

October 2022

Volume 0
Number 1

Featured Article:
*A Look back at Leff and McGee: Close Textual
Analysis and the Link Between Theory and
Rhetorical Artifact*
Dr. Kevin Stein

Utah Journal of Communication



Staff

Editorial Board

Dr. Braden Bagley
Dr. Matthew Barton
Dr. Arthur Challis
Dr. Dawan Coombs
Dr. Hayden Coombs
Dr. Wm. Bryan Paul
Dr. Jon Smith
Dr. Kevin Stein
Dr. McKay West
Dr. Lijie Zhou

Managing Board

Hayden Coombs
Braden Bagley
Kevin Stein
Matthew Barton
Jennifer Burt
Michele Fogg

Authors

Braden Bagley
Hayden Coombs
Adam Mikesell
Kevin Stein
Kyle Thompson
Esther Chang Worley

UJOC

VOL. 0 | NO. 1

04

UJOC Featured Article:
A Look back at Leff and McGee: Close Textual Analysis and the Link Between Theory and Rhetorical Artifact
by Kevin Stein

21

Mythical framing messages in ESPN.com's coverage of the NBA Finals over 10 years.
by Hayden Coombs

40

UJOC Featured Student Article:
Walking in Between: The Messaging in Jeffrey R. Holland's Speech The Second Half of the Second Century of Brigham Young University
by Esther Chang Worley

11

Careers, demographics, and internet availability: Predictors of social media addiction
by Braden Bagley, Hayden Coombs, Adam Mikesell

31

Religious Freedom With Chinese Characteristics: Successful Strategic Communication for International Churches
by Kyle Thompson



A look back at Leff and McGee: Close textual analysis and the link between theory and rhetorical artifact

Dr. Kevin Stein, Ph.D

Professor of Communication, Southern Utah University

Abstract

The essay explores a new method of close textual analysis—one that neither applies common theoretical frameworks to a rhetorical artifact nor abandons theory entirely. It compares and contrasts the ideas of Michael Leff and Michael McGee and supports a method that merges the two camps. The essay argues that a solely deductive approach to rhetorical criticism, which merely imposes theory on a textual object, is not a practical approach for extracting valuable insights from a text. Conversely, Leff's essentially atheoretical approach to the close reading of texts is overly systematic and somewhat monotonous. The essay supports the idea that textual analysis should examine the implicit micro-features of discourse and therefore uses the Unabomber Manifesto as an abbreviated case study for illustrating a process of close reading that utilizes theory in a more inductive manner.

Key words: Leff, McGee, theory, object, rhetorical criticism, close reading, Unabomber.

There are numerous points of contention that divide rhetorical critics into various methodological camps. However, two tensions seem to exist at the forefront of current debate on rhetorical practices. One such tension is the rift between those critics who rely heavily on theory to guide their analyses of rhetorical objects and those critics who promote a more atheoretical approach to the study of texts. The latter group is clearly in the minority, as many prominent examples of good criticism utilize abstract theoretical frameworks to gain insight into particular artifacts. One example of this type of framework is Kenneth Burke's Theory of Dramatism. Although Burkean methods of criticism can uncover interesting details regarding the motives underlying human action, it is often projected on to the text before the appropriateness of the fit is even determined. People will often say that a square peg cannot fit inside a round hole. While it may be true the square will not fit perfectly, it certainly can be made to fit with some effort.

The same force is often applied in order to make rhetorical theory "fit" particular objects. Perhaps another overused cliché related to criticism is that critics attempting to apply a tired theoretical structure to a text are accused of conducting "cookie-cutter" criticism. This implies in some way that the critic is taking the text and reshaping it into the object that best justifies the use of the chosen theory. The merit of this claim depends on how someone views the act of interpretation. The critic does not alter or manipulate the text to make it appear as though it is physically something that it is not. The text never changes, but the lens for viewing it does. A more appropriate analogy might be the way people extract images from cloud formations. Suppose that when two people are looking up at the same cloud, one sees a giant rabbit and the other a squid. In a similar way, rhetorical critics examine texts that contain the same explicit features, but they often disagree about the implicit features. They disagree about the image that the final criticism should take.

One may see a text as calling for Boorman's fantasy theme analysis, while another critic believes that the application of Toulmin's model of argument structure will offer the best insights. Either approach would dramatically change the interpretations offered by the critic, which is always substantially different from the original text.

Michael Leff and Michael McGee, though advocating very different philosophical approaches to textual criticism, are the biggest proponents of methods that rely less on theory and more on the textual object. Leff (1986) argued that the critic becomes like a "circuit rider, forever circling the herd, but never getting to its center" (p. 377). He believes that theory deters attention away from the text and celebrates it for its extrinsic features such as context and social consequences. McGee argues that there should be a "divorce between theory and practice" (Gaonkar, 1990, p. 304). He believes that if theory is to emerge at all, it should be the result of the initial practice of observation. Both scholars provide very specific methods for examining texts independent of theory. They promote a "close reading" of texts that generates insights inherently present in the object and not extracted through the use of preexisting theoretical approaches.

The purpose of this essay is to determine if there is a method that merges theoretical approaches to criticism and close textual analysis without falling victim to the pitfalls identified by Leff and McGee. I would argue that there may be and I will attempt to illustrate this process using a short textual excerpt from a rhetorical object that is historically significant, but probably less praiseworthy than other well-known discourses: the Unabomber Manifesto. However, before I can articulate my own position in greater detail, it is important that I provide a clear discussion of the current methods of close textual analysis. I will first begin by defining the method. Second, I will explain the points of agreement and disagreement between Leff and McGee. Third, I will identify strengths and weaknesses in these positions and offer an alternative method of analysis that incorporates theory into the practice. And last, I will conduct a close reading or micro-analysis of the introduction of the Unabomber Manifesto to illustrate the method.

Just How Close is a "Close Reading?"

A micro-level approach to textual analysis was first suggested by Michael Leff (1992), who argued that a "close reading" of the text was necessary to "concentrate on the fundamental operations of rhetorical language." He makes a distinction between two types of criticism: ideological criticism and textual criticism.

Ideological criticism focuses on the "extensional, social, and political force of discursive practice." Textual criticism centers on "the effort to interpret the intentional dynamics of a text" (p. 223). The textual, or intentional, approach works from a finished product and looks at the processes that created it. The ideological, or extensional, approach breaks down the product in order to see how it contributes to these broader social and political processes. Though Leff (1992) argues that the two types of criticism can work in conjunction with each other, he also argues that a focus on the larger unit of a text or its effects "absorbs the unique features of a particular work" (p. 229). A more illuminating method for examining a text is to look at particulars, or what Leff (1992) identifies as textual fragments.

The implicit meanings present within the features of a text are ripe for extraction if the critic is willing to abandon his or her focus on the broader theoretical structures that dictate what is to be found. Leff and Sachs (1990) explained this process in greater precision when they wrote:

Rhetorical criticism finds its end in interpretative understanding; such understanding locates itself in the full complexity of a particular transaction rather than in the discovery of abstract regularities or disembodied theoretical principles. While the critic must frame the discourse within its context, the focus of attention centers on the text itself and the rhetorical features embedded within it. Working from the evidence within the text, the critic proceeds to make inferences about what the work is designed to do, how it is designed to do it, and how well that design functions to structure and transmit meanings within the realm of public experience. (p. 256)

The difference between Leff's method of analysis and contemporary approaches to rhetorical criticism is that judgments regarding the semantic functions of a text are expected to emerge from the examination of features rather than the analysis being used as a tool for confirming what is expected to be uncovered.

