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Speaker & Gavel

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Mentorship As An Evolving Practice: Emma And Justin's Excellent Adventure

Justin Gus Foote and Emma Murdock

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Mentorship as an Evolving Practice: Emma and Justin's Excellent Adventure

Justin G. Foote and Emma Murdock

Abstract

This paper provides a semi-autoethnographic exploration of the evolving practice of mentorship within forensic debate. Ultimately, this paper is situated within previous literature, such as Buell's (2004) understanding of mentorship models, but expands on the need for an evolving mentorship model within student-professor mentorship, especially as the student role changes from undergraduate student to graduate student. The researchers' arguments in this paper are around how mentorship in student-professor relationships needs to adapt as the student's role changes from novice to experienced competitor and eventually from student to coach. The goal of the mentor-mentee relationship is long-term success for both parties that can provide a more profound connection both professionally and personally. Thus, by exploring each researcher's experience within forensics, there can be a greater understanding of the practical benefits of a lasting and growing mentorship in the forensic community.

KEY TERMS: Mentorship, Mentor, Mentee, Evolving, Forensics

The relationships, experiences, and knowledge students gain during college can fundamentally shape their lifetime personal and career outcomes (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Stanton-Salazar, 2011), especially in the unique subset of forensics. The supportive relationship within the forensics culture between student-student relationships as well as student-professor mentorship can provide a wide range of benefits. In general, student-professor mentorship has been shown to help students develop their interests, maintain retention, and help students find their career paths (Hagler & Rhodes, 2018; Trolian et al., 2016). Forensics is a place of opportunities to grow mentorship and foster students to succeed in graduate studies. Thus, this semi-autoethnographic exploration is a further extension of the argument for a hybrid model of mentoring first proffered by Holm and Foote (2011).

Buell (2004) notes that mentoring within academia remains much more fluid than mentoring within the business realm. A predominant argument for mentoring being of utmost importance in academia comes from Kelly and Schweitzer (1999), who argue that mentorship is the heart of the graduate school experience. Although there are similarities between mentorship in business and academia, academia is fundamentally built on good mentors fostering a strong academic tradition. As a result, this paper hopes to expand on the understanding of how mentorship evolves and functions through an exploration of Emma and Justin's experiences.

Forensics provides a unique venue in which the importance of academic mentoring becomes pivotal. Any quick discussion with a current forensics coach will reveal current coaches have had strong mentors. In fact, the vast majority of forensics coaches moved from competitor to coach with the guidance of their undergraduate coaches. Forensics thrives because of the successful mentoring the activity fosters. However, because of the strong focus on mentoring and the reliance on undergraduate competitors to shift into coaching roles, Buell's (2004) mentoring models need some modification.

In her article, Buell (2004) identifies four models of mentoring that emerge from her research on mentor-mentee relationships: the cloning model, the nurturing model, the friendship model, and the apprentice model. Holm and Foote (2011) previously articulated an argument for a hybrid nurturing-friendship model encompassing the shift from graduate teaching assistant to coach. This work expands that argument by focusing on the shifting nature of mentorship as a student-coach mentorship experience shifted to a coach-coach mentorship experience through sharing an ethnographic narrative further solidifying the nature of a nurturing-friendship hybrid model of mentorship. There is value in shared experience and this article highlights the continued experience of coaches and students as they adapt to different roles while still maintaining various mentor-mentee roles.

Emma: The Adventure from Competitor to Coach

I have grown in both my undergraduate and graduate programs as a result of the mentoring I received from my former debate coach. My experience in debate as a competitor has provided me with many opportunities in graduate school, including the ability to be an assistant debate coach while in my graduate program, which is paying for my schooling. One of the hardest things during my transition from student to coach was having to navigate what it looks like, and means to be, a debate coach. Since the head coach was another graduate student, there was a lack of in-depth mentorship I could gain from the head coach because we both had questions and struggled similarly. I leaned heavily on my former debate coach and we often discussed problems that occurred during the transition.

As a young graduate student, I was close in age to most of my debate students. I had to learn how to be encouraging and friendly but maintain that clear distinction of coach. Frequently, we learn roles and information based on what has been previously observed (Hendry & Oliver, 2012; Yiend et al., 2014). To negotiate that tenuous relationship, I reflected on how my debate coach interacted with me, and I strove to model that behavior. The benefit of having a deep mentorship with my debate coach, that has transcended my undergraduate experience, has made an easier transition to being a full-time coach. In addition to reflecting on past experiences with my coach I asked him questions and got his advice on how he would do things. His mentorship helped me grow into my role as coach and has ultimately helped me grow my debate knowledge regarding different debate styles.

As with any sport, forensics teams create a culture primarily based on participation. That culture produces close ties that provide great ways to connect and constantly learn new ideas

(Goodnight & Mitchell, 2008). When I became a coach, I transitioned from the National Parliamentary Debate Association (NPDA) to the International Public Debate Association (IPDA), a transition which was shocking and stressful. I leaned on my forensics connections and former coach to help find IPDA information. I never really enjoyed metaphor rounds during my NPDA career, nor did I overly enjoy the pop culture rounds. Yet somehow, I found myself in the form of forensics that primarily focused on those prompts: There was a learning curve.

The learning curve urged me out of my comfort zone and brought me great rewards. Because many of my students were also new to forensics, we learned together. As my students and I learned about IPDA, I often reached out to my former debate coach, sharing resolutions for his students to use and asking questions when uncertainties arose. The constant evolution that we undergo as students in forensics is a fantastic feat, and it does not just stop at being a student participating in forensics. It continues into coaching.

Justin: Evolution of a Coach-Mentor to Friend-Mentor

Much of how our mentor-mentee relationship has evolved has followed a path similar to how I had been mentored during my time in forensics, although there are some key differences. Having never participated in speech and debate as an undergrad, I lacked the competitive experience of many coaches, including Emma; however, our experiences in the roles we have undertaken are still much the same despite this difference. When Emma was a competitor on my team I prepped with the mindset that I can't tell them everything; they need to go into the round having created material they know and understand, so rather than give them the material to use, I taught them how to think so they could create their own arguments. However, I was the head coach, so if I needed the students to address certain arguments in the round I made sure they got them into their notes—not particular arguments per se, but rather potential argumentative areas to consider.

Although I had other students on the team who graduated and went to graduate school, Emma was the first who also started coaching speech and debate as a graduate assistant. Both of us began that particular position with a little hesitancy–I had no idea what forensics was when I was asked to become a coach and Emma was not looking for coaching positions. Both opportunities just fell into our respective laps and those surprise opportunities have become some of our most rewarding experiences. Emma undertaking this new role in graduate school allowed me to realize how my own mentoring style would adapt as my mentee's situation changed. Much like my own experience being mentored when moving from a graduate assistant into a head coaching role, I noticed a greater reliance on the friendship model of mentoring than the nurturing model (Buell, 2004). Holm and Foote's (2011) National Communication Association presentation argued for a hybrid of Buell's mentorship models, pointing out that a nurturing-friendship model best described the nature of the forensics director-graduate assistant relationship.

Emma continued to approach to me with questions and concerns about coaching and graduate school as she began coaching her own team. Rather than make sure she did things a

certain way, as I may have done when she was a competitor, I offered her ideas and insights on various responses one could use in whatever situation she was facing. I also gave advice on how to acclimate to a new team. Understanding her comfort level with the norms of my team and discussing how she must be attuned to the traditions of her current institution helped Emma merge her experience as a competitor with the expectations of her role as a new coach. The mentor-mentee relationship had definitely changed from nurturing toward one of friendship—a model built on mutual learning.

Additionally, I made a conscious effort to continue what I found to be one of the single most important aspects of being a good mentor that I was shown by mentoring with Dr. Todd Holm, fostering a start to academic performance at the graduate level. Just as Dr. Holm had taken the time to make sure I had something ready to submit to conferences, and encouraged me to start publishing my scholarship, I reached out to Emma to make sure she had material ready to present and have encouraged her to publish. Oddly enough, with my program's reframing from NPDA more toward IPDA Emma has the unique ability to adapt the mentor-mentee role and help her former coach ease into a new style of debate. Like much in life, the mentor-mentee relationship rarely remains static.

This semi-autoethnographic work adds auxiliary evidence supporting the creation of a hybrid nurturing-friendship model of mentoring. The role of coach-student relationship, often found in the nurturing model, never truly disappears, at least in venues where competition has been the primary genesis for the coach-student relationship. At the same time, the mutually beneficial learning aspect of the friendship model is prominent in coach-coach relationships, at least in those instances where one of the coaches initially assumed the role of student. Despite their similarities, the differences between business and academia may warrant a re-examination of how mentorship models are enacted. At the very least, the evolution of students, from undergraduate competitor to graduate assistant to coach, offers a unique setting in which the suggested models of mentorship insufficiently encompass the rich relationship of forensic coaches and students.

Conclusion

The goal of mentorship in forensics is for students to evolve and to be active learners, a skill instilled in many speech and debate students. The mentorship also needs to adapt as the student's role changes from novice to experienced competitor and eventually from student to coach. Forensics is a changing environment with plenty of nuanced events and debate types to learn, therefore adaptability is essential in fostering mentorship. Buell (2004) states that mentorship has different models but lacks accounting for the possible evolution of a mentoring relationship. As we develop into new roles and our responsibilities shift, learning experiences also change, and thus the mentor-mentee role must also adapt.

There are missed learning opportunities if the mentorship does not evolve. If Justin could not adapt to Emma's IPDA questions, he would have missed the learning opportunities that different disciplines of forensics offer; just as Emma would have been unable to expand her

coaching knowledge without relying on Justin's past experience. The goal of the mentor-mentee relationship is long-term success for both parties that can provide a deeper connection both professionally and personally. If one does not foster the mentor-mentee relationship for the long term, there is a loss of these important milestones that help grow each coach for the better.

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At The Intersection Of Ableism, Entelechy, And Policy Debate

Alex McVey and Matthew Gerber

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Dr. McVey is an Assistant Professor and Director of Debate. Alex is a critical-cultural communication scholar who works at the intersection of rhetoric, argumentation, and media studies to examine the relationship between power, inequality, and discourse. Alex's work focuses on mediated representations of policing in the United States as well as the rhetorical dynamics of visual, digital, and surveillant media.

Matthew Gerber (Baylor University)

Dr. Gerber is an Associate Professor who retired from his debate-related duties at Baylor in the Fall of 2022, after 20 years as the Director of Debate. His research interests include argumentation, debate, rhetorical criticism, and disability studies. He holds the Ph.D. from the University of Kansas.

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At the Intersection of Ableism, Entelechy, and Policy Debate

Alex McVey and Matthew Gerber

Abstract

This article investigates the causes of ableism and inaccessibility in policy debate, and also envisions alternatives to the current conception of debate that could open doors to more participants at all levels of ability. We argue that the rhetorical theories of Kenneth Burke help to illuminate symbolic practices in debate which function to exclude disabled voices. We also forward the argument that the competitive nature of policy debate, along with its dominant discursive practices and speech codes, constitutes an example of what Kenneth Burke calls 'entelechy'. We further argue that the entelechial nature of policy debate is at the root of ableism in the activity. Finally, we further employ Burke's theory of the comic frame to elucidate how the institutions and individuals in the policy debate community might engage in self-reflection as a way to generate fresh approaches to the problem of ableism and exclusion in policy debate.

KEY TERMS: Debate, Disability, Entelechy, Kenneth Burke, Comic Frame

This essay argues that despite increasing attempts at inclusion, policy debate remains a hostile place for people with intellectual disabilities. We hold that policy debate's persistent ableism cannot be disentangled from the activity's ongoing investment in a telos of competition as primary value of intercollegiate policy debate. We employ Kenneth Burke's theories of entelechy to examine how policy debate's tendencies toward competition and perfection cultivate modes of exclusion toward disabled people. We illuminate both the institutional symbolic structures and rhetorical practices that contribute to the unsatisfactory or unsafe experience of disabled debaters in the activity. Entelechy is Burke's term for the human tendency to pursue perfection (even to sometimes disastrous ends, and often with rotten means) in all actions, discourses, and ideas. The rhetorical theories of Burke illuminate symbolic and material practices in the debate community that function to marginalize disabled voices and condition debate coaches and competitors to normalize the exclusion of disabled bodies from the spaces of debate. We also employ Burke's theory of the comic frame to elucidate ways in which the people who constitute the debate community might engage in critical self-reflection as a way to generate fresh approaches to the problem of ableism in policy debate. The notion of the comic frame is a Burkean way of looking at the world through a lens of human fallibility and inevitable error, and is often cast as a symbolic alternative to the tragic framework, wherein entelechy and the more extreme, damaging human motives and tendencies lie.

The marginalization of debaters with intellectual disabilities is a pressing problem for the policy debate community. Despite increasing levels of awareness, as well as in-round argumentation centering on issues of disability, the response of policy debate to disabled people continues to be a work in progress. In particular, the policy debate space has continually proven to be less than accommodating to people who are intellectually or developmentally disabled (Gerber, 2016; Richter, 2016).[1] In a survey of 378 college debate coaches and students, Paul Mabrey and Keith Richards (2017) found that 38% of respondents identified as having some form of disability, and of that group, 12.2% categorized their disability as "psychological" in nature (p.8). Lack of access or a bad experience in policy debate has negative outcomes for disabled people who are seeking the educational, civic, and social benefits associated with debate participation. The impact of these shortcomings should not be understated. In a follow-up question related to overall satisfaction with the NDT/CEDA debate community, "significant differences existed with those identifying a disability showing lower satisfaction than those indicating no disability" (Mabrey & Richards, 2017, p.26). The authors found this data to be "troubling" for the NDT/CEDA community in that "traditionally marginalized groups are not experiencing the same satisfaction as others" (p.26). The divergence in quality of experience (or even participation in the first place) for students and coaches with disabilities must compel the members of the community to "continue to discuss and address inaccessibility in debate" (Miller, 2016, p.4). Indeed, there is a significant need not only for scholars to "attempt to identify why these kinds of asymmetrical experiences are happening," but also for educational institutions to undertake concrete measures to guarantee that disabled students are not shut out in the first place, and to ensure that they "do not experience hostile and less satisfying debate participation" (Mabrey & Richards, 2017, p.27). We argue that one enduring feature of college debate's exclusion and hostility towards disabled people is the continued emphasis on speed-reading, or spreading. We locate debate's continued compulsion towards speed within a broader entelechial obsession with competition and argumentative ability that privileges exceptional bodily performance as the norm against which disabled bodies are judged to be lacking. We remain unsatisfied with what we view as a limited and limiting view of debate's ends, gesturing towards comic alternatives to debate's rotten perfection. We hope this essay contributes to ongoing efforts to subvert the entelechial obsession with competition and speed at the cost of access and inclusion.

[1] This article is primarily concerned with the experience of those with intellectual or cognitive disabilities in policy debate. While this article talks in general terms about intellectual and cognitive disabilities, we define those here as including but not limited to: autism spectrum disorders (ASDs), pervasive developmental disorders (PDD-NOS), Down Syndrome, aphasia, attention deficit, dyslexia, dyscalculia, memory loss, and Tourette's Syndrome, among a host of others.

Burke, Entelechy and the Comic Frame

Western culture's broader obsession with entelechy, the drive to perfection, is deeply interwoven with the rhetorical norms of ableism, or the privileging of the perspectives and needs of able-bodied subjects over and against those of disabled people. Normalization is a rhetorical practice that defines human bodies through a telos of accomplishment, achievement, and success, with disabled bodies situated as the perverse underside of human capacity and ability. In this section, we read Burkean theory through the lens of disability studies to theorize entelechy as a rhetorical vehicle for the normalization of ableist practices under the ideological guise of the natural and inevitable force of competition and perfection. We show how entelechialism defines the ideological territory of debate, even as current practitioners may seek to redefine debate beyond its entelechial ends.

According to Burke, entelechy is a uniquely human tendency. Burke characterized humans as not only "separated from his natural condition by instruments of his own making" (symbol systems), but also as being "rotten with perfection" (Burke, 1963-1964, p.507). Burke argued that "there is a principal of perfection implicit in the nature of symbol systems; and in keeping with his nature as a symbol-using animal, man is moved by this principle" (Burke, 1963-1964, p.508). The continual striving for perfection, the pursuit of the continued clarification and elevation of our terministic screens and symbols into final fruition, thus informs the definition of entelechy. Rowland and Jones (2001) refer to this as "terministic compulsion" or the tendency to "take one's terminology to the end of the symbolic line" (p.57). Burke, drawing on Aristotle, posited that anything which comes into existence tends to symbolically move toward its entelechial end, and that "this state of completion is its full actuality" (Burke, 1969, p.261). For Burke, the "finishedness" of a thing, helps to classify and create symbolic order according to the states of perfection or final form that make up the essence of that thing (Burke, 1950, p.14). Jan Hovden (2006) argued that for Burke, "entelechy is the force of symbol systems to compel their adherents to see them to completion, and he believes that this compulsion contains within it numerous dangers" (p.507). The authors are in solidarity with Hovden's characterization of Burke's concept of entelechy. We also agree with Rowland and Jones, who argued that entelechy is a slippery rhetorical construct, and one that is often difficult to apply because humans do not always engage in extreme entelechy (2001, p.57). Indeed, entelechial compulsion undergirds the normalization of extremism in the name of human perfection. In a case study about the discursive structure of video games, Soukup (2007) deployed Burke's concept of perfection to describe the "entelechial motivational system" which appeared in most popular video games with "remarkable uniformity" (p.159). This motivational system, which encourages the "finishing" of the game, and the pursuit of one's personal competitive objectives to completion is not unlike the entelechial nature of policy debate. Using entelechy as a critical tool helps us to name discourses which promote a "dangerous mix of competition, conquest, hierarchy, and aggressive domination" (Soukup, 2007, p.159).

