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FOR EVERY ACTION THERE IS A STORY: NARRATIVES OF OKLAHOMA TEACHERS ABOUT THE 2018 WALKOUT AND TEACHING IN OKLAHOMA

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“Whether you think you can or you think you can’t, you’re right.” Henry Ford

Scott, thank you for helping me believe I can, even when I had doubts. I love you more than Alaska! ~ Cheryl

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Abstract

Members of social movements create and maintain the meanings of that movement (Snow & Benford, 1992). Interviews with 49 teachers between September and November 2018 provide the data for this qualitative study. This dissertation investigates how the stories of individuals who were teaching in Oklahoma at the time of the April 2018 walkout engage with public issues. Image Repair Theory (IRT) is used to explain how participants told specific types of stories to address public opinion about the teachers' actions. Stories which frame the walkout, explain formation of individual and collective identity, and address competing stories of leadership are all ways participants make sense of the walkout. Consideration of how stories and narratives shape Oklahoma teachers' expressions of public and private action led to identification of a new communication model I call the *Coercion of Social Responsibility*, which explains how implied social contracts led teachers to remain in untenable situations. I also identify how some participants escaped the coercion and what moved teachers to become involved in the walkout. Ways teachers talk to each other about civic engagement and their intent to be involved in political action are discussed. Implications for future research are addressed.

Keywords: social movements, political discussion, narrative, Image Repair Theory, leadership, coercion, social contracts

For Every Action There is a Story: Narratives of Oklahoma Teachers About the 2018 Walkout and Teaching in Oklahoma

Talking with others about public issues fosters a democratic society, but many people avoid political discussion. Direct correlations between citizen interactions and political engagement have been found, with political discussion boosting levels of engagement (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1989; Eliasoph, 1998; Gamson, 1992; Putnam, 1995; Walsh, 2004). Informal interactions with those an individual identifies with may both lead to increased involvement in civic actions such as voting and contribute to political polarization (Walsh, 2004). Decline of traditional social networks has led to decreased civic discussion (Putnam, 1995).

In social movements organizers and members create and maintain the meanings of that movement (Snow & Benford, 1992) and communication is an essential part of the process (Foust & Hoyt, 2018). Using "master frames" or overarching ideas to connect a movement's ideas together can help a movement gain traction, becoming more powerful as ideas resonate with participants and observers (Snow & Benford, 1992, p. 140), leading to civic discussion. Master frames may also emerge when multiple movements coalesce, connecting these related movements together and providing an explanation for why similar events occur in multiple locales (Swart, 1995).

Recent emergence of new types of political movements raises questions about how workers talk about, organize, and engage with public issues. Mobilization has been traditionally defined as collective, where groups of citizens work together to achieve a common goal, transgressing institutionally established social norms (Melucci, 1980) through ongoing endeavors (Kavada, 2016). The emergence of social media and other technologies

makes the social mobilization process connective, offering citizens "a personal path to engagement" (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013, p.41).

In 1935 Congress passed the National Labor Relations Act (Wagner Act) giving all workers except government employees legal permission to unionize and engage in collective bargaining while clarifying for employers a list of unfair labor practices (Kimeldorf, 2013; Kimeldorf & Stepan-Norris, 1992; Mikva, 1986). The Wagner Act was weakened by the Taft-Hartley Act in 1947 which defined and prohibited unfair labor practices by employees and unions as well as employers (Mills & Brown, 1950). States began enacting right-to-work laws, limiting unions' abilities to require all employees to contribute to union representation (Dixon, 2010). President Ronald Reagan's 1981 firing of air traffic controllers, federal employees legally prohibited from striking, empowered private employers to adopt discretionary hiring and discharge practices (Greenspan, 2003). Weakening of labor law continued and by 2004 employers were more likely to threaten to replace their workers than unions were to threaten to strike (Pope, 2004).

In 2001 Oklahoma voters approved a measure prohibiting the requirement for employees to pay union dues (Hogler & LaJeunesse, 2001). After the proposal was passed, Oklahoma became the 22nd state with "right-to-work" laws (Novak, 2010, para. 4). In 2015, Governor Mary Fallin signed legislation eliminating the option for school districts to deduct union dues from teachers' pay, requiring teachers who chose union membership to pay their dues to the union directly (Robson, 2015). Union membership in Oklahoma declined following these changes to state law, with unions representing only 7.4% of all Oklahoma employees in 2018 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019).

Despite limited union membership and laws preventing them from "striking," from April 2-12, 2018 teachers across the state of Oklahoma walked out of their classrooms (Gstalter, 2018). This walkout was preceded by a teacher strike in West Virginia, and several other teacher walkouts occurred over the next few months (Kamenetz & Lombardo, 2018). After the Oklahoma walkout more than 100 teachers, school counselors, and principals ran for public office in Oklahoma (Karson, 2018). What led teachers to decide they needed to walk out? How can their stories about the walkout be used to understand how expressions of public and private action are shaped? How did the weak presence of labor unions in Oklahoma impact the organization and leadership of the walkout?

Stories are everywhere, shared among friends and told over radio, television, and social media. Stories explain lived experience, bridging historic fact and elements of fiction (Ricouer, 1991). They are used to create meaning by illustrating the essence of human experience (Tao, 2002). When individuals tell stories about their own political power, do they talk more about how their actions matter or focus upon where they believe their actions do not matter? How do feelings of adversity or perceptions of political power influence the stories people tell about the nature of the world? How do perceived obstacles affect the stories people tell about individual power? How do public employees address public sentiment portraying their actions in a negative light?

The purpose of this study is to explore how the stories and narratives of Oklahoma teachers create meaning around the 2018 teacher walkout in Oklahoma. The walkout represents an interesting case of political action by a population, teachers, not generally viewed as a constituency. Later in this dissertation I will discuss how study participants heard repeatedly how teachers are not politically active and decided that in Oklahoma, legislators

do need to be concerned about their actions. In Chapter One, I review current literature relating to storytelling, narrative, and identity. This provides foundation for later findings on how teachers shaped their stories about education. Chapter Two explains my study design, including how I recruited participants for the study, collected data, and conducted rigorous qualitative analysis. Chapter Three examines the issue of education in Oklahoma. Image Repair Theory examines why specific types of stories by participants were used to explain the walkout. This chapter also explores how teachers talked about public and private action. In Chapter Four I explore the ways study participants made sense of the walkout. I address the different ways teachers framed the walkout, how individual and collective identity developed, and how competing stories of leadership arose from the walkout. Chapter Five addresses how stories and narratives shaped Oklahoma teachers' expressions of public and private action. In this chapter I develop a new concept, the *Coercion of Social Responsibility*, which argues participants continued to teach because of commitment to their students. I then address ways participants could escape the coercion and reclaim their sense of self. I also discuss what moved teachers to become involved in the walkout. Chapter Six explains teachers' actions during the walkout, exploring how teachers talked to others about the issue of education in Oklahoma and their stories of political action. Finally, Chapter Seven summarizes my findings in the analytical chapters, identifies the contributions my research makes to the discipline of communication, and offers areas for future research or ways in which my research can be extended.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

Storytelling

Storytelling is the means to make sense of the world (Fisher, 1987). People tell stories. Through these stories, they "read and evaluate the texts of life" (Fisher, 1987, p.18) which are rewritten and reenacted to give meaning to thought and action. Narrative explains life (Ricoeur, 1991) because humans tell stories to share and understand lived experience. A world without storytelling "would mean a world without history, myths or drama, and lives without reminiscence, revelation, and interpretative revision" (Ochs, 2006, p.64). By telling stories, individuals both evaluate and interpret experience (Feldman, Skoldberg, Brown, & Horner, 2004). The stories individuals share offer insight into how they define reality and retroactively make sense of the events which unfold in their lives (Czarniawska, 2004). Stories are a tool both speakers and listeners can use to develop shared understanding about events and experiences (Feldman, Skoldberg, Brown, & Horner, 2004).

When humans place "the character and qualities of objects and events of interest within stories that portray intentions, feelings, and ambitions, and how one cares about them" (Delafield-Butt & Trevarthen, 2015, p.1) they communicate. Storytelling also aids individuals in identifying with groups because stories are not merely descriptive but are also evaluative (Black, 2009). Communication shapes how individual perception can become shared realities, influencing how groups live, act, and succeed (Broom & Avanzino, 2010). Listeners understand stories shared with them by referencing others stories they have heard (Polletta, 2008). Listening to the stories of those with different world views allows individuals to understand alternative means of interpreting reality (Fisher, 1987; Ricouer, 1991).

Lack of engagement with individuals who hold opposing views to their own may lead citizens to conclude those who disagree are stupid, unrealistic, or un-American. (Blanda, 2016). With a population exceeding 327 million (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018), listening to other Americans' stories may help citizens find common ground and ways to work across the aisle without being afraid by doing so they compromise their individual values. Stories can humanize different ideas, rather than seeing opposing political views as "fundamental differences in who we are as human beings" (Cramer, 2016, p.211).

Stories are one means through which individuals make sense of the world. Individuals share stories to share or reflect upon previous events, engaging in retrospective evaluations (Czarniawska, 2004).

Big and Small Stories

Reflection on the order of events, and how these events affect a storyteller on an individual level may analyzed in a variety of ways. Stories can be used to explore "big picture" concepts or smaller, day-to-day ideas. "Big stories" can be used by researchers to explore how stories reflect the nature of reality (Bamberg, 2011, p.16), while "small stories" assist individuals in developing and affirming identity as they view themselves in relation to others (Page, Harper, & Frobenius, 2013).

Stories explain reality. Some stories talk about how the world is, others reflect upon how the world was, while still others explain how the world may become. The stories shared with others allow reality to be interpreted together and "enables them to imagine and appreciate each other's perspectives" (Black, 2008, p.96). Stories attribute meaning and motives to both the acts we make, and the acts made by others. Attribution of meanings and motives becomes especially obvious when considering the core values which shape both our

actions and how we talk with each other about political issues, because those values will affect how we accept or reject others' stories. Attribution is especially relevant when values create stories widely accepted in society.

The Story of Class

Sometimes stories become "national narratives." These are stories which may identify, define, impose upon, or shape a nation's culture or values, providing listeners with reasons why the stories should be accepted and retold (Malone, Hultman, Anderson, & Romeiro, 2017). These national narratives are one explanation of why issues become publicly important.

Stories shared often enough create myths. Myths are narratives "associated with the values, assumptions and goals of a specific ideology or identifiable family of ideologies" (Flood, 2002, p.42). For myth to form, a story must have been shared with multiple individuals and repeated often enough to become universalized (Gabriel, 1991). Consider, for example, the Horatio Alger myth, also known as the American Dream. The myth functions to claim individuals are responsible for creating their own opportunities for success and has become dominant in American discourse (Sarachek, 1978).

The Horatio Alger myth frames the definition of success, as system justification theory (SJT) explains. According to SJT marginalized groups "sometimes support and justify the social order to an even greater degree than members of advantaged groups do" (Jost, Pelham, Sheldon, & Sullivan, 2003, p.14). Belief in the Horatio Alger myth offers hope individuals can improve their own circumstances as long as they try hard enough, even if those circumstances "result in sharply differentiated attainment orientations across social lines" (Bozick, Alexander, Entwisle, Dauber, & Kerr, 2010, p.2028). When individuals buy

into the American Dream, failure to improve their life circumstances may lead to an internal acceptance that they have not worked hard enough regardless of why the failure happened. Achieving the American Dream is a result of individuals' hard work and perseverance. Opportunities are created by individuals (Sarachek, 1978) who "have shown moral character through trial by fire," and this demonstration of character is rewarded with financial stability and emotional well-being (Hochschild, 2016, p.140).

Poverty not only hides opportunities, it creates barriers which can leave those born into it with a sense of hopelessness. These barriers include hunger, lack of proper medical and dental care, residing in unsafe dwellings, experiencing multiple utility shutoffs, or having clothing not designed to meet climatic needs (Adair, 2005). Although the Horatio Alger myth is dominant in American discourse, how do those lacking day-to-day necessities generate the opportunities to change their class status?

How an issue is discussed – the stories told about it or distributed around it – influence perceptions and expectations of the storyteller and the audience by framing the story or providing cues to listeners. A frame can even appear to be the story itself (Ryfe, 2004). Framing involves preferring one explanation over another, emphasizing the salience of one aspect of the story over others (Entman, 1993, p.53), or presenting information so alternatives are invisible, and only the preferred outcome appears viable (Blue & Dale, 2016). The preference of one explanation or alternative over another emphasizes selective aspects of reality, causing other information to fade into the background (Lecheler & de Vreese, 2012). Cues allow listeners to infer meaning from a story, so they "make simplified evaluations without analyzing extensive information" (Druckman, Hennessy, St. Charles, & Webber, 2010, p. 137).

Narrative

The narrative perspective leads individuals to shape and conform thoughts and actions into "'plots' that are always in the process of recreation" (Fisher, 1987, p.18). Our universal habit of sharing and listening to stories means individuals are socialized to "recognize the coherence and fidelity of stories they tell and experience" (Fisher, 1987, p.24). Stories are heard differently than other types of messages, and listeners experience "vicariously the events and emotions" the storytellers express through narrative (Polletta, 2008, p.27). Cohesive stories influence listeners through both the story and its underlying values, leading them to assess those values as they relate to their own lives. Narratives provide a way to interpret the world, but they are also shaped by their temporal setting, the retroactive assessment of the stories, individuals' culture, and the attitudes of and about the people who tell them (Fisher, 1989), allowing a single narrative to be interpreted multiple ways. Listeners interpret stories contextually, by referencing other stories they have heard to find implied meanings (Polletta,2008).

Narratives give structure to temporal moments (Ree, 1991), guiding individuals to specific emotional reactions within a "framework of acceptability or normality" (Cederberg, 2013, p.135). Storytellers co-create meaning with their audiences based on narrative flow (Greenhalgh & Hurwitz, 1999). Attributions of meaning based on action and the processes of changing experience into narrative help individuals "make meaning from the complexity of everyday life" (Naughton, 2014). Meaning become explanation, giving a community or culture form (Clair, 2006). Narrative "reflects social beliefs and relationships" while also providing the speaker and listeners with the option and abiltiy to negotiate meaning and modify these narratives (De Fina, 2003, p. 369).

Some researchers distinguish between stories and narratives, defining stories as temporal events containing a clear beginning and end and narratives as larger concepts which may contain multiple stories (Feldman, Skoldberg, Brown, & Horner, 2004). Distinguishing between the two may be helpful when analyzing metanarratives, where "different ideas and perspectives are reconciled to produce what is treated as a coherent and rational view of the world" on a grand scale (Chatterjee, 2014, p. 998). Analyzing multiple stories can allow a researcher to identify and articulate overarching meaning (Richardson, 1990).

Narratives may contain the following elements: orientation, complication, evaluation, resolution, and coda (Labov & Waletzky, 1967). *Orientation* anchors the story in time and place, providing background to a listener. *Complication* occurs when the storyteller explains what happened. *Evaluation* gives the story meaning, telling a listener why the story matters. *Resolution* closes the story, helping shape its form. When present, a *coda* is used by the storyteller to return to the present moment in conversation. Labov (1972) later refined the elements to also include an abstract, because "it is not uncommon for narrators to begin with one or two clauses summarizing the whole story" (p.363).

Narratives can also be "distributed" and occur over a period of time, across an array of mediums including social media and in-person interactions, and in fragments rather than sharing the entire story at once (Walker, 2004). Narrative inquiry allows scholars to anchor their research in place and time, providing a "pathway into dimensions of meaning that cannot be had any other way" (Freeman, 2015, p.28). When analyzing narrative, considering how one event connects to others is essential, instead of viewing the event as isolated (Wortham & Rhodes, 2015).

Some stories are repeated and told by multiple people, moving beyond the individual to a more global scale establishing a collective identity. These stories are told to articulate specific ideas, and "articulated in accord with some set of purposes or interests, and such stories are inherently political, establishing *positions* from which flow social consequences" (Brown, 2006, p.739). Storytelling and narrative is important to social movements because narrative "constructs agency, shapes identity, and motivates action" (Ganz, 2001, p. 4). Stories lead a movement's members to develop – or converge – upon shared meaning and identity (Gilmore & Kramer, 2019).

Identity

Sharing stories with others is a fundamental aspect of building identity (Collins, 2003). Georgakopoulou (2006) found small stories to be especially helpful in building identity because they tell group members about recurrent and routine activities, signaling who belongs. Individuals may determine social identities either deductively by identifying what group members have in common, or inductively by inferring identity based upon individual expression (Postmes, Spears, Lee, & Novak, 2005). Stories invite members of a group to "understand the storyteller's perspective and encounter the characters' experiences for themselves" (Black, 20008, p. 109). In addition, these stories can demonstrate how individuals belong or ways they are unique because speakers are able to choose the stories they tell, the actors they include in their stories, and the audience for those stories (Thorne, 2004).

When individuals tell stories they both share their lived experiences and shape that experience (Ochs & Capps, 1996). People make meaning by comparing themselves to others and making judgments based upon perception (Eliasoph & Lichterman, 2003). Individuals

are more likely to accept ideas reinforcing how they see themselves and the nature of reality than they are to accept information negating those views. Identity is formed as part of this process of acceptance or rejection (Stets & Burke, 2000). The way people "define their existence and understand the world around them" (Swann, 1987, p.1039) is as important in finding shared meaning as the stories told explaining existence. Reinforcement can occur either because individuals choose to interact with those who will reinforce their views or because interactions are interpreted as reinforcement even if they are not (Sedikides & Strube, 1997; Swann, 1987; Swann, Rentfrow, & Sellers, 2003).

Although stories help create shared identity, there are times when this process may be more harmful than helpful. Lau (2010) argues "ascribed identity scripts undermine democratic deliberation" (p.899) because identity scripts are imposed by outsiders based on expectations of what a specific identity means. Identity scripts do not offer a single stereotype but are built upon multiple stereotypes which can be both descriptive and normative. Use of stereotypes creates identity based upon the perceptions of others, and these "scripts create power inequalities based on individuals' ability and willingness to negotiate scripts, such as those based on sex and race" (Lau, 2010, p.919). Lau (2010) argues stereotypes create a position where individuals must negotiate scripts in order to appeal to the public and may choose positions on policy in order to negate outsider expectations, because scripts create assumptions about identity. Capitulation to dominant norms can hinder deliberation, limiting individuals' abilities to talk with each other "because ascribed identity scripts figuratively plug listeners' ears" (Lau, 2010, p.938).

The social identify perspective is one area of scholarship which explores how identity explains the nature of reality, incorporating two theories: social identity theory and self-

categorization theory (Reynolds, 2011). The first of these theories, social identity theory, explains that group members self-identify, viewing members of their group more favorably than they do outsiders (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The second theory, self-categorization theory, addresses the process through which group identities increase or decreases salience (Hogg & Reid, 2006). Identifying similarities between themselves and others leads to "the dynamic emergence of a particular self-view" affecting how a situation is subjectively perceived (Reynolds, 2011, p.362). Identification transforms individual action into group behavior. Individual identity is self-categorized within the social identity perspective (Stets & Burke, 2000).

Narrative, Storytelling, Political Engagement, and Identity

When people tell stories, they negotiate their abilities to identify with or differentiate themselves from others (Cramer, 2016). Building connections or identifying differences through these narratives which are organized by the storyteller (Czarniawska, 2004) may build solidarity or highlight differences (Cramer, 2016). For example, Cramer (2016) found public employees are often among the highest wage earners in rural communities even if their incomes are lower than earners in the private sector in urban communities, guiding public "perception that public workers are overpaid" (p. 133).

Narratives sometimes provide a bridge between personal experience and politics (Kim, Wyatt, & Katz, 1999). Individuals may speak with each other about issues at home (Wyatt, Katz, & Kim, 2000). Walsh (2004) points out social identity plays a role informing opinions, making sense of political issues, and knowing when to speak. She uses the example of "Old Timers" who make political discussion appear easier, possibly because close connections between friends lessens tension when talking about politics. Their conversations

were grounded in identities structuring how they talk about interests (Walsh, 2004). She found the Old Timers rarely spoke up in the group and disagreed, potentially because of the group's level of homogeneity. Citizens may avoid political talk in fear of offending or being offended, to the point of not speaking their mind when they hear something they deeply disagree with.

Instead of remaining silent, citizens may choose to follow the lead of others. "Story lines" developed by "political elites" provide the public with direction on how to interpret issues or events (Winter, 2008, p.19). Political elites have power and may use this power to identify appropriate or "acceptable discourse" (Zerubavel, 2006, p.36) When appropriate discourse is identified, metaphors and analogies are "fundamental" to evaluating and understanding events (Winter, 2008, p.39), becoming narratives and stories "embedded into a storytelling framework" (DeSanctis, 2012, p.171) then used to persuade others. Narrative fidelity by members of a social movement allows them to change or redirect public conversation about an issue or set of issues (Benford & Snow, 2000). Compromise can affect narrative fidelity, and Levine and Nierras (2007) found many activists were concerned about compromising, viewing compromise as a means of silencing their voices before they obtained political power.

In the complex political system of the United States, narrative is an important tool for helping citizens determine what issues to support, who to vote for, and how to act (Boswell, 2013). Often scholarship on deliberation focuses upon its public aspects, but deliberation also applies in private and interpersonal settings. "[W]hen group members disagree about a public issue that is important to them, they not only provide reasons for their positions and engage

in argumentation, they also articulate aspects of who they are, what groups they belong to, and what the issue means for their definition of themselves" (Black, 2009, p.2).

Social Movements

In social movements, participants "articulate their interests, express concerns and critiques, and propose remedies to identified problems by engaging in a variety of collective actions" (Curiel, 2018, p.8). Participants focus the attention of outsiders on the areas of the movement they wish to make salient, communicating their stories through a process called framing (Fairhurst, 2011). Frames are used to demonstrate injustice (Snow & Benford, 1992), and collective action frames are used to galvanize individuals to act (Benford & Snow, 2000). When individuals become invested in an issue, political action is generated by "specific personal life concerns" (Han, 2009, p.13). Individuals are moved to act "when the costs of collective action are so low and the incentives are so great that even individuals or groups that would normally not engage in protest feel encouraged to do so" (Tarrow, 1989, p.8). However, action without plans in place can have limited success.

In his guide to grassroots campaigning Cooper (1993) argued there are four essential elements needed for the campaign to be successful: Outreach, communication, media, and targeting. Plans are developed and then volunteers are used to generate excitement and call people to action, which occurred during the presidential campaigns of Barack Obama and Donald J. Trump. When these elements are missing, questions arise whether the movement will have "longterm sustainability," (Mason, 2012) or dwindle into a historical footnote. The presence or absence of a recognizable leader may influence a movement's ability to maintain visibility (Han, 2014). Inexperienced leadership may also struggle to maintain the movement itself (Gitlin, 2003).

