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An Editor’s Note
Todd Holm

The 2015 State of Delta Sigma Rho-Tau Kappa Alpha
Ben Walker

Copycat Forensics: How Social Learning Problematizes Intercollegiate Forensic Performances
Alyssa Reid

The Person We Knew: Perceptions of the Identity of Loved Ones With Dementia by Family Caregivers
Amber Jannusch & Dena Huisman

Foreign Policy Rhetoric in the 1992 Presidential Campaign: Bill Clinton’s Exceptionalist Jeremiad
Jason A. Edwards

Bully or Dupe? Governor Chris Christie’s Image Repair on the Bridge Lane Closure Scandal
William L. Benoit
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 format.
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Speaker and Gavel is an international, peer-reviewed journal publishing high-quality, original research in the field of communication studies. While it has its roots in the pedagogy of competitive speech and debate and welcomes submissions from that sub-discipline it is open to, and regularly publishes, articles from any of communications sub-disciplines. We maintain a focus on competitive speech and debate issues but we are also open to submissions from all communication related fields including (but not limited to):

- Applied Comm
- Argumentation & Debate
- Communication Theory
- Computer Mediated Comm
- Conflict
- Critical Scholarship
- Cultural Studies
- Forensics
- Health Comm
- Humor Studies
- Instructional Comm
- Intercultural Comm
- Interpersonal Comm
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- Political Comm
- Public Relations
- Queer Studies
- Rhetoric
- Speech Anxiety
- Communication Theory
- Humor Studies
- Public Relations
- Queer Studies
- Rhetoric
- Speech Anxiety

Additionally the journal is open to all research methodologies, (rhetorical, qualitative, quantitative, historical, etc.). In addition S&G will also except one or two literature reviews for each issue and a limited number of scholarly book reviews may also be considered. Viewpoint articles - research-based commentary, preferably on a currently relevant issue related to the forensics and/or debate community will also be considered.

All research, with the exception of the literature reviews and scholarly book reviews, should further our understanding of human communication. The way(s) in which the manuscript does that should be clear and evident.

All submissions are independently reviewed by anonymous expert peer referees. By submitting you are stipulating that:

1. The manuscript is your own original work and has not been previously published elsewhere and is not currently under consideration for publication elsewhere.
2. If a previous draft was presented at a conference or convention (which will not negatively affect the chances of publication and is actually encouraged) it has been noted on the title page.
3. The manuscript does not contain anything abusive, libelous, obscene, illegal, defamatory, nor does it contain information you know or suspect to be false or misleading.
4. You have gained permission to use copyrighted material (photos, cartoons, etc.) and can provide proof of that permission upon acceptance.
5. You have conducted any original empirical research after the approval of and in accordance with your institution’s Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Guidelines for Submission:

1. Submission deadlines are January 15th and July 15th of each year. It is never too early to submit your article.
2. Submissions should be made via email as Word document attachments with the author(s) contact information in a separate attachment. (send to toddtholm@gmail.com)
3. Speaker & Gavel requires submissions follow the most recent Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA) guidelines.
4. The text should be double-spaced throughout and should be standard Times New Roman 12 point font.
5. Personal identifiers should be removed from the title page and from the document. The rest of the information on the title page and abstract should remain intact.
6. Please provide full contact information for the corresponding author including email, mailing address, and preferred contact phone number. Also include academic affiliations for all co-authors. This information should be sent in a document separate from the main text of the article to ensure an anonymous peer review.
7. Please provide information about any special funding the research received or conventions or conferences at which previous drafts have been presented so it can be noted in the publication.

Please send submissions to:

toddtholm@gmail.com

I look forward to receiving your submissions.

Sincerely,

Dr. Todd T. Holm
Director of Professional Communication
Expeditionary Warfare School
Marine Corps University
Marine Corps Base Quantico
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An Editor’s Note</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Todd Holm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The 2015 State of Delta Sigma Rho-Tau Kappa Alpha</td>
<td>2-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben Walker</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copycat Forensics: How Social Learning Problematizes Intercollegiate Forensic Performances</td>
<td>4-16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alyssa Reid</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Person We Knew: Perceptions of the Identity of Loved Ones With Dementia by Family Caregivers</td>
<td>17-31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amber Jannusch &amp; Dena Huisman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Policy Rhetoric in the 1992 Presidential Campaign: Bill Clinton’s Exceptionalist Jeremiad</td>
<td>32-53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason A. Edwards</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bully or Dupe? Governor Chris Christie’s Image Repair on the Bridge Lane Closure Scandal</td>
<td>54-67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William L. Benoit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Editor’s Note

This issue of Speaker & Gavel is a shared effort between Dr. Stephen Croucher (University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, Finland) and Dr. Todd Holm (Marine Corps University, Quantico, VA). Dr. Croucher, his editorial assistants, and editorial board did a fine job of selecting excellent articles and working with authors through the revision and resubmission process. They are all to be commended on an excellent job.

This also marks my first issue as an editor for Speaker & Gavel. With guidance and direction from Dr. Ben Walker and the DSR-TKA Executive Committee we are planning several changes to the journal in the next couple of issues. These are largely cosmetic (layout, formatting, design, etc.) but we are also providing opportunities for outlets for materials that are not traditionally available. We maintain our focus on research and scholarship devoted to intercollegiate speech and debate competitions. But we are open to research from all communication sub-disciplines. For more information about that please see the Call for Papers in the preceding pages.

Finally, we are expanding our editorial board. So as not to overload our editors and ensure a quick turn-around from subject matter experts we are looking for more people interested in being on the editorial board. If you are interested joining the editorial board please contact me (toddholm@gmail.com). We are seeking reviewers with a terminal degree (PhD, EdD, JD, MFA), a forensics background either as a competitor or coach, and some publication experience. You don’t have to be currently active in forensics; as a matter of fact, former forensics people are perfect for our needs because they are not as overloaded during the travel season.

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The 2015 State of Delta Sigma Rho-Tau Kappa Alpha

Ben Walker

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Delta Sigma Rho-Tau Kappa Alpha (DSR-TKA) has a long and proud history. DSR was founded in 1906 as a national honorary, while TKA was founded two years later in 1908. Much later along, in 1963, the two merged. In the 1960’s the organization mostly supported debate, but as forensic activities evolved across the country so did DSR-TKA; public speaking events were adopted, followed by oral interpretation competition. The organization flourished for many years as one of the main voices in forensic leadership.

Many years have passed since DSR-TKA merged and the organization has eroded from memory for many. I can recall spending my entire undergraduate and graduate years active in forensics, but never hearing the name of this historical organization until my second year in graduate school. But DSR-TKA has been instrumental in shaping the forensic experience for so many students and coaches; it is weaved into the fabric of forensic history that has guided our way for so long.

In his 2013 article in Speaker and Gavel, Larry Schnoor remembered being at the 1968 DSR-TKA national tournament when Dr. Martin Luther King was shot. The riots in Washington and the experience he had with this team helped shape his career. Schnoor also fondly recalled the 1966 DSR-TKA national tournament where 52 schools attended, but noted that sometimes nationals had over 75 teams participating. Those numbers no longer bless the organization, with team memberships dwindling to single digits in recent years. Schnoor estimates the rise of other national forensic organizations has a direct link to the decline of DSR-TKA. Finally, after many years of declining membership, the DSR-TKA decided in 2014 to no longer host a national tournament.

DSR-TKA can still play a significant role in today’s world of collegiate forensics and as we move into the future. DSR-TKA is carving out a new space to better serve the students and coaches of this activity. When I first joined the organization to serve as the Vice President in 2011, I was asked to bring a fresh perspective. When I moved into the role of President in 2013, I made it a priority to reshape and revitalize this once thriving organization.

The National Council was reformed and together we began the process of bringing DSR-TKA back into relevance. We took a look at the national landscape and found that the vast majority of forensic organizations center on a tournament model. Since the national tournament circuit is already crowded with many quality options for teams to choose from, DSR-TKA has opted to move away from that.
But what does such an organization look like? How does it serve the community? These are the questions in which the National Council continues to debate. DSR-TKA has embraced change and has moved away from the honorary model as well, switching to a simple fee-based membership. We will continue to seek to provide educational opportunities and recognition of excellence in collegiate speech and debate. In addition to publishing Speaker and Gavel, our bi-annual journal regarding communication studies, and offering support to the entire collegiate forensic community, we provide members with a variety of benefits, including:

**The Online Forensics Festival:** With the skyrocketing costs of competition and the need for business professionals to be able to present themselves effectively to via modern telecommunication systems, DSR-TKA has led the way with a digital tournament that offers students a way to gain valuable feedback without the grind of travel.

**Special awards:** We understand that recognition for hard work is greatly appreciated on a personal and professional level. DSR-TKA offers awards for student Forensic Scholars, the Top Forensic Publication, Coach of the Year, and the Spirit of Forensics Team award. Along with the recognition from the Online Forensics Festival, these awards attempt to balance celebrating excellence in our students and our coaches.

**Grants:** We also now have specially funded grants that help fund projects for forensic teams that may be strapped for cash. DSR-TKA wishes to foster forensic excellence in all forms and sometimes that takes a little financial assistance. Members can apply for funds to help them travel or cover other costs. Each grant will be named after important members from the history of DSR-TKA.

While there have been many changes to DSR-TKA, our commitment to forensic scholarship has never been stronger. Speaker & Gavel remains one of the main areas where we believe we can serve the forensic community. This journal represents the voice of so many of our peers and encouraging quality scholarship is an ideal way for those messages be heard.

As we move into the future, DSR-TKA will be leader in the forensic community. Where there is a need for recognition and support of forensic excellence, we will seek to meet it. We will encourage forensic pedagogy and provide resources to those who need them. While we may not look the same as in the past, and we may function differently than many organizations, DSR-TKA is ready to serve you. Please join us as we make the future of forensics brighter for all of us.

Ben Walker
President
Delta Sigma Rho-Tau Kappa Alpha
Copycat Forensics:
How Social Learning Problematizes Intercollegiate Forensic Performances

Alyssa Reid

Alyssa Reid (M.F.A., Minnesota State University, Mankato) is the Assistant Director of Individual Events and a Lecturer at James Madison University in Harrisonburg, VA.

ABSTRACT

This paper highlights noticeable problems stemming from students adopting forensic norms without critiquing practice. Although many pedagogically sound reasons account for some structural similarities in events, many performance choices enacted in forensic competition are not grounded in educational principles but are learned and fostered through social learning. Currently, students can achieve forensic success without developing sound reasons for performance choices. Uncovering the ways in which students, judges, and coaches, produce and reproduce copycat performances can improve overall academic and competitive rigor.

Keywords: Social Learning, Forensic Pedagogy, Forensic Judging, Forensic Research

Introduction

A typical weekend evening for many forensic educators involves discussing weekend goings with students. Often during these conversations, I am taken aback when I hear students state that an event “works” a certain way or that they would be successful if they incorporated a “buzz phrase” like other winning speeches they have seen. I have often wondered what my students are learning when they watch their peers. Many forensic coaches, myself included, encourage students to observe and learn while at tournaments. Subsequently, students often witness, emulate, and adopt the behavior of fruitful forensic speakers and speeches. Paine (2005) argued that adherence to forensic norms regulate not only the perception of how events should be performed, but that they also infiltrate all aspects of forensic culture. Our students pick up on most aspects of forensic culture without coaches present.

Every organizational culture has a unique set of nuanced behavioral norms. Intercollegiate forensic individual event competition is no exception. Individual events are not only framed by competition rules but are often evaluated on how well one executes forensic norms. Many forensic scholars have contextualized how norms alter competition e.g., Billings, 1997, 2002; Burnett, Brand, & Meister, 2003; Carmack & Holm, 2005; Cronn-Mills & Golden,
1997; Duncan, 2013; Epping & Labrie, 2005, Gaer, 2002; Morris, 2005; Ott, 1998; Paine, 2005; Ribarsky, 2005; VerLinden, 1997. Adoption of norms is a primary facet of observational learning thus presenting a problematic issue; our students are modeling themselves after each other but are doing so without critically asking why they are copying their peers, or if they even should.

Coaches should to stop treating what other teams are doing as isolated from what their own students are doing. Although every team fosters their own team philosophies and pedagogies, students are proliferating and incorporating socially learned traits into their performances. Every performance a coach is mentoring has the potential to ripple into other forensic performances from other teams. When one student pushes the boundary of an event it can soon become a cascade moment for individual event participation and multiple programs experiment with events and norms. Therefore, forensic students should develop as discerning observational learners, yet it would seem that they are losing the performance pedagogy behind observed forensic presentations, which should spur more academic discussion among students, judges, and coaches about what students are performing at tournaments but more importantly what it means for intercollegiate forensic competition.

Most students are capable of evaluating and correcting their behavior. However many are lacking the critical ability to question their own behavior; this lack of critique towards socially learned behavior is problematic not only for our activity but is also disservice to the alumni we produce. This paper will problematize Social Learning Theory and then address future potentialities for the activity to move beyond copycat forensics.

Social Learning Theory

Social Learning Theory is a very broad theoretical framework that would be difficult to explore in its’ entirety, therefore I shall apply multiple facets of the principle to forensic students and judges.

Students. The inclination for our students to inspect other competitors and adapt to the norms of the activity are inherent to human socialization behavior. Rendell, Boyd, Cownden, Enquist, Eriksson, Feldman, Fogarty, Ghirlanda, Lillicrap, Laland (2010) found that copying conduct is natural and effective in competition settings. Part of succeeding in any field requires learning how to not only navigate the norms, but to perform them well. Peteraf and Stanley (1997) stated that the desire to effectively navigate norms stems from reducing uncertainty in social interactions. Therefore, students want to follow forensic norms in order to better predict performance outcomes.

Forensic norms are uniquely scrutinized during performances, i.e. body movement, pacing, off stage focus, and topic selection (Epping and LaBrie, 2005). Therefore, in round performances serve as locations of embodied norms. Students might observe other competitors paying particular detail to bodily performance and interpret the success of other participants as reason to alter bodily performance, often resulting in a blind adoption of norms. Carmack and Holm (2005) reasoned that socializing to the conventions are at the forefront of forensic group
interaction because the human dynamics i.e. competitor, teams, judges, alter frequently. Norms are a more stable facet of the activity for students to observe and execute with familiarity. Therefore, students that desire success develop a grasp of the activity as soon as possible often achieved by observational learning. Observation is the primal tenet of social learning theory. Bandura (1969) reasoned that complex catalogues of communicated behavior could be understood through observing behavior. In many ways, social learning is the most direct form of knowledge students develop about forensic culture. Bikhchandani, Hirshleifer and Welch (1998) defined the optimal shift in behavior based on observed actions of preceding individuals as an informational cascade.

Informational cascades according to Bikhchandani, Hirshleifer and Welch (1998) develop when individuals are placed in similar situations, with similar available means, with similar alternative actions, while facing similar benefits or payoffs, much like a forensic tournament. The simple surveying of peers often requires students to develop their interpretation of what successful competitors look like until they find their own way. This exercise of trial and error is a form of modeling socially learned behavior. Much like a cascade, observations flow from competitor to competitor. What starts as an individual performance choice, can become forensic norm. Schunk and Zimmerman (1997) maintained that students develop self-value through comparison. Competitors will frequently self-examine and choose to either adopt or defy conventions. Ladd and Mize (1983) articulated that students are engaging in a social learning process when they alter concepts or performances as a response to adjust outcomes. If a forensic competitor earns success at a tournament than other students are likely to adopt the behavior of that winning student. If the copied behavior bodes well for other students competitively than copying becomes reinforced behavior in forensic competition.

