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Speaker & Gavel

Volume 44/2007

On the Conversational Style of Ronald Reagan
“A – E = <Gc” Revisited and Reassessed
Windy Y. Lawrence
Ronald H. Carpenter

Newspaper Coverage of U.S. Senate Debates
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Finding an Acceptable Definition of “Original” Work
in Platform Speeches
A Study of Community College Coaches
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Giving Voice to the Wild
The Rhetorical Legacy of Sigurd Olson and *The Singing Wilderness*
Brant Short

Journal of
DELTA SIGMA RHO—TAU KAPPA ALPHA
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Delta Sigma Rho—Tau Kappa Alpha
National Honorary Forensic Society
www.dsr-tka.org/

EDITORIAL STAFF

Editor Daniel Cronn-Mills
Minnesota State University, Mankato
daniel.cronn-mills@mnsu.edu

Office Kathy Steiner

Editor's Note:

S&G went to an entire online format with volume 41/2004 of the journal. The journal will be available online at: www.dsr-tka.org/ The layout and design of the journal will *not* change in the online format. The journal will be available online as a pdf document. A pdf document is identical to a traditional hardcopy journal. We hope enjoy and utilize the new format.

Speaker & Gavel

<http://www.dsr-tka.org/> Volume 44 / 2007

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**Delta Sigma Rho—Tau Kappa Alpha
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Editor

Daniel Cronn-Mills
230 Armstrong Hall
Minnesota State University
Mankato, MN 56001
507.389.2213
daniel.cronn-mills@mnsu.edu

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On the Conversational Style of Ronald Reagan “A – E = <Gc” Revisited and Reassessed

Windy Y. Lawrence & Ronald H. Carpenter

Abstract

During contemporaneous rhetorical criticism of his style in discourse, President Ronald Reagan was assessed in terms of his living up to the eloquence of John F. Kennedy’s Inaugural Address. In those two *Speaker & Gavel* Essays, Reagan was found to be deficient and thus a “less-than-great communicator.” After revisiting and reassessing those two essays, Reagan’s essentially conversational mode of communication for television was found to embody rhetorical elements that indeed may have fostered eloquence sufficient to retain the sobriquet of “great communicator.”

Introduction

In two *Speaker & Gavel* essays during the 1980s, President Ronald Reagan’s style in discourse was the focus of contemporaneous rhetorical criticism. Therein, his attempts to achieve stylized syntax and lexicon were scrutinized (during his presidency) for adherence to classical desiderata conducing to eloquence, and exemplars of style against which Reagan’s sentences were measured often were in John F. Kennedy’s Inaugural Address. In the first of those two essays, canonical lore about style known to Roman rhetoricians as *elocutio* (abbreviated as “E” for formulary assessment), was measured against Reagan’s “A” (representing the classical canon of *actio* with advice about effective delivery with voice and body). Hence, whereas Reagan’s prowess with the latter was acknowledged, his deficiencies with the former led to his being deemed a less-than-great communicator—or “<GC.” Then, when “A—E = <GC” received a *redivida* essay, Reagan’s style in discourse was judged “impotent” (Carpenter, 1982-83; 1987).

I

Ronald Reagan retains the sobriquet, “Great Communicator.” Reassessment of his style in discourse—or lack thereof—thus is warranted. Impetus for so doing now stems partly from Clarke’s 2004 book, *Ask not: The inauguration of John F. Kennedy and the speech that changed America*, which asserts that this address “is generally acknowledged to have been the greatest oration of any twentieth-century American politician” (p. 9). Kennedy’s lasting impress now prompts this question: why would an able communicator—such as Reagan still is acknowledged to be—try to surpass or even match Kennedyesque eloquence? Plain spoken, “give ‘em hell” Harry Truman eschewed efforts to match the style of his predecessor, Franklin Roosevelt, and did not suffer politically by thus being deemed a second-rate stylist (at best). And George Herbert Walker Bush

never matched the polished delivery of his presidential predecessor so why even try (even if that ineptness was lampooned continually on *Saturday Night Live*)?

Still another factor impels re-assessing the aptness of Kennedyesque style as a standard for Reagan. The Kennedy Inaugural is on a DVD accompanying Tofel's 2005 book, *Sounding the trumpet: The making of John F. Kennedy's Inaugural Address*. Rhetorical critics viewing that speech again likely would concur that Kennedy largely was *oblivious* of television cameras. Directness with his live audience is obvious; continual, staccato gestures pointing his right hand index finger or poking the lectern with it are intended to enhance effect and affect of his words for people facing him directly; and his emotional involvement with the live audience before him impelled (more toward his peroration) his almost strident delivery—*regardless* of how it might play for cameras and television screens favoring Marshall McLuhan's notion of "cool" messages.

Reagan differs. His true audiences virtually always are cameras. And his prowess with delivery for them was honed on Hollywood sound stages, often by a cinematographic technique called "shot and reverse shot," whereby "continuity editing" of a scene between two actors has an "establishing shot" showing both of them conversing and then "shot and reverse shot" showing each of them in turn either speaking or listening and interacting with the other person. When retakes of a scene are necessary because one actor erred in delivering a line for desired effect, the second actor often left the sound stage; and the remaining actor then simply addressed the camera (Ingrid Bergman, for instance, did not have to be present if Humphrey Bogart's *Casablanca* lines had to be delivered again). Skilled actors speak well to cameras, and only a reminder is in order about Reagan's honed "mastery of voice and body while speaking."

Conducive to his admirable performance (*actio*) were a particularly well-modulated baritone voice capable of controlled variation between restrained forcefulness and an almost hushed whisper, sustained eye contact, well-timed gestures, physical poise, and a superb sense of when to pause for clarity, emphasis, and emotional affect. ... Add his well-timed, characteristic nod of the head with clenched teeth and pursed lips between some words, whereby an impression of determination was reinforced. In combination with physical poise that bespoke both unflappable stature and the coolness so suitable for television, Reagan's rhetoric of voice and body warranted acclaim for performance (*actio*) and the controlled flexibility and polished delivery of his lines (Carpenter & Lawrence, 2005).

Great communicators need more than delivery, however. Effective content of their discourse is mandatory, even at the subtlest nuances of syntax and lexicon.

II

Any "great communicator" surely is that "*rhetorically sensitive person ... willing to undergo the strain of adaptation*" in order "to deal better with the very different perceptual world of the Other" (Hart & Burks, 1972, pp. 76, 83).

Moreover, after determining “which ideas are to be made known,” rhetorically sensitive people will “attempt to process and to choose among all possible verbal strategies *before* giving utterance to an idea” (Hart & Burks, 1972, p. 89). Obviously, what publics now hear as presidential discourse reflects substantial input from pollsters, speechwriters, political advisors, and even *prior* empirical quantification of the specific words most likely to work best qualitatively. For Reagan’s 1980 Acceptance Address to the Republican National Convention, for example, Richard Wirthlin’s research tool, PINS (Political INformation System) tested early drafts on focus groups of 30 to 100 listeners who turned dials in different directions on electronic boxes while listening to various speech drafts; “real time” EKG-like readouts thus indicated specific words they qualitatively liked or disliked; and those words then predominated quantitatively in Reagan’s important address (Hall, 2002).

In *Verbal Style and the Presidency* (1984), Hart utilized DICTION, his computerized program that relies on lists of previously chosen words (or “dictionaries”) that then are identified in presidential speeches to reveal predetermined “major” factors of activity, optimism, certainty, and realism as well as “minor” elements of embellishment, self-reference, variety, familiarity, human interest, complexity, and symbolism. Hart (1984) thus examined “individual presidents, searching for those habits of locution which best explain popular reactions to their respective presidencies” and thereby studied “the American people themselves” (pp. 14-17, 24). Nevertheless, other indices of presidents’ “habits of locution” and hence rhetorical sensitivity are found less in final drafts as finally worded with lexical items on investigators’ predetermined lists but rather more in presidents’ personal, longhand emendations—additions, crossed out words, substitutions, and deletions of sentences, for instance—in successive drafts of important speeches as they reveal “adaptation” *before* delivery. Rather than words found in discourse as it conforms to previously established computer dictionaries, these longhand emendations are evidence of presidents’ personal predilections on behalf of “great” communication.

In Ronald Reagan’s case, such evidence exists in successive drafts of his 27 October 1983, nationally televised “Address to the Nation on Events in Lebanon and Grenada.” After the terrorist bombing of the U.S. Marine barracks at the Beirut airport in Lebanon, “when more than 200 of the sleeping men were killed,” Reagan described this “one hideous, insane attack” and explained what thereby was required of Americans. The Reagan Presidential Library has successive drafts of the speech:

1. One draft went to Reagan from speechwriter Ben Elliott on 26 October as a “proposed draft for your speech to the Nation tomorrow evening. It has been through an initial senior staff review.”
2. Another draft consisting of substantially long passages added in Reagan’s handwriting as well as his deletions of crossed-out passages from the Elliott draft, replete with the longhand emendations in syntax and lexicon.

3. A more polished draft reflecting all of the above but including still further subtle, longhand changes that reveal Reagan's rhetorically sensitive "adaptation."
4. A successive draft on 27 October (shortly before its delivery) that embodies additional changes in Reagan's handwriting plus inclusion of an urgently recommended, substantive addition recommended in a memo from speechwriter Anthony R. Dolan, which also offers insights into the president's rhetorical sensitivity.
5. The final draft of the speech exactly as delivered.¹

All of our quotations herein revealing Reagan's rhetorical sensitivity are drawn from these five documents as we specify in our text. In sum total, these materials constitute a treasure trove of direct evidence about Reagan's personal predilections conducing to "great" communication for which he is acclaimed.

III

One clearly dominant trend in Reagan's "habits of locution" (to use Hart's terminology) is consistent longhand wording and emendations in successive drafts to change what might have been a formal address on a somber subject to an increasingly more conversational or colloquial mode of sentence construction. Reagan introduced a conversation style, rhetorically different from any of his predecessors (Jamieson, 1988). His personal preferences thereby created new potentials for standards within presidential political discourse and thereby gave rise to rhetorical choices different from those expected for a traditional public speech. Indeed, because conversations usually occur between two people or a very small group of individuals, that mode of expression is expected to be more personal and informal than speeches given to larger audiences. Contemporaneous rhetorical criticism of Reagan's handwritten alterations reveal three features of the conversation style, each of which arguably offers a distinct advantage contributing to the effectiveness and appropriateness of his discourse for television.

To reveal Reagan's rhetorical sensitivity, perhaps the most quantitatively prominent of his emendations is a distinct tendency to substitute informal contractions and qualifiers for what instead might have been usage that is more grammatically formal. Indeed, successive drafts featuring Reagan's personal edits demonstrated his propensity to pepper successful drafts with transitional words to begin sentences, such as "Well," "Now," "So," and "But." Furthermore, he added contractions throughout his speech such as "it's," "don't," "can't," "that's," and "we're." Because they generally are more spontaneous and informal, conversations usually feature more qualifiers, broken sentences, and contractions that lend themselves to a more personal tone. These emendations created a more informal, plainer style but were not the only alterations that undergirded his conversational style.

Another personal preference demonstrated in the president's longhand emendations is his obedience to the rules of polite conversation. In essence, by

mimicking the back-and-forth structure of questioning that is encouraged in a personal dialogue, he privileged the rules of social etiquette wherein turn-taking and polite interaction are essential (Hollihan & Baaske, 1994; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). For instance, Reagan contended in longhand, “To answer those who ask if we’re serving any purpose in being there, let me answer a question with a question. Would the terrorists have launched their suicide attacks against the multinational force if it were not doing its job?” Much like two participants engaged in conversation, Reagan structured his question as if his audience had asked him a question first. In fact, Reagan’s steadfast commitment to this form is demonstrated when his speechwriters in a successive draft changed his sentence to read simply, “let me answer with a question,” and Reagan changed his sentence *back* to the original emphasis and repetition of the word “question.” Similarly, Reagan changed: “There are those who say we should get out of Lebanon” to “Let me ask those who say we should get out of Lebanon: If we were to leave Lebanon now, what message would that send to those who foment instability and terrorism?” In another instance, the original draft read:

Brave men have been taken from us. Many others have been wounded. All carried out their duties with honor. The worst possible course we could now take would be to run from Lebanon, stripping every ounce of meaning and purpose from their courageous sacrifice.

To this, Reagan added a question: “Are we to tell them sacrifice was wasted?” Furthermore, the politeness of his style is reinforced by the wording of his questions, such as “*May I* [emphasis ours] share something with you I think you’d like to know?” Instead of simply stating claims, Reagan asked questions of his audience and mimicked the feel of a participative, personal interaction. Reagan’s wording thereby created an overall feel of a conversationalist who aimed at exchanging information for the sake of understanding and relating on a more personal level.

While sentence structure complemented this personal style, Reagan’s use of an inclusive and familiar tone, accomplished through word choice and analogies, reinforced this conversational form. For instance, in addition to copious usages of pronouns like “we” and “us,” Reagan’s personal editing revealed his changing of “government” to “our government,” “this nation” to “our nation,” and “visible support” to “our support” as evidence of his tendency toward inclusive wording.

Reagan’s emendations also reveal a proclivity for familiar, more common words, with his substitution of the term “well-being” for “vitality” and “suicide mission” for “kamikaze mission.” After all, nearly four decades had elapsed since World War II, and “suicide” was a more likely word in Americans’ vocabulary than “kamikaze.” Further contributing to this tone, Reagan changed “Robert McFarlane” to “Bud McFarlane” opting for the type of nickname more likely found being used with familiar friends. Reagan also made several analogies, noted for their effectiveness in putting the unfamiliar in terms of the familiar, in his description of “Grenada” as only “twice the size of the District of Colum-

bia.” Similarly, he included a comparison between freedom and an insurance policy: “Sam Rayburn once said that freedom is not something a nation can work for once and win forever. He said it is ‘like an insurance policy; it’s [*sic*] premiums must be kept up to date, in order to keep it, we have to keep working for it – sacrificing for it – just as long as we live.” Reagan even used familiar scenes watched on American televisions as proof of Lebanese ineffectiveness in controlling militias: “Only a year ago we were watching on our TV screens the shelling and bombing of Beirut which was being used as a fortress by P.L.O. bands.” Reagan’s inclusive and familiar tone complimented and reinforced his use of the conversational style.

The personal qualities of a conversational style are particularly effective as television has changed the nature of the relationship between speaker and viewer, and Reagan used the conversation style to reinforce the transformation of this relationship. If President John F. Kennedy used the camera as something to speak *through* to a wider audience, Reagan used the camera as his conversational partner and let the immediate audience overhear him conversing. Such a strategy, however, is hardly evidence of eloquence or reason alone for Reagan’s communication greatness. Further critical assessment is warranted.

