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Capstone
12 February 2026

“It is vital that you hold on to both your whimsy and your political rage”. This message has been circulating around different social media platforms, mainly on TikTok and Instagram. Posts that use these words and this message all follow a similar structure. There is an image or a video in the background, with the message being the forefront of the media. These posts mainly come from accounts that post memes about current political happenings. It appears to orbit mainly in female-packed circles, with conventionally feminine backgrounds. But outside of social media posts, we will also mention certain communal actions that occur that promote this sense of ‘whimsy’.

Communication studies revolve around how people exchange and interpret messages (Ott & Mack). The posts that will be analyzed in this paper are very clearly pushing an agenda, a push to add ‘whimsy’ into your life even when it feels like there is no room for it. We will go over some examples from the 2025 protests where we see rhetoric about how protesters are violent and how that rhetoric is being shifted through whimsical actions by protesters themselves. Whimsy is being used in this context to disrupt dominant patterns; it is an affective force with low intensity to promote change (Geary). We see this overarching idea through many methods used in communication studies.



Feminist theory has a main focus on binaries and disrupting them, queer theory works on social perspectives, and camp under queer theory is about 'not making fun of it, but making fun out of it' (Ott & Mack).

At this time in the world, it is seemingly impossible to live life without being somewhat stuck in the cycle of bad news and social media. A consequence of this is constantly being bombarded with information overload, which can lead people to become depressed or burned out (Mann). At the time this paper is being written, there is heavy news coverage about ICE actions in America. ICE has gotten progressively more violent, to the point that they have killed several people, and that has sparked nationwide protests and strikes (Cineas). And from these protests rose not just rage, but also a surprising amount of joy and a sense of community.

This paper will dive into what whimsy is and how it's helping in these hard times, through community, humor, and messaging. We will talk about political rage with a focus on the 2025 Portland protests and how joyful resistance as a whole is shifting rhetoric to promote a slower and more whimsical way of protesting and viewing the world.

Whimsy

Humor in protests and political resistance is not a new phenomenon; it has a rich history and goes by many names, joyful resistance, satire, tactical frivolity, camp, and carnivalesque, to name just a few. But what makes whimsy different is how surprising and fleeting it is (Mann). Something is whimsical if it catches you off guard, makes you stop and marvel with a sense of childlike wonder. Going to a protest prepared for violence, but instead, there are people dancing in inflatable costumes, or a pop-up aerobics class happening outside of an ICE detention center. "Whimsy is adopting the

ridiculous and taking it seriously” (Maddox). It’s a productive waste of time, giving attention to things that you ‘don’t have time to give attention to’. By giving it your time, you are self-indulging in joy; whimsy is in the eye of the beholder, again, making this phenomenon hard to define.

Whimsy shows up as a gentle weapon in activism; it uses playfulness and surprise to disrupt and disarm (Thompson). Using whimsy in activism, and protests more specifically, transforms the dominant message of violence and hatred that revolves around the notion of protesting. As whimsy is something that is made to capture your attention, it is also more likely to gain coverage from media outlets to even further display this new view, and shift the way people think about and imagine protests (Thompson).

Whimsy also has the potential to transform physical locations into movement spaces (Diaz). Through collaborative protest art such as posters, performances, or other forms of physical art, the public is able to take ownership and participate in a personal and creative way. Whimsy is here to spread joy, creativity, laughs, and ideas, and this is how resistance begins.

With all of this potential whimsy has, there are certain limits to what it can attain. Because whimsy is so fleeting, it is an experience and not an aesthetic; it is hard to concretize and sustain, making long-term structural change unlikely (Mann). There is also discussion on whimsy and privilege; some scholars argue that one can only be ‘whimsical’ when they have a certain level of privilege (Maddox), “you can’t be whimsical if you’re hungry or fighting for your life” (Maddox). Whimsical acts can be seen as enchanting, but if it’s something that remains in a physical space for long

periods of time, it can shift to more of a nuisance. Certain acts of whimsy can also be seen as inconsiderate in the face of high-stress and high-gravity situations. The lighter approach that whimsy holds can be good for those who are tentative, but in the face of major action, it may not produce the desired meaning.