Students perceive tournament success as endorsement of, good and bad, performance choices often attributing competition success to the wrong reasons. It would then lead a student to reason that they have indeed learned how to win. Compounded by what Monaco and Martin (2007) characterize as unique feeling of specialness the millennial generation experiences from competitive success in extra-curricular activities students are prompted to perpetuate successful choices in lieu of academically sound choices. Swift (2008) elaborated: “Unfortunately, trophies can become a greater reward than individual and collective integrity” (p. 7). Improperly citing sources, audience pandering, milking the moment, and occasional flubs can easily be misinterpreted by competitors as behavior to emulate, thus reinforcing problematic messages to self-evaluating students. These competitive experiences, if unexamined, become dogmatic principles that students share.

Unfortunately, student audience members often observe without guidance, and develop forensic conventions into doctrine when the comparatively self-evaluate. Sellnow (1994) argued experiential education required grounding in theoretical principles in order to be effectively applied in real world situations. Even more problematic is when students bypass valuable self-reflection. However, Bikhchandani, Hirshleifer and Welch (1998) found problem when an informational cascades develop into herding, or the propensity to rely on others for information
rather than critical self-evaluation. Forensic competitors too often fall prey to herding behavior. Fully observable herding behavior is achieved when in round performances are subject to the same unspoken nuances. Olson (1989) observed that the norms stifled forensic innovation. To a degree, this observation stands.

Many events do seem to fit into patterns; however some of those patterns are grounded in pedagogy such as a teaser in an interpretation event before an introduction as it functions as an Attention Getting Device for an interpretation event. However, the concept of a teaser seems to be less and less grounded in this pedagogy as students will finish their introduction after three minutes have passed. Students seem to understand that they need to provide some literature up front in order to get the audience invested in the speech, but simultaneously seem the lack the ability to understand when a performance is being teased and fully immersed. It should be at that point when a coach steps in, if they see one of their students with such a long “introduction” and should begin asking questions. If a student in a public speaking class were as verbose in an introduction/attention getting device it would presumably be reflected in a dropped grade. In this particular instance, the norm is evolving outside of pedagogical principles.

Herding most likely occurs when students espouse uninformed anecdotal advice with canonical ethos. These interactions were humorously described by Perry (2002) as picking up information from “the streets” (p.72). Students drawn to this activity have a tendency to enjoy communicating and relish in the opportunity to share what they know, emphatically. Furthermore, Peteraf and Shanley (1997) contended that developing mutual understandings are critical to establishing group identity. While students sharing experiential knowledge helps establish community rapport the act simultaneously perpetuates herding. Walker (2011) characterized experiential knowledge as wanting “to leave how a student interprets their experience open for the student to figure out” (p. 9). I value this approach however broadcasting personal experiences among competitors often becomes shared unquestioned “rules” for events. A laissez faire approach to norm adoption problematizes what students learn from forensic competition. Blind adherence to norms often manifests in book opening and closing techniques, speech voice, unnatural pausing, and too much disclosure for topic selection. Norms in this vein are nontransferable skills outside of forensic participation and accepting forensic norms as standard without a critical interrogation only entrenches reproductions of dominant cultural ideologies.

**Judges.** Many forensic scholars have laid the groundwork for evaluating judging practices: Jensen, 1988; Klosa & Dubois, 2001; Mills, 1991; Morris, 2005; Nelson, 2010; Ott, 1998; Outzen, Youngvorst, & Cronn-Mills, 2013; Ross, 1984; VerLinden, 1986. Forensic norms are culturally constructed and inscribed through ballots. Scott and Birkholt (1996) clarified that forensic judges are subject to inconsistent judging paradigms that stem from personal biases. Klosa and Dubois (2001) explained that ballots functionally evaluate rounds and provide educational feedback for students. However, ballots can serve a third function: behavior endorsement. A ballot is not just a means of competitive necessity and educational
dissemination, but it serves to inform students what behavior is successful in forensic culture and what is not.

Schunk and Zimmerman (1997) contended that students are more likely to perpetuate a behavior if it has been validated. Judges therefore are as responsible for herding behavior as students. Competitors adjust behaviors in order to appease a particular judging pool. I believe this is how students develop potentially off putting speech performance choices. Students might develop a “speech voice” while they are learning how to project and use a room more effectively and if they happen to gain more competitive success they will likely adopt that bad habit, even if criticized on a ballot. This often produces a certain “competition” speaking style that is unique to our activity, socially enforced by in round rankings. Ribarsky (2005) summed: “This lack of realistic presentational styles through norm perpetuation further hinders the educational values” (p. 20). Functionally, we are teaching our students how to be effective forensic speakers rather than effective public speakers. Our stylized form of speaking has, quite frankly, gotten away from us. I have witnessed many performance trends in forensic oral performance that is so idiosyncratic to forensic culture that it is actually off putting to lay audiences, such as performing every line of prose as a question. Competitive success effectively teaches students to adapt to a forensic audience and judges but not necessarily all audiences.

The power of endorsement is further problematized when Elmer and VanHorn (2003) highlighted “there is no definitive standard for event descriptions or judge requirements” (p. 105). Without these definitive standards judges, especially former competitors, rely on cursory knowledge gleaned from experience, often delivered as dogmatic truths on ballots. This is probably why Ott (1998) described judges as police that enforce and reinforce performance traits. Consistently relying on judges that learned through observation and anecdotal information sets a disturbing precedent. Reid (2012) portrayed forensic judges as facilitators whom all too frequently reward performances that best demonstrate forensic norms. Including alumni judges with poor pedagogical training into the judging pool decreases ballot efficacy, however this is an all too common resort. The common assertion is that a competitor knows how a tournament works therefore their feedback should be inherently valued. Unfortunately, alumni ballots are not guaranteed to promote forensic pedagogy.

When Cronn-Mills and Golden (1997) outlined how forensic norms should be enforced, they were presenting an indictment aimed at the heavily shrouded “rules” of our activity. However, their paper exists solely in the academic realm. Conversations about norm enforcement are still ever present in judging lounges and are rarely critical. It seems that judges understand that different programs approach forensic competition differently yet it is not universally understood that there is no singular way to do individual events correctly. Critics that have gleaned their forensic knowledge through the herding process tend to write ballots that reflect their socially learned forensic behavior. Often these judges are very familiar with competitors at the tournament and they will write casual ballots with instructions for how the event should be performed. As former competitors are using up eligibility and graduating into our judging pools, they are effectively poisoning the well of the judging pool. Morris (2005) defined judges that
ranked more from norm enforcement rather than sound pedagogy as evaluator critics. Evaluator critics often learned forensics absent from pedagogy and enforce forensic knowledge attained through herding can often provide not only uneducated ballots, but occasionally, anti-educational ballots. There is a difference between an opinion and an educated opinion. Being complicit with poor judging recruitment practices is validation among coaches that we support poor judging practices.

If we are not educating our judging pool, even our alumni, we are simply producing more evaluator critics. It is the responsibility of the tournament host to find judges but often the host is so overwhelmed helping along first time judges that it is easy to overlook alumni judges, however I believe these judges to be more problematic to the activity. Lindemann (2002) accused these types of judges of pressuring students to change pieces or arguments because they have seen them done before. A student still has much to learn from a particular piece no matter how many times a judge has seen it performed. Although Ross (1984) called for localized judge skill workshops, which was furthered by Outzen Youngvorst, and Cronn-Mills (2013), such a practice has yet to be universally adopted. Frequently, tournament judges are not adequately prepared to impart effective critique. It might be difficult to accept that coaches are culpable for poor judging practices. It is further complicated when our teams and students may receive recognition as a result of a poorly trained judging pool.

Solutions
As a passionate educator and coach, I refuse to claim that intercollegiate forensic competition is wholly non-educational. Both competitive and educational aspects of the activity shaped and continue to shape my worldview in profound ways. However, it is important that as educators, coaches understand how norms are influencing students to gauge what students are learning. It is a difficult task to ascertain not only what students are learning but also when they are learning. Bandura (1971) initially pinpointed the difficulty of social learning because a learner does not have to consciously learn in order to learn. A significant amount of forensic learning is unmonitored. Student progress is observable but it is hard to say what exactly attributed to the intellectual growth and maturity directly. It could be a ballot, a fellow student, a profound coaching appointment, and/or epiphany of clarity when in a round. Whatever the case may be, norms of the activity influence students to at least some degree but, allowing competition to norms dictate our student’s performance choices is pedagogically irresponsible. Cronn-Mills and Croucher (2013) asserted: “Forensic scholars constantly work with their student competitors to review comments and triage the importance/relevancy/necessity of the comments to improve the speech/interpretation/performance” (p. 12). I think that norms should be treated in the same manner in order to move past inflexible enforcement. In order to combat potentially negative socially learned behavior I suggest Workshops, Student Mentoring, and Forensic Pedagogy Scholarships.

Workshops. Some forensic organizations host individual event workshops. Often during these workshops students will perform multiple genres to demonstrate them to beginners. It
would be beneficial to schedule multiple speakers performing different styles and structures of public address, limited preparation speeches, and literature performances. Workshops are beneficial educational experiences for students not quite ready to jump into competition. However, we could make competition more welcoming to novices by operating some of them as tournaments with workshop elements. Before awards, tournament hosts could incorporate open forums or TED Talk type discussions headed by a forensic community member during league tournaments, such as MAFLs, TCFLs, SNAFUs or PSCFAs. Having these talks while tournament staff are tabbing could be an easy way to enact this. Students would relish in an opportunity to share and learn if facilitated in a sound way. If every tournament hosted by one of these organizations did workshops, it could be particularly beneficial to new programs or student run programs.

Additionally, tournaments could provide novice breakout rounds and provide ballots for student observers. Maybe more experienced students could get ballots that do not have ranks and ratings and provide suggestions. Although some potential herding could happen this way, coaches can at least review the information being offered to their students. The practice of learning how to write instructional feedback could be beneficial for students. This introduction could help usher more effective critics and fewer future evaluator critics. The ballots written by students could simply be gathered and stuffed into school ballot envelopes with relatively little added effort and cost to tournament hosts.

An integrated workshop approach to communal forensic pedagogy could establish an intellectual trickledown effect among competitors. Conversations among students could move beyond pleasantries or norm enforcement to more involved discussions about performance and social issues. To a degree, this is already happening at forensic tournaments, but well-established theoretical guidelines would provide more conversations grounded in forensic educational principles and hopefully decrease forensic herd behavior.

**Student Mentoring.** Furthermore, coaches should be encouraging students at tournaments of varying competitive levels to come watch a round that coaches are judging. This could foster a conversation about rankings. Some of the best “van talk” moments have come from students engaged and willing to justify their perspective of a round that none of their teammates were competing. These conversations also begin to guide students into the realm of appraising a round of competition while limiting their individual stakes. I often enjoy these conversations because I can hear how a student would rank the round and then I will ask them to describe how someone could justify their sixth place ranking as the first place. Students may realize that different judges can rank differently and putting them in a position to justify the opposite opinion is not only a good practice in ballot writing but also a fascinating exercise in critical thinking. Harnessing a potential evaluator critic while they are still competing could be the key to increasing the amount of educational feedback on ballots. Starting the process earlier could teach students how to begin more pedagogical opinions before they are placed in the role of judge.
Furthermore, as a community we can also begin a more concerned effort to mentor coaches. One of the joys of this activity is building relationships with students but inevitably we have to let them go. Many talented performers leave the forensic community when they graduate, or lose eligibility. However, I developed my passion for coaching when I coached a high school team. It was rewarding. It was fun. It helped me envision my future as a pedagogue. Although this is a personal experience, I know many others have had similar experiences. Encourage students to work at local high schools or speech camps. If the student is extremely busy, suggest they judge a local high school tournament. If a student demonstrates a particular skill for coaching, teach them how to fill out leg qualification paperwork. Maybe if a student has qualified all of the events they wish to compete with for nationals, suggest that they travel on a tournament weekend to learn how to tab. It is critical that we instill the sense of a larger community while students are competing. Promoting a greater sense of community early can provide students with a feeling of pride associated with intercollegiate forensic competition. Students motivated towards preserving forensics are likely to come back as better competitors as well as future judges and/or coaches.

Forensic Pedagogy Scholarship. It is important that students understand that work put into their events before the tournament matters regardless of what other competitors are doing. Therefore, it might be time that tournaments provided awards for students working to improve forensic pedagogy. A few years ago, the National Forensic Association experimental event was Forensic Criticism. Many scoffed that any event could technically be forensic criticism according to the broad definition of the event. However, the event provided an opportunity for students to actively begin discussing how to make forensic competition better. There is no reason why we cannot support this sentiment without competition. Providing scholarships to students that wish to improve forensic pedagogy could significantly alter the landscape of our disciplinary scholarship. National organizations could provide a scholarship for the top paper and have the paper published in the national journal or even develop a special edition just dedicated to undergraduate research dedicated to forensic research. The forensic community as a whole can begin to adopt a philosophy of student incorporated pedagogy.

Local forensic organizations could provide scholarships for students that provide written critiques of their performances and establish an event improvement journal. Teams could provide a reward for a similar practice and use it for educational assessment purposes. Imagine how rewarding and refreshing it would be to read a student’s thought process for performance enhancements throughout the year! Providing recognition for forensic specific research for undergraduates could spur more forensic research as a whole. For decades, the forensic community has been pushing for increased published scholarship: Cronn-Mills and Croucher, 2013; Croucher, 2006; Hample, 1981; Kay, 1990; Kerber & Cronn-Mills, 2005; Klumpp, 1990; Logue & Shea, 1990; McGlone, 1969; Ryan, 1998. Raising students in an atmosphere of explicit research application beyond forensic performances could foster generations of academically invested educators and subsequently more forensic publications. Encouraging students to research forensic practices could also help guide them to making more pedagogically grounded
decisions in the performance choices. Students researching forensic norms would be more likely to critically self-evaluate and avoid herding behavior.

**Conclusion**

Social learning theory is a double-edged sword for competitive forensics. On one hand it helps students’ process multiple scenarios for different communication exigencies, while on the other hand it is difficult to monitor and truly determine what lessons are being imparted. Duncan (2013) argued that the “conventions are minor aspects of performances and do not negate the educational value of this activity” (p.21). I wish to further this sentiment. It is not that the norms negate education rather they are shaping how and what students are learning. Because norm convention is not limited to forensic culture it is paramount that we teach students how to assess norms and how they wish to navigate them in forensic and real world settings. For example, muted pant suits have dominated women’s professional wear for at least two decades and yet certain teams still dogmatically assert bright skirt suits for their female competitors and other teams. Although it is not directly communicated, female students are learning that in order to be professionally successful they also need to adhere to normative femininity. As critics, we need to be more critical of the messages or norms we are communicating to students. We cannot control what other competitors or judges tell our students but we can help our students navigate decisions they make based on feedback. To foster a community of people with the same perspectives and performances is educationally irresponsible.

Bikhchandani, Hirshleifer and Welch (1992) articulated, “mass behavior is often fragile in the sense that small shocks can frequently lead to large shifts in behavior” (p. 993). If we wish to alter the information cascades our students are receiving than we need to be more active in altering those messages. It is time that coaches amend problematic, archaic, uniformed approaches towards how events should be performed. We can start by adopting an attitude of willingness. Our activity is no longer at a point where we can treat each team as isolated intellectual property islands. Derryberry (1991) argued for programs to build total programs, which he described as teams grounded in providing opportunities for students to research and organize language while developing presentational skills. One of the best ways to do this is through forensic community building. If we want the activity to improve we need to push our students to push the boundaries of our norms. If we are tired of speeches sounding the same then we have to start taking more risks. Forensic competition is a co-cultural activity that allows students to simultaneously represent cultural constructs while critiquing them. It is time that more forensic performances lived up to their potential to effectively critique. Spurring new perspectives in the activity is paramount for forensic competition to evolve beyond copycat forensics.