Humans often stretch their symbol systems to extremist ends that go beyond mere fulfillment and completion. Indeed, entelechy "results from our ability to use symbols to envision the extreme ends of behavior" (Hubbard, 1998, p.360). In his essay on entelechy and the rhetoric of religious cults, Stan Lindsay argued that Burke "implicitly recognizes the possibility of this extremist type of entelechy- what might be called psychotic entelechy" (Burke, 1968, p.180; Lindsay, 1999, p.270). For Lindsay, the characteristics of "psychotic entelechy" entail a proclivity by some to be "so desirous of fulfilling or bringing to perfection the implications of their terminologies that they engage in very hazardous or damaging actions" (1999, p.272). In tracing the rhetoric of cult leader David Koresh, Lindsay found that the dangerous part of his discourse was not that he was necessarily irrational, but rather that his symbol system was "super rational" (at least as it appeared to the members of his community) and that he had carried his "meaning to the extreme" (p.279). By advocating for the ultimate finishedness of the biblical prophecies which were foretold in his preaching, Koresh "laid out his own telos" and was thus compelled to "literally live out the entelechy" (Lindsay, 1999, p.277). Another potentially minacious aspect of extreme entelechialism is its potential to obfuscate alternative outcomes and the discursive means by which to reach them. As Bryan Hubbard (1998) postulated in his study of the entelechial aspects of the deliberation surrounding the development and ultimate detonation of the nuclear bomb in the 1940s, "entelechy prevents the exploration of alternatives and informed discussion by maintaining a steady course for the decision." (p.360). The relentless pursuit of entelechial perfection produces narrowed, constrained futures and potentialities.

The normalization of perfection and competition functions as a pervasive constraint against the agency and positionality of disabled persons in policy debate. As Timothy Dolmage argues, ableism is a rhetorical phenomenon, operating on the level of deeply inscribed, everyday discourse and vernacular, and predicated on the "mythical able-bodied norm" (2014, p.22). For Dolmage, the rhetorical construction of normalcy, and the ways in which it controls and inscribes bodies, is coupled with the cultural valorization of able-bodiedness; making disability "abject, invisible, disposable, less than human, while able-bodiedness is at once ideal, normal, and the mean or default" (2014, p.22). Communities reproduce ableism in subtle and insidious ways. Norms are transmitted to subsequent generations not as intentional modes of exclusion but as solidified expectations regarding bodily competence and ability. As James Cherney argues, "the ways of interpreting disability and assumptions about bodies that produce ableism are learned" and are handed down by "the previous generation" (2011, para. 2). We argue that the inherited ideologies and taken-for-granted assumptions of debate may perpetuate harmful assumptions about disability, even as programs actively fight to pursue new motivations and justifications for debate. Likewise, toward the end of identifying rhetorical practices that undergird these tendencies, especially in the case of extreme examples, Cherney's approach to ableism aids in understanding the historical origins of long-ingrained assumptions about disability in an argument community.

Fortunately, the negative outcomes associated with entelechial extremism are not inevitable. Burke's notions of the tragic and comic frames provide guidance here. For Burke, "the tragic frame is marked by individuals committed to pushing their ideas to a rotten end" and by "the tragic tendency to push toward perfection regardless of the consequences" (Renegar & Dionisopoulos, 2011, p.325). On the other hand, the comic perspective proceeds from the assumption of human fallibility, inherent imperfection, and flaw. The purpose of the comic frame is to generate self-reflection and the creation of "argumentative space in the middle ground between opposites, recognizing that an absolutist frame is too rigid to allow for cooperative societal action" (Madsen, 1993, np). The comic perspective allows for humans to see through the narrow confines of their own terministic screens and to ostensibly help "those who possess these screens from being compelled to take them to their entelechial ends" (Hovden, 2006, p.507). Burke's comic frame is also useful as a method by which critics and members of a community might offer "minor repairs" to the current system without throwing out an entire institution (Toker, 2002). As Hovden put it, the comic frame "allows for the challenging of pieties without causing the destruction of the order itself" (2006, p.507). Along similar lines, Travis Cram argued that the comic perspective functions to "rein in the dangers of tragic thinking by correcting rather than banishing antagonists and emphasizing inclusion within a community" (2017, p.80). Cram's postulation is helpful here, in that the authors do not seek to "exile" those coaches and debaters who exhibit extreme entelechialism in debate; but nor do we seek to gloss over the glaring problem of ableism in the name of community harmony. Rather, we view our arguments here as part of an ongoing, long-term project designed to amend the activity in ways that render it more accessible to all. In the conclusion, we point to nascent practices and discursive interventions that seek to subvert the ingrained entelechial norms of policy debate, diverting the compulsion towards perfection into the comic possibilities of imperfection.

The Entelechial Tendencies of Policy Debate

This section examines the entelechial tendencies of policy debate, and how these tendencies reproduce ableist norms and practices within the activity. In particular, we name three rhetorical norms of entelechy that have, over time, come to define modern policy debate: Competition, Speed, and Rhetorical Ability. Our argument in this section is not that all policy debaters, programs, or coaches actively participate in the construction and maintenance of these ideologies. We name these forces entelechial tendencies to emphasize the way that these ideological norms have influenced the history of policy debate, not to state that these drives function as universal or unquestioned commands mindlessly repeated by policy debate automatons. We recognize that policy debate has created space for divergent voices and motivations that challenge many of the taken-for-granted assumptions of policy debate. We will revisit some of the challenges that have emerged to the entelechial forces of policy debate in the next section of the essay. Nevertheless, we hope the examples gathered here, collected from both published and public records of policy debate, as well as decades of personal experience from the authors as policy debate coaches, point towards pervasive norms that continue to shape how debaters perceive themselves and their communities. This critique emerges out of a practice of

self-reflexivity, seeking to understand the way our own coaching and debating experiences reflect, are shaped by, and participate in norms of ableist exclusion. Our argument is not that the whole of the debate community is engaged in win-at-all-costs extreme entelechy; or that every debater strives with fury to cram as many words-per-minute into every speech in a debate. Instead, we argue that under entelechial systems, the extreme becomes normalized, so even extreme examples of entelechial ideology become regularized guideposts for judging the performances of bodies in debate, with devastating effects for those whose bodies cannot meet the ideals of exceptional debate performance.

Entelechy of Competition

Policy debate has always been competitive in nature. As William Keith argued in his Keynote Address to the National Developmental Debate Conference at Wake Forest in 2009, "NDT-style debate is intensely focused on competition, almost, one might say, in a warlike way" (2010). Debaters compete in front of trained judges who render a win or loss at the conclusion of the round. The competitive nature of policy debate creates a rhetorical situation in which winning functions as the ultimate entelechial end of participation. This all-in commitment to competitive success and victory is evidence, in and of itself, of the ways in which entelechy discursively operates. This argument is not novel; significant existing scholarship in debate laments the rise of competition as the overarching telos of debate competition (Mitchell et al 2010). Much of the focus in existing critique of debate's competitive drive focuses on the ways that competition functions to insulate debate from public audiences, blunting the impact of debate as an activity aimed at civic participation and diminishing the possible value of debate for watchful institutional audiences. As Mitchell et al argue, "Once an enterprise born from the difficulties of engagement with public audiences, academic debate became estranged from its audience-centered origins during the mid-twentieth century. The rise of tournament competition as an organizing telos augured debate's ascetic turn, characterized by heightened specialization, intensified insularity, and fetishization of technique" (2010, 107). While we agree generally that the competitive telos of debate makes it inaccessible for broader public audiences, we believe that these criticisms themselves ignore the differential inaccessibility of debate's competitive practices. Centering disability in our examination of policy debate's exclusionary practices allows us to see how debate's competitive drive does not just isolate the activity from broader, dominant publics, but also how it performs a doubled exclusion of those disabled bodies and voices who are always/already excluded from the public itself.

The institutional practices and symbol systems that point participants toward "winning ways" are at the root of ableism in policy debate, and the exclusion of disabled students and coaches from the activity. While there are many examples which support our argument, we will focus primarily on two: first, the entelechial commitment to attaining victory at all costs, and to accumulating wins in debate; and second, the rapid rate of delivery (or "spreading") which has emerged as an extreme entelechial speech code that has become both a requirement for success and a tool of exclusion, particularly for students and coaches with intellectual disabilities. Policy

debate is a competitive game, and the game model of debate has pervaded the judging and coaching culture of the activity since its inception. The late Tuna Snider (1984) argued that the game approach to judging a debate (and ultimately rendering either a win or a loss) was the “silent”/default decision-making paradigm for most judges (p.19). The competitive gaming model of judging continues to be the overwhelming prevailing approach (Gerber & Nagel, 2017, p.45). Even critiques of the gaming model of debate concede that at root, “debaters are in fact, contestants involved in a competition and not agents of a government agency in an effort to simulate plan adoption” (Warner, 2003, p.65). According to Maxwell Schnurer, “in the 1980s debaters used gaming to defend speaking quickly in debates” (2003, p.46). While an examination of the notion of debate as a game is not the focus of the present essay, it is worth noting that that the game metaphor “crowds out other ways of viewing debate”, and this fact may warrant separate interrogation into its effects and impacts on the activity (Kaylor, 2015, p.33).

From the moment they are introduced to the policy debate game, some novice students are subject to both the entelechial aspirations of their coaches, and to their own human desire to maximize personal potential (measured, of course, by the number of times they defeat their opponents). They are exhaustively trained in the strategic trappings of winning; out-smarting and out-talking one’s opponent and gaining a victory, one granted by an expertly trained judge who has been long-immersed in the arcane and recondite symbolic structures of the activity. The continued development of novice debaters (who inevitably flounder and stumble in their initial forays) into something approaching a competent competitor (one who wins regularly), requires even deeper immersion into the rules, speech techniques, and strategy of debate. Thus, through the machinations of entelechy, the novice debater can engage in “the process of changing from what something is into what something should become” (Lindsay, 1999, p.270). While entelechialism is a uniquely human tendency, and is thus endemic to most competitive games, it is particularly pronounced and obvious as it appears in some segments of policy debate, an activity that along with its university sponsors and private donors, has nurtured an “unacceptable preoccupation with competition” (Hlavacik, Lain, Ivanovic, & Ontiveros-Kersch, 2016, p.395). The implication of this entelechial obsession is that many debaters either self-select out of the activity when the true nature of what it means to succeed becomes apparent, or they continue to participate in a system in which perpetual disappointment ensues because of an inability to reach the idealized norms of bodily performance. This is particularly true of debaters with disabilities.

Other examples of the entelechial nature of winning in policy debate abound. Take for instance the narrative history of policy debate, which is saturated with legendary stories of students or coaches who engage in herculean feats of self-deprivation and sacrifice: coaches staying up all night to research, cut evidence, and strategize to outsmart and defeat one’s opponent in elimination rounds; students staying up all week before a big tournament to get a competitive edge and notch another win over a rival team; graduate assistant coaches who skip the readings for the Master’s seminar, but who instead spend their finite time researching esoteric topics with sometimes little bearing on their chosen course of study. In the experience of the authors, while that research may be enjoyable (because of the promise of the thrill of

victory), it is often not particularly contributory to academic success, and often trades off with other projects or life priorities. These are the mythic heroes of contemporary intercollegiate policy debate, placed on a pedestal because they are/were willing to sacrifice their mental and physical well-being in order to get the "W." Tragically, and throughout the history of policy debate, too many coaches and competitors have "died for the cause" from "too much stress over wins and losses, the bottom line" (Gerber, 2009, p.90). A renewed commitment to self-regulation, indeed self-preservation in policy debate could be actualized if extreme entelechial tendencies were held in check and generationally filtered out of debate pedagogy.

After all, according to the "The Speech" by the late Scott Deatherage (the winningest coach in the history of NDT debate) preparing for debate competition must begin "when the topic is released [in July] until the final debate is concluded [in April] and continues at all points in between" (Snider, 2011, np). Later in "The Speech" Deatherage famously laid out his opinion on the proper way to conduct a winning cross-examination. "Don't ask, argue!" he implored, and then he repeated that phrase several times. "Don't ask, argue!". For Deatherage (and for generations of his former students and coaches), the cross-examination was wasted if one simply asked questions for clarification, or for the organizational sake of one's flowsheet, or for a deeper understanding of an opponent's position, simply for the sake of understanding. Rather, the cross-examination period should optimally be used strategically to set up one's own arguments and to expose and exploit weaknesses in the arguments of the adversaries. Like "spreading," the "proper" way to conduct a winning cross-examination (by foregrounding one's own arguments rather than by asking questions for true clarification or understanding) is a speech code, circulated through policy debate's past and present. This speech code, this "best practice" of cross-examination, sacrifices understanding and clarity for a competitive advantage; it enshrines misunderstanding, opacity, and deception; it foregrounds winning over the edification of the parties involved; and it is entelechial insofar as it unreflexively carries out a dangerous symbolic practice to its extreme. This speech code is also ableist in that it complicates the in-round experience for students, coaches, or judges who have intellectual disabilities. This speech code encourages debaters with disabilities to actively avoid asking the very types of questions that might make their experience in policy debate more navigable.

The drive for entelechial perfection comes to define how the policy debate community advocates for the value of debate to stakeholders within colleges and high schools that fund and resource policy debate programs. Many studies have pointed to the positive impact of policy debate competition on student academic achievement, the development of critical thinking skills, higher rates of civic engagement, and matriculation to college or higher education (Colbert, 1995; Kennedy, 2007; Breger, 1998; Lee, 1998). However, the measurement of those achievements is most often based on "win/loss records, speaker points, or placement in a given tournament" (Stone-Watt, 2012, p.81). While there should be multiple metrics by which universities assess and track student outcomes related to their participation in policy debate (Partlow-LeFevre, 2012), the reality is that most debate coaches feel that they are "rewarded more by their university for focusing on competitive success" rather than for foregrounding those

aforementioned ancillary pedagogical advantages (Hlavacik, Lain, Ivanovic, & Ontiveros-Kersch, 2016, p.394). Many universities that field debate programs expect wins, because those are measurable metrics, and because defeating opponents is a point of pride to be celebrated. Thus, it is notoriously hard for coaches to generate publicity for teams that don't advance beyond the preliminary rounds. Coaches often struggle to explain the NDT first-round at large process to administrators who fail to see why being ranked 16th in the country is even noteworthy. Universities also find themselves caught up in entelechy as they assess and represent the quality of their institution to educational accrediting organizations. They must be able to portray the debate program, for example, as being successful (and blossoming toward perfection), and the easiest way to do that is to point to wins, particularly over peer institutions or ivy league schools who also support policy debate programs.

Entelechy of Speed

One of the most emblematic characteristics of policy debate is the discursive practice known as "spreading": a speech code that is inculcated in college debaters (and also in high school and middle school students) who are taught that "speed kills" and that overwhelming one's opponent with a blizzard of arguments, evidence, and debate theory is one of the keys to winning. Thinking and talking faster than one's opponents opens new doors to the entelechial pinnacle of debate victory. University hosted summer debate camps, including the ones we have hosted and taught at, spend hours teaching debaters how to keep up with the norms of high-tempo bodily debate performance that participants may expect to see at the highest echelons of debate competition. Even as many debaters have questioned what gets called the "flogo-centric" paradigm of debate practice, the normalized way of teaching policy debate holds that dropped arguments are assumed to be true arguments, thus creating added incentive to speak and deliver arguments quickly, in hopes that opponents will "drop" or concede arguments and lose the debate. Training one's body to speak, think, and write at greater speeds than one's opponent normalizes bodily perfection and a drive towards competition as the paradigm of what constitutes desirable debate practice. Even the so-called critical styles of debate (an ideological alternative to the expectation of strict fidelity to policy content in debate) often retain the same sound and rapid delivery mechanisms. Indeed, to the "uninitiated observer, this type of critical debate would not sound much different from traditional policy debate" (Solt, 2004, p.52). Often, even debaters who make the aforementioned in-round arguments about disability adhere to the discursive practice of spreading.

One need not look far for an example of how these speech codes are weaponized against students with disabilities. In a recent article published in the Rostrum (the official publication of the National Speech and Debate Association, and one read by thousands of high school speech and debate instructors), the two authors (both attorneys specializing in the Americans with Disabilities Act) made it clear that any debate competitor with a fine-motor impairment who requests that their opponent slow down (not spread) so that they can "keep up while flowing" is not seeking a legitimate, protected accommodation, but is rather seeking a competitive

advantage, which would be unfair to the debater who has mastered the art of speaking quickly and wants to overwhelm their opponent with speed (Mayes & Zirkel, 2018, p.42). This amounts to institutionally sanctioned discrimination against students with auditory processing disorders or fine-motor impairment who wish to compete in the policy debate activity. Those types of disabilities are common in people with dyslexia, autism spectrum disorders, Tourette's Syndrome, or other learning disabilities, and in people who simply process information at a slower pace than their neuro-typical peers. A more recent article from the Rostrum focused on ways that the debate community could be more inclusive for people with visible/physical disabilities, but stopped short of offering solutions to the intractable problem of the ongoing exclusion of those with intellectual disabilities (Freeman & Pizzo, 2020, p.20). We argue that debaters with so-called "invisible" disabilities are more acutely impacted by extreme entelechialism in policy debate, and this article attempts to engage in the hard work needed to generate solutions to the dilemma.

In the 1990s and 2000s, the practice of debaters simply saying "more evidence" during a speech, rather than labelling and briefly explaining what their evidence says by way of a "tagline", became common. This practice, akin to simply "piling on" one's opponent with an ever-growing mountain of evidence, is yet another example of entelechy in which the content of the argument or evidence is not as important as the creation of more ink on a judge's flowsheet. Indeed, "policy debate has developed its own shorthand jargon and even a specialized method of notetaking (called "flowing") to accommodate and account for the rapid delivery" employed in most policy debate rounds (Gerber, 2009, p.82). Thus, the mere suggestion of "more evidence" creates a corresponding visual marker on a judge's flowsheet which denotes the symbolic presence of an argument which even without explanation, is often deemed to be true if not directly addressed. The extreme entelechial end of this speech code would envision a judge's flow to be covered with these symbolic notations of evidence, preferably on both the front and back sides of the legal-size flow paper, thus "burying" the opposing team and "crushing them" under the weight of multiple unaddressed (thus True) arguments or pieces of evidence.

