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Editor’s Note

During the 2006-2007 academic year, the CTAM Board of Governors decided that the CTAM Journal would go to an all-online format, beginning with Volume 34 (2007). With this change, we remain dedicated to producing a high quality journal comprised of articles that have gone through a rigorous review process, while allowing increased access of the journal to a wider audience.

The Journal is available at the CTAM Website: http://www.mnsu.edu/cmst/ctam/journal.html
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CTAM JOURNAL MISSION STATEMENT

The Communication and Theater Association of Minnesota Journal (CTAMJ) is the scholarly journal of the Communication and Theater Association of Minnesota (CTAM). The journal is an outlet for articles related to issues of discipline-related importance including articles discussing innovative teaching methods. All theoretical and methodological approaches are welcome.

Authors should submit an electronic copy of their work as a Word document by e-mail to the editor. A separate, electronic title page should include a 100-125 word abstract of the article, author’s name and professional title, job title, the school or institutional affiliation of the author(s), a mailing address, and an e-mail address. Care should be taken that author identification has been removed from the manuscript itself for review purposes. All manuscripts should be prepared according to current APA or MLA guidelines.

CTAMJ encourages contributions from scholars and practitioners, who comprise all segments of the journal’s readership, including K-12 educators, graduate school, community college, and college or university groups. The journal welcomes theoretical and applied articles from both the theater and communication disciplines. Capable scholars in the appropriate field will blindly review all general manuscripts.

No work will be accepted or rejected purely on the basis of its methodology or subject. Author sex, race, ethnic background, geographical location or work affiliation (secondary/college level, department, etc.) of the author(s) are never considered in making editorial judgments. The demands of the disciplines of speech communication and theater are key factors in the editorial judgments made. All editorial decisions attempt to balance these demands with the needs and interests of the journal’s readers.

The journal is guided by three key principles:

- To provide an outlet for the expression of diverse ideas.
- To publish high quality scholarship in the disciplines of Speech Communication and Theater.
- To meet the journal-related needs of CTAM and its members.

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The call for Manuscripts goes out in the fall of the year and the deadline for submissions is in March of the following year. Details of how to submit are given in the Call which is sent to all members, departments, and announced in SPECTRA. Book review ideas should be queried with the editor in advance of the submission date. Book reviews are generally published if accepted on a space available basis. All articles are read anonymously by at least two associate editors. All author identification markings are removed from the articles and no editor reads the work of a colleague. Associate editors may submit articles to the journal, but their work must go through the process of blind review, just as any other submitter. The journal editor facilitates the process and makes final decisions based on the associate editor’s recommendations and comments. If there are any questions about the process, please direct them to the journal editor.

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FROM THE EDITOR

At the Annual Convention of the Central States Communication Association in Kansas City last April, the Communication and Theater Association of Minnesota Journal was recognized as the Outstanding State Journal. This was a great honor and a testament to the hard work of everyone who made last year’s volume a success.

I would like to thank everyone who contributed to Volume 39 including everyone who submitted manuscripts. We were very lucky to have had some truly excellent submissions last year. I would also like to thank my Editorial Assistant, Bradford Wakefield, who had the thankless job of transcribing and proofreading. Finally, and most importantly, I want to thank the Associate Editors who review and re-review all of the manuscripts submitted. I have been exceptionally lucky to have such thoughtful, critical, dedicated people willing to invest a lot of time and energy to make this journal great. I could put out a single page without their hard work. The CTAM Journal’s Associate Editors represent institutions throughout the United States but each and every one of them has, at one time or another, called Minnesota home and I am grateful that for their commitment to the Communication and Theater Association of Minnesota.

All my gratitude,

James P. Dimock, Editor
Communication & Theater Association of Minnesota Journal
Friends “For Good”
Wicked: A New Musical and the Idealization of Friendship

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Abstract
This rhetorical analysis explores the relationship between the two main characters, Elphaba and G(a)linda, in the musical Wicked through the interpersonal communication lens of friendship. This article focuses on the role that friendship plays in the musical and suggests that friendship is a relationship that can be stronger than romantic relationships. Through the application of Rawlins’ work on friendship to the relationship between Elphaba and G(a)linda, this analysis suggests that friendship is the most prominent relationship in Wicked. Wicked offers an important message to theatre-goers: Friendship is something to be valued and cherished.

Introduction
In 2003, Wicked: A New Musical began its now ten-year Broadway run. While the musical received mixed reviews at the time, it soon grew to be one of today’s most popular musical theatre productions (Wolf, 2007). Based on Gregory Maguire’s hit novel Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West, the musical is both a prequel and a sequel to L. Frank Baum’s The Wonderful Wizard of Oz. Wicked: A New Musical tells the stories of Elphaba, an ambitious, intelligent, green-skinned girl who becomes the Wicked Witch of the West, and Galinda, a pretty, self-centered, popular girl who becomes Glinda the Good. The musical reinvents Baum’s Land of Oz as a hegemonic society where Animals (with a capital A), which are distinguished from animals (with a lower-case a) because of their ability to think and communicate, are an oppressed social class that is being silenced by the Wizard of Oz and his regime. While many messages in the musical concern power dynamics (Kruse & Prettyman, 2008; Schrader, 2010), the show also paints a picture of an idealized friendship between the two main characters.

This article suggests that the musical Wicked offers an example of the ideal friendship. Through a rhetorical analysis of the show’s script, lyrics, sheet music, and cast recording, I examine how Wicked communicates messages about the interpersonal relationship of friendship to its audience members. This analysis uses Wicked as an example of the intersection of theatre and interpersonal communication, relying heavily on communication research in the area of friendship. This article contends that friendship is an overarching theme throughout the musical, and that the relationship between Elphaba and G(a)linda is positioned in a way that suggests that
friendships can be equally as important as romantic relationships. Furthermore, it suggests that audience members may learn lessons about friendship from *Wicked*, which they may apply to their own real-life friendships.

While theatre has long been reported as an important medium for social commentary (Denning, 1996; Elliot, 1990; Langas, 2005; Papa, 1999), musical theatre as a rhetorical text has been studied less frequently. Among these scholars are Aiken (2005), Cook (2009), and Most (1998), who analyzed *Oklahoma!*, focusing on the racist and sexist meanings in the script and lyrics, albeit in different ways; Sebesta (2006) and Schrader (2009), who examined the musical *Rent*; and Pao (1992), who studied *Miss Saigon*, observing the roles that gender and race played in the casting of the show. Perhaps because of its popularity or because of its many messages, *Wicked* has been studied by scholars in a variety of disciplines. Performance scholar Stacy Wolf (2008) has argued that G(a)linda and Elphaba are an example of a queer couple. She compared the music, and in particular, the duets between Elphaba and G(a)linda in *Wicked* to the duets between male and female romantic leads in classic musicals like *Oklahoma!*, *Guys and Dolls*, and *Carousel*. In a separate article, Wolf (2007) also examined the connection young women feel to the characters of Elphaba and G(a)linda, as well as to the actresses playing these characters. In 2009, Lane applied Relational-Cultural Theory to the musical, suggesting that the relationship between G(a)linda and Elphaba is similar to the relationship between a counselor and client. Kruse and Prettyman (2008) observed women’s leadership styles in *Wicked*, suggesting that Madame Morrible uses a “masculine” leadership style, G(a)linda uses a “feminine” leadership style, and that Elphaba represents women who reject both styles. In her dissertation, Burger (2009) also looked at *Wicked: A New Musical*, but in conjunction with the book version of *Wicked*, the film version of *The Wiz*, the 1929 film *The Wizard of Oz*, and L. Frank Baum’s original novel. Focusing on the key issues of gender, race, home, and magic, which appear in all five works and all relate to American identity, Burger argued that myth, like performance and text, is fluid, not fixed. In 2010, Schrader examined the musical in terms of social movement leadership and hegemony, suggesting that Elphaba is a militant social movement leader, G(a)linda becomes a conservative social movement leader, and the Wizard of Oz uses hegemonic functions to oppress Ozian Animals, a type of social class in Oz. In 2011, Schrader studied *Wicked* in terms of women’s humor stereotypes, suggesting that the characters break down these stereotypes. In 2012, Schweitzer examined the musical through an adolescent psychology lens, arguing that the musical serves as a “twenty-first century parable” (p. 499) for teenage girls. Indeed, *Wicked* is a rhetorical text with a variety of meanings for theatre-goers.

This analysis attempts to bridge the areas of rhetoric and theatre with an important interpersonal communication concept: Friendship. Through the application of theoretical constructs concerning friendship to the relationship between Elphaba and G(a)linda in *Wicked*, this analysis suggests that friendship is the most prominent relationship in *Wicked*. By doing so, this article suggests that *Wicked* delivers an important message to theatre-goers: Friendship is something to be valued and cherished.

**From Loathing to Liking: A Friendship is Born**

In the musical, Elphaba and Galinda first meet when they arrive at their chosen college, Shiz University. The two young women are as different as one might imagine: Galinda is pretty, popular, and flighty, while Elphaba is unattractive, down-to-earth, and talented. While neither character likes the other initially, it is not until they are paired as roommates that they truly realize to what extent they dislike one another. While writing letters to their parents, they declare
their hatred for each other in song. Both girls notice their “faces flushing” and their “heads reeling,” causing them to question the feeling that brings on these symptoms. They both arrive at the same answer:

Both: Loathing! Unadulterated loathing…
Galinda: For your face…
Elphaba: Your voice…
Galinda: Your clothing…
Both: Let’s just say: I loathe it all! Every little trait, however small, makes my very flesh begin to crawl with simple, utter loathing!

It seems unlikely that Galinda and Elphaba will become friends. They bicker in class, tease each other, and say unkind things behind each other’s backs. They are, to use Coates’ (1999) terms, “behaving badly” (p. 66). Coates, basing her work on Goffman’s (1959) concepts of “frontstage” and “backstage,” noted that women were more likely to “behave badly,” or rather in a way that does not adhere to societal expectations of how women “should” act, in “backstage” situations. Galinda and Elphaba express feelings and say certain things “backstage” when they speak privately to friends or family members; they say things that they would not say “frontstage.” Yet a strange turn of events causes the two to become friends.

When Fiyero, a popular, attractive prince from Oz’s western province, arrives at Shiz, he and Galinda are instantly attracted to one another. Galinda wants to go to the school dance with Fiyero, but first she must rid herself of an unwanted suitor, a Munchkin named Boq. She convinces Boq to do her a favor by asking Elphaba’s sister, the beautiful and disabled Nessarose, to the dance, which frees Galinda to go with Fiyero. Nessarose, thrilled that she has been asked to the dance, tells Elphaba of Galinda’s “selfless” act. Elphaba, who loves her sister dearly, decides to return the favor to Galinda by convincing the headmistress, Madame Morrible, to include Galinda in their private sorcery seminar, which is something in which Galinda desperately wanted to participate. Meanwhile, Galinda, who is unaware of Elphaba’s kind deed, plays a trick on her roommate by giving her an ugly hat, which she insists is “smart” and “sharp,” to wear to the dance.

At the dance, Madame Morrible stops by to give Galinda a wand for the sorcery seminar and informs her that her inclusion in the seminar was due solely to Elphaba’s insistence. Suddenly, Galinda feels guilty about what she has done. When Elphaba arrives, wearing the ugly pointed black hat, she is ridiculed, and glares at Galinda, knowing that she has been tricked. Defiantly, Elphaba begins to dance by herself, looking rather silly and uncoordinated. Galinda, knowing what she must do, joins Elphaba in her silly dance and risks her own popularity in doing so. Gradually, the other students join in, symbolically representing Elphaba’s acceptance by her peers. Most importantly, this odd twist of events positions the two young women as friends.

Unlikely friendships often arise from unlikely circumstances. Rawlins (2009) examined Toni Morrison’s short story, “Recitatif,” which tells the story of two girls (later women), one Caucasian and one African-American, who become friends when they are placed at an orphanage. These two girls, Roberta and Twyla, who come from very different backgrounds (for example, one had a mother who neglected her while the other had a mother who cared for her very much), become friends because they are placed in a social situation that allows this friendship to emerge. While Galinda and Elphaba, too, were placed in a situation where friendship could blossom (they were roommates), they did not become friends until they became open to accepting one another. They were not engaging in dialogue until the moment at the dance. As Rawlins (2009) noted, “participating in the genuine spirit of dialogue mandates simultaneous self-respect
and respect for others” (p. 57). It is not until the events at the dance cause Elphaba and Galinda to have respect for each other that they can truly engage in dialogue and become friends. Theatre-goers may identify with Elphaba and Galinda in this respect, perhaps noting and reflecting upon their own unlikely friendships.

After the dance, Galinda and Elphaba solidify their friendship by telling secrets and participating in makeovers. Galinda tells Elphaba a secret – that she and Fiyero are going to be married (even though she hasn’t told Fiyero this yet). She prods Elphaba until Elphaba finally agrees to tell a secret of her own: That her father hates her because she is responsible for her mother’s death. Elphaba explains that because she was born with green skin, her father forced her mother to chew milk flowers while she was pregnant with Nessarose; this resulted in Nessarose’s disability and their mother’s death. Galinda compassionately insists that Elphaba’s secret isn’t true, noting that it was the milk flowers that killed her mother, not Elphaba.

Narratives, like the secrets Elphaba and Galinda told one another, are an important part of friendship. Cheshire (2000) noted that adolescent girls, who are but a few years younger than Elphaba and Galinda at this point in the musical, construct their selves through their stories. In Galinda’s story, she is able to construct herself as Fiyero’s fiancée. By telling Elphaba, she is attempting to make her story real. Rawlins (2009) explained that “telling stories together explores the points of view and particularities of each friend’s individuated life” (p. 47). Through Galinda’s story, Elphaba is able to see that her friend values romantic love. Through Elphaba’s story, Galinda is able to understand Elphaba’s self-blame and guilt. Rawlins also noted that “telling stories is an embodied effort that involves the simultaneous and consequential activities of speaking and listening” (p. 48). In their dialogic exchange, Galinda and Elphaba take turns speaking and listening. Even Galinda, who is so fond of being the center of attention, makes an effort to listen to her new friend. Through this scene, Wicked offers theatre-goers a lesson about the importance of engaging in dialogue and listening to friends.

In the following scene, an interesting twist occurs when Elphaba and Fiyero appear to be attracted to one another while participating in an act of rebellion in order to free a caged Lion cub. After Fiyero leaves, Elphaba sings a lonely ballad in the rain: “Don’t wish, don’t start. Wishing only wounds the heart. I wasn’t born for the rose and pearl. There’s a girl I know...he loves her so. I’m not that girl.”

Elphaba is in love with Fiyero, but she chooses not to pursue him because it would violate her friendship with Galinda, his girlfriend. Rawlins and Holl (1987) observed that adolescents, who, again, are only a few years younger than Elphaba and Galinda are in the musical, were particularly concerned with trust. Trust involved “relying on someone else not to speak in a way or relate information that might undermine or dislodge how an individual sees him/herself and/or perceives others as seeing him/her in the present social order” (pp. 359-360). Elphaba knows that Galinda trusts her, and exploring a relationship with Fiyero would destroy how Galinda sees herself: As the perfect girl with the perfect boyfriend. Because Elphaba cares for her friend, she chooses Galinda’s happiness over her own.

As Elphaba sings, Madame Morrible arrives with a letter: The Wizard of Oz wishes to see Elphaba. Ecstatic, Elphaba goes to the train station where Galinda, Boq, and Nessarose have gathered to wish her goodbye and good luck. Boq and Nessarose begin to quarrel, leaving Galinda alone with Elphaba to tell her friend that she feels her relationship with Fiyero is in danger. Fiyero arrives with flowers for Elphaba and wishes her good luck, but barely notices Galinda, who even changed her name to Glinda in order to find common ground with Fiyero, who, like
Elphaba, is deeply concerned about Animal Rights. When Fiyero leaves, Glinda begins to cry. Elphaba tries to comfort her friend:

Elphaba: Don’t cry, Galinda…
Glinda: It’s Glinda now. Stupid idea, I don’t even know what made me say it.
Elphaba: Oh, it doesn’t matter what your name is – everyone loves you!

