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# Sit, Stand, Speak: Examining the Perceptions of the Basic Public Speaking Student on Normative Forensic Practices and their Effect on Competitor Credibility in Oratory

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Sit, Stand, Speak:  
Examining the Perceptions of the Basic Public Speaking Student on  
Normative Forensic Practices and their Effect on Competitor Credibility in Oratory

By  
Katie M. Brunner

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Fine Arts  
In  
Communication Studies  
Forensics

Minnesota State University, Mankato

Mankato, MN

May 2015

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

This thesis has been examined and approved.

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### **Abstract**

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This paper examines basic public speaking students' perceptions forensic competitor credibility based on normative factors present within the forensic community. Anecdotal and experiential evidence provided this researcher with reason to believe that the unwritten rules and normative expectations of forensics were so far-removed from what students were used to seeing in their classrooms and in the media, that they could have a negative impact on a competitor's ethos, from the basic public speaking students' perspective. This research was performed in an attempt to determine whether these anecdotal and experiential assumptions were accurate and also to gain insight into the how students were conceptualizing ethos in public speaking. Students were recruited from Communication Studies 100 & 102 classrooms to participate in focus groups, in which they were shown three persuasive speaking national finalists from the 2013 American Forensics Association national tournament. Students were then asked a series of discussion questions based on the normative expectations connected to persuasive speaking (i.e. business-professional attire, formal posture/gestures, language use, topic choice, memorization, and speech structure) to determine whether these normative factors had an effect on how students perceived the competitors' credibility (ethos). Students' responses were analyzed to determine that the normative expectations, except in the areas of memorization and nonverbal communication (i.e. posture and gesturing), were found to positively impact a competitor's credibility. However, further inductive critical discourse analysis revealed three intriguing themes regarding the students'

conceptualization of ethos: *professionalism as assumed competence, high credibility/low identification, and gendered expectations of appropriateness*. These findings indicate numerous critical implications regarding how teaching and coaching practices alike may perpetuate capitalistic assumptions of professionalism, power, and the meaning of success.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to say a huge thank you to faculty within the Communication Studies Department at Minnesota State University, Mankato for helping me through this process and for all of your help in my academic and professional life. Specifically, I would like to thank Jim Dimock for the countless hours spent hashing out ideas in your office (or sketching them out on a board in some classroom) and for always being there when I need a good cry or some sweets. Additionally, I would like to thank Chris Brown for all your help, specifically with choosing and understanding my method of research and just for being there when I needed you the most. I also want to thank Kirsti Cole for the excellent insight into additional resources that helped shape and justify my research. Finally, I would not have been able to do my research without the assistance of Leah White and Larry Schnoor, who provided the resource videos for my focus groups and also Aaron Dimock, who helped talk me through the difficult process of choosing an appropriate analysis method. Please accept my most sincere gratitude for all of your assistance in this long, but rewarding, process.

Additionally, it is often those who are in the background—those who support us in the little things—who get forgotten and I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to my colleagues in the department, for always being there when I needed to vent and for your helpful feedback in my scholarly work. Also, to my family, specifically my mother, who has always been there to listen and support me in everything that I do. You are the reason I am where I am. Finally, I must thank the person who has been there fighting with me throughout the past two semesters, my partner Wesley. The one who made sure I didn't starve or lose my mind as researched, typed, edited, or dug through hours of focus

group transcriptions while working on my analysis in the car on a 12 hour road trip/job interview. You kept me laughing, and your love and unfailing support are the real reason I survived. I could never find the words to thank you enough. I love you.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

I have been involved with the forensic community in some capacity for over 10 years. My experience varied greatly, beginning with participation at my high school in the rural community of Pembine, Wisconsin to becoming a graduate forensic coach and pursuing my Master of Fine Arts degree with the intention of securing a position as an Assistant Director of Forensics when I graduate. Throughout all of these unique experiences, I have always known forensics would be something that would help me throughout the rest of my life. I knew, even when I didn't know exactly how, it would help get me to where I needed to be in life; more than music, theatre, or any sports activity I was involved in. This was an activity even my naïve 16 year-old-self could see would pay off in the long run. So through the stress, the disappointment, and the chaotic journey, every forensicator is well aware of, this was the thought that kept me going.

During my undergraduate degree, my involvement with the forensic team was the single most important thing I accomplished, and that had nothing to do with competitive success. Actually, I was never anything more than regionally successful during my time as an undergraduate. This was partly due to my own lack of initiative and motivation, which was a useful lesson to learn in itself. It was also because I always saw a different kind of value in what I was doing. I was always intimately connected with the pieces I chose to speak about and, regardless of their level of success; I found great satisfaction in the opportunity to just be able to perform them. Furthermore, I saw extrinsic benefits of my involvement in forensics in the form of my ability to present in my classes, to speak up in large groups when I didn't agree with something, and to pursue action in my community, church, and workplace. It was the educational benefits—the ability to form

arguments and communicate my ideas, the ability to structure and write research papers and speeches, and the verbal and nonverbal communication skills acquired through numerous practice sessions and competitions that really meant the most to me when all was said and done. These were the skills that allowed me to get into graduate school. These were the skills that allowed me to pursue a field (teaching) which will now become my career. I can't imagine getting up and trying to teach my classes without the background that being in forensics has given me. So, ultimately, this activity has affected my life in ways I wasn't even aware of until I experienced them, which emphasizes the monumental benefits of this activity as a whole.

It was these experiences with forensics that prompted me to pursue research within this activity, which I have found to have had such a profound value in my life and the lives of the students I've coached and competed with. Jorgenson (2011) made the following claim with regard to person experience and research:

What we see and hear in fieldwork settings is affected by our backgrounds, proclivities, and social locations. These attributes enter into the research process at every stage, guiding our formulation of research problems, our conduct "in the field" as we present ourselves to participants and judge the relevance of their responses to our questions, and later our reporting of findings. (p. 115)

My personal experiences allowed me to contextualize the subjects that I teach to my classes and have prompted me to explore research avenues that will enrich both the forensic community and the communication discipline as a whole. As an active participator in the role of graduate teaching assistant and graduate forensics coach, I am able to see how certain factors interact in teaching and forensics, which has enriched my

understand of communication overall. So it is easy for me to express to my students the importance of communication. I don't have to stretch the truth when I tell them it will literally encompass every area of their lives, be it professional, or relational, or otherwise. I am able to show public speaking students the value of these core principles, many of which I have learned from judging and coaching forensics. Kelly, Paine, Richardson, and White (2014) argued "collegiate forensics is, at its core, an extremely effective model for teaching communication principles" (p. 41). I can attest to this. Many of the strategies that I employed as an instructor of the Fundamentals of Communication course, especially approaches to speech development and delivery, were derived from my experience as a forensic competitor or a coach. These experiences, and the critical reflection on their relationship, are what prompted me to perform this research.

### **Problem Statement**

My teaching techniques have been influenced greatly by the assumption that forensic speeches represent communication "best practices." However, this assumption was challenged during my second semester as a graduate teaching assistant. I brought in a competitor on the forensics team to give her persuasive speech as an example for my class, who were preparing for their own advocacy speeches. When she had finished and left the room, I asked the class for their feedback of the speech and they surprised me by being far more critical than I originally thought they would be. However, they weren't critical of the speaker's speech, but rather, had much to say about her delivery style and structure, as well as other nonverbal indicators that made them question the speaker's credibility in presenting her topic. For example, as this student's speech dealt with issues of minimum wage, one student stated he would "never have believe that she had ever

worked a day of minimum wage in her whole life” because of her professional dress and language choices, as well as her vocal tone. Others agreed, citing the “staged” transition walks and gestures as unnatural and distracting. Their feedback, while respectful, exemplified a challenge of my long-held beliefs about forensic pedagogy and what practices are being emphasized within the community and how these practices align with what I was teaching in my classroom.

My own experience has been echoed in conversations with colleagues and other faculty members. This anecdotal evidence is also represented through a recount of personal experience by Nance (2003) about inviting a forensics student into her basic public speaking course:

The speech had a clear, linear organization. It was the instructor’s contention that this speech represented exemplary public speaking. The student audience was shocked! Their overwhelming response was that the speech was “cold”, “canned”, and “impersonal.” To them, the presentation style seemed overly choreographed and the language too technical for a student audience. While they were respectful of the instructor’s right to her opinion, they refused to accept this speech as an example of their “ideal.” (p. 454)

While it is important to acknowledge that this recounted experience happened in a class predominated by students of color (Nance, 2003), this is a commonly expressed assumption among instructors of the basic course, regardless of racial, gender, age or socioeconomic class diversity in their classrooms. Brand (2000) argued that delivery techniques and other norms that would not be rewarded in classrooms or professional situations are being openly encouraged in the forensic community. These critiques

indicate serious implications regarding the need for reconsideration of normative practices in forensics. Therefore, it is important to determine whether these assumptions are a representation of reality. Furthermore, I believe the basic public speaking students' experience and perceptions of forensic speakers can unlock an un-tapped resource of information and allow us to see what they perceive to be "best practices" (Duncan, 2013) in communication. If we wish to understand how to best serve *all* our students, we must be willing to critically examine our practices as teachers and as coaches. As teaching strategies in the basic communication course align with some areas of forensic pedagogy and greatly differ in others, forensic speeches offer an intriguing context in which to consider student perceptions of communication.

### **Justification**

Criticism of forensics has been around as long as forensics. In Plato's (1989) dialogue "The Gorgias," Socrates criticized Gorgias—perhaps the world's first impromptu speaker—for teaching his students how to speak well without actually knowing anything important to speak about. This has set the foundation for criticism of competitive performance for over two millennia. Dimock (2008) pointed out that even the term "oral interpretation" was developed in response to criticism that the reading and performance of literature was intellectually and theoretically vacuous and although communication studies as a discipline was founded in part by forensic and debate coaches it wasn't long before serious scholars became critical of the activity. Kully (1972) concluded that "not only has the relationship between speech communication and forensics cooled considerably during the past few years, but it will continue to deteriorate" (p. 193). Burgoon (1989) confirmed that deterioration, contending "there

exists a chasm between communication and speech” (p.303). More recently, scholars, administrators and professors have critiqued the activity for losing sight of the educational goals of forensics in lieu of competitive goals (Holm & Miller, 2004; Burnett, Brand, & Meister, 2003).

Recently however, the National Forensics Association has sought to acknowledge such criticisms and move forensic practice and evaluation “toward pedagogical prerogatives fully relevant and strongly tied to the foundations of the Communication discipline” (Kelly, Paine, Richardson, & White, 2014, p. 38). A formative analysis of each category of events in forensics was implemented to help coaches and judges shape the *purpose* of these events to more fully reflect “root principles and rhetorical foundations” and “resist replication of past performances” (p. 38). Furthermore, there are many scholars who would defend competition as a beneficial means of supplementing and even enhancing educational practices (Duncan, 2013; Hinck, 2003). There has been a strong push to move away from the argument of education *or* competition and just focus on grounding the activity and the competitive standards in practices that reflect effective communication pedagogy. Hinck (2003) argued, “through forensics competition students begin to understand how competing ideas shape political and organizational outcomes” (p. 65). He argued further that competition enhances the educational benefits through mentoring opportunities, encouraging perseverance, and teamwork—as long as these competitive goals are centered within the educational foundation. So, many scholars are encouraging a more critical reflection on forensics practices, to make sure that we are connecting to the discipline and providing our students with the most beneficial

experience we can. This research is an attempt to gauge whether our efforts are succeeding.

Given that forensics is situated within both the field of communication and in the larger context of institutionalized higher education, I begin with the assumption that the conversation regarding the educational outcomes and the unwritten rules and norms of forensics should be grounded in communication theory and particularly in the subdiscipline of organizational communication. Craig and Muller (2007) defined organizations as “a dense overlay of many conversations, each oriented to some phase of activity” (p. 400). The relevant distinction I am making here is between organizations on one hand and groups or teams on the other. In my experience, forensics competitors, coaches, and other participants typically describe forensics organizations as teams and this terminology is also consistent with the literature on groups and teams. For example, Dainton and Zelle (2001) define groups and teams as “three or more individuals working toward a common purpose” and “a coordinated group who works together” (p. 77-78). I counter that the use of the word team is misleading. First, forensics teams do not have the self-direction typical of group and team communication. A coach or administrator holds considerable authority over the team. While team atmosphere and culture may contribute to team’s overall success, individual accomplishment and collective accomplishment are at best only loosely correlated. Therefore, I contend that forensics teams fall under Dainton and Zelle’s definition of an organization or a “group of people who coordinate activities to achieve individual and collective goals” (p. 100). Communication within forensics teams is oriented toward the three functions of relationship, organizing, and change (Shockley-Zalabak, 2002); however, it is within the



organizing function that the problem within the organizational communication in forensics is revealed.

Paine (2005) argued that there are unwritten rules in the forensics world which “possess tremendous power, functioning to separate the ‘in-group’ who know and follow the rules from the ‘out-group’ who don’t have access to (or deliberately choose to flout) these assumptive guidelines” (p. 79). These norms include but are not limited to: the expectation of professional attire (suits and ties for men, skirt suits and heels for women); linear organizational structure of speeches and the use of academic language; gestures (often tied to expectations of feminine and masculine power) and transitional movement; topic selection and memorization. Normative practices vary based on the type of competitive event and, because the expectations and norms for public address events (e.g. informative speeches, persuasive speeches, and communication analysis) and interpretive performance (e.g. prose, poetry, program oral interpretation, etc.). In this study, I will be looking at platform speaking, specifically persuasive speaking sometimes called original oratory. This is justifiable as public address speeches best correlate with skills taught in basic communication and public speaking courses.

As previously noted, much of the anecdotal criticism of forensics that my research will consider concerns speaker credibility. Aristotle (1946) discussed the importance of ethos: “Persuasion is achieved by the speaker’s personal character when the speech is spoken as to make us think him credible” (p. 1356). When an audience questions a speaker’s ethos, the speaker’s ability to accomplish his or her persuasive goal is compromised. Moline (1988) argued: “Speakers can show us inadvertently that they did not believe what we took them to believe when they initially persuaded us. This is

sufficient to destroy credibility, and with it, the belief one was persuaded to hold” (p. 261). In the anecdotal criticisms of forensic persuasive speaking, normative practices could inadvertently make it seem as though the speaker does not believe in what they are speaking about (e.g. someone who has never worked minimum wage arguing to lower the minimum wage) and these perceptions, whether accurate or not, will affect a speaker’s ability to give a successful persuasive speech. Frankly, these claims have been made within the community as recently as the 2015 coaches meeting at the National Forensic Association (NFA) national tournament in Ohio, when a former competitor argued that competitors are often negatively perceived by those outside of the community based on normative evaluations. Claims such as these shape the conversations we are having within the forensic community, and subsequently, the important decisions that are made based on these conversations. Therefore, it is important that we consider them critically, and I will explain how my research can serve this purpose in the subsequent sections.

### **Rationale**

Forensics coaches, directors and assistant directors have all felt the pressure for years to legitimize forensics scholarship within the Communication field. Brand (2000) argued that we need to “create alliances within the discipline, to promote and disseminate research and to find ways to extend the lifespan of the director of forensics, including tenure, promotion and other evaluation standards” (p. 2). In order to do this, we have to have measurable research to present and publish. Although there are exceptions, such as Allen, Berkowitz, Hunt and Louden’s (1999) meta-analysis which established a link between forensics and higher levels of critical thinking, it is important to note that much of the criticism of forensics—both negative and positive—is grounded in personal

experience and reflection rather than analysis of data. Even Allen et al.'s study isn't a measure of public speaking skills but of critical thinking. There is thus undoubtedly a call for an examination of forensics as communication pedagogy. Forensic professionals have been criticized on the grounds that the majority of our publications are considered "think" pieces. These essays look specifically at different events or practices, but fail to connect these with real-world practices or communication theory. Furthermore, Ryan (1998) argued from his perspective as the editor for the *National Forensic Journal* that the National Communication Association conference is overflowing with different forensics panels, however, these are mostly discussion-based, and rarely feature completed research papers. Brand (2000) discussed how forensic professionals are under so much pressure from the tasks associated with running a team that they have little time to produce scholarship, and even when they do, it "rarely takes the next step to become a publication" (p. 5). This is a valid concern that indicates a unique responsibility for all forensic professionals. My research is an attempt to address these concerns, by examining this assumption that is based purely on anecdotal evidence through the use of focus group research.

Given the nature of the anecdotal evidence, I wish to examine whether normative practices such as memorization, language, linear organization, rehearsed gestures and transition walks make students in introductory level public speaking courses more or less willing to accept the ethos of the forensics student in oratory. Specifically, I am interested in determining how students felt about the language and structure speakers chose to use, which aspects of the speakers' nonverbal communication they found effective or ineffective (i.e. whether the speakers' appearance or body language affected their

credibility) and whether the students were able to identify with the speakers. Finally, I wanted to see if they recognized techniques from their own public speaking class and how they perceived these techniques. Therefore, I seek to answer the following research questions:

RQ 1: What are the factors that affect whether or not basic public speaking students see a speaker as credible?

RQ 2: Do the normative practices affect how the basic public speaking student perceives a forensic speaker? If so, how?

RQ 3: Do normative practices in forensics line up with what students are learning in the basic public speaking course?

### **Relevance**

This area of research is significant within the forensic community because it allows for a critical examination of the normative practices in forensics and whether they are detrimental to students. Furthermore, this research is relevant to the communication discipline as it allows us to determine the forensic practices that are visible in communication classrooms and how students are reacting to them. Initially, Millsap (1998) argued that much of the literature calls forensics events out as being too formulaic or “cookie cutter” (p. 31). By perpetuating the reproduction of these unwritten rules, and rewarding them with competitive success, the forensic community is reproducing cookie cutter competitors as well. Hada (1999) defined this process as *cloning*. He stated: “Cloning in forensics refers to the automated, hypnotic, robotic, meticulously imitative approach to performances, especially in public discourse and interpretation, but also in debate” (p. 33). In the context of the communication discipline, it is important to consider

which forensic practices are being held up as best practices and critically examine the justification behind these practices. My research seeks to glean some insight into the communication practices that basic public speaking students consider effective and why they consider them so.

In Chapter two, I will review the literature relevant to speaker credibility; normative practices, power, and control; and forensics and the basic communication course. Chapter three provides and elaborates on the methodology and data analysis techniques I will use for this research. Chapter four will examine the results that I discovered through applying the analysis techniques to the data set on an inductive level. Chapter 5 discusses the implications of this research, particularly in the areas of perception and what we can glean from the way that students are communicating about credibility. Finally, Chapter 6 examines the limitations of this research and areas that this research could be expanded on in the future both in forensic research and Communication scholarship in general.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

To gain a more thorough understanding of this the perceived tension between forensic's competitive norms and perceived speaker credibility, I examined research in the areas of speaker credibility; normative practices, power, and control; and forensics as pedagogy. As mentioned in Chapter 1, **credibility (ethos)** is one of the most important factors in persuasive speaking because as Aristotle (1946) argued, the speaker must establish the audience's trust in order to persuade. While pathos (emotional appeals) and logos (logical appeals) are also important to consider, my principle concern in this thesis is ethos so while this review of the literature touches on pathos and logos, the thrust of the review is directed at factors related to credibility. Additionally, I will examine research on **the relationship between normative practices and power and control in organizations**, as this is representative of the purpose they serve in forensics. Paine (2005) argued that "in the context of forensics, the rules which govern the activity are relatively few—but the norms which operate on the competitive circuit are legion" (p. 80). It is important to examine the role that norms play in the forensic community to determine why they are so prevalent and relied upon so heavily in coaching and judging situations. Paine argued further, "the vast majority of an individual's behavior at a tournament is subject to reward or censure under the operation of the unwritten rules of this activity" (p. 81). Finally, I will consider research on **forensics as pedagogy**. It is important to examine how our practices are aligning with what it being taught in the classroom (Kelly, Paine, Richardson, & White, 2014) for many different reasons, including: legitimizing forensics within Communication departments, rooting forensic practices in expectations of the Communication discipline itself, and ensuring student

success in the classroom and in the future (Holm & Miller, 2004; Kelly, et. al, 2014; Brand, 2000; Burgoon, 1989). Therefore, I will examine the research on how communication pedagogy is prioritized both in the classroom and in forensics. All of these areas of research are pertinent to the discussion on perceptions of credibility and where these perceptions may come from, so I will direct the first section of the literature review to examining research on credibility.