IV

In addition to contractions, qualifiers, politeness, and turn-taking, conversational style also includes anecdotal forms of evidence, and some of that manifest content (in contradistinction to stylized sentences) well might qualify as what Kenneth Burke calls the “representative anecdote” that is “summational” (1953, p. 324). Reflecting the Aristotelian notion that an apt “example” (typically from “facts of history,” 1356b and 1393a) is a cornerstone of discourse to persuade, Burkeian rhetorical theory extols those “*selections of reality*” that are so “*summational*” as to become sources of appeals around which “*human relations grandly converge*” (1953, p. 324). Or in classical rhetorical theory espoused by Longinus when elaborating *On the Sublime*, a statement of “extraordinary genius” is “marvelous” in its “power to persuade” by bringing “force sovereign and irresistible to bear upon every hearer”; for “sublimity, we know, brought out at the happy moment, parts all the matter this way and that, and like a lightening flash, reveals, at a stroke and in its entirety, the power of the orator.”² Could conversational Reagan be capable of Longinian sublime? Perhaps so.

On 26 October 1983, the day before Reagan’s televised address, the following urgent Memorandum was sent (as underlined) to speechwriters Robert C. McFarlane, David Gergan, Ben Elliot, and Allen Myer; its author was a close confidant of the president:

FROM: ANTHONY R. DOLAN

SUBJECT: Very Important Passage in TV Address

Urge inclusion of this anecdote. It says it all.

I know of course that no words from me can ever fully describe or do justice to the unselfish devotion of the young men who were and are today part of our Marine contingent in Beirut. I will attempt no such words.

But I do think something that happened to the commandant of our Marine Corps, General Paul Kelley, while he was visiting critically injured Marines in an Air Force Hospital. It says more than any of us could ever hope to say about the gallantry and heroism of these young men; young men who serve so willingly so that others might have a chance at peace and freedom in their own lives and in the life of their country.

I will let General Kelley's words describe the incident. He spoke of a "young Marine with more tubes going in and out of his body than I have ever seen in one body.

"He could not see very well. He reached up and grabbed my four stars, just to make sure I was who I said I was.

"He held my hand with a firm grip. He was making signals and we realized he wanted to tell me something. We put a pad of paper in his hand . . . and he wrote "Semper fi.""

Well, if you've been a Marine or if like myself you're an admirer of the Marines, you know those words are a battle cry, a greeting and a legend in the Marine Corps. They're Marine shorthand for the motto of the corps — "Semper Fidelis" — "always faithful."

General Kelly has a reputation for being a very sophisticated General and a very tough Marine. But he cried when he saw those words, and who can blame him.

That Marine and all those others like him, living and dead, have been faithful to their ideals, they have given willingly of themselves so that a nearly defenseless people in a region of great strategic importance to the free world will have a chance someday to live lives free of murder and mayhem and terrorism. I think that young Marine and all of his comrades have given everyone of us something to live up to. They were not afraid to stand for their country or, no matter how difficult and slow the journey might be, to give to others that last best hope of a better future. We cannot and will not dishonor them now and the sacrifices they have made by failing to remain as faithful to the cause of freedom and the pursuit of peace as they have been.

This summational (if not sublime) representative anecdote supplied by Dolan—because "it says it all"—figured prominently in Reagan's speech.

The memorandum found its way directly to Reagan, who recognized its rhetorical value and quickly added in his own handwriting, an ending to the anecdote that became the peroration of the speech as it evolved into final form before delivery: "I would like to ask you all—where ever you may be in this beloved land to pray for these wounded young men and to pray for the bereaved familys [*sic*] of those who gave their lives. I will not ask you to pray for the dead because they are safe in God's loving arms and beyond need of our prayers. God Bless you and God Bless America." Actually Reagan first had written, "to pray

for these wounded young men and for the bereaved” but as an afterthought changed his sentence to say, “to pray for these wounded young men and *to pray* [italics ours] for the bereaved” Repetition of “to pray” reveals a sense of a religiosity that might work to his rhetorical advantage. In the final draft as delivered, however, Reagan reversed the original order of the sentences. Thus, “I will not ask you to pray for the dead, because they’re safe in God’s loving arms and beyond need of our prayers” now *preceded* praying “for these wounded young men and” Conforming to Learning Theory law about the advantage of recency over primacy, Longinian “lightening” likely is symbolic of an immediate *present* more so than a *past* event now unalterable.

Reagan’s longhand emendations on the memorandum reveal another, almost instinctive impulse to ignore the past and emphasize the present. He simply crossed out Dolan’s first paragraph beginning, “I know of course that no words from me . . . I will attempt no such words.” Favoring immediacy and getting quickly to the anecdote, as if wanting quickly to tell an important story, Reagan preferred for the final draft, “May I share something with you I think you’d like to know? It’s something that that happened to the Commandant” Even at the last moment of final emendation, along with “you’d,” Reagan changed his original, longhand “It is” to a more conversational “It’s.”

Critical endeavor to explicate Reagan’s rhetorical sensitivity surely should address this question: is a potential representative anecdote about Marine Corps General Paul Kelley evidence of *Dolan’s* rhetorical sensitivity, which the President usurped and passed off as his own? Or, did Dolan accurately assess, predict, and thereby conform to *Reagan’s* already established, rhetorical preferences, whether for presidential discourse generally or the Lebanon speech specifically? The latter alternative well may be the more likely. Dolan could serve an important role for Reagan *because he knew* his president’s preferences. And still other longhand emendations evince that already established predilection on the president’s part.

At 5:30 PM on Wednesday, 26 October, Ben Elliot’s speechwriting team had completed a “proposed draft for your speech to the Nation tomorrow evening. It has been through an initial senior staff review.” The draft at that point in time had this statement:

Well, we intend to meet our responsibilities. For longer than any of us can remember, the people of the Middle East have lived from war to war with no prospect for any other future. Because it is our moral obligation, and because of our important interests in the area, that dreadful cycle must be broken. That is our course and there is no responsible alternative.

With longhand emendations, Reagan changed the paragraph as follows:

Let us meet our responsibilities. For longer than any of us can remember, the people of the Middle East have lived from war to war with no prospect for any other future. That dreadful cycle must be broken. Why are we there?

A Lebanese mother told one of our Ambassadors her little girl had only attended school 2 of the last 8 years. Now because of our presence there her daughter could live a normal life.

Reagan *himself* preferred an anecdote to represent—in a personal story mode of expression—American responsibilities in that part of the world. His preference prevailed in the text as delivered on 27 October 1983. And a sense of its “summational” quality is evident in his immediately next emendation: crossing out, with bold markings, the next *four* paragraphs of the Elliot draft to start, in his longhand, a new topic: “Now I know another part of the world is very much on your minds, a place much closer to our shores. It is of course the ‘Isle of Spice’—Grenada” (retained, as is, in the draft as delivered).

Finally, Dolan’s correct anticipation of Reagan’s personal predilection for anecdotes, such as that about General Kelley, is demonstrated in what may be the most subtle but nevertheless revealing evidence of his president’s rhetorical sensitivity. Working in longhand with the Elliot draft, Reagan read the following sentence about the situation in Lebanon: “We are there protecting our own interests.” Reagan crossed out the last word, “interests.” That wounded Marine could not be summational of any ignoble interest (such as Middle East oil) but only the nobility of *our own* people. Nevertheless, for the draft as finally delivered, Reagan could not resist—again—his imperative to embody more conversational contractions: “We’re not somewhere else in the world protecting someone else’s interests; we’re there protecting our own.” Reagan was subtle, summational, and perhaps even sublime.

V

In 1964, Marshall McLuhan published a significant book, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. The analysis therein of television as a medium of monumental import is directly relevant for an understanding of some person in an electronic age that potentially could become a “Great Communicator.” For if any president matched McLuhan’s notion of how television might be used for optimal rhetorical advantage, Ronald Reagan was he.

Essentially, McLuhan epitomized television as a “cool” medium of communication, which in turn requires a correspondingly “cool” communicator as well as “cool” messages, in both content and form as well as substance and style. After all, television essentially requires of viewers a *high* degree of “participation” as they connect light emitting dots flitting rapidly across a screen to create images *low* in definition (despite current claims for HDTV). Thus, in short, anyone using TV as a primary mode of communication—as American presidents now do—will strive for a correspondingly “low pressure style of presentation” so that the message meets the strictures of the medium (McLuhan, 1964, p. 270). As if presciently anticipating an actor turned President, McLuhan (1964) described an ideal television persona:

The TV actor does not have to project either his voice or himself.
Likewise, TV acting is so extremely intimate, because of the peculiar

involvement of the viewer with the completion or “closing” of the TV image, that the actor must achieve a great degree of spontaneous casualness that would be irrelevant in movies and lost on stage. For the audience participates in the inner life of the TV actor as fully as in the outer life of the movie star. . . . Newscasters and actors alike report the frequency with which they are approached by people ‘who feel they’ve met them before. Joanne Woodward in an interview was asked what was the difference between being a movie star and a TV actress. “She replied: “When I was in the movies I heard people say, ‘There goes Joanne Woodward.’ Now they say, ‘There goes somebody I think I know’” (pp. 276-277).

And as in real-life, face-to-face conversation, with its “preference for the facial expression, TV is not so much an action, as a reaction medium” (McLuhan, 1964, pp. 277). In the past, the Jack Paar show was an example that “revealed the inherent need of TV for spontaneous chat and dialogue”; in the present of his presidency, Ronald Reagan, with his penchant for a conversational mode of expression for the Lebanon speech is an exemplar of likable “cool.”

The contrapuntal representative anecdote, however, is potentially a message segment whose specificity renders high definition. Reagan’s account of General Kelley’s moving encounter with the badly wounded Marine left nothing to the imagination. TV viewers listening to that account heard all the details about the characters, their outward states, and their inner feelings. The approximately 385 words of the anecdote likely required about 3 minutes of time for delivery. Nevertheless, in an age becoming attuned to five commercials in a row, each of which is 15 seconds in length (or perhaps more), three minutes of continuous statement about General Kelley and the Marine may have pushed the limits of required time span for “sublimity” that in the Longinian mode “brought out at the happy moment, parts all the matter this way and that, and like a lightning flash, reveals, at a stroke and in its entirety, the power of the orator” (1988, p. 267). Nevertheless, if he indeed achieved Longinian effect and affect, Ronald Reagan found a rhetorical counterpart for the eloquent style of John F. Kennedy’s Inaugural Address. Thus, failure to match favorably the epigrammatic prose of a president in 1961 was *not* an apt criterion to assess presidential language in the 1980s as “less-than-great.”

For those rhetorical critics and theorists who maintain a vital interest in the traditional canon of style as a source of epigrammatic sentences, Reagan’s successful mastery of the contemporary medium of television well may have raised a serious question: have efforts to achieve apt anecdotes replaced striving for stylized sentences? Ronald Reagan may have offered an answer. Both can be eloquent.

Endnotes

¹ In the Reagan Presidential Library, these five documents are found under “Collection and/or Subject File” as White House/Office Files Speechwriting Drafts, OA 8206, WHORM Subject Files, SP 818 and SP 818 18858, and WHORM Subject Files SP818. The authors express their gratitude to Professor Kurt Ritter, Texas A & M University, for making these primary source, textual materials available to us.

² We use the translation of Longinus *On the Sublime* by A.O Prickard, in *Readings in Classical Rhetoric*, ed. Thomas W. Benson and Michael H. Prosser. Davis CA: Hermagoras Press, 1988, p. 267.

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Windy Y. Lawrence, Ph. D., (Corresponding author), Assistant Professor of Communication Studies, University of Houston-Downtown, Department of Arts & Humanities, One Main Street, Houston, TX 77002, lawrencew@uhd.edu

Ronald H. Carpenter, Ph. D., Professor of English and Communication Studies, University of Florida, Department of English, Turlington Hall 4340, Gainesville, FL 32611, ronstyle@ufl.edu

Newspaper Coverage of U.S. Senate Debates

William Benoit
Corey Davis

Abstract

Political debates are important message forms, capable of informing and influencing voters. However, news coverage of debates informs and influences both those who watch, and those who do not watch, the debates. This study compared the content (functions and topics) of 10 U.S. Senate debates from 1998-2004 with the content of newspaper articles about those particular debates. Newspaper coverage of debates was significantly more negative than the debates themselves, reporting a higher percentage of attacks and a smaller percentage of acclaims than the candidates employed. The newspaper articles also stressed character more, and policy less, than the candidates. This journalistic emphasis may facilitate the impression that the candidates are more negative than they really are and that candidates are more concerned with character – and less with policy – than their messages indicate. We also discovered that newspaper coverage of senatorial debates stresses defenses more, policy less, and character more than news coverage of presidential debates.

Introduction

There can be no doubt that political debates are a very important campaign medium (McKinney & Carlin, 2004; Racine Group, 2002). A media effects perspective is justified by the results of a recent meta-analysis: Debates have been found to increase knowledge of the issues and change preference for candidates' issue stands, debates are capable of producing an agenda-setting effect, debates have been shown to alter perceptions of the candidates' personality, and debates can also affect vote preference of viewers (Benoit, Hansen, & Verser, 2003). Clearly, political debates merit scholarly attention.

Accordingly, scholars have developed an extensive literature on presidential debates (books on the topic include Benoit & Wells, 1996; Bishop, Meadow, & Jackson-Beeck, 1979; Carlin & McKinney, 1994; Coleman, 2000; Friedenberg, 1994; Hellweg, Pfau, & Brydon, 1992; Hinck, 1993; Jamieson & Birdsell, 1988; Kraus, 1962, 1979, 2000; Lemert et al., 1991; Martel, 1983; Racine Group, 2002; Swerdlow, 1984, 1987). However, political debates in campaigns for other offices besides that of the president are becoming increasingly common in modern campaigns. For instance, almost twenty years ago Ornstein (1987) observed that "These days debates are the norm, not the exception, in congressional, mayoral, and gubernatorial politics" (p. 58). Debates for non-presidential elective office have reached higher levels of visibility in recent years because of the national attention they receive from C-SPAN, which televised over 100 debates in 2002 and 2004. Research indicates that presidential primary debates have

larger effects on viewers than debates in the general election campaign (Benoit, Hansen, & Verser, 2003), it seems likely that viewers know less about contenders in the primary campaign than about the two party nominees in the general election phase. It is possible that these non-presidential debates also have relatively large effects because the candidates for these offices also tend to be less well-known than the Democratic and Republican nominees for president.

Furthermore, it is important to realize that millions of people watch political debates and they may be influenced directly by these campaign events. However, Kendall (1997) noted that news coverage of the debates is also very important to voters: "Not only do they see the debates, but they also see the commentary about those debates on television news, as well as in other media. Many more people who have not watched the debates also hear or read analyses of them" (p. 1). So, news coverage of debates has the potential to influence both voters who watch, and voters who do not watch, political debates. Furthermore, there is reason to believe that news coverage of debates has important consequences for the electorate. Chaffee and Dennis (1979) argue that "It may well be that the press's interpretation of the debate. . . is more important in determining the impact on the electorate than is the debate itself" (p. 85; see also Lowry, Bridges, & Barefield, 1990; Steeper, 1978). Accordingly, this study investigates news coverage of campaign debates for U.S. Senate.