Elphaba again is engaging in helping Glinda assign meaning to her life through her story. Stories, as Rawlins (2009) explained, are “fundamentally concerned with the meanings that we assign to our experiences and lives” (p. 47). Glinda, devastated that Fiyero may no longer love her, needs a friend to help her find meaning in her life. Elphaba does this by reminding Glinda of her popularity, something that Glinda values highly. When this attempt at consoling her friend ultimately fails, Elphaba sighs, hugs her friend, and invites Glinda to come with her on her trip to the Emerald City.

When they arrive, the two young women are amazed by the city. With excitement, they explore the sights while singing the upbeat song “One Short Day.” They conclude their song by expressing their commitment to their friendship:
Both: We’re just two friends…
Elphaba: Two good friends…
Glinda: Two best friends… (emphasis New York Performance Script’s)

It is interesting that Glinda, the popular one, is the one who declares that Elphaba is her best friend. Elphaba, who has so few friends, calls Glinda her good friend, but Glinda, who has so many friends, refers to Elphaba as her best friend. This labeling further solidifies their commitment to one another…a commitment that is challenged once they meet the Wizard of Oz.

### Judging and Accepting a Friend’s Decision

Elphaba and Glinda meet the Wizard together, frightened and holding hands like two children. The Wizard offers both of them positions of power, as long as Elphaba can cast what she is told is a levitation spell on the Wizard’s Monkey Servant, Chistery. Madame Morrible, the Wizard’s new press secretary, hands Elphaba an ancient book of spells called the Grimmerie. Elphaba successfully casts the spell, but the two young women are terrified when the Monkey screams in pain and sprouts wings. When the Wizard informs them that Chistery, and others like him, will be used as spies to report “subversive Animal behavior,” Elphaba grabs the Grimmerie and runs off, leaving Glinda to apologize for her and to run after her.

Elphaba runs to a tiny, barren room in the uppermost turret of the palace, where Glinda joins her. The two young women quarrel over their differing behaviors:
Glinda: Why couldn’t you have stayed calm for once, instead of flying off the handle?! I hope you’re happy how you hurt your cause forever! I hope you think you’re clever!
Elphaba: I hope you’re happy, too! I hope you’re proud how you would grovel in submission to feed your own ambition!

This argument reveals Elphaba’s and Glinda’s differing values, but it also shows that they care enough about each other to confront one another when they disagree. Wright (1982) noted that women, more than men, tend to confront sources of disagreement in their friendships, and Elphaba and Glinda do exactly that. They are not afraid to tell each other how they feel. As Rawlins (2009) observed, all friendships include a dialectical tension referred to as “the dialectic of judgment and acceptance” (p. 107). Here, Glinda and Elphaba are nearing the judgment end of this dialectic; each is judging the other’s actions, but only because they care about each other.
The quarrel is interrupted by Madame Morrible’s voice on a loudspeaker, announcing that Elphaba is an evil enemy who must be stopped. Glinda whispers “Oh, no…” and assures Elphaba that everything will be okay if she just apologizes to the Wizard. Glinda expresses care for her friend by recognizing Elphaba’s own values (that she longs to work with the Wizard) and by suggesting a way that her friend could still make her dreams come true. Elphaba, however, is not interested in reversing her actions; she has decided to take a stand against the oppression she has witnessed regarding the Animals.

Before the guards break down the door, Elphaba casts a levitation spell that enables a broom to fly, and asks Glinda to join her on her journey to help the Animals and fight the Wizard. Through song, the girls imagine what it would be like to work together:

Elphaba: Unlimited…together, we’re unlimited. Together, we’ll be the greatest team there’s ever been, Glinda! Dreams, the way we planned ‘em…
Glinda: If we work in tandem…
Both: There’s no fight we cannot win! Just you and I, defying gravity!
Glinda and Elphaba are exploring one possible future; one that would involve an adventure in which the two friends can participate together. Rawlins (1982) explained that young adulthood is “a time for investigating with others various career and lifestyle alternatives in conjunction with one’s personal relationships, values, and preferred modes of relaxation” (p. 104). Through this portion of the song “Defying Gravity,” Glinda and Elphaba consider one possible lifestyle option.

However, while Glinda may happily imagine travelling the country on a broom with her best friend, she is not yet ready to give up her “perfect” life for this adventure. When Elphaba asks if she’s coming, she quietly wraps a black blanket around Elphaba’s shoulders and sings, “I hope you’re happy, now that you’re choosing this.” Elphaba replies in song, “You, too. I hope it brings you bliss.” Together, they join in song: “I really hope you get it, and you don’t live to regret it. I hope you’re happy in the end. I hope you’re happy, my friend.”

The two young women are parting ways, but as they do, the pendulum of judgment and acceptance swings towards the acceptance opposition. The melody echoes the confrontation earlier in the scene, but the lyrics, dynamics of the music, and nonverbal actions of the actresses indicate that this is truly a moment of acceptance for Elphaba and Glinda’s friendship. They are sad to part ways, but happy for each other because each is following her dream. The two characters are performing “conjunctive freedoms,” which allow “for both the edifying individuation and participation of friendship” (Rawlins, 2009, p. 179).

When the guards rush in, they grab Glinda, who protests, but Elphaba, flying on the broom, diverts the guards’ attention by screaming, “It’s not her! She has nothing to do with it! I’m the one you want! It’s me!” Here, she clears Glinda’s name, allowing her friend to pursue her own dream. Glinda also has one last wish for her friend. As Elphaba declares her triumph while the citizens of Oz point and call her “wicked,” Glinda sings “I hope you’re happy!” one last time, in order to wish her friend well.

Testing Friendship: A Double Betrayal

At the beginning of Act II, Glinda has become an adored public figure, and Elphaba has become Oz’s scapegoat. Fiyero, who is engaged to Glinda only because she wishes it, has become Captain of the Guard in order to find Elphaba, his true love. Glinda recognizes that her “perfect” life is not perfect without her best friend, but engages in the process of face-saving (Goffman, 1959) and insists through song that she “couldn’t be happier.”
Elphaba, though a wanted criminal now, sneaks into the palace in order to free some of the winged Monkeys from their cages. The Wizard tries to strike a deal with her, and she begins to accept, but then finds a silent and incoherent Doctor Dillamond, her former Goat-professor who has been stripped of his title and taken away, and declares war on the Wizard once again. When the Wizard calls for the guards, Fiyero arrives, and is shocked to find Elphaba. Much to the other characters’ surprise, he pulls his gun on the Wizard, not Elphaba, and tells Elphaba to leave.

Suddenly, Glinda appears in the doorway, and is thrilled to see her friend. “Elphie!” she cries. “Thank Oz you’re alive!” She continues in her own well-meaning and uneducated way, “Only, you shouldn’t have come. If anyone discovers you…” She then notices Fiyero holding his gun on the Wizard, and fears for both Fiyero’s and Elphaba’s lives. In an attempt to use her good reputation with the Wizard to save her friend and her fiancé, she pleads to the Wizard: “Your Ozness, he means no disrespectation! Please understand; we all went to school together.”

Fiyero, though, does not wish to be saved. He announces that he’s going with Elphaba, and both women stare at him in shock. Suddenly, Glinda has a realization. “What are you saying?” she asks, struggling to find the words. “That, all this time…the two of you…behind my back…” Elphaba insists that “it wasn’t like that,” but then runs off with Fiyero.

“Fine! Go!” Glinda bitterly cries. “You deserve each other!” Glinda feels betrayed by both her fiancé and her best friend. Johnson, Wittenberg, Haigh, Wigley, Becker, Brown and Craig (2004) noted that two of the turning points in deteriorating friendships are conflict and one friend finding a romantic partner. Specifically, they observe that women were more likely than men to list conflict as a negative turning point. Elphaba’s act of finding a lover causes particular unhappiness for Glinda, not because Glinda wants Elphaba to herself, but because Glinda is in love with the man who loves her friend. Furthermore, conflict, or a betrayal in this case, causes deterioration in Glinda and Elphaba’s friendship. This betrayal, to use May’s (1967) terms, is a “sin against the friend.”

Glinda is shaken and sobbing when Madame Morrible arrives. The Wizard and Morrible discuss the situation and begin to think of a plan to capture Elphaba. Glinda, angry at Elphaba and Fiyero, suggests in a moment of weakness that the Wizard and Morrible spread a rumor that Elphaba’s sister, Nessarose, is in trouble. If they do this, Glinda says, Elphaba will fly to her sister’s side and they can capture her. Thinking that she has created an eye-for-eye situation, Glinda retires, reprising the song “I’m Not That Girl,” which Elphaba sang in Act I when referring to Fiyero’s relationship with Glinda.

Elphaba and Fiyero escape to a forest, where they sing a love song together. When Elphaba begins to look troubled, Fiyero assures her, “You and Glinda will make up, and someday…” Fiyero recognizes the importance of this friendship to his lover. As Rawlins (2009) stated, we have a “deep regard for our friends’ irreplaceable presence in our lives” (p. 56). This is indeed true for the friendship between Elphaba and Glinda, and Fiyero recognizes this “sacredness” (p. 56) of friendship. In this recognition, he assures Elphaba that her friendship with Glinda is not over.

Meanwhile, though Glinda may have thought that the Wizard’s regime would spread a rumor that would result in Elphaba’s incarceration, the Wizard and Morrible have other plans. Morrible uses her sorcery powers to create a tornado that causes a house to fall from the sky, killing Nessarose. Glinda, arriving first, quietly picks a flower and sinks to her knees in grief. When Elphaba arrives, the two women begin to quarrel:

Elphaba: (sarcastically) What a touching display of grief.
Glinda: (indignantly) I don’t believe we have anything further to say to one anoth-
er.
Elphaba: I wanted something to remember her by. All that was left of her were
those shoes…and now that wretched little farm girl has walked off with them! So I
would appreciate some time alone to say goodbye to my sister! (Then quietly)
Nessa…oh, Nessa, forgive me.
The two women engage in conflict in this scene. Both of their comments, especially
Glinda’s remark, suggest what Buber (1970) referred to as an I-It relationship; they are discon-
firming each other as people. Rather than engaging in dialogue, they choose rejection due to their
anger. Glinda, though, attempts to change this when she sees how upset Elphaba is about her sis-
ter. She responds compassionately: “Elphie, don’t blame yourself. It’s dreadful…to have a house
fall on you. But, accidents will happen.”
Though well-meant, this comment infuriates Elphaba. She responds with “You call this
an accident?!” An angry conversation follows:
Glinda: Yes! Well, maybe not an accident, but…
Elphaba: Well then, what would you call it?
Glinda: Well…a regime change. Caused by a bizarre and unexpected…twister of
fate.
Elphaba: So you think cyclones just appear? Out of the blue?
Glinda: I don’t know, I never really…
Elphaba: No, of course you never…you’re too busy telling everyone how wonder-
ful everything is!
Glinda: Well, I’m a public figure now! People expect me to…
Elphaba: Lie?
Glinda: Be encouraging!
Here, the dialectic of judgment and acceptance has swung to the judgment side of the
continuum. The two women continue to criticize each other until the true nature of the conflict
arises. Glinda snaps, “Well, a lot of us are taking things that don’t belong to us, aren’t we?” This
statement indicates Glinda’s emotions about being betrayed by her friend. However, Elphaba,
who never pursued Fiyero until he made it clear which witch he truly loved, defends herself:
Now wait just a clock-tick. I know it’s difficult for that blissful blond brain of
yours to comprehend that someone like him could actually choose someone like
me! But it’s happened; it’s real! And you can wave that ridiculous wand all you
want; you can’t change it! He never belonged to you, he doesn’t love you, and he
never did! He loves me!
This monologue results in Glinda slapping Elphaba, and the two women attempt to attack
each other with their chosen weapons: A magic wand and a broomstick. By the time the guards
arrive to capture Elphaba, the women have gotten into a fistfight. This time, Elphaba feels be-
trayed. She says to Glinda, “I can’t believe you would sink this low: To use my sister’s death as
a trap to capture me!” Glinda replies, “What?! No! I only meant…” Before she can finish her
statement, Fiyero arrives to save Elphaba, at the expense of his own freedom.
Interestingly, it appears that Glinda and Elphaba may have been able to engage in dia-
logue that may have resulted in the mending of their friendship in this scene, but circumstances
do not permit it. However, some of Elphaba’s comments cause Glinda think about her own life
choices, as well as her friend’s. She returns to the Wizard’s palace, where a group of witch hunt-
ers has gathered to search for and kill Elphaba. Glinda protests against the rumors she hears, and
confronts Madame Morrible about the cyclone that killed Nessarose. When Morrible tells her to “shut up,” Glinda forces herself to smile and wave, but then runs off Kiamo Ko Castle to warn Elphaba that the witch hunters are coming for her. Despite her feelings of betrayal, she is ready to engage in dialogue with her friend.

**Saying Goodbye to a Dear Friend**

When Glinda arrives at the castle, Elphaba has locked up Dorothy and is trying to get her to remove Nessarose’s shoes. She is also trying to get Chistery, a Flying Monkey, to speak. Elphaba tells Glinda twice to go away, but Glinda is persistent:

"Let the little girl go. And that poor little dog – Dodo. Elphaba, I know you don’t want to hear this, but somebody has to say it: You are out of control! I mean, come on. They’re just shoes! Let it go. Elphie, please. You can’t go on like this."

Here, Glinda demonstrates caring for her friend. She realizes that Elphaba is at a point of desperation, even though Elphaba may not yet realize it herself. In extending Aristotle’s discussion of friendship, Rawlins (2009) suggested that “friendship involves mutual concern for the other’s well-being for that person’s own sake” (p. 177). Here, Glinda shows concern for Elphaba’s well-being. She is not trying to persuade Elphaba to be like her; she accepts Elphaba’s own uniqueness and tries to persuade her to do what is best for her.

It takes Elphaba a bit longer to express her own concern for Glinda, but after receiving some bad news regarding Fiyero, she does indeed express her own concern for Glinda. Realizing that she must surrender, she tells Glinda, “You can’t be found here. You must go.” Elphaba is concerned about Glinda’s own future as a leader of Oz; she knows that if Glinda is found with the so-called Wicked Witch of the West, she will lose all credibility with her followers. In order to protect her friend, she insists that Glinda not try to clear her name. As Rawlins (2009) observed, “in expressing thoughts and feelings to friends, we embrace the responsibility to protect our friends’ and our own privacy, areas of vulnerability, and threats to dignity” (p. 58). Elphaba, who recognizes that Glinda clearing her name would result in Glinda’s own vulnerability and loss of credibility in the public sphere, makes Glinda promise not to do such an action. Reluctantly, Glinda agrees. Elphaba hands her the Grimmerie and tells her, “Now it’s up to you.”

A touching moment occurs when Elphaba confesses that Glinda is the only friend she has ever had. Perhaps this unique position of singularity that Glinda has held in Elphaba’s life has caused Elphaba to be more in tune with her friend’s needs, even when Glinda does not recognize her own needs. Glinda replies comically, “And I’ve had so many friends. But only one that mattered.” Glinda notes that she comes from a very different perspective, but echoes Elphaba’s sentiments when she tells her that she is the only friend that really mattered to her. This sentiment is further indicated by Glinda as she begins singing the duet “For Good:"

I’ve heard it said, that people come into our lives for a reason, bringing something we must learn. And we are led to those who help us most to grow, if we let them, and we help them in return. Well, I don’t know if I believe that’s true, but I know I’m who I am today because I knew you. Like a comet pulled from orbit as it passes a sun, like a stream that meets a boulder halfway through the wood. Who can say if I’ve been changed for the better? But because I knew you, I have been changed for good.

Glinda confesses that Elphaba has made a profound impact on her life, and implies that she is thankful for it. Furthermore, her solo here suggests that she recognizes that she must say goodbye to her friend. She does not say “because I know you;” she says “because I knew you” –
in the past tense. Glinda knows that this will be the last time she will engage in dialogue with her friend, and because of this finality, she intends to express her sentiments towards Elphaba.

Elphaba echoes these same sentiments in her solo lines:

It well may be that we will never meet again in this lifetime, so let me say before we part: So much of me is made of what I learned from you. You’ll be with me, like a handprint on my heart. And now whatever way our stories end, I know you have re-written mine, by being my friend.

Elphaba also recognizes that this is likely the last time she will participate in dialogue with her friend, and she expresses her own feelings towards Glinda. She also notes that her friend has permanently changed her: “You’ll be with me, like a handprint on my heart.” This dialogical encounter enables both friends to seek forgiveness from one another:

Elphaba: And just to clear the air, I ask forgiveness for the things I’ve done you blame me for.
Glinda: But then, I guess, we know there’s blame to share.
Both: And none of it seems to matter anymore.

