

84 Lumber’s Constrained Polysemy: Limiting Interpretive Play and the Power of Audience Agency in Inspirational Immigrant Narratives

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The 2017 Super Bowl commercial for 84 Lumber simultaneously “broke the Internet” and added to the national debate over immigration by depicting the journey of a mother and daughter to the U.S.–Mexico border. Nielsen reported that 111.3 million people watched the 90-second commercial on TV and the company’s website received 6 million requests within an hour to “see the conclusion at Journey84.com,” which sparked so much traffic it crashed the website. Reactions to both advertisements were immediate and mixed. Through audience analysis of tweets with the hashtags #84lumber and #SuperBowl, this study highlights the constrained polysemic interpretations of 84 Lumber’s advertisement. This article argues that the advertisement’s messages are indicative of greater discourses about immigration. Commentary surrounding the advertisement has failed to address the “symbolic” message of the “journey” to citizenship.

Keywords: Latinx media studies, citizenship, immigration, audience studies, polysemy, Super Bowl advertising

The Super Bowl is arguably the most visible venue not just for football, but also for advertising. 84 Lumber, a supplier located in Eighty Four, Pennsylvania, added to the national debate over immigration through its 2017 Super Bowl commercial depicting the journey of a mother and daughter to the U.S.–Mexico border. The company’s original version of the advertisement was rejected by Super Bowl broadcaster Fox as being too controversial because it showed a border wall with a big wooden door, constructed by 84 Lumber (Kelly, 2017). Instead, millions watched an altered 90-second commercial encouraging audiences

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to “see the conclusion at Journey84.com” (84 Lumber, 2017a).² The response was so overwhelming that immediately after the commercial aired, the company’s website crashed because of heavy user traffic. Reactions to both advertisements were mixed after audiences gained access to the nearly six-minute video that *does* depict the door (Hill, 2017).

Through an analysis of tweets about the different versions of this commercial, this article argues that the polarization in audience interpretations of this polysemic advertisement is indicative of greater discourses about immigration in this historic moment. Findings indicate the advertising’s messages are ambiguous and, at first glance, *all* readings are dominant; however, subsequent statements from 84 Lumber resulted in a constrained canonical interpretation. Statements released by 84 Lumber itself as well as tweets by Super Bowl audiences have largely failed to address the company’s problematic argument related to the “symbolic” message of the “journey” to citizenship (84 Lumber News, 2017b).

As will be expanded on, 84 Lumber’s advertisement and subsequent statements about the advertisement are problematic because of how they depict a legally impossible immigration trajectory of an undocumented mother and daughter that relies on overarching discourses of citizenship, nationality, and otherness. 84 Lumber’s positionality as a corporation creating an advertisement using tropes of illegal immigration journeys while denying support for undocumented immigrants feeds into existing narratives of how Latinx immigrants are positioned as legal outsiders within the United States regardless of their actual citizenship status. We contend that by creating an advertisement capitalizing on immigration discourses and anti-Latinx sentiment, the corporation 84 Lumber is exhibiting citizenship excess. And this representation necessitates scrutiny. Citizenship excess and deficit are two sides of the same coin, produced by inequities in the U.S. judicial system that deny political capital to Latinx bodies in all areas of everyday life (Amaya, 2013).

As such, this article provides background on the advertisement, places this research within existing literature, and presents a qualitative content analysis of Twitter user responses to the two versions of this advertisement. From there, this work contextualizes major themes in light of larger discourse about citizenship, immigration, and advertising.

Polysemy, Social Media, and Citizenship Excess

Before exploring audience interpretations and the social media responses to how immigration is handled in the advertisement, it is helpful to outline key literature discussing polysemy and the power of interpretation, citizenship excess, and social media discourses.

² Significantly, the domain Journey84.com is no longer owned by or affiliated with 84 Lumber, requiring the use of an Internet archival tool, the Wayback Machine, to capture historical snapshots of the site taken in February 2017; by June 2017, the site began redirecting users to the main 84 Lumber website, and by December 2017 it seems to have disappeared altogether, becoming an artifact or digital ghost of sorts. The link to the archived snapshot is included in the reference to Journey84.com/careers (84 Lumber Company, n.d.).

The recruitment advertisement 84 Lumber, Brunner, and Fixer Partners created is a unique media artifact. McAllister and Galindo-Ramirez (2017) highlight how the Super Bowl is a powerful venue for mass advertising, and thus advertisements may attempt to appeal to all, or most, audiences. The back-and-forth between Super Bowl viewers and 84 Lumber about initial audience reactions speaks to at least some kind of agency or power the audience may have had in interpreting the two advertisements. Hence, Fiske's (1986) notion of polysemy, or the multiple interpretations a given text may have, is useful in analyzing an ambiguous advertisement. Gray and Lotz (2012) suggest being open to multiple readings of texts "leads directly to the power of the audience" (pp. 44–45), and away from textual influence. However, Jenson (1990) argues that polysemy "is only a political potential . . . people make their own sense of media, but that sense is bounded by the social definition of genres" (p. 74); thus, audience analyses are always in contention with larger cultural mythologies, popular imaginaries, and/or structural factors at play. This tempers both Fiske (1986) and Eco (1989), in that although an advertisement may have "a great variety of potential meanings" (p. x), these meanings are impacted by preexisting discourse, such as the Latino Threat Narrative—as will be discussed shortly (Chavez, 2013). Ultimately, then, the role of polysemy in audience relationships to ideological messages in mediated texts may be contradictory. Perhaps most importantly for this project is the discussion of polysemy advanced by Luis Rivera-Perez (1996), where polysemy "evolves from a textual and semiotic category to a political means for redemptive cultural practices. Television's excess allows it to serve as a conveyer of dominant ideology and, simultaneously, to reveal the latter's arbitrariness and naturalness" (p. 41). Rivera-Perez (1996) argues polysemy represents an excess of meaning extending beyond what creators intend, but interpretations are always already constrained by hegemonic views.

