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Continuing to Do the Work: An Examination of the Experiences of Students of Color in Collegiate Speech

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Abstract

This thesis examines how the experiences of students of color in the collegiate speech community are inextricably linked to their race. Students of color, unlike white students, face unique challenges in the predominately white speech community. Using qualitative interviews to uncover the experiences of students of color who have participated in collegiate speech, this project details 6 major themes: Internal Pressures, External Pressures, Navigating Voice, Issues of Representation, Team Dynamics, and Survival Strategies. As well as implications, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

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Chapter One: Introduction

My introduction to collegiate forensics began when I joined the team at the University of Wisconsin - Eau Claire. At the time I joined, I was one of five students of color on the team. The University of Wisconsin - Eau Claire is a predominantly white institution and the forensics team was comparably more diverse, but still white dominated. Of the five students of color on the team at that time, only two of us competed at tournaments regularly and spent a significant amount of time engaged in team activities. The other two students were much more removed from the team and I rarely saw them for the entirety of my first year.

By my second year competing, I was the only student of color who competed for the entirety of the competitive season. Some of the students of color I had built relationships with the year prior had graduated, another had transferred to a more diverse university, and the team had not successfully recruited any new students of color. That year I often found myself as the only person of color attending team meeting, events, and traveling to tournaments. I formed relationships with the other students around me, but I always felt a palpable difference between myself and the white students around me.

By my third year, I was the only student of color on my team in any capacity. By the time I was finishing up my fourth year the team had not recruited or retained any other students of color. While many students of color had come and gone throughout my time, they never stayed for very long. As the only student of color on this team, I experienced unique challenges my white peers did not.

As my time as a graduate teaching assistant at Minnesota State University, Mankato comes to an end and I reflect on my time as a graduate student and coach, I see similar patterns occurring with the students of color who joined the team. After my experience as a student of

color, it was my goal as a budding coach of color to advocate for the students of color who joined the team.

However, recruiting and retaining students of color was a challenge. The MNSU forensics team was once again a predominately white team. Though the campus itself was more racially diverse than the UWEC campus, the diversity on the campus didn't seem to translate to the team. Even when we were able to connect with students of color, they often attended a team meeting or two or perhaps a few tournaments before stepping away from the team. Some would share that they simply didn't have time for the activity, while others expressed that they didn't feel welcome in the activity. In my three years at MNSU, we only had one competitor of color compete on a consistent basis. We had many students of color join us for brief periods of time, but again, they frequently left the team shortly after joining. Many chose to leave after their first tournaments, some citing issues with tournament culture and many expressing concerns with insensitive ballots after the tournament had ended. Each of these comments were familiar to me as I recalled how I felt as if I had to craft a persona while competing, and often felt disparaged by insensitive comments on my ballots.

Seeing the similarities between my time as a student and my time as a coach, it became clear to me that although the forensics community prides itself on being an open and equitable space, it hasn't made any large strides to improve the overall experiences for students of color. Students of color are incredibly valuable to the activity. They share powerful stories and messages that move the community to change their ideologies and actions; however, they often endure great hardships in their efforts to share those stories within the forensics community. I believe we owe it to students of color to better understand their experiences participating in collegiate speech and work to improve what they feel needs improving. If the speech community

wants to become an equitable arena, we must continue to deconstruct and improve the activity, with the voices of the students the activity is meant to serve centered in the process.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of students of color in collegiate speech. Through this research I hope to create a deeper understanding of how students of color engage with the activity and how the activity alters the expression of students of color. With this research I seek to reveal the tactics students of color use navigate individual expression and how these tactics influence student of color's feelings of belonging in the activity. With this work I strive to provide insight into how speech can become a more welcoming place for students of color by illustrating where the community still falls short and what can be done to improve student of color experiences.

Although the participants I interviewed for this research represent a small portion of the student population, their perspectives provide excellent insight into how students of color experiences are shaped by the activity, and they provide guidance for the community to begin making progress toward a more equitable environment. The experiences shared by current and former competitors in this research reveal a need for change with how we approach diversity in the activity. Through this research I seek to explore how student experiences in speech are influenced by minoritized racial identity. This work hopes to contribute to bodies of knowledge within forensics research and provide coaches with a better understanding of how their coaching, judging, and team management practices influence students of color experiences for better or for worse. Ultimately, this work strives to inspire current and future coaches to reflect on their practices to better understand how these practices may implicitly disadvantage students of color. In the forensics field, little research exists examining race and its effect on student experience.

Understanding this topic through the perspectives of students of color is vital for coaches and the community at large to begin making the changes students of color want to see.

Research Questions

The primary goal of this research is to understand the experiences of students of color in collegiate forensics. Therefore, I posed three research questions to gain insight into the experiences of students of color in the forensics community. To begin, I posed my first research question:

RQ1: How does forensics impose itself on students of color?

This question intends to address the overall focus of this research by examining the how the forensics community influences the behaviors, thoughts, and feelings of students of color. While the experiences of students vary due to a multitude of factors, this question seeks to highlight the ways a student's race impacts the interpersonal interactions they have within the activity. Understanding the interpersonal interactions students have in forensics can provide insight into how those interactions shape the thoughts and feelings students of color have towards the activity and how students learn the norms and culture of the activity.

To examine how students of color react to the forensics norms and culture, I posed a second research question:

RQ2: How do students of color navigate the unwritten rules of forensics?

Gaining insight into the strategies students of color use to combat negative feelings towards the norms and culture that are structurally built into the activity can provide clearer guidance on how to dismantle and reimagine a culture that is more welcoming to students of color. The way race shapes a student’s experience in forensics is complex and students react to the activity differently as a result. Some students may acclimate well to the activity, while others begrudgingly

assimilate into the activity or other choose to rebel in the face of system that was ultimately not created for them.

Finally, to explore the ways in which students feel their authenticity is affected by forensics culture, I posed my third research question:

RQ3: How does forensics limit the expression of students of color? How is it that students of color navigate the cultural forces that limit their expression in forensics?

Gaining insight into how students of color feel constrained by the culture of forensics can provide further guidance on how to revisit the norms we uphold in the activity and reassess the culture we have built to improve the experiences of students of color.

Preview of Chapters

Having introduced the research project and presented my research questions, the thesis proceeds with a review of literature. Chapter Two outlines the relevant bodies of work that have informed this study, and situates my project within ongoing academic discourse in communication and related fields. This literature review includes topics such as the construction of identity, race as visible identity, team culture and cohesion, the importance of coach behaviors, public speaking norms, and competitive culture. I then proceed to Chapter Three, which describes the research methods used for this study and provides theoretical justification for the benefits of interviewing as a qualitative approach. This chapter outlines recruiting practices, my data collection process, and my procedures for analyzing interview transcripts. Chapter Four presents the results of the thematic analysis. In this chapter, each research question is answered by discussing the themes discovered through the analysis process. Using direct quotations from each interview as well as my interpretation of data found in the transcripts, this chapter seeks to represent the experiences of the students interviewed. Finally, Chapter Five

discusses the significance of this research and provides implications for the forensics community to reckon with. Limitations of this research are also discussed through reflection of the research process. Additionally, this chapter introduces potential avenues for future research related to the findings of this project.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The motivation for this research is to understand the experiences of students of color in collegiate speech and debate or forensics. This research is necessary to understand how students of color navigate the world of forensics. In this chapter, I outline the influence of identity, race, team culture, coach behavior, public speaking curriculum, and competitive culture on the overall satisfaction a student of color feels regarding their forensics career. After discussing the aforementioned elements and how they affect the non-white forensics experience, the reader should better understand how existing research contextualizes the challenges students of color face when participating in competitive speech and debate.

Importance of Identity

One's identity is a core aspect of the human experience. Identity provides context and understanding for the world and those around us. Despite the value placed on identity and the wealth of research that has been done on the concept, our understanding of identity is not yet complete. Identity is multifaceted, layered, and nuanced. Identity theory claims "persons have multiple selves" as a result of various and differentiated experiences, interactions, and relationships (Brenner et al., 2014, p. 232). Drawing from a vast body of research on identity, I will examine foundational texts to situate identity in a context that will be useful for this project.

Initially, identity is often thought of as aggregate. Harwood (2005) explained, "the individual self can be understood at different levels of abstraction" (p. 84). Harwood recognized two different types of identity - personal identity and social identity. While both personal and social identities contribute to the "larger self-system," they are frequently conceptualized as two distinct identities (Swann et al., 2009, p. 995). Gonzales-Backen et al. (2015) defined personal identity as "personal conceptualizations about one's physical, psychological, and social

characteristics and abilities" (p. 203). Social identity can be defined as "a person's sense of self, derived from perceived membership in social groups" (Charness & Chen, 2020, p. 692). Both personal and social identities inform the individual self. Personal conceptualizations of oneself as well as the social groups one belongs to both impact how individuals understand their identity.

Understanding the distinction between personal and social identity can provide insight into individual identity and the lived experiences that stem from identity. Swann et al. (2009) help illustrate this distinction by explaining "personal identities refer to properties of the individual such as intelligent or extravert, [whereas] group identities refer to the groups with which individuals align themselves, such as American, Democrat, or family member" (p. 995). Harwood (2006) further explained we place a high value on identities because "at the individual level (personal identity) we are concerned with our difference from other individuals and the things that make us unique as people. At the collective level (social identity) we are concerned with our groups' differences from other groups and the things that make our group unique" (p. 84-85). In other words, identities are how humans situate themselves in the world around them through both individual understanding and social or group affinity.

However, personal and social identities are not the only identity dichotomy that has been introduced as a means to further understand the individual self. The concept of visible and nonvisible identities also shapes how we understand the self (Clair et al., 2005). The distinction between visible and nonvisible identities relies on what is easily perceivable. Examples of visible identities most often include "sex, race, age, ethnicity, physical appearance, language, speech patterns, and dialect" (Clair et al., 2005, p. 78). In contrast, nonvisible identities generally include "religion, occupation, national origin, club or social group memberships, illness, and sexual orientation" (p. 78). Though invisible and visible identities both impact an individual's

self-concept, visible identities are more easily perceived by others. Visible identities are more easily prescribed to individuals by others which may increase the impact of visible identities on an individual's overall self-concept.

A final duality that has emerged in the study of identity is that of identity salience and identity prominence, both of which further abstract the concept of the individual self. Identity salience is defined as "the probability that a given identity will be invoked in social interaction or, alternatively, as a substantial propensity to define a situation in a way that provides an opportunity to perform that identity" (Brenner et al., 2014, p. 232). Identity salience refers to the identities individuals feel a stronger connection to and are more likely to play a key role in the daily experiences of individuals. Similarly, identity prominence "is essentially defined as the individual's subjective sense of the worth or value of an identity to himself or herself" (p. 233). In simpler terms, identity prominence can be thought of as the importance of identity. The distinction between identity salience and identity prominence is subtle as they are both concerned with "the significance of persons' subjective responses to themselves" (p. 233). However, identity salience can be thought of as situational and is tied to social behavior while identity prominence "reflects the ideal self and is defined as the subjective value or worth to persons of a given identity relative to that of other identities" (p. 233). Ultimately, salient and prominent identities are more likely to impact the daily experiences of an individual due to the importance individuals put on those identities. The introduction of visible and nonvisible identities, identity salience, and identity prominence somewhat complicate personal and social identities. Do personal identities tend to be more visible or non-visible? Do visible identities tend to be more salient or prominent than nonvisible identities? What factors influence identity salience and identity prominence? How does the visibility of identity affect belonging? Such

questions inspire a needed attention to how identity is constructed, and how it comes to bear on communication situations across a variety of contexts.

Identity Construction

If identity itself is a complicated concept, the mechanisms through which identity is constructed – and how it influences various communication situations – are even more complex. Matthews et al. (2014) explain identity construction occurs at the "intersection of both the individual and the social world" (p. 2356). The formation of each of these identities (personal and social) creates a chicken and egg conundrum - which forms first, personal or social identity? Social identity theory sheds light on how both personal and social identities are constructed. The theory breaks down three main components that make up social identity: categorization, identification, and comparison (Charness & Chen, 2020).

Initially, we engage in categorization, the first component of social identity theory. In the categorization stage, we put others as well as ourselves into socially-constructed categories. The categories we put people in allow us to label and define others. As we engage in this process of labeling and defining others, we also label and define ourselves. Based on the categories we label others with we also gain an understanding of what categories and labels define ourselves. This leads to the next step in social identity theory - identification. In this process "we associate ourselves with certain groups" (Charness & Chen, 2020, p. 292). Through identification, we understand which groups we belong to or which we identify with (also known as in-groups) and which we do not identify with (known as out-groups). Finally, we engage in comparison. Through comparison, we compare our in-groups to other out-groups. This comparison has the ability to "create favorable biases toward the group to which we belong" (p. 292) and conversely create unfavorable biases toward out-groups. Social identity theory therefore provides a

framework to see how through categorization, identification, and comparison social identity informs personal identity in a mutually-constructed process.

Although personal and social identity have been conceptualized as two separate entities, a strong sense of connection to an in-group can lead to identity fusion (Swann et al., 2009). Identity fusion can be defined as "a feeling of deep connection with others who share salient social identities" (Misch et al., 2018, p. 531). When identity fusion occurs, the barrier between the individual and the group is blurred, and "the group comes to be regarded as functionally equivalent with the personal self" (Swann et al., 2009, p. 995). Identity fusion makes group identity equally influential as individual identity. As group identity becomes as prominent as individual identity individuals do not sacrifice their individual identities. Although similar to social identity theory's identification this process differs as identity fusion does not involve depersonalization. Depersonalization can have a negative impact on individual expression and autonomy.

Through identification, "when people identify with groups, they theoretically undergo a cognitive process of depersonalization" (Swann et al., 2009, p. 996). Swann et al. (2009) elaborate, "depersonalized individuals may be well suited for falling in line and obeying orders issued by the group leader, but they lack the initiative to enact extraordinary actions for the group" (p. 996). In contrast, they note:

> the opposite is true for fused persons. When people become fused with a group, they do not relinquish their sense of personal identity in favor of their group identity nor do they come to regard themselves as undifferentiated members of the group. Instead, fused persons retain a strong sense of personal identity. (p. 996)

Swann et al. continue to say, “for fused persons, group membership is intensely personal, for they feel that they care as much about the outcomes of the group as their own outcomes” (p. 996). When individuals experience identity fusion, they obtain a deep sense of belonging.

Identity fusion is closely related to identity salience as it serves a behavioral function. Similar to identity salience, identity fusion predicts the behavior of the individual in conjunction with their identities. Identity fusion can be achieved through shared experience, as positive events and the “co-experience of traumatic events predicted higher levels of identity fusion” (Misch et al., 2018, p. 532). Visible identities like race are likely to inspire identity fusion as the visible evidence of one's membership to these groups is readily perceivable by both in-group and out-group. This perceivability increases the chance that individuals of the same race will have similar experiences as a result of their race, increasing identity fusion.

Race as a Visible Identity

Race is frequently recognized as a visible and social identity. With physical marks such as skin color, hair texture, and facial structure, we have socially constructed what different races look like. Other “visible” identities like language, speech patterns, and dialect have also been included in the social construction of race. With a collective understanding of what it means to “sound black,” for example, race can be seen and heard. For this reason, race can be thought of as “fundamental rather than peripheral to the self” (Alcoff & Alcoff, 2006, p. 6). Alcoff & Alcoff (2006) further claim, “in our excessively materialist society, only what is visible can generally achieve the status of accepted truth” (p. 6). Comparing race to other personal and social identities, they argue race operates as our “penultimate visible self” because “age can be surgically masked, homosexuality can be rendered invisible on the street, and class can be hidden behind a cultivated accent or clothing style” (Alcoff & Alcoff, 2006, p. 6). Even recognizing the

possibility of racial ambiguity, Alcoff & Alcoff defend that because race is socially constructed, many believe "(a) there exists a fact of the matter about one's racial identity, usually determined by ancestry, and (b) that identity is discernible if one observes carefully the person's physical features and practiced mannerisms" (p. 7). The visibility of race as an identity means this identity is more likely to be salient as individuals are connected to this identity both personally and socially by themselves, their in-groups, and out-groups.

The visibility of race allows racism and prejudice to proliferate because this "discrimination, along with other forms of oppression, is embedded within the socio-cultural fabric of the United States" (Camara & Orbe, 2011, p. 112). The standardization of racism in modern society can be seen interpersonally, institutionally, and structurally.

Interpersonally, racism manifests in forms of overt and covert racism as well as micro and macro aggressions among other things. Institutionally and structurally, differential treatment can be seen in "housing, employment, health, and the criminal justice system" (Camara & Orbe, 2011, p. 112). As a result of numerous forms and layers of oppression, people of color have become susceptible to "discrimination in their everyday lives" (Camara & Orbe, 2011, p. 112). In other words, people of color cannot move through the world without experiencing racialized discrimination. This constant exposure to racialized discrimination in a world where whiteness is viewed as the norm has a negative effect on belonging (Reddy, 1998, p. 57).

Education is one particular domain in which racism remains pervasive. Due to racial disparities historically and currently in the education field, "educational settings are raced in the sense that the social construction of 'race' is enacted and instantiated through a variety of social practices in school" (Murphy & Zirkel, 2015, p. 3). Murphy & Zirkel (2015) further elucidate students of color are expected to **"**manage and operate within a context where negative

stereotypes about [their] group, abilities, and, indeed, one's likelihood of 'belonging,' are culturally pervasive" (p. 3). In an educational setting, students of color are exposed to interpersonal racism from their predominantly white teachers and institutional racism in the form of stereotypes and hidden curricula. It is important to note both interpersonal racism and institutional racism feed off of "the other," in large part because "cross-race teaching interactions in which white teachers instruct [students of color] are the norm in the United States" (Jacoby-Senghor et al., 2016, p. 54). The interpersonal racism students face at the hands of their teachers becomes systemic, with connections to the school-to-prison pipeline, for example. Such institutionalized and systemic white dominance in education creates an environment that is hostile towards non-white students.

