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Julie Louceil Germain Walker  
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Every(day) Identities in Forensics:  
Performing Identities within the Constraints of Intercollegiate Forensics

By

Julie L. G. Walker

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

Masters of Fine Arts

in

Forensics

Minnesota State University, Mankato

Mankato, Minnesota

2016

June 17, 2016

The following thesis has been examined and approved.

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### **Abstract**

Walker, J. L. G., MFA, Department of Communication Studies, College of Arts and Humanities, Minnesota State University, Mankato. June 2016, Every(day) Identities in Forensics: Performing Identities within the Constraints of Intercollegiate Forensics. Thesis Advisor: Dr. Daniel Cronn-Mills.

Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical theory of identity provides a framework for making sense of complicated, mundane identity performances. Through in-depth interviews and focus groups conducted with the intercollegiate forensic co-culture members, the current research builds on Goffman's theory. Crystallization-based analysis showed identity performances are situated within one another like Russian matryoshka (nesting) dolls. Co-cultural expectations produce multi-level professionalism expectations, and overlapping co-cultures mean individuals manage conflicting conventions. Implications are offered for the forensics community, other co-cultures, and identity scholars.

Key Words: Identity; Forensics (Public Speaking); Professionalism; Goffman; Co-Culture

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

*While trying to shake the cobwebs from my head on a Monday morning, coffee still brewing across the hall in the lab, I hear my colleague and partner Ben groan loudly from his office. Apparently the ballots he's reading from last weekend's tournament are not pretty. I stifle a yawn as he storms into my office and plops into my oversized, overstuffed green chair. "Some good comments from the weekend?" I ask sarcastically. "I can't believe they commented on it again! It's a reasonable accommodation! You wouldn't ask a person in a wheelchair not to use a wheelchair!" he said, referring to judge critiques. I sighed. It's going to be a long day.*

Personal identity has fascinated me for several years. My earliest conceptions of personal identity focused on identity as a constant, unchanging possession. Experiences over the past decade have shown me varying definitions of identity. Through research and consideration, I now conceptualize identity as a spacial-temporal performance with an enduring sense of what dis/individualizes me from/to others.

*"I think we need to hug it out," she said. The competitor, wearing her sunglasses, just finished a masterful performance about her experiences using sunglasses as a medical assistive device. Most people aren't used to sunglasses as a medical necessity. She and I are both crying because we know the emotional toll crafting, memorizing, and performing this particular piece took on her. After we talk through a few comments about the performance, she confided "I'm not sure*

*I'm ready to compete wearing sunglasses in other rounds." The wall of mirrors in the practice room reflect her hesitant posture. "I just don't want to see this end up on my ballots."*

Identity as performance, instead of a possession, is constantly subject to change. Many think of performance as a formalized, highly curated, staged presentation. Goffman (1959) theorized everyday mundane identity performances are like staged performances with clear front and back region spaces, predetermined roles, and consequences for role errors. The dynamic context does not mean an individual's identity is constantly shifting; daily patterns of similar behaviors show our general personality within specific situations. When teaching, I tend to make snarky comments and typically incorporate profanity into classroom discussions. In the past six months, my hair has been four different colors (purple, blond, brown, and now auburn). The decisions I make about my appearance and the trends in how I communicate with students provide a sense of who I am based on the consistent performances they observe. To my students, I am a spritely person with subversive tendencies, or at least that's the performance I try to curate.

I am enthralled by how identity is situated within the context in which performed. The situated nature of identity performance highlights negotiated decisions predicated on socially delivered benefits and/or consequences. When students see my purple hair on the first day of class, I know my decision may negatively affect my credibility. Simultaneously, I know my ability to build professor-student connections are heightened for some students by jarring the typical professor aesthetic. The color of my hair does not affect how much knowledge I have, nor does my hair impact my ability to organize

information into a cogent set of lectures and activities (though I recognize my hair color impacts the delivery of my messages if students are distracted by the color). When friends see my purple hair, they know I enjoy thumbing my nose at societal expectations for normalcy. When my kids see my purple hair, they are confused about how mommy's hair changed colors. When my partner sees my purple hair, he knows the release I feel when I embrace my goofy, unprofessional personality during times of extreme stress (like researching and writing my thesis). I know identity performances are differently valued based on context. I wanted to know about how specific contexts impacted identity performances.

*“Well,” I said, “at this point, you’re in a tricky position. You put up a performance about your experiences with cone dystrophy and how you want people to see you when you’re wearing your glasses. Your performance will look pretty competition- driven if you’re not wearing sunglasses in other rounds while arguing for acceptance in this round.” I pause, knowing the history of her decision not to wear sunglasses during rounds is somewhat fraught. I sigh inwardly at the previous coach’s tactless treatment of her choice to wear sunglasses while performing. The sunglasses are a necessary tool used to filter the light. She has to decide if fitting the performance aesthetics is worth suffering the physical repercussions of standing in a painfully bright room or risk seeing comments about her inability to connect with audience members. I reassure her, “You know I’ll support whatever decision you make.”*

## **Introduction to the Intercollegiate Forensics Co-Culture**

Fenner (2008) called forensics “a complex culture with a diverse body of organizations, events, rules, and competitions” (p. 134). Miller (2005) argued forensics is a co-culture existing to provide students the opportunity to develop oral communication skills through evaluation and competition. Competition is an important part of the forensic co-culture, demonstrated by scholars’ attention to scoring fairness (e.g., Weiss, 1984, Kokoska, 2010), evaluator evaluations (e.g., Kay & Aden, 1984; Goodnow, 2007; Goodnow & Carlson, 2007), physical awards (Williams & Gantt, 2008), and evaluations of national competition outcomes (i.e., Leiboff, 1987a; Leiboff, 1987b; Leiboff, 1990). Despite the inherent competition focus, many coaches and scholars argue forensics is an educational activity. The competition/education disparity is a hotly contested dialectic. Burnett, Brand, and Meister (2003) and Hinck (2003) wrote seminal articles and the 2008 National Developmental Conference on Individual Events in Peoria, Illinois specifically explored what the education/competition duality. Regardless of where coaches, competitors, and teams fall on the spectrum, the primary activity around which the forensics community exists is the forensic tournament.

Teams travel to tournament locations where individual and duet student performances vie for the top ratings in rounds. Typically tournaments use preliminary competition rounds to determine which competitors advance to outrounds; outround rankings determine overall tournament placements. Most preliminary rounds include an average of six speakers, and final outrounds usually incorporate six speakers (depending on how many students compete in a category, how close preliminary round performances

ranked, and other factors). Students are ranked (1 being best) and rated (typically 25 or 100 being best) compared to the other competitors in the round. Tournaments are scheduled from August to April each year (Dickmeyer, 2002); regular season tournaments provide opportunities for students to develop speaking abilities and qualify for national tournaments (West, 2008; Rudnick, 2010). Nearly all tournaments are open to any team in the United States, but many organizations host tournaments culminating the season to crown the top competitors each year. Culminating tournaments are called nationals, and they are the focus for many forensic programs.

The American Forensics Association (AFA) segments competition regions geographically as part of their nationals qualification matrix. Table 1.1 lists the AFA District locations (American Forensic Association, 2015). Not all teams are a part of the AFA, so while the team geographically falls within a District, they may not be District members. Districts segment geographical areas where teams compete, so the present study uses Districts as a way to categorize participants.

Since 2004 I have been involved with the forensics community. I began competing in high school in Wisconsin and then competed for two years for the University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire. I judged tournaments and coached students informally for several years until 2015 when I officially began coaching an intercollegiate speech team. As an undergraduate member of the collegiate forensics community, I learned quickly about the aesthetic and interaction expectations. Through my undergraduate forensics involvement, I saw huge parts of myself change. Not all changes are because of my involvement with speech. Some changes happen as a part of my

transition to adulthood. I hear competitors (often seniors) lovingly describing their relationships with the forensics community, yet I hear competitors and coaches railing against stifling norms of the forensics community's culture.

Table 1.1  
*AFA Competition Districts*

<u>District</u>	<u>Geographic Area</u>
1	California, Nevada, Hawaii
2	Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, Alaska California State University Humboldt
3	Oklahoma, Kansas, Texas, Missouri, Louisiana, Arkansas
4	North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Nebraska
5	Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Truman State (MO)
6	Georgia, Tennessee, Florida, Alabama, North Carolina, South Carolina, Mississippi, Kentucky
7	Virginia, Maryland, New Jersey, Delaware, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, District of Columbia, Ohio University, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New York, Staten Island, N.Y., Connecticut, Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, University of Akron (OH)
*8	* The option for District 8 to re-establish itself is available when the number of schools in the District shows sustainability.
9	Utah, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, El Paso, Texas, and Eastern Montana College

*“Judges just aren’t getting why my topic is such a big deal!” my student complained as she paced back and forth in the practice room. After taking the performance to several tournaments and not finding the competitive success she sought, my student and I were brainstorming improvements. “Maybe people aren’t getting it. What if we used some of the comments your judges wrote on*



*ballots to justify the importance of the topic?” I suggested. “Let’s look through your ballots.” The student went to grab her judging critique sheets from her mailbox in the team room. I knew her frustration stemmed partly from opening up a vulnerable part of herself to the forensics community and not feeling like her message was approved. “Here’s one from a persuasion round,” she said, walking back into the room, “by wearing the dark glasses we miss a very important communicative tool.” “Well,” I responded, “we knew your sunglasses were going to have some blowback from judges who weren’t seeing your POI performance where you explained it. That’s a really good example to include into your performance. Any other good ones?” “I trust the glasses are required? They really cut down on the affect,” she read stiffly. “Was that in informative?” I asked. “No,” she answered shortly, “it was from my POI.” Outwardly, I talked about how using the words of judges might help people understand her experiences. Inwardly, I railed against judges whose comments were affecting my student’s vision of herself.*

### **Problem Statement**

The amount of time spent within forensics culture for many people is extensive, including preparing and practicing speeches, socializing with a team, and competing at local, regional, national, and international tournaments. Culturally enforced identity performances enacted over time may have influence outside the forensic microcosm. Croucher, Long, Meredith, Oommen, and Steele (2009) stated “individuals who partake in [forensics] are socialized into a community. That socialization can deeply influence an

individual's sense of self or identity just as if an individual were to become part of any organization" (pp. 74-75). Croucher et al. emphasized "[the competitor's] sense of self could forever be changed through the socialization process" (p. 75). Carbaugh (1996) argued anthropologically personal identity is useful in a cultural study, suggesting my study may illustrate broader cultural trends in forensics. The forensics community seeks inclusiveness and promotes social and legal justice, so a critical exploration of identity within the forensics community is substantiated. Therefore, I first seek to illuminate how students, coaches, and judges view competitor identity performances and, second, explore how performance limitations may be enforced within the community. The scope of my research focuses on student identity performances.

My study differs from previous research by attempting to enumerate specific behaviors allowed, and the enforcement mechanisms to constrain identity performances in individual events competitors. My research will attempt to gather a holistic picture of forensics culture through coach, competitor, and extended community member perspectives. The study may provide the community with insight for change between who and what we claim to value and what we enforce.

### **Objectives**

Two primary research questions direct my study:

RQ1: What identity performances are rewarded by the individual events intercollegiate forensics community?

RQ2: How are identity performance limits enforced in the community?

The first research question aims to illuminate expected identity behaviors for competitors.

The second research question explores how competitors, judges, extended community members, and others enforce community norms and identity performances.

### **Précis of Remaining Chapters**

Chapter Two utilizes Goffman's (1959) identity performance work as the basis for exploring identity in the study. Chapter Three explains the method used to create, conduct, transcribe, and analyze the data. Specific themes and findings are discussed in full detail in Chapter Four, using crystallization to offer rich, thick descriptions of the results. Chapter Five offers implications and impacts on identity performance and forensic research. Finally, Chapter Five identifies research limitations and suggests areas for future research.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

The study of individual identity crosses disciplines and explores a complex, variously understood, and innumerably defined concept. Individual identity borrows from and is studied using anthropological (Hallowell, 1955; Carbaugh, 1996), biological (Schoore, 1994), communicational (Cheney, 1991; Hecht, 1993; Harré & Gillett, 1994; Schrag, 1997), psychological (Suls, 1983), sociological (Mead, 1934; Goffman, 1959), philosophical (Wittgenstein, 1999/1922; Gallois, 1998), feminist (Brinton Lykes, 1985; Chodorow, 1978/1999), and innumerable other perspectives (e.g. Martin and Barresi, 2006). Various identity is labelled the soul (e.g. Martin & Barresi, 2006), the self (Chodorow, 1978/1999; Carbaugh, 1996), the self-concept (Cushman & Cahn, 1985), and the ego (Schoore, 1994).

### **Relevant Identity Scholars and Theories**

Cooley's (1964/1902) looking-glass self, where identity negotiations occur based on with and judgements from significant others in our lives, impacted the 20<sup>th</sup> century's identity theorization. Social behaviorist psychologist Mead (1934) argued identity should be understood through individual and the behaviorist lenses, thereby elucidating the affect social influences have on individual identity. Mead argued social influences affect identity (re)creation. Mead's argument assumes identity is not static or stable; identity is explored as it formed and reformed throughout an individual's experiences. Societal components inherently require understanding the role communication plays in intricate process of creating and recreating the self. Sociologist Goffman (1959, 1967, 1986) and

communication scholar Hecht (1993) expanded Mead's work, exploring the performative and communicative aspects of identity.

Goffman combined sociology and dramaturgy to craft an identity theory many scholars would deem worth of a "stamp of genius" (Scheff, 2006, p. 1). Though many scholars used the metaphor of an individual acting out and performing her identity, Goffman (1959) viewed identity explicitly through the theatrical lens. He suggested props, context, and interactions impact both an actor's behaviors and the mundane identities we perform and (re)create. Goffman (1959) defined performance as "all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants" (p. 15). Each role might involve playing different parts for different audiences. Roles are the parts, or routines, associated with established characters played within preordained sets. Parts are "pre-established patterns of action" which unfold "during a performance and which may be presented or played through on other occasions" (Goffman, 1959, p. 16). Multiple parts may be enacted to perform certain roles. Role achievement evaluates how successfully someone meets role requirements (Woodward, Webb, & Prowse, 2005) as affirmed by peers and confirmed by rituals, creeds and programs (Erikson, 1963). Goffman's definition relies on the following assumptions: the self exists only within (co)created contexts; and contexts are governed by rules.

Role requirements are determined by the co-culture within which the role exists, the audiences for which the role is played, and the context in which the role is performed (Goffman, 1959). Some roles occur in multiple settings, such as the role of activist

(Kleinam, 1972), while others occur in singular, co-cultural contexts. Each role carries specific behavior expectations determined and enforced by audiences. Self-presentation performances are enacted by individuals in congress with an audience. Performances can be (un)conscious, (un)planned, (un)calculated, and/or *given(off)*. *Given* performances involve controlled behaviors, while *given off* performances are perceived as “ungovernable” (Goffman, 1959, p. 7). Goffman (1967) defined the self simultaneously as the perceived character based on an encounter AND a player competing (dis)honorably in a context. He argued regardless of intentionality, self-presentations employed consistently for specific situations are called fronts, which affect the performer’s face.

Fronts are the settings and personal signifiers defining the situation for the audience (Goffman, 1959). Personal fronts (e.g. attire, race, facial expressions) and setting (e.g. artifacts, furniture) tend to fit predictable patterns, and new fronts are rarely created. Fronts affect an individual’s face. Goffman (1967) defined face as “the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself” by the “pattern of verbal and nonverbal acts by which he expresses his view of the situation and through this his evaluation of the participants, especially himself” that “others assume he has taken during a particular contact” (p. 5). In essence, face is the effectiveness and evaluation of the fronts put on by interactants. To be out of face or in wrong face indicates incorrect front selection. Face is maintained through cues *given (off)*, meaning (un)conscious choices impact audience member perceptions.

Audience members look to cues given off to check the validity of explicitly stated information (Goffman, 1959). As I have previously alluded, audience plays a key role in

self-presentation. Goffman (1959, 1967) explained the audience evaluates fronts, and tacitly cooperates in (or avoids) face-related conversations. Audience members also look to fronts to determine “how best to act in order to call forth a desired response” from an individual and how to “predict his future behavior” (Goffman, 1959, p. 1), which influence the face-related behavior during interactions.

Performers often create idealized fronts based on contextual needs, which may mean concealing personal behaviors or stigmatized traits incongruous with contextually-located expectations. Goffman (1986) defined stigma as the space between the audience’s anticipated character for the performer and the performer’s actual attributes. Stigmas may be apparent, making the individual immediately discredited and stigmatized, or able to be found out, making the individual discreditable (Goffman). Goffman acknowledged when performers reject a stigmatized status, the stigmas do not exist; only when performers and audiences distinguish the stigmatized characteristic(s) are the performances degraded. Therefore the stigma only exists when the performer and the audience consciously (though at times tacitly) acknowledge the stigma’s existence. Stigmas go beyond face-losing behaviors. To avoid stigmatization, Goffman (1959) asserted performers conceal “activities, facts, and motives which are incompatible with idealized fronts,” instead relegating unappealing characteristics and behaviors to back region settings hidden from audience members (p. 48). Performers maintain idealized fronts by crafting poised, unflappable performances suppressing tendencies to avoid shame in front of audience members.

Goffman (1989) suggested stigmatized individuals have three options: correct the stigma, blame the stigma for all problems, or bearing the stigma. Each option requires conscious choices by the stigmatized person. Without conscious recognition, the stigma does not exist because the stigma is co-created/supported during interactions. To correct a stigma, a person may take action to eradicate the imperfection (e.g., surgically altering breasts to increase their size). Hiding the stigma would occur if a woman wore a padded bra but did not permanently alter her body. Bearing stigmas happens when an individual blames the stigma for disappointments in other arenas, like a woman blaming a failed relationship on small breasts.

Communication theorist Hecht (1993) postulated communication itself is identity. He suggested identity is enduring and constantly changing, and he argued culture, community, and relationships develop a generally stable core individual identity. The enacted form of an identity impacts others' perceptions, which may impact the way he negotiates identity in future interactions. When personal/societal expectations or enacted/perceived identities differ, cognitive dissonance management occurs to determine if a new identity performance is necessary. We communicate identities through online interactions and personal narrative.

We communicate our identities in face-to-face and online interactions. Social networking sites (SNS) provide opportunities to present ourselves online. Studies have examined connections between online and offline performances through chat rooms (Helsper, 2014), Instagram (Smith & Sanderson, 2015), and Twitter (Marwick & boyd, 2011). Toma and Carlson (2012) constrained self-presentation in SNS through four



factors: self-description; co-construction with network members; performing for a large number of people making up multiple audiences; and accrual over time. Unlike offline situations, online presentations are not contextually situated. Hogan (2010) suggested SNS communications require a unified self-presentation for a collapsed audience (Binder, Howes, & Smart, 2012; Marwick & boyd, 2011; Vitak, 2012). Collapsed audiences refer to the multiple groups of people consuming SNS self-presentations, which requires “presenting oneself to heterogeneous audiences [and] becomes challenging as users attempt to balance these varied audience expectations” (Rui & Stefanone, 2013, p. 1292). Unified self-presentation is aided through increased control over information revelation (Dunn, 2008; Gradiaru, 2013). Because of online editability, individuals portray themselves in flattering, idealized ways (Hogan, 2010; Toma & Carlson, 2012). An individual’s online portrayal must be grounded in authentic offline identity performances. Warranting theory posits audience members will trust other-provided information more than self-provided information (Walther & Parks, 2002; Walther, van der Heide, Hamel, & Shulman, 2009), because others have less reason to manipulate (or idealize) presentations. I extend Toma and Carlson’s (2012) evaluation of Facebook profiles, arguing all SNS are “complex and highly tactical creations where aspects of self are strategically emphasized, deemphasized, or accurately portrayed” (p. 21). Online interactions often include personal narratives (Gradinaru, 2015), which are another way identity is communicated.

Langellier (1989) asserted “in the language of Erving Goffman, the personal narrative is an act of self-presentation” (p. 247). Personal narratives (re)constitute

identities and experience. Peterson (1983) objected to treating the audience member as a receptacle. Personal narratives are stories told to mutually rapt or conversationally participative audiences (Peterson & Langellier, 1997). Langellier (1983) defined two participative audience roles: the per-former [sic], a mute character in dialogue with the reader co-creating the performance space; and the witness, who, in attending to the performance, gains a deeper understanding of the self. To “let itself be moved by an aesthetic text” the audience must demarcate the performer’s and the audience member’s selves, thereby revealing (concealed) identity aspects and experiencing a different reality (Langellier, 1983, p. 36). In revealing (un)conscious audience attitudes and values (enacted through fronts and face-governed performances), personal narratives about stigmatized identities could alter connected cultural norms.

When performed in mundane conversation especially, personal narratives are situated in culturally regulated interaction spaces governed by cultural norms (Langellier 1999). Peterson and Langellier (2006) explained performing narratives involves framing the mundane, which provides commentary opportunities for routine front performances. However, Peterson and Langellier (1997) cautioned allowing the frame to distort the cultural situatedness of the narrative within the context of the teller, audience, and setting. Langellier (1999) wrote tellers manage “strategy, situation, and social conventions,” and she argued the contracts negotiated between teller and audience member create a vulnerable, liminal space (p. 128). Many narrative events are kernel stories, or stories that are built to fit unique situations and purposes (Langellier, 1989). The way kernel stories are retold impacts the person telling the story and the audience, which makes narrative a

shaping force. Langellier (1999) argued “the *personal* in personal narrative implies a performative struggle for agency rather than the expressive act of a pre-existing, autonomous, fixed, unified, or stable self which serves as the origin or accomplishment of experience” (emphasis hers, p. 129).

Peterson and Langellier (2006) argued personal and group identities emerge through narrative. Culture is created based on norms describing the (in)correct ways to live (Langellier, 1999). The “canonical stories” provided by culture create “a narrative *bricolage* into which we are recruited by virtue of membership in communities” (Langellier, p. 139). Langellier (1989) argued narrative does not describe reality, but rather narrative constitutes reality. Without narrative, the realities co-created by teller and audience do not exist, meaning narrative is imbued with the ability to (re)produce power relations. Peterson and Langellier (2006) wrote “performing narrative makes it possible to resist, thwart, and alter [power] relations” (p. 178). Especially in relation to stigmatized identities, personal narratives, which “exist in, through, and across the body” (Peterson & Langellier, 1997, p. 146), provide opportunities to challenge cultural norms about identities and characteristics deemed (in)appropriate, making personal narratives inherently political in nature (Langellier, 1999). Because narratives illuminate personal and group identities, understanding culture is important in the current research.

