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Obama Transforming: Using Functional Theory to Identify Transformational Leadership

Kristina Drumheller & Greg G. Armfield

Abstract

The 2008 presidential campaign convention speeches broke records as viewers flocked to the speeches by Obama, Palin, and McCain in numbers that rivaled *American Idol* ratings. Adapting functional theory (Benoit, 2007) to include transformational leadership characteristics (Bass & Avolio, 1990), President Obama's 2008 nomination acceptance speech was used to test the adapting of functional theory for analyzing leadership claims. Secondary data were used as evidentiary support of Obama's efforts to make changes once in the White House. Results are discussed and framed within functional theory and transformational leadership.

Keywords: transformational leadership, functional theory, convention speech, political, rhetoric

Introduction

In presidential campaigns, candidates are expected to argue that they are going to make substantive changes from the previous administration, whether as an extension of public policies with high approval ratings or distancing from negatively viewed policies and administrations. In the 2008 presidential election, both the Republican and Democratic nominees felt the need to distance themselves from the Bush administration and offer real change, in new directions from the current policies. Obama, in particular, had to convince the American public that he not only had experience, but the right kind of experience for the substantive change he felt America needed; change that included electing a black man as president for the first time in U.S. history. Studies on the transformational leadership of presidents are few (e.g., House, Spangler, & Woycke, 1991; Wendt & Fairhurst, 1994) with limited methods for analyzing leadership rhetoric. This study seeks, first, to expand on the methods of analysis for transformational leadership by suggesting that functional theory can be adapted to look more in depth at leadership characteristics. It is expected that functional theory could be similarly adapted to explore other characteristics more fully, such as defense posturing or strategic planning, to go beyond what messages are being constructed to what those messages actually say about the presidential ability. Second, this study seeks to test the adapted theory to identify claims of leadership in Barack Obama's 2008 nomination acceptance speech. As such, we believe that in order to best evaluate the transformational nature of political leadership, it is important to both analyze a leader's words and behaviors. Secondary data are used for evidentiary support of the challenges faced by Obama in transforming the White House.

Rationale

It has become standard in recent campaigns that candidates must at least appear to be transformational (Wendt & Fairhurst, 1994). Past presidents have been identified as transformational leaders (e.g., Abraham Lincoln), but with little research on the campaign messages or inaugural addresses that got them to the White House. Adding to the limited studies conducted that have questioned the leadership styles of presidential candidates, we seek to extend the use of functional theory (Benoit, 2007) as a tool for identifying transformational leadership acclaims and attacks to the contrary.

Nomination speeches are recognized as representative of a candidate's campaign and are valued by scholars because of their wide reach and presentation of a candidate's social and political agendas (Daughton, 1994). In fact, the acceptance speech "is often regarded by politicians and critical observers as the most important address of a candidate's campaign" (Scheele, 1984, p. 51). It is not uncommon that singular nomination acceptance speeches are rhetorically analyzed (Houck, 1997; Scheele, 1984), or rhetorical and content analysis comparisons of speeches offered (Daughton, 1994; Östman, 2012; Petrocik, Benoit, & Hansen, 2003-2004). Nomination acceptance speeches often attract the largest audience for the campaign, which is true of Obama's acceptance speech, which was watched by over 38 million viewers. Additionally, nomination acceptance speeches "are not as partisan as conventional wisdom might suggest" (Petrocik et al., 2003/2004, p. 610). The speeches tend to be celebrations of the nomination with more coverage of a wider range of issues.

Acceptance speeches also serve to frame the individual embodiment of the office. Houck's (1997) analysis suggests that Franklin Delano Roosevelt's 1932 nomination acceptance speech served to show physical ability, despite a disability, to serve as president. In similar vein, Obama's acceptance speech acknowledged, "the vision of where America is headed is infused with historical and even mythic purpose" (Dilliplane, 2012, p. 143) as he stood to prove that race was no longer a barrier to the executive office. Today's televised nomination speeches reach millions, providing candidates with an opportunity to articulate vision as leader of the free world without the time constraints of advertisements and debates (Petrocik et al., 2003). The claims of leadership inherent in this type of address are thus worth exploring, which can be done by expanding the scope of functional theory to include transformational leadership characteristics as defined by Bass (1985).

Transformational leadership studies on presidential and presidential candidate rhetoric are limited, with most transformational leadership studies conducted in corporate settings (e.g., Jiang, 2012; Levine, Muenchent, & Brooks, 2010; Pillai, Schriesham, & Williams, 1999), and more recently educational settings (Bolkan & Goodboy, 2011), using both quantitative and qualitative analysis techniques. House et al. (1991) conducted a thorough analysis of charismatic presidential rhetoric while Wendt and Fairhurst (1994) rhetorically analyzed the leadership styles of the 1992 presidential candidates. This study seeks to take such research efforts a step further by using an adapted version of functional theory to analyze the leadership claims made by a nominated candidate and the

challenges faced once elected. Presidents rely on public opinion, which makes transformational leadership characteristics important for achieving political goals. A review of relevant literature is followed by an analysis and discussion of Obama's presidential rhetoric.