Elphaba and Glinda are participating in what Kelley (1998) referred to as direct forgiveness. This type of forgiveness occurs when people bluntly tell others that they are forgiven. Direct forgiveness, for Kelley, exists in contrast to indirect forgiveness, in which forgiveness is “just understood” (p. 264) and conditional forgiveness, which attaches stipulations to forgiveness. Using Kelley’s three forms of forgiveness, Merolla (2008) suggested that “transgressions of increasing severity and blameworthiness tend to be forgiven indirectly or conditionally” (p. 114). Interestingly, Elphaba and Glinda challenge this finding. Their transgressions indeed were severe: Elphaba “stole” Glinda’s fiancé, albeit unwittingly, and Glinda played a role, although also unwittingly, in the murder of Elphaba’s sister. Perhaps it is the understanding between these two friends that neither intentionally performed the transgression that causes them to directly forgive one another. The forgiveness illustrated through Wicked may provide audience members with an ideal to strive for in their own friendships.

The two women switch voice parts at this point in the song: Glinda, the soprano, sings the alto melody, while Elphaba, the mezzo-soprano, sings the soprano descant. In her dissertation, Schrader (2010) argued that this switch symbolizes the passing of the torch of leadership, but the interweaving of the two voices also suggests that the two women have entangled their lives in a way that each will be forever influenced by her friend. They finish the song with a hug, and Elphaba ushers Glinda to a hiding place. A curtain is pulled and a silhouette of Elphaba is apparent, followed by a shadow of a young girl and a bucket of water. Elphaba lets out a heart-stopping cry, and is “melted.”

When Glinda emerges from her hiding place and pulls back the curtain, only the ugly black hat and a green bottle remain of Elphaba. Glinda sadly picks up the hat and hugs it, as Chistery finally begins to speak and hands her the bottle. Heartbroken by the loss of her friend and empowered by Elphaba’s desire for Glinda to continue her work on behalf of Animal Rights, Glinda enters the Wizard’s palace, exiles the Wizard, imprisons Madame Morrible, and takes over as the new leader of Oz. Chistery hands the Grimmerie to Glinda, who steps into her mechanical bubble to address the citizens of Oz regarding Elphaba’s apparent death. She hugs the book in memory of Elphaba, mourning the loss of her best friend.

Meanwhile, a scarecrow stands on the other side of the stage, and a trap door in the floor of the stage opens, revealing Elphaba. Elphaba has faked her own death and has turned Fiyero into a scarecrow in order to save both of their lives. Fiyero urges Elphaba to leave Oz with him,
but she pauses a minute, and softly says, “I only wish Glinda could know that we’re alive.” Elphaba, though thankful that her plan has worked, is also mourning the loss of her friend. Above all, she wishes she could tell her best friend that she and Fiyero are alive and well, but Fiyero reminds her that it cannot be if they want to be safe. In the final moment of the musical, Elphaba and Fiyero, with mixed emotions, leave Oz, while Glinda retires to her palace chamber, hugging the Grimmerie and crying in remembrance of her lost friend.

**Discussion**

By analyzing the script, lyrics, sheet music and the cast recording of *Wicked* through the communicative lens of friendship, I have attempted to reveal how the relationship between Elphaba and Glinda is an ideal friendship. Elphaba and Glinda participate in what Rawlins (2009) referred to as the dialectic of judgment and acceptance, and, although they (unintentionally) betray each other, they seek forgiveness from one another and offer forgiveness to one another directly and unconditionally. Although this is a fictional idealized friendship, it provides its audience members with an ideal to strive for in their own real-life friendships.

Audience members may find that they have friendships that parallel Elphaba and G(a)linda’s relationship. Some theatre-goers may relate to one or both of the characters and/or compare their friends to one of both of the characters. Some theatre-goers may learn lessons from the characters, such as the value of forgiveness, the importance of trust, or the roles that storytelling, dialogue, and listening play in friendships. Through *Wicked*, audience members may be encouraged to give unlikely friendships a chance.

Additionally, *Wicked* suggests that, in some cases, friendship, rather than a romantic relationship, can be the most important relationship in one’s life. In *Wicked*, the most prominent relationship is between two friends, Elphaba and G(a)linda. Wolf (2008) observed that the arrangement of songs in *Wicked* echoes the same pattern that, in 1950s and 1960s musicals, places the two leading characters in a romantic relationship. This pattern serves to highlight the most important relationship in a musical. For example, in *Oklahoma!*, the key relationship is a romance between Curly and Laurey, and in *Guys and Dolls*, it is a romantic relationship between Sarah and Sky. However, *Wicked’s* key relationship is not a romance; it is a friendship. The song arrangement that Wolf noted highlights the importance of friendship in *Wicked*.

Furthermore, this analysis suggests that the role of Fiyero serves to bring attention to the friendship between Elphaba and G(a)linda. Fiyero serves as a cause of tension in the friendship between Elphaba and Glinda. His role enables the first betrayal, of which Glinda must find it in her heart to forgive her dear friend for “stealing” her fiancé. Wolf (2008) noted that Fiyero “fails to register as a significant force in *Wicked*” (p. 18). Indeed, she is correct: Fiyero cannot be as strong a character as Glinda or Elphaba because he is not part of the primary relationship in the musical: The close friendship between the two women. Instead, Fiyero serves to place the women in situations that allow their friendship to both deteriorate and grow stronger.

By creating an ideal friendship between G(a)linda and Elphaba, and by placing it in the forefront of the musical, *Wicked* suggests that friendships can be just as important, if not more valuable, than romantic relationships. Future research may explore this concept in real-life settings, as well as in other fictional texts in which strong friendships are observed. As Rawlins and others acknowledge, friendship is an integral part of life. Friendship need not play second fiddle to romance. Indeed, *Wicked* creates a relationship between its two main characters that shows the value of friendship, while not framing friendship as inferior or secondary to romantic relationship-
ships. Elphaba and Glinda, like so many real-life friends, find their friendship fulfilling in itself, so much so that they change each other “for good.”

References


A Superpower Apologizes? President Clinton’s Address in Rwanda

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Abstract

The failure to intervene in Rwanda was one of the greatest foreign policy mishaps of Bill Clinton’s presidency. In March 1998, Clinton made an extended tour of the African subcontinent with a stop in Rwanda. During his brief visit, the president attempted to repair the image of the United States among Rwandans and the broader international community. Clinton used three primary image repair strategies: democratization of blame, corrective action, and transcendence. Despite his emphasis on the important lessons that the world could learn from the Rwandan genocide, we argue that his rhetorical choices ultimately undermined his larger mission and led to the mixed response he received from pundits, politicians, and policymakers.

Introduction

On April 6, 1994, a plane carrying the presidents of Rwanda and Burundi was shot down over the central African nation of Rwanda. The assassination of these political leaders was a signal to Rwanda’s Hutu led majority government to begin committing genocidal atrocities against the minority Tutsis. In a little over 100 days an estimated 800,000-1 million Rwandans lost their lives in the genocide. During this time period, the United States, the United Nations, and other nation-states did nothing to stem the violence. U.N. Secretary General Boutros-Boutros Ghali publicly castigated the international community for its inaction and implored the U.N. Security Council to do something. As he noted at a press conference in the early stages of the genocide, “All of us are responsible for this failure. It is genocide which has been committed. More than 200,000 people have been killed, and . . . the international community is still discussing what ought to be done” (Meisler, 1994, p. A6). Five years later, a genocide panel looking into the inaction of the United Nations came up with a similar finding when it stated “incompetence of the United Nations, coupled with the political paralysis of the United States and other powers, led to the failure to stop the murder of as many 800,000 Rwandans” (Lynch, 1999, p. A29). The reason why the United States did not intervene can be traced to the Clinton administration’s foreign policy failure in Somalia – the scene of a disastrous U.S. military intervention in 1993, where 18 American soldiers and an estimated 500 to 2,000 Somalis were killed during a peacekeeping mission in Mogadishu. Because of that foreign policy debacle the administration issued strict guidelines about committing the United States to further peacekeeping missions. Rwanda was the first test of that policy. The Clinton administration, fearing another Somalia, did little to intervene or convince other nations to put their troops in harm’s way (Preston & Williams, 1994). Stephen Pope (1999) summarized the criticism leveled at the Clinton administration suc-
cinctly when he stated “the United States leadership and the entire international community, especially Belgium, France, and the United States, failed completely in their responsibility during this tragedy” (p. 8). Considering President Clinton actively promoted the United States as the “indispensable nation” America’s failure to intervene in Rwanda certainly harmed its image as a world leader and defender of civilization - particularly in the eyes of Rwandans and Africans.

Four years after the genocide, President Clinton made a groundbreaking trip to Africa where he wanted to introduce the “American people to a new Africa” (French, 1998). Clinton’s six-nation trip was the most extensive tour of Africa undertaken by an American president and the first trip by a U.S. president since Jimmy Carter (French, 1998). Part of Clinton’s trip was a stop in Kigali, Rwanda. During this three and a half hour visit (he never left the airport because of security concerns), the president visited with genocide survivors, met with Rwandan national leaders, and delivered an address meant to repair America’s image and attempt to rebuild relations with Rwanda, the United States, and the international community. Ultimately, we argue that while Clinton’s address was meant to outline lessons that could be learned from the genocide, his rhetorical choices undermined his larger efforts, leading to a mixed response from pundits and politicians.

Clinton’s Rwandan address deserves scholarly merit for several reasons. First, the essay adds another interesting dimension to Benoit’s image repair theory by arguing that Clinton engaged in the rhetorical strategy of democratization of blame, which we maintain can be another form of denial. Second, while there have been a number of image repair studies that explore how political figures have employed the strategies, most i) focus on the politician’s character failings rather than a specific policy issues (see Benoit & McHale, 1999; Blaney & Benoit, 2001; Dewberry & Fox, 2012), and ii) few examine the success or failure of their efforts in an international context (for exceptions see Wena, Yu, and Benoit, 2009, 2012; Zhang & Benoit, 2004, 2009). This essay addresses those omissions in scholarship. Finally, while Clinton’s rhetorical choices may have ultimately undermined his overall purpose and altered the legacy of the presidency and the international community at that time; they also offer insights into the challenges involved in attempting to negotiate a nation’s image internationally, especially when mistakes have been made.

Having outlined the purpose and contributions the essay makes, we provide the reader with a theoretical discussion of image repair theory, before using it to examine President Clinton’s Rwanda address. Finally, we draw implications from the analysis.

**Image Repair Theory**

Communication scholars have paid significant attention to the rhetorical dimensions of attempts by politicians, corporations, governments, and entertainers to repair their image for many years (see Benoit, 1995a, 1995b, 1997; Benoit & McHale, 1999; Dewberry & Fox, 2012; Moody, 2011; Welsh & McCallister-Spooner, 2011; Stein, 2008, 2010; Wena, Yu & Benoit, 2009, 2012; Zhang & Benoit, 2004, 2009). One of the foundational aspects of image repair theory is the rhetorical genre of apologia. According to Ware and Linkugel (1973) apologia is a speech of self-defense, typically because someone has accused another of various acts of wrongdoing. When confronted with an attack on one’s character and/or policy, Ware and Linkugel reasoned that rhetors could use four strategies to repair damaged ethos: denial, bolstering, differentiation, and transcendence. Ware and Linkugel’s ideas have more recently been subsumed into image repair research. Benoit (1995a) asserted that creating and maintaining one’s image is a primary communicative activity. Moreover, if that image has been damaged in some way then a
response, an attempt at image repair, is essential to a rhetor. In composing his theory, Benoit offers a typology of five general approaches, with multiple sub-strategies, rhetors might use to re-build their image.

In Benoit’s (1995a) work the first general strategy is denial. Denial can come in two forms. Simple denial is where the speaker clearly states they did not commit the act they were accused of committing. The second form, shifting the blame (also known as victimimage), concedes the action occurred but moves the responsibility for its occurrence to another party. Both of these strategies allow a speaker to deny wrongdoing.

The second broad category supplied by Benoit is evading responsibility, which contains four specific rhetorical postures. Provocation occurs when the speaker claims the offensive action was the result of responding to the negative actions of another; in essence, they were provoked, and therefore responsibility does not lie with them, but with the person who invited their response. A second strategy for evading responsibility is defeasibility, which happens when the person argues that events outside of their control caused the action. In attempts to evade responsibility speakers also might argue that the wrongful act was accidental, and thus not their fault. Finally, sometimes speakers will claim they had good intentions when they committed the act in an attempt to evade responsibility. Ultimately, all four of these strategies represent attempts to avoid taking responsibility for an offensive act, thus repairing, at least in part, the damage done to an image.

Benoit’s third category, reducing offensiveness, contains the most sub-strategies for image repair: six. The first of these, bolstering, takes place when the speaker extols virtuous and good qualities they possess in an attempt to engender positive feelings toward them while simultaneously making the action they committed seem less offensive. Secondly, an accused person or group can argue the offense was not as offensive as it is made out to be, thus minimizing its damage. Speakers can also differentiate the offensiveness of an act by comparing it to other, far more aberrant and distasteful actions. Rhetors can also attempt transcendence by placing the action in a broader more positive light. Fifth, the accused can turn the tables and attack the accuser’s credibility and motives, thus making their offense even viler than the one committed by the speaker. The final method of reducing offensiveness is compensation, because it attempts to reimburse the victims of the offense, although this does not necessarily come with an admission of guilt.

The fourth category of image repair strategies available to speakers is corrective action, and like denial it comes in two forms. In the first form the accused offers to repair any damage that resulted from the offending action. Sometimes this involves charitable giving, volunteering, or even seeking professional assistance. In the event that the action’s damage cannot be reversed, speakers can take a second form of corrective action whereby they enumerate plans to prevent the recurrence of the offending act. Both of these strategies show a willingness to materially participate in the repair of an image, but again, neither necessarily accompanies an admission of guilt.

The admission of guilt, or mortification, is the final image restoration category explicated by Benoit. This is when a speaker takes full responsibility for their actions and apologizes to those damaged by the offense. Often, admissions of guilt are accompanied by other strategies from the other categories, and when done well by a speaker an image can be quickly repaired. In the case of President Clinton’s Rwandan visit/address we argue that while the president did achieve some success by employing several of these strategies, his rhetoric undercut his reconciliation efforts.
President Clinton’s Address in Rwanda

President Clinton used a number of different strategies in his Rwandan image repair discourse. These strategies included mortification, transcendence, corrective action, and defeasibility. President Clinton embarked on a 12 day “upbeat tour” tour of several African nations with growing economies and strengthening democracies in March 1998. He delivered his Rwanda address during a three and a half hour stop-over on the tarmac at Kigali airport on March 25th, 1998. He began with the traditional pleasantries, thanking the Rwandan President, Vice-President, and some genocide survivors for graciously greeting him and his U.S. delegation. Clinton then noted his primary purpose was to:

Pay the respects of my Nation to all who suffered and perished in the Rwandan genocide.

It is my hope that through this trip, in every corner of the world today and tomorrow, their story will be told; that 4 years ago in this beautiful, green, lovely land, a clear and conscious decision was made by those in power that the peoples of this country would not live side by side in peace. (p. 495).

Clinton then proceeded to recount, albeit briefly, the composition of the genocide and how it was “not spontaneous or accidental” but rather a policy “aimed at the systematic destruction of a people” (p. 496). The Rwandan genocide demonstrated people’s capacity for evil, something Clinton asserted “we cannot abolish ... but we must never accept it. And we know it can be overcome” (p. 496). This rhetorical history and Clinton’s underlying tone suggested to those in attendance that the international community had made a “conscious decision” to not assist in stopping the genocide. Despite this inaction, however, Clinton implied that he, and the international community, may have learned some transcendent lesson for future U.S.-Rwandan nations: the United States must “overcome” its own political inertia so his promise of “never again” was more than empty rhetoric.

In the next section of his address, Clinton (1998) stated:

The international community, together with nations in Africa, must bear its share of responsibility for this tragedy, as well. We did not act quickly enough after the killing began. We should not have allowed the refugee camps to become safe havens for the killers. We did not immediately call these crimes by their rightful name: genocide. We cannot change the past, but we can and must do everything in our power to help you build a future without fear and full of hope (p. 495).