### **Co-Culture**

Jackson, II and Garner (1998) defined culture as “a set of patterns, beliefs, behaviors, institutions, symbols, and practices shared and perpetuated by a consolidated group of individuals” (p. 44). The concept of co-cultures has evolved over the past thirty

years in communication research. Drawing from muted group theory (Ardener, 1975) and standpoint theory (Hill Collins, 1986), co-culture was defined by Orbe (1996) as a subset of a culture. The term co-culture was used to avoid devaluing a culture situated within a dominant culture (e.g., subculture). Castle Bell, Hopson, Weathers, and Ross (2015) provided examples of co-cultures, such as colleges, workplaces, and ethnic groups. Research has focused extensively on how co-cultures communicate with dominant cultures (e.g., Stanback & Pearce, 1981), but scholars have not explored the ways members create and enforce behavior expectations. Ramírez-Sánchez (2008) argued co-cultures form within co-cultures when marginalized group members create pockets of culture within larger co-cultures which are then situated within dominant cultures. One example of a co-culture is intercollegiate forensics.

### **Identity Research in Forensics**

Forensics as an activity spans from as early as middle school through graduate school. Forensics has been studied as a co-culture at the high school (e.g., Fine, 2001) and college levels (e.g., Paine, 2005; Jensen, 2008). Intercollegiate forensics includes several forms of debate and individual competition events. Debate culture and individual-events culture, while related, encompass different norms and rules, so all future references to forensics in my study refer specifically to intercollegiate non-debate forensics.

Paine (2005) described forensics as “an identifiable subculture” encompassing rules that impact group member behavior (p. 81). Students typically compete at tournaments throughout the academic year. Forensics provides educational and

competitive public speaking opportunities to students. Forensics culture is comprised of current and former coaches and student competitors; secondary members including lay judges and extended community members. Brand (2002) defined lay judges as people who “perform the basic responsibilities of a judge” but are unconnected to forensics culture (p. 62). Lay judges are not former competitors or coaches, and they do not have or seek more than a tertiary connection to forensics culture. Lay judges impact competitors and coaches, and they may critique forensics norms and rules. Extended community members may include long-time judges, partners and children, and individuals who engage frequently over a period of time with the forensics community; they understand and have the power to (re)enforce identity behaviors for competitors. Burnett, Brand, and Meister (2003) called on the forensics community to see the educational value lay judges provide students through their feedback. The National Forensics Association (NFA) national tournament preliminary rounds for limited preparation events included lay judges and extended community members (Harris, Jr., 1986). Lay judges and extended community members are relied upon to judge speeches at tournaments and provide useful comments to the competitors.

Culture is constructed through written and unwritten rules. Paine (2005) pointed out few formal written rules in forensics competition exist, but coaches and competitors recognize multitudes of unwritten competition and social rules. Paine provided an extensive list of articles addressing the informal, unspoken forensics rules such as presentation style, and topic and piece selections. Rules are created and enforced through competitive success and other methods (Friedley, 1992; Burnett, Brand, & Meister, 2003;

Kelley, 2005). Unwritten rules may control how identity performances are supported and encouraged. While formal forensics performances are evaluated, interactions between judges and competitors may alter how a competitor is viewed. Conversations take place during and outside of tournaments. Interactions outside the realm of competition extend identity performance beyond the seven-to-ten minute presentations. Performance incongruence across time may impact perceived competitor identity.

Pioneering forensics research often focused on craft-based concerns, such as Brady's (1974) discussion on supporting materials or Schroeder's (1983) instructions about prose interpretation. Forensics identity research primarily deals with specific identity traits (e.g., Croucher, Thornton, and Eckstein, 2006, who noted research about gender ethnicity, and team-based identity). Some studies have explored the expected forensics behavior norms (Dause & Seltzer, 1970; Aspdal, 1997; West, 1997; Miller, 2005; and Paine, 2005), but norms are often referred to tangentially (e.g. Billings, 2002; or Burnett, Brand, and Meister, 2003). Norms dictate mundane identity performances, and they are indicative of larger cultural values. Miller (2005) described the shared experiences and values forensics community members share; he argued forensics is a co-culture that can be segmented further into additional co-cultures (e.g., regional forensics communities).

On an organizational level, team culture and organizational identities have been studied (e.g., West, 1997; Miller, 2005; Croucher, Thornton, & Eckstein, 2006; White, 2010). Croucher, Long, Meredith, Oommen, and Steele (2009) underscored the limited research individual identity has received in forensics research. Treadaway and Hill (1999)

evaluated narratives in debate to understand organizational identity, but similar research has not been conducted specifically regarding individual events competitors. Team culture and organizational identities impact individual identity performances, but they are not equivalent with one another. Forensics provides an interesting context to understand individual identity performances within a co-cultural context.

Front and back region performances exist within forensics, such as competitors controlling conversation topics in front of judges. Front region performances require co-culturally-located roles, parts, and fronts. For instance, the female competitor role requires conservative attire (Jones, 1987; Paine, 2005), which typically includes professional suits, high heeled shoes, and unobtrusive jewelry, which is a part required for some female business professionals. Roles involve varying levels of conscious attention to behavior and expressions given (off). Students may behave in accordance with organizational traditions unconsciously (VerLinden, 1997); alternatively some teams prepare students for a multitude of speech situations so competitors can consciously choose the “correct” behavior (Billings, 2002). Table 2.1 postulates ways competitors (un)consciously meet expectations.

Langellier and Peterson (1997) stated personal narratives are shared with rapt, mute audiences (e.g., during a competitive performance) or conversationally participative audiences (e.g., during competitive or social self-presentations). Impromptu Speaking performances, one competitive category featuring a rapt audience, are built on kernel stories where examples are shared for different purposes depending on the competitive round (Boone, 1987).

Table 2.1  
*Anticipated Specific Identities of Forensics Competitors*

Identity	Location of Performance			Description
	In Rounds	In Tournament	Out of Tournament	
Friendly Competitor				Knows names, encourages others
Strategic	X	X	X	Networking for competitive benefits
Authentic	X	X	X	Perceived as a friendly person
Ambitious Competitor				Receives awards frequently
Talented	X	X	X	Naturally gifted as speaker
Hard- Working		X	X	Dedicates effort to succeed
Organizationally- Focused				Activity participation outside of individual competition
Leader		X	X	Representative for organizations
Teammate	X	X	X	Celebrates team success
Educationally- Focused				Seeks more than trophies/recognition
Mentor	X	X	X	Offers advice to others
Learner		X	X	Seeks judge advice, does ballot analysis
Other				
Activist	X	X	X	Wants to improve the world
Genre Specific	X	X		LP'er, PA'er, and/or Interper

*Note.* The table postulates potential identities forensics competitors may enact. Multiple roles can be played concurrently.

Team history narratives may also function as kernel stories, where the same narrative about van talk may teach the importance of maintaining face at tournaments and prompt competitors to become advocates (Outzen, 2015). Whether told in competition or conversationally engaged, personal narratives have the power to “educate, empower, and emancipate” (Langellier, 1999, p. 129).



Competitive performance and social self-presentation intersect during rounds when a competitor forgets part of a memorized speech. Speech norms dictate face should be saved by the competitor by pretending the mistake did not happen and by the audience members (taking the role of social self-presentation) downplaying or ignoring the flub. Competitive self-presentation may involve interacting with judges and competitors from multiple teams to strategically network across the community. Recognizing the potential gain from validity checks, some performers use “calculated unintentionality” to manipulate the expressions which seem given off (Goffman, 1959, p. 9). Goffman underscored the likelihood audience members can distinguish conscious manipulation of what appear to be expressions given off, meaning the intended benefits of the calculated unintentionality may backfire. Moreover, if a coach overhears an otherwise upright competitor insulting a judge’s ballot the coach notes the incongruous self-presentations and may distrust the competitor’s future front presentations. When competitors behave correctly unconsciously, their apparent authenticity and spontaneous understanding of forensics norms are rewarded socially and competitively.

Few formal rules exist in forensics (VerLinden, 1997), but norms determine appropriate fronts, which thereby limits which identities are to be performed and which are to be hidden, which identities are considered *normal* and which are *stigmatized* (Goffman, 1989). Stigmas are forbidden identities determined by co-cultural expectations. Competitors may respond by correcting (e.g., a visually-impaired competitor getting laser eye surgery to remove the need to wear glasses during competition); concealing (e.g., removing glasses prior to presenting and pretending to be

able to make eye contact); or blaming the stigma (e.g., blaming vision problems for lack of competitive success).

The subjective nature of effective presentation skill means other factors (e.g. networking, rule knowledge, or resource availability) impact competitive success, like the evaluator's training, background, and position (Mills, 1983; Ross, 1984; Brand, 2002), the speaker-evaluator relationship, and norms of the competition location (Cronn-Mills and Golden, 1997; Burnett, Brand, and Meister, 2003; Miller, 2005; Paine, 2005).

Competitors (and coaches) who recognize the existence of factors outside the competition round may fulfill additional roles to improve the likelihood of competitive success during tournament rounds. Understanding the competitive/strategic performance norms in the forensics community may explain why some competitors seek, and some coaches and judges encourage, certain behaviors and identities. The dramaturgical connections between performance and roles, self, and narrative in forensics provide abundant theoretical underpinning for understanding how identity is performed, policed, and (re)created in forensics. Through (un)conscious self-presentations, competitors impact competitive outcomes and have the potential to impact their selves and the forensics community at large.

### **Chapter 3: Method**

Intercollegiate forensics is a community comprised of individuals of varied backgrounds who interact for social and competitive purposes. As a community built on competitive communication, forensics abounds with opportunities interaction-based identity negotiations. I gathered data using interviews and focus groups to understand identity performance, norms, and enforcement in forensics. Qualitative research does not prioritize replicability like quantitative science; qualitative data emphasizes transparency so those reading research reports understand interpretation methods leading to the conclusions (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). After justifying the methods used in the study, I detail how I planned to gather and analyze the data.

#### **Justification for Methods**

Qualitative research is appropriate for evaluating identity performance in intercollegiate forensics. Patton (1990) argued qualitative methods may provide new insight for organizations whose activities become routine. Qualitative research provides opportunities for participants to collaborate in the research process. First, while each forensic tournament and team have their own quirks, the community is built on shared norms which facilitate a sense of routineness. Competitors expect one another to attend tournaments wearing suits (or similar business-style clothing). Coaches expect the central hub of a tournament, often called the ballot table, to know or be able to find out information about the tournament. Teams expect an awards ceremony at the end of the tournament. The routines associated with tournaments develop from norms accepted by

the community, and often routines go unquestioned. Qualitative inquiry provides the space necessary to tease apart norms. We can answer questions about the routine from multiple perspectives to understand how norms affect community members.

Interviewing is the first data-collection approach I planned to use. Interviewing provides an appropriate data-collection method based on the research questions. Interviews provide insights unobtainable by observation. While my experiences in forensics provide information, they are limited by factors such as the amount of time I spend in the current culture and the people with whom I associate. Interviewing gives participants the chance to describe experiences and share how they make sense of the world. Given the complex nature of identity performance and governance, multiple perspectives are imperative. Significant individuals (including extended community members and lay judges) maintain and enforce norms and rules through (inter)actions with students. Therefore, to reify current identity performance trends, a broad set of descriptions are required to make up my dataset.

Cataloguing varied experiences should provide a compelling way to accurately represent current identity performance behaviors within the forensics community. By seeking diverse narratives about forensic experiences, I have the potential to find cultural proclivities hidden by routine. Krueger (1994) noted one limitation of interview research is individuals may hesitate to self-disclose in certain dyadic situations. McCroskey and Richmond (1980) described communication apprehension as having a situational component, where some individuals may feel apprehensive or hesitate to disclose in dyadic situations and others hesitate in group settings. Therefore, data collection will

include focus groups. While some individuals may hesitate to share information in group settings due to their situational communication apprehension, the use of both focus groups and interviews reinforces opportunities to participate in ways that are most convenient and comfortable for the individuals.

Focus groups create permissive environments for relevant participants and can spur disclosure and generate ideas otherwise missed in individual interviews. Patton (1990) noted focus groups tend to reject extreme ideas which might improve validity. Krueger (1994) discussed how the socially oriented procedure yields an increased sample size, “insights unavailable from individual interviews, questionnaires, or other data sources,” and high face validity (p. 32). Face validity, or as Patton (1990) defined “report believability,” measures the *prima facie* reliability of data (p. 469). Face validity is not the most important reliability factor, but does help evaluate the initial accuracy of research and analysis. Morgan (1988) suggested the natural vocabulary evoked by a group setting, the ability to unpack complex behaviors and motivations, and greater emphasis on the participants’ views (based on the smaller interviewer role) provide additional benefits for focus group use. Morgan (1988) and Krueger (1994) identified shortcomings for focus groups, such as difficulty analyzing data and a decreased overall production of ideas. Patton (1990) argued the number of questions or topics covered in focus groups is necessarily smaller than in individual interviews due to the time a conversation requires. Patton further noted the potential conflicts or divergent conversation streams between participants who know each other as limitations.

While limitations exist, focus groups are essential to my research. Forensics balances individual competition with group dynamics; success can be earned in both ways. Miller (2005) observed team travel and tournaments function in similar ways across the micro-cultures, or the regionally specific norms in the forensics community. Miller asserted “the shared experiences ... create a strong sense of identification among members of the forensics community” (p. 4). Individual competitor experiences are similar (such as rule adherence for competition) but personal goals and category differences create multiple perspectives. Further, despite identifying with the larger community, Orme (2012) contended individual team cultures vary widely across the community. Therefore, focus groups may have uncovered perspectives otherwise hidden or downplayed. One team may use specific names for activities like “van talk,” and comparing experiences in a focus group will have the potential to expose otherwise missed themes. Ross (1984) noted the value of informal focus group discussion for his judging paradigm; he described a conversation where his judging criteria became more concrete for evaluating rhetorical criticism. The collective and subjective experiences native to forensic competition mean discussion groups could provide individuals the ability to articulate experiences they had in relation to the larger forensics community. Based on the justification, interviewing and focus groups are appropriate methods for my study.

### **Data Collection Overview**

**Interviews.** I planned to interview participants using what Patton (1990) called the general interview guide approach and what Fontana and Frey (2000) labelled the

semi-structured interview approach. My planned approach differs from what Patton (1990) described as the informal conversation approach (usually accompanying observational field work, a fully unstructured method where conversation flow dictates interview direction) and the standardized open-ended interview (characterized by static pre-determined questions unvaried across participants). Questions about forensics experiences would be based on Patton's (1990), and Kvale and Brinkman's (2009) interview procedures. I will start by defining the population to be interviewed. Based on guidelines by Jensen, Christy, Gettings, and Lareau (2013) who conducted a norm analysis of 1,865 interview and focus group studies published in top-ranked journals in communication, public health, and interdisciplinary social science from 2005 to 2009, I intend to gather between 25-30 interviews from across the forensics community. However, as Patton (1990) and Charmaz (2000) pointed out, redundancy in interviews may indicate a saturation point in the research process. A data saturation point is when interviews no longer gather new data; instead the data continue showing the same information, which suggests data collection is complete. Therefore, I will be continually aware of the potential for having reached the saturation point. If the saturation point is reached prior to conducting 25-30 interviews and the interviewees represent a purposeful sample, I will stop conducting interviews.

Patton (1990) emphasized the importance of purposeful sampling given the relatively small number of participants when interviewing is used to collect data. I planned to recruit participants from the following groups: current and former competitors and coaches, current extended community members, and lay judges. Purposeful sampling

means privileging certain community members when recruiting interviewees. I will attempt to sample equally from each group, though if time constrains data gathering I will privilege in-group cultural participants (former and current competitors and coaches; extended community members) over lay judges. In-group participants interact daily with forensic culture, meaning unpacking their experiences may provide richer data. However, the value of lay judge experiences to illuminate cultural aspects invisible to in-group participants should not be downplayed, which is why I plan to include lay judges. I will seek participants whose involvement in forensics varies. I will use face-to-face, phone, and computer-mediated channels.

First, I will recruit participants with messages on the Individual Events Listserv (i-el@mnsu.edu), social-media platforms, and through personal contacts to develop an initial interview roster. Second, during each interview conducted during the study I will ask for names of potential participants using the snowball recruitment method. Participants who complete the interviews may be able to recommend people whom Patton (1990) defined as “information-rich cases,” or people who may provide new perspectives on identity performance issues (p. 176). Third, I will continue using the snowball sampling begun with initially interviewed participants to find and interview individuals whose rich experiences might provide relevant and unique data for my research. The interconnected nature of the forensics community means I may unavoidably know personally or by reputation most of the people interviewed for the study; to minimize bias I will use standardized recruitment scripts (see Appendix A) and begin the interview using standardized scripts (see Appendix B).



Patton (1990) explained the general interview guide approach includes developing a list of possible questions or topics and including probing questions during the interview. Bringing a question/topic list but maintaining conversational flow balances systematic and comprehensive data collection goals. The interview questions are listed in Appendix C. As advised by Jensen, et al. (2013), I will collect demographic information to contextualize answers. To focus actual interview time on the identity experiences of the participant, when possible I will ask participants to complete a demographic survey prior to the interview. Before asking questions during the interview, I will obtain informed consent from participants, ensuring all are aware of the procedure and their rights. I will audio-record all interviews. I will use funneling questions (moving from broad to specific questions) as my overarching interview pattern. I will begin each interview by exchanging pleasantries, providing a briefing to encourage comfortable sharing during the interview, and providing initial definitions to frame the conversation (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). During interviews, I plan to use probing questions to ascertain clarifying remarks. I anticipate interviews will last two hours each.

**Focus groups.** Similar to the interviews, focus groups will explore a variety of opinions from the forensics community. Based on Jensen, et al. (2013), I intend to conduct six focus groups with five to seven members each. Each group will consist of one identified population: students, coaches, lay judges, former competitors, former coaches, and extended community members. Separating groups by sub-populations in the forensics community will be appropriate to remove some power structures which may prevent participation (e.g., current competitors who might not share opinions based on

fear of retribution from coaches or judges). Krueger (1994) argued utilizing multiple focus groups creates the opportunity to detect trends across the population.

Focus groups will likely occur at forensic competitions. I will obtain informed consent from the participants, and I will ensure they are aware of the procedure and their rights. I will audio-record the focus groups. Similar to the individual interviews, I prepared a list of topics (see Appendix D) based on the research question goals prior to the group meeting. One of the benefits of focus groups is the flexibility of the conversation and the ability to discuss complex issues with others. Morgan (1988) described the number of questions or prompts in a more structured focus group should be limited to five or less, but he suggested preparing probing questions in case conversation wanes.

I need to be conscious of limitations resulting from my strategies. First, Morgan (1988) warned limiting groups to subpopulations may skew the data depending upon the uniqueness of group participants. Second, Patton (1990) contended when participants know one another, which is likely in the forensics community, full confidentiality is not possible for participants. Krueger (1994) noted in the past, researchers valued unfamiliarity between participants; Krueger further noted knowing and having relationships with focus group members may limit self-disclosure due to the ongoing relationships between participants. Third, gathering focus group data during forensic tournaments means participants may be eager to complete the focus group to engage in more usual interactions with forensic friends. The desire to complete the focus group may stifle discussion. Despite limitations, Patton (1990) asserted, “the object is to get high-

quality data in a social context where people can consider their own views in the context of the views of others” (p. 335). Focus groups provide data only available through group conversations, so the combination of focus group and interview data should provide a more robust data set for analysis.

### **Data Transcription**

I will begin my analysis by transcribing the audio recordings of the interviews and focus groups. Transcriptions will be completed by me. My initial transcription will include names and details shared by the participant, but upon completion of the transcription I will assign pseudonyms and removed all descriptions which might compromise participant anonymity. Participants will be given the option to choose their own pseudonyms. Participants will be given the option to receive a copy of the transcription, and they will be encouraged to contact me if they want to alter or nuance their responses.

I will listen to the audio recordings of the interviews and focus groups multiple times to identify key phrases and important sections of data. After identifying important data relevant to the research questions, I will transcribe those sections for analysis. Patton (1990) acknowledged transcripts provide the most desirable data set. However, Patton maintained “only those quotations that are particularly important for data analysis and reporting need be transcribed” when “resources are not sufficient to permit full transcriptions” (p. 350). Tracy (2013) pointed out “transcriptions are human constructions, and how they are constructed depends on the goals of the larger research

project” so “some researchers make detailed summaries of interviews and only transcribe key quotations” (p. 178).

### **Analysis**

Data analysis will be conducted using the iterative analysis approach outlined by Tracy (2013), reading the data from the alternating perspectives of emic (data-driven analysis) and etic (pre-existing theoretical and conceptual analysis). Tracy’s procedure has not been utilized as widely as other methods like grounded theory, but articles utilizing Tracy’s method have appeared in journals from a variety of disciplines (e.g., Malvini Redden, Tracy, & Shafer, 2013; Tracy & Rivera, 2010; Tracy, Myers, & Scott, 2006). I will start analysis by integrating interview and focus group data together and separating the data into the population segments (lay judges, current competitors, etc). By comingling the interviews and focus group data, I mitigate the data-gathering method shortcomings. I will conclude the first analysis phase by (re)reading and (re)listening to the data noting emergent concepts from the recordings and text while asking the question “what is *a* story here?” (Tracy, 2013, p. 188). Rather than attempting to ascertain a Truth, I will immerse myself in the data. The primary-cycle coding I complete will be done manually and will involve re-listening and (re)coding the segments several times to capture the essence of the data.

Primary-cycle codes will be translated into what Tracy (2013) called first-level codes. First-level codes convey a condensed version of the data rather than initiating analysis. I will use gerunds like hiding or embracing, as well as *in vivo* codes capturing the “jargon, slang, and vocabulary” of the forensics community (Tracy, p. 190). I will

fracture the data into more detailed categories, recognizing the opportunity to later combine like-codes when I create my codebook. After coding my data, I will update my initial coding book, including a title of the code, a definition, and an example (see Table 3.1).

After completing an initial coding book, I will read over the codebook and revisit my initial research questions to determine if the data accurately answers them. Informed by the recrafted research questions, I will listen and read through the data again, noting new codes tied specifically to the research questions.

Table 3.1

*Example Initial Coding Book Entry*

Title	Definition	Example
Tradition	Identity performances limited due to team traditions	“Students from [that school] just always are making choices based on competition because that team and the alumni of the program care so much about winning. They can’t make meaningful topic or lit choices because they just have to win.”