Social movements are often led by citizen groups or political figures. The use of local volunteers has been found to increase voter mobilization and may fuel participation in other civic activities by persuading citizens that voting is important to them (Sinclair, McConnell, & Michelson, 2013). Volunteers may be initially energized to act or advocate, but that energy may wane with time leading to decreased involvement (Han, Sparks, & Towery, 2017).

Stories help individuals define reality help individuals make sense of lived experience (Czarniawska, 2004; Fisher, 1987). The frames of a social movement are the stories which allow the movement's members to make sense of that movement and are influenced by members' identities (Hogg & Reid, 2006).

Image Repair Theory

A desire to be viewed positively and protect their identities may lead individuals to act and shape stories to protect or change how others view them (Benoit, 2015). Image is a component of identity, based upon perceptions about an individual or group (Benoit, 1997) "which usually arise from persuasive messages that attack, criticize, or express suspicion" (Benoit, 2015, p. 1). Image Repair Theory explains how offenders can use their stories and narratives to change public perspective after action or inaction is labeled as offensive and they are viewed as responsible for the offense (Compton, 2016).

According to Image Repair Theory individuals, groups and organizations use five approaches to repair their image: "denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification" (Compton, 2016, p. 354). Denying the offense may release the perceived offender from being identified as culpable either by negating the accusation or shifting responsibility for the offense to another party (Benoit, 2015). Evading responsibility is not denial of an offense but instead offers explanations for the offense which

may include claiming the offender was provoked, claiming the offense was unavoidable, claiming the offense occurred accidentally, or claiming the offender was well-meaning and did not intend to offend (Compton, 2016).

Reducing the perceived offense of action or inaction is the third strategy found in Image Repair Theory. Reduction of offense may occur by having offenders stress previously positive actions or their positive qualities in an attempt to bolster goodwill, minimize the level of offense by arguing those finding offense are overreacting, compare the offense with other offense deemed to be worse, contextualize the offense as being part of something positive or better, or attack the accuser (Benoit, 2015; Compton, 2016). Taking corrective action to "fix the problem, restore the situation, or in some way amend the consequences of the offense" (Compton, 2016, p. 354) could be classified as a means of reducing offense but is listed as a fourth strategy of Image Repair Theory (Benoit, 2015).

"Mortification" (Benoit, 2015, p. 26) is the final strategy of Image Repair Theory. Offenders apologize for the actions or inactions, hoping the public will consider the expression of regret sincere, forgive the offense (Compton, 2016), and restore goodwill (Benoit, 2015).

Strategies identified by Image Repair Theory all work to protect the identity of the group or individual who is deemed to have committed an offense (Benoit, 1997; Holtzhausen & Roberts, 2009). Threats to reputation compel offenders to "offer explanations, defenses, justifications, rationalizations, apologies, or excuses" (Benoit, 2015, p. 19). Use of any of the strategies discussed in this section is an attempt to influence public perception about the identify of an individual, group, or organization (Benoit, 2015).

Research Questions

When individuals tell their own stories, they make or express meaning of lived experience (Seidman, 2013). When others listen to those stories, meaning is shared (Weiss, 1994). In interviews participants share personal perceptions about the nature of reality (Czarniawska, 2004). Storytelling and narrative is often the means through which these perceptions are shared, acting as a primary means to understand for the speaker to understand themselves and the world around them (Walker, 2004). Narrative both "reflects social beliefs and relationships and contributes to negotiate and modify them" (De Fina, 2003, p. 369). Analyzing interviews to find the stories embedded within them offers opportunity to understand how teachers frame their experiences as teachers in Oklahoma and the April 2018 walkout.

Personal goals can motivate action (Han, 2009) and stories provide a way to interpret the meaning behind actions taken. Investigating how stories affect how individuals interpret and create meaning from lived experience led to the following research questions:

RQ 1: What kinds of stories and narratives do Oklahoma teachers use to explain how education became a public issue?

RQ 2: What kinds of stories and narratives do Oklahoma teachers use to make sense of the Oklahoma Teacher's walkout of April 2018?

RQ 3: How do stories and narratives shape Oklahoma teachers' expressions of public and private action?

RQ 4: How do stories and narratives shape Oklahoma teachers' intentions to talk about and engage in politics?

As this literature review has demonstrated, stories and narrative are a primary means for individuals to interact and engage with one another. Stories provide space for individuals to talk with each other and actively engage in dialogue (Black, 2008; Toledano, 2018). Narrative is used by individuals to make sense of the world (Fisher, 1987; Ricouer, 1991). Groups use storytelling and narrative to develop a shared reality (Broom & Avanzino, 2010; Polletta, 2008). Dialogic storytelling builds identity (Black, 2008) and storytelling also helps groups sustain identity (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 1994) by allowing them to converge on shared meaning (Gilmore & Kramer, 2019). Stories which become widely known and accepted by society become myths (Sarachek, 1978). Stories emphasizing salience of one aspect of an issue over another frame how others will interpret events (Blue & Dale, 2016; Entman, 1993). Stories are structures which motivates members of a social movement to act (Ganz, 2001). Storytelling is a cornerstone of human communication, enabling individuals to organize experience, in part through the assumption human action is intentional (Czarniawska, 2004). This dissertation will use analysis of stories and narratives to understand how Oklahoma teachers created meaning about teaching in Oklahoma and the April 2018 teacher walkout.

Chapter 2: Methods

Participants

A total of 49 people participated in this study. Of the participants, 40 were female and 9 were male. Two participants retired following the 2017-2018 academic year and two had taken positions in other states. Six became teachers through an alternative certification route. There was at least one participant per public school grade, including Pre-K. Participants taught core subjects including English, math, and science; electives including art, music, computer classes, food and consumer science, and foreign language; four were school librarians; and one was a school counselor. There were two participants who taught at public charter schools while the others worked for specific school districts.

Fifteen participants came from Oklahoma City or Tulsa, twelve taught in communities with populations between 20,001 and 100,000, eighteen came from communities with populations between 101 and 20,000, and four taught in communities with fewer than 100 residents.

Participants came from all areas of the state, including the panhandle, north, south, east, and west. The youngest participant was 24 and the oldest was 65, with a median age of 44. There were participants who were leaders of the walkout, participants who opposed the walkout, participants who felt conflicted about the walkout, participants whose districts were supportive of the walkout, participants whose districts threatened punitive measures would be used against teachers who walked out, and participants whose districts were neutral. Two participants were running for state office at the time they were interviewed. Five participants taught in other states prior to moving to Oklahoma. One participant was a second-year teacher at the time of the walkout, another had been teaching for over 40 years, while the other participants' length of time teaching fell between the two.

Design and Procedures

I focused upon Oklahoma educators who were employed within the state at the time of the 2018 walkout in this study. I chose to conduct focused, in-depth interviews with participants with the goals of (a) allowing participants to tell their stories while (b) focusing those stories upon their political thoughts and actions as they related to teaching in Oklahoma.

Solicitation Procedures

After receiving approval to proceed with this study from the university Institutional Review Board (IRB), I recruited participants in three ways. First, I posted messages on Facebook asking Oklahoma teachers or former teachers to contact me if they would be interested in participating in a study about teaching in Oklahoma. Second, I sent at least 25 recruitment messages to publicly available email addresses of teachers in each Oklahoma's 77 counties. Recipients of the emailed recruitment messages were selected randomly with the goal of reaching participants from a wide range of school districts, subject areas, grade levels, and communities. Third, I asked participants to share my contact information with other teachers who they thought might be interested in being a part of the study.

Interviews and Practices

All interviews were conducted between October 4 and November 14, 2018. Only two interviews took place after the midterm elections held on November 6, 2018.

Interviews were conducted at a location of the participants' choosing. Multiple interviews were held in libraries or coffee shops, a handful were held in the participant's classroom or office, one interview took place at the participant's home, and several took place using technology, including Skype, Facebook video chat, or telephone.

In the interviews I asked limited demographic questions addressing participants' age, gender, and community where they taught in Oklahoma to ensure I was including a wide range of backgrounds and perspectives. I then asked participants about why they became teachers and to tell me about a typical week during the academic year. After the teachers' backgrounds had been covered, teachers were asked to talk about the walkout. I asked them to share their reactions to hearing about a potential walkout; provide their thoughts on why the walkout occurred in April 2018; speak on how others reacted to and talked about the walkout, including the media; discuss the roles played by teachers' associations and unions; tell me what they believe the walkout accomplished or failed to accomplish; and talk about how the walkout has affected personal political views as well as intent to engage in civic action.

Each participant provided oral consent to the study. I chose oral consent so no records would link participants to the study because there was potential for repercussions if identities were known, either by the school districts employing teachers or by other teachers who disagreed with the stated positions. Participants were assigned a random code and all records related to each interview are saved using that code.

Transcription Practices

Interviews were audio recorded. When all 49 interviews were complete they were sent to a transcription service and transcribed. Once accuracy of the transcripts was confirmed, audio recordings were deleted. I then went through each transcript and removed potential identifiers, such as community names, making exceptions for the large communities of Oklahoma City and Tulsa.

Analysis

Upon completion of interview transcription, the data was reduced in the following ways. First, information potentially able to identify participants was separated from the transcripts. Collecting demographic information during the data collection process allowed me to seek maximum variance in participants and ensure I talked with educators from a wide range of backgrounds, including participants who had been teaching in Oklahoma for decades; participants who left teaching; participants who were new to teaching at the time of the walkout; participants who took active roles in the walkout; participants who did not get involved in the walkout; participants whose districts were supportive; and participants whose districts were unsupportive or punitive but did not impact the overall stories. Second, the questions and answers related to the news media were set aside. Although participants had meaningful reactions to the questions about professional news coverage, their answers did not address one of the research questions.

Tentative labels were used during early exploration of the data, allowing categories to not only emerge from the data but also "fold into each other" (Seidman, 2013, p.128). Categorization grounded in the data allowed me to build theory which emerged from the data itself (Charmaz, 2006). Analysis considered connections or separations between passages, while being cautious to not assume dramatic stories were representative of all participants rather than idiosyncratic (Mostyn, 1985; Seidman, 2013).

Following the assignment of tentative labels, I used open coding (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011) while reading and rereading each interview with the goal of understanding the underlying message of participants stories and responses. The program MAXQDA 2018 (VERBI, 2017) was used to assist in tracking themes and concepts. The process of open

coding is fundamental to the process of data analysis (Walker & Myrick, 2006) and did not end until all responses had been coded. Through an iterative process I identified preliminary themes in the data. I then considered broader categories within the codes as well as emergent themes, allowing me to reduce the data and focus on those themes, making it easier to conceptualize. Commitment to academic rigor necessitated reading through the data multiple times, constantly comparing codes with each other so I accurately and appropriately captured participants' idea. During this process I identified initial themes of "standing up" for children, civic action and engagement, talking about political issues with others, raising awareness or educating the public, social media, poverty, grassroots movements, unions, respect, using one's voice, and unity.

Preliminary themes were categorized and then compared with each other to determine interrelated concepts. By maximizing comparisons, I analyzed and focused upon how emergent themes are different from or similar to others. Focused coding helps "bring a conceptual perspective to the situational and the individual experience" (Piantanida, Tananis, & Grubs, 2004, p. 335). I examined codes occurring with low frequency to see if they could be merged with other codes. I also sought to identify the key elements and core messages within each theme.

I then worked to break down themes and discover how the codes and categories related to each other. Consideration of the relationships of codes and categories allowed me to use the focused codes to find theoretical form, developing a coherent analytical story while seeing possibilities, establishing connections, and asking questions (Charmaz, 2006). When the answers to my research questions reached theoretical saturation and all avenues and alternatives for the teachers' stories had been exhausted the process ended.

Quality in Qualitative Analysis

Quality qualitative research contains the following characteristics: "worthy topic, rich rigor, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethics, and meaningful coherence" (Tracy, 2010, p.539). To ensure the quality of my contribution to scholarly research I took several steps. First, I was careful in topic selection. The Oklahoma teacher's walkout occurred in April 2018 and ripples from the event were still in motion at the time of data collection. When the walkout failed to increase wages and per-student expenditures to the levels teachers demanded many educators chose to run for public office. Talking with teachers about the walkout and attitudes about political involvement provided an opportunity to build upon current scholarship about political engagement and mobilization by giving teachers opportunity to share their stories. Second, as a parent of children attending school in Oklahoma and a friend to and family member of many teachers, I realized my empathy aligns with the teachers in this study. For this reason, research and interview questions were structured so I did not examine questions of whether the walkout was right or wrong, but instead analyzed the stories Oklahoma teachers tell, mitigating potential observer bias. Third, I sought resonance both through the mechanics of the dissertation, making it "interesting" to read, and by identifying how the research is transferable. Fourth, I have acted ethically, protecting the identities of participants, Fifth, I have strived to create a cohesive study by connecting "research design, data collection, and analysis with [my] theoretical framework and situational goals" (Tracy, 2010, p.848).

Validation Strategies

Cresswell (2007) argued at least two validation strategies should be incorporated into a study. I used four. First, I employed rigorous data collection procedures. Second, I have

used thick description in the chapters analyzing the research questions to allow readers of the study to determine whether there are shared characteristics which will allow them to "transfer information to other settings" (p.209). Third, I have clarified personal biases and assumptions, so readers of the study realize I was sympathetic to and supportive of the teachers during the walkout. Fourth, I used member checking to "solicit participants' views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations" (p.208). Following the completion of analysis, I sent rough drafts of this dissertation to three Oklahoma teachers who agreed to check my findings. Two were study participants and one was not. None of the three disagreed with my analysis and conclusions.

Chapter 3: The Issue of Oklahoma Education

By the beginning of 2018 teacher pay and per-pupil/classroom spending had been declining for several years in Oklahoma. The state cut funding to districts five times in 2017 alone due to account shortfalls. After the fifth cut "Tulsa Superintendent Dr. Deborah Gist said '[t]his round of reductions marks our fifth state funding cut since January - totaling $4.56 million over a three-month period'" (Bryan, 2017). Funding cuts not only stagnated the wages of Oklahoma teachers, but also affected districts' abilities to make necessary building repairs and purchase current textbooks. K-12 funding in Oklahoma decreased by 15.6% in Oklahoma between 2008 and 2015, while personal and income tax rates decreased by 28.2% (Leachman, Masterson, & Figueroa, 2017). Oklahoma had not seen a tax increase since 1990 (Blanc, 2018) and school funding, when adjusted for inflation, had dropped by "28% per student since 2008" (Felder, 2018).

The legislature attempted to raise taxes for teacher pay in November 2017 but failed (Wendler, 2018). In February 2018 the Oklahoma legislature voted on a "Step Up Plan" which was "a budget proposal crafted by business leaders and endorsed by Gov. Mary Fallin" (Brown, 2018, para.5) designed to help with what was becoming viewed as an education funding crisis. Oklahoma law requires any bills raising taxes be passed by three-fourths of the legislature (Felder, 2017) and the "Step Up Plan" failed to meet that threshold, with a final vote of 63-35 (Brown, 2018). The day after the "Step Up Plan" failed Chuck McCauley, Superintendent of Bartlesville School District, sent an email to other state superintendents asking how many of them would support a teacher walkout (Eger, 2018).

On February 22 West Virginia began what would be a 9-day statewide teacher strike. In response, Stillwater teacher Alberto Morejon, after searching for and not finding a group

relating to an Oklahoma walkout, created a Facebook page titled “Oklahoma Teacher Walkout – The Time is Now!” which within 10 days exceeded 65,000 members (Eger & Hardiman, 2018). Although initially the Oklahoma Education Association (OEA) wanted to hold a walkout in late April, teachers opposed the date, wanting a work stoppage to occur faster (Wendler, 2018). Based on teacher demands, on March 8 OEA president Alicia Priest issued the following statement:

> Today we're putting lawmakers on notice. If they do not meet the terms we’ve laid out, then on April 2, the Oklahoma Education Association calls on every teacher, support professional and administrator to walk out of their school house and headed to the State House. On April 2, schools across the state will begin to shut down. (Brandes, 2018)

Faced with the possibility of a teacher work action, on March 28 the Oklahoma “Senate passed the largest tax increase in state history to fund teacher pay raises and education needs” (Brilbeck, 2018).

Despite the tax increase, on April 2 teachers across Oklahoma walked out of their classrooms. Over 36,000 demonstrated at the capitol building, while many others participated in their communities (Gstalter, 2018). The walkout ended on April 12 when Alicia Priest “called for educators to return to the classroom and to shift their efforts to supporting candidates in the fall elections who favor increased education spending” (Goldstein & Dias, 2018). The walkout ended with “an average $6,100 pay raise and a small bump to school funding” (Will, 2018) but many of the teachers’ requests went unanswered.

Teachers chose to react to the stalemate with legislators by running for office, with “at least 66 current teachers” (Will, 2018) and “a total of 112 educators” (Karson, 2018)

filing to run as the walkout ended. Although during the walkout legislators were intractable and labeled the teachers' efforts "akin to extortion" (Levitz, 2018, para. 14), many incumbent legislators lost during the primary process (Krehbiel, 2018). Seventy-one teachers made it to either a runoff or the general election (Karson, 2018; Reilly, 2018).

On general election night four school principals (Superville, 2018) and six teachers (Teacher candidates, 2018) won their general election races. OEA announced overall, "16 current or former educators won seats" in the state legislature (Hertneky, 2018).

Those who organize or engage in a social movement create and maintain the meanings of that movement (Snow & Benford, 1992). Metaphors and analogies are "fundamental" to evaluating and understanding events (Winter, 2008, p.39). These metaphors and analogies become narratives and stories and used to persuade others, becoming "embedded into a storytelling framework" (DeSanctis, 2012, p.171). Investigating how teachers created meaning about the walkout led to RQ 1:

What kinds of stories and narratives do Oklahoma teachers use to explain how education became a public issue?

A Broken System

The Oklahoma education system issue has several problems. These problems have led to a teacher workforce struggling to provide services to the state's children as the number of available teachers has dwindled and the number of students enrolled in public education has increased (Blatt, 2018). As Hadleigh[1] noted in her interview:

> I think there's people that have permanently walked out of education that live here in this state, I think there's 3-6,000 licensed certified teachers in this state that have gone to other jobs because they can't get paid what they're supposed to be paid here.

[1] All participants are referred to by pseudonyms.

The departure of individuals from the teaching profession has led to an environment where those who remain struggle to meet the needs of students.

The goal of teaching is for students to "develop a process of usable knowledge" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006, p. 674) built upon previous concepts learned, with critical thinking assisting in this development. However, the passage of No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), signed into law by President George W. Bush in 2002, was based upon the assumption the teaching process should have similitude for all teachers when presenting knowledge to their students (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006). Teaching became a matter of science to be empirically verified by assessing student knowledge through standardized tests and holding the teachers accountable for testing outcomes (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006). In addition, federal funds for public schools became tied to those outcomes (Paige, 2006) and the public school classroom and process of learning became market driven (Heinrich & Nisar, 2013). Teachers found themselves in "a cultural environment where ideas are publicly framed and debated, shaping parental expectations, policymakers' rulemaking, and perhaps educators' beliefs about what constitutes legitimate professional practices" (Russell, 2011, p. 259).

The push for teacher accountability continued and President Barack Obama advocated for student performance on standardized tests to impact teacher pay (Stout, 2009). The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) effectively removed federal oversight of K-12 education in 2015 (McGuinn, 2016) but states continue to use standardized tests to assess student learning, ignoring "the creativity and professionalism of teachers" (Levine & Levine, 2012, p.113).

Against a backdrop where education is viewed in terms of outcome rather than as a process, study participants found themselves with increased workloads, fewer resources, and more expectations. Participants had a range of perspectives on many of the issues discussed in their interviews, but a consistent theme all participants articulated is that the education system in Oklahoma is broken:

> I started to look at the education level of even our top students and I began to think about what the leadership of Oklahoma would look like in fifteen to twenty years and it scared me. We won't be able to get ourselves out of this mess if we aren't educating leaders that can help us do that. (Chloe)

In their interviews, participants repeatedly returned to the narrative of a broken educational system: Pay, classroom funding, feeling overwhelmed, and a teacher shortage. These concerns will be addressed in more detail in the following pages.

Pay

Based on legislation passed before the walkout, teachers received an "average raise of $6100" (Will, 2018) but most of the teachers I spoke with said the walkout was not about pay. Charlene summarized what many of the participants were saying, telling me the walkout was about "making education a priority in the state of Oklahoma." Despite this articulation, wages weighed heavily on the minds of many participants. Lisa taught in other states before moving to Oklahoma and shared the following story:

> I will say that I was flabbergasted when I got my first check when we moved here because I thought honestly that they didn't have somebody's paperwork or years of experience paper or maybe my master's degree wasn't on there or something. So, just went and asked the HR people whose paperwork do you not have because, you know, this is obviously not my paycheck, right. They're like, oh no, all the paperwork's in.

Teachers did not only discuss how their salaries were lower than in other states. They also articulated how the wages they receive in Oklahoma do not keep up with basic costs of living:

> Think about ten years ago, how much you paid for a gallon of milk versus what you pay for it now. Now think about how much money you brought into your home ten years ago and how much money you brought in now. Because we have not increased our pay that much in ten years. (Isabel)

Although the problem with low and stagnant wages came up in several interviews, pay was not where teachers focused. They spoke more about student need and how they wanted to provide more for those who they teach.

> You know, the raise is nice and we got a raise and that was nice, but overall funding should have been the main focus, cause I don't need the raise if I don't have to buy things in my classroom anymore. You know? It would have been okay. (Fiona)

More participants spoke about per pupil funding than about their personal income.

Classroom Funding

Classroom funding was a concern of many student participants. As Marie explained:

> You cannot, if you personally had your budget, your family's budget cut and slashed by you know whatever it was, 70 percent or you know whatever, you could not live. And how people think that we could take our state budget and take out literally billions of dollars and think that we are going to be able to function, I don't see the thinking there.