Entelechy of Argumentative Ability

The privileging of extreme bodily performance as the desired norm of argumentative ability functions as a pervasive mode of exclusion for those bodies that fail to meet these standards of normalization. Our argument is not that judges and coaches actively and consciously exclude those who cannot or will not participate in speed, but rather that the norm of bodily and cognitive competence comes to define our expectations regarding proper debate performance. In the opening sequence of her article about ableism in the field of communication studies, Vanessa Beasley (2021) argued that rhetoricians, and particularly former policy debaters who continue to populate the ranks of the communication discipline, not only "want to win" (p.291), but are also at least subconsciously excluding disabled voices from the realm of deliberation because "we do not expect them to win" (p.293). Students with intellectual disabilities are often not recruited into the activity or encouraged to try policy debate in the first place, because of the presumption that

they might "not be able to follow (as in cognitively track) the logic of rules or arguments in a manner that would enable them to participate" (Beasley, 2021, p.300). The prevailing model of policy debate as a competitive game is exclusionary of students and coaches with disabilities because the members of the policy debate community have themselves "made a priori decisions that people with disabilities will almost always lose" (Beasley, 2021, p.294). While the sole focus of Beasley's article is not policy debate, the authors are in solidarity with her extended opening examples about the activity, as they resonate deeply with our own personal experiences both in the academy and in debate.

The entelechial drive toward winning is also self-perpetuating in that students who demonstrate the bodily and intellectual competencies of winning debaters often may receive more attention, more coaching, and more academic benefit from the activity because they are perceived, consciously or subconsciously, as winners. In this framework students with intellectual disabilities may face invisible or de facto external barriers, or may even not seek inclusion in the first place, given the tendency for norms of bodily and cognitive excellence to be highlighted as exemplars of proper policy debate performance. Similarly, the other trappings of winning and entelechialism discussed previously are equally ableist and exclusive. Many people disabled or not, are not capable of the super-human feats of mental and physical stamina required for success in policy debate. That said, the kind of sustained, up-all-night, prepping at all times, approach to policy debate will, by definition, be tougher (or impossible) for people with intellectual disabilities when compared with their neuro-typical peers.

The benefits associated with participation are celebrated to justify funding for policy debate programs, but the purported academic, civic, and social profit of participation is often reserved for able-bodied students who can compete and win. Those with intellectual disabilities are confronted with structural obstacles to their very participation in the activity (not to mention the barriers they face with regard to actual competitive success or winning policy debates regularly). Policy debate describes itself as an activity committed to emancipation, equality, and the creation of an accessible, supportive discursive space for people with disabilities. Yet, speech codes like "spreading," a discursive practice that is emblematic of the policy debate activity, have frequently been employed to deter participation or to "exclude traditionally disenfranchised voices" based on (dis)ability, race, and location (Nelson & Miller, 2016, p.5; Ryan & Sovacool, 2006, p.48-49; Pack-Jordan & Jordan, 2018). Simply put, "the speed and complex jargon in debate continues to become increasingly- dare I say- exclusive" (Ferguson, 2016, p.8).

Comic Frame Correctives

This article has attempted to draw readers attention toward damaging entelechial tendencies in the policy debate activity, proclivities which function to suppress meaningful participation for students and coaches with intellectual disabilities. Here, we utilize Burke's theories of the comic frame to interrogate alternatives to the entelechial and ableist discourse patterns that undergird policy debate. As mentioned previously, Burke's comic frame of acceptance allows for members of a discourse community to dig up, analyze, and reform their

own harmful rhetorical practices. By proceeding from the assumption of human imperfection, inadequacy, and proneness to error, the comic frame "can serve as a vehicle for self-examination" and create cognizance of "the possibility that unexamined routine habits and trends could lead to a disastrous future" (Renegar & Dionisopoulos, 2011, p.325). By examining the harmful and exclusionary discursive habits of the policy debate community, one can also begin to envision correctives to that behavior and alternatives to the ableist underpinnings of the activity. The comic perspective thus acts as a tempering check on human entelechial tendencies.

Community Self-regulation

Eliminating ableism in policy debate will not be a simple fix, but within a comic framework those repairs do not seem as daunting and unattainable. Toward that end, we offer a few suggestions as starting points for further deliberation. Initially, and simply put, policy debate and its constituents must make a determined effort to hold their own extreme entelechial tendencies in check. Instead of "pushing their ideas toward a rotten end" and striving to transform debaters who experience disability into perfect debating machines, the comic frame of acceptance allows us to accept those people for who they are, and to meet them where they are in terms of coaching and instruction (Renegar & Dionisopoulos, 2011, p.325). Not all students will be able to experience policy debate in the same way, and the one-size-fits-all approach to teaching, judging, and competing in policy debate must give way to a more diverse, hyper-subjective, localized method by which each student can approach the activity on their own terms.

There are several encouraging developments on this front, such as the Healthy Debater Initiative, as well as other self-regulatory movements in the community such as the move to six preliminary rounds at most major tournaments (instead of the standard eight). The majority of the community has decided that the loss of data points from those two missing prelim rounds did not outweigh the benefits of ending the day early, and building in more time to relax after rounds, or sleep just a little later in the morning. Thus, inroads can be cut into the entelechial tendencies of policy debate. While this may seem like an insignificant example, it proves that the humans who inhabit the debate space can mutually agree to dull the sharp edges that characterize the entelechial tendencies of the activity; the rottenness that co-mingles with the pursuit of competitive perfection.

The authors also argue that the COVID-19 protocols instituted by the NDT and CEDA, and the high degree of community compliance with those rules, demonstrates the ability of the community to acknowledge and step back from, its own entelechial practices. In 2021, the national championship tournaments achieved nearly universal adherence to in-person masking mandates, no small feat given that wearing a facemask likely compelled debaters to slow down a little, enunciate more clearly, and breathe differently as compared to speaking without a mask. At once, this small change both protected people with compromised immune systems (people whose bodies were different than the discursively constructed able-bodied norm), but also helped to demonstrate that at least in some cases, the dominant speech code could be deviated from without catastrophic results. This is not to equate the dangers of spreading with the dangers of

the pandemic, or to debate the scientific merits of masking; rather, we simply argue that when the policy debate community is in peril (and we believe it is, for a number of reasons that are beyond the scope of this essay), it has shown an ability to self-regulate in ways that are beneficial and healthy. These changes are helpful for students and coaches who do not, or cannot, meet the standard assumptions and expectations about bodily and cognitive performance that are baked into contemporary policy debate.

Additionally, in order to cut into the entelechial ways in which debate is evaluated by administrators and decisionmakers who are in control of resource allocation, the community must change how it frames and represents the activity. Success in policy debate should be presented based on individual student development, and on the extra education that participation in debate affords competitors. Speaker awards and win-loss percentages are important, but they should be framed as a secondary metric when advocating for one's program. Most colleges and universities are ostensibly deeply concerned with and committed to undergraduate research, and yet "debaters have been doing 'undergraduate research' for years, but our programs are rarely (if ever) mentioned when university administrators start talking about undergraduate research initiatives" (Morello, 1997, para.8). If participation in policy debate was more often lauded as a boon to undergraduate research and the enrichment of student knowledge, rather than being tied to success in tournament competition, it could undermine the forces of entelechy which co-produce both ableism in debate and in the evaluation of debate programs by administrators. Policy debate has grappled with "public relations" problems since its inception, but those issues become more acute when the problem is "in-house" at one's own college or university. A shift in the metrics of evaluation and representation from one of quantitative success (accumulation of wins and awards) to one at least partially based on individual student edification is needed, although the authors recognize from our own experience that this may be a difficult task. That said, once again Burke's notion of the comic frame provides critics with the "adventurous equipment" needed to upend standards of judgement which rest solely on "the somewhat empty accumulation of facts" (Burke, 1984, p.170-171).

Changes in Policy Debate Adjudication

We have argued that the dominant speech-code in policy debate, "spreading," is ableist and exclusionary at multiple levels. A comic frame of acceptance helps us to envision ways to renew or at least revise those discursive speech practices as "entrenched conventions that might be redefined, reimagined, or transcended. (Renegar & Dionisopoulos, 2011, p.326)". In other words, the comic frame provides argument communities with a tool for self-reflection; a path to admitting that the current approach, to judging, for example, is missing the mark. Specifically, a comic frame allows us to envision new modes of judging and evaluating policy debates which both captures and co-opts the tremendous influence judges hold over the symbolic structures and practices of the activity (Rowland & Deatherage, 1998). The delivery and speaking practices that judges choose to reward with higher speaker points is one area where it may be possible to harness the entelechial drive toward winning and mobilize it against itself. If judges began

rewarding a style of delivery which was slower and less reliant on debate jargon, those students and coaches who were interested in winning would most certainly adapt their approach, creating new entry points for previously excluded students (Rowland & Deatherage, 1988, 248-249). Additionally, judges have the authority to enforce requested accommodations like asking for one's opponent to slow down, or even requesting additional prep time. Judges should continue to use that enforcement power to make changes in the debate space that would improve the experience of debaters with disabilities.

It is the judging community in policy debate which holds the power to effectuate changes in discursive practices that have been normalized in the name of competitive success. As Scott Harris argues, unsurprisingly "debaters utilize communication strategies which maximize their individual success" (entelechy), a tendency which foregrounds "information processing over delivery" (which can lead to extreme entelechy, as we have described it here) (1995, p.129). As Rowland confirmed, "we cannot expect debaters to take a long-term perspective on the activity in an environment that is inherently competitive", meaning that change from within must come from the judges of the activity. This is a project that has been attempted before (and should be revisited and expanded) as a way to increase meaningful participation for black debaters in the activity. Shanara Reid-Brinkley argued that one aspect of the Louisville debate project in the early 1990s was to replace "expert judges with lay judges" as a method to destabilize "common research and speech delivery practices in policy debate", practices which functioned to exclude black debaters from meaningful participation (2023, p.4-5). We argue that many of those same discursive practices and approaches to judging are also exclusionary to people with disabilities who seek meaningful participation in policy debate, and that changes in how debates are adjudicated may warrant additional scholarly and community investigation. Similarly, Steven Combs (1993) maintained that to square the purported pedagogical benefits of policy debate with the reality of how debate operates in practice, the community ought to reorient itself toward a more "public advocacy perspective" which envisions the use of lay judges instead of highly trained argumentation technocrats who reward and encourage the rapid delivery which pervades policy debate (p. 43). Finally, judges, students and coaches should consider a pause in order to self-examine their own ableist predispositions, and to determine the depth of their "own identities as the smartest people in the room when it comes to understanding how, when, and why some kinds of rhetoric win" (Beasley, 2021, p.297). As Gilbert noted, comic frames of judgement are needed in times of public and community krisis, particularly as they relate to questions regarding which course of action or trajectory that an argument community should pursue (2014, p.275).

Changes in Competition

In line with the comic frame of interpretation, we would be remiss if we did not close with at least a few descriptions of the types of radical new worlds of policy debate that could center disability justice and simultaneously destabilize the entelechy driving policy debate. While the most obvious solution, and the one which extends directly from the line of logic laid

out in the article, is to simply remove the wins and losses from the activity, the authors believe that suggestion falls prey to the same critique of entelechialism that we have laid out herein. Totally removing the competitive aspect of the policy debate game would potentially undercut the reason many are attracted to the debate endeavor in the first place, and would risk further closing off the activity at a moment when it can ill afford such a thing. At the same time, a conscious tempering of the drive for competitive success, coupled with a shift toward a model of policy debate which focuses more on the fostering of publicly accessible communication and delivery styles, is not necessarily incommensurate with a drive to increase the number of people and programs who do what we do. Toward this end, Foote (2022) suggested that a shift toward a metric of program evaluation in which civic engagement, and debate as a vehicle for social change, was foregrounded as an alternative to the base accumulation of wins and trophies, might aid in increasing participation and by extension, accessibility. Indeed, within this framework, both neuro-typical and intellectually disabled debaters could find success by harnessing and developing their innate power as advocates.

The authors also suggest other incremental steps which could chip away at the foundations of entelechy that undergird the activity, even if it does not obliterate the last vestiges of it altogether. In line with the earlier suggestion about changes in judging, it is worth considering a tournament or competition in which the only evaluation was based on speaker points. This might induce competitors to change their speaking style (albeit temporarily), if there was some aforementioned notification or agreement that the expectation was for a more oratorical style of presentation. Debaters would be striving for the rank of one, two, three, or four during the debate, and looking to maximize their speaker points rather than on the goal of winning, per se. There is no ballot at the end, only a ranking of one's speeches in comparison to the opponents, and an assignation of numerical speaker points. We would like to believe that debaters would genuinely participate in good faith, but admittedly there is a lack of research to support this claim, and it represents a radical departure from the normalized speech codes which we have detailed here. Would this idea rupture extreme entelechialism and alter the speech code in intercollegiate policy debate? Probably not, but if this idea was expanded and adopted for one round at every tournament, for example, it might begin to gradually diminish the powerful grasp that spreading has on the policy debate community, thus increasing access and improving the experience for debaters with disabilities.

Another "radical" example that we suggest is the creation or expansion of policy debate leagues at the high school and college level which are designed to specifically serve the needs of disabled students. In this world, we could at least start to tell new stories about who the policy debate community is, and what we aspire to be. One example which helps to illustrate this point is the debate program at Gallaudet University, a college dedicated to serving students from the deaf and signing community. Their website describes the program as "dedicated to fostering disagreement, debate, and civic engagement in ASL and English" (https://gallaudet.edu/center-democracy-deaf-america/debate-team/). Gallaudet does not participate in NDT-CEDA style debate, and thus they are not bound by the same gatekeeping speech codes and entry barriers

which govern that particular format. Rather, their program is focused on fomenting public speaking skills while also retaining a competitive component to incentivize participation. While the format may be different, Gallaudet's debaters most certainly engage in policy debate, most recently on the topic of whether deaf people should be allowed to serve in the military. In this public debate, which took place in April of 2023 and was adjudicated by a three-person panel composed of a columnist from the Washington Post, a retired colonel from the U.S. Army, and a local attorney (rather than by debate experts or argumentation scholars) deaf debaters from Gallaudet were paired with hearing (non-deaf) debaters from the U.S. Naval Academy. While the authors concede that we do not know which side won the debate, that point is immaterial. A public policy debate occurred in which half of the competitors were disabled, yet were able to meaningfully participate because of changes in the style of delivery, changes in who judged the debate, and changes in the reasoning for why the debate happened in the first place (for the education of both the students and the audience, rather than to defeat an opponent and put another win in the "W" column). While the differences between the public style of policy debate engaged in by disabled debaters at Gallaudet and the current practices that characterize most policy debate at the college level are vast, those differences themselves point to a broader conclusion that is informed by Burke's comic frame. As Tom Jesse argued, embracing a comic frame in which people admit their own tendencies toward being wrong, can compel humans to open themselves to difference, and to interrogate "other positions in the world, even positions which would typically reside outside the border of our frame of acceptance" (2013, para.15). A perspective based on human tendencies to engage in mistake rather than in malice helps to resolve the dilemma of what ought be done about the continued perpetration and practice of ableism in policy debate.

Conclusion

This essay lays out a critique of the way that ableist norms and tendencies in policy debate emerge out of debate's entelechial drives. We developed a theoretical foundation for understanding how ableism is perpetuated in debate in both conscious and unconscious ways by situating Burkean theories of entelechy alongside critiques of structural ableism developed in disability studies. This framework draws attention to the way that norms of expected bodily performance come to be defined around the pursuit of perfection, positing the extreme as the norm and judging that which falls short of these extremes as lacking. We documented myriad ways that entelechial norms of competition, speed, and argumentative ability manifest in debate practices and speech codes that are exclusionary toward debaters with intellectual disabilities. However, we view these norms not as inevitable, but as subject to challenge and alternative ways of imagining and conceptualizing debate. By turning to the comic frame in Burkean writing, we explore new ways of inhabiting debate that might subvert debate's entelechial drives toward more inclusive ends.

The goal of this paper is not to call for a wholesale rejection of policy debate, competition, or even the use of speed and spreading in policy debate. Nor do we articulate this

argument from a position of purity, imagining ourselves as outside of these norms and ideologies. Instead, we offer this critique as a self-reflexive examination of the way that our own debating and coaching experiences are inflected by communal drives and desires that produce hostilities and exclusions towards disabled people that have gone unchallenged for far too long. We hope that calling into question the way that debate's drive towards competitive excellence reifies norms and practices that generalize bodily expectations against which disabled people are judged as lacking may help create new spaces to rethink what inclusion of different identities may look like in debate.

The academic, civic, and social benefits associated with competitive debate in general, and with policy debate in particular, should be available and accessible to all. While the authors believe this essay provides some potential starting points and enriches the ongoing conversation about ableism in debate, we recognize that future research is needed to more deeply interrogate all of the questions and problems raised herein. Toward that end, additional studies which centered on ways the dominant gaming metaphor of policy debate could be destabilized or amended would be welcome. Similarly, future scholarship which explored the ways in which disability could be "weaponized" in debate, as an in-round tactic, would be useful. For example, research which examined the prevalence and success of debate teams who make accommodations part of their strategy (such as asking opponents to slow down, or asking judges for additional prep time) would be insightful. Finally, more inquiry into disability-specific debate leagues or contests (along the lines of the Gallaudet project), would provide a useful blueprint for the pursuit of tangible, pragmatic changes in debate competition.

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Power Grid Politics: Winter Storm Uri and Texas Governor Greg Abbott's Image Repair Discourse

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Power Grid Politics: Winter Storm Uri and Texas Governor Greg Abbott's Image Repair Discourse

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Abstract

Winter storm Uri hit the state of Texas on February 14, 2021. Bringing record amounts of snow, ice, and prolonged sub-zero temperatures, the storm caused widespread power outages which led to hundreds of deaths, and created a complex rhetorical situation for Governor Greg Abbott. This article examines the image repair discourse engaged in by Abbott, and ultimately concludes that his use of blame-shifting, corrective action, and defeasibility strategies were ultimately effective, but to varying degrees based on each respective strategy. We argue herein that Abbott's strategy of shifting the blame for the debacle to ERCOT was his most effective tactic, while his reliance on corrective action approaches (while necessary and expected by the audience) were only marginally persuasive. Abbott's defeasibility strategy was undercut both by conflicting statements, and by the recent reality that Texas does, in fact, experience extreme weather events however rare. We also argue that severe weather events are likely to become more frequent in the future, and that Texas in particular will be uniquely impacted by these storms due to climate change. We conclude that the political fortunes of elected officials will increasingly depend on how they justify their response to these cataclysmic storms.