### **Speaker Credibility**

One of the greatest hurdles for the persuasive speaker in forensics to overcome is establishing speaker credibility. Forensic orators take on the responsibility of advocating for “socially significant topics” (Kelly, Paine, Richardson, & White, 2014, p. 45) which are, often, controversial in nature and require the critical consideration of both speaker and audience. O’Keefe argued “there are requirements for the sender, the means, and the recipient to consider something persuasive” (as cited in Dainton & Zelle, 2011, p. 124). One of the most significant requirements for the sender to consider is how to establish credibility with his or her audience. In order to be considered a credible persuasive speaker in the forensic community, students have to consider numerous elements, ranging from establishing a connection with their audience, to the considering normative expectations, such as attire, language choices, and gesturing. However, to establish the expectations of speaker credibility in persuasive speaking in general, it is important to look at the historical research that has been done on this subject, namely Aristotle’s (1946) conceptualization of ethos and its significance to rhetoric.

### **Aristotle and the Origins of Ethos**

The history of ethos begins with Aristotle. In his seminal work on persuasion, *The Rhetoric*, Aristotle (1946) identified three modes of persuasion: ethos, “which focuses on the personal character of the speaker;” pathos, or the ability to use emotional appeals to put the “audience in a certain frame of mind;” and logos, which focuses on the proof, or logic, “apparent in the words of the speech itself” (p. 1356). Effective persuasive arguments include all three modes of proof but this work focuses on ethos, or a speaker’s ability to establish, character, trustworthiness—in short, credibility with their audience.

Ethos refers to proof that comes from the speaker’s credibility. Aristotle (1946) claimed, “Persuasion is achieved by the speaker’s personal character when the speech is spoken as to make us think him credible” (p. 1356). Scheidel (1973) commented and expanded upon this claim by arguing there are two types of credibility: one type which is “possessed by the speaker prior to giving the speech” and one type which “can be developed” through the construction and delivery of that speech (p. 28). This prior ethos is something with which forensics competitors must contend. Students who develop a reputation for being likeable (or unlikeable), ethical (or unethical), competitively successful (or unsuccessful) and similar aspects of character will obviously have a greater prior ethos which will give them a competitive advantage. This prior ethos may also include things outside a speaker’s control such as, but not limited to, race and gender. Instruction in persuasion, however, while acknowledging the importance of prior ethos, focuses on what is teachable and learnable—the dimensions of ethos which are performed in the speech. I will focus instead the second type of credibility, the one that can be developed by the speaker, through three main strategies: establishing trustworthiness, providing evidence, and elements of speech delivery.



### **Establishing Trustworthiness**

The successful advocate must be someone the audience finds trustworthy.

Golden, Berquist, and Coleman (1976) argued that “the Greeks conceived of the perfect speaker as one who possessed intelligence, a virtuous character, and goodwill” (p. 37). Integrity is judged by how truthful we perceive a speaker to be and whether or not we perceive them as acting in our best interests. Thus, if an audience feels they are being lied to or manipulated, they are less likely to find a speaker credible and less likely to be persuaded. Aristotle (1946) also made the argument that “we believe good men more fully and readily than others: this is true generally, whatever the question is, and absolutely true where exact certainty is impossible and opinions are divided” (p. 1356). This has been of special interest regarding forensics competition because, as many researchers (Scott & Birkholt, 1996, Elmer & Van Horn, 2003) have pointed out, forensics is an incredibly subjective activity. Paine (2005) argued “by its very nature, forensics demands that judges make largely ‘subjective’ decisions—the very performance that one judge loves will be severely criticized by another critic” (p. 81). It is hard for speakers to gauge where their audiences stand (agreeing or disagreeing) with their topics, and since the same manuscript is performed throughout a season, inevitably speakers will deliver the same speech to both sympathetic and hostile audiences. Thus, they may be introducing an argument upon which opinions are very divided, and they need to do everything that they can do to maintain credibility if they are going to have any chance of changing their audiences’ (and judges’) attitude. Dainton and Zelley (2011) argued that “attitudes are learned evaluations; they are not something that people are born with; as such, attitudes are changeable” (p. 122). So, even if the competitor is speaking on a

contentious issue, they will have more of a chance of shifting attitudes within their audiences if they are perceived as credible.

Turk (1985) stated that “the most important factor in credibility is that you should be perceived as honest and fair” (p. 216). Speakers need to show their audiences that they are presenting honest, justified arguments that are meant to change their attitudes or perceptions without trying to manipulate them. Aristotle (1946) argued that this can be hindered in three ways: the speaker can form a false opinion due to lack of adequate information; he or she can form a true opinion, but not disclose it or alter it in some manipulative way, or they can be “both sensible and upright, but not well disposed to their hearers, and may fail in consequence to recommend what they know to be the best course” (p. 1378). Furthermore, we must consider how pathos is inextricably linked to ethos in this area. Kastely (2004) argued “because audiences bring particular histories and interests with them, ethos and pathos cannot be merely supplemental modes of persuasion but rather are essential for the making of practical and aesthetic judgements” (p. 224). If an audience believes that their emotions are being manipulated to further the speaker’s goals, they will be less likely to find the speaker trustworthy. In addition to this, Loseke (2009) argued that an audience perceives emotional codes embedded in culture: “as cultural ways of feeling, emotion codes are sets of ideas about what emotions are appropriate to feel when, where, and toward whom or what, as well as how emotion should be outwardly expressed” (pp. 498-499). While ethos and pathos are generally understood as two separate modes of persuasion, they are concomitant in that if the audience views the speaker’s emotion as genuine and/or appropriate, the speaker will appear more credible. If the audience believes a speaker’s emotion to be inappropriate

relative to the subject of the speech, credibility will be reduced. Therefore, we must also examine how trustworthiness is intimately linked to two additional concerns that speakers need to be aware of when considering their credibility: providing evidence and speech delivery.

### **Providing Evidence**

Rybacki and Rybacki (2008) argued that “experimental observations, statistics, expert opinion, personal testimony, matters of common knowledge, or previously established claims make up the pool of material used as grounds in an argument” (p. 89). Competitors are expected to provide evidence in all public address events as both a means of enhancing credibility and also an ethical responsibility. Kelly, Paine, Richardson, and White (2014) discussed the “basic ethical requirement of public speaking that speakers be as fully informed as possible concerning the topics they discuss with audiences” (p. 46). Forensics students are also “responsible for evaluating the materials gathered in terms of their accuracy, credibility, relevance, and so on” (Verderber & Verderber, 2005, p. 314). Competitors are encouraged to use sources from the most recent scholarly journals and books, and reputable magazines and newspapers. This selective emphasis on news sources and research-based evidence is what is expected when it comes to credibility in forensics, although it may also be problematic, as I will discuss in subsequent sections. Given these expectations, though, it is important to consider what makes a source credible.

Rybacki and Rybacki (2008) argued that there are two main things to consider when looking at credible sources: reliability and quality. Reliability is determined by the audience “based on accuracy and recency” (p. 89). Concerning accuracy, competitors

need to be aware of proper use of quotations and paraphrasing to present the most accurate representation of their information. As stated above, competitors are also expected to glean their information from relatively recent sources, if not current events. The quality of information “results when you ground your claims with information that best helps the audience understand how you have arrived at the conclusions implied by your claim making” (p. 89). Forensics students are instructed to construct arguments using research in a similar way as public speaking students are. Evidence must be used to back up any claim they are making and properly cited within delivery in order to maintain credibility. Furthermore, Rybacki and Rybacki discussed the importance of keeping information and evidence consistent throughout the speech, as claims that contradict themselves will also have a negative effect on the speaker’s argument and stop them from being successful in their persuasive goals. How a competitor chooses to discuss his or her evidence and support their arguments has a significant effect on how they are viewed as credible or not credible by their audience.

### **Speech Delivery**

There are many things forensics competitors need to consider when it comes to speech delivery and credibility. Some of these are related to normative practices in forensics (e.g. attire, speech transition walks, etc.) but there are some aspects of delivery that transcend the boundaries of forensics such as the ability identify with an audience.

First, the expectation in the forensic community is that students will be dressed in business professional attire. While the specific expectations have changed, “such as the expectation that women should only wear black, white, or red” (Paine, 2005, p. 80), skirt suits for women and “business-colored” (p. 80) suits for men are the most commonly

seen in competitive forensics. While research does support that clothing style can affect credibility and likeability, which “have been considered the two most important image dimensions in impression management” (Morris, Gorham, Cohen, & Huffman, 1996, p. 136), the clothing style accepted in forensics is very much rooted in normative expectation. Furthermore, when referring to nonverbal physical delivery, while a speaker’s credibility is affected by how well they engage their audience (Thourlby, 1978), there are no necessary parameters on how a speaker must engage the audience, so long as it doesn’t take away from a speaker’s perceived confidence (e.g. fidgeting). Therefore, we cannot make a judgment call on what method of engagement is most effective when it comes to moving around the room, as one could argue that something as unstructured as a the stage movement in a TED talk or even someone standing stationary behind a podium can still engage their audience (e.g. President Obama’s State of the Union Address) The three-point walk refers to a normative expectation within the forensic community that is used in every public address event, including persuasion. This physical delivery technique requires students to walk to one side of the room and then the other, corresponding with the main points of their speech. Attire and speech transition walks exemplify aspects of delivery that could have the potential to positively or negatively affect a speaker’s credibility, depending on how they are used.

Second, students are encouraged to establish a rapport and connection with their audience. In both the forensic and the academic community as a whole, this rapport can be achieved through numerous nonverbal behaviors such as rate, eye contact, vocal variation and volume. Olson (2010) argued that “in addition to vocal emotion, speakers can show further conviction by directly addressing the audience, particularly the judges”

(p. 204) and establishing a connection with them. Students must be sure that they are familiar enough with their speeches that they will not stumble, but not so familiar that they sound insincere. Aristotle (1946) said that “Naturalness is persuasive, artificiality is the contrary” (p. 1404). Therefore, audiences will often be more receptive of speakers who appear to be comfortable and conversational. An additional aspect forensic speakers must consider when it comes to establishing ethos through audience connection is identification. Introduced by Kenneth Burke (1950), identification, also called consubstantiation, has been treated from a number of different perspectives. Day (1960) argued that identification is an extension of Aristotelian rhetoric, in which a speaker shows the audience how alike they are, rather than trying to persuade them to one side or another. He emphasized Burke’s argument that “you persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your way as his” (Burke, 1950, as cited in Day, 1960, p. 271) So, through this perspective, persuasion occurs not just through argument, but through the audience’s perception that you are like them, and thus, concerned with their interests. Zappen (2009) interpreted identification as a transcendent action, where speaker and audience fuse perspectives to see get a fuller view of the topic as a whole. Transcendent identification would require a much more conversational format that would allow for both parties within the dialogue to transcend to new meaning. However, given the time constraint in the event of persuasion, speakers in the forensic community would be more concerned with Day’s perspective of identification. Speakers have limited time to engage their audience, but identification is an aspect of delivery that they must consider. However, it should be stated that forensic students are often keenly aware of the homogeneity of their

audiences when they are in competition, so they could arguably overlook this aspect of ethos. It is important to consider the effect this might have on an audience outside the forensic community.

Thus, forensics students have a great deal to consider when it comes to delivery and speaker credibility. An effective advocate needs to find a way to speak about socially significant topics in a way that their audience will be able to understand and appreciate, while still holding to the standards of speaker credibility as a means of persuasion. However, when considering ethos as speaker credibility, specifically as speaker credibility that must be developed (rather than inherent) we must look next at how normative expectations in forensics play a role in the decisions that competitors make that may affect how they are perceived.

### **Normative Practices and Organizational Control**

Paine (2005) noted “in the context of forensics, the rules which govern the activity are comparatively few—but the norms which operate on the competitive circuit are legion” (p. 80). He further clarified that norms refer to “habits and patterns which may become so entrenched that they operate as if they were rules” (p. 80). In this clarification is the assumption that competitors will, once they learn the normative expectations of the activity, strive to act within these norms and not outside of them. Tompkins and Cheney’s (1985) theory of organizational identification and control “centers on the way that an individual’s connection to the organization influences behavior and decision-making in team-based structures” (as cited in Dainton & Zelle, 2011, p. 109). One aspect of organizational identification that forensic competitors are tethered to would be the normative practices associated with the activity. Thus, they are

also inadvertently connected to the expectations that are influenced by (and, in turn, influence) power and control in forensics organizations. To gain a more thorough understanding of this, I will discuss the theory of organizational identification and control (Tompkins & Cheney, 1985), focusing on the shift from overt forms of control to unobtrusive and concertive control. Next, I will look more specifically at Deetz's theory of distorted communication and discursive closure and how they are exemplified through construction of normative expectations in the forensic community.

Tompkins and Cheney (1985) argued that changes in organizations during the 20<sup>th</sup> century have caused a shift in how organizations foster identification and control. Rather than trying to convince members to work harder or support the organization using overtly authoritarian means (e.g. threats of firing or demotion), many organizational cultures have moved to a more hegemonic style of control. In an organization power and control are closely related and work together to achieve a goal. Tompkins and Cheney (1985) state that, "organizational power [is] the ability or capacity of a person to control the contributions of others toward a goal" (McPhee & Tompkins, 1985, p.180). In the theory of organizational identification and control, Tompkins and Cheney explain how identification makes strengthened power and control possible without upsetting or discouraging the members of the organization. The theory states that through interactions and common understanding "explicit rules and regulations [are replaced by] implicit but highly motivating core values" (McPhee & Tompkins, 1985, p.184). Therefore, identification in organizations allows for unobtrusive control that is not as easily observed.

### **Unobtrusive and Concertive Control**



Early scholarship on unobtrusive control focused on persuasive and controlling aspects of decision making in organizations, sometimes reducing the construct to internalization of organizational values (Bullis, 1991; Treadwell & Harrison, 1994). Unobtrusive control is “the process of influencing employees”—or in this case competitors’—“decisions without overtly stating demands” (Bisel, Ford, & Keyton, 2007, p. 137). Internalization of values and coercion without strictly stating demands connects directly to the unwritten rules or normative practices in forensics. While there is a lack of scholarship that connects these norms directly to power and control, many scholars have critiqued these normative practices for limiting competitors and creating carbon-copy speakers in forensics (Paine, 2005; Gaer, 2002; Cronn-Mills & Golden, 1997; McGee & McGee, 2010). These scholars also argue that regardless of the detrimental effects, members of organizations will follow these normative practices, because that is what it takes to win.

Concertive control “happens when coworkers develop mechanisms to reward and control behavior the influences the team” (Dainton & Zelle, 2011, p. 110). Barker (1993) argued that this is reached when members of the organization develop a “negotiated consensus on how to shape their behavior according to a set of core values” (p. 411). This is complicated in the forensic community, due to the fact that team members may or may not police over other members’ behavior if they’re breaking norms and negatively affecting the team’s success. For example, one of the regularly accepted norms within the community is the expectation of formal, business professional attire. If a competitor was constantly being critiqued for wearing something outside these normative expectations, this could impact outside perceptions of the team and team

members or coaches may intervene and tell this student that they must change their wardrobe. The presence of former competitors and team members as judges also indicates a sense of blurred hierarchy in the activity. These judges give tangible rewards/punishments for following or breaking norms in the form of rates and rankings on ballots (Paine, 2005; Gaer, 2002). Furthermore, as judges often come to the forensic community as former competitors or coaches, these norms are often accepted and reproduced throughout the years (Morris, 2005; Paine, 2005). This cyclical pattern exists due to the invisible or accepted nature of these norms, rather than any form of negative intent. It is important to shed some light on the relationship between norms and control by examining research on communicative practices within forensics organizations through the lens of Deetz's theory of distorted communication. By doing this, I argue that the hidden types of unobtrusive and concertive control become apparent.

### **Systematically Distorted Communication**

Deetz (1992) argued that "communication is distorted whenever genuine conversation is precluded or, more specifically, any of the conditions of the *ideal* speech situation are not upheld" (p. 173). These distortions often lead to conflicting meanings in the pursuit of common understanding. Within the forensic community, these distortions can take the form of the unwritten rules and norms that competitors are expected to follow in order to produce successful communication, at least in the competitive sense. Rawls (1999) stated that rules are written and required by institutions, while norms are the socially accepted behaviors that individuals engage in to meet these requirements. Deetz argued that within an organization, distortion is something that can happen systematically, in that there is a "latent strategic reproduction of meaning rather than

participatory production of it” (p. 174). These norms are not only readily accepted within the community as the way it has to be, but also reproduced through reward and punishment in the form of competitive success or failure. Gaer (2002) argued that forensics is “dominated by ‘conventions’ and ‘unwritten formulas established by coaches, judges, and students’ that constitute ‘ways of winning’” (p. 54). These norms include but are not limited to: the expectation of professional attire (suits and ties for men, skirt suits and heels for women); organizational structure of speeches and the use of academic language; gestures (often tied to expectations of feminine and masculine power) and transitional movement; topic selection and memorization.

Habermas (1984) asserted that “such communication pathologies [systematic distortion] can be conceived as the result of a confusion between actions oriented to reaching understanding [communicative action] and actions oriented to success [strategic action]” (p. 332). This has significant implications for the forensic community when we consider what is more important: our goals of reaching out to communities by advocating for very worthwhile causes, or being competitively successful. This is not to say that the two cannot coincide, but as Paine (2005) argued, “once a student learns that a certain formula is what ‘wins’, many become unwilling to push the envelope which surrounds the straight-and-narrow path” (p. 83). This straight-and-narrow path can refer to the use of academic language (whether suited for the topic or not), choosing topics based on the desire for success rather than personal connection, or the utilization of signposts, transitions, or gestures that are unfamiliar to audiences outside the forensic community. VerLinden (1997) argued these and other such norms “contradict the current public address pedagogy” and “results in an artificial style of delivery” (para. 61). Considering

the critical goals of many of our speech topics—which seek to illuminate racism, sexism and classism—the fact that many of the norms within the forensic community outwardly perpetuate these ideas by requiring women to walk around in skirts and heels and requiring financially-burdened college students to buy expensive suits, is definitely problematic.