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The Person We Knew:
Perceptions of the Identity of Loved Ones With Dementia by Family Caregivers

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ABSTRACT

While several studies have looked at the identity of dementia patients, most focus on the point of the view of the patient. However, caretakers’ and family members’ view of the identity of the dementia patient is unstudied. This study attempts to see how family caregivers’ view of their family member’s dementia manifests in communication about the loved one. This study is a preliminary examination of family caregivers’ constructions of the identity of their loved one, revealing that caretakers have one of three views: the patient without an identity, the patient as a different person, or the patient as “not lost” or gone. Caregivers’ interpretation of the loved one’s identity was seen in how the patient was discussed and treated.

Keywords: Dementia, family communication, health communication, caretaker communication, identity and communication

Introduction

Alzheimer’s Disease and related dementia illnesses affect approximately 6.8 million Americans (National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS), 2009). People with dementia suffer from a decreasing ability to speak, understand, and retain information, including long-established relationships (Alzheimer’s Association, 2010). While most studies of dementia focus on the perspective of the patient, this study argues for a more systems-oriented approach to understanding how partners and caretakers understand their partner’s changed identity as a dementia sufferer. According to family systems theory, a change in one member is a change for all, which means that these changes in a person suffering from dementia must affect that person’s family member as well (Galvin, Dickson, & Marrow, 2006). To examine how the family understands his study examines the ways in which family understanding of the identity of the dementia sufferer factors into their family relationship.
Literature Review

Dementia is not a specific disease, but rather an umbrella term for the symptoms caused by a number of disorders, diseases and conditions that damage brain cells. In addition to a decline in memory, to be classified as dementia, there must also be decline in at least one of the following categories: 1) the ability to generate coherent speech or understand language; 2) the ability to recognize or identify objects; 3) the ability to execute motor activities despite sufficient ability; or 4) the ability to think abstractly or plan and carry out complex tasks (Alzheimer’s Association, 2010). The United States Office of Technology Assessment estimates that approximately 6.8 million Americans have dementia, and at least 1.8 million are severely affected (NINDS, 2009). The most common type of dementia, affecting 5.3 million Americans and accounting for an estimated 60-80 percent of cases, is Alzheimer’s disease. While different types of dementia have a variety of typical characteristics, most (including vascular dementia and Parkinson’s induced dementia) share characteristics with and following a similar pattern of decline to Alzheimer’s Disease (Alzheimer’s Association, 2010).

Unlike many other illnesses, communication impairment is inherent in dementia (Bayles et al., 1987; Byrne & Orange, 2005a, 2005b), and caregivers notice communication difficulties at early stages in the disease (Byrne & Orange, 2005b). Patients with dementia have difficulty both in communicating needs and in understanding what is being communicated to them. They have some difficulty understanding factual material, and even more significant problems understanding inferential material (Biassou, Onishi, Grossman & D’Esposito, 1995). Alzheimer’s Disease researchers have found that patients with AD may understand main ideas but not details, and so encourage caregivers to refer back often to a main idea of a conversation, rather than providing more detailed information (Welland, Lubinski & Higginbotham, 2002). However, Orange (1995) found in his interviews with family caregivers of Alzheimer’s patients that communication impairment had a significant effect not just on the dementia patient, but also on the caregiver, who reported common feelings of frustration, loneliness, guilt, embarrassment and isolation, which in turn may affect the caregiver’s self-image.

Dementia Patient Identity in Relationships

Patients with dementia exhibit significant behavioral problems, caused by internal and external confusion, excess noise or situational unfamiliarity. These behavioral problems manifest through acting out, depressive episodes, or paranoia. The reduction in basic abilities as well as the change in typical behavior make it seem to the family caregiver as if the patient is no longer the person he or she once was (Baxter, Braithwaite, Golish & Olson, 2002; Gillies and Johnston, 2004). In fact, “those involved in the care of individuals who have [dementia] routinely describe a change in the person’s very ‘identity’” (Gillies & Johnson, 2004, p. 439). This identity change is twofold: first, there is a daily inability to perform as one did previously, and second, there is an inability to understand what is going on, to know who one is or where one is. The former of these reflects directly on a personal sense of self, and the other as a direct expression of the sense of self.
Further, physical, behavioral, and cognitive changes all play in to the potential perceived identity change by caregivers about the person with dementia (Cohen-Mansfield, Parpura-Gill, & Golander, 2006). One major area where dementia complications have been found is in autobiographical memory. Autobiographical memory is composed of memories, particularly from childhood or early adulthood, which people rely on to give strength and quality to their identity, enabling integration of past and present selves and continuity of identity (Addis & Tippett, 2004). Addis and Tippett examined autobiographical memory of patients with Alzheimer’s by administering a test of autobiographical memory and two tests of identity. They found that people with AD have impaired autobiographical memory and accompanying changes in their own perception of their sense of self.

Despite this, some aspects of self-identity can survive even in cases of severe dementia (Dworkin, 1986). Differentiating between personal identity and social identity, Sabat and Harre (1992) theorized that while social identity, which requires interaction with others, is often lost because of the communicative and cognitive implications of dementia, the personal identity can persist. In testing personal identity indicators in dementia patients, Tappen, Williams, Fishman, and Touhy (1999) found clear indices of personal identity in mid to late stage Alzheimer’s patients; these patients responded to their names, referred to themselves in the first person, and observed and discussed their own cognitive changes, all signaling some understanding of their personal concept.

However, personal identity is developed in and through relationships, linking with social identity. Dementia necessarily changes the cognitive and communicative patterns within a family unit. Cohen-Mansfield, Golander, and Amheim (2000) found that the patient’s place in the family is a domain of identity most likely to be recalled, but loss of memory prevents sharing of memories with loved ones. Given that joint memory constructs social frameworks and leads to shared attitudes, helping to form a self, the declining ability to develop joint memories or hold on to other social memories impacts the ability to develop a social sense of self.

Sabat (2002) addressed the issue of identity in dementia patients with a social constructionist approach, explaining the interaction of three types of self: the self of personal identity, the self of mental and physical abilities and attributes, and the socially presented self (or selves). Dementia affects all three types to varying degrees and in varying sequential order, implicating the ability of a dementia patient to maintain a sense of identity, and the ability of a caregiver to address a dementia patient in terms of a sense of identity (Shenk, 2005). The personal self is affected through the impairment of autobiographical memory; the mental and physical self is affected by cognitive and accompanying physical limitations; and the socially presented self-suffers from the patient’s inability to communicate or share memories and experiences with those around them.

As memory, cognition, and communication decline, family caregivers often observe that their loved one is “not the person s/he used to be.” This affects how the family member interacts with the dementia patient. Caregivers may separate from and exclude the patient more, imposing an identity of “sick person” or patient, challenging personhood (Kitwood, 1997) and potentially
leading to “social death” (Sweeting & Gilhooly, 1997). On the other hand, some caregivers try to compensate for dementia impairment by hanging on to their relatives’ previous identity (Gillies & Johnston, 2004), often by calling up everyday memories and rituals (Orona, 1990). In so doing, however, the caregiver may be just as guilty of imposing an identity on the dementia patient in failing to recognize that identity is dynamic and changing.

Ambiguous Loss and Dementia

Dementia is a progressive illness without a cure. As the disease progresses, patients continue to decline mentally, and sometimes physically (Bayles et al., 1987). This results in a “living death” where the person is physically present, but not mentally or emotionally present, something referred to in family communication research as ambiguous loss.

Ambiguous loss refers to the relational disorder that occurs with psychological absence of a loved one in a family who is “there, but not there” (Boss, 2007, p. 105). Ambiguous Loss theory has been applied to caregivers of family members with dementia (Boss, 2010; Boss, Greenburg, & Pearce-McCall, 1990; Garwick, Detzner, & Boss, 1994; Kaplan & Boss, 1999; Thomas, Clement, Hazif-Thomas, & Leger, 2001), though typically with a family systems theory approach (Carroll et al., 2007). Boss (2010) summarized her research on ambiguous loss for caregivers of family members with dementia, explaining the anxiety and depression that coincides with the trauma and inability to have closure:

Unlike death, with ambiguous loss (e.g., dementia or brain injury), the process of bereavement is blocked by an external situation beyond the control of the sufferers. Even the strongest people are immobilized in such situations. Grief therapies are understandably resisted (p. 140).

Because a loved one with dementia is both present and absent at the same time, a caregiver is faced with confusion, depression, and loss of hope and meaning from the inability to have closure or finalization (Boss, 2010).

Boss (2010) explained that ambiguous loss further complicates the caregivers’ attempts to find meaning or make sense of what is happening in their lives. Caregivers often become resistant to loss and change and become rigid, rather than becoming more comfortable with ambiguity (Boss, 1999). The behavioral reactions caregivers have to dealing with this ambiguous loss can reflect how the caregiver views the loved one’s identity, seen in the different ways caregivers respond to social identity changes.

Reaction of caregivers

A significant number of patients, particularly those with early- to mid-stage dementia, are cared for primarily by family and friends in the community. In 2009, an estimated 10.9 million Americans, primarily untrained family members, provide unpaid care for a person with dementia, providing in total 12.5 billion hours of care (Alzheimer’s Association, 2010). Thus, a
The number of caregivers of patients with dementia are in a position to notice behavioral and personality changes, and are able to compare a patient’s current behavior to the patient’s previous behavior.

The viewpoint on identity and the actions a caregiver takes has significant impact on the dementia patient. “Identity loss derives from both internal recognition (subjective or experienced) and external reaction, when, for example, family carers change their attitudes and behaviors towards the affected individual (objective and observed)” (Gillies & Johnston, 2004, p. 436). If a caregiver views a loved one with dementia as a different person, he or she may begin to treat that person as an “other,” which can lead to what Sweeting and Gilhooly (1997) termed “social death.” This happens when an ill person loses his or her social identity through lack of social recognition (Kitwood, 1997). Caregivers in this situation may impose a generic identity of “sick patient” to the loved one, as is often done by caregiving professionals dealing with dementia patients as well as non-cognitively impaired patients (Wilkinson, 1991).

On the other hand, some caregivers refuse to acknowledge identity changes, trying to compensate for the loved one’s impairment by clinging to memories and the relative’s previous identity (Gillies & Johnston, 2004). Orona (1990) studied identity loss in people with Alzheimer’s Disease, as well as the strategies caregivers use to “hang on” to the loved ones. She found that family caregivers use memories to recall and recreate former identities through rituals and re-enactment of special experiences, as well as experiences of everyday living, because “memory keeping appears to have significance for the relative as an acknowledgment of the person ‘as before’” (p. 1254). In so doing, however, caregivers focus on the previous identity, rather than understanding and accepting that identity is a fluid concept (Kelly, 1970). The implication of this is that, like the case of the caregiver imposing an identity of “sick person” on the loved one, these caregivers are also imposing an identity, this time of the person they previously knew.

Most of these studies on identity and dementia tended to focus on the identity of the individual with dementia from that individual’s point of view, looking at caregivers’ behavior only as it is interpreted by the dementia patient. While this is an important area of identity to explore, it neglects to present the perspective of the caregiver. Because identity is socially constructed and because people behave toward another congruent to how they view that person, the caregiver’s emic interpretation of their loved ones’ identity is important to add to the study of dementia, caregiving and identity.

The exploration of the family caregivers’ point of view of their loved one should be multi-faceted. As a preliminary attempt to set the groundwork for further nuanced identity and caregiving studies, this study looks generally at family caregivers’ anonymous reports of whether they think their loved one is “the same” or “different” and what that means, as well as what the caregivers generally conceptualize as the patient’s “new” identity. Thus:

**RQ:** How do family members of individuals with dementia view their loved one’s current identity as a dementia patient?
Method

Because the goal of this study is to explore identity considerations by caregivers, we used an interpretive framework in search of the caregiver’s unprompted perspective. To explore caregivers’ perspectives, we accessed the public message boards of the Alzheimer’s Association Online to find mention of identity concerns. This website provides a forum for anonymous comments to and from caregivers for people with Alzheimer’s Disease and other forms of dementia, giving an opportunity for caregivers to share their frustrations and techniques without the threat of social desirability biasing their answers (Fisher, 1993). For the purposes of this study, we examined the Caregivers Forum, with over 250,000 posts on a wide variety of issues, and a forum specifically for spouses or partners who are caregivers, which contained over 2000 posts. We started with a list of potentially relevant words and themes from prior research (as stated in the literature review), including “identity,” “loss,” “changed,” and “personality” in various combinations. Including the original topic post and all responses to that post, we collected 44 posts, totaling 20 pages, from 31 caregivers, that contained these words.

We then coded analytically, following Miles and Huberman’s (1994) outline of qualitative data analysis. This involved highlighting all specific references in the data, then inductively coding for themes or patterns of similarity in how the poster framed the identity of the patient as a family member and individual. From there we organized our coded data into coherent themes. We continued to revise the codes within each category to determine whether all instances were similar enough to be grouped or to be separated into separate codes or subcategories. We found enough commonality not to require further categorizing, resulting in three categories of responses to our research question. However, the third category did suggest further distinction, leading to three subcategories. Saturation was reached at the 24th post, after which previously identified codes were sufficiently comprehensive and no additional distinct codes were needed for the remaining data.

Results and Discussion

Comments from caregivers reflected one of three major positions on the identity of their loved one who has dementia: the loved one is a different person, the loved one is still there, or the loved one has lost his or her identity. This last position can be further broken into three majors reasons for the loss of identity: because of personality changes, because of ability decline, or because of the disease itself.

“He’s Losing Himself”

Some caregivers expressly tied identity to personality, arguing that the personality of the person with dementia has either been lost or changed, causing a loss of identity. In these responses, caregivers implied that they had lost their partner because the disease took their identity away from them. For example, one poster wrote about her husband’s, her mother’s and her own dementia diagnoses:
He is slowly but surely losing (sic) himself to his disease. I can say that because I too have EOAD/FTD [Early Onset Alzheimer’s Disease/ Frontal Temporal Dementia] and I know I am slowly dying (loosing [sic] my identity, my personality, and my mind). I am, also, a caregiver to my Mom who has Alz (Alzheimer’s Disease). She told me the same thing about herself. We are all as terrified as you are.

This caregiver (and eventual patient) seems to view identity and personality as tied together, and, as both are affected by dementia, this loss of identity results in a virtual death; she seems to suggest that if you are not a person with a personality, you are no one.

Another poster argued that one’s identity is made from memories and personalities: “I think there’s a location in the brain that takes remembered elements of people’s personalities and assembles them into identities. When it gets damaged, the elements no longer go together into a coherent whole.” This poster suggested that dementia damages the brain, making people forget parts of their personality. Because, in his view, identity is made up of these personality elements, dementia in turn makes people lose their own identity. This view sees identity to be made of a combination of memories and personalities, both of which are affected by Alzheimer’s Disease and dementia.

Blurring the line between personality and ability effects on a loved one’s identity, one poster suggested that the loss of these two is what creates one’s identity:

So much of what we did as professionals and what our loved one’s (LO’s) did are a large part of our identity. The personality essence of the person and ourselves together are also part of that identity and the world as we know it in our sphere of existence.

This post addressed the web of interaction involved in figuring out the identity of a loved one with dementia. The changing personality of the loved one affects both his or her own identity, as well as the interaction with the caregivers and the world. This interaction, in turn, affects identity.

A number of posters wrote of the decline in a loved one’s abilities, then tying that decline into the loss of identity. For these posters, the inability to do something, whether professionally or personally, as one did it before affects one’s identity. One poster referred to his father’s loss by saying, “I remember when we had to take the keys away from my dad…and it was really hard, especially because my father drove for a living. Driving was a huge part of his identity.” When this patient could no longer drive, he lost the professional identity of a driver, as well as losing a large part of his personal liberty, according to his son and caregiver.