The Function of Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is one of the models of charismatic leadership (House et al., 1991; Northouse, 2013) and is one of the most researched leadership theories (Aldoory & Toth, 2004; Antonakis, 2012; Barbuto & Burbach, 2006). It focuses on the exchange between leader and follower, where the leader engages with followers in order to "create a connection that raises the level of motivation and morality in both the leader and the follower" (Northouse, 2013, p. 186). Based on the work of House (1976) and Burns (1978), Bass (1985) notably expanded transformational leadership by describing transactional (related to goal attainment) and transformational leadership as a single continuum. Although charisma is a necessary part of transformational leadership, it is not a sufficient condition (Yammariono, 1993). Four factors of transformational leadership have been identified by scholars: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration (Bass, 1985; Wendt & Fairhurst, 1994).

Idealized influence, or charisma, is the emotional component (Antonakis, 2012). The leader is viewed as a strong role model and followers seek to emulate the leader. "These leaders usually have very high standards of moral and ethical conduct and can be counted on to do the right thing" (Northouse, 2013, p. 191). They gain followers' trust and are able to encourage others to follow their mission or vision and generally engage moral higher reasoning (Avolio, 2005; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1998). Although often conflated with charismatic leadership, researchers caution that transformational leadership is not just due to charisma. "Because charisma is a relationship and not a personality characteristic of leaders, charisma exists only because followers say it does or followers behave in specific ways" (House et al., 1991, p. 366). Thus, transformational leadership relies heavily on the perception of followers.

Followers are inspired to commit to a leader's vision of a "more desirable future" (Avolio, 2005, p. 196) through the use of symbols and pathos as a result of the second factor, which is inspirational motivation. The leader takes the focus off of self-interest and places it on team effort. Inspirational leaders are not afraid to take risks to achieve their vision and are able to motivate others to join them on the journey. This is done through intellectual stimulation, the third factor, by asking followers to be creative and innovative. In so doing, followers should also continuously challenge their own beliefs and the beliefs of the leader and organization. The goal of sharing diverse ideas is to generate "the highest levels of creativity from one's followers" (Avolio, 2005, p. 197). Transformational leaders ultimately encourage followers to look at problems in new ways (Avolio & Gibbons, 1988) and "are distinguished by their risk taking, goal articulation, high expectations, emphasis on collective identity, self-assertion, and vision" (Aldoory & Toth, 2004, p. 159). These factors are dependent on the rela-

tional aspects of leader communication, or individualized consideration. Leaders appear supportive by listening to the needs of followers and communicating expressively: getting to know those with whom they work to be supportive where necessary, but also challenging to help followers in their own development as leaders. The leader might delegate and motivate so followers begin to take their own initiative to the point of no longer needing to rely on a leader.

Transformational leadership has been evaluated in various contexts from educational settings to corporate organizations, with less attention given to political leadership. Bolkan and Goodboy (2011) studied transformational leadership in the classroom and found that instructors who personalized content and challenged students to engage in critical thinking were perceived to be dynamic transformational leaders. Corporate leaders have been perceived as transformational based on their use of bureaucracy, norms, symbols, rituals, and establishment of trust as instruments of organizational change: cultural factors which are likewise available to political leaders (Wendt & Fairhurst, 1994). But, unlike instructors and many organizational leaders, political leaders work closely with legislators and foreign leaders and present a “very public campaign in which he or she goes on the record in terms of a proposed vision and political vision” (Wendt & Fairhurst, 1994, p. 185). Understandably, this public image challenges presidential efforts to be innovative in a divisive political system.

Expectations of political leadership have evolved as “leaders frame and shape the context of a situation using actions and utterances” (Witherspoon, 1997, p. 6) to manage meaning using greater stylistic trends and social media in contemporary presidential campaigns. Leaders manage meaning as interpreters, educators, and advocates (Witherspoon, 1997); political leaders in particular are expected to have “a vision” that manages meanings “about the future direction of the country. However, to manage meaning about future directions is also to create a set of expectations for behavior or action to follow. The anticipated outcome is successfully managed change once in office” (Wendt & Fairhurst, 1994, p. 181). Identifying transformational leadership claims in campaign rhetoric can be useful as strategists and constituents evaluate the candidate’s transition from “idealism and interpretive strategies” (Wendt & Fairhurst, 1994, p. 192) of campaigns to the bureaucratic complexities of governing inherent in our political structure.

Political transformational leaders. Political leaders have often been identified as transformational (e.g., House et al., 1991; Wendt & Fairhurst, 1994) by getting followers to value idealized goals, transcend self-interest for the sake of the organization, and move followers toward higher-level needs (Bass, 1985; 1990). Transformational leaders are able to command the attention of followers and communicate a vision which others are willing to follow while simultaneously empowering others to take part in that vision (Bennis, 1984). Presidential campaigns offer candidates the opportunity to address important issues facing the nation.

The 2008 presidential contest was an historical moment with Obama communicating a vision of the American dream that included breaking race barriers.

Although race discourse was limited in Obama's nomination acceptance speech, key speeches throughout the campaign provided the potential for Obama to demonstrate transformational leadership qualities. Dilliplane (2012) argues that Obama's *A More Perfect Union* speech was "a beacon moment designed to resonate with overarching campaign themes consistently reiterating who and what Obama's candidacy represented" (p. 146). It is likely Obama's acceptance speech furthers the rhetoric encompassed by key moments in his campaign (Dilliplane, 2012; Howell, 2011).