Deetz (1992) discussed that the “most important forms of systematic distortion can exist in ‘self-producing’ or ‘self-referential’ systems” (p. 181). Little research is devoted to discussing where these unwritten rules or norms came from. The one exception being the norms that are discussed in relation to interpretive events, which Cronn-Mills and Golden (1997) stated happen as a result of a student trying something new and being rewarded for it, then judges assume this new approach is the norm, so they penalize any students who don’t follow it, then the original student graduates and goes on to judge or coach, taking their new established norm with them. In self-referential systems,

attention is drawn to the way in which [organizations], like all human systems, produce themselves in an environment (as signified) that they have enacted from their own internal signifying system, and evaluate their success through the use of criteria developed internal to the process being evaluated. (Deetz, 1992, p. 181)

Paine (2005) argued “these unwritten rules possess tremendous power, functioning to separate the ‘in-group,’ who know and follow the rules, from the ‘out-group,’ who do not have access to (or deliberately choose to flout) these assumptive guidelines” (p. 79). The unwritten rules function to drive an even larger wedge between the arguments of competitive vs. educational in forensics, as they privilege certain teams or individuals

who either know how to navigate these norms or have the pre-established ethos to get away with breaking them. Paine also argued that judges have the ability to break away from these norms by rewarding those competitors that choose to go outside of them. One aspect of the self-referential system is that “no one has to desire control for the cycle to work” (Deetz, 1992, p. 183). This process is on-going, and as long as the norms as a whole are accepted and left unchanged within our community, we will keep reproducing competitors who follow these norms and perpetuate the ideals that are attached to them. Therefore, it is important to consider discursive closure practices and how they serve to silence contradicting ideas.

### **Discursive Closure**

Discursive closure refers to those practices that serve to suppress any potential conflict (Deetz, 1992). Forensics norms have been largely examined and exposed (VerLinden, 1997; Cronn-Mills, 1997; Paine, 2005); however, they have not seen a significant change. Habermas (1984) argued that as long as the suppression to this conflict exists, there will always be certain forms of communication that are dominated. Though this is arguably a result of a desired unity throughout the forensic community, Deetz argued “with unity the continued production of experience is constrained, since the tension of difference is lost” (p. 188). Negative communicative practices that exemplify discursive closure include: *disqualification*—denying access/requiring expertise to speak; *naturalization*—treating socially-produced behaviors as naturally occurring; *neutralization*—the denial of hidden values associated with norms; *topical avoidance*—the prohibition of discussion of certain practices; *subjectification of experience*—placing responsibility for change on those within the system; *legitimation*—rationalization

through higher-order justification; and *pacification*—or the diversion of the discussion through reasonable attempts to address the problem (Deetz, 1992). This is exemplified in forensics through giving competitors high ranks for following norms (Paine, 2005); treating unwritten rules as assumed or expected (McGee & McGee, 2010); lack of discussion of the implications of gender, race, class, and ability in relation to forensics norms; arguing that competitors and judges must be the ones to challenge norms (Paine, 2005); and the justification of norms as necessary for an assumed standard of professional preparation (Cheney & Ashcroft, 2007). McGee and McGee (2010) discussed unwritten rules, whether mundane or substantial, will trump written rules, not only in competition, but also in everyday interactions between competitors. This is more than just deciding who gets the winning rank in a round, this is informing our students on expectations for life as competitors and as future professionals. Closer examination of these communication practices and their connection to forensics norms can illuminate the concertive control that is inherent within these practices. We must be willing to take a deeper look at normative practices, not to place blame or fault, but to recognize an area of great opportunity for positive change within our community. Finally, it is important to bring ourselves back to the foundations of the discipline, and recognize how communication pedagogy is emphasized in the classroom and within the activity of forensics.

### **Forensics as Pedagogy**

Goggin (2012) argued “students need to learn to pose lots of questions as they consider the world, themselves, other people, supracollectives, and other discourses” (p. 14). This is true of both forensic students and students within our classrooms. Regardless

of the type of classroom environment we are trying to foster, students need to be in a place where they can challenge themselves and critically consider what they are learning and how it applies to their lives, now and in the future. McClellan and Sanders (2013) asserted “the classroom is an overlooked, yet tremendously meaningful site for demonstrating the value of our theories and knowledge” (p. 280). Therefore, we must consider how communication pedagogy is being emphasized in our practices in the classroom as instructors and outside the classroom as coaches.

### **Communication Pedagogy Emphasized in the Classroom**

The basic public speaking course is structured in numerous different ways, from just teaching communication theory, to just teaching communication practice (public speaking), to a mixture of both. Toon and Wright (2013) argued “an emphasis on both theory and practice is especially useful to the study of persuasive communication because an understanding of how receivers process persuasive messages (theory) can enhance one’s ability to construct effective persuasive messages (practice)” (p. 76). My experience with teaching public speaking incorporated both of these strategies, and so my focus will come from the context of this teaching environment. However, in order to comparatively examine pedagogical practices in forensics and public speaking classrooms, I will focus more specifically on the most common techniques.

When looking at the practical aspects of teaching speech, many classes and textbooks are set up with the following main sections: speech preparation, content development, organization, and verbal and nonverbal delivery (O’Hair, Rubenstein, & Stewart, 2013; Fraleigh & Truman, 2014; O’ Hair & Wiemann, 2013). The main

intersections between the basic public speaking course and forensics come in the areas of content development, organization, and verbal/nonverbal delivery.

In the public speaking classroom, content development often manifests itself in the form of topic choice. This can be pedagogically situated within one of the five canons of rhetoric: invention. Leff described Cicero's treatment of the topics in *De Oratore* as "an inventional process resulting in the discovery of material, giving greater emphasis to logical relationships and creating categories of topics based on the subject of the discourse" (as cited in Lauer, 2004, p. 25). Larson (1972) argued that one of the biggest responsibilities for speech instructors is how to "help students learn how to discover—that is 'invent'—ideas to talk or write about" (p. 303). He asserted that "invention should be taught as a way for the student to understand better his world and the events in it, so that he can decide what needs to be said about that world" (p. 303). This exemplifies my experience with the structure of the basic public speaking course and how we encourage our students to examine their own lives as a means of discovering topics to write their speeches. Throughout the semester, students in my classroom were challenged to think about how advocacy plays a role in daily life and how they relate to the larger social issues in the world today. Ryan (2004) argued "invention viewed as social and creative has the potential to support new insights on rhetorical memory as social, creative, and revisionist" (Ryan, 2004, p. 38). Life experiences influence those topics that competitors feel passionate about and influences how they speak about these topics.

Another common content area is organization, which is also pedagogically connected to the five canons of rhetoric. As instructors, we have the responsibility to



show our students why effective organization matters in public speaking, however, there are numerous different organization styles that a student could choose from. Waldeck, Kearney, and Plax (2013) stated that students should first choose between two organizing frameworks and then narrow down their organizational pattern. Students should decide if a linear framework—very direct, logical progressions, including signposts and transitions—or a configural framework—which is still organized, but is “more indirect and won’t include spelled out main points or signposts” (p. 160). Nance (2003) argued that utilizing examples of non-traditional speaking situations (i.e. family gatherings, church functions, or rites of passage events) in the classroom helps professors “promote classroom discussion of the contextual factors that influence speech communication” (p. 454). However, many of these events fall outside the basic linear structure of speech examples that we utilize in our classes. There are benefits and drawbacks to each of the organizational frameworks, and we ultimately need to encourage the student to go with the framework that is the most appropriate for his or her topic or argument.

Finally, students are encouraged to pay specific attention to both verbal and nonverbal aspects of delivery. “Research in speech communication is interested in the effects of messages as well as in diagnosing characteristics of the speaker” (Pierce, 1971, p. 177), so I will look at some of the more accepted concepts in verbal communication and the less uniform expectations regarding nonverbal communication. Starkweather (1956) argued “those exposed to both verbal and vocal cues rely more heavily on vocal information in assessing the personality of the speaker” (p. 396). Therefore, expectations such as speaking at a rate that the audience can follow and understand, adjusting your volume as needed, and adding vocal inflection and variety where appropriate, are

generally agreed upon in most classrooms, though they may be an indicator of a more important implication, which I will address later. However, nonverbal speech expectations differ greatly from classroom to classroom. These include expectations for attire, importance of engaging the room through movement, and gesturing. Most instructors are willing to acknowledge, on some level, the affect that clothing has on a speaker's impression management (Goffman, 1959), however, the degree to which (if at all) an instructor requires their students to dress professionally depends greatly on the professor and the context. For example, you would be hard-pressed to see a basic public speaking professor require formal business attire for speech presentations, whereas that may be the expectation in a business or management classroom. Furthermore, the requirement of gesturing or engaging the room may be affected by an instructor's decision to allow their students to use note cards, outlines, or a podium. So, while some of the pedagogical practices may vary from classroom to classroom, they all can be—in some way—connected to basic theoretical communication principles that our students would be familiar with. Now, I will examine similar pedagogical strategies within the forensic community to determine how they compare with what is being taught in the classroom.

### **Communication Pedagogy Emphasized in Forensics**

As I stated previously, there have been many scholars in recent years that have sought to ground the forensics activity back in the communication discipline where it originated. Kelly, Paine, Richardson, and White (2014) contributed greatly to this discussion by providing a breakdown of forensic events and what they purpose of each event is, “relating to roots and motivations for teaching” (p. 38). Further examination of

the conceptual frameworks presented in the classroom and how they manifest in coaching and competitive situations will provide important information as to whether we are succeeding in our goal to reconnect to communication.

Competitors' topic choices are influenced by a number of different sources, from coaches, to other competitors and even the normative forensic practices as a whole. Olson (2010) argued for personal connection to one's topic in an analysis of winning oratory speeches: "it is critical to reinforce already known criteria of topic selection, and that is the topic/problem must be one the speaker feels strongly about...several successful contestants have indicated how their topics impact them personally" (p. 199). Thus, our competitors need to glean from life experience these specific areas that they feel personally connected to. However; they also need to consider the need for topics to be socially significant. Walsh (1980) argued that traditional problems that arise in society are generally considered to be the most effective. However, in the forensic environment, which lends to a unique combination of competition and education (Hinck, 2003); we must examine whether our students are selecting "socially significant" topics (Kelly, Paine, Richardson, and White, 2014, p. 45) based on arguments that they truly care about or arguments that they believe will be competitively successful. Due to normative expectations in the activity, and the overall nature of seeing and competing against similar competitors all year long, forensic students must consider a topic that is novel to either to the community as a whole, or at least to the judges that they will encounter (Morris, 2005). Kelly et al (2014) argued that topic selection is an important issue for competitors to confront and they must consider such things as: "potential interest for audience, narrowing of topics, choice of perspective and which topic components to

privilege” (p. 45). They argued further that “beyond college, they [competitors] will often be asked to address topic areas that they would not otherwise have selected” and it is important to consider topics within the context of “a shared community experience” (p. 45). This is an intriguing conundrum in forensics, as we are often sharing our speeches with a shared community of academics, who often share a homogenous set of viewpoints that may not reflect what students would encounter outside of the forensic community. So, while the pedagogically-situated expectations of choosing a topic that one can personally connect to and can relate to an audience is obviously something that coaches and students should strive for, it is one area that can be impacted by the emphasis of normative practices.

The area of speech organization is one aspect of forensics that is heavily influenced by normative expectations. While we begin with the pedagogically-sound argument that “clear organization is important to any message you send...you will not make sense to your listeners if your ideas are not clearly organized” (Sellnow, 2003, p. 171), the message is then extended to include normative practices, which privilege linear organizational styles. In oratory, these include the problem-cause-solution format or the cause-effect-solution format. VerLinden (1997) argued that students will hesitate to attempt an organization outside of the normal or expected format, because they don’t want to risk their competitive success. Epping and Labrie (2005) stated “even though a student *can* try a new persuasion format, odds are good that if it is not a mixed causal design (problem-cause-solution) the student will probably get sixth place in the round” (p. 19). This is not to say that a linear speech construction is ineffective, simply that the expectation to use this organizational format and not another is representative of

normative influence on communication pedagogy in forensics. Baker (1965) found that “the perception of a disorganized speaker results in a reduction of the speaker’s credibility” (p. 149). Therefore, regardless of whether speakers are following general pedagogical structure patterns or normative practices, organizational structure is important to consider when constructing a persuasive argument.

Finally, verbal and nonverbal delivery aspects are given a great deal of attention in the forensic community, for obvious reasons. Duncan (2013) argued that we are teaching our students to speak with eloquence, and that necessarily comes with certain expectations and requirements, particularly in a competitive activity. Verbal expectations, as discussed in the section above, are generally agreed upon within the community. Pronunciation, volume, emotion, natural tone and style: these are all vocal aspects that are necessary, and align well with communication pedagogy. This is indicated in Kelly, Paine, Richardson, and White (2014) which compares these strategies and others to alignment with the National Forensic Association Academic Learning Compact in four domain areas: “Discipline, knowledge, and skills; Communication; Critical thinking; and Integrity/values” (p. 39-40). However, nonverbal delivery aspects have been scrutinized for their emphasis on normative expectations, rather than communication pedagogy or real-world practice (Paine, 2005; Burnett, Brand & Meister, 2003; Gaer, 2002; VerLinden 1997; Epping & Labrie, 2005; Billings, 2005). For example, while “a neatly groomed professional appearance” (Kelly, et al., 2014, p. 48) does contribute to perceptions of credibility; the expectation that competitors dress in formal, business attire in forensics is a normative value, not a pedagogical one. Furthermore, research would suggest that while formal attire increases perceptions of credibility and expertise, it

decreases perceptions of likability or approachability (Leathers, 1992; Raiscot, 1983; Smith & Malandro, 1985), which can have a negative impact on a competitor's ability to create identification with their audience. The same can be said for the formal gesturing styles and the three-point walks that are seen in all public address events in forensics. While they originate from a pedagogically-sound justification, the highly formalized style reflects normative expectations.

Two other considerations that receive less attention overall, but indicate the dissimilarity in classroom pedagogical focus and forensics pedagogical focus are: language and memorization. While the importance of language and word choice pedagogically aligns with the classical canon of style (Kelly, Paine, Richardson, and White, 2014), the emphasis in the classroom and in forensics may manifest itself in different ways. Jaffe (2006) argued "the most basic stylistic requirements faced by a speaker involve choosing language that is accurate, appropriate, concise, clear, concrete, and interesting" (p. 240). The disconnect between the classroom and the forensic community can be seen in the requirement of *appropriateness*. If we value audience analysis to determine what is appropriate for language use and what is not, then it is important to consider, once again, the homogeneity of the forensic audience in comparison with the audience students have in the classroom. Not only do forensic students construct their speeches for fellow communication student audience members, but also for their judges, who are (in most cases) academics themselves. When it comes to language, speakers walk a fine line between what is appropriate for establishing expertness (Shiedel, 1973) and connecting with their audience in a way that is accessible. Therefore, the definition of appropriate language means two very different things in these

different contexts. Finally, I will look at memorization within the classroom and forensic context.

Memorization, again, is pedagogically connected with the five canons of rhetoric. However, its meaning has changed from the time of Greek and Roman scholars, who “stressed the importance of the speaker’s being able to utter the words in the actual moment of the presentation to the audience” to the understanding today: “*memoria* means practice, practice, and more practice, so that the orator may be ready to express what had been planned” (Golden, Goodwin, Coleman, & Sproule, 2007, p. 9). There is still much discussion and debate as to what strategies (memorized/manuscript/extemporaneous) are most beneficial in the classroom (Kelly, Paine, Richardson, & White, 2014) but it is common to see most students on some form of manuscript—a notecard, outline, or technical presentation. This is not the case in public address events in forensics, although it is still expected within the limited preparation events. Even though the AFA-NIET event handbook states that minimal notes are permitted in persuasion or other public address events, it is a normative expectation that students will be memorized. Kelly, et. al (2014) acknowledged this factor and emphasized how students must not let it stand in the way of effective delivery techniques:

While “perfectly flawless memorization” may be the ideal, striving for this level of memorization should not be allowed to exonerate the student from meeting other learning objectives. Thus, seamless memorization should not be allowed to excuse factual errors, source citation mistakes, or “robotic” delivery. Furthermore, memory “glitches” must be considered in relation to the degree to which the student satisfies (or fails to satisfy) other learning challenges (p. 49).

So, while this is an understood and expected element of public address in the forensic community, there is much debate over whether delivering a fully memorized speech aligns with pedagogical standards taught in the classroom.

By looking at the research regarding speaker credibility, forensic norms in relation to organizational power and control and degree to which communication pedagogy is emphasized, both in the classroom and in forensics, we can understand the complicated dichotomy between pedagogical strategies and normative forensic practices. By utilizing focus groups to determine whether these practices will have an effect on how students in the classroom perceive the credibility of forensic speakers, I hope to determine what effect (if any) these norms are having on audience members outside of the forensic community and what that can tell us about the future direction of communication and forensic pedagogy.



## Chapter Three: Methodology

### Overview

My primary research goal is to determine whether public speaking students find forensics competitors to be ‘cold,’ ‘canned,’ and ‘impersonal’ as has been suggested by anecdotal evidence. In order to do this, I will be asking students currently enrolled in introductory communication and public speaking courses to participate in focus groups. I will show them examples of award-winning persuasive speeches and engage the students in a guided discussion of source credibility and ethos. In this way I hope to determine whether or not there is methodologically sound data which supports the anecdotal evidence. This research thus answers a call by the forensics community for “measurable” research relative to forensics practices.

This project also has another, more complex goal. I hope to learn what students *self-report* as techniques that are effective and appealing or ineffective and unappealing. As communication scholars, we sometimes forget that our students have a wealth of knowledge to share and I am seeking to understand not only how students perceive speakers, but why they perceive them the way that they do. Berg (2001) stated the successful utilization of focus groups permits researchers to “observe a process that is often of profound importance to qualitative investigations, namely interaction” (p. 114). I am interested in determining what these students’ conceptions of ethos really are and what factors have shaped those notions. So first, I will introduce the method of research that I utilized for this study. Then I will justify the use of this method rather than other methods. I will finally describe my research plan and how I plan to analyze my data.

### Focus Groups

Neuman (1997) described focus groups as a “special kind of interview situation that is largely non-quantitative” (p. 253). In this method, researchers work to recruit subjects using different methods, depending on the goals of the research. According to Neuman, researchers gather respondents together to discuss a pre-determined issue for one to two hours. Berg (2001) described this method as “guided or unguided discussions addressing a particular topic of interest or relevance to the group and the researcher” (p. 111). There are many advantages to using this type of method for my research, but the main benefit is “the degree to which focus groups encourage participants to reflect upon personally relevant and real information-seeking activities, rather than contrived laboratory experiences or survey scenarios imposed by the researcher” (Metzger, Flanagan & Medders, 2010, p. 418). This is accomplished by encouraging open discussion among focus groups. A moderator (who is generally the primary researcher or research assistant) is present to introduce the issue, ask questions, and make sure that the voices of all respondents are considered, but strives to allow for as much flexibility as possible to let the respondents determine the direction of the conversation. Responses are generally recorded, using either an audio or video recording device, and transcribed for analysis at a later time. This method is beneficial when researchers seek to assess the “behaviors, attitudes and opinions” (Berg, 2001, p.68) of groups, rather than of just individuals. Therefore, I will look at the reasoning behind my use of this method of research and why I chose this method over other qualitative methods that were available.