For stage three of analysis, following Malvini Redden, et al. (2013), I will move “between [my] data and existing literature to examine emergent themes and existing salient issues” to balance analyzing “emergent grounded themes” and my research goals (p. 2). Based on my informed reading of the data and relevant texts, I will use my first-order codes (along with open coding of the texts and recordings when necessary) to create a final codebook to guide my “final round of focused coding” (Tracy & Rivera, 2010, p. 13). I will create codes using what Charmaz (2006) called an “examined stance” where I carefully monitor my position in relation to the data, whether the codes relay emic or etic basis, and when codes rely upon existing research (p. 69). Malvini Redden,

et al. (2013) noted an examined stance ensures codes connect to the data, reflect participant descriptions, and are “coded reliably and consistently” (p. 4). After coding data, I will analyze the data and assess the validity, reliability, and generalizability.

Golafshani (2003) argued validity (did I amass the information I intended to collect?) and reliability (is my data consistent with itself and is my data analysis dependable?) are intertwined in qualitative studies. Golafshani explained “reliability and validity are conceptualized as trustworthiness, rigor and quality in qualitative paradigm” (p. 604). Noble and Smith (2015) reported “qualitative research is frequently criticised [sic] for lacking scientific rigour [sic] with poor justification of the methods adopted, lack of transparency in the analytical procedures, and the findings being merely a collection of personal opinions subject to researcher bias” (p. 34). Noble and Smith provided a list of suggestions to improve reliability and validity:

1. account for personal biases and acknowledge biases in sampling
2. keep clear records and include descriptions of analysis processes in the written reports
3. include “verbatim descriptions of participants’ accounts” to support findings (p. 35)
4. search for themes and outliers to see different perspectives are represented
5. include other researchers and respondent opinions on research conclusions to determine if analysis is accurate
6. use multiple methods to “help produce a more comprehensive set of findings” (p. 35).

My validity and reliability will be maintained in many ways. Krueger (1994) reported verification requires collecting enough accurate data. Enough is a relative term, but returning to Jensen, et al.'s (2013) findings and Patton's (1990) assertion about the data saturation level, I intend to collect enough data to reach the appropriate levels for reliability. Collecting data using mixed methods from a variety of source perspectives in the forensics community means I will accumulate data showing trends and contradictions. A qualitative researcher seeks to illuminate trends and contradictions, and by amassing information from about six focus groups and 25-30 interviews I will likely find reliable and valid information. I will include clear descriptions of my methods and procedures along with verbatim accounts from participants in my research results (see chapter 4). I include my personal biases through descriptions of my identities and assumptions below.

Qualitative researchers codify data into meaningful analyses, and the analyses are shaped by the standpoints and positionality of the researcher. Qualitative research requires the investigator to become what Lincoln and Denzin (2000) called the *bricoleur*, or the instrument crafting a cohesive design from the collected data. Lincoln and Denzin argued understanding data analysis requires paradigmatic understanding of the research instrument (i.e., the researcher). Paradigmatic commitments impact research findings. The Food Network show *Chopped* provides a useful metaphor for qualitative research. With the same ingredients, time frame, and equipment, each chef creates a meal, but the experiences each person bring to the kitchen shape their work. As Kenneth Burke (1965) articulated, "Though the materials of our experience are established, we are poetic in our rearrangement of them" (p. 218).

The experiences investigators bring to qualitative research impact the analysis results. Because the researcher is the analysis instrument, reflexivity is vital to producing high-quality qualitative research. Fontana and Frey (2000) and Gergen and Gergen (2000) argued reflexivity is an important part of establishing analysis validity and thematically coding data. Miles and Huberman (1994) articulated the importance of reflexivity, arguing analysis credibility is affected by the way “a researcher construes the shape of the social world” (p. 2). Gergen and Gergen (2000) argued reflexivity reveals “work as historically, culturally, and personally situated” (p. 1028). Tracy (2013) argued readers benefit from knowing the researchers are aware and considerate of “their role and impact in the scene” (p. 233). Janesick (2000) stated “the researcher must describe and explain his or her social, philosophical, and physical location in the study” because qualitative research relies on the analyst’s perspective (p. 389). Making clear my positionality elucidates where my analyses originate.

**My standpoint.** I am a white, female, upper-middle-class, educated, married, mother. I am queer, but my sexuality currently manifests heterosexually. I do not currently associate with any major religion, but I faithfully practiced Catholicism until a few years ago. Most of my life I have lived in the Midwest, primarily in rural areas, but I spent several months living in Colorado, Indianapolis, and Georgia. My ontological and epistemological framework most closely resembles the interpretivist paradigm. Ontologically, I identify as a social constructionist, which Golafshani (2003) interpreted as someone who believes reality is created through interaction; facts do not exist outside shared experiences. Epistemologically, I identify as a subjectivist, which means I can



only understand situations through perceptions of those directly involved with the activities. How we make meaning is based upon our experiences. Thus, the overarching assumption based on my perspectives is: there is no one Truth; truths are extracted from the meanings individuals ascribe to situations. Axiologically, I feel drawn to the critical research perspective where the focus is using research to empower disenfranchised and marginalized groups to decrease oppression. I primarily engage my critical (as opposed to my interpretive) side during research results dissemination and the actions I take in supporting community groups, social movements, and empowering classroom pedagogy. My research standpoint is outlined in Table 3.2. My privileged demographic characteristics are not noticeably apparent to me because they go uncontested in most of my interactions; while my demographics affect my analyses, I make conscious efforts to recognize the impacts.

The dis/connections between my current ideology and the values instilled during adolescence influenced my life. Despite my mom criticizing feminism throughout my childhood, my role as feminist mother includes trying to provide spaces for my children to explore gender and actively fighting heteronormative assumptions placed on my kids. My parenting battles may not seem germane to identity performance in the forensics community, however, my current identity struggles direct my interests and fuel my research energy. My family polices my identity in many ways, from passive aggressive comments to not inviting me to family functions; each time I act inappropriately based on family norms, I am made to understand my gaffe. The forensics community functions a lot like families. Each team is like a family unit, while all teams combine under the

surname “individual events competitors.” Teams abide by their own norms, but the structures governing teams (e.g., travel activities or budget), and the culture (the United States) and co-culture (the forensic activity) within which they exist, impact decisions making (Miller, 2005). Team values are imbued by coaches (White, 2010) and inter- and intra-team feuds disrupt harmonious interactions.

Table 3.2  
*Julie L. G. Walker’s Research Standpoint*

Demographic Positionality	
White	Upper-Middle-Class
Female	Mother
Married	Educated (Business, B. S. and Communication, M. A.)
Specific Childhood-Adulthood Dis/Connections	
Live and raised in rural midwest	
No current religious practice, raised and, until recently, practiced Catholicism	
Liberal, raised Conservative	
Queer, manifesting heterosexually, raised thinking homosexuality was attention seeking; I am not “out” to my immediate biological family	
Feminist, raised thinking feminism was unnecessary and contemptable	
Paradigmatic Standpoints	
Ontological-Interpretivist-Social Constructionist	
Epistemological-Interpretivist-Subjectivist	
Axiological-Critical Scholar	

The forensics community played an important role in shaping who I am today. As a coach now, I feel responsible for providing spaces where students can work to achieve their forensic goals and helping students figure out their places in the world. The forensic co-culture is a space where students can experiment with new identities through their

competitive performances and their social self-presentations. However, just like my family, forensics has mechanisms through which certain identity performances are (not) approved. Understanding more about which identities are rewarded and how identity performances are regulated in (c)overt ways may help students understand the forensic “family” better; deeper understanding may aid identity negotiations and self-presentation decisions.

Tracy (2013) argued qualitative research analyses “align not only with themes emerging in primary coding, but also with ones that mesh well with research goals, experience, and ... make use of past expertise” (p. 191). Based on my experiences and prior research, I am primed to address specific issues, but may be prone to omit others. Table 3.3 lists my previous publication and conference presentation areas. Tracy, Eger, Huffman, Redden, and Scarduzio (2015) refuted claims qualitative researchers can be wholly driven by the data collected. Tracy et al. emphasized any given data set may provide rich information from which numerous studies could be conducted, so while data does direct research, so too does a researcher’s experiences and interests.

Table 3.3  
*Walker Previous Research Areas*

General Area	Specific Research Topic
Identity	Marital Surname Choice and Identity (Negotiations)
Forensics	Communication Apprehension LMX Leadership
Critical Communication Pedagogy	Classroom Praxis
Civility	Strategic Rhetorical Use
Management	Mission Statements on College Campuses

## **Generalizability**

Forensic culture is similar to many other cultures; forensics encompasses a wide geographical area and naturally develops co-cultures. My research may be generalizable across forensic culture because I plan to sample individual interviews and focus groups from a geographically diverse group of participants. I will seek participants using purposeful sampling to further increase generalizable analyses. Forensic research may seem narrow in its scope, however the nature of my study means the analysis can be generalizable to communities similar to forensics. Forensics is a team-based, national-travelling, competitive activity, similar to sports programs. Forensics involves individual competitors working together/against one another, even within the same team, but teams work together to achieve goals. Forensic teams are semi-transient and do not compete or stay in locations belonging only to forensic culture; community may be built on attire, language, and other visible and (in)visible aspects of the culture. Community groups who build community based on norms rather than formal facilities may benefit from the analyses in my research. The implications norms have on individual identities, and the impacts individual identities have on norms might have implications for the previously mentioned cultures. Additional generalizability possibilities are discussed in Chapter 5.

## Chapter 4: Results

Chapter Three outlined the planned data gathering and analysis process. When enacted, the plan changed slightly. The first section of the chapter highlights differences between intended and actual actions. Details are provided about the collected data.

### Data Collection Process

Over a period of two months, I collected data through 17 interviews and three focus groups involving 15 people. The intent was to collect data from 30 interviews and 36 focus group participants. Based on data saturation, I streamlined the data collection process when I was hearing similar stories and no new themes were emerging during interviews. Having employed purposeful sampling, I reached the data saturation point. Individual interviews were conducted with five active coaches, one former coach,<sup>1</sup> six current students, two former students, three extended-community members,<sup>2</sup> and one lay judge. The focus groups were separated by role within the forensics community into three groups: six current coaches, five current students, and four lay judges. In total, I collected about 23 hours of audio recordings.

Maintaining anonymity in forensics research can be difficult. The forensics community is fairly tightknit and some individuals may be identifiable by a full description. For instance, if I provided my full forensics related history (Participant “Julie” competed for two years in the Midwest, judged for three years for the Midwest, unofficially coached for a year in the Southeast, then unofficially coached in the Midwest for two years until she was officially hired as a coach in the Midwest), figuring out who I

was would not be difficult. To protect the anonymity of participants, I developed broad, overarching data categories to relate the types of people with whom I spoke. I recognize I am essentializing individuals based on limited identity markers; I further recognize the performance of the identity markers listed here is always individualized and should not be characterized by stereotyped notions of identity performance. However, I want to provide some context to the participants' backgrounds without relaying information that may compromise anonymity.

While analyzing the data, I separated individuals into integrated community members and non-integrated community members. Integrated community members included current and former students and coaches. Non-integrated individuals included extended-community members and lay judges. Separating the data by integration level was useful to: (1) compare experiences of those who coached and competed; (2) check the ways non-integrated individuals viewed topics discussed by community members. For instance, conversations in the coach focus group problematized student topic choice and the mandated disclosure some students perceive necessary for competitive success. Later, a lay judge argued a competitor in a wheelchair missed a competitive opportunity by not performing a disability piece.

Current and former coaches ranged from serving as first year graduate teaching-assistant coaches to having coached for more than 30 years; some coached consistently, while others took time away and then returned to coach full time. Coaches were employed by public institutions and private religious schools. Coaches self-identified as queer, straight, gay, and lesbian. Of the three female and nine male coaches, one coach

self-identified as Latino/a (gender removed to maintain anonymity); all other coaches appeared to be Caucasian. Most coaches self-identified as critical, progressive individuals, but one coach self-identified as conservative. Coaches currently served Districts 4, 6, and 7, and former coaching experiences included Districts 3, 4, and 9.

Current and former students participated from one semester to four years; many competed in high school before joining college speech. Students self-identified as Caucasian, Indian, and Latina/o. Competitors either self-identified as liberals or did not self-identify. Students attended four- and two-year public institutions and private religious schools. Two students worked with more than one coaching staff (e.g., transferred schools; a new coach was hired). Eight students identified as female and four students as male. Current students competed in Districts 4 and 6, and former competitors were involved in Districts 1, 3, 4, 6, and 7, which further broadens the experiences of participants regionally and, because cultures evolve, temporally. One student self-identified as a member of the disabled community. Two students self-identified as introverted.

Non-integrated participants were extended-community members and lay judges. Each extended-community member had, at some point, been involved with the forensics community, but they were not current competitors or coaches. Extended-community members did not play daily active roles, but they do understand the culture of forensics. All non-integrated individuals were connected to District 4. Seven non-integrated individuals were currently teaching collegiate communication studies classes, and all interact with current and former competitors and coaches on a frequent basis. All non-

integrated individuals identified as Caucasian except for one person of Chinese descent. Two non-integrated individuals self-identified as gay, and one self-identified as conservative.

### **Analysis**

I began my analysis by listening to audio tracks and preparing a list of important sections to transcribe. I transcribed the important sections within one day to ensure transcription quality and to familiarize myself with the data. I began the coding process after completing the initial analysis stage.

I read through all coach transcripts. Per Tracy's (2013) method, I noted adjectives, gerunds, and jargon-based language. I highlighted significant phrases or words, especially if the words were used in more than one conversation. I revisited transcription notes and the original interview notes adding phrases and words. I separated the lists into content areas to begin developing themes, and then I reread coach interviews to nuance categories of connected comments (e.g., coach Daniel and competitor Matthew recognized accessibility issues because of connections to disabled competitors). I read all remaining interview data, transcription lists, and original interview notes to check comprehensiveness.

When coding interview and focus group data, I looked for patterns but I was pulled toward themes relating to my experiences. First, I noted privileged and marginalized identity performances and the ways competitors are taught to follow group norms. Second, I was drawn to stories of community outsiders who are a part of the



forensics activity but are not fully welcomed into the community. Third, I looked to identify norms performances community members found problematic.

Because of my involvement with the forensics community, I consciously scrutinized important potential analytical omissions. First, because I identify as a Caucasian individual with few apparent intersecting marginalizing identities (my queerness is hidden by my heterosexual monogamous partner), I am less aware of and sensitive to how racial identity performances may be policed. Until 2010, I did not begin to understand or acknowledge racism in the United States. I am embarrassed to admit my ignorance (and I recognize the privilege associated with said ignorance), but I know I do not have the same comprehension level as I do of sexism. Second, my business manager education and current coaching work frames some issues perceived by others as (problematic) norms or performances as team management. My background and research (e.g., Walker & Walker, 2013) may make me initially dismissive of issues addressed in the data. I recognize leadership choices may be dictated by structures governing team management. Third, I have been competing, coaching, or judging since 2004, and I began formally studying performance as a graduate student in 2010. I understand why some norms exist. Therefore, like VerLinden (1997), I consciously sought to elevate and problematize the mundane.

Listing my research-shaping activities is disconcerting for me, but reflexively considering my positionality helped me closely monitor my own coding and analysis behaviors. Taylor and Bogdan (1998) stated “all observations are filtered through the

researcher's selective lens" (p. 160). Stating my standpoint in written form heightens my urgency to address missed research blind spots.

### **Crystallization Integration**

I cannot remove biases from my work; in response, Gergen and Gergen (2000) suggested using multiple voicing to analyze data. Using multiple voicing addresses what Lincoln and Denzen (2000) described as "the crisis of representation" where researchers struggle to authentically represent the other through their written reporting (p. 1050). I included research participant voices and words in the analysis sections. My voice narrates as the author and analyst, but the participant voices illuminate the details.

Central to my epistemological framing is the rejection of a singular, knowable Truth. Identity research write-ups can succumb to treacherously simplified analyses of complex, ever-changing performances. Many qualitative researchers utilize triangulation methods in an effort to create a centralized location of understanding, but Richardson (2000) reminded triangulation assumes any given interaction involves three perspectives. Richardson argued more than three perspectives comprise situations and meanings. Denzen and Lincoln (2000) described how "crystals are prisms that reflect and refract, creating ever-changing images and pictures of reality" (p. 873). "What we see," wrote Richardson (2000) "depends upon our angle of repose" (p. 934). Through reflecting *and* refracting during analysis, Ellingson (2009) explained crystallization allows researchers to reflect the participant voice *and* narrate the analysis more effectively.

Ellingson (2009) wrote crystallization requires five major components: depth, balance, multi-voiced, researcher reflexivity, and rejecting objectivity. Ellingson stressed crystallization includes:

1. “deep, thickly described, complexly rendered interpretation of meanings about a phenomenon or group” (p. 10),
2. “at least one middle-ground (constructivist or postpositivist) and one interpretive, artistic, performative, or otherwise creative analytical approach” (p. 10),
3. utilization of “more than one genre of writing and/or other medium” (p. 10),
4. inclusion of “a significant degree of reflexive consideration of the researcher’s self and roles in the process of research design, data collection, and representation” (p. 10), and
5. eschewing one “singular, discoverable Truth” (p. 10).

Ellingson argued qualitative projects using crystallization are more functional, aesthetically pleasing, and reflective of author and participant voices. Tracy, Eger, Huffman, Redden, and Scarduzio (2015) criticized the desirability of research written without the inescapable messiness associated with the qualitative research process. Crystallization can be used to combat overly simplistic and researcher-voiced analyses. Ellingson (2009) described how analyses employing crystallization methods are “embodied, imperfect, insightful constructions rather than immaculate end products” (p. 120).

Richardson (2000) argued texts should not be judged based on a standard aesthetic. The crystallization I used includes a content-analysis based write-up interspersed with composite anecdotes representing kernel stories and meta-narratives present throughout the data set. Composite narrative quotations are noted through superscript, and the notations correspond to Table 4.1. Combining the scientific with the artistic responds to Richardson’s (2000) call “to look through both lenses, to see a ‘social science art form’” (p. 937). My analysis centers on two thematic areas: A (a play) Play (or the notion of flattened, overlapping stage areas); and Professionalism. For each section, I vacillate between reflecting and refracting the data set, allowing the voices to be filtered through my analytic lens and then elevating participant voices through the composite narratives.

Table 4.1  
*Composite Narrative Quotation Codes*

<u>Current Coaches</u>		<u>Current Students</u>		<u>Extended-Community Members</u>		<u>Lay Judges</u>	
cc-a	Blake	cs-a	Sahil	ec-a	Carl	lj-a	Richard
cc-b	Jackson	cs-b	Kaitlyn	ec-b	Alvira	lj-b	Tracy
cc-c	Nicole	cs-c	Kayla	ec-c	Kylie	lj-c	Amanda
cc-d	Callie	cs-d	Aubrey			lj-d	Juliette
cc-e	Hailey	cs-e	Bailey	<u>Former Coach</u>		lj-e	Cameron
cc-f	Ben <sup>3</sup>	cs-f	Matthew	fc-a	Edward		
cc-g	Daniel	cs-g	Parker				
cc-h	Anthony	cs-h	Hilary	<u>Former Student</u>			
cc-i	Ryan	cs-i	Vivian	fs-a	JoAnna		
cc-j	Felipe	cs-j	Evan				
cc-k	Lucas						

### **A (A Play) Play (And So On)**

Goffman (1959) located everyday performances in front region spaces, or locations where an individual is either directly interacting with or is within “visual or aural range” of an audience expecting a specific front (p. 107). Back regions were safe havens from audience expectations where fronts can be removed. Less curated performances of self will not be witnessed by audience members. Back and front regions are segregated; when audience members intrude in back regions, performers are almost always embarrassed.

Social networking site identity researchers argue online presentations of self require managing a collapsed audience able to view archived versions of our online self-presentations (Binder, Howes, & Smart, 2012; Marwick & boyd, 2011; Vitak, 2012). Collapsed audiences online require multiple, simultaneous front region presentations. Rui and Stefanone (2013) argued inappropriate online performances result in negative consequences. Participants identified multiple regions and fronts expected for successful forensic performances. Much like Russian matryoshka (nesting) dolls, participant narratives illuminated multiple embedded performance levels. Four levels emerged from the data.

Forensic tournaments occur to create the competitive round spaces (typically located in classrooms or lecture halls) including a cast of judges, audience members, and performers. I call the explicit performance space “Level 1.” Level 1 is embedded within multiple layers of performance spaces. The at-large tournament space was described by participants as another performance space or what I label “Level 2” performances. Level

2 performance expectations overlap with (but are distinct from) Level 1. Level 2 performances are embedded in a third layer of expectations I call “Level 3” performances, whereby team culture, regional expectations, organizational affiliation, or other parameters dictate appropriate performance choices. Level 3 performances exist within a broader environment. “Level 4” performances describe the ways forensics teams and tournaments are embedded in the culture of the United States, the institutes of higher education, and SNS activity.

Because each level is embedded in the next, front and back region areas blur, complicating performance requirements for a collapsed audience. Some individuals may be fellow “cast members” for one performance (e.g., competitors share similar front requirements when performing in Level 2) and may simultaneously balance conflicting roles when audiences collapse (e.g., conservative students will likely applaud a liberal persuasive speech despite contradictions with personal beliefs to fit Level 1 expectations). Failure to recognize overlapping expectations results in failure to meet community behavior norms, which decreases Level 1 competitive success. Overlapping front expectations limit the performance space available for individuals, thus limiting the scope of appropriate behaviors and requiring careful identity performance curation.