Edwin Black (1980) also supported an intentional approach to the study of texts, though he did not use the same language to describe the process. Black argued:

These corresponding perspectives on criticism are, respectively, the theoretic or etic viewpoint, which approaches a rhetorical transaction from the outside of that transaction and interprets the transaction in terms of pre-existing theory; and the non-theoretic or nominalistic or emic viewpoint, which approaches the rhetorical

transaction in what is hoped to be its own terms, without conscious expectations drawn from any sources other than the rhetorical transaction itself. (p.331)

Black seems to support a form of rhetorical analysis that does not draw heavily on extrinsic theoretical principles. But unlike Leff, he does not suggest an alternative method that utilizes the emic approach.

The above definitions inform the aspiring critic that the more effective analysis begins with an examination of the internal workings of a textual object, but reveals a fairly ambiguous procedure for exploring these features. Perhaps this is because each discourse is unique from other discourses even in the same genre. It would be inappropriate to assume that a tool appropriate for one analysis would work equally well in another analysis. Close reading celebrates the unique identity of each text and attempts to engage the rhetorical object with zero expectations, an essentially atheoretical approach. Theoretical approaches to criticism simply reduce a text to abstract regularities, implying that the smaller features can best be explained by relegating them to broad categories. McGee (1990) argued:

Foreign policy expert Henry Kissinger may have chosen 8,000 words to express in Foreign Affairs his opinion of U.S. policy in the Middle East. The debater, the public speaker, the journalist, the legislator, or the essayist, however, will represent that discourse in 250 words, reducing and condensing Kissinger's apparently finished text into a fragment that seems more important than the whole from which it came. (p. 280)

The critic might assume that a summary of the patterns of a particular text is useful to the passive reader who might otherwise not recognize these implicit features. However, reducing the text in this way alleviates all of the alternative possibilities for interpretation. The critic is likely to ignore important features in favor of those that can be more easily clustered together.

Leff vs. McGee

To this point, I have emphasized the areas of agreement between Leff and McGee. Both scholars support a more intrinsic approach to the analysis of textual objects. Both reject the use of theory as a means of reducing texts to simple categories and abstract principles. There are several issues, however, that divide them. One is the relative boundary of the rhetorical text. McGee (1990) wrote that “if by ‘text’ we mean the sort of finished discourse anticipated in consequence of an essentially homogenous

culture, no texts exist today. We have instead fragments of ‘information’ that constitute our context” (p. 287). McGee views rhetoric as a social process that generates a wide range of structures, namely beliefs, attitudes, actions, and even communities (Gaonkar,1990). Leff, on the other hand, views rhetoric as locally stable and very much contained (Campbell, 1990). His analyses of famous oratorical masterpieces such as Lincoln’s “House Divided” speech and Edmund Burke’s “Speech at Bristol, Previous to the Election” are indicative of his attitude that a speech-act contains discourse that has physical boundaries that can be apprehended by the rhetorical critic. Leff sees the discursive object as “a field of action unified into a functional and locally stable product” (Gaonkar, 1990, p. 291). The way each critic views the stability of the rhetorical object should influence his or her approach to the analysis. Because Leff believes the discourse is contained, he feels justified in ignoring important extrinsic features of the text such as context and effects.

Leff and McGee represent very different positions regarding the importance of context in rhetorical criticism. Leff seems to group context with other “extensional” elements of a text’s construction. Biographical information about the rhetor, historical events preceding the rhetorical act, and social consequences of the discourse all represent fringe areas beyond the primacy of the text itself. Theoretical structures are simply distractions that move the critic away from the “intentional” elements. Leff does not dismiss that a context does exist, but argues rather that the analysis can yield fruitful insights independent of a contextual focus. It may be true that the oratorical masterpieces that are central to Leff’s research contain important rhetorical features removed from their context, but many contemporary texts might lose their flavor if not for the interesting circumstances that gave rise to the discourse. McGee (1990) also believes that the text should be the primary focus, but argues that any belief that rhetoric can be constructed as sufficient unto itself is sheer fantasy.” He argues that “the elements of context are so important to the text that one cannot discover or even discuss the meaning of text without reference to them” (p. 283).

These attitudes regarding the boundaries of discourse and the importance of rhetorical context help to explain the specific approaches offered by Leff and McGee. Leff wants to understand how rhetoric functions to create meaning. McGee wants to examine the product in order to understand the specific social and historical processes that constituted it. This process/product distinction is at the heart of the chasm that separates Leff from McGee.

Strengths and Limitations of Current “Close Reading” Conceptions

Hopefully, in outlining the individual positions of Leff and McGee, I have provided a sense of the advantages that this type of method brings to rhetorical criticism. An examination of the rhetorical text itself is probably one of the few areas of communication not shared with other disciplines. Perhaps the closest area to rhetorical criticism is literary criticism, which still differs greatly because of its focus on the aesthetic features of a text in lieu of the persuasive features. A movement toward extrinsic or ideological criticism moves us ever closer to other disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, political science, and philosophy. This blurring of disciplinary boundaries continues to thwart the aims of current scholars who are trying to establish the field of communication as its own domain.

One explanation for this shift to extensional issues is that theory provides readers an explanation of what is happening in the text. By reducing it to a set of categories, the critic tells readers inside and outside of our discipline that the text “essentially” functions in one particular way. We might summarize a legal discourse as containing five key arguments, a political speech as utilizing a metaphor for change, or an interpersonal dispute as consisting of a few unique conflict styles. Perhaps critics feel inadequate in using these types of findings to justify the existence of our field of study. We add more heft to our argument by situating it in a significant rhetorical situation or in identifying a broad range of social consequences of the discourse. We might even magnify the importance of our interpretations by grouping a single text with similar texts and imply that the consequences of the collective are the same as the individual. Leff and McGee offer relatively systematic approaches to close textual analysis. Their efforts to move criticism away from broad summations of discourse to a microscopic focus of textual particulars are admirable and serve the discipline well if we can more effectively justify the importance of the “intrinsic effects.”

Unfortunately, current conceptions of close readings are not as developed as they could be. Leff argues that context is both relevant and irrelevant. He implies that a text has its own unique context that is more immediate than the more distant historical processes that give rise to a text. Obviously, when a text is produced, any number of factors contribute to its construction. However, the critic determines which contextual elements are critical to the examination of the text. In some ways, the critic binds the broad contextual issues into a form that is more manageable. Suppose I wanted to do a close

reading of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech. It would be difficult to ignore every facet of the discursive context and simply focus on the text in a vacuum. On the other hand, there are certainly a plethora of contextual issues that cannot, and perhaps should not, be included in the discussion of the object. Does the critic need to address the full history of the African-American struggle for equality extending back to the days of slavery or synthesize biographical information about the entire King family in order to apprehend the text’s features? The boundaries of a textual artifact’s context can never truly be identified, yet the skillful critic is still able to make judgments about which contextual issues are relevant to the analysis.

Also vague are conceptions of what a textual “effect” involves. Many scholars would probably not identify the effective merging of form and content in a speech as being an effect, especially if the effect is not explained in terms of the number of people influenced by the discourse or the number of oppressive ideologies reinforced through it. When critics use language such as “the text functions to create,” they are implying a textual effect, but often do not identify it as such because ideological critics sometimes claim ownership over the language of rhetorical impact. This hesitancy to justify textual criticism by its inherent effects limits the recognition given to this type of criticism and further establishes the intentional and ideological critics as representing two very distinct modes of thought.

