

# JOURNAL OF THE SPEECH AND THEATRE ASSOCIATION OF MISSOURI

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## Scholarly Articles

**“You Lie!” and “I’m Sorry.”: Congressman Joe Wilson’s  
Outburst and Attempted Image Repair**

*Josh Compton & Brett Miller*

**“It’s all About Getting the Job Done:” Information Acquisition  
Among Restaurant Workers**

*Scott A. Myers, Michael Sollitto, Gregory A. Cranmer,  
Zachary W. Goldman, Hannah Ball, & Hailey G. Gillen*

**The Actor As Fire And Cloud**

*John Wilson*

## States Advisory Showcase

**Approaching the Podium Through the Arts:  
Incorporating an Arts Appreciation Framework Within  
Public Speaking Curriculum**

*Scott Jensen*

**The Giving Voice Project:**

**Using Interactive Theatre to Improve Cultural Competency**

*Carol J. Maples*

## Teaching Resources

**The Personal SWOT: An Opportunity for Student Reflection,  
Growth, and Planning**

*Jennifer A. Butler & Daniel P. Modaff*

**How Do You Really Feel? Social Perception Exercise**

*David Wendt*

## Honoring Dr. Loren Reid

**Fond Memories of Dr. Loren Reid: Tribute to a Gentleman  
and Scholar**

*Barry C. Poyner*

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## Scholarly Articles

- “You Lie!” and “I’m Sorry.”: Congressman Joe Wilson’s  
Outburst and Attempted Image Repair 1  
*Josh Compton & Brett Miller*
- “It’s all About Getting the Job Done:” Information Acquisition  
Among Restaurant Workers 18  
*Scott A. Myers, Michael Sollitto, Gregory A. Cranmer,  
Zachary W. Goldman, Hannah Ball, & Hailey G. Gillen*
- The Actor As Fire And Cloud 32  
*John Wilson*

## State Advisory Showcase

- Approaching the Podium Through the Arts: Incorporating an  
Arts Appreciation Framework Within Public Speaking  
Curriculum 49  
*Scott Jensen*
- The Giving Voice Project: Using Interactive Theatre to Improve  
Cultural Competency 71  
*Carol J. Maples*

## Teaching Resources

- The Personal SWOT: An Opportunity for Student Reflection,  
Growth, and Planning 85  
*Jennifer A. Butler & Daniel P. Modaff*
- How Do You Really Feel? Social Perception Exercise 94  
*David Wendt*

## Honoring Dr. Loren Reid

- Fond Memories of Dr. Loren Reid: Tribute to a Gentleman and  
Scholar 99  
*Barry C. Poyner*

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Association of Missouri**  
*Volume 45, Fall 2015*

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**Journal of the Speech and Theatre Association of Missouri**  
**Fall 2016 – Volume 46**

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All submissions should be in Microsoft Word, and emailed to the Editor. References should follow the latest edition of the American Psychological Association style manual. A separate page with abstract, author affiliation and bio(s) should be included. All submissions should be received by February 16, 2016, to ensure full consideration for publication.

Updated submission information for volume 46 will be available in October of 2015 at the website for the Speech and Theatre Association of Missouri – **[www.speechandtheatremo.org](http://www.speechandtheatremo.org)**

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**“You Lie!” and “I’m Sorry.”:  
Congressman Joe Wilson’s Outburst and Attempted Image Repair**  
*Josh Compton & Brett Miller*

**Abstract**

*South Carolina Representative Joe Wilson shouted “You lie!” at President Barack Obama, interrupting the president’s speech before a joint session of Congress. Facing widespread criticism, Wilson apologized. We use this unique case to consider the peculiar nature of outburst as a form of attack—an attack that, instead of damaging the image of its target, often inflicts primary damage on the image of the attacker. We conclude that Wilson’s image repair efforts largely failed, as measured against a criterion of appropriateness. The analysis highlights unique impacts of delivery dimensions as requisites for outbursts, shifting focus from conventional conceptualizations of content in image repair scholarship. Further, implications of outburst as rhetorical attack and as a rhetorical act necessitating defense are explored.*

Political power is often negotiated and engineered through a symbiosis of rhetorical attack (*kategoria*) and defense (*apologia*). Perhaps no political institution performs both forms of discourse as dramatically as the United States Congress. Joanne Freeman, professor of history at Yale, observed, “Congress has a long and storied culture of apology, to go along with its long and storied culture of insult – and ... the two traditions are inextricably bound together” (2009, para. 2). Politicians failing to attack opponents risk the appearance of weakness. Politicians failing to appear conciliatory and apologetic can promote too aggressive an identity. Successful politicians are provocative and pacifying *enough*. Power is achieved through balance.

There are few more dramatic examples than the balancing act attempted by South Carolina Representative Joe Wilson during and after a joint session of Congress on September 9, 2009. Rep. Wilson shouted, “You lie!” at President Barack Obama after the president claimed in a speech that health care benefits under new laws would not extend to

“illegal immigrants.” Wilson’s outburst “stunned members of both parties in the House chamber” (Hulse, 2009a, para. 3). Morris Fiona, political scientist at Stanford University, deemed it “a new low for the contemporary era” (cited in Kiely, 2009, para. 16). The political theater of that outburst, and the subsequent apology and image repair efforts, set up a unique analog of rhetorical attack and defense and an unprecedented context for political image repair efforts.

While consideration of image repair discourse and, to a lesser extent, rhetorical attacks on image are addressed in the extant literature, less attention has been paid to rhetorical outburst as accusation and as reason for rhetorical defense. This essay considers the peculiar nature of outburst rhetoric, specifically the manner in which outburst performs as a rhetorical attack, or *kategoria*, provoking subsequent image repair efforts. Whereas most image repair analyses trace an attack and then the restorative strategies of the attacked, this essay takes a less conventional approach: We trace an accusation and then the image repair attempts of the accuser, when the attack did more than fail. It backfired.

### **Outburst as Attack**

Before considering how outburst functions as a unique form of attack, it is useful to consider the nature of image attacks in general. Two options for approaching attacks include types of stasis: fact, definition, quality, and jurisdiction (Ryan, 1982), or distinct topoi: responsibility and offensiveness (Benoit & Dorries, 1996).

Wilson’s outburst could be taken in form and substance as an attack addressing stasis questions. By shouting, “You lie!” he seemed to be asserting a matter of fact (your statement is false), implying a matter of definition (that is bad), suggesting a matter of quality (you are dishonest), and tacitly claiming a matter of jurisdiction (this is the correct venue for reproach). The outburst could also be understood as employing two topoi of persuasive attack (see Benoit & Dorries, 1996). By saying “you,” he assigned responsibility to Obama, and suggested the President’s culpability is strong, since Obama was speaking from prepared remarks and likely understood the consequences of his actions. When Wilson said, “lie,” he increased the negative perceptions or perceived offensiveness of the act as inconsistent and dishonest. In two words, “You lie!,” Wilson attacked the president in terms of fact,

definition, quality, responsibility, and offensiveness. In sum, Wilson's message was that President Obama was responsible for stating a falsehood that was dishonest and damaging in its effects.

It is the "!" part of the two-word attack and its setting that added layers of complexity. This attack was shouted – "You lie!", not "You lie." – and made in such a privileged location as the chamber of the U.S. House of Representatives by a member of Congress to the President of the United States during a nationally televised speech. Wilson lacked the requisite authority to launch an attack in this particular rhetorical sphere. No one did. Irrespective of the legitimacy of Wilson's charge, in short, he did not have permission to make it.

This break with decorum, we argue, is what characterizes an outburst – the exclamatory nature ("!"), an inconsistency, or violation of expectations (see Burgoon, 1978), within a particular rhetorical sphere. Under these conditions, delivery overshadows the message. For instance, if a tennis player verbally assaults a line judge on national television, or a celebrity musician attacks the credibility of a fellow artist at an awards show, the privileged sphere helps define the act as an outburst and assigns culpability to it. It becomes less important to the audience whether the ball was out of bounds, or whether one artist is more deserving of an award than another. The unauthorized speech obscures. The actions of the athlete or musician in question may not be viewed as particularly offensive in a less formal setting (e.g., a practice match, a private party). Likewise, if a politician uses a campaign, a debate rebuttal, or an appearance on talk radio to claim his or her opponent is dishonest, the speech may not be viewed as terribly offensive, since the situation seems to authorize the speaker to use more corrosive discourse. However, when similar accusations are shouted in an environment that historically places a premium on decorum and hierarchy, the speech may be considered less legitimate and more offensive.

Lincoln (1994) clarified the importance of authority, or rhetorical license: "The question of permission is an important one, for most groups treat the opportunity to speak within such places as a scarce and valued resource" (p. 9). Even if a speaker is authorized implicitly by occupying a certain position or rank, certain obligations remain (e.g., a Vice President cursing out a senator while still in the Senate chamber). The trusted rhetor is nevertheless expected to be respectful of the group's "sensibilities and values as expressed in the codes of etiquette, decorum,

and ritual that determine the kinds of speech and behavior considered appropriate to the setting” (Lincoln, 1994, p. 9). A violation of these implicit rules often results in some form of social or formal penalty. So, an outburst is a rare case of rhetorical attack in which the unauthorized form of the accusation itself may be seen by the salient audience as more offensive than the original accusation contained in the outburst. Few remember what Sen. Leahy said to provoke Vice President Cheney in 2004, but most remember Cheney’s crude response.

For further evidence that Wilson’s attack functioned as an outburst, we turn to responses to Wilson’s approach. The attack was roundly criticized. Rahm Emmanuel, White House chief of staff, said: “No president has ever been treated like that. Ever” (cited in Hulse, 2009a, para. 7), and on ABC’s morning talk show, *Good Morning America*, Vice President Joe Biden concluded: “I thought it demeaned the institution” (cited in Kiely, 2009, para. 5). House Democratic Whip James Clyburn, noting Wilson’s refusal to offer a public apology on the floor of the House, remarked: “He hasn’t realized the gravity of what he said, or maybe it doesn’t matter to him” (cited in Kiely, 2009, para. 12). Wilson also received criticism for this outburst from members of his own political party. Representative Joe Barton, R-Texas, said: “We ought to be able to get our message across to the president without resorting to playground tactics” (cited in Kiely, 2009, para. 10). Even Roxeanne Wilson, Joe Wilson’s wife, rebuked – mildly – her husband, saying during a video statement: “Who’s the nut that hollered out, ‘You lie or you liar? ... I couldn’t believe that Joe would say that, but he is very passionate and he is fighting the good fight” (cited in Hulse, 2009b, paras. 15-16). A survey of criticism reveals that much of the condemnation was based more on the act of outburst than the content of the outburst – an outburst that violated expectations of decorum and disregarded issues of authority.

Wilson was attacked for his attack. As the would-be accuser, he almost immediately found himself to be in need of his own image repair. It was a complicated rhetorical quandary, but one clarified by the conceptual lens of William Benoit’s typology of image repair. We turn to Benoit’s work as a useful means of tracing and assessing Wilson’s rhetorical moves.

### Outburst as Reason for Image Repair

Benoit's (1995) typology of image repair is grounded in scholarship of *apologia* (e.g., Ware & Linkugel, 1973) and accounts (Scott & Lyman, 1968). The typology is formed from five primary image repair strategies, which are further divided into specific tactics. This tool of analysis enables the rhetorical critic to identify and then analyze rhetorical attempts at image repair after someone (or some entity, such as a business or corporation) is considered responsible for an offensive act (Benoit, 1995).

*Denial* occurs when the accused either claims the perceived offensive act did not occur (*simple denial*) or attempts to move responsibility for the act to another target (*shifting the blame*). *Evading responsibility* occurs when the accused admits that an act occurs but rejects accountability for the act, a strategy that has four possible tactics: *provocation* (claiming that the act was in response to another offensive act – a challenge that had to be answered), *defeasibility* (claiming that the act was beyond control; extenuating circumstances led to the act), *accident* (claiming that the act was an accident), and *good intentions* (claiming that the accused meant well when committing the act). The third strategy, *reducing offensiveness*, occurs when the actor addresses the perceived offensiveness of the act, and this strategy has six possible tactics: *bolstering* (pointing out the positive attributes or accomplishments of the accused so that, in comparison, the act does not look as bad), *minimization* (downplaying the offensiveness of the act, suggesting that the act really was not as bad as it may appear), *differentiation* (comparing the act to another more offensive act so that, in comparison, the act in question does not look as bad), *transcendence* (placing the offensive act in a larger context, asking the audience to consider a bigger picture), *attacking the accuser* (casting doubt on the credibility of the one[s] making the accusation to lessen the charges), and *compensation* (offering some sort of reimbursement to those harmed by the act). *Corrective action* is the fourth strategy, and it occurs when the accused offers to repair the situation and/or to prevent the offensive act – or one like it – from happening again. *Mortification*, the final strategy, is an expression of regret for the offensive act. (See Benoit, 1995, 2000, for a thorough treatment of these strategies and tactics.)

Wilson made two distinct public relations attempts to repair his image after his outburst: a written statement issued the night of the outburst, and an extended interview on a Sunday morning television news program.

*Rep. Wilson's Written Statement of Apology*

Rep. Wilson's first apology came in the form of a written statement released by his office a few hours after the president's speech. The apology was reprinted – or excerpted – in a number of media forums, including national and regional newspapers.

Wilson's statement began: "This evening I let my emotions get the best of me when listening to the President's remarks regarding the coverage of illegal immigrants in the health care bill" (cited in Hulse, 2009a, para. 11). Wilson's first line – and even his first two words – was purposeful. His reference to "this evening" offered an implicit argument that his response to his infraction was immediate and timely. Indeed, when President Obama was asked for his response to Wilson's apology, the president said that he accepted the apology and, in his response, specifically mentioned that Wilson "apologized quickly" (cited in Sisk, 2009, para. 9).

The statement continued: "While I disagree with the President's statement, my comments were inappropriate and regrettable" (cited in Hulse, 2009a, para. 11). Wilson's first identifiable strategy of image repair suggested defeasibility – that he was not in control of his emotions. He let his emotions "get the best of me." Wilson would return to this strategy, putting forward a criterion for outbursts – spontaneity – as a way to excuse the outburst. Wilson also further attempted to excuse himself, clarifying the scope of both his remark and his apology. While acknowledging his outburst was ultimately "inappropriate" and "regrettable," he attempted to escape some culpability by casting his "comments" as simple disagreement. He seemed to be suggesting that he had good intentions: he wanted to go on record with a counterargument (a common and honorable act among legislators in a democracy); he just did not deliver his position in the correct manner. He ignored the outburst part of his rhetoric.

The statement ended: "I extend sincere apologies to the President for this lack of civility" (cited in Hulse, 2009a, para. 11). Wilson

concluded with a statement of mortification – his “sincere apologies.” However, he mitigates the mortification some when he apologizes for “this” incivility, not “my” incivility, as though the untoward act was separate from him. Next, Wilson returned to implicit arguments to minimize his infraction. First, he clarified that he was apologizing only “to the President,” and secondly, that he was apologizing for “this lack of civility.” The implicit argument, then, was that the only one offended by his act, his outburst, was the President, and that his infraction was a breach of decorum (between a member of the House and the President) and no more than that.

In three sentences totaling 53 words, Rep. Wilson used two image repair strategies: evading responsibility (through defeasibility and good intentions), and mortification. It was an unconventional combination of strategies – as he apologized for something he also suggested that he was not entirely responsible for doing.

*Rep. Wilson’s Image Repair Attempts via Interview*

A few days later, appearing on a Sunday morning broadcast of *Fox News Sunday* with Chris Wallace, Wilson offered variations on the theme of his written apology that both continued and, in some cases, moved away from, his written statement. The dialogic nature of the interview brought Wilson into some areas he had not yet addressed in his more generic written statement.

Asked by Wallace, “What are you going to do, sir?” in response to calls for a formal apology on the floor of the House, Wilson began: “Chris, I’m a civil person. I believe in civility on the floor” (Interview, 2009, para. 6). Immediately, Wilson returned to the issue of civility – something he had addressed at the end of his written statement (his apology for a “lack of civility”). Notably, however, Wilson pivoted from asking for forgiveness for a “lack of civility” to bolstering with claims that he was “a civil person [who] believe[s] in civility ...” With this tautology, early in the interview, Wilson’s second attempt at image repair introduced a new strategy – bolstering – that was markedly absent from his written statement.

Immediately after attempts at bolstering, Wilson returned to a strategy first introduced in his written statement: defeasibility. But this time, Wilson did more than claim “I let my emotions get the best of

me... ” Instead, he provided narrative context for the claim, a narrative that also allowed him to tie back into bolstering:

Additionally, on Wednesday night, I had just completed town hall meetings, the largest congressional town hall meetings in the history of South Carolina ... People were passionate. They do not want government control of health care. And so on Wednesday night I had what one of my sons said was a town hall moment .... (Interview, 2009, para. 6-7)

His story, then, was he had “a town hall moment.” Toby Miller, chairman of the Media and Cultural Studies Department at the University of California at Riverside, argued that the tumultuous town hall meetings on health care in the summer of 2009 assisted in creating an atmosphere of incivility that may have emboldened Wilson: “I think it represents an extraordinary shift in the terrain” (Haygood & Richards, 2009).

At this point, Wallace interrupted to ask Wilson for his response to calls that he should offer a formal apology. Wilson responded, in part, with: “I am not going to apologize again” (Interview, 2009, para. 13). Next, Wilson added: “In fact, I’ve been proven correct on the issue of citizen verification. And in fact, the Senate adopted it on Friday, and then I’m very grateful on Friday night the White House has now – is now going to include it in their bill” (Interview, 2009, para. 15). Wilson segued into a continuation of his earlier claims about the accuracy of his complaint. We see shadows of his earlier strategy of claiming good intentions – that he was simply trying to set the record straight.