**Telling the story: *Level 1.*** “There’s all this work and then there’s this little bit of fun and sexiness where you get to perform.<sup>ec-a</sup> You have this stage, this unique space where you get to express those unique parts of your identity.<sup>cs-a, cs-b</sup> When you do speeches, you show such a vulnerable part of you.<sup>cs-c</sup> It’s more of a protected space in the round.<sup>cc-a</sup> [Competitors are] able to talk about some topics that may be edgy to talk about

in other places and even if they were to discuss this speech outside of that setting, it maybe seem a little inappropriate.<sup>lj-a</sup> It's like outside the round, you have to step off of that platform.<sup>cs-d,</sup>

“The types of materials that are selected, that's a huge part of what you're willing to portray, what you're willing to put out there.<sup>fs-a</sup> [Competitors] have to taper their identity both in how they express it and what they talk about in their interests in the conventional demands that end up on the ballot.<sup>cc-b</sup> [As an audience,] they have to actually sit there and watch, and they're so amazed by others who have been in the event for a while. But then they figure it out and then it all builds. By the time that they're seniors they have found that place to be able to actually present themselves in that piece.<sup>cc-c</sup>

Your message is more powerful when people can see who you are through your piece.<sup>cc-d</sup> You're putting a little bit of yourself into all of your events.<sup>cc-b</sup>

I like to do characters that aren't me at all because it's fun to be not yourself in situations. I get to spend 10 minutes outside my body.<sup>cc-c</sup>

“At a certain point, it's the performance that matters, but it impacts the impression you make because it's a small enough community.<sup>ec-a</sup> I totally think that I need to look and act a certain way to fulfill a certain identity.<sup>cc-d</sup> There are a lot of community norms I need to fit into.<sup>cs-e</sup>

If I try to do something different, the judge might dock me for it, and that deters me from ever trying to do something because I care more about getting the 1 or 2 in the round. That's me, I'm a slave to society. At least I admit it.<sup>cs-c</sup>

We enjoy fighting conformity. I think there is a lot of conformity in forensics but there is a lot of opportunity in choosing to do something that sounds good and if it happens to satisfy those rules ... if you don't let the rules of forensics confine you, you can produce a better product.<sup>cs-b</sup>

“[There are] etiquette and rules that come into the performance space.<sup>ec-b</sup> I think it starts with their aesthetic and how they get dressed.<sup>cc-e</sup> There's kind of like a standard dress that you're supposed to have in speech.<sup>ec-b</sup>

<p>We have a couple of people on our team with visible tattoos and facial piercings, but they told us at the beginning of the year as long as it's not distracting, we're fine.<sup>cs-d</sup></p>	<p>That was so distracting the way her tattoos were out.<sup>ec-b</sup></p>
<p>I have heard things that have been pretty grim. Like “cover it up” like “what makes her think she should be able to dress like that,” and it's like “dudes, come on!”<sup>ec-b</sup></p>	<p>The only time I ever wrote on a ballot anything about clothing was if it was really something distracting.<sup>fs-a</sup> Sometimes I would not write it, but I knew that coach and I would go talk with the coach. It's distracting from what they're doing. As much as I want to avoid that, it does play a part.<sup>fc-a</sup></p>
<p>There's some people who have like colored hair, and it's fun to see more about you as a personality just cause while you are in a suit, I feel like I have a better feel on you because you still can incorporate your own style.<sup>cs-b</sup></p>	<p>I dye my hair red for the four and a half months outside of speech competition, and then I dye it back because I feel like I have to tone it back down for the community.<sup>cs-e</sup></p>
<p>I think you'll find that a lot of judges aren't going to respond [well] to your pants suit.<sup>cc-f</sup></p>	<p>"I really hate that I have to wear this skirt right now, I'd much rather wear pants," and every other woman is like "same, I'd much rather wear pants, we should probably not talk about this right now."<sup>cs-e</sup></p>
<p>They did say that women have to wear lipstick in order to travel. It was a competitive thing. I was like "Whatever you're comfortable with, not my place to tell you what to do cosmetically."<sup>cc-g</sup></p>	<p>Bright red lipstick on their lips, what does that do, it draws the attention of me to their lips because it's so vibrant and red. And many times that interferes with what they're saying, when words should be the focus.<sup>fc-a</sup></p>



I think people who have invisible disabilities, I don't think they feel comfortable asking for accommodations in speech. I wonder if students feel that they can ask for [accommodations] or if there's a whole notion of competition so it's like "you're getting an advantage" when you're clearly not, that kind of stigma.<sup>cc-d</sup>

We did a whole bunch of different ideas, but it's so difficult to fit into that performance aesthetic. My coach said no one's going to comment on it, who would be stupid enough to comment this, it's a reasonable adaptation that you need, but then every year I get one judge be like "I'm distracted by [the adaptation]."<sup>cc-f</sup>

"They will not let you not acknowledge privilege."<sup>cc-h</sup>

If you're politically conservative, you hide it in this community.<sup>cc-h</sup>

No one wrote on a ballot "conservative ideas are stupid."<sup>cc-a</sup>

I saw an ADS this year on how this community makes it really difficult to be a Republican, but the things she said I was like "yeah, those are bad things to say or be." I think that it's good for them to learn how to pass in this progressive community, but I also thing that the reality is that we don't talk much about the fact that there are still lots of students have to hide their conservative or Christian or Republican identities.<sup>cc-f</sup>

To say there's no room for religion, no room for religious discussion is completely false.<sup>fs-a</sup>

I feel like religion is not a topic that's talked about a lot.<sup>lj-b</sup>

Some of them, they realize this is what the rest of the world thinks, and more importantly this is how the rest of the world views you and your religion. Now what are you going to do about it?<sup>cc-a</sup>

It's hard to be a homophobic, conservative Christian.<sup>cc-a</sup>

I think those people learn to sort of be chameleons and pick these very social minded topics that the round is over ... [trails off].<sup>cc-f</sup> That's pretty much where the demanding ends, and I think that's appropriate for a community dedicated to communication.<sup>cc-h</sup>

**Characterizing Level 1 performance spaces.** Participants defined a Level 1 stage, describing behaviors and expectations characteristic to Levels 1 and 2. Competitor Sahil and lay judge Juliette said Level 1 performances happened on a "stage." Competitor

Aubrey noted “it’s like outside the round, you have to step off of that platform, but when you step onto it, it’s higher than you ever imagined.” Participants described boundaries between Level 1 front and back regions, which were recognizable based on interaction content (extended-community member Alvira) and scripting (“you dismiss us” competitors informed lay judge Amanda, referring to how to end a competition round). Competitors requesting dismissal from the Level 1 space indicates both explicitly understood space and acknowledgement of understood performance expectations. Level 1 performances operated under specific “rules, like in a game” (extended-community member Kylie).

Rules were described for appearance, presentation structure, and conversation topics; playing the game correctly led to predictable desirable outcomes. Former coach Edward described how ill-fitting, wrinkled, or ostentatious attire impacted judging outcomes. Coach Hailey described the appearance conveyed through written messages impacts perception, noting “it’s hard not to notice somebody’s handwriting.” Competitor Evan highlighted the ways structure confined Level 1 performances when he described how “you get to pick your topic and make stylistic choices about it, but the structure is predetermined. So while you get to be creative in that structure, you still have to follow the [unwritten] rules.” Lay judge Tracy noted performers have explicit movement expectations “like a beauty pageant where they have to hit those Xs.” Former competitor JoAnna described how even the performance aid used in interpretive events (the black binder used to hold literature) included specific “book conformity” rules. Competitor Aubrey described the explicit scripting she was taught to use during Level 1

performances: “My first round of ADS<sup>4</sup> there were girls sitting behind me who were like ‘How long have you been doing forensics?’ I was like ‘I feel like I’ve been doing forensics forever.’ Normally I would be like ‘this is my first round!’”

**Telling the story: *Level 2*.** “Obviously at tournaments, what you wear and how you act is really important. Our team in particular, [our coaches] have really high standards.<sup>cc-d</sup> My appearance does not necessarily dictate how professional I can be.<sup>cc-e</sup> I love clothes, but once you get into forensics it gets completely whitewashed. Like I see girls on a day when they’re not competing and I’ll be like ‘Oh my gosh, you look like we could like chill!’ Which is weird because everything else is so inclusive, so it feels like you have to have the brightly colored suit, subtle jewelry, curled hair, and that’s not necessarily a bad thing, but like<sup>cs-b</sup>

there’s kind of like a standard dress that you’re supposed to have in speech. But students will still, their personalities absolutely come out despite the standard.<sup>ec-b</sup>

clothes are very much a unifying thing and if you don’t pass that unifying standard, that’s detrimental.<sup>cs-b</sup>

I think it doesn’t necessarily change the facets of your outside identity, but it certainly enhances and amplifies them.<sup>cs-e>></sup>

“Strangely enough, how [competitors] interact in the hallways, the way people talk, the way people respond in conversation, whether they’re willing to talk with people beyond their own team, or whether they talk at all or whether they put their headphones and do their homework, I think people kind of express themselves in those ways too.<sup>ec-b</sup>

Onstage and offstage. I think you’re constantly performing in the hallway when we’re having a regular conversation, but you can tell if people are being authentic to who they are.<sup>cs-e>></sup>

“Awards ceremonies are a whole different spectacle in and of themselves.<sup>ec-b</sup> At awards ceremonies I still have to wear heels and sit very nicely and be controlled, even though I'm not super good at it, because that's the expectation for me.<sup>cs-e</sup> I love the hug thing, because you have the people who decide to hug versus the people who don't decide to hug. You have this one person that's like [hesitating pulling back mimicked] and then embraced awkwardly just like ‘please let me sit down.’ There was this swing tournament<sup>5</sup> where someone decided they didn't want to hug and they gave a fist bump, and then throughout the rest of the tournament, there was a war between fist bumps and hugging and it was like ‘No no no, we're poetry people, we're going to hug’ or ‘No no no, we're informative people, we're going to keep the fist bump and do it really nerdily.’ It was fascinating evolution of this small gesture and how people decided to react.<sup>ec-b</sup>”

“I've noticed as I sit there looking at what's going on in a tournament, [competitors] interact with each other depending upon a status. I think when you're more successful, and I mean the teams that have been experiencing success, you are able to identify with other teams who are also experiencing success more so than the marginal teams. [Several top 20 AFA teams], they form their own little community. It's hard to break into that community. It takes a while. And you break into it either by the success of your students OR you came from [a top 20 program].<sup>fc-a</sup>”

**Characterizing Level 2 performance spaces.** Level 2 spaces were described as a “tournament area” (competitor Hilary) or “tournament atmosphere” (coach Callie). Coach Hailey poetically described entering the tournament location: “As we pull up to our destination, the inspirational hip hop is muted.” Callie described entering the tournament

space: “There's a strong notion of you're in the tournament as soon as it starts, you're always performing. You're always competing; when you're walking in between rounds and you're talking to people, when you're in awards, when you interact with anybody.”

Hailey included “when looking at postings or schematics” as other Level 2 spaces.

Extended-community member Alvira said the “wild, crazy, insane schedule” of a tournament led students to create a hurried presence, conveying a tournament atmosphere: “it just seems like this wild scurry. ‘I’ve gotta go here, I’ve gotta find this building, and we’re going to write things like this really fast.’ It’s impressive.”

Participants noted expectations at tournaments differed. Competitor Vivian recognized

There are so many things that affect the way that a performer feels and acts at a tournament. I would totally carry myself differently if I was at nationals right now. I would not be cursing and laughing and being crass. I would be kissing ass and talking with people I didn’t like and doing what I need to do to get where I want to be. When we’re at bigger tournaments with bigger schools, we feel a heaviness and a very different sense of identity.

Blake, a coach at a religious-affiliated institution, recalled a conversation regarding the Level 1 performance content with an administrator after his team hosted a tournament: “It’s like ‘They performed what?! On OUR campus?’”

Team behaviors became more noticeable during Level 2 performances. Coach Hailey described lunchtime routines, where some teams create escapes by “hiding away” team members from the minutia of the tournament, some “structure lunchtime and pre-round warmups,” and some have students “fend for themselves.” Competitor Aubrey and

lay judge Cameron discussed the loud, obnoxious, or messy ways some teams managed artifact and communication tendencies in public spaces between competition rounds, which former competitor JoAnna said “sends maybe a less competitive, unprofessional message.” Several participants described how certain teams dress similarly, such as teams who tend to wear bowties (competitor Hilary); competitor Bailey told a story about how at one school, “they color coordinate every day. So they all matched, so when they were together you could tell they were a team, but when they were apart you couldn't.”

Rules governed appropriate Level 2 behaviors. Lay judge Cameron compared a typical day on campus to a speech tournament setting: “You look around campus and you can sense that something is different. Most of the groups kind of keep to themselves, they are very respectful of one another, they are very quiet, kept, respectful, but you know, fun and caring.” Competitor Vivian described forensics as being over-the-top extensions of other performances: “I’m me times 10 when I’m at forensics competitions. I’m funnier, I’m more enthusiastic both inside and outside of rounds, I’m just, I’m me times 10!” Competitor Parker described the type of focus some people have when they enter the tournament space. Extended-community member Alvira described how “awards ceremonies are a whole spectacle,” which competitor Bailey described as continuing the tournament atmosphere expectations. Coach Hailey suggested competitor identity performances emerge prior to awards ceremonies. Coach Daniel stated, “I felt that there was a strong pressure to uphold the standard of decorum and public dress.” Decorum and professionalism will be described in more depth in the next theme.

Level 2 performances were spaces where competitors and teams indicated their goals through interactions and overall demeanor. Former competitor JoAnna noted hyper-serious competitors perform a cold demeanor. Competitor Bailey described how one coach she worked with required stoicism between rounds to “avoid appearing vulnerable” to competition. Competitor Kayla talked about the how competitors “view and carry themselves,” noting “I think everyone sizes people up.” Kayla, who competed for two years at a community college before transferring to a four-year school (and a larger program) provided a unique perspective on the differences program focus makes in how a student performs identity during a tournament. She commented:

[At my current university] we are more strict about [tournament behaviors]. We're at the university level. We're not community college anymore. You've got to take this seriously. I've learned a lot more this year with etiquette and being more presentable and stuff. Especially with how I dress. I think that's because [our coaches] want us to be more on the national level rather than just worried about the state. State just happens. We're more focused on the big picture than just state.

Former coach Edward noted the difference team goals have on interpersonal interactions during Level 2 performances. He described how

At tournaments, students [from programs who routinely rank within the top 20 in the nation at national tournaments] tend to be talking to each other, their coaches tend to be talking to each other, and not spend so much time with people smaller schools. Now, the smaller schools tend to do the same thing amongst themselves

because they can't break into that other identity group. It's not to say a [top-20 program] coach won't talk with other people, but there's definitely a grouping. Competitor Vivian agreed, saying "There's big school-small school culture. [My school] is a fairly small school on the national culture. When we're at bigger tournaments [there is] a different sense of identity. 'I don't have a national outgroup,<sup>6</sup> I don't matter.' That affects your identity."

Former competitor JoAnna and coach Anthony described the impact individual competitors have on the overall team success. Anthony said most intra-team strife he experienced came from differing foci of team members: "So the people who are really hardcore, there is a lot of conflict with people who are on the team for other reasons." JoAnna found when her teammates were "the noisy kids sitting around, playing cards ... it does unfortunately have the potential to disseminate that particular image of the team," which then affects individual competitor images.

Almost everyone interviewed described the forensics community as embracing a liberal perspective. Coach Daniel characterized his competitors' political affiliations as ranging "all the way from Hilary to Bernie." Competitor Kaitlyn described how forensics is "like, this liberal bubble." Competitor Vivian viewed forensics as "pretty much one of the only outlet that I have which I get to be around like-minded people who accept this aspect of me. I can't talk about this with like my boyfriend, who's a republican." Competitor Matthew noted the somewhat isolating nature of the liberal bubble compared to other interactions he shares: "It's difficult going back to my very conservative family,



and they're like making fun of Black Lives Matter. You're sitting there like 'if I step out, I'm going to be called a socialist or some shit.'”

One of the most interesting aspects of the Level 1-Level 2 distinctions were the ways competitors and judges collectively created spaces and enforce rules for one level while simultaneously sharing the back stage of another Level. Extended-community member Kylie recalled

I always found it fascinating because you'd be walking around in the building and it'd be right there. They're practicing their piece. It's such a weird experience, like you don't expect to see this outside of the classroom or outside the competition room, but that is the speech practice realm, in the middle of the hallway.

Lay judge Richard described what practicing sounded like:

Yeah, I notice them practicing in the hallway and they're all doing it in the same way. Like some people will talk to the wall and some people will pace back and forth. Just weird nonverbal behavior, they're all whispering really quietly because they all still have to verbally say everything, but they're being quiet so they don't disturb anything.

Coach Daniel described how female competitors “carry a bag around with flats, but when [they're] performing [they] have to wear heels of a certain type.” Common acceptable practice at speech tournaments allows women to change into flat shoes to walk long distances between rounds (where high heeled shoes are the expectation). However, the high heeled shoes must be put on prior to entering the Level 1 performance space.

Judges and students create Level 1 performances spaces as explicit front regions, meaning back region behaviors occur when the barrier is crossed. Judges (who have co-created the back region) ignore certain back region behaviors while traveling to the front region spaces (e.g. changing costumes, practicing lines) but penalize competitors for other back region behaviors. Former coach Edward commented

It's a part of our whole general society. Just look at our tv, movies, music, we're hearing "fucker," "mother fucker," all of this kind of language. If a judge hears you using that kind of language at a tournament, they might say "what type of a person is this?" It could color their judgement of you very easily. Because we all do that.

Despite Level 1 audiences ignoring some back region behaviors others affect evaluation of front region performances. Disjointed performances make audiences question authenticity.

**Telling the story: *Authenticity*.** "Obviously, if you're performing something that doesn't sound like you or it's not you, it's really difficult to sell it.<sup>cs-d</sup> For general public speaking skills, it would be better to pick those more personal topics. I saw one, it was a girl in a wheelchair, she wasn't talking about the wheelchair, she was talking about something completely different, and I was like 'why didn't you pick a topic to do with your disability' cause you're talking about, I don't even remember what it was, it wasn't that memorable, and I thought 'you'd have a much better more personal topic that you could have went with, but you went with this one that is kind of dull and generic.'<sup>lj-a</sup>

Yeah [in training] they said "if you just connect with it better, give a higher score" and I'm like that's a bad reasoning! It's so subjective!<sup>lj-c</sup> As a speech teacher I'm not allowed to do that!<sup>lj-b</sup> "Yeah, I like your topic, A+."<sup>lj-c</sup>

Sometimes I waste time trying to think about what the judge would want to hear.<sup>cs-a</sup>

"In extemp,<sup>7</sup> I might think 'okay, I'm in this region for a tournament, this judge is probably more conservative, I'm going to go with more conservative sources, some conservative ideas,' so even if I don't agree with it sometimes I have to try to change the way I present myself to appeal to them more.<sup>cs-a</sup> When you do impromptu<sup>8</sup> of course it has to be based off past experiences, but I don't know if I'm necessarily putting anything that's me into it, even though it's based off of my experience. So if I agree or disagree with a quotation that I'm given in impromptu, it might not necessarily be because I feel that way. It might be because I have more to talk about on a certain subject, so if you were to ask me out of a round what I actually thought about a quotation, even though I might not be able to come up with as many or as eloquent of examples I may feel differently about it than what I presented in the round.<sup>cs-g></sup>

"I identify as gay but I wasn't out during my entire competitive career, and so I never performed gay [interp] pieces,<sup>9</sup> I deliberately avoided them because the only people who were doing those pieces were out gay people and I wasn't ready at that point. So even when a coach of mine suggested a piece that had a gay narrator I passed on it 'Nah, I kinda like this one where he marries a [singsong voice] lady' because that piece of the identity was so bound up in literature selection that I knew if I performed a gay piece [then] that that's what people would think about me.<sup>cc-i></sup>

"I'm of two minds about it because on one hand I'm like 'No, if this affects you, I think that you owe it to us to share that with us.' I think of lot of this is in response to the

inauthenticity people feel and perceive. To some extent, when a student discloses, we're like 'oh, thank GOD, they found something that actually resonates with them.' Where I struggle with it is that it leaves a lot of voices out or forces people to find the ways and seek out in their own identity and their own past those opportunities for disclosure that are going to be able to make them competitive. And so at that point a lot of the times it doesn't feel terribly genuine.<sup>cc-f</sup>

I love the fact that a norm is evolving that if you don't talk about what you're doing outside of the speech round you lose ethos. If you're really serious and say in your solutions "you should become better educated about X" you damned well better have put something together to help me become educated. You can go anywhere and create a web presence for yourself. You build ethos by demonstrating your dedication to the topic outside of the round.<sup>cc-h</sup>

Sign this petition. I've created this Facebook page, like it. I've got this petition, sign it. I've created this group, join it. It's all about I've done this and so this is truly, truly, *truly* me.<sup>cc-c</sup> And then you look at it and [laughing] there's three links to an article from when they built it in September.<sup>cc-f</sup> If I never see another QR code in my life, and my students insist on having them!<sup>cc-b, cc-c</sup>

Sometimes people just want to wear the mask, even if they're part of the community, they want to wear the mask of the community rather than genuinely existing in it.<sup>cc-b,</sup>

**Levels 1 and 2 authenticity.** Authenticity is expected in Level 1. Competitor Matthew and coach Nicole shared stories of discredited Level 1 front region performances. Nicole described the desire for performers to show the Level 1 performance extending beyond the confines of Level 1 spaces (thus conveying an authentic performance not taken off when in the back region), where students try to convey through actions and presentation content "this is truly, truly, truly me." Some students desire authenticity across performance spaces. Coach Anthony shared many "students in forensics are very interested in the other aspects of their identity becoming a

part of their forensics identity,” which coincided with how extended-community member Alvira and coach Daniel described some students as “mission driven” when making performance choices. Lay judge Juliette stated most bluntly what many others expressed: “I expect them to tell their own story ... because it’s more related and connected with their own life.”

Level 2 authenticity took many forms. Extended-community member Carl described the forensics experience overall as simply being focused “on finding your voice and trying to be authentic.” Other participants described competitors behaving in ways to reinforce Level 1 performances, thus conveying authenticity through consistent performances of self. Competitor Bailey compared her tone with judges and the ballot table to conversations with competitor interactions: “If I know [the competitor] personally, I feel like I can’t lie to them anymore.” Competitors Vivian and Bailey cynically acknowledged the political nature of identity performance during forensics tournaments. Bailey observed “When you seem fake to the community, people know it. It affects the amount of friends you can make and how people will perceive your performances. I think you’re encouraged to have some level of authenticity outside the round.” Vivian commented “There’s a facade, for sure. You want your judges to like you, you want the other team members to like you, because, you know, every team talks. There’s so much politics that go into forensics if you want to do well.” Vivian described preferential treatment a competitor receives if they are perceived as nice. Coach Jackson agreed: “It’s not supposed to play into how [judges] evaluate your performance, but you

do the job of separating someone from like their habits and then tell us how difficult it is.” Vivian pointed out “that’s where you see identities go away.”

Coaches, judges, and competitors sought authenticity within Level 1 performance spaces, but performances were not limited to singular locations and one-time interactions. Unlike a theatre, many forensic competitors engaged in multiple staged performances each day of competition, sometimes within the same hour-long time frame. Performances deemed required in one setting may be inappropriate for another based on the rules of the spaces. Coach Nicole described her experiences of students in multiple Level 1 performances:

Here we are, we've judged the entire day, we've seen these students in all the other events and you walk into ADS and it's like whoa. It is a different person in there. And I'm not sure that's really them or not or if they're putting on a different identity when they come into that.

Lay judge Cameron echoed Nicole’s sentiment, saying “I haven’t seen the same speaker in multiple panels yet, so I’m kinda waiting for that to see what happens. How will my perceptions change? Will I think that you lied to me? I don’t know.”