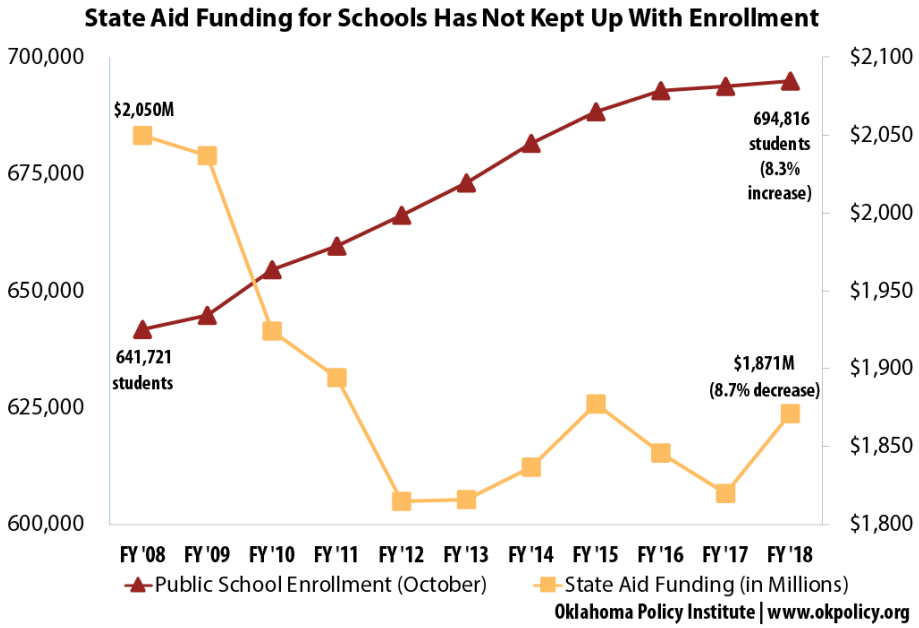

Figure 1. Funding and enrollment discrepancy. From *Oklahoma Policy Institute*, n.d. Retrieved January 13, 2019 from https://okpolicy.org/issues/education/. Copyright [2018] by Oklahoma Policy Institute. Reprinted with permission.

Figure 1 illustrates how student enrollment in public schools in Oklahoma has increased while state funding has decreased.

As mentioned in the subsection addressing wages, while participants were concerned about teacher salaries they were also concerned about classroom supplies. Frequently the two were linked, as this story from Lisa demonstrates:

> The dwindling funds for classroom support is the issue, then when teachers are dipping into their own salaries for hundreds of thousands of dollars every year that becomes an issue. Because even as a science teacher I had what was existing equipment here, so hardware, but never was any mention of here's the 500 dollars for chemicals or here's the 200 dollars for consumables in your classroom We, we buy stuff every year for our classrooms like colored pencils because you're teaching science, they have to put in color what they see. (Lisa)

Although some participants were able and willing to purchase classroom supplies others were not, while others expressed funding issues were much bigger than classroom consumables. Teachers discussed how funding affected class sizes and the state of the buildings they were teaching in as well. Chad explained:

> I'm teachin' P.E. They didn't give me any money. I didn't suddenly show up and, hey, look here's they got forty new basketballs and I've got these gymnastic nets now that the kids can roll on. All the lights in my gym are suddenly working. The teachers down the hallway suddenly they didn't walk in the room and say, hey, look, there's only twenty desks. That means they only have twenty students, no, they walked in and saw they have thirty desks and wondering where they're gonna get another four desks for the students standing over there. They didn't go, oh look, we've got enough textbooks for everybody. They looked and saw, I still don't have any textbooks for anybody. I don't have any paper. I don't have any pencils.

Although Chad had problems with lighting in the gym he teaches in, Gretchen's stories about some of her experiences teaching in the Oklahoma City area illustrate how educational funding creates stressful challenges.

> For my first teaching assignment, I taught and blackboards were broken. I couldn't even write on the blackboard. So, I went out and I bought tub surround and had my husband come in and drill holes, so we could use them as makeshift blackboards. And I'm just like, this is crazy. I taught, and the next teaching assignment I taught in

> standing water because we weren't in MAPS approval for roofing. So, we had a bucket there, but the bucket didn't catch everything. So, I knew enough, couldn't wear any opened toed shoes, that by the end of the day if the custodian hadn't come and mopped up your feet were going to be wet.

Lily was an experienced teacher who came from another state. She expressed how funding impacted multiple aspects of teaching in Oklahoma:

> In Oklahoma a typical week as a teacher is, in my relative opinion, utter chaos. I mean coming from two other states where a full schedule is considered 5 classes and they have legal limits on class size to then teach 6 classes in a state that has no limit on class size so, you've extended your day, you have more kids. … I was angry from the very day I started teaching here and really honestly did not do a good job of keeping that to myself. I spent a lot of time walking around saying things to people like, "Why are we teaching 6 classes? How was, how did this happen? You know when did six classes become a full schedule? Why are there no caps? Better books? Smaller class sizes?" Like things that are just research proven to be effective and in an educational setting.

Poor funding, larger classes, and longer hours combined to create a challenging environment for Oklahoma teachers.

Overwhelmed

For the teachers, financial concerns were not the only reasons they identified the system as broken. Demands on time and emotions were also problematic:

> We were pretty much writing our own curriculum, so we had outdated reading series that we were using a little bit, and then we had brand-new math standards and the district had approved of the curriculum but couldn't pay for it, and so they just said find your own things on the internet. And so, we would have meetings and we would discuss data. The lessons never ever lessened, but the workload was almost twice because we were making everything up from scratch. And so, every time they would come to say one more thing that we had to do, it got very, very frustrating. (Kendra)

As Kendra's story illustrates, teachers had to put in more hours to provide their students with curriculum. Because districts were unable to purchase materials for the classroom, teachers had to develop materials without the help of textbooks before they could determine the best

way for their students to learn core concepts. Brynn, a special education teacher in the Oklahoma City area shared the following story:

> When I went to OU and learned about what it meant to be a teacher, one thing that we did is we went to the curriculum library and we pulled out curriculum and it had activities and objectives and like all these important things. And they still expect us to have all those things, but they now expect us to go find it on Pinterest. I've been told in staff meetings "go look on Pinterest." Like I don't even have time to get on Pinterest for fun, much less I'm going to go find a lesson there, then create the lesson, then write up the objectives to it. It went from you're going to educate these children to you're going to make up the education and they keep changing the standards. You know, there was nothing wrong with our curriculum and they got like barely any kind of supplies for it and then they were like oh, supplies don't matter now after we spent all the time learning about it.

Many demands were placed on the time of Oklahoma teachers. Writing curriculum before writing lesson plans takes time. Extra students in a room means taking more energy to manage the room and spending more time covering material because there are more students present to ask questions, and more time to spend grading the assignments submitted by those students. As the quote from Lily at the end of the previous section demonstrates, teachers also had to teach more classes and go without planning periods, and she was not the only participant to comment upon this:

> It is a very stressful job, and that is the hard part for me. When they don't give us the resources that we need, when they overfill our classrooms, when I have six classes with 40 kids in them, I don't have, I physically, there's not enough time in the day to get all of that work done. (Allie)

Another demand placed upon teachers' time was standardized testing. They were concerned about the hours they had to spend preparing students for tests as well as administering those tests.

> One of the things I was vocal about with parents is the testing and the way the testing was done, the amount of money that was spent on testing the resources, the man-hour resources that we were taking away from our students. The classroom instruction hours we were taking away from the students was focused on testing. (Charlene)

Testing was not only an issue because of time. It was also an issue for teachers because of how they felt it affected their students emotionally.

> I taught kindergarten, you know, when I first started, went away came back. And now kindergarten is being taught as first grade. The huge emphasis is on reading which for five-year-olds is really not appropriate. My daughter could read anything you put in front of her before she even went to kindergarten. I don't have any problem teaching a child however far they can go, I will go with them. But to tell a five-year-old or make a five-year-old feel they are failing because they can't read is horrendous, and to tell their parents that their children need to be on a plan because they are not reading is horrible. And it's unconscionable and what that does is it takes that child at the very beginning and makes them start off their career as a scholar feeling like a failure, instead of making them love going to school, love learning, love, you know, doing things that are appropriate to where they are. We have all the brain research, we know what they need to be doing, and when you're trying to do those things that you know they should be doing, you are criticized. (Marie)

Teachers were not only overwhelmed by how much time they needed to invest to be able to teach effectively or by how they felt their responsibilities affected students' emotional well-being, but they were also affected emotionally by the demands of the job.

> When you are pouring hours and hours into your work and you are physically and emotionally exhausted and you come home from a day and you physically cannot even move because of the amount of emotional stress and physical stress, I have many colleagues who continue to have bruises on their body because of child, children, students acting out in the classroom with no support. It's going to break you. It's going to take a toll. (Hilary)

Although she talked about the emotional affect teaching in Oklahoma had on her, Hilary took the time to let me know teachers are not the only ones overwhelmed. She wanted me to understand students were affected emotionally not only by Oklahoma's educational system but by life too:

> The amount of trauma that an average Oklahoma child goes through, I believe I was reading yesterday one in four children are below poverty line here in Oklahoma, that's the latest statistic that I read from Oklahoma policy institute. One in four.

The sense of being overwhelmed affected teachers in the classroom. It also led many to walk away from Oklahoma, from teaching, or both.

Emergency Certifications and Teacher Shortage

A substantial contributing cause of teachers' sense of being overwhelmed is the shortage of teachers in Oklahoma. It creates an atmosphere of uncertainty.

> The best people leave. The best people leave and the turnover in the state is shocking. I mean I'm teaching in what is locally known as one of the best places to teach in the State of Oklahoma and you know the admin is really supportive. And with what they've got they're doing a great job, but their turnover rate my middle school principal said last year is 30%. She's replacing 3 out of 10 every year. Thirty percent of her staff leaves every year, that's insane. You can't build an educational program when one third of your staff leaves every year, it's impossible. That alone is a mind-boggling statistic to me just speaking to the State of Education in Oklahoma. (Lily)

April 2018 was not the first time Oklahoma teachers had walked out of their classrooms. In 1990 teachers walked out for similar reasons, leading to the passage of House Bill 1017. It increased taxes, set minimum teacher salaries, and placed limits on class sizes ("House Bill 1017", n.d.). However, in the years between 1990 and 2018 the state budget allocation for education decreased while student enrollments increased, leading to a situation where fewer teachers taught more students and districts had no way to abide by the caps on class sizes (Archer, 2012). By December 2018 "almost 2900" emergency certifications had been issued for the 2018-2019 school year, a sharp contrast from the 32 issued during the 2011-2012 school year (Eger, 2018b). According to the Oklahoma Policy Institute, "there are more than 700 fewer teachers in Oklahoma public schools in the 2017-18 school year than there were in 2013-14, while student enrollment has grown by about 15,000" (Blatt, 2018). In a world where learning is measured by students' performance on state tests, Oklahoma teachers find themselves teaching in short-staffed schools where many teachers have not received any training in educational theories or classroom management.

Chloe had taught for several years prior to the walkout in a military community and she expressed frustration with what she saw as unbalanced pressures:

> I've had so many co-teachers that have literally come in off the street and don't know content and don't know classroom management and I'm stuck between them. You know, I'm stuck between a teacher who doesn't know how to teach and students who have difficulty learning, and then they ask me why it's crazy in there like it's my fault.

Teachers are caught between the need by the state to provide educational services to every student, and an inability to find enough people to offer those services. Sabrina taught for two years in Oklahoma before leaving to teach in another state, and she reflected:

> Why are we understaffed? It's because we lack the funding to hire more staff. And not only that, but we're lacking the ability to find people who can actually fill those roles. In my school we had 27 teaching positions when I left. I don't know how many we had when I started maybe 25 or 26 because we grew quite a bit in those two years. We had about, grew about 100 kids in that two-year period. But I came in, there was six of us the year I came in, and I was the only traditionally certified teacher and the others were all emergency certified.

Her concerns were echoed by other teachers. Over half of the study participants mentioned teacher shortages. They were both frustrated by the number of emergency certified teachers and unable to see a way to not need to hire them.

Several teachers shared how the teacher shortage has caused them to contemplate leaving. There was sympathy for those who chose to teach in other states.

> The bottom line is, teachers were leaving because they couldn't afford to stay. It wasn't because they didn't want to stay. When you're talking about a single mom that has three kids and teaches and can't pay her bills, she didn't leave because she wanted to, she left because she had to do, she left because she had to do what was right for her own children and her own home. And the difference in salary in the other states is unbelievable. It's not like oh, they just get paid a couple thousand more. No, it's unbelievable the difference. (Deanne)

Participants were very aware of how teacher pay in Oklahoma compares to nearby states. As Andrea explained:

> When you can drive three hours and make more than $15,000 increase in pay, that's a problem. And I understand, if I drive 22 hours I could double my pay. But that's 22 hours. If I drive to Denton I can make $16,000 dollars more than I'm making right

> now, and that's unacceptable. Texas comes to Oklahoma to recruit teachers. If a neighboring state is recruiting your teachers, you have a problem.

By April 2018, the low pay compared to other states, the limited funding provided for classroom supplies and curriculum, the increased responsibilities, time demands, feelings of being overwhelmed by what was required to be able to teach, and the teacher shortage had created a sense of crisis for Oklahoma teachers:

> With every state, we all know, the foundation of a state's progression is through education. Education impacts homelessness, education impacts incarceration, it's the foundation of anything. And so, research is out there that states put money into education, they're going to be better off with jobs, the economy, crime rate, homelessness rate, mental health rate. It's really until this state understands that, this concern, this problem's going to continue. (Bridgette)

As the previous stories and narratives demonstrate, the teachers' stories frame the educational system as one needing urgent attention. Low pay, inadequate classroom funding, buildings in disrepair, crowded classrooms, demands on time, and the increasing shortage of qualified teachers led Oklahoma teachers to the realization something needed to change.

Setting the Record Straight

Image Repair Theory (IRT) presumes individuals want others to view them positively. When reputations are maligned, it is natural to communicate in such a way those reputations become viewed favorably (Benoit, 2015). Attacks are comprised of two components: first, something is labeled as undesirable and second, someone is responsible (Benoit, 2015). As teachers determined a walkout to be the best way to shed light on the state of Oklahoma education, they also realized they had to correct public perceptions about what teachers do. Andrea taught in a state where education was fully funded prior to coming to Oklahoma, and her comment demonstrates how teachers used IRT:

> Since education is such a big draw on the state budget it's easy to say, well the teachers, the teachers only work eight months out of a year, or nine months or

> whatever they want to say, and well I would love to have the teachers' schedule, and well you know all they are is babysitters, and all the negative things that they say about teachers. They put that narrative out there and we have to speak publicly to defend ourselves. And I think the private industry that attacked us and that makes us out to be the bane of the state's existence makes us, you know, we had to defend ourselves. And it's too bad because back in the day education was an honored profession and everyone respected teachers. Not that there aren't things that could be changed, there are always things that could be changed, but to say oh we just are inefficient, we just need to cut the waste and working in a school where I have to empty in my own trash all the time because we can't afford custodians, no. There is no more fat to cut. It's been cut.

Andrea's story demonstrates the attacks Oklahoma teachers faced prior to and during the April 2018 walkout. These attacks can be summarized by the following points:

1. Oklahoma students are suffering.
2. The reason students are suffering is because teachers are not doing their jobs (or not doing their jobs properly).

The merits of an attack do not matter, but others' perceptions do (Benoit, 1997). According to Benoit (2015), there are five strategies the Oklahoma teachers could employ to repair their image: Denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness, taking corrective action, or demonstrating remorse for their actions (p.31). I will show how the teachers' stories employed the first three strategies identified by Benoit, but I am also going to extend his theory because there was a sixth approach used by study participants. They flipped the script by framing Oklahoma teachers as good, explaining they achieve more with fewer resources.

Denial or Transfer of Responsibility

According to IRT, denial appears in two forms. The first is a simple negation of the accusation, saying it is wrong or untrue. The second form identifies the issue as someone else's responsibility (Benoit, 2015).

Carey's statement provides an example of denial, addressing the idea teachers are inefficient:

> I think the private industry that attacked us and that makes us out to be the bane of the state's existence makes us, to say we just are inefficient, we just need to cut the waste. And working in a school where I have to empty in my own trash all the time because we can't afford custodians, no. There is no more fat to cut, it's been cut. And all the personnel that used to support raising kids out of poverty, those programs are long gone because those were programs that got cut.

Stella also denied students are suffering because of teachers' actions or inaction.

> The teachers, we needed it to be known of all of the things that we do every year, day in and day out, without trying to get any credit for it. Without trying to get any notoriety about it.

Study participants stated the issues with education in Oklahoma were because of decisions made by governmental entities or school administration. They agreed there are many issues with education in Oklahoma but explained blame should be given to other parties instead of the teachers. Deanne argued:

> Do you tell surgeons well, you're going to go into surgery but you don't have any scalpels, oh, and you can't have an anesthesiologist either, and you only get one nurse and good luck on that one, but at the end of the day we're going to grade you on it, too? I mean, it's like they expect, expect, expect, and then don't provide what's needed in order to be successful.

Deanne's argument demonstrates denial of responsibility for the crisis in education, in an effort to repair how others viewed teachers. The teachers wanted the public to know they were hampered by not having the resources needed to effectively do their jobs. Problems existed, but it was not the fault of teachers because they adapted. They did not vocalize the problems they were facing until they had to so the public would understand the educational crisis was based on the actions of others.

Andrea explained the lack of vocalizing problems:

> Teachers don't generally complain. And if we do, we complain to other teachers. We don't say to parents, oh, you know, these books are crap because you try to make your school look good. So, when parents come in, you put a shiny face on it and you smooth it over and you go buy some extra things that you need to make it look nice. I don't think parents in Oklahoma realized just how bad it was until it was really starting to come out that your kids are sitting on desks that are held together with duct tape and toilet paper and twine, and these books are the same books that you had in this same classroom.

Some teachers not only denied student suffering occurred because teacher action or inaction, but also identified others as responsible. Cynthia placed the blame for the Oklahoma educational system on the state.

> I mean we're cheating our students. We've cut our school length 25 days. We've cut 25 days out of our program, out of our whole year. It's ridiculous. Our kids, we are failing our kids I feel like. I feel like that we are putting more illegible children out there, more people that are not work presentable.

Mike, a teacher from the Tulsa area, was more specific and argued problems were created by the Oklahoma legislature:

> Oklahoma seems to be one of these states that subscribes to the ideology that we can cut our way to prosperity. They've made it almost impossible to raise revenue and at the same time we've been cutting it like crazy. That created a crisis in number of teachers and it's not just teachers' salaries, you know, because when the money's not there you start cutting teachers. That means the teachers who are left have more work to do.

Hadleigh also talked about how tax cuts caused the problems but included the A-F report card system when shifting the blame. The A-F system was adopted by Oklahoma in 2011 to measure whether students were meeting state grade-level academic standards (A-F Report Card, n.d.). The report card not only reviewed how students scored on state tests, but schools who did not have at least 90% of their students complete the test would receive an F regardless of how the students who did take the test performed (Hofmeister, 2015). She said:

> You know, it's great to cut taxes and cut taxes and cut taxes, but I mean, we've cut taxes so much in our state that we've cut the heart of it. I mean I feel like education is the heart of your state, you know, and if you don't have a good education here, which

> you know, we're dead last in the ringer, then you've cut the heart of your state to do that. You know you've, you send people to prison, you don't, I mean you don't give them the, we've got so many things now, you know, like the report card thing, and I mean God forbid you're in a school that doesn't have all the, the bells and the whistles and you know all the kids that are starting out knowing how to read whenever they come in. I mean, if you're in a school that's working with kids that have some struggles and stuff, it's like this glaring obvious thing of oh, man, it's that school out there and nobody wants to apply out to that school and nobody, every kid needs a good teacher and it just, it just makes it hard.

Teachers attributed the problems in the educational system to other entities as well. Alex, who is nearing retirement after teaching for over 40 years, blamed administrators:

> I dread being here is because I dread what the administration is doing or has done over the weekend to, to give to us so that we have something else to do. And you know, the, just, most of the day is filled with teaching and it's a good day when I get to be with the kids, it's a bad day when I have to talk to somebody in the office.

Regardless of whether they claimed not to be responsible for the educational crisis in Oklahoma or attributed blame to other parties, teachers argued blame should not be laid at their feet. Rejection of blame clearly demonstrated denial as identified by IRT.

Evasion of Responsibility

Another approach to repairing one's image involves evading responsibility for the problem. According to IRT evading responsibility involves adding to the script. Instead of solely agreeing with the accusations, those attacked can add another clause to the script. Oklahoma teachers tried to nullify attacks against them, managing the threat to their reputations by explaining the issue occurred because they lacked necessary tools to do their jobs properly. Adding a third clause changed the script to:

1. Oklahoma students are suffering.
2. The reason students are suffering is because teachers are not doing their jobs (or not doing their jobs properly).

3. Teachers are not doing their jobs properly because they do not have the resources allowing them to do so.

Participants' stories about ways the Oklahoma educational system is not working can be seen under the "A Broken System" heading, where teachers repeatedly spoke about a lack of resources. Offering the third statement of the script nullified the criticisms which identified issues were the fault of teachers. Brynn's statement summarizes many of the stories:

> I mean, things are just falling apart, whether it's the roof or the books, the desks. I mean, we're expected to provide everything or fund it somehow and it's, you know, it's just not, it's not practical. You don't ask a construction worker to bring his own backhoe.

Study participants wanted me to understand the Oklahoma educational system hampered them. They evaded responsibility by attributing responsibility for problems to someone or something else.

Reducing Offense

According to IRT, a third way to manage threats to one's image is to reduce the offense, leading others to decide the problem or offense is not as great as it was initially perceived to be (Benoit, 2015). One way to reduce offensiveness is to attack the accuser. The teachers who participated in the study identified and attacked three different accusers: Oklahoma government, school administrators, and parents.

Participants worried about Oklahoma having misplaced values. Hilary singled out state government when she said the walkout "alerted the statehouse education must be addressed and can no longer be sacrificed. Money can no longer be taken away from public education to fund other things." Ellen also implied the problem was related to governmental

budgeting and called out what she viewed as misplaced priorities out on the sign she carried during the walkout.

> One side says "Last ten years prison funding has gone up 34% and education funding has gone down 28%. What's wrong Oklahoma?" The other said "$19,000 a year per prisoner and 9.2-thousand a year per student. What's wrong, Oklahoma?" It's really not right. I knew it was there somewhere. I knew it was the prison funding versus the student funding. It's not. Because that's saying prisoners are more important than kids, and they're not.

Andrea agreed, saying

> Show me what you spend your money on and that's what you value, and we obviously don't value our kids or their education or our schools, but we value giving, you know, corporate tax credits, big companies, which is wrong.

During the walkout thousands of teachers demonstrated at the Oklahoma capitol and challenged the state's priorities. However, government was not the only entity teachers felt they were being accused by. Chad identified school administration as an attacker and pushed back by saying

> There's absolutely no help from administrators in [district] any longer. They're so afraid of being sued by the parents that they won't do anything. And they spend all their time, what do they spend all their time doing? Blaming the teachers for the children that don't know how to behave. That don't want to do work. That don't' want to come to school and they blame the teachers. It's the teacher's fault. Believe it or not it's always the teacher's fault. Johnny put that coat on. Must be that teacher's fault.