Another limitation of close reading is the systematic and often overly descriptive method of moving through the text. Leffs (1988) close reading of the temporal dimensions in Lincoln’s “Second Inaugural” address illustrates this style of criticism:

The opening paragraph contains no striking ideas or stylistic flourishes; in fact, it has a somewhat awkward appearance. Yet, it seems carefully constructed to achieve Lincoln’s purposes and to establish the framework and tone for the speech as a whole. Most obviously, Lincoln introduces the temporary markers that define his perspective. The first sentence contrasts the present occasion with his previous inaugural. The second sentence refers to the past, the third and fourth to the present, and the final sentence looks forward to the future. (p. 27)

Leff moves systematically through the features of the text paragraph by paragraph and line by line. Apart from a brief introduction that justifies the use of a close reading and identifies temporality as a theme that emerged from the close reading, the above excerpt indicates

how Leff begins his discussion of the speech. He includes no contextual information other than the names of the speaker and the speech. Though he identifies a common theme of the text, he does attempt to use the theme as a signifier of the whole discourse. Leff also does not imply that the text carries a specific “effect” beyond its mere “symbolic action” (p. 31).

An Alternative Approach to Close Reading

Based on these inherent limitations in previous efforts at close reading, I would like to offer an alternative to the close textual methods introduced by Leff and McGee, though admittedly this approach is not wholly original. Other scholars have suggested that an effective merger can exist between theory, context, and close analysis of textual artifacts. For example, Wayne Brockreide (1974) suggested that critics should look for the specific elements of a text and then compare what is found against existing theory. If no theory currently exists to explain the findings, a new theory should be developed. This approach is similar to grounded theory, but there are a couple of key differences. One is that Brockreide’s method does not reduce a text to its essential features. It measures individual features against the broader theoretical perspectives. A second important difference is that once a new theory is created, it is viewed as an end unto itself. The developed theory is not used again to explain other texts that have not yet undergone a close textual reading.

Black (1980) agrees with Brockreide in terms of where the interpretation should begin. He said: “I don’t believe that a critic should evaluate an object emically, but an emic interpretation may be an avenue into a fair and full etic evaluation” (p. 334). Both scholars offer perspectives that run counter to Leff and McGee. A close textual analysis should begin with the text and end with theory. However, it is difficult for critics to resist the temptation to use the new theory on a textual object. When a fisherman finally catches a fish, does he throw the fish back and take satisfaction in learning that worms are the best bait, morning is the best time of the day to fish, and that shore fishing is as effective as boat fishing? Most likely, he will use what he has learned in subsequent fishing expeditions. But when a new theory emerges from close textual reading, the critic should be satisfied with having an isolated glimpse into what persuasive effect a rhetorical object can produce.

Micro-features of the Unabomber Manifesto

I will now attempt to utilize a method of close reading that incorporates the strengths of existing notions of close reading, while minimizing the limitations inherent in this type

of method. Let me first summarize what this method entails. First, I recognize that context is artificially bound and can be referenced in a close textual reading without jeopardizing the “closeness” of my focus on textual features. Second, I side with Leff’s argument that a discourse is relatively stable and contained. Though the boundaries are not concrete, as asserted by McGee, the process of rhetorical criticism would become obsolete without some sense of these discursive boundaries. Third, and perhaps most importantly, rhetorical criticism cannot be done independent of theory. A critic might be able to do a close reading without attaching a theoretical framework to the text, which dictates how it is to be categorized, but no one can read a text without bringing a single theoretical assumption to the table. Just as qualitative researchers attempt to bracket their assumptions going into a communication event, rhetorical critics should do the same at the onset of each observation. The critic should be aware of what philosophical paradigms might influence the analysis and attempt to reconcile these preconceived ideas with the insights generated from the observation.

Several assumptions guided me in my selection of the Unabomber Manifesto as an important text worthy of study. This sentence alone illustrates a bias by asserting that the text is both “important” and “worthy of study.” All researchers, including rhetorical critics, select their objects of study based on which questions interest them. If they randomly selected research questions in order to avoid these biases, there would be no such thing as a program of study and there would be a great many bored scholars. Apart from my assumption regarding the text’s worthiness, I also assume that the context is significant, that the text will yield something interesting, and that a close systematic examination of the features is the appropriate method of analysis.

The contextual issues surrounding the creation of the Unabomber Manifesto are complex. However, just as this is a micro-analysis of textual features, it will also be an abbreviation of other elements of rhetorical criticism that would typically be included in such an analysis. Therefore, let me simply summarize what this brief analysis entails. Ted Kaczynski, also known as the Unabomber, was terrorizing airports and universities nationwide by sending explosive devices through the mail system. His plan was to use the fear generated from this violence to blackmail a prominent national newspaper into publishing his lengthy treatise expressing criticism of technological advancement in society. His plan worked. The manuscript was published in its entirety and the violence ceased. Kaczinski was apprehended by the F.B.I. when

his brother recognized the manuscript in the Washington Post and alerted the officials.

The text itself is rhetorically interesting. First, Kaczynski espoused the doctrines in the manifesto so passionately that he was willing to kill people and to blackmail a major newspaper. Second, there was a rather apparent contradiction between Kaczynski’s hatred of all things technological and his *modus operandi* of using technology to construct state of the art bombs to achieve his end goal. The method of close textual analysis calls for a broader focus on the surface features of the text, followed by a close analysis of the implicit features, and finally a reexamination of the broad features in light of what was found in the close reading.

After examining just one paragraph of the introduction of the manifesto, I soon realized why critics have chosen not to engage in this method of analysis. One paragraph yielded enough interesting insights to warrant a full rhetorical study. I will share just a few insights of each stage of my three-stage analytic process. As I began inductively to look for what Leff would call “transparent” features, I noticed several things, some of them very obvious. First, the manifesto is a treatise on the ills of technology and industry. Second, the organizational structure of the piece is important to the author because paragraphs are numbered. Perhaps he believes this essay will receive great attention and needs paragraphs to be numbered for easy reference. This might elevate the aesthetic value of his work to that of poetry, which also often contains numbered lines. Third, Kaczynski is not seeking a physical change, but an attitudinal one. Fourth, Kaczynski does not provide his own individual voice to the text, but relies on a collective voice through his frequent use of “we” phrases. Fifth, the paragraphs are poorly developed and seem to represent random thoughts. This might be an indication that the manifesto was not very well planned out. And sixth, there appears to be little or no evidence of outside material used to support the claims made in the text.

Now I will move to more implicit or micro” features, though I concede that what is deemed implicit or explicit is a matter of judgment. First, Kaczynski uses a couple of metaphors to illustrate his overall complaint. He argues that people are like “engineered products” and “cogs in the machine.” He also personifies the technological system as being able to experience a “physical or psychological adjustment” and that this adjustment will cause the system “pain.” This juxtaposition of metaphors reveals an inherent contradiction in his choice of images. How can the system be simultaneously alive and dead, humanistic and

machine-like? Second, Kaczynski argues that the process of change, if even possible, will be very long and painful. The form/style of the text seems to parallel the argument that Kaczynski makes. The flow of his words, like the road to technological revolution, is also long and painful. Third, Kaczynski uses a hypothetical syllogism to illustrate the two divergent paths that face civilization. He argues that “if the present system survives, the consequences will be inevitable: There is no way of reforming or modifying the system so as to prevent it from depriving people of dignity and autonomy.” However, Kaczynski does not provide a scenario for the other path. If the system were to break down entirely on its own, there would be no need for reform. Whether Kaczynski was aware of this omission cannot be known, but the absence of this logical step in his argument may be textual evidence of his underlying intent.

