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Distortion in the Description of Scholarly Research Methods in Competitive Forensics

Leah White

Introduction

Communication analysis, or rhetorical criticism, has been my favorite event since I first competed in the category my senior year of college. Now as a coach, I enjoy watching my students wrestle with academic theory as they struggle to communicate arguments. Students who initially found the event intimidating are drawn to its lure as an activity which challenges them to see social events from a constantly changing perspective. Ballots present new questions never considered, which often lead to further revisions as the student tries to master her or his analysis. I am always eager to judge this category. I am continually impressed with the critical observations our students are making. As Rosenthal (1985) argues “The roots of intercollegiate forensics are planted firmly in the field of rhetoric. Thus, rhetorical criticism is one of the most important speaking events, since it may be used to educate students in the scholarly intricacies of the academic parent” (p. 137). Simply put, I never tire of this event.

As with all love affairs, however, the object of my affection has flaws. I have tried my best to ignore or rationalize these flaws. I argue with myself that the event just needs more time, perhaps two more minutes, to really show its potential. Maybe all the event lacks is an opportunity to ask and answer questions. But now that communication analysis and I have been together for nearly two decades, I must come to terms with the fact that our relationship is growing stale. Older, I am no longer comfortable embracing an event that is not meeting its full pedagogical potential.

Since the inception of the event, forensic educators have struggled to define their expectations for competitive rhetorical criticism or communication analysis. Harris (1987) writes “rhetorical criticism means different things to different parts of the forensic community and the result is confusion about how the event should be judged and prepared and what expectations we have regarding the final product” (p. 21). Yet if this is still indeed the case, I wonder why of all the events it seems to have become one of the most standardized. Ott (1998) argues “certain identifiable traits pervade the event of rhetorical criticism; moreover, judges police and thereby reinforce these traits through their judging practices” (54). According to Ott (1998), these traits include; topics driven by “recency, shock value, and obscurity” (p. 55); “a three-point organizational pattern featuring method, application, and implications” (p. 56); a method which “drives the analysis section” (p. 57); and a final section “proving the rhetor was a rhetorical success or failure” (p. 57). Like Ott (1998), I find myself most troubled by the way the event has been driven to a limited definition of what is an appropriate methodology for a rhetorical criticism. He argues, “In forensics, a rhetorical

method most often refers to a student's reduction of a practicing critic's rhetorical analysis to a set of key principles" (Ott, 1998, p. 56). In practice, this means a student is allowed to use one (and on rare occasions two) scholarly publications from which to pull her or his analytical framework.

Dean and Benoit's (1984) content analysis of ballots in rhetorical criticism revealed "Judges indicate that they consider it the critic's task to choose one approach and then justify the utility of that selection" (p. 105). The justification for this limited approach is based on the idea that "methodology provides a narrowing function so that the student can hope to fit the analysis and criticism into the ten minute framework which is mandated by the contest situation" (Dean, 1985, p.121). This "narrowing function" is where many of my concerns with the event are found. Specifically, in this article I am concerned with our expectations regarding how students select and apply "methods" to their chosen topics. I argue that due to artificial expectations dictated by the unwritten rules of the event, students are not able to engage in accurate application of their selected scholarly articles. I will develop this argument by examining four communication analysis speeches presented in final rounds at the AFA-NIET to determine how accurately these students explain and represent their selected scholarship. I conclude the essay by offering suggestions for how we can encourage students to incorporate rhetorical theory into speeches in a more educationally sound way.

Analysis of Student Speeches

In an effort to offer the most accurate analysis of current practice, I randomly selected my sample speeches from the twelve speeches presented in the 2007 and 2008 AFA-NIET final rounds of communication analysis. Before selecting my sample, I made certain I could locate all twelve of the scholarly articles the students cited as the sources for their methodologies. Once I had collected the articles, I randomly drew the names of the four students whose speeches I would analyze. Once my sample was finalized, I viewed each of the four speeches and transcribed all elements of the speeches pertaining to the explanation of the selected methodologies. I then carefully read each of the scholarly articles, comparing the content of the articles to my transcriptions of each speech. I took note of any instances when I perceived there to be inaccuracies between the arguments stated in the articles cited and the explanations given by the students in the speeches. When discrepancies were noted, I would watch the speech again to verify the accuracy of my transcriptions.

