1 Introduction

This Element's main argument is that pragmatics, more specifically (im)politeness research, needs to be more cognizant of intergroup communication, understood as those cases in which social – rather than individual – identity is salient (Giles, 2012). The thrust behind it is that there seem to be many communicative phenomena that simply cannot be accounted for in interpersonal terms but are collective in nature and should be understood by recourse to a group. This is true of interactions when those involved occupy positions afforded to them by a recognized social identity – such as employer/employee in a corporate meeting or Black Lives Matter supporter in a demonstration. Further, there are certain actions that cannot be performed at the individual level because they emanate from the group and, as such, need to be carried out by it (or emissaries acting on its behalf). Among these, we find groups' reprisal to members' breaching of social norms. Social norms are, in themselves, a quintessential group phenomenon. By displaying overt (or at least perceived) disdain for group norms, a member may be (intentionally or perceived as) signaling that they do not conform to the group's cultural practices and thus be seen as potentially harmful to group life. Often, different types of retribution for infringement ensue which, on occasion, may be quite severe, resulting in group exclusion and ostracism (Tomasello et al., 2012).

Group exclusion practices are at the heart of what has become known as *cancel culture (CC)*, here understood as a blanket term used to refer to a modern form of ostracism in which someone (the *cancelee*) is thrust out of social or professional circles as a result of being fired, deplatformed or boycotted by others, the *cancelers*. The *cancelee* is also subjected to public shaming and censorship and often faces serious financial, and even legal, repercussions for having engaged in different types of behavior perceived as immoral. Morality is closely connected to social norms and, thus, to group goals and collective intentionality (Tomasello, 2018). While the fact that *CC* exists is not controversial, what varies substantially is whether it is seen either as (i) a way to keep individuals accountable and provide a voice to traditionally disenfranchised groups (first wave) or (ii) an unjust form of punishment and censorship that aims at undermining, among others, freedom of speech (second wave; Romano, 2021; Section 4.2). Here, without taking a stance on whether its goals are laudable or censurable, *cancelation* is viewed as an intrinsically aggressive off/online set of group practices whose main goals are public exposure, group exclusion, punishment of target *cancelees,* and social regulation. *CC*-associated practices can thus be categorized as a type of *reactive aggression* (Allen & Anderson, 2017) since they involve retaliation to perceived offense with further offense (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2022b). Therefore, this Element is firmly

anchored in the subfield of pragmatics that analyzes understandings of (im) politeness and language aggression and conflict (Culpeper, 2011).

By focusing on their interconnections, this Element aims at advancing our knowledge of intergroup communication, on the one hand, and of *CC*, on the other. With very few exceptions (Bouvier, 2020; Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2021, 2022a, 2022b; Haugh, 2022), *CC* analyses have taken a macro-level approach and, as a result, may have painted this social phenomenon with a thick brush, many of its idiosyncrasies glossed over (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2021). Indeed, some are calling for "qualitative accounts of the specific practices and interactional dynamics at play" and a more ethnographic approach to these phenomena (Ng, 2020: 623).

By taking a discursive pragmatics approach to the data (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2010c, 2013; Garcés-Conejos Blitvich & Sifianou, 2019) that involves macro/meso/micro-level analyses, this Element scrutinizes the complexities of three case studies of *cancelation* involving three American women from different walks of life: Congresswoman Liz Cheney, comedian Ellen Degeneres, and sports commentator Rachel Nichols.[1] Thus, the study has a USA focus. Importantly, although CC is claimed to be experienced elsewhere (Velasco, 2020), its origins are quintessentially American (see Section 4). To carry out the study, Fairclough's (2003) discourse in social practice model is taken as a starting point, since it nicely incorporates these three levels of sociological inquiry: discourses (macro-level units) are instantiated in genres (meso-level units), which are, in turn realized at the micro-level (via different types of linguistic – and other semiotic – [inter]actions) many of which are entextualized, such as the user-generated comments in the corpus. More specifically, *CC*, at the macro-level, is understood as a Big C Conversation (Gee, 2014) and will be distinguished from the processes involved in the now *recognizable* (Blommaert et al., 2018; Garfinkel, 2002) practice of *cancelation* (Saint-Louis, 2021) whereby individuals get canceled, which is properly realized at the meso-level via a complex genre ecology (Spinuzzi & Zachy, 2000) and at the micro-level by genre-specific constrained interactions. Although research (Saint-Louis, 2021) insightfully pointed to the conceptual differences between *CC* and *cancelation*, no discourse-based analysis to date has offered a detailed description of the meso-level practices deployed to carry out *cancelation*. From this perspective, this Element contributes to advancing discursive pragmatics/(im)politeness, as these fields have traditionally paid more attention to the macro and micro-levels.