Literature Review

Several studies have investigated news coverage of presidential campaigns (for a review, see Benoit, Stein, & Hansen, 2005). A number of other studies have examined news coverage of non-presidential campaigns (e.g., Atkeson & Partin, 2001; Becker & Fuchs, 1967; Graber, 1989; Kahn, 1995; Kahn & Kenney, 1999; Kelley, 1958; Ostroff & Sandell, 1984; Serini, Powers, & Johnson, 1998; Simon, 2002; Tidmarch, Hyman, & Sorkin, 1984; Vermeer, 1987; West, 1994). None of this work on non-presidential election coverage, however, has looked specifically at news coverage of political debates. Other studies have investigated non-presidential debates (Bystrom, Roper, Gobetz, Massey, & Beal, 1991; Conrad, 1993; Hullett & Loudon, 1998; Just, Crigler, & Wallach, 1990; Lichtenstein, 1982; Ornstein, 1987; Pfau, 1983; Philport & Balon, 1975). However, these studies also have not examined news coverage of those debates.

A few studies have examined news coverage of presidential debates, comparing the content of debates with content of the news coverage of those debates. The key variables – function and topic – are derived from Functional Theory (Benoit, in press; Benoit et al. 2003). Political campaign messages have three distinct functions: acclaims, which praise the candidate; attacks, which attack the opponent; and defenses, which refute attacks. This discourse can occur on two topics: policy (governmental action and problems amenable to governmental action) and character (the qualities and abilities of the candidates). So, statements by candidates (in the debates and quoted or paraphrased in news stories about the debates) have two dimensions: functions (acclaims, attacks, and defenses) and topics (policy and character).

Benoit, Stein, and Hansen (2004; see also Benoit & Currie, 2001) content analyzed newspaper coverage of presidential campaign debates from the general election, 1980-2000. They found that the news stories on debates were significantly more negative than the debates covered in the stories: Attacks comprised 50% of the statements from candidates reported in the news but only 31% of the statements candidates made in the debates; acclaims appeared less frequently in coverage than debates. Similarly, Benoit, Hansen, and Stein (2004; see also Reber & Benoit 2001) analyzed newspaper coverage of presidential primary debates from 1980-2004. Once again, attacks were exaggerated in stories about these debates (52% in stories, 20% in debates), whereas acclaims were under reported. So, news stories about both presidential primary and general debates have been found to be much more negative than the campaign messages themselves.

This line of work has also examined the topics of news coverage of general presidential debates. In the general campaign, policy was discussed significantly more in the debates than in the stories about the debates (74% to 69%) whereas character was emphasized more in the news than in the debates themselves (31% to 26%; Benoit, Stein, & Hansen, 2004). Once again, this pattern occurred in newspaper stories about presidential primary debates as well. In the debates, the candidates devoted significantly more of their comments to policy than did stories about the debates (65% to 60%); the stories stressed character more than the debates (40% to 35%). Kendall (1997), who wrote about news coverage of the 1996 presidential debates, reported a similar pattern:

Media interpretations have been found to follow a pattern: They devote little time to the content of the debates and much time to the personalities of the candidates and the process by which they make the decision to debate, prepare to debate, and “spin” the stories about expectations for and effects of the debates. (p. 1)

In short, the news appears to have a tendency to overemphasize character coverage at the expense of policy.

So, newspaper coverage of both primary and general presidential debates reveal two patterns: (1) news stories discuss attacks more frequently than they occur in debates and (2) stories emphasize character more, and policy less, than the debates. However, we do not know whether these patterns also occur in non-presidential debates. Accordingly, this study will replicate existing studies of newspaper coverage of general (Benoit, Stein, & Hansen, 2004) and primary (Benoit, Hansen, & Stein, 2004) presidential debates, extending that work to investigate news coverage of U.S. Senate debates. Based on the findings just reported, we propose two hypotheses:

- H1. Newspaper coverage of U.S. Senate debates will cover attacks more frequently, and acclaims less frequently, than they occur in the debates.
- H2. Newspaper coverage of U.S. Senate debates will cover character more frequently, and policy less frequently, than they occur in the debates.

Finally, existence of data on newspaper coverage of presidential debates (Benoit, Stein, & Hansen, 2004) allows us to test for differences in emphasis of functions or topics between presidential and senatorial news coverage:

- RQ1. Does newspaper coverage of U.S. Senate debates emphasize the same functions as coverage of presidential debates?
- RQ2. Does newspaper coverage of U.S. Senate debates emphasize the same topics as coverage of presidential debates?

This study will extend our knowledge of news coverage of political campaign debates to contests for other political office.

Method

We analyzed newspaper coverage of 10 U.S. Senate debates from 1998-2004. These debates featured 10 Democrats and 10 Republicans including 7 incumbents, 7 challengers, and 6 open-seat candidates, a nice balance of candidates (Benoit, Brazeal, & Airne, 2006). For the current study, we employed Lexis-Nexis to locate newspaper stories about each of these debates. We searched for articles published after the debates (rather than articles about preparation for or expectations about the debates) so we could compare the content of the debates with the content of articles reporting on the debates. We ignored articles that did not focus on the debate, were very short, or were transcripts of the debates. These procedures obtained a sample of 17 newspaper articles about this sample of debates (note that these articles were written about these particular debates, not about Senate debates generally). The sample is described in Table 1.

The content – functions and topics – of these debates is known from previous research (Benoit, Brazeal, & Airne, 2006),¹ which will facilitate comparison of our (new) content analysis of news coverage of these debates with (existing) content analysis of the debates themselves. Similarly, we can compare the data on newspaper coverage of presidential debates (Benoit, Stein, & Hansen, 2004) with the new data on newspaper coverage of senatorial debates produced here. The content analysis in this study of news coverage employed three steps, utilizing the same procedures employed to analyze these Senate debates. First, we located statements in a newspaper story that described the candidates' comments in the debate (either direct quotations or paraphrases). Other comments, such as descriptions of the debates and evaluative statements from the reporters, were excluded. Second, the statements in the stories about the candidates' comments were unitized into themes or utterances that address a coherent idea (in our discussion, we use the terms "utterances," "comments," and "remarks" synonymously with "themes"). Berelson (1952) defined a theme as "an assertion about a subject-matter" (p. 138). Holsti (1969) explained that a theme is "a single assertion about some subject" (p. 116). So, a theme is an argument (an argument₁ in O'Keefe's [1977] terminology) about the candidates or their issue positions. Because discourse is enthymematic, themes can vary in length from a

phrase to several sentences. Third, as in the research on debates, each theme in the newspaper stories was coded for the two variables under investigation here: functions (acclaims, attacks, defenses) and topics (policy, character).

Table 1. *Newspaper Stories on Senate Debates*

Year	Stories	State	Candidates	Incumbent	Challenger	Open
2004 9/19	2	SD	Daschle Thune	1	1	0
2004 10/30	1	UT	VanDam Bennett	1	1	0
2004 10/3	1	OK	Carson Coburn	0	0	2
2004 10/12	2	IL	Obama Keyes	0	0	2
2002 9/22	2	CO	Strickland Allard	1	1	0
2002 10/24	2	MO	Carnahan Talent	1	1	0
2000 9/13	2	NY	Clinton Lazio	0	0	2
2000 10/24	2	CA	Feinstein Campbell	1	1	0
2000 10/22	1	MI	Stabenow Abraham	1	1	0
1998 10/19	2	FL	Graham Crist	1	1	0
Total	17	10	20	7	7	6

First candidate is a Democrat; second candidate is a Republican.

We then compared the data about news coverage produced by these content analytic procedures with the results of previous content analysis of these Senate debates. In other words, we began with the content analysis of the debates already available in the literature, and replicated those procedures to content analyze newspaper stories about the debates, and then compared the results of the existing content analyses of the debates with the new content analyses of the news coverage of these debates. The data from content analysis of debates and newspaper coverage of those debates are comparable because they were generated with identical procedures.

Two coders performed content analysis on these texts. Reliability was assessed with a subset of approximately 10% of the texts. We employed Cohen's (1960) κ , which accounts for agreement by chance. κ for function (acclaim, attack, defend) in coding the debates was .93; κ for topic (policy, character) was .88. In the analysis of newspaper stories κ for functions in newspaper stories was .95 and for coding topic was .91. Landis and Koch (1977) indicate that κ s between .61-.80 reflect "substantial" agreement and κ s between .81-1.0 represent "almost perfect" inter-coder reliability (p. 165). This means the reliability of these data are acceptable.

Because the content analytic procedures produce frequency data, we will test the two hypotheses with *chi-square* analyses. We report the significance level and the effect size (Cramer's *V* for 2x3 *chi-squares* and ϕ for 2x2 *chi-squares*).

Results

The first hypothesis predicted that newspaper coverage of U.S. Senate debates would be more negative than the debates themselves. This prediction was upheld in these data: the most common function in news coverage was attacks despite the fact that the most common function in the debates was acclaims. Specifically, attacks comprised only 29% of the debate utterances but were 48% of the statements from candidates in the articles; acclaims, on the other hand, constituted 60% of the statements made by candidates in the debates but only 39% of the statements from candidates in the news articles. For example, a story about the 1998 Graham-Crist debate reported that Charlie Crist charged that Bob Graham "has voted for more taxes" (March & Kennedy, 1998, p. 1). This illustrates an attack because most voters prefer lower, rather than higher, taxes. On the other hand, the story also reported that Graham boasted that he voted "to bring us to a balanced budget and the strongest economy we've had in this century," a clear illustration of acclaiming. A story on the 2000 Feinstein-Campbell debates reported that Tom Campbell accused the Democrat of having a conflict of interest. The story reported that "Feinstein dismissed the allegations as a desperate tactic by a losing candidate" (Ainsworth, 2000, p. A3), an example of a defense. A story on the Strickland-Allard debate of 2002 reported that Allard accused Strickland of "misstating Allard's positions in television ads" (McAllister, 2002, p. A1). Because the actual policy positions are not discussed, this is an attack on Strickland for dishonesty in his campaign. These differences are statistically significant ($\chi^2 [df = 2] = 80.17, p < .0001, V = .18$; the frequency of acclaims versus attacks [excluding defenses] was also significantly different: $\chi^2 [df = 1] = 82.96, p < .0001, \phi = .19$) and the data are reported in Table 2.

Table 2. *Functions of U.S. Senate Debates and News Coverage, 1998-2004*

	Acclaims	Attacks	Defenses	$\chi^2 (df = 2)$
Debates	1346 (60%)	597 (29%)	219 (11%)	80.17, $p < .0001$
News Stories	163 (39%)	200 (48%)	57 (14%)	$V = .18$

Note. The *chi-square* for acclaims versus attacks (excluding defenses) is also statistically significant: 82.96, $p < .0001, \phi = .19$.

Hypothesis 2 anticipated that newspaper articles about U.S. Senate debates would stress character more, and policy less, than the debates themselves. This prediction was also confirmed. Although both debates and newspapers discussed policy more than character, the emphasis on policy was greater in the debates (71%) than in the news stories (57%); conversely, newspaper articles discussed character more than the debates (43% to 29%). For example, the story on the

Feinstein-Campbell debate reported that Feinstein said “she had worked with Republicans to produce major bills like the Desert Protection Act, the Tahoe Restoration Plan, and the 1994 Assault Weapons Ban” (Ainsworth, 2000, p. A3). This statement is an example of policy discussion. These differences are statistically significant ($\chi^2 [df = 1] = 26.02, p < .0001, \phi = .11$) and the data can be found in Table 3.

Table 3. *Topics of U.S. Senate Debates and News Coverage, 1998-2004*

	Policy	Character	$\chi^2 (df = 1)$
Debates	1307 (71%)	536 (29%)	26.02, $p < .0001$
News Stories	210 (57%)	156 (43%)	$\phi = .11$

The first research question concerned the distribution of the three functions in news coverage of senatorial and presidential debates. There was a statistically significant difference in functions ($\chi^2 [df = 2] = 7.97, p < .05, V = .05$). Inspection of the means reported in Table 4 shows that senatorial debate coverage reports fewer acclaims and attacks and more defenses than presidential debate coverage. Further analysis using only acclaims and attacks reveals that there is no significant difference in use of these two functions ($\chi^2 [df = 1] = .05, p > .82$), which means that the difference in function inheres only in defense.

Table 4. *Functions of News Coverage of Presidential and U.S. Senate Debates*

	Acclaims	Attacks	Defenses	$\chi^2 (df = 2)$
Senate	163 (39%)	200 (48%)	57 (14%)	7.97, $p < .05$
Presidential	969 (41%)	1160 (50%)	214 (9%)	$V = .05$

Note. The *chi-square* for acclaims versus attacks (excluding defenses) is not significant: $.05, p > .82$.

Research question two investigated the emphasis on the two topics in senatorial and presidential debate news coverage. Here again a significant difference emerged: Senate debate coverage discussed policy less, and character more, than presidential debate coverage ($\chi^2 [df = 1] = 18.34, p < .05, \phi = .08$). See Table 5 for these data.

Table 5. *Topics of News Coverage of Presidential and U.S. Senate Debates*

	Policy	Character	$\chi^2 (df = 1)$
Senate	210 (57%)	156 (43%)	18.34, $p < .05$
Presidential	1542 (69%)	702 (31%)	$\phi = .08$

Discussion

This study investigated the accuracy of newspaper coverage of U.S. Senate debates. Rather than perform fact checks (e.g., www.factcheck.org) on the truth of reporters' statements, we looked to see if newspaper articles about debates

accurately reflected the tone and topics of the debates themselves. As with news coverage of presidential primary and general debates (Benoit, Hansen, & Stein, 2004; Benoit, Stein, & Hansen, 2004), newspaper accounts of Senate debates accentuate the negative. Attacks comprised less than one-third of the statements made by candidates in these debates; however, almost half of all statements attributed to candidates in these articles were attacks. Positive statements were correspondingly under represented (60% of candidate debate statements were acclaims but only 39% of the comments quoted or paraphrased from candidates were positive). Clearly, these newspaper articles fostered the impression that these Senate debates were more negative than they were in fact.

A negative tone in political campaign coverage should not be surprising. Hart observed that “political news is reliably negative” (p. 173). The *New York Times*’ coverage of general election campaigns is more negative (57%) than positive (39%; Benoit, Stein, & Hansen, 2005). Similarly, Jamieson, Waldman, and Devitt (1998) observed that “reliance on news reports for information about the campaign would lead one to conclude that it contained a far higher level of attack than was in fact the case” (p. 325). So newspaper coverage of U.S. Senate debates is substantially more negative than the campaign messages themselves.