### **Justification**

The purpose of my research is to gauge the perceptions of a specific group—students in the basic public speaking course. This represents one justification for my use

of focus groups in my research. Berg (2001) stated that interviews are more suited for providing in-depth personal experiences. However, I am not trying to determine the effect on the individual, but how a collective group of students, who have all been exposed to similar curriculum regarding best practices in public speaking, interpret the effects of these normative practices. Interaction allows for “greater amounts of detail on various attitudes, opinions, and experiences” and allows me to “learn how subjects might have discussed these issues among themselves” (Berg, 2001, p. 113). Understandably the subject of ethos and speaker credibility is not one that comes up in regular conversation, which is why I will use the videos to get them thinking about the techniques that they are learning about and get their perspective on how these techniques are effective or ineffective in the speeches that they will see. The choice to utilize students who are not in any of my classes and who will not be familiar with the competitors giving these speeches is justifiable because I am hoping that it will encourage honest, critical opinions without the fear of offending someone. Rubin and Rubin (1995) explain:

In focus groups, the goal is to let people spark off one another, suggesting dimensions and nuances of the original problem that any one individual might not have thought of. Sometimes a totally different understanding of a problem emerges from the group discussion. (p. 140)

Aside from the original assumption, resulting from the anecdotal evidence and personal experience, there is no evidence stating that public speaking students will find the normative practices in forensics to be detrimental to speaker credibility, so the focus group method will allow me to examine their self-reported experiences in an open matter, allowing for different outcomes to emerge if they exist. Leonhard asserted that people

“will tell us more about a topic and do so in greater depth if they are encouraged to act spontaneously instead of reacting to questions” (as cited in Fern, 2001, p. 144). This provides further support for my use of focus groups rather than other research methods, such as surveys, interviews, and participant observation. Rakow (2011) argued that qualitative methods, such as focus groups, are of particular appropriate for critical and cultural scholars as they “enable researchers to learn how people make sense of their worlds and how they interpret their own actions and circumstances” (p. 417). There was also time constraints. Berg (2001) explained that focus groups are ideal for data in situations where “certain groups of interest to social scientists may remain available for study only for limited amounts of time” (p. 111). Semitransient populations, such as students, represent one of these groups. One of my goals for this research is to hold my focus groups around the time that students in CMST 100 are working on their advocacy speeches and students in CMST 102 are involved in persuasive speeches for finals. I want to encourage comparison between what these students are seeing in the example oratory speeches and the practices they are being taught and using in their communication courses.

Though other methods of research exist and are effective at getting people to provide in-depth feedback, none of these provide the same dynamic group element as a focus group. Though I acknowledge that there will be challenges to overcome as far as recruitment and analysis this method of research will be the most effective way to gauge this group’s perceptions regarding normative practices in forensics and their effect on credibility. Now that I have discussed what a focus group is and why it is appropriate for

my research, I will explain how I plan to executed my research by first, looking at how I recruited participants, then explaining how I implemented the focus groups.

### **Participant Demographics**

Participants were recruited through contacting graduate teaching assistants who are teaching Communication Studies 100 (Fundamentals of Communication) or 102 (Public Speaking). These instructors were asked to determine if any of their students were interested in participating in this research as an extra credit opportunity for their class. There were 44 students signed up to attend the focus group sessions. Throughout four different focus groups, 14 students attended and participated in the research. These students each filled out a self-classified demographic survey to determine the diversity of participation in this research. See figure 1.1

*Table 1.1: Recruitment Demographics*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Biological Sex/Preferred Gender</b>	<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>Year in School</b>	<b>Socioeconomic Status</b>	<b>Forensic Knowledge</b>
I1	Male	Sikh	Freshman	Middle class	None
I2	Male	Nepali	Sophomore	Middle class	None
W1	Female	White	Sophomore	Middle class	None
W2	Female	White	Sophomore	Working/Middle class	None
W3	Female	White	Sophomore	Working class	None
P1	Male	White	Freshman	Middle/Working class	None
P2	Female	White	Freshman	Middle class	None
P3	Male	Black African	Junior	Middle class	Yes—public speaking in social/academic
D1	Male	White	Sophomore	Middle class	None
D2	Male	White	Junior	Working/Middle class	None
D3	Male	White	Sophomore	Middle class	None
D4	Female	Hispanic	Junior	Middle class	None
D5	Female	Asian/Hmong	Sophomore	Working/Middle class	Yes--ambassador

I showed sample speeches from the persuasion final round at the 2013 American Forensics Association national tournament. These speeches were chosen to exemplify best practices in the forensic community. As Duncan (2013) argued “we should point to the work of our students as evidence of the power of rhetorical invention and mastery taught by our activity” (p. 20). This approach, looking at final rounds as examples of best practices, has been used effectively by other researchers in assessing forensic competition (e.g. Dimock, 2007). The only criteria I used to determine the speakers that were chosen was an attempt to avoid topics that might be trigger-inducing for some students. The following table represents the competitors and the topics of the speeches that were viewed. These videos are available within the public domain, so while competitors names will not be used, demographic information (as classified by the participants) is needed to differentiate between the three speakers that students referred to in my focus groups.

*Table 1.2: Speeches*

<b>Competitor</b>	<b>Biological Sex</b>	<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>Topic Chosen</b>
Speaker 1	Female	White	Fair wages for those with disabilities
Speaker 2	Male	Black	Accountability for Wall Street and Big Banks
Speaker 3	Female	White	Overmedication of adopted children

### **Implementation of Research**

I held a total of four focus groups in two evenings, with a total of 14 participants. Students willingly and voluntarily participated in this research and they were informed that they could leave at any time without penalty. The research involved participation in a focus group session that lasted about an hour and a half. Students were asked to introduce themselves and briefly interact to meet anyone they do not already know. I gave them an easy question to pose to other students in the room to establish rapport:

“What is the best movie you have seen lately?” As participants were talking, I set up the speech videos and handed out demographic surveys, consent forms, and note-taking sheets. I explained the focus group would be conducted, informing students that the discussion portion of the session would be video recorded. I then asked students to read through and sign the consent form if they wished to participate. Students filled out a brief demographic survey, asking them to disclose (if comfortable) their sex/gender, race/ethnicity, year in college, experience with forensics, and background information on self-identified socio-economic status (see Table 1.1). I provided some brief background information on what competitive forensics is, as many indicated they had no prior experience with it. We briefly contextualized ethos based on what students reported learning in their current classrooms. Then I gave the students a sheet to take notes on while they watched the three persuasive speeches, indicating that they could use them to write down what aspects of the speeches they find effective or ineffective and justify their reasoning using knowledge gleaned from class or personal preference. I showed the three videos of persuasive speeches; beginning with Speaker 1 and ending with Speaker 3 (see Table 1.2). After the videos, I led the students in a discussion, by asking probing questions, but also allowing the discussion to develop as the participants identify new subjects of interest. These questions varied somewhat, depending on the direction that focus groups took naturally in discussion, but main questions were based on examining the normative practices and determining whether students found them effective or ineffective, I will discuss these below.

### **Discussion Questions**

I asked the students questions based on the general categories of communication pedagogy and the necessary elements for effectively establishing ethos as presented in the literature review. These included questions about what the speaker chose to persuade the audience on and how they did so. I also asked questions regarding the speakers' verbal and nonverbal aspects of delivery and how they effected how the students viewed their credibility. I asked students specific questions regarding dress and appearance and their effect on credibility. Finally, I asked the speakers to identify whether they thought the techniques that speakers were using in these speeches aligned with what they were learning in their classes. A list of pre-planned questions is included in Appendix A. As previously stated, this is not an exhaustive list, as many of the focus groups took on a more impromptu/discussion-based style of questioning and I negotiated my question-posing to fit this context. After all of the focus groups were completed, I transcribed the video-recorded discussion sessions, focusing on both verbal and nonverbal aspects present in the videos. My questions and comments, both planned and clarifying/conversational were included in the transcription and transcribed from the perspective of respondent (R). The full transcription is included in Appendix B.

### **Method of Analysis**

In addition to the methodological plan that I will utilize to pursue my research, I will also explain the method of analysis I utilized. I will look first at what critical discourse analysis is and the scholars that have contributed to this method of analysis. Next I will justify why I used this method rather than others and how it will help me interpret my data. Finally, I will discuss method of inductive analysis and how it will contribute to the understanding of this data.



### **Overview of Discourse Analysis**

Discourse analysis is a method of analysis that “involves a number of assumptions that are important in their own right and also as a foundation for doing discourse-analytic research” (Wood & Kroger, 2000, p. 3). Therefore, I will not be able to provide an exhaustive list of all of these foundations or the scholars who are connected to them, but rather will attempt to incorporate a few perspectives to determine the focus of my research. Potter (1997) looked at discourse analysis as “the study of texts and talk in social practices” and further specified the foundational assumption that discourse analysis is “a medium for interaction; analysis of discourse becomes, then, analysis of what people do” (p. 146). This assumption looks at language as a feature of social life, something we create and that is created through us. Sampson (1993) argued “discourse theorists maintain that talk is constitutive of the realities within which we live, rather than expressive of an earlier, discourse-independent reality” (p. 1221). Therefore, the way we speak about situations, events, objects in our lives represents what we come to accept as reality (Sampson, 1993). There are three main assumptions to consider with this form of analysis: language as action, or looking beyond just *talk* to consider what this *talk* actually doing and *how* the actions are expressed in communication; discourse as focus rather than route, or moving from looking at the language to looking at the phenomenon being created by its use; and variability, which acknowledges that language produces different versions of reality for different people (Wood & Kroger, 2000). It is difficult to consider a working definition of discourse itself, as the interdisciplinary studies within this method often use the term in different, sometimes competing ways. However, for the focus of this research, I will put for the definition provided by Jorgenson and Phillips

(2002): “a particular way of talking about and understanding the world (or an aspect of the world)” (p. 1). They look at approaches to discourse analysis that share the common assumption that “our ways of talking do not neutrally reflect our world, identities and social relations, but, rather, play an active role in creating and changing them.” (p. 1). One of these approaches, which I will expand upon as the specific analysis method that I will utilize to interpret my data is critical discourse analysis.

### **Critical Discourse Analysis**

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) “provides theories and methods for empirical study of the relations between discourse and social and cultural developments in different social domains” (Jorgenson & Phillips, 2002, p. 60). These practices examine how language is discursively formed and interpreted within society and culture. “The emphasis is thus on the understanding of discourse in relation to social problems; to social structural variables such as race, gender, and class; and above all power” (Wood & Kroger, 2000, p. 21). These practices are often examined within a Marxist perspective, but have also been influenced by seminal figures in postmodern thought including Barthes, Derrida, and Foucault. Fairclough and Wodak (1997) identified five common features to CDA. First, the character of social/cultural processes and structures are partly linguistic-discursive. “It is partly through discursive practices in everyday life (processes of text production and consumption) that social and cultural reproduction and change take place” (Jorgenson & Phillips, 2002, p. 61). Second is the discourse as constitutive *and* constituted. This feature argues that discourse both helps create the social world and is, in turn, created by it. Fairclough (1992) argued “the discursive constitution of society does not emanate from a free play of ideas in people’s heads but from social practice which is

firmly rooted in and oriented to real, material social structures” (p. 66). The third feature is that language must be analyzed within its social context. The fourth feature examines how discourse functions ideologically. Fairclough and Wodak (1997) examine how this feature acknowledges the claim in CDA that discursive practices contribute to unequal power structures and the reproduction of them in society. These can include unequal power relations between “social classes, women and men, ethnic minorities, and the majority; these effects are understood as ideological effects” (Jorgenson & Phillips, p. 63). The fifth feature of CDA is that it is not an objective method, but rather “understands itself as a critical approach which is politically committed to social change” (p. 64). Fairclough (1992) focused specifically on discourse as political and ideological practice.

Discourse as political practice establishes, sustains, and changes and the collective entities (classes, blocs, communities, groups) between which power relations obtain. Discourse as ideological practice constitutes, naturalizes, sustains, and changes significations of the world from diverse populations in power relations. (p. 67)

Fairclough introduced a three-dimensional conception of discourse, which looks at discourse as text, or the features of text and language; discursive practice, or the process of text production, consumption and distribution; and discourse as social practice, focusing on ideology and hegemony as discursively produced and reproduced. I will utilize these practices throughout the course of my analysis to determine how the basic public speaking students’ perceptions of credibility are shaped by forensic norms. Now that I have examined discourse analysis and CDA in particular, I will justify why this method of analysis is appropriate for this research and why other methods are not.

### **Justification**

As I am seeking to understand how the participants in this research construct the meaning of credibility and effective communication, it is imperative that I analyze how they utilize language and discourse to construct these meanings, and furthermore, what these constructions might say about their experiences as a student and the future of communication and forensic pedagogy. If “talk is constitutive of realities” (Sampson, 1993, p.1221), then this method of analysis can help me determine what the abstract concepts of credibility and communication mean to these students and how they form their perceptions based on these meanings. Fairclough (1992) referred to discourse as a “mode of action, one form in which people may act upon the world and especially upon each other, as well as a mode of representation” (p. 63). This justifies the use focus group research in order to answer my research question. I will be able to determine whether the participants’ discourse is being shaped by others within the group as well. Furthermore, in examining normative forensic practices as invisible but accepted indicators of power and control within the forensic community, I contend the use of a method of analysis that examines those factors associated with structures of power is the most appropriate method of investigation. As Fairclough (1992) noted:

Discourse contributes to the constitution of all those dimensions of social structure which directly or indirectly shape and constrain it: its own norms and conventions, as well as the relations, identities and constitutions which lie behind them. (p. 64)

Finally, in considering the third assumption of discourse analysis, variability, I argue that this fits my research as I am not seeking to make a generalized assumption, but trying to

determine how students feel about these concepts personally, so I must be prepared for students to define credibility in different ways and place different levels of importance on different aspects of speaker credibility.

### **Inductive Analysis**

A main component of CDA is the critical examination of social and cultural power structures and how discourse constitutes these structures and is, in turn, constructed by them as well. Therefore, the second step in the analysis process required an inductive approach. Lodico et al (2010) stated “inductive reasoning is often referred to as a “bottom-up” approach to knowing, in which the researcher uses observations to build an abstraction or to describe a picture of the phenomenon that is being studied” (p.10). Fairclough (1992) emphasized the need for a researcher to look for those aspects that are not immediately apparent in the data: “a text only makes sense to someone who makes sense of it, someone who is able to infer those meaningful relations in the absence of explicit markers” (p. 84). Therefore I utilized Fairclough’s three dimensional concept of discourse to reveal three critical themes within the discourse, which I will summarize below and expand upon in subsequent sections. First, in looking at the discourse as text, I examined the technique of “alternative wordings and their political and ideological significance” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 77). Examination of the language surrounding professional dress revealed perceptions that regarded the antithesis of this appearance to be “lazy,” “uneducated,” or “unmotivated,” revealing the first theme of *professionalism as assumed competence*. Second, Fairclough argued “texts are consumed differently in different social contexts” (1992, p. 79). When examining the discursive practice in the data, it was necessary to consider how it was produced and the factors surrounding this

context—such as the choice to show competitors who were video recording and the disclosure of their status as national finalists. This dimension of analysis is referred to as intertextuality. Bakhtin (1986) argued, “in terms of production an intertextual perspective stresses the historicity of texts: how they always constitute additions to existing chains of speech communication” (p. 94). So, in looking at how participants were viewing the text in this context, they not only viewed the competitor differently based on the mediated performance, but this was further contextualized by their own comparative perceptions of speeches they had just seen performed in the classroom. The language surrounding the unattainability of this level of performance and the questioning of why this level would be expected of them revealed the second theme: *high credibility/low identification*. Third, Fairclough looks at discourse as social practice through the lens of ideology and hegemony, “placing discourse within a view of power and hegemony, and a view of the evolution of power relations as hegemonic struggle” (1992, p. 86). He argued that these ideologies are most effective when they become naturalized and accepted as common sense. Participants were far more likely to critique the female competitors, not aggressively, but benevolently, revealing the third theme: *gendered expectations of appropriateness*. An interesting revelation in this process appeared not in the perceptions of the speakers as credible or not, but rather in the assumptions and perceptions connected with credibility as a social construct. In the final sections, I will discuss how through inductive critical discourse analysis, I discovered much more than I had originally anticipated when I began. I will discuss the results of my research and how this research did not necessarily address my research questions as initially expected. The dialogue that students in my focus groups were engaging in went beyond the simple

question of whether or not competitors were perceived as credible based on the normative expectations of forensics to uncover some implications regarding *how* students are perceiving credibility.

## Chapter Five: Results

Through my analysis process, it became clear that the anecdotal and experiential evidence regarding students' negative perceptions of forensic competitor credibility based on normative practices were not necessarily a reflection of reality, at least within the students that participated in my research. Students were not in unanimous agreement about any of the normative practices that we discussed as overwhelmingly effective or ineffective. Ultimately, students, for the most part, perceived the forensic speakers as highly credible. However, it is the justification of why they found the speakers credible that reveals some intriguing implications in this research. Wood & Kroger (2000) recommended "discourse analysis requires the ability to examine discourse creatively in all of its multifarious and an open-mindedness to entertain multiple possibilities" (p. 91). Therefore, at this point in my analysis, I considered my data from multiple different angles to reveal some critical implications regarding perceptions of credibility, or rather, I moved beyond whether the students found the forensic competitors credible or not and considered how they were forming their perceptions of what it means to be credible. Fairclough's (1992) three dimensional concept of discourse served as a useful tool in this process, however, these interpretations were also gleaned from other strategies for openly engaging a set of discourse, such as considering personal reactions during analysis, looking past the obvious or the literal meaning of language, looking for what is not there, playing with the text (omitting/changing words to interpret meaning), and considering multiple functions of discourse (Wood & Kroger, 2000). My analysis interpretations were also gleaned from other strategies for openly engaging a set of discourse, such as considering personal reactions during analysis, looking past the obvious or the literal



meaning of language, looking for what is not there, playing with the text (omitting/changing words to interpret meaning), and considering multiple functions of discourse (Wood & Kroger, 2000). In terms of critical discourse analysis, Fairclough (1992) argued discourse is formed and inhibited by social class and other social relations, by social institution (law or education), by classification systems, and “various norms and conventions of both a discursive and non-discursive nature” (p. 64). Therefore, in my inductive analysis, I was very sensitive to how students were discussing social relations and classifications—even if they weren’t blatantly addressing them—and how the social institution of education plays a role in perpetuating this discourse. In the following section, I will discuss the results of my inductive analysis by examining the three themes of *professionalism as assumed competence*, *high credibility/low identification*, and *gendered expectations of appropriateness*.

### **Inductive Results-Professionalism as Assumed Competence**

First, by utilizing the first level of Fairclough’s three dimensional concept of discourse, I examined how participants were speaking about professional dress and credibility. This was one aspect of delivery that was acknowledged by some, if not all, participants within each focus group. In examining this aspect of the discourse as text (Fairclough, 1992), I looked at the combination of signifiers and signifieds to produce socially motivated signs. This extension looks further than the theory of semiotics (de Saussure, 1959). Hodge and Kress (1988) refer to Charles Sanders Peirce’s triadic model of semiosis, which “depicts the action of a sign as a limitless process of infinite semiosis, where one interpretant (or idea linked to a sign) generates another. The flow of these infinite processes of interpretation are constrained in Peirce’s model by the material

world (the object), and cultural rules of thought, or habit” (p. 20). Therefore, looking at professional dress as a signifier and credible as a signified, allowed me to interpret some intriguing elements about how the students perceived what it meant to be credible; specifically as I examined how they talked about the antithesis to credibility, which they presented as “lazy,” “unmotivated,” or “uneducated.” These were the points of analysis that led me to my first theme of *professionalism as assumed competence*.