Key campaign moments can bring leadership potential into view with the transactional/transformational continuum used to identify effective political leadership styles. "In exchanging promises for votes, the transactional leader works within the framework of the self-interests of his or her constituency, whereas the transformational leader moves to change the framework" (Bass, 1990). According to Bass (1990), President Lincoln was willing to shift paradigms to keep the Union together, where his predecessor, James Buchanan, would allow the Union to disintegrate to stay the course. Jimmy Carter and Herbert Hoover exemplify competent presidents who failed to inspire, while John F. Kennedy and Franklin Delano Roosevelt were less intellectual but far more inspirational, and able to stimulate creativity and commitment in others (Bass, 1990). Despite the dichotomous beginnings under Burns (1978), Bass (1985) suggests that a leader can be transformational and still be transactional; that is, a presidential candidate can still promise transactional things like lower taxes, protected social security, and health care reform in exchange for votes as well as engage in transformational rhetoric to motivate followers for a new vision. Transformational leadership augments the effects of transactional leadership (Bass, 1990).

One style often dominates despite combined transformational and transactional leadership style opportunities. Wendt and Fairhurst (1994) conducted research on the rhetoric of leadership in the 1992 presidential election. They argued that George Bush was quickly identified as a transactional leader rather than one concerned with real change. Bill Clinton showed much more promise as a transformational leader, accomplishing "the basics of transformational leadership outlined by Bass (1985); he had a vision that inspired, was intellectually stimulating, and provided consideration for the individual by appearing to reach out to the individual voter" (p. 188). They argued, however, that Clinton had difficulty creating a "*working* vision" [emphasis original] because of his lack of Washington experience (p. 190). Obama similarly lacked significant Washington experience with limited senatorial experience.

Executive power does pose unique challenges for those trying to be visionary yet create stability, both goals of transformational leaders. Incumbent presidents, for example, would have a more difficult time arguing for a vision if they have not managed change during their previous term (Wendt & Fairhurst, 1994). In the 2008 election, however, both Republican and Democratic candidates were challengers to the position providing both candidates a unique stance for bringing change to the office of president. However, a vision for change must also create a sense of stability; a difficult promise in a declining economy. Challenge-

ers still would have to contend with any critiques of the jobs they did in the offices they held prior to their presidential bid, but the fact that neither candidate in the 2008 election had held the highest office limited incumbent attacks, although Obama tried to frame McCain as a surrogate incumbent (Benoit & Glantz, 2012).

The difficulty navigating partisan politics means U.S. presidents must rely on public support more than institutional support in passing decisions (Burns, 1978). FDR was particularly apt at sympathetic listening, and thus, exhibited individualized consideration. He was more persuasive because he was able to speak to individual concerns rather than collective doubt. However, some leaders might actually be pseudotransformational, appearing transformational but lacking certain characteristics, particularly individualized consideration, which serves to address impeded visions (Bass & Steidlemeir, 1998; Wendt & Fairhurst, 1994). Wendt and Fairhurst (1994) note charisma is difficult to sustain once in office particularly because “the constraints imposed by what political leaders do will . . . affect how they use the instruments of change to accomplish their goals” (p. 185). Clearly, anyone would face challenges maintaining the characteristics of transformational leadership, so while a candidate might claim to be transformational, the realities of the job might interfere with the candidate’s vision. Rather than viewing transformational leadership claims in a vacuum, functional theory can be utilized to analyze leadership claims in relation to acclaims, attacks, and defenses.

Functional Theory

Developed by Benoit (Benoit, 2007; Benoit, Blaney, & Pier, 2007) the functional theory of political campaign discourse acknowledges the instrumental purpose of campaign rhetoric, namely to win the election. It is used to analyze messages politicians use to accomplish their goal of being elected. To that end, functional theory serves its purpose. However, the potential exists for functional theory to be combined with other theories or concepts to suggest the reasoning behind a candidate winning the majority vote, such as a candidate purporting to be a transformational leader. As such, functional theory can help scholars reveal the subtext of the campaign beyond the stated goals of campaign rhetoric. Further, functional theory might also get to the management of meaning not traditionally found in transformational leadership models (Wendt & Fairhurst, 1994).

Functional theory acknowledges that voters are asked to choose between candidates, comparing their rhetoric and determining who is best for the job (Benoit, 2007). Because of this comparative act, candidates must distinguish themselves from their opponent. Although candidates do not differ on every point, they choose platforms that distinguish their skills from those of their opponent. Candidates must demonstrate their leadership ability and superiority through their campaign messages, differentiating themselves in a way that voters favor. This is done through acclaiming, attacking, and defending. In other words, a candidate might self-praise using acclaims, showing how the candidate is better and more advantageous than the other candidate. Candidates might also use attacks or criticize their opponent, casting the opponent in an unfavorable

light. In particular, it is common to attack an opponent's leadership ability, portraying the opponent as incompetent in contrast to the candidate's acclaimed leadership prowess. Lastly, candidates might need to offer a defense against attacks from their opponent or refute the negative claims of their opponent. Candidates tend to use acclaims more than attacks and defenses, and attacks more than defenses (Benoit, 2007).

The discourse of candidates centers on policy and character issues, with policy comments outweighing character issues in most cases. General goals, past deeds, and future plans are three sub-forms of policy identified by Benoit (2001), while personal qualities, leadership ability, and ideals are identified as sub-forms of character. General goals are used more often to acclaim and state the position of the candidate. Ideals, which are characteristically similar to goals, are used more to acclaim. General goals are used more often than future plans, which makes sense because goals are more easily identified and defended than specific proposals or plans (Benoit, 2007). It is the sub-form of leadership quality that can be expanded to address the specific transformational leadership factors: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass & Avolio, 1990).