This emphasis on the negative in news articles is easy to understand. Attacks, clash, or conflict is likely to be more interesting than platitudes. Surely journalists want to arouse and maintain their readers’ interest and a focus on attacks might well be thought to serve this goal. Furthermore, voters must know the differences between candidates in order to decide whom is preferable. If voters only hear positive statements (“I’m for more jobs,” “I’m also for more jobs,” “I want to protect Social Security,” “I will also preserve Social Security”), there is little basis for preferring one over the other. Criticism or attacks – if truthful and accurate – can help distinguish candidates and give voters a reason to prefer one over another. So, attacks are not necessarily undesirable in and of themselves.

The potential problem lies in the fact that newspaper coverage of debates could easily create the impression that the candidates were more negative than was actually the case. Although some questions have been raised about their study (see, e.g., Finkel & Geer, 1999), Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995) argued that negativity in political advertising adversely affects voter turnout. It is possible that high levels of negativity – or high *perceived* levels of negativity – in political debates could also depress voter turnout. It is worth noting that, as Finkel and Geer point out, one of Ansolabehere and Iyengar’s studies content analyzed negativity in news about the campaign (rather than negativity in television spots). That means their research actually found that higher levels of attacks in *news* was associated with lower turnout. Therefore, there is a possibility that the fact that news coverage of U.S. Senate debates is so negative could have a tendency to depress voter turnout on election day.

Our findings also indicate that newspaper accounts of Senate debates emphasize character more, and policy less, than the debates themselves. News coverage of presidential campaigns generally emphasizes horse race the most (40%

of themes in stories); after that, character is more common than policy (31% to 25%; Benoit, Stein, & Hansen, 2005). This emphasis on character is also consistent with studies of news coverage of presidential primary and general debates (Benoit, Hansen, & Stein, 2004; Benoit, Stein, & Hansen, 2004). Similarly, Sears and Chaffee (1979) commented on the 1976 presidential debates: “the debates themselves were heavily issue-oriented, but the subsequent coverage of them decidedly less so” (p. 228). As with presidential debates, newspaper coverage of Senate debates stressed policy less, and character more, than the debates themselves.

Why would journalists stress character more than the candidates themselves? Patterson (1994) explained that “Policy problems lack the novelty that the journalist seeks. . . . The first time that a candidate takes a position on a key issue, the press is almost certain to report it. Further statements on the same issue become progressively less newsworthy, unless a new wrinkle is added” (p. 61). So, the search for the “new” in “news” may incline journalists to slight policy. Furthermore, Clarke and Evans (1983), who surveyed 82 reporters who covered U.S. House of Representative races in 1978, observed that:

Candidates are above all recognized for speaking out on particular policy positions.... Strikingly, issue-related topics recede when reporters turn to analyzing the strengths and weaknesses that they think will determine the election.... On the whole, candidates do not dwell on these [personal] characteristics in their appeals to voters. Yet journalists believe that they are important factors in determining the outcome of a congressional race. (pp. 39-42)

If journalists believe that character is more important than policy, it makes sense that they would stress that topic in their articles about debates.

However, the journalists’ tendency to privilege character over policy is not consistent with voters’ express wishes. Brazeal and Benoit (2001) report public opinion data from five different years in which voters reported that state, local, and national issues were a more important determinant of their vote for Congress than candidate character. Similarly, a Princeton Survey Research Associates poll from 1999 (on presidential elections) found that only 8% of respondents thought that news organizations should pay the most attention to “what a candidate is like as a person”; in sharp contrast, 27% said the news should devote most attention to “what a candidate has accomplished in the past” and 63% thought the news should spend most time on “what a candidate believes about important issues.” An emphasis on character over policy in stories about Senate debates may be detrimental to voters’ interests.

Conclusion

This study investigated newspaper coverage of U.S. Senate debates from 1998-2004. Political debates have become more popular as time passes and research has established that they are capable of influencing voters. However, news coverage of debates can influence those who watch these debates as well

as those who do not watch them. The newspaper articles in our sample did not accurately reflect the content of the debates on two dimensions. First, the frequency of attacks in news coverage was much higher than the frequency of attacks in the debates themselves. This emphasis may foster the impression that campaigns are more negative than they are in fact. Second, the news stories discussed character more, and policy less, than the debates. This journalistic emphasis may do a disservice to voters, who report that policy is more important to them than character.

This study also discovered that although the general emphasis is the same (newspaper coverage of debates at both levels stresses attacks and character more than the debates themselves), nevertheless there are differences in news coverage of senatorial and presidential debates. Senate debate coverage stresses defenses more than presidential debate coverage. Senate races have a more limited audience than presidential debates because the candidates' constituency in senate campaigns are statewide rather than nationwide. Presidential candidates need to address a wider range of issues to address the national electorate, compared with senate candidates. This could mean that the news coverage stresses defenses to highlight differences on the issues that matter most to voters. The other difference – more coverage of character and less of policy in senate than presidential coverage – may be related to the fact that a senator is 1 among 99 other senators – and one among 534 other members of congress. When the president signs a bill or implements the law, he (all presidents so far have been male) appears to be solely responsible and is therefore clearly associated with the policy. Because responsibility for legislation is so diffuse (535 law makers in congress), it is more difficult for senators to become identified with particular policies. Thus, news coverage may stress character of senatorial candidates more than presidential candidates. Note that we do not argue the president *in fact* is solely responsible; clearly the entire executive branch is involved.. Our point is that the president is more likely to be *perceived* as responsible for a policy than a senator.

Future research could consider both other news media – such as television or Internet coverage of debates – and political debates held for other offices besides the U.S. Senate. Debates for governor, U.S. House, as well as other offices have been held. Political debates have also been held in other countries (including Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Greece, Holland, Israel, New Zealand, Scotland, South Korea, Sweden, Poland, Taiwan, and the Ukraine) and news coverage of those events merit scholarly attention. Although the results reported here are consistent with presidential primary and general news coverage of debates, we do not know if the findings would replicate with other kinds of political debates. Furthermore, research on the effects of watching debates, comparing those exposed to news reports and those who are not, could add to our understanding.

Endnotes

¹Benoit, Brazeal, and Airne content analyzed 15 Senate debates; however, we were only able to locate newspaper stories about 10 of those debates. In order to make the data for debates and news directly comparable here, this study only includes data from the 10 debates for which we could locate newspaper articles. Accordingly, the data on Senate debates for functions and topics vary between their results and the data we report here (the frequencies are smaller and the percentages are slightly different here).

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Finding an Acceptable Definition of “Original” Work in Platform Speeches A Study of Community College Coaches

Crystal Lane Swift
Gary Rybold

Abstract

The quantitative analysis of this paper was undertaken to discover coach definitions of “original work” in platform speaking in the community college forensics competition. A survey was conducted to determine if there was any consistency to coaching practices when considering a recent rule change requiring that all platform speeches be the original work of the student. Although the literature review indicates that academia has established guidelines for plagiarism and unattributed collaboration, no such consistent definition was found among the coaches surveyed. The discussion of the results revolves around the conclusion that coaches are consistent in their own practices but those practices are not universal within the field. Ultimately, the conclusion is that an agreed upon definition of “original work” remains in question.

Introduction

In 2005, at the general meeting of Phi Rho Pi, a rule was passed to insert the word “original” in the requirements that platform speeches be the original work of the student. Specifically, 2005 Phi Rho Pi proposal form #8 changed section 3 (event rules); part 4 (unlimited preparation events) item “b” to read: “The speeches and the personalized introduction of interpretive programs in these events must be the original work of the student.” Even though a majority of coaches and students who voted for the rule change wanted the word added to the language, one coach commented “How would they know?” while another said “What does original mean?” That rule change and the lack of a cohesive definition of “original” provide the impetus for this paper.

Many opinions have surfaced in the writing of platform speeches. Comments such as “actors do not write their own scripts, so why should students have to write their own speeches” or “writing a speech to entertain is like writing a sitcom: it takes a team of writers” point to an belief that original work of the student includes collaborative effort. A student once joked to one of the authors, “my coaches didn’t change one sentence in my STE. That sentence was on page three.” This type of involvement is justified by some as providing solid pedagogy in teaching the process of writing. Many conclude the best product will surface through the synergy of collaboration.

Some of the controversy surrounding the coaching process involves several practices. Of course, the most obvious violation is to hand a student a speech

that has been written by someone else. Since the student was not even involved in the original invention process most would agree this is not “the original work of the student.” However, such a blatant violation of the rules is rarely the charge and is usually not cited as the need for the original wording. Instead there are other practices that as Kimball (1989) wrote “a few colleagues over the years raise . . . in the face of polite silence” (p. 12). Some of those practices we have heard from others that are considered to be violations of the original rule are:

1. Giving students topics, research, artifacts (for CA) or models (researched and copied by the coach for use in CA).
2. Sitting down with a student to assist in an extensive outlining process (30 minutes plus) in the beginning stages of a platform speech.
3. Placing students who may not be good writers into a group writing process. During this process the speech would be at the center of a big group process to assist the student in writing the speech.
4. After a draft is completed, a coach and the student would sit down at a computer and review the entire speech, sentence by sentence, to develop the best finished product.
5. Taking a student’s speech and editing or reworking language without the student present.

Did some of the above standard coaching practices (and perhaps others) motivate Phi Rho Pi to change the rule to specify “original?” Is there an implication in the term “original” that the student is being evaluated in both the manner of delivery and the matter of content? If there is no guarantee of a minimal involvement by the coach, does an evaluator need to consider the unattributed collaboration in a decision or exclude consideration of content since it is not the sole indicator of the speakers writing skills?

To answer these questions it is imperative for Phi Rho Pi to determine a common definition of “original work.” If no such consistency is found, what actions should be taken to move the community towards a commonality of practice within coaching? Our study undertakes answering the first question to determine if there is a common definition for “original work.” Recommendations about our findings will be outlined in the discussion.

Review of Literature

Academia is very vocal when it comes to ethical concerns and definitions of original work and unattributed collaboration. This is true in both general academic definitions of plagiarism and specifically with forensics ethical considerations. However, while general academia outlines specifics for what qualifies as plagiarism, forensics tends to be much more ambiguous.

General Academic Definitions of Plagiarism

To begin our understanding of original work, it appears that most of academia does not struggle with definitional problems of collaboration. Harvard’s website undertakes an extensive discussion on the misuse of sources. Section 3.2b specifically defines Improper Collaboration:

Collaborative discussion and brainstorming is a vital activity of professional scholars, especially in the sciences; but these scholars not only acknowledge in each completed article the contribution of other discussants, but write the article on their own or else submit a single article under two names. When you are asked to collaborate on a project but required to submit separate papers, you must write up your paper on your own, acknowledging the extent of your collaboration in a note. You and your partner should not compose the report or exam answer as you sit together, but only take notes.

Section 3.2 (d) continued

Abetting plagiarism: You are also guilty of misusing sources if you knowingly help another student plagiarize whether by letting the student copy your own paper, or by selling the student a paper of yours or somebody else's, or by writing a paper or part of a paper for the student: as, for example, when in the course of "editing" a paper for another student you go beyond correcting mechanical errors and begin redrafting significant amounts of the paper. Any of these actions makes you liable for disciplinary action by the College. If another student asks you for help with a paper, try whenever possible to phrase your comments as questions that will draw out the student's own ideas. (2005)

The University of Cincinnati in their UC Student Code of Conduct "defines plagiarism as: Submitting as one's own, original work, material that has been produced through unacknowledged collaboration with others . . ." Stuart (2005), citing the University of Texas, provides this definition: "plagiarism, strictly speaking, is not a question of intent. Any use of the content or style of another's intellectual product with proper attribution constitutes plagiarism."

He continued "plagiarism and unauthorized collaboration are very closely related areas of scholastic dishonesty . . . plagiarism and unauthorized collaboration both involve the same fundamental deception: the representation of another's work as one's own." He offered this example: "each student submits a written work misrepresenting as his or her own, which in fact he or she has borrowed from other unattributed sources: the other students. Remember, plagiarism includes not just copying from a published source, but also submitting work obtained from *any* source as one's own" (Emphasis added).

Stuart specifically discusses the pedagogical and production justifications:

Unauthorized Collaboration

In the American educational system, the concept of original work is a fundamental tenet of scholarship. In recent years, more educators have also recognized the value of having students work on some assignments in groups. Students, however, may be engaging in scholastic dishonesty if they fail to distinguish between collaboration that is authorized for a particular assignment and collaboration that is done for the sake of expediency. Some students rationalize their involvement in unauthorized collaboration on the basis that it "helps them learn better" and is not cheating because they are

contributing to the final product...Unauthorized collaboration with another person on an assignment for academic credit is a common form of scholastic dishonesty.

The George Mason University website strikes a positive tone with its honor policy when it discusses appropriate collaboration:

... the final paper is your responsibility; it is not appropriate to turn your paper over to someone else to edit, revise, or complete for you. If only your name appears on an assignment, your professor has the right to expect that the work you turn in is fully and completely your own, with the exception of the information, ideas, and language you have clearly credited to others. As part of a learning community, you are encouraged to incorporate ideas from colleagues, but you must give credit in an appropriate manner.

Three fundamental principles to follow at all times are: 1) All work submitted under your name must be your own, 2) When using the work or ideas of other, including your fellow students, you must give appropriate credit. 3) If you are uncertain about the ground rules on a particular assignment, ask for clarification.

California State University, Los Angeles in their catalog offers the following on plagiarism:

One distinctive characteristic of an educated person is the ability to use language correctly and effectively to express ideas. Faculty assign written work to help students develop those skills. Each professor will outline specific criteria for writing assignments, but all expect students to present work that represents the students' understanding of the subject in the students' own words.

It is seldom expected that student papers will be based entirely or even primarily on original ideas or original research. Therefore, incorporating the concepts of others is appropriate when use of quotations, citations of original sources, and acknowledgement to the author has been properly issued. However, papers that consist entirely of quotations and citations should be rewritten to show the student's own understanding and expressive ability. The purpose of a written assignment is the development of communication and analytic skills, and every student should be able to distinguish their own ideas from the ideas of another. Properly indicating those distinctions on a written assignment will aid every student in avoiding plagiarizing the work of another.

Irvine Valley College published the following guidelines in the student honesty and dishonesty portion of their catalog (p.21).

2. Plagiarism is the misrepresentation of someone else's words, ideas or data as one's own work. Students should be advise to state the source of the ideas when these are known, since this lends strength to their arguments and is part of the ethics of scholarship.