Asked to explain his refusal to offer a formal apology to his House colleagues, Wilson replied:

My view is that the apology to the president, to the White House, his acceptance, the vice president’s acceptance – people know my civility. They know that this was a one-time event, and it was out of frustration. I believe in the truth.

What I heard was not true. (Interview, 2009, para. 27)

With these lines, Wilson tried to put an end to the apology storyline – that he apologized, it was accepted, and everyone should now move on. He also returned to bolstering – he labeled himself as civil and someone who “believe[s] in the truth.” We also find a strategy that seems to fall under the category of corrective action: A commitment not to do something like this again, (i.e., “this was a one-time event”). Wilson added another layer to his emotion-attributed defeasibility: frustration.

“Frustration” is the most specific naming of what type of emotion caused him to break decorum. It is also worthy of noting that Wilson repeated his primary charge: President Obama was not telling the truth, only this time, using more measured language (and punctuation), and in a time and place separated from the unique expectations of a presidential address to Congress.

Later in the interview, a clip of the outburst was re-played, and Wallace asked Wilson how he felt. Wilson responded:

Well, I have respect for the president. I have respect for the office of the president. I would never do something like that again...I just felt so provoked because I am on committee, on the committee – Education and Labor ... So I knew what he said was not true. I read the bill. I read all 1,000 pages.  
(Interview, 2009, para. 37)

Wilson continued a fairly consistent line of bolstering, highlighting his respect for the president to underscore his argument that he is civil, and corrective action – “I would never do something like that again.” Wilson continued to assert that President Obama was not telling the truth. He also introduced a new line of image repair argumentation: provocation. Indeed, Wilson used the specific word, “provoked,” to explain his outburst. He also repeated the argument embedded in his outburst—that the president was lying. Asked by Wallace for clarification on whether the president “was lying,” Wilson replied: “I believe he was misstating the facts ... I truly would have said it in a different way if I had time. And I – I respect, again, the president...” (Interview, 2009, para. 41, 43). Wilson’s stated respect for the president would be a recurring theme in the interview, mentioned again when Wallace asked for a response to the accusation that Wilson’s remarks were motivated by Obama’s race.

We also find a reemergence of the defeasibility line of defense – “I truly would have said it in a different way if I had time.” This statement added another variable through which Wilson claimed that he should not be held completely responsible – not only did emotions override his control, but also, he had very little time to formulate a better response.

Toward the end of the interview, Rep. Wilson provided a repetition of his primary arguments:

I apologized to the president one time, and it was accepted by the president, the vice president, and so I – I believe that the American people know that I'm a civil person, a person who respects the institution of the House. I have apologized to the president. I believe that is sufficient. (Interview, 2009, para. 78-79)

With these lines, Wilson highlighted that he had apologized (mortification) and attempted to bolster ("I'm a civil person ... who respects the institution of the House"). Wilson, at least, accepted the appropriateness of his own apology: He minimized the scope of the infraction and narrowly defined the offended audience as one person (the president). By apologizing for the outburst to the target of that outburst, Wilson attempts to reengineer the rhetorical situation, authorizing him to consider the matter resolved (and, we might assume, his image repaired).

Some of the image repair strategies attempted by Wilson in the interview resemble those used in his first written statement. Once again, Wilson claimed good intentions – that is, he tried to argue that he was trying to correct a falsehood, and that this intent should be factored into an assessment of his offense. Once again, Wilson continued a line of evading responsibility in general, and asserting defeasibility in particular, with an argument that his emotions took control and that he had limited time to respond. This time, Wilson also provided a narrative backing for his emotional state – that he was caught up in the spirit of the rallies that he had been attending that day. Once again, Wilson continued to mention his apology to the President. New strategies also appeared in the interview: bolstering and corrective action. Wilson stressed that he was civil, and he committed – twice – to not doing something like this again.

On September 15, the House voted to formally rebuke Rep. Wilson in a 240 to 179 vote (Kane, 2009). Seven Republicans joined Democrats to pass the resolution of disapproval. Bob Inglis, one of the Republicans who voted for the measure, noted, "That problem could have been fixed by an apology to the House" (cited in Freeman, 2009, para. 1). Many Democrats agreed. They "characterized the sanction as mild and said they would not have pursued any action at all had Mr. Wilson taken the floor and apologized to his colleagues for disrupting the address" (Hulse, 2009b, para. 7).

## Discussion

Outbursts change the expected pattern of attacks and image repair: (*kategoria*) followed by defense (*apologia*). In a conventional analysis of Rep. Wilson and Pres. Obama's "exchange," an examination of the rhetorical situation would likely identify the attack (Wilson: You lie!) and then turn to the image repair strategies of the target of the attack (Obama: That's not true.). Obama's image repair attempts would be classified as a simple denial. It is a remarkably short speech set (Ryan, 1982), a five-word attack and defense. However, as our analysis reveals, outbursts change the conventional pattern of attack and defense. Rep. Wilson's attack was followed by his own image repair as Wilson attempted to repair the damage from his own attack. A short two-word outburst led to an extended national dialogue about decorum, authority, etiquette, and civility in an unprecedented rhetorical scenario.

Unprecedented, we argue, but likely not an isolated incident. Indeed, this exchange typifies a heated form of political rhetoric that seems here to stay, at least for a while. Thus, an analysis of Wilson's outburst and subsequent image repair does more than highlight a specific incidence of a political rhetorical breach. Instead, an analysis of Wilson's outburst and subsequent image repair serves as a model for analyzing other, and future, political outbursts. As we consider five primary conclusions of this analysis, we tie our findings into larger issues of outburst in and out of the political sphere.

*1. Image rehabilitation after outbursts should acknowledge issues of authority.* Much of the criticism of Wilson stemmed from his breach of decorum – the “!” nature of his statement. Yet, his formal apology was not performed in the same rhetorical space as the offense – despite calls for an apology before the House. This was a mistake. Children who, for example, break a neighbor's window with a misguided rock are seldom allowed by their parents to write a note of apology to rectify the offense. Instead, parents instruct children to approach the neighbor – at the location of the offense, placing themselves in the same space where the attacked may authorize speech – to offer their apologies. By doing so, the offenders do not just mortify; they rebalance the authority equation.

Wilson did not rebalance the authority equation. Although he made his apology directly to President Obama, approximating a private

exchange – a note of apology – he made his attack in public. His outburst was a personal offense to Obama, but it was also an offense to the House rules and to general etiquette. Yet, Wilson explicitly refused to apologize to the House. Consequently, Wilson’s image repair attempts did not meet a standard of appropriateness in light of the infraction. His violation can be measured against the stasis issue of jurisdiction: A joint session of Congress was not an appropriate venue for a rebuke; a private apology was not an appropriate venue for atoning for a public infraction.

Media further complicate the rhetorical equation. Mediated private acts become public; public acts take on a veneer of intrapersonal as news consumers see actors’ faces and hear actors’ own words in their own voices (Meyrowtiz, 1985). Mediated outbursts can fundamentally change how we draw lines of appropriateness across political contexts – from debates to formal legislative sessions, from town hall meetings to campaign stop Q&As. An outburst crosses a line of appropriateness – by definition; image repair after outbursts must acknowledge similar lines of appropriateness.

*2. Claims of defeasibility after outbursts may backfire and further damage credibility.* Wilson’s most commonly repeated strategy was of defeasibility – a claim that he could not control his emotions. We contend that this repeated strategy might have backfired. As one *New York Times* editorialist put it: “Wouldn’t you rather admit it was a plan than say you had so little self-control that hearing the president make a frequently stated claim about a much-debated bill caused you to create a spectacle on national TV?” (Collins, 2009, para. 10). We expect our politicians to act reasonably, to display control, and Wilson’s outburst not only called that characteristic into question, but his image repair attempts explicitly admitted a lack of control. His admission, his inability to control himself, also weakens his commitment to avoid repeating similar acts in the future. If his outburst was in fact a loss of control, what steps will he take to prevent it from happening again?

President Bush faced similar problems in his public accounting for the War in Iraq and the federal response to the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Benoit (2006) found that Bush’s claims of bad intelligence about Iraq did not help to rehabilitate his public standing, since he seemed to trade in the appearance of malfeasance for a rather significant case of misfeasance. Among other strategies, Bush also claimed defeasibility regarding Katrina. Benoit and Henson (2009) argued this

strategy served to make him appear weak and ineffectual as a leader.

Further, Wilson's reasons for defeasibility were not always consistent. While most of his defeasibility claims were tied to the unpredictability of emotions and feelings, he also added, at one point during his interview with Chris Wallace: "I truly would have said it in a different way if I had time." This statement was especially odd. An audience member during a speech – especially a formal speech – is not expected to interrupt or interject. It was not that President Obama paused for audience comments or questions, as Wilson's argument that he just did not have enough time to formulate this response suggests. In addition, he creates an internal contradiction: His unauthorized speech was regrettable because it was out of control *and* not long enough. He suggests a longer argument would have been more appropriate, while never dealing with the clear jurisdictional issue of whether it would ever be the right time and place to do during a presidential address. Time will tell if the reckless abandon of "a town hall moment" will rise to a level of respectability in the hallowed halls of Congress, but for the time being it seems unlikely that the absence of self-control will merit a favorable response from most auditors.

Lessons of the limitations of defeasibility after outbursts extend beyond Wilson's ineffective strategy. Other political and public actors should take heed: Outbursts, in their very act of being an outburst, suggest a lack of control. As Goffman (1955) observed, "The person must restrain his [*sic*] emotional involvement so as not to present an image of someone with no self-control or dignity who does not rise above his feelings" (p. 227). Drawing attention to this lack of control in explanations that follow only magnify a potential weakness.

3. *Outburst image repair must address all salient audiences – immediately.* Wilson should have apologized to all involved – the President, the House, and the viewing public – in his first written statement. Wilson was right to apologize quickly – even if he was asked by his colleagues to do so (see Interview, 2009). Wilson's apology – while timely – was incomplete. By adopting the discourse of *hoi polloi* in this particular situation, Wilson offended more than the person of President Obama; he violated the privileged sphere with unauthorized speech. In making this rhetorical attack, his claim of offensiveness *becomes the offense*, not due to its content, but because it so significantly stepped over the communication boundaries that had held sway in an

historic institution. At a minimum, salient audiences of the outburst engaged Ryan's (1982) stasis of quality (the act was inexcusable) and the stasis jurisdiction (the actor lacked sufficient authority), and Benoit and Dorries' (1996) topoi of responsibility (he knew better) and offensiveness (he undermined the respect for the institution). The rhetorical form becomes the offense, a conundrum that Wilson never sufficiently addresses. Even some of his Republican colleagues publicly acknowledged that his image repair discourse was incomplete.

4. *Outbursts are defined by a delivery dissonant with their contexts.* The content of Wilson's outburst – calling the President a liar – is harsh, whether shouted or whispered. Yet, in some political arenas, even such direct verbal attacks fit within the realm of expectations (e.g., political debates). What dictates the offensiveness of Wilson's outburst, then, was that the political arena in question values – in its rules and in its tone – controlled demeanor.

5. *Rhetors may attempt to reduce dissonance inherent in their outbursts by redefining the context of their outburst.* Wilson attempted to shift his remarks to a rancorous town hall setting to lessen the offensiveness of his outburst. One of his more unique responses occurred during an interview on Fox News. Quoting his son, he mentioned, as an excuse for his outburst, that he was having “a town hall moment.” For some in his audience, this strategy probably resonated. Previous to 2009, summertime town hall meetings were a relatively uneventful tradition for Congressional members coming home and connecting with their constituents. However, during the summer of 2009, “Americans who would soon serve as the backbone of the Tea Party movement showed up at town hall meetings around the country to rail against lawmakers over the health care bill and other issues (Montopoli, 2010, para. 2). The tone became angry and loud, creating a template for conservative responses to the President's health care proposals. Yet this “town hall” approach is only responsible if one equates the tension and bluster of the 2009 summertime town halls with a joint session of Congress. As mentioned previously, we contend that for a majority of observers, the two rhetorical situations are not equal. Indeed, Gallup (2009) found that “Americans by more than a 3-to-1 margin oppose rather than favor Rep. Wilson's” outburst.

Our conclusions in this essay suggest the importance of studying further the function of outburst as attack and offense – not only in

political realms, but in areas such as entertainment and commerce as well. Jamieson (2012) finds that the cultural media industries and the tenor of much public discourse are growing more corrosive. Scenes of otherwise civil and meaningful dialogue like town halls are transformed into metaphors for rancor and confrontation. Consequently, it would be valuable to turn more scholarly attention to the nature of outbursts and rhetorical authority in the public negotiation of issues and image, a crucial yet understudied focus for public communication practice and scholarship.

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**“It’s all About Getting the Job Done:”  
Information Acquisition Among Restaurant Workers**  
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**Abstract**

*The purpose of this study was to identify the types of information that restaurant workers consider important for their successful job performance, and the information-seeking strategies they use to seek these types of information. Six focus groups with 41 restaurant employees were conducted. Using thematic analysis, it was found that restaurant workers considered technical and referent information to be the most important to their job performance and they relied on the overt, third party, and observing strategies to obtain this information.*

According to the National Restaurant Association (2015), one half of all Americans have been employed by the restaurant industry at some point during their working lives. Regardless of whether the restaurant is a quick service, casual dining, or fine dining establishment and independent of the capacity in which individuals are employed (e.g., cook, server), all restaurant work is centered on meeting the needs and demands of its customers (Susskind, Kacmar, & Borchgrevink, 2007). Meeting these needs and demands, however, can be problematic due to the stressors that surround restaurant work. These stressors include low pay; hectic and demanding work shifts and schedules; problematic coworkers, managers, and customers; the pressure to uphold both individual restaurant and franchise standards; and a high rate of employee turnover (Bennett, Aden, Broome, Mitchell, & Rigdon, 2010; Petree, Broome, & Bennett, 2012; Self & Dewald, 2011).

Accompanying these stressors is the continual and necessary need for restaurant workers to obtain the information necessary for them to perform their tasks satisfactorily. Morrison (1995) identified seven types of information organizational employees find useful. Three types -- technical, referent, and appraisal--are essential for job performance. *Technical information* provides the content needed to perform a job

efficiently and effectively; *referent information* identifies the responsibilities, expectations, and objectives associated with a specific job; and *appraisal information* evaluates the extent to which a job is performed adequately (Morrison). Four types of information--social, normative, organizational, and political--afford insight into how a workplace functions. *Social information* deals with the relationships established among employees; *normative information* centers on the corporate history, culture, and philosophy; *organizational information* focuses on the workplace policies and procedures; and *political information* revolves around the power structure and resource allocation of the organization (Morrison).

To obtain these types of information, organizational employees typically use one of several information-seeking strategies (Miller & Jablin, 1991). Of the seven strategies, only one strategy--the *overt strategy*--requires direct interaction between two employees (Miller & Jablin) and usually is used when an employee has a particular information source in mind (Morrison, 1993b). The other six strategies are monitoring strategies through which employees obtain information in ways other than direct interaction and without a particular information source in mind (Miller & Jablin; Morrison). The *indirect strategy* requires hinting at the information through asking questions or making comments, the *third party strategy* involves obtaining information from coworkers other than the desired information source, the *testing strategy* necessitates deviating from workplace norms to determine if the deviation is noticed by coworkers, the *observing strategy* entails watching how coworkers behave and communicate, the *disguising conversations* strategy involves embedding verbal prompts into conversations with coworkers to obtain information, and the *surveillance strategy* requires retrospectively reflecting on how coworkers behave and communicate (Miller & Jablin).

### **Rationale**

According to Susskind et al. (2007), the extent to which restaurant workers embrace a guest service orientation is linked to the amount and types of support they receive from their coworkers and their supervisors. That is, when employees are able to rely on their coworkers and their managers to provide them with relevant information, tips,

advice, and help, they are more motivated to provide efficient customer service. Because the support restaurant workers provide for each other is grounded in information, one purpose of this study was to identify the types of information restaurant workers deem important for successful job performance. Another purpose was to identify the information-seeking strategies restaurant workers use to seek information because whether they directly or indirectly seek information may be dependent on the relationships they have with their coworkers and supervisors. To examine these ideas, the following two research questions are posed:

RQ1: Among restaurant workers, what types of information are considered to be the most important in terms of job performance?

RQ2: Among restaurant workers, what information-seeking do they use most frequently to obtain the information necessary for job performance?

### **Method**

Participants were 41 restaurant employees (22 men, 19 women) who worked, on average, 22 hours ( $M = 22.10$ ,  $SD = 9.84$ ;  $Mo = 20$ ) a week at a quick service restaurant ( $n = 26$ ), a casual dining restaurant ( $n = 11$ ), a fine dining restaurant ( $n = 1$ ), or other ( $n = 3$ ). Their ages ranged from 18-28 years ( $M = 20.59$ ,  $SD = 1.79$ ) and the majority of participants was Caucasian ( $n = 33$ , or 80%). Most participants were currently enrolled in college ( $n = 32$ , or 78%), with the remaining participants having completed either high school ( $n = 7$ ) or an associate's degree ( $n = 2$ ). The participants had an average of 16.85 months ( $SD = 24.31$ ) of experience working at their respective workplace ( $Mo = 1$  year; range: 1 month-12 years).