After examining just a few of the extrinsic and intrinsic features of a single paragraph of the Unabomber manifesto, I believe that some distance can be created between the critic’s “bracketed” assumptions about what is likely to be yielded from a textual exploration and the analysis itself. Some may dispute the possibility, but I did not begin my analysis looking for syllogisms, metaphors, and periodic sentences. These were not theoretical structures that I used to guide my analysis of the text. “Touchstones are not models for copying, but referents which can inform our expectations of what rhetorical discourse ought to do and of what it is capable of doing (Leff, 1990, p. 269). Rhetoricians should not be trained in broad theoretical structures that can be used to analyze texts. They should become masters of rhetorical processes. An extensive knowledge of rhetorical possibilities will allow the critic to examine textual objects freely and without expectations because they will allow the text to communicate its most important features. In a way, rhetorical functions serve as theoretical principles that can inform our reading of a text, but we should always go into the analysis with what Leff (1980) calls “informed innocence.” We possess knowledge of what rhetoric can do based on what its functions have previously been, but we are always open to new possibilities that may emerge based on the unique nature of each text. Clearly, rhetorical criticism can be conducted without a broad theoretical framework guiding the method. The abbreviated close reading of the Unabomber text indicates that close features can be examined in light of common rhetorical principles (theory), but should not be analyzed with preconceived expectations. Gaonkar (1990) wrote: “In the last twenty-five years rhetorical criticism has moved in the wrong direction. The focus has shifted from substance (object) to methods to such an extent that criticism

has become an object of study rather than a vehicle of study” (p. 308). “Cookie Cutter” critical theories only reinforce this attitude by objectifying criticism as pentadic, fantasy-theme analysis, metaphor, cluster, narrative, and many others.

References

Black, E. (1980). A note on theory and practice in rhetorical criticism. *Western Journal of Speech Communication*, 44, 331–336.

Brockriede, W. (1974). Rhetorical criticism as argument. *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 60, 165–174.

Campbell, J. A. (1990). Special issue on rhetorical criticism. *Western Journal of Speech Communication*, 54, 249–251.

Gaonkar, D. P. (1990). Object and method in rhetorical criticism: From Wicheins to Leff and McGee. *Western Journal of Speech Communication*, 54, 290–316.

Leff, M. (1980). Interpretation and the art of the rhetorical critic. *Western Journal of Speech Communication*, 44, 337–349.

Leff, M. (1986). Textual criticism: The legacy of G.P. Mohrmann. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 72, 377–389.

Leff, M. (1988). Dimensions of temporality in Lincoln’s second inaugural. *Communication Reports*, 1, 26–31.

Leff, M. & Sachs, A. (1990). Words the most like things: Iconicity and the rhetorical text. *Western Journal of Speech Communication*, 54, 252–273.

Leff, M. (1992). Things made by words: Reflections on textual criticism. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 78, 223–231.

Redding, W. C. (1957). Extrinsic and intrinsic criticism. *Western Speech*, 96–103.

Careers, demographics, and internet availability: Predictors of social media addiction

Dr. Braden H. Bagley, Ph.D

Assistant Professor of Communication, Southern Utah University

Dr. Hayden Coombs, Ph.D

Assistant Professor of Communication, Southern Utah University

Adam Mikesell, MA

Ph.D. Candidate, University of Connecticut

Abstract

Obsessive social media use has become a prevalent addictive behavior. The purpose of this study was to take a deeper look at what specific variables are leading to social media addiction. Specifically, we wanted to see if variables such as unlimited data and Wi-Fi availability, social media job requirements, and other demographics including education, age, gender, and marital status, predict increased addiction behaviors such as withdrawal and mood modification. As social media becomes increasingly prevalent, and the mental health issues that are connected become clearer, it is imperative that both predictors and solutions to social media addiction are identified. In the current study, a sample of 347 participants, recruited via Amazon Mechanical Turk, responded to a survey using a version of the Bergen Facebook Addiction Scale that was modified to represent all social media platforms. The scale measured social media salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict, and relapse. Results revealed that being younger, more educated, married, male, having better access to internet, and having a job that required social media usage, all lead to a higher likelihood of social media addiction behaviors.

Key words: Social Media Addiction, Salience, Mood Modification, Tolerance, Withdrawal, Relapse.

To many citizens of the United States, the idea of the two main political parties working together to address an issue seems unlikely at best. So, when the two parties actually work together to solve problems, it speaks to the concern and the consensus of the issue. This happened in February of 2022 when Democratic Senator Amy Klobuchar and Republican Senator Cynthia Lummis introduced a bipartisan bill to fund research addressing social media addiction prevention (Goldsberry, 2022). Obsessive internet use has become so prevalent that it is often listed among behavioral addictions such as pornography, gambling, shopping, video games, binge eating, and plastic surgery (Iliades, 2016). Perhaps it is time to start addressing social media addiction the same way that these other behavioral addictions are addressed, and treating the victims with care and respect.

One possible factor driving social media addiction is the increase in internet availability. Just two decades ago, the smartphone wasn’t yet in existence. In the early days of social media, when Myspace commanded the market share, people who wanted to spend time on social media had to find a desktop computer and access the platforms through traditional web browsers. Now, with 4.28 billion unique mobile internet users worldwide (Lin, 2021), many people are accessing the internet literally everywhere they go. In addition, unlimited data plans have become the norm rather than the exception for those with more disposable income. In 2012, most major carriers were offering limited data plan as their main option for users, and throttling data for anyone lucky enough to be grandfathered into an unlimited plan (Kovach, 2012). Fast-forward to 2022, and practically

every carrier is pushing their unlimited data plans (Michaels, 2022). The geographical and financial barriers to constant internet access are gone.

Some people don't have the choice to avoid social media, as their jobs demand it. 27% of Americans are required to use social media as part of their job duties (Dean, 2021). Indeed, a search engine for employment opportunities, has identified 14 common job titles that are based solely on social media, including content curator, social media coordinator, social media specialist, social media manager, social media community manager, digital strategist, brand manager, content strategist, etc. (Indeed editorial team, 2021). This doesn't include people who have social media as just one responsibility among many others, such as a marketing director. It's not uncommon in the 2020's for the average person to be required by their employer to use social media. The purpose of this study was to take a deeper look at what specific variables are leading to social media addiction. Specifically, we wanted to see if variables such as unlimited data, job requirements, and other demographics led to increased addiction behaviors such as withdrawal and mood modification. The following literature review outlines the framework of this study.

Social Media Additction

The Addiction Center (n. d.), defines social media addiction as, "a behavioral addiction that is characterized as being overly concerned about social media, driven by an uncontrollable urge to log on to or use social media, and devoting so much time and effort to social media that it impairs other important life areas" (para. 1). One study that exemplifies this behavior measured social media addiction among 700 high school students and found that approximately 85% of the students were using social media for at least two hours-per-day (Simsek, Elciyar, & Kizilhan, 2019). As social media has evolved, it has become more addictive to its audience because of its ability to provide satisfaction through recognition, and has been identified as a significant predictor in life satisfaction (Sahin, 2017). Haynes (2018) explains that the average American spends approximately two to four hours on their smartphone per day. This has led to a correlation between addiction and negative mental health outcomes such as depression, anxiety, and poor sleep quality (Woods & Scott, 2016).