No student shall:

- a. Intentionally represent as one's own work the work, words, ideas, or arrangement of ideas or research, formulae, diagrams, or statistics, evidence of another.
- b. Take sole credit for ideas that resulted from a collaboration with others. (p. 21)

Louisiana State University provides this definition in the student code of conduct item 16: Committing Plagiarism. "Plagiarism" is defined as the unacknowledged inclusion of someone else's words, structure, ideas, or data. When a student submits work as his/her own that includes the words, structure, ideas, or data of others, the source of this information must be acknowledged through complete, accurate, and specific references, and, if verbatim statements are included, through quotation marks as well. Failure to identify any source (including interviews, surveys, etc.), published in any medium (including on the internet) or unpublished, from which words, structure, ideas, or data have been taken, constitutes plagiarism;

The American Historical Association emphasized ethical responsibility for all of academia: "Every institution that includes or represents a body of scholars has an obligation to establish procedures designed to clarify and uphold their ethical standards." (1995 Statement of Standards of Professional Conduct as cited in the ASU website, 2005)

The Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (2001) provides a bright line standard:

Plagiarism (Principle 6.22). Psychologists do not claim the words and ideas of another as their own; they give credit where credit is due....The key element of this principle is that an author does not present the work of another as if it were his or her own work. This can extend to ideas as well as written words....Given the free exchange of ideas, which is very important to the health of psychology; an author may not know where an idea for a study originated. If the author does know, however, the author should acknowledge the source; this includes personal communication. (p. 349-350)

The Modern Language Association simplified the definition, "In short, to plagiarize is to give the impression that your have written or thought something that you have in fact borrowed from someone else." (MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, 1988 as cited in the ASU website, 2005).

Forensics Ethical Considerations

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Establishing a definition of plagiarism in platform speaking is dependent on many factors. One starting point is communicative ethics. Jensen (1997) defined ethics as “the moral responsibility to choose, intentionally and voluntarily, oughtness in values like rightness, goodness, truthfulness, justice, and virtue, which may, in a communicative transaction, significantly affect ourselves and others” (emphasis in original, p. 4). He argued that teaching communicative ethics to undergraduates is essential yet problematic, due to the lack of agreement upon definition and employment. This problem could be avoided with clarity in teaching. Nilsen (1966) also established the inherent need for establishing ethical practices within platform speaking specifically, because it has the potential to influence the audience’s choices.

The American Forensics Association outlines original work in their website under the AFA CODE of Standard, Article II: Competitor Practices:

2. In Individual events which involve original student speech compositions (oratory/persuasion, informative/expository, after-dinner/epideictic, rhetorical criticism, impromptu, extemporaneous or other similar speaking contests), the speaker shall not commit plagiarism.
 - A. Plagiarism is defined as claiming another’s written or spoken word as one’s own, or claiming as one’s own a significant portion of the creative work of another.
 - B. A speech in individual events competition is considered plagiarized when the student presenting it was not the principle person responsible for researching, drafting, organizing, composing, refining, and generally constructing the speech in question.

Regardless of disagreement over definitions, it is clear that the forensic community strives to teach and practice ethical behaviors. A number of scholars who study forensics have attempted to uncover the ethical implications of the activity, including: Cronn-Mills (2000), Cronn-Mills and Golden (1997), Endres (1988), Frank (1983), Friedley (1983), Gaskill (1998), Green (1988), Grisez (1965), Hanson (1986), Kuster (1998), Lewis (1988), Littlefield (1986), Pratt (1998), Rice and Mummert (2001), Rosenthal (1985), Sanders (1966), Stewart (1986), Thomas (1983), Thomas and Hart (1983), and VerLinden (1997). Subject matters that have been addressed by forensic researchers regarding ethics include plagiarism (Anderson, 1989; Frank, 1983; Ulrich, 1984), source citation concerns (Anderson, 1989; Frank, 1983; Friedley, 1982; Greenstreet, 1990), coaches writing platform speeches for students (Kalanquin, 1989; Ulrich, 1984), and whether or not tournament administration ought to include competitors and undergraduate students (Ulrich, 1984).

Perhaps the clearest justification for study in this area comes from Friedley (1983), who stated, “while textbooks provide little focus on the ethical use of evidence in original speech events [platform speeches/public address speeches], the forensics community as a whole has clearly demonstrated a concern for the

ethics issue” (p. 110). The forensic community as well as communication studies as a whole has had a recent increase in interest and concern regarding ethics. Anderson (2000) stated that because the area of communication studies does not usually aim to prepare students for one, specific career, the ethical responsibilities of the field are ambiguous. He reported that the National Communication Association (NCA)—at the time the Speech Communication Association (SCA)—formed a committee on communication ethics in 1984 and drafted a credo regarding the subject in 1999, which was adopted that same year.

There have been many debates and inconsistencies in the study of communicative ethics. However, Brembeck and Howell (1952) set the norm for persuasion texts to have a chapter regarding ethics. Additionally, Anderson (1979) found seven consistent unethical behaviors as defined by speech text books: 1) being unprepared, 2) letting audience adaptations overtake convictions, 3) being insincere, 4) the fallacy of suppressing evidence, 5) lying, 6) using pathos to mask truth, and 7) not listening critically.

The specific controversial subjects within the ethics of platform speaking seem to be: detailed source citation, ghostwriting, and collaboration. VerLinden (1996) argued detailed source citation has become the norm in forensic competition and is problematic. The reason that competitors tend to follow the norm of overly detailed source citations is because this is the current expectation. It is attribution to the author(s), however, not the date that avoids plagiarism. Franck (1983) furthered that in order to check the validity of sources, it is not necessary to have the level of detail usually included in forensic speeches. Reinard (1991) agreed by stating that the exact date of a source does not bolster its credibility. Source citation may increase a speaker’s ethos, but only if the source itself is credible (Bettinghaus & Cody, 1994; Freely, 1996; Simmons, 1986; Warnick & Inch, 1994; Ziegelmüller, Kay, & Dause, 1990). Many speech communication texts inform their readers that there are a variety of citing sources (e.g. Barrett, 1993; Beebe & Beebe, 1991; Ehninger, Gronbeck, & Monroe, 1984; Gamble & Gamble, 1994; Lucas, 1992; Nelson & Pearson, 1990; Samovar & Mills, 1980; Sproule, 1991; Verderber, 1994; Wilson, Arnold, & Wertheimer, 1990; Wolvin, Berko, & Wolvin, 1993; Zeuschner, 1992). However, there are other speech communication texts that do not give specific plan for how to cite sources at all (Osborn & Osborn, 1991; Peterson, Stephen, & White, 1992; Ross, 1992; Taylor, Meyer, Rosegrant, & Samples, 1992).

McBath (1975) stated that the goal of forensic coaches ought to be to teach that “students communicate various forms of argument more effectively” (p. 11). However, rewarding overly detailed citations violates this educational goal, because no student will use this practice in the real world, this practice perpetuates poor sentence structure, and it can distract the audience (VerLinden, 1996). To correct the problem of detailed source citations, coaches must teach their students to “be brief in citing a source. Give just enough information to satisfy essential needs” (Barrett, 1993, 156). Judges must also take responsibility in this area by stopping the practice of rewarding detailed source citations, talk to each other about doing so, and replace detailed sources with reference pages (VerLinden, 1996). Haiman (1984) argued that ghostwriting is a major concern

in the forensic community. He drew two conclusions about ghostwriting: speakers and audiences both have responsibility to be accountable and there is no excuse for not attributing original authors.

Bormann (1961) stated that the primary reason that ghostwritten speeches are problematic is because of the inherent deception involved. He went on to reveal that many authors defend ghostwriting by saying that the act of reciting another author's speech makes those ideas those of the speaker as well. Additionally, Bormann (1961) exposed that authors speak in support of collaboration by saying that there is no deception involved in collaboration at all. He concluded that there is a continuum in the ethics of speechwriting, and it is the director of forensics' responsibility to draw and enforce a line along that continuum for his or her competitors. Until we hold public speakers such as the president accountable for ghostwriting, however, Bormann claimed, there will always be ambiguity in this area.

Method

This study sought to establish a general definition for what constitutes "original work of the student" for platform events in Phi Rho Pi competition. The survey we used was original, and tested four variables: coaches' value of ethics, coaches' perception of collaboration in platform speeches, coaches' perception of coach editing of student platform speeches, and coaches' perception of whether the student ought to be the sole author of the platform speech with no outside help (see Appendix). There were five items for each variable, totaling 20 items altogether. We used a seven-point Likert scale where one represented strongly disagree and seven represented strongly agree. We used electronic means to send the survey to all programs provided by Phi Rho Pi, after obtaining secure permission of the executive board to conduct the survey with their data base.

Results

Demographics

Our participants consisted of 38 forensics coaches; 14 were female and 24 were male. They ranged in age from 25 to 60 and had between two and 38 years of forensic coaching experience. Seven were not directors of forensics and 31 were directors; 30 were the primary coach for platform speeches, 29 were the primary coach for interpretation of literature speeches, 26 were the primary coach for limited preparation speeches, and 21 were the primary coach for debate.

Analysis

Our survey tested four variables: coaches' value of ethics, coaches' perception of collaboration in platform speeches, coaches' perception of coach editing of student platform speeches, and coaches' perception of whether the student ought to be the sole author of the platform speech with no outside help. We calculated the means of items one through five to create the ethics scale ($\alpha=.86$),

items six through 10 to create the collaboration scale ($\alpha=.48$), 11 through 15 to create the edit scale ($\alpha=.50$), and 16 through 20 to create the student scale ($\alpha=.71$). Then, the mean of the collaboration, edit, and student scales was calculated to determine the coaches' overall perception of students having help of any kind when authoring platform speeches, the practice scale ($\alpha=.81$).

Once our scales had been transformed, we ran independent sample t-tests to determine whether sex, status, or events coached made a significant difference in perception of any of our variables. There were no statistically significant results. Our data suggests that sex, status, and events coached do not correlate with a coach's value of ethics, perception of collaboration in platform speeches, perception of coach editing of student platform speeches, or perception of whether the student ought to be the sole author of the platform speech with no outside help.

Next, we ran a Pearson two-tailed correlation on our transformed scales. Here we found some significance. Collaboration and ethics had a .59 correlation, with a .01 significance level. Collaboration and student had a .38 correlation, with a .05 significance level. Collaboration and practice had a .63 correlation with a .01 significance level. Edit and student had a .53 correlation, with a .01 significance level. Edit and practice had a .75 correlation, with a .01 significance level. Student and practice had a .87 correlation, with a .01 significance level.

Discussion

Demographics

On the Phi Rho Pi website, there are 91 schools and 112 coaches listed as members. This means that we were able to collect data from 34% of our target population. While it would have been ideal to collect data from the entirety of the population, and our results are not completely generalizable to all Phi Rho Pi coaches, we do believe that we have a fairly representative sample. For future studies in this area, it may be helpful to collect data at the Phi Rho Pi National Tournament in order to increase return of the surveys.

Scales

Our ethics scale and practice scale had the most highly reliable internal validity, which indicates that the coaches in our sample may agree on definitions of ethics and put similar habits into practice when it comes to forensic platform speaking. However, our edit, collaboration, and student scales had highly unreliable internal validity. This seems to be the crux of our results. Coaches do not seem to agree on definitions of appropriate editing, how much collaboration is appropriate, or where the line of absolute one-student authoring lies. Some of the unsolicited comments about the survey yielded excellent qualitative data. For example, in response to item number six, "Speeches that were the product of a collaborative effort should not be labeled as 'original work of the student,'" which is a collaboration question, one participant wrote, "Yikes. It really depends upon what you mean by collaboration." In response to item number 10, another collaboration item, "Coaches should provide topic recommendations for

students competing in platform speeches,” another participant wrote, “What do we do when we teach courses?”

On an editing question, another participant responded, “it depends how you define editing - if it is writing comments of what to revise, than it is perfectly acceptable - but I sense this isn't what you meant” to item 11, “Coaches should never edit a student's speech without the student present.” Another participant, in response to item 14, “Ghost editing (providing words and phrases without crediting the source) is a problem in forensics competition,” simply wrote “don't know really.” Another coach responded with the following at the end of his or her responses to the survey items:

This survey is confusing. The term "editing" is not clearly defined. I really hesitate to send this in, because of this ambiguity but I know that it is probably important research for you. So let me express my feelings in a non-likert way and you can use this info as you see fit. If, by editing you mean; someone other than the student writing whole paragraphs or sections, I am ethically opposed to it. If, by editing you mean; sitting with a student (at the computer) and using questions and discussion to help them come up with better choices for how the speech is written, than I think it is not only ethical - but highly recommended. If, by editing you mean; a coach sitting with the speech and a red pen (I still like red) and crossing out sections and offering a limited number of phrasing suggestions and then sending the student off to rewrite the speech than I think that is also acceptable.

Another coach put his or her overall response to the survey as follows:

I filled out the survey, but I think I was looking too much into the word, “edit,” so I marked 4. By editing, do you mean a coach rewriting a speech? I would never write any of my students' speeches, but I would definitely give them a lot of feedback that goes beyond grammar (e.g., thought process and logic). Perhaps I am incorporating feedback with editing. Does collaborative effort include feedback? I am not looking for a response back. I just wanted you to know that I had difficulties filling out this survey and by marking four (which I am assuming is neutral) may not really represent my view.

One respondent simply wrote, “(Confusing question)” in response to item 13, “Forensic competition coaching should allow for more specific editing than English Department writing laboratories.” A final participant suggested, “In an ideal world,” in response to item 16, “Coach editing of a student speech for competition constitutes plagiarism.”

In further support of a lack of understandable definitions, at the end of a survey, one coach wrote:

I appreciate that y'all are doing this, but it is really hard to quantitatively answer these questions w/o explaining rationale and clearing up gray areas in wording. I'm sure that the last thing you need is a colleague rambling about the survey, but it was so difficult to make definitive statements on these topics. In case you ever felt the need to read about my random thoughts, here's where I had such a hard time. If not, good luck collecting the responses and presenting! If a collaborative speech writing process is a coach writing half the speech that is unethical. But I define a collaborative process as sitting w/the student and suggesting substructure and brainstorming humor w/them and cleaning up words. In this way, they learn how to do all of this much easier themselves. I also don't force topics on students, but if you know them and find a topic that fits them, suggesting it isn't wrong. Editing a speech without them present is like grading a paper. I won't rewrite, but will make suggestions, clean language (in pen and not just on a computer file) and they see where they went wrong. The idea of students working on one another's speeches is tricky too. When teammates invest in one another and look at one another's speeches or watch delivery, it brings the team closer together. I'm not saying that "smarty PHD track" should write all the CA's. I am saying that it's great when students make suggestions and learn how to be peer coaches.

Another respondent made these comments:

I believe that I understand the intent of the questions, but I feel I need to clarify some "definitions" that guided my answers for them to be relevant at all. I consider "collaborative" to be instructional (where the coach and student talk through research and organization together and workshop ideas); therefore it should be considered the original work of the student because s/he created it through an instructional process. "Collaborative" IS NOT, "student writes some, coach writes some." I fear that was an implication in the survey. The extremes of this survey were confusing. Is there an inherent assumption that it's all or nothing when working on a public address? I mean, if the coach "coaches" then is it no longer the work of the student? Anyway, I am sure that your project will cover all this issues. I just wanted to clarify so the results aren't invalid.