Upon receiving approval from the university's Institutional Review Board, participants were recruited from students enrolled in several (both introductory and advanced) communication courses at a large Mid-Atlantic institution. Undergraduate students in these courses who currently worked either part-time or full-time at a restaurant were invited to participate in a focus group conducted outside of regularly scheduled class time. They were informed that the focus group would be audiotaped, that their participation would be voluntary, and that their responses would be kept confidential. Students were given the option of

participating themselves or recruiting a friend who met the same criteria. Those students who chose to participate (either themselves or through recruitment of a friend) received a minimal amount of extra credit at the discretion of their course instructor.

Six focus groups ranging in size from 4-10 members were conducted, which ranged in length from 42 to 59 minutes ( $M = 51.68$ ,  $SD = 5.51$ ). Following the procedures advocated by Kruger and Casey (2009), each focus group was conducted by a three or four member team and consisted of a moderator, an assistant moderator, and a greeter. Participants were met by the greeter, constructed a name tent that listed their first name and their place of employment, completed a demographic information sheet that inquired about their tenure at their workplace, and provided with two lists needed for the focus group (i.e., one list identified and defined each of the seven types of information, one list identified and defined each of the seven information-seeking strategies). Once the focus group was complete, participants were thanked for their participation and excused.

The audiotapes of the six focus groups then were transcribed, which resulted in 105 pages of single-spaced text. Using standard qualitative procedures identified by Strauss and Corbin (1998), the data first were analyzed by having each member of the research team independently read all six transcripts and identify themes through open coding. These themes (i.e., identified by the research team members) then were analyzed a second time by the leader of the research team. Utilizing Owen's (1984) criteria for theme identification (i.e., recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness), the findings obtained in this study emerged.

## Results

The first research question inquired about the types of information that restaurant employees considered to be the most important in terms of their job performance. Overwhelmingly, the majority of participants reported that both technical and referent information were the most crucial types of information needed for completing their job responsibilities. They considered the acquisition of technical information the most basic type of needed information because it not only let them know what they needed to do to get the job done, but also it centered on the basic yet specific details about the tasks for which

they were particularly responsible, such as the ingredients that comprise a menu item, how to “ring up” an order, and the specials being offered. As one participant concisely noted, “if I don’t know what goes on the sandwich, how do I know how to make it?” Acquiring technical information also was considered important due to the standardization in the food service industry that requires routine patterns of service, products, and customer experience within and across restaurant locations, particularly among those participants who worked at a franchised restaurant and were required to complete their tasks based on a specific protocol to ensure identical service across all franchised restaurants. As one participant stated, “if your customers go down the street to another [location], you better make sure it is going to be the exact same thing they get here.”

Other participants claimed technical information resulted in speed and efficiency, increased customer turnover, and increased restaurant profits. Obtaining technical information also served as a motive for receiving financial and social rewards. For financial rewards, participants viewed mastering technical information as a means of getting promoted, being assigned more shifts, and receiving an official paycheck. Those participants who relied on tips considered technical information to be crucial to their livelihood because, as one participant stated, “you make \$2.13 an hour. If you don’t know how to do your job, you are not going to make any money.” For social rewards, respect awarded from their peers was important. “If you are not going to do the job right, no one is going to respect you,” remarked one participant. Another participant stated that technical information was important because coworkers would have no desire to associate with them if they were unable to do their job correctly: “No one is [like] going to want to be associated with you if you are not doing your job right, so it would be tough to be comfortable if you don’t know how to do your job.” For many restaurant workers, knowing technical information was essential to being perceived favorably by their coworkers.

The participants also considered it important to obtain referent information due to the collaborative effort required among restaurant employees to complete their tasks efficiently. As one participant suggested, “if everyone is not doing a specific job, then it’s kind of a mess. So I think that it is [referent information] that makes it run smoothly.” Because restaurants employ a variety of workers who fulfill a

specific task (e.g., custodial, customer service, food preparation), obtaining information about each task is essential. Moreover, employees are eventually expected to know the specific tasks associated with their position. Several participants noted that they were required to complete “side work” as part of their duties and that this side work changed from day to day. Knowing the specific tasks associated with side work on a given day was necessary because “if you don’t do side work right it messes everything up for everyone, and nobody will do it because it’s your fault.” One participant indicted that “you really need to know what you are required to do and what is expected of you . . . that is why you are there.”

At the same time, participants did not consider the other types of information (i.e., social, appraisal, normative, organizational, and political) to be important because these five types had little to do with their job performance (at least in their eyes) and also because the types of information simply are not useful. For many participants, social information was considered less important because it represented more of a fraternizing aspect of their jobs, particularly for those participants who worked alone and were physically isolated (e.g., working in a dish room by themselves) from their coworkers. As one participant stated, “I work at a station by myself, so I don’t really have to talk to anybody. I just have my headphones in.” Appraisal information was devalued because many participants believed their performance did not matter, largely due in part to a lack of formal feedback received from their managers (e.g., systematic performance assessments). Rather, appraisal information emerged in verbal statements such as “good job;” “I don’t have control over that, [the managers] just decide how [well you perform];” “I know I do my job well, so it’s like if they don’t think that, that’s their fault;” and “you are not really going to get fired from [doing your job] poorly.” Both normative and organizational information were deemed less important to some participants because they did not consider either the history or the policies of the organization to be directly relevant to completing their job tasks. “I couldn’t care less about the organization’s culture . . . I don’t need to know the history or worry about stuff to make a burger,” one participant stated. Very few participants regarded political information to be important, primarily because they considered the political structure of their restaurant to be rather obvious or flat.

The second research question inquired about the information-seeking strategies restaurant workers use most frequently to obtain the information necessary for their job performance. Collectively, most of the participants reported that they used the overt information-seeking strategy most frequently for seeking information simply because it was perceived to be the most efficient and easiest way to acquire accurate information. One reason why the use of the overt strategy was perceived as efficient was because it allowed participants to learn quickly and immediately about their tasks. As one participant said, "I like to get straight to the point . . . I figure the best way to learn or find something out is to just directly ask a question. You know, like how to do it. Like, basically I feel if you ask, 'how do you do this?' they'll show you the right way and all the steps to do it and the right manner." Other participants considered the overt information-seeking strategy to be efficient because it was the "safest bet" to obtain information directly from an individual (almost always a manager) who wanted the task completed the "right way." Still other participants used the overt strategy because it allowed them to obtain the information needed to complete an assigned task without having to take the time to observe how their coworkers performed the same task. And by using the overt strategy with a manager, participants stated that they could learn exactly what they needed to know in order to correctly perform their tasks rather than run the risk of receiving inaccurate information that could jeopardize their job. As one participant noted, ". . . it is easier to get a straightforward answer from the boss . . . maybe a coworker doesn't exactly know and they tell you something and then you do it, so you're wrong and you get yelled at for it. It's easier to just go to the boss and skip any problems that might occur."

When information could not be obtained directly, participants relied primarily on two of the six monitoring information-seeking strategies, which are the third party strategy and the observing strategy. Participants used the third party strategy primarily out of convenience, although this strategy also was used if the participants' bosses or managers were busy or unavailable. One participant stated that "sometimes the bosses are busy, or a lot of times you're working right next to three or four other waitresses so it's just so much easier to tap them on the shoulder and ask, because they're right there." Participants used the observing strategy when they were unable to remember or retain

information, when they wanted to obtain information without annoying or appearing incompetent in front of their coworkers (e.g., one participant reported “when you’re just starting out, you don’t want to ask a lot of questions and seem like you don’t really know what you’re doing”), or when they needed to learn the necessary work norms (e.g., one participant said “you can ask the manager and they tell you the right way [to perform a task], but it’s not the fast way. They tell you the right way to do it, but everybody else does it the fast way”).

Although the other monitoring information-seeking strategies (i.e., indirect, testing, surveillance, and disguising conversations) were used infrequently, participants were adamant that their decision to not use the testing information-seeking strategy was most influenced by the repercussions that could arise from its use. These repercussions included being assigned an unfavorable task, losing their preferred shifts, getting reprimanded, and possibly getting terminated. Even in those restaurants that participants described as “lenient” or “forgiving,” the use of the testing strategy was considered to be risky and problematic. One participant said “I mean, if you test it out and you get your manager on a bad day, you could get fired” and another participant said “if I was to just break rules to see how they would react, I’d probably get fired pretty quick.” They also reported a lack of job security and the frequency of turnover in their organization as deterrents against using the testing strategy because, as one participant offered, “I wouldn’t want to break the rules and then get fired for it just for trying to see if that was what I could do.” The surveillance, disguising conversations, and indirect strategies were rarely used because their use was regarded as ineffective, inefficient, and irrelevant. “At work, you’re not really trying to hint around or question, you’re trying to get it done as quickly as possible,” noted one participant.

## **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to examine the information acquisition practices of restaurant workers by inquiring about both the types of information they deem important for successful job performance and the specific information-seeking strategies they use to acquire information. Collectively, the findings suggest that restaurant workers (a) identify technical and referent information as being the most important to

their job success and (b) rely primarily on the overt information-seeking strategy, and, to a lesser extent, the third party and observing strategies as a means to obtain technical and referent information. These collective findings not only support Morrison's (1995) claim that some information types are considered to be more useful than other types, but also that the importance of information, as well as the frequency with which organizational employees seek information, affects workers' choice of information-seeking strategies (Miller, 1996).

Similar to the findings obtained in other studies (e.g., Comer, 1991; Morrison, 1993b), the participants in this study reported that they considered both referent and technical information to be important to their job success. This finding makes sense, given that (a) organizational newcomers seek information specifically as a way to learn how to accomplish job-related tasks and obtain workplace rules and standards (Teboul, 1997) and (b) the acquisition of technical information results in increased task mastery, whereas the acquisition of referent information results in enhanced work role clarity (Morrison, 1993a). Because restaurants require their employees to directly interact with guests by providing them with an immediate and tangible product (i.e., food and beverage service), often based on a predetermined and arbitrary time frame that adheres to strict industry standards and requirements (Susskind et al., 2007), restaurant workers must rely on technical and referent information simply to meet the demands of their guests. Other types of information (e.g., social, appraisal, normative, organizational, and political) may not be deemed as important, useful, or even necessary by restaurant workers because these information types generally do not affect the preparation and distribution of the product, which ultimately is the vehicle through which guests rate the effectiveness and efficiency of any restaurant. Indeed, Morrison (1995) found that organizational newcomers seek technical and referent information more frequently than social, appraisal, normative, organizational and political information. And as Morrison and Vancouver (2000) posited, if certain types of information are considered to be important, then employees will seek more information.

At the same time, the participants in this study reported using the overt, third party, and observing information-seeking strategies as ways to obtain both technical and referent information. This finding, too, echoes the findings of prior research studies in that organizational

employees not only report using the overt information-seeking strategy the most frequently (Comer, 1991; Holder, 1996; Miller, 1996; Myers, 1998), but also do so particularly when seeking technical information (Comer; Morrison, 1991, 1995). However, participants also reported using two of the six monitoring strategies--third party and observing--when seeking information. In the restaurant industry, employees may use these two strategies due to the fast pace and interdependent nature of their work tasks. Unlike some other occupations, restaurants rely on teamwork and coordination among its employees to meet its goals. For these workers, then, being able to ask a third party (rather than their immediate supervisor) for information or observe the actions of their coworkers may be the most appropriate strategy, particularly if the information source is unavailable or workers are afraid that their requests for information will be interpreted as a sign of incompetence. As Morrison and Vancouver (2000; Vancouver & Morrison, 1995) reported, employees are less likely to seek information if they consider the information to be difficult to obtain, if the source either is not accessible or lacks credibility, or if their relationship with the source is low quality. These reasons, while speculative, may explain why the participants in this study chose to use the third party and observing information-seeking strategies.

One limitation of this study, which should be considered in future research endeavors, is that the social costs associated with obtaining the seven types of information, as well as with using the seven information-seeking strategies, was not assessed. Social costs are negatively related to individuals' use of the overt information-seeking strategy and positively related to individuals' use of the monitoring information-seeking strategies (Fonner & Timmerman, 2009; Miller, 1996). Because one stressor linked with employment in the restaurant industry is dealing with hostile, lazy, and rude coworkers (Petree et al., 2012), it is possible that interacting with these coworkers is perceived as a social cost, which may influence whether and how restaurant workers chose to seek information from each other. At the same time, because the restaurant industry suffers from a high turnover rate (Self & Dewald, 2011), employees may not be able to develop peer relationships (i.e., information, collegial, and special; Kram & Isabella, 1985) with each other, which may affect both their need to obtain information and the strategies they use to seek information. Because organizational workers

are more likely to seek information from their peers than from their supervisors (Teboul, 1994) and peers are more available than supervisors as information sources (Miller, 1996), exploring further the role that peer relationships plays in restaurant workers' information acquisition practices is warranted.

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## The Actor As Fire And Cloud

John Wilson

### Abstract

*The Actor As Fire And Cloud* challenges artists, but especially Christian artists to trust the Bible as teachable **knowledge**, and to extrapolate from scripture, principles in the craft of actor training that are applicable to all students, irrespective of any specific faith allegiance or none at all. The conflict of teaching from Biblical texts and the perceived political inferences, stereotypes and intolerances they assert within academic and public circles keeps these writings from being used in theatre classrooms to the detriment of students exploring their craft—for, it is asserted—the Bible **is** reliable knowledge and the historical stories, characters and principles contained therein have a wealth to teach all of us as active students of theatre, and life.

The classical understanding is that the arts are a powerful means of communicating something significant about reality, a means of representing truth.

—Charles Colson and Nancy Pearcey, *How Now Shall We Live?*

Imagine that you are one of the six hundred thousand Jews escaping Egypt at the beginning of the Exodus. You are with your spouse, your children, or your friends. You have your possessions, your animals, and sparse food supplies. The congregation around you is filled with fast talk and excitement as you literally walk away from centuries of bondage and domination by the country you just yesterday called home. A pillar of cloud guides you during the day, a pillar of fire by night. The presence of God and where he is leading are unmistakable. At night, when your eyes simply cannot stave off sleep any longer, you take your last glance at a towering inferno that communicates power, life, love, and safety. It is impossible to be distracted by anything other than what is happening in that very moment in front of you. Each of your senses is

alive. There is very little thought to the past. The future cannot even be conceived. Only the now reigns supreme. In the morning, you wake and the immediacy of the moment starts all over again as you realize the fire has transformed miraculously into a monolith of cloud that moves independent of the wind, guiding your tribe in detailed and traceable steps that move forward, left, and right. It is impossible not to pay attention, point, gasp, and have the awe and majesty of every moment be expressed with tears, shouts of praise, and unfettered laughter.

Compare this to a few nights earlier and the approaching first Passover. The witching hour is midnight, but the land waits not for a witch but for the Lord himself, accompanied by the Angel of Death and the promise of coming destruction upon the firstborn of all humans and animals. Moses has been sending the Passover instructions that God communicated to him throughout the Israelite territories: “Take care of [the sheep] until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the people of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs. On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every first born—both men and animals—and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord. The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt” (Ex 12:6–7, 12–13).

Did anyone sleep that night? “Okay, fresh coat of lamb’s blood is on the door. Good night. Sleep well! See you in the morning.” What about any Egyptians who had heard the rumors of the approaching disaster, or who had Jewish friends who explicitly warned them? What was the tenor of the family dynamic inside those households? After all, they had just seen Moses deliver on the nine previous plagues. “Angel-Smangel! Moses serves a false god. Let’s get some shut-eye.”

I imagine that in both households, there was a presence and moment-to-moment living that matched the height of the life-and-death stakes before them. I can imagine every parent and grandparent staying up to that witching hour of midnight, standing in the cramped doorway where the children slept, their eyes round and their breath held as they watched the oldest son in the room, sleeping peacefully. At 12:01, as the children of the Passover kept sleeping and the Egyptian children suddenly stopped breathing, seemingly turning to stone, there was an

equal amount of wailing and praising that filled the Egyptian night. Every parent was now in touch with the immediate presence of joy or anguish. They wore it on their skin; it was palpable in their voices; and they clung to each other, either gripped with fear or ready to faint from relief.

We have lost the mystery of this kind of presence. We rarely live in the moment with another human being. We are even less present with God. The nuances of communication within a myriad of relationships are being subjugated by social media and endless distractions embedded across the Internet. For marriages, families, and friendships, this enslavement to twenty-four-hour media/entertainment/gaming/social networking causes fissures, creating an incrementally increasing distance between ourselves and those we love. More to the point of this article, however, this diminishing presence, when between actors onstage and the audiences in the theatre, means death. Without genuine presence, without actors living fully and truthfully moment-to-moment onstage, the death of theatre as the preeminent storytelling experience is inescapable.

You might argue that the Exodus or other Biblical examples invoke a necessity of presence because their life circumstances were so dangerous, but I will counter with, “Acting is dangerous!” Or, if not—it should be! Every moment on stage, you risk telling the story wrong, not communicating truth, and being emotionally dishonest or not present enough to guide your fellow actors or the audience to the heart and soul of the story. That kind of danger is real. The responsibility you have as an actor carries with it the potential to change minds and hearts. As Paul Johnson asserts in his book, *Intellectuals*, “Those who want to influence men’s minds have long recognized that the theatre is the most powerful medium through which to make the attempt.”

Listening and being present. These are essentials to the craft of acting, and they are presumed such an instinctual part of the “talent DNA” in great actors that they can often be considered too difficult to teach with concrete systems in the theatre classroom. How do you, after all, *teach* presence? But here is where combining Biblical scripture with standard acting technique can awaken the imaginations of our students and inspire them to not just comprehend the *idea* of presence, but *apprehend* it as part of their artistic intuition.