Before moving into the results of my analysis, I would like to offer an explanation regarding how I categorized two distinct approaches to utilizing scholarly articles as sources for methodologies. German (1985) compares critical methodologies in rhetorical criticism to camera lenses which "provide varied perspectives on the photographer's subject" (p. 86). In my experience as a coach, there seem to be two main ways to use an article as the method, or lens, for a communication analysis or rhetorical criticism speech. Essentially, the method is what allows one to build their analysis, and this is guided by either the

“blue print” or the “tool box” approach. In the blue print approach, a student will use an article that clearly lays out specific steps or stages a rhetor must follow in order to accomplish some rhetorical act. In a sense, the student layers the preexisting blueprint on his/her artifact and shows how the concepts appear in the application. The tool box approach, however, is not nearly as tidy. Here, the student, usually with the help of a coach, extracts a framework from the article. The ideas used for the analysis are present in the article, but not mapped out in any clearly identifiable way. Essentially, the student picks and chooses the ideas that are needed to conduct the analysis. German (1985) warns, however, that “because distortions of complex systems of thought are not acceptable, a critic should be careful when using only selected aspects of the methodology” (p. 96). Generally, as long as the tools are indeed found in the article, and the combined use of those tools does not create major contradictions, this approach can be an effective way to manage the significant constraint of having to explain a method for analysis in no more than 3 minutes.

The first speech I selected for my analysis was delivered at the 2007 AFA-NIET. Hopper’s (2007) speech analyzes the “Ova the Rainbow” web site, which is sponsored by an egg donation and surrogacy agency. Hopper asks the research question, “Does the new advertising and selection process of “OvathRainbow.com” rhetorically commodify human life?” To analyze this artifact, Hopper utilized Hirschman and Hill’s (2000) article, “On Human Commoditization and Resistance: A Model Based on Buchenwald Concentration Camp.” In her speech, Hopper seeks to argue that the Ova The Rainbow web site functions to commodify the women who choose to serve as egg donors for the agency. In that the article provides a clear model, her use of this essay places her in the “blueprint” category.

My analysis of Hopper’s (2007) speech reveals several concerns regarding the accuracy with which the original article is applied in the speech. My first observation is Hopper gave the incorrect article title and publication date for the method. Hopper cites the article as “On human commodification and resistance” as published in the June 2006 *Journal of Psychology and Marketing*. The article, however, seems to only appear in the June 2000 issue of *Psychology and Marketing* and the full title is “On human commoditization and resistance: A model based on Buchenwald concentration camp”. I assume the discrepancy in the date is the result of a memorization error, rather than any calculated attempt to alter the citation. Additionally, students often drop the secondary level of an article title to either avoid confusion or save time. Of far greater concern to me, however, is that the term *commoditization* is replaced in the title of the article, as well as throughout Hopper’s speech, as *commodification*. At no point in Hirschman and Hill’s (2000) essay do they use the term commodification. They specifically state, “Our intention is to construct a model of human commoditization derived from a historic instance of this process” (Hirschman & Hill, 2000, p. 470). They define commoditization as “the transformation of a human being into the property of another person” (Hirschman & Hill, 2000, p. 469-470) and clearly indicate that they are basing their work in the original model of commoditization as presented by Kopytoff (1986). Hopper gives no nod to the fact Hir-

schman and Hill's model is not original, nor does she explain her choice to use the term commodification rather than commoditization.

A brief investigation of the terms in several online dictionaries reveals that the words can be used interchangeably and are often considered synonyms. Yet, I can think of no reason, other than a memorization or clerical error, why a speaker would not honor the original choice of the authors. This seems especially important when Hirschman and Hill (2000) are clearly building off the work of a previous scholar who chose the term commoditization rather than commodification. Although little is lost in the meaning of the term substitution, I will admit it took me considerably longer to track down Hopper's (2007) method than it did to find others included in this study.

Other inconsistencies between the original article and Hopper's (2007) speech occurred with respect to how she explained and applied the principles of the commoditization process. Initially, Hopper describes the first stage of the process, 'pre-commodification,' [sic] as "recognition and identification of wanted and unwanted characteristics in a product." This definition, however, is not mentioned in any form in the two paragraph explanation of this stage of the process as given by Hirschman and Hill. In fact, the explanation of pre-commodification given in the article makes no mention of products, but rather is focused on consumers and their choices. Hirschman and Hill (2000) define the pre-commodification stage as one where people "are assumed at the outset to enjoy all the rights and privileges of selfhood" (p. 474). Consistent with the article, Hopper does explain how our collective purchase choices come to define us as individuals. What she does not clarify, however, is according to Hirschman and Hill, when one becomes a commoditized person, the previously unimportant consumption decisions become crucial to personal identity. They argue, "The absence of meaningful choice can wreak havoc on the maintenance of selfhood and identity" (Hirschman & Hill, 2000, p. 474). Given the article is analyzing the narratives of those who were held as Nazi prisoners at Buchenwald, to ignore the significance a loss of consumer agency has on the commoditized seems fundamental to the method and problematic that it is not mentioned in Hoppers speech.