These posts identify the connection between abilities (such as the ability to take care of one’s self) and identity, suggesting that the loss of independence because of dementia contributes to a loss of identity. Dementia patients, particularly those who need more extensive care in a
home or professional setting, often lose these little elements of independence, perhaps because of how the caretaker or family member views the identity of the patient. The caregivers who tie personality or ability to identity may assume that because the patient does not display himself as before, he is bereft of identity; in turn, they may react with caregiving styles that reinforce this conclusion, such as removing wallets and being overly restrictive on independence.

The decline of abilities and eventual loss of individuality and independence is, as these caregivers recognize, a generally inevitable part of the progression of dementia. But while some caregivers point to specific abilities that contribute to identity, others suggest that the disease itself results in the loved ones “losing their minds/self/identity’ as we stand by and feel helpless.” Interestingly, in this comment, the mind is essentially equated with the self and with identity. Similarly, another poster linked the mind to the self by stating that the disease “is like being given a death sentence for one’s personhood” and yet another said “it is like identity theft only more complete and unrelenting.” These posters, then, view identity of their loved one as something tied to personality or ability, both of which are affected by dementia. This effect, then, causes the dementia patient to lose his or her identity completely.

“This disease has totally changed him”

A similar yet distinct view in the posts suggested that dementia patients are a “different person” rather than a lost person. In this case, the caregivers do not claim that the loved one has no personality or identity, but rather that the identity of the loved one is merely changed from what it was before. One poster wrote a long list of identities her mother-in-law used to be (shortened here):

If my MIL was who she was before this disease reared its ugly head, she would still be in the home she loves (without forgetting how to cook for herself, or turn the burners off when she is done), would still be running her household efficiently (without getting 6+ months behind in her bills and having her utilities turned off)...She would still be socializing...She would not have to be in a state of frustration all of the time, because her life would continue just as it had been. She would not have to pack her belongings each day, believing she is going "home" tomorrow...Yes, she is still my beloved Mother-in-law, Mother of my Hubby, and doting Grandmother to my children...but she is definitely (sic) a different person.

This post illustrates how complete the life change can be when a loved one has Alzheimer’s Disease or dementia; the loved one is no longer the “same person” doing the same activities as he or she did before the onset of the disease but still the person they know.

A number of caregivers used the phrase “different person” to describe their loved one. Generally this comes off as a kind of mourning for the person their loved one used to be or frustration with the current personality display, but occasionally this view was identified as a coping mechanism:
When it comes to the car and driving my father says especially hurtful/mean
[things] and can get VERY angry. When he asks for the car we tell him it needs
new tires to be inspected etc. (even though I sold it a few weeks ago). This seems
to settle him until the next day when he asks again…This disease has totally
changed my father into a different person and I know he would be horrified if he
understood what he said/did. I try to remind myself of this often.

For some of these caregivers, the fact that their loved one is different can be a way of justifying
the strange and hurtful outbursts common with dementia. For others, it is a way of explaining
that their memories of the loved one do not comport with the patient’s current actions.

Viewing the loved one with dementia as a “different person” also helps caregivers
explain the effect the disease has on themselves and their relationships. One caregiver explains:

I grieve deeply for the finality of the unalterable changes connected to her life.
While making these changes are a drastic and permanent alteration to the universe
of our loved ones; it also alters ours in relationship to how it always “was” and
“used to be” with them. The most basic belongingness, comfort and identity is of
being ourselves at home. Home. We hear the echoes of their lives and how they
lived them. We see this in our heart and mind’s eye without words but with
feelings. Who they were, and who they will never return to be again. This is the
tragedy.

The fact that the patient with dementia is completely different, in this view, helps explain the
personalities changes and helps the caregiver cope, without completely denying the personhood
or identity of the loved one.

Some caregivers work to acknowledge and understand the change in their loved one and
the apparent “different person” with whom they now interact, while still holding on to the person
their loved one “used to be.”

My grandparents live with us for about half the year. I’ve just started noticing
how my Grandma is acting like a kid (playing with toys and coloring books) and
it definitely hurts a lot. I hate to see her suffer like this because I’ve always been
close to her. The best thing you can do is remember who she was, the good times
you had and hold onto those as long as you can. Even though she is a totally
different person now, a little bit of her is still there.

Caregivers in this situation reconcile their view of the loved one’s identity as it was and as it
currently is, while trying not to remove their personhood. In so doing, they are attempting to
deny the dichotomy between “same” and “different” – their loved one is a different person in
personality and action, yet the same person in more than just a shell.
“Never write someone off”

Some caregivers, rather than denying their loved one’s identity or considering their new or different identity as a dementia sufferer, insist that their loved one remains who he or she is, despite the dementia. One poster advises, “Never write someone off – there is always a person in there. Even if they don’t know your identity, you know theirs and that affirms their personhood.” By this interpretation, personhood exists in the “other,” not just in the individual. In other words, identity is not personally owned, but is also a product of the memories and actions of those around a person. This construction of identity as socially constructed allows caregivers to hold on to their loved one’s previous identity. Some insist their loved one is “not lost” and retains his or her personhood. For example, one poster wrote:

Be sure to relate with them [dementia patients] as if their own personalities are still present, even when it seems they are just a shell as I’ve heard it put. Each day your LOs live is a part of their identity here on this earth. Who is to say they are empty. Even today, after Pat has been gone for a week, I feel her CARING for me now. Whether it is all in my mind or not, it comforts me to know our LOs have someone there in the moments most needed.

By this interpretation, existence itself is what determines one’s identity. As long as the patient is alive he or she maintains the identity of that loved one in the eyes of family and friends.

Caregivers who insist that their loved one is “not lost” often commented on the need for a more person-centered style of care. One poster lamented the view of patients in some professional settings, asking,

“How is it, if someone is quite elderly or has dementia, they lose their identity? I have often witnessed patient’s (sic) unintentionally treated like an inanimate object, or being without personhood. I often recommend to families to bring photos of their loved one to put about the bed so that staff can see the REAL being inside the body.”

Another poster, concentrating on the importance of preserving a loved one’s identity, observed that “communicating our needs, wishes and feelings is vital” and insisted that “as a carer, it’s important to encourage the person with dementia to communication in whichever way work best for them.” For these caregivers in particular, the view of identity is tied to their actions and caregiving style; because they see the patient as “not gone” and still the loved one they remember, they may be attempting to hold on to the identity or role of the loved one as he or she was before.

In the perspectives in this category, family members care for the patient based on an identity in their own memory in interaction with the body of the patient. These caregivers
manage their family relationships by focusing on what was as a factor in what currently is for the family around the patient.

**Conclusion**

Family caregivers of loved ones with Alzheimer’s Disease or other forms of dementia commonly commented on their interpretation of their loved one’s identity on the anonymous Alzheimer’s Association forums. These caregivers tended to have one of three major approaches to identity of dementia patients: either 1) they considered the patient to have lost his or her identity, 2) they considered the patient to be a different person, ostensibly with a different identity, or 3) they insisted that the loved one maintained his or her own identity in some manner.

How a caregiver viewed his or her loved one was somewhat reflected in their attitudes toward the patient. Those who insisted that the person was “not lost” emphasized communication and person-centered treatment; those who thought of the loved one as a “different person” used that consideration to cope and to understand the different actions of their loved one.

This preliminary study can allow future researchers to use these general pattern outlines to further explore both how caretakers view the identities of their loved ones with dementia, as well as how, if at all, this view manifests in interaction with the patient. Findings can also be used in professional settings, to raise awareness of the complications of identity in cases of dementia, particularly in light of the social construction of the self.

One limitation of this study is the relatively small sample size. The sample size was only 44 messages, which may mean only a small component of the range of views of caregivers. Future studies should consider using multiple message boards, a local support group, or surveys to broaden the range of responses.

Anonymity of the posters was both a benefit and a drawback. On one hand, having anonymity in posting may make posters feel more comfortable being fully honest without risk to being seen as careless or mean to their family member (Fisher, 1993). On the other hand, we still can’t guarantee full honesty as even anonymous people manage their public performances of proper caregivers. Further, because of the nature of our collection, we were unable to ask follow-up questions to clarify posters’ views on their loved one’s identity. We could only rely on what they wrote at one moment of their lives.

To resolve both potential limitations, we encourage future researchers to conduct interviews or surveys that allow for a more holistic and focused perspective on the range of views about identity of dementia patients by their caregivers. In particular, we encourage interviews to understand the potential dialectical tensions that may occur when caregivers both love their family member while also feeling frustration, anger, or even resentment at their loss of relational identity, tied to ambiguous loss.

We further recommend that future research consider how these issues connect to the caregiver’s relationship with other family members in the system. How do family groups
communicate together about the identity and care management of the dementia sufferer? How do family members construct the identity of the caregiver as well as the patient?

Given that millions of Americans are suffering from dementia-related illnesses, leading to countless more family members connected to this body of illnesses, more communication research must be done to better understand the complicated relational dynamics that surround the stress and loving care that go into managing family and individual identity in ambiguous loss.
References


Foreign Policy Rhetoric in the 1992 Presidential Campaign: Bill Clinton’s Exceptionalist Jeremiad

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ABSTRACT

This essay examines presidential candidate Bill Clinton’s rhetoric regarding America’s role in the world during the 1992 presidential campaign. Despite the fact that foreign policy was George H.W. Bush’s strength during the campaign, candidate Clinton was able to develop a coherent vision for America’s role in the world that he carried into his presidency. I argue he did so by fusing together the American exceptionalist missions of exemplar and intervention. In doing so, Clinton altered a tension embedded in debates over U.S. foreign policy rhetoric. To further differentiate his candidacy from President Bush, Clinton encased this discourse within a secular jeremiad that offered Clinton the opportunity to attack President Bush on the one hand, while articulating his own vision for American domestic and international affairs.

Keywords: foreign policy rhetoric, campaign rhetoric, Bill Clinton, jeremiad, presidential rhetoric

Introduction

Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger (1994) observed in his sweeping and masterful history of international relations, Diplomacy, that American foreign policy and its accompanying rhetoric has always had at its heart a tension between those who would argue that “America serves its values best by perfecting democracy at home, thereby acting as a beacon for the rest of mankind” with those that maintain “America’s values impose on it an obligation to crusade for them around the world” (p. 17). These two divergent approaches to U.S. foreign policy—known as the mission of exemplar and mission of intervention—flow from a similar belief structure in America’s exceptionalism (see Edwards, 2008; McCartney, 2006; McCrisken, 2003; McDougall, 1997; Merk, 1995). The tension Kissinger noted stems from U.S. foreign policy makers largely diverging and debating on how the United States should enact its status as an exceptional nation. The tension between these two approaches is particularly evident during crises in international affairs where the United States actively debates what its true role in the world should be. This tension can be readily found in debates over the Mexican War, the Annexation of the Philippines, the League of Nations Debate, and the post-World War II debate.
After the end of the Cold War this tension was also readily apparent. Shawn and Trevor Parry-Giles (2002) demonstrated the 1990s were a time of great anxiety both nationally and internationally because of the constant flux and transformation of the international environment. Historian Stanley Hoffman (1989) noted the end of the Cold War juncture meant that the United States had to “rethink its role in the world, just as it was forced to do by the cataclysmic changes that followed the end of the Second World War” (p. 84). H.W. Brands (1998a) suggested there was a great crisis in American thinking about its role in the world in the 1990s because of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Former Secretary of State Madeline Albright (2005) confirmed that argument in a talk she gave at Hofstra University. According to Secretary Albright, concern over what America’s role in the world would be was the fundamental foreign policy problem the Clinton administration faced during the 1992 presidential campaign and when it took office in 1993. Without the USSR, the U.S. had lost its primary mission for its foreign policy. While the United States was now the sole superpower, America’s foreign policy establishment openly debated what the post-Cold War environment would look like and how should the U.S. position itself in this environment. Clearly, the United States faced an exigency regarding its role in the world after the end of the Cold War.

This paper examines how presidential candidate Bill Clinton rhetorically navigated this rhetorical exigency during the 1992 presidential campaign. Examining Clinton’s discourse in the 1992 presidential campaign is important for several reasons. First, there is a plethora of research on campaign discourse that surrounds political ads, economic issues, debates, new media, voter participation, and other subjects. Yet the focus on American foreign policy as a campaign issue continues to be one of the least developed areas within the literature surrounding presidential campaign discourse. Understanding how Clinton discussed America’s role in the world can serve as a basis for future studies of the subject. Concomitantly, the 1992 presidential election can be considered particularly important. For one, it marks one of the great transition periods within the history of U.S. international relations. Most of these transition periods are not discussed in a comprehensive fashion. Scholarship on foreign policy rhetoric tends to focus on a specific event, not a general transition period from one era to the next (for an exception see Schonberg, 2003). This study provides an opportunity to mine what the arguments were of this transition period and how those arguments have evolved over time. Third, the 1992 presidential election was the first presidential election in the post-Cold War era, a time of great transition and anxiety for the United States regarding its foreign policy. However, there is little discussion of this important transition period when discussing the 1992 election. The focus primarily is on the economic recession, the scandals of Bill Clinton, the third-party run of Ross Perot. However, the rhetoric of candidate Clinton had a profound effect on how he would set America’s foreign policy course for the next 8 years. The issues Clinton discussed are still part of the international affairs landscape today. Finally, examining candidate Clinton’s discourse offers a clear opportunity to demonstrate how candidate Clinton fused the narratives of American exceptionalism together to justify his foreign policy positions. Traditionally, those narratives are held apart by separate camps. Clinton fused them together and altered a tension embedded within American
exceptionalism. By studying how Clinton did this in the 1992 presidential campaign can inform how future presidents may engage in similar rhetorical arguments when constructing America’s role in the world.

In this essay, I argue that Clinton consistently maintained the United States must continue its role as world leader. He did so by tailoring America’s exceptionalist narratives to meet the needs of America’s post-Cold War environment. Specifically, Clinton fused America’s exceptionalist narratives of exemplar and intervention together (I explain what those narratives are composed of in the next section). In fusing these missions together, the future president altered a traditional tension within American exceptionalism to work for him rather than against him. Furthermore, I maintain that Clinton conducted and couched this exceptionalist fusion within a secular jeremiadic logic.

To make this argument, this essay proceeds in three parts. First, I provide a brief outline on the rhetoric of American exceptionalism, particularly as it relates to U.S. foreign policy. Second, I outline the debate surrounding America’s role in the world amongst pundits, policymakers, and politicians. Third, I analyze five major speeches Clinton gave during the 1992 campaign to unpack his exceptionalist logic. Those speeches were Clinton’s announcement address, his three “New Covenant” speeches at Georgetown University that outlined his vision for the presidency, and his nomination acceptance address at the 1992 Democratic National Convention. I use those specific speeches because they were the major policy speeches Clinton made during the campaign outlining his vision for the presidency. Finally, I discuss some implications concerning Bill Clinton’s legacy and American exceptionalism.

The Rhetoric of American Exceptionalism

The arguments made about the U.S. role in the world are largely structured by its exceptionalist tradition (Edwards, 2008). According to this tradition, the United States views itself as a unique and superior state when compared with others. Alexis de Tocqueville (1830/1975) first used the term exceptional to describe America, but its actual roots can be found in colonial pronouncements. Most famously, Puritan leader John Winthrop declared the Massachusetts Bay Colony would be a “new Israel” and a “shining city upon a hill” that would serve as a beacon of hope for the entire world to admire and emulate (qtd in McCrisken, 2003, p. 5). Over one hundred years later, Thomas Paine stated in Common Sense that America had the power to “begin the world over again.” This power led many to believe that through America’s providential nature, it could escape the trappings of monarchy, hereditary elites, and all of the other ills that plagued Europe in the late eighteenth century.