Further complicating the performances are the multiple roles competitors play in the spaces. Students carefully curate competitive performance and self roles in Level 1 performances. Competitive self involves the portrayal of a specific identity performance when not in the competitive performance role. Students make (un)conscious choices to perform their competitive self-performances. Many participants described how

authenticity was desirable across Level 1 performance spaces, yet limits the level of individuality competitors may be able to convey. Coach Jackson said:

We almost demand a certain level of individuality and personality, but within the confines of what's expected of the event. Not rules-wise but convention-wise, which when they're enforced like rules are the exact same thing. But we want people to be charming or funny or to be very smart or engaging, a large gamut of things we want from that even, but if people are too funny or they're too silly, or if they talk about their interests too often, then it's seen as a competitive disadvantage.

At times, judges questioned Level 1 authenticity in inappropriate ways. Coach Nicole recalled a British student being told the British accent used during a performance did not sound authentic (the judge did not know the student outside the front region Level 1 performance). Coach Callie recalled a student who practiced the Pentecostal faith was told the modest dress she claimed to value was inauthentic when viewed in light of her forensic performance attire (a skirt suit).

Marginalized individuals were frustrated when judges downgraded performances for conveying their authentic selves too much. Coaches Felipe, Ben, Callie, and Hailey and competitor Matthew described situations where competitors were rebuked for presenting racial or disability-focused performances too frequently across Level 1 performance spaces. Felipe, reflecting on his time as a competitor said “I find it extremely problematic when people would encapsulate my performance styles as ‘oh, he’s just the guy who would do the Latino pieces.’ I’ve found that sort of diminishes my

narrative and my experiences.” Coach Hailey described a conversation where someone questioned her choice to allow a student with a mental disability focusing performances on the disability; the person asked “You’re not worried that people are going to say [ze]’s a one-trick pony, [ze] only cares about one thing?” Competitor Matthew noted “I’ve always strayed away from doing multiple disability pieces a year because I felt like I would be labeled as the disabled speaker, like that’s the only thing I can do well.”

Coach Callie described how the stereotypical “gay-voice” (which she acknowledged was problematic shorthand) was considered appropriate for interpretive performance spaces but not welcome in public-address presentations. Callie said “it is interesting that depending on the type of space, even within forensics, those kind of identifiers are highlighted as more important than others.” While the forensics community values and promotes authenticity within Level 1, uniform authenticity across Level 1 spaces was deemed inappropriate for marginalized identities. Put more simply, as coach Hailey asked “did you ever have a ballot that said you did too many white pieces? No.”

Complicating matters are the social self-performances competitors (un)consciously curate. Some people, without consciously deciding to perform in a specific way, convey introverted or extroverted performances. Other competitors may seek to perform extroverted behaviors for reasons not connected with competition. When audience members observing performances do not view the performances as authentic, individuals risk losing credibility. Jackson described how he saw identity, performance, authenticity, and credibility interconnecting:



No one is asking these questions of baseball players. Like, how do baseball players explore their identities, really? It's that identity is sort of an inherent part of ethos, and you can't really get away from that with what we're doing, so we constantly have to worry about how identity is at play.

**Telling the story: *Level 3*.** “Team culture plays a big part in performance identity.<sup>cc-a</sup>

I think it's a very large feeling that when you see a team, there's a lot of team patriotism, pride.<sup>cs-h</sup>

We're in this like weird paradox where we're supposed to have a lot of team pride, but the second you walk into the round when they say "where are you from" you're supposed to say [your state] and not tell people [the school] where you're from.<sup>cs-e</sup>

When we're in the van on the way to the tournament, when we're together, when we're apart, when we're having a regular conversation in the hallway, when we have a [team space] and there's couches and there's a comfy area for us to hang out and bond and we're not really doing forensics, group identity performance changes based on what atmosphere you're in.<sup>cs-e, cs-i, cc-e»</sup>

“There's certain conformity to dress, the etiquette and rules that come into the performance space. Any structure or group demands that you give up some part of yourself to be a part of it. A team is a team, you have to conform at some point. People do definitely try to show who they are, but because they're part of speech they're complicit in something, they've agreed to become part of the team so they can't damage the team with what they do, whereas they might start out a certain way, they might feel compelled to tame their identity for the good of the team. Is that good or bad? I don't really know that.<sup>ec-b»</sup>

“Our students feel very significantly that they are speech people, they aren't theatre people, they're speech team people. And maybe there's even a slight rivalry between the two.<sup>ec-b</sup> If you told [non-forensics] people you were part of a travelling chorus team, that would make complete sense. No one would question that. Just because it's changed slightly to speaking instead of singing, it's just something [non-forensics] people have trouble associating with much if they haven't been a part of it themselves.<sup>cs-j</sup> In some ways, there's that sense of team identity and then in other ways there's the “oh, this is what forensics is” and that's where we get into some trouble.<sup>cc-e></sup>”

“There's lots of different ways team cultures are evident.<sup>cc-e</sup> Team culture happens in team vans and stuff.<sup>ec-b</sup> Van rides are so much more than just going from point A to point B.<sup>ec-a</sup> There's usually some sort of bonding thing that happens there. Some people sing, some people share jokes, I watched one team just totally harass their coach and it was really funny and delightful, but that was like a bonding thing for them. And [the students] ganging up on [the coach] was kind of like their coming together as a cohesive unit.<sup>ec-b></sup>”

“Vocal warmups,<sup>10</sup> how they function, each team has a very different approach to vocal warmups that's just evident in team culture and group identity.<sup>cc-e</sup> During group warmups, you obviously have to participate and join in, though sometimes new people are like ‘I'm not doing that, that's crazy.’ Again, anytime you have form, structure, group, you have to give something up. I haven't been around long enough to see how big the compromise is for some people.<sup>ec-b</sup> Many of the warmups that I have observed, there might be some members of the team that do it because they have to do it in order to be

accepted. And I have observed some that seem a bit disturbed by the language that's being used or the innuendos that are done with certain warmup activities. They may feel forced to put on a face for that so they are accepted by their teammates but really it bothers them, they don't like it. I think there's some team members that recognize that's what's happening.<sup>fc-a></sup>

“I tell my team this every year, we have a mixture of personalities here and every year the team is different.<sup>cc-a</sup>

I came to the [school] for different reasons, and joined the team as an afterthought.<sup>cs-e</sup>

We have students who join the team to get over their fear of public speaking, students who join the team because they want to be a national champion, and everyone in between.<sup>cc-h</sup>

I joined the team by accident.<sup>cs-b</sup>

I joined [the team for] extemp because I wanted to learn more about politics [for my major].<sup>cs-j</sup>

We're all very different kinds of people. Everybody is weird. We don't hold back. We are a bunch of nuts.<sup>cs-i</sup> It's an environment where you form really fast bonds.<sup>cs-h</sup> You're traveling, you're living, you're eating, you're spending the entire day with people, you travel with them, you sleep on them in the car and get sick with them, you are talking about not, like, softball subjects.<sup>cs-c, cs-h, cs-i</sup> You show such a vulnerable part of you because speech is so vulnerable and the topics that you do mean a lot to a lot of people.<sup>cs-c</sup> It's definitely going to form strong alliances.<sup>cs-h</sup> When you're a part of the team you make these friendships that are unreal. That's such a different kind of bond than any other friendships that I have.<sup>cs-c</sup> We realize how weird everyone is and how diverse everyone's past is whereas you wouldn't normally talk about things like that. So I think we're brought

together by that.<sup>cs-b</sup> I think differences are interesting. I think it makes us closer as a group because it would be boring if we were all the same.<sup>cs-d></sup>

**Characterizing Level 3 performance spaces.** Level 2 performances exist within Level 3 performances where structures such as team culture, regional expectations, organizational affiliation, or other parameters dictate appropriate behaviors. Coach Blake spoke extensively about team culture. He described how “teams definitely have their own identities” and “team culture plays a big part in the performance of identity.” Some team culture aspects are determined by region (like the AFA districts) or, as coach Hailey and former coach Edward described, by state. Hailey affectionately said “I say this with all love and respect for this particular region, Nebraska is part of District 4, but they’re not part of District 4. Nebraska is their own subset of forensic culture. I could camp out and just study Nebraska forensics.” Edward described the tournaments a team attends conveying particular identifying characteristics: “If you want to be one of the big boys or big girls, you have to go to the big tournaments, otherwise you’re put into a subcategory.”

Team cultures vary drastically from one another in many ways. Former competitor JoAnna described how success may be defined differently for different schools:

I can think of a team in our area, a lot of the students faced physical disabilities, mental disabilities. Their success was measured like “wow, I got better feedback on my ballot this time” or “I got a chance to visit with this really cool person.”

Having this relationship with that team, I understood that having success for them

meant something very different from another school that was maybe used to bringing home a lot of hardware [trophies] on the weekends.

Coach Blake compared several team cultures, describing “some teams have a very rigid schedule, ‘we practice this day, we practice that day.’” Coach Daniel noted one team required “20 hours of practice a week. That’s crazy!” Blake suggested some teams operated under lax controls, where a “hodge podge of personalities all just form some quirky little thing.” Competitor Kaitlyn described how her team was the “miscellaneous. We’re the people who didn’t fit in anywhere else.” Extended-community member Carl commented “Some coaches are all about ‘pick your people and the speeches that can get into a semifinal [round at nationals] and work with them.’ Others are much more democratic and will work with the people who want to work with them.” Competitor Bailey, who transitioned between coaches of differing philosophies, shared some coaches emphasized a gymnastics-type approach where students individually competed, but their success benefited the overall team. Other coaches, Bailey said, viewed forensics as “a football team [where] everyone gets points for themselves, but you also have a role to play.” Coach Blake disagreed, arguing team culture is a “combination of the [competitor] personalities” rather than coach driven.

Level 3 locations are varied. Competitor Vivian included several locations in her description:

Team spaces, like the [team work room] on our campus, the van, and then the hotel rooms are where we can take the stress off of this very stressful activity. You’re not going to rip a fart in front of your duo partner when you’ve only

known her for an hour. But we spend so much time together that it gets to the point where it doesn't matter. "I know you. You smell. It's cool. I smell too. Let's be smelly together."

The type of behaviors Vivian described vary drastically from the types of performances expected during Level 1 or 2 performances.

Van travel was an important site for the communication and reification of team identity. Competitor Kayla maintained "when you travel with [a team] and sleep on them in the car and get sick with them, I think that's such a different kind of bond than any other friendships that I have." Kayla described how the van talk, or conversations taking place inside the van, differed on different teams. She talked about how on the first team she competed for, van talk about other competitors was primarily kind; her current team's van talk focused nationally, was meaner, and emphasized "trash talking." When Kayla tried to say something nice about a fellow competitor, a team member said "you don't say she's nice." Van rides typically involve particular music choices, which impact a team's overall identity. Coach Hailey described how the tournament day setting begins in the van with the "songs that teams listen to on the way to a tournament. Many teams listen to music to get their students hyped."

While the van clearly was a location where team identity was communicated, Coach Anthony argued van rides provided spaces where "we see [competitors'] true identities. Especially on long van rides, especially after an exhausting tournament, everybody's filters are down, everybody's defenses are down, everybody's ability to give a damn is lessened." Coach Daniel suggested competitors might hide political affiliations

from judges during Level 1 or 2 performances, but “in the van, of course, [competitors are] all very willing to talk about their political beliefs.” Former coach Edward observed “sometimes students reveal things in the van that I would rather not know, or maybe someone else in the van would rather not know,” though he did acknowledge “what’s said in the van stays in the van.” Competitor Bailey disagreed with Edward’s assertion van conversations stay within van confines. Bailey argued when she is nice to other competitors, the van talk with coaches about her as a person means a “little path has been established” which might yield competitive advantages for Level 1 performances.

Hotel rooms are a second important site for team and individual identity performances. Competitor Sahil said “Everyone has their own thing they do to unwind or things they consider fun, and you have to adapt to it instead of being rude. You just have to compromise.” The compromises made by competitors help build the team cultures and identities. Competitor Vivian described how times outside the tournament, like during van rides or at hotels, “that’s when you see people how they really are.” She described a typical evening at a hotel after a day of competition: “Alright, well, I’m going to be walking around in my underwear for a couple minutes, hope that’s okay. This is me. I’m going to wear my *Spongebob Squarepants* t-shirt and my *Family Guy* pants and, like, let’s talk about *Bob’s Burgers*.” While Level 3 identity performances involved less managed directives than Levels 2 or 1, Level 3 performances still included expected performances to fit within team standards. Participants expressed the numerous ways individuals relax into back region performances. However, due to the nature of the team-based, travel-heavy competition in forensics, individual identities still were required to fit

within certain expectations, because “any structure or group demands that you give up some part of yourself to be a part of it” (extended-community member Alvira).

**Telling the story: Level 4.** “It’s hard to deny the influence Facebook has had on forensics and how forensics plays out, you know?<sup>cc-e</sup> You meet someone at AFA and become friends. And maybe it’s just Facebook friends, but you don’t have these intense rivalries where teams are taught to hate other teams.<sup>cc-h</sup> So it’s all very interconnected.<sup>cc-e</sup> I think one of the things we have to confront in this activity, especially on social media these days, is we’re not seeing these people for the first time in the round most of the time. I remember the first time I was judged by August Benassi.<sup>11</sup> I had no clue who he was until well after that round. Nowadays that wouldn’t happen.<sup>cc-f</sup> I think the few conversations about Facebook with the teams I coached, students understand, but they always bristle. ‘Ok, fine, I can talk about this, I can’t talk about that. Fine. But DON’T TELL ME HOW TO FACEBOOK.<sup>cc-i>></sup>”

“I feel less bad about things like that when people are losing their jobs for what they post on Facebook.<sup>cc-b</sup> If it’s a reflection of the team and it’s poor, we’re going to say something.<sup>cc-e</sup> I think it affects identity, too.<sup>cc-b</sup> Sometimes a student will go on one too many rants on Facebook, and I think ugh. Or sometimes a student will post something on Facebook that’s very touching. It definitely makes me think of that student differently.<sup>cc-e</sup> How they are performing on social media and outside of rounds affects whether or not I perceive them to be a likeable, genuine person.<sup>cc-f</sup> Because forensic participation is part of the larger United States academic culture, the whole university culture, there’s definitely ways to appeal to certain levels of groups more than others.<sup>cc-e>></sup>”



**Characterizing Level 4 performance spaces.** Level 3 performances are situated within Level 4 performance contexts. Level 4 contexts include the culture of the United States, the institute of higher education the competitor attends and the team represents, and SNS activity.

Teams impact perceptions of institutions and institutions impact makeups of teams. Coach Callie described how competitors impact the way she views the institute of higher education a team represents. Specifically, she noted a team where most competitors are Black, so she assumed they attended an historically black college; she was surprised to learn less than 10% of the student population held minority status. The institutions of higher education impact the types of students who participate in forensics and shape Level 1, 2, and 3 performances. Coach Anthony said

Part of [the team culture] is the culture of the college itself. It actually has less to do with being a forensicator [someone who competes in forensic tournaments] and more to do with being a [member of this private school]. [At our school], we have a lot of students who are privileged in many ways. They might have the work ethic, but that work ethic crumbles when they encounter obstacles because they've never had obstacles like that. Public school students tend to have more resilience.

Competitor Vivian said financial support impacts team identity: “[My team’s] underfunded, we don't get scholarships. I have to pay for my suits. I am not getting paid to be here. There's privileged programs and non-privileged programs, and that affects the way that a performer feels and acts at a tournament.” Extended-community member Carl

extended Vivian's argument, saying "A lot of it is going to depend on if you have team resources to pay for [supplies] and suits, that affects you." Financial support impacts how fully a competitor can immerse herself into Level 1 performances.

Level 4 front region performances occur in the back region of Levels 1, 2, and 3.

Coach Hailey described the situatedness of Levels 1, 2 and 3 within Level 4:

We like to elevate ourselves and think that we are a progressive, liberal community when that isn't inherently the case. Forensics is still just as susceptible to racism, ethnocentrism, homophobia, heteronormativity, we're just as subject to all that because we live in a society that is all those things. It demonstrates itself in little ways, just little creeping ways that stuff shows up in identity and identity performance.

Despite a decidedly liberal atmosphere, the forensics community exists within the United States, and the cultural characteristics necessarily situate decisions, performances, and values as they are performed in Levels 1, 2, and 3.

SNS complicate front and back region performances. Competitor Bailey discussed her careful selection of SNS relationships, recognizing "if I friend you on Facebook, you're going to know my non-forensics identity." Coach Ryan explained "Social media is probably the biggest example of how students perform an identity. [It's] this digital projection that they meticulously curate." Ryan described students posting unprofessional messages ("Tournament in four days, I'm so not ready, five sad emojis") and wondered if students realized "Your competition can see this. You know that, right?" Coach Hailey argued individual performances on SNS connect with team identity, saying students'

“individual thoughts are simultaneously attached to this school and this team that you compete for. The students have to be taught what they can and cannot express once they are a member of a team.” Coach Ben described SNS as helping students know one another better, or at least be aware of the others’ existences; Coach Anthony argued SNS make “forensics less poisonous” because “there’s too much humanity there. You’re seeing what their passions are and what their favorite songs are and their heartaches.”

Different coaches used different approaches to SNS: Ryan and Jackson had no policies except the suggestion to extend courtesy to forensics community members. Hailey prohibited SNS use once the team begins traveling toward Levels 1 and 2. Jackson tells competitors each semester “Look, judging for forensics doesn’t just take place in the round. It happens all the time. So if you’re doing something particularly annoying or abrasive on social media, people will remember.” Forensics judges and coaches are largely not physically present in competitors’ Level 4 spaces. However, the digital presence of the Level 4 SNS spaces means what in previous decades may have been a back region space now may require front region performances.

**Telling the story: *Level interactions.*** “I think the way we try to show who we are outside of forensics is like a Venn diagram. So there is a circle that is like ‘me in my entirety, my identity as a whole’ and then there’s like ‘my forensics identity as a whole’ and we slowly merge the two circles depending on how long we’ve been in the activity, what our standing is in the community, and, like, how much of ourselves we put into our competitive persona. Because whether or not I’m at the front of the room, I’m actually competing the entire weekend. So when you decide what you’re going to speak about in a

competition, part of the Venn diagram begins to overlap. I'm friends with a lot of my judges on social media. But I think that's a riskier way to establish connections with judges. I would only do that with certain people because I know if I friend you on Facebook, you're going to know the other circle of the Venn diagram, you're going to know my non-forensics identity. So I have to pick and choose that really carefully. While our identities are mixing, they're Venn diagrams, [but] they're also a circle map. So I think when a small facet of my identity becomes part of my forensics identity, it becomes enhanced or more prominent in my outside of forensics identity because I become more comfortable discussing and performing it literally and figuratively.<sup>cs-e</sup>

**Characterizing multi-level performance interactions.** The preceding sections illustrated the performance levels competitors navigate. Level 1 performances are nestled into Level 2 performances. Level 1 back regions are the Level 2 front region. Level 2 back regions are the Level 3 front region. As competitors navigate multi-level interactions where the same people (judges, fellow competitors, and coaches) inhabit multiple performance levels, competitors manage sometimes conflicting roles of competitive performer, competitive self, and social self. For instance, competitors' Level 1 competitive performance role may (not) be expected to match Levels 2, 3, or 4 identity performances.

Some audience members (note the use of audience members refers interactants at every level) may only see Levels 1 and 2 (e.g., lay judges who see performances and tournament behavior). Some audience members only verify student authenticity within Levels 1 and 2, without questioning the competitive performance, competitive-self, or

social- self roles. Other audience members may see competitors across all levels (e.g., fellow competitors who view Level 1 performances, interact during Level 2 performances, share team vans for Level 3 performances, and communicate on social media for Level 4 performances).

Conscious performance authenticity becomes important during multi-level performances. Coach Ben suggested some competitors consciously alter multi-level performances from their typical identity performances to be accepted in the forensics community:

It's kind of like "Here's my weekend forensics performance that my coach tells me is a really strong topic that's going to be successful and resonate with this very progressive community." I think that there are some of those students who drop that and it ends at the competition door. But I think that they also definitely monitor that on social media. And some of them play that up to the point of posting related things on Facebook and stuff because they realize like "Oh, if this is my topic, then I really have to come across as though I care about it," and they almost overcompensate sometimes. They're not bad people, it's just they've found this way to adapt.

Coach Ben was concerned about performance authenticity when students consciously altered behaviors to fit forensics community standards. During Level 3 interactions, a competitor talks with a coach to determine appropriate behaviors and topics for Levels 1 and 2 performances. Once the Level 1 and 2 performance trends are established, the competitor may choose to stop performing the prepared identity. The competitor may feel

pressure to portray the Level 1 and 2 behaviors in Level 4 performances if audience members inhabit multiple layers (e.g., social network connections with judges).

Competitor Bailey described the stoic behaviors her previous coaches required for Level 2 performances. She said “All of us knew people didn’t like us. The way we were instructed to act reinforced that. Now I am repeatedly brought to tears because I am going into rounds with friends. It has impacted my identity on circuit.” Bailey stated the differences between past and present behavioral pressures in Level 3 impacted her Level 2 performances, which then impacted Level 1 performances. As Goffman (1959) argued, audience members often distinguish conscious manipulation of expressions given off resulting in negative consequences. However, as I discussed in Chapter 2, actors (e.g., judges, fellow competitors, coaches) can complicitly determine which behaviors are (not) allowed and expected to be manipulated without social and competitive repercussions.

Forensics as a co-culture exists within the larger framework of the United States. Despite clear separations between front and back regions, each level is situated within the next. Specific identity behaviors are linked to particular norms existing in cultures outside the forensics community. “As the norms of society change,” former coach Edward noted (specifically in regard to “race, sexual identity, and gender”), the way competitors perform their identities change. Coach Hailey described how her current gender presentation stems from her forensics identity performances. Hailey described how her gender and sexuality were “policed or politicized in ballots and in ways that are unhealthy.” The Level 4 performance norms and expectations impact all other levels of

performance. Parts from various contexts intermingle to create norms. Professionalism is one norm area impacting the forensics community.

### **Professionalism**

After evaluating, analyzing, agonizing, and lovingly crafting the A (A Play) Play thematic write-up, I re(re)read the data and initial identified themes, including how participants talked about professionalism. I wanted to understand, after emically exploring professionalism, how existing research described professionalism. Therefore, I etically explored how other scholars understood professionalism.