Key Terms: apologia, image repair, weather rhetoric, political communication

On the evening of February 14th, 2021, Valentine's Day, winter storm 'Uri' blanketed the entire state of Texas in heavy snow, ice, and sub-zero temperatures that lasted for nearly a week. The storm resulted in widespread power outages and electrical grid failures statewide, as "two out of three" Texans lost power, and another 49% of the public lost access to running water for more than two days (Stipes, 2021, para. 1). The death, damage, and destruction caused by this storm reached historic and unprecedented proportions. The toll in human lives that the storm exacted was high, as 246 people died outright as a result of hypothermia (freezing to death), carbon monoxide poisoning (from the use of coal-fired heaters or generators in a poorly ventilated space), fire caused by electric space heaters, or in automobile accidents caused by the treacherous road conditions (Svitek, 2022a). Revised accounts indicate that the storm was responsible for upwards of 700 deaths (Grinesky, Collins, & Chakraborty, 2022, para. 1). What made the impact of Uri so acute is that most Texans had never been exposed to the type of prolonged sub-freezing temperatures that accompanied the storm, and thus millions of people were caught largely unprepared (Machemer, 2021).

Unfortunately, in the contemporary era of warming global climates, Texas will likely see an increase in extreme winter storms like Uri; rather than being a 'once-in-a-lifetime' event, these storms will occur more often, and are likely to be more severe than in the past (Kollier, 2020). Indeed, the power outages in Texas caused by Uri were due to "climate change stressing systems that aren't built for extreme weather events" (House, Stone, & Ge, 2022, para. 2). Others argue that "emerging science suggests that global warming could play a role in arctic changes that cause southerly cold snaps like the one that devastated Texas in February 2021" (Mendez & Douglas, 2022, para. 12). Climate change not only brings with it stifling heat and arid conditions, but also increasingly unpredictable and intense ice and snow events to geographic locations and populations unaccustomed to such weather, such as those in Texas (Irfan, 2021). These dangerous new meteorological trends will naturally create the need for the political leadership in the state of Texas (and across the country) to address the public, and the authors argue that increasingly, that type of rhetoric will take on the dimensions of political apologia and/or image repair discourse (particularly in cases where a storm and its aftermath have been mishandled by politicians). It is also important to note here that apologia speeches often do not contain an actual apology or acceptance of culpability (mortification), and that rather, they often entail defending one's actions or policies rather than saying "sorry" in the traditional sense (Ryan, 1982, p.255).

The deadly winter storm that engulfed the state of Texas in February of 2021 had an immediate impact on Texas politics. The failures of the power grid and the handling of the crisis by Texas Governor Greg Abbott and by ERCOT (the Electric Reliability Council of Texas, an administrative body appointed by the Governor) were widely discussed by "many state lawmakers" (Ferman, 2021, para. 1), and indeed "there was national embarrassment-Texas was a laughingstock around the country" (Theophil, 2021, para. 5). One author argued that "despite the misery, death, economic disruption, and embarrassment that Texas suffered, little has changed" and that Texas "remains susceptible to the threat that another winter storm could inflict blackouts as bad as -or worse than- last year's catastrophe" (Gold, 2022, para. 8). Underscoring the political impact of the storm, another commentator suggested that the "weather crisis may act as the catalyst for voters to realize the old ways might no longer be the best" (Diaz, 2021, para. 1). Specifically, this essay argues that changes in the weather of Texas, brought on by or intensified by climate change, have taken center-stage as one of the hot-button issues that will likely dominate political discourse in the state in the coming years. The authors conclude that these new political weather rhetorics are 'seasonal' and that the types of political arguments being deployed and engaged in by Texas politicians, are increasingly likely to be dictated by the weather crisis of the moment, and how each political actor justifies their handling of that crisis.

The discursive milieu surrounding winter storm 'Uri' and the subsequent power grid failures of 2021, yields one particular example that helps to illuminate this trend. Abbott was roundly criticized by voters, the media, and other national political actors for his perceived mishandling of the storm and its aftermath, and the reliability of the Texas power-grid continued to be a critical issue for voters even as the memory of the storm faded. The authors argue herein that Governor Abbott's strategies of blame-shifting, defeasibility, and corrective action are best

illustrated, explained, and framed by the scholarly literature on political apologia and image repair, which is briefly reviewed below. Again, the authors argue that this example helps to demonstrate that the future cycles of political rhetoric in the state of Texas may literally hinge on the increasingly volatile weather, and how political actors respond to the aftermath of those events. While we isolate our arguments here to the rhetoric surrounding winter storm Uri, this is not the first time Abbott's handling of a weather crisis had become an issue on the gubernatorial campaign trail. In 2018, Lupe Valdez, the Democratic nominee for governor, "criticized Abbott for not calling a special session after Hurricane Harvey last year to tap the state's savings account, known as the Rainy Day Fund" (Svitek, 2018, para. 3). This fact helps to underscore and confirm the political trend examined in the present article. Before exploring Governor Abbott's discourse more thoroughly, it is necessary to briefly review the scholarly literature in the sub-fields of political apologia and weather rhetoric, to provide a frame of reference for this project, and to situate this essay in the current academic conversation.

Contextualizing Weather Apologia

The scholarly and critical vocabularies that inform and guide this study are found in two subfields of rhetoric: political apologia and/or image repair discourse, and weather rhetoric. This section of the article will briefly sketch out the parameters of those genres of scholarship, foregrounding the theoretical takeaways that help to undergird our arguments. Concurrently, the authors intend for this article to enrich and deepen our scholarly understandings of those two sub-fields as well, by extending their contours to new and previously unexplored contexts.

Political apologia and image repair discourse has been frequently and thoroughly theorized in the field of communication (Ware & Linkugel, 1973; Benoit, 1997; Benoit & Henson, 2009). Research in this area has provided a useful critical tool for scholars who seek to highlight and analyze the persuasive image repair messaging that emanates from political leaders, CEOs, celebrities, and other public figures who find themselves compelled to defend their character or policy (in)actions in the face of a crisis. While a full review of this area of scholarship is beyond the scope of this project, a brief snapshot of the relevant parts of this literature base is necessary to help provide a critical methodology that will inform this essay. The generic typology of apologia and image repair discourse rests on the assumption that public figures will continue to find themselves in situations which warrant explanation to various audiences, be they customers, stockholders, fans, or in this case, registered voters in the state of Texas. Toward that end, scholars have developed and shaped categories which elucidate the various strategies and discursive stances that are available to political actors who must engage in image repair discourse (Ryan, 1982).

Generically speaking, those categorically and operationally defined strategies and postures of verbal self-defense include: denial, blame-shifting, provocation, defeasibility, accident, good intentions, bolstering, minimization, differentiation, transcendence, attacking the accuser, corrective action, compensation, and mortification (Ware & Linkugel, 1973, p.275; Benoit, 1997, p.179). Speakers who employ the denial strategy seek to deny involvement,

participation, complicity, or responsibility in wrongdoing or malfeasance. Denial strategies also include blame-shifting, in which the speaker attempts to evade responsibility for perceived wrongdoing by blaming other actors or alternate causes for the offending act. This approach rests on the assumption that "if another person (or group or organization) actually committed the offensive act, the accused should not be held responsible for that act" (Benoit, 2017b, p.245). It is important to note here that blame-shifting, as an instrumental strategy, can only be deemed successful if the speaker who shifted the blame is, in fact, "exonerated" in the perception of the audience (Sellnow, Ulmer & Snider, 1998, p.69).

Closely related to the strategy of blame-shifting is Kenneth Burke's concept of scapegoating, and the authors will briefly sketch out its dimensions here in order to help untangle Abbott's rhetoric later in the article. For Burke (1973), the rhetorical construction of a scapegoat meant discursively casting an actor or agent as blameworthy due to inherent evilness or possessing undesirable, bad qualities. The scapegoat functions as a "representative" of those bad qualities, and thus can be "sacrificed" in order for the rhetor to purge guilt (Burke, 1973, p.39). Kent and Boatwright (2018) further explain that "scapegoating involves intentionally taking advantage of others, 'sacrificing' the careers and livelihoods of others for *the good of an individual, or organization" (p.515). This theoretical position helps to explain Abbott's rhetorical moves in the wake of Winter Storm Uri.*

Speakers who adopt the provocation approach tend to argue that the offending act was a righteous response to a legitimate provocation by another actor, such as when a corporation justifies a move to a different state to avoid new, restrictive regulations. The defeasibility strategy typically entails the speaker arguing that they lacked enough information or control to make an acceptable decision, or that their lack of information contributed to the offending act in question (Benoit, 2006, p.292). Another discursive posture is simply to argue that the situation was an accident, and that the offending act was truly unforeseeable and unexpected. A sub-variant of the accident strategy is the good intentions approach, in which the speaker argues that they "meant well", but intervening actors or events derailed the original intent of the act in question (Furgerson & Benoit, 2013, p.276). Bolstering strategies rely on the speaker's ability to "bolster his or her own image by highlighting positive qualities or actions in order to strengthen the audience's positive feelings" (Benoit, 2019, p.4), or to discursively link their called-into-question ethos with the actions or personae of other acts or actors who are viewed in a positive light by a particular audience. The minimization strategy is simply when the speaker attempts to downplay or downgrade the meaning or impact of the situation at hand. Any attempt by the rhetor to lessen or diminish the importance of the offending act would fall into this category. Speakers who deploy the differentiation strategy attempt to compare the extant crisis or offending act to other, less offensive acts as a way of minimizing the impact. Transcendence is a rhetorical device employed by the speaker that allows the audience to 'move past' the offending act, and often the rhetor claims to have 'learned from all of this' or promises to be a 'better person' following the offensive act. In some situations, speakers attempt to 'turn the tables' by attacking the accuser. This approach can take many forms, but "attacks can be primarily directed

toward character and/or policy" (Benoit, 2017a, p.2), or toward the motivations or intent of an actor/agent who has levied allegations against the speaker.

Those rhetors who engage in or pledge future corrective action for perceived wrongdoing, are implicitly admitting responsibility for the offending act, but are also attempting to regain public trust by promising to fix the problem. Corrective action can take many forms, and the use of this strategy is obviously constrained by the particular exigencies of the situation in question. One sub-strategy related to corrective action is the compensation approach, which simply entails the speaker paying for the damages caused by the offending act. Finally, speakers who accept full responsibility for the offending act, and who directly apologize for the wrongdoing, are said to be exercising the mortification strategy. Benoit and Brinson (1994) argued that a "textbook" definition of the mortification strategy is one in which "the apologist accepts responsibility, acknowledges the suffering of the victims without attempting to diminish the undesirable consequences they suffered, and directly apologizes for the offensive act" (p.82). The authors argue herein that the unique sub-genre of political weather apologia will likely continue to be characterized by, informed by, and measured against the current parameters and strategies that comprise apologia and image repair as a genre of rhetoric.

While the rhetorical dimensions of weather are just beginning to be studied and theorized in the discipline of communication, scholars recognized decades ago that weather, and the communication surrounding it, had lost its "innocence", and had become politicized as "human action enters more and more as a factor in the earth's atmosphere" (Rosen, 1989, p.32). Rees (2021) argued that "the weather is anything but neutral", implying that politics and ideology have seeped into common public understandings of weather-related events and how to make sense of them (p.25). These germinal research projects contemplate rhetorics associated with weather at a number of different intersections. As Majdik, Platt, and Meister (2011) argue, weather, at its symbolic base, is a rhetorical phenomenon: "as a contingent element of an uncertain future, we watch it, forecast it, judge it, prepare for it, pray for it, and dodge it" (p.74). Some studies have focused on meteorology, and the ways in which cultural performativity, deeply ingrained tropes, visual imagery and spectacle, and dogma creep into weather reports, making them less about the sharing of information, and more about "weathertainment" (Meister, 2001, p.425). Other approaches to weather discourse have more pragmatic implications, such as research which examines tornado warning efficacy (Perreault, Houston, and Wilkins, 2014; Liu, et al, 2020), or studies that analyze the persuasiveness of tsunami early-warning messaging (Oldring, Milekhina & Brand, 2020). Still other research projects have examined weather rhetoric from an image repair perspective. Compton (2018) lamented the recurring plight of the erroneous weather forecaster, who is situationally compelled to engage in rhetoric to control "the damage to credibility caused by a botched forecast of a storm" (p.779).

The essay which most closely resembles and informs the present study is the article by Benoit & Henson (2009), which examined President Bush's image repair discourse following his mishandling of Hurricane Katrina. Here, the authors argue that Bush's use of bolstering,

defeasibility, and corrective action strategies failed to rehabilitate Bush's credibility on this issue, and that defeasibility, in particular, was a poor strategic choice given that it implied an unprepared, overwhelmed, and ineffective government response to what should have been a predictable crisis (Benoit & Henson, 2009, p.43). That all said, surprisingly few studies have specifically analyzed how politicians respond when they are held publicly culpable for mishandling the effects of severe weather. Even fewer studies have focused on how state-level politicians are compelled to respond to their constituents, and to their political opponents, following catastrophic weather events. The authors hope to forward this essay as a corrective to that gap in the literature. The current project is situated in, and informed by, this emerging rhetorical sub-genre because it grapples with the unpredictable nature of weather, and the always-fallible human response to such crises by elected political leaders.

Equipped with this understanding of how both political apologia and weather rhetoric are operationalized, and with a typology of the strategies and postures available to rhetors in mind, we can critically analyze and evaluate the rhetoric of Governor Greg Abbott, who found himself in hot water with voters following the deep freeze of February 2021. In terms of our critical methodological approach, the authors engaged in a close-textual analysis of Abbott's public discourse in the immediate aftermath of the storm, a period which the authors define here as February 16th, 2021 (Abbott's first public statement about the storm) through February 24th, 2021, by which time the power outages had largely subsided and the immediate danger posed by the storm had passed (Lee, Maron & Mostafavi, 2022). While Abbott continued to make statements about the storm, and while this was an issue with persistent relevance for the public, the authors feel that this timeframe adequately captures the contours and parameters of Abbott's response to the storm. Specifically, we examined his rhetoric on Twitter, his public statements and speeches, and his press conferences which focused on the state response to the power outages. The authors coded these texts to see which image repair strategies emerged as the most prevalent and representative in his discourse. For the sake of organization, the next three sections will address each of Abbott's primary strategies separately, but it is worth noting that these three particular strategies were often used together, in conjunction with one another, and sometimes even in the same public statement.

Blame-shifting

As winter storm Uri unfolded in mid-February 2021, people in the state of Texas found themselves in a deadly and dangerous situation, facing widespread power outages as the electric grid sputtered and eventually collapsed, leaving millions of people in the dark and cold. Naturally, people wanted answers, and as the Governor of Texas, Greg Abbott found himself in a precarious political position. Julian Castro, the Democratic mayor of San Antonio (the seventh-largest city in the United States), attacked Abbott on Twitter, arguing that he "failed to prepare for this storm, was too slow to respond, and now blames everyone but himself for this mess" (Manchester & Miller, 2021, para. 3). Castro and other "Democrats say that Abbot ultimately holds responsibility for not acting earlier to prepare the state for a major weather emergency"

(Manchester & Miller, 2021, para.23). Even conservative leaders in Texas targeted Abbott for blame, as JoAnn Fleming, the Executive Director of Grassroots America, argued that "Texans are angry and they have every right to be…failed power, water and communications surely took some lives" (Caputo, 2021, para.3). Thus, Abbott found himself at the center of a blizzard of criticism from the public and from other politicians from both sides of the aisle.

In the hours and days following the storm, and as the magnitude of the crisis became as clear as the ice that coated Texas roads, Abbott's damage control apparatus shifted into high gear. Governor Abbott took to Twitter, delivered public speeches, held press conferences, and agreed to several on-air interviews in order to both disseminate vital information, and to begin to control the parameters of the narrative surrounding his response to the storm. Having thoroughly examined and coded this set of texts, the authors argue that three primary image repair strategies emerged from Abbott's discourse: blame-shifting, corrective action, and defeasibility. This section of the essay analyzes Abbott's use of blame-shifting and argues that his two-pronged, targeted attacks on the ERCOT board and on the viability (or lack thereof) of renewable energy, offer an illustrative example into the form and function of that strategy, and also demonstrates how effective that approach can be particularly early in a crisis situation.

The first target of Abbott's blame-shifting strategy was the collective ERCOT board, and also specific members of that appointed body. In a tweet on February 16th, 2021, Abbott deployed the blame-shifting strategy, by attacking the members of ERCOT (Electric Reliability Commission of Texas) directly, who were appointed to that board and charged with regulating and ensuring the dependable delivery of electric power to residents of Texas. In that tweet, Abbott argued:

The Electric Reliability Commission of Texas has been anything but reliable over the past 24 Hours. Far too many Texans are without power and heat for their homes as our state faces freezing temperatures and severe winter weather. This is unacceptable. Reviewing the preparations and decision by ERCOT is an emergency item so we can get a full picture of what caused this problem and find long-term solutions. I thank my partners in the House and Senate for acting quickly on this challenge, and I will work with them to enhance Texas' electric grid and ensure that our state never experiences power outages like this again (Abbott, 2021a).

This particular tweet, issued less than 48-hours after the onset of the severe weather, tipped Abbott's hand in terms of the overall strategic approach that he would employ. Herein, he began the process of shifting the blame to ERCOT, but also conflated and employed the other two main strategies that would exemplify his image repair. This tweet also clearly displayed his use of the defeasibility strategy, when he argued that investigation was necessary to get a "full picture" of the causes of the grid failure, implying that he lacked information or insight into how ERCOT had prepared for the possibility of a catastrophic winter storm. Also at play in this tweet is the corrective action strategy, in which Abbott promised an expeditious investigation into the root causes of the crisis, which again was laid at the feet of the ERCOT board.