When Hopper explains the second stage of the process, initiation, she does discuss the stripping of individuality felt by the commodified [sic] but still does not clarify the importance of the loss of agency. Rather she focuses on how the loss of the commodified's [sic] individuality results in the person being seen as a unit who is "assigned an identifier such as a number" (Hopper 2007). Although the explanation of the method in the article does not mention the assignment of identifiers, the application section does use the example of camp prisoners being assigned serial numbers and colored triangles as a means to externally impose a new identity. My analysis shows Hopper's discussion of the second stage of the commoditization process to be the most consistent with the article.

Hopper's (2007) discussion of the third stage of the commoditization process reveals further inconsistencies with the original article. Hirschman and Hill (2000) label the third stage of the process "Externally Imposed Maintenance

of Commoditization versus Resistance to Commoditization” (p. 474) which Hopper abbreviates to simply “Externally Imposed Maintenance”. Due to time constraints, speakers often need to abbreviate or revise labels found in a selected method, but my concern with this relabeling by Hopper is by truncating the label she ignores the key aspect of this stage of the commoditization process. According to Hirschman and Hill (2000), this stage of the process focuses heavily on the idea that “those enforcing commoditization will do so by restricting all meaningful consumer-behavior choice” (p. 475). Hopper makes no mention of consumer behavior, once again ignoring the agency of the commoditized. The major misrepresentation of the method is found, however, in that the authors clearly imply that at this stage of the process there is “an ongoing struggle” (Hirschman & Hill, 2000, p. 474) between those seeking to commoditize others and those struggling to resist that commoditization. At no point in her explanation of the method or during the application of the method to her artifact, does Hopper make mention of the presence of a struggle between the commoditizer and the commoditized.

Essentially, Hopper (2007) has removed any aspect of agency of the commoditized from her discussion. Perhaps this choice would not bother me if the subject of Hirschman and Hill’s (2000) essay wasn’t one of the most horrific examples of human commoditization in history. To not mention the significant role of resistance in the process seems to remove the one shred of agency the commoditized still have. Ignoring that element of the article is somewhat like Hopper’s own version of ideological commoditization of Hirschman and Hill’s article. The difficulties Hopper has in accurately representing her selected scholarly article are directly tied to the constraints she must deal with as a speaker in this competitive context. Judges will not *allow* her to ignore or adapt a step in an established model, but she is also dealing with a time limit which prevents her from ever fully explaining every nuance in the methodology. It is highly possible the distinction was present in an earlier draft of the speech. My assessment is that Hopper’s inaccuracies with respect to the application of this segment of the method are significant, but short of using an entirely different article, I am unsure how she could fully explain the tension between the commoditizer and commoditized.

The second speech I selected for my analysis was presented at the 2008 AFA-NIET. Moscaritolo’s (2008) speech analyzes the “Blasphemy Challenge,” which is a call for people to denounce the Holy Spirit in self-posted videos on you-tube, as presented on www.blasphemychallenge.com. He asks the question, “How effectively does the Blasphemy Challenge’s use of coming out rhetoric give voice to the American atheist movement?” To analyze this project, Moscaritolo used Chirrey’s February 2003 *Journal of Sociolinguistics* article, “I hereby come out’: What sort of speech act is coming out?” which he inaccurately cited as being from the July 2003 issue. Given that the actual month does not appear on the printed copy of the article, and one must look specifically at the electronic index to verify the publication month, his citation error is understandable. In that the article centers around the presentation of interview data, does not provide a clear model or process to be followed and Moscaritolo extracts his

framework from the general ideas of the essay, he is using the “toolbox” approach to constructing his method.