Oklahoma media showed there were parents who opposed teachers walking out, with one parent creating a Facebook page titled "End the Oklahoma Walk-Out" because she was concerned her children would lose ground academically while classes were not in session (Mitchell, 2018). Parental opposition prompted Lily to ask:

> Why aren't parents more involved? Why aren't parents up in arms? I mean, people pay taxes that go to school here. Why are they not more concerned about how their tax money is being allocated? Why there aren't better conditions for their kids. Conditions that they're paying for? Better books? Smaller class sizes? Like things that are just research proven to be effective and in an educational setting and I

> honestly – I mean I hate to say that I blame the parents – but the parents are the ones really [who] have more pull in terms of making real change and it surprises me that they were not more like blanket on board. Just like across the board, on board. It surprises me that parents are like "teachers are always complaining."

Teachers pushed back against the idea they were responsible for the problems with Oklahoma education, pointing out how blame should be assigned to the state, school districts, and parents. By pushing back against naysayers, they were working to repair their images.

Flipping the Script

Participants in the Oklahoma teacher study did not tell stories demonstrating how the broken educational system either necessitated their engaging in corrective action or apologizing for their actions/lack of action. Their lack of corrective action or apologies can be easily explained because, although teachers desired to repair their image, they did not believe they were responsible for the problems. However, they actively worked to change the message about what Oklahoma teachers do and create a new narrative. Flipping the script is different than denial. Denial involves either saying "it wasn't me" or finding a different responsible party. In flipping the script, teachers chose neither of these options, instead speaking about how teachers in Oklahoma accomplish a great deal with limited resources. Flipping the script does not evade responsibility but negates the accusation by speaking to how teachers do much more than what the job requires. When they flip the script teachers are not talking about previous actions or events they believe should be viewed favorably but are focusing on how their current actions are positive. Flipping the script is also not an attempt to reduce offensiveness. Teachers are not bolstering in attempt to offset or make up for the damage from the act of failing to meet their students' educational needs or dismissing/minimizing the problem (Benoit, 2015). Instead, they speak to how they help

students overcome despite the limitations placed on them. Alex's statement demonstrates overcoming:

> If I was a legislator I would have been out there bragging we didn't give them a pay raise but we're in the top, but Oklahoma's education system is in the top 25 in the nation. So, we get a lot for our lack of money.

I could not find evidence to support the claim Oklahoma's educational system is ranked in the top 25 nationally but I did find in 2015 Oklahoma was ranked second out of all 50 states "for implementing a comprehensive system that ensures students develop strong literacy skills and read on grade level by the third grade" (Study ranks Oklahoma, 2015). However, Oklahoma's ranking is a different conversation. The point is, teachers were finding ways to articulate they are doing their jobs well, negating the second half of the attack rather than rejecting it.

Alex was not the only participant to talk about how effective Oklahoma teachers are. Andrea also spoke about how much teachers accomplish:

> We have good teachers. Oklahoma teachers are poorly paid, poorly funded, and rank up in the low, low 30s of achievement, which is pretty incredible. It's like saying here's a rake that has only half of the teeth and one glove so good luck there, but we're doing it with pieced-together things and 25-year-old textbooks with duct tape, 'cause everything is better with duct tape.

Andrea not only talked about teachers being successful with less, but she also flipped the script by describing the dedication of Oklahoma teachers. The idea of dedication came up several times during participant interviews and acts to negate the idea teachers are not doing their jobs or doing the jobs properly. Kent said "the Oklahoma teacher is a dedicated professional that works hard and gets a lack of respect." Bailey extended the idea, saying:

> We are dedicated in making this profession the very best that it can be. Teachers are dedicated. They don't want to walk out of the classroom. They want to be in their classroom. I mean, like, it's hard for us to take a sick day, we drive ourselves to school and we're sick. We don't want to miss class with our kids.

According to study participants, teachers give. Oklahoma students may be suffering, but teachers are doing the best they can to alleviate their suffering, even going above and beyond the responsibilities of their jobs. Stella is a librarian in a smaller community, and commented:

> Our students have a lot of needs. I think it's well-addressed that our students are exposed to way more different things than I have ever even been, that I was never exposed to as an adult. And so, we as teachers, we see the need we take care of that need. Whether it is we're giving money, so a student can go to the dentist.

Benoit (2015) did not identify flipping the script as an approach used in repairing one's image. He may not have seen flipping the script because those he studied never considered themselves to be innocent of what they were accused. As the stories in this section demonstrate, the Oklahoma teachers I spoke with expressed how that they and other teachers did considerably more than the job required them to. They wanted to repair their image but did not feel responsible for creating the problems in Oklahoma education.

Teachers used carefully constructed narratives to "foster public sentiment" (Dimitriu, 2012, p. 196). These narratives attempted to reframe public expectations (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, & Roselle, 2013) by offering a coherent narrative designed to persuade listeners to accept their alternate explanations (Zaharna, 2016). They offered these explanations through what has been identified by Benoit as Image Repair Theory (2015).

Awareness, Boiling Frogs, and the Spotlight

What garnered attention of parents, the media, and the public? What caused many Oklahoma teachers to decide in April 2018 they needed to walk out of their classrooms?

Many of the study participants expressed they reached a point where they suddenly realized that public education was in terrible shape. For some of them awareness came

slowly, with a gradual deterioration in conditions and morale, as the following story from Hilary demonstrates:

> This has been the old little phrase you can't just put a frog straight in the boiling water, he'll jump right out, but you put it in cold water and slowly start heating it up, then before you know it, he's dead. Same thing with the funding for public education. It started with just we'll take a little out here, let's just take a little out here, let's just take a little bit, little bit, little bit, and then before we've known it, it's been such a drastic cut that just one two-week [walkout] and a couple bills is not going to repair it.

Teachers reached a breaking point where they felt they had to say something about the environments they were teaching in. Education became a public issue because not saying something became untenable. Having fewer teachers in the state set water to boiling as the following story demonstrates:

> I think what finally tipped teachers over the edge was that you're being held to this standard for educating students and yet you're given nothing to work with. The example I used to use was they put your feet in concrete boots, handcuffed your hands, and said, now swim across the English Channel. That isn't going to happen. That wasn't reality. Yet, every time you brought that up you were perceived as a radical, perceived as a rebel. So, I think it just, what's that expression? Timing is everything. So, we had this perfect storm of discontent. Being asked to do more with less and being constantly reassured that we could do something next year. And next year never materialized. And I think it was just that point that, it was that straw that broke everybody's back. Because there were a lot of teachers trying to walk out that said if we don't get what we need, if we don't get what we want, we're not coming back. And they didn't.

Gretchen's account of what it is like to teach in Oklahoma eloquently describes what many of the study's participants shared in bits and pieces. State funding meant teachers did not have the resources needed to teach and buildings did not meet minimum standards for health and safety. Teachers spent their own money to help fill the gap between what they had and what students needed, but eventually the deprivation and demands led to people to walk away from the state, from teaching, or both. Those left realized if they did not get help they

were going to face a situation they might not be able to recover from. Wyatt, a teacher in a smaller industrial community, commented:

> The system eventually is going to crash itself. Eventually, people are going to you know education will crash ---- will crumple in on itself and it's going to be the state government's fault. It's gonna be the people voting fault, but eventually and as brutal and as ugly as that part of its going to be in terms of the funding collapse that's probably going to be the wakeup call that needs to happen in order for people finally change their minds.

Although Wyatt argued having the educational system collapse would be the impetus to fix the problems in Oklahoma, many other teachers wanted to avoid having issues reach that point.

Jeri explained:

> When that decision was made [to walk out] I felt like it was an important thing to do because I was doing it for my kids. The best thing for my kids was not for me to be in the classroom for that period of time. The best thing was for me to be out on the job trying to advocate for the future of those kids and those kids' kids and that sort of thing.

Acting on behalf of children was not limited to the students who teachers serve. It also entailed thinking of the well-being of their own children. As Lily explained:

> I think a lot of teachers would teach and be happy and fantastic if they could just feed their children. I'm not gonna swear in my interview, but if they could feed their fucking kids you'd have premium people teaching. The best people leave. The best people leave and the turnover in state is shocking.

The well-being of Oklahoma children was a common story shared by study participants. Oklahoma teachers told the narrative that acting for the children required them to speak up about what might have otherwise remained hidden. Although the teachers may have wanted to be able to meet the needs of their own children or their students without bringing educational issues into public space, they were unable to solve societal issues solely through individual actions.

The final explanation teachers offered for why education became a public issue was the issue was already public. Like the old story of the emperor who walked naked through the city until a small child identified his lack of clothes, Oklahoma education was exposed for everyone to see but not everyone wanted to identify what they were seeing. Teachers in Oklahoma in 2018 were already in the public eye. Salaries were publicly available, with many districts posting their step schedules online. Pauline stated in her interview:

> Used to, you know, it's always been public record what our salaries are in our administration, but you'd have to go to the library to get it. Now you just jump on the website and there's all the salary information.

Information about the conditions of the Oklahoma education system was readily available. Test scores and the school A-F report cards were not only on the Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE) website, but many districts mailed reports to parents and local new media covered how their schools were graded (Willert, 2014).

Another subtle sign of the problems in Oklahoma education was the increasing costs being passed on to parents. Schools were posting lengthy lists of school supplies to get needed materials no longer paid for by the state. Many teachers resorted to using DonorsChoose.org, a website allowing individuals and groups to sponsor classrooms (DonorsChoose.org, n.d.). Andrea explained:

> I know that there's videos that I've seen where, and it's, there was a teacher in, was it Tulsa, who had a sign that, you know, she wasn't asking for money, she wanted school supplies, you know, school supplies.

Although the Oklahoma City and Tulsa metropolitan areas are large enough community members might not realize teachers were supplementing their incomes by taking on additional employment, many Oklahoma teachers lived in communities where supplementation was obvious. Hugh taught in a smaller district and said:

> Well, I think number one is people in the public saw teachers working second jobs and I think that was definitely a topic of discussion. I had, for a while I had a second job, I worked at a movie theatre, and I saw parents of my students and stuff all the time and they'd be like. "oh what are you doing here?" Oh, well you know I have to pay my bills.

By the time the walkout became widely discussed, teachers felt problems had reached a point they were visible to anyone who was not actively ignoring them. Exposure was not a choice, it was something that happened. Josh, a charter school teacher, explained:

> I think that once there were certain things that you could no longer ignore going on in Oklahoma, like all of the school districts forced to go to four day weeks and the fact that so many programs have cut speech and debate, or so many schools have cut drama programs, music programs, world language programs, field trips have gone down, all of these things that can no longer be ignored have become so visible. You get the pictures of broken chairs that the students are sitting in or overcrowded classrooms with 40 kids sitting on the heater and sitting on the floor. The books held together with duct tape. That's become so visible I think that's when it had to be a public outcry.

For teachers, exposure meant they had to act. They had to raise awareness. As their stories demonstrate, they had to walk out.

The stories and narratives teachers used to make sense of the walkout will be addressed in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Making Sense of it All

Sensemaking is an active process where observers attempt to understand and interpret events as they develop (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2015) through a "socially rooted process of creating sense or meaning out of information problems, discontinuities, and disconnections" (Westbrook, 2006, p.563) within a preexisting system (Ashmos & Nathan, 2002). Sensemaking is not retrospective but an emergent process which is "ongoing, instrumental, subtle, swift, social, and easily taken for granted" (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005, p.409) and occurs through accessing mental models. Mental models are shared understandings within a group or organization (Mohammed, Ferzandi, & Hamilton, 2010) and allow groups to construct shared meaning. They may even help develop a group identity (Klimoski & Mohammed, 1994). Mental models are intuitive (Hill & Levenhagen, 2008) and dynamic, occurring within "specific social context[s]" (Guiette & Vandenbempt, 2013, p.730).

Narratives provide a way to interpret the world. Sensemaking is one type of interpretation. Actions and relationships are what lead individuals to engage in sensemaking, leading to a process through which shared experiences create identity and culture (Langenberg & Wesseling, 2016). Individuals form groups and organizations through convergence of "mutual interests" and goals (Langenberg & Wesseling, 2016, p.232). Meaning arises by giving attention to lived experience (Weick, 1995) through a collective process (Langenberg & Wesseling, 2016; Nancy, 2000).

As noted in Chapter 2, Oklahoma teachers are not homogeneous. That chapter examines the multiple identities and backgrounds study participants have, although they all have the shared experience of being educators in Oklahoma. Teachers' stories about the walkout are important because narrative is frequently the means through which people make

sense of the world (Feldman, Skoldberg, Brown, & Turner, 2004). RQ 2 seeks to understand how these stories led teachers to engage in sensemaking:

RQ 2: What kinds of stories and narratives do Oklahoma teachers use to make sense of the Oklahoma Teacher's Walkout in April 2018?

Horatio Alger and Individual Success

According to an idea often referred to as the "American Dream," if an individual works hard enough he or she will be successful. Stories abound about average citizens who became billionaires like Bill Gates who founded Microsoft and Mark Zuckerberg who created Facebook in his college dorm room. That both Gates and Zuckerberg dropped out of Harvard and had parents who were successful professionals are facts rarely mentioned. Instead, the men are used as examples of how with hard work and ingenuity anyone can have the same success.

Narrative brings concepts together so that ideas become linked and provide tools for explaining how, what, and why events have meaning (Ryfe, 2006). Stories shared often enough create myths. For myth to form a story must have been shared with multiple individuals with "individual accounts of each story as recitals and [accounts] to the common core as the organizational myth" (Gabriel, 1991, p.860). The Horatio Alger myth, in which individuals overcome challenges, create their own opportunities, and become wildly successful, is dominant in American discourse (Sarachek, 1978).

Acceptance of the Horatio Alger myth makes it harder for those who are not struggling economically to understand the positions of those who do. As Jurkiewicz (2009) pointed out, lack of understanding leads to questions such as "why can't these people just pull themselves up by their bootstraps?" (p.68). With a dominant American myth holding

individuals responsible for improving their positions in life, those who fail to do so are perceived to be unmotivated, lacking initiative, or seeking a handout on the back of others' hard work. Participants in the study talked about how members of the public viewed the walkout through a lens of meritocracy, which Gretchen shared she worked to counteract:

> As an educator, if you even want to insure your spouse, and I remember doing this when I first came here my take-home pay was a total of $1,200 a month, to insure my husband at that time was $600 a month. So, they were asking me to live on $600 a month. And honestly, I'm not making much more than that even with the quote raise that we got. And I'm considered a "veteran teacher" at this point. So, yeah, I'm not seeing this great financial boom. And when people say, well you got the raise why are, this was on social media sites. Because I was hitting every news site and making my commentary about, you know, before you run your mouth, people look at these pay stubs and you tell me what we're making and whether or not you can live on them. Well, you knew that going in. Yes, but going in and expecting to make a livable wage I don't think, I don't think anyone asked us to take a vow of poverty to go into public education.

"Individual success and failure in American society have often been measured in monetary terms" (Rank & Hirschl, 2001, p.651). The poor are not separated from the middle class or wealthy because of a social system or power structure but because of their own actions, because "status differences are merit based" (McCoy, Wellman, Cosley, Saslow, & Epel, 2013, p.308). Teachers in Oklahoma reached the point where they decided they had to speak up about how they deserved better; they had to walk out to demonstrate they merited more than the state had been giving because they had exhausted their other options, as Isabel explained:

> There was nothing else for us to do. Me and my husband have been going down to the capitol on spring break, sometimes on our anniversary, dragging our girls there. I worked several additional jobs. I'm a writer so I wrote several columns for regional magazines and got those types of paychecks coming in. My husband also drives Uber and he gives private softball lessons. Plus, he's a building coordinator; that comes with stipends. He was the instructional technology coach so that came with a stipend. He was the webmaster so that came with a stipend. So, we're doing all these other things, and something had to give. And, it was just, you know, for ten years we had been thinking oh, they're going to take care of us. Oh, they're going to take care of

> us. So, I think that the reason it happened in 2018 specifically was because we had been cut to the quick. We were bleeding. We're bleeding teachers, we're losing kids. When we have to ask parents to bring copy paper, so we can make copies, that is not the way this should be run. I think too, our superintendent Chuck McCauley here in Bartlesville. He's also about our age so he remembers that walkout that happened [in 1990] and remembers thinking that it will never come to this again but that's really the last time we had impactful education legislation and funding. So, that's why I think it came to this because there was no other option. We had exhausted every other option this we knew worked before so we're gonna give it a try again.

Those who are successful take credit for their social status. "High status individuals, motivated to maintain their elevated social positions and the benefits they bestow, are particularly likely to explain their many social advantages in terms of a fair application of effort, talent, and skill" (Kraus & Callaghan, 2014, p.1). Society recognizes success by embracing the explanation that creativity, ingenuity, and/or hard work are the reasons why Jeff Bezos and Bill Gates are now two of the wealthiest men in the world, without considering the upper-class backgrounds both men came from. Although "the American business elite has been predominantly native born, urban, better educated than the general population" and most often comes from a family of origin with higher economic status (Sarachek, 1978, p.439), American culture still teaches that anyone can succeed if they invest time and effort. Teachers reached a point where they needed the rest of Oklahoma to know that the relationship between financial success and time invested was unbalanced, as Andrea's story demonstrates:

> I think everybody just had had enough. I mean, I know people who had two or three jobs. I mean, I have another job. It's, I still have another job in spite of my great raise. So, it's, it's not easy and I don't think any, anybody realizes that it's insulting when somebody tells you that you know what you do is not worth anything because every single person that works and that is a functioning member of society comes through my classroom. You can drop out of high school, but you can't drop out of sixth grade, you have to go through sixth grade. I teach everybody.

Those who are unsuccessful may also take credit for their social status. Accepting the American Dream may make meritocracy a "legitimizing ideology for members of low status groups" (McCoy et al, 2013, p.316), helping those with high status to retain their status. Legitimizing the system contributing to their oppression leads to those who are oppressed becoming the architects of their own social prison, where citizens with lower socioeconomic status buy into the idea that their lives will improve through hard work, despite lacking capital to invest in bettering their lives (Engels & Marx, 2005). The process of the legitimization of oppression in the stories told by Oklahoma teachers is explored at length in Chapter 5.

During the interviews for this study, many participants stated one of the reasons for the walkout was because they needed to set the record straight. They needed the public to know how teaching had changed over the years.

> When people were saying that you know that teachers actually get paid enough money and they're lying about their salaries people started posting their W-2's. A lot of parents were like, "holy crap I had no idea!" Or when people were just saying crazy stuff about they don't really work second jobs. Well then teachers started posting what their second job is and a lot of people once again had no idea. I think a huge part was the media doing stories about that kind of stuff, but really just teachers had to opening up about what it's like to be a teacher. You know, talking about second jobs, posting their paystubs and W-2's. Bringing enlightenment to the fact that a lot of teachers, half of their paycheck goes just for healthcare. I mean, that's like $800 bucks just right there to have your children and wife, to have health insurance on them, and that's not including dental or vision. I think just stuff like that, people posting pictures of their classrooms. I mean their conditions of the books. It's just a lot of stuff the parents had no idea about, and it's because teachers don't really complain. I mean, they've always just done the best with what they have, and a lot of parents just had no idea what the conditions are like, what the textbooks were like, how teachers really do have second jobs. I mean, all the stuff that they do after school to get stipend to make some extra money or just the fact that we're one of the lowest paid states in the country.

As Kris shares in the above story, teachers had to demonstrate to the public how their incomes were unable to meet basic needs, and their demonstration occurred because of the walkout.

Stained Glass and Clear Panes: Social Movements and Framing Identity

In social movements, narratives use frames to demonstrate injustice (Snow & Benford, 1992) while collective action frames are used to galvanize individuals to act (Benford & Snow, 2000). Members of a movement create new codes which act to shape interactions with each other and the public. Use of these new codes allows members to develop different ways of talking and develop new models of how the world should be in order to effect change in a way conforming "to the movement's ideals and values" (Kavada, 2016, p.10). These new codes may be used to reject frames of injustice by changing how situations discussed. Study participants rejected frames blaming them for the economic hardships they faced as teachers in Oklahoma. As Gretchen explained:

> Whether you realize it or not you are signing up for a battle of poverty. I think I get to take home $50 more per paycheck but the nice thing is now I can afford disability insurance where it didn't before. But, I'm thinking to myself, you should have that. You should have that. You shouldn't have to worry about becoming disabled with a state employer. You still have teachers that have to borrow sick leave from each other for long-term illnesses. I still think you see a lot of that poverty.

Low incomes were an unanticipated outcome for becoming teachers.

The Rest of the Story

Several teachers in the study talked about how the walkout provided them the opportunity to educate the public and "set the record straight." Parents and other members of the public had misconceptions about what teachers did or their jobs entailed, and the teachers I interviewed expressed feeling compelled to change those misconceptions. They argued the public did not have clear grasp of what teachers in Oklahoma experienced, and that lack of

understanding colored their comprehension of the issues. Their narrative was that public perception of what it means is to be teacher is either incorrect or incomplete.

Gillian, an elementary music teacher from a smaller Oklahoma city, shared the following story:

> I don't have a budget of my own. My money comes from selling DVDs and pictures of the shows that they do, but even the classroom teachers it takes them a lot for them to get like a new curriculum. I was talking to some of the third grade teachers that I went with, and you know they're doing the very best they can but they have to teach to a test that doesn't have a real curriculum that goes with it because first of all there isn't one, somebody needs to get one, but then they have to actually buy it, the school district has to buy it, and that's a whole other thing. So, they're a little bit like reaching in the dark because of funding.

As someone who did not teach a core subject, Gillian had to raise money to purchase the sheet music for songs her students would sing. However, she wanted me to know teachers who were evaluated based on how well their students did on state tests did not even have curriculum covering the material for those tests. She wanted to "set the record straight."

Wyatt chose not to walk out with his school district even though classes were canceled. He explained how his decision was based partially because he felt the public saw the walkout as a "money grab," but he also talked in his interview about how parents did not understand the issues faced by teachers:

> There were a lot of parents who become quite ugly, especially on social media, because they didn't understand whatsoever. I guess it was kind of one of my contentions in the first place, was regardless of the reason that we had personally for going on the walkout, it's what the walkout represented. So, even though to most of the people who went it was about the funding and not the money or the pay raise so much, there's no way you could disassociate those two. Regardless of what you felt you represented the pay raise and most of the parents predictably didn't see the difference.