Generally, three basic tenets make up America’s belief that it is a chosen nation. The first precept is the United States is a special nation with a special destiny, which other states will want to emulate (McCriskan, 2003). This belief is rooted in colonial declarations where public officials forged the idea that God chose the United States for a special role in history. This principle is engrained in the American psyche. In foreign policy, this precept grounds the U.S.
argument that its role in the world is always performed with good intentions. Second, proponents of American exceptionalism proclaim that the United States is qualitatively different from the Old World or Europe. Corrupt European governments exploited their own people and sought to dominate peoples abroad solely to increase their power (McCrisken, 2003). The settlers of the New World escaped this political environment, travelling to a place they imagined as a virgin land where people could build upon ideas, values, and principles untried in other parts of the globe. The U.S. Constitution embodies these principles, providing America the structure it needed to develop into the greatest republican society in the world while escaping the corruption and discord found in European politics (Hofstader, 1948). From this claim, the United States justifies that it can remain distinct from other regions. Third and finally, it is the belief of exceptionalists the United States can escape the problems that eventually plague all states. All great nations are destined to rise and fall. But America’s founders argued it could escape this natural national devolution because of its unique geography, system of government, and Divine Providence. America is exceptional “not for what it is, but what it could be” (McCrisken, 2003, p. 8). Although a perfect union is never possible within the United States or in any nation, because it is always attempting to form a “more perfect union,” its exceptional quality is never fully complete. This distinctiveness and superiority of the United States allows it to continually strive to better itself and the world. According to this logic, America will never experience devolution of its power. This reasoning serves as the basis for the United States to declare it knows what is best for the world.

Taken together, these basic tenets of exceptionalism are used by political leaders to declare America is “an extraordinary nation with a special role to play in human history” (McCrisken, 2003, p. 1). In foreign policy matters, this exceptionalist logic functions to give Americans “order to their vision of the world and defining their place in it” (Hunt, 1988, p. 15). In essence, American exceptionalism defines how the United States sees itself in the international order and American presidential candidates and presidents largely adhere to these basic premises (Campbell & Jamieson, 2009; McCartney, 2006; McEvoy-Levy, 2001). That said there have been significant differences amongst political figures as to how the United States should enact these exceptional qualities, particularly in presidential elections (i.e. McKinley and Bryan in 1896 and 1900). These differences have led to the creation of two distinct narratives of what America’s role in the world should be: the mission of exemplar and the mission of intervention (see Baritz, 1985; Lipset, 1996; McCartney, 2004; Madsen, 1998; Merk, 1995).

Proponents of the mission of exemplar define America’s role in the world as “standing apart from the world and serving merely as a model of social and political possibility” (McCartney, 2004, p. 401). Activities that create this exceptional model of “social and political possibility” include perfecting American institutions, increasing material prosperity, integrating diverse populations into one America, and continuing to strive for more civil rights. By doing these things, the United States demonstrates its exceptional quality and becomes a symbol for others to emulate. Proponents of this mission further argue that achieving and maintaining an exemplar status is a full time job; to do more than that (such as meddling in the affairs of other
states) would put an undue burden upon the American people. As H.W. Brands (1998b) warned, “in attempting to save the world, and probably failing, America could risk losing its democratic soul” (p. viii). For adherents of the exemplar worldview, the United States stands as a beacon of freedom, but it should not involve itself in the political or military battles of other states, lest it infect America’s body politic. Thus, the mission of exemplar acts as a constraint upon getting heavily involved with other nation-states. This narrative largely dominated the foreign policy discourse of presidents such as Washington, Jefferson, Monroe, Quincy Adams, Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover, while also serving as the foundation for isolationist arguments in the interregnum between World Wars I and II (Baritz, 1985; McCartney, 2004; McEvoy-Levy, 2001).

Around the turn of the 20th century, American ambitions in international affairs began to change. Leaders advocated a new mission—intervention—should guide U.S. decisions in foreign policy matters. Proponents of this mission, like the exemplarists, hold the United States is exceptional. But unlike these advocates they believe that America validates its exceptional nature by active engagement with the world in all spheres of political, social, economic, and cultural life (Bostdorff, 1987). These advocates included presidents such as Theodore Roosevelt, Wilson, and every president since Franklin Roosevelt. These interventionists argued exemplarists were naïve in thinking the United States could isolate itself from the world. The growth of American power at the turn of the twentieth century and the increasing interconnectedness of the world convinced these leaders America’s exceptionalist heritage is best demonstrated by engaging and leading humanity. According to the interventionist logic, our “special role” to play was to be a leader in helping the world progress toward greater democracy, freedom, human rights, free markets, etc., while also defending those that subscribe to similar ideals.

Both worldviews create a rhetorical tension within foreign policy in defining America’s role in the world. This tension grows during times of foreign policy transition. For example, after World War I, there was a large debate among America’s foreign policy establishment as to whether the United States should join the League of Nations. Woodrow Wilson, representing the interventionist tradition, advocated the United States be a fully vested member of the League of Nations; whereas Henry Cabot Lodge, a leader of the exemplarists, viewed full international investment with the League with skepticism (Ambrosius, 1987; Dorsey, 1999; Ikenberry, 2001). The United States failure to join the League of Nations resulted in a return to a “normal” foreign policy, but it did not end the conflict between these advocates.

The end of the Cold War brought with it another debate. Candidate Bill Clinton advanced his view of America’s role in the world through a jeremiadic logic during the 1992 presidential campaign. The American jeremiad is a narrative used by many rhetors throughout U.S. history that has America’s exceptionalism as its basis. Its origins begin with the Puritans arrival in North America (Bercovitch, 1978). As noted earlier, Puritans saw themselves as a covenant-driven people who had come to the New World to establish a new Israel that would be a “shining city upon a hill.” When it was apparent that members of the community or the community at large had committed a large violation of that contract then the community’s minister would issue a
jeremiad that would intertwine spiritual guidance and advice on public affairs (Murphy, 1990). By the time of the American Revolution, all Americans were considered part of a larger covenant, such as Thomas Paine’s exhortation that Americans had the power to begin the world over again. This covenant did not exalt allegiance to God, but rather allegiance to secular documents like the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, while the Founding Fathers became god-like figures who bestowed this covenant upon the American people. From that covenant flowed bountiful expectations for the American people. If the United States stayed true to its convention then its citizens would be given the opportunity to live the American dream. The American dream, another fundamental storyline in the creation of American identity, is predominantly a tale about obtaining material success for one’s self, children, and future generations (Fisher, 1973; Moore & Ragsdale, 1997). According to Hanno Hardt (1998), the creation of the middle class and the ability to achieve this goal is the ultimate fulfillment of the American promise. By becoming part of the middle class and furthering its growth, Americans essentially obtain this unique station in U.S political culture. It provides a coherent identity for American citizens. The stability of the middle class offers a sense of order in a sea of disorder.

As the history of the United States progressed, there would be many political figures who would argue that America and Americans strayed from the founding covenant. Consequently, many Americans would not be able to achieve the American dream and the very identity of its citizens was in peril. As a response, particularly candidates running for the president, rhetors would offer a jeremiad (Ritter, 1980). Presidential candidates, particularly during times of transition and flux within the American political culture, take on the role of prophet and s/he builds their message around three themes (Stoda & Dionisopoulos, 2000). First, the rhetor reminds its audience of their covenant. Second, the prophet describes the deviation from that promise and the consequences created from this deviation. Finally, s/he asserts that if people would repent, reform, and return to the hallmarks of the convention then they can still fulfill their overall mission (Bercovitch, 1978; Murphy, 1990; Stoda & Dionisopoulos, 2000). From the rhetor’s perspective, the need and want to return to being a “chosen people” would unite citizens to achieve traditional goals. However, because the community could never quite go back to the original covenant the jeremiad functions as a means to create a climate of anxiety so that others act to stop the calamity from recurring (Bercovitch, 1978). In doing so, the jeremiadic message offers ways to rid people of their evil and provide for a time of renewal. Ultimately, as Murphy (1990) maintained:

Modern jeremiahs assume that Americans are a chosen people with a special mission to establish a ‘shining city upon a hill.’ They point to the difficulties of the day as evidence that the people have failed to adhere to the values that made them special, to the great principles articulated by patriots such as Jefferson and Lincoln. The evils demonstrate the need to renew the American covenant and to restore the principles of the past so that the promised bright future can become a reality. (p. 404)
In the 1992 presidential campaign, candidate Bill Clinton presented himself as a “modern Jeremiah.”

**To Retreat or Lead the World**

Before we can understand Bill Clinton as a foreign policy Jeremiah it is important to contextualize the post-Cold War environment and the accompanying debate over America’s role in the world. When the Soviet Union collapsed there were a number of political pundits who debated the composition of the post-Cold War setting. Famously, political scientist Francis Fukuyama was one of the first. Fukuyama was invited by his mentor, University of Chicago philosopher Allan Bloom, to give a talk in his lecture series titled the “Decline of the West” (Beinart, 2010, p. 244). In his 1989 talk, given at a NATO meeting on the French Riviera, Fukuyama (1992) boldly declared the end of the Cold War marked the “end of history.” Despite some of the doom and gloom from some of the other speakers, Fukuyama reasoned that liberal democracy and free markets had triumphed over their communist rivals. As a result, it would lead to increased global interdependence and integration, economic prosperity, and generally more freedom within the global environment. Surely there would be bumps along the way to full global integration, but the forces of democracy and free markets had won and the march toward this end of history was an inexorable logic that all states would eventually adopt.

Others involved in this debate were not as optimistic. Robert Kaplan (1994) depicted the post-Cold War arena, not as the end of history, but as the “coming anarchy.” He envisioned a future where small nation-states break down amid dysfunctional domestic and international environments. These breakdowns would create a hornet’s nest of global problems, including conflict dominated by ethnic, religious, and tribal hatreds such as the ones in Somalia, Rwanda, and Bosnia. At the same time, small governments did not have the ability to battle terrorists, drug cartels, and other criminal organizations. These states would be virtual prisoners within their own countries, causing worldwide headaches. The global integration of technology and capital threatened to dislocate thousands, if not millions, of people who were not ready for the global economy, causing extended economic hardship for a world that was still recovering from the 1991 recession. For Kaplan, this anarchic situation threatened to tear world apart, providing innumerable problems to the great powers and international institutions.

Harvard political scientist Samuel Huntington (1996) shared Kaplan’s pessimistic view of the post-Cold War world. Although he argued the world was headed toward a “clash of civilizations” between differing cultural blocs of Western, Sinic, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American, and African communities. For Huntington, these cultural entities replaced the bipolar international order of the Cold War. The fault lines between the civilizations had been masked by Cold War battles between the United States and Soviet Union, but with the breakup of the USSR and other nation-states, the cracks in the world order were ever apparent. Because of their divergent interests, these civilizations, Huntington reasoned, would disagree, sometimes violently, with how to order the civic and social life of the international community.
Princeton political scientist G. John Ikenberry (1996) took a much more optimistic view of the post-Cold War global environment than Kagan and Huntington. For Ikenberry, there was no disintegration of the international environment after the collapse of the Soviet Union. This common assumption was fundamentally false. In reality, the world order created after World War II was alive and well. This order consisted of international organizations and institutions like the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the National Atlantic Treaty Organization, and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (later the World Trade Organization), who were a little older and needed reform, but were ready to serve the needs of the international community. According to Ikenberry (1996), this world order was “more robust than during the Cold War years” (p. 79). For Kaplan and Huntington, the post-Cold War environment was one of disintegration and chaos; whereas for Fukuyama and Ikenberry, it was one of growing integration and interdependence, with some bumps along the way to this inexorable logic.

Amidst this intellectual debate about the composition of the international environment, there was another layer to this debate amongst pundits and politicians about what America’s role in the world should be in this environment. Many pundits questioned and predicted the decline of American power in the post-Cold War environment. The 1990s was a time of considerable angst for many in the United States because politics at the national and international level was in constant flux, causing anxiety about America’s global leadership. Because of the economic recession and America’s inability to deal with domestic and international problems (e.g. the political chaos in Haiti, Yugoslavia, and Somalia), *Time* magazine asked in October of 1992 “is the US in an irreversible decline as the world’s premier power?” The French newspaper *Le Monde* published a twelve-part series on how America’s leadership role in the world and its subsequent power was being diminished at an increasingly rapid rate (Cameron, 2005). British historian Paul Kennedy predicted that the power of the United States would significantly start to wane in the post-Cold War arena as it ran against other powers like Japan, China, and a resurgent and unified Germany (Kennedy, 1988). This predicted decline in American power and its subsequent leadership role would inevitably jeopardize its exceptionalist mission of intervention and American exceptionalism itself.

Accordingly, this debate spilled over into American politics as to what the United States should do to deal with this supposed decline. One side of the debate featured prominent foreign policy voices calling for the United States to return to a more “normal” American foreign policy (i.e. return to its exemplar role). Amongst the most vociferous advocates of this position was former United Nations Ambassador during the Reagan Administration Jeanne Kirkpatrick (1990; 1991) and the stalwart neoconservative thinker Irving Kristol. Once the Soviet Union had collapsed Kirkpatrick and Kristol, as Peter Beinart put it (2010), “let out a sigh of relief and declared that it was time for America to become, in Kirkpatrick’s words “a normal country in a normal time” (p. 295). The United States had, according to Kristol and Kirkpatrick, been on the battlefield for too long. Accordingly, America’s house was in disorder, its domestic community
was suffering, and the economy needed to be tended. America did not need to go looking for “more armies to slay” (Beinart, 2010, p. 295).

Three specific reasons oriented the specific debate amongst those who wanted American foreign policy to return to normal. First, the United States did not have the financial resources to continue its superpower role. As Paul Kennedy (1988) attempted to demonstrate in his book, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, all great empires eventually experienced imperial overstretch and collapsed from within. Because of its battles with the Soviet Union, the United States did not have the financial wherewithal to go around the world combatting additional enemies. The Reagan administration had driven up debt and deficits too far and too fast. The end of the Cold War provided the opportunity for America to get its economic house in order and stop trying to police the global neighborhoods.

Additionally, America not only lacked financial resources to continue its interventionist mission, but it also lacked the basic will to do so. American foreign policy elites were convinced that the United States would not spend its treasure, let alone shed its blood in the absence of some great foreign menace. Instead, these exemplarists argued for disbanding NATO, getting American troops out of Asia and Europe, withdrawing from the United Nations, and cutting defense spending. As Irving Kristol (1990) put it, “there are theorists who would happily burden us with the mission of monitoring and maintaining the Middle East, Asia, etc. . . . We are just not going to be that kind of imperial power . . . The American people violently reject any such scenario” (p. 23).

Finally, America lacked the wisdom to continue its interventionist mission. The United States should not try to convert the world to its particular ideology, lest it go the way of the Soviet Union. Rather, they should let nations develop on their own. To demonstrate this point, Jeanne Kirkpatrick and Irving Kristol both applauded the Bush administration for standing by while the Soviets tried to crush Lithuania’s fledgling democracy. Furthermore, Kristol vociferously denounced the efforts of Bush administration officials to spread democracy to the Ukraine or any other Eastern European country (Beinart, 2010). The United States did not have the knowledge and wherewithal to be imposing itself into every domestic situation across the world.

The above exemplarist arguments were soon taken up by Republicans and Democrats within the 1992 presidential election. For example, Republican presidential candidate Pat Buchanan largely echoed Kirkpatrick and Kristol’s points of view. Buchanan argued the United States had won the Cold War and now it was time to come home. The U.S. should get out of the United Nations and NATO, remove its troops from foreign countries, and disentangle itself from the world. Buchanan’s ideas were also reflected by some Democratic presidential candidates such as Virginia Governor Douglas Wilder and Iowa Senator Tom Harkin who accused the Bush administration of spending too much time on foreign affairs and ignoring the domestic arena. It was time, as Kirkpatrick maintained, for the United States to come home and tend to its own household first and deal with any international problems a distant second (Ornstein, 1992).