Social Media and Polysemy

Social media can add to the reinforcing of "preferred" interpretations of texts by media industries but can also introduce an interactive and user-generated cacophony with users' ability to assert their own interpretations publicly. Nicole Cox (2015) complicates the relationships among advertisers, social media, and audiences in her discussion of how media corporations—in this case, Bravo—use social media to interact with audiences, heighten viewer engagement, and generate interest. This rise in corporate-audience interactivity changes both the texts and how they are received and interpreted by fast-moving Twitter users (Jenkins, 2009). Wenhong Chen (2015) cautiously argues that access to mobile apps and social media is positively associated with "generating and sharing content about their cultural appreciation or appropriation with friends or followers in real time" (p. 84); this speeds up and mutates how audiences can interpret or reinterpret any given media. Advertisers strategically reach out to audiences, targeting values, attitudes, and emotions as well as their social media accounts (Lam & Hannah, 2016). A huge mediated event like the Super Bowl celebrates the corporate advertiser-audience relationship in a unique way, as argued by McAllister & Galindo-Ramirez (2017). Thus, although the 84 Lumber advertisement represents new mediated content and a complication of polysemy, it can be grounded in literature focusing on audience analysis and polysemy, corporate-audience social media interaction, and the social media savviness of advertising.

This particular case study engages the tensions between fictionalized narratives of immigration as contrasted with the realities within the United States' normative culture. The 2017 Super Bowl, the first one after the election of anti-immigrant President Donald Trump, aired in an era of heightened tensions surrounding immigration and involved basic cultural assumptions about citizenship that are embedded in enactments of

social power (Amaya, 2013; Chavez, 2013; Glum, 2015). For example, Eduardo Gonzalez (2019) notes that “the immigrant,” as an identity category, has been recreated time and again to serve many political agendas (p. 51). Eduardo Gonzalez (2019) addresses how Donald Trump’s 2016 “Make America Great Again” presidential campaign drew on nativist and ethnonationalist discourses surrounding citizenship to attack and dehumanize Latinxs, especially those of Mexican ancestry. In his discussion, Eduardo Gonzalez (2019) cites Amaya (2013) to contextualize “true citizenship” and the role of media in underrepresenting, if not erasing, minorities in the public sphere (p. 50). Both Eduardo Gonzalez (2019) and Amaya (2013) demonstrate that Latinxs rarely transform economic citizenship into political capital and that this inability to do so hinges on cultural citizenship. Rosaldo and Flores (1997) theorize cultural citizenship in terms of identity, respect, and rights. Cultural citizenship, then, is tied to how communities contest and reimagine identity. As a process, cultural citizenship accounts for how communities claim and expand their rights (Rosaldo & Flores, 1997). Eduardo Gonzalez (2019) suggests that Latinxs who have been able to transcend citizenship deficits have been able to do so because of economic and political capital in addition to benefitting from Whiteness (p. 50).

Citizenship Excess and Media

Isabel Molina-Guzmán (2012) examines how Latinx immigrants are framed in U.S. news media, concluding that “citizenship is always aligned with whiteness (sometimes black) and noncitizenship is associated with Latina/os” (p. 221). Hector Amaya (2013) expands on Molina-Guzmán (2012) by arguing Latinxs are symbolically erased from the national imaginary in that media portrayals of Latinxs represent them as deficient in citizenship and thus, their political capital is diminished; this contrasts with his theoretical concept of citizenship excess where “citizenship excess is a type of *process* that legalizes inclusion and exclusion” (p. 33). Amaya (2013) combines cultural, political, and legal definitions of citizenship to expose how citizenship becomes a technology of power that generates legal inequality. Citizenship excess negatively affects Latinxs in the realm of “institutions (the nation-state), forms of consciousness (the citizen), and political and cultural practices (the national political community)” (Amaya, 2013, p. 15). Amaya’s (2013) theoretical concept of citizenship excess is underpinned by scholarship on coloniality and critical race theory that highlight the ethnoracial roots of the formation of the United States. Amaya (2013) argues:

When we simply theorize citizenship as a neutral technology of power, we are being generous to a concept that citizenship excess defines as intrinsically polluted. Citizenship excess acknowledges that citizenship is a technology of power, but it also theorizes that excess has always been part of citizenship and that citizenship also means the willingness to coerce and to remain ethically pure while coercing. (p. 19)

Thus, focusing on this wide-reaching, viral event, this article explores audience interpretations, corporate responses, and social media in its contextualized, racialized United States setting.