Educators have the power to shape the everyday experiences of students of color in the classroom in both positive and negative ways. For example, Jacoby-Senghor et al. (2016) document how teachers' biased expectations for their students of color harm those students' outcomes. Though whiteness is often thought of as invisible due to its prominence, it still affects how white people experience and interact with others. Factors such as stereotyping and white superiority can lead to lower expectations for students of color, and as a result, students of color may experience "less interpersonal warmth and less effortful teaching" (Jacoby-Senghor et al., 2016, p. 51) which can negatively affect learning and belonging.

Given these constraints, a sense of belonging can be hard to achieve for students of color. As educational institutions are tasked with "sorting people based on intellectual performance and achievement" amid the presence of "negative intellectual stereotypes that target one's group," students of color often end up feeling a sense of belonging to a stigmatized group, and "may experience concerns about whether or not they 'belong' in [educational] settings" (Murphy

& Zirkel, 2015, p. 3). This sense of *un*-belonging can hurt "students' engagement, enjoyment, and performance in educational settings" (Murphy & Zirkel, 2015, p. 3). When students of color feel a sense of belonging in educational spaces, they are more likely to remain in those educational spaces and achieve greater success in those spaces as well.

Just as race has an everyday presence in the lives of people of color, "racial and ethnic stereotypes exist 'in the air' within educational settings" (Murphy & Zirkel, 2015, p. 6). Such omnipresence of stereotypes on an institutional level has a negative impact on the "sense of belonging that students from stigmatized racial and ethnic groups may achieve in school" (Murphy & Zirkel, 2015, p. 5). Murphy and Zirkel explain, because "students are aware of stereotypes that impugn their group" this can negatively impact their feelings of belonging (p. 5). As a result, students may experience "belonging uncertainty" (Walton & Cohen, 2007) especially because stigmatized racial groups also know that "others in the academic environment (e.g., teachers, peers) could potentially endorse those stereotypes" (Murphy & Zirkel, 2015, p. 5). Murphy and Zirkel (2015) further report that "feelings of belonging were a significant predictor of enjoyment of academic work and interest in pursuing academic goals among Black, Latino/a, and Asian American students" (p. 6). This finding helps illustrate how a lack of belonging in schools can also lead to decreased satisfaction in the experiences of students of color.

When students experience a decreased sense of belonging, it is often the result of perceived otherness or difference from the majority. Student-student relationships are an important intervention against this sense of otherness in higher education, but students do not need to feel like part of the majority; a perceived similarity with just one other person can positively impact belonging. Higher education is a space where students of color experience these feelings of otherness, but extracurricular activities can help connect students with like-

minded individuals and allow them to find a social group to belong to. Extracurriculars like forensics connect students with other students who share their interests. Forensics connects students across the nation and provides an opportunity for students to connect with students who do not attend their own universities. When students do not find belonging on their home campuses, they can seek out belonging in the forensics community.

Education and Competition in Competitive Forensics

In speech and debate, the goal of teaching students skills such as argumentation and delivery is situated within a competitive atmosphere. Most of the community would agree that the primary goal of forensics is to facilitate learning (Hinck, 2003). However, one of the primary ways this learning occurs in forensics is in the competitive arena, where a vast body of judges assess student performance and proficiency. As a result, judges play a key role in enforcing both rules and norms through the comments they leave on ballots, and the way they rank students against each other. Students are expected to master many skills to become "effective" speakers. These learning objectives closely echo the written (rules) and unwritten rules (norms) in which forensic speech is situated. Looking at the elements of audience, style, and delivery (elements that are present in all events) we can more closely examine what is expected of forensics students based on these written and unwritten rules.

Audience consideration or audience analysis is viewed as the ability of a speaker to "tailor a speech to a listeners' knowledge level, needs, and interests" (Kelly et al., 2014, p. 43). Audience analysis is uniquely situated in forensics because of "the current nature of forensics tournaments, where students are challenged to speak to basically the same amorphously defined audience of professional forensics coaches mixed with widely assorted lay judges week after week" (p. 43). This means the expectation for students to engage in audience analysis is

incredibly constrained. Furthermore, the written rules for many events require the speech to be fully researched (in the case of public address), composed, and memorized (Kelly et al., 2014). This presents consideration for which audience students must play to - "the audience of the moment (the particular judge or judges in the room) [or] the larger more extended community or audience who the critic is being asked to represent, and reminds us of the responsibility of adjudicators to prioritize the targeting of audiences-as-groups over the targeting of audiences—as—individuals" (Kelly et al., 2014, p. 43). Regardless of the audience, students are expected to "demonstrate their awareness of, concern for, and focus on reaching the general community embodied by the 'listening other'" (p. 44). To effectively reach their audiences, students are encouraged to adapt their usual speaking styles in favor of a more universally accepted style of speech.

Alongside research and audience analysis, forensics cultivates a hyper-focused attention to style. Forensic scholars view style as

> the importance of word choice, of the language we select to clothe our ideas. It calls on speakers to pay attention to more than content alone and to recognize that the precise words we use to convey that content have a powerful effect on the audiences we speak to. (Kelly et al., 2014, p. 47)

Effective speakers are expected to choose "language that is accurate, appropriate, concise, clear, concrete, and interesting" (Kelly et al., 2014, 47). Style is concerned with making the speech interesting to the listeners' ear, this can be achieved "by incorporating alliteration, rhyming, repetition, personification, hyperbole, metaphors, and similes" (Jaffe, 2006, pp. 240-246). Kelly et al. (2014) note style is one element of effective speech that has been complicated by the "issue of elitist language (sexist, ageist, ethnocentric, etc.)" (p. 47). Ultimately, style is influenced by

the identities a speaker holds. Speaking styles can be gendered or racialized as a result our perceptions of what effective speakers look and sound like are gendered and racialized as well.

Finally, a speaker's delivery is vital – both vocally and nonverbally. Sellnow (2003) notes "listeners tend to be influenced more by delivery than by the actual content of speeches," and approximately "55 to 90 percent of the meaning listeners grasp is essentially derived from delivery" (p. 256). Various skills come together to influence vocal delivery, such as "pronunciation, articulation, stress, accents and dialects, clarity, volume, pitch, rate, and the use of pauses," perceived "'natural delivery,' enthusiasm, attitudes of confidence, and competence, tone (and monotone), rhythm, and vocal fillers" as well as "intelligibility, vocal variety, and conversational style" (Kelly et al., 2014, p. 48). With so many elements to consider delivery is entirely subjective. While the listening ear of one audience member may view a speaker as effective another member of the same audience may view the speaker as ineffective. As a result, students must craft a delivery style that is pleasing to the ears of the majority in their audience.

Paired with vocal delivery is nonverbal delivery. Nonverbal communication is present in all messages and varies culturally and situationally. However, communication scholars recognize effective delivery is achieved "not only in terms of vocal nonverbal skills, but equally well-developed physical delivery skills as well" (Kelly et al., 2014, p. 48). Effective nonverbal delivery is reliant on a number of factors:

> . . . space (taking into account the size of the audience, the cultural context of the speech, the size of the room, the group's density, seating arrangements, and the speaker's distance from the audience), time (arriving at an appropriate time and adhering to established time limits), appearance (studies show that a neatly groomed and professional appearance does send important messages about a speaker's commitment to the topic and

> occasion as well as about their credibility), eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, posture, and body movements. (Sellnow, 2003, pp. 260-261)

Similar to style and vocal delivery, physical delivery is informed by identity and culture. To be considered effective speakers, students must adapt their physical delivery to cater to the preferences of the dominant culture. The necessity for effective speakers to adapt their style, vocal, and physical delivery allows norms to emerge over time. To be an effective speaker students must not only abide by the written rules of the activity, but they must also abide by the norms of the activity.

Rules and Norms as Determinants of Forensic Culture

The pursuit of these goals, whether they be educational or competitive, contributes to a collective identity among the forensics community which has been built through tradition and culture. One of the most potent ways forensics culture manifests is through rules and norms. These rules or norms exist structurally within the activity and direct the way we expect students to participate in-round and out-of-round. Rules and norms have been present in the community for decades, and Kelly et al. (2014) claim "the assessment of what constitutes 'quality performance' in collegiate forensics [remains a] mysterious and unsupported collective conception of unwritten rules and performance practices related to a very narrow and instinctive set of standards" (p. 38). Paine (2005) notes "rules are often formal and explicit whereas norms tend to be informal and implicit (p. 79). Rules are mandated and have an "official governing body" that ensures they are followed. Norms are simplified as "habits or patterns which evolve over time among members of a community" (p. 79). Paine notes, "norms tend to be more flexible in their application" and with the lack of a clear governing body the competitive circuit becomes

the enforcer (p. 80). While rules are the only officially recognized regulations students are expected to follow, norms can hold just as much power.

However, in many cases, rules and norms are far too ambiguous and sometimes seem to be at odds with what we are trying to teach. For instance, “the desire to stay ‘in time,’ the desire to see students speak ‘without notes,’ etc.” are both examples of rules that can be found in event descriptions that contribute to “the exclusion of other important learning objectives” and places “a single factor, element or consideration” as the “dominant factor in a critique” (Kelly et al., 2014, p. 40). Event descriptions are brief and vague. These event descriptions fail to illustrate the learning objectives that students are meant to benefit from. The focus on event descriptions limits what judges assess, which creates more strict parameters for how students are allowed to perform in-round.

Rules and norms are the results of the competitive culture in the speech community. The competitive culture of forensics can put a strain on students, because “competition requires students to try to win” (Hinck, 2003, p. 62). As a result of this urge to win, rules and norms hold power over students. Both rules and norms affect how students conduct themselves in and out of the round - for example:

> The posting of finalists ("never scream or show unduly intense excitement or disappointment"), the nonverbal behaviors evident during award assemblies ("clap equally for everybody and never cheer for your own school or give the raspberry to another school"), the way we enter rooms ("wait quietly outside the door if the round is already in progress and only walk in when you're absolutely sure nobody is speaking"), the way we leave rooms ("ask the judge's permission to leave if you depart mid-round to get to another event, but don't wave and shout 'good luck' to the other contestants"), and

> even the way students write their names on the blackboard ("print your name rather than use cursive letters and don't make your handwriting either too big or too small"). (Paine, 2005, pp. 80-81)

These are all examples of how competitors behave as a result of norms. The pervasiveness of norms as well as their ambiguous and variable nature mean they have the power to shape and reshape “every aspect of the forensics experience” (Paine, 2005, p. 80). Although norms are not rules, they are honored just the same because “individual behavior at a tournament is subject to reward or censure under the operation of the unwritten rules of the activity” (Paine, 2005, p. 81). Rules and norms shape the way students experience the competitive culture of speech. When at tournaments, the ways students behave and perform are colored by rules and norms. The competitive culture is just half of the student experience. The culture of their teams also plays a large role in how students understand and engage with the activity.

Team Culture and Cohesion

Student experiences in forensics can be examined on two different levels, within their teams and the community at large. The team functions as a smaller group of people who can interact more frequently, allowing for more interpersonal interactions. Here, students gain their first understanding of the speech and debate world as it is relayed by coaches and teammates. On the community level, students are exposed to a wide variety of people and gain a personal understanding of the activity. Student experiences in their teams shape their experiences in the community and vice versa. To understand how they come together we must examine how team identity and community identity are constructed.

Initially, team identity requires team cohesion. Cohesion is a vital tool for teams. Team cohesion can be defined as “a shared attraction, bonding, or sense of pride among team members

that are driven by social- or task-based elements associated with team membership" (Grossman et al., 2022, p. 182). Team cohesion has the power to turn a group into a team. Groups and teams are distinct from one another because a team is conceptualized as "an energetic group of people who are committed to achieving common objectives, who work well together and enjoy doing, and who produce high-quality results" (Francis & Young, 1979, as cited by Friedley & Manchester, 2005, p. 95). Teams come in many different forms. Teams form in educational, athletic, and corporate settings. While each of these settings differs greatly, the value of team cohesion is recognized in all. Teams realize there are many benefits to working with others. However, achieving effective team cohesion can be difficult.

Friedley & Manchester (2005) explain that because "team cohesion is rooted in the feelings team members have for one another as well as a common goal," the process of "creating, shaping, and strengthening those feelings relies on the use of effective communication" (p. 96). Establishing strong team cohesion is important because team cohesion is one of the most influential factors to encourage continued investment and presence within a group (Turman, 2003, p. 87). Friedley & Manchester (2005) argue "clear and consistent messages about the value of this team experience and what it means to be a member of this team are critical from the onset of team formation" (p. 96). They go on to say team members require "clear and consistent messages about how members of this team behave, in their relationships with [the] coaching staff and other team members, as well as their preparation for intercollegiate forensics competition" (Friedley & Manchester, 2005). Turman (year) adds clear team expectations and goals also positively affects team cohesion (p. 97).

From clear team expectations and goals, team culture emerges. Team culture aids in the establishment of team cohesion through the implementation of tradition. Tradition can lay the

framework for connection between team members; however, if the team members do not buy into the traditions, they will be rendered ineffectual (Rowe & Cronn-Mills, 2005). Through the implementation of tradition and the building of culture, consubstantiation can occur. Consubstantiation is "a way of life as an acting together, and in acting together, men [sic] have common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, attitudes that make them consubstantial" (Burke, 1969, as cited by Friedley & Manchester, 2005, p. 103-104). Team culture can be made stronger through the process of consubstantiation as “consubstantiality creates a strong notion of the ‘insider/outsider’ allowing the student to feel very absorbed by team tradition” (Friedley & Manchester, 2005, p. 104). However, this absorption into the team identity can increase a team’s cohesion at the expense of individual identity or the opportunity to build relationships in the larger community.

As the chief arbiters of culture and tradition, coaches also play a fundamental role in the development and maintenance of team culture. A coach's behavior is key to the establishment of team cohesion because the coach is part of the team while also holding power over the team. For this reason, coaches have the power to bolster or diminish team cohesion based on how they behave. Mageau and Vallerand (2003) note “coaches’ behaviors affect athletes’ motivation through their impact on perceptions of autonomy, competence, and relatedness” (p. 892). Coaching behaviors and strategies can benefit team dynamics as students learn “encouraging others to succeed, sharing the excitement of others' successes, owning as well as taking pride in team success, and receiving support from others” brings them closer to their teammates and increases team cohesion (Friedley & Manchester, 2005, p. 97). When coaches foster a healthy and supportive team culture students are more likely to buy into the team's goals and connect with their teammates.

Autonomy support is one way coaches can increase team cohesion. Autonomy support occurs when "an individual in a position of authority takes the other's perspective, acknowledges the other's feelings, and provides the other with pertinent information and opportunities for choice while minimizing the use of pressures and demands" (Black & Deci, 2000, as cited by Mageau & Vallerand, 2003, p. 886). Outlining how autonomy support can be fostered, they explain:

> Autonomy supportive individuals: (1) provide as much choice as possible within specific limits and rules; (2) provide a rationale for tasks, limits, and rules; (3) inquire about and acknowledge others' feelings; (4) allow opportunities to take initiatives and to do independent work; (5) provide non-controlling competence feedback; (6) avoid overt control, guilt-inducing criticisms, controlling statements and tangible rewards; and (7) prevent ego involvement from taking place. (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003, p. 886)

It should be noted, that "being autonomous does not equate with being independent, since it is possible for someone to depend on a provider and still be autonomous in one's actions" (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003, p. 892). Autonomy supportive coaches can benefit the experiences of students by allowing them freedom to express themselves while also providing support in taking risks in their performances.

Kelly et al. (2014) layout a long list of the key elements coaches attempt to teach - comprehensive learning objectives which include communication ethics, audience consideration, and location consideration; public address learning objectives which include, audience analysis, analysis of the occasion, topic selection, research, organization, language (style), vocal delivery, physical delivery, and memorization; oral interpretation learning objectives which include, the origin and development of performance criticism, text selection, textual analysis, textual

continuity and integrity, and character performance continuity and integrity; and finally limited preparation learning objectives which include limited preparation, speech content, critical thinking, and speech delivery. There are many educational objectives coaches commit themselves to teaching students. The culture that coaches create on their teams determines the experiences of their students. By providing students with adequate autonomy and support, they are more freely able to express themselves and grow as a result of their time in speech.

What we seem to be missing when we get here to the end of the lit review is a specific focus on race in forensics – how do all of these topics coalesce into the project you're doing for the thesis? I think you've given us a really good higher-order overview… but now we need the grounding to happen.

Race in Forensics

The role race plays in the forensics community has received little attention. While it is largely understood that students benefit from their time in forensics, it is unclear how race affects the experiences of students of color in the activity. In their research, Valdivia and Simon (1997) revealed the average teams consisted of "10 white participants and two minority group members," (p. 8). The lack of diversity on most forensics teams makes the forensics community a white-dominated academic space. Even as the number of students of color in the activity has increased over time, students of color are still a minority within the speech community. Similar to students of color in more traditional academic settings, this lack of diversity can affect students' feelings of belonging and ultimately affect their levels of engagement and success within the activity (Murphy & Zirkel, 2015, p. 3).

Additionally, though the number of students of color in the activity has increased this is likely due to students of color expressing interest in the activity and not the activity making an

effort to bring in more students of color. As Valdivia and Simon (1997) found in their research, 69% of the teams surveyed had not made any strides to increase their team's diversity (p. 10). Despite calls to increase diversity within the speech community, it seems many teams still struggle to recruit students of color.

While some teams have made efforts to recruit more students of color, retention is rarely addressed. As a community, we have little understanding of how a students' race affects their decision to leave the activity. To make the speech community a more equitable space, this must be addressed. The speech community positioning itself as an equitable space has lulled the community into a false sense of progress. While the community celebrates diversity, students of color are told they are valued, and students of color receive celebratory praise for sharing their stories students of color remain "marginalized, disregarded, and disdained," (Baldridge, 2020, p. 750). The historic whiteness of the activity continues to shape the way we view speech which affects the way students participate in the activity. The culture of the activity both in and out-of-round impacts how students feel they belong within the activity. To make the speech community a place that students of color want to be, the community must first address the structures that shape the way we all interact with the activity.