Throughout the focus groups, it wasn't the initial comments regarding professional dress that revealed social implications in the discourse, but it was the qualifying statements they would make to me or to the other participants that revealed the most. For example, in the first focus group, after the first participant commented that the competitors were dressed “perfectly” to communicate they were serious about their topics, the other participant in the group qualified with the following statement:

*I2: You have to be dressed in a formal way; no one will give you attention otherwise.*

This was one of the many statements that reveal implications regarding the way that participants conceptualized credibility. In addition to what I discussed in Chapter two regarding Aristotle's conception of ethos, different scholars have argued that credibility is composed of several different dimensions. For example, Hovland, Janis, and Kelley (1953) claimed that credibility consists of expertness and trustworthiness; Berlo, Lemert, and Mertz (1969–1970) viewed credibility as consisting of safety, qualification, and dynamism; Teven and McCroskey (1997) argued that credibility is comprised of competence, character, and caring; and Eisend (2006) saw credibility as composed of sincerity, professionalism, and attraction. I would argue that the way that students in my focus groups were discussing credibility coincided with scholars who connect credibility with competence, or knowledge and expertise of their topic area and mastery of public

speaking skills. Ultimately, the discourse surrounding the way that students discussed professional dress represented the following line of thinking: professional dress creates the perception of competence, which creates the perception of credibility. This notion is exemplified in the following discursive examples:

***I1:** They are in formal dress and formal dress shows that they are serious about their topic. All three of them were in formal dress and there was no wrong thing about how they were dressed.*

***W2:** They looked professional, so that made them look more credible.*

***P2:** They looked professional. **P3:** Yes, so you tend to believe them.*

***D2:** Dressed for success.*

So students saw formal dress as an indicator of credibility on its own, outside of any content-based judgements or perceptions that they formed once they heard the speaker's speech. What's even more significant is the participants also made the jump from this perception to the claim that if professional dress makes you look more competent and increases perceptions of credibility; it follows that the inverse must be true as well. Students claimed that the absence of professional dress would inherently bring with it perceptions of laziness, lack of motivation, or lack of preparation. This is exemplified in the qualifying statement I discussed above and also in the following examples:

***I1:** If you go in a t-shirt and jeans, in that serious topic, people are not interested in the topic. People will think: what is he going to talk about? And people don't believe that, ya know...if that second guy was in a t-shirt and jeans, I would probably ignore that.*

***W1:** Like if you come dressed in sweatshirt and sweatpants with your hair up, then you look kinda like lazy, like you didn't put work into it.*

*PI: If you show up to an interview in like shorts or something, they're not even going to care what you have to say, they're not going to hire you. If you show up in a nice suit or a shirt and tie, they'll respect you and they'll listen to what you have to say.*

This is an intriguing aspect of this research when considering the implications for credibility and socioeconomic class. If professional dress is linked to perceptions of credibility and casual dress is linked to perceptions of laziness, we must critically consider how that affects the way we feel about those who, either due to their choice of profession or due to the inability to afford such clothing, do not dress professionally. We must also consider what we are saying, to forensic students and public speaking students alike, when we emphasize the need for such attire. I will discuss the implications of this expectation in subsequent discussion sections; however, first I will discuss the other two themes that emerged from my inductive analysis: increased credibility/decreased identification and gendered expectations of appropriateness.

### **Inductive Results—High Credibility/Low Identification**

Second, by examining the text and considering the second dimensional concept of discourse, I wanted to engage the text as discursive practice, looking at how “texts are produced (and consumed) in specific ways in specific social contexts” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 78). Context affects the interpretation of texts. This was true in my analysis of the discourse, and it was true in the participants’ interpretation of the speeches that they saw. On one hand, they were watching a mediated presentation of students who were identified as national finalists in forensics. On another hand, they identified numerous areas within the categories that I revealed in my deductive analysis that made the expectation of comparison between forensic speakers and speakers in the basic public speaking course “unrealistic” or “overwhelming.” Furthermore, while they attributed

credibility to professional dress, they stated that they couldn't ever see themselves at that level of performance, which made it harder to connect with the speaker. I discussed the importance of identification in chapter two. Day (1960) emphasized Kenneth Burke's argument that "you persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your way as his" (Burke, 1950, as cited in Day, 1960, p. 271) So, through this perspective, persuasion occurs not just through argument, but through the audience's perception that you are like them, and thus, concerned with their interests. So, through my inductive analysis, I was concerned with whether or not this aspect of ethos was being achieved by the forensic speakers. While participants found most aspects of forensic speeches to enhance credibility, these were the same aspects that hindered the development of identification between speakers and participants. Many comments revealed that participants saw forensic students on an entirely different level than they would see themselves or their classmates. Reasons for this perception varied from the amount of time forensic students are given to prepare, to the difference in commitment between class assignments and competition, and an inherent ability to speak well in front of others. For example, a participant had this to say in regard to preparation for speeches:

*WI: They've been doing this for how long, and we've...I mean, in high school, I barely gave speeches, I think just group presentations so it's like I don't have as much practice, as much as they do.*

So this participant, and others in this focus group, argued that it was unrealistic for their professor to show them these speeches as examples and expect them to somehow get to this level. Another participant stated this expectation was "overwhelming," especially for a 100 level class. In addition to preparation and practice, participants found that the

environment of forensics as a competitive activity led to a greater commitment to speeches in comparison to what they did in their classes. This exemplifies text as discursive practice, looking at how “texts are produced (and consumed) in specific ways in specific social contexts” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 78). Students viewed the context of competitive public speaking as far removed from what should be expected of them in a basic public speaking course. For example:

*PI: I think it's just a little different, like, they're competing for something they actually want, and we're just forced to give a 5 minute speech and pick a topic, like out of the blue. So, I mean, obviously we don't have the same emotion toward the topic as they do.*

Participants in this group went on to say that the speeches they saw looked “perfect” and that they would be really impressed if any of their classmates came in and gave a speech like that. This was intriguing, as the group had a fair amount of negative criticism regarding these speeches in the beginning of the focus group, but they still placed the competitors at a level that, in their opinion, would be unattainable for the student in the basic public speaking classroom. Furthermore, some participants viewed forensic students as just naturally better speakers than most other people. I found the use of the term natural to be intriguing, considering they used the term “unnatural” when referring to many negative comments regarding body language and delivery. However, the following comment represents a view for some participants that the simple act of voluntarily joining a competitive speech activity is indicative of a natural talent that many do not possess:

*W1: I think it like comes naturally. Like some people are really good at speaking and some people are just obviously not very good. I just think when they try to teach it, for some people it will just click, but for some people it just doesn't.*

This could be indicative of a larger, pragmatic issue when it comes to required communication courses and what we're doing (or what we're unable to do) in the allotted time, as I will discuss in the subsequent section.

In addition to contextually-based factors, students specifically discussed memorization and professional dress as factors that enhanced credibility, but detracted from identification. As I discussed in chapter five, there was not a consensus among participants about a normative factor that decreased credibility, but the norm of memorization was critiqued by all as being unrealistic or not matching up with what they saw in their classrooms or in the real world. All participants stated that they were not expected to memorize in their classrooms and many critiqued memorization as going against what they learned regarding audience analysis and interaction. For example, one participant stated memorization does not adequately prepare students to address questions regarding subject matter:

*II: One guy [forensic student] came, and his topic was really nice. But when people asked the question, he got confused because he was memorized, so he couldn't remember the main point. If you want to be a professional speaker, you have to understand the topic, not to memorize. Of course, we need to memorize the points, the outline, but not everything. This is my own opinion, because I never did that.*

Participants in two other focus groups had similar concerns with memorization, related specifically to audience analysis and persuasive techniques. For example, the following

comments address concerns regarding gauging audience comprehension and audience compliance with the persuasive tactics that you're using:

*P1: Yeah, I think if this was a smaller group, then you would have to pay attention to the listeners and see if they're following you, and if they're not then you kind of have to improvise as you go and make sure they are. So if you have your speech memorized, you can't really go off of what you have, so you would have to be able to change it up as you go.*

*D3: You gotta gauge the audience too. My professor says that the reason he doesn't want us getting comfortable with memorization is because if you forget, then you're gonna lose your mind, many people lose their spot and can't ever get it back again. But you also need to be able to change up your persuasive strategies based on their reactions.*

So, while students were quick to label memorization as an impressive aspect of these speeches, calling them “perfect” or arguing that the fluidity of the speaker was an aspect that kept the audience intrigued and made it seem like the speaker really “knew what they were talking about,” many stated that this did not align with what they were learning in their classes and was an aspect of the speech that they could not identify with. However, one participant critiqued it on an aesthetic level as well, stating:

*W1: The memorization thing. I think that it looked too rehearsed at some points. And it just seemed like they had just practiced it and practiced it and it wasn't coming from them, they just wrote it down and memorized it, and I just think that's kind of unrealistic.*

This was the only focus group that critiqued memorization as detrimental to credibility and identification, because they argued that it made competitors sound like they were faking it, so audience members didn't want to believe them. However, across all focus



groups, memorization was a factor in hindering participant identification with forensic competitors.

The final factor that was cited by participants as hindering identification is professional dress. As I discussed earlier in this section and in the deductive results, students found professional dress to greatly increase the credibility of the speakers, stating that it made them seem more knowledgeable, more prepared, and more respectable. However, these traits did not actually make the students identify with these speakers. Due to the fact that formal professional dress was not an expectation in their classes, they had a hard time seeing the forensic speakers as aware of the issues that were important to them. For example, the following comment extends on an example from earlier in the deductive results and shows that students found forensic speakers very credible, but that wasn't always seen positively:

*WI: It's kinda like ok, well this person looks like they dress like...well college students wear really comfortable clothes, we don't necessarily walk around in like suits and nice dresses or whatever. They aren't in our mindset, like they don't like...they think differently about topics, because they're dressed like that, and they look at it in a different view than we do...like sometimes it does come off as, 'Well, they're in a nice suit, they look like professional and smart,' but then, it's like, 'well, do they really know how I think about it?'*

Day (1960) argued identification is crucial insofar as a speaker can show the audience how alike they are. In this case, professional business attire distanced the speaker from the audience, due to the fact that they perceived it as an indication of the speaker being in a different mindset than most college students.

My inductive analysis revealed numerous contextual and discursive factors that indicated students' perception that as credibility increased, identification decreased—at least within the context of this research. Factors which affected this perception included interpretation of speakers from a different standpoint, due to the competitive nature of forensics and the labeling of students as national competition, and normative expectations that seemed to simultaneously hinder and help the competitor's ability to persuade an audience. Many factors came into play in regard to participants' perceptions of ethos in forensic speakers. For the last section of the inductive results, I will discuss the final theme, which examined how participants criticized and praised both the male and the female competitors, revealing that my research group didn't see one gender as inherently more credible, but attributed certain expectations of appropriate behavior that were linked to gender-based assumptions of credibility.

### **Inductive Results—Gendered expectations of appropriateness**

The most exhaustive portion of the inductive analysis considered how the participants were measuring the credibility of each speaker and what aspects were seen as positive or negative for each speaker and why. This analysis revealed some intriguing perceptions on how students viewed the female competitors and the male competitor. Fairclough (1992) put forth the third dimensional concept of discourse as social practice. He was particularly concerned with situating this within ideology and hegemony. Ideology is situated within a hegemonic system in

the implicit and unconscious materialization of ideologies in practices (which contain them as implicit theoretical 'premises'), ideology being a conception of

the world that is implicitly manifest in art, in law, in economic activity and in the manifestations of individual and collective life (Gramsci, 1971, p. 328).

Fairclough argued that this causes actors within these structures to view ideologies as “common sense, naturalized, or automatized” (1992, p. 92). This concept speaks to my analysis as I found that participants were critical of both the male and female competitors, but it was the reason behind these criticisms that revealed ambivalent, sexist ideology. In this portion of the analysis, I took note of each incidence where a competitor critiqued both the male and the female competitors. Next, I looked at instances of positive feedback on both male and female competitors. Finally, I looked at the motivations behind positive and negative feedback to reveal what students found to be appropriate and inappropriate in the areas of body language, topic choice, dress, delivery, and emotional connection (pathos).

In my analysis, I examined how participants were discussing the forensic speakers specifically—rather than looking at them collectively (i.e. professional dress was looked at more universally)—to reveal how participants perceived the different competitors and what this revealed about their assumptions of ethos and gender. It should be noted that competitors were not all the same race. However, aside from one comment in one of the focus groups regarding the male competitor’s increased credibility as a black man to critique the Obama administration, participants were largely silent regarding racial indicators of credibility. As this was only one comment out of all of my focus groups, it is unclear as to the reasoning behind the absence of the discussion of race among the student participants. However, while there were 14 focus group participants, nine of these participants identified themselves as Caucasian, so while some diversity

existed among participants; it was far from a majority. Therefore, my analysis really focused on how participants were discussing speakers based on biological sex and their perceptions of gender appropriate behavior.

Fairclough (1992) argued that discursive structures cause individuals to view ideologies as “common sense, naturalized, or automatized” (p. 92). So I will preface my discussion of this section of the results by saying that very few comments that participants made were outwardly critical to either male or female participants. Rather, the comments, when connected with the act they were critiquing, revealed some intriguing perceptions regarding what participants saw as appropriate for each competitor and what that reveals about gendered expectations of appropriateness. I took note of each incidence where a competitor critiqued both the male and the female competitors. Next, I looked at instances of positive and negative feedback on both male and female competitors. Finally, I looked at the motivations behind positive and negative feedback to reveal what students found to be appropriate and inappropriate in the areas of body language, topic choice, dress, delivery, and emotional connection (pathos). Overall, I found that of the comments that were directed at specific competitors, there were 23 positive and 11 negative comments attributed to the male competitor. While there were 19 positive and 26 negative comments attributed to the female competitors. These figures would indicate that, overall, participants were much more critical of the female competitors than they were of the male competitor. However, it should be noted that many of these negative comments coincided with body language. Some examples of comments included:

*P3: The first girl, she would kind of just walk, and then just keep her arms right there (stiff—arms at side) it just kind of looked really awkward. The guy his walk was a lot better! She just looked like a deer in headlights.*

As I mentioned in the beginning of this section, body language was the one normative expectation that the majority of participants found as negatively affecting the competitors' credibility. While both of the female competitors exhibited body language that coincides with the normative expectations in forensics—which included formal gestures (emphasizing words/phrases) and the three-point-walk (engagement that coincides with walking to another side of the room for each main point) and grounded posture, which discourages shifting from side to side unless one is specifically within the three-point-walk—the male competitor subverted all of these normative expectations except for the three-point-walk. This could have attributed for some of the negative commentary that was directed toward the female competitors, but it also says something about who has the inherent credibility to subvert normative expectations in the forensic community. Jamieson (1988) argued that the masculine style has long dominated public rhetoric and women have typically adapted accordingly. This can be seen in the forensic community as well. Research has been conducted in forensics in the areas of: gender-based inequity in extemporaneous speaking (Olson, 2001), examination of gender-based participation and success rates (Manchester & Freidley, 2003), women's gender-based experiences in intercollegiate forensics (Greenstreet, Joeckel, Martin, & Piercy, 1998), gender-bias in rankings on the ballot (White, 1997) among other areas. Much of the research does indicate a bias toward inherent ethos of male competitors. Therefore, as I discussed in chapter two, inherent ethos would give a competitor more freedom to subvert norms without repercussion. However, the forensic community further

complicates inherent ethos with the addition of competitive success throughout a competitor's college experience. As I cannot assume whether this competitor's ability to subvert norms was due to inherent ethos as a male competitor or as a very successful competitor (or both), I will focus instead on examining the participants' comments, both positive and negative, regarding both the male competitor and the female competitors and examine what these comments reveal regarding how the participants saw each competitor's behavior as appropriate or inappropriate and the justification behind these claims, within the areas of: verbal and nonverbal emotional expression and emotional connection.

In regard to emotional expression, participants viewed the competitors' behavior on two levels: the competitors' verbal and nonverbal expression—or emotional tone of speaking—and the competitors' emotional connection to the topic or the audience. Participants in three of the four focus groups viewed the male competitor's loud, aggressive, and in their words “angry” expression in a very favorable light, whereas they reacted more favorably toward positive or “happy” forms of expression for the female competitor. For example:

*P2: I feel like the guy's body language made it more effective and his voice was really loud, which was very effective as well.*

*P1: And like, the guy's facial expression, when he said something angry he had like a scowl on his face. And then the first woman, she would always be smiling, which sorta made her feel more personable.*

*II: The second guy, he was excited about his topic and his expression was nice. I'm the guy that likes to talk about body language, ya know, and so I liked that guy. But*

*ladies always be silent and they don't show the expression, but they convince the audience from their speech, not the body language.*

The final sample comment could also have cultural implications, as this was one of the focus groups with international students, but it does exemplify the discourse surrounding positive commentary that participants attributed to the competitors verbal and nonverbal emotional expression. Furthermore, when looking at the negative feedback regarding emotional expression, the same behavior that was judged positively for the male competitor was looked at differently for the female competitor:

*P1: It just kind of seemed like she was yelling at us, not really talking to us.*

*P2: I just liked that she told the story in the beginning to get our attention. But then, ya like he said, her voice was kind of weird.*

Furthermore, participants stated that while the male competitor's delivery was seen as more credible due to volume, excitement, and the passion connected to the anger that he portrayed, he was seen by some as not as connected to his topic. This brings me to the second aspect that participants critiqued both positively and negatively based on perceived appropriateness: emotional connection to the topic and audience.

As I discussed in chapter two, the important connection between pathos and ethos exists in the audience's perception of whether or not the emotions being displayed by the speaker are appropriate for the situation. Within this context, that manifested itself in whether competitor's emotion matched the topic they were speaking of. First and foremost, positive comments in many of the focus groups actually connected the female speakers to the fact that they were speaking about topics that was seen by the participants as very "emotional." For example, the following comments were in regard to aspects that students found effective overall:

*I2: Her topic was really, like, emotional because it talked about disabled people and the way they are not able to work and talking about how they're being exploited, this was something that really attracted the attention of the audience.*

*I1: And the emotion, like he just said, it's emotional, it touches.*

*W3: They keep them from getting that job, people that don't have a voice. I thought what she said 'a voice for the voiceless' was important.*

*P1: I believe the first girl, since it's not so broad of a topic, did a good job of using emotions, like feeling bad for them and knowing that they're not going to live as nice as others, just because of disability which they can't even control, so you feel emotionally concerned for them and that might make people want to contribute more.*

Conversely, the male competitor's topic was seen as far-reaching and much more general.

This was seen positively by some participants who argued that the value of a topic is in its ability to relate to a larger audience. However, this also allowed for a certain amount of emotional disconnect, with the exception of the emotion of anger, which was seen favorably as a way to connect with the audience and convince them to help.

*P1: The second guy seemed like he was actually angry himself, like he was being taken advantage of too. So he wanted action done to better himself and others.*

Not surprisingly, both of these pathos-driven tactics are congruent with the topics competitors chose to speak about, so their mention does not necessarily indicate gender-based expectations on the part of the participants, but rather, effective communication tactics utilized by the competitors. However, what is intriguing is that the strong emotional connection that the female competitors were expected to have for their topics was labeled by some participants as overly dramatic or artifice, and by others as restrained for the topic. So, while these "emotional" topics were looked at positively, the



audience did not trust the female competitors' pathos, thus they found it inappropriate for the context.

*D1: And then for her topic, she didn't seem very emotional, like for the big problem of kids being given all these drugs.*

*D2: I'm not trying to be insulting...she almost 'William Shatnered' her passion, like overacted it, like you could tell it was kind of fake. Like, ok, I can tell you care, but now you're trying to 'used car salesman' care about this topic.*

*D5: "Going off of what he said about flip-flopping, I feel like her facial expressions were kind of bi-polar, because she would say something serious, have a serious face, but many times it would seem like she was smiling or something, it really threw me off.*

*D2: When she first started, it seemed like her emotions were non-existent. I'm sure it was just nervousness, but the first thing I noticed is that she was just talking and not using her facial expressions.*

Conversely, the male competitor's pathos was accepted as natural and effective. Whether through aggressive language or tone or gestures, participants reported that it seemed as though he was just speaking to them and this seemed to indicate a personal connection to the topic he was speaking on.