All of these responses suggest that the definitions of editing, collaboration, and our primary research concern, "original work," are not uniform among coaches. This means that some of the student speeches used in competition have the advantage of coaching which substantially changes the text of the speech while other students must compete with speeches they have written exclusively by themselves. Most would agree the collaboration speeches will have a competitive edge. Does this mean that one set of coaches provides too much involvement, while others not enough? The study does not answer that value proposition.

Correlations

Our correlations indicate several things about our survey population's opinions. The correlation between collaboration and ethics was a positive 59% at a 99% confidence level, which indicates that the more a coach views ethics as an essential value to platform speakers, the more he or she will discourage collaboration in platform speech writing. The correlation between collaboration and student was a positive 38% at a 95% confidence level, which indicates that the more a coach discourages collaboration the more he or she will encourage his or her students to write their platform speeches completely on their own. The correlation between collaboration and practice was a positive 63% at a 99% confidence level, which indicates that the more a coach discourages collaboration, the more he or she will discourage students seeking help overall with their forensic platform speeches.

The correlation between edit and student was a positive 53% at a 99% confidence level, which indicates that the more a coach discourages outside editing, the more he or she will also encourage a student to write his or her platform speech completely on his or her own. The correlation between edit and practice was a positive 75% at a 99% confidence level, which indicates that the more a coach discourages outside editing, the more he or she will discourage students seeking help overall with their forensic platform speeches. The correlation between student and practice was a positive 87% at a 99% confidence level, which indicates that the more a coach encourages students to write their forensic platform speeches on their own, the more he or she will discourage students seeking help overall with their forensic platform speeches.

Conclusion

Though many of our participants pointed out that our definitions were unclear, the consistency in their answers shows that they may have clear definitions of these variables. Overall the results of the study lead us to conclude that the inclusion of word "original" by Phi Rho Pi will have little effect on coaching practices. Quite simply, coaches do not agree on definition of what constitutes ethical behavior in collaboration on platform speech writing. Therefore, although a majority of Phi Rho Pi voted to specify "original" in the rule, nothing really changed. So even though, some may have voted for the rule to stop the use of unattributed collaboration, others who believe that unattributed collaboration is their coaching duty will not be deterred. If Phi Rho Pi, on the whole, wants to move in the general direction of the rest of academia to label unattributed collaboration as plagiarism, then a specific bright line standard must be established. Even if a clear standard was codified, enforcement may still present a problem.

The respondents may not have fully understood what we meant on the survey, but they do seem to have their own consistent perspectives. The coaches who disagree with the practice of one of the variables tend to disagree with the practice of all of them. The concerns that coaches raise about not being clear on definitions is the primary concern of this study. The many possibilities of defini-

tions seems to support previous research that has drawn the conclusion that forensic coaches are resistant to universal rules or practices (e. g. Swift, 2006).

However, even if there is a subset of coaches who would violate a more objectively defined rule, Phi Rho Pi should try to communicate clear standards as a way to establish a uniform ethical guideline for coaches and competitors to follow. In this way the community as a whole would know what is expected and the playing field would be more level. Judges would also know that when evaluating the text of a platform speech the students were operating under the same constraints. Moore (2002) calls academia to action in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. “But faculty members (at least those who haven’t resorted to plagiarism themselves) remain in the front lines of a war against plagiarism. What is at stake? Truth and honor.”

Appendix

Please answer the following questions about yourself.

I am ___female ___male and ___years old

I am a(n) ___director of forensics ___assistant coach

I primarily coach ___platform speaking ___interpretation of literature events
___limited preparation events ___debate

I have been coaching forensics for ___years

Please indicate the degree to which you agree with the following statements on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

1. Ethics are secondary to competitive success when it comes to platform speaking.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
2. It is important for platform speakers to be as ethical as possible.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
3. Coaches should be as ethical as possible when coaching platform speeches.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
4. Platform speakers should follow the rules of the events as literally as possible.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
5. The most important value to uphold in forensics is ethics.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
6. Speeches that were the product of a collaborative effort should not be labeled as “original work of the student.”
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

7. If a student is having trouble, a coach should write an introduction for a student speech.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
8. A collaborative speech writing process is an excellent pedagogical tool for speech writing.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
9. Coaches should provide one researched article to start a student on a speech.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
10. Coaches should provide topic recommendations for students competing in platform speeches.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
11. Coaches should never edit a student's speech without the student present.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
12. Coaches should not provide specific language suggestions for any platform speeches.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
13. Forensic competition coaching should allow for more specific editing than English Department writing laboratories.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
14. Ghost editing (providing words and phrases without crediting the source) is a problem in forensics competition.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
15. Coach editing of a student speech for competition constitutes plagiarism.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
16. Platform speeches ought to be written from start to finish only by the competitor.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
17. Platform speeches should not have to be completely the work of the student speaker.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
18. Students should be allowed to work on each other's speeches instead of having to work totally alone.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

19. Participating in platform speaking is an effective way for students to learn to be better writers on their own.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
20. In writing platform speeches, students should be responsible for every word written without any editing (other than grammar corrections) from another person.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

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Crystal Lane Swift, Louisiana State University, Gary Rybold , Irvine Valley College. A version of the paper previously presented at the 2006 National Communication Association convention, San Antonio, Texas

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Giving Voice to the Wild The Rhetorical Legacy of Sigurd Olson and *The Singing Wilderness*

Brant Short

Introduction

Social movements have many rhetorical requirements, including the need for advocates who can articulate a vision that defines the movement's ideology, charts a course of action, and inspires the faithful to continue their commitment to the cause. Sometimes these visions emerge in the form of speeches ("I Have a Dream"), manifestos (The Port Huron Statement), books (*The Feminist Mystique*), or even novels (*Uncle Tom's Cabin*). In the contemporary American environmental movement many notable advocates have advanced the cause of environmentalism, including Aldo Leopold, Rachel Carson, Edward Abbey, Terry Tempest Williams, and Annie Dillard. While these individuals certainly contributed to the environmentalist vision, few also became recognized movement leaders, assuming national standing as organizational representatives. Social movements, by their very nature as "uninstitutionalized collectivities," require eloquent and pragmatic advocates. "The survival and effectiveness of any movement," contend Herbert Simons and Elizabeth Mechling, "are dependent upon adherence to its program, loyalty to its leadership, a collective willingness and capacity to work, energy mobilization, and member satisfaction" (1981, p. 422). As a result, understanding the environmental movement as a political and cultural requires discussion of the movement's rhetorical leadership.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the decades in which conservation was transformed into environmentalism, one person combined the roles of movement visionary and national leader. Sigurd Olson served as one of the nation's leading public advocates for preservation of America's wild lands and wild creatures in these important decades. He wrote best-selling books promoting environmental values for a public audience often ignorant and/or indifferent to the conservation movement and its specific goals. He gave speeches to many groups, offered legislative testimony to a variety of powerful audiences and worked closely with political leaders including Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall. He served as a national leader for several major conservation groups and received honors from other groups for his leadership and advocacy. Olson gave a voice to the wild that paved the way for other advocates, for landmark legislation, and ultimately in helping the environmental crusade move into the mainstream of American public life. While many individuals shaped the popular environmental movement in the United States, Olson played a pivotal role in helping Americans reconsider their view of wilderness, nature, and humanity through his numerous essays, books, and speeches. In this study I will examine Olson's first and most notable work, *The Singing Wilderness*, published in 1956. This book became a standard

work of the period, it established Olson as a national leader among American conservationists, and most significantly, it served as a rhetorical blueprint for others who were greatly inspired by Olson's personal quest to understand the natural world on its own terms.

In this essay, I will describe Olson's status among scholars and provide a biographical overview of significant events in his life. Next I will analyze *The Singing Wilderness* as a rhetorical text which established Olson's reputations among American conservationists. Finally I will discuss Olson's contributions to the emerging environmental movement of the 1960s and 1970s. I believe that Sigurd Olson is a major prophet of the environmentalist crusade and that *The Singing Wilderness* must be remembered by scholars who seek a complete rhetorical history of the American environmental movement.

Sigurd Olson's Life and Legacy

Scholars from many disciplines agree that Olson was a major figure in the emerging environmental movement. Philosopher J. Baird Callicott concluded that Olson, along with Bob Marshall, were the "wilderness-movement giants in the first half of the twentieth century" (2000, p. 27). Historian Roderick Nash labeled Olson as one of the "new leaders" of the conservation movement after John Muir's death, listing Olson, Aldo Leopold, Robert Marshall, Howard Zahniser and David Brower as the movement's next generation of leaders (1982, p. 200). Noting the "considerable popularity" of Olson's books, Nash concluded that Olson's work "helped create a climate of opinion in which Secretary of Agriculture Orville L. Freeman could issue a directive to National Forest offices on January 12, 1965, giving unprecedented protection to its wilderness qualities" (1982, p. 209). In a critique of pressures to commercialize the national park experience in the United States, environmental journalist Michael Frome praised Olson's leadership in opposing snowmobiling in national parks, calling him a "master outdoorsman and inspirational writer about the north woods" (1992, p. 199). In his historical account of the American environmental movement, Philip Shabecoff pointed to the Wilderness Society of the 1950s and 1960s and its "core of talented, inspired and now storied conservationists," which included Olson, Zahniser, Olaus Murie, and several others, as major leaders in the effort to pass the Wilderness Act (1992, p. 88). Historian Mark Harvey cites Olson's leadership in the Wilderness Society as vital when some members urged Howard Zahniser to abandon pursuit of legislation creating a national wilderness system (2005, pp. 214-215). In a literary criticism of Olson's various books, Sanford Marovitz wrote that Olson had earned a reputation as "one of the most dedicated outdoorsmen, outspoken environmentalists, and prolific nature writers of this century" (1992, p. 107). Finally, Interior Secretary Udall, in his popular historical account of American conservation, *The Quiet Crisis*, concluded that the Wilderness Act of 1964 received approval with the hard work of Wilderness Society Executive Howard Zahniser and "Sigurd Olson, whose pro-wilderness books and essays served as background music for a steady flow of articles How-

ard composed to bring the wilderness gospel into the mainstream of American thought” (1988, p. 218).

After his death in 1982, Olson’s stature seemed to dim, losing appeal as others took up the cause for wilderness preservation. Several of his books went out of print and few environmentalists quoted him in their own speeches, essays and books. At the end of the twentieth century, however, a renewed interest in Olson emerged. As Olson’s 100th birthday neared in 1999, a biography of his life was published, all of his books were reprinted in a new series with widespread accessibility, and articles praising his life appeared in selected publications. For example, ecologist Ted Gostomski, wrote that Olson was recognized as a “voice of nature” to many people during his life. “His work is as important today as it was during his lifetime,” concluded Gostomski (1999, n.p.). In a review of Olson’s environmental leadership, the President of the National Wildlife Federation, Mark Van Putten, called Olson “one of the past century’s greatest conservationists. His writings and the example of his life will continue to inspire and guide this century’s conservation leaders” (quoted in Darland, 2000, n. p.).

Born in Chicago, Olson moved to rural Wisconsin as youth, and spent his early days in small towns throughout the state. His father was a minister in the Swedish American Baptist church and the family moved often. As a child Olson spent a lot time alone in the woods exploring and developing a passion for wilderness. “The Song of the North still fills me with the same gladness as when I first heard it,” wrote Olson in his autobiography. “I seemed drawn in its general direction as naturally as migrating bird is by unseen lines of force, or a salmon by some invisible power toward the stream where it was spawned. Within me was a constant longing, and when I listened to this song, I understood” (Olson, 1969, p. 61). Olson’s father was a stern figure who told his two sons that there were only three appropriate choices for a career, “the ministry, teaching or farming, and all others were unessential.” His father believed that his sons had to find a life “dedicated to the welfare of mankind or tilling the soil, never in mundane pursuits having to do with material things” (Olson, 1969, p. 63). Olson knew teaching was the only choice of the three that fit his values and dreams.

Olson attended Northland College and later transferred to the University of Wisconsin where he received his bachelor's degree. He taught high school biology and geology in northern Minnesota and later attended University of Illinois where he earned master's degree in ecology, writing his thesis on timber wolves and coyotes. His promise as a researcher was so great that Aldo Leopold recruited him to the doctoral program in ecology at the University of Wisconsin. Confronted with great personal dilemma of whether to pursue a scholarly life or begin teaching, Olson was clearly torn, accepting Leopold’s offer and then withdrawing at the last minute He became a junior college teacher and later dean in Ely, Minnesota, where he stayed until 1947 when he resigned to write and work in conservation organizations.

Olson wanted to write about nature, but not from a scholarly vantage. He had been writing since his early 20s, but had years of limited success. He did not like writing adventure essays (even though he published a number of newspaper columns on hunting and fishing trips) and was a flop at fiction. Besides writing

and teaching, he also was an outdoor guide in the 1920s and 1930s, supplementing his teaching salary by summer guiding into the Boundary Waters area of Minnesota and Canada. In the late 1940s and early 1950s he assumed leadership positions in the Izzak Walton League and the National Parks Association and in the 1960s he became President of the Wilderness Society. An active lobbyist and tireless public speaker on behalf of wilderness, Olson served as President of the National Parks Association "during three landmark events in conservation history" (Backes, 1997, p. 259). First, he was instrumental in the conservation movement's effort to save Dinosaur National Monument in 1956. Second, he helped conservation groups lobby for a massive funding increase for the National Park Service in the Mission 66 program. Third, he was a leader in promoting federal legislation to create a national wilderness preservation system, resulting in the Wilderness Act of 1964. In addition to these efforts, at the age of 74, he chaired a national commission to develop a master plan for Yellowstone National Park.

In 1956, after years of writing with limited success, Olson published his first book, *The Singing Wilderness*, a series of essays about his interaction with nature. He discussed his book idea with Howard Zahniser, executive secretary of the Wilderness Society, who was enthusiastic about the project and recommended that Olson contact Rachel Carson's literary agent, Marie Rodell. Olson wrote to Rodell, who agreed to represent Olson and sold several of the essays to popular magazines such as *Sports Illustrated*. The book was submitted to at least three publishers, finally receiving a contract from Alfred Knopf. It was a best-seller, making the *New York Times* best-seller list and ultimately selling over 70,000 copies. Backes describes the positive response the book generated (1997, pp. 254-258) and concludes that the book's message "cemented the Wilderness Society's decision to add Olson to its governing council in 1956" (1997, p 255). The book's publication culminated Olson's quest to find an appropriate audience for his description of wilderness and nature. His biographer writes:

For thirty years Sigurd Olson had been obsessed with writing, had felt it was his ordained mission in life, that success was his destiny. The odds often had seemed insurmountable: the kind of writing he was best at and loved most editors said had not market. . . . Somehow, despite the many rejections, despite the self-torture—despite the genuinely long odds of succeeding as a writer of essays—he had held fast to his dream, and had triumphed. (Backes, 1997, pp. 257-258)

Olson's book was not an overt work of advocacy. It did not promote any specific legislation, it was not historically situated in its content, and it rarely moved beyond Olson's personal experiences in the wild. Its autobiographical nature, however, marked Olson's belief that his personal stories could indeed change the world, albeit one reader at a time. Fans included Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas who hiked the paths near the Potomac River with Olson to publicize threats to American rivers (Graham, 1980, p. 65) and Interior Secre-

tary Udall who called Olson, “One of the most inspired, and inspiring of America’s conservation leaders” (Huyck, 1965, 46).