Chapter Three: Methodology

In this chapter, I review the methods used in this project. The qualitative approach allowed for in-depth accounts of the experiences of students of color and provided vital insights into how race impacts the way students of color experience collegiate speech. With this chapter, I detail my theoretical approach in this project, review my participant pool, and discuss my analysis.

Theoretical Approach

Interviewing is a powerful qualitative tool. "Interviews are conversations with a purpose" focused on understanding the experiences of the subject (Tracy, 2013, p. 138). To conduct my research, I opted for the semi-structured interview. In this type of interview, "the interviewer enters the conversation with flexible questions and probes, or maybe even with just a list of bullet points" (Tracy, 2013, p. 139). Semi-structured interviews seek to "stimulate discussion rather than dictate it," and the interviewer takes on the roles of 'listener' and 'reflector' more than the role of a 'questioner' (p. 139). Semi-structured interviews lack the rigidity of a structured interview in questions that are asked and the physical setting in which the interview takes place. The benefits of semi-structured interviews include the ability to report "more emic, emergent understandings" of research topics and for the "interviewees' complex viewpoints to be heard without the strict constraints of scripted questions" (Tracy, 2013, p. 139). They also encourage the interviewee to share their emotional experiences. Semi-structured interviews allow the interviewer to engage in real dialogue with interviewees fostering organic and complex responses.

The freedom semi-structured interviews provide made them ideal for my research. The experiences of students of color in forensics are incredibly nuanced. Two individuals who share

many identities can still experience those identities and the world around them differently. The varied and shifting relationship between the individuals and their identities is so complex, to try and constrain the conversation by using a structured interview would skew data or make it ineffectual. Using a structured interview would have felt like an attempt to insert essentialism into the experiences of people of color. “Essentialism obscures the truth of diverse and multi-layered identities” by homogenizing the experiences of the other (Mills & Unsworth, 2018, p. 329). As Mills and Unsworth (2018) argue, “The notion that all people in a particular racial group think, act, and experience life in the same way” will reduce potential findings and offer an incomplete picture of the experiences of competitors of color (p. 329).

Furthermore, the experiences of students of color in forensics can oftentimes be painful. Semi-structured interviews allowed for divergence from topics that were too painful for students to talk about, and also allowed students to be more descriptive where they felt comfortable. This format also allowed me to asked specific follow-up questions in response to the information students shared without feeling like I was veering too far from my interview questions. My goal was to create an interview environment where I was free to engage in dialogue with and really connect with students.

Paired with the semi-structured interview, I employed both narrative and discursive interview types as well as a responsive interview stance. Tracy (2013) explains that “narrative interviews are open-ended, relatively unstructured interviews that encourage the participant to tell stories rather than just answer questions” (p. 159). This type of interview lends itself to the participants I sought to interview. In addition to hearing the stories of my participants, I also used discursive interviewing to encourage my participants to reflect on the power structures present within the forensics community.

Throughout the interview process, I made an effort to build community with my participants. Using responsive interviewing, I saw the value in "building a reciprocal relationship, honoring interviewees with unfailingly respectful behavior, reflecting on [my] own biases and openly acknowledging their potential effect, and owning the emotional effect of interviews" (Tracy, 2013, p. 142). As a visibly racialized person and as someone who participated in speech and debate, I had experiences that were very similar to the students I interviewed. Because of my positioning, feigning ignorance to the experiences my participants had would have been recognizable as disingenuous to my participants who could ascertain that I was once a student of color participating in speech.

I recognize this approach may have affected the perceived depth and rigor of my research. However, from a self-reflexive standpoint, being disingenuous with students when my racial identification of 'non-white' is readily recognizable would simply lead to mistrust. Furthermore, remaining candid with students was necessary to create trust as my position as a potential future judge or someone who knows their teammates and coaches could have led to apprehension in discussing their experiences on their teams and in the community.

Participants

For this research, my ideal participant demographic was vast. As I sought to understand how students of color experience the world of forensics – and because forensics research on race is incredibly limited – my participant demographic needed to be diverse. Ultimately, my ideal participant would simply identify as a person of color and also participate in collegiate speech. Interviewing students from various racial backgrounds provided a much-needed understanding of how race affects competitors' experiences in speech. I attempted to interview students from each racial demographic present within the community at large.

Because my experience in the forensics world is primarily in individual events, my focus was primarily on students of color who participated in individual events (speech). I also interviewed students of color who had debate experience so long as they had experience participating in individual events as well. As different individual events have differing criteria, rules, and norms, I also attempted to interview participants with diverse event participation. To get a more robust picture of the experience of competitors of color, first-hand accounts of encounters with the various elements of forensic education and competition was vital. I sought students of color who had experience in the various events in the public address, oral interpretation, and limited preparation genres.

I also attempted to find participants with varying intersections of identity to gain further insight into student experiences. By exploring how racial identity interacts with ethnicity, gender, nationality, sexual orientation, disability, body identity, religion, and class, for example, I hoped to gain a better understanding of how identity salience affected competitor experiences. To achieve my research goals, an understanding of the participants' whole selves was needed to understand if racial identity salience and prominence increase or decrease belonging in students of color.

In addition, I attempted to find competitors of color from various districts within the community to add another layer of understanding of student experiences. By focusing on many regions, it was easier to determine if the patterns that arose were a larger community issue or if competitors of color experienced more or less belonging in different regions.

Additionally, interviewing students who had competed for varying durations of time also provided insight into how students of color acclimate to the forensics world. This demographic allowed me to determine if students who had competed for four years had different experiences

with the forensic community than students who competed for one year or less. Examining these varying durations of participation allowed me to uncover how belonging was affected by the duration of participation of students of color in speech.

Next, I sought a group of participants with varying levels of engagement. I suspected that students who described themselves as deeply engaged or committed to the activity of forensics would feel a different sense of belonging than less engaged students. Seeking this participant pool allowed me to determine if students who were more engaged experienced more or less belonging.

Finally, I sought a participant pool who experienced varying degrees of success in the competitive arena. This diversity in competitive success allowed me to determine if students of color who excel in the activity are more likely to have acclimated well to the forensic environment in comparison to students who struggle competitively. By including students of color who excel and those who struggle in competition, I hoped to understand if students who have achieved competitive success feel a stronger sense of belonging than students who have not.

Although the forensics community is small in relation to the general population, the presence of students of color in the forensic community is even smaller still. Because of the wide variance I desired in my participants was so vast, it was a challenge to connect with enough students of color to meet my goals. Finding my participant demographic was done with an open call to the community. An open call was the best option for recruiting my participants because it removed any pressure students may have felt if I reached out to them personally. Additionally, seeing which students responded to my call gave further insight into the experiences of student

of color demographics within the activity. To accomplish this, I distributed a call for participants through (add details about how you actually recruited people – IEL, facebook pages, etc.).

Ultimately, I was able to interview 14 students of color. The age of my participants ranged from 18 to 24 years old. Of my 14 participants, six of my participants identified as Asian, four of my participants identified as Black, two of my participants identified as Black or Mixed, one identified as Multiracial, and one identified as Latine/Hispanic. Five participants participated in speech for four years, two competed for three years, two competed for two years, and five competed for 1 year. Notably, I interviewed only one participant who had no high school speech experience. Additionally, of the participants I spoke to two indicated they left the activity before graduating and before using all of their eligibility.

My participants pool indicated they not only felt strongly connected to their racial and ethnic identities but also various other identities with six participants indicating they spoke a language other than English, four participants indicated they identified as gender diverse, two identified as queer, one participant identified as autistics, one participant identified as low-income, and one participants identified as a transfer student.

Procedures

Initially, my interview questions consisted of demographic questions. Demographic questions laid the framework for my data analysis: to understand how race affects belonging in the forensics community, I first needed to know the racial identities of my participants. Furthermore, collecting demographic information helped me to discern if belonging was affected by race, or by another identity category.

Next, I included questions regarding perceived team demographics and the students' team relationships. Questions such as ‘how many people of color are on your team’ and ‘how close are

you with your teammates' provided context for how students saw themselves in relation to their team and how their perceptions influenced their sense of belonging. I also asked similar questions regarding how students perceive the community at large.

After I gained an understanding of how students of color perceived their teams and the forensic community overall, I asked questions regarding belonging to or identifying with a group, such as - 'how does your race impact your understanding of self' and 'how connected do you feel to other competitors in your region?"

This basic interview plan functioned as a starting point for the interview process. These questions enabled conversations about race, belonging, the forensics community, and the factors that contribute to racial identity and feelings of belonging for each individual I interviewed.

Analysis

I recorded each interview I conducted using (Zoom's automatic transcription process). My interviews produced 743 minutes (approximately 12.4 hours) of audio recordings, which I then transcribed to produce 475 pages of transcripts. After transcribing each of my interviews and reviewing the transcripts for accuracy, I began the coding process by re-reading the transcriptions of my participants and listening to the recordings of their responses. Listening to my participants responses while re-reading my transcriptions was vital because it allowed me to take note of the repetition of different concept they spoke about while also being able to listen to the way their tone, volume, and other paralinguistic expression influenced the words that they were speaking.

During this review process, I also applied Owen's (1894) coding criteria. Owen proposed identifying codes through three factors: recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness. Recurrence is conceptualized as being "observed when at least two parts of a report has the same thread of

meaning, even though different wording indicated such a meaning" (p. 275). This was helpful when determining my major themes. Student often spoke about very similar experiences, and because the institutions in the speech community function with structure and rigidity, many of the environments students of color find themselves in operate in very similar ways. Recurrence heavily impacted the creation of major themes because, although students sometimes spoke about their experiences using different language, they all had a story centering on the pressures they felt from forces outside of their own internal desires. When discussing these experiences, students described how these external pressures – such as judge power, for example – influenced the way they behaved at tournament and influenced the ways they performed.

Owen's (1984) next criterion of repetition was also influential in my coding process. Repetition is conceptualized as the "repetition of key words, phrases or sentences. Criterion extension of recurrence in that it is an explicit repeated use of the same wording" (p. 275). This criterion was particularly useful in identifying major themes like Navigating Voice, where many participants explicitly spoke about voice. This word holds great significance in the speech community because voice represents the messages, advocacy, and agency of students.

Finally, Owen's (1984) "third criterion, forcefulness, refers to vocal inflection, volume, or dramatic pauses which serve to stress and subordinate some utterances from other locutions in the oral reports" (p. 275). This criterion was useful when paired with the audio recording of student responses. Listening to the ways in which students spoke about their experienced revealed the significance of certain aspects of those experiences. In one instance, a participant spoke about the fear they felt as a student of color performing for white judges. The student began to cry as they recounted these experiences they had. The strong emotion that they felt as a result of this experience made it crucial to include in my research.

After the open coding process, I began my second phase of coding. To achieve this, I chose to analyze my open codes using axial coding. According to Charmaz (2006), axial coding:

> Specifies the properties and dimensions of a category. . . . [a researcher builds] Axial coding follows the development of a major category . . . the purposes of axial coding are to sort, synthesize, and organize large amounts of data and reassemble them in new ways after open coding" (p. 60).

This coding method was useful because it allowed me to easily analyze the large data set I had, and to condense my codes into categories and sub-themes to better and more succinctly thematize my data.

Throughout the coding process, six major themes emerged: Internal Pressures, External Pressures, Navigating Voice, Issues of Representation, Team Dynamics, and Changes and Transformation. Each of these major themes was comprised of three to four subthemes, and together they provide a detailed and robust depiction of the experiences of students of color in forensics. In the following chapter, I present these themes with illustrations from my participants and my own analytic insight.

Chapter Four: Findings

This chapter examines the findings of this study. After reviewing the interview transcripts, I was able to analyze the responses from the current and former students of color who have participated in forensics. Through this analysis, I discovered five major themes using responses from my research participants regarding their experiences in collegiate forensics.

Theme 1: Internal Pressures

During the interview process, many participants reported struggles they had faced regarding their interactions with the forensics community. Participants reported feelings of personal responsibility, expectations for self-exploitation, and demands for excellence. I attempted to examine how the position of students of color in the activity influenced their feelings about the aforementioned concepts and how these concepts become the internal pressures students of color experience. The position students of color feel they occupy in the forensics community is directly affected by the internal pressures they feel while engaging in the activity. Throughout my interviews, participants talked about these internal pressures through three primary vehicles: feelings of personal responsibility, self-exploitation, and POC excellence.

Feelings of personal responsibility

First, several of my research participants indicated they felt a sense of personal responsibility regarding how they conduct themselves both in and out of rounds. Feelings of personal responsibility illustrate how *students of color feel they must act as vessels for discourse and educators of others in the community*, be it other students, coaches, or judges, and either in round or out of round. Students reported they feel obligated to speak on topics related to their identities or the experiences of others with whom they share identities with, which manifested in a number of ways. Some participants felt they must act as a force to make change and improve

the community. Others explained they felt pressure to educate the people in positions of power. Some felt a responsibility to act as an ambassador for their underrepresented communities, becoming a location for other students of color to seek refuge and support, and others felt tethered to the activity to continue their education through the support of scholarships.

The responsibilities students discussed were various, but many students expressed that these various personal responsibilities played a role in their forensics experience. For example, Gem, a competitor in their 4th year, explained the pressure they feel to speak on topics related to their identity in their speeches:

> My identity has just put more pressure on me to do well than others to speak on certain topics. I feel like in college it's very limited, especially with the tournaments I go to, having issues and speeches that concern black experiences is very limited, and I'm also just like very passionate about it, so I wouldn't necessarily say it's a pressure, but something that I feel obligated to do.

This same idea was echoed by Tru, a second-year competitor, who explained the limitations they feel as a student of color are more internal than external: "I've never been felt to made by any coach or teammate that because I'm a student of color, I should be performing a piece about being a student of color. I've never felt that way... I place that own burden on my shoulders, where I feel I have to perform a piece about [my identity]."

Even without overt external pressure, students of color still feel constrained in topic selection due to internal pressure. Students of color feel some obligation or limitation to speak on topics that centered on their lived experiences as people of color. Furthermore, some students of color feel pressure to continue forensics participation despite their negative experiences. Many participants described how fulfilling their participation in forensics had been, but they also

revealed how negative experiences made them feel they had to remain in the activity. For example, Ty, a participant who competed for four years, explained:

> Many times throughout the year, [other competitors] were like: Last week I received a racist ballot that, you know, last year at AFA I received one and stuff. Maybe I am being this person who, I haven't created this conversation, but I'm continuing it. and then it also weighs on me because I was like, you know, this 9 min and 30 performance is only doing so much. And so I felt like I was letting people down at the same time.

This feeling was also exemplified by Lane, a competitor in their fourth-year of speech and debate, who stated:

> I want to change things. Like I physically want to be a part of what is changing forensics. So it just kind of makes me, like, every single time I see a little thing that I'm like, Oh, that should probably not be a rule in forensics, or that's kind of not okay. It just makes you want to, like, come back and help out and like judge and coach and try to make the circuit better in any way I can. So I think it affects me in a good way, because I want to be able to be more involved and actually fix things.

Both Ty and Lane explained how their experiences in forensics as students of color have instilled a degree of personal responsibility in them. Feeling a need to act as a voice for other students of color or creating change in the forensics community became internalized as personal responsibilities. This theme connected to each of my research questions which examine how interpersonal interactions and structural forces impact or limit the agency and authenticity of students of color.

Self-Exploitation

Many of my participants explained that throughout their time in forensics they had experienced some degree of self-exploitation, or a *feeling that students must offer themselves up as a spectacle for judges in round and the feelings of burnout they experience as a result of becoming that spectacle*. This pressure is closely related to the marginalized identities students have and the trauma that has been experienced from those identities. Students may experience feelings of burnout from reliving trauma or from feeling their voices are being misunderstood.

Some students linked these feelings of self-exploitation to 'playing the game,' a common phrase in the forensics community, and they pointed to self-exploitation as one of the requirements for the success of students of color in the activity. This is exemplified through the words of Zavier, a former competitor who chose to step away from the activity after one year of competition:

> When I think playing the game, I think the same thing, like, it leans itself into the competitive nature of forensics. Where you basically have to play nice with other people. Like you have to on some level. It's political, you know what I mean. So you have to be competitive if you want to be successful. I think that playing the game is doing what it takes to win, you know, to get the first place, and sometimes that's compromising your values... especially in interp. But it's like putting your trauma on a platter for everyone to judge. Sometimes it's abusing your trauma, or using your ethnicity to your advantage.

This idea was furthered by Eden, a first-year competitor, who explained:

> I think that the only limitation forensics has is the fact that it's like any other event, it's very random and very much hit or miss whether you're going to get a POC judge in this round, or whether you're not. I think that the only barrier between me and forensics is the fact that I'm a POC performer. So there's more things I have to worry about like whether I

> have to dramatize it for a judge, just to prove my point, or whether I can look at a judge and say, you'll understand, and I can have a more heart-to-heart conversation.

Tru elaborates on the specific challenges students of color and other marginalized students face due to this culture of using personal trauma in performances:

> I think, like I've always had moments where I felt like internalized burnout, just because, like I love speech a lot, and that gets tiring and stressful for a lot of people. I do think that as students of color, we do tend to face that a lot more generally, we tend to take on topics that are hard, harder, I think, than dominant cultures would deemed to be performable for. Like the levels I'm talking about, not like content, I guess, but like performable of a white person. It's stressful, and it's rough, and it's intensive, and sometimes it's honestly traumatic. Like I've been the person to do hard speeches. it's to defy norms of what speech rewards and what speech doesn't reward.
>
> We also do forget that speech is a competition. and it does need to like, have some of that fun competitive logic behind it, to keep it engaging, because I think that also motivates the spawning and creation of new ideas. We always want to keep engaging with what's new and what's fresh, and what's interesting, but also keeping like the same roots that we have, the same passions, the same interests, the same fires that we keep stoking. And I think, like any marginalized, I don't think it, it doesn't even have to be tied to your identity as a person of color. I think, like you as a marginalized person in speech and forensics, you are automatically prone to honestly hurting yourself through speech more just because of what this activity is intended to want from you.