Many teachers saw similar public reactions and had to reframe the story of Oklahoma education to gain public support by presenting a different reality. Reframing involved both

providing their own definition about what was happening and controlling the context of the walkout (Fairhurst, 2011). Sabrina stated the walkout was "about advocating for our kids and making sure that the world understood what was actually happening in our classrooms." Lisa also provided context when she stated, "we weren't out there to, you know, better ourselves, we were out there for our kids." Both Sabrina and Lisa focused on the walkout happening for their students, with Sabrina defining the walkout as advocacy.

Preferring one aspect of a story over another can lead other information to fade into the background (Lecheler & de Vreese, 2012). Emphasizing the salience of one aspect of a story over another changes the lens observers use to understand the story (Entman, 1993). The reframing may even appear to be a story in and of itself (Ryfe, 2004). Erica spoke about the conditions in schools around Oklahoma:

> It just got to the point, especially after we've seen things that have happened with storms, like several years ago where the school was almost destroyed, and then seeing where there's flooding when you go and look at a gym and the gym has got, you know, peeling things from the ceiling and whatever. It's just been building now for a long time. I'm also a master teacher, and so I travel around Oklahoma and teach seminars, so I get the opportunity to talk to other teachers. I heard the same thing everywhere I went when they talk about what they're able to do. One school, they don't have Chrome Books. I mean here in [community] we have Chrome Books, they have none. They have a computer lab that may or may not get WIFI for the day. And so, they're basically having to teach with what they have. And the great thing about teachers is we will make do, we'll make do.

Erica's story frames the issue of teaching in Oklahoma as being one of "making do" despite lack of resources and facilities with structural problems.

Funding played a big part in how the walkout was framed, both by opponents and by participants. Carey's story illustrates a frame initially placed upon the issue of Oklahoma education:

> The money interest that I mentioned before, are a big part of the reason for the negative publicity that teachers get. Oh, we don't, you know, the, I'll use… but

> anyway, let's say it's the oil industry that says we don't want to pay any more taxes. Since education is such a big draw on the state budget, it's easy for them to say, for them to blame teachers and say the teachers only work eight months out of a year, or nine months or whatever they want to say, or well I would love to have the teachers' schedule, or well you know all they are is babysitters, and all the things that they say about all the negative things that they say about teachers. And, you know there is whatever. The principals are paid too much, the superintendents are paid too much, all of the things that they say. They put that narrative out there and we had to speak publicly to defend ourselves. And I think the private industry that attacked us and that makes us out to be the bane of the state's existence makes us, you know, we had to defend ourselves. It's too bad because back in the day education was an honored profession and everyone respected teachers. Not that there aren't things that could be changed, there are always things that could be changed, but to say oh we just are inefficient, we just need to cut the waste. Working in a school where I had to empty in my own trash all the time because we can't afford custodians, no, there is no more fat to cut, it's been cut. And all the personnel that used to support raising kids out of poverty, those programs are long gone because those were programs that got cut. So, that forced us into the public space.

Carey was not alone in addressing how teachers believed it important to reframe the story about Oklahoma teachers. Paige's story demonstrates both her disagreement with how the issue was initially framed and her realization the story had to be reframed:

> I think we realized that everybody else didn't realize this was happening. I mean, we knew it was happening because we're all a community of teachers. We know that we've got second jobs and we know that we're running to Walmart after school to get supplies for tomorrow's lab and paying for it with my own checking account because I have to jump through 14 hoops to get a PO signed. We know, we know this about each other, and I guess we didn't realize that other people didn't know this, and I think the fact that, that we suddenly became aware that oh, my gosh, they really think that this isn't happening. I don't think teachers ever intended for it to be a private issue, it was just something that you do because you do it for the kids.

Josh extended Paige's realization:

> There were certain things that you could no longer ignore going on in Oklahoma, like all of the school districts forced to go to four day weeks and the fact that so many programs have cut speech and debate, or so many schools have cut drama programs, music programs, world language programs, field trips have gone down, all of these things that can no longer be ignored have become so visible. You get the pictures of broken chairs that the students are sitting in or overcrowded classrooms with 40 kids sitting on the heater and sitting on the floor. The books held together with duct tape. That's become so visible I think that's when it had to be a public outcry.

Additional exploration of how teachers reframed the story of being a teacher in Oklahoma can be seen in Chapter 3 in the section addressing how teachers used Image Repair Theory to change public perceptions.

Defining Self, Defining Others

Part of an individual's self-concept is derived from the social groups and categories they belong to (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Hogg & Reid, 2006). Individuals may determine their social identities either deductively, identifying what group members have in common, or inductively, where identity is inferred based expression of individuality (Postmes, Spears, Lee, & Novak, 2005). The inductive process occurs because characteristics "emerge as a function of individual personalities or interpersonal attractions within the group" (p.750).

One way many of the teachers who participated in the study defined themselves was as an Oklahoma teacher. Tanya, an English teacher from the Oklahoma City area, stated:

> I am an Oklahoma teacher and I don't want to be a Texas teacher or a Kansas teacher or an Arkansas teacher or a Missouri teacher. I'm not really changed by the walkout. I am the same teacher I was before April, and I'll be the same teacher for the next 10 to 15 years. I'm not going anywhere, but it hurts sometimes to be a teacher, and to know that there are people who do not think that you and the job that you do are really all that important. And I think that the walkout more than anything, we knew that those people were out there before the walkout, but the walkout brought those people out of the woodwork who really don't think that teachers are really all that important, and that hurts. But, it makes me want to teach better and prove them wrong.

Tanya identifies herself as both a teacher and an Oklahoman, providing a story teachers could use to deductively identify shared characteristics. Norah, an art teacher from a small, rural school district, echoed the sentiment:

> The Oklahoma teacher is here because they choose to be. There are other options, there are better options, but most of us stay because we care about Oklahoma. This ship is sinking in a lot of ways but most of us are there trying to plug the holes so that Oklahoma the ship can stay afloat.

I do not know whether Tanya or Norah have met each other, but their common story offers them the ability to identify with each other.

The ability to see themselves are unique individuals and observe diversity may create a sense of solidarity among a group's members and "strengthen the group's ability for coordinated action and enhance its efficacy and associated feelings of collected power" (Postmes, Spears, Lee, & Novak, 2005, p. 749). In the social movement literature, members of the movement must juggle the challenge of creating a sense of shared identity while demonstrating how the movement's members are different from others (Gamson, 1997). In other words, participants must define both who is included in the movement and who is excluded from the movement. Collective identity forms when individuals identify "cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, practice, category, or institution" (Polletta & Jasper, 2001, p. 285). Through a dynamic process, identities of those who support a movement, those who oppose it, and those who remain neutral emerge (Hunt, Benford, & Snow, 1994). Those involved can shift between identities because boundaries are typically symbolic (Gamson, 1997). These shifting identities may explain why several study participants commented on seeing community support decrease as the walkout continued into a second week.

In her interview Vicky talked about how she saw these different types of responses or identities in her community:

> Some people were very against it [the walkout], "You know you guys just be thankful you have a job, you have all the summers off anyway. You don't work, you just work eight to three and then you're done." And, we had those others who were very much on the line with us that were saying, "Hey! They don't work just in the school year they do classes all summer, they prepare and get things ready for kids all summer." I mean, they were very supportive of us. And I even actually heard one say, "You know, if you think they get paid enough go spend a week in the room or in the school just for a watching eye, just doing nothing other than watching. Or go in and

> volunteer in the classroom and you'll certainly see what they're experiencing, what they're going through."

A sense of identity was important to defining who supported or opposed the walkout, but identity was not limited to "being a teacher." Participants in the walkout also had to realize continuing the status quo was untenable. Josh, who teaches fine arts at a public charter school, explained the challenges of reaching this realization:

> It almost had to get to a point where it was almost unbearable before people really decided to put their foot down, because we're taught to be appreciative of what you have and to make do with what you have and just the idea that the cuts have been made year after year after year to the point where last year's seniors, the last time that they had had what is considered a fully funded education was when they were first graders, so for an entire group of kids to make it almost through their entire public education and having cuts in significant, or in consecutive years, it was just astounding to me and I thought something's got to change.

Despite having the same career, teachers do not have homogeneous values and ideas. Valuing support for public education does not equate to belonging to a specific political party. Although it may be easy to think of teachers as a uniform voting bloc, teachers can and often do have divergent viewpoints. The next section in this chapter will discuss how diverging views and attitudes led to stories of competing goals.

Too Many Cooks: Whose Walkout is it Anyway?

Many of the teachers I interviewed told me the walkout happened in April 2018 because there were leaders who set events in motion. In response to being asked what the walkout was about, Paige said:

> Broken promises. Repeatedly broken promises that things were going to change from the capital and they just didn't over and over and over. I think that we'd finally just had it. And I think there was finally a person to organize and kind of, I think, the leadership that led the walkout stepped up and got organized and there was finally, instead of talk there was some action.

Despite agreement from participants in this study about leaders stepping forward to coordinate the walkout, the leadership identified varied from individual to individual. There were competing stories about why the walkout occurred in April 2018 and how events unfolded. In this section I will first identify and explain the different stories participants told, and then discuss the implications of those differences.

The Bartlesville Story

On February 13, 2018, Chuck McCauley, superintendent of the Bartlesville School District, sent an email survey to other superintendents of Oklahoma districts asking how many of them would support a teacher walkout. In response, districts "with 25 percent of all 695,000 public school students in Oklahoma" (Eger, 2018) indicated they would support a walkout. McCauley's actions and the response by other superintendents was reported on by the Tulsa World in February 2018. Bartlesville School District was the first to publicly suggest a walkout, and as Isabel, one of the study participants noted, "Bartlesville was the first to call it and come back" when public support began to wane.

Bartlesville developed a plan for increasing state funding, shown in Figure 2. "When OEA failed to propose a revenue plan, Bartlesville then led the way to a resolution for FY19 by designing and promoting its original Time Is Now plan" (TimeisnowOK.com FAQ, n. d., para. 5). The Time is Now proposal, with the assistance of Representative Earl Sears, was used as the framework for the plan eventually passed by the Oklahoma legislature in March 2018 (TimeisnowOK.com, n. d.).

THE NEEDS	THE COST (millions)	REVENUE SOURCES	FUNDING (millions)
OKLAHOMA PUBLIC SCHOOLS:		5% gross production tax	$ 200
$6,000 teacher pay raise	$ (366)	Income tax deduct. cap	$ 106
Restore school formula funding	$ (115)	$1.00/pack cigarette tax	$ 163
(available for support raises)		Other tobacco taxes	$ 13
		3¢/gal gas and 6¢/gal diesel tax	$ 113
STATE OF OKLAHOMA:		$1/MWh renewables tax	$ 23
Core services funding	$ (219)	Ball/dice gaming	$ 22
(fill budget hole; available for raises)		Lodging tax	$ 60
TOTALS	$ (700)		$ 700

Figure 2. The Original Time is Now (Bartlesville) plan. From *TimeisnowOK.com*, n.d. Retrieved February 17, 2019 from https://sites.google.com/view/thetimeisnowok/home/original-plan-details/. Copyright [2018] by The Time is Now, Oklahoma! Reprinted with permission.

Despite finding news articles backing up stories about Bartlesville School District having a prominent role in the walkout and negotiations for funding, only 2 out of the 49 teachers I interviewed mentioned Bartlesville.

The Grassroots Story

On February 22, 2018 West Virginia's teachers went on strike, closing schools in "all 55 counties" (Larimer, 2018). In response, Stillwater teacher Alberto Morejon searched for a group on Facebook supporting an Oklahoma walkout. When he did not find one, he created the group "Oklahoma Teacher Walkout – The Time is Now!" Within 10 days the page had over 65,000 members (Eger & Hardiman, 2018). Despite a similarity in names, Morejon's Facebook page was not affiliated with the Bartlesville TimeisnowOK.com site.

Many of the teachers I interviewed believed the walkout to be grassroots based. As Wyatt said:

> I think it was just kind of one of those contagious ideas. Somebody suggested it and a bunch of people thought it was a good idea. I thought it was very telling that it was a grassroots movement as opposed to a union movement.

Many of the teachers I interviewed referred specifically to Morejon's Facebook group when I asked how they heard about the walkout, mentioning him by name. Others talked about how the movement started because of social media. For example, Kendra said the walkout "started as the most grassroots movement ever, I mean, just from a Facebook page." These participants identified the movement as action which began with the teachers.

Several participants stated the walkout occurred because of grassroots efforts and also expressed the role of the unions was limited. Chloe, a special education teacher from a community based around a military base, stated:

> I think the teachers with the groups led this. I was so put-off by POE and OEA. OEA wants to talk about how they had the sound system and the potty thingies out there and yes, it's true we probably wouldn't have had as much momentum and willingness to be out there without the music and the stage and the potties, that's a big deal. And POE wants to say, how much they worked with the legislators even though their big schtick before that was that they're not political. So, I think that they all played a part, but I think it was just the teachers and the individual teacher groups that really kept us going.

Some participants attempted to remain neutral in their analysis, as this statement from Tanya demonstrates:

> I think they didn't really think that we do, but then when they realized that we would, then they wanted to support us. And I could be completely wrong about that because I really, I wasn't a member before the walkout. Just this past year I just didn't renew my membership in OEA, so they weren't really communicating with me. But it didn't seem like they were even talking about it until the Facebook page and the, pretty much the inevitability that it was going to happen.
> Robin believed the unions were involved in the walkout but noted their support waned the longer it dragged on.

> At first I felt like they were pretty supportive, but towards the end I think they made a comment, but something about the walkout costing them too much money in portapotties and stuff like that, it kind of belittled what the teachers were trying to do, I felt, but. So, at the beginning I feel like they were supportive, but as it continued on, I think they were, they kind of wanted to get it over with.

Robin made it a point to tell me she wasn't sure how accurate her information about the union was because she had already made the decision to accept a position in Texas, but her feelings remained the same regardless of her factual accuracy. Others were more explicit in their dismissal of the Oklahoma unions. When explaining why she believed the walkout was a grassroots effort, Sabrina said:

> It [the walkout] wouldn't have happened without it. OEA would have never walked out in the first place, period. They would have never even considered it because a couple years ago when I was still an OEA member, there was a group of us we'd gone to the capitol. I think it was 2014 maybe. I was a sophomore because I think I was in my first semester of clinical teaching and I had gone to the capitol in April that year and we were meeting with legislators and it was actually brought up while we were there. There were like maybe 200 people or something that were there. That was like our educational advocacy. It was brought up, we needed to do something drastic people aren't going to wake up. Well, what if we like went on strike. At that point it was the strike idea because the whole actual walk out hadn't become a concept yet and OEA kind of indicated, no, that's never going to happen.

Chloe added to her initial assessment of the role the unions played in the walkout later in her interview and said:

> I don't think it would have happened anyway. OEA wanted the original strike date to be I believe April 24th. So, I looked it up, why April 24th, or April 27th, April 26th, I can't remember. So, I looked it up what happens on that day in the legislature and that was the last day that they could submit legislative pieces. So, by that time the entire process would have been essentially over. That's just wrong. It's completely wrong and sneaky. And that's when everybody started dumping their OEA funds, I mean OEA memberships. The rating on their Facebook page went to like 0.1 because everybody was on their Facebook page calling bullcrap like it was. I think that's whenever the grassroots movement and Alberto and the Oklahoma Walkout page, I think that's whenever it was really able to come in and provide the leadership that OEA was not going to supply.

As the above stories demonstrates some study participants believed the unions played a role in the walkout, but saw that role as supportive, supplemental, or occurring solely because the teachers forced their hand.

Unions in Oklahoma

Oklahoma has three teachers' unions: American Federation of Teachers (AFT), Oklahoma Education Association (OEA), and Professional Oklahoma Educators (POE). OEA is the state chapter of the National Education Association (NEA) and has the largest presence in Oklahoma, with offices located near the capitol building. AFT is also a local chapter of a national organization but only has about 2700 members in Oklahoma (Kamenetz & Lombardo, 2018). POE is not a member of a parent organization but is an association in and of itself.

Despite many teachers telling stories about how the unions did not lead the way, there were others who spoke favorably of them while also identifying a grassroots element in the walkout. Deanne was a teacher from a small, rural community who shared:

> I think POE and OEA, they did a great job, they did exactly what they thought they should do. I respect them. I think they both have great leaders. Um, but there's a lot of teachers that are not members of either because they can't afford it. We don't have to be a member of the, of a union. I work with teachers that cannot afford the 22 dollars a month to be POE. Now, I do not know how much OEA is, but I know it's more expensive. But that's why I think the grassroots came to play, also, is not all of the thousands and thousands of teachers and administrators and parents and students that were up there during the walkout are a member of either one of those. And so, that's why, I think the unions helped, I think they knew who to get in touch with to get on TV and to get the media ball rolling. So, that was, that's a very grateful thing that I have for them, because you know, who's going to come to [community] and listen to me. You know? Channel four's not going to show up here, you know. I don't know anybody that's going to do that. And so, they, they have a platform and they used it, and I think it was appropriate and I think they did a very good job in doing that.

Three of the participants I interviewed have leadership roles within OEA. Alex had been teaching in Oklahoma for more than 40 years at the time of the walkout and was the local representative for his school district. He said:

> Every time there's been teachers who go to the capital and protest something, usually it's teacher wages, I usually go. As the leader of our teacher association here, I feel

> it's my duty to do that, and so I was happy to see that finally someone was doing something so that maybe they [the legislature] would take notice. [I heard about the walkout] through OEA. I meet with the OEA, people from OEA once a month, I meet with them. But I talk to them once a week or two or three times a week sometimes. I get emails from them, I get phone calls, I'm on their list so I get, found out that way.

Karen was involved in planning the walkout with OEA. When asked how she heard about the walkout, she replied:

> We had been planning for it for over 18 months, so in my position that's kind of a hard question to answer. But it, well, the time's come. So, we figured that we would have to take some sort of job action if we did not get funding for public education. And so, you know, just resigned to the fact that we're going to be working with our locals and building up to the possibility while still trying to do everything we can to get the funding passed.

Like Alex, Andrea was an OEA representative at her school and shared the following story:

> I know that they had been talking about it and planning it for more than two years, I don't know that they're really grassroots. The only grassroots that I saw was when OEA originally came out and said April 23rd, there was a groundswell because we know that testing, they [the legislature] don't care, they'll say fine, go on strike, don't come back, we don't care, the tests are done we don't need you. And because we know that that's how they feel, we don't need you, you did your duty, tests are done and that's all that matters, cause that's what it starts to feel like. As long as we get the tests done it doesn't matter. So, it had to interfere with testing.

Despite most study participants stating the walkout happened because of the actions in West Virginia and the rapid sharing of ideas over social media, those actively involved with OEA told a different story.

Some teachers who participated in the walkout did not believe it started as a nonunion movement, but their stories about which union led the way differed. Annie, who teaches in a smaller community not far from Oklahoma City, spoke positively about OEA:

> I am actually a member of OEA, and even though there were moments where I was like, that's a little disappointing, that's still what OEA did there. I felt like they were right about the ending time. I know lots of people don't believe that, but I also know lots of people do. You know, I think Alicia Priest was in a very, very tough position, very tough. You know? She's just one person, you know, and right before this all happened, well actually, almost in the midst of it, she was reelected to that position,

> you know, by all the people who had been complaining about her. So, actually, they, they were the organizing structure for that. If it hadn't been for them, it wouldn't have happened like that.

Norah was pleased with the actions of OEA and dismissive of the other unions. She told me:

> One of the associations that is not the OEA like to talk about how supportive they were and how for it they were when on their website specifically they said they did not support a job side action, whatever it is, the walkout. They didn't support the walkout. But they took credit for it when the OEA was the one who paid tens of thousands of dollars for everything. I think the bill for the porta-potties alone was $15,000 I want to say, all of that's paid by the NEA and the OEA. So, the National Education Association and the Oklahoma Education Association did a lot, and then the other groups I feel took credit for things they weren't involved with and directly disagreed with. But once they saw the momentum and things happening, they decided they wanted to be part of it. So, overall, NEA, OEA, I was pleased with how that went and the job they did and how they headed it up. That's not a small task to organize a giant rally and event.

On the other hand, Greg believed the funding package passed because OEA and POE worked together:

> POE worked with the legislatures very well – excellent plan. We called it 6-step or 60-step plan or something like that, get 60,000 dollars and they combined the first three steps in the first week. OEA was more of a public face to it, I think while POE worked within the legislation. I mean, so it was kind of a combination of the two that got what we got.

Pauline was a member of POE and felt they represented teachers while OEA went beyond what they should have done:

> POE was sending out information specifically saying that we are not with the OEA, and they disagreed on how it was going to be done. And I don't remember the particulars about what things they were wanting; they were trying to add on state employees and hourly workers and non-certified workers. And POE was very, I mean we would get emails almost every day saying this is not what we are pushing for, we are pushing for this. I don't know what it was exactly. I feel like it was almost unnecessary for OEA to try to push for all of that on our behalf, which wasn't our behalf. It was other people's behalf, and rightly so they probably should have raises but it just seemed like they were going too far.

Kent believed POE to be the driving force behind the funding package passed prior to the walkout:

> I'm a POE member, and what I understand was the majority directly got an increase in funding in those things that were negotiated mainly by POE, the Republican majority leadership really would only talk to POE, and it felt like every, every benefit that we actually gained, POE negotiated.

As the range of stories about the unions demonstrates, teachers did not have consistent narratives about their roles. Teachers did not have consistent narratives about who started the walkout, with credit being divided between Bartlesville, Alberto Morejon, and the unions. Teachers did not have consistent narratives about what they were asking for from the walkout, because the Bartlesville plan, the OEA plan, and the POE plans were all different. These divergent stories demonstrate competing goals and competing leadership.

Following the Oklahoma walkout several other states and cities have also had teachers walk out of their classrooms with varying degrees of success. Future research focused upon how unified leaders of each walkout related to the final outcomes is merited.

Guessing Games and Tug-of-War

As discussed in the preceding section, study participants shared a wide range of stories about the origination and leadership of the walkout. Lack of clear, centralized leadership may have contributed to how the walkout ended. Social movements are often led by citizen groups or political figures, but inexperienced leadership can struggle to maintain momentum (Gitlin, 2003). I analyze participants' stories about leadership during the walkout in this section.

Competing Goals, Competing Leadership

Bridgette, a special education teacher in Oklahoma City who had been teaching for over 20 years at the time of the walkout, was a representative for AFT. She made the following comment:

> It was disheartening for me, and I was, I was an AFT member, I was not an OEA and I was not POE, but every, it's like, most of us had been out there for a long time, it's like all three entities had their own agenda. And to me, when I go out there and it felt like they were also, they were each entity of union, they were all trying to gain more members, so profit bearing. So, to me, I thought this is all coming down to money. But I thought if those unions would have worked together as one instead of three, I would have thought it would have been a better plan for all of us.