A study by Hou, Xiong, Jiang, Song, and Wang (2019) shows how social media addiction can affect mental health and academic performance (with self-esteem being a mediating variable). Those who have a higher level of social media addiction have worse mental health.

Also, academic performance and self-esteem are negatively correlated with social media addiction. With evidence that social media addiction is a growing problem, a study from Van Den Eijnden, et al. (2016) revealed that social media disorder is heavily correlated with depression and attention deficit.

Brevers and Turel (2019) conducted a two-part study to observe self-controlling strategies with social media use. In the first study, participants were asked to write one sentence to elaborate on their action/thinking and context for how they control their social media use. Results showed that self-control takes two forms: 1) reactive "in the moment" acts, and 2) being proactive by reinforcing or challenging current behavior. The second part of the study evaluated four themes of self-control strategies: (1) Trait self-control, (2) social networking site use habit, (3) social networking site self-control strategies, and (4) social networking site addiction symptoms. Results showed that individuals with a prominent trait of self-control scored lower in use habits and addiction symptoms. Self-control then can be looked at as the first step to breaking social media addiction.

There is not one concrete method when it comes to attempting to quit an addiction to social media. Schoenebeck (2014) conducted a study on social media breaks using participants in Lent as her sample. The average person who has quit social media resists the temptation for approximately 25 days. The main reasons participants wanted to give up social media were privacy, productivity, misuse, and data. Results showed that 64% gave up social media in the 40-day Lenten Period, while 36% only posted on social media two times or less. 31% of individuals who lasted the entire duration of Lent followed up on social media by announcing that they were back.

An article by Bullinger and Vie (2017) broke down the influences on social media abstainers, non-users, and those who try to quit. The study looked at conversations about abstainers and why they have yet to adopt social media in their day-to-day lives. From the perspective of social media users, these abstainers seemed to be out of the loop. Non-users found that benefits of not using social media outweighed the benefits of using, such as being overwhelmed and addiction concerns. Though social media abstainers may have a negative perception amongst social media users, studies show that there are significant benefits to not using these outlets (Turel, Cavagnaro, & Meshi, 2018). In regards to social media quitters, Bullinger and Vie (2017), found that those who stopped using social media experienced fatigue and celebratory reflections about quitting. Lastly, those who have quit

and started using social media again tend to have been influenced by their peers and/or the individual not permanently deleting the social media account.

The Bergen Facebook Addiction Scale

Developed in 2012, the Bergen Facebook Addiction Scale (Andreassen, et al., 2012) is used to measure salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict, and relapse. Salience is defined as situation where "the activity dominates thinking and behavior" (Andreassen, et al., 2012, p. 503). The scale measures how much time is spent thinking about and planning to use Facebook, freeing up time for Facebook, and pondering about recent happenings on Facebook. Tolerance is high when "increasing amounts of the activity are required to achieve previous effects" (Andreassen, et al., 2012, p. 503). The Bergen scale for tolerance measures time spent on Facebook, urge to use Facebook, and a feeling that one needs to increase use to get the same pleasure from Facebook. Mood Modification is when "the activity modified/improves mood" (Andreassen, et al., 2012, p. 503). The Bergen scale measures the perception that one uses Facebook to forget about personal problems, reduce negative emotions, and reduce restlessness. Withdrawal is "the occurrence of unpleasant feelings when the activity is discounted or suddenly reduced" (Andreassen, et al., 2012, p. 503). The Bergen scale measures restlessness, irritability, and negative feelings when prohibited from using Facebook. Conflict occurs when "the activity causes conflicts in relationships, in work/education, and other activities" (Andreassen, et al., 2012, p. 503). The Bergen scale measures the degree to which one perceives Facebook to have a negative impact on job/studies, other hobbies or leisure activities, and partners, family members or friends. Relapse is "a tendency to revert to earlier patterns of the activity after abstinence or control" (Andreassen, et al., p. 503). The Bergen scale measures experiences that include being told by others to reduce use of Facebook, trying to cut down time spent on Facebook without success, and deciding to use Facebook less frequently and failing.

Recent studies using the Bergen scale show that it is valuable and useful for measuring problematic Facebook use (Chen, et al., 2021; Primi, et al., 2021). The scale has also been used to link social networking sites to depression and anxiety symptoms (Jovanovic, Visnjic, & Gmijovic, 2021). Based on this literature review and on a version of the Bergen Facebook Addiction scale that we modified to measure overall social media addiction (further elaborated on in the following method section), the following research questions guided this

research.

RQ1: Which of seven variables including gender, age, education, marital status, data plan, WIFI access, and social media job requirement predict social media salience.

RQ2: Which of seven variables including gender, age, education, marital status, data plan, WIFI access, and social media job requirement predict social media tolerance.

RQ3: Which of seven variables including gender, age, education, marital status, data plan, WIFI access, and social media job requirement predict social media mood modification.

RQ4: Which of seven variables including gender, age, education, marital status, data plan, WIFI access, and social media job requirement predict social media relapse.

RQ5: Which of seven variables including gender, age, education, marital status, data plan, WIFI access, and social media job requirement predict social media withdrawal.

RQ6: Which of seven variables including gender, age, education, marital status, data plan, WIFI access, and social media job requirement predict social media conflict.

Method

Participants and Procedures

Individuals were recruited to participate in this project through Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) on January 26th, 2022. Once an MTurk worker agreed to participate in the project (IRB approved), they were led to a Qualtrics survey. At the end of the survey, they were asked to leave a unique personal code that they could re-enter into the MTurk assignment page. Once the codes were matched, respondents were given a \$0.10 incentive. 474 responses were initially recorded. Of those, six were removed because of identical IP addresses, which were possibly duplicate responses. Two responses were incomplete and removed from the data. There were four easy-to-answer attention check questions given in the survey. Only participants that got all four questions correct were kept in the data set. This prevented lazy responses from being included. 122 respondents missed one or more attention check. This left a final sample of 347 participants. The demographics of the population sample are available in table 1.

Table 1. *Sample Demographics*

Demographic	N (%)		
Male	174 (50.1%)	-	-
Female	168 (48.4%)	-	-
Other or N/A	5 (1.3%)	-	-
18-24 years	-	20 (5.8%)	-
25-34 years	-	138 (39.8%)	-
35-44 years	-	95 (27.4%)	-
45-54 years	-	48 (13.8%)	-
55-64 years	-	32 (9.2%)	-
65-74 years	-	12 (3.5%)	-
75 years +	-	2 (0.6%)	-
No college degree	-	-	90 (25.9%)
2-year degree	-	-	24 (6.9%)
4-year degree	-	-	188 (54.2%)
Graduate degree	-	-	45 (12.9%)
Married	-	-	171 (49.4%)
Not Married	-	-	175 (46.8%)

Instrument

The survey used in this study included three different item types, including conditions, measures, and demographics. The order of all items was randomized in Qualtrics for each participant. Four separate items were used to establish group conditions. The first asked participants what best described their data plan. They could respond with unlimited data, personal limited data, shared limited data, or no data. The second item asked participants if they agreed or disagreed with the statement, "I have a job that requires me to use social media." The third item asked participants if they agreed or disagreed with the statement, "I usually have access to Wi-Fi." The fourth item asked participants if they agreed or disagreed with the statement "I usually have a good internet connection on my phone."