Political Rage

Political rage is often a reaction to some form of injustice; it is a collective emotion used to disrupt the status quo (Halberstam). It is a group refusal to be reasonable or polite, a ground to provoke fear in the hearts of those who hold power to produce radical change. Resistance based in rage is also a site for people to maintain self-respect, a physical expression that can be used to share their upsets and demand better that feels productive. Rage gives people a sense of being; with enough people holding onto rage in a similar manner, it legitimizes the feelings of those being



marginalized or ignored (Halberstam). It's important to remember that political rage is a valid emotion, but it is different from rage. Political rage is directed at systematic oppression and violence, while rage mainly focuses on a singular person or personal instance (Dikec).

The current framing of political rage can potentially enforce the rhetoric of protesters being violent, and most of the coverage of violence focuses on people of color (Dikec). When rage and violence are what's being covered, it can pull away from the reasons it's

happening. Streamlining instances of ‘irrational’ and ‘impulsive’ mobs invalidates the protestors’ reasoning for being out on the streets (Dikec).

Not only this, but being angry is tiring. When initial rage dissolves, it’s hard to keep the previous momentum going, causing movements to reach a stalemate in their progression (Bostdorff).

The Portland Frog Resistance



direct example of ‘holding both whimsy and political rage’ can be seen in the 2025 Portland Protests. Dominant Rhetoric around protests has two major lenses, one dismisses protestors and labels them as violent criminals, while the other side sees protest as a tool for self-respect and declaration of rights (Dikec). The first lens is the one the Trump administration is using regarding the protests around the 2025 Portland Protests. Trump publicly used rhetoric such as “radical violence”, “premeditated anarchy”, calling the city a “war-ravaged hellhole” (Armstrong). Framing protests in this

manner can dissuade new people from joining, putting in their minds that to be at a protest means to be in a violent war zone.

With the previous rhetoric being put out by those who hold positions of power, people in Portland are using new tactics to show a different side of the protests. Citizens are utilizing whimsy to spread their message in a warmer and safer tone, and they are utilizing social media to spread that message outside of their city. At one point, a man who goes by Toad showed up to a protest in an inflatable frog costume, simply because he wanted to 'spread a little joy' (Best). When that particular protest took a more aggressive turn, one ICE agent sprayed pepper spray directly into the air vent of the costume. The incident was caught on video and quickly went viral. After that incident, more and more people showed up to protests in inflatable costumes, frogs remaining the favorite, but there are also unicorns, dinosaurs, hot dogs, bananas, and so many more.

These frogs (and other creatures) are utilizing tactical frivolity to thwart this image of violence and hate. Protesters are making themselves absurd to de-escalate tension and give a visual of the militarized overkill taking place in their city (Thompson). "I mean, how can you be mad at a guy in a frog costume?" (Thompson). It also changes the overall conception, some calling these protests the 'people's costume party', so the protest is not showing just what they are fighting *against*, but also what they are fighting *for*. This humor is another force of affect; people dancing around in silly costumes and blowing bubbles make you smile, and you have a positive reaction (Mann). Humor and whimsy sustain and build movements through shared laughter and a sense of belonging.

Conclusion

The posts that hold the message of how we must “hold on to both your whimsy and your political rage” push the idea that serious issues, such as the Portland frog protest, don’t have to be solemn occasions. Yes, you’re fighting against government violence, but that doesn’t mean you have to be violent yourself. Publicizing a protest where people are wearing inflatable costumes redefines the reality of these protest spaces. Joyful resistance creates a ‘lighter point of entry’ to appeal to a wider audience and celebrate, not just fight. Whimsy also validates rage; there is almost a bubble of whimsy that allows you to talk back to power, but with a shield of playfulness that doesn’t immediately trigger the idea of protesters as violent (Caron). Utilizing whimsy in a resistance context allows for creativity and imagination to bypass presented logic and lead to unexpected insights.

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