Lynch (2009) and Reed (2013) defined professionalism as organization-located identity performance norms. Lynch emphasized the required “specialized training and body of abstract knowledge” required to perform identity within professional guidelines (p. 447). Reed argued professionalism “determines who is qualified to perform certain tasks ... prevents others from controlling those tasks, [and controls] the criteria by which performance is evaluated” (p. 556). Professionalism dovetails with Goffman’s (1959) concept of roles. Goffman defined roles as routines associated with established characters for particular spaces. Pre-established behavior patterns are evaluated by criteria and enforced by mechanisms. Professionalism is defined for the current analysis as *a system of norms and rules established to bring order to identity performances within organizations*.

Motley and Sturgill (2013) broke down professionalism norms into (1) product skills (behaviors connected to desirable goal outcomes in the organization, like catering messages to particular audiences) and (2) process skills (the interactional habits required

to accomplish desirable goal outcomes in the organization, like managing relationships with colleagues when working in team settings). Motley and Sturgill's breakdown corresponds to two of the performances described in Chapter 2: (1) competitive performance of literature or public address and (2) competitive performance of self. Competitors seeking successful organizational outcomes (e.g., 1-25<sup>12</sup>) enact professional performances.

Professionalism is a fraught set of expectations. Cheney and Ashcraft (2007) argued the term professional "continues to evoke tangible evidence of status and identity, powerful images of actors with attendant evaluations of bodies and behaviors, and exclusive networks of relationships" (p. 153). Cheney and Ashcraft described how co-cultures may attempt to delegitimize particular groups to gain social capital; particularly, Cheney and Ashcraft highlighted how gender, race, and class are among the identity characteristics policed through professionalism. Downplaying "open access and democratic participation ... may deliberately or unwittingly ... naturalize the exclusion of particular social groups" (Cheney & Ashcraft, p.152), which is problematic given their description of professionalism as arbitrary and constraining "in the name of efficiency" (p. 150). Lynch (2009) argued peer- and self-control uphold professional norms which can be (c)over (Cheney & Ashcraft, 2007). What becomes apparent in understanding professionalism etically is the way scholars locate mechanisms of identity control within the professional lens. RQ1 was illuminated by exploring the A (A Play) Play theme; RQ1 and RQ2 will both be addressed by exploring professionalism. Emically evaluating the



data, three areas emerged: expected professionalism behaviors, mechanisms enforcing the professionalism based behaviors, and problems provoked by professionalism.

**Telling the story: *Professionalism and norms.*** “I think there is a definite identity or persona that is created for competitors, and that is black suits, blue suits, don’t stray too much. Women in skirt suits.<sup>ec-c</sup> We are meticulously dressed.<sup>cs-d</sup>

<p>It’s in the rules, you have to wear professional attire.<sup>cc-b</sup> And that’s all part of the game.<sup>ec-c</sup></p>	<p>I looked, and [the rule] says "formal attire" Formal attire is tuxedos and ball gowns and no one is wearing those.<sup>cc-b</sup></p>
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Do you appear professional? Do you have a coordinated look?<sup>ec-a</sup> It kinda feels like when you’re little and playing dress up, but you’re an adult.<sup>cc-c</sup>

<p>They’re not wearing a full blown suit. That would never have been allowed on my team where I’m from. They should wear a matching suit, like the jacket and the pants have to match.<sup>cc-e</sup></p>	<p>Heaven forbid they wear a different suit top with a different suit bottom. That’s how professional women dress outside of forensics, that’s very common to wear.<sup>cc-e</sup></p>	<p>Oh my God, look at how that person is dressed. What were they thinking?<sup>fc-a</sup></p>
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It can be a simple thing, such as how you wear your hair.<sup>fc-a</sup> The women will wear specific shoes.<sup>lj-b></sup>

“Especially the older men in particular, have this concept of how people should dress for the speech things, a kind of uniformity of appearance, and it really bothers them when anybody goes outside of the line of the perfectly dressed speech person.<sup>ec-b, cc-g</sup>

<p>I think some students' individuality comes across somewhat in how they dress.<sup>fc-a</sup></p>	<p>Does she still keep her own sense of style? Of course, they're her clothes, she didn't go to Walmart and buy a bag and put it over herself.<sup>ec-b</sup></p>
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<p>To me, it looks like everyone dresses the same.<sup>cs-b</sup></p>	<p>We don’t have to fit completely within the box. While there are some rules, you can step outside and say “I wear this because I want to.<sup>cs-c&gt;</sup></p>
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It's their individual choice.<sup>fc-a</sup> | I think dress should be more individualized.<sup>lj-d</sup>

They may need to recognize that that may play a part in their judgement.<sup>fc-a</sup> So that [is] something that really matter[s], the way they have to fill those expectations.<sup>fs-a»</sup>

“Some of it is done in the way that you interact with your team and others.<sup>ec-a</sup> It branches out to the interactions in the community outside of the round.<sup>cs-e</sup> Our coaches will discourage us from saying ‘oh, I’m so new at this, this sucks, this round was awful’ those really unprofessional sounding things that people will say and the judge will be like [looks sideways in a judgmental manner] really?<sup>cs-d</sup> I believe there are certain behaviors that are important when competing, and making sure they were not making remarks that could be interpreted as against somebody or just in poor taste. You can’t do that because your overall image plays a part in how you come across.<sup>fc-a</sup> There’s less expression of individuality, of political sensibilities than I would have expected.<sup>cc-g</sup> The way that they carry themselves. It's very confident, it's very professional.<sup>lj-e</sup> It's because of the professional space because, as we know there needs to be a professional identity.<sup>cc-d</sup> It's just part of the professional world, being accountable to things that you express. But that's an old argument with freedom of speech.<sup>cc-b</sup> This is a professional activity.<sup>cc-i»</sup>

**Professionalism and norms in forensics.** Motley and Sturgill’s (2013) provided an effective framework (product skills and process skills) for organizing professional behaviors performed in the forensics community. Product skills involve behaviors connected to the goal outcomes for the co-culture, such as using prescribed movement or the small black binder during Level 1 performances. Success in the forensics community means different things to competitors, teams, and universities. Brennan (2011) found

success was based on competition, individual growth, skill development, education, goals, and satisfaction. I focus on the competition-based professionalism norms which encompasses the skill development students work through during their time competing in forensics. Coach Anthony most succinctly defined successful product skill performances: “in our world the way we know if we've communicated effectively is the judge puts a 1-25 on the ballot. Now, there are other ways of being rewarded. Stories like that, they're the exception. We're rewarded by competitive results.” Competitor Kayla said students seek competitive success. Forensics exists primarily to evaluate and reward Level 1 performances, so Level 1 performances, including category-specific behaviors and delivery, are the way product skills professionalism will be explored for forensics.

Extemporaneous speaking was one category where professional behaviors were laid out for competitors. Lay judge Tracy recognized in an extemp round the competitors “all used the exact same resource [and] all of them used the exact same examples in their speeches.” Former coach Edward described the shift in extemp speaking over the past few decades: “It used to be that you could give an extemp speech without citing the *Singapore Times*. You'd use the material you had available. But with the advent of the Internet, the advent of computers and everything, all of that has changed.” Extended-community member Carl recalled “They started out with libraries and photo copies. It got to if [the resource] was later than five days old, it didn't make a difference. Today everything is electronic.”

Former coach Edward described interpretation events product skills. Edward identified multiple, intermingled poems intertextually woven together rather than one

single poem better fit the current style for poetry interpretation. Edward described the use of teasers, or a short section of the piece performed before the competitor introduces the main theme, the title(s) and author (s) of the piece(s), noting “I don't think teasers are always necessary. Doesn't mean you can't use them, but everybody does it that way.”

Coach Hailey described the problem she had with how competitors structure teasers and introductions:

We become so paranoid as competitors about not competitively succeeding that we hold ourselves back from doing something that feels right and from experimenting. So their teaser and their intro is ending at after 3 minutes. At that point, I'm no longer teased. You are no longer introducing. You have 10 minutes to talk and you are 30% through. I mean pedagogically there's no grounding for doing that.

Beyond category-specific professionalism norms, participants noted general delivery expectations.

Lay judges Amanda and Juliette and extended-community members Kylie and Carl identified a specific style of delivery (labeled as robotic by numerous participants) within Level 1 performances. Kylie compared her evaluations with other judges' and recognized “I was always a little off because what I wanted for delivery was not what they were being coached to do.” Carl compared the typical vocal delivery used in other communities, like what is used by lawyers or on National Public Radio (NPR) with the delivery norms of forensics: “It always amazes me how rigid the speech norms become. It's kind of like listening to someone from NPR, they kind of develop that cadence over

time and it's distracting to me because I'm not part of that community.” Participants sought delivery with particular movements, hand gestures, the use of particular artifacts (e.g., a small black binder to hold literature for interpretation categories, a particular style of visual aids on black foam board), and the way a competitor pronounces words (Carl, competitor Hilary, and lay judge Cameron).

Part of the general delivery professionalism expectations included audience analysis behaviors. Coach Nicole described how less experienced competitors do not recognize the need to relate content to the audience. Lay judge Amanda saw one competitor manage a conservative identity performance:

I had one girl, somewhere in the introduction she was like "I'm a Republican" and she went on to some very conservative topic. She made some comment about, like, “the majority of you in here probably don't have the same beliefs I do." She might want to prepare the audience so they're not shocked or put off.

Competitor Bailey described building skills to analyze a judge’s “emotional or physical cues to see if they agree with me and whether or not they're genuinely listening to what I have to say.” Coach Ben argued audience analysis “at a base level, regardless of political bias, is what we should be doing in this activity.” Audience analysis happens in typical public speaking skills education, but many product skills behavior expectations were arbitrary and required training and knowledge to perform appropriately.

Extended-community member Kylie recalled “the first time I [judged I] had no fucking clue what was going on. [It was] very daunting as an outsider to learn the codes.” Coach Ryan argued “it takes a while” to learn forensics professionalism norms because

“it's a big body of knowledge here in forensics.” Despite coaches Hailey, Blake, and Anthony noting many norms not being pedagogically driven, Level 1 performance norms (related to the product skills) influenced success. Coach Anthony said:

As critics, if we're having a bad day or it's a tight round, a norm is comforting because it's a way to break a tie in our mind. New judges are very much hampered by norms because they think that's the way it's supposed to be.

Product skill behavior success depends upon an individual's ability to master process skills, such as managing relationships or wearing appropriate attire. Regardless of the quality of gestures or audience analysis, “you present as a person” (former coach Edward). Product skill behaviors are not independent of process skills, such as the ways a competitor dresses or behaves.

Attire was the most often discussed aspect of how competitors conveyed identity characteristics. Former competitor JoAnna succinctly described the aesthetic expectations:

Suits, plain colored typically, accessories need to be understated, you're looking at pearls for women, smaller tie clasps for men, nothing obnoxious for your hair style, there are people who get reprimanded for that, women are supposed to have the closed toed shoes, men have to have dress shoes, all of those things. I think what you choose to carry your materials in, your outerwear, even the quality of, with extemporaneous [speaking], the quality of their devices. If you go in there and your computer looks nice and it's a whole laptop and you've clearly spent a

little money and it's coming out of a nice bag, I think that says something about you.

Numerous participants described how female competitors are encouraged (or required) to wear skirt suits. Callie identified professional dress as a “kind of costuming” designed to fit cultural expectations. Extended-community member Kylie theorized uniform appearance is a strategy: “is if everyone looks alike then all you have [for evaluation] is their delivery,” but JoAnna argued “I think there's a slight intimidation factor that's used to send that message that ‘I'm a serious competitor. I'm taking myself seriously. You should too.’” Lay judge Tracy described how “suit jackets are hot” so she supported the choice of male competitors wearing other professional attire. Lay judge Richard described how the inauthenticity may impact discomfort: “I would never wear a suit and tie, that's just not who I am, it's not how I was raised, but I could still dress nicely and you know look presentable in a certain way if I'm giving a speech.” Despite required, uniform attire, Tracy recalled seeing competitors “try to express themselves a little bit” through a “crazy tie” or shoes that were “flashy and crazy.”

Competitors control the overall impression they emit as much as the clothing they wear. Lay judge Cameron could not pinpoint exactly what separates students competing in a speech tournament from typical college students existing on college campuses, but he described how he could “sense that something is different.” Coach Callie described “an air of professionalism” as influencing “the way that people are performing their identities” or the way competitors “choose to highlight or downplay parts of their identities.” Former competitors JoAnna described her first experiences in a speech

tournament. She felt she needed to start by “adhering to the norms” before she could work “on the things that mattered for competition.” Competitor Kayla, too, noted once competitors “understand the flow of things” competitors can move forward to working on Level 1 competition performances.

Participants tried to describe the mundane professionalism behaviors expected of competitors, but many struggled to move past the appearance norms. Former coach Edward noted several behaviors he expected from his students, including “being on time, making sure they were a receptive audience, [and] making sure that they were not making any remarks that could be interpreted as against somebody or just in poor taste.” Edward suggested conversations about alcohol consumption or other specific topics may negatively impact the student’s competitive success. Competitor Aubrey commented “some people would say it’s teaching you to be tactful and socially correct,” but she felt troubled her normal conversation content was not allowed “because that might not impress people ... Sometimes your real self is not appropriate for a lot of different things; 90% of the things you say can’t be repeated in front of professional people and that’s a really hard thing to realize.” Even SNS communication is monitored for professional content. Coach Jackson noted “It’s just part of the professional world, being accountable to the things that you express. I feel less bad about things like that when people are losing their jobs for what they post on Facebook.” Regardless of which interaction Level, professionalism constrained competitors.

**Telling the story: *Mechanisms.*** “If there's people performing their identity in a particular manner that doesn't really fit in the quasi professional mold then I think that it



gets discouraged. In a lot of forensics spaces I think that the kind of unspoken rule is like professional dress and the expectations of physical appearance in forensics is really apparent but it's not something we're talking about ever.<sup>cc-d,</sup>

“[Some competitors'] coaches let them wear pants above the ankle and they have tight tank top type things and a weird sweater and you're like 'that's not a suit.’<sup>cc-d,</sup>

Professionalism [is] much more taught or expected out of some of the other teams.<sup>fs-a</sup>

You have to dress this way or you're going to get kicked off the squad.<sup>cc-g</sup>

They can dress however they want. <sup>cs-d</sup>	The coaches are obviously the ones in charge of their dress. <sup>cs-d</sup>	I think it's team atmosphere, not just coaches. Team more than coaches. <sup>cs-h</sup>
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There's some teams that have a kind of intentionality to it where in other schools there's not an intentionality to it.<sup>ec-a</sup> Part of it could be driven by the school has a reputation in the past and it's hard to break that pattern.<sup>fc-a</sup> I can't lie, I know some people experience pressure from administration to have really capable performers or the money is going to be cut off kind of thing.<sup>fs-a, cs-e,</sup>

“There's definitely a social aspect.<sup>cc-e</sup> You show me what to do and how to react.<sup>cs-c</sup> Whoever is on the top tier of competitors, they really set those molds and boxes because that's what people look up to in terms of trends.<sup>cs-c</sup> Seeing what is rewarded gives students more of an idea of what is and isn't acceptable.<sup>cs-d</sup> I think a lot more people used to smoke, and there are markers that go with that. It's getting policed out now. I think it's driving out of the competitive realm and into the back rooms a little more.<sup>ec-a,</sup>

“It definitely ends up on the ballot to notify them.<sup>cc-b</sup> Definitely it's not above a judge to write something on a ballot if they're questioning how something was handled.<sup>fs-</sup>

<sup>a</sup> ‘Listen, I think your purple hair is awesome, but people aren’t going to read it as professional.’<sup>cc-e</sup> I would judge someone more highly if they were wearing nice clothes than if they're wearing sweatpants.<sup>lf-c</sup>

There's a lot of rules. <sup>lj-b</sup>	There really aren’t very many specific written rules in collegiate forensics. <sup>fs-a</sup>	They had all these norms they clearly announced as rules. <sup>cc-g</sup>
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If you’re questioning it, chances are other people are questioning it too. It merits discussion.<sup>fs-a</sup> It’s only over a period of time that they figure it out.<sup>ec-a</sup>

**Mechanisms imposing professionalism.** Competitor Bailey said “I suppose it’s just a natural instinct at this point because that is what is expected of me.” VerLinden (1997) observed competitors’ often unconsciously behave in prescribed ways.

Participants provided detailed information about the mechanisms influencing their behaviors. One clear way to examine the data is to visualize the sources and types of mechanisms which was done in Table 4.2. The next section organizes mechanisms based on the ability to impart social pressure and those capable of coercion.

***Social pressure mechanisms.*** Competitors are motivated to behave professionally by mechanisms exerting social pressure. Individuals may face ostracism or miss opportunities if they ignore professionalism norms. Citing product skills (like how to open and close the black binder used for interpretive performances), Coach Hailey stated “Students definitely get that knowledge from each other, either explicitly telling or students observing and maybe making incorrect assumptions.” Whether implicit or explicitly observed, students look to community and team members to learn accepted professional behavior. Sometimes the observations may be stifling (“we probably shouldn’t talk about this,” competitor Bailey).

Table 4.2  
*Mechanisms Imparting Professionalism in Intercollegiate Forensics*

	Description	Example
<b>Forensics Community Based Mechanisms</b>		
Praise	Positive reinforcement from community members	“You’re a great audience member!”
Behaviors of Notable Teams	Top-ranked teams set appropriate behavior benchmarks	“Wiki team members talk with judges like this, I should too.”
Notable Coach Behavior	Tournament directors, successful coaches, and others known in the community set behavior standards	“I could talk with these important people if I smoked with them.”
Observation	Competitors see other students behaving in specific ways	“Everyone uses notecards in extemp”
Ballots	Judges provide written feedback to students, which sometimes offers explicit professionalism advice	“You were a poor audience member. Your rank dropped to third.”
Competitive Success	Rewarding or associating particular behaviors with success	“The champions are stoic”
The Other Gaze	A way for coaches, judges, or other competitors to defer responsibility for the impact a comment may have	“I don’t mind your tattoos, but I think you’ll find other judges do”
<b>Team Based Mechanisms</b>		
Team Tradition	Past team culture influences current team culture	“We’ve always done it this way”
Team Members	Current team culture influences behavior choices	“Our team’s women wear skirt suits”
Alumni	Alumni may financially impact team expectations	“I won’t give my annual donation if you don’t start winning”
Coach	Coaching appointments may include behavior suggestions or imperatives	“Have you tried using product in your hair to avoid looking frazzled?”
Scholarship Money	Coaches and administrators determine if scholarship dollars should be awarded and if expectations are met	“If you don’t get more appropriate suits, you will lose your scholarship”
Explicit Rules	Coaches or team leaders may set rules determining appropriate behaviors or required actions	“You did not practice the required amount this week, you do not travel”
<b>Institute of Higher Education Mechanisms</b>		
Administration	Administrators can withhold funding if the team is not successful enough	“If you aren’t ranked in the top-20 again next year, your budget will be cut.”

*Note.* Examples provided in Table 4.2 are hypothetical.

Other times observations may provide new avenues for students to explore identities. Coach Callie found when students see others “embracing their black identity and has black hair, I hope that would give them the tools and act as a mechanism to say ‘oh, I can do that too.’” Observing other students means seeking examples of winning behaviors. Extended-community member Carl described how in the past competitors would engage in drug use with members from top teams (Carl believed current drug use has been relegated to back regions). Carl described the how perceived social capital of notable administrators’ behaviors (such as smoking) impacted the behaviors of others (“it was easier to hang out” with the bigwigs if you were a smoker). Team members “spend so much time” together (competitor Vivian) their behaviors are “products of the situation that's around” them (competitor Hilary).

Team tradition and team culture can create powerful social influences. Coaches, by nature of their position as a defined leader on the team, impact team culture and thereby expected (professional) behaviors. Coach Blake concluded his team tended to be fairly introverted compared with other teams in his area due to his “personality rubbing off on them.” Former competitor JoAnna, who felt frustrated at her first tournament experience with the lack of explicit coach-driven education she received about professionalism, suggested the coach, alumni, and other members of the team communicate professionalism norms “depending on how hands-on the program is with competitors.” Several coaches felt conflicted about professionalism enforcement. Coach Callie acknowledged “I don’t like having to police them, but then I feel like I have to because then it’s policed anyway on their ballots.”

Competitor Hilary argued “I don’t think any culture can be enforced by just one element. We look at other people to see what we should be doing, so of course [competitors are] going to look to their teammates.” On larger teams, the number of returning team members means “it is easier to latch on to one of” the older team members (competitor Kayla) for “help with students knowing how to get dressed and where to go” (extended-community member Carl) rather than a coach for knowledge about professionalism. Ultimately, coach Blake argued “the coaching aspect can shape [team culture], but otherwise it’s a combination of the personalities you have.”

Comments on ballots written by judges were described by several participants as ways competitors learned about acceptable and expected Level 1 and 2 behaviors. Former competitor JoAnna argued for judges right to comment on behaviors they find “particularly obnoxious or distracting. It’s your right and your duty to write it on the ballot, even if you don’t rank that person differently.” Former coach Edward shared times when he would “go talk with the coach” about student behaviors instead of writing concerns on ballots. Competitor Aubrey, while admitting her frustrations with what she felt were stifling professionalism norms, acknowledged “when you act professional at tournaments and people compliment your coaches on how well you handle yourself or how you interact with people, it’s really satisfying. People are inherently motivated by praise.”

Coach Ben noted professionalism norms are often “couched” using the other gaze. Similar to the Mulvey’s (1975) concept of male gaze, other gaze orients a situation through the visual and controlling viewpoints of a powerful other. On ballots or during

coaching sessions, competitors are given directives about professionalism referencing the other as the justification for behavior modification. Coach Jackson shared a comment he might write on a student ballot: the behavior is “not an RFD<sup>13</sup> for me, but you might want to think about it.” Coach Callie recalled a fellow competitor’s coaches required her to cover a tattoo referencing the LGBTQ+ community saying, “Well, we just don't want her being discriminated against in a round.” Former competitor JoAnna noted judges may make a comment on a ballot in to protect audience members from offensive material. Public speakers do need to analyze audience member perspectives when making decisions. However, several participants noted using other gaze was a way to abdicate personal responsibility for enforcing potentially problematic professionalism norms. Ben even joked “I don’t have a problem with this, but I think you’ll find that a lot of judges aren’t going to respond to your pants suit” in reference to the arbitrary expectation for female competitors to wear skirt suits.