On the other side of this debate, there were those who argued that the United States must maintain its traditional leadership role that it had held since the end of World War II. One of the
largest advocates of said position was columnist Charles Krauthammer. While Jeanne Kirkpatrick wanted to come home, Krauthammer wanted to stay on patrol. The world, according to Krauthammer, still contained a proliferation of dangers such as: rogue states (i.e. Saddam Hussein’s Iraq), terrorists, and narco-states like Venezuela. The United States, in Krauthammer’s worldview as well as others, need to be even more vigilant than ever (Beinart, 2010).

More importantly, however, was the removal of the Soviet Union provided the United States the opportunity to make and transform the world in its own image. For example, William Kristol (Irving Kristol’s son) and Robert Kagan, advocated throughout the 1990s, for something they called “benevolent hegemony.” For Kristol and Kagan (1996) the world had never known a greater power than the United States who did not want to readily wield that power to dominate other states. Because of this benevolence toward states—America’s lack of willingness to use its power solely for its own interests—the United States must maintain its hegemonic interventionist role. Only through American intervention can the world maintain its balance and its structure. The United States being on patrol and being active was especially important in a global environment without clear guideposts. The United States provided stability without the fear that it would be an empire like previous states in history. Further integration and involvement was needed for the continued stabilization of the world as it dealt a time of immense transition, while at the same time this maintained American dominance in all areas: military, economic, political, cultural, and socially.

The interventionist rhetoric of pundits like Krauthammer, William Kristol, and Kagan, did not totally spill over into the 1992 presidential campaign. Both George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton opposed abandoning America’s post-World War II leadership role. However, Clinton took a unique rhetorical position in trying to navigating this overall debate. Clinton argued through a secular jeremiad that U.S. leadership was predicated on it getting its house in order at home. The mission of intervention flowed from the mission of exemplar in Clinton’s campaign and subsequent presidential rhetoric. Only through restoring the U.S. as an example for the world to emulate could it maintain and extend its interventionism.

Candidate Clinton’s Foreign Policy Jeremiad

During the campaign candidate Clinton educated Americans on what the true mission of America and the American government should be. Procter and Ritter Procter and Ritter (1996) call this element of the jeremiad “the promise.” The promise is typically related to our past, our heritage and those who had been exemplars of that promise. Interpreting the promise in the right way allows rhetors to link their present policies with the “historic purpose of the nation” (p. 5). In his announcement address seeking the presidency, Clinton (1991a) stated that at Georgetown he had a professor “who taught me that America was the greatest country in the world because our people believed in and acted on two simple ideas: first that the future can be better than the present; and second that each of us has a personal responsibility to make it so” (para. 12). The job of government, candidate Clinton (1991a) argued, was “to create more opportunity. The
people’s responsibility is to make the most of it” (para. 2). For Clinton, the “promise” of America was that its leaders continued to look forward; it continually progressed to become a “more perfect union.” The job of America’s leaders and government was to enact policies that would “create more opportunity” for Americans to obtain the American dream, which would perpetuate America’s exceptional status.

To assure this promise would be there for future generations, Clinton (1991a) asserted his primary responsibility would be to “keep America strong and safe from foreign dangers . . . but we cannot build a safe and secure world unless we can make America strong at home. It is our ability to take care of our own at home that gives us the strength to stand up for what we believe around the world” (para. 13). To drive that point home Clinton (1991a) maintained the demise of the Soviet Union provided an important lesson for all Americans. As he put it “the historic events in recent months teach us an important lesson: National security begins at home: For the Soviet Empire never lost to us on the field of battle. Their system rotted from the inside out, from economic, political, and spiritual failure” (para. 10). Here, candidate Clinton directly linked U.S. foreign and domestic policy together. Candidate Clinton asserted our status as an exemplar nation was the basis for American global leadership abroad. If that exemplar mission was damaged in some way, then U.S. global leadership and the very nature of its exceptionalism was in danger. Furthermore, by linking the mission of exemplar with an interventionist role in world affairs Clinton rhetorically modified an inherent tension in American exceptionalism. During other foreign policy transitions in American history, exemplarists and interventionists were traditionally odds with each other (i.e. the League of Nations debate). Proponents for each side carried out fierce debates as to what America’s true role in the world should be. For candidate Clinton, in a new global economy, this old debate did not apply; “national security begins at home.” By implication this meant that in a post-Cold War environment, the missions of American exceptionalism must be fused together. America’s role in the world, its leadership, was predicated on what occurred in the domestic sphere. To lead the world, the United States needed to “take care of its own at home.” Clinton’s history lesson about the “Soviet Empire” proved that maxim to be true. The Soviet Union did not lie on the dustbin of history because of battlefield losses. Rather, it “rotted from the inside out” because it did not pay attention to its domestic sphere. Consequently, the Soviets were no longer a superpower and a world leader. According to Clinton’s reasoning, the same future awaited the United States if it did not enact policies that facilitated the American dream. Thus, America’s true foreign policy mission was to create more opportunity for the dream to be achieved. By being strong at home, the United States could then maintain and extend the leadership role it achieved after World War II. Consequently, Clinton’s rhetoric then extended, but modified American exceptionalism.

However, candidate Clinton (1991b) viewed America’s foreign policy mission and its subsequent leadership role in the world as being in grave danger. As he put it:

in the last three years, we’ve seen the Berlin wall come down, Germany reunify, all of Eastern Europe abandon communism, a coup in the Soviet Union fall, and the Soviet Union itself disintegrate, liberating the Baltics and other republics . . . America should be celebrating today. All around the world, the American dream is ascendant . . . Yet today
we’re not celebrating. Why? Because all of us fear deep down inside that even as the American dream reigns supreme abroad, it’s dying here at home. We’re losing jobs and wasting opportunities. (para. 8)

As a result of losing the American dream, the United States was “losing America’s leadership in the world because we’re losing the American dream right here at home.” The end of the Cold War marked a triumphant period for U.S. foreign policy. American and Western values appeared to be ascendant. As noted earlier, Francis Fukuyama (1992) famously stated the end of the Cold War marked the end of history because the great ideologies of communism and socialism had lost to the forces of free markets and democracy. America’s exportation of democracy and the “American dream” abroad was finally coming to fruition all across the globe. There were more free-market democracies in the post-Cold War than in the history of humankind. The United States was triumphant. Yet the world the United States had built was one where it could no longer maintain “its leadership in the world.” Clinton’s previous discussion of the Soviet Union and his allusions to it above suggested the United States was in the early stages of becoming the next Soviet Union, unless America woke up to the signs of its own decay. Without clear intervention, the providential covenant established over three hundred years ago would disappear. Subsequently, the United States would be merely another nation-state.

During his presidential campaign, candidate Clinton openly laid the blame for the United States’ decay with the Reagan and subsequent Bush administration, along with Republican congressional leadership. Clinton’s rhetoric outlined a myriad of problems President Bush and Republicans created, causing the United States to stray from its founding covenant. For example, Clinton (1991a) argued President Bush “devoted his time and energy to foreign concerns and ignored dire problems here at home” (para. 4). According to Clinton, Bush paid more attention to international troubles resulting from the massive post-Cold War changes than he did on trying to get the United States out of its economic recession. The president had forgotten the primary lesson of the Soviet Union’s collapse: “The Soviet Union collapsed from the inside out—from economic, political, and spiritual failure” (1991b, para. 2). These specific “economic, political, and spiritual failures began with Bush being “caught in the grip of a failed economic theory” (Clinton, 1992, para. 21). This theory—supply side economics—produced during the Reagan administration and carried over with the Bush presidency fashioned an era when America’s capitalists “have exalted private gain over public obligation, special interest over the common good, wealth and fame over work and family” (Clinton, 1992, para. 21). During the 1980s and early 1990s, the president’s economic policies “ushered in a gilded age of greed and selfishness, of irresponsibility and excess, and of neglect” (1991b, para. 14). This “gilded age” saw “S&L crooks steal billions of dollars in other people’s money. Pentagon consultants and HUD contractors stole from the taxpayers,” while “many big corporate executives raised their own salaries even when their own companies were losing money and their workers were being put into the unemployment lines” (Clinton, 1991c, para. 6). Clinton further asserted “for 12 years, the Republicans have been telling us that America’s problems aren’t their problem. They washed their hands of responsibility for the economy and education and health
care and social policy and turned it over to fifty states and a thousand points of light.” (1991a, p. 2). Instead of helping America’s middle class, Bush was actually harming it by raising “taxes on the people driving pickup trucks” and lowering “taxes on the people riding in limousines” (Clinton, 1992, para. 15).

As a result of President Bush’s ignoring America’s domestic problems, the United States suffered a number of different consequences. Economically, Clinton (1992) asserted, America was “falling behind . . . We have gone from first to 13th in the world in wages since Ronald Reagan and Bush have been in office” (para. 16). America’s CEOs now were “paid about 100 times as the average worker,” which was four times higher than Germany which as at “23 to 1” and Japan who was at “17 to 1” (Clinton, 1991c, para. 7). The collapse in wages had the greatest impact on America’s middle class. For Clinton, the middle class were “forgotten” during the Reagan-Bush years (Clinton, 1991c, para. 7). During the Bush administration, “middle class people are spending more hours on the job, spending less time with their children, bringing home a smaller paycheck to pay more for health care and housing and education. Our streets are meaner, our families are broken, our health care is the costliest in the world and we get less for it” (1991c, para. 10). Because of President Reagan and Bush’s “gilded age” economic policies, candidate Clinton (1991c), argued “the very fiber of our nation is breaking down: Families are coming apart, kids are dropping out of school, drugs, and crime dominate our streets (para. 10).” Even in U.S. foreign affairs, supposedly President Bush’s strength and expertise, American leadership suffered. Because of “the longest economic slump since World War II . . . elements in both parties now want America to respond to the collapse of communism and a crippling recession at home by retreating from the world” (Clinton, 1991d, para. 3). Clinton (1991a) pointed out that America’s global leadership was so imperiled that the “Japanese prime minister actually said he felt sympathy for the United States” (para. 14). Ultimately, President Bush provided “no national vision, no national partnership, no national leadership” that would restore the United States and the American dream for millions of Americans (Clinton, 1991a, para. 5).

In the above passages, Clinton analogized the Reagan and Bush years of the 1980s and 1990s to America of the 1880s and the 1890s. Historical analogies are often imperfect vehicles for making judgments about the present from the past. However, rhetors consistently use historical analogies to facilitate judgment about present situations. They evoke perceived lessons of past experience that can legitimize certain policy options and delegitimize others (Edwards, 2007; Paris, 2002). Clinton’s contextual use of the gilded age analogy certainly suggested his attempts to delegitimize Reagan-Bush economic policy. The “Gilded Age,” a period in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, particularly the 1880s and 1890s, signaled the rise of the modern American industrial economy. The American economy expanded more rapidly than at any other time in U.S. history. Industrial production rose faster than any other nation. The United States began to challenge great powers, like Great Britain, for global economic supremacy. Moreover, it also marked the rise of the great capitalists of American industry. Men like Cornelius Vanderbilt, John Rockefeller, Andrew Mellon, Andrew Carnegie, and J.P. Morgan became extremely wealthy and demonstrated that opulence. However, there were immense
social inequities that came with the Gilded Age. The expansion of the economy and the subsequent wealth was done without safeguards for the American worker. Extreme wealth for men like Vanderbilt, Rockefeller, Carnegie, Mellon, and Morgan was obtained on the backs of American labor. Unions were busted; worker protests were violently put down. Vanderbilt, Rockefeller, Carnegie, and the like grew extremely wealthy, while laborers and farmers grew poorer. American presidents offered little in the way of legislation to curb the excesses of American industry (Edwards, 2005; Hopkins, 1940). For Clinton, the 1980s and the 1990s, were America’s new “gilded age.” The modern industrial economy was replaced by supply-side economics. “S&L crooks,” “Pentagon and HUD contractors,” and “corporate executives” replaced the greater robber-barons of Vanderbilt, Rockefeller, and Morgan. By implication President Reagan and President Bush were akin to the do-nothing presidencies for American workers of the 1880s and 1890s. The consequences of Reagan and Bush’s Gilded Age were certainly not the violence that broke out between American workers and corporations during the 1880s and 1890s, but they were just as dire. The Reagan-Bush Gilded Age pushed down wages for middle-class families, while the gap between the average worker and corporate executives rose. Middle-class families worked longer hours for less pay and less time spent with their families. They spent more on housing, education, and health care, while receiving less of it, than at any time in American history. Under the Reagan-Bush Gilded Age, the American middle class was being squeezed from all sides. Obtaining and maintaining middle-class status proved to be elusive than ever. By analogizing the Reagan-Bush years with the Gilded Age, Clinton attempted to delegitimize Bush’s economic policy; further suggesting those presidential policies were destroying the American dream and subsequently American exceptionalism. Part of the American covenant is the ability of every American to be given the opportunity to achieve the American dream. Obtaining, maintaining, and expanding middle class status is a barometer of the health of that narrative. For Clinton, the Reagan-Bush years narrowed, not expanded that dream for millions of Americans. As a result, if the United States could not maintain and expand its middle class then the United States would lose its status as an example for other nations to emulate, endangering its core identity as a chosen nation.

Moreover, the Reagan-Bush gilded age analogy implied America’s role as a world leader was in peril. Recall, Clinton argued U.S. global leadership flowed from “our ability to take care of our own at home that gives us the strength to stand up for what we believe around the world.” President Bush’s inability to “take care of our own at home” negatively impacted the United States’ ability to lead on international issues. America’s economic struggles had grown so bad that the Japanese prime minister felt “sympathy” for the United States and elements from the Democratic and Republican parties wanted the United States to “retreat from the world.” The Reagan-Bush years led America away from its founding covenant, which put its foreign policy leadership in danger. Ultimately, Clinton’s rhetoric cast a negative light on the Reagan-Bush era, setting the stage for a resetting and restoring of the American covenant, which would then strengthen its leadership abroad.
While the gilded age produced a number of economic inequities within the United States, it also ushered in movements to offer a different vision for American significantly reform its economic, social, and spiritual covenant. American workers began to demand better wages, shorter hours, and better working conditions. The women’s suffrage movement accelerated as more women entered the workforce and demanded to have their voice heard at the ballot box. The Third Great Awakening also accelerated during the Gilded Age. Organizations such as the YMCA and the Salvation Army were all established to help combat societal ills created by the rapid expansion of American industry (Edwards, 2005; Hopkins, 1940). Although there was no great social movement that appeared when Clinton ran for the presidency in 1992, candidate Clinton offered himself as a modern Jeremiah who could reset and restore America’s covenant, which would reify American exceptionalism and its global leadership.

Clinton’s prophetic vision came through his campaign theme of a “New Covenant.” Candidate Clinton wanted to re-establish the social contract between the American government and its citizens through shared responsibility, opportunity, and community. The campaign theme of “New Covenant” took on a whole host of different principles that Clinton assured the American people would restore its promise. One of the fundamental tenets Clinton advanced was to remove the false choice policymakers created in discussing domestic and international policy. Clinton asserted U.S. global leadership flowed from its ability to take care of its own house at home. Only when that was finished could the United States build, broaden, maintain, and defend the rest of the houses in America’s global neighborhood. Clinton (1991d) took that idea one step further in his “New Covenant on American Security” speech at Georgetown. In that address, Clinton emphatically asserted “foreign and domestic policy are inseparable in today’s world. If we’re not strong at home, we can’t lead the world we’ve done so much to make. And if withdraw from the world, it will hurt us economically at home” (para. 2). Clinton made two rhetorical moves in this short passage. Aside from America’s role in the world flowing from one sphere to the next, his linkage of domestic and foreign policy was part of his larger campaign’s emphasis on renewing U.S. competition in an ever-broadening global economy. During his campaign and his presidency, Clinton continually asserted globalization was the dominant paradigm in global affairs (Edwards, 2008). Accordingly, the United States cannot separate its domestic sphere from the international. The U.S. must maintain both for the American economy to grow, create a broader form of prosperity for all, and expand the middle class, which would give greater access to the American Dream at home and also abroad. By recognizing this new reality of the global economy, Americans better prepare themselves to compete on a much larger scale, deal with the problems that come from that competition, but harness the larger benefits that can be created with new markets and new customers. This new reality provides a means for the United States to extend its exemplar status as the economic envy of the world, which then warrants it to maintain its global leadership.