In his explanation of the base assumptions guiding the article, unlike Hopper (2007) who neglected to mention the theoretical base on which her authors’ grounded their article, Moscaritolo (2008) does indicate that Chirrey’s (2003) study is grounded in an understanding of J.L. Austin’s concept of speech acts. He specifically mentions prelocutionary acts which are those that produce psychological consequences. Although Chirrey does define Austin’s concepts of locutionary and illocutionary acts as well, Moscaritolo’s choice to reference only prelocutionary acts is justified because the article focuses on “the extent to which and the ways in which the speaker’s and hearer’s realities are altered” in the utterance of coming out (Chirrey, 2003, p. 26). Although he does not go into detail regarding the performative aspects of such speech acts, Moscaritolo is able to make his reference to Austin in one brief clause, therefore adding accuracy to his interpretation of Chirrey’s article without taking too much of his limited time.

The accuracy with which he sets up the general assumption of Chirrey’s article, however, is not consistent with the remainder of his speech. My major concern with Moscaritolo’s speech is that he seems to have taken a very liberal approach to the toolbox style of method construction. He states Chirrey “articulates three main tenets” which he labels “external catalyst; listener response; and collective representation” (Moscaritolo 2008). This wording implies that Chirrey is presenting clear argument claims related to each of these “tenets”. A close reading of Chirrey’s article does not easily reveal the argument sources for these tenets. I believe misleading statements such as this are common in competition given that judges expect clearly identifiable steps or stages which they can outline and then follow throughout the second point. If one is using the toolbox approach to building a method for analysis, competitive success hinges on the student’s ability to present those ideas as if they appeared in the article as bolded subject headings.

Initially, when describing the first tenet, Moscaritolo (2008) states, “Chirrey finds that the choice to come out is often catalyzed by an external force” and then he cites Chirrey’s example of a lesbian whose “choice to come out was in response to her relatives constantly asking when she would get married”. At no point in Chirrey’s article do I find a direct discussion of the necessity of a catalyst in order for someone to come out. In fact, the example Moscaritolo offers is actually found in a section of the article where Chirrey is describing the expected outcomes many gays and lesbians hope to experience as a result of coming out. Chirrey (2003) states, “One lesbian told me that her hoped-for outcomes included that relatives would stop asking her when she would get married” (p. 34). The presence of a catalyst motivating coming out statements seems somewhat self-evident, but my reading of the article does not identify this as one of Chirrey’s main lines of argument. I do not disagree with Moscaritolo’s claim regarding the importance of a catalyst; I just disagree with the isolation of this idea as a specific tenet found in Chirrey’s article.

When explaining the second tenet, Moscaritolo (2008) states, “Chirrey argues that coming out is dependent on the listener’s subsequent behavior and thoughts”. This is consistent with my reading of Chirrey’s (2003) article, in that to truly explore the prelocutionary aspect of the act of coming out, the vast majority of her essay focuses on the reactions of listeners to coming out statements. She offers numerous examples of both positive and negative reactions from listeners. The example provided by Moscaritolo to correspond with his explanation of this idea fits well with the argument and is explained in a way consistent with how the example was originally used by Chirrey.

Moscaritolo (2008) explains his third tenet as the argument that “coming out creates a collective representation” and then describes Chirrey’s example of how the British media represented the coming out of British Pop Idol, Will Young. The way Moscaritolo frames this example, however, is not consistent with Chirrey’s use. In her article, Chirrey (2003) argues she seeks to “examine the diversity of prelocutionary acts in which a coming-out locution may result” (p. 31). She recognizes “subjectivity has an influence on the prelocutionary acts of coming out” (Chirrey, 2003, p.31). To illustrate this argument, when describing the experiences of Will Young, she cited *both* positive and negative media portrayals of Young’s statements. For example, she reports *The Guardian* “frames Young’s action in terms of a neutral act of revelation of information that is viewed in a non-judgmental way” (Chirrey, 2003, p.32). She also offers examples of newspapers that framed Young’s statements as an “admission” or “confession” thus identifying his homosexual identity as something criminal or deviant. Moscaritolo limits his interpretation of Chirrey’s argument to these negative examples, ignoring the possibility that a coming out statement could result in a positive collective representation. Although I do not disagree with Moscaritolo’s identification of collective representations, I am concerned with his framing of this tenet as primarily a negative outcome. As with my critique of Hopper’s (2007) speech, I suspect this decision was driven by time constraints, rather than any calculated attempt to disregard an aspect of Chirrey’s article.