For the measures, 18 items were used from the Bergen Facebook Addiction scale (Andreassen, Torsheim, Brunborg, & Pallesen, 2012), and modified to reflect social media addiction in lieu of just Facebook addiction. The 18 items made up six scales measuring salience, tolerance, mood modification, relapse, withdrawal, and conflict. Each scale was comprised of three items. Each scale had acceptable reliability (salience ($\alpha=.889$), tolerance ($\alpha=.852$), mood ($\alpha=.878$), relapse ($\alpha=.905$), withdrawal ($\alpha=.929$), and conflict ($\alpha=.872$)). Finally, participants were asked several demographic questions inquiring about biological sex, age, race, education, and marital status.

Data Analysis

Multivariate linear regression analysis was used for each of the six dependent variables in order to address the research questions of this study. Predictors in the models included female (because only a small number of participants (N=5) identified as a biological sex other than male or female, female was used as the dummy variable in the analysis with male participants included in the constant), age, education (participants with college degrees were included as the dummy variable "educated" with all other participants in the constant), married (with all other marital statuses in the constant), unlimited data plan, social media job requirement, and WiFi availability.

Results

Regression analysis was used to address the research questions. The results below are organized by each of the six measures of the Bergen scale. For each dependent measure, analysis was conducted with all four factors.

Salience

The model for salience was significant ($R^2=.399$, $F(7, 331)=31.446$, $p<.001$). The results of the model are shown in table 2. Sex (Female) and age were both negative significant predictors of salience among participants. Specifically, females reported significantly less salience than men, and there was a decrease in salience with age. This essentially means that women and older participants spend less time thinking

about social media. Education, marriage, and social media job requirement were all positive significant predictors of salience. Specifically, participants with college degrees reported higher salience scores than those without. Married participants reported significantly higher salience scores than those who were not married. And those who have jobs that require them to use social media reported higher salience scores than those that don't have the same requirements. Therefore, participants in these categories were more consumed with social media.

Table 2. *Regression Results for Salience*

Variable	β	t	p
Female	-.092	-2.12	.035*
Age	-.228	-5.169	<.001*
Educated	.089	2.041	.042*
Married	.162	3.668	<.001*
Unlimited Data Plan	-.087	-1.958	.051
Soc. Media Job Duties	.441	9.696	<.001*
WiFi Access	-.048	-1.083	.280

Tolerance

The model for tolerance was significant ($R^2=.397$, $F(7, 331)=31.090$, $p<.001$). The results of the model are shown in table 3. Age was the only negative significant predictors of tolerance among participants. Specifically, there was a decrease in tolerance with age. This essentially means that younger participants needed more social media in order to feel satisfied. Education, marriage, and social media job requirement were all positive significant predictors of tolerance. Specifically, participants with college degrees reported higher tolerance scores than those without. Married participants reported significantly higher tolerance scores than those who were not married. And those who have jobs that require them to use social media reported higher tolerance scores than those that don't have the same requirements. Therefore, people in these categories need more social media in order to feel satisfied.

Table 3. *Regression Results for Tolerance*

Variable	β	t	p
Female	-.077	-1.773	.077
Age	-.226	-5.100	<.001*
Educated	.124	2.842	.005*
Married	.148	3.334	<.001*
Unlimited Data Plan	-.016	-0.362	.717
Soc. Media Job Duties	.453	9.920	<.001*
WiFi Access	-.025	-0.574	.556

Mood Modification

The model for mood modification was significant ($R^2=.316$, $F(7, 334)=22.020$, $p<.001$). The results of the model are shown in table 4. Age was the only negative significant predictors of mood modification among participants. Specifically, there was a decrease in mood modification with age. This means that social media significantly impacted the mood of younger participants. Education and social media job requirement were both positive significant predictors of mood modification. Specifically, participants with college degrees reported higher mood modification scores than those without. And those who have jobs that require them to use social media reported higher mood modification scores than those that don't have the same requirements. For these participants, their mood was more likely to be altered by social media.

Table 4. *Regression Results for Mood Modification*

Variable	β	t	p
Female	-.010	-0.211	.833
Age	-.260	-5.535	<.001*
Educated	.129	2.781	.006*
Married	.062	1.313	.190
Unlimited Data Plan	-.051	-1.075	.283
Soc. Media Job Duties	.388	8.011	<.001*
WIFI Access	-.006	-0.122	.903

Relapse

The model for relapse was significant ($R^2=.349$, $F(7, 333)=25.498$, $p<.001$). The results of the model are shown in table 5. Sex (Female), age, and WIFI access were negative significant predictors of relapse among participants. Specifically, females had a significantly lower relapse score than males. There was also a decrease in relapse scores with age. Finally, better WIFI access led to lower relapse scores. Education, marriage, and social media job requirement were all positive significant predictors of relapse. Specifically, participants with college degrees reported higher relapse scores than those without. Those who were married reported higher relapse scores than those who were unmarried. And those who have jobs that require them to use social media reported higher relapse scores than those that don't have the same requirements.

Table 5. *Regression Results for Relapse*

Variable	β	t	p
Female	-.109	-2.414	.016*
Age	-.209	-4.574	<.001*
Educated	.109	2.399	.017*
Married	.168	3.652	<.001*
Unlimited Data Plan	-.059	-1.290	.198
Soc. Media Job Duties	.370	7.845	<.001*
WIFI Access	-.105	-2.303	.022*

Withdrawal

The model for withdrawal was significant ($R^2=.380$, $F(7, 334)=29.300$, $p<.001$). The results of the model are shown in table 6. Age, unlimited data plan, and WIFI access were negative significant predictors of relapse among participants. Specifically, there was a decrease in withdrawal scores with age. Also, those with unlimited data plans reported a lower withdrawal score than those who had limited data. Finally, better WIFI access led to lower withdrawal scores. Education, marriage, and social media job requirement were all positive significant predictors of withdrawal. Specifically, participants with college degrees reported higher withdrawal scores than those without. Those who were married reported higher withdrawal scores than those who were unmarried. And those who have jobs that require them to use social media reported higher withdrawal scores than those that don't have the same requirements.

Table 6. *Regression Results for Withdrawal*

Variable	β	t	p
Female	-.053	-1.213	.226
Age	-.236	-5.288	<.001*
Educated	.120	2.707	.007*
Married	.173	3.877	<.001*
Unlimited Data Plan	-.092	-2.057	.040*
Soc. Media Job Duties	.379	8.230	<.001*
WIFI Access	-.103	-2.317	.021*

Conflict

The model for conflict was significant ($R^2=.309$, $F(7, 330)=21.119$, $p<.001$). The results of the model are shown in table 7. Age was the only negative significant predictors of conflict among participants. Specifically, there was a decrease in conflict scores with age. Marriage and social media job requirement were both positive significant predictors of conflict. Specifically, those who were married reported higher conflict scores than those who were unmarried. And those who have jobs that require them to use social media reported higher conflict scores than those that don't have the same requirements.