On the surface, it appears as if Clinton was using the strategy of mortification because he accepted, on behalf of the international community, blame for allowing the Rwandan genocide to leap out of control. As the leader of the United States and the implied leader of the international community, Clinton attempted to make the case that the entire world, including his administration (although he never singled out the United States for responsibility), failed to stop the deadly atrocities. However, we contend that Clinton engaged in a faux form of mortification. Mortification requires the rhetor admit blame for their specific actions. Clinton made no mention the mistakes the United States made regarding the Rwandan genocide. Instead, we maintain the president engaged in the strategy democratization of blame (Barnett, 2002). Democratization of blame involves spreading the blame across various rhetors, which makes everyone (not a specific entity) responsible for the offending act. In a sense, it is another strategy of (or akin to) denial because it appears as if the rhetor takes responsibility for their actions, but at the same time admits to no specific guilt. They deny any specific kind of wrongdoing. Clinton also stated “The international community, together with nations in Africa, must bear its share of responsibility for this tragedy” with the “we implied blame could be spread to every major power within the interna-
tional community, along with the United States. While it is laudable that the president admitted a foreign policy mistake, the ‘sharing’ of responsibility made Clinton’s supposed confession a diffusion of any responsibility for American inaction. As the supposed world leader, the United States has a greater obligation to lead on global issues. In the above passage, he suggested that all countries can behave equally, that each has as much ability to stop global problems when they arise. In essence, the president denied the capacity of the United States to truly exert international leadership on this kind of issue. In doing so, he implied America cannot prevent future atrocities, and undermined the ability of Rwanda and other nations torn apart by mass atrocity to build a future “without fear and full of hope.” Thus, Clinton’s pledge to “never accept” genocide was severely undermined by his own words.

In that same passage, Clinton moved from democratization of blame into a strategy of transcendence by arguing that “we”—the United States, international community, and Rwandans—must move forward to “build a future without fear and full of hope.” Indeed, transcendence appears to be the dominant strategy of Clinton’s Rwanda address. On several occasions he attempted to take his audience out of its current position and paint a picture where a peaceful and prosperous future lies ahead for Rwanda if its people work in concert with the international community. Here, Clinton attempted to place the Rwandan genocide in a more positive light, providing an opportunity for Rwandans and the international community to learn valuable lessons from this tragedy. Clinton (1998) stated:

We owe to those who died and to those who survived and who loved them, our every effort to increase our vigilance and strengthen our stand against those who would commit such atrocities in the future, here or elsewhere. Indeed we owe to all the peoples of the world who are at risk because each bloodletting hastens the next as the value of human life is degraded and violence becomes tolerated . . . we owe to all the people in the world our best efforts to organize ourselves so that we can maximize the changes of preventing these events. And where they cannot be prevented, we can move more quickly to minimize the horror. So let us challenge ourselves to build a world in which no branch of humanity because of national, racial, ethnic, or religious origin, is again threatened with destruction because of those characteristics of which people should rightly be proud. Let us work together a community of civilized nations to strengthen our ability to prevent, and if necessary, to stop genocide. (pp. 496-497)

At the end of his address, Clinton (1998) advanced similar transcendent lessons about the Rwandan genocide. He noted:

And so I say to you, though the road is hard and uncertain and there are many difficulties ahead, and like every other person, who wishes to help, I doubt we will not be able to do everything I would like to do, there are things we can do. And if we set about the business of doing them together, you can overcome the awful burden that you have endured. You can put a smile on the face of every child in this country, and you can make people once again believe they should live as people were living who were singing to us and dancing for us today. That’s what I believe. That is what I came here to say. And that is what I wish for you. Thank you and God bless you. (p. 499).

Throughout both passages Clinton attempted to weave the lessons of Rwandan genocide into a larger vision of what Rwanda, with help from the international community, could accomplish in the future. Clinton appeared to be stating that, while the genocide was a tragic event, the history of that event does not need to dominate the destiny of this nation. It demonstrated the capacity for evil that men have. Now that capacity is recognized and we can use it to build a better
future for Rwanda, Africa, and the world. The world owes a debt to those who died in the genocide and its accompanying survivors to be vigilant by identifying potential hotspots and engage in actions that would prevent this kind of tragedy again from occurring because these acts of violence ultimately tear at the fabric of the community humanity we all share. The world owes a debt to the genocide survivors and to humanity to “overcome the awful burden” of violence, putting in place mechanisms where people can work, live, and play together so that all may prosper on this small planet.

In some respects, Clinton’s transcendence was reminiscent of John F. Kennedy’s American University address in 1963. In that address, Kennedy (1963) attempted to build a bridge of peace with the Soviet Union by reducing the tension and “re-humanizing” the Soviets to some degree (see Kimble, 2009). The most famous line from that address, which has been repeated in other speeches and films was, “in the final analysis our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children’s future. And we are all mortal.” Indeed, Clinton’s transcendence was ‘Kennedyesque.’ For Clinton, the Rwandan genocide provided the opportunity for Rwanda and the international community to move forward together, not separated by ethnic and tribal tension as it was before the genocide, united in a common humanity where the future was bright for all Rwandans regardless of “national, racial, ethnic, or religious origin.”

Clinton’s message of transcendence, however, was undermined by other aspects of his address. For example, Clinton asserted he had a lack of control and information regarding the events within Rwanda. The president stated, “it may seem strange to you here . . . but all over the world there were people like me sitting in offices, day after day after day, who did not appreciate the depth and speed with which you were being engulfed by this unimaginable terror” (p. 497). In this passage, Clinton attempted to distance himself from charges that in 1994 his administration and other international leaders (such as U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan who attempted to apologize for the United Nations inaction during the Rwandan genocide), actually had much more information regarding the genocide but did nothing to stop it. However, Clinton’s claim of ignorance lacked credibility and belied the evidence from other sources. It is incomprehensible that a nation as powerful as the U.S., with its extensive and sophisticated network of satellites and intelligence, failed to understand the scope of the Rwandan genocide. Rather, looking back it seems clear that political exigency, not ignorance, was what caused America’s inaction. After the foreign policy debacle of Rwanda, the domestic political failure of healthcare, Clinton did not want to give ammunition to his Republican opponents who were castigating him as a weak and feckless leader. The lack of action within Rwanda also demonstrated the low priority sub-Saharan Africa received in the Clinton White House in the first term of his presidency. African countries were not part of America’s dominant set of national interests, thus they did not get the policy attention they deserve.

Additionally, Clinton’s claim he did not understand the depth and speed of the genocide runs contrary to accounts from various sources. For example, Alison DesForges (2000), a Human Rights Watch consultant, asserted US officials knew “two days, not two weeks, after the slaughter began on April 6” (p.141). Similarly, Harvard University Professor Samantha Power (2002) in her book A Problem from Hell, noted the Clinton administration did have knowledge of the rapidly deteriorating situation in Rwanda. Canadian General Romeo Dallaire (2003), who was in charge of the U.N. peacekeeping force within Rwanda immediately prior to the genocide, claimed he sent several reports to the United Nations about the escalation of ethnic conflict in Rwanda. Certainly, those reports would have been passed onto the U.N. Security Council and the
American Ambassador to the U.N. who could have contacted the president. While it is possible the president and “international community” did not appreciate the “speed” and “depth” of the Rwandan genocide, their inaction certainly cost time and, ultimately, lives. The situation was also hampered by limits placed on the United Nations Security Council (and the US military forces) to intervene, which clearly demonstrated weakness inherent in the international community’s ability to deal with issues concerning ethnic cleansing and genocide at that time.

The final strategies Clinton employed were specific corrective actions he pledged the United States would take to ensure Rwanda could recover from the genocide, and measures to prevent its occurrence. First, the President directed his administration to “improve, with the international community, our system of identifying and spotlighting nations in danger of genocidal violence” so preventative measures can be taken to arrest any potential violence (p. 497). Second, the United States pledged to be the first nation to contribute $2 million to Rwandan Genocide Survivors Fund so that genocide survivors and communities could find the care they need. Third, Clinton pledged more than $30 million to a Great Lakes Judicial Initiative to create conditions for an “impartial, credible, and effective” judicial system to be built that would gain the respect of Rwandans, Burundi, Uganda, and other nations within Central Africa. Additionally, Clinton renewed America’s support for an International Tribunal on the Rwandan Genocide, while pledging to assist Rwandan officials to try those responsible for war crimes. Finally, the president asserted that a permanent international court should be created to deal with crimes such as genocide, instead of a special tribunal that had to be set up by the United Nations. A permanent court furthered Clinton’s transcendent ideals of humanity being judged by the same standards regardless of their origin.

Some of Clinton’s corrective actions did assist with Rwanda’s healing in the aftermath of the genocide. The Great Lakes Judicial initiative did lead to improved conditions in the judicial systems in Rwanda and Burundi. Moreover, it assisted in supporting the Gacaca court, which has been the primary place where perpetrators of the genocide have been prosecuted. However, the Clinton administration failed in its efforts to push for a system that would spotlight countries susceptible to genocidal violence. Indeed, between 2003 and 2004, less than 5 years after Clinton’s address, it is estimated that as many as 300,000 people died in Darfur, a drought-prone region of western Sudan. (The Bush administration was quicker to label the situation as genocide despite UN uncertainty about whether it was or wasn’t at the time.)

Indeed, the United States also did not move to create the permanent genocide tribunal that Clinton proposed. Instead, genocide trials are still either prosecuted under special tribunal (e.g. the Gacaca Court) or given special attention at the International Criminal Court within The Hague. At the time of this writing, few advances have been made to create a system that would prosecute individuals for genocide and no systematic prosecution for the crimes in Darfur have begun. To date, the United States (under the Clinton, Bush, and Obama administrations) has not pushed the issue at the United Nations either.

**Audience Reception of Clinton’s Address**

Although we have no polling data to evaluate Clinton’s rhetorical efforts in Rwanda, press accounts indicate that reviews of Clinton’s address were mixed at best. For example, Constance Freeman, Director of African Studies at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington stated one of the “high points” of the trip was Clinton’s meeting with survivors of the genocide, stating that “if this trip is nothing else but symbolism, it was well worth it” (Condon, 1998, p. A1). Davis (1998) claimed that the sustained applause from the crowd gathered at
the airport that day was as though “the country released a huge sigh of relief that, finally, the unacceptability of genocide had been acknowledged” (p.11B). Additionally, Clinton appeared visibly moved when interacting with survivors; Rwandans also appreciated that he agreed with Rwandan President Pasteur Bizimungu’s assertion that the genocide resulted not from ancient tribal differences, but from a “clear and conscious decision” by extremist political leaders (Strobel, 1998, p. A1). Bizimungu (1998) called the visit, “an elegant statement of your condemnation of the genocide, a sign of solidarity with the victims and a challenge to the international community to work to stem the recurrence of genocide” (para. 2). Tito Rutaremara, who survived political violence in Rwanda in 1959, 1962, 1967 and 1994, stated “Having the leader of the whole world coming to small Rwanda, it is a big difference.” He also stated that the United States “should have stopped the genocide” (Strobel, 1998, p. A1). An article in the *Financial Times* stated, “President Clinton’s Africa safari…has not only raised the profile of a marginalized continent…It has proved a salutary learning experience from Mr. Clinton. It has brought home to him the enormity of Africa’s problems and the inadequacy of the US response” (Educating Bill, 1998, p. 19).

Clinton’s address was also disparaged by many. Yael Aronoff (1998) argued that while Clinton’s apology exhibited genuine empathy, “It does not do enough to ensure that future genocides will be prevented or ended (p. A25). Theology professor Stephen Pope (1999) accused Clinton of word manipulation, castigating his apology as “superficial sentiment as a means of damage control, it amounted to an alibi for unconscionable negligence and even active obstruction of what any decent person would recognize as a duty to protect people from being massacred (p.8). A *Boston Globe* editorial called the apology “incomplete” and “misleading,” and London’s *Guardian* newspaper labeled the apology disingenuous, that “Non-intervention was US policy, not an oversight” (Ryle, 1998). In 1994 a *New York Times* article claimed that Kofi Annan’s aides admitted privately that “The Americans said no…It was fresh after Somalia, and the Americans were not going to have it” (McKinley, 1998). The greatest criticism came in a report issued by the United Nations Genocide Panel in December 1999 asserting the president’s apology did little to ease the US and UN’s culpability in the 1994 massacre, labeling apologies made by Clinton and a similar one made by Secretary General Kofi Annan in May 1998 as “inadequate” (Lynch, 1999, p.29). Clinton’s main goal was to repair the damage done by American and international inaction. However, despite his best efforts and intentions to make amends to the people of Rwanda and ensure a similar atrocity would never happen again – his efforts fell short and were met with lukewarm reviews by the international press.

**Implications**

In this essay, we analyzed President Clinton’s attempts to repair the image of the United States and the international community with an address given before a Rwandan audience in 1998. We argue that the president’s purpose was undercut by the rhetorical choices he made. From this analysis we can draw several implications.

First, we maintain that democratization of blame should be added as a strategy of denial to image repair theory. Rhetors who democratize blame for their actions attempt to spread responsibility to multiple rhetors and/or factors leading to their specific behavior. Those that employ the strategy successfully may be able to extricate themselves from the situation. Based on some press accounts, there were some Rwandans who accepted Clinton’s attempts at reconciliation because of this strategy. Indeed, it can be an effective strategy for some rhetors.
More importantly, although we deem this address to be unsuccessful we argue that it does serve three important purposes. Initially, just because a rhetor may fail at their larger rhetorical goal, it does not mean they are not worthy of study. In fact, there are great lessons to be learned in failure. Frobish (2007) asserted some of the most important rhetorical lessons can be found in the rhetorical inadequacy of famous rhetors. Indeed, Clinton’s failed attempt at image repair illustrates what not to do in image repair and reconciliation. Kim, Avery and Lariscy (2009) found that the most effective strategies with image repair were full apologies with healthy doses of mortification and corrective action. Rhetors, when they admit past transgression, should fully come clean as to that specific wrongdoing, even if it causes short-term pain. Girma Negash (2006) noted that a full reckoning of mistakes was really the only way to move past indiscretion to build a more positive present and future with individuals and communities.

Additionally, Clinton’s rhetoric left an important legacy for the presidency. His tour of Africa, particularly his Rwanda address, began a tradition within American foreign policy rhetoric that Edwards (2008) termed confessional foreign policy. Confessional foreign policy is where a president acknowledges past mistakes by his administration or past administrations. In doing so, confessional foreign policy can help symbolically remove impediments caused by past wrongdoing. It serves to reset relationships between the United States and affected countries and/or regions. President Clinton’s confessions in Africa were the first by a president to admit foreign policy wrongdoing, particularly on foreign soil. The Clinton administration proceeded to continue its confessional foreign policy by admitting mistakes past administrations had committed in Guatemala and Greece. President George W. Bush employed a confessional foreign policy strategy by acknowledging American wrongdoing with its policies toward Hungary, Africa, and Egypt during the Cold War. President Obama has also admitted injustices committed by the United States against South American countries, the Middle East, India, Pakistan, and Europe (Edwards, forthcoming). Thus, while we have argued Clinton’s rhetorical choices undermined his larger message of contrition, it did provide a precedent for future presidents to recognize America’s checkered foreign policy past that offered new rhetorical ground to (re)build relationships across the globe.

Finally, it could be argued that Clinton’s Rwanda rhetoric can be caused a sea change in international discussions of preventing genocide and mass atrocity. In 1999, U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan began a campaign to get nation-states to discuss and resolve tensions between interfering in a nation’s sovereignty and the larger goal of protecting human rights. In 2000, at the behest of the U.N., Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien created the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) to outline a broader framework for humanitarian intervention. In 2001, ICISS released its final report entitled Responsibility to Protect. In this report, ICISS argued that states have a responsibility to protect civilians from crimes against humanity, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and genocide with military force if necessary.