The third speech I selected for my analysis was presented in 2007. Schultz’s (2007) speech analyzes the Washington Defense of Marriage Alliance’s successful effort to send forward ballot initiative 957. This initiative satirically called for all heterosexual couples in the state of Washington to prove the biological ability to procreate before being allowed to marry as well as produce a child within three years to avoid having the marriage annulled. Schultz analyzes this satirical movement asking the question, “How does the introduction of a law shape the culture around a particular social issue?” He uses James Boyd White’s essay, “Law as rhetoric, rhetoric as law: The arts of cultural and communal life” published in the summer 1985 *University of Chicago Law Review* as the source for his critical method. Schultz argues that because the article “examines the way that law communicatively reflects and shapes culture” it is a useful lens through which to process his artifact. White’s essay offers Schultz a toolbox from which to build his analytical framework, but as compared to other speeches, this toolbox is more neatly organized. Although Schultz does need to extract the framework he uses, his first two tenets are clearly previewed as main argu-

ments of a core section of the essay. The third tenet is pulled from a synthesis of the overall argument of the piece.

Initially, Schultz (2007) does an excellent job of summarizing the main idea of the essay into a concise yet highly accurate overview. Schultz explains White (1985) “rejects the traditional Western notion of law as synonymous with authority, instead adopting a more classical notion of law as a series of discourses; as an ongoing conversation.” This is consistent with the opening paragraph of White’s essay where he writes, “law is most usefully seen not, as it usually is by academics and philosophers, as a system of rules, but as a branch of rhetoric...as the central art by which community and culture are established, maintained and transformed” (White, 1985, p. 684). My only concern with how Schultz contextualizes the essay is that he argues White “steeps” his writings “heavily in communication theory” when White actually focuses exclusively on rhetorical theory. The distinction is not imperative, as one can easily argue rhetoric is a branch of communication theory.

Schultz’ (2007) explanation of the first two tenets of his framework is quite consistent with how White (1985) presents the ideas in the essay. The first two tenets are pulled from the third main section of the article where White outlines what he views as the “three aspects of the lawyer’s work” (688). Although White does not give these aspects tidy labels, the tags Schultz applies to the arguments are tightly grounded in the text. Schultz calls the first tenet, “law as rhetoric” and explains that this means a lawyer is a rhetor who is expected to speak in the language of his or her “time and place.” This is clearly grounded in White’s (1985) argument that, “the lawyer, like any rhetorician, must always start by speaking the language of his or her audience, whatever it may be” (p. 688). Schultz refers to examples given by White to help explain this idea.

Schultz (2007) labels the second tenet “legal rhetoric as ever changing” and explains this as the principle that it is a lawyer’s responsibility to change language in order to fit strategic needs, in that the lawyer must not just interpret a case, but also help determine how we should talk about the case. This is consistent with White’s (1985) explanation of the second aspect of a lawyer’s work which he argues, “For in speaking the language of the law, the lawyer must always be ready to try to change it... That is, the lawyer is always saying not only, ‘here is how this case should be decided,’ but also, ‘Here—in this language—is the way this case and similar cases should be talked about’” (p. 690).

Schultz starts to drift from the neatly organized part of the toolbox when he identifies the third tenet he wishes to use from the essay. Whereas White (1985) explains the third aspect of a lawyer’s work is an acceptance of “ethical or communal character, or its socially constitutive nature” (p. 690), Schultz chooses to not discuss the link to ethos, but focuses only on the aspect of what he labels “legal rhetoric as constitutive”. Schultz describes the third tenet of his method as the idea “in any legal proceedings, some narratives are privileged over others” and as a result, “the persons or social groups associated with those narratives are also privileged, thereby reshaping the fabric of our society”. Toward the end of the essay when White (1985) begins to synthesize his ideas, he writes,

“The basic idea of the legal hearing is that two stories will be told in opposition or competition and a choice made between them” (697). Thus, although Schultz is basically building a specific tenet for analysis from one of the most general arguments of the essay as a whole, the argument is clearly present in the essay as the constitutive nature of legal rhetoric is White’s primary claim.

Of the speeches analyzed, Schultz (2007) provides the most accurate representation of his selected article. This may in part be due to the fact that White’s (1985) article offers the freedom of a toolbox approach while also giving some clear organizational clues regarding his key arguments. Schultz, therefore, can select the aspects of the article that best meet his needs, but is not at as much risk as Moscaritolo (2008) who had to do more to impose an artificial structure on the ideas found in his article.

