of the Study	*This is a research project being conducted by Dr. Elizabeth Toth and Ms. Stephanie Madden in the Department of Communication at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you are involved, or have been involved, with Invisible Children. The purpose of this research project is to investigate how activist publics interpret narrative discourse from an activist organization to understand how this influences activism.*
Procedures	*The procedures involve interviewing several Invisible Children activists in a series of focus groups. These groups will be conducted in person at a date and time determined by you and the researcher. The focus groups will last approximately one to two hours and will be audiotaped. You may decline to be audiotaped and still participate in the study. Questions will focus on describing your ideas of narrative, interpreting narrative discourse from the organization, your identity as an activist, and a discussion of how narrative influences activism. Questions include: How do you define narrative/stories? How do you view your identity as an activist? How do the stories of Invisible Children influence your involvement?*
Potential Risks and Discomforts	*There may be some risk, in terms of identification, from participating in this research study and being audiotaped. However, all information will be kept confidential. Your organization's name and your name will not be identified or linked to the data you provide at any time unless you give your express consent to reveal these identities. If the organizational leader provides written permission to release the organization's name, the researcher will distribute copies of this written consent directly to all research participants prior to conducting an interview. In addition, you as an individual study participant should initial the appropriate statement below regarding your desire to remain confidential or have your name associated with your responses.* _____I agree to have my name associated with my responses in study publications and documents. _____I do not agree to have my name associated with my responses in study publications and documents.

Potential Benefits	*This research is not designed to help you personally, but the results may help the investigator learn more about messaging strategies from an activist organization to an activist public. We hope that, in the future, other people and organizations might benefit from this study through improved understanding of these phenomena.*
Confidentiality	*This research project involves making audiotapes of you for purposes of accuracy in data collection. You may decline to be audiotaped and still participate in the study. We will do our best to keep your personal information confidential Should you choose not to participate in the study, information on your refusal to participate in the study will not be released to the organization and/or your supervisor.* *In addition, your name and your organization's name will not be identified or linked to the data at any time. The data you provide through your responses will not be shared with your employer except in aggregate form, grouped with data others provide for reporting and presentation. Only the principal and student investigators will have access to the names of the participants.* *Data will be securely stored on the investigators' password protected computers, several hard disks, and audiotapes. Hard copies and audiotapes. Hard copies and audiotapes of the data will remain in the possession of the student investigator at her locked office. Informed consent forms will be stored separately from any and all data. All data including audiotapes will be destroyed (i.e., shredded or erased) when their use is no longer needed but not before minimum of five years after data collection. If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.* *Please initial:* ___ I agree to be audiotaped during my participation in this study ___ I do not agree to be audiotaped during my participation in this study
Right to Withdraw and Questions	*Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.* *If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the investigator, Dr. Elizabeth Toth at 301-405-*

	8077 or eltoth@umd.edu.
Participant Rights	*If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:* **University of Maryland College Park** **Institutional Review Board Office** **0101 Lee Building** **College Park, Maryland, 20742** **E-mail: irb@umd.edu** **Telephone: 301-405-0678** *This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.*
Statement of Consent	*Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form.* *If you agree to participate, please sign your name below.*
Signature and Date	**NAME OF SUBJECT** **[Please Print]**

	SIGNATURE OF SUBJECT	
	DATE	

Appendix E: Individual Interview Participant Descriptions

Amber (25, Caucasian, Female): Amber has been involved with Invisible Children for five years and currently works for Invisible Children in San Diego. She is also a former Roadie for the organization and lives in California.

Dan (30, Hispanic, Male): Dan has been involved with Invisible Children for six years and regularly attended meetings at his campus chapter during graduate school. He is currently a visiting scholar in China, but did his graduate work at a small, private Southern university.

Eric (20, Caucasian, Male): Eric has been involved with Invisible Children for one year and is involved with his campus chapter. He is a junior at a large, public mid-Atlantic university.

Erin (22, Caucasian, Female): Erin has been involved with Invisible Children for four years and is president of her campus chapter. She is a senior at a small, private Southern university.

George (18, El Salvadorian, Male): George has been involved with Invisible Children for two years and serves as vice-president for his campus chapter. He is a sophomore at large, public mid-Atlantic university.

Heather (24, Caucasian, Female): Heather has been involved with Invisible Children for five years. She serves as the faculty advisor for the Invisible Children chapter at the school where she teaches. She also traveled to Uganda with the Invisible Children program as part of their Teacher Exchange initiative. Heather currently resides in Florida.

Jill (18, Asian/Pacific Islander, Female): Jill has been involved with Invisible Children for two years and regularly attends meetings at her campus chapter. She is currently a freshman at a large, public mid-Atlantic university.

Justin (19, Native American, Male): Justin has been involved with Invisible Children for four years and served as vice-president of his campus chapter. He is a sophomore at a small private mid-Atlantic university.

Julie (20, Caucasian, Female): Julie has been involved with Invisible Children for four years and serves as president of her campus chapter. She is a sophomore at a large, public mid-Atlantic university.

Keisha (21, African-American, Female): Keisha has been involved with Invisible Children for three years and is the Schools for Schools representative at her campus chapter. She is currently a senior at a large, public mid-Atlantic university.

Linda (19, Caucasian, Female): Linda has been involved with Invisible Children for four years and served as the president of her campus chapter. She is a sophomore at a small, private mid-Atlantic university.

Mary (19, Caucasian, Female): Mary has been involved with Invisible Children for three years and serves as president of her campus chapter. She is currently a freshman at a small, private Midwestern university.

Megan (19, Caucasian, Female): Megan has been involved with Invisible Children for two years and serves as president of her campus chapter. She is a sophomore at a small, private Southern university.

Mike (32, Caucasian, Male): Mike has been involved with Invisible Children for two and a half years and serves as president of his campus chapter. He is also a former Roadie for the organization. He is currently a senior at a large, public Southern university.

Teresa (21, Caucasian, Female): Teresa has been involved with Invisible Children for one year and serves as the vice-president at her campus chapter. She is a senior at a large, public mid-Atlantic university.

Susan (21, Caucasian, Female): Susan has been involved with Invisible Children for six years and serves as the president of her campus chapter. She is also a former Roadie for the organization. She is a senior at a large, public Midwestern university.

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