[1] Three middle aged/white women were chosen as targets to homogenize the sample. However, this Element looks at *CC* from an ideological rather than gendered perspective.

Regarding the micro-level, interactions that realize the genre commonly known as online comments, a sizeable analytic corpus extracted from the *CC* Corpus, were qualitatively scrutinized to gain insights into intergroup communication. Although, as mentioned, *CC* is not just an online phenomenon, its online manifestations do carry significant weight as initiators and continuators of *cancelation*. In addition, they provide prime sites for the analysis of group behavior and intergroup communication. In part, this has to do with the anonymity afforded by online platforms: anonymity enhances social identity (Reicher et al., 1995). Further, digital communication allows for the creation of a multiplicity of diverse groups (from very *thick* to very *light*, Blommaert, 2017a) and affords the necessary "scenes," online free spaces (Fine, 2012; Rao & Dutta, 2012), for these groups to assemble and carry out different actions related to the group's goals. These goals are closely tied to their claimed social identity (Fine, 2012) and collective intentionality (Jankovic & Ludwig, 2017). In this respect, *CC* is related to what has been described as *light* groups, a staple of online communication. The present study also contributes to understanding of how such groups become agents (Tuomela, 2013).

Concerning *CC*, this Element helps to dispel some commonly held beliefs: such as that *CC* is entirely an online phenomenon or that it is univocal in its direction: led by *woke* mobs that seek the same goal. Indeed, conservatives also engage in a type of straightforward *cancelation* typically associated with the first wave of *CC* (as Cheney's case illustrates). Results confirm that *CC* has evolved since its inception and support claims of a second wave (Romano, 2021) in which the *ultimate canceller* – that is, corporations, political parties, and so on – rather than the *cancelees* themselves, becomes the target. However, this second wave is not necessarily conservative-led. A third type of *cancelation* (not associated with a specific political persuasion) targets both the *cancelee and* the *ultimate canceler*. Further, from the analysis of complex genre ecologies deployed to carry out *cancelation*s, *CC* emerges as prime example of the off/online nexus of post-digital societies (Blommaert, 2019) and will be here seen from the perspective of augmented reality which understands the digital and the physical as highly enmeshed (Jurgenson, 2011).

Additionally, although group phenomena such as social exclusion/ostracism have received considerable attention (Foucault, 1996; Hoover & Milner, 1998; Peters & Beasley, 2014) for the most part, little is known about how these exclusionary practices are carried out at the micro-level. Significantly, these rituals are approached here spatially, from a geo-semiotics perspective. Following Goffman (1963b), Scollon and Wong Scollon (2003) and Blommaert (2013), off/online space is understood as being regulative and, thus, historical and political. Further, applying the tenets of emotional geographies (Davidson et al., 2005),

the online free spaces here under scrutiny are seen as transforming into "other-condemning/suffering" (Haidt, 2003) emotional spaces where behavior considered antinormative (i.e., triggers that set *cancelation* in motion) is, in turn, un/civilly evaluated. Furthermore, said spaces become moralizing sites about offline normativity where the dark side of morality emerges full force (Monroe & Ashby Plant, 2019; Rempala et al., 2020). Relatedly, results reveal a close connection between morality, shared emotions, and aggressive retaliation via (im)politeness.