The final speech I analyzed for this project was presented in 2008. Conner’s (2008) speech analyzes people’s nonviolent reactions to the interactive video art installation “Domestic Tension.” This installation appeared at Chicago’s Flatfile Gallery, but anyone could logon and take part in the experience which involved allowing people to shoot the artist with a remote control paintball gun. Some participants responded by creating a virtual shield to protect the artist. It is this response that Conner explores by asking the question, “How did participation in interactive violence encourage some players to adopt non-violent rhetoric?” To explore this issue, Conner used Shuen-shing Lee’s essay “‘I lose, therefore I think’: A search for contemplation amid wars of push-button glare” found in the December 2003 online journal *Game Studies: The International Journal of Computer Game Research*. She suggests that because this article “attempts to explain why some violent video games cause players to act or think in a non-violent way” it is an appropriate method to use when examining Domestic Tension. My main concern with Conner’s application of this essay springs from her justification statement. Lee explains the goal of the essay is to examine computer games “imbued with socio-political critique” which he describes as games involving “a careful examination of certain aspects of society, often self-reflexively criticizing the dominant tendencies of the game industry itself. They appropriate and twist the established gaming models and schemas of popular games. These re-calibrations challenge the supposition that games equal fun” (para 1). Therefore, the purpose of his essay is to explore how such games result in contemplative or critical thinking rather than nonviolence. Clearly a cognitive response can be considered nonviolent, but Conner’s justification of the method implies that the article’s main focus is on the nonviolent *actions* of gamers rather than the ways such games influence gamers’ critical reflections of the game industry itself.

Conner (2008) also uses the toolbox approach to building a critical framework. Lee’s (2003) essay is essentially a discussion of several games which he describes as art games, or those that are “serious in their desire to transform games into a medium of expression for voices unheard, visions seldom seen” (para. 30). He turns to current scholarly critiques of video games to guide his analysis. From Lee’s article, Conner extracts three “qualities” that need to be present in a video game if “players will respond with nonviolent rhetoric”. As

previously stated, this misrepresents the article, in that Lee is discussing the qualities of art games which lead gamers to critical reflection of the violence present in games not their nonviolent responses. With the exception of the third quality, however, I am able to find clear links between Conner's selected tools and Lee's arguments.

Initially, Conner (2008) explains that in order for there to be a nonviolent response to a video game, "the game must be endless." She explains this as the idea that regardless of the actions taken in the game it will continue indefinitely. Her assessment is that the "endlessness of the game represents the endlessness of violence". This is consistent with Lee's arguments with respect to how art games can lead to critical reflection among gamers. He describes such games as having, "a metaphorical end, en route to which a specific kind of player is able to realize the implications of "to lose" in an intentionally un-winnable form" (Lee, 2003, para.11). Conner references Lee's example of the game *New York Defender* where players unsuccessfully try to protect New York from a terrorist attack. Because the attackers continue to multiply, there is no way for the gamer to successfully intercept them all. Thus, the game never ends and the message is that it is impossible to stop the violence of terrorism.

Conner (2008) states the second quality needed in a game to provoke a non-violent response is "the game must avoid score keeping." Lee (2003) spends a significant portion of his article discussing how art games do not keep score in the traditional manner of other video games. He suggests that by "Faithfully addressing painful issues of the real world, both games [*New York Defender* and *Kabul Kaboom*] 'show' their message in action rather than 'tell' it in a non-interactive statement, an accomplishment made possible mainly by the anti-competitive twist of the you-never-win form" (Lee, 2003, para. 8). Conner's explanation of this quality as the idea that one "can't be a winner in a situation where people must risk their lives to find food" is consistent with Lee's (2003) assessment that an art game "embodies a tragic form" by illustrating the real horrors of the daily lives of those "characters" often depicted in traditional video games (para 2). Thus, Conner is accurate in her use of the argument the lack of score keeping in a videogame leads to a nontraditional response to that game.

Although I can find evidence of the first two qualities Conner (2008) discusses, I struggled to determine a direct link in Lee's (2003) article to her third quality which she states is "games must produce feelings of guilt". At no point in the article do I find a discussion of guilt. Lee does mention the idea of regret as it relates to how gamers bemoan choices they made during the game that hindered their performance. Yet this discussion does not link to feelings of guilt. My assessment is Conner is equating Lee's discussion of basic critical dissonance a gamer feels when playing an art game with a more specific feeling of guilt guided by ethical concerns. Conner states Lee argues for a game to provoke nonviolent rhetoric, it uses realistic elements which "forces players to consider the ethical implications of their actions in the game." Lee does discuss how the use of real identities in a game can lead a player to engage in social critique, and he does cite the same example Conner provides, but he does not tie this to spe-