Chloe spoke about the walkout having multiple leaders, but she spoke about grassroots leadership as well as union leadership.

> I really respected Alicia Priest when she went out there and said here's our list of demands. I thought they were a little high, but I think I was one of the only ones that realized that this is a negotiation and you have to go high and meet in the middle. I was kind of shocked at how many teachers didn't understand that. So, I appreciated that leadership. I appreciated the leadership of Alberto Morejon or however you say his name. I didn't really see any leadership from POE like as a forefront. And then in our community I think that the grassroots leadership in our community and in our group of people was really huge. So, you know, there were just a lot of things that were happening. I think that the leadership came from a bunch of different place.

Having multiple parties involved can be beneficial, but if those parties do not agree on who the spokesperson or negotiator should be, confusion may develop about who has the ability to agree to terms or make decisions. Isabel spoke about competing ideas during the walkout:

> The problem that I saw was that, after that survey came out to the other superintendents and *Tulsa World* broke that, then we saw, instead of people coming and saying okay Bartlesville, tell us what to do next, we saw several different groups saying okay, well we've got to get on this. So we've had Alberto Morejon who started up his group out of Stillwater and then we had Larry Cagle who did the Oklahoma Teacher's United out of Tulsa and then we had the Angela Clark Little Oklahoma Parents and Educators Public Education, whatever, OKPEPE that had all of that going. And I feel like each of those had started a movement at some point and we needed, we were all grassroots, and we needed to come together on one lawn and we weren't necessarily doing that.

Hilary, an elementary teacher from the Tulsa area, spoke in her interview about how competing goals and leadership were noticed by more than just the teachers who participated in the walkout.

> Legislators, in private meetings, they would tell us we can tell you guys aren't all a united front because it, I mean, think about how many teachers are in Oklahoma, and think about how even within your own family, getting five people to agree on the same restaurant is nearly impossible, somebody's going to be disappointed, so then you take however many teachers are in the state of Oklahoma, and you've got some school districts, they don't feel the crunch of what I just described. Maybe they don't have a school that has 16 different languages. Maybe they don't have a school that is 98 percent poverty. So, you have those little bubbles of the schools within Oklahoma that are thinking I don't know what you guys are talking about, our, we're doing great over here. Well, you're doing great because of your private sectors that are pouring into your schools. So, you look at the state funding formula and the schools which depend upon the state funding formula, they're drowning. So, the grassroots, it was needed because that's what empowered the teachers. But the conflict, going back to your previous question, about the teacher unions, and so that's where I think it helped us, but it also hurt us because everything happened so quickly so there wasn't time to really get everybody organized, and there were too many leaders trying to organize and the followers didn't know who to follow.

Many of the parties identified by the teachers as having leadership roles in the walkout had not led similar activities previously. The leaders at Bartlesville School District and Alberto Morejon were individuals who acted because "the time is now" for something to happen, working at the grassroots level. Willow, a Spanish teacher from the Oklahoma City area, made the following suggestion about OEA:

> Alicia Priest had not, to my knowledge, been in anything like this before. It's not like she had had experience negotiating anything like this in another state. I did hear, I thought that they had some national help that had been sent in, now, if they did maybe those people didn't gauge or situation appropriately or didn't know the components involved in our legislature. But, I worked for an association, I took a four-year break from teaching. I worked for the Oklahoma Bankers Association. So, having worked for an association, a non-profit, somebody that lobbies for bankers, I know that in a crisis sometimes the person who is at the helm in all the smooth sailing may not be the person best-suited to lead you through that type of crisis and maybe that was the case here. I mean, who's to say. I'm sure everyone was doing the best they could at the time. But maybe, who knows, you'd have to ask Alicia if there are things she'd have done differently. I don't know that I could have done any better.

Willow's comment implies Alicia Priest, who was president of OEA at the time of the walkout, was in an unfamiliar role. Participants' stories indicate the teachers saw the most visible leaders of the walkout to be learning how to lead a social movement as events

unfolded. Whether other leaders would have handled the walkout differently is a guessing game, but experience may have made a difference in how negotiations were handled. Both Morejon and Bartlesville served as catalysts for grassroots action with much of their efforts appearing online. Tufekci (2013) suggests when a movement mobilizes members through social media without developing an infrastructure it may hamper negotiations, possibly because the movement's leadership has to navigate unfamiliar territory.

I focus on participant stories about the Oklahoma teacher's walkout in this dissertation, but it is important to remember teacher walkouts happened in other states as well during the first half of 2018. West Virginia finished their statewide strike in March. There were also walkouts in Kentucky, Arizona, Colorado, and North Carolina (Van Dam, 2019).

Social movements go through stages. Initially, participants may desire to bring attention to an issue before the issue becomes of importance to a wider population but can lack cohesion. As a movement gains momentum and members become unified around central goals, the "movements can play a role in creating and expanding their own opportunities" (Sawyers & Meyer, 1999, p.202). The Oklahoma walkout may have struggled to unify around specific demands because the movement was emerging, but as other states also walked out the message of making change through civic action became prominent. A theme of civic engagement was part of the stories told by many of the teachers I spoke with. The majority of study participants spoke about how they would be voting in November in hope of changing the composition of the state legislature.

Most teachers I spoke to indicated doing "something" during the walkout. The following exchange I had with Paige is representative of multiple conversations:

Cheryl: Did you participate?

Paige: Absolutely.

Cheryl: What helped you decide whether or not to get involved?

Paige: There was no decision. I was going to, I was going. If they were going, I was going. I was ready. I'm still ready. My, my raise has amounted to 300 dollars a month. And, and I'm not ungrateful for it, but it's 300 dollars a month.

Even Kent, who was one of the two teachers who stated they were actively opposed to the walkout, still made appointments and went "to the capitol twice" to meet with his legislators. However, volunteers may be initially energized to act or advocate, but energy and involvement decreases over time (Han, Sparks, & Towery, 2017), especially if the leadership does not delegate "true responsibility" (Han, 2009, p.119). Being responsible for specific outcomes, regardless of how small the responsibility may initially be, leads to a greater sense of commitment to a movement or organization (Han, 2009). On the other hand, limited responsibility may contribute to weak identification with a group and lower investment (Vugt & Hart, 2004).

If the walkout had ended and teachers had returned to their classrooms without shared goals to keep them invested in the movement, the stories participants told me could have been very different. The teachers gave themselves responsibilities. They became responsible for campaigning for state office, either for themselves or on another's behalf, and they became responsible to vote.

Remember in November

Competing leadership during the walkout could have led teachers to walk away from the movement. The decision by many teachers to run for office when the legislature was not bending to demands may have developed an investment in civic action by individuals who

would not have otherwise been involved. As Bridgette said, “You know, before this walkout, teachers really didn’t vote much.” Chapter 6 discusses teachers’ civic engagement in more detail, but Michelle summarizes the impact of having the walkout followed by determination to elect candidates who better represented teachers to the state legislature:

> I think people woke up and said okay it’s time for us to be a little bit more active. And so I think there’s going to be, I think there’s going to be a lot of changes, a lot of turnover. And I think people are going to, I think there’s going to be a record number of people voting that haven’t in the past, so I think it’s just kind of a wakeup call.

How individuals assess their capabilities affects their choice of action (Farman, Riffe, Kifer, & Elder, 2018), according to self-efficacy theory. It analyzes what individuals “can do rather than will do” because “can is a judgment of capability; will is a statement of intention” (Bandura, 2006). Individuals may focus upon what their group can achieve together or harbor doubts about personal abilities (Velasquez and LaRose, 2015) Self-efficacy can affect goalsetting and group member’s expectations (Bandura, 1995).

Over the course of the interviews I held for this study, based on comments by early participants about how excited they were teachers were becoming politically engaged I began asking teachers what they would choose if they had to pick between getting everything they asked for in the walkout or having teachers become more involved. Brynn, an elementary special education teacher, said:

> I think teachers being more politically engaged would be my choice because of the longer lasting effect. Electing more women, engaging more voters and changing the mindset of the public is more powerful and transformative than getting the raises and funding we sought for fellow staff and the classrooms.

Of those asked, 21 teachers were in full agreement with Brynn. Another 6 were torn, as Carey’s comment illustrates:

> I don't know if you could have got one without the other. You understand? That end, in, in fighting for the raises, for the funding, people became more politically aware, if that makes sense. And if I had to choose one or the other, boy I don't know.

Only 3 of the teachers I asked the question would choose concessions rather than greater engagement.

Realization of a need to be personally involved in the political process in Oklahoma was repeatedly mentioned by study participants. Although teachers expressed concern about the leadership during the walkout, at the end of the day they spoke on the need for them to act moving forward. The walkout began as a collective action, but at the end of the day teachers realized individual acts were equally essential for changing the state of education in Oklahoma.

Chapter 5: Caged or Free

Personal goals can motivate action generated by "specific life concerns" (Han, 2009, p.13). Stories provide a means to interpret meaning behind action, leading to RQ 3:

How do stories and narratives shape Oklahoma teachers' expressions of public and private action?

I will analyze the question by exploring a new paradigm I am calling the *Coercion of Social Responsibility*. I will also build upon ideas of motivation and participation in American politics introduced by Han (2009).

The Responsibility Trap

Coercive control is the use of nonviolent tactics to maintain dominance over another (Crossman & Hardesty, 2018; Hamberger, Larsen, & Lehrner, 2017). It is a component of intimate partner violence, where abusers use social power to exert authority over their partners in an ongoing feedback loop which influences victims' responses, leading to "constraint through commitment" (Crossman & Hardesty, 2018, p.203). Coercion can be either overt or covert (Pitman, 2017). Crossman and Hardesty's (2018) study of women who experienced coercive control within marriage prior to divorcing found societal pressures and expectations hampered their ability to act in their own interests, eventually causing "feelings of constraint" to become "feelings of being controlled" (p.200). To maintain their relationships, sometimes women internalized and accepted the constraint (Crossman & Hardesty, 2018; Raven, 1993). Coercive control occurs when someone else targets another through imposition or withholding, influencing the target's behaviors, and even leading to the target feeling a sense of obligation or responsibility (Dutton & Goodman, 2005, p.245).

Compliance can arise from "social norms and expectations" (Crossman & Hardesty, 2018, p.205).

Participants in my study had multiple narratives of external constraint in relation to teaching in Oklahoma, leading me to identify parallels between teachers and victims of emotional abuse in a phenomenon I am calling the *Coercion of Social Responsibility*. Several participants' stories of external imposition on teachers due to Oklahoma's broken educational system are addressed in Chapter 4, and I will elaborate upon this idea further in this chapter. In the *Coercion of Social Responsibility* individuals internalize messages about the roles they should fulfill in society as part of their employment. Internalization occurs when careers are assessed as vital to meeting the social needs; nurses, teachers, social workers all serve the public good. Coercive control does not only require individuals to act in a specific manner, but those controlled may also internalize and accept this control (Raven, 1993) even when working conditions or personal desires would otherwise lead them to leave. Many teachers accepted the expectations they believed society placed upon them, and this acceptance controlled them not only at the surface level, but internally as well. Bailey's explanation of what it is like to be a teacher provides an example of internal control:

> It's really, really hard. It's a lonely job. And so, I don't think I'll ever really leave because I'm too dedicated to my kids. I think it's exhausting work, but I think it has to be done. Somebody has to stay and love these babies.

As the above statement illustrates, despite the challenges of the job and feeling "lonely," Bailey internalized a sense of responsibility for the students she teaches. She accepted the expectation she was the "somebody" who needs to care for her "babies." Although not explicitly stated, her statement implies Bailey felt if she did not stay others might not. She was not alone. Concern about what would happen to Oklahoma students if the

teacher were to leave was voiced by more than one study participant. Having a sense of obligation acted to constrain them, leading them to remain in Oklahoma despite the personal costs.

> I'm not leaving because if we all leave, who's going to be here for the kids? We can't all leave, we can't do it. I will do what I have to do and make through it and, you know, gripe if I want to about not having the money, gripe about not having the budget, but at the end of the day, I'm still going to do what I have to do, and do the best that I can. Come up with ways, and that's what teachers do. We make things.

As Deanne's story demonstrates, many teachers internalized the idea of serving their students. Internalization led them to remain in a situation where they continued working despite the personal costs, because they felt responsible for their students.

Internalization of social responsibility may also explain why some teachers opposed the walkout: they felt it was a violation of the expectations they had agreed to meet. As Wyatt said,

> It's not like I had no idea what teacher pay was going to be. I did a lot of research into that ahead of time and certainly I knew that I would never get paid as much as I felt that I would deserve or that teachers deserve in general. I knew ahead of time exactly what I was getting into. And so, while teachers absolutely need more money – probably, you know, definitely more money than even the raise gave us – and while it's close to criminal the kind of funding that the state is giving to Oklahoma educators, I don't think that it's entirely honest for me to know what I was getting into, having accepted the pay ahead of time, knowing pursuing this career that it would never be enough, and then turn around after having accepted it and say I want more. I'm going to protest until I get more.

In this internalization pushing back against expectations was, for Wyatt, the wrong action to choose.

When they choose to remain in untenable situations others may blame victims for their circumstances (Storer, Rodriguez, & Franklin, 2018). Observers may not realize or understand underlying reasons for the decision to stay may include abusers imposing limits on how or where the victim may act (Sharp-Jeffs, Kelly, & Klein, 2018), emotional

dimensions including a "strong commitment to the relationship, shame and self-blame, and optimism for improvement" (Hendy, Eggen, Gustitus, McLeod, & Ng, 2003, p.163), family or societal expectations (Grigsby & Hartman, 1997), fear of retaliation (Storer, Rodriguez, & Franklin, 2018), inability to cognitively process that the relationship is harmful (Baly, 2010), lack of resources (Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Stephens, Hamedani, Markus, Bergsicker, & Eloul, 2009), and poor social support (Hendy, Eggen, Gustitus, McLeod, & Ng, 2003). I will provide examples demonstrating how the stories of participants about teaching in Oklahoma addressed many of the reasons listed in the preceding sentence.

Standardized testing and longer days are two ways the educational system in Oklahoma imposed limitations upon teachers.

> Kids should be able to celebrate with "hey I came in and I didn't know any of my alphabet and now I can read on a second grade level and hey I may be a fifth grader but that's a huge accomplishment." Teachers should be able to be excited about that and not have to worry about reporting to some stupid state testing oh well your kid didn't pass a state test. What does that solve? You know, the testing industry is a two-billion-dollar industry, how much money, how many pencils would that buy? How many chairs would that buy? You know, give all the teachers a hundred thousand dollars, let's see what they can do with it. But we give it to the testing industry and we give it to this person so they can grade this and tell us that we're losers year after year because we're teaching the kids that come from a disadvantaged house, because you know their mom is working 80 hours a week and they're taking care of their siblings when they get home. They don't have the same privileges. It just makes me so frustrated. It's like those kids cannot catch a break.

Although Hadleigh's story focuses on the students she taught, her frustration with how testing rules controlled her ability to support her students in ways she felt were appropriate is obvious.

Lily was a teacher for one of the highest ranked districts in Oklahoma. Testing was not a concern she raised in her interview, but she felt constrained by class sizes and the number of students she was required to teach.

> In Oklahoma a typical week as a teacher is utter chaos. I mean, coming from two other states where a full schedule is considered 5 classes and they have legal limits on class size to then teach 6 class in a state that has no limit on class size so, you've extended your day, you have more kids. I'm fortunate to have fallen into a district which is pretty socioeconomically advantaged so, the kids are at least coming like having eaten breakfast, having basic lit---, Exposure to literature is there, those fundamental things are, but the volume is unhealthy.

Several participants shared stories demonstrating an emotional dimension to their continued commitment to teaching in the state, as Norah's comment demonstrates:

> The Oklahoma teacher is here because they choose to be. There are other options, there are better options, but most of us stay because we care about Oklahoma. This ship is sinking in a lot of ways but most of us are there trying to plug the holes so that Oklahoma the ship can stay afloat. So, I think the Oklahoma teacher's story is one of dedication, exhaustion and hope for things to get better cause there's not much further.

Many teachers spoke about how they kept hoping the state would act to take care of the problems with the educational system before the walkout was organized. Ellen explained her thoughts prior to the walkout:

> I hope that the legislature gets its act together and realize that these kids are the most important resource that we have. And they need to realize that if they don't start paying the teachers, they're wanting high quality but they're not paying for it. So, the high quality is walking out the door and out of the state. So, I was hoping the legislature would make a turnaround before the walkout, but they didn't.

Cynthia faced family members not understanding what was happening to her as an Oklahoma teacher:

> My sister didn't know that there was a ton of stuff that we do. She didn't realize that I did that. She didn't realize how limited my sick leave was or my medical leave or she didn't realize that my first year of teaching doesn't count. My first year of teaching doesn't count until I retire and then, you know, and it might if I've got my 120 sick day leaves accumulated. My first year of teaching doesn't even count. She didn't know that.

Emily's story contains several elements which can be used to explain why those who experience coercive control choose to remain in a bad situation, including having limits

imposed on her actions, commitment to her relationship with students, and poor support from the educational system:

> Teaching is a hard profession. It's not what it was 10 years ago. It's not what it was 7 years ago. There's a lot of red tape that's hold us back from fully teaching. I would love to do more hands-on activities and stuff like that, but I also have that pressure of I have to teach everything because even though they say don't teach to the text. You're teaching to make sure that everything's covered because I would hate for a student to fail because I couldn't give them every tool or resource, and that's a lot of pressure. Because the students that I teach they're smart, they just need more time and they need more patience and they need that constant redirection, but they need that creativity too. I see a lot of creativity and I'm very creative and it drives me crazy to where I can't give them everything that I want to give because of that deadline coming and I know it's coming and they know it's coming. I've never been in occupation that had so much stress over something. It would be like a doctor be like well I can only talk to you for 5 seconds because I've got another patient, here's what, you know like they sit down, they talk to you, they evaluate you; they and that's where I want to do with my students. I want to see where they're going. I want to help them in that area, but half the time I'm just covering the material to make sure I, that they've got it and some of them don't really understand or why and I do the best I can, but I want to give more and that's what most teachers want to do, they want to give more. They want to create more cause things that we've talked about that we did or projects that our teachers did we can't do anymore because we don't have time for that. Things that we remember as adults, we can't do anymore because we don't have time for it and we're really doing a disservice to our children because of that. What about kids who are struggling? You know thinking of ways, that critical thinking. I feel like I don't give that enough and hate that cause I know I could run with it and got with it and I'm, I would like to get to the point to where I could do that, but with the time and the energy and the effort of what I'm already pulling in day to day and week to week I'm doing the best I can. Part of me wants to do more, but I'm restricted, and I don't think anybody ever wants to go into a job and feel like they can do more but are restricted.

For many who experience coercive control, leaving the relationship takes time. First, survivors must realize there is a problem (Baly, 2010). Then for many survivors, once they identify the toxicity of the relationship it takes time to develop emotional or financial resources necessary to leave (Crossman & Hardesty, 2018). When dealing with the *Coercion of Social Responsibility,* teachers had to identify the problem, which is not as straightforward a process as it sounds. As Annie said, "for the most part, I think teachers are heads down,

blinders on." Teachers had to realize social responsibility did not necessitate continuing to deal with a broken system. They had to be able to identify what they wanted instead of focusing solely on what others wanted.

> Who knows how to teach reading better? The person who's been doing it for twenty years? Or that dude down at the board who says we want you to do it this way? That's what autonomy is. Being able to do it your way. And if it gets better results or the same results. That's what I mean by that. (Chad)

As Chad explained, Oklahoma teachers wanted to have freedom to determine what their students needed without being forced to follow a specific model. Teachers wanted to be able to tailor teaching to the students they saw rather than treating teaching as a one-size-fits-all commodity.

Moving Beyond the Matrix

Wuest and Merritt-Gray (2001) identified four stages survivors go through following an abusive relationship in what the authors call the Reclaiming Self model: survivors may counteract the abuse, break free, not go back, and move on. Teachers who experience the *Coercion of Social Responsibility* and become aware of that coercion may follow any of those four steps, but the process is not linear for them. The difference between domestic abuse survivors and teachers may rest in definition or public perception. In 2019 domestic abuse is a known phenomenon and widely condemned by the public. In contrast, although teachers used to have "high cultural and social status" (Esteve, 2000, p.203) this status has changed in recent years. Allie, Greg, and Lily all stated they are treated as "glorified babysitters" instead of "professionals". A change in social status may be unnoticed by those who attended school before implementation of those additional responsibilities (Esteve, 2000), hampering recognition of the *Coercion of Social Responsibility.* The lack of public awareness about this coercion may lead to teachers following a non-linear path to reclaiming

their sense of self, because they do not have a way to express how their teaching environments are unhealthy.

Moved to Counteraction

Participation in the walkout is one means teachers used to counteract the *Coercion of Social Responsibility*. Kris told me many of them realized conditions would not change and "nothing is ever going to get done unless the teacher takes it in their own hands."

People may not be politicized prior to choosing to participate in political action (Han, 2009). Personal concerns lead to individuals' actions because "costs of collective action are so low and the incentives are so great that even individuals or groups that would normally not engage in protest feel encouraged to do so" (Tarrow, 1989, p.8). Working collectively to "articulate their interests, express concerns and critiques, and propose remedies to identified problems" (Curiel, 2018, p.8), participants in the Oklahoma Teacher Walkout had the opportunity to actively oppose attempts to constrain them. As Vicky said, "we have been pushed back, you know, like they always say, teachers teach because they can't do anything else, it's like well hello, how did you get to get anywhere where you are without a teacher?"

Michelle commented on the demands teachers face in Oklahoma and how badly resolution was needed.

> Teachers are putting so much time and so much effort into something and they're not seeing any pay raises, they're not seeing any compensation for the work that they're doing, the right kind of compensation, and when it's been several years of change, change, change, change and you're put in, you're changing the standards, you're doing this, and then there's no change. You've had all of these demands, but you're not being compensated for that. So, I think that was a lot of it. I think it's okay, enough is enough.

Counteraction of the *Coercion of Social Responsibility* occurred when teachers walked out, but many teachers felt the state government expected teachers would remain in

their classrooms regardless of what happened at the capitol. As Carey said, “It didn’t matter that thousands of us went and tried to talk to our legislatures, they didn’t care. Soon as we were gone, they went back to their cutting education mentality.” Justine spoke in more detail about this, saying:

> We need salaries. Honestly, it’s ridiculous, our salaries are embarrassing, but the funding and the way the government has devolved public education or denigrated public education in favor of for-profit state legislature was just about as much as we could take. Teachers are usually very respected, it was realized you wouldn’t be anywhere if it weren’t for the teachers who taught you. Couldn’t have that education, couldn’t have that degree if somebody hadn’t guided you in that direction. But anymore there’s a lot of disrespect and unfortunately, respect comes with a price tag.