This Element is organized as follows: Section 2 discusses the hurdles to and proposes a model for a pragmatics/(im)politeness of intergroup communication. Section 3 pays close attention to the meso-level, the level of groups, and discusses how online spaces facilitate the formation of light groupings. Section 4 begins the empirical part of the Element by tackling the macro-level exploration of *CC* and includes an overview of the three case studies that are probed in the meso/micro-levels of analysis, the foci of Sections 5 and 6, respectively. For ease of reading, a methods section related to each discursive level starts the dedicated sections. In Section 7, analysis driven responses are provided to the guiding research questions (Section 3.1) and future venues for further research are discussed.

2 A Pragmatics of Intergroup Communication

Pragmatics, both utterance and discourse based, has mostly focused on interpersonal communication (Haugh et al., 2013; Locher & Graham, 2010), in which the personal/individual identity of the interlocutors is most salient. Personal identity refers to self-categories which define the individual as a unique person, regarding their individual differences from other (ingroup) members. For its part, intergroup communication was defined as "interactions where participants' group identities – their clans, cliques, unions, generations, families, and so on – almost entirely dictate the conversational dynamics; speakers' idiosyncratic characteristics here would be almost immaterial" (Giles, 2012: 3). The boundaries between personal and social identity are porous: group/social identity is the portion of an individual's self-concept derived from perceived membership in a relevant social group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979/2006). Despite pragmatics scholarship leaning toward the former, the latter plays a major (some argue even more highly pervasive) role in communication. As Giles (2012: 3) noted, "Henri Tajfel had always argued . . . that at least 70% of so-called interpersonal interactions were actually highly intergroup in nature . . . this could perhaps even turn to be an underestimate."

Saying that pragmatics has mostly focused on interpersonal communication does not mean that there are no studies in which intergroup communication figures prominently. For example, within (im)politeness research, there has been substantial work done on communication in professional genres: service

encounters (Márquez Reiter & Bou-Franch, 2017), health encounters (Locher & Schnurr, 2017); courtroom discourse (Lakoff, 1988), political discourse (Harris, 2001) and on gender (Holmes, 2013; Lakoff, 1975; Mills, 2003), all instances of social identity being salient. The same could be said about intercultural/cross-cultural/contrastive pragmatics that focus on national, ethnic, or language/culture groups (Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper, 1989; Márquez-Reiter & Placencia, 2005; Sifianou, 1999). To a lesser degree, links have been established between other social identities and (im)politeness. For instance, religion (Ariff, 2012), age (Bella, 2009), social class (Salmani-Nodoushan, 2007), and race (Morgan, 2010).

However, intergroup communication has often been approached from an interpersonal perspective and the constraints placed on communication by occurring intergroup have, in my view, not been sufficiently explored. This may be due, as Blommaert (2017a) discusses in his review of Durkheim's ideas, to the dominance of Rational Choice Theory, a spin-off of Methodological Individualism. Methodological Individualism argues that every human activity can be reduced to individual levels of subjectivity in action (such as interests, intentions, motives, concerns, decisions) even if it is eminently social. Rational Choice is driven by the maximization of individual profit (material and symbolic) and proceeds by means of calculated intentional and rational decisions by individuals.

It is not difficult to trace strong parallels between the tenets of Methodological Individualism and those of foundational models and theories of pragmatics, such as Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness, and their rational Model Person, Leech's (1983) characterization of pragmatics as eminently strategic and thus rhetorical, a means to an end, and the speaker-centeredness that dominates Speech Act Theory. Further, Blommaert (2017a: 17) points out that, in its most radical versions of Rational Choice, "people never seem to communicate or to communicate only in dyadic logical dialogue." Dyadic communication has also been a staple in pragmatics, perhaps another hurdle to tackling genres that involve collective engagement and polylogal interaction (Bou-Franch & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2014). All in all, with such a strong bias toward individualism, it has not been easy to conceptualize the "social fact," that is, the collective in Durkheim's terms, in pragmatic terms.