*D2: technically everyone has a connection, but he took it personal...*

*D3: Without making it act like he does, like he was actually more convincing.*

Gramsci (1971) examined the implicit and unconscious emergence of ideologies in practices and how they are manifested within discourse. In examining the difference between what participants found appropriate for certain competitors and not appropriate for others, I have found—within this research group—that while anger/aggressiveness was praised for the male participant, it was perceived negatively for

female participants. This reveals ideological perceptions of gender inequity in society. Jost and Kay (2005) showed that men perceive the system of gender relations to be significantly more justified than do women. System-justifying beliefs have consequences for both high and low status groups, such as the internalization of stereotypes, and the belief that economic equality is legitimate and necessary (Jost, Pelham, Sheldon, & Sullivan, 2003; Kay & Jost, 2003), and system justification is an important facet of sexist ideology (Calogero & Jost, 2011). However, within my focus groups, female participants and male participants alike were critical of female competitors' style of communication, so this may indicate a larger issue within the educational system, which I will discuss in the subsequent section.

### **Inductive Results—Conclusion**

While my research revealed some telling information about the inaccuracy of anecdotal evidence and the complexity of how public speaking students view ethos with respect to forensics, my inductive results yielded some even more important information regarding how students conceptualize ethos in general and the factors that may be involved in who these students see as credible and why. Critical discourse analysis allowed me to examine the systemic constructs with regard to socioeconomic class and gender that factor into how students perceive speakers. In the final section, I will discuss some implications of research, as well as the limitations and some areas for extending this research in the future.

## Chapter Six: Discussion

While this research may serve as a challenge to the forensic community to go beyond the realm of anecdotal evidence and examine critiques by utilizing the research that has already been done in this activity and expanding upon this with our own critical inquiry; it also reveals some intriguing implications for the communication discipline as a whole and how we perceive—and teach—concepts relating to ethos. As public speaking teachers, forensic coaches, or both, we have the responsibility to teach students how to critically examine their worlds, but we also have the responsibility to prepare them for their future. Herein lies the unique challenge that we face as educators. There is a reason that some of the normative expectations of forensics are pedagogically grounded within teaching expectations for the public speaking classroom. For example, in the basic public speaking course, while instructors may not require that students come dressed in formal business attire, the requirement of having a student dress up on a day that they will be giving a presentation is grounded in the justification of preparing them for what is expected in a job interview or within the professional world. Teaching them to use specific language and research is grounded in the expectation that giving an effective speech or presentation requires preparation and credible background information to support their arguments. However, there is a vast array of students, from a wide variety ethnic, racial, and social backgrounds that come through the basic public speaking course, especially when these courses are required for all majors; so assuming that they are all preparing for communication as necessary for the professional world limits those students who fall outside of this category. Furthermore, this assumption serves to perpetuate a privileging of certain communication styles, namely those that are visible in

the business and professional world. Fairclough looks at discourse as social practice through the lens of ideology and hegemony, “placing discourse within a view of power and hegemony, and a view of the evolution of power relations as hegemonic struggle” (1992, p. 86). As my research suggests, students’ conceptualization of what it means to be credible reveals implications regarding social structures such as class and gender. More disturbing, is that these perceptions were discussed in a very normalized manner, as though it should be common sense to assume that someone would not be taken seriously if they were not dressed professionally. As I discussed in my analysis, ideology and hegemony are strongly connected in regard to the naturalization of social structures in discourse. Gramsci (1971) argued

Ideology is understood within this framework (hegemony) in, for instance, its focusing of the implicit and unconscious materialization of ideologies in practices (which contain them as implicit theoretical ‘premises’), ideology being a conception of the world that is implicitly manifest in art, in law, in economic activity and in the manifestations of individual and collective life (p. 328).

Therefore, I would argue that as educators, we must critically examine our own assumptions and justification regarding what makes an effective public speaker and what these requirements—in forensics and the basic public speaking course—may reveal about capitalist ideology that permeates higher education.

In regard to forensics, I would argue that one of the most detrimental effects of the reproduction of the unwritten rules within the forensic community is that by connecting them to competitive success, we inadvertently disconnect them from the ideological values that they represent. Competitors willingly participate in the unwritten

rules because they, justifiably, desire success. As I discussed in chapter two, we are a community that prides itself on critical consideration of topics regarding power relations of race, gender, socioeconomic class, ability, and many other important areas. We're an activity that prides itself on advocating for marginalized groups or causes relating to social justice. Kelly, Paine, Richardson, and White (2014) discussed that competitors within public address should be picking "socially significant" topics (p. 45). However, we are not as quick to be critical of the classed and gendered requirements for professional dress and what it means to have a powerful gesture or requirements for expensive suits and academic language that have blatant socioeconomic class, race, and accessibility implications. This represents the naturalization of these ideologies within our community due to the emphasis on unwritten rules. So, on one hand, competitors are being taught to argue against these detrimental systemic issues, and on the other hand they are forced to perpetuate these ideologies or risk their own competitive success by challenging these norms.

In examining the inductive results of my research, it is evident that these ideologies are not only permeating the forensic community, but are on some level influencing how public speaking students conceptualize ethos. The participants in my research indicated through the perception of professionalism as assumed competence that a speaker must be dressed professionally in order to be taken seriously. This reveals some disturbing ideology about the assumption of a speaker who is not dressed professionally as uneducated, unmotivated, and unworthy of acknowledgement. This influences their own conceptions of what it takes to be successful, but also influences the perceptions, especially in relation to power and socioeconomic class, that they will take with them in

the future. Furthermore, participants' discourse surrounding what is appropriate for male and female speakers represents a perpetuation of negative assumptions of masculinity and femininity and how these assumptions relate to ethos. Both male and female participants were quick to label the female competitors' use of powerful language, delivery, and gestures as unnatural or inappropriate. This is especially problematic when considering how female students see themselves within the classroom. Therefore, as forensic coaches and educators, we must be willing to acknowledge what the normative expectations in forensics, as well as the pedagogically justified expectations in our classrooms, are teaching our students

The forensic community holds a unique position in that is based on the incredibly valuable nature of this activity. We are a community of individuals that is well-spoken, motivated and compassionate; an effective combination when it comes to speaking out against injustice—even if that injustice is tied to the values inherent in our own normative expectations. Challenging these unwritten rules and norms serves the dual purpose of challenging the capitalistic ideology attached to them. However, as discussed in chapter two, in forensics the impetus for change is often placed on competitors and judges (Paine, 2005). While competitors obviously have the capability to challenge the norms, while they are connected to competitive success, the motivation to challenge them is greatly reduced. Furthermore, judges often report that due to a lack of specific, rule-based expectations within each event, normative expectations fill the gap and give them more criteria on which to judge a performance (Paine, 2005). My argument, then, is for an extension of the discourse within in the forensic community, not just identifying these normative practices, but acknowledging the ideological value attached to them. In

addition to this, we must increase our research that examines how these normative practices are viewed, both within and outside of our community. This would provide an increased transparency regarding the implications of these normative practices that is not situated within the realm of what is competitively successful or not successful, but rather, is motivated by the concern for our students while they are in the forensic community and well beyond their time as competitors. These norms permeate our entire community; therefore, the critical discussion to challenge and subvert them must permeate the community as well. Hall (1985) argued

By generating discourses which condense a range of different connotations, the dispersed conditions of practice of different social groups can be effectively drawn together in a way that make those social forces not a simply a class “in itself,” positioned by some other relations over which it has no control, but also capable of intervening as a historical force, a class for itself, capable of establishing new collective projects (p. 96).

Recognizing the agency within our community to challenge these ideologies facilitates an empowering discussion recognizing that change is attainable, as long as we are willing to look critically at these practices, acknowledge the role we play in perpetuating them, and collaborate to solutions that will be beneficial for our students and the community as a whole.

These conversations become more challenging for educators within the classroom, as many university-specific regulations may dictate how the basic public speaking course is taught and which areas we must emphasize. However, we can challenge students to consider their perceptions with regard to ethos and expose the

ideological assumptions connected to them. For example, participants within my research discussed how the competitors' increased credibility actually decreased participants' ability to identify with them. This could indicate a very worthwhile discussion regarding the justification for emphasizing competence over identification when it comes to finding a speaker credible. This conversation could empower students to acknowledge the importance of recognizing a speaker's life experience and how this affects their credibility. Often, we fall into the trap of considering the messages provided by those with perceived expertise as more valid than those based on lived experience. Expertise refers to "the extent to which a communicator is perceived to be a source of valid assertions" (Hovland et al., 1953, p. 21). Experience, knowledge, qualification, and skill are related to attributed expertise (Ohanian, 1990). Research suggests that expertise is positively related to the perceptions of credibility (Meyer et al., 2010) and believability (Hallahan, 1999). Additionally, sources perceived to be expert have been shown to influence individuals' attitudes (Petty & Wegener, 1998; Sternthal et al., 1978). While teaching our students how to discern credibility in source information is important, challenging them to consider their own assumptions with regard to what constitutes credibility is one way that we can help them understand the ideological concerns embedded in these assumptions. As educators, we have the ability to foster these critical dialogues within our classrooms. What students do with this information is beyond our control, but challenging them to think critically is a step in the right direction. My research revealed intriguing implications within the forensic community as well as within the communication as a whole, but it is far from exhaustive. Therefore, I will discuss



some limitations to this research and how these limitations can point to other useful avenues of research in the future.

### **Research Limitations**

The first, and most evident, limitation of this research is the relatively small size of my focus group participation. While this research was meant to qualitatively consider participants' personal experiences, rather than trying to generalize across a community, these focus groups were still effective in acknowledging the discourse among students and how perceptions were being formed individually and within each focus group. However, as this research revealed some troubling implications regarding conceptions of ethos, examining additional focus groups or establishing a quantitative measurement to assess how a larger number of students view speaker credibility would be beneficial to the communication discipline. Furthermore, I must acknowledge that the structure of the focus groups may have resulted in skewed responses due to students' assumptions of my expectations as a forensic coach or communication instructor. Participants were recruited from current public speaking courses by offering extra credit as an incentive. Therefore, participants may have come in with assumptions regarding what their instructor was expecting them to get out of this experience or assumptions about what I was looking for based on my position and background in relation to forensics. I attempted to remove any assumed bias by providing limited background information regarding this connection, however, due to the fact that only two out of the fourteen participants had any knowledge as to the nature of forensics, I found it necessary to provide the necessary context regarding what the activity entailed, including the competitive nature of events and why forensic students got involved with the activity. This contextual information may have

contributed to the assumption that as a forensic coach, I would expect them to view competitors in a positive light. In addition to this, I opted to show participants recorded speeches, rather than utilizing competitors from the university team, to avoid the possibility that participants would know competitors and not want to offend them. Furthermore, I opted to utilize persuasive speeches that were in national final rounds, as these would represent best practices in the forensic community. However, the context of seeing a mediated example, paired with the knowledge that these competitors were national finalists, may have resulted in biased perceptions based on participants' assumptions of credibility as competence. If participants saw these speakers as representative of the best speeches in the nation, this would give all of the competitors a level of inherent credibility before participants had even gotten a chance to see them speak. Finally, although each participant had learned concepts relating to ethos within their respective classes, there was not necessarily a shared understanding of what that meant in regard to this research. While I wanted them to speak about their perceptions using personal experience and knowledge-base, a shared understanding could be beneficial as a starting point for gauging what they saw in the speeches as credible or not. This, again, may be beneficial to gauge their perceptions on a larger scale. Given these limitations, I will discuss some areas for future research that address these issues and also some potential areas that arose within the research as a whole.

### **Future Research**

This research is very beneficial for the forensic community, as it allowed me to utilize anecdotal evidence and determine whether these long-held critiques were justified. While the size of the research group was limited, the research revealed the majority of

participant responses did not support what the anecdotal evidence would claim regarding how public speaking students view forensic competitors. Future research could include utilizing larger groups or the repetition of similar research to determine whether these results could be replicated. This would be beneficial to determine the validity of the results. In regard to the inductive results, participants' conceptualizations of ethos may have been affected by certain contextual elements of the focus groups, therefore, additional research could be conducted utilizing in-person example speeches performed in the middle of the competitive season. This could reveal additional results regarding participant identification with competitors and whether perceptions of credibility were tied to inherent assumptions of the competitors' success as national finalists.

Furthermore, I conducted this research at the end of the semester, so participants would have the conceptual background provided by their public speaking course to discuss aspects of ethos. However, this also meant that many participants were viewing competitors' speeches through the comparative lens of speeches that they had recently been exposed to within their classes. Future research involving students who were just beginning their experience in this class (with a shared understanding of ethos established within the research context) may indicate a less biased report of competitor credibility, as they would not have class speeches to compare them to. Finally, this research could be extended within the forensic community by assessing forensic competitors' perceptions of how the normative expectations affect speaker credibility. Although the unwritten rules in forensics are reproduced and followed due to their connection with competitive success, we may be overestimating forensic students' perception of them as beneficial. Future research that gauges how forensic students really discuss the normative

expectations could greatly benefit the community as a whole and could be the catalyst to the critical discussion surrounding the norms and their beneficial/detrimental effects on the students who participate in this activity. Overall, additional research that links forensics to the communication discipline further legitimizes our activity within our institutions and among communication and forensics faculty. Fostering this partnership will be greatly beneficial and can only help us to guarantee that the value of this activity is understood and recognized.

### **Conclusion**

This research, while eye-opening, was very validating to me as a future forensic professional. My personal experience challenged me to critically consider this activity that I have been so connected to my entire life, and in doing so, has allowed me to acknowledge that while our experiences are incredibly useful, it is important to take the next step and participate in the research that will further this community and the discipline as a whole. As the next generation of forensic educators, we will be participating in the conversations that will shape the future of the activity. Understanding how those within and outside our community conceptualize important concepts, such as ethos; will only help us to move these conversations in the right direction.

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### Appendix A: Focus Group Questions

- 1.) How did you feel about the topic the competitor chose to speak about?
  - a. What techniques did the speaker use to persuade you?
  - b. Were they effective? Why/Why not?
  - c. Did the speaker show that they were connected with this issue? If so, how?
  
- 2.) What would you consider a “socially significant” issue?
  - a. Do you believe that the speaker’s topic fits your definition of “socially significant”? Why/why not?
  
- 3.) What aspects of the speaker’s delivery did you find effective? What aspects did you find to be ineffective? Why?
  - a. Can you tell me about any specific things that aided your comprehension of this speech (i.e. language choices, repetition, structure)?
  - b. Can you tell me about any specific things that hindered your comprehension of this speech (i.e. accent, jargon, unclear message)?
  
- 4.) How did the speaker’s physical appearance affect their credibility (ethos) in presenting this message?
  - a. Do you believe that professional dress enhances credibility? Why/why not?
  - b. Were there any additional factors that affected credibility in the speaker?
  
- 5.) What techniques did the speaker use to help you understand their argument?
  - a. Does this line up with what you’re learning in the public speaking course? Why or why not?

## **Appendix B: Focus Group Transcription**

### **Focus group 1—(CMST 100)**

#### **Overall: effective/ineffective**

I 1: "I like the second speaker (black male-punishing Wall Street), the expression was good to attract the audience. But the last one (white female-adoption and drug abuse) that lady was standing in the same place for a couple of minutes and explaining without the body language. I felt this was a little bit awkward, audience won't be attracted by that position, ya know? But the guy who talked about the administration was awesome. I liked his speech and the expression and the way he speaks. He was talking about a particular topic, but he attracted the audience too with body language."

I 2: "For me, I liked the first one (white female-disability worker's rights). Her topic was really, like, emotional because it talked about disabled people and the way they are not able to work and talking about how they're being exploited, this was something that really attracted the attention of the audience. From my own view, one thing I didn't think was effective was when she just picked up something, like, to get it signed from the audience. I thought that wasn't too effective, it should be done after the speech is done."

#### **Topics: how did they convince you?**

I 1: "The first topic was good, actually, in the sense that she sourced, she called on the sources from different articles and those things and put everything together in a nice way. It was talking about disability and minimum wages and I like that topic, compared to other topics. And the emotion, like he just said, it's emotional, it touches. The first one, she called on a bunch of articles and we can see that this is true and organized topics."

I 2: "For me, I think the most interesting topic was the first one and the last one. The first one is because everyone needs money, so because it was about low wages, everyone needs to raise the minimum wage. So that was effective overall, everybody's in there and involved with the topic. And the last topic, she was talking about kids and how they need extra care so although they don't have

their parents or something, but they still need better care like, um, like other kids."

**Topics: were the speakers connected?**

I 1: (Immediate response—excited facial expressions/gestures) "Yeah, the first, she was in that condition and she expressed like that (moves arms forward in large gesture). Her expression was sentimental like her topic—disability and not giving people wages—she was in that condition. And the last one, about the kids, that was good. Those speakers were in that topic, ya know? But that second one, it was a little bit...it's hard to say...they have to show that expression, how to explain the topic that the Obama administration. The way he did was awesome, but compared to the other two topics, he was not that much inside the topic. He talked about the politician, how the politician will be explained."

I 2: "For me, the last lady was too emotional about her topic, no smile, no nothing (negative facial expression), I think the second guy was too confident about what he was talking about. I felt like that wasn't something that attracted the audience because he was too confident about it. (Clarification requested) I think it didn't work well in that he was too confident, but it did work well in that he grabbed the attention of the audience because of the way he was speaking and the way he was loud, ya know?"

**What do you consider to be "socially significant?"**

I 1: "Controversy about marijuana, those are the complicated things to decide by the government and for the public too, ya know? Government thinks that maybe it goes wrong if it legalizes and public think that it may be helpful if it got legalized and that is too different opinions for the government side and public side. Government think that we get a lot of taxes if we legalized marijuana, but some other people think that its bad. It happened in Colorado, talking about that they got 300 million in taxes, whereas they only got 16 million. It's not much helpful for the government. It's up to government and up to public people; there are two versions of thinking. (animated hand gestures). I like that marijuana topic most and I am really more concerned about that topic. Minnesota is also talking about the legalization topic now, but we'll see what the government decides."

I 2: "I would do a speech on climate change because I think that is something that is affecting all over the world. World climate is affecting like everything, like every activity is being affected by climate change entirely."

Respondent: It sounds like both of you consider something that is socially significant to be something that affects a lot of people, is this correct? (Affirmative response—head nodding)

**Do you think the topics that were spoken about are considered socially significant?**

I 1: (Immediate response) "Yes." Why or why not? "The first person talked about disabilities and those are hidden behind the mirror. They have a lot of problems behind the mirror. And nobody is there to talk about the problem, but she took that problem and talked about it in the public. That's the thing, we need to come out. There are a lot of people who are not getting proper salary according to their knowledge and they are working hard. So those things are good and I liked that first one. We rarely hear about those types of topics, like marijuana and global warming, those are topics you hear about all the time, but disability and minimum wage, we rarely hear people talk about these."

I 2: "I'll go with him. We often hear about minimum wage, but not from the point of view of disability. So that was something new, for something for us to know about, because the disabled people are being exploited. And the other speech, the second one, because it was affected all over like all America, the prices have gone up and everything, I think that was even a good topic too."

I 1: "Yeah, the first topic was, uh, I didn't know about that, to be honest. I thought that disabled people were treated nicely. To realize that this was an issue, that they were being paid less money, it was the first time I have heard this. So I like that. But that second guy was talking about the crisis, which all we know, we can see that."