Lack of respect from an abuser is common in coercive control, who uses “tactics such as criticism, verbal abuse, economic control, isolation, and cruelty” (Pitman, 2017, p.146). Isolation was identified as an issue for many study participants, who also said the walkout helped them to counteract their sense of isolation.

> That whole thing, the, the Facebook thing, the groups where you could instantly communicate with people who are in the same situation you’re in but maybe even in a different town, but they’re dealing with the same things and you’re all of the sudden like oh my gosh, it’s not just me, it’s not just me. And knowing that there were that many of us, that strength in numbers thing was really empowering. And I, this sounds so awful, but I feel like sometimes that that isolation is kind of on purpose, and when we broke down the isolation and got together, it was this really empowering and energizing thing.

As Marie explains, knowing other teachers had similar experiences allowed her to counteract the sense that her frustration was limited to her.

Counteraction appeared in forms other than walking out of the classroom or changing internal messages. Some participants realized they had to speak up to those who had given them responsibilities outside their job description. Passive acceptance of additional requirements, which occurred through the *Coercion of Social Responsibility*, helped to create unbearable working environments. Teachers needed to reach a point where they realized they

had to be their own voice and push back against the pressure they were being placed under. Kendra, a teacher from a mid-sized community who was running for office, said:

> I think there's this understanding on the part of educators that advocacy has to be part of our job. And this idea that we deserve to be compensated fairly, we should not have to rewrite a curriculum from scratch, that's not necessarily okay. And so, I think finding our voice to make the working conditions better. That was one of the things I mentioned to my superintendent when I was telling him that he should not have closed down our schools. I said oh, if we got everything that we needed are you buying a math curriculum next year? And sure enough, he did.

As Kendra's story demonstrates, private action, which was conversation with her superintendent, changed her teaching environment.

Moved to Leave

The second and third aspects of Reclaiming Self are breaking free and choosing to not go back (Wuest & Merritt-Gray, 2001). Although many Oklahoma teachers chose to participate in the walkout, reclaiming their sense of self by working to counteract the messages which acted to constrain them, others left. For teachers, breaking free meant quitting their jobs and refusing to continue in an environment they saw as untenable. Fiona shared the following:

> Last school year, right before spring break, one of our teachers quit, like not coming back for the rest of the school year, and then the walkout happened. And I just felt that was a really important part of what affected me in the walkout as well, I guess. Cause when she left, she was a fantastic teacher, a fantastic person, oh my goodness, the lessons she planned, her classroom was gorgeous, she was our department head for my department, and so when she left, I became the department head. I had to quit my second job, my second income because that was going to be so time consuming. And now this year, it's just a whole different school year without her, and it's awful that, you know, I had a teacher friend leave during the school year. I hope that doesn't happen again.

For Fiona's friend, walking away allowed her to leave the *Coercion of Social Responsibility.*

Four of the teachers I spoke with for this study are no longer teaching in Oklahoma. Two retired. Two are now teaching in other states. Sabrina's story demonstrates her rejection of the *Coercion of Social Responsibility.*

> When I chose to leave it was, I viewed it as my own form of protest, that I'm still choosing to walk out. Because we haven't fixed the underlying problem. And so much of my belief, whether it's the popular belief or not, I pride myself in being the best educator. I pride myself in continuing my education. I pride myself in making sure that I am always using the most effective instructional techniques and that my content is on par with any other educator.

However, she was torn about the impact of her actions. The following story shows how, although she has currently broken free, Sabrina is not at a point where she is choosing to not go back:

> I was a student who came from a really rough lot in life. I had educators who stepped in and filled that gap in my life and said we are going to make sure you are a success because we believe in you. We're going to be tough on you. We're going to push you, but we believe in you. I came from being that student to being the teacher for those kids and trying to fill that gap for those kids, and sadly now that I'm not doing that. My intention is, *I have an ambition of coming back one day* [emphasis mine].

In contrast, Robin made it clear that she had not only broken free from the environment she had been teaching in at the time of the walkout but also would not return, saying "I don't think I'd return to Oklahoma."

Moving On

The fourth aspect of Reclaiming Self identified by Wuest and Merritt-Gray (2001) is moving on. When they move on, those who experienced coercive control have reclaimed their lives and made the decision to not look back, instead making decisions based on what they want instead of what someone else wants them to do.

> I retired. I'm 62, so I'm retiring, and you now, we got a raise, I'm not going to benefit from that raise at all, not in a paycheck and not in my retirement for the rest of my life. The fact that they did not give us a raise for the last 10 and a half of my career means that my retirement for the rest of my life is going to be lower. Um, so it didn't,

> no, but I felt, I can't explain it, but I felt strongly that it was the right time and that there was something else that I needed to be doing. And I never wanted to be anything but a classroom teacher, I didn't want to be a principal, I didn't want to be an instructional coach, I didn't want to be a, you know, big administrator, I wanted to be a classroom teacher because that's what I'm good at, that's what I love. I didn't want to do anything bigger. Right now, I had this strong feeling I need to do something bigger, and I think that came from the walkout, that's one of the effects that it had on me. (Marie)

I want to note, Marie shared the only story of moving on I heard from participants. Carey retired for personal reasons unrelated to the walkout. Although she is no longer an Oklahoma teacher, with external factors involved the stories she told did not demonstrate a choice to move on but instead showed a prioritization of familial needs over career.

Moved to Action

There are many reasons why teachers chose to get involved in the walkout. Although I can identify some stories teachers told as responses to a system of coercive control through *Coercion of Social Responsibility*, this was not the only reason why teachers chose to walk out. Their expressions of public and private action illustrated other reasons as well. Han (2009) found individuals who were not politically motivated would get involved when they identified a wrong that needed to be righted. She argued "action at its core is an expression of personal value" and motivation to act is based on prioritizing values (Han, 2009, p.35). Prioritization is not static, but changes based on internal factors like needs or emotions, or external influences like personal interactions or current events (Han, 2009). Participants' stories about their actions during the walkout illustrate this prioritization of values. She identified three themes in how individuals choose to become involved in public action and I was able to identify stories which included all three of these themes.

Motivation and Participation

Action is not motivated solely by values but must also include a "triggering experience that personalizes politics" (Han, 2009, p.103). Personalized politics served to relate "political action directly to their personal goals" (Han, 2009, p.107). For some teachers their own experiences motivated them. For example, Chloe explained her reasoning for participating in the walkout:

> I think it's just my passion for how completely broken Oklahoma education is. Combined with all of the different things that I started seeing about the GDP being down 2% and then whenever I saw that everybody else in the region was so much higher than that. And that I had been buying, $1,900 a month, I had been buying my own ink and my own science supplies and projects for my kids to do, so that oil companies could have a better tax break. I was done at that point. Absolutely not. My students will have science, money for science experiments that didn't come out of my pocket, come out of my [own] kids' mouths.

Realizing the discrepancy between her resources and the revenue streams Oklahoma chose to utilize led her to decide it was important to get involved.

Paige was motivated to get involve because of others' experiences.

> A friend of mine, she now works for Oklahoma City that used to work for us, her and a friend of hers, they had made a video about having to Uber and having to provide services outside of school and all these different things that they had to do and how they could barely make ends meet and barely keep food on the table.

Teachers' stories of triggering experiences did not only focus on how those experiences led them to participate in the walkout. Cynthia shared the story of why she voted against having her district walk out.

> Prior to the walkout my thoughts and views were, we ought to just not come to school one day, we ought to walk out now and then see what they would do. Then it became a reality and then it was like oh, no. You don't think about all the other people involved. My aides, my bus drivers, the cooks. We already were down to hardly no janitorial staff, we were cleaning our rooms, taking out the trash, cleaning the tables, the flu epidemic was crazy. I was, I didn't know what to do. Supported it [the walkout], but yet didn't support it because I was scared for the people that made my job work. I cannot do my job… I can't do my job without my aides.

For Cynthia, the realization of how walking out would lead support staff to go without a paycheck led to the decision not to participate. She became motivated to act on their behalf instead of acting on her own behalf.

Other teachers identified their students as a triggering experience. Alex said

> People were taking their kids out and they're going up to Oklahoma City to help protest for, for teachers, for education, because they felt like this was for their kids. And they were right because, you know, they always say it's for the children, it was for the children. One of my fellow teachers, she wouldn't go. She said, "I'm going to be here unless the kids need me." And I said "you're telling them that they're not worth you going to fight for them by being here."

He was motivated to participate because of his students' needs, but his coworker did not have the same motivation. She interpreted students' needs differently.

Hannah was motivated to participate in the walkout but was employed by a district whose administration decided school would remain in session. She expressed frustration with the decision and found a way to get involved despite the district's decision.

> We stood, after school hours we would stand on, you know, main street holding our sign to say, you know, we needed, we were supporting them and the teachers needed to, um, needed support and our education system needed some change.

Despite her personal actions, because the district did not close she answered my question about whether she participated in the walkout with "I did not, our school did not." She did not realize standing in her community with a sign was participation until I asked about other action she took during the walkout as a follow-up question.

Mike was hospitalized with a serious health issue right before the walkout and felt he could not go to the capitol without seriously jeopardizing his physical well-being. He also stated he did not participate in the walkout, even though:

> I called and lobbied every day and when I got to feeling a little bit better like, I guess, late in the first week starting in second week walkout started going out and holding up signs on the sidewalks and things like that.

Hannah and Mike's struggles to identify their actions as participation in the walkout were not isolated. Other than the study participants who specifically stated they opposed the walkout, those who did not go to the capitol minimized their expressions of private actions. Isabel commented on how she saw private action minimized:

> One of my friends, she said, "well I couldn't really afford to go the capitol, so I just had book club with these kids." And I was like, "wait, so, when kids weren't in school you were discussing literature with them. Oh, that's cool, too bad you didn't participate in doing anything productive that week." You know, I think that's just as important because those kids for whatever reason knew that, okay I can't be at the capitol, but I can be here with you and I'm going to choose to be here with you.

It is important to not only identify action as protest or require protest to occur in designated areas. It could be argued those who quietly offer support so others are able to act have just as important of a role. Teachers who provided childcare to allow parents to continue to work while schools were closed, who served meals to students during the walkout, who carried signs in communities far from Oklahoma City, and who called or sent letters to their elected representatives were also involved in the walkout. Their efforts should be recognized.

Participation Leads to Commitment

Han (2009) found when individuals participate in civic action they then become motivated to be civically active. Commitment to civic engagement could be identified in study participants' expressions of public and private action. For some, participating in the walkout has led them to choose to be engaged in other ways. Referring to coworkers who participated in the walkout, Kris observed "I think it really lit a fire, it really intensified it and

just got people you know wanting to vote and wanting to actually pay attention to politics and support positive change."

According to Michelle, her participation in the walkout changed her outlook on civic participation.

> It made me realize that I happen to be one of those people that is a nonconfrontational person. I kind of just like everything to go smoothly, just let me carry on about my life, and knowing that sometimes there's a point that even if it is your personality that sometimes your voice needs to be heard, that you've got to spend some time and be involved.

Some teachers identified how participation made a difference but did not articulate expression of public and private action. Erica commented on how the walkout showed "the teachers have a voice and when we're willing to get united, our voice is very loud and people start to listen," but did not identify whether she was personally willing to "get united." Gretchen talked about parental involvement. "Parents got involved and I want to keep that momentum. I want the parents to understand, don't have a short memory about this process." She was concerned teachers would continue their expressions of public and private action, but parents would forget about issues brought to light by and during the walkout.

Civic Leadership

Participation is more likely to continue when individuals who are initially invested in a cause are allowed to fill roles "which give [them] a sense of accountability" (Han, 2009, p.119). Accountability leads those who are involved initially to feel "a greater sense of responsibility, investment, and motivation to stay involved" (Han, 2009, 121).

Greg expressed how teachers want to be involved.

> I think it brought teachers into the political conversation. Cause a lot of times before that, at least when I would educate, a student educator when I was in college, we were always taught that teachers need to stay out of politics and everything because we, we care of the kids. Let the politicians do the politics and then we'll educate them. But

> we can't, the one is connected to it and it can't be unconnected. And I think it finally got teachers woken up, like… we want to protect what we have and not keep getting chipped away.

According to Han's (2009) findings, to keep the momentum and maintain civic involvement both publicly and privately by the teachers, it is important for those who have roles of leadership to share responsibilities with others.

Discussion about leadership of the walkout can be found in Chapter 4, but the stories told by participants do not demonstrate having responsibilities shared to keep them involved.

Chapter 6: Awakening the Sleeping Giant

Dewey (1927) argued those in government should serve the people or community they represent. Service happens when the citizens of those communities are involved in not only electing representatives but help determine the policies enacted. (Dewey, 1927, p. 146), but what occurs when a group becomes politically involved based upon its perceptions of governmental action?

When social movements occur, members are faced with choices. Members must determine whether they are going to act during a specific moment of time or whether they will remain involved longer. They must also determine whether they will work to influence those already in power or attempt to replace them (Ash, 1972). The desire to understand Oklahoma teachers' goals for being involved in and enacting policies in the state led to RQ 4:

How do stories and narratives shape Oklahoma teachers' intentions to talk about and engage in politics?

Study participants spoke about becoming politically engaged and talking with each other about sociopolitical issues. I will explore the stories teachers told about their political involvement and the ways they choose to talk, or not talk, about political issues with others in this chapter.

Doing Politics

The development of students into prepared, knowledgeable, and engaged citizens is one of the expected outcomes of public education (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). Teachers identify the promotion of civic engagement as "an important part of their jobs" (Jacobsen & Casalaspi, 2018, p. 177), but since No Child Left Behind became law the time spent covering social studies in school has decreased by 44% (CCSSO, 2018).

According to the teachers I interviewed, civic engagement by educators has also decreased. Several participants shared similar stories to Hilary, who stated "we were told by multiple legislators before the walkout, voting records are public records, teachers don't vote." Jeri elaborated on this, stating she heard "one of the legislators told a group of teachers that he didn't need to listen to what they wanted because they don't vote. Something like 19% of teachers get out and vote."

Lack of voting or other forms of political involvement by teachers was seen by participants as a contributing factor for cutting education funding by the Oklahoma legislature, because:

> Over and over and over again different lawmakers kept telling us teachers don't vote, who cares what you think. And so, they had a point. If you don't vote and if you don't call and if you don't get involved um your voice doesn't really matter as much. (Kendra)

Teachers took the criticism of their involvement in Oklahoma politics seriously. As the walkout ended "a total of 112 educators" (Karson, 2018) including "at least 66 current teachers" (Will, 2018) filed to run for office in Oklahoma. Of those candidates, 71 teachers advanced to either a run-off or the general election (Karson, 2018; Reilly, 2018). The actions of these educators embodied the observation "Americans are a democratic people who have always taken charge of public affairs *themselves* [emphasis mine]" (Tocqueville, 2004, p.499).

A wide range of volunteers stepped forward and formed networks to help candidates through the campaign process (Bailey, 2018). During the primary, runoff, and general elections in 2018 several Facebook groups provided information to interested teachers and supporters about candidates, regardless of whether they were educators or not (Murphy,

2018). Sharing of information and engagement brought "together a multitude of citizens who would otherwise remain strangers" (Tocqueville, 2004, p.591).

I asked study participants about their thoughts on teachers choosing to run for office. Most participants supported teachers who chose to enter the political arena although Britney was an exception stating, "I think it's better for teachers to stay in the classroom and for the legislators to listen to what they need,". Greg applauded teachers who ran for office for "keeping us in the conversation" while other participants implied teachers were more qualified than other candidates. Karen asked:

> Who better to serve in the legislature than a teacher who is trained on listening techniques, who is trained on getting to the crux of problems, who is flexible by nature based on the needs of the students, and, and who are lifelong learners to learn not just education issues as, as it relates to the political spectrum, but energy, you know, taxes and state budgets and all the other things that legislatures have to deal with?

Teachers who chose to run for office were not only seen by study participants to benefit education, but as a positive for Oklahoma as a whole.

The majority of teachers who participated in this study spoke with me before the 2018 general election, with only two interviews taking place after polls closed November 6, 2018. Although most did not know election results, they expressed that teachers running for office was positive regardless of outcome:

> I absolutely love it and I think that even if the teachers that run don't get elected, I think that that sends enough of a message that we're willing to do whatever it takes to impact education and education funding, that it will even, that it will move the needle for those who were previously less willing to make sacrifices and like change taxes and things like that, gross production tax, it will move the needle towards them being more willing to. (Josh)

The decision to run for office was viewed favorably by most study participants, who voiced the idea action was a welcome change from complacency and not voting. However,

some teachers expressed concern teachers might have chosen to run for office because emotions ran high during the walkout, whereas others worried about the motives of those who chose to run. Justine said:

> Political office I think, to run, someone should have a sense of duty, not being there to exploit power or to make money but they should have a sense of duty. I think if they have that sense of duty and are an intelligent person, willing to do research, willing to admit when they're wrong, willing to listen to people, doesn't matter what walk of life they come from. I think perhaps teachers, if they're running now, if they were fired up and they gained that sense of duty, more power to them, fantastic.

Justine was concerned teachers may have decided to run based on their emotions during the walkout and not because they understood what the responsibilities of legislatures would be.

Teachers chose to run for office, but they were not the only candidates. Over 600 candidates filed for office during the Thursday and Friday of the week the walkout ended (Hubbard, 2018). Several study participants told me they were pleased more people were running for office because, as Kris articulated, "I don't think anyone should be unopposed." Marie was excited about the potential for a more diverse Oklahoma legislature:

> I was just watching, observing, and I am noticing that, you know, a vast majority of people who set the rules for all the rest of us are old, white men. Old, white, rich men. And that's not our population. And so, whether they were even teachers or not, just to get some different people in there would be fabulous, but obviously to have people who, like me, have been on the ground, you know, doing the work and really know what things you're talking about.

Marie was not just concerned about having legislators who support and understand issues of education, she also cared about representing a wider range of Oklahoma residents. Having a diverse range of candidates offered the potential for marginalized groups to be recognized (Abrams, 2019) with a range of voices and views involved in the legislative process.

Although most participants viewed the decision by teachers who chose to become political candidates favorably, there were teachers like Allie who worried about the impact

on teaching if the teacher candidates won their races, saying "we need those teachers in the classroom." Vicky also had mixed thoughts and provided a longer explanation about why she felt conflicted:

> We're already struggling with the loss of teachers, shortages already. And then we pull, I don't know, 30, 40, I don't even know how many even ran, a lot, and I don't know how many will actually get their seats, but we pull all those teachers out of schools and then we have holes.

Oklahoma's teacher shortage and its impact on teachers is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

Of the candidates who ran, "16 current or former educators won seats" in state government (Hertneky, 2018). Teachers in Oklahoma in November 2018 voted. Rita explained how the criticism about teachers not voting encouraged her to both vote and be informed about what she was voting for:

> [The walkout] really pushed me into becoming more politically active than I had been before. I'm sorry to say I wasn't a very active voter beforehand, but after the walkout, I make sure I vote in every election, I don't care what it's for. Dog catcher? I'm going to vote in it. And, you know, I just moved this summer and I made sure I got my voter registration in.

Colleen chose to run for office but did not expect to win. She expressed winning the seat was less important to the big picture in Oklahoma:

> I'm glad that the teachers are actually figuring out they have to do something. They actually have to run for office, get ahold of the representatives. At least go vote. Just vote. That's the thing. I'm sitting here going, if that number goes from 30 to 90% of teachers voting, then the walkout succeeded, quite honestly, in helping people understand how participating makes a difference.

For both Rita and Colleen, choosing to not only be aware of events happening in Oklahoma politics but to also take action was importance regardless of the outcome of their actions.

Change usually does not happen overnight, but the walkout led Oklahoma teachers to take the important first step to becoming more civically aware. The walkout also led them to reassess how they were addressing this need for civic awareness with students:

> If you want a big election, then you need to get the eighteen to twenty-one-year-olds to vote. Because they're the biggest one next to the baby boomers. And I don't see the teachers – at least I haven't heard of our teachers talking to their students about being registered to vote. You don't have to present one side or the other but at least say "are you registered to vote? Do you know what you're doing? Here's a sample ballot. Here's your candidates. Here's a forum that this one's at, here's a forum that one's at." You don't have to be political to present facts. I think that's part of the problem is everybody's so caught up in Republican or Democrat that nobody's sitting there going, "it doesn't matter if you're Republican or Democrat all you have to do is say go vote." You're not telling them which way to vote. You're just telling them to go vote. (Colleen)

Colleen's statement illustrates how teachers realized their need to act, but they also realized that they needed to talk with others about political action as well.

Talking Politics

Talking about public issues "is one of the most important building blocks" to have in a well-functioning democracy (Kwak, Williams, Wang, & Lee, 2005, p.87). Inability to talk about issues may lead individuals to "retreat from public life" (Wells et al, 2017, p.151), undercutting democratic stability and affecting individuals' feelings of political efficacy. Political efficacy is "the feeling that political and social change is possible" (Campbell, Gurin, & Miller, 1954, p.187) and builds upon individuals' believing their actions will make a difference. Citizens should be provided with the means to vocalize recommendations on how to improve their communities. Public education often incorporates discussion on public issues in the classroom where teachers introduce their students to ways to engage in civil civic discourse (Longo, 2013). As part of the democratic social process, each citizen needs to feel as if he or she has his or her own unique voice in the discussion.

Many scholars have established how talking about politics with others impacts the ways individuals think about issues. Discussion can increase participation (Ryfe & Stalsburg, 2012); affect how public ideas form and become fragmented (Gamson, 1994); establish and maintain individuals' sense of identity (Walsh, 2004); influence schemas, or mental structures, used to process otherwise ambiguous information (Winter, 2008); and reinforce "tightly held norms of civic behavior" (Sinclair, 2012). I will explore how talking about politics affected Oklahoma teachers in this section.

A 2016 study found technology allows individuals to engage in small acts of collective action (Margetts, John, Hale, & Yasseri). The authors coined the term social information to describe how the knowledge others are acting leads an individual to see that action as a social norm and engage in the activity as well (Margetts, John, Hale, & Yasseri, 2016), but actions may be diverse and fragmented. Social media aids in the identification of social engagement as a norm (Ellison, Steinfeld, & Lampe, 2007; Gil de Zuniga, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2012). Political participation and the use of the internet as an information source have been linked, as long as an individual is already interested in one or more sociopolitical issues (Boulianne, 2009; Quintelier & Vissers, 2008). Participation is not limited to online activities but extends into the public sphere (Ekstrom & Ostman, 2015).