Scripture is historical. Irrespective of one’s beliefs about the supernatural, the presence of a triune God in the universe, or his

covenant with Abraham's offspring, the historical facts are incontrovertible: Israel has existed as a kingdom for millennia and their various captivities by Egypt and Babylon are recorded in the histories of other peoples, not just in the Jewish texts. Contrary to the prejudices of some historians who want to write Israel's existence off as pure myth, too many evidences exist corroborating the Biblical texts. Assyrian and Egyptian archeology have offered up numerous steles and stones extinguishing the Israel myth with hieroglyphics and inscriptions identifying Israel as a nation, even identifying them as a nation under captivity and upon whom slave labor has been practiced for the advancement of the conquering kingdoms. "Archaeologists have uncovered a tomb schematic showing Semitic slaves making mud bricks at the Egyptian city of Thebes on the Nile. Likewise, a well-known inscription at the private tomb of Rekhmire, the highest-ranking official under pharaohs Tuthmosis III and Amenophis II, depicts slaves making mud bricks during the construction of the Karnak Temple Complex. Egyptian-born professor of Old Testament and Ancient Near Eastern history and archaeology James Hoffmeier aptly points out that, 'the practice of using forced labor for building projects is only documented for the period 1450-1200, the very time most Biblical historians place the Israelites in Egypt.'"

There are many other archeological artifacts, inscriptions, steles, stones and scrolls that make the verdict clear: The Exodus is part of Israel's history. The acting principles available to glean from God's presence with them as a pillar of both fire and cloud, before and after the crossing of the Red Sea, can be used to inspire and teach students *about* presence regardless whether one actually believes in the supernatural details of the Exodus itself.

This is not the same as trying to teach these principles using the fantastical mythologies of ancient Greece or Rome. There are no records in history from which today's humans actively live by the precepts of Zeus or Apollo; no worship is given based on sacred texts or resting on evidence from antiquity, yet alone reality. It has already been categorically dismissed that these mythologies were superstitions and stories—belief systems nonetheless—but rooted in imagination and religion, not reality. The Biblical stories, by contrast, deal with real events concerning real people in real places, and though the supernatural might be an obstacle for some, the historical movements of the Jewish

people and at least the *possibility* of the supernatural events being true provide more anchorage in the imagination of the actor than trying to extrapolate concrete acting tools from fairy tales.

This potentially divisive thesis (that the Bible unveils to its artistic readers, knowledge of historical events and Biblically based virtues that in turn can translate to cognate acting tools) drives us to a pause in which each artist must make a distinction between *faith* and *knowledge*. The objectives of the Western world since the 17<sup>th</sup> century have been to slowly construct an “upper room” where the faith of the believer is to be ushered and kept behind closed doors; with faith, its superstitions and its private rituals out of the way—upstairs and kept private—knowledge is then left on the main floor, acting as the only currency of intellect in the market place of ideas. Fast-forward to the post-Christian era of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and you see the upper room fully finished and faith comfortably locked away. But are faith and knowledge supposed to be separated like this?

“The central teachings of the Christian religion, such as those of the Apostles’ Creed, were from the beginning presented and accepted as knowledge—knowledge of what is real and what is right. That is why they had the transforming effect they did on a world dead set against them. Indeed, the Biblical tradition as a whole presents itself, rightly or wrongly, as one of *knowledge of God*.”

Whether it’s Abraham leaving his land in search of a land he did not know, promised to him by God, or Moses being called to rescue the Israelites, or the prophet Samuel picking David as king, or David himself going up against Goliath: all of these actions credited to the individuals as actions of *faith*, were based on each one of them having a *knowledge* of God. “Over and over in the Old Testament the explanation of events in human history is that humans may *know* that Jehovah is the living God. *An act of faith in the Biblical tradition is always undertaken in an environment of knowledge and is inseparable from it.*”

Dallas Willard rightly summarizes this thought from his book, *Knowing Christ Today*, when he says, “We can never understand the life of faith seen in scripture and in serious Christian living unless we drop the idea of faith as a “blind leap” and understand that faith is the commitment to action, often beyond our natural abilities, *based upon knowledge of God and God’s ways*. The romantic talk of “leaping,” to which we in the Western world have become accustomed, actually

amounts to “leaping” *without* faith—that is, with no genuine belief at all. And that is actually what people have in mind today when they speak of a “leap of faith.”

The Biblical stories know absolutely nothing of blind “leaps of faith,” as that phrase is now understood. Such “leaps” are a pure fantasy imposed upon those stories and upon the religious life by the prejudices and tortured turns of modern thought. The result has been to undermine the *foundations of faith in knowledge* and to leave the teachings of Jesus and his people (along with those of all other religions) hanging in the air, with no right or responsibility to direct human life. That also explains how many people can now say, “All religions are equal.” What is meant is that all religions are equally devoid of knowledge and reality or truth. In fact, however, no known religions are the same; they teach and practice radically different things. You only have to look at them to see that. To say they are all the “same” is to disrespect them. It is a way of claiming that none really matter, that their distinctives are of no human significance.”

One of the most highly regarded American philosophers, Alvin Plantinga rightly points out that knowledge is an essential element to Christian faith, and he dismisses the common assumption that one can only believe that God exists, but cannot know it. He remarks, “The Bible regularly speaks of *knowledge* in this context—not just rational or well-founded belief. Of course, it is true that the believer has *faith*—faith in God, faith in what he reveals—but this by no means settles the issue. The question is whether he doesn’t also *know* that God exists.” Irrespective of whether you are reading the Old or New Testament, knowledge *of* God is always the connecting tissue to faith *in* God.

Up until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Bible was one of the main texts, if not the only text in the classroom. There was a time when the Bible was taught *as knowledge*. To look at its dismissal from the classroom as enlightenment from Stone Age thinking, is to not pay attention to the political winners and losers since the 1960’s. Bolstering this argument is important for the artistic teacher who wants to dive into scripture in order to extract Biblical inspiration for teaching the craft of acting.

The acting teacher desiring to teach artistic truths from scripture should rest secure in the Bible’s authority throughout academic history. That teacher, armed with the *artistic* agenda of her syllabus should quell

any fear from administrative personnel who think an acting lesson from the Bible is on par with proselytizing. The Bible can be easily shown to offer rich and diverse acting tools that widen our students' understanding of basic performance principles. Listening and being present, for example, are only two of many Biblical virtues that translate into acting cognates, and the Exodus story is only one of many that can awaken the artists' imagination, helping them actually apprehend the practice of presence and effective listening onstage.

Let's put this to the test. In the following, I will combine Biblical stories, principles, and quotations with the rudimentary stage concepts of listening and presence as taught by master teachers, Patsy Rodenburg and Sanford Meisner. This combination will be an attempt to coalesce Biblical story and teaching, with practiced acting craft, using the Bible to expand our knowledge and imagination in order to more deeply apply Meisner and Rodenburg's acting techniques.

Patsy Rodenburg, England's acclaimed voice teacher and actor coach to the stars has done a beautiful job in codifying three circles of energy that she regularly teaches at the Michael Howard Studios in New York City, which are richly detailed in her book, *The Second Circle*. These circles of energy ultimately relate to our presence, vulnerability, and allowance of transparency and intimacy within relationships.

"Circles of Energy" sounds a bit nebulous or esoteric, so let me provide an example of what the phrase means. If you were to stand just inches behind "Karen," the degree of discomfort for Karen would be negligible for the simple reason that human awareness and energy almost exclusively travel forward. If Karen turns around, both you and she potentially experience extreme discomfort because there is an affront to each of your "personal bubbles." With this idea of human energy always moving forward, let's take a look at Rodenburg's three circles of energy.

### **First Circle**

This is energy that stops just short of you. If you were to extend your arm straight out in front of you, First Circle energy would probably stop at your elbow. It's energy that falls back on itself. It's an energy that keeps you introspective and unaware of your own surroundings. When we look at a person sitting alone at a cafe daydreaming, we think to ourselves, "they are really 'lost in thought' or 'in a world of their own.'"

That's what it means to be in the First Circle. It is an energy that is completely isolated, neither inviting nor repelling intimacy but existing on a deserted island of self-inspection and private thought. First Circle energy can be an extremely positive asset for film—which is about the only time it invites you to be in relationship. Otherwise, when onstage, it's most beneficial use is in soliloquy or to show transparency of thought. First Circle energy, if used positively, is not for the benefit of the other actors onstage but for the insight it gives to the audience in regard to character psychology.

### **Third Circle**

This is the opposite of the First Circle. This is energy forced outward. It is the energy that says, "I've arrived, here's a good joke, everyone look at me! The life of the party has come into your midst!" Third Circle energy can "put on airs" and have a false bravado about it. It can be overpowering and burst your personal bubble and make you feel uncomfortable or even in danger. Third Circle energy can be abrasive because it has the potential to knock everything down in its path. But Third Circle energy has its place on stage and in life. It is the scream for help when in danger; it is the energy of musical theatre and often of farce.

### **Second Circle**

People in this circle fully connect with the world; they are present, alert, and available to others. The energy is focused. Second Circle energy envelops the other person, not in a penetrating or forceful way, in which the other person's bubble is compromised, but in a way that allows both bubbles to coexist. Second Circle energy is porous. It allows for an exchange and flow of energy. It is the give and take of genuine intimacy. When you are experiencing Second Circle energy in life, you describe it as "really connecting, really listening, and really being heard." When Second Circle energy exists onstage, the audience moves forward to the edge of their seats because they know "it's about to get real up in here." Second Circle energy is the intimate first kiss between Romeo and Juliet as equally as it is the last look between Stella and Blanche at opposite ends of the room before Blanche is escorted out

of the apartment by the Nurse and Doctor. When experiencing and observing Second Circle energy, the participants and observers think, “Real life is happening, right now.”

This has been a theory of Patsy Rodenburg’s for the past thirty years, to which she has only recently given words, definitions, and examples. But she has been thinking on and developing these ideas for most of her adult life, and she offers us a great wealth of knowledge with this particular concept. According to Patsy, all three circles of energy are necessary and appropriate for our lives on and off the stage. But it’s most often in the second circle that our greatest intimacies occur in our private lives and when our keenest acts of theatrical excellence occur on the stage. What she is ultimately describing for the benefit of us all, as both global citizens and theatrical artists, is the stripped away and most authentic meaning behind the activities of Listening and Being Present.

I have discovered that nearly any time I have witnessed arresting presence and listening onstage, it has been born out of the Biblical virtue of *humility*. And though Patsy Rodenburg doesn’t focus on humility in the depth and breadth of her work, she has certainly recognized it in passing, as she did when she tipped her hat to the humble in an interview with *The New York Times* in 2001. “I like actors,” she said. “The good ones are not vain; they’re full of humility. When they go onstage, you know immediately if they can do their job.” Isn’t it interesting that Ms. Rodenburg compares excellence onstage not to great listening or great presence (though obviously these are necessary) but to humility? Humility is, I believe, the fountain from which great listening and presence flow. Humility is the genesis of excellence onstage. “Whereas it had been supposed that the fullest possible enjoyment is to be found by extending our ego to infinity, the truth is that the fullest possible enjoyment is to be found by reducing our ego to zero.”□

This paradox creates a great tension in the actor, not because all actors are megalomaniacs, though certainly some are, but because nearly every actor is scared. Patsy Rodenburg confirms as much and adds, according to a medical study, “an actor going onstage for a press night undergoes the same tension as a victim in a major car accident.” Unfortunately, the most instinctual, easiest, and most common push back against fear is to slip either into the first or third circle as a means of survival, and in so doing, killing every legitimate chance of authenticity onstage. But when humility reigns in the character of the person onstage,

then the sum of her present ego is zero, and by all mathematical equations (and equally corroborated by King Lear to his daughter Cordelia), “Nothing will come of nothing.” Fear, in that moment, if not at zero, will certainly be abated to its minimum. Worrying about how you’re doing on opening night, worrying about how you’re being perceived by the audience or even the other actors, is nothing short of a self-consciousness that erodes your ability to exist in the *now* and be fully present and available onstage. You cannot do two things at once equally well, and you cannot give one hundred percent of your attention to both yourself and your acting partner. I always tell my students, “You will never be at your absolute best, and consequently recognized for your absolute best work, until you take the focus off of yourself and make it about the other person.” This is true of your most mundane as well as your most intimate relationships in life, and it is true of every connected moment you experience in the theatre. From the actor’s perspective, Sanford Meisner says it like this: “What you do doesn’t depend on you. It depends on the other fellow.”

This is the vitality of being in the second circle—not just onstage, but in life. By putting our focus on others and off of ourselves, we are being a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Look again at how God manifested himself as such to the escaping Jews during the Exodus. His presence was captivating, powerful, and of great comfort. The cloud was a signpost and a guide by day and the fire was warmth and a source of peace at night. In the same way, we are called to be that pillar of both cloud and fire for our fellow actors. The immediacy and strength of our undistracted presence should serve not only as a moment-to-moment guide to each of our communal steps onstage but also a source of light, passion, comfort, and peace. It’s in the cloud and the fire that there is trust. And there is no greater antidote to fear onstage than trusting that your fellow actor knows exactly where he’s going and is going to make it all about you along the way. When we do the same for him, when there is both cloud and fire in every moment and every person onstage, the audience will follow us wherever we want to go, even if it’s across the parting sea. This is another Meisner concept that reinforces a primary Christian principle: when we put our attention on another person, we *relinquish control*, and in so doing, we become unguarded and more interesting onstage because our natural impulses can be seen. This of course, relates to a larger Christian parallel of

placing our cares and problems at the foot of the cross, relinquishing control to Jesus, and in so doing, experiencing freedom.

I believe acting can be so difficult for anyone living in this time of technological advancement partially because we have lost the ability to genuinely listen and be present with each other on a daily basis. We do not practice presence as a virtue to be increasingly fanned into flame. If we don't cultivate these virtues in our day-to-day living, we will not benefit from them as disciplines in the theatre; as they are foreign to us in both places, we will neither recognize these virtues' absence nor understand how destitute and poor we are in that absence. The digital culture is killing our ability to really understand the human condition and express empathy for human suffering. Technology is deadening our emotional response. Constant, unending information is making actors dull. Our Facebook feeds simultaneously show us the horrors of ISIS juxtaposed with kittens doing the "darndest things." As artists we must take seriously the Internet saturation input, and the emotional access output that is compromised when our presence in the digital culture is out of balance. Moderation and boundaries are just as applicable to social media as they are to food, alcohol or other vices.

Multitasking, now thought to be the cornerstone of success, is the cornerstone of nothing architecturally sound or even remotely successful. Multitasking dilutes purpose and action. It steals your best presence with any person and on any project. You don't dig a foundation, pour concrete, and start putting up drywall all at the same time. You give your entire attention to the foundation alone, and when it is complete and when you know it's perfectly ready for the next stage, only then do you move your attention and energy in the next direction. If on first dates you take your smartphone and divide your interest and attention among your date, Facebook, Twitter, e-mail, and the television hanging in the corner of the restaurant, don't expect a second date. If, however, every device is put away, and you have assigned value and importance to the person sitting opposite you, and she is your only concern and your every thought for the next couple of hours, then she will make sure you never have a first date with anyone else, ever—she will be the one clamoring for your presence and pursuing you.

*Assigning importance and value* to a person, object, or cause is vital in developing the habits of listening and being present. This is why I say it is a discipline. It must be your volitional choice to listen onstage

and be fully available with your presence. You must be desperate for it. When Nehemiah returned from exile at the behest of King Artaxerxes and arrived in Jerusalem around 445 BC, the temple needed to be rebuilt, as did the fortifying wall surrounding the city, which was in great disrepair. His focus and intention was absolutely dedicated to this singular project, and in fifty-two days, the entire wall was repaired and rebuilt. When Ezra the prophet arrived and the exiled began to flood the city, Ezra understood the desperation for revival among his people. He gathered them together by the Water Gate at the entrance to the city and there, every day for a week, he opened up the Book of the Law of Moses and read it aloud while the people stood for hours on end and listened. Nehemiah 8:3 says, “And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law.” From this focused and desperate need to hear the Word of God, revival had its outpouring across the nation of Israel. The people had accounted themselves desperate, and esteemed God’s Word so highly, that their only choice was to be present and truly listen. It is only when you make yourself desperate for authenticity, and when you esteem the text you’ve been given and the other actors sharing that text, that you will ignite the fire and invite the cloud onstage. Only then will you be equipped to authentically listen and be present in every moment.

If listening and the art of being present is a discipline, beyond assigning value to a person and esteeming the text, how else can it be practiced? What are the daily disciplines or habits of listening and staying present? Of the conglomerate that comprises today’s best acting techniques, I believe the teaching and training of Sanford Meisner stand above the rest. There are some fantastic master teachers that came from The Group Theatre in the 1940s; most of them have written books, opened schools, taught incredible master classes, and provided independent actor coaching for some very big names in the industry. But it’s Meisner’s legacy that endures most in the classroom. Without going into all the details that encompass his two-year training program, let me start where Meisner would start: “taking the first thing.”

“Taking the first thing” is about your immediate and unedited observation, about anything or anyone in front of you. It is about getting in touch with your first and primary impulse. It’s responding to a stimulus with absolute transparency in order to respond to the stimulus with absolute truthfulness. Our search onstage is always for the truth in every moment. The moment pretense, avoidance, editing, or any other

diluting influence seeps in, the truth itself is maligned, even if only slightly. This can be extremely difficult for the actor. There is often more than one observation about stimuli, correct? But the trick is immediately assessing what it is that I first observe. What is my primary impulse when I see that object or encounter that person?