Over the past decade, the Responsibility to Protect doctrine (R2P) has been debated and negotiated by the international community. As a concept, at the 2005 World Summit, all nations agreed to language enshrining the R2P doctrine as a principle that nation-states should attempt to live up too (Bain, 2010; Bellamy, 2006, 2009; Benjamin, 2010; Evans, 2009). However, putting this concept into practice has proven more difficult. Certainly, the intellectual heft of R2P was not enough for the international community to prevent the atrocities in Darfur, despite it being called a genocide by the United States and other nations. However, it has served as justification to protect civilians in Kenya in 2007-2008, Libya in 2011 and potentially in Syria in 2013 (Cotler & Genser, 2011; Zenko, 2013). We do not claim that President Clinton’s address directly
led to the creation of R2P, but it was part of the initial sea change that the international community has taken regarding the ideas of sovereignty and the responsibilities of nation-states. We also do not claim that genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and ethnic cleaning will now suddenly go away because of this enlightened sea change. Domestic politics and the national interests of states, including America, will still rule many of their decisions to act. However, the fact that there has been movement to ameliorate the problem of genocide, even at the intellectual level should offer some small celebration for those who value human rights, equality, and the protection of citizens. President Clinton’s address marks the beginning of a conversation and debate that continues and will continue for us to “work together as a community of civilized nations to strengthen our ability to prevent, and if necessary, to stop genocide” (Clinton, 1998, pp. 498).

References


*Unanswered Prayers: A Study of Apologia for God in the Matter of Prayer*

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Unanswered Prayers:
A Study of Apologia for God in the Matter of Prayer

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Abstract:
Many Christian writers and thinkers take up the vexing issue of unanswered prayer and thereby use various rhetorical strategies to address the intersection of pertinent teaching about prayer, and the disjunctive, problematic life experiences concerning the experience of unanswered prayer. Our investigation uses the ancient rhetorical genre of apologia as a lens to better understand the tactics and stances taken up by those who seek to guide members of faith communities toward reconciliation between perceived biblical teaching and actual life experiences concerning unanswered prayer. Our study incorporates an analysis of both the formal and conceptual strategies utilized by rhetors who seek to repair, or account for, breaches in lived-faith and understood teaching by religious communities through investigation of representative contemporary rhetors who address prayer.

“Promises and pie-crust are made to be broken.”
-Jonathan Swift

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. "Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!
(Matt. 7:7-11, NIV)

Upon reading New Testament passages such as Matthew 7:7-11, one could forgive an inexperienced disciple for expecting an immediate, accurate, and pleasing response from God to a specific prayer request. Experienced believers, however, recognize that immediate answer to prayer is rare and infrequently matches prayer requests with exact precision. Therein is born a communication dilemma to which many rhetors on prayer have addressed thought and careful explanation. How do believers address the seeming disparity between certain New Testament claims about prayer and God’s response (or non-response) to prayer and human interpretation of results? Below we have explained in greater detail the benefit from focusing on messages created to address this dilemma (which include extension of knowledge in both the genre of rhetoric under consideration and possible benefits to those who would seek to understand rhetorical tactics that may reach pertinent audiences).
We have addressed defense (or explanation) statements produced by individuals who believe they understand the biblical and life reasons that answer potential questions concerning the unfairness, immorality, or unethical responses of God based on New Testament teachings about normative expectations concerning results (or perception of lack thereof) from faithful prayer from Christian believers.

Apologia has long been a focus of scholars interested in public explanation or justification of behavior or policy. Previous studies have addressed apologia ranging through apostates, presidents, pro athletes, popes, kings, and soldiers (among many others) (Benoit, 1995; Blair, 1984; Butler, 1972; Dorgan 1972; Huxman & Bruce 1995; Kruse, 1981; McClearley, 1983; Ryan, 1982, 1984; Short, 1987; Vartabedian, 1985). While groups, corporations, and professional occupations have been addressed in apologia studies (Benoit & Brinson 1990; Hearit, 1995; Phillips 1999), the majority of such studies examine public figures who must (in Ware and Linkugel’s [1973] formulation) “speak in defense of themselves” (p. 273).

Our study differs from the bulk of apologia and related studies in that we have addressed apologia by rhetors given in defense of another. And, the another in question is the putative creator of the universe. We have examined similarities and differences between explanations given in support of God by Christian believers concerning the matter of unanswered prayer and traditional understandings of apologia discourse in public. Such examination should expand and refine apologia theory as well as shed some light on typical explanations concerning the dilemma perceived in unanswered prayer. Since all of the popular books on prayer we discovered treated the concern of unanswered prayer, we assume it holds a place as a standard issue within the overall area of Christian prayer.

The most comprehensive examination of apologia through the mid-90s is available from Benoit (1995). He sifted through over seventy years of studies in apologia and image restoration by rhetorical critics, persuasion researchers, and sociologists. By integrating this substantial research review he expanded Ware and Linkugel’s (1973) long-used scheme of apologia and arrives at four primary image restoration strategies: denial, evading responsibility, reducing offensiveness of event, and corrective action.

We have used these categories, and types of apologia within them, as a baseline structure against which to judge discourse found in over twenty books, written from a variety of Christian perspectives, traditions, and denominations, that address prayer for a popular (i.e., non-scholarly, non-technical) audience.

**Justification for Study**

Prayer is a substantial, common form of everyday communication for most Americans. An April 2009 survey by the Pew Research Center found that 78% of Americans believe prayer is an important part of their daily lives (Pew, 2009). Similarly, a July 2008 AARP survey found that 69% of Americans consider time spent in prayer an important daily habit (Opinion, 2008). In May of 2010, *USA Today* reported that 83% of Americans believe that God answers prayer (Grossman, 2010). Moreover, across the last four decades Gallup has reported that nearly 90% of Americans pray (Baesler 1997; Paloma & Gallup, 1991).

Since 1997 a number of articles have been published in communication journals on prayer. However, we agreed with MacGeorge, et al. (2007) who argued that, despite the ubiquity and religious importance of individual prayer behavior, the study of prayer has not received the attention it deserves among communication scholars. Our study helps address an important part
of this potent area of investigation digging into pertinent messages presented in popular books on prayer to observe and analyze persuasive tactics used therein.

Our study focuses on unanswered prayer and apologia. We explore how Christian writers of popular books on prayer deal with the issue of unanswered prayer. Rhetors who wrote in these books sought to use the best argumentative strategies available to convince their audience members of how to best approach the practice of prayer.

Several useful articles have been written on religious apologia. Blaney and Benoit (1997), Sullivan (1998), and Blaney (2001) all argue from several vantage points that the apologia strategy of transcendence (placing the objectionable action or behavior in a different evaluative context) permeates religious image restoration rhetoric.

A robust examination of ancient and modern apologia discourse related to Christian groups and individuals is found in Miller’s (2002) book Divine: Apology: The Discourse of Religious Image Restoration. Miller’s project in the book is substantial as he sought to improve not only apologia-related studies, but also wanted to fashion a contribution to a much larger project: an understanding of a Christian rhetoric. While his work in this book is both telling and valuable, neither his individual case studies, nor his theory-building concluding remarks, focused on either of the core concerns in our study: prayer and the defense via apologia for one by another. To be sure some minor mentions of some apologia messages of a secondary rhetor in defense of a primary rhetor (e.g., in the chapter “Standing by Their Men: Southern Baptists and Women Scorned” (pp. 103-121) are made, but these examples are neither the focus or substance of the analysis done in any case study in the book. Likewise, prayer as an important form of communication is not a central issue or concern in any of the case studies, or in Miller’s theory building.

Further rhetorical analysis of rhetors writing about prayer to popular audiences is in order, keeping in mind the possibility that the apologia strategy of transcendence may permeate such communication by the very nature of the intent and sought function by such rhetors (Blaney & Benoit, 1997, p. 30). Again, certainly apologia as a powerful form of rhetoric has often been seen as a worthwhile venue for understanding Christian-related messages, but even then some have disagreed that apologia-qua-apologia is the correct understanding of the discourse under consideration. For instance, in his study “Francis Schaeffer’s Apparent Apology in Pollution and the Death of Man,” Sullivan (1998) argued that Schaefer’s writings are not apologia; rather, they are apparent apologies for Christianity related more to philosophical apologetics. While each of these studies offered an interesting background for our discussion, especially the claim that all religious apologia has used the argument tactics of transcendence, we wish to focus on a persuasive dynamic that has not yet been analyzed. We have looked at image restoration from the vantage point of rhetors offering an apologia for another—not just another human, but rhetors who claim to speak on behalf of God.

Since prayer, and use of prayer, are central to many Christian concepts of faith in a divine being or creator, explanations of perceived failure of (or difficulty with) that practice or communication hold considerable importance.

Since New Testament scripture addresses prayer from a number of vantage points, contemporary, as well as earlier-day, believers have often reflected on the importance of prayer. Mother Teresa (1985) has said: “Jesus Christ told us that we ought ‘always to pray and not to faint.’ St. Paul says, ‘pray without ceasing.’ God calls all men and women to this disposition of heart—to pray always” (p. 89). Kierkegaard claimed (concerning the power of prayer): “The archimedean point outside the world is the little chamber where a true suppliant prays in all sincerity—where he lifts the world off its hinges” (as cited in Buttrick, 1942, p. 82; Heiler, 1932, p 34).
While some would proclaim the centrality of prayer: “... prayer is the key that unlocks the door of God’s treasure house ... (Kneeling, 1986, p. 9), others remain unconvinced of any discernable instrumental quality to prayer communication. Kant, for example, asserted “It [prayer] is at once an absurd and presumptuous delusion to try by the insistent importunity of prayer, whether God might not be deflected from the plan of his wisdom to provide some momentary advantage to us” (as cited in Heiler, 1932, p.89). Others reside somewhere in between with significant reservations as to who might be completely successful with prayer: “My own idea is that it [fully answered prayer] occurs only when the one who prays does so as God's fellow-worker, demanding what is needed for the joint work. It is the prophet’s, the apostle’s, missionary’s, the healer's prayer that is made with this confidence and finds the confidence justified by the event” (Lewis, 1991, pp. 60-61). Disputes over efficacy of prayer aside, many Christian believers hold to (and have held to) a view of prayer that leads to messages under investigation in this study.

Instruction then, particularly those prayer instructions from Jesus of Nazareth found in the New Testament, have long held deep importance for believers in Christ. Certain parts of those instructions seem to suggest a near causal relationship between prayer and God response. For instance Jesus’ teaching as recorded in the Gospel of Luke:

So I say to you, ask, and you will receive; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, those who seek find, and to those who knock, the door will be opened.

Would any father among you offer his son a snake when he asks for a fish, or a scorpion when he asks for an egg? If you, bad as your are, know how to give good things to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him! 
(Luke 11:9-15, REB)

If the life experience of Christians over the ages had found a functional connection between direct, instrumental prayer requests and perceived results, few (if any) of the books or chapters which form the artifact base of this study would have been written. The perceived disjunction between the teaching promise of prayer and eventual results, however, received written attention even in the first 50-70 years after Jesus’ death. So some passages in the gospels, and elsewhere in New Testament canon, reflect the same causal prayer promise already mentioned—with important conditions (emphasis is added):

If you dwell in me, and my words dwell in you, ask whatever you want, and you shall have it. This is how my Father is glorified: you are to bear fruit in plenty and so be my disciples. (John 15:7-8, REB)

This is what I want you to do: Ask the Father for whatever is in keeping with the things I’ve revealed to you. Ask in my name, according to my will, and he’ll most certainly give it to you. Your joy will be a river overflowing its banks! (John 16:23-24, The Message)

From now on, whatever you request along the lines of who I am and what I am doing, I’ll do it. That’s how the Father will be seen for who he is in the Son. I mean it. Whatever you request in this way, I’ll do. (John 14:14, The Message)
If New Testament writers recorded these qualifying words of Jesus for believers, why have they seemingly not been sufficient to explain or deal with the dilemma of unanswered prayer? Contemporary rhetors expend considerable energy and focus on helping believers grappling with the expectations born of Jesus’ prayer promises. Below we have specified our artifact selection, but for now we can note that we sought popular Christian writers who took up the challenge of addressing prayer for audience members seeking new or refined understandings about prayer. Our aspiration was not to tease out the purpose or history of these expectation-building promises; rather we wish to deal with the persuasive tactics used by rhetors to bring understanding to the perceived problem.

While apologia messages have been studied as solutions to problems (e.g., capital trial for treason, or bribery charges, or campaign accusations) (Gold, 1978; Kruse, 1977), few have fully focused on apologia created by others than the principals engaged in the social, cultural, or political difficulty under examination. This study opens a wider (necessary) door to the study of apologia created by supporters of those under attack or suspicion. Since contemporary discourse is a welter of voices attempting influence, we would do well to recognize the power and influence of those other voices. In this study other voices must be heard as few claim to hear (or speak) directly the voice of God concerning renewed, contemporary understanding of scripture.

Similarly, apologia has been seen as a necessary part of an accusation and defense exchange within a culture; indeed, some have suggested that this is the hallmark of apologia messages (Ryan, 1984). This study finds, however, that apologia messages can be expressed in relationship to a perceived communication problem with no direct accusation indicated or referenced. While we gladly grant that philosophical and theological writing on issues concerning God/human interaction (including elements of dissatisfaction with that interaction) is voluminous, nonetheless, rhetors’ messages analyzed in this study spend no direct effort on establishing accusation or other factors of katagoria; rather, the perceived phenomena of unanswered prayer is treated as an important experience for Christian believers without the rhetors directly trying to establish an accusation basis for their responses. Put another way, rhetors encountered in this analysis took as a given the necessity of a defense concerning unanswered prayer without expressing any recognizable need for a specific accusation that would have authorized or encouraged their prose. This unrequested response dynamic is at once mysterious, yet recognizable, when seen in light of the expectations produced by scriptural promises concerning prayer (and expected response to prayer).

The qualifying and hedging statements about prayer given by Jesus in the Gospel of John (listed above) serve to illustrate the perceived power of promises such as the ones enumerated in Matt. 7 and Luke 11. Norms for such claims have long been recognized as demanding a legitimate response on the part of the promise-giver. Austin (1975), in his ground breaking lectures on the performance aspects of language, devoted an entire class of utterances called commissives to linguistic expressions which were most strongly typified by promises: Commisives “are typified by promising or otherwise undertaking; they commit you to doing something” (p. 151-152). Similarly, Grice (1975) and others have recognized the underlying expectations of conversational rules (Bach & Harnish, 1979; Bennett, 1990; Davis, 1998) that hold makers of propositional performance claims to strict standards of expectation. When the giver, or maker, of a promise is expected to fulfill the promise, social, cultural, and personal sanctions await the person who fails to match the promise made. Such violations often engender explanation of failure.

Our study investigates the dynamic of a promise-giver and promise-receivers separated by thousands of miles and years, and multiple translations. Hence, the imperative for response is
not held within a conventional, interpersonal or social communication framework. Instead, the sheer importance of the promise, and the plausibility that the maker of the promise could keep it, make possible promise violations important enough to compel twentieth-century believers to write apologia messages.  

Hence, the power of a perceived promise engenders such an apologia message when violation of that promise would bring fundamental issues of faith and reliability into question. Better understanding apologia that operates in human discourse without accompanying direct accusation adds to our better understanding of prayer messages as the subject of cultural discussion and should also encourage investigation of other, similar, forms of apologia.

Analysis Process

To accomplish our study we followed these steps of analysis. First, we scoured bibliographies and bestseller lists for popular press, Christian books on prayer; we then gathered 19 books from twentieth- and twentieth-first century rhetors who addressed prayer—which also specifically took notice of unanswered prayer. Our initial search led us to many books on prayer that addressed prayer from historical, contemplative, political, or devotional perspectives (see for instance Elliott, 1985; Foster, 1992; Keating, 1992; Kiley, 1997). We selected only those general books that attempted to explain prayer (including unanswered prayer) to a lay audience of Christian believers. This selection of books acts as a snapshot of contemporary, Twentieth-Century, popular teaching and thought on prayer within mainstream Christian traditions. Such a selection allows us access to pertinent discussion on prayer and unanswered prayer by Christian rhetors who sought to reach a large, popular audience. Second, we read our selected books seeking to find any chapters or sections that addressed unanswered prayer or doubt in praying; two of the books surveyed devoted the entire book to the subject of unanswered prayer (Greig, 2007; Mosley, 1992) while another (Jensen, 2008) saw the phenomena as central to his investigation of faith and belief. Next we re-surveyed the contemporary literature in apologia research with an eye toward finding analysis categories and conceptual challenges that might serve in this study. Next we selected analysis categories generally built by Ware and Linkugel (1973) as well as refinements by Benoit (1995). Finally, we analyzed our various selected texts and compared them to existing categories and studies.