History of Latin American Immigration to the United States and Background on the Advertisement

In the above literature, we outline key findings in polysemy, social media, and citizenship excess to begin connecting threads about how discourses of immigration both impact and are impacted by

advertising spectacles like the Super Bowl. With 84 Lumber's advertisement, though, also comes the weight of historic contestations around immigration, labor, and the meaning of citizenship. Pulling citizenship excess and deficit into this history contextualizes the advertisement and the political environment into which the advertisement aired.

Juan González (2011) presents the most comprehensive history of the Latinx experience and immigration from Latin America to the United States in *Harvest of Empire*. In this history, González connects the flow of capital from the United States to Latin America, at a time when the former was expanding its territory, to the rise of the United States as an economic empire dominating the modern world, and subsequently, to the rise in migration north from Latin America since the 1960s. More specifically, González contends that Latin American immigrants differ from previous immigrants for a number of reasons. Unlike other immigrants, Latin Americans were unable to transition from immigrant status to the mainstream. Instead, immigrants from Latin America were constrained into a linguistic and racialized caste status. Ultimately, Latin Americans did not see Whiteness³ expand, as it did for European immigrants in the preindustrial era, to incorporate them into the national fabric. As much is evidenced by Trump's presidential campaign "Make America Great Again," which was launched by Trump's specific and sustained attacks against Mexican immigrants. Eduardo Gonzalez (2019) contends that then candidate Trump tapped into preexisting stereotypes in his campaign speeches, such as immigrant bodies contaminating U.S. soil (Cisneros, 2008); Latinx immigrants and refugees threatening American life (Molina-Guzmán, 2012); and xenophobic fears about shifting demographics (Villa-Nicholas, 2019). Galarza (2020) specifically addresses discourses of citizenship excess and deficit in the CW's TV series *Jane the Virgin*. These discourses are united by the thread of citizenship, culture, and media because cultural depictions contest the citizenship of Latinxs in the United States (E. Gonzalez, 2019).

Background on the Advertisement

The 90-second version of this advertisement, titled "The Journey Begins," aired shortly before the Super Bowl halftime show to an audience of approximately 111.3 million,⁴ according to Nielsen ratings reports (Huddleston, 2017). This advertisement begins with the journey of an undocumented mother and daughter from Mexico through the borderlands, relying on facial expressions, pastoral depictions of rural Mexico, and soft background music to create a carefully and beautifully constructed pathos-based appeal. The ad successfully uses close-up shots of the daughter's hopeful, smiling face as she gathers scraps of red, white, and blue material during the journey, presenting the daughter as an optimistic and innocent adventurer. Wide shots of family farms, forest sunsets, and desert campfires present the journey as a fun exploration, with the heart of the advertisement being the interpersonal relationship between mother and daughter. However, before the family actually makes it to the United States, the advertisement is cut short with the text "see the conclusion at Journey84.com" (84 Lumber, 2017a). 84 Lumber tweeted the longer

³ For a history on European immigration to the United States, see Painter's *The History of White People* (2011).

⁴ Huddleston (2017) reports that the broadcast audience size for the 2017 Super Bowl was 111.3 million, per Nielsen ratings. However, this number does not account for audience viewership via livestream online, Fox Sports Go, and Fox Deportes—a Spanish-language channel. Fox reported that these additional ways of watching the Super Bowl brought the total audience size to 113.7 million (Huddleston, 2017).

version of the advertisement with the caption "Our complete Super Bowl story. See a mother & daughter's *symbolic* [emphasis added] journey toward becoming legal American citizens. [link]" (84 Lumber News, 2017b). This longer advertisement shows the mother and daughter's arrival to a border wall made of concrete, and they walk through recently constructed wooden doors. The advertisement ends with "the will to succeed is always welcome here," but before this text, audiences see a group of construction workers drive away from the border after having constructed the doors, implying the supplies used to build them came from 84 Lumber (Hill, 2017).

A day after the Super Bowl, the company responded to criticisms leveled by Twitter users who argued 84 Lumber was endorsing undocumented immigration with a statement saying,

We do not condone illegal immigration. The journey of the mother and daughter symbolizes grit, dedication and sacrifice. Characteristics that we look for in our people at 84 Lumber. President Trump has previously said there should be a "big beautiful door in the wall so that people can come into this country legally." We couldn't agree more. (Hill, 2017)

The purpose of the advertisement was to recruit potential employees (Kelly, 2017), but because of the polysemy of the advertisement, some interpretations ran counter to 84 Lumber's intent, as will be discussed in our analysis.

Method

This article addresses audience interpretations through Twitter of both the short and long versions of 84 Lumber's advertisements; these analyses are drawn from Noble and Tynes' (2016) work on Internet cultures and intersectionality, and Stoltzfus-Brown's (2018) work on social media hashtags surrounding the Women's March movement. Through this social media platform, we conducted an advanced search for tweets published anywhere in the world with the hashtags #84lumber and #superbowl between February 5, 2017 (Super Bowl Sunday), and February 26, 2017. We used Twitter because of its accessibility and the fact that it is a relatively public platform, keeping in mind that not all searchable tweets were actually visible. We selected a three-week time span because the Super Bowl advertisement drove audience engagement for more than three weeks, according to Brunnerworks, the advertising agency that produced the advertisement (Brunner Company, n.d.). The tweets were sorted from most recent to oldest and, after scrolling to the bottom of the search results, the Web page was converted to a PDF file, printed, and archived.