Table 7. *Regression Results for Conflict*

Variable	β	t	p
Female	-.029	-0.629	.530
Age	-.200	-4.219	<.001*
Educated	.078	1.668	.096
Married	.155	3.259	<.001*
Unlimited Data Plan	-.041	-0.853	.394
Soc. Media Job Duties	.389	7.986	<.001*
WIFI Access	-.075	-1.596	.111

Table 8. Measures Predicted by Each Factor

	Salience	Tolerance	Mood	Relapse	Withdrawal	Conflict
Female	Less Time	-	-	Control	-	-
Younger	More Time	Need More	Alters Mood	No Control	Withdrawal	Conflict
Educated	More Time	Need More	Alters Mood	No Control	Withdrawal	Conflict
Married	More Time	Need More	-	No Control	Withdrawal	Conflict
Unlimited Data	-	-	-	-	No Withdrawal	-
Soc. Media Job	More Time	Need More	Alters Mood	No Control	Withdrawal	Conflict
WIFI Access	-	-	-	Control	No Withdrawal	-

Discussion

The following discussion section is organized by independent variable, with each subsection covering the implications for each.

Sex

Two main findings were revealed in regard to sex. Specifically, both of these findings showed females to be more resilient than males. There were not enough participants in other sex categories to draw any significant findings. The first finding was that male participants spent more time thinking about social media

(salience). Second, male participants also experienced more situations in which they could not control the amount of social media in which they consumed (relapse). This aligns with a study from Jaradat and Atyeh (2017) that also found that men spent more time on certain social media apps such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Google+, and LinkedIn.

These are both interesting findings in that they seem to work against current narratives that social media is more problematic for females. For instance, recent whistleblower reports from inside Facebook uncovered internal data that

revealed Instagram (a product of Facebook) is especially harmful to young women (Elsesser, 2021). These two seemingly contradictory findings don't have to be reconciled however. It is the opinion of the researchers here that instead, both male and female social media issues are relevant and important, but different. For female social media users, it's the culture of comparison and shaming that is most harmful (Crouse, 2021). For male social media users, it's addiction to the platforms and an inability to control the amount of time dedicated to using the apps. Perhaps for these two genders, different types of interventions are needed.

Age

All across the board there was a noticeable and significant trend among participants. Younger people are far more likely to show signs of social media addiction. In all six categories, younger people were significantly worse off regardless of the measure. This shouldn't be surprising to anyone familiar with the literature, as other studies (Ferris, Hollenbaugh, & Sommer, 2021) including those by the author of the Bergen Facebook scale (Andreassen, et al., 2017) have already shed light on this trend. Therefore, while this specific finding doesn't add anything novel to the literature, it does strengthen existing hypotheses.

Education

A perhaps surprising finding of this study was a very strong indication that social media addiction is a bigger problem for those with more education. This appears to run contrary to most the available literature. Tunc-Aksan and Akbay (2019), for example, found that perceived academic competence actually decreased smartphone addiction levels. However, their sample came from a population of high school students. In the current study, the participants referred to as 'educated' were those with college degrees. We could not find any literature that supports this finding, or any that lead to possible explanations for why this is the case. Further research should be done in order to validate this finding. Also, qualitative methods should be used in further research to better understand why this may be the case.

Marriage

Social media usage has been identified as a negative predictor of marriage quality and happiness, and a positive predictor of troubled relationships and thinking about divorce (Valenzuela, Halpern, & Katz, 2014). This makes the findings of the current study even more troubling. We found the five of the six social media addiction variables were predicted

by being married. Mood modification was the only exception. One possible cause for this is the likelihood that married couples experience an initial decline in leisure (Claxton & Perry-Jenkins, 2008). As couples spend less time out of the house participating in leisure activities, it gives them more time to spend in the house on social media. We believe that this is contributing to social media addiction. Therefore, we recommend awareness campaigns that would open the eyes of married couples to this potential issue.

Job Requirement as the Strongest Predictor of Social Media Addiction

As it turns out, job requirement was the strongest and most consistent predictor of all six social media addiction measures. In every model that we ran, job requirement reliably predicted each social media addiction characteristic. This should not be surprising as an individual's job often consumes a large amount of time throughout his or her week. For some, a workplace can be the one atmosphere where the option to use social media is not available. This can provide them with a meaningful and routine break from social media almost every day. If that break is taken away, then it is more likely that the individual will experience negative consequences of social media saturation. The question then arises, is it the duty of the employer to prevent overexposure to social media, especially when it is a required function of the job? While that question is difficult to answer, it appears that it would improve the mental health of employees if social media requirements were regulated.

Internet Availability

Unlimited data plans were only a predictor of one social media addiction variable: withdrawal. The withdrawal items asked participants about restlessness, irritability, and negative feelings when prohibited from using social media. According to our data, having unlimited data increases these feelings. This makes sense as it is easy to draw a logical line from unlimited data to time using social media. If someone has zero constraints on the amount of time they can spend using social media without any additional financial costs, then using platforms for long stretches of time would come naturally. Then, attempts to withdraw would be more difficult. Consequently, it is our recommendation, based on this data, that individuals experience withdrawal due to social media consumption should consider enrolling in a limited data plan. This could serve as a stopping queue that will free up time for other important lifestyle necessities.

Having reliable Wi-Fi access was a significant predictor of both withdrawal and relapse. The same arguments made above in regard to unlimited data and withdrawal apply here. In addition, people with reliable Wi-Fi also experience stronger feelings of relapse. These feelings are brought on by attempts to quit or limit social media that are unsuccessful. Reliable Wi-Fi access, like unlimited data, eliminates financial and time barriers that put in natural stopping queues. It is difficult to come up with solutions that would be both effective and practical. Making internet less available and more expensive will cause more problems than it would fix. Therefore, future research should aim to identify other ways that could solve the problem of social media addiction. As social media becomes increasingly prevalent, and the mental health issues that are connected become clearer, it is imperative that both predictors and solutions to social media addiction are identified. This study will hopefully serve the former. We have identified several predictors of social media addiction including jobs that require social media as a duty and internet availability.

References

- Addiction Center (n.d.) What is Social Media Addiction? Retrieved March 3, 2020, from <https://www.addictioncenter.com/drugs/social-media-addiction/>
- Andreassen, C. S., Torsheim, T., Brunborg, G. S., & Pallesen, S. (2012). Development of a Facebook addiction scale. *Psychological reports*, 110(2), 501–517.
- Aygul, T. A., & Akbay, S. E. (2019). Smartphone addiction, fear of missing out, and perceived competence as predictors of social media addiction of adolescents. *European Journal of Educational Research*, 8(2), 559–566.
- Brevers, D., & Turel, O. (2019). Strategies for self-controlling social media use: Classification and role in preventing social media addiction symptoms. *Journal of Behavioral Addictions*, 8(3), 554–563. <https://doi.org/10.1556/2006.8.2019.49>.
- Bullinger, C., & Vie, S. (2017). After a decade of social media: Abstainers and ex-users. *Social Writing/Social Media: Publics, Presentations, and Pedagogies. Perspectives on Writing. Fort Collins, Colorado: The WAC Clearinghouse and University Press of Colorado*. Retrieved March 3, 2020, from <https://wac.colostate.edu/books/social/chapter4.pdf>

Chen, C. Y., Chen, I. H., Pakpour, A. H., Lin, C. Y., & Griffiths, M. D. (2021). Internet-related behaviors and psychological distress among schoolchildren during the COVID-19 school hiatus. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 24(10), 654–663.