**What specific techniques helped you understand the speech?**

I 1: "The speech was organized with both the points. I personally can say that, in a good way, that they are a problem and they need to come out, and we need to solve



that problem. Government needs to solve that problem. I'm not saying that I disagree; I agree that what they talk about is true and real, because they call it a bunch of social things. I support them, but I don't have any idea what to do, how to solve it. Especially the second guy, the crisis, we don't know how to solve those things, only government knows how to solve those things.

Respondent: I want to clarify and ask if there were any language factors, any structural factors, the way they spoke about the issue or moved in the speech, did any of these factors affect how you understood the speech or whether or not it persuaded you?

I 1: "We can understand what they are trying to do. They organized the speech according to the audience, how the audience can understand. They started with an introduction and talked about the problem and how to find the solution. Those are organized things, so that was good."

I 2: "For me, the speech was kind of light, because they started out with something that was giving up a story that was to attract the audience. Like the last speech, the lady she talked about a kid and that was in the hospital and it was shocking the audience and attracting the attention because we don't talk about the kids and what they are facing. Also, I think the three of them walking around was a thing to keep the audience focused on you."

**Any techniques that you found ineffective?**

I 1: "Sometimes the sources, they gave the sources, and I don't know what they are talking about or where they came from. I know they are proper sources and they helped their speech to convince the audience, but sometimes the sources were confusing for me, it's hard to understand."

I 2: "I think the ineffective thing for the first lady was that she asked the audience to sign some agreement or something and I think that was ineffective. The other thing that would be better if they used some more common sources for students, especially like international students, and use examples to attract us or make us understand."

**When you talked in your class about ethos (explanation of credibility), what did you think about how speakers'**

**appearance (what they were wearing or how they presented themselves)?**

I 1: "They are in formal dress and formal dress shows that they are serious about their topic. All three of them were in formal dress and there was no wrong thing about how they were dressed. They expressed how they feel. The second guy, he was excited about his topic and his expression was nice. I'm the guy that likes to talk about body language, ya know, and so I liked that guy. But ladies always be silent and they don't show the expression, but they convince the audience from their speech, not the body language."

I 2: "Yeah, talking about body language, the way they were dressed was the way you want to speak in front of people you have to be dressed in a formal way, no one will give you attention otherwise. I think the second speech, that guy was too serious, the way he was acting, he was just looking at the audience and (\*makes a very stiff posture\*) that made him look too serious about it.

I 1: "The topic also, the lady topic was very serious, but the guy topic was very exciting, it's not about serious things, not really compared to the other topics, so he was able to express nicely.

I 1: "If you go in a t-shirt and jeans, in that serious topic, people are not interested in the topic. People will think : what is he going to talk about? And people don't believe that, ya know. If you're talking about a serious topic, you should be serious, and all of those people did the same things. Those were the perfect topic with the perfect get-up. If that second guy was in a t-shirt and jeans, I would probably ignore that." (\*Waves hand dismissively\*)

I 2: "I feel, it also depends on the audience you are having (\*other participant laughs\*). If you have the audience of people who are like really old, you need to be dressed well in front of them, but if you're just going to speak in front of highschool kids, you'll still get their attentions."

**Were there any techniques (language) that helped you comprehend what they were saying?**

I 1: "For me, I'm not a native language speaker; it's really hard to understand others' language, except my language. And these people, they used more harder language than common people. Each speech is different, but they used harder words to understand, which is difficult. But if they used more examples, it would be easier to understand. A couple of them, they give examples, but those examples are not significant to the topic and it's a little bit difficult for me to understand. I can understand what they're trying to say, but if they gave easier examples, it's more easier for me to understand exactly what they're trying to say.

I 2: "He had a good point to there and what I think is that it's depending on the people you're speaking to. If I was from America, and I was going to speak to the American people, even if I use the hard language, they will understand or catch up (\*other participant agrees, verbally and nonverbally\*). But if I know I'm going to talk to international people, I have to use some language that is not as advanced. So, it would be helpful to use the simple language, especially in front of people who aren't native speakers, it would make it helpful to understand.

**Did the techniques in the speeches match what you are learning in your classes? Why/why not?**

I 1: "Yes. That is the way the teacher wanted us to present. We did it in a different way, like this is a speech class, and we can't do exactly what the professor want. I have to use my own way of introducing myself and the topic and using examples and using experience. People have their own style, but this is a totally different pattern. It's harder for me to talk about things like that. I can't introduce myself like that, I can't talk like that."

I 2: "For me, I think there's some things there that are similar to our last speech. For example, we get a lot of marks for keeping eye contact with the audience, as the guy in the second speech did. Another thing is to move around to attract attention, that was another thing that was similar to this speech. Another thing is to give an attention attracting statement for the speech, that was another thing that was similar."

I 1: "Each speech can affect from their first sentence you know, how they start. Some people start with the flow, you go up. And some people thing they do, and they go down. The third lady, she was loud at the beginning and later she was going down, ya know. It was common, because her topic was serious to go down, but the second guy was in the same flow, he didn't go up and down. It depends on their topic how they choose."

**Do you think this is similar to speeches we see in the media or other public speeches?**

I 1: "We all know Ted, right? Lots of speeches in the website, that is a website. Ted Talks. I used to see that speech and people used to organize their topic and they know what they're going to talk and how they're going to talk and how they're going to attract people. That's the thing we want, professional speakers. We are not professional speakers, but we can learn something from them, how to start. Those things are interesting. I took the public speaking in my course, and more than that, I wanted to learn something from my course. My professor knows what his students want, because he is a student too, so it's easy to understand student to student. So public speaking is a nice position to attract the audience, if you have a fear of speaking."

I 2: "If you have public speaking speeches and other speeches, they have similarities, but they have many difference. If you're addressing the people, like athletics, but some different professional speakers talk differently than others.

I 1: "We never see those people that are memorized and they are walking around the room and they go with the flow and that is different. Because they are a professional speaker and we are just doing it for a class. Like, we had a student come in to class to talk about a particular topic (forensic student). The point was awesome, but he gave a study and people asked a question and he got confused. He goes with the point you know (\*gave a confused face\*). When you have memorization, it's very hard. I never memorize. When I select a topic, I relate it to my experience and my opinion. I outline the points, but I don't memorize all the things. It comes automatically when you talk, if you're familiar with the topic. The same thing happened with students, not with professional speakers.

I 2: "And someone like the president, he doesn't even write his own speech."

I 1: "One guy came, and his topic was really nice. But when people asked the question, he got confused because he was memorized, so he couldn't remember the main point. If you want to be a professional speaker, you have to understand the topic, not to memorize. Of course, we need to memorize the points, the outline, but not everything. This is my own opinion, because I never did that. I gave many speeches in my own language, but I never memorized."

I 2: "This is the first time I've ever given a speech in this class."

I 1: "We didn't have speeches like this in our class, because people were reading from their whole speeches written on their cards. I don't think that is the good way to do that, because then audience won't be attracted, even if it's a good topic, audience won't be persuaded. So speakers, whether memorized or not, they must attract the audience, that's the main thing. And the audience should be able to ask the question from any part of the speech, they should know that and that makes them a good speaker. Whether you attract or not, if the audience asks a question and you don't know how to answer, it's not a good thing."

### **Focus Group 2—(CMST 100)**

#### **What did you find effective or ineffective?**

W1: "The only thing I found ineffective with the second one was his tie color. Like that's the first thing I noticed when I looked at him. I saw the bright green tie and for the first good part it's all I was looking at, to be completely honest."

W2: "The topic was really boring in the second speech and I just kept getting lost. I think I'm just not interested in it, so I couldn't listen to it."

W3: "I think the second one was really enthusiastic and invested in what he was saying. He had really good facial and voice variation and hand gestures that were really effective, but sometimes he spoke kind of fast and I couldn't pay attention to it."

W1: "So on the second one, like in the end, he kind of brought it back to the audience—like, they're using our money—and this made think about the topic more, because I was thinking, 'It's my money, what are they doing with it?' and that kind of got me. Maybe if he would have said more about that in the beginning, maybe I would have been able to listen more. Because, like, in the end I was more engaged in the topic and it like meant more to me than just random things. I think, like, specifically with a topic like that, since it's a complicated topic."

**How did you feel about the topics?**

W3: "I like the first one a lot. It was something that meant a lot to me."

W1: "I agree. I am going into special ed and I have some family members that are disabled, so it really meant more to me than the second or the third one."

W 2: "I didn't know about some of that stuff, so it was good to hear more about it."

**What did they do to help you connect to the topic?**

W3: "Her solution, or plan of action, like how you can sign the petition they made, and all that stuff, I thought that was really cool."

W1: "They kind of made it easier for you, ya know, like if you're interested, you can easily make a difference."

W2: "What they said I guess."

**Did they show that they were connected to the topic?**

W2: "They seemed very interested in what they were talking about."

W1: "I think the second one seemed more into his topic than the first one did. I think the first lady...um...The second one was more relaxed up there, he like, didn't seem as stiff as the first one did. That kind of made it seem like he knows more about it and like is more wanting a change."

**What would you consider a socially significant issue?**

W2: "All having the same opportunities. Equal rights."

W3: "I spoke on sugar restrictions and food and nutrition and stuff."

W1: "I know a girl in our class talked about the abstinence thing, the class, you know how in highschool how you have to take the sex ed or whatever. That's really big right now, because it's a lot different than it was. That's a big topic because they shouldn't just teach abstinence. That's big with our age."

**Would you consider the topics you heard tonight to be socially significant?**

W1: "The first one. There's more people worried about that because there's more like handicapped people. Maybe its just because I'm a special ed major but, I see a lot more handicapped people and people worried about their rights rather than the government. Because the government has been like that for so long."

W3: "They keep them from getting that job, people that don't have a voice. I thought what she said 'a voice for the voiceless' was important."

W1: "Like she (W2) said, equality is important—that's the most important thing right now."

**What aspects of delivery did you find effective?**

W3: "Voice variation, hand gestures, and they used an appropriate topic."

W1: "I think the second one, his like, hand gestures were the perfect amount. It wasn't like overbearing where his hands were flailing all over (\*flails), but it was like a good amount to where it came off as he cared."

W3: "And it made it really natural looking too, like everything flowed."

W1: "The first one was like really like, she did a few ones but they were just right here (\*robotic motion\*) and it didn't really like, I don't know, her whole body didn't get into it."

W3: "Then the 3<sup>rd</sup> one I felt like was kind of awkward (\*group laughs, nodding\*). Sometimes she used them where they didn't even make sense to me. And she kept just going like this (\*wave hand back and forth \*) like down there too.

**What did you find that was ineffective?**

W1: "A few of them spoke really fast. It was hard for me to like comprehend it at first. I didn't expect them to speak so fast so I was really confused. Especially the second one, with all the words he was using, I needed time to understand how he was using them and since he went so fast, it didn't click."

W2: "The second one, I don't know if it was his voice or he, like, came on too strong with what he was talking about, but it was hard for me to listen to him or like hear what he was saying.

**Was there anything (specifically) that helped you to understand what they were saying?**

W1: "Uh, the first one, she like, you know how like, when you have a business, you use the first letter of each word (acronym), she used that a lot, like throughout. So it kind of like made me understand like 'oh, she's still talking about this...and they're doing this' so it made it all come together sort of. So then she wasn't talking about one thing and then went to the next and then went to the next and then like just went on with different things. She brought stuff from the beginning to the end and, like, it flowed."

W3: "I have that written down too. How she started with the long story and then went back to it in the end."

**Was there anything (specifically) that hindered your understanding?**

W3: "I guess for the second one, I didn't really like, it's not something I was interested in and it was kind of over my head, so there was no way I was going to understand really what he was talking about. He just made it more for people that knew about it."



W1: "Yeah. I think I agree. Like, I didn't really understand like the main point he was trying to get across, I just knew he was talking about like government and them spending our money on like stuff that was not beneficial to us. At least, that's what I got from it. And then I didn't understand what he was trying to persuade us to do."

W2: "The first one, I could really understand what she was saying. But the second one, it was just hard to understand everything, I don't know if it was that I didn't know the topic enough or it was just too complicated."

**Was there anything about the speaker's physical appearance that affected how you saw them as credible?**

W1: "I think the first one, as far as appearance goes, she didn't really wear anything that stood out, it was like neutral colors. And that kind of like, you looked at what she was wearing, but then once you looked at it, you didn't like worry about it, because it was just like neutral, it wasn't like (not saying it was ugly) but it was just like something that didn't catch your attention and draw you away from what they were trying to say."

W2: "They looked professional, so that made them look more credible."

**Is this similar to what you saw in your classes?**

W1: "It's kinda like ok, well this person looks like they dress like...well college students wear really comfortable clothes, we don't necessarily walk around in like suits and nice dresses or whatever. They aren't in our mindset, like they don't like...they think differently about topics, because they're dressed like that, and they look at it in a different view than we do."

**Are you able to connect to them?**

W1: "Like sometimes it does come off as, 'Well, they're in a nice suit, they look like professional and smart,' but then, it's like, 'well, do they really know how I think about it?'"

**Was there anything else that affected how credible they looked?**

W2: "The first one, she stood like, really stiff. If she would have loosened up I think it would have been easier to listen to. It gets a little uncomfortable."

W1: "I think the same with the third one. Like in the beginning, it looked like she was just staring at somebody and I was like, 'oh, I don't want to be that person!'"

W3: "The walk was kind of a nice change of scene, but I felt like the first one did it a lot. If its used appropriately, I feel like it could have been effective."

W1: "I feel like it was kind of awkward because like the first one, like, walked, stopped and barely moved and then walked, stopped, barely moved (\*stiff motions with hands and body\*) . And the guy kind of like eased over (\*flowing hand movement) and didn't just walk and stop. It all comes down to he just looked more comfortable.

**Do these speeches line up with what you're being taught in your 100/102 classes?**

W2: "Yeah. They talk about like facial expressions, gestures, walking, eye contact. They did all that. And dressing appropriately, obviously not that much, but..."

W3: "We weren't allowed to wear sweatpants for our persuasive speeches."

**Why do you think your professor said that?**

W3: "just to look professional..."

W1: "It kind of helps. Like if you come dressed in sweatshirt and sweatpants with your hair up, then you look kinda like lazy, like you didn't put work into it."

**So, do you think that those techniques are what we're seeing in class speeches?**

W2: "I feel like you know what you want to do before you get up there, but we don't go up and speak enough in front of people, so we don't get the practice. So I just don't feel comfortable at least, making that much eye contact or walking, it's just not natural for me."

W3: "I think it varies from person to person, like, everyone learns differently..."

W1: "I think it like comes naturally. Like some people are *really* good at speaking and some people just obviously not very good. I just think when they try to teach it, for some people it will just click, but for some people it just doesn't. And it's not effective in how they speak."

**If your professor said, "I want you to speak like that" what would you say?**

W3: "Are you kidding?!"

W1: "I think I would say it's kind of unrealistic..."

W2: "Overwhelming."

W1: "Just like she said, they've been doing this for how long, and we've...I mean, in high school, I barely gave speeches, I think just group presentations so it's like I don't have as much practice, as much as they do..."

W3: "especially for a 100 level class."

**Do you think this is an example of good communication?**

W1: "You have to know what people think that good communication is. So you can strive to be like that, but who says you're gonna get there. It's kind of far from, at least where I am."

\*all agreed\*

**Any last comments?**

W1: "The memorization thing. I think that it looked too rehearsed at some points. And it just seemed like they had just practiced it and practiced it and it wasn't coming from them, they just wrote it down and memorized it, and I just think that's kind of unrealistic."

**How do these compare to speeches you see in real life?**

W3: "The second guy was able to deliver it and make it seem not so rehearsed, but I feel like the first girl..."

W1: "The first and third one, they just seemed like, that's all they were thinking about, like 'what's coming next?' or 'what do I have to say next?' and then that made them not comfortable."

W2: "You don't want to be worried about, like, forgetting what you're going to say. And then they're just stiff and awkward."

W3: "And I don't really like when they don't have the podium in front, because then I feel like that makes it kind of awkward too."

**With transition walking or in general?**

W3: "In general, because they when they're standing there, they just have their arms like this."(\*stiff position, arms at side\*)

W1: "Yeah, I agree! If I was in the front row by them, I would feel awkward!"

Focus Group 3--(both CMST 100 & 102)

**What were some of the things you found effective/ineffective?**

P1: "The first one, I thought her wardrobe choice was ineffective. She looked like a 50 year old grandma or a pile of dirt, she just kind of looked bad, I thought. She provided really good facts and examples, so that was good I thought, and then her emotion and tone made you want to listen."

P2: "I thought the first one spoke loud and clear and she was very informative and knew what she was talking about. For ineffective, she kept saying like first, like every time she was transitioning, so it got really repetitive..."

P1:"I also thought she used the word 'sweatshop' too much, so maybe if she found another synonym for that, it would be better."

P3: "I thought the use of the bad language was offensive--she was like, comfortable talking about that topic--and I also didn't like all of the connectors like she said."

P2: "For the second one, I thought he was very compassionate and he used good hand gestures."

P1: "I thought he was professionally dressed, he had good posture and emotion. The only bad thing that I could think of was the use of the comic book in the solution that seemed sort of unprofessional."

P3: "The effective part, is that he gave a lot of information, a lot of examples with statistics and things like that and that allows us to understand the topic."

P1: "For the third girl, her hand movements just felt kind of scripted like a robot, she looked awkward doing it. And then it just kind of seemed like she was yelling at us, not really talking to us."

P2: "I just liked that she told the story in the beginning to get our attention. But then, ya like he said, her voice was kind of weird."

P3: "What I noticed from the three of them was that the use of the body language was effective, also the examples and the citations (\*all agree with him on the last point\*)."

**What did you think about each of the topics?**

P1: "Well, I think the male that spoke, his topic affected everyone, because, you know, fraud and stuff. But then, the first lady who spoke, it doesn't really affect many people unless you are related know someone with a disability, that's the only way you can really connect."

P3: "The first one, the topic was the workers equality and she was talking about those who have disabilities have to have the same rights as people who are normal like us, and I thought the point was actually very good."

R: "So you think this was connected to a bigger issue?"  
(\*answers in the affirmative\*)

P2: "I liked the first topic the best, because I have a family member that's disabled, so I have a personal connection."

**What would you all consider to be a socially significant issue?**

P1: "I think to be socially significant; it has to affect the majority of citizens, because if you want something to be done, you're gonna need numbers and for numbers, it just has to affect more people."

P2: "I think it has to be a broad topic that affects a lot of people."

R: "Do you think it's possible to make those more specific topics more relevant to the larger population? Do you think the speakers did that?"

P1: "I believe the first girl, since its not so broad of a topic, did a good job of using emotions, like feeling bad for them and knowing that they're not going to live as nice as others, just because of disability which they can't even control, so you feel emotionally concerned for them and that might make people want to contribute more."

P3: "I think that we learned the logos, ethos, pathos, and just a question: which one is linked to the emotional? R: Pathos "Pathos was the main emotional appeal used in the speeches."

**Were you able to connect to the topic? Were they effective?**

P1: "I think they were effective, like at the end of the first one, you were like, 'well, maybe I don't want to buy this company's products, since they're treating people unfairly, or maybe that you want to take action to make it more better."

P2: "Yeah. I think they were all effective."

**How did the speakers show they were connected to their topics?**

P1: "The second guy seemed like he was actually angry himself, like he was being taken advantage of too. So he wanted action done to better himself and others."

R: "What about the other two?"

P2: "Kind of, but not really I guess, not as much as the other guy."