While blaming the ERCOT board collectively for their failure to adequately prepare and manage the grid for extreme weather, Abbott also shifted the blame to specific members of the board, particularly those who did not actually live in Texas. On February 23rd, 2021, a little over a week after the storm hit, and with snow, ice, and power outages remaining in some parts of the state, four members of the ERCOT board resigned from their positions. All four of those board members were not native Texans, and lived out-of-state. In their letter of resignation, they made mention of "concerns about out-of-state board leadership at ERCOT" and that they were abandoning their positions "to allow state leaders a free hand with future direction and to eliminate distractions" (Kingery, 2021, para. 4-5). Governor Abbott publicly welcomed the resignations and continued to fault ERCOT for its actions and inactions in the face of the storm. His specific emphasis on the word "Texans" in his statement functioned to hammer home the "outsider status" of the board members:

"When Texans were in desperate need of electricity, ERCOT failed to do its job and Texans were left shivering in their homes without power. ERCOT leadership made assurances that Texas' power infrastructure was prepared for the winter storm, but those assurances proved to be devastatingly false. The lack of preparedness and transparency at ERCOT is unacceptable, and I welcome these resignations." (Abbott, 2021e, para. 2)

On February 16th, 2021, the same day that Governor Abbott released the initial tweet blaming ERCOT, he also sat down for an on-air interview with Sean Hannity, of the FOX News network. In this interview, Abbott doubled-down on the blame-shifting strategy, but with a different target altogether. When asked by Hannity if wind turbines and other renewable energy sources were reliable, Abbott retorted:

> This shows how the Green New Deal would be a deadly deal for the United States of America. Texas is blessed with multiple sources of energy, such as natural gas and oil and nuclear, but you saw from what [inaudible] said, and that is our wind and our solar, they got shut down and they were collectively more than 10% of our power grid, and that thrust Texas into a situation where it was lacking power in a statewide basis, that was power that was spread out by that ERCOT organization that you were talking about. (2021b, para.3).

Here, Abbott attempted to shift the blame toward congressional Democrats in Washington who had been pushing the so-called "Green New Deal," which relies heavily on renewable sources of energy such as wind, solar, and geothermal power. He also blamed renewable energy sources like wind and solar power for being unreliable in extreme temperatures. In truth, Abbott's "focus on windmills ignores the evident fact that every kind of power generation fell short in this storm" (Domonoske, 2021, para. 6), and that "shutdowns at natural gas and thermal plants during a surge in demand were also a contributing factor (or a larger contributing factor?) to the outages" (Chute, 2021, para. 5).

In a televised statewide address on February 24th, 2021, Abbott continued to rhetorically batter the ERCOT board and its members. Abbott argued that in the days leading up to the storm,

which was accurately predicted by weather forecasters up to a week in advance (Spivey, 2021, para. 9), "ERCOT repeatedly assured the state and the public that ERCOT was prepared. Those assurances turned out to be false" (Abbott, 2021e, para. 5). Abbott also sought to shift the blame for the perceived slow state response to the crisis on ERCOT as well, when he proclaimed that "ERCOT operators should have acted quicker to stabilize the grid and to prevent power generators from being knocked offline" (2021e, para. 6). Governor Abbott further entrenched the blame-shifting strategy by again linking himself to outraged Texans who had been "victimized" by ERCOT, and simultaneously sounded a call to corrective action when he remarked that "our task now is to take the lessons of the past week and the anger that we all feel and channel them into immediate action" (2021e, para. 7).

Corrective Action

On February 17th, 2021, Abbott held a press conference to update Texas residents on efforts to restore power, and to outline the corrective actions that were already underway. In this press conference, after delivering a brief update on the storm itself (which by that time was subsiding and beginning to exit the state), Abbott led with the news that "6,000 megawatts have been added to the Texas grid", and that "1.2 million households" would have resumed electric power in the near term (Abbott, 2021c, para. 3). He also used this opportunity to continue shifting the blame toward over-reliance on renewables, by arguing that "17,200 megawatts of renewable generated power remain out either because of freezing of the wind or because of lack of sun for the solar" (Abbott, 2021c, para. 4). On February 19th, Abbott returned to Twitter, and posted a short, simple tweet that outlined the corrective actions being taken by his office to rectify the myriad problems that resulted from the storm: "The State is working around the clock to address four immediate winter weather priorities: 1.Restore Power 2.Support local officials to restore water 3.Ensure access to food & resources 4.Get refineries back online" (Abbott, 2021d, para. 1).

On February 24th, 2021, ten days after Winter Storm Uri struck, Governor Abbott held a "rare statewide televised address" designed to "reassure Texans that the state was moving aggressively" to deal with the aftermath of the crisis (Svitek, 2021, para. 1). The first words of the speech hinted at the use of a mortification strategy (which never fully materialized), when Abbott remarked: "Tragic does not even begin to describe the devastation and suffering that you have endured over the past week" (Abbott, 2021f, para. 1). However, while he acknowledged the audience's suffering, without trying to minimize it, he did not take the next requisite step of that strategic approach and accept responsibility or blame for the crisis. In fact, he even rhetorically positioned himself as a "victim" when he argued that he understood the righteous anger of Texans, and that "I'm angry too" (2021f, para. 4). This approach further underscored his heavy reliance on the blame-shifting strategy, as he continued to distance himself from the ERCOT board and project his anger toward them. Returning to the corrective action blueprint, Governor Abbott promised constituents that "the legislative session will not end until we fix these problems, and we will ensure that the tragic events of the past week will never be repeated"

(Cobler, 2021, para. 4). The remainder of Abbott's speech was dedicated to outlining the steps being taken to alleviate the disparate impacts of the storm, including moves to combat "skyrocketing power bills", "overhaul ERCOT", and to "fund the winterization of the Texas power infrastructure" (2021e, para. 8-10).

Over the course of the next several months, Abbott continued to take corrective actions aimed at updating the Texas electrical grid. These rhetorical gestures were both symbolic and tangible actions such as Abbott's championing of the passage of "sweeping legislation to overhaul the state's power grid", which included "requiring power plants to upgrade for more extreme weather" (Douglas & Ferman, 2021, para. 1). Abbott also made rhetorical moves aimed at placing further blame on ERCOT and deepening perceptions that the ERCOT members responsible for the mishandling of Uri were "outsiders". In August of 2022 as part of an ongoing effort to fulfill his promise to overhaul the ERCOT board, Governor Abbott vetoed the nomination of Steve Berberich, a widely supported candidate to lead the organization, "because he came from California" (Ferman, 2022, para. 6).

Defeasibility

While the defeasibility strategy played a minor role in Abbott's image repair rhetoric, it is worthy of analysis both in terms of a thorough and accurate review of what the Governor said in defense of himself, but also on its own merits. Having already claimed in his initial tweet on February 16th, 2021 that he lacked full insight into ERCOT's planning and preparedness for the winter storm, in his follow-up interview with Sean Hannity, Abbott explicitly tried to rhetorically create distance between himself and "that ERCOT organization that you were talking about". This statement makes it seem like ERCOT was something he didn't know much about; as if the first time he had heard of ERCOT was on the Hannity show, and that he didn't have oversight or control over this particular group. This discursive approach is best classified as defeasibility, but also entails an element of differentiation, in that Abbott is trying to create separation between his office and an obscure bureaucratic organization that was ostensibly previously unknown to him. Later in the same interview, Abbott again relied on the defeasibility approach, by arguing that winter storm Uri, and its accompanying prolonged sub-zero temperatures were truly "unprecedented" and thus not predictable (Abbott, 2021b, para. 11). Despite the fact that "Texas experienced a similar energy crisis ten years ago" and that warnings were issued that "energy producers needed to insulate and winterize their systems for extreme cold", Abbott and his administration were seemingly waylaid by Winter Storm Uri (Norton, 2021, para. 3). Having highlighted the primary image repair strategies used by Governor Abbott in response to winter storm Uri, the next section of the essay will discuss their efficacy.

Critical Analysis Of Abbott's Image Repair Strategies

Given his position as the Governor of Texas, and operating from the assumption that Abbott needed to engage in exactly the kind of "face-saving" discourse called forth by the situation, the authors argue that the effectiveness and appropriateness of his image repair strategies was ultimately effective, particularly in terms of shifting the blame to ERCOT. As

noted earlier, the use of blame-shifting as a rhetorical tactic can only be deemed effective if the intended audience actually perceives that the speaker was not at fault, and that the target of the blame shift is actually the culpable party. In this case, the authors argue that three lines of argument seem to support the conclusion that Abbott was "exonerated" in the minds of Texas voters. First, even though the fact of the matter is that "ERCOT is overseen by the Texas Public Utility Commission, whose three commissioners are appointed by the governor", and that Abbott is "the elected official most directly accountable for their performance" (Hooks, 2021, para. 18), the Governor was able to evince that he did not control the levers of power in that particular organization. In a survey of Texas residents a month after Winter Storm Uri, "58 percent of respondents blamed ERCOT for the situation that created rolling outages throughout the storm" (Murray, 2021, para. 2). Drollinger (2022) noted that following Uri "many blamed ERCOT's board of directors, but some pointed to state lawmakers" (para. 7). In either case, blame was not placed on Abbott, which was the goal and purpose of his blame-shifting rhetoric.

Second, the attempt to shift the blame to ERCOT occurred very early in the crisis, indeed as it was still ongoing. In other cases, this would create "bad optics" for the Governor, but in this situation the public's outrage was palpable, and Hooks (2021) noted that "the effort to direct the public fury began long before the snow melted" (para. 12). ERCOT proved to be a convenient (and archetypal) scapegoat for the debacle, and the authors argue that Abbott's ability to portray the board members as "outsiders" who didn't care about Texans was an effective move with constituents who are historically xenophobic and mistrustful of "others" (Ramsey, 2016). Here, Abbott was able to transfer blame for the devastation caused by Uri to the ERCOT board members, sacrificing their careers and livelihoods (at least for those four members who immediately resigned their positions in the wake of the crisis), and absolving himself of guilt and responsibility. In addition, because of the early nature of the blame-shift, indeed while the crisis was still in full swing, Abbott benefitted from a political misstep by one of his Republican colleagues, Senator Ted Cruz. Cruz took an ill-advised family trip to Cancun in the middle of winter storm Uri, "lied about it, and was shamed into returning" (Hooks, 2021, para. 25). "While that story sucked up oxygen, the lights came back on for most Texans" (Hooks, 2021, para. 25). Cruz's untimely jaunt to Cancun provided the public and media a convenient scapegoat other than Abbott, and further deflected criticism away from the governor. Indeed, Editor-at-large Chris Cillizza of CNN publicly questioned, "did Cruz's bad publicity make us miss the real story of the grid failure-Abbott's own failures amid crisis?" (2021, para. 3).

Third, while this article does not necessarily attempt to explain the intricacies of Texas gubernatorial politics, and the "why and how" of Abbott's electoral victory in November of 2022, it is nonetheless significant that he won in a landslide over an opponent who "made the grid's problems a big part of his campaign and has criticized Abbott over his handling of the grid during and after last year's tragedy" (Ferman, 2022, para. 17). The authors argue that political exoneration for past misdeeds is often best reflected by wins or losses in elections, and in this case, Abbott's handling (or mishandling) of Uri did not ultimately cost him the gubernatorial election of November 2022. Rather, Abbott triumphed handily over Beto O'Rourke, who made

the issue an early centerpiece of his campaign against the incumbent governor (O'Rourke would later make gun control the primary issue in his campaign, a move which was spurred by the school shootings in Uvalde, Texas on May 24th, 2022). Given that shifting the blame for Uri's aftermath to the ERCOT board was Abbott's primary rhetorical strategy, the reader can draw at least circumstantial conclusions that this approach was effective with Texas voters.

The second level of Abbott's blame-shifting strategy was to castigate unreliable renewable sources of energy as part of the problem, but his own statements in the media seemed to undercut the effectiveness of this approach. In comments to a local Dallas news station shortly before he appeared on the Hannity show on February 16th, 2021, Abbott "told the truth" when he pointed out problems with the reliability of the natural gas supply during the storm, saying "it's just frozen right now…frozen in the pipeline…it's frozen at the rig…it's frozen at the transmission line" (Hooks, 2021, para. 15). While there were also problems with power generation from renewable sources such as wind (frozen turbines) and solar (no sun during and after the storm), the reliance on renewables was not solely (or even mostly) responsible for the power outages. Public opinion polling confirms that Abbott's constituents were less persuaded by this line of argumentation. Studies conducted in the weeks following the storm concluded that only 6.7% of Texas residents placed blame on frozen wind turbines or other sources of renewable energy (Murray, 2021, para. 3). In an ironic twist, House Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY), who was one of the main supporters of the so-called "Green New Deal" which Governor Abbott attacked in his appearance on the Hannity show, raised millions of dollars to help victims of the winter storm in Texas (Schwartz, 2021, para. 1). While Abbott's blame-shifting to the ERCOT board resonated with Texans, the second level of that strategy (blaming frozen wind turbines for the overall power grid failure) was only marginally effective given that it lacked truth, and because Abbott himself made conflicting statements which undermined the coherence of the Governor's narrative. In other words, the blame-shifting to renewable energy strategy might have been more cogent and persuasive had Abbott also not admitted that fossil fuel-based energy sources also failed during the storm. The authors do acknowledge, however, that shifting the blame to renewable energy sources may have played into the same audience perceptions about "outsiders" and "liberal" politics that helped to make Abbott's blame-shifting strategy toward ERCOT effective with Texans. Here, Abbott's ability to symbolically summon and link the broader ongoing "culture wars" in America to local Texas politics, may have provided him some cover.

Governor Abbott's use of corrective action strategies seems both appropriate and necessary, even if their efficacy has proven to be debate-able. In a weather crisis situation such as the one created by Uri, elected officials are expected, compelled, to outline the steps being taken to avoid similar impacts in the future, even if those measures are purely symbolic. Indeed, Governor Abbott's focus on corrective actions and "keeping a cool head" in previous crises that "pinballed from hurricanes to mass shootings to worldwide pandemic" had generally served him well (Moritz 2021, para. 3), and the authors argue that this situation was no different, as least as it relates to the use of this specific image repair strategy. As Benoit and Brinson (1994) argued,

some situations, particularly those resulting in widespread catastrophe or involving mass casualties (in this case hundreds of deaths), require public officials to do more than simply apologize. Indeed, the authors argue here that the sub-genre of "weather apologia" by political leaders, particularly those "in charge" such as state governors or the President, will likely compel and require corrective actions even if there is a simultaneous attempt by the rhetor to avoid culpability through the use of blame-shifting. Even if blame-shifting to another actor is successful, the governor or President will still be expected to rectify the situation and prevent its further occurrence. Under these circumstances "apologies are not enough", and leaders must outline the steps they will take to prevent future recurrence of the problem (p.84). In this case, Abbott's suggested corrective actions were translated into legislative action over the course of several months following the crisis.

The potential pitfall in the use of these strategies lies in the interplay between corrective action strategies, and Abbott's attempts to use blame-shifting and defeasibility approaches to skirt responsibility for the crisis. If Abbott truly could not have reasonably predicted and prepared for the eventuality of a catastrophic winter storm, and he truly did not have access to the levers of power because they rested with ERCOT, then why would his public constituents believe that he possessed the authority to direct corrective actions in the aftermath of the crisis? If he truly, legitimately, had no involvement in the factors which contributed to the disaster, why wouldn't he just wash his hands of the situation, continue to blame ERCOT, and continue the status quo? The answer probably lies in the assumption among his constituents that even if he was not directly responsible for the fiasco, his ability to muster resources as the Governor meant that he was on the hook for correcting the foul-ups that caused the crisis, and for taking steps to ensure that similar disasters do not occur in the future. That being said, there seems to be general consensus that Abbott's recommendations for winterization of the grid and increased oversight and regulation of both public and private utilities are both warranted and supported by Texans by at least slim (yet statistically significant) margins (Svitek, 2022b; Texas Politics Project, 2022).

In terms of Governor Abbott's use of the defeasibility strategy, the authors argue that this approach had mixed results, and perhaps could have been handled differently given the exigencies of the situation. As mentioned earlier in the article, President Bush's use of the defeasibility strategy following the mishandling of Hurricane Katrina's aftermath was ineffectual because New Orleans had frequently been hit by strong hurricanes in the past, and because large portions of that city lie below sea-level. Bush's claims that Katrina was impossible to foresee, "unprecedented" and "extraordinary", rang hollow with an audience that simply knew better (Benoit & Henson, 2009, p.43). It is true that to some degree, a winter storm of the duration, magnitude, and intensity of winter storm Uri was out of the ordinary (to say the least) in Texas. Weather events like these, particularly in Texas, are often viewed as an "unpredictable, unavoidable act of God", and thus beyond human control (Loftis, 2021, para. 3). Thus, the unique and uncommon nature of the winter storm that hit Texas did afford Abbott some political cover, and did function to make his use of the defeasibility strategy germane in this situation, if not wholly effective. That said, one mitigating factor that undercut the efficacy of this strategy

was that in 2011, Texas faced a similar (though not as long or severe) winter storm that resulted in widespread power outages. Many "policy observers blamed the power system failure on the legislators and state agencies who they say did not properly heed the warnings of previous storms or account for more extreme weather events warned of by climate scientists" (Douglas, McGee & McCullough, 2021, para. 5). Abbott's remarks in the Hannity interview also seem to conflict with his claims about the "unprecedented" nature of the storm, as he himself reminded Hannity that "Amarillo is closer to Colorado than it is to Austin, Texas, and so there are parts of Texas where it actually does snow that much" (2021b, para. 10). Ultimately, his use of the defeasibility strategy likely risked undercutting the shifting of blame to ERCOT; if an extreme snowstorm was not foreseeable for Governor Abbott, it seems to follow that it would have also been difficult to predict for ERCOT. If his comments on the Hannity show were accurate, and it was indeed not unheard of for at least parts of Texas to receive large amounts of snow and ice, then his shifting of blame to ERCOT rings hollow, and he himself should have taken action to prevent the devastating impacts of the storm.