In the next three sections, I propose a framework to overcome potential hurdles to a group pragmatics/(im)politeness. Although it mostly focuses on (im)politeness, due to this Element's relational emphasis, it can be extended to other pragmatic phenomena (such as explicated/implicated meaning which is heavily influenced by the meso-level and individual/social identity claims/attribution). At the core of my proposal lies the recommendation to make pragmatics discursive in its orientation (see Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2010c, 2013; Garcés-Conejos Blitvich & Sifianou, 2019) and the related need to explore the meso-level of

sociological enquiry (much less researched than the macro and micro-levels in pragmatics scholarship). The meso-level happens to be the level of practices, and thus of groups, and, therefore, essential to understand collective action and intentionality (key components of the proposed framework). In this respect, Culpeper and Haugh (2021: 323) argue that "meso-level concepts do have an important role to play in teasing out the role context plays in assessments of (im) politeness. Indeed, we suspect that it is at the meso-level that the most important work in theorizing (im)politeness is most likely to continue." In addition, especially for research on (im)politeness, a discursive pragmatics opens the door to deeper considerations of identity in relation to face, central constructs of (im) politeness models, as identity is at the core of discourses.

2.1 Overcoming Potential Hurdles to a Pragmatics(im)politeness of Groups

2.1.1 Face and Identity

The lack of exploration of intergroup communication within pragmatics/(im) politeness may be due to several factors. One of them being that, in general, most research has not necessarily focused on identity but on *face*. Face, the inspiration behind the core concept in Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework, was defined by Goffman as "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact. Face is an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes" (1955/ 1967: 5). As Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2013) argued, Goffman conceptualized face as being tied to a line (a role, an identity).[2] However, Brown and Levinson's construal of face altered its essence, as they separated face from *line* and presented it as a primarily cognitive construct possessed by a rational *Model Person*. This focus on individualism is one of the reasons why their politeness theory drew some of the earliest critiques from scholars from collectivism-oriented cultures (Matsumoto, 1988; Nwoye, 1992) and the argument behind taking into consideration discernment along with strategic politeness (Ide, 1989). It has also been a deterrent for advancing the study of intergroup communication.

Relatedly, another reason leading to a dearth of research on intergroup communication can be related to how face is further conceptualized, more specifically as to whether it is taken to be accrued over time, which means it can be attached to groups (Sifianou 2011; Wang & Spencer-Oatey, 2015) or is emergent in interaction (Arundale, 1999; Haugh, 2007), in which case it cannot be shared by a group (since it is unlikely that all members would be interacting concurrently).

[2] Goffman dropped the term 'face' and substituted it with identity in the bulk of his work.

Although this is a key conceptual point that needs to be tackled to theorize intergroup communication (see Haugh et al., 2013 discussion of relational histories), it has not received significant attention within (im)politeness research. Some exceptions are Hatfield and Hahn (2014) and, more recently, O'Driscoll (2017: 104) who concluded that "it is again not clear how group face . . . is to be distinguished from (the self-evidently valid concept of) a group's reputation / image / identity." However, he went on to cite Spencer-Oatey's (2005) "social identity face," the desire for acknowledgment of one's social identities or roles (e.g., group leader, valued customer), as appearing to have distinct meaning.

In my view, the problems that face, as understood in the literature discussed, poses in relation to groups can be bypassed by resorting, instead, to a closely related concept: identity or the social positioning of self and other (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005: 586). Although face and identity are both significantly related to the construction and presentation of self (Goffman, 1955/1967), they have – for the most part – been the cornerstones of different research traditions. One fundamental difference between (im)politeness and identity scholarship is that the latter has devoted considerable thought to whether identity is accrued or emergent in interaction. There seems to be quite universal consensus in post-structural/discursive approaches to identity in this respect: identity is discursive, intersubjectively co-constructed, *emergent* in interaction (for instance, it involves those very ephemeral subject positions that we occupy in unfolding discourse and that make up stance), but also *durable* (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005).