Zavier, Eden, and Tru all talked about how the competitive nature of the activity has influenced their feelings of self-exploitation. The pressure students feel to create competitively

successful performances leads some students to speak on topics or make performance choices that are damaging to them mentally and emotionally. Furthermore, when students do these performances, they can feel more burnout if they feel they have to over-dramatize the experiences they are sharing in order to be compelling.

POC Excellence

Many of my participants spoke about their relationship with competitive success, and revealed they felt an expectation to be more successful than their white counterparts. This expectation of POC excellence emerged when participants alluded to *how students of color excel within the forensics community despite the odds being stacked against them, and the pressure students feel to be excellent to achieve the level of success white students enjoy.* Students also reminisced about being inspired by the performances and stories of other students of color and how seeing those performances improved the experience for them.

Many students also spoke with a sense of pride for seeing other POC succeed in the activity. Gem discussed this idea of feeling pressure to excel as a student of color:

> I had this sense of like, I have to do well. Or I have to present in an excellent, excellent way, right? There's a conversation of like, black people have to be ten times more than others to be taken seriously, right? And I think that is very especially for this community. But it may not also just be a race thing. If you're a good performer, you're a good performer, and people look for you. But I think like as an African American woman, just in general, with ongoing societal pressures, I feel like I have to be more than that ten times, 20, 30 times. Other individuals, they may not have that pressure.

Shea, a first-year competitor, continued this idea of feeling pressure to perform excellence in forensics when they explained:

> A lot of times in the tournament you'll find there's like two or three people of color in an event. If it's a, let's say prose, right, because it's the biggest one, there's like two or three [students of color] out of like 12. But there's also always a person of color that wins. I feel like sometimes it's a lot about like, I need to do so good because I'm a person of color, and people are gonna care about that, like we're winning. If there is only ten of us and like, eight of us got an award, then clearly someone's doing something better.

Both Gem and Shea explained how this sense of an unspoken expectation of excellence in forensics has become a burden, amplifying previous pressures they had felt to succeed in forensics through higher ranks and breaking to out-rounds. This internal pressure to exemplify excellence was born from their identities, the expectations others in the community had for them, and from seeing other students of color excel in the activity. However, excellence was also seen as a source of pride. Despite the added internal pressure to succeed as individuals, students of color feel pride when they see other students of color performing and succeeding competitively.

Internal pressures play a significant role in the experiences of students of color. Students feel these pressures both in and out of round. Students of color feel pressure to be educators; acting as catalysts for change in the community. When students speak on inequality they are expected to pioneer movements towards a more equitable environment. When making performance choices, students of color feel pressure to dramatize their struggles in order to remain competitive. This is further compounded by the pressures students have to exemplify excellence in their performances and competitive success. Feeling pressure to be successful has driven students of color to exploit their own pain to achieve success and feel a sense of belonging.

Theme 2: External Pressures

In addition to the aforementioned internal pressures, all of my research participants spoke about the external pressures they experienced as students of color. External pressures refer to the motivating forces outside the students' personal goals and desires. These pressures often come from coaches and judges and they encourage students of color to alter their voices and performance styles in order to achieve competitive success and uphold the status quo. Students who deviate from norms are more likely to experience overt external pressure, but all students of color can experience these pressures. Similarities between internal and external pressures arise due to the influence external pressures can have on internal pressures. External pressures have the power to encourage students to speak using sacrificed or stifled voice and are often the biggest factor in dissuading students from speaking with found voice. This theme highlights how the expression of students of color is limited in the speech community. Throughout my interviews, participants talked about these external pressures through three primary vehicles: identity demands, type-casting, and tailoring to audience.

Identity demands

Identity demands can be conceptualized as the *forced responsibility placed on students of color by people in positions of power in the speech community what and how students of color advocate in their performances*. Identity demands come in the form of judges or coaches pushing students of color into topics related to their racial or ethnic identities, which often comes with a request for personal connection or vulnerability from the student; increased insistence that students of color engage with solvency more thoroughly and frequently than other students, often asking for extensive action plans in genres that don’t typically require solvency; or judges and coaches encouraging students of color to sanitize their performances and arguments to better suit their own perception or understanding of the performance. Identity demands are made of

students of color in-round and in coaching sessions. Students of color are subjected to this form of external pressure more so than other students due to the visibility of their identities as people of color.

Many of my research participants expressed a history of their coaches pressuring them to speak on topics specifically related to their racial or ethnic identities. Even if students did not previously indicate they had a desire to do a performance about their identity, their coaches still insisted students of color perform race related topics in order to gain a competitive edge. This idea was shared by Nova, who explained, "[The speech community] really emphasizes identity speeches. I have heard of coaches telling their… students that they should only do identity speeches because that 'will guarantee your success'…I think it can be limiting." Many students of color have been encouraged to abandon their own voices and desires in order to satisfy the desire of their coaches. Many students of color also want to explore other aspects of their identities or want to speak on topics that do not specifically relate to their identities.

However, many coaches believe identity-based speeches are the most effective way for students of color to achieve competitive success. This idea was also addressed by Jo, who explained, "a lot of coaches pressure their competitors to do certain topics… coaches are kind of forcing black competitors to do certain topics because they believe it's going to score well or break to finals." Coaches are motivated to pressure their students of color into doing identity-based topics due to the perception that racial identity pieces are more competitively successful than the other topics students of color may want to explore. However, coaches are not the only force encouraging students to focus on race-based performances. Lane elaborated on this idea even further when they stated, "Sadly going on the circuit, working with my coaches, a lot of it

made me feel like I had to do pieces about my race." Lane also indicated that the external pressure to perform race pieces was driven by the larger competitive circuit. They continued,

> I feel like it didn't start with my coaches… topics about race do really well competitively… and some coaches are just kind of like. 'Oh, well, the circuit likes this, and we want you to be competitively successful. So we're gonna push this on you as well.'

This remark highlights how systemically students of color voices have been commodified. Coaches seek to build competitively successful teams, and to do so they push students of color toward topics and performances that will appeal to judges. In this sense, coaches are selecting and green-lighting performances for the appeasement of judges. The performances that succeed at this are then propped up as examples for coaches to attempt to replicate sometimes without taking the students' voice into consideration. Nova, Jo, and Lane all reveal the impact coach pressure can have on the experiences of students of color.

Coaches, like students, want to be competitively successful, but it seems some coaches are more concerned with winning than they are concerned with platforming their students' voices. When coaches pressure their students of color into speaking on certain topics, students can feel constrained and dissatisfied with their performances. And although some students of color want to speak about their racial and ethnic identities, others do not – or, at the very least, they want the freedom to speak on topics outside of their racial or ethnic identities. This idea was shared by Ren, who explained,

> I think that I am more than just being Indian… For me, I really treasure my fully American identity as well because I'm not yet a US citizen and it means a lot to me to

> have the label of American... so constantly talking about being Indian can sometimes make me feel like I'm not.

Coaches and judges expecting students of color to speak on race-based topics limits the expression of students of color and tokenizes their voices. Pressuring students of color to always speak about race-based topics can also otherize students and make them feel as if they do not belong.

Furthermore, the additional expectation for students of color to perform race-related speeches that are particularly emotionally taxing can decrease student satisfaction. This unique forced responsibility puts students of color into a stressful position. Shea illustrated this stress when they lamented, "[My] coaches will push me to talk about race a lot. But I do not want to talk about all the horrible things happening in the world! I should not be the one carrying that!" Shea's words reveal how the topics their coaches select for them center on the plights of people of colors' experiences. This focus on the negative experiences of people of color can be exhausting for students of color. It also puts students of color in a position where they feel they are being held responsible for solving or bringing awareness to issues that are largely outside of their own control.

Oftentimes, demands for identity-based topics come with the added request for vulnerability in the performances of students of color. Ty contributed to this idea by saying, "[There are] coaches that have said, 'be vulnerable,' or 'what part of you will make you cry the quickest?'" Ty's remarks showcase how the vulnerability that is asked of students of color can become predatory. Coaches and judges want to see students of color speak about their racial experiences however they only want to see those stories presented in a way that is compelling to

them. The stories of students of color and their emotional safety has taken a backseat to the competitive viability of their performances.

Shea and Ty illustrate the various ways speaking on these heavy and emotionally taxing topics can have a negative effect on students of color. Encouraging students of color to constantly speak on topics of racial injustice or inequality can make students feel as if they have no time to rest. Students of color are often fighting the battles of racial injustice in their personal lives and when speech does not allow them any opportunity to escape this can lead to burnout. This theme connects to two of my research questions, examining how students of color are othered and constrained through tokenization.

Typecasting

Typecasting can be seen as *the act of pushing students of color into stereotypical roles, topics, or genres. Typecasting differs from identity demands because typecasting focuses on demands put on students because of their status broadly as students of color, rather than their unique racial or ethnic identity*. Here, students of color may be encouraged to speak on a topic that is not related to their own racial or ethnic identity but is instead related to a racial or ethnic group they do not belong to that may share some vague similarity to their own identity, such as a Chinese American student being asked to perform a piece about the Korean immigrant experience. Identity demands seek deeper intimacy and personal connection whereas typecasting seeks generalization and depersonalization.

Many of my participants revealed they had experienced both identity demands and typecasting. Many students spoke about how they felt as if they were pigeon-holed into specific topics or roles simply because of their status as people of color. Shea's words illustrate this phenomenon best, as they explained it was common for their coaches to push them to speak on

topics that were “not even related to me. It might be like a random refugee crisis. And I'll be pushed to talk about that because I'm [a person of color].” In this case, Shea had no personal or identity relation to this topic, yet their coaches believed they should speak on the topic because they were a person of color. Coaches pushing topics such as this when their students have no personal connection to the topic can lead students to feel as if their own personal stories and experiences do not matter – only their shared marginalized position. Zavier spoke on the experience of performing a piece that felt typecast when they explained, “My first prose was a piece about what [a Muslim man] and his father experienced after 9/11, but I’m not Muslim! So I was kind of given that piece, and it always felt wrong performing it.” Zavier’s lack of agency to speak on a topic they felt connected to and passionate about had a negative effect on their experience in speech. Being typecast into this role put Zavier in a position where they felt uncomfortable performing the role that did not represent their personal experience.

Coaches were cited as the biggest offenders of pushing typecasted roles and topics onto their students, perhaps made more egregious due to the personal relationship they are expected to have built with their students. Coaches pushing typecasts onto their students of color can be frustrating for students, which is made more exhausting when students have previously communicated what their desires are for the performances they create. For example, Sage recounted their experiences being typecast by their coaches:

> When I was first joining the team. I really wanted to start giving speeches on my experience as a Black person… when I went into one of my first meetings, [my coach] asked questions about what I wanted to give speeches on, and I told them I wanted to give speeches on my experiences as a Black American or my experiences as a Black woman or a biracial woman. And then, right after we had gone through this giant

> conversation about what I wanted to give speeches on, how I identified… one of the first questions they asked was if I wanted to give speeches on being an African immigrant. Which felt extremely insulting, not only to myself, but, I would imagine, to people who actually are from Africa, and have those experiences, the fact that they have asked me to tell somebody else's story because of the color of my skin - it was just frustrating because, like, they seemed like they wanted me to tell it, because they thought it would do good. They thought it would be an experience that needed to be told, but they didn't seem to care who it was coming from, or that it wasn't my experience to tell.

Sage's words encapsulate the hurt students of color can experience due to typecasting and how other students of color are inadvertently hurt by typecasting as well. When coaches push their students of color to speak on experiences that are not their own, typecasting can create false representation for the stories that get told. The experiences of students of color are unique and not interchangeable. Students of color recognize the importance of authentic representation so when they are asked to speak on the experiences of others it can put them in an uncomfortable position.

Finally, typecasting plays a large role in the genres that students of color are even permitted to participate in. Rio spoke about this occurrence at length when they explained,

> I see a… white coaches can just smell a national title when they get a person of color on the team. You have this black guy, you're gonna be a National Champion in poetry… These weird stereotypes, I don't even know where they come from… probably because a person of color had to be the GOAT to be acknowledged in this activity… a people just automatically stereotyping them… like, "Black people do poetry."

Rio's words highlight a norm in which students of color are stereotyped into specific speech genres, where "Black people do poetry" or "Asian students don't do interp." They continued,

> you can be a person of color who likes this genre that isn't stereotypically for [you]. But they'll still try and gravitate you to that genre that they think will be for you, because this black person won a national title in this, or this Asian person won a national title of this, or this Latine person won a national title doing this piece or doing it this style, etc, etc.

Unlike topic or role-based typecasting, this form of typecasting affects the landscape of the activity. The events coaches allow or even encourage their students of color to participate in are constrained by what events coaches believe their students will be competitively successful in. Typecasting hurts students of color because it prevents them from participating in the events they want to participate in and limits their voices to just a handful of genres and leads them to believe they will only be successful if they follow these typecasting norms. This idea was echoed in the words of Skye, who stated,

> I feel like when watching other people do PA… I can't really like, see myself, or even imagine myself speaking with the eloquency that they do… I don't really like PA, anyways, but I feel like if there wasn't that added layer of being singled out, because of the way I talk I feel like I might be more open to the idea.

Skye's use of AAVE has led them to believe that they cannot be successful in the Public Address genre. Because Skye is Black and speaks using a Black dialect, the norms of the community have discouraged them from participating in genres that are not stereotyped as Black genres. Rio finalized their remarks by saying, "I'm not saying that Black people don't be fucking shit up in poetry, because we do! But we also fuck shit up in impromptu and extemp, we fuck shit up in crit." Students of color should feel empowered to participate in any speech genre. Though

stereotypes have arisen that pushed students of color into specific genres, coaches should encourage their students that their voices are of value even in the genres that are not stereotypically for them. This theme relates to two of my research questions as it illustrates how the interactions students have with their coaches have a direct effect on their personal expression.

Tailoring to audience/judge power

Tailoring to audience and judge power relates specifically to *the norm that students must always adapt their performances to appeal to their audiences*. For students of color this task can be particularly draining simply because the audiences that students of color are always expected to tailor their performances to are never audiences made up of their peers. For white students, the task of tailoring to the audience is much less taxing. With the vast majority of the speech community being made up of white competitors, coaches, and judges, white students can expect that their messages will be received with little need for adaptation, whereas students of color must always adapt their performances to be more understandable or palatable to their predominantly white audiences. The expectation that students of color must tailor their performances and arguments to their audience ultimately centers whiteness and white epistemologies.

Judge power is situated here due to the judge's position as an audience member with the most power to impact the student's competitive experience. Each of my research participants had at least one negative experience involving either tailoring to audience or judge power. Many of my participants spoke about how they felt they needed to alter their performances or their speaking style in order to be competitively successful and appease their audience. Ultimately, the audience member students of color are most concerned with appeasing is their judge. The power of the judge was illustrated through the words of Ash: "I think most of my negative experiences

[have] been shaped by judges and critique sheets." This remark showcases just how much impact judges can have on the overall experience of students of color in speech. Especially when students of color deviate from norms of the community, judges often punish students for trying something new. Ash continued,

> It felt like I was starting from like 5 or 10 steps back from everyone else, because I needed to prove that [breaking norms] was something that you could do. I needed to prove that I could be different and successful, and it took so much work for people to just listen and overcome that initial resistance and like, appreciate what I had to say.

The lack of control Ash felt over their speech experience was largely due to the interaction they had with judges, especially through the ballot. Ash explained, as they started to speak more about the topics they cared about and speaking in a way that was authentic to them, they felt as if they were put at a competitive disadvantage due to judges being resistant to their non-normative way of doing speech. This idea was shared by Rio: "I think the lack of control just came from Eurocentric norms, so it's not like I can't do whatever the fuck I want... But it's whether or not the outcome will be… beneficial for me." In the same vein, even when students of color have the freedom to speak authentically as themselves they know that speaking authentically may be a detriment to their goals of competitive success and oftentimes is at odds with gaining competitive success.

Both Ash and Rio expressed how deviating from norms in the speech community could have detrimental effects on the competitive success of the performances of students of color. When the norms that students are expected to conform to are rooted in eurocentrism it can be hard for students of color to abide by these norms. Frequently, the norms put in place within the community do not resonate with students of color and have the potential to sanitize the stories of

students of color. However, students of color don't need to break norms to have concerns about judge reception.

Many students of color do not challenge norms in their performances. Nevertheless, these students are still just as concerned about how their judges are viewing their performances. Although for some students of color, challenging a long-standing norm may be the reason they are ranked-down in a competition, for all students of color, simply talking about being a student of color may be enough for a judge to rank them lower. This idea can be seen through the words of Skye:

> Whenever I speak about my identity, especially my racial identity, I just have this thought in the back of my head that this judge could literally ruin this entire tournament for me. Because they have a bias towards my race, or because they have a bias towards what I'm talking about. I feel like that's something that, you know, white students in forensics don't really have to think about.

Many students of color wrestle with the possibility of a judge ranking them lower simply for speaking up about their own racialized experiences. Many students of color feel as if they have to dilute their performances in order to be successful. This fear was echoed by Jo, who stated, "We're doing things to achieve a certain success. Basically, steer away from who you are authentically to please the majority." Jo's perspective expands on the remarks of Skye in stating that students of color are not allowed to be their authentic selves in front of their white judges and audiences.

Both Skye and Jo explain how being a student of color has put them at a disadvantage when they perform for predominantly white audiences and judges. Their remarks make it clear that when students of color step into a round, they feel their white peers have a better chance at

success simply for being white. Judges have the power to uplift students of color or stifle the voices of students of color. Unfortunately, too often judges contribute to students feeling stifled.

The experiences students of color have with tailoring to audience and judge power are contingent on the competitive success they enjoy. Students of color who reported more competitive success were more likely to say they had not experienced receiving a racist ballot. However, every student said they had known others to receive racist ballots even if they themselves did not. Students of color from more diverse regions also reported less judge misbehavior than students of color who competed in predominantly white areas. This theme relates to all of my research questions as it illustrates how forensics norms influence students of color, how students of color navigate those norms, and how norms limit the expression of students of color.