Analysis

We understand that certain avenues of apologia were nearly automatically untenable for rhetors we encountered in our study due to theological perspectives they hold. First of all, the actions of *provocation, defeasibility, accident, and good intentions* which form types of the strategy of *evading responsibility* are simply out of character of the God of the Old and New Covenantal writings and therefore or do not apply. The being worshiped as creator of the universe, parter of the Red Sea, the giver of child to Hanna, and enabler of the warrior-shepherd David by millions was an unlikely candidate for the strategies that allow perceived violators to sidestep responsibility. The arguments made by rhetors writing in a popular, mainstream Christian tradition, as they defended God, presuppose the impossibility that their creator of day and night would have somehow slipped and made a mistake in not answering a prayer.

Similarly the strategies of mortification and corrective action seemed ill fit for characteristics and norms normally associated by believers with God. Having a supreme deity who somehow expressed “I’m sorry” or “We have a new three-part response plan” concerning perceived
unanswered prayer has not been normative, or discoverable, in Old, or New, Testament canon, or in contemporary writing on prayer surveyed here that follow in that tradition.

On the other hand, the tactics of denial, shifting the blame, differentiation, bolstering, and transcendence were in evidence in these writings. Understanding these strategies provides the focus of our analysis. The following sections offer our discoveries in investigation of these areas.

**Strategies of Response: Combining Shifting Blame and Differentiation**

Rhetors covered in this study often defended God in their arguments when they combined the strategies of denial and differentiation. The strategy of differentiation was employed to deny any fault on the part of God. In the case of unanswered prayer, defenders shifted the blame arguing that the fault was not God’s, but that unanswered prayers were caused by the character flaws of the people who pray. Benoit (1995) argued that shifting the blame “can be a variant of denial, because the accused cannot have committed the . . . act if someone else actually did it” (p. 75). According the Ware and Linkugel (1973) differentiation “is often signaled by the accused’s request for a suspension of judgment until his actions can be viewed from a different perspective” (p. 278). In other words, defenders of God ask those whose prayers are unanswered to look at another part of the equation of prayer and by taking another perspective finding the cause of their unanswered prayers.

Some defenders used spatial metaphor to shift the blame of unanswered prayer from God to those who pray. The defender asked the pray-ers for a suspension of judgment until the cause of unanswered prayer could be viewed from a different perspective and to consider that they may be the cause of their own unanswered prayers. Stanley (1992) wrote that people get angry with God for not answering their prayers, but they “need to understand how to get into position to allow Him to answer our prayers. The problem is not in God’s ability . . . the problem is with us” (p. 55). He wrote that prayers go unanswered because people “cling to unconfessed bitterness and hatred toward a family member . . . because of our wrong motives . . . because of stingy . . . [and] because of unconfessed sin” (pp. 69-70). Stanley thereby suggested that God’s character is not in question. The blame is shifted and the pray-ers are offered another perspective to the cause of unanswered prayer.

In a similar vein, three rhetors (Chambers, 1994; Hybels, 1998; Rinker, 1959) each constructed a barrier metaphor to deny, via differentiation, any wrongdoing on the part of God and shift the blame to those who pray. Rinker stated that “There are no unanswered prayers, but . . . obstacles to answered prayer” (pp. 62-67). Hybel’s (1998) suggested that, “It is possible that something is wrong in our lives, that we have set up some barrier between ourselves and God” (p. 97). These rhetors list several different types of barriers that people construct that hinder their prayer. The list included the following types of barriers: not praying long enough (Hybels, 1998, p. 101, Rinker, 1959, p. 63), unconfessed sin (Hybels, 1998, p. 103), guilt (Rinker, 1959, p. 64), a secret sympathy with sin (Sanders, 1977, p. 89), unresolved relational conflict (Hybels, 1998, p. 104), lack of respect for the spouse (Sanders, 1977, p. 92), selfishness (Hybels, 1998, p. 105), uncaring, bitter, unforgiving spirit (Hybels, 1998, p. 106; Sanders, 1977, p. 91), inadequate faith (Hybels, 1998, p. 107; Sanders, 1977, p. 93), and impure motives (Anderson, 1996, p. 144; Sanders, 1977, p. 89). The defenders, by having listed the possible procedure errors or character flaws of those whose prayers are unanswered, shifted the blame away from God and offer pray-er culpability as the most likely explanation.

Defenders also shifted the blame to the pray-ers when they argued that unanswered prayer was caused by not following the proper conditions. E.M. Bounds (1981) wrote: “The whole
explanation [to unanswered prayer] is found in wrong praying. We ask and receive not because we ask amiss” (p. 202). Mother Teresa (1985) suggested that proper prayer must be made in silence. She explained that,

Our prayer life suffers so much because our hearts are not silent, for, as you know ‘only in the silence of the heart, God speaks.’ . . . ‘God is the friend of silence. His language is silence.’ ‘Be still and know that I am.’ He requires us to be silent to discover him. In silence of the heart he speaks to us. (pp. 100-101)

Charles Stanley (1992) used Biblical texts like a contract lawyer listing the “six conditions that must be true in our lives if God is going to answer our prayers” (p. 55).

Citing Psalm 66:18, Stanley (1992) stated that those who pray must first “have a right relationship with [God]” (p. 55). Secondly, prayer-ers’ requests need to “. . . be specific” (p. 55) according to Mark 11:24 and Psalm 37:4. Thirdly, those who pray must, according to 1 John 5:14, “ask according to [God’s] will” (p. 57). Fourthly, Stanley cited Jesus’ proclamation from both John 14:14 and 15:7 to argue that prayer-ers “must make sure everything in the prayer is in keeping with [God’s] character” (pp. 57-58). Stanley used James 1:7,8 to state the fifth condition that, “Doubt and prayer do not mix” (p. 58). “Finally, we must have the right motives” (p. 60). Here Stanley cites Matthew 5:16. Rinker offered a shorter list of three conditions. She claims that “we should ask in His Name (John 16:24) . . . let His Word live in our hearts (John 15:7) and . . . keep on asking . . . (Matthew 7:7,8)” (p. 63).

Instead of writing like a lawyer, Mosley (1992) devoted most of his 191-page book If Only God Would Answer: What to Do When You Ask, Seek, & Knock- And Nothing Happens offering tips on how to get answers to prayer. Mosley’s book took the form of popular self-help books complete with cartoon illustrations. His tips implicitly suggested that blame for difficulties in prayer should be cast on the pray-er. For example, Mosley wrote, “Our prayers . . . often run into a brick wall because we tend to focus exclusively on the final, complete solution . . . . It will help immensely if we break our requests down into small, shorter-term petitions” (p. 12). He also recommended that believers take an active role in prayer:

First you see a need: your spouse is depressed; your child’s schoolmate is neglected . . .

Think and pray: How can God meet that need? . . . Then formulate a petition in which you cooperate with God in meeting that need . . . asking to meet the Lord and His resources at that point of need. (p. 26)

Mosley (1982) offered sixteen chapters of suggestions like the examples above. Unlike Stanley (1992) and Rinker (1959), Mosley rarely cited Biblical texts to support or illustrate his tips to receive answered prayers. However, mirroring Stanley and Rinker, he implicitly denied any fault on the part of God for unanswered prayer by shifting the cause of unanswered prayer to those who pray. Following his tips suggested a reorientation wherein the pray-er will have their prayers answered. Yancey (2006) joined the chorus of these voices that shift the blame and invoked a motivated theme related to social justice: “Thus God flatly declares that, in addition to our private spiritual state our social concern (or lack of it)—for the poor, for orphans and widows—also has a direct bearing on how our prayers are received” (p. 224).

This combination of shifting the blame and offering another explanation to the cause of unanswered prayer offer a plausible explanation for unanswered prayer. Benoit (1995) claimed that shifting the blame:

... may well be more effective than simple denial for two reasons. First, it provides a target for any ill will the audience feels, and this ill feeling may be shifted away from the accused.
Second, it answers the question that makes the audience hesitate to accept a simple denial: ‘Who did it?’ (pp. 75-76)

Rhetors who defended God by shifting the blame back to the pray-ers themselves may take advantage of this dynamic identified by Benoit (1995). If readers identify with one of the defender’s explanations, that they were the cause of unanswered prayer, then any animosity that the pray-ers may have had for God may be resolved. However, if pray-ers believe that they have not created any barriers, met the required conditions and followed the proper procedures for prayer then this strategy would most likely fail.12

As has been previously demonstrated, defending rhetors have used a combination of denial and differentiation strategies in several ways. They denied that unanswered prayer is God’s fault by shifting the blame, arguing that prayers are not answered because: 1) of the immoral character of those who pray, 2) praying incorrectly, and 3) praying for comprehensive solutions when people should pray for smaller solutions in which the pray-er can participate.

Transcendence and bolstering are two tactics that formed a formidable portion of the apologia created by rhetors analyzed in this study. We cover first the transcending messages that cover the most frequent and forceful arguments used to explain unanswered prayer.

**Strategies of Transcendence**

Transcendence “functions by placing the act in a different context” (Benoit 1995, p. 77). We, for reasons enumerated previously, are using the category of transcendence developed and used by Benoit (1995), Ware and Linkugel (1973) (and others), but we firmly resist the notion that transcendence used by the rhetors analyzed here fits the notion of non-denial advanced by Benoit: “None of these six strategies [bolstering, minimization, differentiation, transcendence, attacking accuser, and compensation] of decreasing offensiveness denies that the actor committed the objectionable act or attempts to diminish the actor’s responsibility for that act” (p. 78).

The act of God not responding to, or changing, or resisting a prayer request from a believer as explained often by these rhetors does emphatically deny God’s wrong action. This denial takes the form of non-human-based transcendence that most typically emphasized superior knowledge or awareness on the part of God, or emphasized specific purpose by God. So, for instance, when Hybels (1998) said: “Why would an all-loving, all-powerful God deny valid requests . . . ? Sometimes the reason for our request is not wrong, but in the infinite mystery of things, the outcome still seems to be ” (p. 93), or again when Stanley (1992) invoked the “big picture:” “. . . we forget the big picture in our prayers . . . God is trying to conform us to his image” (p. 64) we find these rhetors building a transcending bridge that enlarges the context, but one that essentially denies that any promise was broken or agreement violated. Carney and Long (1997) captured this emphasis on superior scope while still emphasizing connection: “He knows a shameless cry often reflects the true depths of the human heart” (p. 93).

Twelve of the nineteen rhetors analyzed in our study used this tactic of claiming a larger awareness on the part of God. Some emphasized timing: “On other occasions our finger-tapping anxiety is simply out of timing with the ever-patient mercy of the Eternal.” (Foster, 1992, p. 183), while others focus on a better knowledge: “But He will always measure our desires against what he knows is best for us” (Stanley, 1992, p. 54). Some times this awareness is qualitatively superior: “Fortunately, our God loves us too much to say yes to inappropriate requests” (Hybels, 1998, p. 90), while other times it is qualitative and perceptual: “God knows what we do not know. God sees what we do not see” (Anderson, 1996, p. 100). In all cases of transcendence ar-
argument, God is presented as being superior and beyond human means in knowledge, chronological awareness, and perceptual evaluative ability.

One interesting variation of transcendence as an argument strategy is when this same strategy is expressed from the human experience perspective instead of propositions about God and God’s actions: “When we ask for something from God we assume we ask for what is best for us . . . . The problem is this: we don’t always know what is best” (Anderson, 1996, p. 30). Hence, whether expressed from the perspective of human limitation or godly strength, a transcending argument is made that serves to explain the presence or occurrence of perceived unanswered prayer.

A predictable variation of this superior awareness is taken up in the imagery of parents and children: “Does a father never say to his child, ‘Wait till you are older (or bigger or wiser...)?’” (Kneeling, 1986, p. 91), or: “Like a child, we are grateful for a Parent who knows better and places higher limits on our lesser requests” (Anderson, 1996, p. 100). Such images dovetail well with the notion that such a superior entity likely is a purposive being.

God is often represented by these rhetors as having very specific purposes. These claims form the next set of transcendence arguments. God is variously seen to be developing character (Hybels, 1998, pp. 95-96), purifying believers (Hybels, 1998, p. 92), creating belief (Anderson 1996, p. 40), or planning to show love (Sargent, 1984, p. 18). God’s purpose is seen as ranging from the abstract and non-specific to very specific: Another reason God withholds answers is because He is in the process of preparing us” (Stanley, 1992, p. 65).

If we could make the Creator of heaven and earth instantly appear at our beck and call, we would not be in communion with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We do that with objects, with things, with idols. But God, the great iconoclast, is constantly smashing our false images of who he is and what he is like.

Can you see how our very sense of absence of God is, therefore, an unsuspecting grace? In the very act of hiddenness God is slowly weaning us of fashioning him in our own image. . . . By refusing to be a puppet on our string or a genie in our bottle, God frees us from our false, idolatrous images. (Foster, 1992, p. 20)

This creative, purposive almighty being does seem to not answer prayer, but that seeming-ness is not unseemly, or wrong; such is the power of transcendent argument by rhetors utilizing a God perspective.

**Strategies of Bolstering**

Bolstering is the fourth main means of creating apologia in the writing we analyzed. Benoit (1995) held that bolstering reduces offensiveness by “mitigating the negative effects of the act on the audience by strengthening the audience’s positive affect for the rhetor” (p. 77). Such a bolstering impact is observed in the understanding prayer discourse we covered in the form of promising the good to a believer who awaits unanswered prayer with frustration: “In God’s providence, he eventually works everything together for good (Romans 8:28)” (Anderson 1996, p. 126). Whether expressed as “love” (Hybels, 1998, p. 90; Anderson 1996, p. 113), or “larger blessing” (Kneeling, 1986, p. 88), or “gift” (Anderson, 1996, p. 31; Kneeling, 1986, p. 91), most of the rhetors seem to echo Stanley (1992) who said: “A fourth reason God withholds answers to our prayers is because He wants to give us something better” (p. 65). And for some rhetors the believers to whom they write already have much of what is better: “God is greater than His promises and often gives more than either we desire or deserve, but He does not always do so” (Kneeling, 1986, p. 91). Consequently, believers are encouraged to see God as a giver of good,
love, and blessing as over against our inability to see pattern or purpose in seemingly unanswered prayer.

Two interesting variations of bolstering were also discovered in these books. The book the *Kneeling Christian* (1986) used a form of implied bolstering based in chronology with this statement: “Rest assured that God never bestows tomorrow’s gift today. . . . His resources are infinite and His ways past finding out” (p. 91). So these rhetors argued an unknown future gift born from inexhaustible resources will belong to their readers, but the believers would never be able to discern its creation or delivery pattern. Another bolstering variation was *negative bolstering* through avoidance of the bad: “I am sure the Lord, in His great loving wisdom, sifts all our requests, and the ones which might harm us are not answered according to our asking” (Rinker, 1959, p. 62). Similarly the author of the book, *Kneeling Christian* (1986), offered readers curse avoidance by explaining that the all-knowing God, who transcended time and space, did not grant all prayer requests of His children because “To have said ‘Yes’ to some of them would have been a curse instead of a blessing” (p. 90).

Human recognition of God’s right to be God formed a final major set of transcending arguments in answer to perceived unanswered prayer. Whereas Rinker (1959) viewed this dynamic from the God perspective: “Because of His care over us, all that may seem disappointing will in the end be beneficial. I believe this, because I am learning more . . . about what He is like. God is greater by far than any idea or concept man could possibly conceive in his little mortal mind” (p. 62). Other rhetors pose this awareness as a corrective primarily from the human side of this prayer circumstance:

Besides, we probably should be thankful that God does not always present himself whenever we wish, because we might not be able to endure such a meeting. Often in the Bible people were scared out of their wits when they encountered the living God. ‘Do not let God speak to us, or we will die,’ pleaded the children of Israel (*Exod. 20:19*). At times this should be our plea as well. (Foster, 1992, p. 20)

And:

If God didn’t require that prayers be ‘according to his will’ for him to answer yes, he would no longer be functioning as God. He would merely be the pawn of human prayers. . . . The consequences would be far-reaching and disastrous. (Anderson, 1996, p. 96)

These expressions of human perspective and human *placement* completed a robust set of apologetic tactics by emphasizing the human-divine connection and paradox.