The original sample contained 1,199 tweets, excluding original tweets to which some users were responding. From this sample we discarded tweets consisting of only links to the short or long version of the advertisement, including links from news organizations and advertising agencies, because these tweets lacked commentary; tweets that did not clearly offer the user's opinion or interpretation of the advertisement(s); tweets seemingly from bots and not from legitimate Twitter users; tweets merely addressing facts, such as the company's website crashing or Fox banning the long version of the advertisement; tweets conveying sarcasm or opinions or arguments related to the football game itself; tweets that repeated verbatim a tweet from a different Twitter user; and tweets in languages other than English and Spanish given the ties of these two languages to the topic. After manually excluding tweets that

fit the previous descriptions, 749 original tweets were individually analyzed. We used Fiesler and Proferes's (2018) recommendations to "reflect carefully" on which tweets to include because their content, context, and "reasonable expectations of privacy" (p. 11); as such, the tweets we include later in our analysis as representative rely on handles seemingly not connected to someone's legal name (e.g., "@PoopyWonton"), and we did not include tweets from private (protected) accounts.

A grounded theoretical approach was undertaken for analysis, pulling from Strauss's critical interpretive version wherein "the study's emphases develop from the data rather than from research questions" (Tracy, 2013, p. 185), but being cognizant of iterative approaches placing emergent data in conversation with existing literature. Christine Scodari (2004) defines this approach as "designed to inhibit imposition of preexisting stances. Instead, appropriate categories are formed and reformed as the data are encountered. These categories and their data then generate appropriate theories and concepts, whether vetted or newly emergent" (p. 179). This theoretical approach informed the methodology of classification and analysis. Every tweet was read in linear progression in their physical form. Then tweets were highlighted, circled, and annotated with notes, such as blue for "crying/sad," red for "love/ing/ed," and yellow for "praise/clapping," as themes emerged. After marking each tweet, we used "primary-cycle coding" to lump together recurring phrases and emotions such as "illegal, #nobannowall, thank you, beautiful, confusion, illegal, and immigra/nt/ion," (Tracy, 2013, p. 169). The representative tweets for each theme are presented verbatim with the exception of emoticons and emojis, for which a textual description is provided. We italicize certain words in the tweets presented here to signal the emphasis placed on emerging themes. Eventually, key themes emerged when the first author initially gathered and analyzed each tweet; the second author later reviewed the data sample and conferred the themes. Each theme will be discussed below, beginning with tweets reinforcing the ambiguous nature of this advertisement and then moving toward those interpretations that fell firmly toward a given reading of the advertisement.

Findings, or the Difficulty of Polysemy

The range of themes emerging from the sample of tweets include humanizing immigrants, identification with the immigrant journey, confusion about the advertisement's message, endorsing illegal immigration, and oppositional decoding that demonstrates a greater awareness of the context surrounding the advertisement. However, the advertisement also had a limited range of plausible interpretations--a constrained polysemy following Rivera-Perez's (1996) argument that polysemy cannot be split from mainstream ideologies. We argue that the inherent connection between interpretation and ideology similar to Hall's (1980) notion of preferred readings may lead to complex interpretive boundaries. Constrained polysemy, then, can be defined as a hegemonic act done to support a dominant narrative. There are still plausible interpretations, but some amount of audience agency is amputated when the act of interpretive play is shut down by the overarching corporate property. Trying to identify the dominant reading of this advertisement in its entirety is difficult because the advertisement was purposefully encoded with multiple meanings before its polysemy was limited by 84 Lumber itself in subsequent engagement with audiences' responses.

In this case, the subject position of the audience member is especially important. Given the political context surrounding the advertisement, audience members who might be supportive of President Trump's

travel ban and proposal for expanding construction of a wall on the U.S.–Mexico border might interpret the advertisement as endorsing illegal immigration. Or they may interpret the advertisement as being supportive of President Trump’s “big beautiful door” idea (Glum, 2015; Hill, 2017). Conversely, audience members critical of President Trump’s border wall proposal and the travel ban might interpret this advertisement as a challenge, “standing up” or “resistance” to the president’s immigration policies because the mother and daughter illegally enter the country and might be perceived as the protagonists. The majority of Twitter users in this sample tweeted about immigration and topics closely related to immigration including labor, politics, and consumer power.