External pressures have a dramatic impact on the experiences of students of color. Students feel these pressures both in and out of round from coaches, judges, and from their peers. Students of color feel pressure to disclose intimate details or emotions related to their lived experiences as people of color. They are encouraged to participate in a select number of events often due to the preconceived notion that they are better suited for some events over others. When performing in round, students of color fear racially insensitive judge feedback and express frustration with having to sanitize their arguments to be accepted by their audiences. The responses students of color receive from others in the community, especially judges, impact students of color and their authentic expression.

Theme 3: Navigating Voice

Throughout the interview process, all of my participants spoke about the various ways in which the forensics community influenced their autonomy and expression. Students reported the

way they act and dress (especially at tournaments), the topics they speak on, the performance choices they make, and the events they choose to participate in are affected by the power structures within the forensics community. Each of these elements of student experience can be synthesized into 'voice.' This theme examines *how students navigate their personal expression or 'voice' in the face of forensics power structures*. Participants spoke about their relationship to voice in three key ways: finding voice, sacrificing voice, and stifling voice. Through this theme, I hope to illustrate how institutional powers and individuals in positions of power both influence the experience of students of color in forensics.

Finding voice

First, many of my participants spoke about the journey they went on to find their voice in forensics. For these students finding voice came with feelings of empowerment to break away from conventions in the forensics community. Many of these students explained they found their voice after they abandoned the notion that they must adapt their performances to satisfy others and instead spoke about topics they were personally passionate about. This idea of speaking about personal passions is illustrated in the words of Ren, a first-year competitor, who explained,

> You should pick a topic that you're passionate about. I really do enjoy finding stories that are specific to my culture and sharing them… because I feel like that's a story that I can tell… whereas if I hadn't been on the circuit… we wouldn't have heard that story.

The importance of passion in their performance was echoed by Eden, another first-year competitor, who stated, "I'm very overprotective of my pieces… I pick pieces that I genuinely love. So it's hard when they're not received well. It's really hard. but I think they are the perfect reflection of me and my struggles." Both Ren and Eden talked about their personal connections to the pieces they perform due to their passion for their topics. They recognized the topics they

choose to speak on are topics that do not get spoken about in the community if their voices remain unheard. This understanding seems to influence their performance choices and allows them to perform their found voices with more confidence.

Additionally, many participants reflected on the necessity for personal control to find voice. This is exemplified by Tru, who stated,

> Luckily I feel like I have a lot of control, I do my own things, at the end of the day, we want [our speeches] to do well… but they also need to be representative of who we want to be. What we want to fight for.

This idea was continued by Lane, who explained,

> I want to talk about my race. But I want to talk about it the way I want to talk about it. And so that kind of felt a lot more freeing, because… I'm able to control what I'm talking about, and how I'm talking about it.

Tru and Lane revealed the importance of control and feeling as if they are given the power to do things their own way rather than conforming to community norms. They elaborated further on the points of Ren and Eden by alluding to that need for passion and personal connection to their pieces as well. These remarks make it clear that finding voice for students of color has a direct link to students feeling empowered to choose their own topics, make their own choices, and try new things without concern for how dominant structures in the activity will receive them.

Finally, many students spoke about the necessity of comfort and taking risks to find their voice. For example, Nova, a competitor who has found themselves participating in forensics on-and-off for the last 3 years, explained,

> I think it's just, like, being able to feel more comfortable. And I think a lot that that comfortability came from taking that step back and kind of reevaluating why I joined

> [forensics] in the first place, And it wasn't to get success with rankings. It was because I get to talk about what I'm passionate about.

Nova provides insight into how comfortability acts as a catalyst for students finding voice. Many of my participants recounted how their relationship with their pieces was directly correlated to their passion for their topics and feelings of control. However, students may not be able to access those feelings if they lack comfortability in the forensics world. Nova also illustrates how the competitive nature of the activity may influence comfortability, which then impacts student passion and control. This theme is connected to my final research question by illustrating what forensics looks like for students of color when their expression has fewer limitations and they are more empowered to find and exercise their voice.

Sacrificing voice

In addition to discussing finding their voice in forensics, many of my research participants spoke about how they have adapted their voices in forensics to appease others in the community. In this theme students revealed they are aware of the potential consequences they may face if they express their true voice. As a result, *students choose to take the path of least resistance and sacrifice elements of themselves to better conform to community norms. Students engage in sacrificing voice by choosing more palatable topics, performing literature they do not like, following organizational formulas, or 'playing the game.'* Responses from my participants indicated they would not sacrifice their authentic voice if they did not feel pressure to do so by others in the forensics community. In this way, students relinquish some of their control and autonomy to avoid competitive or social consequences.

Some participants cited internal pressures like community culture and following norms as a key influence in sacrificing voice. For example, Zavier stated, "You see people performing

pieces about their race or ethnicity and usually they do really well. So you want to emulate that from some level." Zavier's comments illustrate how the desire to emulate the performances of other students inadvertently affects one's found voice and can contribute to a student feeling the need to sacrifice their voice. Seeing other students of color be successful while speaking about race-related topics can increase sacrificed voice because it creates a standard in which students of color are expected to speak about race-related topics. If students of color only see other students of color speak on race-related topics they may choose to follow suit and sacrifice voice by focusing on those topics over the other topics that they are equally passionate about. When students of color believe they must speak about race, they may sacrifice their authentic voice to be more competitive or compelling.

Not only do the topics students are expected to speak on influence sacrificed voice but the way students of color vocally and physically present also plays a role. Students of color may feel compelled to sacrifice voice by changing their vocal and physical expression in order to be seen as competitive. This idea of emulating competitively successful speaking styles was furthered by Ren, who stated, "I'm trying to be more of myself, but I feel like I do have to speak louder or do things when I enter the room, for example, my posture, just making sure that I am being more authoritative, to compete." Ren described how students of color can feel as if they have to alter their authentic voice to be taken seriously in-round. They demonstrate how much students of color adapt their presentation both physically and vocally. The desire to be competitively successful in an environment that discourages students from speaking as their authentic selves leads students to sacrifice their authentic voices to rank high in-round. Ash, who has graduated after three years of forensics competition, elaborated on this desire to gain competitive success through emulation:

> It was just an obsession of 'I want the one.' So I'm just going to perform what they want to see and not what I want to perform. Frankly it looked like studying… pieces that are in those national final round recordings and essentially doing a copy paste to how I write or block or organize a piece… I'll just copy what they do.

Ash's words make it clear this emulation is a sacrifice that students of color make in order to 'get the one.' Zavier, Ren, and Ash all speak about the way forensics norms and standard practices can implicitly influence students to sacrifice their authentic voice. Each of these students referenced how the performance styles of other students in the community shaped the way they participated in forensics spaces. Wanting to emulate the work of successful students in the community or attempting to mimic successful performances led students to dismiss their own instincts and speak with voices that were not entirely their own. For students of color, sacrificing voice becomes second nature as they implicitly recognize external pressures like POC excellence demand competitive success. Students of color understand the path of least resistance for gaining the success that is expected of them is through sacrificed voice. Each of these students expressed some amount of regret at sacrificing voice. Furthermore, their willingness to participate in sacrificing voice was recounted as obligatory in order to gain competitive success.

Next, many participants revealed external pressures like coaches and judges also contributed to sacrificing voice. This idea was illustrated by Gem, who spoke about how judges have the power to influence sacrificed voice because students fear repercussions competitively: "What is the consequence if you were to challenge [norms]? Does that mean being ranked last? Does that mean not breaking to finals… the community likes to say, 'we encourage these unique experiences' but it's not reflected in… judging." Similarly, Shea, a first-year competitor, continued this idea of feeling a need to sacrifice voice in order to appease judges: "It feels like

you're telling your lie sometimes because… you are just crafting it so… the judges rank you up. So in that sense we don't have much control, because you're crafting for a specific audience. You're kind of trapped." Gem and Shea provided insight into how students of color sacrificed voice in response to or to avoid consequences from coaches and judges. Coaches and judges hold immense power over students of color because of their position as barriers to student competitive success. These students illustrate some of the questions and concerns students of color consider when crafting their performances. Students spoke about the pressure to appease people in these positions of power and how tailoring their performances to their expected audience requires the use of sacrificed voice. This theme connects to two of my research questions, revealing how forensics imposes itself onto students of color and how that imposition limits student expression by motivating students to sacrifice their own voices in order to gain success and avoid punishment.

Stifling voice

Finally, many of my participants revealed they had experiences in which *the words and actions of other members of the forensics community succeeded in silencing students of color, especially students who attempt to speak through their found voice*. The most cited influences in voice stifling were judges and coaches. Voice stifling comes in many forms, including coaches not permitting certain topics, styles of dress, or performance choices, or judges dropping events that fail to follow convention, or with which they can't relate. Stifling voice differs from sacrificing voice because sacrificing voice occurs when students choose to alter their voices due to internal pressures, whereas stifling voice is the result of students experiencing external pressures to alter their voice. Ultimately, there is little POC students can do to avoid stifling voice, and sacrificing voice acts as a defense mechanism used to reduce the impact of stifling

voice. Zavier explained how interactions with their coaches ultimately stifled their voice by policing what topics they found acceptable. “I experienced power struggles especially with trying to do the performances I wanted to do or the topics I wanted to do. One time I wanted to do a piece but… [my coaches] didn't think it was competitive enough.” Lane echoed this experience in their recounting of their own interactions with coaches: “if [white coaches] don't see [the topic] the same way POC competitors do, then there's a high chance that they won't like it, or they won't think it's going to be competitive, or they won't let it go out.” Both Zavier and Lane commented on the power coaches have to stifle students’ voices. The position of the coach entails they have direct control over the performances that their students are permitted to do. When coaches center competitive success over student voice, student can feel stifled.

However, coaches are not the only source of stifled voice. Judges also contribute to the stifling of student voices. Ty expounded on this idea of judges having the power to stifle student voice when they explained, “I had taken [my speech] out…and [judges] were like ‘don't do this’... I felt like I had to play into respectability politics.” Ty’s remarks showcase how the comments judges make on student performances can explicitly stifle student voice. When judges overtly discourage students from speaking on certain topics, it can make students feel as if they must adapt their performances to be more palatable. This idea was extended by Nova, who revealed,

> Sometimes it can be just disheartening. If, like, you have a piece that is personal to you, and then, like judges, they don't necessarily understand, or like a lot of cases, almost exemplify the problem that you are trying to bring awareness to in your speech.

Nova’s comment depicts how judges can implicitly stifle student voices. Judges who lack cultural competence may misunderstand students of color and their performances. This

misunderstanding can lead to students of color receiving insensitive comments on ballots, and unfortunately, as Nova stated, judges can enact the same violence on students that the students are trying to advocate against.

The words of Zavier, Lane, Ty, and Nova all encapsulate the struggles students encounter when their voices are stifled. The words and actions of judges and coaches are the largest contributors to stifled voice. This is especially true for students of color who actively choose to speak from their found voice. The students of color who attempt to bring in more of their personal perspectives, challenge community norms, and share underrepresented stories are more likely to be stifled than students who adapt to accepted community norms. This theme relates to two of my research questions regarding how forensics intentionally or unintentionally enforces limitations of students of color and limits their expression to fit within the parameters of community norms.

Navigating voice is a challenge for students of color in particular. The power that coaches and judges hold in the community has a direct effect on the expression of students of color. That power differential between student-coach or student-judge is only further expanded for students of color who often interact with white coaches and judges. Students of color not only have to modify their voices for competitive success but also for safety. When students of color speak out, their voices are not always heard and oftentimes their voices are intentionally or inadvertently stifled. This has resulted in students choosing to sacrifice elements of their voices in order to achieve more competitive success and ward off offensive or insensitive feedback from coaches and judges.

Theme 4: Issues of Representation

In the speech community, students of color can oftentimes spend much of their time in white-dominated spaces. Many students of color find themselves as the only POC on their team or in their regional circuit. Students of color may attend many tournaments before encountering another student of color – let alone a student from their same ethnic or racial background. This is especially true for students who attend smaller universities, who do not travel as far or as often. Lack of representation in the speech community has caused students of color to feel othered within the activity, negatively impacting their sense of belonging. These feelings of unbelonging occur both in and out-of-round as a result of lack of diversity. This theme examines the various ways students of color feel difference or unbelonging and highlights how diversity, or lack thereof, in-round and out-of-round have an impact on students of color.

Diversity in round

Although students of color frequently experience feelings of difference or unbelonging in forensics, they also experience moments in which they felt likeness or belonging. Many of my participants explained when discussing their experiences in-round, it was rare for them to encounter other students of color in their rounds and even rarer for them to encounter a judge of color. Many of my participants revealed they frequently feel fear when entering a round where they were the only person of color or were expected to perform for a white judge. This fear was compounded when students of color broke to finals and were expected to perform for all white judging panels. However, when students of color were able to interact with or even just see other people of color in their rounds, my interviewees spoke about how greatly that impacted their experience for the better.

Initially, seeing more people of color in-round was appreciated by many of my interviewees. Ty spoke to this idea of the benefits of seeing more judges of color in-round:

> I always love performing for judges of color. I felt at home… [In one of my rounds] it was terrifying because the entire panel was white, all 6 of us were competitors of color. Which was cool, because… we did that. But at the same time it's like, "you couldn't put one [judge of color] on the panel?"

In this case, Ty's words reveal how the presence of white judges can be taxing for students of color, whereas encountering judges of color acted as a form of relief. When speaking to white judges on topics that relate to the lived experience of being a person of color, students of color can feel discomfort due to the power differentials that exist due to their positions as student/judge and as POC/white. This idea was expanded on by Eden, who stated,

> [When I perform for] a lot of judges who are POC, I get very good reception, because they don't have to force themselves to open up. When it comes to coaches or judges that are not POC, they have to tell themselves, "Okay, let's look at it from… the POC performer's perspective." [But POC judges] don't have to force themselves to think like a person of color.

The power dynamics that exist between white judges and students of color make it challenging for students of color to feel as if their voices belong in the speech community. However, with the presence of judges of color, students of color feel a sense of ease knowing that a judge of color is more likely to understand and relate to the experiences they are presenting in their performances.

As a result, this feeling of being understood or having similarities with their judges can make students of color feel more connected to the speech community at large. Oftentimes, just the presence of judges of color can improve the experience of students of color. Judges of color can make students feel more understood, seen, and free to be their authentic selves. This is especially true when students of color encounter judges of color who share their racial or ethnic

identity. Rio spoke about the connection they have felt with the judges of color they have encountered:

> last year, [in one of my rounds there were] 2 judges of color, one that was a black man. They understood. The white judges will never understand... But that black judge [looked] me in the eye and… cried with me… Because they truly understand my pain. My plights… we need that… All the worry you have of not connecting, of not getting a message across to someone is just gone. You actively feel that weight come off your shoulders. And now you can just perform.

Having the opportunity to connect with judges who share racial or ethnic identity is a rare occurrence for students of color, but when they are able to make those connections it is therapeutic. With the lack of diversity in the speech community, especially when addressing diversity amongst judges and even coaches, Rio highlights how students of color need to see and perform for people who look like them and understand their lived experiences. When students of color are able to perform for members of their own racial or ethnic community, they are able to speak in a voice that is more true and feel more comfortable in the activity.

Ty, Eden, and Rio all highlight the importance of judges of color being present in the speech community. Many of my participants spoke at length about the role of judges of color, indicating judges of color are vital to improving how students of color experience collegiate speech. Having representation for people of color in positions of power in the community can help students of color feel a deeper sense of belonging.

Diversity in-round is vital to create feelings of belonging in students of color. Though diversity of fellow competitors and audience were also discussed by some of my participants, the overwhelming focus on judge diversity indicates that above all, students of color crave a more

diverse judging pool both regionally and nationally. This theme relates to all three of my research questions because it explores how the interpersonal and structural relationships students are able to form with judges of color in-round can positively impact the expression and authenticity of students of color.

Diversity out of round

Finally, all of my participants spoke about how their speech experience has been improved by diversity out-of-round. The ways in which my participants spoke about diversity out-of-round was much broader than the insights given regarding diversity in-round, likely in part to the lack of diversity students are often exposed to in-round. Here, students spoke about the connections they were able to form with other students of color and coaches of color as well. *Diversity out-of-round covers all of the interactions students have with their teammates, their coaches, fellow competitors from other teams, and the interactions they have with their judges after the round has ended*. These interactions can happen either in-between rounds at tournaments or outside of tournaments entirely.

The connections made with fellow teammates of color were described as crucial for many of my participants. Students on predominantly white teams held these connections in high regard. Shea discussed how their relationship with another person of color on their team was a benefit to them:

> it's very sad to be the only person [of color]. It's really tiring… last year, when we had another student of color joining the team, I remember we clicked so quickly… It was just like that need that we both had… and that was very important for me. But then she [left the team].

Being the only person of color on a speech team is often very taxing for students of color. Having other students of color on the team can help by providing extra support and understanding.

Oftentimes students of color are able to bond over shared experiences and commiserate over the shared struggles they encounter in the speech community. This is also true for the relationships students of color form with competitors of color from other teams. Ash explained the relationships they built with other students of color assisted them through the challenges they faced as a student of color in speech when they stated,

> I'm really lucky to have some really really great friends on the circuit, and oftentimes [I] would call up and just vent… And I think all of us were just ready to fuck it up. We were all just very, very angry. If any of us received a negative judge comment… all of us were in together to want to [create] change.

This comment from Ash showcases the solidarity students of color have with each other. So many students of color in the speech community face the same struggles: they encounter insensitive ballots, they struggle to have their messages understood, and they feel like they do not belong. The relationships that students form outside of their own teams allow them to make their voices heard even as there are often attempts to silence them. The relationships students of color have with each other across teams are particularly meaningful for students who compete on teams where they are the only student of color.

The challenges students of color face are uniquely tied to their positions as people of color. While relationships with fellow competitors of color can be helpful, students of color also desire support from more experienced coaches of color who can help guide and console them in

the face of their struggles. Eden shared how their relationship with their coach of color has benefitted them. They revealed,

> one of my assistant coaches [of color], after [one tournament]... it was a really tough time for me, and so when I asked [them] about the whole situation about being put at a disadvantage… [they] told me the truth… how well [my piece will] be received in other places, nationally. And that definitely gave me a lot of courage and a lot more excitement for nationals.