You can take the first thing in nearly every moment of your day if you are simply willing to be aware of it and make a silent acknowledgment about it to yourself. Across whatever landscape you may walk throughout your day (the college campus, the city street, down the hall of the office building, at the beach, in the mountains, or coming out of the bathroom at the restaurant), myriad stimuli present themselves to you, ready for your response the moment you take a second to allow interaction with them. What strikes you about the color of this wall, the temperature of the air, the smell in this room, or the shadows on the floor?

When we lift our gaze up off the ground and walk through our day with our head up, actively looking for stimuli with which we can interact, we practice the essential disciplines of listening and being present with the people and the world in front of us. In doing this daily, we are cultivating these disciplines for the stage as well.

But it is not enough for the audience to see us observe the glare from our lover onstage; they must see us repelled by it or inflamed with passion. It is not enough for Hamlet to hear, “Revenge his foul and unnatural murder”<sup>□</sup> from the ghost of his dead father; more to the point, what does he feel upon hearing it? This is the next step in genuine listening and being present. What is your emotional reaction? How does it make you feel? This is the most vital and most primary of steps because once you know how you feel, then you know what to do. Emotion is the bridge that connects your observations to actions, and ultimately, the stage is a place of doing. Characters don’t just *emote* and *feel* onstage, they *do*. And more precisely to the point, they do *because* they feel. Truly listening, authentic presence, and taking the first thing in life or on the stage allows us to have an emotional reaction that fuels and impels us to act. We literally hear and process our “cue,” and then we’re off with our response.

How can you genuinely know what you’re supposed to do onstage if you haven’t listened well enough to know how you feel? Ultimately, listening leads to action! And that action is undergirded by an

emotional fire of varying degree. You must fully receive before you can fully respond. “Everyone should be quick to listen and slow to speak” (James 1:19) is advice for both the stage and life. This verse doesn’t infer a literal pause onstage before every response, but that your response only comes after you have fully listened and processed how it makes you feel; then and only then are you even ready for your response, whether that response is instantaneous or comes after a slow-burning moment of silence. What can’t happen is a genuine and full response before there’s been genuine and full listening. It short-circuits the moment and diminishes the truth. “He who answers before listening—that is his folly and his shame” (Proverbs 18:3).

This kind of listening takes a clear mind and a focus on the singleness of the moment. You can’t have anything hanging over you; you can’t have ancillary thoughts distracting you from your purpose onstage. It’s like Christ telling you to go and settle accounts and forgive your brother before you come make a sacrifice at the temple for your own forgiveness. Onstage, you must take care of first things, first. And that first thing is always the very present moment in front of you to which you must listen fully and then go about your business of doing, propelled by your emotional response.

Christ’s warning about judgment to the unbelieving people of his day was ultimately a pronouncement of judgment on their listening. It wasn’t an attack on their lack of faith, or an attack on their refusal to believe; their lack of faith and their refusal to believe were the fruits of their active refusal *to listen*. “The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon’s wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here (Matthew 12:42).

Lastly, listening and being present in life allows for more effective presence and genuine listening in rehearsals, which should translate, if authentic listening and presence are practiced and established in every rehearsal, to the pinnacle of these disciplines being experienced in performance. Ultimately, nobody wants to pay money to see a really polished rehearsal. The experience the audience pays for is to see the story unfolding before their eyes as if it were happening for the very first time. There can be no aspect of, “This is exactly how we’ve rehearsed it—enjoy!”

A polished rehearsal makes for a very stale performance. Rehearsals are the *types and shadows* of the approaching future reality. There are Biblical types and shadows embedded throughout scripture. They are always signposts pointing to a greater and better reality. The Old Testament Jerusalem temple, for example, was the literal place where heaven and earth met. But the temple pointed to a greater reality when “the earth [would] be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Hab. 2:14). The Jewish temple sacrificial system was a type and shadow pointing to Christ as the be all and end all, *perfect* sacrifice that would once and for all deliver humankind from the grips of sin and death. King David was a *type* of Christ. The forty years of wandering and testing in the desert during the Exodus was a type and shadow of the forty days of testing and fasting Christ underwent after his baptism in the Jordan and his commission to act as Israel’s messiah. The Passover type points to Christ and the Easter reality. The Sabbath was always a signpost of the approaching perfect rest and peace we all can enjoy in and through Jesus.

But the temple became legalistic. Animal and material sacrifices repetitively became a rote and stale tradition to be practiced ceremonially but without heart. The Sabbath was a demarcation between Jews and Gentiles—a way to exclude pagans from knowing or understanding who God is. The Sabbath, for all intents and purposes, became an idol of national identity, not a real and in-time-and-space way to experience God’s presence and peace. The Passover became a perfunctory celebration honoring the past, without dreaming with excitement about the potential of the future. All of these traditions were purposeful and *good*, but they weren’t the *best*. They always pointed to something greater. Rehearsals are good and necessary, and listening and being present within them is part of the disciplined practice needed in the theatre, but rehearsals will always be a signpost of something greater—*opening night and the full run of the show*. No matter the excellence of a discovery made in rehearsal, you are called toward more than merely repeating it in performance. You are called to rediscover that moment in its newest form, its newest reality, in the largest way possible, *for the first time*, making what happened in rehearsal a *type and shadow* of the better, future reality being lived out currently underneath the pillar of cloud and fire that consumes the stage.

When the audience rises at the end of the play and the critic begins to first formulate her thoughts about your performance and the play, whether they laud your time onstage as excellent or of little note will be a judgment on how well you listened and whether you were fully present. For only through your listening and your presence onstage can the audience embark on the present journey with you. It is your responsibility to be the pillar of cloud and fire. If you don't pick up that mantle and take that calling seriously, then expect nothing more than wispy smoke and dying embers. Regardless of all your best efforts, a performance void of authentic listening and dynamic presence will be nothing more than "a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more: it is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing (*Macbeth* 5.5. 24-28).

\* \* \*

It is my contention that the Bible could at least return to the drama classroom and be taught *as knowledge*, giving numerous examples of how to glean its principles and coalesce them into teachable tools for the craft of acting. I have written a book on this subject, *The Actor As Fire and Cloud*, in which listening and being present is just one of many chapter topics. Other themes explored include humility, will, discipline, talent, calling or purpose, stage fright, courage, brokenness, worldview, emotional fullness, action, love, and faith. *The Actor As Fire and Cloud* is being published by Bold Vision Books and will be available spring, 2016.

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Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version\*, NIV\*. © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica Inc.

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***Approaching the Podium Through the Arts: Incorporating an Arts  
Appreciation Framework within Public Speaking Curriculum***

Scott Jensen

**Abstract**

*We typically think of a public speaking course as focusing on helping students alleviate speech anxiety and develop presentational skills through traditional informative and persuasive speech assignments. The model has worked for countless educators and students, for countless generations. Webster University has re-defined their public speaking course to secure its place within their new general education program. Public speaking at Webster is now an arts appreciation course, including dimensions of critical analysis, peer review, and oral interpretation as part of the core course content. This paper discusses the unique face of Webster's public speaking course, along with the implications of teaching public speaking from an arts perspective at any level of education. The paper provides background into the course re-design and debate over general education coding, assessment results, student and instructor reflections, and sample activities.*

It is not uncommon for public speaking to be a general education requirement on a college campus. If not the course, many campuses will at least require experience with giving oral presentations as a pre-requisite to graduation. More often than not, public speaking benefits from the presumption that being able to speak effectively to an audience is an important skill for success in life. One of the factors that makes it common to accept the importance of public speaking without much argument is the consistent, almost predictable nature of most public speaking course curricula. Webster University recently launched a new, in some ways revolutionary general education program that integrates skills and knowledge, sandwiched in between two interdisciplinary seminars taken in the first and third years of the college experience. In an effort to incorporate public speaking into the program's framework of knowledge areas, the course was re-shaped to provide an arts orientation to its core content. This paper defends this orientation as a strategy for

teaching public speaking in a way that expands students' presentational abilities and expands their knowledge base beyond traditional public speaking conventions.

### **The Arts and Public Speaking**

Perhaps the best place to begin this defense of public speaking as an academic experience in arts appreciation is a defense of the integration of the two. *The Free Dictionary* suggests art is "human effort to imitate, supplement, alter, or counteract the work of nature; high quality of conception or execution, as found in works of beauty; aesthetic value" (on-line). It defines the arts, the collective area comprised of art, as "imaginative, creative, and nonscientific branches of knowledge considered collectively, esp. as studied academically" (on-line). The same dictionary defines oratory as "skill or eloquence in public speaking; the art of public speaking, esp. in an eloquent manner" (on-line). If public speaking is intended to teach a student to write and recite three or four minute speeches that inform or change attitudes, it might difficult to reasonably argue that public speaking is a study in the arts. At the same time, public speaking can include a study of great speaking and oratorical traditions that have shaped the evolution of civilization. If the course celebrates oratorical traditions while incorporating activities and seeking to fulfill outcomes that help students find and share their voice in sincere, unprecedented ways, it resembles the framework of what we have come to know as "the arts."

Lucas (2012), in his best-selling text's overview of public speaking, writes "public speaking is a vital means of civic engagement. It is a way to express your ideas and have an impact on issues that matter in society. As a form of empowerment, it can—and often does—make a difference in little things people care about very much" (p. 5). Gura and Lee (2005), in their leading text on oral interpretation, frame interpretation as "the art of communicating to an audience a work of literary art in its intellectual, emotional, and aesthetic entirety." They add that "art implies skill in performance" (p. 4). From an academic perspective, and the perspective an incoming first year college student might read in his or her first assignment in public speaking or oral interpretation, it should be clear that public speaking can be very simple and uninspiring, but when done well it reflects the power of language

and elocution that inspires, informs, and persuades. Further, a logical curricular marriage between the traditions of oral interpretation and public speaking exists. Even psychoanalytic research establishes a strong explanation for stage fright across the range of types of performers. Research among musical performers, actors, and public speakers all point to building relationships and feelings of comfort, or lack thereof, as explanations and remedies to speech anxiety (Simmonds and Southcott, 2012).

Research has established an instructional connection between teaching public speaking and employing academic areas traditionally seen as “the arts.” Manjooran and Resmi (2013) found that theatre and performance can be invaluable in helping to teach a second language. In their study, the researchers found that theatre performance improved learners’ oral skills and self-confidence. The elements from theatre that were found most contributive to these results include teamwork, frequent practice, performance, and taking on other roles. Cohen and Wei (2010) outline a strategy for using music and music video to draw analogies for students as to how an effective speech—perhaps one that moves to levels of oratory—resembles the performance of music.

Clearly not all public speaking courses are inherently studies in art, but the relationship between the arts and public speaking is not hard to identify. McKay and McKay (2008), in an essay on oratory, provide this perspective that emphasizes the artistic nature of powerfully shaped public address:

Oratory has been called the highest art for it encompasses all other disciplines. It requires a knowledge of literature, the ability to construct prose, and an ear for rhythm, harmony, and musicality. Oratory is not mere speaking, but speech that appeals to our noblest sentiments, animates our souls, stirs passions and emotions, and inspires virtuous action. It is often at its finest when fostered during times of tragedy, pain, crisis, fear, and turmoil. In these situations it serves as a light, a guide to those who cannot themselves make sense of the chaos and look to a leader to point the way (on-line).

While not all speeches in a public speaking course—perhaps none—will resemble presentations that meet the model alluded to by the McKays, instruction in public speaking has the potential to draw students to such

an outcome. It has the potential to help students develop the knowledge and skill to become orators.

### **Webster's Global Citizenship Program and Public Speaking**

Webster University has recently implemented a new general education program, a 30 hour program called the Global Citizenship Program (GCP). The program includes 24 hours of coursework that encompasses six knowledge areas: roots of culture (two three-hour courses required), social systems and human behavior, (two three-hour courses required), physical and natural world, global understanding, quantitative literacy, and arts appreciation. The additional six hours are a first-year seminar taken in the student's first collegiate year, and a keystone seminar, ideally taken after the "middle" 24 hours are completed. In addition to courses being coded for a knowledge area, all general education courses must be coded for one of six skills: ethical reasoning, written communication, intercultural competence, critical thinking, quantitative literacy, and oral communication. While a course does not need to be coded for a knowledge area, most students have gravitated toward courses that satisfy both a knowledge and skill area when selecting general education coursework. In other words, courses are more likely to attract students when they satisfy both aspects of the general education program.

This reality of needing to be coded for a knowledge and a skill area motivated a re-design of Webster's public speaking course. Coding the course for most of the knowledge areas would have necessitated a prior restraint being placed on speech topics in order to insure a curriculum rich in the selected knowledge area. I am philosophically opposed to restricting students' topics for any reason beyond good taste. Given that, the only knowledge area within the Global Citizenship Project that could be argued as appropriate for public speaking was arts appreciation. The GCP program defines arts appreciation as students demonstrating knowledge of human artistic expressions gained through analysis, reflection, or practical experience. While a case was made for this coding that included discussion of public speaking as a brand of performance that integrates authorship of content and performance, as well as the oldest traditions of oratory as art, resistance was clear. Webster has an incredibly strong college of fine arts in which all degree

programs require juried auditions, portfolios, or other entrance requirements. Given this culture, it was hard for some committee members to approve public speaking as potentially the only arts appreciation course that might be part of a select student's collegiate experience. Nevertheless, the course's coding was eventually approved. The course was argued to fulfill outcomes of arts appreciation with the following paragraph:

As in any demonstration of arts appreciation, orally presenting messages intrinsically demands an awareness, development, and expression of creativity. Public speaking reflects this creativity through compelling command of language—verbal and nonverbal, oral and non-oral. Originally this course was housed in the Department of Theatre and Dance, further reflecting the traditional connections between aesthetic and rhetorical elements of oral expression. Effective speakers must convey messages that reflect congruence in both words and actions, much like any other artistic expression conveys a message through its unique medium and the symbols appropriate to that medium. Public speaking uniquely meets all three options for demonstrating arts appreciation (as outlined in the GCP rubric) of analysis (through peer critiquing and discussion of “great” speeches), reflection (through self-critiquing), and practical experience (through the delivery of several speeches). Students' presentations range from brief to lengthy, and from informative to oral interpretations of others' creative expressions.

### **Core Curriculum of Webster's Arts Appreciation Public Speaking Course**

The learning outcomes for SPCM 1040—Public Speaking at Webster University are shared in all sections of the course. They are:

1. Demonstrate an understanding of the conventions of effective speechmaking through the delivery of speeches geared to a variety of specified purposes.
2. Effectively write speeches that are well organized and interesting to his/her audience.

3. Demonstrate appreciation of audience-centered oral communication through effective adaptation to cumulative audience feedback throughout the course of the semester.
4. Demonstrate performance techniques that are purposeful and natural when delivering a speech.
5. Critically and constructively review speech content and delivery.
6. Be able to accept and overcome feelings of speech anxiety.
7. Express a critical understanding of the traditions and conventions of oratory as art through an analysis of a “great” speech.
8. Develop and refine a personal voice of advocacy through analysis, reflection, and practical application of language as framed in orally communicated messages.

In many ways the Webster public speaking course resembles any other college-level public speaking course, complete with informative and persuasive speeches, as well as other presentations to round out the semester. The distinctions lie in self-reflection, critical questioning distinctions between public speaking and oratory, and performance of literature. (Appendix A includes a syllabus, along with three assignments from the course.) While each public speaking section reflects the unique approaches of its instructors, it also includes the following: no less than four graded presentations, at least one informative speech, at least one persuasive speech, at least one oral interpretation of an approved non-self authored prose, poetic, or dramatic work, and at least one presentation utilizing visual aids and/or demonstrations. Further, each section includes an assignment asking students to analyze a “great speech” in which conventions of speech as an art form are present. Finally, each section must include at least one graded speech being video-taped and self-assessed through a written review. All graded presentations must also be peer critiqued and students must document and apply the peer feedback to subsequent presentations throughout the semester. What may have most persuaded the GCP committee to accept the argument for coding public speaking as arts appreciation was the inclusion of peer and self-critiquing, as well as non-traditional presentation projects.

While Webster’s public speaking sections always included peer critiquing, the integration of peer and self-critiquing was a revision in the course. Although students often don’t prefer to watch themselves on tape, doing so allows them to identify what the instructor and peers tell

them regarding their presentations. The self-assessment assignment is a very simple review of their speech (video-taped) with an assessment of what was done well and what needs improvement. Overwhelmingly, students' self-assessments are far more critical than graded evaluations or peers' critiques. Most self-assessments also incorporate the peer feedback speakers received. This reinforced self-reflection process has led to more rapid and enduring improvement in students' speaking performances during the course.

The oral interpretation assignment is, perhaps, the most significant change in the public speaking curriculum. Students are asked to select any literary work, or collection of works, to perform. The assignment closely mirrors the process of a forensic competitor preparing to compete in an oral interpretation event. Students may combine literature into a program, or confine themselves to a single genre of literature. They are asked to perform with their material in a binder or other appropriate holder. An introduction is also included in which the student describes the content of the literature and establishes its relevance to the audience. When I incorporated this assignment into the course I thought it would heighten anxiety and be the least favorite of all the class assignments. What I have found—and my other public speaking instructors' experiences have been the same—is students love this assignment for the opportunity to express their convictions through another's voice. Often students select oral interpretation or reader's theatres as their final class presentation projects.

### **Assessments and Reflections**

Assessments of this new approach to public speaking are still formative. The five areas within the GCP rubric for oral communication are organization, language, delivery, reasoning and support, and central message. Instructors assess how well students perform within each of these five areas, on a four-point scale of beginning to exemplary. The assessment of each student reflects where they fall within the full range of public speaking. In other words, most students in a beginning public speaking course, even the most talented of students, would likely fall within the first two levels of competence, while seniors with a wealth of speaking experience might be expected to fall within the third and fourth levels of competence. We are adding to our assessments pre and post

communication apprehension surveys, course evaluations, overall grades and how they evolve through the course, and instructor narratives that take into account students' presentational content and performance. Thus far the course appears to be meeting its learning outcomes.