Identities are durable, not because individuals have essential or primal identities, but because dialogically constructed identities are recreated in multiple local practices where they make sense and create meaning (Holland & Lave, 2001). Butler (1990) refers to a process of *sedimentation* whereby people repeatedly draw on resources that gradually build up an appearance of fixed identities. Whereas it is true that certain aspects of person, role and social identities are more stable, even those are always overlapping with each other and constantly changing (Burke & Stets, 2009). Barker and Galasinski (2001: 31) sum up this well when they state: "Identities are both unstable *and* temporarily stabilized by social practice and regular, predictable behaviour." From this unstable/stabilized, emergent/durable perspective, it is conceptually quite unproblematic to tie identity (and face, as we will see later in this section) to groups.

In the mid-to-late 2000s, identity started to be presented alongside face in the definitions of (im)politeness. Scholars also began enquiring about its relationship with face and introducing (im)politeness studies to the frameworks developed for the analysis of identity, arguing for their relevance to (im)politeness research (see among others Spencer-Oatey, 2007; Locher, 2008; Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2009, 2013; Garcés-Conejos Blitvich & Sifianou, 2017;

Garcés-Conejos Blitvich & Georgakopoulou, 2021). Those scholars who argued for a more multi-disciplinary approach to the study of (im)politeness phenomena saw identity models as a means to achieve that goal, due to the close relationship between face, identity, and self-presentation. Proposed ways of advancing the field can be summarized as follows:

a. (Im)politeness manifestations/assessments can be tied to identity (co)construction, not just to face.
b. Identity and face are inseparable, as they co-constitute each other.
c. (Im)politeness can be analyzed as an index in identity construction.
d. Models developed for the analysis of identity construction can be fruitfully applied to the study of (im)politeness (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich & Sifianou, 2017: 238).

Since then, identity has either replaced face as a core concept in (im)politeness research or has been seen as essential to grasp what face entails, as face needs vary depending on the identity being co-constructed by an agent engaged in a specific practice: that is, an agent's face needs as a *mother* differ substantially from those of the same agent's face as a *surgeon*, or as a *bridge player*. In this practice-based approach, face and identity are viewed as difficult to tease apart in interaction and as co-constituting each other (Joseph, 2013; Miller, 2013). Crucially, agents engaged in practice may claim or be attributed either an individual or a social identity and its concomitant face needs and thus group (social) identity is seen, from this perspective, as unproblematically tied to face. Indeed, the concept of self-esteem so closely connected to face is foremost in the conceptualization of social identity as discussed by Tajfel (1979) who proposed that the groups (e.g., social class, family, and football team) which people belonged to are an important source of pride and self-worth. Relatedly, Goffman (1959: 85) reconceptualized his framework in making the team, rather than the individual, the basic unit of the interactional order. The goal of the team is to help teammates maintain the line they have selected. In this sense, teams/groups provide us with a sense of belonging to the social world.

2.1.2 Collective Intentionality and Action

Yet, another motive behind the inattention toward intergroup communication in pragmatics/(im)politeness may have to do with the major role that intentionality has played in pragmatic understandings of the conveyance and interpretation of meaning (especially in the Cognitive-Philosophical foundational models and theories of the field, which primed speaker-meaning, such as Speech Act Theory, Grice's Cooperative Principle, etc.).

Although its role as an a priori concept has been questioned (Haugh, 2008a), most pragmatic scholars still see intention as playing a (varying) influential role in communication (Culpeper, 2011; different contributions to *Journal of Pragmatics 179*, 2021). As Haugh (2008b) discussed, traditional views relate intentionality to *individual* utterances/speakers, but a higher-order intention would need to be attached to larger stretches of discourse. In addition, if intentionality is understood as co-constructed among participants in interaction, it may be appropriate to consider a *we-intention* as also being applicable (Haugh, 2008a; Haugh & Jaszczolt, 2012). However, Haugh (2008b) saw *we-intention*, as described in the then extant literature, as static and not adequately capturing the emergent nature of inferential work underpinning cooperative activities, such as conversation.