When students of color feel disheartened as a result of the challenges they face in the speech community, coaches of color can help motivate students of color out of these slumps by sharing their own past experiences as former competitors of color. These relationships can be the difference between students bouncing back from their negative experiences or becoming forever disillusioned with the activity.

Students of color feel compelled to seek relationships outside of their own teams when they compete for teams that lack diversity in their coaching staff. This idea can be exemplified through the words of Rio, who explained how their relationships with coaches of color differ from their relationships with white coaches.

> They affirmed us. That was a big part of it. I felt affirmed… It's the affirmation, whether it be a hug, whether it be from a conversation after the round, or just them, just like being happy when someone from your identity wins something big… that's what keeps me gravitating towards these coaches of color. Because [the same things] happened to them before, it still happens to them, and so they make sure that if it happens to us then we have a space, we have someone we can confide to.

The ways in which coaches of color are able to relate to students of color makes the relationships they form together special. The way coaches of color relate to the experiences students of color speak about, how coaches provide advice on how to overcome, and the desire they have to form relationships with and uplift competitors of color make important connections for students of color.

Diversity out-of-round, like diversity in round, has a long-reaching effect on the overall sense of belonging students of color feel. Students of color want to form close relationships with other people of color where they feel they can fully express themselves. The ways in which students of color feel difference or unbelonging can be mitigated by the connections they make with other people of color in the speech community. This theme connects to two of my research questions as it indicates how the interpersonal relationships students of color form are used as a tool for resisting the cultural forces that attempt to limit their expression.

Feeling difference/unbelonging

Feelings of difference/unbelonging were discussed by many of my research participants. Feelings of difference/unbelonging illustrate how *students of color frequently feel as if they are not completely welcome in the activity socially or competitively, the ways in which students of color feel the activity is inaccessible to them, and how those feelings arise due to systemic forces*. How students relate to their judges, coaches, teammates, and fellow competitors all influence the ability of students of color to feel as if they belong in the activity. Lack of diversity in-round and out-of-round can greatly impact the feelings of difference and unbelonging students of color feel while participating in speech. Shea explained how interacting with other students in the activity has been difficult: “white students kind of lean towards other white American students a lot of times, and I feel a little bit left out sometimes.” As a student of color who is not American-born,

Shea revealed they have had struggles integrating into social atmospheres in the speech community. In social, non-competitive settings, students of color can have a hard time feeling accepted by white students in the community, which increases the likelihood that students of color feel like outsiders in the community. This is especially true for students of color who participate in teams or districts that are predominately white. When students of color do not see themselves represented in the activity they are more likely to experiences feelings of difference and unbelonging. This idea was echoed by Sage, who explained,

> Trying to be held at that same spot as my white [teammates], trying to be seen by my coaches as not just the black girl on team… but to be seen and respected as not just this token, but as a person who deserved to be there.

Sage's words reveal how feelings of unbelonging stem from student-student interactions and also student-coach interactions. Coaches, just like teammates, have the power to strongly influence feelings of difference and unbelonging students of color experience in speech. Without other teammates of color represented in their program, Sage revealed they did not feel as if they were truly seen as a member of their team. When students of color don't see themselves represented in other members of their teams they can feel misunderstood, tokenized, and othered. These feelings then manifest as feelings of difference and unbelonging.

Both Shea and Sage reveal how the representation of students of color on their own teams can have a dramatic impact on their likelihood to feel a sense of belonging in the speech community. Seeing other students of color in-round or out-of-round can help students of color feel more welcome in the activity. The presences of other students of color can reduce feelings of difference and unbelonging because the presences of other people of color indicates a degree of

safety for many students of color. Ultimately, when students feel underrepresented in-round or out-of-round , similar to Sage, they do not continue to compete for very long.

Although the interactions students of color have out-of-round with their teammates and coaches have a large influence on the sense of belonging students of color feel, it is not the only factor. The competitive culture of the speech community at large also plays a key role in a sense of belonging for students of color. My research participants spoke of a large variety of in-round competitive-cultural influences that shaped their feelings of unbelonging in the activity. These influences ranged from judge reception of their performances, judge diversity, genre diversity, and expectations to abide by norms. Even if the encounters students had with these influences were inadvertent, they still had the same effects as more overt competitive-cultural influences to discourage students of color from feeling as if they belong in the speech community.

Notably, judge diversity and judge reception to performances has a significant impact on the felt belonging of students of color. Eden explained the feelings they experience as a result of poor reception:

> I think the way [performances are] received is so important because a lot of my pieces are connected to me and my identity. So I almost see it as a mirror or a gateway to, how are you looking at me as a person? *Are* you perceiving me as a person…? How important do you think my struggle is? And it's unfortunate to say that when you give a piece someone has to as a coach or a judge will weigh that struggle, and fully criticize the struggle when sometimes you just want someone to listen.

Eden's words highlight how the role of judges and coaches to assess the performances of students of color can contribute to feelings of unbelonging. The way in which we as a community critique student performance has had a negative effect on students of color, like

Eden. As a community, judge reception has made students of color feel as if their voices are not represented and therefore unwelcome. When assessing student performances, failing to recognize the humanity of students of color and failing to seek deeper understanding has led to feelings of difference and unbelonging that inspire students of color to wonder if their judges are even perceiving them as people.

Moreover, lack of representation in judge diversity also impacts how students of color feel difference or unbelonging. This idea can be illustrated through the words of Tru, who explained,

> Overwhelmingly, every judging panel I had at nationals last year was super white. [I was in a round] where it was like seven people, and like four diversity speeches in a row, including me. And it was a judging panel of three white men, and then all three white people got out of the round… Did I get dropped because other people… had a better performance than me? Or did I get dropped because I was a person of color?

The lack of diversity in the judging pool has led to students of color feeling underrepresented in the competitive arena. When students of color speak about their experiences as people of color in rounds with white judges they feel as if they will not be understood, which increases feelings of difference. When students of color always have to perform for white judges, they must always wonder if their position as non-white has a negative effect on their ability to connect with their judges and gain the competitive success they desire. When students of color feel unrepresented in the judging pool, their feelings of difference and unbelonging are likely to increase.

In addition, students of color experience feelings of difference and unbelonging as a result of the lack of diversity within the speech genres they see themselves represented in. Students of color are a small minority of the student population and oftentimes are encouraged

by their coaches to participate in specific speech genres. This limits the amount of representation students of color see of people who look like them in certain speech genres. For this reason, students of color can feel as if they do not belong in specific speech genres. This idea was illustrated by Skye, who explained,

> When looking at especially PA categories, you have to have a very… professional personality which I don't have… I use a lot of AAVE, and… for people who have grown up in these areas and have these speaking habits, PA categories can be a little bit of a slap in the face because… if it comes down to someone who uses AAVE and someone who talks "proper," the person that talks proper is going to be given the one… I don't really like PA, anyways, but I feel like if there wasn't that added layer of being singled out because of the way I talk, I feel like I might be more open to the idea.

This comment showcases how lack of representation of people who speak like them in PA categories has deterred Skye from participating in that genre. When students of color only see themselves represented in just a few select genres, it can be challenging for students of color to see themselves succeeding in the genres they do not see themselves represented in.

However, simply getting more students of color to participate and succeed in these genres won't resolve those feelings of difference or unbelonging because, as Rio revealed, "A black [person could] win a national title in LP and yet I [would] still feel like my examples, how my blackness adds nuance to a quotation, will be put at a disadvantage." The success of students of color in genres where they are underrepresented doesn't assuage the feelings of unbelonging other students of color have in those genres. The success of a few students of color has not prompted others to participate because the success of those few students has not improved the

experience for students of color at large. Rio went on to speak about how some event paradigms have contributed to these feelings of unbelonging:

> I can get a quotation that I just completely disagree with and a judge will be like, 'you should agree with this always.' [If] the quotation was created by an actual racist piece of shit I'm just supposed to blindly agree with them on it… I'm not gonna agree with you because when you [chose] that quotation that I have to speak about you didn't think about me.

Rio highlights how strict paradigms have put them at a disadvantage in events like the LP's. These remarks showcase how lack of representation in the structures that are set in place to run tournaments can also ostracize students of color and push them towards feelings of difference and unbelonging. The way impromptu quotations are selected or how extemporaneous questions are written can impact if students of color feel they belong in those event genres.

Finally, the systemic structures currently in place in the activity are upheld by norms that also influence how students of color feel difference and unbelonging. The norms that exist in the activity frequently and uniquely disadvantage students of color, and leave them feeling othered. Ash illustrated this idea when they explained,

> It's a lot of informal conventions and informal rules… Just because you're not in a suit, Does that invalidate your presence? Does that say less of you as a performer, as a speaker, as an advocate…? This is part of the culture; or this is how people act; or this is how judges write things; or this is how coaches have been taught; or this is how students have been taught; that shape a culture that's frankly hostile to people of color.

The dominance of whiteness in the activity of speech has created an environment in which students of color *feel* difference, which can often exacerbate feelings of unbelonging. As the

competitive culture of the activity continues to uphold traditional ideals like expecting students to wear suits or endorsing white epistemologies as indisputable arbiters of knowledge, students of color have been made to feel their bodies and voices do not belong in the speech community.

The words of Eden, Tru, Skye, Rio, and Ash all encapsulate how the lack of representation of people of color in creating the competitive culture in speech has impacted their experiences as students of color in the activity. How their performances are received, the diversity of the judging pool, representation in all event genres, and event paradigms and structures all determine if students of color feel they belong in the speech community. The remarks of my interviewees substantiate that competitive success isn't an indicator of the satisfaction of students of color in the activity. Even when students of color achieve competitive success, they can still experience feelings of difference or unbelonging due to the above factors.

Feeling difference or unbelonging have immense influence on the satisfaction of students of color in speech. Students of color can feel difference or unbelonging due to interpersonal interactions or systemic structures. When students of color feel they do not belong either socially or competitively, they may not feel welcome to continue participating in the activity and will almost certainly leave the activity for good. This theme relates to two of my research questions, examining how speech imposes itself on and limits the expression of students of color and how students of color and how students of color choose to navigate the cultural forces are impressed upon them.

Issues of representation impact all students of color, but may have a stronger influence on students of color who do not have any other people of color on their teams or who have few people of color in their regions. Students who are able to connect with other people of color, either on their own teams or by meeting other people of color through tournament travel,

expressed more feelings of belonging than students who did not. However, these increased feelings of belonging were limited. While students of color can feel belonging on their teams, they may not feel belonging at tournaments or in specific event genres. For students of color, feelings of difference and belonging ebbed and flowed in various facets of their speech experiences. For every student I interviewed, felt difference and unbelonging were directly tied to representation of people of color in the speech community.

Theme 5: Team Dynamics

When looking at the experiences of students of color, team dynamics must be addressed. Speech teams are the building blocks of the larger speech community. Examining how speech teams welcome students of color is necessary to gain a better understanding of how the speech community accepts students of color. Team dynamics teach students of color what to expect from, and how to navigate through, the larger speech community. Due to a lack of participants from racially diverse teams, this theme focuses primarily on *the dynamics of predominantly white teams with few students of color*. *Team dynamics include the connections students of color make with their coaches, the tensions that can arise between students of color and their team, how teams show support for students of color, and how that support often lacks necessary cultural competence*. Through this theme I will illustrate how team dynamics shape the experiences of students of color in collegiate speech.

Coach connections

Initially, coach connection illustrates how *the relationships students of color form with their coaches influence their experience in speech*. Coaches play a key role in recruiting, retaining, and integrating students into their teams and the community at large. Coach connection focuses on the relationships students of color form with their white coaches can uniquely alter

how the student views the activity. The way white coaches are able to relate to the students of color on their teams ultimately shapes how students of color engage with the activity.

Many of my research participants indicated they had developed strong connections with their coaches. Some students attributed these fulfilling relationships to the time their coaches invested in them as individuals. This idea was illustrated by Nova, who stated,

> [They're] just very supportive and open to all ideas… knowing that all these people are trying their hardest to support us in making our messages as clear as possible. So just having that network of people, and just… being able to get feedback from anyone any time and everything, and just like, not having any sort of fear of judgment has been really special for this team.

For students of color working with white coaches, it is important to see coaches investing time in them – especially when students of color are competing for predominately white teams. Students of color need to know that they are supported and that they have a network of people to offer that support. If students don't feel that support from their coaches, they are unlikely to feel that support in the rest of their team. Building this connection can make the difference for students of color. Ash elaborated on this point when they explained, "Just investing and focusing on someone for like 5 min at a time, just like, that to me was above and beyond and that's how they showed up for me." When coaches are able to invest time in their students of color in a one-on-one setting, they can build stronger connections with students and offer more support. The words of Nova and Ash reveal how the relationships between white coaches and their students of color can create feelings of support in students of color. When students of color feel a connection with their coaches they are more likely to remain in the activity. By investing time in their students of color, coaches can create a more welcoming environment for students of color.

Additionally, students of color feel coach connection when they see their coaches are able to fulfill their needs. When students of color interact with white coaches there can often be feelings of disconnect due to a lack of shared lived experience and cultural differences; however, coaches can connect with students of color by prioritizing their students' needs and advocating for their students. This idea was exemplified through the words of Skye, who stated,

> I never had an actual suit in high school, because I can't really afford to get one, and my coach brought some suits that [they] had, and gave me one of them to be able to compete with this season. And that was just super awesome.

In this case, Skye's coach recognized a need that they had and did what they could to fulfill that need. Students of color are not the only students who struggle financially; however, it can be more impactful for a coach to offer extra financial assistance or provide resources because that can be the catalyst for a connection to be built. By listening to students of color and fulfilling their needs coaches can begin the process of building trust with their students of color which can allow deeper connections to develop thereafter.

Trust is vital to coach connection, and meeting students' needs will help build that trust. This is especially true when coaches are willing to advocate for their students of color publicly. Coaches who are willing to advocate for and defend their students in moments where they have experienced racial insensitivity can make students of color feel stronger connection. This idea was illustrated by Ren, who explained,

> There were like, a couple of things that happened at a tournament specifically, that I was kind of concerned. I wasn't sure if it was because of my race or ethnicity, and I told my coaches about it, and they were like, "oh, we can go up to the Tab. We can talk about this

privately. We can have a discussion." And it was like, I wasn't expecting them to take it so seriously. But they did, and it was just an incident of like, I felt very protected.

Oftentimes, experiencing racial insensitivity and racism is commonplace for students of color. At times, it can feel as if their struggles do not warrant outrage or attention. However, as demonstrated by Ren's comment, it is unexpected and appreciated when coaches are willing to defend their students of color in these moments. When students of color can see that their coaches are willing to protect them, they are much more likely to feel coach connection.

Skye and Ren both discussed the impact coach advocacy can have on students of color feelings of coach connection. Their words illustrate the importance of trust between students of color and their white coaches. Due to racial and cultural barriers as well as the power dynamics that exist between coaches and students, it can be hard for students of color to develop close relationships with their white coaches. Trust must be built at least in part by the actions of the coach in order for students of color to feel comfortable enough to build coach connection. This theme relates to my research questions by illustrating how cultural forces influence the expression of students of color.

Intrateam conflict

Though speech teams vary in size and culture, all teams are subject to moments of conflict or disagreement. For students of color, especially on predominately white teams, these moments of conflict can occur more frequently. Intrateam tensions illustrate the various types of conflict students of color must navigate if they are to remain active participants on their speech teams. These conflicts are often indirect, resulting from the othering or feelings of difference students of color experience. *Intrateam tensions focuses on the overt and covert conflicts students of color encounter when interacting with their white teammates*. Students of color do

experience conflict with one another; however, exploring the role that whiteness plays in the conflicts students of color engage in helps illustrate how team environments can affect their speech experience.

Many of my research participants recalled experiences when they had to manage overt team conflicts. For some students, teammate insensitivity was a contributing factor to the overt conflicts they experienced. Shea spoke to this idea when they explained,

> Because I'm always the only person in the room… it's really tiring also to like be correcting people when they say something stupid. In my team… all the students are white and they're all from [racially homogenous areas]… it's a very interesting relationship with me. I feel like sometimes [I'm] the only interaction they've had with a person of color… So sometimes there are some comments that are like, very off.

Shea's experiences were colored by their team's lack of exposure to diverse people and perspectives. Having to manage these moments of insensitivity has forced them into moments of overt conflict, creating an environment that increased intrateam tension. When students of color are put in situations where they feel they must engage in overt conflict, it is likely to also increase feelings of unbelonging.

Furthermore, even when students of color did not have to manage overt conflicts, they did still have to manage covert conflicts. These conflicts often came in the form of microaggressions. Covert conflicts differ from overt conflict because though they are just as damaging, covert conflict are the battles students of color are not directly engaged in and are not verbally contested. These conflicts are born from remarks that are said in passing or not directly spoken to the student of color, which makes them difficult for students of color to address. Sage

recalled some of the covert conflicts they were exposed to in their time competing when they revealed,

> [With some of my team members] it was hard to feel supported… because of how often they would conflate their queerness to my blackness. Or… [one of my teammates told me] a white person on my team was talking about… how people of color could just talk about… their race and win because of it… it almost felt like they were seeing these racial marginalizations as a privilege.

When students of color are exposed to covert conflict they can be put into a difficult position. Hearing racially insensitive remarks from teammates is challenging, but hearing those remarks second-hand or spoken to others on their teams can create an environment in which students of color must instigate a confrontation themselves in order to address the offense. This hurts students of color because it positions them as the instigators of conflict rather than the victims of racial insensitivity. Knowing this, students of color may choose to endure the effects of covert conflicts to save face. When students of color have to endure covert conflict it can decrease the feeling of support they experience.

As students of color struggle between overt and covert conflict, they may find it necessary to put on a face in order to connect with their white teammates and increase their personal feelings of belonging. This idea was expressed by Zavier, who explained, "[On my team] I did have to lean myself into a kind of a persona in some sense just to connect with them [and] try to get closer with the team." Overt and covert conflicts have the power to ostracize students of color. In order to combat these feelings of difference, students of color may choose to minimize the moments in which they are experiencing racial insensitivity in order to avoid

conflict. In this case, students of color who prioritize connection with their team may have to sacrifice parts of themselves in order to endure overt and covert conflict.