Confusion and Mixed Signals

The first emergent theme is related to confusion about the advertisement’s message, thus reflecting the polysemic potential the advertisement contains. Some users expressed confusion explicitly, and others asked questions indicating one or more plausible interpretations of the Super Bowl advertisement. This can be demonstrated by the following: “Am I the only one that’s *confused* by the message of the #84lumber ad? It could be considered *pro wall or anti wall*. #SuperBowl” (Heyheydaddio, 2017), and another tweet stating: “#84Lumber #SuperBowl ad immigration debate, Upon viewing, it’s *not entirely clear what the ad is trying to say*” (Sanuuuuu!, 2017). Examples of users asking specific questions include tweets like: “WTF #84lumber are you srsly [*sic*] showcasing illegal immigrants?? Or was that ad *abt [sic] something else?* #SuperBowl,” (Peterson, 2017), and “Did #84lumber just run a help wanted ad for #illegalimmigrants on the #SuperBowl ???” (Riehm, 2017), and “Is #84lumber selling building supplies or immigration reform? #SuperBowl” (Weaver, 2017). One user asked for other interpretations of the advertisement, tweeting: “We are all in agreement that the @84LumberNews #SuperBowl ad promotes open borders. Right? *Any other way to interpret it?*#ad Bowl #84lumber” (Eldridge, 2017). Yet another user tweeted a question with a different interpretation, saying: “What the fuck was that?!?!?!? #84lumber are they the official builder of #trumpswall #NoBanNoWall #SuperBowl #SuperBowlSunday #refuse #resist” (Liston, 2017). Again, these user tweets exemplify the advertisement’s constrained polysemy and the difficulty of an overly ambiguous message designed to entertain and persuade a mass audience through being vaguely political.

Humanizing the Immigrant Experience

From the first emergent theme expressing confusion, the other representative themes moved on to a constrained polysemic interpretation dependent not just on 84 Lumber’s statements, but also cultural discourse surrounding citizenship excess and deficit outlined by Amaya (2013). As such, the next emergent theme was the interpretation that this advertisement humanized the immigrant experience (of walking through the borderlands to “El Norte”). One user tweeted, “Commendations to #84Lumber for the #SuperBowl #commercial pointing out that we are all *humans* and strive for a better life” (De Mattos, 2017). Another echoed a similar interpretation, tweeting: “I’ll say that I am a fan of 84 Lumber’s ad. *Humans are humans*, no matter where they come from #SuperBowl #NeverTrump #84Lumber” (PostFactualPTX, 2017). Others expressed gratitude toward the company for a message they interpreted as supportive of humanity, tweeting: “#cocacola #Budweiser #airbnb #84lumber #audi Thank you for supporting *humanity* & embracing the real great American values #SuperBowl” (Habash, 2017). Another user explicitly addressed

the company's perceived purpose and message, saying: "#84Lumber spot was NOT meant to endorse illegal immigration. It was to remind us that *immigrants (legal or not) are HUMAN*. #SuperBowl" (X. Gonzalez, 2017). Lastly, another user asked a question indicative of the perceived message of the advertisement: "If this commercial doesn't get to your heart & *humanity*, what will? #84lumber #superbowl" (Jodi, 2017). Users' interpretation of the advertisement as humanizing speaks to immigrants being negatively represented in media, such as the visual narrative of "immigrant as pollutant" (Cisneros, 2008). This dehumanization is reflective of how Amaya theorizes that immigrants with citizenship deficit may be viewed as not quite as human when compared with those with citizenship excess.

Identifying with the Immigrant Experience

Another emergent theme is users' identification with the immigrants' journey. For these users, the interpretation of the advertisement's message as a universal narrative about immigrants is implied. Interestingly, though, tweets placed in this category were all *personal* identifications with immigration because the users were immigrants themselves or were descendants of immigrants. For example, one user tweeted: "84 Lumber Super Bowl Commercial—The Entire Journey. #Resistance #ourstory#mexican #american #84lumber #Superbowl" (Ruelas, 2017). Similarly, another user tweeted: "#84Lumber #SuperBowl Ad—The #EntireJourney [link] via @YouTube Thx u 4 *telling my #family story*& 4 taking a stand" (Panameno, 2017). Yet another user tweeted, and later deleted, a universalizing interpretation, saying, "@84LumberNews Thank you for helping to tell the TRUE *story of so many immigrants*. #SuperBowl #84Lumber" (Lynn, 2017). Another user tweeted twice about personal identification with immigrant narratives, saying: "Watching that #84lumber #SuperBowl commercial is like *reliving my immigrant story* [sad face emoji, sad face emoji, sad face emoji]" (Edith, 2017a) and described her age, "#84lumber #SuperBowl #SuperBowl2017 just took me back to *when I was 9 years old* [sad face emoji, sad face emoji] #immigration" (Edith, 2017b). In addition, a user tweeted about identification with the advertisement's message through immigrant grandparents, saying: "[crying emoji] I'm still [sad face w/tear emoji] #84lumber #SuperBowl #Mexican #Hispanics #Latin #Immigrants #refugees #MyGrandparents[USA Flag emoji]" (Mex1candy, 2017a) and "[womanw/hand-raised emoji] lost my [poop emoji] so emo [crying emoji] for *grandparents immigrants* that risked it all for us to be living the [USA Flag emoji] American Dream #84Lumber #SuperBowl" (Mex1candy, 2017b). Most of these users interpreted the advertisement through personal and often emotional narratives about immigration and the desire to be American, recognizing the ad's symbolic nature while still being struck by its romantic, inspirational aesthetic. Thus, the advertisement gave visibility to these stories through social media interpretations that connected familial and cultural memory with contemporary media representations. As argued by Villa-Nicholas (2019), "these [tweets by Latinx users], then, can be seen as data that reveal the contemporary anxieties, collective memory building, and current shaping of Latinx identity" (p. 4). The second and third themes of humanizing immigrants and identifying with the immigrant journey through one's own direct connection to immigration are interesting in that these interpretations rely on preexisting familiarity with the very real difficulties of immigration as opposed to the purely symbolic immigration journey the advertisement depicts. Additionally, following Eduardo Gonzalez (2019), as the advertisement does not use tropes of "Latino identity across social and political spheres: the bandit, male buffoon, female clown, Latin lover, dark lady, and the harlot" (p. 52), it may be easier for these audiences to interpellate the mother and daughter as being familiar, familial, and