Michael Osborn (2013), an icon in the field of communication, spoke at Texas State University in 2012 to help commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of that university's department of communication studies. In his speech he notes, "Aristotle wrote an enduring treatise on the nature and technique of the spoken word, and Plato wrote classic dialogues in which he justified his reservations about this newly unleashed power of public communication. But it is not too much to claim that communication practice and study was instrumental to this great high-water mark of civilization in the developing story of humanity" (p. 21). Public speaking is a central part of our society. It is the means by which ideas are shared and society evolves. Words inspire. The eloquence with which they are spoken enable the inspiration to be impactful and enduring. This is art. Teaching this art helps us equip students to communicate, grow in their abilities and confidence, and become adults who are the very people employers want to hire (Berrett, 2013). Webster's approach to public speaking also provides the kind of experience to which Morreale and Pearson allude when they write "communication educators should be mindful of the critical role they play in the future lives of their students. These students may be communication majors, or non-majors participating in the only formal communication instruction they may ever experience. While many factors affect the course of any life, competent communication plays a critical role in how our students will react to and manage life's challenges" (p. 236)

If Webster University, and the instructors of SPCM 1040 have it their way, our approach to communication will empower students in ways that allow them to see and shape the world through beauty, power, and eloquence.

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Appendix A

Syllabus, SPCM 1040—Public Speaking

Oral Interpretation Assignment

Critical Speech Review Assignment

Self-Assessment Activity

## SPCM 1040 Public Speaking

### **Instructor**

Scott Jensen

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Office Contact: (314) 968-7439 [jensensc@webster.edu](mailto:jensensc@webster.edu)

Office Hours: MW 11:00 – 12:00 pm, T 12:00 – 1:00 pm

Other times by appointment

### **Course Description**

Students learn the organization, development, and delivery of a variety of formal public speeches. The course includes public speeches and a variety of other speaking exercises to help students adapt to audiences and contexts, solve delivery problems and build confidence. It is the objective of the course to help students manage communication apprehension, communicate more effectively in the oral channel, adapt to various audiences and speaking situations, and both think and listen critically. Activities also help the student to develop realistic evaluations of various speaking occasions.

This course is part of the GCP program as an *Arts Appreciation* content area and an *Oral Communication* skill area.

### **Course Level Learning Outcomes**

1. Demonstrate an understanding of the conventions of effective speechmaking through the delivery of speeches geared to a variety of specified purposes.
2. Effectively write speeches that are well organized and interesting to his/her audience.
3. Demonstrate appreciation of audience-centered oral communication through effective adaptation to cumulative audience feedback throughout the course of the semester.
4. Demonstrate performance techniques that are purposeful and natural when delivering a speech.
5. Critically and constructively review speech content and delivery.
6. Be able to accept and overcome feelings of speech anxiety.

7. Express a critical understanding of the traditions and conventions of oratory as art through an analysis of a “great” speech.
8. Develop and refine a personal voice of advocacy through analysis, reflection, and practical application of language as framed in orally communicated messages.

### **Materials**

Handouts and Other Materials...all will be provided by instructor  
SD Memory Card

### **Grading Breakdown**

Quizzes	10%
Written Speech Critiques/Analyses	25%
Speaking Activities	65%

### **Activities**

#### **Pet Peeve Speech 35**

Students will deliver a speech that explains their biggest source of frustration.

#### **Visual Aid/Demonstration Speech 50**

Students will deliver a speech that utilizes some form of visual assistance to supplement the ideas within the speech.

#### **Oral Interpretation 70**

Students will perform an oral interpretation of a published poetic, prose, or dramatic work.

#### **Persuasive Project 150**

Students will deliver a persuasive speech that includes efforts to adapt to their audience per results of an audience analysis that each student will conduct.

#### **Symposium Project 100**

Students will be part of a group presentation on any topic of the group’s choice. Grades will include an individual, group, and peer assessment.

#### **Impromptu Speech 50**

Students will deliver a speech designed to test their ability to fashion a speech with very little preparation.

#### **Quizzes 45**

Quizzes will vary in points.

<b>Self-Assessments</b>	<b>75</b>
Students will video-tape their first five speeches and provide a written self-critique of each performance.	
<b>Final Project</b>	<b>100</b>
Students will devote the first few weeks of the course to creating a final project. This final project can be a group or individual project. Students will define its parameters, help to create rubrics for evaluation, and justify its appropriateness for a final project.	
<b>Listening and Peer Assessments</b>	<b>50</b>
Students will be expected to attend classes, particularly when presentations are given. These participation points will reflect attendance and peer critiques on presentation days.	
<b>Critical Speech Analysis</b>	<b>50</b>
Students will review a speech, to be approved by the instructor. The speech should be one proven to be noteworthy via being represented in scholarly historical or rhetorical literature.	
<b>TOTAL POSSIBLE POINTS</b>	<b>775</b>

### Policy Statements

#### **Attendance and Late Work**

The nature of this course is that in-class discussions and projects are critical. As such, class attendance is strongly encouraged. Only students who miss class for excused reasons will be given the opportunity to make up in-class projects for points. Likewise, all **written** assignments will be evaluated, even if submitted late. Work that is late for reasons that are not excused will receive a 20% penalty. Excused absences **must be documented** and include representing the university in an official manner, illness, and deaths of family members. Other circumstances will be discussed on a case by case basis. No in-class activities or oral activities will be made up if missed for reasons that are not excused.

#### **Speaking Schedules**

Speaking schedules for all speeches will be determined by (1) volunteers for the earliest available speaking positions, and then (2) random scheduling of non-volunteers for remaining speaking positions. Once speaking schedules are announced students are responsible for either

speaking at their assigned times, or arranging for trades with colleagues. Trades are not official until both parties notify the instructor.

### **Class Decorum**

Students should refrain from any electronic communication during class sessions, including cell phone texting or conversations and Internet communication. Students should also **never enter a room when a student is speaking; late students should listen at the door and enter after any student speech that is in process has been completed.** Class discussions and peer evaluation of student performance is encouraged and in some cases required. All discussion and critiques should be based on respect for individuals and diversity of world views and perspectives.

### **Academic Dishonesty**

All instances of academic dishonesty will result in a “0” for the given assignment, as well as referral to the appropriate university administrator(s). This includes, but is not limited to cheating on a celebration of knowledge, crediting others’ research as your own ideas, submitting (verbatim) work for grade consideration that is submitted for grade consideration in another course, and submitting work completed by another person(s) as your own. Any questions of what constitutes academic dishonesty should be brought to the instructor.

### **Americans With Disabilities Act**

Students with impaired sensory, manual, or speaking skills are encouraged and have the responsibility to contact the instructor, in a timely fashion, regarding reasonable accommodation needs. Further, if you have a disability that may have some impact on your work in this class and for which you may require accommodations contact the Academic Resource Center at (314) 968-7495.

### Weekly Schedule

Week 1	Course Overview and Dyad Introductions Public Speaking –Aesthetic and Rhetorical Traditions  Listening Introductions, Conclusions, and Main Ideas <b>A: Pet Peeve Speech</b> <b>A: Self-Assessments</b> <b>A: Assign Planning Direction for Final Project</b>
Week 2	Delivery <b>A: Assign Critical Speech Review</b>  Managing Anxiety and Constructive Criticism <b>Quiz—Introductions and Conclusions, Listening</b>
Week 3	<b>No Class</b> —Labor Day Holiday  Pet Peeve Presentations <b>A: Visual Aid/Demonstration Speech</b>
Week 4	<b>Pet Peeve Presentations</b> Speaking to Inform Visual Aids and Demonstrations  Language and Organization <b>Quiz—Delivery, Visual Aids and Demonstrations</b>
Week 5	Evidence and Research Quiz—Language and Organization <b>A: Oral Interpretation Presentation</b>  Visual Aid/Demonstration Presentations
Week 6	Visual Aid/Demonstration Presentations <b>A: Symposium Project and Presentation</b>

Week 7	Oral Interpretation Presentations <b>D: Critical Speech Review</b>
Week 8	Oral Interpretation Presentations  Oral Interpretation Presentations Group Dynamics <b>A: Final Project</b>
Week 9	Persuasion <b>A: Persuasion Project</b>  Audience Analysis and Adaptation
Week 10	Argumentation and Reasoning <b>Argumentation and Reasoning</b>
Week 11	Impromptu Speaking <b>Quiz—Persuasion and Audience Analysis</b>  <b>Impromptu Presentations</b>
Week 12	Impromptu Presentations <b>Group Work—Symposium Project</b>
Week 13	Persuasive Presentations <b>Persuasive Presentations</b>
Week 14	Persuasive Presentations <b>Symposium Presentations</b>
Week 15	Symposium Presentations <b>Flex Day—Final Project Preparations</b>
Week 16	Final Project

### SPCM 1040—Oral Interpretation Assignment

There are many ways one can present a message orally. Typically we think of public speaking or oratory as the primary means of oral communication. Oral interpretation or performance is another way of expressing oneself through the words of someone else. This assignment asks students to select and perform a piece of literature. Their performance is not acting—there are no props, no costumes, and little movement. Rather, their performance is reflective of vocal, facial, and gestural animation that captures the language and emotion of the literature and its imagery.

Specific aspects of the assignment:

1. Students will select a piece or pieces of literature to perform. Students should expect to have to edit down from longer originals to make their material fit the time constraints of the assignment.
2. Literature should reflect a particular message the student wants to communicate. If more than one piece of literature is used, each should be consistent with a clear theme or message being communicated. In other words, they should have something in common, fitting into a general program.
3. The final copy of the literature being performed may be in a manuscript and delivered from a binder or folder that does not distract and allows for smooth turns of manuscript pages. It may also be memorized. If the performer chooses to use a manuscript, s/he should be largely free of needing to refer to the manuscript during the performance. The manuscript should be held in one hand. ***No lectern should be used for this presentation.***
4. Students are able to edit original literature in whatever manner they choose, including but not limited to changing the order of action, editing out characters, editing out lines, repeating lines, etc. The only limits on editing are (1) the original intent of the author can't be changed, (2) gender or sex of characters can't be changed, and (3) words or other material can't be added. Students may also perform

any literature they choose, including material with characters of different sex, gender, ethnicity, etc. ***Students are encouraged to be creative in their choices of literature and the performance choices used to present their selected literature.***

5. The student should write an introduction that (1) establishes a connection between the literature and the audience, much like relating to the audience in the introduction of a traditional speech, (2) identifies the message of the literature, and (3) identifies the author and title(s) being performed. If more than one piece of literature is being performed, the introduction should also provide a “catchy” title for the common theme of the performance.
6. The overall time limit for this performance is 4-8 minutes. This includes the introduction. One point will be deducted for each 15 second period over or under this timeframe.

Performances are worth 70 points.

SPCM 1040—Oral Performance of Literature

Student \_\_\_\_\_ Time (4-8 minutes) \_\_\_\_\_

Title/Theme \_\_\_\_\_ Grade (70 points max) \_\_\_\_\_

**Introduction** (0-15 points) \_\_\_\_\_

Did the student effectively establish a connection between the literature and the audience? Was the literature introduced in a way that made its message seem both clear and compelling?

**Expression of Literary Tone** (0-15 points) \_\_\_\_\_

Did the student effectively express the tone of the literature, capturing clear suggestions of emotion that were appropriate to the intent of the literature?

**Characterization** (0-15 points) \_\_\_\_\_

Did the student express the characterization of individuals and actions within the literature in such a manner as to make it seem believable?

**Poise and Command** (0-10 points) \_\_\_\_\_

Did the student show a command of the performance, making choices that were purposeful and demonstrating poise?

**Structure/Editing** (0-10 points) \_\_\_\_\_

Did the student edit the literature in a manner that allowed it to flow logically? Were themes clear if multiple pieces of literature were used?

**Literature and Theme** (0-5 points) \_\_\_\_\_

Did the student's choice of literature exhibit good taste and salience for the audience?

SPCM 1040—Public Speaking

*Critical Speech Review*

One of the best ways to understand what distinguishes between a “speech” and a “great” speech is to examine speeches scholars and society have declared to be great. This assignment asks students to select and analyze a speech of their choice. The analysis will include exploring both the delivery and content of the speech in an effort to identify what makes it uniquely effective.

Students should select a speech for which they can analyze both the manuscript and video delivery. The speech should be one that is referenced in literature/scholarship outside the student’s own life experience. The standard for an exceptional speech under this assignment is subjective, but in general should meet the expectations of *oratory* as opposed to *public speaking* (as each was discussed in class). Speeches should be approved by the instructor. ***Speeches should be approved by Wednesday, September 11<sup>th</sup>***

Critical reviews should meet the following requirements:

- Students should discuss the context in which the speech was delivered. This should include addressing, at minimum, when it was presented, the purpose for the speech, where it was presented, and who, in a general sense, comprised the audience. Anything unique about the context should be highlighted.
- Students should discuss language strategies/choices employed by the speaker that were particularly effective. This discussion should include examples and reasons for labeling them effective.
- Students should discuss the delivery of the speech, including aspects of delivery that stand out as exceptional.
- Students should include in their reviews research in which the speech, its purpose, and/or its impact are referenced. This

research should include at least one print source and at least two sources total. Again, these are minimums.

- Students should provide their own review of the overall impact of the speech, including conclusions as to its overall effectiveness, its potential/proven ability to be a model for future speeches of similar purpose, and how the speech can contribute to our understanding of oratory as art.

Papers should be a minimum of three pages, typed and double-spaced, in length. Additionally, students should provide a bibliography of works consulted/cited. Additionally, students should provide a copy of the manuscript of the speech and, if available, a link to a video of the speech.

The paper is due *Wednesday, October 9<sup>th</sup>*. It is worth 50 points.

SPCM 1040—Public Speaking

*Self-Assessment Activities*

Students will video-tape their own speeches throughout the semester. For each speech that is taped, students should...

- Tape their speech on an SD card,
- View their speech, and
- Write a reflection that addresses (at minimum)
  - How well they met the requirements of the assignment,
  - Things they did well,
  - Things on which they can improve,
  - How they will use their self-assessment to prepare for the next speech, and
  - What grade they would give themselves.

Assessments should be typed, double-spaced, and no less than a page in length. Each assessment is worth 15 points and is due the class period following the day on which the speech was taped.

***Scott Jensen (MA, Central Missouri State University) is Professor and Director of Forensics at Webster University. He is also coordinator of the Speech Communication Studies degree program. Jensen is the current Executive Secretary and Past-President of the Speech & Theatre Association of Missouri.***

**The Giving Voice Project:  
Using Interactive Theatre to Improve Cultural Competency**  
*Carol J. Maples*

**Abstract**

*Theatre is a powerful tool to help people understand those who are different from them. Most diversity training does not include the crucial aspect of practice. Studies have shown that participants in diversity training need the opportunity to practice what has been learned. Most are reluctant to use what has been learned in training for fear of failure, making a situation worse, or repercussions. There needs to be a chance to practice before a challenging situation happens in a classroom or elsewhere. The Giving Voice Project developed diversity training with the crucial component of practice by using interactive theatre. Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed is the basis for the work of Giving Voice.*

**Introduction**

Interactive theatre training is the basis for Missouri State University's *Giving Voice*, a troupe of university students employing a unique and engaging approach to confront oppression and address challenging interpersonal situations. Emphasizing the power of storytelling through various theatre exercises, the Giving Voice Project was developed to confront prejudice and stereotypes. The engaging approach opens the often-difficult dialogue needed to improve the classroom or work environment for everyone. The troupe now refers to this as *courageous conversations*.

*Giving Voice* brings diversity training to a new level. An engaging approach to improving cultural competence, theatre is used to directly address issues of oppression, including micro-aggressions. The project was based on Augusto Boal's *Theater of the Oppressed*, a social-action theater form building on Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. The project was designed to portray the complexities and challenges of everyday situations. This is done through scenarios that

shed light on discrimination; this discrimination, once named, can be combated. The training provides a safe environment to confront our own biases and discuss their impact. A trained facilitator guides participants through a series of phases designed to help participants let go of reflexive thinking and acclimate to new paradigms in thinking. A typical training session is structured to build from fun, safe, and engaging games to challenging exercises that some participants may find uncomfortable as they face the realities and implications of stereotyping.

Missouri State University and other Predominately White Institutions (PWI) were involved in a 2009 Harvard study on issues of oppression called *Voices of Diversity* (Caplan et al.). The study showed all the universities could do better for their diverse students. I was approached for ideas to improve the campus climate. I immediately thought of the research project I had just finished on use of interactive theatre for professional development. As an artist and scholar, I knew the power of theatre. “You cannot defect from an insight; you cannot unsee what you’ve seen” was one of my favorite quotes from one of the study participants. I quickly suggested developing our own interactive theatre troupe for professional development. Support came from the Provost and the Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning for the initial pilot project.

### **Beginnings**

Students auditioning were made aware of the challenging subjects that would be addressed through this new troupe. Actors’ callbacks were determined based on initial auditions and the need to include diverse ethnicities. The callbacks required the actors to be prepared to share a true story of oppression. The story could be something that happened to the actor or to someone else. However, if any of the actors chose to share another person’s story, it was to be shared as if it had happened to them. The callback space was established as a safe zone for the various stories and readings from scenarios. Six undergraduate actors were cast, enrolled in a special topics course, and were awarded scholarships from the Provost. The troupe members became researchers, with an ongoing assignment to gather true stories of oppression from our campus and share those stories in rehearsals. Fortunately for our purposes but unfortunately for the university, as with other PWI, they had no trouble finding stories. While the troupe

members were gathering stories, they were also engaged in various ensemble building endeavors and *Theatre of the Oppressed* exercises to prepare them for this type of work.