Given these realities, it seems probable that the choice of these image repair strategies, though not necessarily in conjunction with one another, and while not always free of contradiction, were ultimately effective in terms of absolving Abbott of responsibility and saving face with voters in Texas. Public opinion polling data seems to confirm our conclusions here, that Governor Abbott's image repair discourse was at least marginally effective. Recent polling data was favorable toward Abbott's handling of the storm, with a Dallas Morning News/UT-Tyler poll taken shortly after Uri indicating that "53% of Texans believe Abbott did very well or well in responding to the power and water outages during February's winter storm" (Roy, 2021, para. 10). Still, public opinion data seems to reflect "widespread anxiety about the return of cold weather", and a "lack of confidence in the state leadership's measures to ensure the reliability of the grid" (Henson & Blank, 2022, para. 1). This data seems to point to an additional conclusion that voter anxieties about power outages are seasonal, like the weather itself, and like the political cycle. However, while one might argue that Abbott's comfortable victory in the November 2022 gubernatorial election was due to the public's short memory, and that the feelings of anger and desperation felt by voters in the immediate aftermath of Winter Storm Ur had largely melted away by that time, one very recent study indicated that as Governor Abbott and Democratic nominee Beto O'Rourke prepared to engage in their only public debate prior to the election, "power and electricity grid issues are among the most important issues that Texas voters think state lawmakers should address" (Deiseroth, 2022, para. 3). The fact that power grid reliability was still at top-of-mind for voters nearly a year and a half after the storm seems to indicate that they had largely been persuaded by Abbott's rhetorical approach, and placed blame for the debacle on actors other than the governor himself. This data also seems to confirm that in terms of the sub-genre of "weather apologia", while certain types of potentially dangerous weather events are typically seasonal (i.e. snow and ice in the winter months, strong thunderstorms in the Spring, drought and fire in the summer months, and increased hurricane

activity in the Fall), the need for management of the rhetoric surrounding these issues will likely become a year-round political contingency.

Conclusions

There has long been a disconnect between actions which are politically expedient and effective, and actions which are deemed to be ethical and morally justifiable. Though Governor Abbott was able to effectively avoid the political fallout from Winter Storm Uri, he did so at the expense of the people who made up the ERCOT board. Inherently, blame-shifting and scapegoating entail "guilt, or at least awareness of wrongdoing" (Kent & Boatwright, 2018, p.516). It is worth noting here that in the opinion of the authors, and from a human-centered standpoint, Governor Abbott could/should have engaged in mortification strategies, and accepted responsibility for his administration's role in the crisis. Following that, he could/should have directly apologized to his constituents, and especially to the families of the victims who perished during Uri. As mentioned earlier, Abbott acknowledged the suffering that Texas residents endured during and after the storm, but stopped well short of assuming any liability for the bungled response. At the most foundational level, winter storm Uri happened during Abbott's time as Governor, and as the chief executive of the state of Texas, he bears at least some culpability even if Texans perceived the majority of the fault to lay with ERCOT. As President Reagan famously remarked in his apologia address on the Iran-Contra affair, "this happened on my watch", and a similar statement from Abbott would have been appreciated in this situation, even if it was not politically expedient given his other discursive choices (Lee & Spano, 1996, p.122). That said, any acceptance of responsibility by the Governor would have been at odds with the blame-shifting strategy, which was the centerpiece (and most effective instrument) of his image repair discourse.

There is an old saying that goes as follows: "if you don't like the weather in Texas, just wait five minutes and it will change." Increasingly, these changes in Texas weather patterns have become both a source of ongoing, year-round voter trepidation about the reliability of the Texas power-grid, and also a seasonal political issue (based on the particular weather crisis of that particular season) that demands discursive attention from elected leaders, or from those seeking to hold office. Indeed, the dependable delivery of electric power to the state was one of the most important issues that dominated the Texas gubernatorial election race in 2022. In fact, "most Texans see shoring up the electric grid as a bigger priority than improving security at the border with Mexico" (Hagan, 2022, para. 7). While this essay focuses primarily on Governor Abbott's image repair discourse in the immediate aftermath of winter storm Uri, the follow-on effects of the storm continued to occupy much of the incumbent Governor's time and legislative focus after the storm. Indeed, political scientist Brandon Rottinghaus argued that "when the temperature drops, the most nervous man in Texas is Governor Greg Abbott" (Hagan, 2022, para. 3).

The Democratic challenger for the governorship, Beto O' Rourke, titled his summer 2021 campaign the "Keepin' the Lights On" tour, prompting Mark Miner, Abbott's director of campaign communication, to accuse O' Rourke of "hoping" for power failures, and running his

campaign based on "fear mongering" (Aguilar, 2022, para. 7). Incumbent Governor Abbott ultimately prevailed in the 2022 gubernatorial election, and that fact seems to support our conclusions here. It also seems to indicate that O'Rourke, who shifted his rhetorical strategy to focus on gun control following the school shootings in Uvalde in May of 2022, perhaps should have continued to hone-in on an issue that was statistically more important to Texas voters, even as the storm became a distant memory: reliable electric power delivery (Deiseroth, 2022, para. 4). While it is beyond the scope of this essay to try and explain the myriad complexities associated with Texas gubernatorial politics, it is not a stretch to argue that O'Rourke's pivot away from his focus on grid reliability to the gun control issue (even though the tragic shootings in Uvalde were more recent than Winter Storm Uri) was not likely to be a successful strategy in Texas. Indeed, O'Rourke's "gun-ban ambitions once again took him straight to the concession speech podium" (Chesnut, 2022, para. 2). It seems clear that the issue of power grid reliability is a salient one with voters in Texas, and is unlikely to go away simply because winter has given way to the typically hot Texas summer. Indeed, the potentiality of rolling summer blackouts due to the excessive heat certainly still exists, and should give pause to politicians who believe that Texas will continue to be able to weather the high summer temperatures as it has in the past (Friedman, 2021). While elected leaders have always been compelled to address and reassure the public in times of crisis, the authors argue that those instances are only likely to increase in the future, as weather in Texas (and the other states in the American south) becomes progressively more volatile due to climate change (Austin & Salazar, 2017). While it is certainly true that humans cannot control the weather, the ways in which elected officials justify their response to inevitable catastrophic weather events merits continued scholarly attention.

While highlighting a specific example of weather-related image repair discourse has been the main focus of this project, the authors also hope that this study enriches and deepens disciplinary knowledge about the form and function of political apologia and image repair more broadly. Based on the example elucidated here, the authors offer a few conclusions toward that end. First, the defeasibility strategy, when deployed as a device to deflect blame, is not likely to be effective if the crisis in question was in fact, predictable. It is no longer possible or acceptable for elected leaders to claim that violent and cataclysmic storms were a "bolt from the blue" and could not have possibly been predicted or prepared for. The new reality is that those types of storms will become more frequent and more ruinous, thus removing defeasibility as an efficacious image repair approach for politicians. Second, when engaged in image repair discourse, rhetors must be wary that "individual strategies used to restore an image may interact with other strategies" (Sellnow, Ulmer & Snider, 1998, p.69). Governor Abbott's image repair discourse was complicated by his simultaneous use of blame-shifting and corrective action strategies. Abbott's message was at times incoherent (though ultimately effective), or at least internally contradictory on this front. It is perceptually inconsistent to deny involvement with the mishandling of an event, but then to simultaneously advocate for corrective action to address the problem. Politicians typically don't "do the time" if they don't "do the crime", and in this case, Abbott's advocacy of corrective action belies his involvement or lack thereof, in the fumbled

crisis response to winter storm Uri. That said, given that this event happened on his "watch", Abbott's (and future political leaders in similar situations) strategic options were paradoxically constrained by the exigencies of the situation.

Finally, in terms of future scholarship that this study might conjure, the authors offer a few examples. While this particular project centered on Governor Greg Abbott's discursive grappling with the aftermath of the winter storm, another essay might focus more deeply on the image repair discourse of Senator Cruz, who also suffered politically for his decision to leave the state of Texas in the midst of the "costliest" and one of the most deadly weather crisis in Texas history (McClelland, 2021, para. 1). Other research in this area might include studies of former President Trump's crisis response to Hurricanes Maria and Irma, which devastated Puerto Rico (a U.S. territory) in 2017, or perhaps even a project which compared Trump's rhetoric on the Puerto Rico storms with how he discussed the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey, which inundated the city of Houston later in 2017. Additionally, the authors suggest a follow-up to the current project, which would chart the trajectory of Governor Abbott's ongoing rhetorical attempts to justify his improvements (or lack thereof) to the Texas electrical power grid in the wake of his electoral victory in November of 2022. Indeed, at the time of the completion of this article in late December of 2022, Texas is once again at risk of widespread power outages due to plunging temperatures and higher-than-estimated demand for electricity. To this point, "luckily the state's grid held, but the resiliency test isn't over" (Foxhall, 2022, para. 2).

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Constitutive Rhetoric and Partisan Polarization in the 2016 Presidential Primary Debates

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Abstract

For decades political scientists and communication scholars have grappled with the connection between political primaries and rising polarization. Despite significant scholarly attention to the connection between primaries and polarization, little attention has been afforded to the rhetoric of polarization in primary campaigns. Through the lens of constitutive rhetoric, we investigate the intersection of primary campaigns and polarization from a rhetorical perspective. We analyze the rhetoric of the 2016 presidential primary debates to understand how candidates drew on traditional and innovative strategies of rhetorical polarization in constituting party identity. We find that establishment candidates depended on in-group affirmation and out-group subversion while partisan outsiders deployed entelechy and affect to constitute a unique partisan identity.

Key Terms: Presidential primary debates, polarization, affect, entelechy

Political primaries are a frequent target for those lamenting the rise of polarization in American politics. Scholars and pundits alike have questioned the role of intraparty political contests in deepening division in the public and among their elected representatives. Primaries are frequently criticized as insular contests in which only the most ideologically extreme voters participate (Troiano, 2021; Walker, 1988). Yet data suggest that primary voters are not more polarized than those who vote in general elections (Abramowitz, 2008; Sides et al., 2020). Others have blamed closed primaries for polarization, but researchers have similarly found no significant effect of open or closed contests on polarization (Hirano et al., 2010; McGhee et al., 2013). Instead, scholars have found consistent evidence that polarization is a product of campaigns and campaign messages rather than the structure of primaries or the nature of primary voters (Sood & Iyengar, 2016; Warner, et al., 2021), with at least one study finding that televised primary debates are among the campaign media increasing polarization in viewers (Warner et al., 2021).

Given the role of campaign messages generally and primary debates in particular in advancing polarization, there is a need for deeper investigation into the polarizing messages in presidential primary debates that moves beyond the assumption that candidates respond to the desires of already extreme primary voters. We argue that the 2016 presidential primary debates functioned as sites of partisan identity negotiation and consequently of polarization. We find that in addition to traditional approaches for enforcing us/them dichotomies, candidates navigated intraparty division by turning to affective or entelechial understandings of partisan identity that maintained the rhetoric of polarization despite obvious in-group differences. We begin by

reviewing the academic literature on constitutive rhetoric, the rhetoric of partisan polarization, and presidential primary debates.

Constitutive Rhetoric and Party Identity

Understandings of campaign rhetoric have long been dominated by functional perspectives, which view campaign discourse as strategic communication with the central aim of winning an election (e.g. Benoit, 1999; Denton et al., 2019). Today much of campaign scholarship focuses on elements and effects of campaign rhetoric beyond the winning or losing of elections (e.g. Stuckey, 2005; Lee, 2017). These trends reflect scholars' appreciation for the more complex socio-cultural implications of campaign discourse, especially in constructing partisan and national identity. The shifting focus of campaign rhetoric reflects a broader move from persuasion to identification (Burke, 1969a). Burke's concept of identification asks how speakers and audiences become consubstantial, with audiences embodying the rhetoric through which they are persuaded.

Drawing from Burkean identification and Althusser's concept of the ideological subject, Charland (1987) proposed a reformulation of rhetoric as constitutive of its audience. Where functional perspectives rely on understandings of rhetoric as emerging in response to an exigence and targeting pre-defined audience (Bitzer, 1968), a constitutive approach allows critics to attune to the ways in which discourse constructs, defines, and redefines shared identities. The constitutive view has particularly focused on the organizing function of rhetoric (Ihlen & Heath, 2018). Crable (1990) argues that rhetoric is inherently organizational and proposes a shift in the understanding of rhetoric from its functional, psychological, and sociological origins to a new focus on the "ontological nature of modern rhetors" (p. 118). This approach centers questions of identity and identification in rhetoric beyond speaker and audience to understand the ways that discourse constitutes organizations and organizational identity.

Charland's (1987) original articulation of constitutive rhetoric investigated a burgeoning political party as it worked to shape a new national identity of *Peuple Québécois*. Despite this initial focus on partisan discourse and the central role of ideology in constitutive rhetoric, there has been little scholarly attention devoted to the ways in which partisan identities are formed, challenged, and maintained through rhetoric (for notable exceptions see McGowan-Kirsch, 2019; R. Neville-Shepard, 2022). A constitutive view allows scholars to see campaign rhetoric, especially in primaries, as constituting organizations and defining in-group/out-group parameters even within powerful, long-established institutions like the Republican and Democratic parties. We position primary debates as sites of identity negotiation and constitutive of party identity to understand the polarizing rhetoric of primary debates divorced from the now disputed understanding that primary messages are simply polarized to appeal to more partisan voters. First, we examine the robust body of literature on the rhetoric of polarization and its association with constitutive rhetoric.

The Rhetoric of Partisan Polarization

While polarization is frequently discussed in the context of political partisanship, it is a wide-ranging rhetorical phenomenon of establishing group identity through opposition to the out-group. Polarization is inextricably tied to constitutive rhetoric (Fortuna, 2019) with rhetors constituting organizational identity through opposition. More than fifty years ago, King and Anderson (1971) argued that the rhetoric of polarization depends equally on in-group cohesion and an expressed belief that the out-group is the primary force preventing an otherwise realizable goal. Within these categories, King and Anderson suggest that two strategies emerge in the rhetoric of polarization: a strategy of *affirmation* and a strategy of *subversion*. Affirmation seeks to build a strong base of support and extol the virtues of the ingroup. By contrast, subversion is aimed at undermining the credibility or efficacy of the opposition. Importantly, subversive rhetoric recasts the opposition as not only unwise but as ill intentioned. Over the last five decades scholars have offered new and profound insights into this phenomenon that defines much of American political life, but the fundamental understanding of polarization as establishing and entrenching "us versus them" dichotomies through in-group affirmation and out-group subversion remains largely unchallenged (McCoy et al., 2018).

Polarization reduces complex and multifaceted organizational identities to a single dimension and utilizes that dimension as a wedge between "us" and "them," creating clear delineation between competing groups or factions (King & Anderson, 1971; McCoy, et al., 2018). Polarization and partisanship depend on the symbolic creation of artificial dichotomies that are fostered by mutually reinforcing stages of isolation within the party and confrontation with opponents (Lanigan, 1970; Raum & Measell, 1974).

As a subset of polarization, political partisanship derives from an affinity for a political party and uses party lines as the markers of in-group and out-group. Parties and political ideologies are frequent sources of polarization in a democracy, yet our understanding of the rhetoric constitutive of these institutions is relatively limited. The rhetoric of polarization provides a lens by which to better understand how partisan lines are constructed and entrenched in the process of party formation and the role that primary debates play in constituting the identity of a political party.

Two significant observations about group identity and outgroup animosity in the last twenty years have reshaped our understanding of the rhetoric of polarization in the context of partisan politics. First, with respect to in-group affirmation, Americans' partisan leanings have increasingly become a defining characteristic of their individual identities and sense of self (Mason, 2018). Political identity has become increasingly entangled with Americans' choices of occupation (Roth et al., 2022), religious affiliation (Margolis, 2018), and geographic location (Bishop, 2009). In this way, many of the cross-cutting cleavages that defined scholarly understanding of partisanship prior to the 21st century (see Dahl, 1982; Lipset & Rokkan, 1967) have evaporated in favor of a society increasingly organized around partisan identity.

Just as in-group identity has shifted over the last twenty years, so has dominant framing

of the political outgroup. Ingroup/outgroup distinctions are no longer defined primarily by divergent ideologies or policy perspectives but rather by what Iyengar et al. (2012) call *affective polarization*. Affective polarization describes the strong, personal dislike of opposing partisans. In recent years scholars have devoted increasing attention to the combination of affect and ideology in organizing (Papacharissi, 2015), but scholarship has thus far done little to examine how intragroup conflict and division shape discourses about the outgroup.

Traditional understandings of the rhetoric of polarization depend on cohesive in-group identity, but polarization seems to be at its peak when in-group identity is in question, such as in presidential primary debates. Our investigation of constitutive rhetoric in primary debates suggest that intraparty factions rely on unique strategies of polarization to navigate around the in-group conflict made plain on the debate stage and constitute a vision of a unified party. Among these strategies is a turn toward entelechy. Burke (2003, p. 125) defines entelechy as, "such use of symbolic resources that potentialities can be said to attain their perfect fulfillment." Or, in a more Aristotelian sense, Burke (1961, p. 246) notes, "the seed 'implicitly contains' a future conforming to its nature, if the external conditions necessary to such unfolding and fulfilment occur in the right order." As a tool of organizational identity formation, entelechy allows rhetors to draw a straight line to the future and situate identity in the perfect fulfilment of an ideal, rather than on the identity as fixed in the present.

Rhetorical critics have noted that entelechial rhetoric plays an important role in ideological sorting and in the rise of presidential hopefuls. Steudeman (2013, p. 88) notes that entelechy provides inroads for those outside traditional ideological nodes, noting that, "As scholars continue to consider how presidents grapple with the conditions and events that brought about their rise to power, careful attention to these rhetorics of entelechy and irony can elucidate the entry points through which new ideological orientations gain their footing." We find that entelechy serves the purpose of defining party identity for political outsiders in presidential primary debates. The final section of our literature review details extant scholarship on primary debates and the unique challenge these contests create for organizational identity.

Primary Debates

Primary debates occur more frequently and typically include more candidates than general election debates but remain significantly understudied by comparison (McKinney & Carlin, 2004). The preponderance of extant literature on presidential primaries takes a functional view of these contests, discussing them largely as tools for the selection of party nominees (Benoit et al., 2002; Kendall, 2000); but rhetorical investigations of televised presidential debates have shed light on the discourses of social change (Murphy, 1992), agency (Kephart & Rafferty, 2017), economics (Coker & Reed, 2021), and masculinity (Kephart, 2020). We argue that primary debates serve a unique function as sites of identity negotiation for political parties. Primary debates stand out as one of the only instances of televised intraparty discourse at a national level. In the modern era, the other major site of intraparty discourse, national conventions, function as a form of party branding with parties unifying around a selected

nominee (Bolton, 2018). Primary debates are unique instances in which party identity is up for debate, with candidates representing varied ideological and policy preferences.