Additionally, linking the two policy spheres sent a message to American isolationists that their desire to retreat from the world was not an option in a new global economy. Recall, our description of the debate that broke out about what America’s role in the world should be in a
post-Cold War world. Politicians on both the left and the right argued the United States had won the Cold War and should begin to retrench, going back to a more “normal” foreign policy that was free of foreign entanglements. For Clinton, this traditionalist, non-interventionist, neo-isolationist position was untenable in this new era of globalization. It marked a position of regression, not progression and directly imperiled America’s role as world leader, a role it had held for well over forty years. By declaring domestic and foreign policy were linked, he offered a progression in thinking about American politics and a vision for how the United States would conduct themselves in this new global environment. The United States would not historically regress. Rather, under a Clinton presidency they would extend their leadership position further that offered to restore America’s economy, the American Dream, and the American covenant.

In arguing for removing the tension between domestic and foreign policy, the president made specific proposals that directly tied into his new vision of the global economy to renewing America’s exemplar status at home and reassert its leadership in the world. Clinton’s “New Covenant” offered proposals for cutting taxes, cutting waste in the federal government, reinventing domestic programs like welfare and social security, and spending more to educate American citizens. As part of this new covenant in foreign policy, Clinton pledged to restructure American military forces to meet the new threats of a post-Cold War world (i.e. nuclear proliferation, ethnic and religious conflict, and environmental threats) and continue to promote democracy abroad. But it was his discussion of economics in American foreign policy that was the centerpiece of his plan to renew America, its leadership abroad, and its basic exceptionalism nature. Clinton (1991d) explained that one of the most important; if not the most important, major challenge facing a new president was to “help lead the world in a new era of global growth” (para. 4). In the 1990s, Clinton (1991d) continued, “international economics is essential and that success in the global economy must be at the core of national security in the 1990s” (para. 6). America’s “economic strength must become a central defining element of our national security policy. We must organize to compete and win in the global economy.” In these short sentences, Clinton brought a new vision to American national security. Up until the post-Cold War era, national security was defined in fairly narrow terms by focusing on weapons systems (i.e. nuclear weapons), military structures, and the strength of the Soviet Union’s military might. International economics were largely left out of a calculus when considering America’s foreign policy strength. For Clinton, this narrow focus was a product of the Cold War, not a post-Cold War era. In an era of globalization where everything and everyone is connected more than ever, economics must be become a part, if not the center, of a nation’s economic policy. To make this national security expansion required someone with a vision that went beyond the immediate campaign. As candidate Clinton (1991c) put it “we need a President, a public and a policy that are not caught in the wars of the past—not World War II, not Vietnam, not the Cold War. What we need to elect in 1992 is not the last President of the 20th century, but the first President of the 21st century” (para. 21). In expanding America’s thinking about national security, Clinton fashioned himself as “the first President of the 21st century.” His rhetoric suggested he was a modern Jeremiah who had the competency to renew American strength at home and abroad.
ELECTING CLINTON WOULD ARREST THE UNITED STATES STRAYING FROM ITS COVENANT AND PROVIDE THE BASIS FOR ITS EXCEPTIONALISM TO BE RESTORED AND EXPANDED INTO A NEW ERA.


CONCLUSIONS

Presidental candidate Bill Clinton crafted his understanding of America’s role in the world in unique and subtle ways. Unlike many of his political opponents, Clinton, like President
Bush, advocated that the United States must maintain and extend its leadership role. However, unlike President Bush, Clinton asserted America’s leadership must begin at home with the power of its example. The presidential candidate argued, couched in a jeremiadic reasoning, President Bush and the Republicans had failed the American people with their economic philosophy; a philosophy that brought ruin to America’s middle class, which in turn endangered America’s mission as an exemplar nation for other states to model. The key to restoring U.S. credibility in the world was for it to revitalize and stabilize its own economy. That stabilization would come through a greater emphasis on education, free trade, and integration with the global economy. Accordingly, the United States’ economy would once again become the engine of global economic growth. That growth would restore its exemplar mission, which would become grounds for U.S. advocacy that it could more easily take on the burdens of its post-World War II role as world leader. By using an exceptionalist jeremiad, Clinton modified American exceptionalism in an important way. Candidate Clinton intertwined the exemplar and interventionist missions together, removing an inherent tension that had been and is still embedded for some, since the early days of the founding era. Clinton’s discourse provides interesting implications and legacies for American foreign policy argument.

First, candidate Clinton’s discourse breaks down the fundamental divide between foreign and domestic issues. Aaron Wildavsky (1966) argued there are “two presidencies,” one in foreign affairs and one in domestic. Typically, policy matters that presidents talk about can be divided into those two spheres. However, Clinton argued this type of thinking is fundamentally out of date. There is no foreign policy or domestic issues in a global economy. Instead, there are only “intermestic” issues that deal with both spheres of presidential politics (Barilleaux, 1985). Certainly, past presidents had discussed how some policies affected both the domestic and foreign policy spheres, but Clinton was really the first president to talk about how all issues can be considered to be intermestic in some way. Clinton’s campaign discourse broke new ground on how to talk about specific issues and laid the groundwork for future presidents to discuss those issues in similar ways.

Additionally, Clinton’s fusion of exceptionalist narratives provides another important implication. As we discussed earlier, traditionally exceptionalists occupy one of two camps: exemplar or interventionist. After World War II, those camps began to be fused together. For example, President Truman (1947) argued in his famous Truman Doctrine speech the United States must intervene in Greece and Turkey to stem the tide of communist aggression, but at the same time these actions would make us safer at home. Clinton became the first president to reverse that logic. In order to maintain our status as a world superpower we must take care of our own economic house first and then that gives us a warrant to maintain and extend our leadership abroad. Thus, Clinton not only removed a fundamental tension within the rhetoric of exceptionalism, but started a new trend by reversing the old Cold War exceptionalist logic. Presidents Bush and Obama have continued this exceptionalist fusion except that Bush reversed Clinton’s logic in light of September 11th and President Obama returned to Clinton’s initial rhetorical fusion (Edwards, 2008; Edwards, 2014). This might indicate that in a post-Cold War
era presidents of different political parties emphasize different arguments when articulating America’s role in the world. It is still too early to tell, but the trends indicate a subtle, but fundamental difference between Republican and Democratic presidential foreign policy rhetoric. More studies must be done to determine if this is the case.

Finally, Clinton’s blending of America’s exceptionalist narratives makes it extremely difficult for any mainstream political figure to argue that the United States can give up its global leadership role. By arguing that the basis for U.S. global leadership and involvement was to be a great example for the world, plus his argument that all political issues have domestic and foreign policy aspects to them, Clinton made it extremely difficult for his opponents to argue the United States needed to return to its “normal” foreign policy of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Future presidential candidates have continued Clinton’s rhetorical groundwork making it extremely difficult for a presidential candidate to make an effective case the United States needs to profoundly alter its foreign policy. Republican presidential candidate Ron Paul attempted to do so in 2008 and 2012, but his following was quite small and his foreign policy arguments gained little traction in America’s political environment. That does not mean the United States might not curtail some of its leadership efforts abroad, but opponents of American intervention may never gain much traction again. Thus, candidate Clinton’s campaign discourse planted the seeds of a rhetorical legacy that continues to influence U.S. foreign policy today.
**References**


Bully or Dupe?

Governor Chris Christie’s Image Repair on the Bridge Lane Closure Scandal

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ABSTRACT

In 2013, two lanes leading to the George Washington Bridge – the busiest in the nation – in Fort Lee, NJ, were closed. In January of 2014, it emerged that Christie’s Deputy Chief of Staff Kelley instigated this problem. Governor Christie was accused of retaliating against Fort Lee’s Mayor Mark Sokolich, who had not endorsed Christie’s re-election bid. Christie fired Kelley, held a press conference, and apologized to Sokolich and the people of Fort Lee. Christie’s primary strategies were mortification and corrective action, but he also used denial, differentiation, minimization, and defeasibility to deal with this situation. Minimization was interesting as Christie attempted to lower expectations for his performance, reducing the offensiveness of his action.

Keywords: Governor Chris Christie, George Washington Bridge, Image Repair, Mortification, Corrective Action; Denial, Minimization, Differentiation, Defeasibility

Introduction

New Jersey Governor Chris Christie faced a serious threat to his image when a scandal concerning lane closings on the George Washington Bridge emerged in 2014. He was accused of being involved in the lane closure. Smith (2014) explained the genesis of the George Washington Bridge lane closure scandal.

In September... the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey closed two of the three lanes that lead to the George Washington Bridge in Fort Lee, across the Hudson from Manhattan. That caused days of massive traffic jams in Fort Lee...

The closures were ordered by David Wildstein, a Christie confidante and the governor’s appointee to the Port Authority, which operates the nation’s busiest bridge.

The lane closures began on September 9, 2013 and lasted through September 13. Reports highlighted children in a school bus that was stuck in traffic, increasing the offensiveness of this...
situation. Furthermore, “Emergency vehicles were delayed in responding to three people with heart problems and a missing toddler, and commuters were left fuming” (Zernikejan, 2014). Early reports blamed a traffic study for the lane closures and in December of 2013 “Mr. Christie mocked the idea that he might have been involved, joking, ‘I actually was the guy working the cones’” (Zernikejan, 2014). Christie dismissed the controversy as “not that big a deal” (Reilly, 2013).

However, these lane closures erupted into a very big deal on January 8, 2014, when it was revealed that “a top Christie aide [Bridget Kelley] had e-mailed David Wildstein at the Port Authority before the closures, telling him, ‘Time for some traffic problems in Fort Lee’” (Smith, 2014). Emails to and from Wildstein were revealed which appeared to gloat over the traffic snarls. Christie came under fire for the lane closings and the disruption that followed; he had, after all, appointed Wildstein to the Port Authority and Bridget Kelley was one of Christie’s top aides. This controversy had implications that extended far beyond the Governor of New Jersey. In 2014, Chris Christie was expected to be a top contender for the Republican presidential nomination, assuming his candidacy was not derailed by the scandal. Of course, it is still early days in the 2016 presidential campaign, but a CNN poll on presidential popularity conducted in December of 2013 found that Christie led Republican politicians and was in a statistical tie with Hillary Clinton (Steinhauser, 2013). Donald Trump captured attention in 2015, but Christie was still invited to participate in the August 8, 2015 Republican primary debate.

Christie held a press conference that lasted over one and three-quarters hours on January 9 to address this scandal. As a governor and a contender for the 2016 presidential election, Christie’s image repair discourse merits scholarly attention. This essay analyzes Christie’s defensive discourse utilizing Image Repair Theory (Benoit, 2015). First, the method is described. Then the criticisms leveled at Christie are identified. This essay works to implement Benoit’s incorporation of Fishbein and Ajzen’s (2010) Theory of Reasoned Action and the concepts of beliefs and values in the analysis (a threat to an image exists when the pertinent audience has a belief that the accused has committed an offensive act). Next, Image Repair Theory will be used to analyze the strategies employed his persuasive discourse. Finally, his defense will be evaluated and implications elucidated.

Method

This essay reports a rhetorical criticism of Governor Chris Christie’s press conference using Image Repair Theory. This approach argues that image, face, or reputation is extremely important for individuals and organizations and discusses strategies for repairing damaged images (Benoit, 2015). Five general strategies of image repair discourse have been identified (Benoit, 2015), three with specific variants or tactics (see Table 1). Each will be discussed in this section.

Table 1. Image Restoration Strategies
Strategy | Key Characteristic | Example
--- | --- | ---
Denial
Simple denial | did not perform act | Tonya Harding denied participating in attack on Nancy Kerrigan
Shift the blame | another performed act | someone else stole your CD, not me
Evasion of Responsibility
Provocation | responded to act of another | I trashed your room because I was mad that you didn’t pick me up after work
Defeasibility | lack of information or ability | late to meeting: wasn’t told new time
Accident | mishap | icy road caused me to lose control of my car
Good Intentions | meant well | I meant to buy you a birthday present, but forgot
Reducing Offensiveness of Event
Bolstering | stress good traits | Clinton boasted of first term successes
Minimization | act not serious | it’s no big deal that I broke your Walkman; it was old and didn’t play well
Differentiation | act less offensive than similar acts | I borrowed your car, I didn’t steal it
Transcendence | more important values | I used up our savings to buy you a present
Attack Accuser | reduce credibility of accuser | Monica Lewinsky said she lied entire life
Compensation | reimburse victim | disabled movie-goers given free passes after denied admission to movie
Corrective Action | plan to solve/prevent recurrence of problem | offer to dry-clean sweater stained by spilled drink
Mortification | apologize | Hugh Grant apologized to E. Hurley
Source: Benoit (1995; 2015)

Denial

Simple denial can take three discrete but related forms. Those accused of wrong-doing may deny that the offensive act occurred, deny that they performed the objectionable act, or deny that the act is harmful. Any of these instantiations of denial, if accepted by the intended audience, can conceivably repair the rhetor’s reputation. Furthermore, a rhetor may also try to
shift the blame. If another person (or group, or organization) actually committed the offensive act, the accused should not be held responsible for that offensive act.

**Evade Responsibility**

This general image repair strategy has four versions or tactics. A rhetor may allege the offensive act was a reasonable response to someone else’s offensive act (typically an act of the alleged victim), and that the rhetor’s response was a reasonable reaction to that provocation. Defeasibility claims that the rhetor lacked the knowledge or ability to avoid committing the offensive act. A rhetor may also argue that the offense occurred by accident. Fourth, the rhetor can claim that the act was actually performed with good intentions.

**Reduce Offensiveness**

There are six different forms of attempting to reduce the apparent offensiveness of the act. First, a rhetor can bolster his or her own image in an attempt to strengthen the audience’s positive feelings toward him or her. Hopefully this will offset the negative feelings that arose from the offensive act. The tactic of minimization suggests that the act in question is not really as offensive as it seems. Differentiation tries to distinguish the act in question from other similar but more offensive actions. In comparison, the act performed by the rhetor may not appear so bad. Transcendence attempts to justify the act by placing it in a more favorable context. A rhetor can attempt to attack the accusers, so as to reduce the credibility of the accusations (or suggest that the victim deserved what happened). The tactic of compensation offers to give the victim money, goods, or services to help reduce the negative feelings toward the rhetor.

**Corrective Action**

Corrective action is a commitment to repair the damage from the offensive act. This general strategy can take two forms. The rhetor can promise to restore the state of affairs before the offensive act or the rhetor can promise to prevent recurrence of the offensive act.

**Mortification**

The last strategy is to admit committing the offensive act and to ask for forgiveness. It is possible that an apparently sincere apology would help restore the rhetor’s image with the intended audience.