### **Boal**

The project was based on Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed*. Originating in Brazil, Boal used theatre in streets, factories, legislatures, churches, any place that needed light shed on issues and where people could participate in finding solutions to a variety of problems, including bullying, drugs, illiteracy, sexual abuse, gender, and racial discrimination, to name a few. These techniques, in some form or another, are now used worldwide to affect positive change. Boal developed this type of theatre to transform performance from its traditional delivery to a passive audience, a type of monologue, to a dialogue between the audience and the actors on stage. Boal experimented with many kinds of interactive theatre. His explorations were based on the assumption that dialogue is the common, healthy dynamic between all human, all human beings desire and are capable of dialogue, and that when a dialogue becomes a monologue, oppression ensues (Babbage, 2004). Theatre is an extraordinary tool for transforming monologue into dialogue. Boal also originated the *spect-actor*. Instead of an audience just being spectators, they were invited to join the scene in order to improve the situation. Thus, the spectator becomes an actor or *spect-actor*. They take action. They become the protagonist of the scene as a "rehearsal for reality" or as Boal described it, "rehearsal for life" (Cruz & Schutzman, 2006). This became the goal for the Giving Voice Project, get the audience involved or what is now referred to as *upstanders* rather than *bystanders*. Currently, the most common tactic used to handle oppression is to deflect and ignore. It is easier to pretend to not hear a comment, see a slight, or claim the need to cover curriculum. Most types of diversity professional development have relevant information. However, it is addressed at passive audience members who are afraid to actually use the information in real situations or they do and make things worse. *Giving Voice* provides a safe environment for audience members to step into the scene and try their ideas to improve the situation.

## Ensemble

The importance of building not only an ensemble but also a *Theatre of the Oppressed* style ensemble was key to the success of the Giving Voice Project. In addition to the usual ensemble building exercises for a regular cast, the troupe needed to face their own biases and develop the trust needed to improvise the stories they were bringing to rehearsal. Games are fundamental to *Theatre of the Oppressed*. They allow participants, actors and non-actors, to expand their imaginations, recognize then deconstruct vernacular language and habitual behaviors, while questioning previously unrecognized societal structures of power and oppression. Skillfully facilitated, these games also build that essential safe and trusting ensemble. Of course, the fact that many of them are fun is an added bonus.

*Games for actors and non-actors* by Augusto Boal has an abundance of these games and exercises. The games the troupe engaged in for training ranged from simplistic to multi-layered but all were thought provoking. Essential to the development of the troupe and a safe environment was the creation of Ground Rules. These were rules established by the troupe members and included a safety word. There is a potential during improvisation of a scenario, when an actor's character says something that penetrates to another actor's own feelings and experiences that are hurtful. The safe word is used to stop the improv and support the actor. Examples of rules included:

*Assume the best of each other*

*Use "I" statements*

*Acknowledge feelings*

*Speak up if you do not feel safe or something bothers you*

*Be sensitive of others*

*Challenge self to deal with difficult issues*

*Leave time to process*

The last rule listed was crucial for the games and exercises to be meaningful. Each game was followed by a debriefing session. Processing what happened during games or exercises helped to recognize and confront issues such as biases, privilege, power, and oppression. This also helped to ensure the actors were emotionally well before leaving rehearsal. Some of the games used included the following:

*Walk / Stop*  
*Columbian Hypnosis*  
*One Person we fear, one person is our protector*  
*Fainting of Frejus*  
*Groups*  
*Handshake*  
*Images*  
*Sculpting*

### **Scenario**

As the actors learned about *Theatre of the Oppressed*, including Forum Theatre, they were also serving as researchers bringing in true stories of oppression from college campuses. Our charge for the project was professional development for faculty and administration, emphasizing racial diversity challenges. Therefore, the majority of the stories came from classrooms and campuses. It also became clear we needed one more member in the troupe to play the teacher in what was becoming a classroom scenario. A graduate assistant joined the troupe to help with the improv and play the role of teacher. We continued to workshop the true stories, using improvisation and exercises, until we developed a short scene, less than 10 minutes. The process for developing a scenario includes transcribing recordings from the troupe's improvisation work as we develop the scenario. This is done several times with continuous editing and refining of the transcriptions until we have a scenario for presentation. The scene was designed to address the topics of stereotypes, oppression, and microaggressions. Microaggressions are subtle, brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights and insults to people on the basis of an aspect of the person's identity such as race, gender, age, ability, class, sexual orientation or religious affiliation. Microaggressions are part of casual conversations, a little joke or comment, sometimes a single word that has made it into our vernacular. People who experience themselves as good, moral, and decent human beings who would never intentionally discriminate against others often perpetrate these small oppressions. If a person is not the target she may not even notice. However, for those who are the target,

day after day after day, studies have shown microaggressions to have harmful psychological impacts on the target person or group (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). They are like constant dripping water that can wear away even the toughest stone. Microaggressions cut across all social identities including race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, disability status, socio-economic class, and other important social dimensions. These insults and invalidations occur throughout organizations, including all majors, departments, and colleges in a university.

While creating the scenario to be used in a forum workshop, the actors also developed characters to bring the different perspectives or voices to the presentation. These characters are then fully developed with complete backgrounds and their own voices that influence them. An excellent but very challenging Boal exercise for this is called *Cops in the Head*. It is essential to ensure that a safe environment has been established and that someone trained for this type of exercise closely facilitates the exercise. There are no perfect characters in the scenario. No one is completely good or bad. For instance, the character who tries to be politically correct uses a single word as an insult that is often overlooked as part of our current language. The character recognized as the white male oppressor is not privileged and works hard to afford college. Sometimes it has been assumed that dialogue used verbatim from interviews has been created for the theatrical effect. Alas, we can never top the true stories of what is said and done to some people in classrooms and across campuses.

The result of the troupe's work was the scenario titled *American History*. Set in a college history class, a new instructor struggles with challenges of diverse students. After being given the group assignment to look at a current event from an historical perspective, the students in the scenario begin to brainstorm ideas. This free exchange of ideas becomes a problem for some students and uncomfortable for most, due to comments made during the discussion. For instance, one student suggests using President Obama as the topic stating, "How about Obama being the first black president. You know, how he got elected...that he got the black vote because he's black, but he also got the white vote because he's light-skinned and doesn't sound like a black person." This statement instigates a series of reactions and comments. The instructor tries to tell a story about being invited to a step competition. However, the focus is on

the students of color. The story concludes with, “I looked around. I found I was the only white person there and I thought, ‘Oh, I’m the minority. This is what it feels like to be a minority.’ And you know I learned from it. I have grown as a person, and now I have black friends. I even invite some of them over for dinner.” Needless to say this story, which actually happened in a college classroom, does not help the situation.

### Forum

An actual forum takes place in three phases: The first phase includes a brief background on the development of the scene, emphasizing it is based on true stories of what is happening to individuals every day on campus. During this phase the facilitator explains the process for the forum and leads the audience through the *Handshake* exercise. This is an exercise highlights subjective reactions to people we see. It emphasizes we rarely see the full picture of what is happening, who people really are, or what they are doing. Instead, from our safe observation distance, we make assumptions based on our own backgrounds and experiences. The facilitator guides the audience to look for assumptions in the scenario they are about to see. These can be assumptions the characters are making about each other or that audience members may be making about the characters. This first phase concludes with the actual scenario presented as conventional theatre. The audience watches a short play. For the pilot project we set the scene in an American History class but the audience is reminded it could be anywhere students are allowed to talk.

Phase two is the *Talkback*. During this phase, the audience interacts directly with the characters. The actors stay in character, while answering questions from the audience. This is where the extensive background developed during the rehearsal process is utilized. Each actor is ready to answer questions from family backgrounds, why they did or said something during the scenario, to how something that was said or done made them feel. The audience has the opportunity to have courageous conversations in a safe environment. During this phase the audience has the chance to ask questions many would not feel comfortable asking outside this environment, especially of people who are different from them. All characters are a part of this phase and may react to answers other characters give. However, characters my call a

time-out to answer particular questions. If a time-out is called, only the audience and not the other characters can hear what is being said. This may be used to reveal something about the character that they do not want the others to know. It could be used to reveal how badly they feel, that there is something in their background that make the situation more difficult. One character in the *American History* scenario uses the time-out to reveal sexual orientation to the audience. The audience uses the *Talkback* phase to get to know the characters better, clear up assumptions, and find out how the situation can be improved for each individual character. Audience members then use the knowledge acquired during this phase to improve the situation during the final phase, *Intervention*.

The *Intervention* phase of a *Giving Voice* forum is the key to successful diversity training. Recent studies have identified the need to practice what is learned in conventional diversity training. Attaining comfort means practice outside of the classroom. The *Intervention* phase of the forum meets this newly recognized need for faculty and others to practice, in order to attain a comfort in addressing issues of microaggressions (Sue, 2010). Ideally, in a full-length forum, the audience has time to brainstorm ideas for the teacher on how to intervene in the various situations that come up during the scenario.

The actors reset the scene and leave in order to play the scenario again. The facilitator explains the rules for the *Intervention* phase. Basically, the audience will witness the same scenario only this time they can stop the oppression. At any point during the replaying of the scene, audience members may raise their hand and say, "stop" in order to address an act of oppression. The new spect-actor may ask for the actors to rewind or fast-forward to a particular place in the scenario. They are to intervene as the instructor and may stay in as little or as long as they wish. Most interventions are for a short time. The audience member tries an idea and stops. The final rule is no magic or mayhem. Magic might be stopping the oppression before it happens, basically because they have seen the scenario already and know to tell a character not to say what they are about to say. The objective of the *Intervention* phase is to let the oppression happen and intervene with an idea to improve the situation. No mayhem basically means: no physical confrontation.

Before beginning the *Intervention* phase the facilitator leads the audience in the *Circle and Cross* activity. This exercise demonstrates a

person's ability to learn through practice. The audience is then reminded that silence indicates approval. In other words, if no one stops the oppression, if no one changes things, then, as in real life, nothing will change. Unlike other forms of diversity training, an individual can try ideas with the *Giving Voice* troupe and receive feedback before trying an idea for the first time in an actual situation.

The audience member steps in for the instructor and the scene begins just before the place the audience member wants to address. The participant then tries an intervention to improve the situation. The intervention may be as simple as saying "Ow!" when one of the students calls another "retarded," and then calmly explaining why that is a hurtful word use. Another intervention may be stating no tolerance for derogatory comments against gays and does so without drawing attention to the gay student who was the target. Other interventions may require more elaborate best practices to improve the situation. Minimally, the forum starts the courageous conversations needed to shed light on the various oppressions and micro-aggressions. With that awareness we can begin to combat them. We hope the audience will not only become more aware but be empowered to take action to improve the environment for all their students.

### Voices

Since the pilot project, *Giving Voice* has developed a variety of scenarios with numerous troupe members. Some scenarios are tailored to specific businesses or organizations, including a leadership workshop for an international company. Each new and revised scenario is based on proven research techniques. We continue to develop and update scenarios for presentations for small groups, students, faculty, staff, and administrators of high schools, colleges, universities, and national conferences. As of this writing our first scenario, *American History*, is the most performed. Although all our scenarios address many forms of oppression, including the brief subtle forms called microaggressions, *American History* mainly focuses on racial issues, along with homophobia and sexism. It has been revised over the last few years to include recent events, such as the racial tensions in Ferguson, Missouri. Sadly, we have found we can easily update some scenarios by simply changing or adding new names and locations. Other scenarios include

*Chalk Talk*, which addresses religion and politics and *Break Room*, *Widget 2.0*, and *Bureaucracy*, which highlight issues in business settings.

The latest research project for *Giving Voice* was in the area of Title IX. We were asked to address the latest issues related to Title IX. The focus was on sexual assault and harassment with an emphasis on intervention, empowering audience members to be *upstanders* rather than *bystanders*. This particular topic did not lend itself to the usual singular scenario, so we developed several for forums with audiences. Each scenario addresses all too common occurrences of sexual harassment and assault and are as follows:

*Club Scene* is set in a nightclub where three female friends arrive to have fun. One of the characters is the designated driver but the other two characters have already started drinking before arriving at the club. A young man buys drinks for and tries to get one of the friends, who has had the most to drink, to leave her friends and go with him to a house party.

*Social Media* deals with a compromising picture of a female student that has gone viral on various forms of social media. Although the female remembers not drinking very much, she did finish a drink for a young man and does not remember the rest of the night.

*Juxtapose* reveals two perspectives on the events of a night of drinking. One is a young man telling his friend about matching with a girl on social media, getting together with the girl at a party, drinking, taking her to a friend's house so she would not get in trouble at her residence hall, and eventually having sex, even though she was reluctant at first. The female perspective is told to her friend about matching with the male, meeting at a party, drinking too much, being offered to stay at a house so she would not get into trouble, and being forced to have sex.

*Midterm* depicts questionable contact and discussions a male instructor has with a female student. It examines the power role of the male instructor over a freshman female not sure what is acceptable at the college level. The use of social media and inappropriate messaging is also addressed.

*Giving Voice* has presented at two national conferences, including the National Conference on Race and Ethnicity, held in Washington, DC. Requests for diversity training forums continue to grow. Hopefully, more groups will continue to develop to address issues of oppression in their areas. *Theatre of the Oppressed* was not developed

for actors. Boal used various forum styles to include non-actors. He believed people involved in or affected by the situations depicted were the best source for interventions to improve their own lives.

*"Theatre is a form of knowledge: it should and can also be a means of transforming society. Theatre can help us build our future, rather than just waiting for it."*

Augusto Boal,  
Director and Educationalist-Theatre of the Oppressed

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**The Personal SWOT:  
An Opportunity for Student Reflection, Growth, and Planning**  
*Jennifer A. Butler & Daniel P. Modaff*

**Abstract**

*This article describes a written project that employs the SWOT technique (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) to assist students in analyzing their communication skills and personality traits in relationship to the demands of their chosen field. This project is best integrated into communication courses with students who have at least one year remaining in college, as the final product includes an action plan that they will need time to implement before entering the job market.*

In the Business and Professional Communication course that we teach, we find that students may have an idea of what occupation they would like to enter after college (see Docan-Morgan (2014) for an assignment related to this), but they have difficulty articulating the specific communication skills and personality traits required to obtain an entry-level position in their desired field. We have developed an assignment that helps students identify their own communication skills and associated personality traits as well as their deficiencies, and compare these with the expectations of their desired field. This assignment, which is based on a SWOT analysis (SWOT stands for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats), provides students with an opportunity to develop an action plan of steps for improvement to complete prior to graduation to make themselves more competitive in their desired field.

SWOT analysis was historically a business management tool that allows the analyst to understand the strengths and weakness of the organization in relationship to the opportunities and threats present in the organizational environment (Panagiotou, 2003). Since its development, SWOT analysis has been used in many industries for many purposes (Helms & Nixon, 2010), including being adapted for adults to use in the job market as a means of analyzing their skills in relationship to the

needs of their field (Olson, 2012). We propose that it can be used even more productively for college students who have the chance to construct a feasible action plan for improving their deficiencies while still in school. As described here, the personal SWOT analysis can also be constructed to focus even more specifically on communication skills.

The process of a SWOT analysis is as beneficial to an individual as it is for the myriad businesses that employ SWOTs each year. The individual SWOT analysis revolves around a self-reflection of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Strengths are those skills or characteristics that the individual believes are beneficial to themselves or others. The list of strengths can be drawn from personal, academic, or professional contexts. They should not be considered to be a projection of future growth or potential as much as a reflection of where the individual sees him/herself presently.

Weaknesses, in the SWOT analysis, are those skills or characteristics that the individual feels that they do not perform adequately or are absent all together. For example, an individual might identify their lack of a second language as a weakness because they would like to speak one but do not presently. In other words, the weaknesses, as with the strengths, do not have to be focused around a particular job or goal; the list is truly a self-reflection of the individual's skills and experiences in personal, academic, or job-related contexts.

In a SWOT analysis, the strengths and weaknesses are then filtered through some sort of industry or personal standard to produce the individual's opportunities and threats of being successful in that particular context. Opportunities are those skills and characteristics likely to yield a favorable outcome in a given market. For example, strong interpersonal communication skills are an opportunity in the human resources field. Threats, on the other hand, are those skills and characteristics that are a potential barrier to success. In the above example, not having clear and concise interpersonal communication skills would be identified as a barrier to success—a threat in the human resources field.

Whereas strengths and weaknesses are self-identified and determined solely by the individual, opportunities and threats are viewed through the lens of the goals or environment the individual is hoping to enter. It is not uncommon for self-identified strengths or weaknesses to be reversed when considering them as opportunities or threats. In other

words, what an individual may see as their strength may in fact be a threat in a particular environment or vice versa. Being an independent worker may be identified as a strength without consideration of context, but in a career in healthcare, being a team player may be more highly valued, thereby rendering independence as a potential threat.

The value in a SWOT analysis lies in its ability to help an individual see themselves through a projected lens, and then develop a strategic action plan to overcome any potential threats to future success in that context.

### **Assignment Details**

Students begin this assignment by analyzing their communication skills and personality traits. To do this, provide them with copies of or links to relevant personality and skills assessments, such as the communication style inventory (“Communication style inventory,” n.d.), a personal creativity inventory (“How creative are you?,” n.d.), and a conflict management styles inventory (“Conflict management styles quiz,” n.d.).