As previously mentioned, primaries are often a target for polarization opponents. Findings from extant research give credence to the assertion that discourse among insular groups may further entrench partisan perspectives and promote animosity toward the political out-group (Sunstein, 2002; Sunstein & Hastie, 2014). The rhetoric of polarization is deeply connected to the type of in-group identity formation that dominates presidential primary debates, yet these debates call into question some of the chief constructs associated with a rhetoric of polarization, namely, an emphasis on in-group cohesion and affirmation. Neither the functional explanation (of candidates appealing to polarized voters) or the current rhetorical perspective (of in-group affirmation/out-group subversion) seem to explain how debates, in which in-group identity is deeply fractured, produce discourses of polarization. We propose that candidates compensate for this lack of cohesion by turning against the outgroup (subversion), providing an entelechial vision of their own party, or organizing around affect.

To best facilitate an examination of interparty and intraparty rhetoric in primaries, we selected the 2016 presidential primary debates as a case study to analyze both interparty and intraparty polarization. The 2016 primary debates are uniquely suited for an investigation of the constitutive nature of both interparty and intraparty discourse. These debates provide the most recent example of an election cycle in which both parties held presidential primary debates. The 2016 election cycle is also one of only two times in over 60 years that neither the incumbent President or Vice President sought nor won their party's nomination for the presidency. Without an incumbent or former president or vice president seeking the nomination, we believe that partisan identity is more open for interpretation or redefinition, emboldening intraparty factions to craft a vision of the party in line with their positions. In 2016, both parties saw the emergence of clear factional lines between establishment insiders and partisan outsiders.

The 2016 Primary Debates

In 2016, both the Democratic and Republican parties saw clear ideological divisions between establishment candidates and party outsiders. For the Republicans, a growing intraparty schism between the Tea Party and establishment Republicans meant that the 2016 contest for the Republican presidential nomination would represent one of the most tumultuous political contests of the modern era. While only four candidates would eventually win primaries, the field opened with a total of 17 candidates. Leading up to the first primary debate in August 2015, New York businessman Donald Trump had a surprising lead in the polls. As a political outsider, Trump appealed initially to the Tea Party wing of the GOP. His lead highlighted the growing rift in the Republican Party between Tea Party conservatives, opposed to cultural and economic shifts during the Obama administration, and establishment conservatives, who hoped to expand the Republican base by reaching out to minority voters whom they had lost in large numbers in 2008 and 2012. In the primary debates, Donald Trump, Texas Senator Ted Cruz, and neurosurgeon Dr. Ben Carson represented the Tea Party wing of the GOP. Leaders of what came

to be called the "establishment wing" of the Republican Party included former Florida Governor Jeb Bush, Florida Senator Marco Rubio, and Ohio Governor John Kasich.

Between August 2015 and April 2016, Republican presidential candidates participated in 12 primary debates. Because of the large number of candidates, the first seven debates included both a "main-stage" debate, featuring the 10 or 11 candidates with the highest poll numbers, and a secondary or "undercard" debate featuring candidates with lower poll numbers. Attempts at party unity unraveled quickly at the beginning of the first debate (August 16, 2015) in Cleveland, OH when moderator Bret Baier asked if any candidates were unwilling to support the eventual Republican nominee. The frontrunner, Donald Trump, was the only candidate not willing to make that pledge. Over the course of the Republican primary debates, tensions between factions continued to grow. In fact, intraparty unity was at such a low point that RNC Chairman Reince Preibus addressed the audience before the final debate on March 10, 2016, in Coral Gables, FL to assure party faithful that the party would support the eventual nominee.

Intraparty factionalism was also on display in the Democratic primary debates. While Secretary of State Hillary Clinton entered the 2016 primary with a sizeable lead over her closest competitor, the unlikely surge of Independent Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders quickly dampened Clinton's hopes of an easy path to the nomination. Sanders succeeded in motivating much of the young, liberal wing of the Democratic Party. Sanders' platform included free college tuition at state universities, universal healthcare, and opposition to free trade agreements. Clinton, seen by many as a representative of the Democratic establishment, advocated reform of the student loan system, continuation of the Affordable Care Act, criminal background checks for firearm purchases, and an increased minimum wage. Clinton and Sanders participated in a series of nine presidential primary debates between October 2015 and April 2016. In the first debate they were joined by Rhode Island Governor Lincoln Chafee, former Virginia Senator Jim Webb, and Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley. While Chafee and Webb ended their candidacies within days of the first debate, O'Malley participated in three more televised debates with Sanders and Clinton before suspending his campaign in February 2016.

Both Republicans and Democrats saw clear divisions between establishment candidates (Clinton, Kasich, Rubio, Bush) and partisan outsiders (Trump, Cruz, Sanders). We will argue that these divisions produced distinct forms of constitutive rhetoric that in turn generated unique rhetorics of polarization. We begin by describing our procedures for selecting and analyzing debate rhetoric before outlining the unique approaches taken by establishment and outsider candidates.

Identifying Constitutive Rhetoric in the 2016 Primaries

Scholars disagree about the specific role of television in shaping debate messages, but there is widespread agreement that modern debates are inseparable from their media context (Kraus, 1996). Beyond simple political arguments, debates are media events; and it is essential for rhetorical critics to view debates in their original modality (McKinney & Carlin, 2004). As such, our analysis proceeded through three stages. First, we viewed all 21 of the Democratic and

Republican primary debates in their original modality. While our findings center primarily on textual evidence of constitutive rhetoric and rhetorical polarization, visual elements play a key role in presidential debates (Patterson et al., 1992), and multiple checks were included to assure that the analysis featured both visual and verbal content. Visual elements did communicate party identity and outgroup opposition. For example, the second Republican debate in Simi Valley, California on September 16, 2015, was held at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, with the retired Air Force One dominating the background, as a reminder of the party's history and connection to Reagan. Additionally, both Republican and Democratic debates utilized stage position as a proxy for party identity by placing candidates polling the highest at the center of the stage and those polling the lowest on the ends and literally at the margins. Similarly, the visual of only Sanders and Clinton on the stage for five of the Democratic debates could be easily contrasted with the Republican debate stage, which never dipped below four candidates, creating clearer visual factions for Democratic viewers. After viewing the debates, we systematically identified candidate exchanges and remarks representative of either cross-party rhetoric or intra-party rhetoric.

Within the identified instances of constitutive rhetoric, it became clear that candidates were engaging in rhetorical strategies of polarization that King and Anderson (1971) refer to as in-group affirmation and out-group subversion. The debates contained ample evidence of both forms of polarized rhetoric, but examining this rhetoric in the context of primary campaign debates revealed unique tensions and exposed a third entelechial component to the rhetoric of polarization. Within each party, there were sharp divisions in the rhetoric used by centrist or establishment candidates like Bush, Clinton, and Kasich and anti-establishment candidates like Sanders, Cruz, and Trump. Both centrists and the anti-establishment candidates employed strategies of subversion relative to the opposing party; but in-group affirmation was complicated by the presence of intraparty factionalism, leaving centrist candidates to emphasize strategies of affirmation, while political outsiders emphasized affect and articulated an entelechial vision of what the party was to become. The prominence of entelechy and affect advance scholarly understanding of the rhetoric of polarization and its association with primary debates. We begin by discussing the more traditional constitution of in-group and out-group from establishment candidates in the 2016 primary debates.

Identity and Polarization from the Establishment

Throughout the 2016 primary debates, centrist candidates foregrounded strategies of in-group affirmation, often vowing to defend an already "strong" or "growing" political party. Rather than acknowledge the stark divisions evidenced by their disagreements with the other candidates, centrist candidates pointed to non-ideological sources for intraparty disagreement and attempted to recast their in-party opponents as somewhere outside the parameters of an otherwise strong movement. In their constitutive rhetoric, centrist candidates claimed ownership over the party's past leaders, unifying symbols, and past legislative accomplishments.

More than any other candidate studied, Hillary Clinton embodied these strategies by extoling the power of the Democratic Party in what she framed as its current form. When Clinton spoke of division in the party, she spoke in the past tense, referring to the Democratic Party that supported Obama over her own candidacy in 2008 and casting the major division in the party as one that had already been bridged with her assistance. Clinton's strategies included invoking past and present Democratic Party leaders, like Harry Truman, Barack Obama, and her husband, Bill Clinton. In doing so, Clinton presented herself as the heir to a strong movement, built on the success of these leaders. Her rhetoric relied heavily on her connection with President Obama. Clinton mentioned Obama by name 97 times during the nine primary debates, more than three times the 31 mentions of Obama made by Sanders. Most of Clinton's mentions praised President Obama and his signature accomplishments.

On multiple occasions Clinton presented the Affordable Care Act as an accomplishment of the entire Democratic Party, glossing over the differences of opinion within the party. During the Des Moines, Iowa debate, Clinton (Democratic Debate 2, November 14) solidified her stance by positing the Affordable Care Act as an essential part of the Democratic lineage, stating, "We've made great progress as a country with the Affordable Care Act. We've been struggling to get this done since Harry Truman. And it was not only a great accomplishment of the Democratic Party, but of President Obama." The lineage framed by Senator Clinton often included the label *progressive.* For example, during the first Democratic debate in Las Vegas, Clinton (October 13) told the audience, "And I don't take a back seat to anyone when it comes to progressive experience and progressive commitment." Both Clinton and Sanders used the progressive label while avoiding the term *liberal* entirely. In fact, only Lincoln Chaffee embraced the categorization of "liberal" during the primary debates and did so only in describing what type of Republican he used to be (Democratic Debate 1).

Attempts to build solidarity and cohesion within the Democratic Party were complicated by the divisions that provide the stasis point for intraparty debates; but Clinton often extolled the virtues of her party even in the face of in-group factionalism. Clinton regularly reminded debate audiences about her shared goals with Sanders. Throughout the debates, Clinton told viewers that both she and Sanders agreed on the need for universal healthcare, increased infrastructure spending, expanding Social Security, support for immigrants, campaign finance reform, and greater financial regulation of Wall Street. This affirming strategy is consistent with King and Anderson's (1971) model of polarization, which seeks to reduce the threat of internal factions and acclaim the virtues of the in-group. Clinton even drew a comparison between her sources of campaign funding and those of her opponent. At the February 11th debate in Milwaukee, Clinton said, "We both have a lot of small donors. I think that sets us apart from a lot of what's happening right now on the Republican side" (Democratic Debate 6). As illustrated by this case, Clinton made frequent use of the Burkean assumed "we" to present the party as unified and consistent (Cheney, 1983).

Clinton repeatedly invoked shared identity with her fellow Democrats, imploring them that, "*As Democrats* we ought to proudly support the Affordable Care Act, improve it, and make it the model we know it can be" (Democratic Debate 2). Clinton's strategy of interparty polarization through affirmation was largely unique to her in the Democratic debates. Statements of agreement on policy issues came overwhelmingly from Clinton; and her frequent agreements with Sanders served as the main difference and dividing point between a noble and unified Democratic Party and their Republican opponents.

While affirmation was dominant in Clinton's rhetoric, subversion was also present. Clinton relied on antithesis and a construction of the Republican out-group to define the partisan landscape and entrench the us/them dichotomy. This foregrounding is apparent even in the way that Clinton addressed intraparty divisions. For example, during the March 7th debate in Flint, Michigan, she told viewers, "You know, we have our differences. And we get into vigorous debate about issues, but compare the substance of this debate with what you saw on the Republican stage last week" (Clinton, Democratic Debate 7). Her attack on Republicans minimized either the presence or significance of in-party divisions, while attacking Republican candidates as lacking substantive issue positions. She similarly presented Republican obstructionism within the framework of Democratic accomplishments:

> Well, I'm a little bewildered about how to respond when you have an agreement which gives you the framework to actually take the action that would have only come about because, in the face of implacable hostility from the Republicans in Congress, President Obama moved forward on gas mileage, he moved forward on the Clean Power Plan. He has moved forward on so many of the fronts that he could, given the executive actions that he was able to take (Clinton, Democratic Debate 9, April 14, 2016).

Hillary Clinton repeatedly engaged in the rhetoric of affirmation even when attacking her rival, Bernie Sanders. In addressing Sanders, Clinton again focused on the successes of President Obama, which she also framed as the successes of the broader Democratic Party. For example, in the same April 14th debate in Brooklyn, NY, Clinton went on to accuse Sanders of undermining Obama's accomplishments through his campaign strategy, stating, "I'm getting a little bit concerned here because, you know, I really believe that the President has done an incredible job against great odds and deserves to be supported" (Democratic Debate 9). Clinton echoed a similar sentiment with respect to healthcare reform, implying that Sanders was ignoring President Obama's accomplishments with the Affordable Care Act and, "starting all over again, trying to throw the country into another really contentious debate" (Democratic Debate 9). She argued that the difference was not between the two Democratic candidates and their desire for universal healthcare, but instead in their response to Republican opposition.

When moments of clear in-group disagreement arose, Clinton maintained her strategy of affirmation by simply redrawing the political boundaries in a way that placed Sanders with the Republicans, outside of an otherwise cohesive party. On March 9th, Clinton told the Miami,

Florida debate audience, "And in 2006, when Senator Sanders was running for the Senate from Vermont, he voted in the House with hardline Republicans for indefinite detention for undocumented immigrants, and then he sided with those Republicans to stand with vigilantes known as Minute Men who were taking up outposts along the border to hunt down immigrants" (Democratic Debate 8). She continued the attack, a few sentences later telling the Senator, "When you got to the Senate in 2007, one of the first things you did was vote against Ted Kennedy's immigration reform, which he'd been working on for years before you ever arrived." Clinton created the impression of a unified Democratic Party but positioned Senator Sanders outside of it. Clinton's rhetorical strategy was reinforced by Sanders' decision to skirt the Democratic label during his time in the United States Senate. In Clinton's characterization, problems arise when candidates break off from the coalition. Clinton presented her long-time involvement in the party and her successes in fundraising efforts to support fellow Democrats as evidence that she was more representative of the party's ideals. Clinton's willingness to own the label of the party, her rhetoric suggested, gave her greater agency to define the party in line with her own positions.

When discussing interparty dynamics, Clinton focused on the major accomplishments of the Democratic Party including the Affordable Care Act, gun-control legislation, and environmental regulation. Here, she built upon the theme of Democratic unity by referring to her ability to consolidate the party's left along with then Senator Obama in 2008. She routinely referred to accomplishments made during the Obama and Bill Clinton Administrations to highlight the progress the party had made in recent years. Clinton often levied attacks against "obstructionist Republicans," but did so against the backdrop of affirmation for an already successful Democratic Party. Clinton's rhetoric resisted efforts to constitute party identity outside of the party's history, norms, and traditions. The party was defined by its past and in opposition to the Republican Party.

With 17 candidates in the race, the ability of centrist Republican candidates to develop substantive positions with respect to the other party was often overshadowed by internal divisions. However, a common refrain from those on the Republican debate stage was that any participant in the debate was far better than either of the Democratic frontrunners. For example, during the January 28th debate in Des Moines, Iowa, Jeb Bush suggested, "Everybody on this stage is better than Hillary Clinton. And I think the focus ought to be on making sure that we leave this nomination process, as wild and woolly as it's going to be — this is not being bad" (Republican Debate 7). Ohio Governor John Kasich, a leading establishment Republican, most clearly demonstrated this strategy. Despite advocating greater openness to compromise, Kasich presented stark differences between Republicans and Democrats on policy issues while foregrounding strategies of in-group affirmation. For example, Kasich regularly challenged President Obama's foreign policy agenda and presented his stance as a distinct alternative. During the Coral Gables debate, Kasich criticized Obama's foreign policy while invoking the Republican ideal of American strength, saying, "And a strong America is what the entire world is begging for. 'Where has America gone?' is what many of our allies say around the world.

When I'm president, they're going to know exactly where we are because we're coming back" (Republican Debate 12).

Throughout the debates, Kasich made consistent reference to his conservative credentials, but he also reminded viewers that he had supported repealing the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and wanted to hand numerous federal powers over to the states. He bragged to a debate audience in Greenville, South Carolina about having sued the Obama administration over the ACA and having refused to organize a healthcare exchange in Ohio, but he couched his polarizing claims in the context of in-group affirmation:

> Now, with Obamacare, I've not only sued the administration, I did not set up an exchange. And he knows that I'm not for Obamacare, never have been. But here's what's interesting about Medicaid. You know who expanded Medicaid five times to try to help the folks and give them opportunity so that you could rise and get a job? President Ronald Reagan. Now, the fact of the matter is, we expanded to get people on their feet, and once they're on their feet, we are giving them the training and the efforts that they need to be able to get work and pull out of that situation (Republican Debate 9).

Kasich engaged in many of the same affirming strategies as Clinton. He presents his in-group credentials, invokes a significant party leader, and presents his in-party opponents as outside of the strong movement solidified under Ronald Reagan.

Like several Republican candidates, Kasich focused on key party figures and party symbols as a means of affirming the virtue of the GOP. At various points in the debates, Kasich identified Presidents Ford, Reagan, and Bush as exemplars of the ideal Republican. Kasich also pointed to his own success and the successes of others on the debate stage as evidence that Republican and not Democratic ideals have worked to lift people out of poverty. Despite his more centrist approach, Kasich did not shy away from the rhetoric of polarization. During the November 10th debate in Wisconsin, Kasich told viewers:

> Well, ladies and gentlemen, if Hillary Clinton or Bernie Sanders were to win this election, my 16-year-olds, I — I worry about what their life is going to be like. You know, the conservative movement is all about opportunity. It is about lower taxes. It's about balanced budgets. It's about less regulation. And it's about sending power, money, and influence back to where we live so we can run America from the bottom up (Republican Debate 4).

Kasich enthusiastically endorsed the virtues of the Republican Party, while presenting the Democratic out-group as threats to his children and the prosperity of future generations. For Kasich, party identity was constituted through ideology, policy preferences, and party history.