P3: "Wasn't there one of them that proposed a petition to sign at the end?"

R: "Yes, what do you all think of that?"

P1: "I think it's kind of tacky, I guess. I don't think it seems professional. Maybe after the speech, you hold a meeting where you present your petition, but just when you're giving the speech, it almost seems like you're marketing yourself, not the topic."

R: "Do you think there's a better way?"

P1: "There's not really another way I guess, because you need people to take action, but you can't just go take action without...the first girl told us to boycott the stores and that's easy, I think she had the best solution."

R: "So you discussed the most significant issues as being the ones that affect the most people, but sometimes those are also the ones with the most difficult (or intangible) solutions."

**In terms of delivery, what were the specific techniques that helped you understand their speeches?**

P3: "I preferred the first and the third speeches, because the girls were talking like slowly, so it's easier to understand and the guy was like going too quickly. And, like, if you have foreigners in the room like me, like my first language is not English so if I have to deal with someone in the room who is talking too quickly, I'll be like (\*makes confused face\*) a bit lost. The ladies were like, more at ease with the way they were speaking. But the body language, the way they had to convey the message is a little different."

P1: "And like, the guys facial expression, when he said something angry he had like a scowl on his face. And then the first woman, she would always be smiling, which sorta made her feel more personable."

P2: "I feel like the guy's body language made it more effective and his voice was really loud, which was very effective as well."

R: "What about transition walks?"

P1: "The first girl, she would kind of just walk, and then just keep her arms right there (\*stiff-arms at side\*) it just kind of looked really awkward. The guy his walk was a lot better! She just looked like a deer in headlights."

P2: "She looked really awkward standing there."

P1: "The guy looked a lot more natural."

**Were there any specific things that may have hindered your understanding?**

P1: "The first girl kept referring to political bills and things, but not many people understand bills, so that's going to get confusing."

P3: "Too many statistics." P1: "Yeah." P2: "She had a lot!"

**What about their physical appearance affected your perception of the speaker's credibility?**

P2: "They looked professional."

P3: "Yes, so you tend to believe them."

P1: "I guess I just didn't like how the first girl was dressed so I didn't really want to pay attention. That's all I could think about, I was like, 'wow, she looks terrible,' and I was just like, I couldn't even listen to her. Then the guy shows up in a nice suit, so you really want to listen to him and the other girl looked nice in the grey. Maybe it was just because her hair just blended weird with the suit; it was a really strange brown, it just looked bad."

R: "So you talked about how professional dress affects credibility in your classes? How do you see this affecting you in the future?"

P1: "Yeah, it will, because if you show up to an interview in like shorts or something, they're not even going to care what you have to say, they're not going to hire you. If you show up in a nice suit or a shirt and tie, they'll respect you and they'll listen to what you have to say."

R: "Any other factors that affect credibility?"



P3: "The way you talk. You have to be confident. Like the first one, I think she forgot something."

R: "What do you all think about the expectation for memorization of speeches?"

P3: (\*shakes head no\*)

P2: "I think it can help and harm. Like, I don't know how to explain it. Like, she messed up a few times, so if she would have had some notecards or something to help her, it would have been more effective."

P3: "I think you have to create a sort of outline in your mind and do not memorize that..."

P1: "Yeah, you don't want it to seem too rehearsed."

P3: "Just need an outline and that's it—like point A and point B and some examples, but if you memorize it all..."

P1: "Like it looked better without notecards, but it's just weird because you know if you just memorized it..."

P2: "It's not as emotionally effective."

**Were there specific techniques that you thought were most effective in persuading you?**

P2: "The stories that they would tell to try to be more personal with their speech."

P2: "There was kind of an introduction for each speech, and then they would give a kind of overview of the situation and that made it better to understand the speech."

P1: "The one girl said, 'we have to understand the causes, effects, and solutions' so that kind of made you look back and see what was the cause and the effect and the solution."

R: "So how do you think one can have structure without getting too repetitive (referring to former comments)?"

P1: "Find synonyms. Like when the girl kept talking about sweatshops, just find another example of a place that treats their employees badly and just use that."

P2: "Taking out the first, second, and all of those words that she's using over and over again. She can have the same structure without using those words every time."

**Do you think these techniques line up with what you're learning in your classes?**

P1: "Partially...I mean, we don't walk around the room, we just stay in one spot, give your speech and sit down."

P3: "Actually she said that we have to like present the topic like we are giving the class, so we are supposed to walk around the class and interact with people. But many just came and read stuff."

P2: "The emotions we are supposed to use are like the ones that they did, so that's kind of the same."

P1: "I think it's just a little different, like, they're competing for something they actually want, and we're just forced to give a 5 minute speech and pick a topic, like out of the blue. So, I mean, obviously we don't have the same emotion toward the topic as they do."

**If your instructor presented this as "good" communication, what would you say?**

P1: "I would agree. They seemed like everything was perfect. If someone gave a speech like that in our class, I would be like, 'wow, they know what they're doing,' rather than if someone just comes in and gives a quick little speech you don't even understand, you would wonder if they even know what they're topic is themselves. So, how can they persuade you to believe in it?"

P3: "I would say, yeah, it's a good delivery."

P2: "I feel like its structured good, the way that they're speaking."

P3: "They also give credit to what they're saying."

R: "So, why do you think you found certain aspects so ineffective?"

P1: "I mean like, hand gestures, like you don't want to just seem stale. So, even though they did hand gestures, they didn't seem effective, but if they didn't do them at all, it would be worse I think."

P3: "Thinking of the second one, if that guy has to give this kind of speech in an international conference, for example, he has to talk like slowly and make sure that everybody is following what he is saying."

P1: "Yeah, I think if this was a smaller group, then you would have to pay attention to the listeners and see if they're following you, and if they're not then you kind of have to improvise as you go and make sure they are. So if you have your speech memorized, you can't really go off of what you have, so you would have to be able to change it up as you go."

P3: "Also reduce the statistics because... (\*everyone laughs and agrees\*) P1: "It was awful!"

P3: "It was like good grief! Numbers, just too much!"

P2: "Maybe have a power point to go along with them." P1: "Yeah, a visual image would be good."

#### **Focus group 4--(both CMST 100 & 102)**

##### **What did you find effective/ineffective?**

D1: "I thought she had really good use of facts and strong wording (i.e. legal abuse). She used good space in the room. I noticed that she was moving from side to center to side, without really pausing in between—which was good, she kept the speech fluid except for that one loss of focus that she had during the speech, but I don't think that drew me away from the speech, because it only happened that one time. I thought she used a good amount of emotion while maintaining professionalism, because this was a topic that you don't want to get too biased on and too into it."

D2: "We got a lot of the same ones. Dressed for success. She used good eye contact, she continuously changed eye contact. She used good dramatic pauses, for example, when

she gave a startling statistic, she would look around the room at the audience to get that effect. She moved really well throughout the room and never stopped talking. She changed her tone and attitude while she was speaking, so like she could talk normal, but then when she got into something that was big or a big part she would get a little more excited or serious. I thought it was also very effective how she stated that she had already been in contact with the congressman. Some things that were ineffective were the memory flub that she had and another thing that I caught is that she used sort of informal language when she used a term like "sweatshop wages," because she didn't really explain what that was, but you could use a more proper word I guess, but at the same time, it does get the point across. The one big thing I noticed was how she specifically asked people to stop supporting charities, which is not something that people will like to hear."

D3: "Going off of a lot of the great points that they made, I mean her voice tone was there, her eye contact was there, very professional, very well-versed in what she was trying to advocate for. But there was times that I caught at least, that she tried to hurry through it, like she got nervous and she was just trying to get through it. Seemed like she was on a time constraint.

D4: "For me, I had some similar points, I thought um, she seemed really well-educated about her subject, so it seemed more believable. And she spoke fluently and confidently. But there were some parts that I felt like she was talking too fast, so it was hard to follow her. And sometimes, like at the beginning, I felt like she just jumped into the speech, I really felt kind of like I needed to catch up after a while. And then, um, her tone of voice was used very well, because when she wanted to emphasize certain points, you could tell, it would change so it was easier to pay attention during those certain parts."

D5: "I agree with the beginning, about how it was kind of hard to draw me in. It was pretty hard to follow in the beginning. But I feel that, up to a certain point, I think it was when she started telling the story, I started to get more into her speech. It was probably because her tone was stronger and I feel like she just delivered that story quite perfectly and I feel that kind of built momentum, so

the rest of her speech ended really well, I didn't feel like it was rushed."

R: "In moving on to the second speaker, please feel free to respond to one another's comments and build discussion if you would like to."

D2: "Ok, well I'm gonna start this one. The second speech, I thought it was nice, that he was dressed really nice, but at the same time, he had the nice suit, but he had a green tie and I feel like that can distract from what he's saying and you're just gonna like look at the tie. I caught myself doing that, I was like, 'That's a green tie!' (D3: It's a power tie!), so obviously it's a distraction. He was very boisterous; he had a nice deep voice, so it carried well. He also used very aggressive hand gestures, they weren't just like (\*half-hearted hand gesture\*) but they were like (\*much more prominent, snapping quick hand gesture\*), so it showed he cared about what he was talking about. I liked how he used broadly-known terms and very strong terms when he was talking about the senators in the beginning, like the purge and all that good stuff. He did use comedy; he made the audience laugh a couple times, so that's always good to break up the negativity. He used very good eye contact, he moved throughout the room. He used language that related really well to the audience. He ended very strongly when he talked about everyone losing their homes. What I didn't like is that he called everyone criminals. That's a very broad, bad generalization. These are our congressman; I understand that they break the law, making them criminals, but it doesn't mean every one of them is a criminal. Another thing, is that the woman before and the woman after had tangible things we could sign to help the problem (letters), but he just had a website that he only referenced once in the speech. This is kind of playing on the boundaries, but I thought it was effective that he talked about Obama, because some people, if that were a white male up there, they would just think that he doesn't like Obama. But since he is also African American, I feel like that creates a closer tie so that you can relate. But at the same time, I thought it was bad that he kept attacking Obama, since he's such a big name."

D3: "Going off what he said, I really enjoyed the speech overall, yeah he had some stuff at the end there that may not have been as professional, but I mean, great tone of voice, great...it's like he actually wanted you to be a part

of that conversation, that he wasn't actually giving a speech. That's what I liked about it, like, he's actually talking to me it feels like, as opposed to 'I'm just here, I'm on a time budget, so here's this speech.'"

D2: "I think the aggressive hand gestures helped with that, rather than 'this is what I want,' he's like calling you to action."

D3: Yeah, he's like, 'I want you...WE should do this!' Like this is the terminology that he used throughout.

D1: "I thought he sounded like a salesman at the end, I didn't want to trust him."

D3: "Using the pop culture reference with the comic book at the end really allowed him to connect with a younger audience."

D2: "I felt like the aggressive hand gestures fit really well with the aggressive language he was using throughout his speech as well, that's one of the things that made it really powerful."

D5: "I just said, when he started talking we saw a lot of confidence from him. He came in very strongly and he had a lot of charisma. But toward the end, I feel like his words were a little rushed, it was pretty hard to get what he was saying sometimes, he didn't enunciate as much, probably because of the time limit."

D1: "I thought the third one, uh, she had a really awkward transition habit. She would stop talking, walk extremely fast to another point in the room, stop and then start again."

D3: "He said exactly what I was thinking! Every time she'd have a transition, you knew she must be changing gears now, because she'd walk and then be trying to get back into the moment."

D1: "And then for her topic, she didn't seem very emotional, like for the big problem of kids being given all these drugs. And I feel like she switched between two different topics. I feel like it almost would have been more effective to keep with talking about foster kids, rather than all kids, because I was kind of confused about what her specific point was, what she was trying to

accomplish. But she did have an easy action for us to take at the end: 'Sign this, I'll send it in. Ok. Even if I didn't believe in it I'd probably help her out because she seemed like a nice person.'

D3: "I was thinking the same. She'd flip-flop between the two topics and she almost...I'm not trying to be insulting...she almost 'William Shatnered' her passion, like overacted it, like you could tell it was kind of fake. Like, ok, I can tell you care, but now you're trying to 'used car salesman' care about this topic."

D5: "Going off of what he said about flip-flopping, I feel like her facial expressions were kind of bi-polar, because she would say something serious, have a serious face, but many times it would seem like she was smiling or something, it really threw me off."

D2: "When she first started, it seemed like her emotions were non-existent. I'm sure it was just nervousness, but the first thing I noticed is that she was just talking and not using her facial expressions. And then, like they were saying, she used pauses very poorly. I think she could have gone into more detail about the bigger events. I also think she was using language that was meant to manipulate the audience. She talked about suicide and all of these depressed kids, maybe she wasn't manipulating her own feelings, because it's still pretty iffy, the way she was acting, but I feel like if she was talking to a group that was very into what she was saying, they would have the pity and actually try to take action. Then at the end, she did use some comic relief..."

D3: "Her comic relief though was kind of poorly timed, you can't talk about school shootings, and then be like 'oh, I'm going to try to play it off with a joke.'"

D2: "She did a good job of using stories and including details like names and statistics to really get us emotionally involved."

**How did you personally feel about the topics they discussed?**

D3: "I was personally really connected with the second guy. Like, I kept thinking, how long are we going to sit back and let them do this?"

D1: "I feel like the more that the topic affects you personally, you're going to be more apt to pay attention and take action afterwards. I feel like the speech about kids or disabilities had no effect on me whatsoever, but the financial situation in the country obviously effects everyone in the country. (D3: Everybody likes money and they don't like people taking our money)"

D2: "I agree with what these two were saying about how something needs to relate to you personally. I obviously like the second one the best, because I really care about that. I wanted to like the first one, but she needs to realize that although it sucks that people with disabilities aren't making minimum wage, they should be happy that they're getting hired at all. My state is a right to work state, so anyone can be fired for any reason, so they should really be happy that they still have a job if they were hired in states like that."

D4: "For me, it was kind of the opposite. I really thought the second was more boring, and for me it didn't really draw my attention. I think because I don't have as much knowledge about what he was talking about and some of the numbers that he was using, like he was talking about percentages, to me they didn't mean anything, because he didn't use it in a context that I could understand. For me, that was more difficult. The one that hit home more personally for me was the third one, because, I have learned more about this topic, so then I was more interested in what she had to say. So that's why, for me, it was a little different, my response to the speeches."

D5: "I actually agree with the percentages part. Like, when he threw them in there, I was just hearing fact after fact, so I was getting a little lost. What got me the most in the second one was when they were asking about the economy and he brought up a comic book as the solution, that was just really surprising."

R: "D2, were you going to add something?"

D2: "No, I was just going to say, she sounded pretty (\*lowers voice to very soft\*) when she started to talk she was like, 'yeah..that one..', I was going to say if that hit home for you, don't be ashamed of that."



(\*group laughs, jokes about getting to know each other at the beginning of the session\*)

**Did you feel like they were connected to their topic?**

D2: "Not the third one. At all..."

D3: "No, she...I don't mean to interrupt you...she definitely overacted it. It seemed like she was trying to 'Meryl Streep' it. I mean, it was pretty ridiculous at some points. But the other two, you could definitely see that they had a personal connection to their topic..."

D2: "Or at least made us believe...technically everyone has a connection, but he took it personal..."

D3: "Without making it act like he does, like he was actually more convincing."

D2: "I feel like the first one played it up really well, with the change in tone and attitude. Also, it sounded like she got choked up a bit at certain points in the story."

**What would you consider a socially significant topic?**

D2: "Money. The budget. Wars. At this moment, probably talk about the blow up of racist cops (\*gives quotation marks\*)or whatever, because that is the big thing, like with the Ferguson thing—I feel like he's doing his job—this is a big topic now."

D1: "Sexism. Racism. Easy ones. (\*laughter\*), I mean they're easy to relate to a larger group of people. You don't really have to conduct an audience analysis to hit those two topics home with a lot of people. Whereas, the more specific topics would take an in-depth audience analysis to know that that's gonna hit home with people. But, finances, you don't really have to conduct an audience analysis."

**What specific aspects of delivery or physical appearance affected the speakers' credibility?**

D2: "They were all dressed for success. The first two, were very confident in themselves, the third one paused and was hesitant, so that was something that negatively affected her. The first one also not only knew what she was talking

about, but she also went a step further and taken action, so it means that she is serious, and she is trying to fix something. I guess the third one sort of did this as well."

D1: "What about personal attachment to the topics? He, I suppose, as the financial one, didn't need to, but he did by saying the banks made profits through our tax money and increased risk. I mean, she's not disabled, but yet she's talking about disabled members of society as 'vulnerable' members of society. So I guess both females didn't relate it...no, I take that back, the third one started to relate it to why it mattered to her and the audience and I think that makes a huge difference in credibility, being able to relate it to yourself and others."

D3: "I think the first two, I thought, rattled through the facts like they almost knew first-hand about their topic. But the third speaker's presentation of facts made it seem like she was cramming for a test an hour before."

D5: "I thought for the second one, he was using a lot of facts, which made me think he knew about stuff. And then at some point to, he stated that 'I understand that this...' and so he was talking about this one side, but he threw in facts from another side of the issue. I thought this made his speech more persuasive, and he kind of referenced another side and I kind of wanted to listen a little more, because it wasn't a total one-sided bashing thing."

D4: "I thought the last two did a good job of using logos, because they presented more numbers and information that way. And the last one too, I noticed how she cited her sources as she was presenting information, so that makes it more credible and believable. And I'm sure the others did too, but I caught it right away the way she said it, the way she connected to her information, it was easy to see that she got her information from sources that were credible."

**What were the techniques that you saw in these speeches that were not in your classes?**

D1: "We don't focus on memorization, I would say at all. We have probably three-fourths of our class just get up in front of the room and read off of a piece of paper and pass it off as an oral speech. That's more of reading out loud. Any third grade can do that."

D3: "I know our professor, when he lets us write something down, he always tells us, 'I don't want you going up there and reading your speech verbatim!'"

R: "Does that increase or decrease credibility?"

D1: "It depends on the speech of course, but for these speeches I would say more credible. You have to be able to stay on task, know what you're talking about, not get side-tracked, if you don't have it memorized, you'll probably pause a lot more, use filler words a lot more..."

D3: "Jump from topic to topic..."

D2: "The only thing about memorizing, is that you can get the facts mixed up, like you're supposed to say 12% and you accidentally say 20%, in that case, I can see why it would be less acceptable. But with how fluid they're presenting these, it seems like they know what they want to say. So, memorization, we say it's in the middle, but I feel like it's one way or another, if they have it memorized and it's fluid and it's a good speech, then we'll believe them, we have no reason not to. But if it's full of pauses, then we're going to question them."

R: "Is this a representation of what you've seen in real life?"

D1: "As far as persuasion goes, I would say, in real life you have to play off of peoples' vulnerabilities, and you have to figure out how susceptible they are to change. So, I mean, if they're more likely to change, you may be able to persuade them, but then you have to figure out where you're vulnerable."

D3: "You gotta gauge the audience too. My professor says that the reason he doesn't want us getting comfortable with memorization is because if you forget, then you're gonna lose your mind, many people lose their spot and can't ever get it back again. But you also need to be able to change up your persuasive strategies based on their reactions."

**What do you consider good communication?**

D3: "If they got their point across, then obviously its good communication. If it sticks with me, on a positive note, then it's good."

D1: "I would say if the task is completed, then it's good communication."

D5: "I just think its good if I'm not getting lost in what they're saying. Usually if it's not strong or their tone doesn't come off strong, I get a little sleepy and then I get a little lost in what they're saying."