After completing and scoring the assessments, students begin the SWOT analysis by examining their personal strengths and weaknesses with a particular focus on communication. To identify their strengths, students should brainstorm a list of their personal strengths (both skills and personality traits) by using the inventory measurements, engaging in personal reflection, and talking with friends, family, and past co-workers. Students should then brainstorm a list of their personal weaknesses (both skills and personality traits) based on the same data gathering procedures. In both instances, students should be encouraged to focus on their communication skills in different contexts (e.g., interpersonal, group, public, mediated, etc.). To be done well, this part of the process should take place over several weeks to allow for multiple data gathering sources to be employed.

With the data gathered for the first half of the personal SWOT, students now move on to understanding their chosen field and the opportunities and threats they will face based on their identified strengths and weaknesses. To begin this stage, students should complete a brief industry analysis of both the required and the desired specific skills recruiters look for when hiring for an entry level position in the student’s

chosen field. To do this, they should examine a minimum of three job postings in the geographic area in which they are interested in living, and research job descriptions on websites such as careerbuilder.com, monster.com, and the Occupational Outlook Handbook, which can be found at [www.bls.gov/ooh/](http://www.bls.gov/ooh/).

Some instructors may opt to have students break this particular stage of the research process into two phases as a means of contributing to individual and departmental assessment efforts. One phase, as described above, is to gather data regarding the *specific* skills and characteristics required for their chosen field. In addition, students could also be directed to gather data regarding the *general* skills that employers look for in job candidates. *National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE)* publishes a list yearly of the top ten skills for job candidates based on survey research they conduct with employers that hire new college graduates. For example, in 2013, NACE reported the following ten candidate skills/qualities employers seek (“Top 10 Skills for Job Candidates,” April 3, 2013):

ability to verbally communicate with persons inside and outside the organization; ability to work in a team structure; ability to make decisions and solve problems; ability to plan, organize, and prioritize work; ability to obtain and process information; ability to analyze quantitative data; technical knowledge related to the job; proficiency with computer software programs; ability to create and/or edit written reports; and, ability to sell or influence others.

Having students use this list of general skills in which to compare their strengths and weaknesses is beneficial not only to them as they identify their personal opportunities and threats, but also as part of a broader departmental assessment effort. How this assignment can be used to contribute to programmatic assessment is discussed at the end of this article.

Next, students should compare their strengths and weaknesses with the brief industry analysis that they have completed. As they do this, they will develop an understanding of the opportunities and threats they face in relationship to their chosen occupation. To identify opportunities, students should identify skills and traits that they possess that make them a competitive applicant for their desired occupation. To identify threats, they should attempt to understand how the skills and

traits they are lacking or deficient in will potential hurt their chances of being a competitive applicant.

It is important to remind students that items they previously identified as strengths may end up being threats while weaknesses may prove to be opportunities; strengths and weaknesses are self-identified while opportunities and threats are skills and personality traits viewed through an industry lens. For example, a student could have a personal strength of being a self-starter who thrives in an independent environment, but their chosen field demands extensive teamwork and monitoring by a senior team leader. Their personal strength, when compared to the nature of the occupation as revealed through industry analysis, turns out to be a threat.

With strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats identified, students next create a strategic action plan. For each threat they identified, they should develop one to three realistic and measurable steps they can take prior to graduation to improve their chances of success. For example, if a career requires particular language skills, students could elect to take a language class, join a modern language club, or purchase a language instruction course. Or, if their chosen career requires leadership skills, they could run for office of a student club, take a course in leadership, or complete an on-line leadership certificate.

The project culminates in a written product (approximately four to seven pages) that includes the following sections: (1) a one page summary of each of the personal inventory assessments conducted—one paragraph summary per assessment; (2) a one to two page industry analysis of their chosen field; (3) a four page personal SWOT analysis—one page for each element; and, (4) a one to three page strategic action plan.

### **Grading the Assignment**

The rubric for grading this assignment should be divided into five sections: (1) required assessments, where the level of thoughtful evaluation of personality traits and skills is considered; (2) industry analysis, where feedback is provided on the thoroughness of research and how clearly described it is; (3) strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats, which privileges descriptions that were specific, clearly

articulated, and focused on the individual, instead of environmental factors such as the economy; (4) strategic action plan, which is evaluated for clarity and the extent to which a measurable plan for overcoming or strengthening weaknesses is identified; and, (5) writing/presentation, which is evaluation on issues such as: is the product reading friendly, and is it free of editing and grammatical mistakes?

### **Assignment Modifications**

This assignment lends itself well to modification to meet the needs of a particular course or the needs of different student populations. For example, it can be modified for students who wish to attend graduate school after graduation; simply substitute a graduate program analysis instead of an industry analysis. If integrated into an introductory general education course for first or second year students, the assignment can be used as an exploratory study for students who are undecided as to their major. The assignment can be modified to include a wide variety of personal assessments including intelligence, least preferred co-workers, leadership styles, decision making preferences, etc. Finally, although the product of this assignment is too personal to be shared in a classroom presentation, it will work well with a one-on-one mock interview or discussion in individual student meetings.

As discussed earlier, this assignment also has the potential to contribute to departmental assessment efforts. To accomplish this, the assignment should be given in an introductory communication course that all communication majors must take. The students would complete their SWOT using the list of general skills articulated by NACE in addition to the specific skills for their chosen field. Copies of the products would be stored digitally by the department and the students' major advisors. The advisor can use the SWOT to help the student choose courses, suggest extra-curricular activities, and monitor progress toward career aspirations.

To close the departmental assessment loop, at the end of their senior year, the students should reflect on their SWOT in a writing assignment (perhaps in a senior capstone course), and provide evidence for how they have enacted their strategic action plan, paying particular attention to their attainment of the general skills articulated by NACE. Department members would analyze the data for general themes and

trends across all students in their major. These data would demonstrate the extent to which communication majors are exiting the program with relevant skills; something departments are regularly directed to articulate in assessment reports. The outcome would provide evidence for short and long-term plans for curriculum revision and development. The reflective exercise at the end of their college career would also provide the student with the chance to reassess his/her readiness to enter their chosen field. Students would have specific and measurable evidence to discuss in job interviews or graduate school applications, and can readily discuss their skill and knowledge-base.

### **Conclusion**

Students report that they appreciate the opportunity to reflect on their skills and personality traits not just as a means for meeting course objectives but for helping them improve their ability to enter the job market successfully in their chosen field. They recognize quickly that the strategic plan they have created serves as a warrant for preparing themselves for their futures. They report that they have been taught that communication skills in particular are important, but through the analysis process they recognized that their own skills were not developed to the levels expected in their chosen fields. Most students are able to create a realistic strategic plan that they feel capable of enacting. They also recognize that the product of this assignment provides them specific and measurable examples of strengths and weaknesses to share during employment interviews.

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**How Do You Really Feel?  
Social Perception Exercise**  
*David Wendt*

**Abstract**

*Controversial social issues can be difficult to discuss in the classroom. For many students, their real feelings are hidden or possibly unknown. This exercise will hopefully reveal personal feelings and will open the classroom to active discussion. Personal bias can plan a major part in the positive or negative pathway of the discussion. As our society works to solve our numerous social problems, open, active discussion can help the future generations offer realistic solutions for a better society.*

Objective: students will analyze their true interpersonal feelings on numerous social situations and perceived problems. An open discussion concerning a variety of social issues can be an insightful experience for all members of the class.

Course: Basic communication classroom K-12 (grades 9-12), Basic Course, Interpersonal and possibly the Basic Health Communication course.

Students can remain closed in class discussion concerning controversial social situations and problems. Many students elect to remain silent when facing strong feelings as a psychological defense mechanism to personally attempt to control the situation. This activity can hopefully help students identify, discuss and analyze 'gut reactions' to social situations. Normally, this exercise takes one complete class period, based on a 45 minute time period. The time frame for the effective use of this activity should be no earlier than the third week of the course. Due to the potential intense feelings of this exercise, students must have some sense of interpersonal safety to be honest with their answers. Personal relationships should have been established and analyzed to some degree by this stage of the class.

### **The Activity**

This activity is a tremendous introductory activity for discrimination/prejudice, interpersonal feelings and values, ethics and moral discussions. It can also be used for a general classroom environment survey. Students will write their initial 'gut reaction' to each example. The time frame is vital as there should not be time to write down the expected societal answers, interpersonal mental blocks or personal bias that can accompany each situation. Twenty to thirty seconds is given between each example for students to write their initial reaction. The instructor will read the example and only repeat it once. The next example will be given at twenty to thirty second intervals. The time frame could be adapted for younger students or students who experience writing difficulties in limited amount of time. The list, in order, includes:

1. Person with AIDS
2. Woman who killed her abusing husband
3. Welfare mother with ten children
4. Man who murdered someone
5. Person with AIDS from drug abuse
6. Homeless man
7. Woman who was raped
8. Fat man without a job
9. Transsexual
10. Baby with AIDS from mother
11. Welfare mother who stole food for her children
12. Man who was raped
13. Woman who murdered someone
14. Gay person with AIDS

The next step is to have the students group their answers. For example, the instructor might tell them to put a star for numbers 1, 5, 10 and 14 (all AIDS issues), a box for numbers 2, 4 and 13 (murder), a circle for 7 and 12 (rape), a crescent for 3 and 11 (welfare situation), a face for 6, 8 and 9 (other). Then the instructor should tell the students to look at the similarly marked answers to see if there is any variance in their critical thinking process. Students should analyze all answers and prepare for

class discussion. If necessary, students may share and discuss answers in a small group before the overall class discussion.

### **Debriefing**

After each category is discussed, then a general overview can occur based on prejudiced/non-discriminatory thinking. Possible areas of discussion:

- Are males and females in all situations viewed differently?
- Does it matter how someone gets AIDS?
- Do you believe that males and females kill for different reasons?
- What is good or bad in each situation?
- Is stealing always wrong?
- Does it matter why someone breaks the law?
- Should situations be viewed on an individual basis?
- What have you learned about yourself after analyzing your answers?
- Did you discover any personal prejudice?
- What are the individual differences with the perceptions of Good versus Bad?

As the class discussion begins, a short statement concerning tolerance and acceptance may be necessary. This can be a perfect time to establish working perimeters of the discussion. Possible student validation of minority ideas can occur at this point. A student with severely intolerant views could harm or limit some classroom discussion.

### **Evaluation**

It is not uncommon that during the first self-reflective phase of the activity, participants may experience a personal 'aha' moment. This may be the first actual 'first time' that their individual bigotry will come to light. This realization can lead to feelings of specific examples of remorse, sorrow or harsh personal memories.

Grading can be done with a response paper indicating an individual student analysis or a general classroom analysis. The synopsis of the

discussion should center on the variation of the answers depending upon the perception of each situation. The slight change in each area normally allows personal bias to be realized. The most notable variance normally occurs in the area of a male verses female being a rape victim. Many students have a vast different opinion concerning that situation. Also the AIDS victims are seen in a distinctive light according to the cause of the disease. Paper evaluation can consist of basic writing traits: grammar, fluency, critical development of each argument, etc.

The second option for an evaluation component is a speech. Each student can select one area that they feel that they have learned something about themselves and their perceptions. It would a good decision to cover one area in some depth: AIDS, rape, murder, welfare or another idea in the speech. Each student should cover their answers and then briefly explain when there was a difference in their perception or explain why there was not a difference. Evaluation of this speech could include a simple rubric on the basic speaking principles: eye contact, fluency, pacing and argument development.

This assignment can simply be used without a graded component. In a typical classroom setting, a diverse range of answers will be discussed in a classroom. An answer showing a lack of tolerance by a student or group of students, will entice other students to ask questions to determine why personal prejudice is felt. Most students feel a sense of compassion for these situations. Certain situations allow for a more diverse opinion. Debating opportunities have occurred as liberal-thinking students ask more conservative-minded students to explain their feelings in a class discussion. It is not uncommon to hear a comment such as "I can't believe that you really believe that!" I have had very few students who refuse to participate as all students have some gut reaction to at least one of these topics due to a personal experience or personal bias. A classroom with vocal students will spend numerous hours on these topics, if allowed.

Instructors may need to focus students who refuse to discuss the opinions in a sincere or rational manner. If the classroom culture has been effectively established, fewer comments of intolerance and bigotry should occur. Hopefully respect is the norm of the environment.

## Appraisal

With numerous 'aha' moments and insightful discussion occurring in each class, this activity has been deemed very popular at both the high school and collegiate levels. The interpersonal self-identification of this activity consistently leads to positive comments on class evaluations. The quick nature of this exercise keeps the attention of students and actually inspires them to write and discuss their initial 'gut reaction'. Student have actually discussed that they really learned something about themselves while discussing this project. This can lead to open discussions concerning a wide variety of social related situations.

For further in-depth knowledge on these social issues:

An Educator's Guide to Gender Bias Issues. [www.ed.uiuc.edu](http://www.ed.uiuc.edu)

Carter. S. (2011, April 30). The Invisible Barrier: Second Generation Gender Discrimination. Psychology Today.

Gender Bias Learning Project. [www.genderbiasbingo.com](http://www.genderbiasbingo.com)

Homelessness Resource Center. [www.nrchmisamhsa.gov](http://www.nrchmisamhsa.gov)

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**Fond Memories of Dr. Loren Reid:  
Tribute to a Gentleman and Scholar**  
*Barry C. Poyner*

The National Communication Association recently celebrated its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2014. Loren Reid was already 9 years of age (born August 26, 1905) when these early speech teachers organized the very first one. In years to come Dr. Reid would become an influential educator and scholar, particularly loving British public address and communication education. His leadership helped strengthen the national association over which he presided in 1957, the Central States Communication Association, and our own Speech and Theatre Association of Missouri.

Various tributes and honors were bestowed on Dr. Reid, both while alive and since his passing on Christmas Day 2014. The purpose of this brief tribute is not meant to be an exhaustive encyclopedic entry, but to share some personal insights of a beloved educator. Besides, Dr. Reid has his own Wikipedia entry with numerous links that readers will find delightful!

Dr. Reid had a gentle spirit about him, and a graciousness that brought out the best in his students. My first occasion to meet him was when he drove his Mercedes to Louisiana State in the mid-1980s and taught a couple of graduate classes, British Public Address and Great Speakers as a guest professor. He told us that he was repaying a debt since Dr. Waldo Braden in retirement had similarly done some teaching at the University of Missouri. I vividly remember the day he reminded us that our republic's history is so brief. He related to us how William Jennings Bryan had stayed in the home of his parents who ran a newspaper in Iowa. As a boy, he had shaken hands with William Jennings Bryan! In our class, he proudly shook each of our hands, and expressed his firm belief that eloquence was transferable! Even today, in my classes, I keep this memory alive by asking students to share with me those that they have shaken hands with that they regarded as great speakers. It gives us opportunity to appreciate them and to also talk about the qualities of a great speaker. The moment can be magical and practical, as I look each student in the eye and share a firm handshake.

Teaching can be very personal, and Dr. Reid had a way of relating material in a personal and memorable way. As we studied the rhetorical efforts of Winston Churchill and the events of World War II, Dr. Reid related that as Paris fell, one of his children was born. Every parent wonders how their children will fare and what kind of world we will give them. The events of his day would give anyone pause. Monumental events give us pause, and each generation might relate where they were and what they were doing when the Twin towers fell on 9-11 or when Elvis died, or JFK was shot. For Dr. Reid, such an event occurred when he learned that the Titanic sank from the telegraph in his father's office! Indeed, our history is brief.

Appreciating good writing and creative writing, Dr. Reid further challenged us that semester to consider the creative writing of Benjamin Disraeli and to speculate how that might have affected his speechmaking. We were each assigned a novel, and while we gave pretty good book reports, I could tell by Dr. Reid's countenance that we had not quite lived up to his expectations or what he hoped we might discover. Good teachers help students find their "voice," and gently admonish them when the voice falters, cracks, or stutters.

As students of communication, we know that the history of public address, what worked well and what did not work so well can improve our praxis. When I began my own teaching career at Truman in Kirksville 26 years ago, I called Dr. Reid and asked if my British Public Address class could stop by and visit him on the way to the Churchill Museum at Westminster in Fulton. As always, he was gracious. We stopped by his house, and he and his beloved "Gus" (short for Augusta) greeted my students, then together we traveled to the Mizzou campus for lunch as we talked about Churchill, Fox, and others. This "Professor on the Loose" (the title of one of his autobiographical works) was becoming more tied to Columbia, yet found email and the internet and was able to travel abroad again! While his first love was Mizzou, he was also delighted that his granddaughter Sara was studying speech therapy at Truman.

Anne Rees, who covered Dr. Reid's 109<sup>th</sup> birthday for the *Columbia Missourian* (Nov. 14, 2014) noted, "In one of our interviews, a person with me told Reid he was impressed that he still seemed to have all of his marbles. Reid paused. 'Yes,' he said, his nearly toothless smile spreading wide, 'Mostly agates.'" Even in his last year of life, Dr. Reid

kept his dry wit, sparkling eyes, and keen comedic timing. What a full life Dr. Reid lived! We will miss this patriarch of our discipline.

One of the last times that I saw Dr. Reid was at a STAM convention. He was scheduled to share thoughts with us and challenged us to share what we learned with our students. He kidded us that dark chocolate was the secret of long life, and at the end recited the beautiful priestly benediction of Numbers 6:24-26 to us: “The LORD bless you and keep you; The LORD make His face shine upon you, And be gracious to you; The LORD lift up His countenance upon you, And give you peace.” Inspired by his words and faith in humanity, I almost felt I had been to church! Dr. Reid embodied “a good man, speaking well.”

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