**Discoveries and Observations**

We learned in our investigation of apologia for God in the matter of unanswered prayer that, unlike the Swift quotation that opens our study, God’s promises are most unlike piecrust—according to defending rhetors. Prayer promises received by New Testament-believing Christians from Jesus were held to be inviolate by these writers addressing audiences of those interested in prayer. Perceived difficulty, or non-answer, or inadequate answer to prayer as understood by believers was also an implicitly powerful force, however, that encouraged various rhetors on prayer as they vigorously addressed a possible rupture in the fabric of faith and belief. Explanations offered by those rhetors fall within the genre of persuasive discourse known to rhetorical critics as apologia.

Examining these persuasive attempts has demonstrated that some of the venerable apologia tactics found in political, social, and corporate arenas of life also find expression and utility for those in the Christian sub-culture in America.
Our analysis of rhetorical writing discovered forms of strategies of denial that shifted the blame thereby suggesting that defenders of God often carry finger-pointing straight to the human pray-er involved in the prayer event or equation. The fullness and vigor which characterize this responsibility assignment in the examined artifacts were interesting because they cast the emphatic nature of a conventional, straight denial into areas of apologia traditionally seen as lesser or weaker forms of the genre. We have argued that assumed belief structures for some large, subcultural audiences served to guide rhetors who used apologia tactics, seen as lesser or weaker in many other apologia-inviting circumstances, to serve as a stronger form of argument for the intended audience.

In the discovery, recognition, and analysis of bolstering, differentiation, and transcendence arguments used by these rhetors we found that those tactics served the function of firm denial in a way that primary, direct denial could not. Moreover, the discovered notions of implied bolstering and negative bolstering should encourage additional attention in other areas of studies concerning apologia. For instance when a world leader, accused of failed or inadequate leadership (say in a worldwide crisis over a volatile middle eastern country), one might usefully pursue the category of negative bolstering when that leader chooses to point out the avoidance of probable negative consequences as a response to her or his critics.

We have argued that this set of apologia messages used in certain forms without the typical and expected necessity of direct accusation. Our analysis strongly suggests that certain rhetorical circumstances may find the defense of others to be as necessary, useful, or desirable as a defense offered by the perceived, principle offender. Also, we have offered evidence that, at least in the case of human-God communication (in the practice of prayer), rhetor tactics of apologia often seen as weaker or lesser than simple denial have offered in kind, and in degree, a firm, unyielding stance of denial that rhetors pose as unsympathetic to adjustment.

Since each of these discoveries may have corollaries in other forms of public persuasive messages that hold interest and value for significant communication communities within American culture, this study can act as a prompt to further investigation. We have suggested international crisis rhetoric as one possible area of investigation, and rhetoric used to respond to natural disasters may offer other possibilities as both circumstances present challenges easily beyond the direct, instrumental control of an individual (e.g., an athlete apologizing for behavior transgressions) which mimic those we reviewed in this study of Christian rhetors.

Additionally, we have taken an area of severe concern to Christian believers, that of unanswered prayer, and have better illuminated the most prominent strategies used by rhetors to defend God against questioning that no doubt comes in the lives of the vast numbers of people who report prayer as a significant part of their lives. To better understand key communication components of that prayer life, as well as to anticipate and understand the discourse developed to address a fundamental problem that lurks in the experience of those who pray, now establishes a vantage point from which others can extend this study or examine some of its many parts in greater depth.

References


**Notes**

1 We have made use of the term *God* and have used the conventional masculine pronoun designation of *He* used by many branches of the Christian faith and represented by the writing conventions of many of the rhetors covered in this study for our own designations; we recognize that contemporary writing has crafted alternatives, some of which we would consider using in another study, but for this effort we decided to write in concert with the work of the rhetors rather than in direct opposition.

2 While some may certainly see the entire project or practice of prayer by Christian believers as suspect, and thereby any professed disappointment explanation as a specious rationalization to avoid confronting an undesirable reality (i.e., the perceived undesirable reality of the nonexistence of God), we are focused in this study not on thorny, underlying issues of religious philo-
phy, or theology, but rather on the persuasive practices of rhetors addressing an important and widespread audience in American culture.

3 To be sure the basic approach of apologia analysis championed by Benoit has been challenged on a number of fronts (e.g., Graves and Filligim 2004, Edwards, 2005, Hatch 2006, or Janssen 2012); nonetheless, no other comprehensive survey or challenge to apologia theory has been accomplished since his work in 1995.

4 For an intriguing study that foregrounds an investigation of unanswered prayer, albeit with a substantially different focus, message base, and method, see: Day (2005).

5 Christian apologetics, while having some obvious shared concern with the rhetorical study of apologia discourse, is out of the purpose and perview of this study. Similar to massive and important issues such as theodicy, creation/creationism, etc. our intent is to stay close to the messages under consideration for the purpose of public message persuasion analysis and not to resolve or address long-standing issues of religious philosophy or theology.


7 For a useful examination of controversies surrounding the reception of Christian scripture, see: Wright (2005), or, Vanhoozer (2002).

8 Witness, for instance the vast literature covered by the study of the book of Job; see for instance: Aufrecht (1985), Newsom (2003), Dailey (1997), and Sanders (1968).

9 We recognize that such apologia can be (and is) given in conversational and speech forms; our focus here is in the most accessible apologia messages that result in enduring message artifacts.

10 In addition to books cited as specific examples in this study, see: Kroll (1997).

11 Since the phrases “those who pray” or “people who pray” may have become overused in this study, we adopted the equally unsatisfactory, but useful, term “pray-er” to substitute for such phrases in early drafts of this research; we later learned that Scroggie (circa 1900) used this term before us (Scroggie, Problem, 1).

12 Important to note that our analysis of persuasion concerning prayer does not permit us to enter into advice about how actual prayer-ers conduct either their lives or prayer lives; to do so would be presumptuous and out-of-bounds for the purposes of our study. Our investigation of the contours of argument invested in these issues is, in fact, focused on the arguments presented—not on the underlying presuppositions of theology or philosophy held by the rhetors. Those issues can (and have) been taken up by those with professional and personal interest in such matters.

13 The notion of stronger or weaker forms of argument in response to accusation easily predate Twentieth- or Twenty-first Century ponderings on such matters; at various time Hermogenes, Aristotle, Cicero (among others) have contended, when concerned with stasis and related concepts, that the earliest and most direct refutation available (typically direct denial of any accusation) is superior, or stronger, than lesser strategies; contemporary theorists of apologia have followed this bent. See: Ryan (1982, p. 256).
The Art of Making Conversation: Learning the Skills Small Talk

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Abstract

Although “small talk” is often dismissed as trifling and superficial communication, the ability to converse comfortably with potential relational partners in initial interpersonal encounters is foundational to building closer relationships. In this assignment, students enhance their interpersonal communication competence through the application of six small talk guidelines in two peer-to-peer conversations and in a capstone conversation with the instructor one-on-one. This assignment is appropriate for a variety of communication courses, including the basic course, interpersonal communication, and courses in professional communication, as it develops students’ skills in active listening, self-disclosure, nonverbal immediacy, and anxiety/uncertainty management in interpersonal communication with strangers.

Concepts

Active Listening, Relationship Initiation, Nonverbal Immediacy, Self-Disclosure, Uncertainty Reduction Theory, Anxiety/Uncertainty Management Theory, Interpersonal Communication Competence

Courses

Interpersonal Communication, Communication Basic Course, Business and Professional Speaking, Communication in Interviewing, Intergroup Communication

Learning Objectives

1) Students will understand and be able to identify the six small talk guidelines for improving one’s competence at small talk.
2) Students will be able to use the small talk guidelines to provide peer-to-peer feedback to their small talk conversational partners.
3) Students will demonstrate mastery in their small talk communication skills through a process of trial and feedback from their peers and the instructor.
Rationale

With the exception of our earliest relationships with primary caregivers, all of our interpersonal relationships begin with an initial communication encounter in which we decide whether we are interested in getting to know someone better. In this crucial first encounter we rely heavily on social norms, which include exchanging factual, non-opinionated, and relatively superficial information (Berger, Gardner, Clatterbuck, & Schulman, 1976; Knapp, 1978), and avoiding the disclosure of our deep, personal feelings about sensitive topics (Rosenfeld, 1979). Thus, in general, our first encounters with a potential relational partner center around safe topics of general interest that have little personal and emotional significance. As DeFleur et al. (2005) observed, while these conversations are often perceived as trivial, they are a complex and crucial part of establishing a closer relationship. Without the foundation of information provided in these initial encounters, there would be nothing upon which to build future intimate knowledge. In fact, Knapp (1978) observed that so-called “small talk” is so important in establishing a relationship, that it should be called “big talk.”

DeFleur et al. (2005) identified six communication skills that can facilitate competent communication in initial interpersonal encounters. Interpersonal communication competence refers to “the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately” (Wood, 2013, p. 30). Whereas effectiveness involves accomplishing the goals we have for specific interactions, appropriateness means that we have adapted our communication behaviors to particular situations and people (Wood, 2013). Helping students to develop their abilities to effectively and appropriately engage in initial encounters with potential relational partners is an important facet of building their overall interpersonal communication competence. Although little research to date has specifically addressed verbal and nonverbal skills that comprise successful small talk, DeFleur and colleagues (2005) have identified a list of useful guidelines for evaluating and improving individuals’ small talk skills.

Maintain Eye Contact

In Western cultures, maintaining eye contact not only signals awareness of the other person, it also communicates cognitive and emotional availability. Studies of nonverbal listening behavior in Western cultures have consistently identified eye contact and forward body lean (a marker of nonverbal immediacy) as two of the most important indicators of interpersonal attraction (Clare, Wiggins, & Itkin, 1975). Most Westerners appreciate it when someone takes an interest in what they are saying, and eye contact serves as an important nonverbal cue signaling interest (DeFleur et al., 2005). Likewise, breaking eye contact with a conversational partner to focus on something else (e.g., a text message or a friend walking by) can communicate disinterest in the conversation and/or the person with whom one is conversing. Although the amount of eye contact and direction of gaze that is appropriate varies culturally, generally speaking, in a Western communication context, competent communicators should strive to make eye contact with their conversational partners 50-70 percent of the time (Stewart, Zediker, & Wittenborn, 2009).

Display Nonverbal Immediacy

Other nonverbal behaviors can communicate interest as well. Nonverbal immediacy refers to a combination of nonverbal behaviors that contribute to perceptions of liking and closeness (Mehrabian, 1981). Head-nodding, leaning forward, smiling, making eye contact, moving one’s eyebrows, shrugging, using open gestures, and orienting one’s body toward the conversa-
tional partner all signal interest in the other person and involvement in what s/he is communicat- ing (DeFleur et al., 2005; Mehrabian, 1981). Nonverbal immediacy cues communicate to the other person that s/he is being listened to; they also facilitate one’s own ability to listen mindfully and attentively to others. Stewart et al. (2009) observed that we are not fully involved in what we are hearing until our body registers our involvement; since body and mind are intimately connected, the kinesthetic sensations of conversational involvement actually help keep one’s mind focused on listening.

Moreover, “immediacy often begets immediacy” (DeFleur et al., 2005, p. 89), that is, when we are nonverbally immediate toward others, the probability is high that they will respond in kind. This is because when people are nonverbally immediate toward us, we often assume that they like us. When we feel someone likes us, approves of us, and enjoys being with us, we feel inclined to reciprocate those feelings (DeFleur et al., 2005).

**Remember and Use the Other Person’s Name**

Our names are an important and highly personal piece of information about us as individuals. As such, the significance of the other person is diminished if one cannot remember his/her partner’s name. Our name is often the first piece of information we disclose about ourselves, and people become offended when we misspell, mispronounce, or forget their names (DeFleur et al., 2005). As such, an essential small talk skill is to develop one’s ability to remember the names of others. There are several strategies available for instructors to share with their students, such as rehearsing the name several times mentally, using it right away in the conversation, and writing it down (DeFleur et al., 2005).

**Draw Out the Other Person**

A key small talk skill for improving one’s competence in initial encounters is encouraging others to talk about themselves. DeFleur and colleagues (2005) recommended that individuals seeking to become stronger communicators capitalize on the fact that people are most comfortable talking about their own experiences and observations. By asking one’s conversational partner general-interest questions and then engaging in active listening behaviors (e.g., nonverbal immediacy, paraphrasing to clarify meaning, asking relevant follow up questions), an individual communicates interest in the other person; in turn, good listeners are liked more and rated as more attractive (Argyle & Cook, 1976) and trustworthy (Mechanic & Meyer, 2000). Despite widespread recognition of listening’s importance to communication competence, evidence suggests that educators have “spent a disproportionate amount of time teaching speaking as opposed to teaching listening” (Janusik, 2010, p. 193). This assignment provides students an opportunity to improve their listening skills.

**Keep It Light**

Since the goal of small talk is to begin the process of gradually building the trust necessary for greater levels of self-disclosure, DeFleur and colleagues (2005) observed that it is important to avoid plunging too quickly into controversial topics that threaten the comfort level of the other person. With respect to this guideline, asking conversational partners about their deep-seated political or religious views would be as inappropriate as disclosing intensely personal information about oneself. In Western cultural contexts, hobbies, occupations, sports, school, a shared event, and the weather, for instance, are generally considered to be comfortable areas of self-disclosure for individuals who have only just met (Johnson, 2009).
**Accentuate the Positive**

Generally, we are more attracted to people who have a positive outlook, and even minor complaints—the weather is terrible, the professor is unfair, there is too much homework—are perceived as conversation “downers” in initial encounters. Specifically, commenting negatively on classmates or a mutual acquaintance can lead a conversation to quickly devolve into an uncomfortable, if not disagreeable, conversation if the other person likes or respects those individuals (DeFleur, et al., 2005). Instead, one should adopt an optimistic tone in initial encounters—all this rain is good for the farmers, the professor is interesting, this class is stretching your mind—that highlights the positive attributes of others and the bright side of situations.

**Time and Materials**

This assignment is designed to be conducted in three sessions at three separate times during a semester. The amount of time between sessions is not important, as long as students have time to receive and review their peer feedback between sessions. The in-class portion of the assignment takes approximately 30 minutes on two separate class days. Each student will need a copy of the small talk grading rubric on both days 1 and 2 of the in-class peer sessions (see Appendix A). The third small talk session is conducted individually with the instructor outside of class and using the same grading rubric. Each individual student-instructor session takes approximately 10-15 minutes. If there are too many students in the course for a one-on-one conversation with each student to be feasible, the assignment has successfully been modified to accommodate an instructor meeting with two students at a time. Although the final small talk session with the instructor is not an absolute necessity, experience has shown that this further motivates students to seriously practice their small talk skills in the peer sessions leading up to the “oral final exam” with the instructor.

**Assignment Directions**

This assignment is most effective when students are exposed to the small talk guidelines and the grading rubric prior to the first day of class in which a small talk session is conducted. The instructor should lecture and/or lead a class discussion addressing each of the six small talk skills identified by DeFleur, et al. (2005). Film clips depicting characters skillfully or poorly using small talk in initial encounters can help further clarify the guidelines by providing concrete illustrations. Jacob Palmer (Ryan Gosling) in the film *Crazy Stupid Love* (Brown, et al., 2011), for example, provides a good illustration of someone who successfully employs several of the small talk guidelines to initiate relationships (e.g., use the other person’s name, draw out the other person, maintain eye contact, display nonverbal immediacy). Using this illustration and similar others also affords the instructor the opportunity to address communication ethics in initiating relationships. The instructor should encourage students to consider what kinds of general topics might be relevant to talk about with a classmate whom they do not know. In addition, students should be encouraged to anticipate which skills they may have the most difficulty with: For example, eye contact is automatic for many students socialized in the norms of the dominant U.S. cultural milieu, but most students find it awkward to use each other’s names. Anticipating these challenges in advance allows students to focus their attention on mastering the skills that may come less “automatically” to them while in-the-moment of the conversation itself.
On the day of the first small talk session, the instructor randomly assigns all students present to conversation dyads. If there are an odd number of students, assign one group of three students. Hand out a copy of the small talk grading rubric to all students and tell each dyad to select which person will be the lead conversationalist first. The other person will be the conversational partner/evaluator. The lead conversationalist is in charge of directing the conversation while using the small talk guidelines, and the conversational partner serves as both an engaged participant in the conversation, as well as the small talk evaluator. Direct the students to begin their conversation and let them visit uninterrupted for 10 minutes. During this time, the conversational partner/evaluator should not be writing comments, but should be making mental note of what the lead conversationalist is doing well and where s/he could improve.