Shea, Sage, and Zavier all spoke about the various struggles they had interacting with their teammates. When students of color experience conflict with their teammates it can create an environment in which they do not feel welcome, which is especially true if the conflicts are frequent. Teammates make up the majority of students of color interactions, so if the experiences they have interacting with their own teammates are fraught with conflict, students of color are unlikely to have a positive speech experience. This theme relates to my research questions by examining how speech imposes itself on students of color and how students of color navigate those imposing forces.

Team Support

Conversely, although students of color experience intrateam conflict they also experience team support. *Team support illustrates the ways in which speech teams rally around students of color and provide assistance, words of encouragement, and validation both within and outside of the competitive speech environment*. My research participants spoke about the importance of team support in uplifting the voices of students of color. This idea was expressed through the words of Rio, who explained,

> I was on a team that really allowed me to explore and experiment… They always made sure to support me… like it was my coaches, and my teammates. My pieces were "me"' pieces, they were pieces that were sad, they were uncomfortable, they were surreal, they were nuanced. I was glad to be on a team who always made sure to support that. They always made sure to support my creativity and my thoughts, my ideas.

The support students of color feel from their teams allows them to explore and speak about their own lived experiences. When students of color feel as if their voices are being uplifted, they are more likely to feel as if they have team support. With team support, students of color can feel more empowered to speak using their found voice and combat the pressures they feel while participating in speech.

Team support is important both in and outside of the speech environment. When participating in the competitive speech environment, students of color can quickly become discouraged and isolated from the larger speech community due to a variety factors, including internal and external pressures; difficulty navigating voice; and feelings of difference/unbelonging. Support from teammates can mitigate these challenges and give students of color the support needed to overcome these struggles. Students of color can benefit greatly from having a strong support network on their teams to fall back on when they are experiencing these struggles. Skye spoke to this idea of the need for a strong support system when they stated,

> I didn't break finals [at] my first tournament… I felt so incredibly defeated, and like maybe speech isn't for me, maybe I shouldn't be doing this. And then this is where my teammates came into play, and they were all supporting me… Whenever I'm feeling down or feeling defeated, all of my teammates constantly reassure me that I'm good at what I do, or that, "it's just one tournament. It's just one judge."

With the many obstacles students of color must overcome to continue participation in competitive speech, words of encouragement can be a great support. When students of color encounter challenges like external pressures and feelings of difference/unbelonging. they may feel as if speech is not a community they should continue participation in. However, team

support can provide students of color with the assistance they need to fortify themselves and continue on.

Though the primary objective of most speech teams is competitive success, team support of students of color outside of speech is just as important. Even if students of color are primarily focused on speech competition, they still need to feel support outside of their competitive environment. Shea expressed the importance of team support outside of speech when they explained,

> My team is really nice… and really helpful… like if I need to go, I don't know, to a doctor appointment, I can call anyone in my team and be like, "hey, can someone drive me? I really need to ride today" and they will help me and I love that.

Team support outside of speech can increase connection between students of color and their speech teams. When teams offer support to students of color outside of speech it can help prevent students of color from feeling like trophy-mules. Students of color battle expectations of competitive greatness, but they should not feel as if their potential for competitive success is the only value they add to a speech team. Students of color require team support outside of speech to feel as if they are truly accepted and welcome on their teams.

The words of Rio, Skye, and Shea illustrate the significance of team support in creating a positive experience for students of color in speech. Especially for students of color who compete for predominantly white teams, feeling support can make the difference between continued participation and early retirement. Team support has a great influence on the overall experience of students of color in speech. Coaches and teammates are the people with whom students of color will interact most during their time in speech. Students of color will have more opportunity to build deep connections with the members of their own teams. From these connections,

students of color will need support from the pressures placed upon them by both the larger community and from within their teams. When students of color encounter conflicts with other members of their team, they need team support in order to feel empowered to speak up and address the conflict. Team support has the power to mitigate the various pressures and violence students of color are exposed to through their participation in speech. This theme connects to my research questions by revealing how cultural forces influence the expression of students of color.

Support without competence

Coach connections and team support have great influence on the experience of students of color. Many of my research participants expressed they did have connections with their coaches and they did feel supported by their teams. However, many of my participants also revealed *the support they received often lacked adequate cultural competence. Though support was present, it was not comprehensive or well-informed*. My participants disclosed the ways in which they saw this cultural incompetence manifest. For some students, this inadequate support presented as lack of knowledge, which was exemplified through the words of Zavier: "I would say I felt very supported but at the same time I think it was tough for [my coaches], because… especially being a POC, I don't feel like they really knew what I needed." This remark illustrates how students of color can still feel support despite being exposed to the cultural incompetence of their teams. Though they may feel supported in the same ways their white teammates do, they may not feel supported specifically as students of color. Struggles with adapting to predominantly white teams put students of color in a position where they need different support to feel as if they are understood and belong. This idea was elaborated by Eden, who stated,

> I do think that [my team] try 100% to support me. I am the only POC performer on my team. There's just some things that they're trying to be racially sensitive on and there's

> some things that they can't fully grasp, and so I feel very supported… even though we are not 100% connecting.

For students of color, feeling supported does not necessarily mean they feel understood by or connected to their team members. However, Eden's words highlight the importance of effort on behalf of white coaches and teammates. Though complete understanding and connection may not be possible for some, when students of color feel as if their teams are putting in effort to understand and connect with them, they are more likely to feel supported by their teams.

Zavier and Eden both spoke about the struggles they have encountered as students of color on predominately white teams. Though they both expressed that they felt supported by their teams, they also indicated that their teams were unable to fully support them as students of color. The disconnect that can emerge between students of color and their white teams due to cultural differences and racial insensitivity must be addressed for students of color to feel support. White coaches must educate themselves on the cultural and racialized experience of the students of color they recruit to their teams, and encourage their white students to do the same. Even when predominately white teams are culturally competent and racially sensitive, their support may still feel lacking to students of color due to racial power dynamics that exist between people of color and white people. White coaches and predominately white teams must be committed to continuous education because if they are unable to provide culturally competent support it is the students of color who struggle.

Furthermore, in their effort to become more culturally competent, white coaches must be willing to reexamine how they choose to lead their teams and coach their students. Many of my research participants expressed relationships with their white coaches in which their coaches were unwilling to recognize that the ways they were taught to coach speech did not align with

the experiences students of color wanted to perform. Coaches who prioritized upholding tradition or standardized performance ideals were more likely to inspire students of color to feel support without competence. This idea was illustrated by Lane when they revealed,

> Some [of my coaches] I do feel like I have their full support. Other ones I feel like they've just been in this old tradition of forensics for so long that it's a lot harder for them to kind of alter their views and switch to a new idea of what forensics should be as a whole.

Coach unwillingness to adapt to changes in the speech community can increase students of color's feelings of support without competence. Historically, speech has been an environment built on standards that uphold whiteness. The way students are expected to dress, behave, and perform all stem from the traditions developed long before people of color were granted access to the speech community. When coaches are unwilling to adapt, they inadvertently ostracize students of color who may not feel comfortable participating in the traditions of their teams. The structural operations of speech teams influence the experiences of students of color. If team operations do not mesh well with the needs of students of color, interpersonal support may not be enough to mitigate feelings of support without competence.

Additionally, coaching procedures must be re-examined. Like team traditions and policies, how coaches choose to coach can lack cultural competence. The performances students of color choose to perform often connect to the cultural experiences of students of color. When coaches are unable to coach theses performances with cultural competence, it can put students of color in an uncomfortable position. This idea was expressed by Sage, who explained,

> One of my challenges was definitely coaching with… my white forensics directors because sometimes the advice that I was given for the speeches that I was doing was not

> racially conscious. So… my coaching sessions… would end up with me explaining why the advice that was being given to me… was wrong. I wasn't just another white forensic speaker, but that I was a black speaker giving a speech on our experiences.

When coaches lack cultural competence, they are unable to assist students in crafting racially sensitive performances. Sage's remarks illustrate how lack of cultural competence in coaching can force students of color to become educators of their coaches. This can be an uncomfortable position for students of color as coaches are seen as authority figures, and attempting to educate can be seen as a challenge to that authority. For this reason, students of color may choose not to confront their coaches about their culturally incompetent guidance and instead simply follow their coaches' direction. Such acquiescence can make students feel as if they are performing stereotypically and inauthentically, which can negatively affect students of color. However, if students do choose to raise their concerns with their coach, their coaches may not be receptive to their feedback they may even react with hostility to student concerns. At best, students of color are likely to experience support without competence, at worst, they are likely to feel no support at all.

Both Lane and Sage described the challenges they encountered while working with their white coaches. In both cases, these challenges stemmed from their coaches being unwilling to adapt and adjust their team policies and coaching practices to accommodate the needs of students of color. Support without competence highlights how students of color can be successfully welcomed into speech teams through interpersonal support. However, when structural and operational procedures remain stagnant and resistant to change, students of color can feel like the support they are receiving lacks cultural competence. When this occurs, feelings of difference can persist and have a negative impact on students' feelings of connection and support. This

theme connects to two of my research questions by examining how forensics imposes itself on students of color and limits their expression.

Team dynamics help identify how the environment of collegiate speech has developed over time and grown into a larger structure that limits the expression of students of color. Oftentimes, predominately white environments can feel unwelcoming to students of color due to the racial power dynamics that exist in society. The discomfort students of color can feel in predominantly white spaces can be exacerbated by elements such as intrateam conflict and support without competence. However, these feelings can also be mitigated by adequate coach connection and team support. When looking at the speech community at large, team dynamics can act as a microcosm to examine what makes students of color feel as if they belong in speech and what inspires them to believe they do not.

Theme 6: Survival Strategies

Students of color experience many challenges in the speech community. However, *changes and transformation provide guidance for students of color to overcome those challenges. Some of the strategies students of color use as a tool of resistance are devised and used intentionally as an act of resistance, while others emerge unintentionally as the diversity in thought and perspective students of color bring to speech disrupt long-standing epistemologies that inform the activity*. The tactics students of color use to resist the various challenges they are presented with, both intentional and otherwise, allow students of color to survive in the activity. The survival of students of color creates change in the activity as the tactics they employ help challenge the structures that oppress students of color. This theme illustrates the different strategies students of color have created to reclaim their voices, and in doing so, create change in the activity.

Performing for POC

Though students of color face many challenges when they choose to participate in speech, many have developed tools to overcome those challenges. My research participants revealed how one of the ways they resist the oppressive forces that seek to limit their expression is to focus on performing for people of color. Performing for people of color acts as a form of resistance because rather than tailoring their performances to the predominately white audiences they are more likely to encounter, students of color choose to create performances that are tailored to the few people of color they will have as audience members. The choice to center people of color and disregard long-held communication standards like (dominant) audience analysis allows students of color to disrupt white supremacy by disregarding their white audience. Ty spoke to this idea of challenging white dominant perspectives, they explained,

> Realizing that I'm still performing for a certain group of people, like I'm performing for people of color, not for white judges and competitors. And like understanding that… the message isn't for that, and that kind of helped, because I was like, I don't have to pander to everyone and I needed to understand that.

This comment showcases how performing for people of color grants students of color the freedom to share messages that are not tailored to white audiences. With this freedom, students of color no longer feel as if they must sanitize their arguments or modify their performances to appease white audiences. They can simply focus on speaking about the messages they are passionate about. Choosing to perform for other people of color also frees students of color from the burden of creating understanding in white audiences. This idea was illustrated by the words of Ash when they stated,

> There are coaches that are very, very stuck in their ways… there are numerous judges that I've had that honestly, I dread performing for because at the end of the day I'm not performing for them. And I don't want to perform for them, because I know that they will never actually get it. And I can see that in their critiques, because their critiques don't seem like they're actually trying to better speech, or they're trying to better my speech. It seems like they are not accepting the way that I'm doing, and are unwilling to look past that.

Furthermore, when students of color choose to perform for people of color, they are able to speak more authentically. This allows students of color to not only perform for other people of color but also to perform for themselves. When students of color are able to abandon the pressure to perform for white audiences, they can speak to their own lived experiences as people of color. This idea was expressed by Rio, who explained, "[My] speech [was] so personal to me that I [didn't] want to appease anybody but myself and other [students of color like me] out there." Rio's remarks reveal how performing for people of color benefits students of color on a personal level. When students of color perform for people of color, they are also performing for themselves.

Choosing to decenter white audiences provides students of color the opportunity to center themselves as performers in the performance process. Instead of writing, blocking, and delivering their speeches through the lens of whiteness, students of color are able to perform as themselves unfiltered. Additionally, by speaking out and sharing their unfiltered personal experiences, students of color are able to carve a space out for themselves in the speech community. Eden elaborated on this idea of making space for oneself in the activity by stating, "I want to make it for me, and through my pieces I want to be able to do that. I want to make

forensics for me." In the speech community, students of color are both advocates for the experiences of their racial demographics in greater society, and for themselves in the microenvironment that is speech. When students of color feel empowered to speak up about their own experiences, even when they are aware they may face backlash, they are actively carving out a space for themselves and their voices within the speech community. As many forces seek to silence or limit the expression of students of color, their willingness to continue speaking up forces the speech community to adapt, change, and improve for students of color.

Finally, performing for people of color allows students of color to connect with other people of color in the process. Sharing these experiences allows students of color to build stronger connections and support systems with other people of color in the activity. These shared experiences make it possible for students of color to inspire each other and offer support to continue speaking up. Ty spoke on this idea when they revealed, "There was never… a [round] where competitors [didn't come] up to me after. And they are like… 'this literally happened to me.' It was always very cathartic … because for a while I believed, maybe it's just me." Ty's comment highlights how performances act as a touchpoint for students of color to build connection with each other. This connection provides students of color moments where they can discuss their experiences and realize that their individual experiences in speech are the product of systemic forces. When students of color share their experiences with each other, they build coalitions to deconstruct the forces that seek to silence their voices.

Such connections benefit students who are currently participating in speech by providing them with a community that understands the struggles they encounter in the activity. These performances help students of color fortify each other by acting as glimpses of what speech could be in the future. This idea was expressed by Ash, who explained,

> It was my [race/ethnicity] speech family… The final time I was able to perform those pieces is the time where my voice shines the most. There were so many [people of color] in the room, and my piece was about being [a person of color]. And so the way that we were able to connect, and the way that I was able to perform for no one else except for myself and for them was such an honest and raw version of my voice. And I attribute it to them in the room, and to that first year [POC] student in the back of the room, that's what I was performing for. That's who I wanted to talk to and talk with. That's who helped shape the voice in my performance itself.

It is the connection students of color make with each other that helps create later change in the activity, as students of color who have participated in speech and found their voice are able to inspire other students of color to do the same. Seeing other students of color challenging the norms of the activity can give other students the courage to do the same. Through their performances, students of color represent the possibility of change and free expression in a community that often makes students of color feel otherwise.

Performing for people of color is a tool frequently used by students of color in speech. The desire to create and perform stories and experiences that are representative of the lived experiences of students of color push them to perform for people of color, whether it is by performing to honor self or to inspire others. This theme relates to my research questions by illustrating how students of color resist the systems and structures that limit their expression.

Tools of resistance/breaking norms

Finally, students of color work to overcome the challenges they face in participating in speech and debate. These tools of resistance take on many forms to help students of color endure the mental and emotional fatigue that accompanies participation in this white-dominant activity.

Students of color have implemented these tools to resists the ways in which speech seeks to constrain how they speak, how they dress, the topics they speak about, and how they perform in-round.

Many of my research participants revealed the ways they dress at tournaments is a response to the norms and structures of the activity. This idea was exemplified by Ren, who explained,

> I try to wear really bright colors. I also wear a specific-sized heel to add to my height. . . . The idea of wearing gold… I didn't want to do it in high school, because I thought it was [stereotypic of my culture]… so I always wore silver jewelry, but now I only wear gold. It's a very small thing, super niche, but actually had a big impact on the way that I dress.

Ren's words illustrate the power that racial stereotypes can have on students of color and the way that they present themselves. However, their remarks also showcase how racial and ethnic pride can be expressed through the clothing and jewelry that students of color wear. The choice to wear clothing with cultural significance can increase student confidence. Cultural clothing can also subvert white expectations of professional dress and allow students to share their culture with the larger speech community.

What students of color choose to wear in competitive settings can be a tool of resistance. Similarly, what students choose not to wear in competition can also act as a tool of resistance. Lane revealed how the expectations that had been placed upon them early in their speech experience influenced their style of dress: "I used to always wear makeup because all of my upper classmen would tell me that femme presenting people need to wear makeup because it makes you better… and the last 2 years I completely stopped wearing makeup." The choice Lane made to no longer wear makeup acted as a tool for resistance. In speech, students are expected to

dress professionally. Historically, the standards for professional dress have been largely influenced by whiteness and gender roles. The expectations of who can, who should, and how to wear makeup has influenced the dress of students of color. Choosing to no longer participate in these expectations gives some power back to the students who choose not to abide by these expectations.

The ways in which students of color resists oppressive speech norms can also be seen in the way they choose to perform. How students of color choose to speak, they ways they choose to organize their speeches, and the events they choose to participate in can all become forces of resistance. Rio spoke to the ways that language choice can act as a tool for resistance when they stated,

> I was told by a white judge that maybe I should use the n-word in my piece, because "the white people laugh at it too much," which… I appreciate the concern. But I didn't choose to say nigga… just to appease White people. I chose to say the word nigga because I say the word nigga a lot of times when I talk to people every single day. I'm black, and I'ma fucking say it.

Students of color make intentional choices about the ways in which they speak about the issues presented in their speeches. Oftentimes, judges assume lack of intentionality on the part of students of color when they present their speeches. However, Rio's words illustrate how a performer's intention can simply be the desire to speak without having to adopt a more Eurocentric speaking style. Choosing to speak in one's own dialect or using language that is familiar can help students of color feel more comfortable in the competitive speech setting. Allowing students of color to speak as themselves without having to conform to "professional" norms allows them more opportunity to find and craft their own voices. Students of color feeling

the freedom to speak as themselves also resists the homogenization of voices in the speech community.