Benoit and colleagues have used functional theory to analyze campaign messages including acceptance addresses, presidential debates, and media influence (see, e.g., Benoit, 1999; Benoit & Brazeal, 2002; Benoit & Glantz, 2012; Benoit & Harthcock, 1999; Benoit & Rill, 2012; Benoit, Wells, Pier, & Blaney, 1999). Benoit's research has shown that the state of the economy influences candidate messages, which is important considering that the winning administration inherited the worst economic recession in 16 years (Benoit, McHale, Hansen, Pier, & McGuire, 2003). Benoit (2007) proposed that policy preferences, character perceptions, and ideology (political party) "work together to influence the voters' image or overall impression of the candidate" which ultimately influences the vote (p. 219). Taken together, these might also trigger perceptions of leadership style, specifically identifying a candidate as a transformational leader.

Of specific interest to this research, Benoit and Glantz (2012) conducted a functional analysis of the 2008 general election presidential television ads. Obama attacked in 68% of the analyzed utterances and acclaimed in 32% with defenses comprising less than 1% of utterances. Leadership ability was discussed in 17% of Obama's character utterances but was the least discussed factor in both character and policy utterances. This adds additional support for analyzing acceptance speeches where leadership ability could become a higher priority for discussion. Using functional theory and transformational leadership, Obama's campaign and presidency are analyzed to identify the promise and challenge of presidential leadership. Although Benoit and Glantz (2012) found that attacks outweighed acclaims in the 2008 presidential campaign ads, previous studies on presidential rhetoric have found acclaims to outweigh attacks. Because the acceptance speech is more about celebrating the party's nomination, we expect that:

H1: Acclaims will outnumber attacks, which will outnumber defenses.

Because transformational leadership is an adaptation to functional theory, there is no clear foundation for assuming that the use of one factor of transformational leadership will be any greater than another. Thus, exploration is necessary.

RQ1: In what ways does Obama use acclaims and attacks of transformational leadership during the 2008 Democratic presidential nomination acceptance speech?

RQ2: How have acclaims of transformational leadership during the 2008 Democratic presidential nomination acceptance speech translated to actions in the White House?

Focusing on transformational differences might allow us to speculate on the role of transformational leadership rhetoric in epideictic presidential convention speeches and implications for the presidency itself.

Method

Using functional theory, content analysis was employed to analyze the transcript of the 2008 nomination acceptance speech from Democratic nominee for president, Barack Obama. Functional theory (Benoit, 2007) has been employed for studying several forms of political discourse including convention acceptance addresses (Benoit et al., 1997), and keynote addresses (Benoit et al., 2000). Additional evidentiary support is provided to argue the difficulty of proclaimed transformational leadership while campaigning colliding with political realities necessitating transactional leadership abilities through an analysis of Obama's promises highlighted in the acceptance speech.

Artifact

Barack Obama delivered his acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention in Denver, Colorado, on August 28, 2008. The convention speech was given at Invesco Field (now Sports Authority Field) in Denver, CO. Sports Authority Field is home to the Denver Broncos, an NFL Franchise, and is an open stadium seating 71,125. A crowd of more than 84,000 was in attendance. Obama argued for needed change from eight years of George W. Bush, promised to end our dependence on oil from the Middle East within 10 years, reduce taxes for 95% of Americans, remove our troops from Iraq, and attacked McCain for his voting record.

The 2008 election produced a record numbers of viewers and four of the most watched convention speeches in history. Presidential candidate Obama drew over 38.3 million viewers while McCain broke the record with over 40 million viewers (Rutenberg & Stelter, 2008; Silva, 2008).

Coding Procedures

Using Functional Theory as a content analysis technique involves three steps (Benoit, 2007). The first step is to unitize the transcripts into themes or

utterances that addressed a coherent functional or transformational leadership theme. Each theme can “extend from one phrase to an entire paragraph” (Benoit & Henson, 2007, p. 41; see also Holsti, 1969; O’Keefe, 1977). Berelson (1952) defined a theme as “an assertion about a subject” (p. 18). Similarly, Holsti (1969) stipulated that a theme is “a single assertion about some subject” (p. 116). Because discourse is inherently enthymematic, themes can vary in length from a phrase to several sentences. Whereas the majority of themes or utterances fit neatly into one of the three categories, those that did not fit into one of the three categories were not coded.

After the text was unitized, themes were classified based on the following definitions: Acclaim, Attack, or Defense (Benoit, 2007). The first level of coding acclaim, attack, or defense were coded as policy or leadership. The policies for acclaims and attacks were coded as past deeds, future plans, or general goals (Benoit, 2007). Leadership acclaims and attacks were coded as idealized influence, individualized consideration, inspirational motivation, or intellectual stimulation based on Bass and Avolio’s (1990) dimensions of transformational leaders (see also Northouse, 2013) instead of Benoit’s original character utterances traditionally coded as personal qualities, leadership ability, and ideals (see Benoit, 2007). In doing so, the content analysis focuses specifically on the dimensions of transformational leaders as identified by Bass and Avolio (1990).