After 10 minutes has passed, the instructor interrupts the conversation dyads and instructs all lead conversationalists to step outside the room until retrieved by the instructor. Provide the conversational partners/evaluators a few minutes to record their feedback on the small talk grading rubric while the conversation is still fresh in their minds. As evaluators are finishing up their notes, engage them in a brief discussion as to how things are going and what they are noticing. Invite the lead conversationalists for round one of the small talk session back into the classroom, have partners switch roles (conversational partner/evaluator becomes lead conversationalist and vice versa), and direct the students to begin round two of the conversation. Allow the dyads to visit for 10 minutes, and then ask the second-round of lead conversationalists to exit the room as the second-round partners/evaluators complete the small talk grading rubric for their partners. As the second-round evaluators are finishing up their notes, engage them in a brief discussion about what kinds of things they are noticing in the conversations that work well and what things are uncomfortable. Bring all students back into the classroom for a large group debriefing. More on the debriefing session is provided in the subsequent section.

Students type up their feedback on their partner’s performance as lead conversationalist in paragraph form using the concepts from the rubric (1-1.5 pages double spaced). Students should be encouraged to be honest and constructive, and they should address their comments directly to their partners. The feedback can be emailed to the partner as an attachment and carbon copied (cc) to the instructor. Students should receive timely feedback from both their peer evaluator and the instructor on ways they can improve their small talk skills for the next session.

Follow the same procedures described above for the second in-class small talk session, randomly assigning conversation dyads on the day of the activity and ensuring that no one is in the same dyad as before. If a group of three is necessary due to an odd number of students, instruct the triad to have co-lead conversationalists for one round. These co-lead conversationalists should each receive feedback from the single evaluator, and as co-evaluators in the second round, they should each provide independent feedback to the single lead conversationalist.

For the final small talk session, the instructor makes a sign-up sheet available for students to arrange an appointment to meet with the instructor. Some students initially find the idea of this session intimidating, but experience has shown that the final session is actually quite pleasant for both the student and the instructor. In this session, the student is the lead conversationalist, and it is the student’s responsibility to demonstrate his/her small talk skills by engaging the instructor in conversation. Time limits can be less strict, but both partners will need to be mindful of each other’s busy schedules and try to keep the conversation to 10-15 minutes. Immediately following the student’s departure, the instructor should complete his/her feedback for the student using the same grading rubric used in the peer-to-peer sessions.
Debriefing and Discussion

Following each of the two in-class small talk sessions, the instructor should invite students to regroup as a class and discuss the challenges they encountered and the successes they experienced in their roles as lead conversationalist and as conversational partner/evaluator. To help guide the discussion, students can be asked to share their thoughts/experiences on the following questions:

1) What is something interesting that you learned about your conversational partner? Did you learn this thing about him/her when you were leading the discussion or when s/he was leading the discussion?
2) What interesting question(s) did the lead conversationalist ask you when you were the conversational partner?
3) What skill(s) did you find the most difficult to consistently use? Why?
4) What skill(s) did you feel came most naturally to you? Why?
5) What kinds of general topics did you and your conversational partner discuss?
6) How might you prepare differently for engaging in small talk if you knew that you were going to have to talk to strangers at your boyfriend/girlfriend’s sister’s wedding (e.g., how might your general topics of conversation be different)? What about for small talk at a job interview?
7) Which of the guidelines for small talk do you think might carry over to the next stage of relational development, helping to deepen an interpersonal relationship?

References


**Appendix A: Small Talk Grading Rubric**

Directions: Mark each item that your partner successfully uses in conversation. In the spaces labeled "comments" provide detailed feedback to your partner on your observations of his/her communication.

**Maintain Eye Contact**

_____ Maintains eye contact the recommended 50-70% of the time (not too much, not too little eye contact)

**Comments:**

**Display Nonverbal Immediacy**

_____ Smiling or neutral, not scowling or constantly neutral (indifferent)

_____ Positions his/her body toward you

_____ Leans in and/or positions body in an "open" way (arms not crossed, etc.)

_____ Artifacts (e.g., cell phone, books, iPod, clothing) not distracting him or her from listening to you

_____ Head movement present and appropriate (nodding, shaking head)

_____ Responds with encouragers (e.g., "uh huh," "I see")

_____ Facial expressions appropriate (e.g., raised eyebrows [surprise], head tilted and/or brow furrowed [inquisitive])

**Comments:**

**Remember and Use the Other Person's Name**

_____ S/he used your name (correctly) at least two (2) times during the conversation.

**Comments:**

**Draw Out the Other Person**

_____ S/he asks questions that encourage you to talk about yourself.

_____ S/he asks relevant follow-up questions that show s/he is listening carefully and is inter-
ested in what you are saying.

Not an inquisition: s/he mixes relevant self-disclosures about him- or herself into the conversation

Comments:

Keep It Light

S/he sticks to topics of general/situational interest; avoids "uncomfortable" topics like political or religious views, opinions about the instructor or others in the class, etc.

Comments:

Accentuate the Positive

S/he avoids discussions about things or people s/he dislikes or is critical of.

Comments:
Doubling Down on Student Discussion:  
A Simple Technique for Increased Involvement

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Objectives
1. Students will actively participate in classroom discussion.  
2. Students will learn to not “over share,” allowing opportunities for others to speak.  
3. Students will be accountable for the material discussed in class.

Courses
This pedagogical idea is appropriate for any Communication course that utilizes class discussion (e.g., Communication Theory, Interpersonal Communication, Organizational Communication, etc.) It is best suited, however, for small to medium sized classrooms – as opposed to large lecture hall settings.

Rationale
Research has consistently indicated that students learn more when they become actively engaged in the learning process (Adler, 1982; Bonwell, 1991; McKeachie, et. al., 1987; see also Chickering & Gamson, 1987). Consequently, this pedagogical idea emphasizes self-exploration and expression. Rather than merely listening to a lecture or passively allowing other students to dominate the class discussion, this idea encourages equal student participation in a manner that is both simple to understand and fun to enact.

Description
Throughout my time as a student, instructors commonly used the “take-a-penny” technique to control classroom discussion. With this technique, students were given 1-3 pennies at the start of each class period. They then relinquished a penny each time they contributed to the class discussion. Although effective in regulating “over sharers,” this technique failed to foster classroom discussion among those who tended to remain quiet. Furthermore, the technique was fundamentally regressive in nature, as students were forced to relinquish their currency with each utterance.

In contrast to the “take-a-penny” technique, the simple pedagogical idea outlined in this paper uses poker chips (or any other form of “currency”) in order to reward student involvement. Each time a student shares her/his thoughts, rather than having to relinquish a penny, the student is given a poker chip. At the end of each class period, students then “cash out” their chips for a
participation grade. Such an approach fosters student involvement with an immediate and public display of praise (by flipping a poker chip in their direction). It also keeps “over sharers” in check via concertive control, without being regressive in nature (Barker, 1999).

**Time Needed**

The class discussion will proceed as usual. The only additional time requirement is at the end of class when students “cash out” for their personal involvement (approximately 5 minutes). Having used this technique for several semesters, I suggest printing a spreadsheet beforehand of students’ names to expedite this process. As students cash out, the instructor can keep track of how many poker chips each student earned via simple checkmarks; at semester’s end, this spreadsheet can also be used to quickly tally the students’ overall participation grades.

**Resources Needed**

A package/case of poker chips, or any other desired form of “currency” (e.g., pennies, paper clips, monopoly money, etc.)

**Directions**

1. Conduct the class discussion as usual.
2. Each time a student offers a constructive comment, insight or response, reward her/him with a poker chip.
3. Instruct students to hold onto each of their poker chips until the designated time.
4. At the end of class or immediately following the class discussion, have students “cash out” by returning their poker chips to you. Use a spreadsheet to record the number of chips each student earned for the day.
5. At semester’s end, use the preceding spreadsheet to tally the total number of poker chips each student received. Determine students’ overall participation scores by grading on a curve.

**Appraisal**

As aforementioned, the simple technique outlined in this paper is not regressive in nature; rather, it rewards students for their active involvement in class discussion. For this reason, I have found throughout my time using the idea that students are surprisingly eager to receive a poker chip. They often perk up at the end of their comment or question, or even raise their hands in anticipation. As the semester progresses and students become more familiar with the process, I often foster discussion by simply setting a stack of poker chips out on my desk or podium. The mere possibility of receiving a poker chip has a discernible impact on the students’ level of attentiveness and participation.

The process of flipping a poker chip to the students also brings a certain level of activity and excitement to an otherwise sedentary environment. Every eye in the room is on the poker chip as it spins through the air. I have even found that it does not matter whether I toss the chip well or make it to my target. The occasionally errant throw inevitably results in laughter from the
classroom, alleviating any pressure that one might feel about the need for athleticism or “good aim.”

Finally, I make it clear to students early in the semester that they should not corner the market on poker chips, as that will hurt their peers’ participation grades. Consequently, I have found it common for students to offer one another gentle reminders of this reality throughout the semester. This form of concertive control not only helps to foster involvement among quiet students, but also keeps “over sharers” from dominating the class discussion.

References


Understanding Proxemics through Restrooms:
A “Hands-Off” Approach to Personal Space and Communication

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Abstract
Numerous methods of teaching nonverbal communication have been well documented in the literature. However, some instructors may struggle to create transformative learning experiences for their students. This teaching activity provides a creative and original way for students to discuss nonverbal communication, specifically proxemics, in a fun, engaging, and memorable learning experience. This exercise asks the learners to reflect upon a previous experience with using a public restroom, critically reflect upon that experience individually, engage in classroom discourse about the experience, and take action by being aware of the space and territoriality choices they make. Students have responded positively to the classroom discussions about the use of personal space, territoriality, and nature of nonverbal interactions within the restroom context.

Courses
Introduction to Communication, Interpersonal Communication, Public Speaking, and Nonverbal Communication

Objectives
1) To expand students’ perceptions of proxemics in nonverbal communication.
2) To increase students’ understanding and awareness of personal space in daily communication.
3) To increase students’ understanding of territoriality and self-reflection of personal responsiveness.

Introduction and Rationale
Nonverbal communication and its numerous facets are discussed in a variety of communication courses. When communicators understand the nonverbal axioms, they are able to engage their audience, judge the use of their personal space, and make appropriate spatial decisions within relationships. As Prabhu (2010) wrote, “the knowledge of the proxemic behavior becomes an indispensable field of study as it adds a wider approach to the study of nonverbal communication” (p. 9). As instructors develop instructional methods to teach nonverbal communication they
are required to make numerous choices in their pedagogical process. There are many instructional methodologies that can be utilized to transmit this content and engage students in an active learning environment. These instructional methods include traditional lecture, small group discussion, role playing, artifact analysis, and classroom exercises (Knapp, 1999). Having used many of the methodologies previously listed, I found that the students were often disconnected from the content and were unable to apply the theoretical concepts to their daily communication. Thus, I sought to develop a creative and original way for students to discuss nonverbal communication, specifically proxemics, in a fun, engaging, and memorable learning experience. In his comprehensive explanation on teaching nonverbal communication, Knapp (1999) explained “[nonverbal] exercises are designed to illustrate a point and provide a memorable learning experience, while at the same time keeping the focus on the substance, not the activity itself” (p. 195). As a result, I created a classroom exercise that invites students to discuss their perception of proxemics, their understanding and awareness of personal space, and their responsiveness to territoriality by examining the use of urinal and stall selection in male and female public restrooms. Bain (2004) suggested “When we encounter new material, we try to comprehend it in terms of something we think we already know” (p. 26). Although most individuals have made choices regarding their restroom behavior, they have not usually considered how culture, gender, and personal attributes influence proxemic choices.

The creation and development of this proxemics teaching exercise was guided by Mezirow’s psychocritical approach to learning. Mezirow (2000) described learning as “the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one’s experience in order to guide future action” (p. 5). When students experience a change in their attitude, beliefs, or perceptions, transformative learning has occurred (Mezirow, 2000). Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007) described the four primary components of the transformative learning process as “experience, critical reflection, reflective discourse, and action” (p. 134). This exercise asks the learners to reflect upon a previous experience with using a public restroom, critically reflect upon that experience individually, engage in classroom discourse about the experience, and take action by being aware of the space and territoriality choices they make.

**Description of the Activity**

Before completing this activity, students should have a general understanding of the definition of nonverbal communication and the axioms of nonverbal communication. This activity may be completed in 25 to 30 minutes of a standard 50-minute class. This activity requires a student handout featuring questions regarding the students’ perceptions of proxemics, personal space, and territoriality (see questions below). In addition, the activity requires four figures showing the bathroom urinals/stalls with different urinals/stalls occupied for each figure (see descriptions of figures below). Also, the debriefing questions connect the activity to the content and the student learning objectives.

Because most, if not all, individuals have utilized a public restroom during their life, the experience is easily established for this exercise. I begin by having the students respond individually to a series of questions which ask the students to critically reflect on the use of proxemics in their lives. The questions are:

1. What are examples of spatial arrangement, territoriality, and personal conversation distances, and what examples have you noticed in your daily communication?
2. What is your degree of intimate, personal, social, and public space? How does this change based on the type of communication encounter and the nature of the relationship you have with the person with whom you are communicating?

3. In what ways does the physical environment influence our nonverbal behavior and the communication choices we make regarding proxemics?

   In order to establish a comfortable environment for classroom discourse, I have a few students share their reactions and reflect upon the introductory questions. However, if the class is rather large, students can work in smaller, collaborative learning groups.

   Next, I move into the specific activity. I have traditionally used four different figures for this exercise; however, more could be utilized to expand the conversation. Each of the figures is described below. The figures can be recreated on a large piece of paper or drawn on the classroom board. Each figure illustrates six restroom stalls/urinals which are numbered one through six from left to right. To the right of the stalls/urinals is the restroom entrance. Figure one shows one individual occupying stall/urinal one. Figure two shows one individual occupying stall/urinal three and another individual occupying stall/urinal five. Figure three shows one individual occupying stall/urinal three and another individual occupying stall/urinal four. Figure four shows individuals occupying stall/urinal one, three, and five.

   Instructors work their way through each individual figure, asking the students to identify which urinal they would select and why they made this choice based on the physical environment and context of the restroom. I allow the entire class to respond. However, an instructor may wish to break the students into small groups and have them respond within their groups. Based on nonverbal research that males and females differ in their nonverbal communication (Gamble & Gamble, 2013), I have the male and female students respond separately, which spurs a lively classroom dialogue.

**Debriefing**

   The use of the discussion questions and figures prompts an exciting classroom discussion. Students connect their prior knowledge on nonverbal communication and proxemics to a humorous, yet practical, example of intimate, personal, social and public space. Once the students have completed the small group discussion, the instructor should pose the following questions to the class. The debriefing connects the instructional concepts and allows the students to be more reflective when making proxemics and territoriality choices.

   1. Although the restroom provides us with an entertaining context to explore the use of proxemics, what other intimate situations might we encounter where consideration of spatial distance would be important?

   2. Considering your perception of territoriality, how do you feel when someone invades your personal space?

   3. Bearing in mind the influence of cultural background on nonverbal behavior, how will you respond to your territoriality and personal conversation distance preference when communicating in a diverse context?

**Appraisal**

   Although this activity may appear to be a little unorthodox, the students respond positively to discussions about the use of personal space, territoriality, and nature of nonverbal interac-
tions within the restroom context. Because a majority, if not all, students have used a busy public restroom, they are able to relate directly to the experience and engage in meaningful dialogue about the choices they have made. The student discourse serves as a foundation for discussion about the use and understanding of nonverbal communication. Many students commented that they were often selective in their restroom choices but had not acknowledged how culture, gender, and personal attributes influenced those choices. As a result, the students leave the classroom with a broader appreciation and understanding of nonverbal communication and proxemics. Moreover, the lesson is meaningful and memorable, and many students have discussed the activity after the completion of the class through informal out-of-class conversations.

Some instructors may not feel comfortable discussing the use of urinal and stall selection with their students. A variation of this assignment might utilize the restroom sinks as a starting point for this dialogue. Previous classroom discussion has illustrated that students face the same challenges when selecting a sink as they do urinal or stall. This has been especially true for female students.

References