Engaging with others to effect change can lead to determination to be involved, because "there is nothing the human will despairs of achieving through the free action of the collective power of individuals" (Tocqueville, 2004, p.215-216). As noted above, there were "16 current or former educators" (Hertneky, 2018) elected to state office in November. Oklahoma also had "the largest number [58] of freshmen lawmakers elected to the Legislature since statehood" with 12 new senators and 46 house members (Stecklein, 2018).

Dialogue and Deliberation

Dialogue and deliberation are two ways through which conversation about public issues occurs. Dialogue is political talk which seeks to develop a shared understanding (Britt, 2007; Sprain & Black, 2018) by exposing people to multiple perspectives (Eisenberg, 2006). Deliberation uses conversation and informational analysis to evaluate both an issue and multiple perspectives on that issue before arriving "at a well-reasoned solution" (Gastil, 2008, pg.8). Engaging in civic conversation enables those who participate to better understand themselves and others by sharing their stories, experiences, and values (Marques & Maia, 2010).

Deliberation among citizens plays an important role in democracy, allowing them to reason together and manage "tensions and paradoxes inherent within systemic, value-laden problems" (Carcasson & Sprain, 2016). Unfortunately, in a time where political engagement is at a low, getting citizens to talk about politics and public policy can be a challenge. How, when, and why citizens talk to each other about political issues depends upon the settings (Jacobs, Cook & Delli Carpini, 2009). Deliberative civic engagement can be performed in many different forms, including one-on-one conversation and online, and each of these processes allows citizens to interact with each other differently. Each enact the power of talking, providing the means to voice concerns, ideas, and opinions (Jacobs, Cook & Delli Carpini, 2009; Leighninger, 2006; Nabatchi, Gastil, Weiksner & Leighninger, 2012; Niemeyer, 2011).

Black (2008) argues storytelling and narrative provides a "link between dialogue and deliberation because personal stories have the potential to invite dialogic moments" (p. 95). Stories can be compelling and judged as "reasonable" by listeners, even if the storyteller and

listeners disagree (Black, 2008, p. 96). Stories provide space for listeners to shape or develop a shared sense of identity or enable the speaker and listeners to find mutual understanding (Black, 2008; Buber, 1988). Citizens may choose to interact with each other based upon shared interests or common concerns about a single and specific policy (Mansbridge, 1983). Citizens may converge on their common interests either coincidentally or because they are equally affected by the issue addressed, they may choose to become involved because they wish to support others' concerns, or they may act for the good of society (Mansbridge, 1983).

Deliberation and dialogue scholarship addresses interactions in formal or informal settings. I focus on informal interactions in this study, conversations commonly occurring among family members or close friends, but which may also occur among others with whom an individual has a relationship (Eveland, Morey & Hutchens, 2011). Engagement in this type of informal conversation following the walkout led Oklahoma teachers to talk about politics with each other, with their families, and with their students. Fiona told me she had been inattentive to elections and legislation before the walkout but:

> Some of my coworkers are very, very politically involved, and so I learned a lot from them during the walkout about. I wasn't very into government, so it was really great hearing what some of them had to say about it and what they had to say about the different people at the capital, different government officials, and just learning how things worked.

Norah had talked with people about political issues before the walkout, but the way she talked changed:

> I've always been political, but not so much in action, more in donating, talking about it, having opinions. And this made me see that it's not just an abstract concept, that government is there to listen to me, that I can directly affect things by my vote, by talking to my legislatures, by calling things out, not just talking to my friends about it but doing something about it. Donating money to people that I believe in, it made everything a little more tangible and real.

These two stories illustrate how informal conversations about political matters occur in day-to-day contexts.

Individuals talk about political issues with those with whom they have relationships, but there may be gaps between an individual's ability to evaluate whether the outcome of conversation or shared actions is successful when compared with the outcome desired (McCluskey, Deshpande, Shah, & McLeod, 2004). Scholars differentiate between internal efficacy, where individuals believe they can make a difference or "solve problems" (Gil de Zuniga, Diehl, & Ardevol-Abreu, 2017, p.575) and external efficacy, which focuses on the confidence individuals have that the government will respond to their demands (Kenski & Stroud, 2006). Individual or self-efficacy is based on perception of what oneself may be able to accomplish (Guan & So, 2016). Collective efficacy is based on an individual's assessment of what they can accomplish in concert with others (Halpern, Valenzuela, & Katz, 2017).

Teachers began to have a sense of efficacy as they interacted with each other on Facebook before the walkout started. They shared their stories with each other which led to the realization they were not alone. As Gretchen said, "all of a sudden, we saw it wasn't just us that were talking about these types of issues," demonstrating to teachers they were not the only individuals, schools, or districts struggling. Talking with each other allowed teachers to realize the problems were shared across Oklahoma. Deanne explained:

> It came to light based on the fact that teachers were open about what they were having to do, and agreeing to talk about and tell their story, and just having an open dialogue and, you know, this is my story and this is what I have to do and, you know, just to be honest and this is the FYI you know. It wasn't just so we could go shopping, you know, I want to go get a new car type of deal. Some of these teachers, it was based on the fact of are they going to be able to stay in Oklahoma and pay their electric bill. And I think that came to light as they were frustrated and wanted people to see what they were having to go through.

Teachers found sharing their stories on social media "reached far beyond just the governor's office hearing our complaints" as Josh said. They raised awareness and began a statewide conversation. Tanya observed:

> I think because of the walkout and because of the voices, that more people are starting to understand that it is a bigger issue than they thought. They may not understand what the issues are, but they are beginning to understand that it is an issue, and I think it should be talked about.

Intentionally talking with others about civic issues leads to choosing to cooperatively "search for mutual understanding" (Marques & Maia, 2010, p.630). Teachers first accomplished this by walking out, but conversations did not stop there. The walkout gave many teachers a network of collaborators to work with.

> I'm thankful for the walkout. I think it did more than just give the teachers a raise, I think it gave them a voice. I think it gave the whole realm of education a close-knit family and I think that in itself is going to monumental for many, many years. (Deanne)

Deanne's story is similar to many study participants' stories. I was told multiple times how having a voice and talking with each other energized teachers and motivated them to remain connected with each other.

The walkout also led teachers to have conversations with each other about political issues. Willow talked about how teachers were talking with each other both at her school and outside its walls, and with the public:

> I noticed that people did start talking about it more. There was more on Facebook. My teacher-friends were putting posts about funding being cut and educating parents and their friends and their community and stuff. Some of my teacher-friends started tracking their actual hours worked. I had two that did that. Teachers were doing things like meeting at Starbucks and doing grade-ins and they'd have a sign that said I'm a teacher working on my unpaid time, grading papers, here I am.

Later in her interview she revisited the discussions teachers were having.

> The current conversation is in the election coming up, how to get pro public ed candidates in office and then I think after that election shakes up it will be how are we gonna get the rest of what we need, for years two and three, and beyond. Because a lot of us realize this is good for one year but what do we do after that.

As Willow demonstrates, talking about politics involves not only talking in the present but creating plans for the future.

During their interviews, several teachers talked about either their own political involvement or the involvement of their coworkers. Hearing from legislators about how their lack of voting and civic involvement led to Oklahoma teachers being dismissed by state politicians galvanized teachers to act. Tocqueville (2004) observed how political freedom requires sacrifice and "has never been won without great effort" (p.583), but sacrifice is not always grand. Being willing to move out a comfort zone can be a small sacrifice. Hilary demonstrated this with the following story:

> I started having those uncomfortable conversations with my colleagues: have you voted today, are you registered to vote. And before, those are kind of taboo questions, in our society it's kind of like you're not supposed to ask because, again, it goes back to our culture of demographics, what if somebody's here illegally, you can't just come up to somebody and say have you registered to vote. It's become this taboo thing. And I got flack on it, you can't be asking people to show your voter registration card. And I'm like why, why can we not have this conversation to say if you're out here advocating for your students and you're advocating for your parents, then why, it has to start at the ballot box. And if we as teachers aren't voting, we have no ground to go to the legislators and complain.

Like many of the other teachers interviewed, Hilary realized she had to not only vote herself but also talk with others about doing the same.

As this chapter has discussed, Oklahoma teachers shared stories about both acting politically and talking politically. As demonstrated, talking about and engaging in politics is intentional. The participants in this study never want to be told again, "teachers don't vote."

Chapter 7: Discussion

> It's still tempting to leave Oklahoma. Because I could go down to Texas and make $55,000 a year. I love Oklahoma. It's been a lot better than it was last year. And I like having the summers off with my son. I like having the same school days as he is. So, I can at least see my son. But I'm also still sitting here going it sure is a struggle. Sure is a struggle. (Colleen)

In this dissertation I have addressed four distinct areas: explanations of how education became a public issue, how teachers make sense of the walkout, how stories and narratives shape expressions of public and private action, and how stories and narratives shape intent to talk about engage in politics. Each of these areas offers opportunities for future research.

Members of a social movement create and maintain the meanings of that movement (Snow & Benford, 1992). For this reason, I asked teachers who were teaching in Oklahoma at the time of the April 2018 walkout to share their stories about the walkout with me. They all spoke about how the Oklahoma educational system is broken, converging upon shared meaning. Their stories communicate similar messages as they reach a shared understanding about the nature of reality (Zanin, Hoelscher, & Kramer, 2016).

When I explored teachers' public and private actions in Chapter 3, I discovered for teachers the world changed. The No Child Left Behind and Every Student Succeeds Acts entail measurable outcomes, forcing teachers into the spotlight. Teachers expressed public education in 2018 was an issue of public importance because the public and government legislation made it become publicly important.

In addition to the legislation making public education private, the world has changed because of social informatics. Salary schedules are posted on school districts' web sites and the Oklahoma Department of Education provides information about teachers' successes as indicated by students' test scores. Crowded classrooms; inadequate funding of textbooks,

classroom supplies, and building maintenance; low pay combined with high demands on teachers' time; and an increasing shortage of qualified teachers all contributed to the realization by study participants and other Oklahoma teachers that there was an urgent need for change. The publicizing of what they believed to be only part of the story led teachers to decide they needed to include their experiences in the public narrative. Legally educational outcomes were no longer private, and teachers believed their experiences should also become public. Social media provided an easily accessible platform to share information and pictures of outdated textbooks, decrepit buildings, and pay stubs.

In Chapter 3 I discuss how Image Repair Theory (IRT) can be applied to teachers' stories about the walkout. IRT identifies how strategies of denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness, taking corrective action, or demonstrating remorse for their actions can lead others to reassess blame (Benoit, 2015). Teachers want to be viewed favorably instead of being castigated for walking out (Benoit, 2015), changing public opinion, correcting misperceptions, and raising their stature. I also found the Oklahoma teachers flipped the script by speaking about how teachers were successful despite the broken educational system. They wanted me to understand how they adapted to the hardships faced and prevailed despite not having adequate resources. Benoit (2015) did not include flipping the script as an approach to image repair, but he also did not study those who considered themselves to be innocent of the accusations they faced. Exploring how other groups or individuals have responded to accusations when they believed themselves to be innocent could identify whether flipping the script has occurred in other situations.

The use of Image Repair Theory by members of a social movement provides the opportunity to extend this area of scholarship into new areas. Research exists addressing the

use of public relations campaigns in social movements (Hallahan, Hotzhausen, van Ruler, Vercic, & Sriramesh, 2007), but not addressing how members of the movement may develop intentional messages for the general public. For example, Ciszek (2017) addressed how social change can strategically guide public opinion with research focused on how activists tactically gained social acceptance for individuals who identity as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT). What she did not address are ways members of a movement may through dialogic reciprocity achieve public support. Oklahoma teachers worked to repair their images using social media to engage with the general public. Exploring how other social movements use Image Repair Theory to gain public support is an important area for scholarship.

In Chapter 4 I focused on the Oklahoma teacher walkout and the ways teachers made sense of the events which unfolded in April 2018. Teachers wanted to "set the record straight" about why they walked out, doing so by framing the story about their actions relative to the students they taught, emphasizing salience of action "for the kids" (Entman, 1993). They established shared characteristics by referring to themselves as "Oklahoma teachers," building solidarity around support for education.

The Horatio Alger myth and its impact on teachers was also addressed in Chapter 4. The belief anyone can succeed if they invest time and effort compared to the hours teachers worked and their level of education created a disconnect between beliefs and outcomes. Teachers realized they could no longer legitimize the system where incomes could not meet basic needs while they often had to pay for necessary supplies to do their jobs. They offered new narratives, sharing their experiences publicly, and emphasizing salience of different

aspects of what it means to be an Oklahoma teacher. Emphasizing teacher shortages, low incomes, and inadequate materials changed the lens observers used to understand their story.

Social identity was important to participants. Many of them focused on how they are Oklahoma teachers. They live in their communities. They serve their communities. They want to continue helping their communities. Several teachers emphasized how teaching in Oklahoma is a choice they want to make. This focus on living and serving the people in their state and the areas where they currently live gave many participants a sense of solidarity both with each other and with the members of the community who supported them. Finding common ground to build shared identity is not a new area of scholarship, but it is important to note many teachers commented about not realizing how much support was available prior to the walkout.

Chapter 4 also discussed issues of competing leadership. Bartlesville school district, unions, and Facebook groups like Oklahoma Teachers – The Time is Now! all favored the walkout, but what they asked for during the walkout was different. Lack of a clear, centralized leader and competing goals left teachers confused, supporting Tufekci's (2013) suggestion that lack of infrastructure may hamper negotiations.

During the interview process from October through November 2018, those I spoke with had different stories about who was responsible for the walkout or where the idea for the walkout first came from. Study participants did not have a consistent narrative about who led the walkout. Some felt it was completely grassroots, originating with and led by the teachers themselves. Several spoke specifically named Alberto Morejon and his Oklahoma Teachers – The Time is Now! Facebook group. Two teachers mentioned the Bartlesville story. Others identified as unions the leaders. Confusion about leadership of the walkout several months

existed several months after the walkout ended instead of becoming clearer in hindsight. Lack of unified leadership led to multiple narratives about the walkout.

Oklahoma has three teachers' unions, but many participants were hesitant when talking about unions. This hesitance may be due to limited union membership in Oklahoma and "right-to-work" laws.

Along with stories of competing leadership, study participants also spoke on inexperienced leadership and about how those identified as leaders had not previously led a walkout. Acting as a catalyst for a social movement and leading that movement may not be best for the movement. Although Rosa Parks did not give up her seat on a bus, helping to launch the Civil Rights movement, Martin Luther King, Jr. is frequently referred to as the movement's leader (Kinnon, 2006). Morejon's creation of a Facebook page provided an online meeting place for teachers seeking social change but planning the change itself may not have been something he was prepared for.

Han (2009) argues social movements need to give members responsibilities to keep them engaged and sustain the movement. The participants in this study shared how they gave themselves responsibilities, including running for office, campaigning for others running for office, and voting. Empowerment of members came from the members themselves. One question for future research is whether devolving of power leads to dropping or missing important elements within a social movement.

Chapter 4 investigated how teachers believed personal involvement was important for the walkout and the November 2018 election. They realized their need as individuals to be involved in the political process in Oklahoma. The walkout was collective action, where teachers gathered together to voice the need for changes to the Oklahoma educational system.

Voting and contacting their representatives is individual action. Revisiting the walkout and interviewing teachers about their experiences after a longer passage of time to see whether the movement can sustain itself without having centralized leadership and a clear infrastructure would extend Han's (2009) findings.

Chapter 5 explored how stories and narratives shaped Oklahoma teachers' expressions of public and private action. Based upon the stories study participants told me, I identified a paradigm I have called the *Coercion of Social Responsibility.* In this paradigm, which I based upon scholarship on domestic violence, individuals internalize expectations about the roles they should fulfill in society based on employment in a field devoted to societal well-being, choosing to remain employed in untenable situations because they feel responsibility for others. This sense of responsibility may also explain why some teachers opposed the walkout. They believed they had accepted a social contract and that asking for something different would violate the contract they agreed to.

Breaking free of the *Coercion of Social Responsibility* can happen when individuals Reclaim Self by counteracting abuse, breaking free, not going back, or moving on (Wuest & Merritt-Gray, 2001). The majority of the participants I interviewed spoke about how walking out was counteraction to what they experienced as teachers in Oklahoma, but only 4 out of the 49 teachers I interviewed broke free from their responsibilities. Research into whether individuals in other fields are affected by the *Coercion of Social Responsibility* or Reclaim Self offers opportunities for scholarship addressing not only teachers but other fields vital for social good, including firefighters, nurses, and social workers. Teaching is a profession dominated by women. Exploring whether individuals employed in male-dominated fields

which serve the social good also experience the *Coercion of Social Responsibility* is also an area for further research.

Personalization of politics for Oklahoma teachers was also explored in Chapter 5. Action is an extension of the actors' values and based on experiences motivating them to act (Han, 2009). All 49 participants shared stories with me about what led them to choose to walk out or not walk out. Many who did not travel to the protests at the capitol but acted in their communities did not view their efforts as participation. Additional research into other social movements and those who quietly provide support for those who are more vocal or visible would be useful. Why did teachers who minimized their actions do so? What is political action? How many citizens view themselves as apolitical or uninvolved while simultaneously supporting political action? How many citizens are more involved than either they or researchers realize?

Chapter 6 explored how stories and narratives shape Oklahoma teachers' intentions to talk about and engage in politics. Many teachers and their supporters chose to run for public office, with over 600 filing to do so during the final days of the Oklahoma 2018 walkout (Hubbard, 2018). Most teachers viewed this positively because it kept candidates from running unopposed. They also spoke at length about the importance of talking with others about the candidates and issues on the November 2018 ballot.

Several participants mentioned how they were told during the walkout "teachers don't vote," implying their concerns were less valid because legislators would not be affected on election day. Although teachers have often been viewed as an importance constituency either this view had changed, or legislators chose to minimize Oklahoma teachers' role as constituents, but study participants had accepted the dismissal of their political power.

Talking to each other informally but intentionally about issues, sharing information through social media, and choosing to be involved led them to conclude political engagement is more important than having received everything asked for during the walkout. Participants discussed the importance of "asking uncomfortable questions" and challenging each other to plan to vote. Further research into whether this intentionality is sustained now that the November 2018 election is history could provide valuable insight into individual motivation for political engagement. Is intentionally asking others their intent to be civically engaged a cultural change or was intentionality limited to this specific movement? Exploring this further in other settings would help gain a better understanding of the current American political climate.

I have explored how teachers constructed meaning about teaching in Oklahoma and the 2018 teacher walkout through storytelling and narrative. These stories often spoke about how the educational system at the time of the walkout had created an environment of struggle as the quote from Colleen at the beginning of this chapter illustrates. Teachers were struggling to survive. Teachers were struggling to meet all the demands placed upon them. Teachers were struggling to help their students. These stories also talked about how the teachers in Oklahoma care passionately for their students and will continue despite the struggles. As Bridgette said to me:

> No matter what problems confront you, you rise above you because it's, it's the humanitarian in all of us. Teachers, when you sign up to be a teacher, you're a caretaker, and those needs take over. I helped kids, I helped their learning, I helped their behavior, but there's one more person in their life that they can depend on and trust. That's there. And they know that, they feel that. You care about them and they realize that.

When I began interviewing study participants in October 2018 I expected teachers' stories to focus on the Oklahoma teacher's walkout. Most of the interview questions, which

are provided in Appendix A, use the terms “walkout” or “walked out.” While teachers did discuss the walkout in detail, they also spoke at length about how much they care about their students, their communities, and the state of Oklahoma. As Alex, who had taught for over 40 years, said:

> Most teachers are people who are there every day trying to make their lives, the lives of their students better. And they’re also there to try to make most of them, by and large most of them were there for the community they live in. They try to make the community they live in better.

I feel privileged to have talked to people who care deeply about what they do and the lives they affect, but found it striking how many of my participants were surprised I was interested in talking with them. Many of the teachers interviewed thanked me for giving them the opportunity to share their stories and provide contextual background which gave meaning to thoughts and actions (Fisher, 1987). Their stories allowed me to imagine and appreciate new perspectives on the 2018 Oklahoma teacher walkout (Black, 2008).

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Demographic Questions:

- Basic info:
    - Age
    - Gender
    - City

Interview Prompts

- What made you decide to become a teacher?
- Can you describe a typical week as a teacher before the walkout?
- Can you describe your reaction to hearing about a potential teacher walkout?
- This is the first time since 1990 that Oklahoma teachers have walked out. Why do you think that happened in April?
- Did you participate in the walkout? What helped you decide whether or not to get involved?
- How did your students and their parents react to the walkout?
- How did other people of your community talk about the walkout?
- How did district and school administrators and your school board talk about the walkout?
- How did people in state government talk about the walkout?
- Do you believe the news covered the walkout accurately or inaccurately? Could you give an example that illustrates your assessment?
- How do you feel about the roles the teacher's associations and unions played in the walkout?
- What effect has the teacher's walkout had on your political views and actions? Could you give an example of a situation or decision you've made that illustrates your answer?
- Many teachers have chosen to run for public office in Oklahoma. What are your thoughts on their political involvement?
- What do you think was accomplished by the walkout?
- What are some things you wish the walkout had accomplished?
    - If you had to choose between getting the entire ask or having teachers become more engaged politically, which would you choose? Why?
- How has teaching in Oklahoma changed following the walkout?

Interviews held after the November 6, 2018 election

- Do you think the election results have changed your views on the walkout? If so, how?

Table 1

Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Age
Alex	Male	65
Allie	Female	33
Andrea	Female	54
Annie	Female	50
Bailey	Female	37
Bridgette	Female	58
Brynn	Female	33
Carey	Female	57
Chad	Male	56
Charlene	Female	47
Chloe	Female	36
Colleen	Female	44
Cynthia	Female	53
Deanne	Female	44
Ellen	Female	57
Emily	Female	31
Erica	Female	64
Fiona	Female	32
Gillian	Female	47
Greg	Male	38
Gretchen	Female	57
Hadleigh	Female	41
Hannah	Female	55
Hilary	Female	43
Hugh	Male	31
Isabel	Female	48
Jeri	Female	53
Josh	Male	33
Justine	Female	56
Karen	Female	47
Kendra	Female	41
Kent	Male	42
Kris	Male	25
Lily	Female	39
Lisa	Female	47
Marie	Female	62
Michelle	Female	45
Mike	Male	52
Norah	Female	38

Paige	Female	47
Pauline	Female	50
Rita	Female	53
Robin	Female	33
Sabrina	Female	24
Stella	Female	30
Tanya	Female	39
Vicky	Female	54
Willow	Female	40
Wyatt	Male	34

Table 2

Structure of Findings

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