Defenses were classified according to the categories of denial, evade responsibility, reduce offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification based on Benoit’s forms of image repair discourse (Benoit, 1999). Defenses coded as denials were coded as simple denial or shifting blame (see appendix for illustrations of each form of an acclaim and attack).

The second author served as coder for the study and was responsible for creating the coding book. The primary author was trained with the codebook and instructions to clarify subsequent coding responsibilities. The primary author coded the first 20% of the Obama transcript in order to assess inter-coder reliability. Both coders reached 99.6% agreement for coding acclaims and 100% agreement when coding attacks. Further, Cohen’s Kappa was calculated at .93 for acclaims and 1.0 for attacks. Since no defenses were coded, the category was removed from the analysis and inter-coder reliability was not calculated. Fleiss (1981) states, “values greater than .75 may be taken to represent excellent agreement beyond chance” (p. 218). Therefore, the figures in excess of .90 give us excellent inter-coder reliability in the coding of the transcript and may be taken to represent good agreement beyond chance.

To answer the second research question, the authors used secondary data from *Tampa Bay Times Politifact.com*, which evaluates whether President Obama was able to keep the campaign promises from his Democratic National Convention acceptance speech while in office over his first term. Although other databases of campaign promises exist, the site was chosen because of its credibility based on ownership, awards, and partnerships. Former owner Nelson Poynter bequeathed the paper to a nonprofit journalism school now called the Poynter Institute to preserve its independent status. Additionally, the Politifact.com portion of the *Tampa Bay Times* recently won a Pulitzer Prize. Its on-

going partnerships with a variety of news sources, including publicly funded NPR, further demonstrates the site's integrity (Holan, 2012).

Promises were defined by Politifact.com as measurable: "We said a promise 'is not a position statement. It is a prospective statement of an action or outcome that is verifiable'" ("How," n.d.). A list of promises were created by poring "through speech transcripts, TV appearances, position papers and campaign Web sites," noting all sources with each promise; however, this research only focused on the promises from the acceptance speech for reasons of research design and validity. Promises were tracked by *Politifact.com* and evaluated according to whether each promise was (a) kept; (b) compromised; (c) broken; (d) stalled; (e) in the works; or, (f) not yet rated.

In order to evaluate the promises made in the nomination acceptance speech, the authors went through Obama's speech and identified all policy promises and then compared our list to one compiled by *CNN* ("Obama," 2008). The completed list contained 42 broad-based promises. We then searched the Politifact database twice to identify promises related to those made in the nomination speech. Promises in the acceptance speech were broad so selection of specific promises in Politifact were somewhat subjective, but every effort was made to make sure that the promises were classified to match the intent of the promise in the acceptance speech. A total of 135 specific promises were identified by both authors as matching the intent of the promises in the acceptance speech. The authors then reviewed the promises to determine whether they have been classified as kept, broken, compromised, stalled, in the works, or not yet rated. Of those identified, only one was still in the works and none were classified as stalled or not yet rated. Appendix B contains the promise categories, a sample of specific promises for each category, and the Politifact ratings in each category. The secondary data provided additional evidentiary support for the second research question and provides this study with a longitudinal aspect in order to evaluate the ability to remain a transformational leader once in office.

Results

The results are grouped by topic and discussed in order. The hypothesis predicted that acclaims would outnumber attacks. Obama used almost three times more acclaims (72%) than attacks (28%; see Table 1). However, no defenses were used. This finding is consistent with past research by Benoit (1999; 2007) on candidate acceptance speeches and campaign advertisements (Benoit & Rill, 2012). A *chi-square goodness of fit test* revealed the frequency of acclaims, $n = 178$ (72%), was significantly greater than attacks, $n = 70$ (28%), $\chi^2(1, N = 248) = 47.03, p < .001$. This supports hypothesis one, which predicted that acclaims would outnumber attacks, which would outnumber defenses.

Table 1

Function of Obama's Presidential Nomination Speech

Acclaim	178 (72%)
Attack	70 (28%)

Total	248
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Note. $\chi^2(1, N=248) = 47.03, p < .001$.

Obama relied on acclaiming his future plans (40%) and general goals (49%) far more than past deeds (11%). With regard to attacks, Obama attacked both McCain and Palin on past deeds (66%) more than their future plans (14%) and general goals (20%).

The first research question asked how acclaims and attacks were used in terms of transformational leadership. Obama focused on acclaiming idealized influence (62%) or motivating voters to embrace change and believe in hope for the future. Obama's speech embodied the other three factors fairly equally: individualized consideration (13%), inspirational motivation (13%), and intellectual stimulation (12%; see Table 2). There was a significant difference in the leadership factors identified, $\chi^2(3, N = 106) = 74.60, p < .001$, with idealized influence far outweighing the other three factors. Nearly 60% of the 178 acclaims in the acceptance speech are leadership acclaims, while all character claims comprised only 38% of Obama's campaign ads (Benoit & Glantz, 2012). It is clear that Obama's intention was to magnify his leadership ability through his acceptance speech, most notably identifying himself as a charismatic leader (idealized influence). Because of the presence of each of the other three factors, it is possible that the audience would view Obama as a transformational leader.