nonthreatening. However, these two interpretive themes are dissonant when placed in conversation with our other emergent themes, as will be discussed below.

Connecting 84 Lumber to American Values

A minor theme present in the analysis is the mention of values and implication that the advertisement's implied values are distinctly American values. Some tweets interpreted the advertisement's message--and, therefore, 84 Lumber as an entire company--as embodying American values. For example, the tweet "Beautiful msg #84lumber 'The Will to Succeed is always welcome here' #America #weaccept #SuperBowl #NationOfImmigrants #values #NoBanNoWall" (Hopkins, 2017). Other users voiced criticism of those in power, tweeting: "[link] TFW [the face when] an obscure lumber company knows more about *American values* than our so-called government #84lumber #SuperBowl" (Sherman, 2017), and, though later deleted, "#SuperBowl winner: America & diversity #weaccept! YES to #Audi #airbnb #cocacola #84lumber #Budweiser and REAL #AMERICANvalues. [heart emoji] #NMP [NotMyPresident]" (Lynne, 2017). Another user tweeted: ".@84LumberNews THIS [the advertisement] is the embodiment of *American values*. We support your stand for *what is right*. #SuperBowl #84lumber" (Our Misconception, 2017). For these users, the advertisement's message was about American values and the perceived threat to those values by the current conservative political administration. However, it is important to highlight that these users did not specify what American values are or which American values were drawn from their interpretations of the advertisement. The positive ambiguity of the advertisement was successful in reflecting a prism of vague value statements, demonstrating myriad ways the advertisement was successful according to audiences, at least in the previous two themes discussed. This interpretation relied less on a personal identification with immigrants deserving citizenship because of their humanity and more on immigrants deserving citizenship because of perceived American patriotism, conflating citizenship with assimilation. This theme echoes the second and third themes in that these interpretations are largely positive, but the next theme demonstrates just how polysemic and polarizing the advertisement originally was. Given the depiction of the little girl making an American flag out of scraps she picks up along the way, these immigrants must also be *patriotic* to the United States—preferably before they even enter the country. These hegemonic narratives emphasizing a focus on vague American values simultaneously ignore the United States' responsibility in contributing to the oppressive conditions immigrants seek to escape (Cantú, Luibhéid, & Stern, 2011).

Connecting 84 Lumber to the Latino Threat Narrative

The themes mentioned above construct immigrants as worthy not just of humanity, but also of cultural citizenship and belonging in the United States because of the mother and daughter's perceived American values. 84 Lumber's attempts at creating a humanist, symbolic, and wholesome advertisement using the ostensibly nonthreatening bodies of a mother and daughter backfired when confronted by users invested in the rigidly gendered and racialized Latino Threat Narrative (Chavez, 2013). For instance, one user stated: "Update: #84Lumber releases new video today..mom has had 4 anchor babies since last filming! #tcot #SuperBowl #tgdN #MAGA #Trump" (Krok, 2017). Chavez (2013) notes that the inclusion of "anchor baby" in the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language has a contested history because the original definition ignored that the term is a pejorative political construct and has been revised as follows:

Anchor baby, n. *Offensive*. Used as a disparaging term for a child born to a noncitizen mother in a country that grants automatic citizenship to children born on its soil, especially when the child's birthplace is thought to have been chosen in order to improve the mother's or other relatives' chances of securing eventual citizenship. (Chavez, 2013, p. 203)

As such, "anchor baby" is a discursive tool that delegitimizes the citizenship claims of not only naturalized Latin American immigrants but also their descendants. And that is the Latinx condition. Another tweet connected the Latino Threat Narrative and trope of Latinx hyperfertility with the "Welfare Queen" trope, commenting "I bet the 2nd half of the 84 Lumber ad doesn't show her at the food stamp office . . . #SuperBowl #84Lumber #Budweiser" (ruff, 2017). One tweet that was later deleted leaned on misogynistic constructions of women as being weaker and lesser, claiming: "#84Lumber doesn't mention women left in the desert bc they're slowing the group down and die from thirst #SuperBowl #SuperBowlCommercials" (Hambo, 2017). Conflating myriad older sexist and racist stereotypes highlight Amaya's (2013) argument that throughout U.S. history, marginalized bodies must repeatedly prove their claim to egalitarian citizenship rights, and even then, such rights may be denied by self-appointed gatekeepers (p. 80). As such, the above interpretations demonstrate that 84 Lumber's attempts at creating an advertisement appealing to emotions and the beauty of interpersonal connection failed in the face of anti-immigrant discourse.