cific feelings of guilt. Lee (2003) describes such elements as transforming “play from a gaming action into a thinking event, from a means of fun-seeking to a schema for the revelation of the games' critical engagement (para. 26). By linking this argument to issues of guilt and ethical implications, Conner seems to be overreaching what Lee is arguing. Conner adds an element of value judgment to an argument where Lee is suggesting critical reflection. In that Conner bases the answer to her stated research question on the fulfillment of this third tenet, the inaccuracy of this representation of the article is concerning. I do not dispute Conner's evaluation of the situation she is analyzing, only her interpretation of Lee's stance. Once again, much like the other speeches analyzed, I suspect this discrepancy has much more to do with Conner's obligations as a speaker to mimic a standardized speech format, than any strategic choice to misrepresent the article.

Discussion and Recommendations

My analysis of these four speeches revealed all of the speakers have presented, to varying degrees, inaccuracies between their original scholarly articles and how they represent that scholarship in their speeches. Some of these inaccuracies can be explained by simple human error. Often when a student is memorizing a speech, details such as the exact month in which a publication appeared get misconstrued. This does not excuse the inaccuracies, but rather serves as a reminder to coaches that we should periodically do a “fact check” with our students' speeches to verify that the citations and quotations in the original manuscript are indeed what have been memorized. I honestly believe many of the discrepancies found in student speeches are the result of busy lives and overcrowded minds. I would rather see us focus our efforts on being more careful than wasting time assessing the motives of our peers.

As a forensic educator, the larger level inaccuracies I identified cause me significant discomfort. As a scholar I respect the obligation we have to represent each other's work in a way that is accurate and respectful. Yet, at the same time, as an educator I also understand the limitations with which my students are working. I therefore must agree with Paine (2008) when he wrote of rhetorical criticism, “We are asking students to do the ultimately un-doable” (p. 125). I support Kay and Aden (1989) who wrote “We maintain that the use of methodology hurts, rather than helps, student efforts to provide original insight. The method tells students what to find and how it should be presented – a recipe in all sense of the word” (p. 35). I believe we as coaches and judges are responsible for developing unobtainable expectations for this event. In our attempts to create standardization for evaluation (Dean 1985; Larson 1985; Harris 1987), we have created a situation where our students must cut corners and engage in academic practices we would not accept in any other educational setting. With this assessment in mind, I propose we need to seriously consider dismantling some of the destructive norms we have created.

Neither the AFA-NIET nor NFA event descriptions dictate such a limited conceptualization of methodology be used in communication analysis or rhetorical criticism speeches. The AFA-NIET description explains the event is, “de-

signed to offer an explanation and/or evaluation of a communication event such as a speech, speaker, movement, poem, poster, film, campaign, etc., through the use of rhetorical principles” (AFA-NIET 2006-2007 Description of Events). Nowhere in this event description does it mandate these principles must be found in easily applied units of three tenets and pulled from a recently published book or article. These are constraints we ourselves have imposed on the event. The NFA event description for rhetorical criticism is not quite as general, as it explains the event is “designed to offer an explanation and/or evaluation of a rhetorical event. Any legitimate critical methodology is permissible” (NFA By-laws). NFA does use the term methodology. Yet current practice in academic rhetorical criticism allows for significant flexibility in the interpretation of this term. I propose we follow this lead in our own competitive practice and support Murphy (1988) who argued twenty years ago, “The importance attached to the development of the methodology in the student speech, however, should be reduced” (p.8). As I agree with Kay and Aden (1989) who state in response to Murphy “if we abandon the idea of theoretical foundation entirely, we find ourselves without standards” (p. 36) I am not yet willing to completely relinquish a critical lens through which to guide analysis, but I am ready to search for some alternatives.

I am most drawn to the ideas advocating the use of a broad theoretical perspective as a student’s guiding analytical framework. This idea has been presented by various scholars over the course of the past two decades (Kay & Aden, 1989; Ott, 1998; Paine, 2008) yet we have not yet allowed ourselves to relinquish the comfort provided by event standardization in order to move forward. Initially, Kay and Aden (1989) argue that students should use a “perspective rather than a set of labels” (p. 36). They hope to find an approach that will respect “the need and desirability of both an established theoretical approach and independent student insight” (Kay & Aden, 1989, p. 37). They suggest the community embrace the use of a critical perspective which they define as:

A critical perspective differs from a methodology in that no concrete step-by-step instructions are laid out; a perspective is basically a theoretical foundation from which the student can build his or her own ideas within the province of rhetoric. Students borrow the basic ideas of rhetorical scholars to make their own ideas clearer and more complete (Kay & Aden, 1989, p. 37)