With regard to attacks, there was no significant difference in the identified leadership factors, $\chi^2(3, N = 35) = 3.06, p > .05$. Obama attacked the overall leadership ability of the Republican ticket (McCain and Palin) as much as he attacked their future policies. Further, Obama's attack on each leadership factor was rather evenly distributed: individualized consideration (34%), intellectual stimulation (29%), idealized influence (23%), and inspirational motivation (14%). Obama focused heavily on acclaiming his leadership, but considering there were only 70 utterances of attack, it can be argued that he also heavily discounted the leadership of the Republican ticket to make sure he stood out as the more capable and transformational leader.

Table 2
Forms of Policy and Leadership Acclaims

Acclaims	
Policy	
Past Deeds	8 (11%)
Future Plans	29 (40%)
General Goals	35 (49%)
Leadership	
Idealized Influence	65 (62%)
Individualized Consideration	14 (13%)
Inspirational Motivation	14 (13%)
Intellectual Stimulation	13 (12%)

Note. $\chi^2(3, N=106) = 74.60, p < .001$.

To answer the second research question on how acclaims of transformational leadership during the 2008 Democratic presidential nomination convention translated to the White House, promises made in the acceptance speech were identified and secondary data from Politifact on the success of the promises were used (see Table 4). A *chi-square goodness of fit test* revealed a significant distribution, $\chi^2(2, N = 135) = 23.7, p < .001$. Obama and his administration have kept 71 of 135 promises (52.5%), with 35 broken (25.9%) and 28 compromised (20.7%). Implications for these results are discussed below.

Table 3
Forms of Policy and Leadership Attacks

Attacks	
Policy	
Past Deeds	23 (66%)
Future Plans	5 (14%)
General Goals	7 (20%)
Leadership	
Idealized Influence	8 (23%)
Individualized Consideration	12 (34%)
Inspirational Motivation	5 (14%)
Intellectual Stimulation	10 (29%)

Note. $\chi^2(3, N = 106) = 74.60, p < .001$.

Table 4

Progress of Obama's Acceptance Speech Promises

Kept	71 (52.5%)
Compromise	28 (20.7%)
Broken	35 (25.9%)
In the Works	1 (<1%)
Total	135

Note. $\chi^2(2, N = 135) = 23.7, p < .001$

Discussion

Despite the rising expectation that candidates at least appear transformational (Wendt & Fairhurst, 1994), very little has been done to assess presidential transformational leadership. Functional theory is useful for identifying the rhetoric attempting to influence voter preference, but this study has shown that it also can be adapted to identify the type of leadership asserted by a political candidate. Analyzing Obama's acceptance speech allowed us to focus on leadership claims not likely developed in other campaign messages, particularly since the 2008 election had the most negative televised advertisements in history (Benoit & Glantz, 2012).

Functional theory was first used to assess the acclaims, attacks, and defenses in Obama's acceptance address. The hypothesis was supported with acclaims outweighing attacks, with both outweighing defenses, as there were none. For the purposes of this study, not having defenses to code potentially limits any conclusions about combining this element of functional theory with the transformational leadership model. Acceptance speeches are meant to be celebratory of a candidate's nomination, so it is not surprising that acclaims would outnumber other rhetorical strategies. Candidates can focus on more positive aspects of their campaigns, including acclaims of leadership potential.

Obama acclaimed his ability to lead the U.S. stating, "I believe that, as hard as it will be, the change we need is coming" (Obama, 2008). He acclaimed his ability to be a transformational leader by becoming the very embodiment of racial change in the White House. Although there were few allusions to race in Obama's nomination acceptance speech, Obama had created a foundation to discursively address race through themes identified in key speeches, such as *A More Perfect Union* (Dilliplane, 2012). Thus, Obama sets a point of reference found in earlier speeches and relies on the American dream through the eyes of Martin Luther King, Jr.:

And it is that promise that, 45 years ago today, brought Americans from every corner of this land to stand together on a Mall in Washington, before Lincoln's Memorial, and hear a young preacher from Georgia speak of his dream. . . . America, we cannot turn back, not with so much work to be done; not with so many children to educate, and so many veterans to care

for; not with an economy to fix, and cities to rebuild, and farms to save; not with so many families to protect and so many lives to mend. (Obama, 2008)

Obama acclaims his vision for restoring the American dream by promising to resolve issues largely perceived as ignored by the Bush administration.

Because Obama claimed to have a working vision for making a difference in Washington D.C. if elected, we also asked whether there were any observed differences in Obama's rhetoric with regard to acclaims of transformational leadership and attacks of the transformational leadership potential of McCain and Palin. Obama acclaimed more of his future plans and general goals while acclaiming his character demonstrating all four transformational leadership elements, with idealized influence heavily outweighing the other three. A candidate who lacks individualized concern could potentially be a pseudotransformational leader (Bass & Steidlemeir, 1998), but this trait was identified in Obama's speech in equal measure to inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation. Although this is not the only measure of a pseudotransformational leader, the presence of individualized concern demonstrates at least some sincerity on Obama's part.

Although Obama clearly acclaimed his leadership in ways that appear transformational, evaluating his efforts following the election can indicate whether it is possible for presidents to be truly transformational given the competitive nature and polarization of a two-party system. Obama has consistently met with resistance for most of his campaigning visions, including closing Guantanamo Bay, health care reform (Harris & VandeHei, 2010), and alternative energy efforts. In fact, closing Guantanamo was categorized as a promise broken, health care reform is largely a promise kept, and alternative energy efforts have seen mixed results. As Wendt and Fairhurst (1994) acknowledge, it is possible to be transformational enough to get votes, but that might not be enough to get things accomplished on Capitol Hill. Clinton was similarly viewed as transformational in his campaign but lacking such leadership in at least the early part of his presidency (Wendt & Fairhurst, 1994). Leadership should be viewed as an ongoing process (Avolio & Gibbons, 1988) so a longitudinal look at presidential efforts might better inform on the elected person's leadership style.