Accusing 84 Lumber of Betraying American Values

Other tweets expanded on this criticism, moving beyond stereotyping the mother and daughter to criticizing the commercial as a whole and its presumed message of an "immigrant-friendly" America. One emergent theme is that of interpreting the advertisement as endorsing illegal immigration. Instead of viewing the advertisement as humanizing, these users interpreted it as condoning the act of illegally immigrating into the country. One user, whose tweet was later deleted, tweeted: "#SuperBowl #NFL #84lumber *endorsing* human trafficking, child labor, *illegal immigration*. Shameful" (Darth Man Boobs, 2017). Another user's tweet, though later deleted, accused 84 Lumber of committing a crime: "@84LumberNews should investgated [*sic*] for *breaking employment laws!* Their commercial is a confession. Retweet if u agree. #84lumber #SuperBowl" (Wick, 2017). Yet another user went further in accusing 84 Lumber of prioritizing undocumented immigrants, tweeting: "#SuperBowl NO MORE OF MY MONEY #84lumber U are *promoting breaking the LAW & putting illegals 1st* #boycott84lumber" (Gay & Deplorable, 2017). This particular statement viewing immigrant bodies as themselves "illegal" is dehumanizing according to Amaya's (2013) and Chavez's (2013) statements about how some immigration discourses conflate citizenship status with xenophobic morality. Chavez (2013) argues that "being an unauthorized migrant, an 'illegal,' is a status conferred by the state, and it then becomes written upon the bodies of the migrants themselves because illegality is both produced and experienced" (p. 28). 84 Lumber echoed this discourse by characterizing immigrant bodies as "illegal" in the advertisement and backtracking in a response to a tweet saying, "We employ skilled labor both full-time & through subcontract trade partners. These individuals are neither cheap nor illegal" (84 Lumber News, 2017c).

To get around the 140-character limit of the medium, another user tweeted, and later deleted, an image with text saying,

@84LumberNews #84lumber #SuperBowl #SuperBowl2017 #SB51 Virtue signaling scumbags promoting the *invasion* of their own country. [image text: While you're on your social justice warrior campaign, please make a commercial featuring American contractors, tradesmen and laborers who are out of work and bankrupt because illegal aliens that don't pay taxes and work for \$5 an hour put them out of business? *Glamorizing a mother and child making a dangerous and illegal crossing into America* like it's a trip to Disneyland is outright shameful and a slap in the face to the people who buy your products.]. (M'Kek, 2017)

The presence of these interpretations represents one end of a spectrum of constrained perceptions, particularly in light of 84 Lumber's official rejection of that interpretation as valid in favor of describing the immigration journey as symbolic and romantic rather than material and realistic. Interestingly, these interpretations relied on viewing the advertisement as literal as opposed to simply symbolic, using a willingness to suspend disbelief about the realities depicted by the advertisement. They also presented any and all Latinx bodies as citizenship deficient, dangerous, and, invasive, thus feeding into the "existing bandit stereotypes of Latin[x] as threatening the U.S. economy, jobs, and lives" (E. Gonzalez, 2019, p. 59).

Contextualizing and Critiquing 84 Lumber's Praxis

The last theme identified in analysis was perhaps the most intriguing: those tweeting about the context surrounding the advertisement, demonstrating a greater awareness of 84 Lumber as well as the pedagogical potential a medium like Twitter provides for intercultural communication (Maragh, 2016). Tweets in this theme connected 84 Lumber's actions as a corporate entity, 84 Lumber's actions as a political actor, and existing tensions about how "Latin[x] bodies are criminalized in the social and political imaginaries of the U.S. public" (E. Gonzalez, 2019, p. 60). For example, one user said the advertisement was misleading: "For all you clapping over #84Lumber commercial, stop. Owner voted for Trump. It's *misleading*. Read their REAL message #SuperBowl" (Lizzie, 2017). Another user extended his critique of 84 Lumber to address what they perceived as the purpose of the advertisement, tweeting an image with the following text:

84 Lumber is not your friend. *84 Lumber doesn't care about immigration. 84 Lumber doesn't want to help immigrants get into this country. They want to use tragedy as a profit tool. They want your money, that's it.* Any money that 84 Lumber has made out of your pockets that's tied up in politics goes straight to republicans. Republicans like Paul Ryan, specifically, who's house aids secretly helped the trump administration write the immigration ban. Which also severely threatens the separation of powers. Fuck 84 Lumber. Fuck conscious consumerism. Fuck that stupid commercial . . . (Garcia, 2017)

That is, a corporation is transforming economic capital into political speech that feeds into hegemonic and nativist immigration discourses at the expense of undocumented immigrants. 84 Lumber, as a corporation with political speech rights in the United States, used its position as a political and corporate actor in creating the advertisement. 84 Lumber then used Twitter to clarify its political position, thus flexing 84 Lumber's own citizenship excess as a corporate entity. This is symbolic violence that can transform into material

violence and the further dehumanization of people who, because of the fiction of legality and illegality, are imbued with citizenship deficit. Undocumented people, as Amaya (2013) demonstrates, do not have juridical standing. They are not subjects; they are objects. The company explicitly constrained audience interpretations by not only presenting a visual depiction of undocumented immigrants but by also arguing that "the journey" was a symbolic representation of the path to citizenship via Twitter (84 Lumber News, 2017b). This is citizenship excess: normalizing the notion that there are only two types of people—citizens and noncitizens (Amaya, 2013, p. 92).