Ott’s (1998) suggestions for improvement are consistent with Kay & Aden. Ott references rhetorical criticism textbooks which organize methods into general categories related to the types of questions they can answer and how they approach discourse as a broad concept. He addresses the criticism this approach will result in students falling into the habit of using only a handful of well known traditional scholars stating, “each method can produce an infinitude of distinct, yet valuable analyses. A feminist criticism of a text, for instance, might look at repressed desire, or phallic representations, or sexist language, for *there*

is no single, prescribed way to do feminist criticism" (Ott, 1998, p. 62). Had our community allowed Moscaritolo (2008) the use of a general perspective in guiding his analysis, rather than the limiting constraint of having to select one scholarly article, he may have been able to turn to current writings in queer theory that clearly do indicate the presence of a catalyst in coming out rhetoric. He then could have used the Chirrey (2003) article to support his claim coming out rhetoric can be applied to a variety of situations where one finds him or herself marginalized and maligned. Further, Conner (2008) could have embraced the general concept of cognitive dissonance as a theoretical perspective which she could have then layered into a discussion of how interactive violent games can provoke critical thought. Rather than closing doors, this approach seems to open them.

Some skeptics of this approach argue undergraduate students are not yet able to handle the difficulties of being responsible for exploring multiple rhetorical perspectives. In fact, some critics also question the ability of judges to evaluate speeches grounded in less specific critical frameworks. Paine (2008) offers an intriguing compromise. Although Paine reached his conclusions based on his critique of our activity's commitment to the obligatory research question in communication analysis and rhetorical criticism, his recommendations serve my purposes quite well. Paine (2008) suggests we need not formally "choose" an acceptable formula for the event for "if the goal of forensics is in fact to educate students...then we need to coach and judge all competitive events based on their ability to enable student learning" (p. 125). To that end, he suggests novice competitors be encouraged to use the "imitative" approach to the event that was popular in the early 1980s. This approach, which is much like what I have termed the "blueprint" style of method development, "relied on requiring students to imitate/emulate the critical process followed by established scholars in the field in order to learn through modeling" (Paine, 2008, p. 125). I would suggest these students return to using the primary works upon which so many academic works have been based. There is a reason scholars continue to turn to influences such as Bitzer, Burke, Foucault, and Condit. These scholars have offered us important understandings about how rhetorical arguments function. Why do we expect our forensic students to ignore these influences in speeches when in our classes we still teach these theories as fundamental? Students choosing this approach would, "dig deep into a set of critical constructs deemed coherent by an established scholar" (Paine, 2008, p. 126). This approach is not unlike popular assignments in introductory rhetorical criticism courses and will serve to introduce forensic students to the concept of rhetorical analysis.

For those students who wish to push themselves with the event, Paine (2008) offers the "inquiry" approach. He explains

I propose that we abandon the search for a particular article or book chapter written by somebody else which offers up a pre-digested set of "steps"...If we simply abandon the search for the "perfect list" or the "ideal article" – if we rethink our definition of and expectations concerning what constitutes a 'critical method' –then we can clear the way to genuine critical inquiry.

Students can create their own ‘lists of steps,’ select their own clusters of ‘critical constructs,’ and thus be empowered to ask and answer research questions in a much more genuine way. (Paine, 2008, p. 126)

I do not believe that this approach is beyond the capabilities of our students. In fact, I firmly believe by embracing Kay & Aden’s (1989) critical perspective or Paine’s (2008) inquiry approach to communication analysis and rhetorical criticism, our students will finally have the freedom to illustrate how insightful they really can be. Rather than having to constantly rework and revise a speech so all the pieces “fit” the constraints, students would be allowed to open their analyses in a variety of directions.

The difficult step, however, is not recognizing what needs to be changed, but rather putting those changes into practice. When students choose to violate the norms in our events, they run the risk of limiting their competitive outcomes. I don’t know how many times I have encouraged a student to do something in an unconventional way, to only reverse my advice a few tournaments later. I feel badly that the student is becoming demoralized by receiving low scores because he or she chose not to use a research question in communication analysis or used a statement of reasons organizational pattern in persuasion. I challenge judges, myself included, to think carefully about the ways in which our application of evaluative norms may be harming the pedagogical outcomes of our events. Change happens slowly in our activity. Often the change is seen one ballot at a time. We all need to begin writing those ballots.

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