

**We’re all drama queens and kings**

In the late 1940s, as social psychologist Robert Bales conducted research on interpersonal interactions in small groups, he noticed people tend to “dramatize” while working on decision-making tasks.

This dramatizing showed up among group members as they discussed past or future scenarios and events. The conversation would speed up, group members would laugh, groan, joke, blush, and show signs of excitement and involvement.

Decades later, communication scholar Ernest Bormann extended Bales’s observations and identified this dynamic process as the sharing of group fantasies. In the 1970s, Bormann and a team of researchers developed Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT), inspired by their own studies in small group dynamics. They also develop a method of analysis, Fantasy Theme Analysis (FTA).

Bormann used the word “fantasies” to mean imaginative ideas. While the terms and concepts may sound strange, think of rhetorical fantasies as a technical term, not some psychological or subconscious phenomena. Identifying these fantasies helps us see the shared symbolic meanings that groups of people develop--that then may spread out to entire communities of likeminded people, creating “symbolic convergence.”

Today communication is much more visual, and scholars have found that symbolic convergence occurs in group visual communication, not just group speech. For example, people reacting to a popular culture trend or a political event may share memes or images on social media that encourage similar sharing.

Symbolic convergence can also be found in organizational communication, such as when corporations react to trending values (like environmentalism) or societal concerns (like immigration) and share expressions of these themes through their own social messaging or even advertisements.