Additionally, the role of race in the oval office is just now being played out, so a longitudinal view of Obama's campaigns and presidency could further highlight racial discourse in the presidency. Some scholars have noted disappointment in the lack of continued discussions of race or articulated policies in the first term of the Obama administration (McPhail & McPhail, 2011). Realistically, the discourse on the effects of race in this presidency will continue beyond Obama's presidency with both his domestic and foreign interactions filtered through race discourse by those who analyze and critique his leadership style as a standing president. It is possible that focusing on pressing policy issues (transactional) derails constructive racial discourse (transformation) once in office (McPhail & McPhail, 2012).

As research has noted, the presidency does require transactional leadership to get things accomplished (Bass, 1985), but whether it interferes with the ability

to truly be transformational is still unclear. The secondary data reveal that more than half of the promises outlined in the acceptance speech have been kept, but overall numbers are less optimistic with only a third of all promises kept. Even with broken promises, it would be unfair to suggest that Obama did not faithfully work to keep those promises. Politifact even notes that a broken promise rating does not mean Obama failed to advocate for his promises, but rather offers possible evidence of other elements of the political system at work such as opposition in Congress or the impact of public opinion (“How,” n.d.). In many of the broad promise goals outlined in the acceptance speech, Obama experienced a mix of success, compromise, and failure in keeping promises. There are some promises, however, that did seem to get little attention. For example, the promise to close the gender wage gap has as its only specific promise to implement a women owned business contracting program. Although it might appear that Obama has kept his promise in this area, one action is hardly enough to change discriminatory wage practices.

It should be noted that Obama has taken on controversial issues that might be characteristic of a transformational leader. The repeal of “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell” was a promise kept and social coup, yet other promises with the intention of ensuring “gays and lesbians have the right to live free of discrimination” remain as promises broken at this time. Nonetheless, Obama has continued to argue for anti-discrimination laws, marriage equality, and adoption equality for gay males and lesbians despite the fact they are divisive issues. It also should be considered that presidents potentially become emboldened by second terms: tackling issues they might not have risked in their first terms. We could see Obama re-address promises that met with derision in his first term.

Additionally, future research might consider the impact of variables such as Congress, checks and balances, and public opinion. There were several notations within the commentary on the promises to indicate efforts made by Obama, such as “Obama has made a good faith effort” (Farley, 2011, “Not enough”); “the current climate makes it difficult for the president to fulfill the letter of his promise” (Jacobson, 2011, “Funding”); and, as Christine Lubinski, vice president for global health at the Infectious Diseases Society of America and HIV Medicine Association, noted: “It’s not really fair to hold the president accountable in a rigid way. The floor fell out with the economy” (Wogan, 2012, “Spending”). These comments suggest that there are several variables that impact the ability of a leader, particularly a president, to be transformational.

There are other potential pitfalls when a speaker relies heavily on charisma (idealized influence) rather than other factors. Obama relied on charisma nearly 4.5 times more than any other factor. Obama’s difficulty getting his vision through a bi-partisan Congress may have quite a bit to do with focusing more on idealized influence and less on individual consideration, intellectual stimulation, and motivational inspiration. Additional research on whether these factors are more prevalent in speeches to Congress and to the public could be revealing. A president’s leadership is meant for leading the American citizens, not necessarily lawmakers, so it could be unfair to attribute falseness to Obama’s intent when up against those who are trying to lead in their own right, often dogmatically

determined to foster their own vision in opposition to that of the president. Additionally, leaders can be transformational and transactional at the same time (Bass, 1985), and although this study did not focus on transactional leadership, it might be that a combination is needed to move transformational visions forward. Bipartisanship might call for more hands on management of ideas and personalities than expected of transformational leaders.

To that end, there is a cautionary tale in our system whereby presidents are consistently protecting themselves and their interests. In the last year and a half of Obama's first presidential term, unemployment has hovered around 9.2% (DOL, 2011) and the debt ceiling was raised to prevent defaulting on loans (Sahadi, 2011). If, in the end, a transformational leader does not really have the capacity to make the visionary changes promised, is it more of a collision than a collaboration of leadership strategies? Such concerns should not be taken lightly as voters consider whether politicians can talk a great vision, but become crippled under bureaucracy.

Conclusion

Although functional theory stands on its own in analyzing political rhetoric, there can be a benefit to leadership studies to combine functional theory with leadership models, in this case, the model of transformational leadership. Political candidates are naturally going to acclaim their leadership potential, but the type of leadership espoused can provide additional insight into a candidate's rhetoric and intentions once reaching the White House. Unfortunately, what is espoused is not always what transpires after inauguration. The ability to influence and motivate could be stifled by partisan stances and, for the first time in U.S. history, challenged by racial differences.