Furthermore, the ways students of color choose to craft their speeches can also act as a powerful tool of resistance. Students of color are able to resist norms and structural forces that constrain them by choosing to intentionally do what is not expected of them. Jo spoke to their experience resisting norms when they revealed, “I've been doing more in public address events, ads, persuasive, or info… the events, and like the literature that you use, and the blocking that you do, and you know, different things that put a spin on [norms].” In the face of challenges like event typecasting, choosing to participate in genres that do not fit those expectations can be a tool of resistance. Participating in these events can allow students to challenge the expectations the larger community has for them and allow them to pave a way for students of color who come after them. Additionally, choosing to do these events in new and innovative ways and attempting to develop different ways to approach these non-stereotypical genres can further subvert community norms.

The words of Rio and Jo showcase the power students of color have to resist speech norms and oppressive powers through performance. The performance choices students of color make has impact on the larger speech community and grants them the power to change their personal experiences as well as help change and reshape the norms that currently exist. How student of color perform can act as tools for resistance and change.

The tools of resistance students of color use out-of-round or outside of their performances are also crucial. The ways in which students of color are allowed to express themselves before and after they perform as well as in the hallways between rounds are constrained by community norms just as much as performance norms. White expectations of professionalism mandate the

ways in which students of color are permitted to behave. However students of color can choose not to abide by these expectations as an act of resistance. Skye expressed this idea by stating,

> There have been like different traditions that have, like, kind of fizzled out more… You're not supposed to scream and cheer… networking and presenting yourself in a certain way definitely has and will continue to josh on my experience because... I don't like pretending to be someone I'm not. So at tournaments, I'm not going to act a certain way or talk a certain way.

Though in some ways traditions and norms that govern the ways students behave outside of rounds have lessened, they are still present enough to make students of color feel as if they must become someone else to participate. When choosing not to participate in these norms, students of color resist these norms. By choosing to not modify their behavior or suppress their joy, students of color disrupt the speech community's definition of professionalism. This idea was continued by Ty, who recalled,

> The way that I've interacted with other people of color in the community is that, like this is a celebration for us… We're allowed to be loud. We're allowed to experience joy, and you know, brown and black joy is not the same as like, white joy, and the way we celebrate is not the same.

Ty's remarks illustrate how conforming to standards of professionalism outside of round can hurt students of color and prevent them from feeling as if they can truly be themselves and connect with other students of color. However, their assertion that students of color should be allowed to express their joy represents the spirit of students of color who choose to continue to express themselves uninhibited.

Skye and Ty showcase how students of color can feel constrained outside of their performances in competitive settings. Oftentimes the professional personas students of color are encouraged to adopt are at odds with their true expression. Students of color can feel like they need to either be more expressive or less expressive to connect with and appease the white majority in the speech community. When students of color choose to cheer or refrain from networking, they can destabilize the social norms of the speech community.

This chapter identified and analyzed my themes and addressed the research questions posed at the beginning of my research project. I have attempted to illustrate the experiences students of color encounter while participating in collegiate speech by listening to the stories of students of color in my participant pool. The students I interviewed for this project largely expressed that participating in speech has had a positive impact on them but the community requires continued growth to become a truly inclusive and accepting space. The following chapter will offer further examination of this analysis, in this section I will discuss implications and limitations of this research and provide potential avenues for future research that can continue with the completion of this project.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Looking back on my own experiences as a student of color in speech, this project was born from the challenges I encountered at that time and the experiences of other students of color I competed with. This research has made clear how the progress that has been made in the speech community has improved the experiences of students of color only incrementally. The responses received from my research participants indicate much still needs to be done to make speech the equitable community we advertise it to be. The experiences of my research participants provide insight into how students of color exist in speech, how the activity silenced them, and how they resist that silencing. The responses I reviewed help illustrate the various strategies students of color employ to persist in speech. Through this research, I have been able to determine the persistence strategies of current and former competitors and how the speech community can evolve to benefit students of color. After examining the importance of this research and my findings, it is time to examine how this research can inform our approaches to make speech a more equitable space. In this chapter, I discuss the implications of this research, examine the limitations of my research, and explore opportunities for further research.

Implications

The results of my analysis reveal implications for the study of students of color and their experiences in collegiate speech. This activity often touts itself as an equitable arena in which students of color and other minoritized students are able to participate without the fear of discrimination and bias. However, it seems the positioning of speech as an already equitable space has halted progress for many minoritized students. The responses from my participants indicate the speech community at large needs to reevaluate what it means to be an equitable space and how to make speech a location of safety for minoritized students. With these

implications but I give voice to the solutions students of color have been proposing for years, revealing what can be done structurally to improve the student of color experiences as well as what we as individuals can do to make the speech community more of what we believe it to be.

Judge Training

Initially, the responses from my participants indicate a need for improved judge training. Oftentimes, judge training is viewed as a tool for hired judges and not school judges or coaches. Judge training must become a tool for school judges and coaches to improve the feedback they provide to students of color. While the relationships students build with the coaches on their own teams inspired feelings of support in students, those same feelings did not translate to the relationships student of color had with the other coaches they interacted with in the community.

For many of these students the primary way they interacted with coaches outside of their team was through the ballot, with those coaches acting as their judges. Despite the supportive relationships coaches seemed to be able to build with the students of color on their own teams, they were unsuccessful in fostering connections with students of color outside of their teams. Seemingly, the same coaches who prop up their own students of color with compassion and empathy forget to extend those same perquisites to the students of color who compete against their teams. Or perhaps coaches who lead teams that lack racial diversity are unaware of the insensitivity in the comments they leave on the ballots of students of color.

The role of a coach in the forensics community is an important one. However, for the majority of the students they will interact within the community, they are not coaches - they are judges. Though many complaints about insensitivity on ballots stem from student of color interactions with *hired* judges, many students expressed they had similar struggles with *coaches* acting as judges as well. Too often, coaches and forensics alumni believe their prior experiences

and continued participation in the activity bar them from the necessity of judge training. However, it is critical that comprehensive judge training become a community-wide concern. Especially as hired judge numbers dwindle, coaches must be committed to refining and reevaluating their judging practices routinely as they become the majority of today's judging pool. Though judge training is recognized as a valuable tool, judge training is only required at a select number of tournaments, such as the National Forensic Association and Pi Kappa Delta.

Outside of the national season, there are no standardized judge training practices or requirements for judges to complete training to fulfill their roles. Many of my participants proposed judge training as a solution to the struggles they have faced in collegiate speech. Judge training must be seen as a tool for all judges, whether they are hired or school judges, graduate coaches or directors of forensics. Judge training should be an opportunity for judges to engage in self-reflexivity and challenge their assessment paradigms. Our current judge training materials do not encourage self-reflexivity so they must be reinvigorated.

One way these trainings can be reinvigorated is through the creation of new diversity trainings. Unfortunately, even when judge training materials are required, they often lack elements that ought to be included. Most judge training materials focus primarily on the functionality of a tournament and event descriptions, but these focuses do not prepare judges to appropriately assess the performances of minoritized students. Though the speech community recognizes implicit bias and its impact on how judges choose to assess the rounds they adjudicate (as evidenced by the virtually universal adoption of the implicit bias statements on ballots), implicit bias and cultural competence remain footnotes in judge training. Even as tournaments have begun to require Title IX training, they have yet to introduce cultural competency training. My participants proposed a comprehensive cultural competency training must be created and

included in judge training materials. This training should discuss what racially insensitive comments look like, how culture influences communication styles, and how racial power dynamics compound already present power dynamics between students and judges in-round.

Cultural competency training should be required at national tournaments in the same way Title IX training has been required. The speech community and its judges must recognize and reckon with the influence race has on the success of students in the speech community. With the implementation of diversity-driven judge trainings like cultural competency training, the speech community can begin to make progress in improving the experiences of students of color in-round and through the interactions they have with judges.

Recruiting Coaches and Judges of Color

Secondly, my participants highlighted the need for more coaches and judges of color. Many students of color have joined the speech community, but we still lack diversity in coaching staffs and judging pools. While my participants stated they felt support from their coaches, they did not feel as if they were able to fully connect with their white coaches specifically. Recruiting more coaches of color into the activity was proposed as a benefit for students of color and their experiences in the activity.

Coaches are a vital part of our activity – they are a source of guidance and comfort for many students. However, racial and cultural misunderstandings can complicate these relationships for students of color. As students of color work on performances that detail their experiences as people of color, they can feel disconnected from their coaches as they must educate their coaches on those lived experiences. Empathizing with the experiences of students of color is important, but there is no substitute for shared experiences. Students of color crave guidance for their performances from coaches who share their cultural background. Having

connection with coaches who share their racial and cultural backgrounds can also provide students with more support in their personal lives as well. When students of color encounter microaggressions and racism on their college campuses or in the speech community, coaches of color can provide support and guidance based on their own experiences as people of color in those spaces.

More coaches of color are needed in the speech community, and recruitment efforts for increasing diversity in the community must be focused on students *and* coaches. As the community begins to prioritize recruiting more coaches of color, coaches should build connections with coaches and alumni of color in the community. Building these connections will allow coaches to connect their students of color with volunteer coaches who more closely relate with their lived experiences. Connecting students of color with coaches of color should be a priority. Coaches should make more of an effort to reach out for assistance in supporting students of color.

Additionally, recruiting more coaches of color to coach will help increase the diversity of tournament judging pool. Recruiting more coaches of color will ultimately increase the number of judges of color a student of color has the chance to encounter in-round. However, simply recruiting more coaches of color is not enough, as recruiting more *judges* of color from outside of the coaching community is also important. Students of color want to share their messages with members of their own racial communities. The messages they want to share are often linked to their lived experiences as racialized people and they want to connection with the people who are judging those performances.

The way judges assess rounds is unquestionably linked to their own lived experiences. Students of color often find themselves performing for white judges. When performing pieces

about their experiences as people of color, students often feel as if they are not understood by their judges. Having more judges of color in the judging pool can greatly improve how confident students feel in-round. Some of my participants recommended having at least one judge of color assigned to out-round judging panels and other recommended offering more pay to hired judges of color. Ultimately students of color want to see themselves reflected in the people who are viewing and assessing their performances.

Although more diverse coaching staffs and more diverse judging panels can be beneficial to students of color, we can't be satisfied with superficial diversity. Recruiting coaches or judges of one marginalized racial demographic does not serve all students of color. People of color are not a monolith, and although we have similar experiences due to our positions in society as non-white, students of color should see coaches and judges from their own racial and cultural background in the activity.

Providing Institutional support

Finally, students want more institutional programs and initiatives that are aimed at improving the experiences of students of color. Students suggested opportunities for improvement regionally and nationally. For many students of color, diversity is lacking not only on their speech teams but in their competitive region. To improve the experiences of students of color, my participants proposed the need for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) coordinators involved with their teams. This role would act as a touchpoint for students of color to seek out extra support outside of their coaching staff. This role would also accompany DEI trainings for coaches and students. Many college campuses already have DEI coordinator roles in place, and making them more accessible and involved with speech teams would be a benefit to all students.

Providing students of color with extra support from DEI coordinators on college campuses and connecting speech teams more closely with Multicultural Centers that are already housed on college campuses can provide students of color with additional institutional support as minoritized students on their speech teams and on college campus at large. Support from speech teams is beneficial to students of color, but support from campus entities that specialized in DEI can help students of color when they are struggling with racial insensitivity on their own teams. Working more closely with DEI coordinators provides both students and coaches with extra tools to recruit and retain students of color.

Additionally, students desire more institutional support from the national speech organizations. Governing bodies like the National Forensics Association (NFA) and the American Forensics Association (AFA) need to create more innovative initiatives for diversity, equity, and inclusion. While NFA has appointed a DEI committee, AFA has yet to establish a DEI committee. Students want more from the DEI committees that were established to improve DEI in the speech community and at national tournaments. Students just want their voices to be heard and for the national organizations to make an effort to implement the suggestions they have for improving the activity. Some of my participants recommended establishing a student-run DEI committee to help amplify the voices of students of color in the activity. More than anyone, students of color know what to do to improve the experiences of students of color in collegiate speech. Institutionally, students of color should be given a space to share their thoughts and proposals for change as well as have the power to implement those changes.

Additionally, my participants proposed a need for stronger protections for students at tournaments and after tournaments have ended. At tournaments, students are at risk of seeing performances that are potentially triggering. To help prevent this, students have recommended

including content warnings on schematics and posting. With the widespread use of services like Speechwire, including content warnings on postings could be an easy fix. All students would benefit from the implementation of content warnings on schematics. With this addition, students and judges would be able to assess before a round starts if they are able to spectate a performance. Content warnings have been adopted in the speech community to keep spectators safe, and this addition would only make the community safer when attending tournaments.

Keeping students safe at tournaments has become an increasing concern for the speech community in recent years, ensuring students have the opportunity to leave the room with the adoption of open-door policies, for example. However, little has been done to help protect students *after* their rounds have ended. Some of my participants recommended introducing ballot blocks to the Speechwire service. With this implementation, ballots that contain slurs or inappropriate comments would be redacted so students would not have to read those comments. This would spare students from having to read overly disparaging comments about themselves or their performances. Furthermore, if a judge has written ballots that contain offensive or insensitive comments, students would have the ability to report these ballots and appeal for permanent judge blocks. When judges leave hurtful comments on ballots there is often little recourse. Ballot blocks and judge barring would give students the power to combat hurtful comments and prevent judges from leaving those comments in the future.

Allowing students a quick and easy way to report insensitive ballots would allow students to have more agency in their experiences and protect themselves. With the support from organizations like NFA and AFA in creating these services, more students will have the agency and support to combat insensitivity and make change within the speech community that will benefit all minoritized students and make the speech community a more equitable space.

These are just a few of the recommendations students have for improving the speech community. With time these suggestions may transform the speech community into a space that is safer and more welcoming to students of color. If the speech community is committed to DEI, safety, and improvement; these implications are a place to start reimagining and rebuilding the community into a truly safe and equitable space.

Limitations

Perhaps the biggest limitation of my research was my ability to get in contact with would-be participants. The region where I attend graduate school is not known for its racial diversity and can be considered one of the least diverse regions in the activity. The lack of diversity in my region made it more difficult for me to get in contact with students of color because there were fewer students of color with whom I was able to promote my research. My recruiting method of sending calls over email also presented challenges to recruiting the racially diverse participant pool I desired. My method to recruit was to simply put out calls for participants and to allow potential participants to indicate interest in my research. I was reluctant to openly recruit participants as I feared I might insert bias into my research with whom I chose to recruit. While this method allowed me to mitigate my own bias in recruiting, busy schedules, traveling to tournaments, and other additional extracurriculars meant many of these email calls were perhaps overlooked by both students and coaches. Despite sending various calls out to the community, it was a challenge to get in contact with many students of color for this reason my participant pool is smaller than I anticipated. This smaller participant pool limited the diversity of the experiences I was able to document in my research.

Of the students of color I was able to get in touch with, many of them identified with similar racial demographics. With this research, I wanted to get in contact with as many students

of color as possible to better represent the experiences of students of color broadly, and the unique experiences of specific racial demographics as well. However, many of my research participants identified as Asian/Asian American or Black. Again, due to my recruiting method, I did not seek to control the demographic makeup of my participant pool. For this reason, my pool was not as diverse as it could have been. Looking at racial demographics of students of color who did reach out with interest in my research, it may indicate that students of color of these demographics have more grievances to discuss or have experienced more racial discrimination in the activity. However, it may also be due to these racial demographics comprising a larger population within the activity than some other racial demographics.

Additionally, many of the participants I interviewed came from the same region. While there were a few outliers, it was difficult for me to recruit participants from a variety of districts. Many of the participants I spoke to competed in less diverse, more white-dominant regions where seeing other competitors of color is uncommon. This lack of interest from students of color who do compete in more racially diverse areas may be attributed to the comfortability they feel in the regions they compete in. For the students of color I did interview, many of them expressed feelings of unbelonging either in on their teams, in their districts, or in the activity at large. Perhaps students from more racially diverse areas did not feel these same feelings of unbelonging so they did not feel inspired to contribute their experiences to this research.

Suggestions for Future Research

Based on my work in this thesis, I propose two opportunities for continued research on the topic of race in forensics. First, many of my participants were students of color who participated on predominately white teams and attended predominately white institutions. This presents the opportunity to examine if the experience in speech is different for students of color

who are on teams that are predominately non-white or who attend universities that are predominately non-white. For example, interviewing students who attend historically Black colleges or universities (HBCUs) could provide an important comparison point to examine how participation in speech is racialized differently, or similarly, depending on team and campus racial demographics. This research can help us better understand the role of university and team racial diversity on the overall experiences of students of color in speech. Furthermore, the speech world can be used to better understand how whiteness is codified into academic spaces more broadly. By exploring the feelings of students of color in predominately non-white settings we can better understand how lacking racial diversity impacts the experiences of students of color in academia at large.

Secondly, many of the participants I spoke to had no experiences with coaches of color. Of the students who did have coaches of color, none of the students indicated that the coach of color they were working with was a director of forensics. While a few had assistant directors of forensics who were people of color, most indicated the coaches of color they were working with were volunteer coaches. The lack of coaches of color in the activity is an avenue for further research to understand what impact working with coaches of color has on students of color as well as how directors of color may impact students of color's feelings of belonging.

Conclusion

As a student of color, I experienced many challenges in the speech community because of my race. Oftentimes, I felt like an outsider looking in when participating in the activity. I felt like my experiences were misunderstood, and I frequently witnessed my experiences being drastically different from my white counterparts. While some progress has been made to improve the experiences of students of color, more progress still needs to be made.

This research provides just a small exploration of the solutions students of color have to improve the speech community. If the speech community is committed to becoming an equitable space, we must listen to students of color and create a seat at the table for them in our ongoing efforts to create a community that truly serves its students. If nothing else, this thesis should encourage coaches to reevaluate how they can better serve their students of color. Students of color are only a small minority of the speech community, but it is vital they are able to speak without fear for their own benefit and the benefit of the speech community.

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