Leaders have varied and specific duties in promoting their movement’s agenda, including the following three roles: organizers, decision-makers and symbols (Stewart, Smith and Denton, 2007, pp. 114–119). Olson performed all three roles in the 1950s and 1960s as a leader in both the Wilderness Society and the National Parks and Conservation Association. But to emerge as a movement leader and gain legitimacy across various movement organizations, an individual must possess at least two of the following three rhetorical attributes: charisma, prophecy, and pragmatism (Stewart, Smith and Denton, 2007, pp.119-125). As such, classical models of rhetoric, which focus upon argument, evidence and rational discourse, fail to explain fully the process in which a movement leader emerges, gains legitimacy and ultimately shapes the movement’s rhetorical and political goals. An alternative means of understanding the emergence of social movement leaders, which allows scholars to assess the function of charisma, prophecy and pragmatism, demands a theory that allows the critic to assess the rhetorical qualities of personal narratives and autobiography, a staple of environmental discourse.

The Rhetorical Message of *The Singing Wilderness*

Michael Osborn contends contemporary rhetoric “seems dominated by strategic pictures, verbal or nonverbal visualizations that linger in the collective memory of audiences as representative of their subjects when rhetoric has been successful” (1986, p. 79). Using this observation as a challenge to conventional scholarship, Osborn offers a new vantage to examine discourse, a theory he calls rhetorical depiction. Rhetorical depiction does not “arise from any single technique or moment in discourse,” writes Osborn. Instead depiction is controlled by the “cumulative impact” of a series of messages. Depiction might gain its currency by contrasting “visual or sensual opposites” or it might emerge from a “radical metaphor” that visualizes a “remarkable tenor-vehicle relationship.” Indeed, Osborn believes that rhetorical depiction may “be considered a master-term of modern rhetoric—a significant, recurring form of address” (1986, p. 80). In discussing the rhetorical dimensions of depiction, Osborn identifies five functions that depiction may serve in public communication.

I believe evaluating the rhetorical qualities of *The Singing Wilderness* can better be examined from Osborn’s model of depiction rather than using a classical model of discourse. Although Olson clearly hoped to inspire, motivate, and even persuade his readers, his style is personal, not public, emotional, not logical, and timeless, not situated. Indeed Olson claimed that he wrote the book to help others learn how to understand the wilderness. When his agent expressed concern that the book was too lyrical and needed more wilderness adventures to attract readers, Olson objected, claiming that there were already many outdoor adventure books on the market. “It was not my wish to do another,” he wrote to Rodell. “The value of my book as I see it in my interpretation of the wilderness, its meaning, and my reactions to it. . . . You may not agree with me at all but I feel very strongly about this” (quoted in Backes, 1997, p. 242).

Olson's approach, using short, descriptive essays that detail simple wilderness experiences, at first glance appears to center upon Olson and his life in the North Woods. Only by a reading the complete text does one sense a larger and more vital message than autobiography. Rhetorical depiction offers an appropriate means of understanding the immediate and lasting rhetorical qualities of *The Singing Wilderness* and in turn helps explain Olson's legacy as a voice of inspiration for readers attracted to the nascent environmental crusade.

The first and (according to Osborn) the most important function of depiction is **presentation**. Osborn identifies two kinds of rhetorical presentations. The first, repetitive, utilizes symbolic representations already shared by a given group. These symbols may be called icons, god or devil terms, ideographs, or cultural archetypes. The power of such symbols is that they have been so embedded in a culture that they are typically accepted without questioning their persuasive qualities. On the other hand, innovative presentations provide new perspectives by finding tensions and incongruities within established cultural symbols. A powerful example of rhetorical presentation is found in Olson's essay, "Easter on the Prairie." It fulfills the functions of both the repetitive and innovative symbols to convey Olson's larger message of how humans should define and commune with nature.

The essay begins with Olson emerging from the "rocks and forests of the still-frozen north to the prairies of the west" (1956, p. 60). Olson described the sensations he felt as he moved from forest to prairie. He thought of the first settlers of North America and how they must have felt moving from the great forests to the prairies. He listened to meadow larks and their "unbroken symphony of sound." This sound, Olson continued, "was the theme song of the prairie, this the song when the herds of buffalo ranged the west, when the Indians rode them down from the horizons" (1956, p. 61). He continued by describing the beautiful sounds of other birds, the mourning doves and the kinglets. Moving to a beautiful lake, Olson saw a flock of herring gulls in flight and then a pair of mallards emerged from their nest. After nine paragraphs of repetitive presentation, describing in intimate detail the wonders of wildlife and nature, Olson turned to the theme of the essay: "A church bell ringing from the crossroads at the other end of the field, and then I remembered it was Easter morning" (1956, p. 62).

At this point the essay changes direction, moving away from a person immersed in nature to a person drawn from the secular to the sacred. Seeing the "white church" in the distance, Olson "looked down at my wet and muddy boots, at my worn jacket. Perhaps they would not mind" (1956, p. 62). At this point the essay becomes an innovative presentation. Looking at the parishioners dressed in their finest, Olson recalled, "I felt out of place in my outdoor clothes. Like the kinglets, I was a stranger, a migrant going through" (1956, p. 63). As he entered the church, Olson was struck by the "cleanest, most scrubbed little church I had ever seen." Indeed, he found the interior of the church as "lovely as the pool with the gulls, the mallards, and the sandpipers, the lushness of the fields. Here was no musty unused building, open once a week or a month. This was part of the out-of-doors" (1956, p. 63). Olson identified a powerful juxtapo-

sition that allowed himself to experience two worlds simultaneously: the natural world dear to his heart and the spiritual world constructed and shared by humans:

The little groups were quiet now—no whispering or frivolity in the house of God. Then through the open windows I heard again the chorus of larks and from some where near by the deep, liquid undertones of the mourning doves. There was a breeze and the smell of a thousand miles of prairie came through the windows, fused with the sweetness of the lilies, the sharp pungence of the geraniums. (1956, p. 63)

And then Olson experienced a fusion between the “somber melody of an ancient hymn” and the music of the meadow larks and the mourning doves. The minister’s words “rolled on and on, and then I heard the larks once more and know that what he said reflected somehow the beauty and the peace of Easter on the prairie.” As the service ended and the congregation moved to leave, Olson witnessed the dual meaning of Easter that gives his readers a powerful rhetorical presentation:

This morning it was the real prairie as it had been a hundred, a thousand years ago, the prairie of the wagon trains, virgin, lush, and beautiful. This morning it was Easter with the promise of resurrection and hope. (1956, p. 65)

In this essay, rhetorical depiction works by merging a spiritual experience in the wilderness (innovative presentation) with a constructed spiritual experience with other people (repetitive presentation). The meaning is clear for Olson’s readers. One may bring a lifetime of theory, philosophy, ideology and theology to the wilderness, but only when a person experiences these presentations together will a complete understanding of the need for wilderness will emerge.

A second function of rhetorical depiction is **intensification** of feeling. Osborn believes that depictions are “lenses that can color what we see and make our reactions smolder.” By giving form to a subject, depiction allows the audience to transfer feeling to the subject of the discourse. Most importantly, depiction can intensify feeling by “reducing vast numbers of a subject to a few synecdochal instances” (1986, 86). In many ways every essay in *The Singing Wilderness* intensifies feelings by discussing simple topics that become representative of a larger and deeper rhetorical message. Olson’s essay entitled “Campfires” illustrates the rhetorical power of intensification. He opens by claiming that a campfire transforms those who experience it in the wild. “Strange stirrings take place within him, and a light comes into his eyes which was not there before” (1956, p. 106). A campfire takes humans back to their ancient past, when fire provided safety, shelter, and warmth, but it also helps us see the future as well: “Around a fire men feel that the whole world is their campsite and all men partners of the trail.”

Olson's imagery fosters intensification around the simple act of building a campfire while in the wilderness. He observed that the building of the fire has "ritualistic significance" in which every act of preparation is "vital and satisfying to civilized man." The campfire is the climax to the adventures of each day in the wilderness and is "as important to a complete experience as the final curtain to a play." Olson described in intimate detail the importance of finding the right spot for the fire, of everyone pitching in to find kindling and wood. He wrote:

As the fire burns, see how it is tended and groomed and fondled, how little chips are added as they fall away from the larger sticks, how every man polices the fringe before him, and treat the blaze as the living thing it is. (1956, p. 108)

For Olson, each campfire he saw reminded him of all his previous experiences in the wilderness. "My campfires," he observed, "seem like glowing beads in a long chain of experience." As he watched the fire begin and then burst into flame, he recaptured "the scenes themselves, pick them out of the almost forgotten limbo of the past and make them live on." After recalling several memorable campfires from his past, Olson concluded the essay by returning to the powerful emotion of human friendship symbolized in the fire:

There have been countless campfires, each one different, but some so blended into their backgrounds that it is hard for them to emerge. But I have found that when I catch even a glimmer of their almost forgotten light in the eyes of some friend who has shared them with me, they begin to flame once more. Those old fires have strange and wonderful powers. Even their memories make life the adventure it was meant to be. (1956, p.111)

The third function of rhetorical depiction is **identification**, the ability of images to create a "sense of closeness or oneness that can develop among those who participate in social communication." Osborn believes the very act of sharing symbols "must be a profoundly satisfying experience, a terminal as well as instrumental function of depiction" (1956, p. 89). I believe that two essays in *The Singing Wilderness* promote a strong sense of identification between Olson and his reader. Both deal with Olson's relationships with other people and the invaluable lessons that he learned about nature, love and memory.

In the first essay, "Grandmother's Trout," Olson recalled one of his first experiences as a boy fishing for brook trout. Although Olson's grandmother "had never been trout fishing in her life," she treated his outdoor adventures as the most important part of his early life. "She shared every joy that was mine, and I loved her for it as only a small boy can who has found perfect companionship," recalled Olson. "From her, I know, I inherited my feeling and love for the wild places of this earth" (1956, p.67). In the rest of the essay Olson detailed the experience of going to the woods by himself and the difficulties encountered as he fishes. Although he lost the "big one" in the creek, he had seven small trout to

take home to his grandmother. The boy ran home shouting for his grandmother to look in his creel. She admired the catch and helped him take the fish and lay on a white platter. In this essay the boy tells his adventure and his grandmother listens. Olson recalled:

She clucks in wonderment and shakes her head in sheer admiration, goes over the entire stream with me pool by pool, rapids by rapids, listens to the birds, sees the flowers, hears the running of the water. How excited she is when I tell her of the big one underneath the stump, and how she suffers with me from the loss!

Olson cleaned the fish outside in a pump and his grandmother prepared her frying pan for dinner. Then under the light of a kitchen lamp, “we sit down to a feast of trout and milk and fresh bread, an eighty year-old lady and a boy of twelve, and talk of robins and spring and the eternal joy of fishing” (1956, p. 72).

Another essay, “Birthday on the Manitou,” also exemplifies Olson’s use of rhetorical identification. In this essay, Olson described going to a favorite fishing spot and suddenly realizing that he is not alone. Acknowledging his selfishness, Olson felt that his private place had been intruded upon. Because of the difficult journey to find this special spot, Olson thought of it as his own: “It was not mine any more than anyone else’s, but I had always felt a certain ownership there based on the fact that I had earned the right to enjoy it” (1956, p. 48). When he finally discovered the intruder, Olson noticed he was a small, spare man. “His legs were braced and he made each cast as if afraid the force of it might throw him off balance. He was old, I could see that, far too old to be fighting the fast treacherous waters and slippery boulders of the Manitou.” Watching the man, Olson’s resentment faded, “I knew that, whatever the reason for his coming in, it must have been very important.” Finally Olson engaged the elderly angler in conversation. The man announced that today was his birthday. “Eighty years old, and this little trip is a sort of celebration. Used to make it every year in the old days, but now it’s been a long time since I came in” (1956, p. 50). The man continued, “Had to see the old river once more, take a crack at the old pool.” As Olson talked of his fishing experiences, he noticed the old man drifting away in memory:

His face was alight wiTh his memories, and his blue eyes looked past me down the river, took in the pool, the riffles below, and a whole series of little pools for a mile downstream. I followed his gaze and for a moment it seemed as though I had never seen the Manitou before. . . . Then while I watched, the vision seemed to fade and I saw again the poplar-covered banks, the bright sunlight on the water, and the old man dozing quietly before me.

The old man said, “I’ve a feeling there’s another big one waiting in that pool. Better work in there, son, and take him.” But Olson realized that he was

the intruder and said he needed to leave to find his partner downstream. “Happy birthday,” Olson shouted. “He waved his rod in salute, and I left him there casting quietly, hiked clear around the pool so I wouldn’t spoil his chances with the big one at the far end” (1956, pp. 52-53).

In these two essays, Olson crafted a powerful sense of identification with his readers by using his relationships with other people to explain the meaning of wilderness for him. As a boy, he learned that his grandmother’s love was expressed through her enthusiasm for his fishing adventure. As a man he witnessed the power of a familiar fishing hole to bring back memories and give renewed life, even though fleeting. These two chapters link Olson with his readers as they recall similar experiences as children with special adults in their life or as adults who must acknowledge that aging is a part of all lives. In each case, a wilderness experience becomes a catalyst for understanding one’s relationship with other humans. In this way, identification with other people is enhanced by the renewal of physical and mental energy that comes by leaving modern society for even a few or weeks.

The fourth function of rhetorical depiction is implementation. This rhetorical function is “instrumental, depiction’s time of action.” Osborn contends that while intensification and identification may transform our emotions and beliefs toward a subject, we still seek a means of action. “What we are,” concludes Osborn, “determines what we can do, or at least what we shall attempt” (1986, p. 92). None of the essays in *The Singing Wilderness* detail a political agenda that tells readers how to save the wilderness through collective action. In many ways such an essay would have been antithetical to Olson’s intent to present an inspiring message. But one essay is striking in suggesting that when an individual experiences the natural world from a different paradigm, others should follow suit. The essay that provides this sense of implementation and in turn epitomizes Olson’s ability to weave various strands of conservation together is entitled “Timber Wolves,” which also serves as the final chapter in the book. In this essay, Olson described a late night encounter, with the temperature 20 below, with two wolves. “When I heard the full-throated bawling howl, I should have had chills racing up and down my spine,” wrote Olson. “Instead, I was thrilled to know that the big grays might have picked up my trail and week following me down the glistening frozen highway of the river.”