Although we only looked at the one speech, our main purpose was to test the usefulness of combining functional theory and the transformational leadership model. There were not any defenses to note in the speech analyzed, limiting any conclusions about how defenses might be combined with transformational leadership claims. However, through this analysis it is clear that identifying factors of transformational leadership can help in discerning the type of leadership proclaimed. The awareness that transformational acclaims do not always transfer into White House action could provide a moment of pause for voters as they attempt to divide charisma from other important factors of motivation, listening, and innovation. A lack of leadership skill could result in a difficult presidency, causing the citizenry to suffer the consequences.

More research needs to be done to test the combined use of functional theory and the transformational leadership model or other potential extensions of the theory. Additionally, focusing on audiences such as Congress and the public would be useful to determine whether a candidate is viewed as being a transactional, transformational, or even pseudotransformational leader. Comparing candidates over time could also be useful in determining the value of transformational leadership characteristics in political office. It is clear that Obama has been able to inspire followers, but being transformational means providing a clear vision that can be acted upon. Less than half of his overall promises have

been fully realized, which could indicate lacking abilities necessary of transformational leaders. However, studying the differences in how presidents tackle issues in their first term versus their second could provide additional insight. Researching a wider variety of rhetoric using this combined method might also prove fruitful in identifying the consistency of the presence or absence of transformational leadership factors.

If it is difficult to carry transformational leadership into the White House, the role of transformational leadership rhetoric in epideictic presidential convention speeches comes into question. By adding elements of the transformational leadership model to the character analysis in functional theory, we were able to go beyond simple claims of leadership and look at more specific characteristics of leadership; namely those that might identify a leader as specifically transformational, developing individual concern, intellectual stimulation, and inspirational motivation along with the charisma that likely got the candidate elected. It is clear from the analysis that Obama appeared as a strong transformational leader, which undoubtedly aided his election. However, Obama seems to be following a similar trajectory as Clinton. Wendt and Fairhurst (1994) noted of Clinton:

A true transformational leader realizes the interrelationship between meaning and action, and will present a *working* vision—a plan which is easily understood, realistic, and manageable in the sense that it can be packaged, sold, and acted upon. With little Washington experience, however, Clinton could not formulate a working vision, one that could realize the promise of transformational leadership. (p. 190)

Obama's lack of insider knowledge became apparent once he took office, which hampered his ability to create change. Despite campaign promises, Obama discovered that closing Guantanamo Bay was not as easy as he thought it would be (Hounshell, 2011) and that there are no "shovel-ready projects" (Condon, 2010) to quickly stimulate the economy. Transformational leadership rhetoric might facilitate getting a candidate into the White House, but it does not unify a divided house.

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Appendix A

Example of

Acclaim

- Policy
 - Past deeds: Because I've seen it in Illinois, when we provided health care to more children and moved more families from welfare to work.
 - Future plans: As President, I will tap our natural gas reserves.
 - General goals: Now is the time to end this addiction and to understand that drilling is a stop-gap measure, not a long term solution, no even close.
- Character (Leadership)
 - Idealized Influence: We are more compassionate than a government that lets veterans sleep on our streets.
 - Individualized Consideration (Personal qualities): She's the one that taught me about hard work.
 - Inspirational Motivation: I believe that, as hard as it will be, the change we need is coming.
 - Intellectual Stimulation: in 10 years, we will finally end our dependence on oil from the middle east. We will do this.

Attack

- Policy
 - Past deeds: But the record's clear: John McCain has voted with George Bush ninety percent of the time.
 - Future plans: We may not agree on abortion, but surely we can agree on reducing the number of unwanted pregnancies in this country.
 - General goals: Don't tell me we can't uphold the Second Amendment while keeping AK-47s out of the hands of criminals.

- Character (Leadership)
 - Idealized Influence: Tell the military families who shoulder their burden silently as they watch their loved ones leave for their third or fourth or fifth tour of duty.
 - Individualized Consideration (Personal qualities): Now, I don't believe that Senator McCain doesn't care what's going on in the lives of Americans. I just think he doesn't know.
 - Inspirational Motivation: If you don't have a record to run on, they you paint your opponent as someone people should run from. You make a big election about small things.
 - Intellectual Stimulation: How else could be propose hundreds of millions in tax breaks for big corporations and oil companies but not one penny of tax relief to more that one hundred million Americans?

Appendix B

Acceptance Speech Promises	Sample of Corresponding Promises	Total	Kept	Comp	Broken	In Works
Tax Promises	No family making less than \$250,000 will see "any form of tax increase."	11	4	3	4	0
Energy Promises	Reduce dependence on foreign oil	18	12	2	3	1
Education Promises	Invest \$10 billion per year in early intervention educational and developmental programs	14	8	4	2	0
Health Care Promises	Sign a "universal" health care bill	16	11	3	2	0
Labor Law Promises	Provide a \$1.5 billion fund to help states launch programs for paid family and medical leave	5	1	0	4	0
Corporate Reform Promises	Close loopholes in the corporate tax deductibility of CEO pay	3	1	0	2	0
Federal Spending	Go "line by line" over earmarks to make sure money	1	0	1	0	0

National De- fense	being spent wisely •Direct military leaders to end war in Iraq •Fully fund the Veterans Admin- istration	25	16	6	3	0
Foreign Rela- tions	Work with Russia to move nuclear weapons off hair- trigger alert	34	16	7	11	0
Other	•Expand the Em- ployment Non- Discrimination Act to include sexual orientation and gender identity •Repeal "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy •Provide a path to citizenship for un- documented immi- grants •Create a prison-to- work incentive program	8	2	2	4	0

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