Coach Hailey pointed out “norms are only apparent when they’re broken,” which provided interesting context for student management of professionalism behavior pressures. Competitor Kayla said “For me, I don't think about breaking the norms, because if I try to do something different, the judge might dock me for it, and that deters me from ever trying to do something.” Conversely, competitor Parker shared his team’s philosophy focused more on performance choices and learning without considering norm conformity; on his team “breaking the norms would kind of be a good thing.” Competitor Bailey recognized despite feeling social pressure, no actual force was used to enforce professional behaviors; she said she behaved in specific ways “because I have to,” then

paused and said “okay, no one is actually forcing me to” before continuing her thought about attire. Bailey and Kayla recognized competitive success hinges on meeting specific professionalism norms. Coach Callie recalled a competitor who did not dwell on some professionalism norms: “I can only think of one person who has tattoos in speech and she doesn't give a fuck. That's her whole thing. She is the most unapologetic performer and she doesn't care about if people see her tattoos.” Callie argued breaking professionalism norms was acceptable if other identity characteristics compensated for the broken norms and expectations. She recalled

My body is not deemed as socially acceptable as yours so I'm going to do things that, you know, fit in this hegemonic beauty norm. So it's kind of like that overcompensating for parts of my identity.

Whether compensating for not meeting norms or explicitly acting against norms, competitors make professionalism choices within the context of social pressures.

*Coercive mechanisms.* While social pressures influence student decisions, the ultimate power behind social pressure varies with the severity of the consequences for not adhering to norms. Some pressures influencing competitor decisions and behaviors exert significantly higher pressures. Coercive mechanisms play a far more powerful role in changing the behaviors enacted by competitors by jeopardizing the ability to win, to compete on the forensics team, and to continue a college education.

First, ballots and competitive success play a coercive role in enforcing particular professionalism behaviors. Etically and emically, data explored in Chapter 4 has shown the dedication with which competitors pursue success in forensics (e.g., spending

weekends traveling to tournaments, wearing uncomfortable clothing, devoting hours to practicing performances). Competitor Matthew, who self-identified as disabled, said he “always strayed away from doing multiple disability pieces a year because I felt like I would be labeled as the disabled speaker like that’s the only thing I can do well.” He described how judges in certain rounds commented he used his disability too often in his jokes, to which Matthew replied “Who are you to say where that line is with my identity? What’s too far?” Coach Callie recalled conversations with a competitor who is Black; the competitor decided to wear her hair naturally to correspond to one of her Level 1 performances. The competitor shared with Callie concerns that judges would find her inauthentic and lower her scores. Callie said “I think there are moments like that with messages in speeches people are trying to convey, but ballots are like ‘Your hair isn’t big enough, you’re not embracing your black identity enough.’” Coach Hailey recalled ballots she received expressing disappointment Hailey chose to wear gender-conforming attire; the judge “felt I was being disingenuous to my [identity].” In efforts to reach competitive success and balance personal identity and professional performances, competitors must navigate which consideration is prioritized.

Second, competitors seek success at tournaments, but many students are not allowed to travel to tournaments if they do not meet professionalism standards. Coaches and forensics programs want students develop appropriate product skills. Each coach has different regulations about what constitutes “tournament ready” (former coach Edward), so competitors must meet standards to compete. Coach Daniel described the “strong system of reinforcement” another team’s coaches used; he shared he’d “seen competitors



kicked off related to minor practice issues.” Coach Callie recalled a peer telling a non-forensics community member she couldn’t dye her hair a non-natural color; when the non-forensics community member said “your coach can’t tell you what to do” the competitor said “yeah, but actually he can.”

Team culture and regulations dictate which professionalism norms are required for competitors. Former competitor JoAnna described the “weeding out” process other teams went through, and coach Hailey mentioned she doesn’t “even bother learning or attaching names to faces to people until [competitors] stick around come nationals because so many people drop from this team.” Coach Ben talked about how “coaches at the powerhouse schools<sup>14</sup> ... inculcate [the norms] into the students.” Coercive forces derive power from the ability to prevent participation in forensics. Former coach Edward lauded the value of alumni, but cautioned “alumni groups can be rather daunting. ‘What do you mean you lost that tournament?’ You want alumni support, but that is often based on what their experience was.” Especially when forensics programs are scrutinized for academic and monetary value during financial crises, alumni support is vitally important to a team having the financial ability to travel to tournaments.

Third, team and university powers can coerce students into particular professionalism behaviors by jeopardizing the competitor’s education. Competitor Kayla said she started competing in speech because her participation earned her a scholarship. Former competitor JoAnna stated

We wanted to attract high quality talent, and it was about that professionalism. If we attracted students that were serious competitors, we had that carrot hanging

out there for them and that was one way of having a certain expectation level and providing an award for those that adhere to that.

Extended-community member Carl reasoned money impacted competitive success:

“Whether or not you have to have a job affects if you can go to meetings and when you can compete on the weekends. I mean, being competitive takes a lot of time!” If competitors do not have scholarships, they have less available time. Maintaining scholarships requires behaviors related to the product and process professionalism skills. Losing a round or not traveling to a specific tournament may influence students, but losing a scholarship providing the monetary means to continue a college education is a powerful mechanism. Because social pressure and coercive mechanisms have the power to impact repeated behaviors, we must explore the potential problematic aspects of professionalism for individual identities.

**Telling the story: *Problems provoked by professionalism.*** “I think we really need to question what we mean by professionalism.<sup>cc-i</sup> I have to start by admitting the ways in which maybe I am part of the problem.<sup>cc-e</sup> [Competitors] may feel forced to put on a face, but it really bothers them, they don’t like it.<sup>fc-a</sup>

Because I have short hair, I feel the need to compensate. So I have to wear excessively feminine facial qualities to fit into the expectation.<sup>cs-e</sup>

She got yelled at all the time by her coaches. I remember she had an LGBT tattoo and they would make her cover it up.<sup>cc-d</sup>

<p>I talk to my friends who are Black who do forensics, and they talk a lot about the professional idea of Black hair and what those expectations are.<sup>cc-d</sup> I know this is a facet not only of the Latino experience and the Black experience and every sort of minority experience. It's not just that piece, there's layers, there's complexities, there's dimensions that I think we need to acknowledge.<sup>cc-j</sup></p>	<p>[My coach said] "no ones' going to comment on it, who would be stupid enough to comment on this, you know, it's an adaptation, it's a reasonable adaptation that you need," but then every year I get 1 judge be like "I'm distracted by [your accommodation]." That says something more about this community than it does me and my performance.<sup>cs-f</sup></p>
<p>I would like to not wear spanx all day, and I would like to not have to wear heels that are higher than my teammates so I look slimmer. Those are parts of my identity that I would like to not do.<sup>cc-d</sup></p>	<p>There was, I did a duo at one time where I was supposed to play a straight man and I'll never forget, I had a judge tell me that I needed to "man up" that I needed to portray the normative gender stereotype.<sup>cc-k</sup></p>
<p>I was doing a program<sup>15</sup> about bystanders to bullying, and I had a judge one time on a ballot say "not to be a bully...but that jacket is a little tight."<sup>cs-fii</sup></p>	<p>I have heard that it's hard to be a good interper if you're not black. So I don't know that that's an attack, but it's definitely an observation about a group identity that I have heard.<sup>cc-h</sup></p>
<p>In my experience this is how [this type of person] will perform blank.<sup>cc-e</sup></p>	<p>Oh, you wore the same outfit yesterday. Why don't you bring two things of clothing?<sup>cc-g</sup></p>
<p>I come to tournaments and whenever an African-American interper goes in, you almost automatically know what that piece is going to be about. What's different between the social concepts of disability as opposed to race where I might get comments from individuals if I did three interps about disability, but there doesn't seem to be any flack coming from that particular identity? It's kind of a hypocrisy.<sup>cs-f</sup></p>	<p>I had a student once on a ballot who was told to get out of her brown box because she had multiple pieces about that experience growing up [racial identifier] and it was something I don't think that judge meant to come across that way, I just don't know how you can filter that and be like, you know, and hear yourself and see that written down and not think that way.<sup>cc-f</sup></p>

“Whether that's race or gender or other things, I think that throws a lot of them off for awhile.<sup>cc-f</sup> Gender lines for what the competitors wear are very rigid.<sup>cc-a</sup> You [have] a class issue.<sup>cc-a</sup> Whether that's race or sexuality,<sup>cc-f</sup>

there were lots of times where that's just policed out of you.<sup>cc-e</sup>

there's a little bit of policing.<sup>cc-a</sup>

One of our obligations was not to simply go along with the trend just because that's what other people do, but that it's our obligation to push back on things that are straining or unfair or unjust or would really cause someone to feel out of place because she couldn't afford to keep herself up at tournaments.<sup>cc-g</sup>”

**Problems provoked by professionalism.** Professionalism illustrates some things competitors should understand, such as having a correctly sized suit (coach Ryan) or helping people “reign in the craziness and quirkiness” (extended-community member Carl). Carl suggested calling some changes to identity “a maturation process rather than repressing identity;” he argued professionalism may help some people move past selfish and annoying habits. Former coach Edward commented “hiding individuality might be a good thing.” But coach Ryan argued “a lot of bad behavior that we see is defended under the banner of professionalism. I think we really need to question what we mean by professionalism.” Ryan was describing the way professionalism is used as a catch-all mechanism to control student behaviors; through professionalism coaches, judges, and teammates can enforce arbitrary norms without justification. Norms become mundane behavior patterns, and without critical consideration, norms can cause problems for product and process skills.

Product skills relate to the desirable outcome in a particular context. Competitive success depends on Level 1 performances, which are evaluated subjectively by judges. While coaches hope ballots focus only on the competitive performances, coach Hailey argued “identity gets critiqued quite regularly in forensics.” Unintentionally, judges may criticize or denigrate a student’s identity rather than the Level 1 performance. Coach Hailey admitted she discards some ballots when judges “say oversimplified things about” a competitor’s identity characteristic; “‘This is how women do something.’ ‘All of them? All of the women?’” she challenged. Coach Callie described the struggles competitors face when they embrace unprofessional aesthetics (like a competitor of color wearing her hair naturally) to correlate to only one of multiple Level 1 performances. Callie commented “If we are saying ‘You need to unapologetically perform your Black identity in this ADS because that's what you're talking about,’ but then that student goes into Communication Analysis round<sup>16</sup> and gets comments about a lack of professionalism, that then becomes a double edged sword for them.” Oversimplification of expected roles based on identity markers and unquestioned arbitrary professionalism rules mean stereotypical behaviors become the required mundane expectations.

Appearance management is primarily a process skill, but some aspects of attire impact the product skill success. Competitor Bailey bluntly said “because the community standards for women is to wear skirt and heels, the way I move and compete and interact with the world is completely changed.” Coach Daniel clarified:

There's so much movement in these DI<sup>17</sup> pieces. They're constantly moving around and all over the place. [My female student] said "yeah, and that's really

unfair because how do I do that in a skirt?" Wow, that's interesting. That's not fair. That's kind of a competitive disadvantage and it's a double whammy because some judges are gonna comment if [she's] wearing a pants suit.

Competitor Matthew also talked about how masculine professional attire combined with his disability meant matching professionalism Level 1 performance aesthetics was impossible, whereas if professionalism was defined differently he would struggle less.

Coach Callie described how tattoo placement mattered more for female competitors than male competitors. Callie said "there wouldn't really be an opportunity for me to see a tattoo from any male competitors, unless it's on their face, which is a life choice," whereas for women, "if there's a leg or ankle or foot tattoo, that could be more of a question." Extended-community member Alvira acknowledged

Men's fashion is a lot more consistent than women's fashion, I mean a guy puts on pants and a shirt and a tie and that's cool. And women have a lot more flexibility in what's available to them and in that sense can be a lot more expressive, and a lot of times they can get hurt for it.

Some competitors are disadvantaged from appropriately meeting professionalism requirements in one area because they are meeting requirements in another resulting in less overall success.

Problems provoked by professionalism intersected with socio-economics and gender identity. First, former coach Edward recalled "I had many students in my early years that came from very poor families that had no idea of what we call 'professional dress,' so I had to work with them about developing that understanding." Some

competitors manage the economic burdens of professional attire by wearing “their dad’s ties” (Coach Hailey), while others “buy suits, wear them for a weekend, and then return them” or “wear each other’s’ clothes” (extended-community member Carl). Coach Daniel had “an open discussion” with his team about some of the embedded socio-economic assumptions; “I told them about a judge who had written a really savage ballot that said ‘Your blazer looks cheap.’ The phrase he used was ‘it makes you look dumpy.’ It was so hurtful because [that competitor] really struggled financially.” Professionalism related to attire may prohibitively prevent students from competing.

Second, gender performance intersects with process skills. Coach Jackson candidly remarked “it’s a little maddening to be upholding so many hegemonic identity norms without question. Why is that an issue when we’re talking [in Level 1 performances] about the suppression of gender identity being literal violence?” Coach Ryan joked “I think we just need to question and know exactly what we’re talking about when we’re talking about professionalism. Like ‘I appreciate your piece about how gender is a social construct, but those pants, honey.’” While Ryan and Jackson commented in jest, they both soberly discussed the concerns they had about the disconnect between content shared and the expected professionalism standards. Competitor Bailey said “when I’m in forensics and being a competitor, I have to be more feminine than normal. I wear an entirely full face of makeup to fit into the expectation.” Coach Callie believed introverted female teammates felt they needed to perform the extroverted, relationship-building female archetype to successfully perform process skills. Ryan, Jackson, Bailey, and Callie all described ways women specifically are

limited and controlled through the professionalism expectations of the forensics community. Because men do not face the same makeup or uniform requirements, coach Daniel argued “this is Title IX crap.”

### **Conclusion**

Complex knots and identity research analysis share similar characteristics. Each is comprised of multiple strands intertwined with the self. Strand lengths differ, complicating the way the knot can be untangled. Just when you feel you’ve found an end you can use as a starting point, you realize you have just begun unpacking a new layer complicating the situation. Some people have no patience to unpack complicated situations, and some methods are better than others.

The Greek myth of the Gordian knot corresponds to how some scholars analyze identity data. The Phrygians decided to select their new king based upon who could untangle a complex knot. After unsuccessfully attempting to find a rope end, Alexander the Great was said to draw his sword and cut the knot in two. Many scholars take a similar approach; with a quick and accurate blow, they cut identity in two, revealing multiple severed ends of the identity rope and making quick work of the identity analysis process.

In *Maniac Magee* by Jerry Spanelli (1992), the protagonist Jeffrey “Maniac” Magee takes a different approach to unraveling the legendary complex knot. Maniac’s approach included first breaking free the layers of grime and dirt accumulated over time to reveal the rope and the complexities of the knot. Maniac then untangled the rope with



fervor. Maniac's efforts took time, but he was able to untangle the rope without resorting to Alexander's approach.

In Chapter 4, I used crystallization to break down identity knots using Maniac Magee's method rather than the Alexandrian solution. My analysis method took time and patience to complete. My results are long, messy, and do not break down identity into sliced sections. Instead, my results contextualize identity performances and work against oversimplifying thematic analyses. The conflicting, messy style used mimics our mundane, messy, conflicting identity performances. In Chapter 5, I will discuss the implications, limitations, and future research opportunities found within the results.

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<sup>1</sup> I defined a current coach as an individual currently employed by a university to coach a team. I make the distinction because the individual I labeled as a former coach self-labeled as a current coach. Given the nature of the individual's current coaching work, the label of current coach does not match my definition.

<sup>2</sup> The extended-community members interacted differently with the forensics community. One is married to a current coach and had experience competing in the past. The second primarily finds literature and judges at tournaments for a team. The third works in a department hosting a forensics team; the third has judged several tournaments in the past at teaches competitors in the classroom.

<sup>3</sup> Coach Ben chose his pseudonym. My partner's name is also Ben. Coach Ben is not my partner Ben.

<sup>4</sup> ADS, or After Dinner Speaking, refers to a category using humor as a persuasive tool.

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<sup>5</sup> A swing tournament refers to a competition weekend where two tournaments are held back to back on the same campus or on two campuses geographically close to one another.

<sup>6</sup> The term outround here refers to the highest levels of competitive success at the national level. After competing in preliminary rounds, the highest ranked and scored competitors “break” to outrounds where they compete against the top 24 competitors in quarterfinals, advancing to the top 12 in semi-finals, and the top six competitors in final rounds.

<sup>7</sup> Extemp, or extemporaneous speaking, is a category where students must respond to a prompt. They are provided 30 minutes to prepare a seven minute speech using pre-gathered source material, such as newspaper articles. Typically extemp prompts are related to current events.

<sup>8</sup> Impromptu, or impromptu speaking, is a category where students analyze a prompt, such as a quotation, comic, or object. They are provided seven minutes to prepare and deliver a speech about the prompt.

<sup>9</sup> Interp pieces, or interpretive pieces, are selections of literature or drama used for the interpretive categories (namely: poetry, prose, dramatic interpretation, duo interpretation, and program oral interpretation). Texts are selected and prepared prior to the tournament.

<sup>10</sup> Many teams begin the tournament day by finding a space where students warm up physically, mentally, and vocally. Warmups are not used by all teams and are different for each team.

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<sup>11</sup> August Benassi is a national champion of multiple events and a three-time individual sweepstakes champion at national speech tournaments held by the American Forensic Association and the National Forensic Association. He is widely acknowledged as a competitor who changed the way dramatic duo interpretation was performed.

<sup>12</sup> 1-25 refers to what rank and score competitors are awarded based on Level 1 performances. The first number is the rank, which compares the competitor with the up to five other speakers in the round. The score nuances the rank; for many tournaments the highest possible score is 25. A judge might rank a competitor first in the round (1), but recognize significant performance deficiencies, so would only award a 22 for the score. To achieve a 1-25 indicates the competitor's performance was superior to all others in the round and was nearly perfect based on the judge's subjective performance criteria.

<sup>13</sup> RFD stands for Reason For Decision. Judges (often at the request of tournament hosts) write an RFD so the student knows what reasons specifically impacted the rank position compared to other competitors.

<sup>14</sup> A powerhouse school is another name for a top-20 program, or a team consistently ranked as one of the best in the United States

<sup>15</sup> A program refers to how competitors intertextually weave texts, often to make an argument.

<sup>16</sup> Communication Analysis refers to a category where competitors analyze a communication act using a rhetorical theory.

<sup>17</sup> DI, or Dramatic Interpretation refers to a category where competitors select and perform a piece of literature.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

*“Is Chapter 4 seriously 60 pages long?” Ben asked. I’d texted him before leaving work. Apparently, Ben saved his snarky comment for me to get the full effect when I arrived home late, weary, bags hanging heavy under my eyes. Lucky me. “Dan is going to kill you.” “Don’t worry, I’ll have a shorter version in Chapter 5.”*

Through 17 interviews and three focus groups, two main themes emerged: A (A Play) Play and Professionalism. A (A Play) Play (read: A Play Within a Play) extended and connected Goffman’s (1959) metaphor of everyday identity behaviors being staged performances with social networking site (SNS) research regarding collapsed audiences (Binder, Howes, & Smart, 2012; Marwick & boyd, 2011; Vitak, 2012) and warranting theory (Walther & Parks, 2002; Walther, van der Heide, Hamel, & Shulman, 2009). Much like Russian matryoshka (nesting) dolls, performances occurred in contexts situated within one another. Four performance levels were identified with overlapping front and back regions. Level 1 back regions were Level 2 front region performances, while Level 2 back regions were Level 3 front region performances (and so on). Because community actors (judges, coaches, competitors, extended-community members, and lay judges) inhabit the same spaces, competitor identity performances were complicated and, at times, problematic.

Two important subthemes emerged from A (A Play) Play: authenticity and interlevel performance management. First, sometimes stakeholders demanded authenticity across levels, but sometimes actors and audience members pretended

audience members did not observe back region performances. For instance, a competitor preparing to enter Level 1 might change from flats to high heels in the hallway; judges may not acknowledge the shoe change in Level 1 critique. Second, inter-level performance management noted the conscious ways competitor performances manipulated behaviors. Level 4 social media performances were altered to portray authentic care about Level 1 topics. Coaching directives (Level 3 identity performances) impacted tournament behavior (Level 2 process skills), which impacted competitive success (Level 1 product skills). Identity expectations in Level 4 regions (like systemic racism in the United States) impacted the Level 1, 2, and 3 performances.

Professionalism expectations provided a set of norms competitors used to guide Level 1 and 2 performances. Motley and Sturgill (2013) broke down professionalism into product skills (behavior expectations connected to successful organizational goal outcome) and process skills (behavior expectations connected to product skill success), providing a useful framework for forensics professionalism. Product skill professionalism norms were rewarded by successful completion of organizational outcomes. Building relationships, improving feedback, and skill development were listed as achievements, but students and coaches listed competitive success as a primary goal for the forensics community. Category specific norms included using sources from within specific time periods, intertextually crafted interpretation programs, and teaser and introduction norms. General delivery expectations dictated use of a black book for interpretive performances, particular visual aid use, and audience analysis. Several participants noted an expected vocal pattern (which many labeled as robotic). Extended-community member Carl

compared vocal pattern expectations to those used by lawyers or National Public Radio announcers.

Process skills were necessary to master before the competitor could achieve Level 1 success. Conservative appearance, including skirt suits for women, closed-toed shoes, and subtle jewelry (such as small tie clips for men) created an expected uniform appearance, though small pieces of flair provided ways for competitors to show individuality. Participants characterized high-level competitors as having a sense of seriousness. Expected behaviors included being on time, listening attentively to Level 1 performances, positive interactions with others, and restricting conversation topics, even when communicating through SNS. Professionalism norms create a body of codes competitors are required to learn and judges deemed important to evaluate students.

Mechanisms for enforcing professionalism (located within the forensics community, the team, and the student's university) exerted social and coercive pressures. Students learned professionalism norms when social pressure is exerted by other competitors (through explicit interactions and implicit observations), especially when looking at successful competitors and high-profile teams and administrators. Comments on ballots and to coaches identified expectations from forensics community members. Team culture and tradition set behavior requirements conveyed through coach directives, team member interactions, and alumni. Ballots and competitive success coercively require some students to choose between the importance of personal identity saliency and success. Reinforcement systems (e.g., teams, coaches, and alumni) "inculcate" competitors with norms (coach Ben). University scholarships determine if students

continue receiving funding to attend school; especially for low-income students, losing scholarships may mean losing their educations. Cheney and Ashcraft (2007) described professionalism as arbitrary and constraining organizational norms, which likely accounts for why coaches felt conflicted about enforcing norms. Many coaches responded by deferring to the “other gaze.” Other gaze is the abdication of personal responsibility by citing the authority and consequences enforced by powerful others.