Olson recalled the cultural fear of wolves that migrated from the Old World to North America and the continued in formal attempts to destroy the predators forever. At the same time, Olson described his satisfaction in knowing that while modern society sought to destroy all wolves, the creatures still existed in the wild. He then recalled a walk earlier in the day and his discovery of a wolf kill on a frozen lake:

That kill was part of the age-old cycle of dependency between the wolves and the deer. The predators, by the elimination of the old, the weak, and diseased, improved the character of the herd. . . . The deer provided food when there was no other source, when the heavy snows hid small rodents,

the fish and snakes, grubs and berries and birds that gave the wolves sustenance during all other seasons of the year. There on the ice was evidence of the completed cycle, and, though all kills are gruesome things, I was glad to see it, for it meant a wilderness in balance, a primitive country that as yet had not been tamed. (1956, p. 242)

Later that night Olson went for a walk and suddenly encountered two large wolves. After catching his scent, they stopped at about 50 feet away and stared at Olson, attempting to discern his potential threat. The wolves bolted leaving Olson to contemplate his experience. He wondered if people would ever overcome their fears of wolves and understand the place of the wolf in the natural world. Saddened by the “constant war of extermination” waged against wolves in North America, Olson concluded, “Practically gone from the United States, wolves are now common only in the Quetico-Superior country, in Canada, and in Alaska, and I knew the day might come when, because of man’s ignorance, the great grays would be gone even from there” (1956, p. 244). He concluded by challenging his readers, who likely had never considered wolves and their ecological and social significance, to broaden their view of how humans should manage wildlife:

We still do not realize that today we can enjoy the wilderness without fear, still do not appreciate the part that predators play in the balanced ecology of any natural community. We seem to prefer herds of semi-domesticated deer and elk and moose, swarms of small game with their natural alertness gone. It is as though we were interested in conserving only a meat supply and nothing of the semblance of the wild. (1956, p. 244)

The final function of rhetorical depiction is reaffirmation. Osborn believes that this function attempts to reaffirm one’s identity, “often in ceremonies during which heroes, martyrs, villains, and the role of the people are recalled in common appreciation” (1986, p. 95) Although many of the essays in the book illustrate the power of symbolic images to reaffirm one’s identity, a striking example of this function appears in “Dark House,” an essay describing a day of fishing in an ice house on a frozen lake. Olson’s son Bob was home and wanted to go ice fishing with his dad: “He wanted time to think long thoughts and hear the whispering of the snow outside the thin tarpaper walls.” Thus, on a January morning with temperatures 20 below, Olson and his son trekked to the family ice house to share an experience they had many times earlier in their life. Olson described the work necessary to get to the ice house and prepare for fishing. As they started fishing and prepared coffee, the bond between son and father returned:

After an hour of tension we began to relax, talked quietly about many things. A fish house is a fine place for visiting—not for argument or weighty ideas, but rather for small talk, local politics, and gossip, things we had seen

coming in, ideas that required no effort, short simple thoughts that came as easily as breathing. (1956, p. 212)

As the two continued to fish, “there was nothing more to say and we lapsed into quiet.” Two hours went by and the two anglers seemed to become part of the world below as they watched for fish. After catching two fish, the two men closed up the ice house and returned home, content to have one fish for dinner and another to share with friends. These were not trophy fish to be mounted on the wall of the angler’s den; instead, the two fish symbolize a natural encounter in which a father and a son found sustenance, both physical and psychological, in their journey to the lake.

In this essay, Olson reaffirms the wilderness as a place to think in solitude and share the experience with another. Although the reader does not know the entire story of father and son, it seems that a child left home and returned as an adult, seeking a place to reaffirm one’s place in the world and with a parent. The “tension” dissipates after an hour, a tension not defined, but easy to sense. The reaffirmation that guides this story comes in the interconnection of the two elements of the narrative: human intrusion into a wild place that is cold and desolate and the bond that exists between father and son. In this way the rhetorical depiction is a reaffirmation of the larger point of Olson’s discourse, in nature a person comes to understand oneself and his/her loved ones.

The Singing Wilderness affirms Osborn’s claim that rhetorical depiction typically “does not arise from any single technique or moment in discourse. More often, it is a controlled gestalt, a cumulative impact.” In this manner, the rhetorician carefully constructs a rhetorical depiction, “citing evidence that lends substance and authenticity to an image, using stylistic techniques that provide its sense of living presence” (Osborn, 1986, p. 80). The images presented in the book come together, presenting a unified vision of how humans should encounter nature, wildlife and wilderness. Olson’s apparently simple tales of wilderness experience, structured in the format of the four seasons, encouraged readers outside the formal conservation movement of the 1950s to enlarge their perspective and in turn embrace an environmental ethic much larger and more complex than wise-use of natural resources. In this vision, readers learn that humans must return to a past time in which they could listen to nature and in turn understand their proper place within it.

Rhetorical depiction may be of value to others who study the sacred texts of the contemporary environmental movement. Many works in the canon, including Edward Abbey’s *Desert Solitaire*, Annie Dillard’s *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, and Terry Tempest Williams’ *Refuge*, appear to be straight-forward tales of autobiography, placing readers within the personal narratives of the author. But these books also exemplify how one person’s autobiography becomes a rhetorical statement for others in the movement. As a result Osborn’s theory of rhetorical depiction and its emphasis upon the cumulative impact of a text offers rhetorical critics an insightful means of assessing autobiography and social movement ideology.

A typical response to Olson's writings comes from James Mathewson. Encountering Olson's books for the first time at a friend's cabin in northern Minnesota, Mathewson recalls that although the books were new to him, they were also as "familiar as the moon." The essays "spoke of a kinship with the earth and its creatures that affirmed what I was feeling so deeply at the time." Since that exposure, concludes Mathewson, "I've been an Olson disciple—a literal follower of his teaching. . . . I've come to cherish beauty of the natural world and share the love for its varied seasons as though his writings were the expressions of my own heart." Like many of Olson's readers, Mathewson believes that his life was changed significantly by the author's books: "Without his writings, I'd never have ventured into the border country, nor been quite so receptive to the mysticism of the wild. Thanks to Olson, my hero for all seasons. I look forward to a lifetime of those experience" (1997, 26).

Sigurd Olson's Environmental Legacy

How may one describe Sigurd Olson's legacy for American environmentalism? From a rhetorical perspective, Olson wrote and spoke on behalf of nature in a new way. Like Aldo Leopold, he wrote about wilderness by combining humanistic and scientific views of nature within an eloquent discourse. Like Rachel Carson, he wrote for a widespread audience, achieving fame and respect from reviewers and the general public. But unlike Leopold and Carson, Olson used his public platform to speak in favor of wilderness preservation and to take his agenda to the Congress through active participation in national environmental organizations. In contrast, Leopold died in 1948 before *A Sand County Almanac* emerged as a central text among environmentalists and Carson, who was gravely ill as *Silent Spring* gained stature, gave very few public speeches in her life and lacked comfort in public situations.

Without question the publication of *The Singing Wilderness* enlarged Olson's role within the national conservation community and gave him the standing to display the three required attributes that create social movement leadership: charisma, prophecy, and pragmatism (Stewart, Smith and Denton, 2007, pp. 119–125). The book demonstrated Olson's prophetic voice in calling for a wilderness ethic that looked beyond the traditional goals of the conservation movement. His vision of wilderness preservation, of sustainable practices and of urgency to act engaged many readers who lacked his broad focus. In contrast, Olson was a pragmatist who worked in a political arena, understood the need for science and public support, and believed that each battle was never fully won or fully lost. Finally, his charisma as a person emerged when readers sought him for advice and direction. Backes notes that most biographers avoid using the word "charisma" in their work for it is overused and may reveal a positive bias in the work. "But in Olson's case," he concludes, "the word seems to apply. There was something in his bearing—a combination of gracefulness, poise, confidence, and an engaging voice—that had a strong effect on people" (Backes, 1997, p. 315). With a national audience gained by *The Singing Wilderness* and growing respect among the leadership in America's conservation community, Olson emerged as a leading figure in the movement's transformational decades.

Between 1956 and 1982, Olson wrote nine books, some very similar to his first book, others quite different in scope and content. The theme that guided Olson's public discourse focused upon the spiritual and intangible qualities of wilderness. Rejecting the concept of preserving certain areas as "wilderness museums," Olson seemed prophetic in his belief that conservation had to stand for more than safeguarding beautiful places for continued human enjoyment. In a speech delivered in 1958, Olson explained his philosophy:

I have decided finally that the preservation of natural areas is more than rocks and trees and lakes and wildlife. It has a far more fundamental significance than any physical attribute any area might have. It is concerned with broad social values that have to do with human happiness, deep human needs, nostalgia, values that may be a counter-action to the type of world we live in. (1958, n.p.)

Sigurd Olson was a pivotal figure in this transformation because of what he wrote and who he was. In other words, Olson was an important symbol as a person. I believe that in pre-World War II America, three disparate groups were at the core of the American conservation movement. Although membership certainly overlapped, three quite different groups of people were drawn to the organized movement in the 1930s and 1940s. First, there were the popular conservationists, individuals who embraced John Muir's belief that preservation of the wilderness was for the good of the human soul. Often portrayed as the "bird watchers" who embraced wilderness as a tonic for civilization, these conservationists adopted a "Spiritual" view of nature. Second, were the outdoor recreationists, the hunters and anglers who saw conservation as the primary means of protecting America's tradition of outdoor sports. This group held a "Material" view of nature, seeing its values in terms of how humans could use it for their immediate gains. Third were the ecologists, the academically-trained biologists who wanted to understand how human intervention affected the natural world. This group adopted a "Scientific" view of nature.

As Olson grew in stature as a spokesperson for wilderness, first in Minnesota and later nationally, it became clear that he embraced *all three traditions* and each helped form his view of wilderness. He believed in the spiritual benefits of wilderness, emerging initially from his upbringing as a Baptist, and later encompassing philosophers and theologians from other traditions. Comfortable discussing God and quoting scripture in his writings and speeches, Olson rejected a fundamentalist view of Christianity. Moreover, he was an avid hunter and angler his entire life. He did not write about hunting in his later years, although his biographer says that Olson hunted most of his life. He wrote of fishing many times, emphasizing the idea to take only that which was needed. In Olson's world view fishing was an act of nature, of being part of the life cycle. Finally, he was an ecologist who taught natural science for nearly three decades. His master's thesis has been recognized as one of the first efforts to create a theory of ecology and impressed Aldo Leopold who attempted to recruit Olson

as a Ph.D. student. Olson often mentioned Leopold's land ethic and ecological conscience in his speeches and essays in the 1950s, helping to promote a new means of understanding the natural world for the average American. After he left academics, Olson served as Chief Ecologist for the Izzak Walton League and regularly participated in national meetings of ecologists.

By holding active membership in all three groups (preservationists, recreationists, ecologists) Olson had legitimacy in calling for a transcendent theory of conservation, a theory that embraced all perspectives and articulated a unified call to action. Olson challenged his readers and listeners to participate fully in the wilderness experience, from personal encounters to political activism. Embedded within his call for action was a strong sense of optimism. Backes observes that Olson's first book compared favorably with *A Sand County Almanac*, but that there were clear differences as well, especially in the tone of the books. "Where Leopold invokes the God of power and wrath, preaching proper ethical behavior toward the land and prophesying doom if society disobeys," writes Backes, "Olson invites his readers to experience the God of love, as made manifest in nature (1997, p. 248).

What then is Olson's legacy for students of the American environmental movement? In my view, three lessons emerge from a study of Sigurd Olson's leadership and advocacy. First, to appreciate and understand the land-human aesthetic, people must experience the wilderness first-hand. Hiking, hunting, skiing, camping, any pursuit that joins people to nature is necessary. Second, the need to embrace the wilderness runs through all people, not just those who find it engaging. This need is primal and it is buried deep within the human psyche. Even when people lack the ability to describe this need, it is a part of all of us. Third, advocacy and eloquence have the power to change the world. How humans define and manage their wilderness depends in large measure on successful advocacy. Arguments and appeals can save a swamp, prevent motorized boats in canoe areas, or preserve wilderness for perpetuity. Olson never gave up on an issue and understood the need to bring others to his views, whether through books, speeches, meetings, or other forms of discourse.

Sigurd Olson changed a part of his world through his rhetoric; he lacked the traditional paths to power, such as wealth, social status, or political office. Among environmentalists of his era, his contributions were immense, as illustrated by the recognition he received from his peers: "Olson is the only person to have received the highest honors of four leading citizen organizations that focus on the public lands: the Izzak Walton League, the National Wildlife Federation, the Sierra Club, and the Wilderness Society" (Backes, 1997, 316). More remarkable, however, is that Olson served as a movement leader and movement visionary at the same time. In addition to his awards for service to conservation groups, Olson also received the John Burroughs Medal, "the highest honor in nature writing." Of the 60 medal winners since 1926, very few served in national leadership roles. Olson's accomplishment is "extraordinary" in the eyes of his biographer, who concludes "that it is extremely difficult to achieve national recognition as nature writer while also leading national conservation groups" (Backes, 1997, p. 316).

Ultimately, Olson's strength came from eloquence and passion on behalf of his cause. In examining the power of rhetorical depiction to redefine cultural norms and values, James Andrews concludes that rhetorical depiction "may well hold the key to understanding the ways in which potent ideological conceptions insinuate themselves into a national psyche" (2000, p. 55). In this manner, Olson challenged the prevailing view of conservation as too limited and asked his readers to broaden both their actions and their attitudes when considering the nation's wilderness. This eloquence, first finding a large public audience in *The Singing Wilderness*, became the core of Olson's wilderness rhetoric that seemed omnipresent in the environmental debates of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. Former Minnesota governor Elmer Anderson remembered Olson this way: "Sig conveyed a religious fervor and a depth of conviction that no one else I know succeeded in generating. Others could win adherence; he produced disciples" (quoted in Backes, 1997, p. 315). Through his writings, speeches, and leadership, Sigurd Olson helped redefine environmentalism in the United States. Olson's legacy may be best summed up by his son Robert, speaking at Northland College in 1999: "He felt a profound duty to bring his vision to the attention of others and translate it into law and practice. . . . Knowing how time erodes the details of life, we can be confident in saying that if Sigurd Olson is remembered for a thousand years, it will be as a defender and definer of wilderness, or, as one writer wished to put it, as the 'Evangelist of the Wilderness'" (1999, n.p.).

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Brant Short, Ph.D., Professor of Speech Communication, School of Communication, Northern Arizona University.