An important, for this Element, related question is whether we should appeal to an ontology of group agents, i.e., when a team plays, is the team just made up of individuals coordinating in search of a common goal or is the team itself that plays? This question has been tackled mostly from the point of view of philosophy and resulted into two opposing camps: individualism and collectivism. Individualism understands and explains both individual action and social ontology resorting to individuals and their relations and interactions. For its part, collectivism argues that there are genuinely emergent social phenomena, such as social objects (i.e., groups), states, facts, events, and processes (Tuomela, 2013).

When dealing with shared intentions, more specifically, two opposing views are upheld: (i) those who spouse reductive views of shared intention, that is, attributing an intention to *us* – as in a group – can be undertaken by resorting to concepts related to individual action/intention, and (ii) those who disagree with this position and hold non-reductive views and understand *we-intentions* as involving an irreducible *we-mode*. The *we-mode* approach (Tuomela, 2007, 2011) is predicated on the crucial distinction between acting as a group member guided by the group ethos versus acting as a private person.

In more recent work, Tuomela (2017: 16) reviewed some of the central accounts of non-reductive views, namely those espoused by Gilbert (1989), Searle (2010) and himself (Tuomela, 2013), and described them along the following lines:

> Groups (including collectively constructed group agents) as social systems (interconnected structures formed out of individuals and their interrelations) seem in many cases to be ontologically emergent (viz. involve qualitatively new features as compared with the individualistic basis) and in this sense irreducible to the individualistic properties of our commonsense framework of agency and persons . . . on conceptual grounds collective states are not reducible to individualist states.

Despite some commonalities, Tuomela criticized Gilbert's plural subject theory arguing that it is circular and Searle's argumentation of *we-intentions* as underdeveloped. His own proposal – based on *I-mode/we-mode* of sociability that takes joint intention, interdependent member intentions (*we-intentions*) are expressible by "we will do x together" – was, in turn, also criticized as circular (Schweikard & Bernhard Schmid, 2021). Further, even among those who agree that collectives can be the subject of intentional state ascription, there is manifest dissent: Gilbert (1989) and Tollefsen (2002, 2015) argue that it is appropriate to attribute a range of intentional states including beliefs to groups. Others, Tuomela (2004) and Wray (2001), disagree with this position as groups, in their view, can accept propositions but cannot be believers.

From this discussion, it sounds as if all proposals that stem from philosophical explanations perhaps leave us with more questions than answers (Weir, 2014), which may also apply to general approaches to individualistic intention within pragmatics, mostly stemming from a philosophy of language tradition. The role of intentionality in interpersonal communication has proven to be difficult to ascertain or agree upon, and group intentionality is certainly not an unproblematic notion either. However, the post-hoc reconstruction of intentionality via inferences and attributions is key in communication, be it interpersonal or intergroup in nature. Therefore, understanding groupness and the attribution of goals and intentions to groups are essential for humans and, not surprisingly, they have played a major role in the development of the species' social cognition (Tomasello & Rakoczy, 2003).

Certainly, knowledge about groups carries important and, sometimes, vital information and impacts attitudes and behaviors (ingroup bias, implicit bias, moral obligations); therefore, it seems essential for humans to be able to categorize others as non/members. Apparently, this is something that children as young as 3 can easily do, using mutual intentions (i.e., the general agreement of individuals that they belong to a group, Noyes & Dunham, 2017: 34) as a guiding principle, closely connected to perceived common goals (Straka et al., 2021). Once groups are constituted socially, children seem strongly inclined to believe that groupness sanctions specific ways of relating and carries with it patterns of behavior, association, and moral obligations (Noyes & Dunham, 2017: 141).

Thus, how people are transformed from a random collection of individuals into a group, a social unit, oriented to joint action is, according to Jankovic and Ludwig (2017: 1–2) *the way they think* about what they are doing together; this way of thinking constitutes the focus of study of collective intentionality[3] (CI) which can be defined as:

[3] It is important to point out that intentionality is not limited to intentions, which are a propositional attitude directed at actions. Intentionality "encompasses all the propositional attitudes – believing, desiring, fearing, hoping, wishing, doubting … as well as perceiving … imagining … and