Professional behaviors can help students mature and understand roles and parts expected in other contexts (e.g., having a suit that fits and isn’t wrinkled), but Coach Ryan argued “a lot of bad behavior that we see is defended under the banner of professionalism.” Through professionalism mechanisms can enforce arbitrary norms without justification. Ballots, often unintentionally, critiqued identity and imposed stereotypical behaviors based on identity markers like race or gender. Attire-based requirements for men and women limited behaviors and changed the ways they interacted with their environments. Participants identified impossible Level 1 performance aesthetics (e.g., delivery movements) due to process skill expectations for some members of the community. Attire requirements meant women’s tattoos were more easily seen, resulting in potential norm violations. Competitors unable to afford professional attire had to borrow or purchase and return clothes to meet expectations. The arbitrarily determined women’s attire, including skirt suits, heels, makeup, and behavior expectations, clashed with the content expected in Level 1 performances (e.g., topics challenging hegemonic norms). Identifying issues is the first step to addressing problematic community norms and behavior policing.

Results for my study were not classified into cleanly distinct categories. Level 1 performances are dictated partially by professionalism norms. Coaches and teams simultaneously exert coercive and social pressure to conform to professionalism norms. Competitors consciously and unconsciously chose behaviors prioritizing personal identity saliency and competitive success. I embraced the complicated nature of identity research by constructing composite participant quotations to illustrate narratives running through the data. Highlighting participant voices and contradicting accounts meant the results reflected competitor lived experiences. Identity winds around itself, creating knots for researchers to untangle. My results are long, messy, and do not break down identity into oversimplified thematic analyses. The conflicting, messy style used mimics messy, conflicting, mundane identity performances.

### **Implications for Forensics**

*My student, a first-year competitor, lounged in my big, green office chair. She stopped in to visit me between classes to check on my writing progress. Grateful for the distraction from grading and research, I shared some of my analysis: “So what was really interesting was the ways we contradict ourselves. Our performances talk about fighting the man and all that, but wearing flats will get written on the ballot as a problem. There’s a huge disconnect there.” “That is some bullshit,” she said, “I hadn’t really thought of it like that. I should be able to wear flats if I want to.” “Right?” I say, “Another coach talked about how wearing a skirt suit limits how much you can move, but movements are expected in a piece.” “Or like what about someone in a wheelchair?” she suggested.*



*“They can’t move around much. Have there been a lot of successful competitors in wheelchairs?” “Not that I’ve seen. Like you said,” I agreed, “it’s some bullshit,” “Well, I don’t care. I’m going to wear a pants suit. They’re more comfortable, I can make more performance choices. I’m going to do it.”*

*I love her enthusiasm to fight forensics norms, but I worry our conversation does not give enough context about how her choice may hurt her competitive success. I recall only one female competitor wearing a pants suit honored at the AFA awards ceremony last year. Am I helping her marginalize herself? How do I balance my role as a mechanism enforcing arbitrary norms and my desire to make the community more inclusive?*

The forensics community recognizes norms dictate behavior and enforce expectations (e.g., Paine, 2005). Situated, multi-level interactions mean students navigate complex identity performance terrains. Professionalism is largely a body of arbitrary rules determining who is successful. Some rules are consistent with other performance-based communities, such as how delivery norms exist for many co-cultures. What is often rebuffed as robotic delivery in the forensics community is no more unusual than the cadence of a DJ on the radio or congressional testimony. Unchecked professionalism provokes problems, and the forensics community needs to do more than complain about the contradictions we reward. Forensic mechanisms for enforcing professionalism norms must act.

Untangling the reasonable (e.g., audience analysis) from the arbitrary (e.g., skirt suits) is complicated and subjective. Mechanisms determine what norms are enforced and in what ways. When scholarship revocation threatens an education or not meeting attire requirements prevent students from the benefits of competing, coaches and administrators need to question how we balance education and competition. Coercive mechanisms need to take responsibility for the norms we enforce under “professionalism.” We are complicit in continuing norms when we acknowledge our frustrations with norms while blaming “other judges” for enforcement. If we truly want change and to make forensics an open, safe space, we need to act. Competition is an important educational tool (Burnett, Brand, & Meister, 2003), but in a community where our successful performances challenge and highlight privilege, we are culpable. We enforce arbitrary and harmful expectations marginalizing members of our community and excluding participation.

Carbaugh (1996) argued social identities are indicative of cultural norms. Participants illustrated community behavioral contradictions. Epistemologically, the forensics community vacillates between rationalism and constructivism. We balance empirical and reason-based knowledge when we craft Level 1 performances, but when looking at ballots evaluating competition, we focus on the reality judges construct. Judges create the students’ competitive realities, and many norms transcended regional differences. Coaches need to help competitors recognize the fundamental epistemological differences.

Competitive success is the tangible way the forensics community rewards behaviors, so the product and process skills required for competitive success show the essence of the community. We are responsible for owning the community's identity; if, as Burnett, Brand, and Meister (2003) argued, our identity is strictly competitive, we need to do away with the myth we are educationally focused. We need to stop coddling and deluding ourselves and take ownership of the heteronormative, sexist behaviors embedded in our culture.

### **Implications for Communities Outside of Forensics and Identity Scholars**

*“So, what’s your research about?” Erika asks, wiping a mug. I’ve spent the last few days sitting at the same table at the same coffee shop, ear buds in (to drown out the conversations and music), slowly drinking dulce de leche flavored coffee. My squinting eyes, trying to will the words in my brain through my fingers into written form, have not gone unnoticed. “Well, I looked at how forensics competitors perform their identities. What I found is that it’s really complicated.” I realize she has no context for what I’m talking about. “Take you here at the coffee shop. You are talking with me in a certain way because you’re at work and I’m a customer, at least when we first met. But if you go back to the kitchen, you can bitch about me being a bad tipper to the other staff members, and I wouldn’t know,” I explained. She laughed. I felt a little uncomfortable using our relationship as the example, but pressed on. “But you’re still at work, and you still have to be your work self,” I continued. “You’ve got rules. Some of them are, like, wear gloves when making food. Others say if you smile and engage with*

*customers, they'll come back more often. But then if you see those customers in other places, you react differently. Like if you were outside the coffee shop and you saw me at a bar, there's this whole shift." "Huh," Erika said, "that's really interesting.*

A (A Play) Play and Professionalism emerged thematically from the data. Co-cultures outside forensics may benefit from analysis using these concepts. The next sections offer potential implications based on projected ways the themes may be applied elsewhere.

**A (A Play) Play.** The forensics community demonstrated four performance levels situated within one another where expectations differed but audiences overlapped. Breaking down other community experiences into Levels may be a useful framework to understanding behaviors in those communities. Table 5.1 offers projections for business, politics, and drag culture. Not all communities may incorporate four levels. Table 5.2 projects how some communities, like families and sports teams, may only exhibit three identity performance levels. Analysis would verify projected levels.

Table 5.1

*Projected Identity Performance Levels for Non-Forensics Communities*

Level	<u>Business</u>	<u>Political Campaign</u>	<u>Drag Culture</u>
1	Meeting with a client	Political rally	Drag show
2	Hallway outside of a meeting	Shaking hands with constituents	Working the crowd before/after performance
3	Drinks with colleagues	In the office	Backstage getting ready
4	United States	Social media	When not in drag

Table 5.2

*Projected Identity Performances for Non-Forensics Communities with Three Levels*

Level	Family	Sports Team
1	Holiday celebration	Game
2	Informal family gathering	Traveling to a game
3	United States	Away from team

Results indicated audience overlap created consequences for inauthentic performances when authenticity was policed across performance levels. Performances are further complicated because they do not exist independent from one another. Co-cultures adjoin and overlap, so Level 4 for one co-culture is Level 1 for another co-culture. A Level 1 family performance may take place as a Level 4 drag culture performance. Performances become complex when performers manage multiple co-cultural expectations, especially for Level 1 or 2 performances. A Level 1 sports performance may take place while a Level 2 family performance (your family comes to support you) simultaneously occurs in the same space. If the expected performance for co-cultures differ, authenticity fitting expectations may be impossible without audience member collusion. Audience members may choose to be complicit in accepting required performance differences while ignoring behaviors not meeting standards. Family members may choose to acknowledge Level 1 sports performances emphasize certain parts of your identity not present or accepted in exclusively family settings, like aggression or profanity.

Ultimately, the A (A Play) Play theme illustrates shared back regions as Goffman (1959) defined rarely exist in a co-culture. Appropriate behaviors are determined by groups of people. Unless an individual is completely alone, expectations impact interaction and behavior outcome success. People (un)consciously recognize the multiple

audiences and expectations they have for how roles are to be played. Performances become mundane and unquestioned over time. Overlapping stages impact authenticity, credibility, and the ability to complete a Level 1 task successfully. We need to complicate Goffman’s model to reflect co-cultural expectations and behaviors.

**Professionalism.** Professionalism and the other gaze were powerful tools used to justify norms. Other co-cultures may benefit from exploring professionalism using the frameworks used in the present study. Table 5.3 postulates professionalism norms in other co-cultures.

Table 5.3

*Projected Application of Professionalism in Non-Forensic Communities*

	<u>Business</u>	<u>Drag</u>	<u>Gymnastics Teams</u>
Product Skills	Technology-based visual aids	know the words to lip synced songs	stick the landing
Process Skills	business casual attire	flamboyant dresses	team leotards
Mechanisms	company standards	performance invitations	scholarships
Problems	limits access to business spaces	excludes low-income performers	highlights body type

Professionalism contextually-locates appropriate behaviors, and following professionalism norms dictates success. My older brother was fired from a job for incorporating crude humor, an acceptable behavior within my family’s co-culture, into client interactions at work. When my *Jezebel*-posting, queer feminist friend Megan attended a baby shower hosted by my family, the only thing my mom said about her (with a controlled facial expression) was “well, I can see why you are friends.” Professionalism norms are mundane expectations highlighted best by new community members and when the norms are broken.

Photographer Endia Beal highlighted norm breaking and the problematic ways expectations exclude people from success in the exhibit “*Can I Touch It?*” (Rosenberg, 2013). The exhibit, (e.g., Figures 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, and 5.4), showcased professional, white women whose hair was coifed in traditionally Black hairstyles (Beal, 2013). Beal wanted to showcase her experiences wearing nonconformist hair in a corporate environment; she knew “she’d have to overcome obstacles, but she didn’t feel that burden should be entirely up to her” (Rosenberg, 2013). Juxtaposing traditional corporate photos and faces with Black hairstyles exposed mundane professionalism expectations. Arbitrary process skill hair professionalism likely has no impact on any product skills, which means cultures are excluded for no reason.

Figure 5.1



Figure 5.2



Figure 5.3



Figure 5.4



Professionalism norms at one time may have been pedagogically grounded, but participants described almost entirely arbitrary norms dictating everyday behaviors. Heidegger (1962) theorized the mundane exists in a *ready-to-hand/present-at-hand* relationship. We interact with aspects of our world without acknowledging their existence; if something is altered or does not fit our expectations, our attention is drawn to the broken piece. We may not think about Black hair in the workplace until Beal makes the norm present-at-hand through her exhibit. When a norm becomes present-at-hand, the norm must be justified, ignored, or explained using other gaze. Communities need to address which reaction they have when norms are questioned by new members or outsiders.

### **Limitations**

All studies are limited by research methods and researcher impacts. Combining interviews and focus groups mitigated method limitations, but the nature of interaction-based methods creates opportunities for demand characteristics to impact results. Orne



(1962) described the ways participants, reading researchers or explicitly being told hypotheses, alter behaviors (un)consciously to help the researcher. Nichols and Maner (2008) found social desirability traits impacted the behavior alterations, and measures used by researchers to temper demand characteristic interacts were ineffective.

First, at the beginning of each interview and focus group, I provided participants with a set of standardized definitions (see Appendix B). Definitions, while important to clarify how I conceptualized identity, provided details about my research purview (e.g., the reference to critical pedagogy and some of my identity markers). My definitions set a specific tone to the conversation and may have shut down comments participants recognized as being outside of my critical orientation. Second, my hair was purple when I collected data. Four participants referred to purple hair when providing examples of unprofessional behavior; two explicitly noted my hair color, and two mediated interviews did not know I had purple hair. My hair color may have altered the examples provided during interactions to focus on appearance-based professionalism during in-person interactions.

Purposeful sampling was used to incorporate voices representing as many experiences as possible, but not all regions of forensics experience were surveyed. Participants did not have connections with Districts 2 or 5.<sup>1</sup> At the data saturation point, I had interviews scheduled with individuals from District 5, but because the data was no longer revealing new themes or problematizing current themes, I did not complete the final interviews. If participants in Districts 1 and 5 vary significantly, I did not capture the experiences. Current coach participants were overwhelmingly male, and current

competitor participants were overwhelmingly female. Narratives may have been more or less prevalent based on the individuals selected. Finally, nearly all participants self-identified as liberal. Conservative forensic competitors and coaches may share different narratives about stigmatized identities.

### **Future Research**

*I've been dreading this email for weeks. Well, not dreading. Fearing perhaps. Today I start comps. I have a week to craft answers to three questions. Here goes. I open the email. Questions 1 and 2 are complex, but doable. Alright, let's see Question 3. "How can the theoretical foundations you are setting with your thesis provide a continuing research agenda both within and outside forensics?" Okay, I know a lot of people freak out about comps, but holy cow, this is a great question. I close my eyes with gratitude for my committee's reminder research is a verb. A hint of a smile crosses my face, and I begin to work.*

The implications of the study provide rich opportunities for future research. Three areas emerge: within the forensics community, outside the forensics community, and for identity scholars. First, within the forensics community my research may prompt identity performance exploration of stigmatized individuals. Goffman (1989) argued stigmatized identities (characteristics rejected by societies) excluded individuals from full cultural membership. Stigmatized identities, (e.g., conservative Republicans in forensics), were identified by participants. Coach Ben suggested a particular study he would like to see done.<sup>2</sup>

I would be really interested to hear dissenting opinions. Non-critical voices are closeted. What do they say to each other when they find each other? You should create personas based on narratives pulled from interviews and focus groups, then have participants choose which narrative resonates with them. You might get more of those closeted voices if they can point and say "that one, already articulated here, and here are the things that I disagree with" rather than forcing them to say the things that they know aren't acceptable in this community.

Coach Ben's suggestion offered a ready-made method to explore individuals with stigmatized identities within the forensics community. Outside of the forensics community, family culture, drag culture, and sports teams may benefit from the level framework and the professionalism analyses.

Family culture has been widely studied using multiple lenses, through including healthcare (Villatoro, Morales, & Mays, 2014), sports culture (Wheeler, 2012), anthropology (Willekens & Lievens, 2014), and performance (Peterson & Langellier, 2006). Understanding family identity policing may be aided using levels and professionalism. Families parallel team experiences in forensics, with coaches dictating strict family "rules" and consequences for disobeying family and cultural norms. Applying the level framework to explore individual identities while concurrently studying family identities may illuminate cultural values (un)consciously acknowledged and enacted.

Drag culture has been studied across many disciplines including communication (Simmons, 2014), psychology (Edmundson, 2010), gender studies (Kahn, Goddard, &

Coy, 2013), and queer studies (Horowitz, 2013). Butler (1990) seminally explored drag culture as a way to explore gender norms. Drag culture, while not always focused on competition, often features competition and public staged performance (in the traditional theatre, not as conceptualized by Goffman, 1959). Performers are rewarded with money, applause, recognition, and (in formal competitions) prizes. Professionalism norms direct the drag community. Applying the level framework and professionalism skills (broken down by product and process skills) may be useful to understand the ways competitive performances, competitive-selves, and social-selves interact, relate, and conflict with one another. As roles are put on and taken off, the ways conflicting community memberships are perceived might lead to careful front and audience management. In turn, the research conducted in drag communities may further illuminate tactics (un)consciously used by forensics community members when managing fronts because the drag community carefully manages stage areas.

Sports teams are often useful to understand coaching or team dynamics (see Gréhaigne, 2011; Rynne, 2013; or Filho, Tenenbaum, and Yang, 2015). Comparisons between forensics and sports teams are valid for many reasons. First, sports and forensics are both competition-oriented, with specific stages for performances intertwined with social self-presentations. Second, some sports, like gymnastics, tennis, golf, or swimming, rely on individual performances combining to yield team success. Team success may have positive impacts on individual success, money earned, and promotional deals garnered by success. Team dynamics, organizational culture, and overall culture of the sport likely impact arbitrary professionalism. Therefore the mechanisms used in

forensics may illuminate inter- and intra-team conflicts and why certain athletes never successfully assimilate into team or sport cultures (e.g., propensity toward identity saliency).

More broadly, identity scholars need to examine the way Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical theory of identity is complicated by the situatedness of performance levels and regions. Goffman postulated audiences are typically excluded from back region areas by barriers and gatekeepers; when audiences invade back regions performers suffer negative consequences. Multi-level performance management requires performers to manage sometimes conflicting professionalism expectations; audience members become complicit in determining which expectations are universally expected and which will be excused. Because Goffman is so widely used to conceptualize identity, we need to evaluate the effectiveness of his model and the ways the model's application oversimplifies mundane performances. Identity performance is messy and complicated. Our methods need to avoid Alexander's solution to the knot and embrace the *Maniac Magee* solution if we wish to reflect mundane, lived experiences.

### **Conclusion**

Identity performance is complicated; meeting expectations is complicated. Scholars have tried to clarify the mundane for centuries. The data collected and analyzed here provide a complex, but useful window into understanding how we learn and meet expectations across multiple performances.

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<sup>1</sup> District 8 was not represented, but currently does not exist.

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<sup>2</sup> I feel uncomfortable listing a future research project suggested by a participant. As the author, I worry citing coach Ben's idea appears lazy. However, coach Ben's idea provides an incredible opportunity to understand a subculture of the forensics community, so I wanted him to receive credit for his idea.

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## Appendix A

### Standardized Recruitment Script

Dear [insert name],

My name is Julie Walker and I am a student in the Communication Studies Department at Minnesota State University, Mankato. I invite you to participate in a research study about identity performance in intercollegiate forensics. You're eligible to participate because you have competed in forensics, have coached forensics, or are a part of the larger forensics community. I obtained your contact information from [describe source].

If you decide to participate in this study, you will answer interview questions about your experiences with forensics. You will not be compensated for your participation, though you may benefit from structured reflection on your participation in forensics. I anticipate the interview will take no more than two hours to complete.

I will audio record our conversation with your permission, and any identifying information would be made confidential through the use of pseudonyms. If any information you shared which may reveal your identity will be omitted from my study to protect your anonymity.

Your participation is voluntary. You can choose to end involvement at any time. If you'd like to participate or have any questions about the study, please contact me at [julie.walker@mnsu.edu](mailto:julie.walker@mnsu.edu) or 507-537-6393.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,  
Julie Walker

IRBNet ID Number: 828213



## Appendix B

### Standardized Interview Opening Script

- Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in my study! I'm really excited to get started, so here is the informed consent form. Please read over this form, ask any questions you have, and, if you feel comfortable participating, sign the form.
- Because you checked on the informed consent form that I can audio record the interview, I am now turning on the recorder.
- So as you know from the informed consent form, I am studying competitor identity in forensics. Identity is kind of a nebulous topic, so I want to provide you some definitions.
  1. When I say "identity" what I'm referring to is a person's sense of self, or the way people see themselves. My identity, for example, includes things like being female, a mom, white, and a professor.
  2. When I say "group identities" what I'm referring to are identities specific to groups of people. Critical pedagogues as a group, for example, typically are focused on social justice, empowering students, and student-centered classrooms.
  3. When I say identity performance, I'm not talking about the characters in interpretive pieces; what I'm talking about is the way we behave and communicate when we're trying to show pieces of ourselves. So the way I behave and communicate around my grandma shows who I am and what I find important, but that's exactly not the way I behave and communicate when I'm around friends. Our performances differ based on the verbal and nonverbal feedback we receive from people around us.
- Make sense? Alright, so let's jump right into this!

## Appendix C

### Interview Questions

1. In what ways and how long have you been affiliated with the forensics community?
  - a. Were or are you a student, a coach, an administrator?
  - b. How many years or semesters have you been involved?
2. Do you intend to be connected to the forensics community in the future?
  - a. In what ways do you anticipate?
3. What types of ways do competitors perform their individual identities in forensics?
  - a. In what ways do student competitors show individuality?
  - b. Do you see people choosing interpretation category literature or public address topics based on their identities?
  - c. Do you see competitors showing individuality through their artifacts, like the way they dress, the types of bags they carry, the types of presentation aids used in their speeches, or other ways?
4. In what ways do you feel competitors are encouraged to hide their individuality in place of conformity?
  - a. How do you think students learn about to which behaviors they should conform?
  - b. When are students breaking free of the conformity?
  - c. When students break conformity, are there repercussions?
  - d. When is breaking conformity allowed without repercussion?
  - e. What norms are allowed to be broken without repercussion?
5. What types of ways do teams or organizations show their group identities in forensics?
  - a. In what ways do teams show unity as a team but yet differentiation from other teams?
  - b. Do you think teams encourage certain identity behaviors from individual competitors in an effort to build a group identity of the team?
6. We know individual identities grow and change over the course of time, especially based on the feedback of others. Forensics is rich with feedback provided by others. Do you see competitors showing their changing identities?
  - a. How are changing identities shown?
  - b. Do you think group identities impact individual identities and the way individual identities change?
7. Do you have anything else you'd like to share?
8. Any questions I missed?

## Appendix D

### Focus Group Topics

1. In what ways and how long have you been affiliated with the forensics community?
  - a. Were or are you a student, a coach, an administrator?<sup>1</sup>
  - b. How many years or semesters have you been involved?
2. What types of ways do competitors perform their individual identities in forensics?
  - a. In what ways do student competitors show individuality?
  - b. Do you see people choosing interpretation category literature or public address topics based on their identities?
  - c. Do you see competitors showing individuality through their artifacts, like the way they dress, the types of bags they carry, the types of presentation aids used in their speeches, or other ways?
3. In what ways do you feel competitors are encouraged to hide their individuality in place of conformity?
  - a. How do you think students learn about to which behaviors they should conform?
  - b. When are students breaking free of the conformity?
  - c. When students break conformity, are there repercussions?
  - d. When is breaking conformity allowed without repercussion?
  - e. What norms are allowed to be broken without repercussion?
4. What types of ways do teams or organizations show their group identities in forensics?
  - a. In what ways do teams show unity as a team but yet differentiation from other teams?
  - b. Do you think teams encourage certain identity behaviors from individual competitors in an effort to build a group identity of the team?
5. We know individual identities grow and change over the course of time, especially based on the feedback of others. Forensics is rich with feedback provided by others. Do you see competitors showing their changing identities?
  - a. How are changing identities shown?
  - b. Do you think group identities impact individual identities and the way individual identities change?
6. Do you have anything else you'd like to share?
7. Any questions I missed?

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<sup>1</sup> Potential follow-up questions are listed after main question. The list of potential follow-up questions is not exhaustive.