Benoit (2015) linked Image Repair Theory with Fishbein and Ajzen’s (2010) Theory of Reasoned Action. According to the Theory of Reasoned Action, attitudes are comprised of beliefs and values. For example, suspicions about Christie were constituted from a belief (that he was involved in the lane closure) and a value (that the disruption from such lane closures is offensive). Image repair discourse is best understood by considering the defense in the context of the accusations. Accusations consist of beliefs and values (the components of an attitude), labeled, respectively, blame and offensiveness by Pomerantz (1978). One who seeks to repair an
image must identify the relevant audience’s attitudes and then attempt to change unfavorable attitudes by changing an unfavorable belief or value or by adding a new and favorable belief or value.

Research has applied Image Repair Theory to discourse in a variety of contexts. Studies have investigated corporate image repair, including rhetorical criticism of defensive messages by Sears (Benoit, 1995b), AT&T (Benoit & Brinson, 1994), USAir (Benoit & Czerwinski, 1997), Firestone (Blaney, Benoit, & Brazeal, 2002), Dow Corning (Brinson & Benoit, 1998), and Texaco (Brinson & Benoit, 1999). Other studies have examined image repair in sports and entertainment, including Hugh Grant (Benoit, 1997), Tiger Woods (Benoit, 2013), Murphy Brown (Benoit & Anderson, 1996), Tanya Harding (Benoit & Hanczor, 1994), Oliver Stone (Benoit & Nill, 1998b), Terrell Owens (Brinson, 2008), and Floyd Landis (Glantz, 2009).

Research has examined international image repair, including the U.S. and Japan (Drumheller & Benoit, 2004), Saudi Arabia and the U.S. (Zhang & Benoit, 2009), and China and SARS (Zhang & Benoit, 2009). Political image repair is another topic of interest, with research focusing on President Bush (Benoit & Henson, 2009), President Reagan (Benoit, Gullifor, & Panici, 1991), Clarence Thomas (Benoit & Nill, 1998b), or President Bill Clinton (Blaney & Benoit, 2001).

Two studies (Benoit, 2006a, 2006b) examined image repair in press conferences and news interviews. For a more detailed review of these topics, see Benoit (2015). This essay employs the strategies postulated by Image Repair Theory as a critical lens to analyze this discourse. Then Christie’s defense will be critically evaluated.

**Critical Analysis of Christie’s Image Repair Discourse**

The unfavorable attitude toward Governor Christie largely stemmed from the accusation that he was responsible for the bridge lane closure. In this case the belief was that Christie was to blame for this event; the value was that the lane closure had negative consequences for those using the bridge. This accusation was supported by two minor additional charges: Christie was a bully and David Wildstein (who actually closed the lanes) was one of Christie’s cronies. Christie’s image repair effort responded to these accusations with six strategies: mortification, corrective action, simple denial, differentiation, minimization, and defeasibility. Each of these strategies will be examined here in turn.

**Mortification**

Benoit (2015) explains that people tend to avoid apologizing for their actions. However, Christie used this strategy in his press conference. Although the simple numbers are less important than the discourse, Christie used the word “apology” or one of its related forms 29 times in this press conference. He said he was “sorry” three times. Christie was attempting to create a new belief here, that he was embarrassed, apologetic, remorseful. He began his statement by saying that:
I’ve come out here today to apologize to the people of New Jersey. I apologize to the people of Fort Lee and I apologize to the members of the state legislature. I am embarrassed and humiliated by the conduct of some of the people on my team. There’s no doubt in my mind that the conduct that they exhibited is completely unacceptable and showed a lack of respect for the appropriate role of government and for the people that were trusted to serve. (All quotations of this image repair taken from Christie, 2014)

Notice that he apologizes for what “come of the people on my team” did, not for what he personally had done; this is important because he denies knowledge of the act.

Christie also addresses those who were directly affected by the lane closing in his discourse:

I believe that all of the people who were affected by this conduct deserve this apology and that’s why I’m giving it to them. I also need to apologize to them for my failure as the governor of this state to understand the true nature of this problem sooner than I did. Notice again that Christie apologizes for his “failure... to understand the true nature of this problem sooner than I did,” not for the lane closures themselves. He follows this apology up by declaring that he will go to Fort Lee that day to apologize to Mayor Sokolich and the people of Fort Lee:

Later today I’m going to be going to Fort Lee, asked to meet with the mayor to apologize to him personally, face to face, and also to apologize to the people of Fort Lee in their town. I think they need to see me do that personally, and I intend to do that later on today. People of those communities for four days were impacted in a completely callous and indifferent way, and I’m going to go and apologize for that.

Christie quite clearly implemented the image repair strategy of mortification in his press conference. He even apologized for making a joke about the lane closures during his December press conference: “I said I’m sorry for that, and I would have never made that joke if I knew the facts that have come forward to me today.” This use of mortification is consistent with his use of denial later (he did not deny the offensive act occurred but he denied that he had instigated it or was aware of it before today).

Note that Christie acknowledged that closing the lanes was an offensive act: “It was an awful, callous, indifferent thing to do.” Four times he declared, “Ultimately I am responsible for what happens under my watch.” He also observed that the gloating emails revealed a “kind of callous indifference” that he did not support. This image repair effort did not attempt to alter the audience’s values (that the act was offensive); the first strategy attempted to create a new belief that he was genuinely sorry for this event (carried out by his underling).

*Corrective Action*
The second component of Christie’s image repair effort was corrective action. He began by creating a new belief, announcing that: “This morning I’ve terminated the employment of Bridget Kelly, effective immediately. I’ve terminated her employment because she lied to me.” He also reported that he had begun the process of questioning his staff about whether other potential problems existed, promising that “if there is additional information that needs to be disclosed, I will do so. If there’s additional actions that need to be taken with my senior staff, I will do so.” He explained, “I believe what they expect of me as the chief executive of this state is when that information comes into my possession, that I consider it and then act as swiftly as possible to remediate whatever ill occurred. That’s what I’ve done today.” So, he fired the staff member who initiated the lane closures and promised to discover whether other abuses occurred and, if so, to correct those as well.

Denial

Christie did not deny that the offensive act, George Washington Bridge lane closures, had occurred. However, faced with these suspicions, he worked to change several beliefs associated with this accusation. Christie denied that he was personally responsible for the lane closures: “I had no knowledge or involvement in this issue, in its planning or it execution.” He repeated this denial, saying that “I had no knowledge of this – of the planning, the execution or anything about it – and I first found out about it after it was over.” He also declared that, “I would never have come out here four or five weeks ago and made a joke about these lane closures if I had ever had an inkling that anyone on my staff would have been so stupid but to be involved.” When asked if he had “authorize[d] this kind of retribution,” he said: “Oh, absolutely not. No. And I knew nothing about this. And until it started to be reported in the papers about the closure, but even then I was told this was a traffic study.” Christie denied that he had instigated the offensive act and he denied that he had known about it before the revelations in January. The Governor had to walk a fine line here. He wanted to change the belief that he had sanctioned (or known about) the lane closure.

In this press conference, he also denied that he was a close friend to David Wildstein, who actually ordered the lane closings:

Well, let me just clear something up about my childhood friend David Wildstein.... I knew who David Wildstein was. I met David on the Tom Kean for governor campaign in 1977. He was a youth volunteer, and so was I. Really, after that time, I completely lost touch with David. We didn’t travel in the same circles in high school.... So we went 23 years without seeing each other, and in the years we did see each other, we passed in the hallways. So I want to clear that up. It doesn’t make a difference except that I think some of the stories (that’ve been written implied) like an emotional relationship and closeness between me and David that doesn’t exist.
This denial reinforces his overall denial of blame, attempting to change the belief that Christie used a crony to retaliate against the major of Fort Lee.

Christie was confronted with the allegation that he was a bully: “Your critics say this reveals that you are a political bully, that your style is payback.” This accusation was relatively minor, but if true it would be consistent with the main accusation that the bridge lanes were closed in an act of retribution. Christie directly denied this accusation, saying “No, I’m not,” and “I am not a bully.” His demeanor throughout the press conference, patient and apologetic, further supported this denial.

**Differentiation**

Christie worked to support his denial of the charge that he was a bully by differentiating his character: “I have very heated discussions and arguments with people in my own party and on the other side of the aisle. I feel passionately about issues. And I don’t hide my emotions from people. I am not a focus-group tested, blow-dried candidate or governor.” He said he was “passionate,” not a bully. Later, he explained that, “I have a very direct, blunt personality. And I understand why some people would then characterize that, especially people who don’t like you, as bullying, but it’s not that.” Here he said I am blunt but not a bully. Here, he tried to undermine the belief that he was a bully by the way he characterized his personality.

**Minimization**

This strategy was implemented in two ways. First, Christie argued that this offensive act was “the exception, it is not the rule, of what’s happened over the last four years in this administration.” He developed this line of defense further when he explained:

I... want the people of New Jersey to know is that this is the exception, not the rule. And they’ve seen that over the last four years with the way I’ve worked and what I’ve done. So I don’t want to fall into the trap of saying, well, this one incident happened, therefore the one incident defines the whole – it does not, just like one employee who’s lied doesn’t determine the character of all the other employees around you.

He minimized the offensive act by arguing that it did not characterize his administration generally.

He also worked to minimize the offensive act by lowering his audience’s expectations. For example, if you think someone promised to loan you $10,000, breaking that promise would appear more offensive than if you thought he or she had promised to loan you $100. Christie explained that “I have repeatedly said to them that while I promise them the best governor’s office I could give them, I could never promise them a perfect governor’s office.” If we expect that people are not perfect and mistakes occur, a mistake might be less offensive: “People, I
think, all across this state understand that human beings are not perfect and mistakes are made” (of course, a pattern of mistakes, or a horrible mistake, could still be seen as offensive). Christie also explained:

This is my job and there are going to be mistakes and there are going to be disappointments. I don’t think there’s a perfect government anywhere in the country, and I certainly never claimed to have one. I claimed to have the best government I could possibly make, but sometimes there are going to be mistakes, and when there are, I have to own up to them and take responsibility and act, and that’s what I’ve done today.

So, the Governor attempted to reduce offensiveness through minimization, reducing his audience’s expectations regarding his performance.

Defeasibility

The final strategy is consistent with his attempt to lower expectations for the audience. Christie observed that “I have 65,000 people working for me every day. And I cannot know what each one of them is doing at every minute.” He elaborated this idea when he argued that “There’s no way that anybody would think that I know about everything that’s going on, not only in every agency of government at all times, but also every independent authority that New Jersey either has on its own or by state – both with New York, with Pennsylvania and with Delaware.” If the Governor cannot know of the acts of 65,000 people, he can hardly be held responsible for those actions. This strategy works well with his attempt to minimize the offensive act, arguing that it was an exception.

Evaluation

The lane closures sounded almost like a schoolboy prank that went very, very wrong. These accusations – that Christie ordered the lane closing, that he was a bully, that he was a crony of Wildstein – constituted a serious threat to his image, both as Governor and as a possible presidential candidate. Given the situation he faced, Christie’s image repair effort was generally well-designed. His mortification appeared genuine; his use of corrective action appropriate, his denial suitable and the strategies of differentiation, minimization, and defeasibility supported his denial. However, the fact that Christie’s hand-picked, key advisor instigated the lane closings is a serious problem. The best story he could hope for was to argue (basically) that he was an unwitting dupe: His advisor went behind his back to play a political dirty trick – but now that the truth was out, Christie fired the responsible party and vowed to do his best to never be duped again. His popularity took a hit but it did rebound to some extent, indirect evidence of the effectiveness of his defense. In December of 2013, key donors for the GOP considered Christie (along with Jeb Bush and Mitt Romney) to be one of the three potential candidates with the “largest existing base of major contributors” (Confessore, 2014, p. A1). The facts, as perceived by the relevant audience, are vital to the success of image repair (Benoit, 2015).
What I want to discuss further is the strategy of minimization through lowering expectations. To date, research on Image Repair Theory (2015) has not addressed this approach. However, it is not a new idea. On the original Star Trek TV show “chief engineer Montgomery ‘Scotty’ Scott... had a reputation as being a miracle worker. As time passes in the series, it comes out that as well as being brilliant, he routinely pads his estimates” (Mr. Cheap, 2014). Peters (1987) articulated this idea as a principle for success: “Under promise, over deliver.” This idea can be found in sports as well. For example, North Carolina State was 5-11 in the Atlantic Coast Conference and hired Mark Gottfried as head coach. In the summer of 2011, before the season began, Gottfried held a press conference. News coverage of this event quoted Gottfried:

“There are a lot of questions about whether or not this returning group can learn how to win and how much can a couple of the freshmen contribute, so I think we’re an unknown, really,” Gottfried said, “If you were trying to handicap the league, I don’t know where to put us. I have no idea…. I think that we should be viewed – in my opinion, as honestly as I can – as a team that’s up in the air. Who knows what we can do? I don’t think this team should be bad. We shouldn’t be a terrible team – I do know that – but I don’t know that we can get real good that quick” (“N.C. State coach lowering,” 2011).

Given a specific level of performance in the coming season – say a 10 and 6 performance in conference games – that record looks better if people were expecting less (e.g., 5-11) than if they were expecting more (say, 13-3).

Political candidates usually have only good things to say about themselves (self-deprecating humor occurs, but is used in moderation). However, politicians routinely downplay their ability in one situation, the run up to a debate. During the 2012 presidential campaign, for example, USA Today commented on the way candidates manage expectations before election debates: “In what has become a quadrennial ritual, President Obama’s and Mitt Romney’s aides are doing their best to lower expectations for their bosses’ performances at next week’s scheduled debate in Denver” (2012). The thinking here is that post-debate perceptions matter more than pre-debate expectations – and it is far better to exceed expectations than to fall short of them. Political candidates usually attempt to reduce expectations for themselves and raise them for opponents just before they debate. Hopefully, after the debate they will look better, having lowered expectations for themselves, while their opponents will look worse.

Of course, one must be very careful when tinkering with expectations. Gottfried made it clear that “We shouldn’t be a terrible team – I do know that.” He did not want his boss, athletes, or fans to come away with the impression that he was a lousy coach; he just wanted to moderate their expectations for him. Similarly, presidential candidates must be careful to lower expectations about their performance in upcoming debates and not about their ability to govern if elected. If Scotty consistently failed to meet his lowered expectations Captain Kirk might start looking for a new chief engineer. In the lane closure scandal Christie wanted to lower
expectations about his administration’s performance from perfection to really good, but not to create expectations that its performance would be bad. These expectations were important to his ability to govern in his second term as well as to keep his presidential ambitions alive. This argument contributed to a well-designed image repair effort.

**Conclusion**

In September of 2013 two lanes of the busiest bridge in the country were closed. In January, revelations indicated that this action was instigated by a member of Governor Chris Christie’s staff, Bridget Kelley. Christie was accused of engaging in political retribution and of being a bully. On January 9 – the day Christie said he learned the truth – he fired Kelley and held a news conference. His image repair effort used well-chosen and well-implemented strategies: mortification, corrective action, denial, differentiation, minimization, and defeasibility. His strategies worked well together: for example, differentiation (I am passionate and blunt, but not a bully) supported his denial (I am not a bully). Defeasibility (I cannot be aware of everything that 65,000 state employees do) was consistent with one aspect of minimization (this is an exception, not a widespread practice of abuse). A particularly interesting image repair strategy was minimization through lowering expectations. Christie argued that he had never promised, and could not be expected to have, a perfect government. Lowering expectations can reduce the offensiveness of a violation of those expectations. This strategy works well with the argument that this abuse was an exception. As long as additional damaging evidence does not emerge, his image could improve after an initial decline. However, the downside of this approach is that Christie’s defense basically admitted that he had been duped; this admission might have the effect of shifting from one accusation (that he was a bully, ordering the bridge closing) to another (that he had been duped by his aide). His less favorable ratings among Republican voters in 2015 suggest that his defense had only a limited effect. This analysis of Christie’s image repair discourse also illustrates the idea that image repair can work through addressing the belief and/or value component of an attitude (Benoit, 2015).
References