The number of tweets placed in this category of greater awareness was small but discursively significant. Twitter users in this category not only demonstrated greater awareness surrounding the company but also expressed confusion and opposition to the multiple messages they perceived from the advertisement. Some of these users' tweets included links to stories about 84 Lumber officials clarifying the advertisement was not pro-immigration, adding to a critical reading of both the advertisement itself and 84 Lumber's underlying goals. Latinx identity in the United States, as evidenced by these tweets, is seen by some as "one that updates in real time through nostalgia, activism, and as a product to be sponsored and consumed" (Villa-Nicholas, 2019, p. 9). 84 Lumber's use of Latinx immigrant bodies as little more than an advertising object—and the corporate distancing from actual undocumented Latinx immigrant voices—is what tweets in this last theme critiqued.

Conclusion and Future Study

84 Lumber's hiring campaign and the advertisement are about individuality and the values of "grit, determination, and hard work" (84 Lumber Company, n.d., par. 1). Again, the Journey 84 website interpellates readers as subjects and asks them to think about whether they embody those values (84 Lumber Company, n.d.). The themes emerging in this analysis are in tension with one another, much like the differences between the advertisement's inspirational fictions and its creators' staunch rebuttals. As one user astutely tweeted, "The #84lumber #SuperBowl ad is the Rorschach test for how you feel about Mexican immigration" (Lechner, 2017). The advertisement is humanizing. The advertisement is endorsing illegal immigration. The advertisement is pro-Trump. The advertisement is anti-Trump. The advertisement is patriotic. The advertisement is un-American. The advertisement's messages embody a constrained polysemy where nearly all interpretations related to immigration are plausible. *And that is the point.* Within the advertisement and its ideological context, there is tension between the hypervisibility of Latinxs in media whereby Latinx populations are presented as always foreign, immigrant, and other; there is simultaneously symbolic annihilation and erasure of Latinxs' bodies who are citizens, who were born in the United States, and who never immigrated. As such, the advertisement discursively forecloses audiences' interpretations of Latinx individuals as *already* citizens, instead constraining brown bodies to outsider status (Amaya, 2013). Regardless of the multiple interpretations, the dominant themes we found are connected by threads of citizenship excess and deficit and the Latino Threat Narrative (Chavez, 2013).

Chavez (2013) argues that a pervasive social imaginary, the Latino Threat Narrative, turns the lives of Latinxs into "virtual lives," where they are objectified and dehumanized even when this narrative is not explicitly invoked. That is, Latinxs, whether U.S.- or foreign-born, "are no longer flesh-and-blood people; they exist as images" (Chavez, 2013, p. 47). Some Twitter users' commentary reflected these binary

abstractions that relied on using the term “illegal” to advance simplistic interpretations that ignored how citizenship and legal status are not neutral and are instead categories meant to give and remove privilege. Rosaldo (1997) suggests the following about the use of “illegal” to mark Latinxs as less than law-abiding:

By a psychological and cultural mechanism of association all Latinos are thus declared to have a blemish that brands us with the stigma of being outside the law. We always live with that mark indicating that whether or not we belong in this country is always in question. (p. 31)

Citizenship is always contingent on structures of power, and this commentary ignores the reality that Latinxs’ bodies will always be marked by the legal fiction of illegality--citizenship deficient, to recall Amaya (2013). In doing so, the advertisement and its various flippant responses also ignore the reality that this citizenship deficit is used to police and surveil Latinx bodies--particularly immigrant ones--while engaging in mundanities: obtaining a license, liking a Facebook post, or simply using their legal name on social media (Rivlin-Nadler, 2019).

Ultimately, the advertisement is disruptive, and its ambivalence in articulating multiple meanings potentially positions audiences against each other instead of the lumber company and 84 Lumber’s strategic use of broader immigrant narratives. However, some Twitter users vowed to boycott the company and others vowed to support it with their wallets. The lumber company faced some criticism, but most critiques were about illegal immigration or about hiring undocumented workers. Perhaps additional analysis of 84 Lumber’s Twitter page would yield more nuanced criticisms, as virtually none of the users in this sample critiqued the company for advancing representations of a journey to citizenship that simply does not exist.

For future research in the area of polysemy, citizenship excess, and mediated representations of Latinx immigrants and identity, there are many angles of exploration ripe for analysis. Though they are beyond the scope of this article, several advertisements in the unusual climate of the 2017 Super Bowl addressed immigration issues more broadly. Comparative analyses of mediated depictions of immigrant experiences could explore the unique ways non-Latinx immigrants are racialized in advertising. Researchers could also discuss additional Super Bowl advertisements and the role of Whiteness, such as the 2017 Budweiser advertisement; analyze the 84 Lumber advertisement using a political economic lens; conduct a rhetorical analysis of 84 Lumber’s political speech; or explore subsequent boycotts of 84 Lumber and mediated discourse surrounding the ostensible activism of the advertisement.

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