Kasich and Clinton's rhetoric, in many ways, embodied the traditional modes of in-group/out-group identity formation, including affirmation and subversion (King & Anderson, 1971), antithesis, unifying symbols, and the assumed we (Burke, 1969b; Cheney, 1983). Establishment candidates were able to frame partisan identity as fixed rather than floating and present their intraparty opponents as attacking an existing entity by striving to redefine what it means to be a Democrat or a Republican. By contrast, those on the wings of their parties needed to constitute an image of party identity outside of the traditional strategies of identification or polarization. These candidates rendered party identity malleable and turned to entelechy to reimagine the ingroup while leaving the out-group as a fixed reference point for opposition.

Identity from the Outsiders

During the Democratic primary debates, Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders was highly critical of the Democratic Party establishment and often grouped its members with the same network of corruption that he argued was characteristic of the Republican out-group. While Sanders would frequently express agreement with Secretary Clinton, he would then take her positions further to the left, by insisting on a major overhaul of the education system, a substantial increase in the minimum wage, or a new wave of environmental regulations. At the February 4th Durham, New Hampshire debate, Sanders told moderator Rachel Maddow, “Secretary Clinton does represent the establishment. I represent, I hope, ordinary Americans, and by the way, who are not all that enamored with the establishment…” (Democratic Debate 5). Sanders’ primary campaign depended on an in-party rhetorical strategy that laid bare intraparty factionalism and foreclosed a strong emphasis on in-group affirmation. Instead, Sanders engaged in in-party rhetoric that highlighted these internal divisions rather than reducing them.

While not affirming the in-group, Sanders certainly engaged in out-group subversion against Republicans, consistent with King and Anderson’s (1971) rhetoric of polarization. He cast Republicans as subservient to the interests of the fossil fuel industry, tying them to the same attack that he had levied against his Democratic opponent, Hillary Clinton, “Do you think there’s a reason why not one Republican has the guts to recognize that climate change is real, and that we need to transform our energy system? Do you think it has anything to do with the Koch brothers and ExxonMobil pouring huge amounts of money into the political system?” (Democratic Debate 5). While Sanders often highlighted major disagreements between himself and Hillary Clinton, he was just as vigorous in his attacks on Republicans. Sanders suggested that Republican success depended on demoralization and voter suppression. He went on to tell the Durham, New Hampshire debate audience:

> Republicans win when people are demoralized and you have a small voter turnout, which, by the way, is why they love voter suppression. I believe that our campaign up to now has shown that we can create an enormous amount of enthusiasm from working people, from young people, who will get involved in the political process and which will drive us to a very large voter turnout (Democratic Debate 5).

Attributing malevolent intentions to the political outgroup is an essential component of subversive rhetoric as defined by King and Anderson. Sanders utilized subversion to undermine his Republican rivals during interparty-focused discussions.

Sanders chastised congressional Republicans for their lack of basic civics knowledge in blocking President Obama's nominee to the Supreme Court; but just as often, he levied simultaneous attacks against members of the Democratic Party. Sanders grouped some Democratic elected officials, including Clinton, with Republicans in their support for what he labeled, "disastrous trade policies" (Democratic Debates 1, 6, 7, 8, & 9). He also criticized Democrats who had joined Republicans in cutting services for veterans. Unlike Clinton's affirming praise for past Democratic presidents, Sanders suggested that Bill Clinton's crime and welfare reform bills in the 1990s had bowed to Republican interests with long-term negative consequences especially for black and brown Americans.

Sanders' rhetoric offers an important addition to the affirmation/subversion heuristic proposed by King and Anderson (1971) that helps make sense of polarization divorced from in-group affirmation or cohesion. Sanders utilized a rhetoric of polarization built on the Aristotelian and Burkean construct of entelechy. For Steudeman (2013), this entelechial vision of party plays a significant role in convention addresses. Such rhetoric may be even more apparent in political primaries and party debates and may provide one of the keys to understanding rhetorics of polarization within fractured parties and fractured movements. Rather than building a coalition around party, Sanders relied on the notion of his supporters as part of a, "movement" or "revolution" (Democratic Debates 1-9). This movement was simultaneously outside the partisan fold but also the next stage of the party's entelechial journey.

This complex relation to partisan identity is most clearly demonstrated in the different manners in which Sanders and Clinton invoke past party leaders on the issue of healthcare. As already noted, Clinton appealed to these leaders as evidence for the significance of the party's accomplishments in the Obama years. In response to Clinton's claim that Sanders was undermining the celebration of their healthcare accomplishment, Sanders said, "The vision from FDR and Harry Truman was healthcare for all people as a right in a cost-effective way. We're not going to tear up the Affordable Care Act. I helped write it. But we are going to move on top of that to a Medicaid-for-all system" (Democratic Debate 4, January 17). Rather than turning to the celebratory rhetoric of affirmation, Sanders noted that the drive for a perfected health system was not yet complete. This drive toward the perfect form is the hallmark of entelechy. Sanders presents his movement as a step toward the ideal form not just for healthcare, but also for the party and for politics more generally.

That Sanders did not seek to vindicate the Democratic Party through affirmation was revealed again in his discussion of Martin Luther King Jr. Sanders said, "As we honor the extraordinary life of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., it's important not only that we remember what he stood for, but that we pledge to continue his vision to transform our country" (Democratic Debate 4). Sanders' framing of this new movement is consistent with Steudeman's (2013, p. 88)

observation that entelechy provides "entry points through which new ideological orientations gain their footing." In imagining politics' ideal form, Sanders was able to situate his movement as the next step in the progressive chain toward party perfection. Sanders' entelechial rhetoric is still aimed at partisan polarity and his entelechial vision for politics is achieved through the Democratic Party also reaching its ideal form. Entelechy challenges the in-group assumptions of the rhetoric of polarization by rejecting the fixity of group identity. Instead, the party's identity is in a state of becoming.

Navigating the relationship between a new movement and the established Democratic Party became a complex task of identification. In one exchange during the final Democratic debate in Brooklyn, NY, debate moderator Dana Bash asked Sanders if he was truly a member of the party and what he was doing to support other Democrats. Sanders responded by proposing a vision of the Democratic Party refreshed by new, young members and broken free from the influence of wealthy contributors:

> The truth is, and you can speak to my colleagues, we have raised millions of dollars to the DSCC. I have written letters that have raised, if I may use the word, huge amount of money so that's just not accurate. But, I will also say, and this is important and maybe the Secretary disagrees with me, but I am proud that millions of young people who previously were not involved in the political process are now coming into it, and I do believe, I do believe that we have got to open the door of the Democratic party to those people. And, I think the future of the Democratic party is not simply by raising money from wealthy campaign contributors (Democratic Debate 9).

The move from Clinton's rhetoric of affirmation to Sanders' use of entelechy, as it relates to the Democratic Party, fosters a profoundly different rhetoric of polarization. Rather than relying on self-praise for the political in-group, Sanders speaks into existence the ideal form: a party healed of internal divisions and able to resolve the exigencies that had for so long confounded it:

> What I believe is that this country, if we stand together and not let the Trumps of the world divide us up, can guarantee health care to all people as a right, can have paid family and medical leave, can make public colleges and universities tuition-free, can lead the world in transforming our energy system and combatting climate change, can break up the large financial institutions, can demand that the wealthiest people in this country start paying their fair share of taxes. And we can do that when millions of people stand up, fight back, and create a government that works for all of us, not just the 1 percent. That is what the political revolution is about. That is what this campaign is about (Democratic Debate 9).

Affirmation depends on pride in the form the party has achieved, whereas entelechy uses the party's ideal form to draw lines between the party, progressing toward its destiny, and the

opposing party, mired in malevolent ideology. Entelechy challenges King and Anderson's model of polarization by allowing for the continuation of out-group polarization despite in-group divisions.

As with Sanders, Republican challengers Donald Trump and Senator Ted Cruz dedicated substantial energy to painting themselves in opposition to their own party's political establishment. Both candidates were highly critical of leaders within their own party, including George and Jeb Bush, Mitt Romney, and John Kasich. Trump described the last months of George W. Bush's administration as a "catastrophe" (Republican Debate 1, August 6) and said Mitt Romney was a "terrible candidate" who "ran a terrible campaign" (Republican Debate 10, February 25). Ted Cruz and Donald Trump did not shy away from intraparty rivalries, including their rivalry with one another. Cruz told the audience at the debate in Boulder, Colorado on October 28th, "You know, everyone here talks about the need to take on Washington. The natural next question is who actually has done so. Who actually has stood up not just to Democrats, but to leaders in our own party? When millions of Americans rose up against Obamacare, I was proud to lead that fight" (Republican Debate 3). Cruz routinely invoked the memory of Ronald Reagan, but, unlike Kasich, Cruz suggested that only Tea Party leaders were the natural heirs to the Reagan movement.

While neither Cruz nor Trump showed rhetorical restraint in attacking their intraparty rivals, they saved the true thrust of their animus for their Democratic challengers and the incumbent Democratic president, Barrack Obama. During the debates, Senator Cruz attacked President Obama over the Iranian Nuclear Agreement, the Fast and Furious gun smuggling investigation, the ACA, illegal immigration, abortion, judicial appointments, and same-sex marriage, among other issues. Cruz not only went after the sitting president using the rhetoric of subversion, he also attacked other Democratic leaders including Chuck Schumer, Harry Reid, and Hillary Clinton. Perhaps the most subversive rhetoric among the Republicans came from the eventual nominee, Donald Trump. Trump often made a point of attacking the motives and intelligence of those in the opposing party. In reference to President Obama, Trump said, "I would be so different from what you have right now. Like, the polar opposite. We have a president who doesn't have a clue. I would say he's incompetent, but I don't want to do that because that's not nice" (Republican Debate 1).

This subversive out-party rhetoric is a hallmark of polarization; but, as with Sanders, Donald Trump's vicious lambasting of his own party does not fit King and Anderson's (1971) model of polarized rhetoric. Donald Trump's rhetoric demonstrated a willingness to expose factionalism within his own party in a way that establishment candidates did not. Trump relied on entelechial rhetoric like that of Senator Sanders, including framing his supporters as a movement reclaiming the lost or corrupted tradition of the party. Trump claimed that he could reclaim the legacy of Reagan by realizing the dreams of the party's ideological forebears. Making the Republican Party great again, as with "making America great again," promotes a vision of ideal forms. Party formation in the style of Trump conforms to what Burke (1969a)

describes as an Aristotelian notion of entelechy: "the striving of each thing to be perfectly the kind of thing it was" (p. 249). In striving for this ideal form, the party as presently constituted is irrelevant, but the party in its final form fills the void of in-group cohesion and party affirmation.

John Kasich, Marco Rubio, and Jeb Bush all made mention of uniting the Republican Party and the country either before or after the election. However, Donald Trump avoided the rhetoric of intraparty unity altogether. Instead, Trump defined what it meant to be a Republican in terms of affect and his own entelechial journey rooted in the movement that he framed as rising around him. Rather than affirming or uniting, Trump promoted a vision of ideal forms and placed himself squarely at the center. The movement that Trump was creating, according to this vision, was entirely of his own design.

During the August 6th debate in Cleveland, Trump told moderator Chris Wallace, "So, if it weren't for me, you wouldn't even be talking about illegal immigration, Chris. You wouldn't even be talking about it. This was not a subject that was on anybody's mind until I brought it up at my announcement" (Republican Debate 1). While Trump was often at the center of his narrative, he also presented himself as having been transformed alongside it. Trump presented his own ideological development as etched in the entelechy of the Republican Party and conservative movement. Trump twice invoked Reagan's move from the Democratic to the Republican Party as mirroring his own shift on the issues. During the February 25th debate in Houston, TX, Trump said, "And if you talk about evolving, Ronald Reagan was a somewhat liberal Democrat. Ronald Reagan evolved into a somewhat strong conservative — more importantly, he was a great president. A great president" (Republican Debate 10). By explaining the shift from left to right as ideological evolution, Trump reframed his partisan transformations as the steps toward an entelechy, which would culminate with his presidency. While those candidates utilizing affirming rhetoric presented Trump's past statements as placing him outside the otherwise united Republican Party, for Trump, these were merely steps on the path of becoming for himself and the party.

At the heart of this entelechy was a merging of business and government, in which Trump's personal success and ambition would be reconciled with the ambitions of the Republican Party. Trump's grand claims in the primary debates relied on his promotion of this reconciling of ambitions as the ideal form of the GOP. During the September 16th debate at the Reagan Presidential Library Trump argued, "If I become president, we will do something really special. We will make this country greater than ever before. We'll have more jobs. We'll have more of everything" (Republican Debate 2). Trump further explained his complex relationship with liberal politics and politicians by justifying his past donations to Democratic candidates, saying, "So at the beginning, I said openly to everybody that I contribute to many, many politicians, both Republican and Democrat. And I have, over the years. I'm a businessman" (Republican Debate 10). Ultimately the merging of Trump's business ambition with the practice of government would create both government and party in their ideal forms. Trump introduced himself during the Simi Valley debate saying,

> I say not in a braggadocious way, I've made billions and billions of dollars dealing with people all over the world, and I want to put whatever that talent is to work for this country so we have great trade deals, we make our country rich again, we make it great again. We build our military, we take care of our vets, we get rid of Obamacare, and we have a great life altogether (Republican Debate, 2).

Trump establishes an ideological foothold by arguing that free market politics had only been missing a free-market leader, a goal that his presidency would realize. For Donald Trump, entelechy supplanted unity in the rhetoric of polarization, paving the way for polarization even from a fractured party.

In addition to his use of entelechy, Trump's rhetoric also emphasized the pathetic and affective elements of subversion for the (re)creation of in-group identity. A sense of frustration and a pre-cognitive rejection of the status quo allowed for the creation of a Republican identity not connected to traditionally conservative issue positions as much as to the growing sense of frustration felt by his base around globalization, anti-racism, and shifting sexual and gender norms within society. Opposing candidates in the debates quickly identified the pull of emotionality within Trump's rhetoric and the potential for this polarizing anger to leave them outside the in-group Trump was constructing. In the Detroit debate (March 3rd), Cruz pointed to Trump's anger as the motivating impulse for the reality star's supporters and attempted to make the case that Trump was himself a part of the problem, "…I understand the folks who are supporting Donald right now. You're angry. You're angry at Washington, and he uses angry rhetoric. But for 40 years, Donald has been part of the corruption in Washington that you're angry about" (Republican Debate 11). Cruz's observation illustrates the broad awareness of how Trump was fomenting affective polarization.

The emotional nature of Trump's strategy was criticized by other leaders in the GOP, including South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley. In her response to President Obama's State of the Union Address, Governor Haley (2016) called for a rejection of "the siren call of the angriest voices." When Fox Business host Maria Bartiromo asked Trump for his response during the North Charleston, South Carolina debate (January 14th) with Haley in attendance, Trump doubled down saying:

> …And I could say, oh, I'm not angry. I'm *very* angry because our country is being run horribly and I will gladly accept the mantle of anger. Our military is a disaster. Our healthcare is a horror show. Obamacare, we're going to repeal it and replace it. We have no borders. Our vets are being treated horribly. Illegal immigration is beyond belief. Our country is being run by incompetent people. And yes, I am angry. And I won't be angry when we fix it, but until we fix it, I'm very, very angry.

Trump boldly claiming "the mantle of anger" illustrates how significant affect is in constituting a new partisan identity and as a driver of polarization. Papacharissi (2015) highlights the growing

significance of *affective publics* in an era of politics dominated by social media in which fragile publics emerge in moments of solidarity around shared affect. Trump's use of affect and entelechy in the 2016 debates tapped into anger and frustration to repaint the boundaries of one of the nation's oldest and most dominant political institutions.

Conclusion

Presidential primary debates have long been criticized for their polarizing potential, but traditional explanations have failed to account for the unique rhetorical pressures of these mediated campaign events. Primary voters do not appear to be more polarized than general election voters and primary debates create fissures in party identity disrupting the assumptions of rhetorical polarization. Rather than producing intraparty skepticism that might resist polarization (Muirhead, 2014), primary debates produce increased polarization and attribution of malevolent intentions to the opposing party (Warner et al., 2021). We argue that primary debates function as sites of identity negotiation as rhetors work to constitute a party in line with their ideological commitments. In so doing, establishment candidates turn to traditional strategies of polarization, including an emphasis on unifying symbols, a common ground, antithesis, and subversion aimed at the opposing party to conceal the fractures in party identity.

Anti-establishment candidates on the ideological wings of their respective parties rely on entelechy as a unique form of rhetorical polarization, presenting their party as on a path of becoming. Denton et al. (2019) argue that "challengers" in political primaries often try to claim the political center, but in 2016, those challenging more established party leaders rejected the center and positioned themselves as embodying the fulfilment of their party's potential. Candidates also relied on the tools of affective polarization, constituting their party around shared affective experiences of frustration, anger, or resentment. Both entelechy and affect are important features of the rhetoric of polarization, especially when in-group identity is under threat.

Our findings advance scholarly understandings of primary campaign rhetoric, primary debates, and the rhetoric of polarization. First, we provide evidence of the constitutive function of presidential primary debates. While scholarship on presidential primary rhetoric has focused on nominee selection, it has failed to appreciate the constitutive function of primary campaign discourse. Beyond their role in selecting nominees, primaries function as sites of identity negotiation for the parties and debates are a key focal point of those negotiations. Primary candidates offer competing visions for the future of their party, grounded in affect and ideology. Not only do candidates articulate visions of their own party, they also work to constitute the opposing party through antithesis and subversion. Rhetorical-critical analyses of presidential primary debates have understandably focused on *intraparty* conflict (Coker & Reed, 2021; Kendall, 2000; McKinney et al., 2001), but interparty divisions are central to the discourse of primary debates. Future scholars should consider the role of both interparty and intraparty exigencies in shaping primary campaign discourse.

Our study also contributes to understandings of the rhetoric of polarization. Through the process of party identity construction, candidates relied on traditional and novel forms of polarizing rhetoric. Establishment candidates navigated intraparty factionalism by claiming ownership over the party's past successes, pointing to unifying leaders or party symbols, and through antithesis in opposition to the other party. Because of the apparent intraparty divisions, outsider candidates lacked access to many of these traditional tools of identity construction and polarization. Instead, these candidates turned to affect and entelechy as forms of polarization to conceal the intraparty divisions made apparent by the debate. Future scholars should continue to investigate the role of affect and entelechy in the rhetoric of polarization.

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