Claxton, A., & Perry-Jenkins, M. (2008). No fun anymore: Leisure and marital quality across the transition to parenthood. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 70(1), 28–43.

Crouse, L. (2021, October). For teen girls, Instagram is a cesspool. *NYT*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/08/opinion/instagram-teen-girls-mental-health.html>

Dean, B. (2021, October). Social network usage and growth statistics: How many people use social media in 2022. *Backlinko*. <https://backlinko.com/social-media-users>

Elsesser, K. (2021, October). Here's how Instagram harms young women according to research. *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kimelsesser/2021/10/05/heres-how-instagram-harms-young-women-according-to-research/?sh=4f41ca47255a>

Ferris, A. L., Hollenbaugh, E. E., & Sommer, P. A. (2021). Applying the uses and gratifications model to examine consequences of social media addiction. *Social Media+ Society*, 7(2), 20563051211019003.

Goldsberry, J. (2022, February). Senators introduce bipartisan bill to combat social media addiction. *Washington Examiner*. <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/news/senators-introduce-bipartisan-bill-to-combat-social-media-addiction>

Haynes, T. (2018). Dopamine, smartphones, and you: A battle for your time. *Harvard: Science in the News*. Retrieved March 3, 2020, from <http://sitn.hms.harvard.edu/flash/2018/dopamine-smartphones-battle-time/>

Hou, Y., Xiong, D., Jiang, T., Song, L., & Wang, Q. (2019). Social media addiction: Its impact, mediation, and intervention. *Cyberpsychology*, 13(1), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.5817/CP2019-1-4>.

Iliades, C. (2016, March). 8 common behavioral addictions. *Every Day Health*. <https://www.everydayhealth.com/addiction-pictures/the-8-most-surprising-addictions.aspx>

Indeed Editorial Team. (2021, March). 14 job titles in social media (with salaries). *Indeed*. <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/finding-a-job/job-titles-social-media/>

Jaradat, M. I. R. M., & Atyeh, A. J. (2017). Do personality traits play a role in social media addiction? Key considerations for successful optimized model to avoid social networking sites addiction: A developing country perspective. *International Journal of Computer Science and Network Security*, 17(8), 120–131.

Jovanović, T., Višnjić, A., & Gmijović, M. (2021). The association between depression and anxiety symptoms with six core components of social networking sites addiction: A cross-sectional study in Serbia. *Acta Medica Medianae*, 60(1), 28–37.

Kovach, S. (2012, March). A comprehensive guide to all those confusing smartphone data plans. *Business Insider*. <https://www.businessinsider.com/smartphone-carrier-data-plans-2012-3>

Lin, Y. (2021, May). 10 internet statistics every marketer should know in 2021. *Oberlo*. <https://www.oberlo.com/blog/internet-statistics>

Michaels, P. (2022, February). Best unlimited data plans in 2022. *Tom's Guide*. <https://www.tomsguide.com/best-picks/best-unlimited-data-plan>

Primi, C., Fioravanti, G., Casale, S., & Donati, M. A. (2021). Measuring problematic Facebook use among adolescents and young adults with the Bergen Facebook addiction scale: A psychometric analysis by applying item response theory. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(6), 2979

Previc, F. H. (2009). *The dopaminergic mind in human evolution and history*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sahin. C. (2017). The predictive vevel of social media addiction for life satisfaction: A Study on university students. *The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology*, 16(4), 120–125.

Schultz W. (2016). Dopamine reward prediction error coding. *Dialogues in clinical neuroscience*, 18(1), 23–32.

Simsek. A., Elciyar. K., & Kizilhan. T. (2019). A comparative study on social media addiction of high school and university students. *Contemporary Educational Technology*, 10(2), 106–119. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30935/cet.554452>

Turel, O., Cavagnaro, D. R., & Meshi, D. (2018). Short abstinence from online social networking sites reduces perceived stress, especially in excessive users. *Psychiatry research*, 270, 947–953.

Valenzuela, S., Halpern, D., & Katz, J. E. (2014). Social network sites, marriage well-being and divorce: Survey and state-level evidence from the United States. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 36, 94–101.

Van Den Eijnden. R. J. J. M., Lemmens. J. S., & Valkenburg. P. M. (2016). The social media disorder scale. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 61, 478–487.

Woods, H. C., & Scott, H. (2016). # Sleepyteens: Social media use in adolescence is associated with poor sleep quality, anxiety, depression and low self-esteem. *Journal of adolescence*, 51, 41–49.

Schoenebeck. S. (2014). Giving up Twitter for Lent: How and why we take breaks from social media. *Computer Systems-CHI* 14, 773–782.

Mythical Framing Messages in ESPN.com's Coverage of the NBA Finals Over 10 Years

Hayden V. Coombs, MA

Assistant Professor of Communication, Southern Utah University

Abstract

This grounded research project examines mythical messages in ESPN.com's coverage of the 2005 and 2015 NBA Finals through the lens of frame and agenda setting theories. During the 2005 and 2015 NBA Finals series combined, ESPN.com (including the ESPN-owned Grantland.com and FiveThirtyEight.com) published a total of 52 articles. The idea of studying the NBA Finals through the lens of mythical framing came from purely empirical observations gathered as a spectator of the television broadcasts of the series, as multiple instances were noted of broadcasters comparing physical attributes and the skillsets of the players participating in the finals to those of superheroes and mythological beings. The complete census of 52 articles published by ESPN.com was analyzed. These articles included game recaps, feature stories, and game previews. This study revealed that there was significant evidence of mythical framing messages in the articles published by ESPN.com in their coverage of the 2015 NBA Finals, but not the 2005 NBA Finals. The relationship between Walt Disney Company-owned properties ESPN and Marvel Comics is observed. It is the belief of the researcher that the mythological framing elements will continue to play a large role in reporting major sporting events, especially as the Walt Disney Company continues to acquire and create new intellectual properties.

Keywords: Framing, Agenda Setting, Sport, Basketball, NBA, Superhero

During game four of the 2008 Eastern Conference Semifinals, Cleveland Cavaliers basketball player LeBron James used his unbelievable quickness to soar by two defenders, then rose into the air, seemingly flying, as he threw down a thunderous dunk over another pair of helpless defenders. The crowd immediately erupted and long-time National basketball Association (NBA) announcer, Kevin Harlan, delivered the most iconic line of his career:

“LeBron James with no regard for human life!”

It was clear in that moment that LeBron James was no ordinary man. He had done something unbelievable. He had done something that normal people are not supposed to have the physical capacity to do. He clearly had superpowers.

The idea of studying ESPN.com's coverage of the NBA Finals through the lens of mythical framing and agenda setting spawned from my childlike admiration of professional basketball players, as

well as from empirical observations I gathered as a spectator of the television broadcasts of the games. I noted multiple instances of broadcasters comparing the physical attributes and skillsets of the players participating in the finals to those of superheroes and mythological beings.

Studying messages delivered through ESPN.com-published articles (artifacts) is important because ESPN.com, Grantland.com, and FiveThirtyEight.com combine to register over 25 million visitors a day (Gaymoli, 2015). This number far surpasses the visitors from rival sports news websites SI.com and Yahoo Sports. It also makes ESPN.com frequented more often than major internet news outlets like CNN.com and The Huffington Post. The sheer mass of ESPN.com's audience provides enough reason for any of its published articles to be examined. Likewise, due to the worldwide following of the NBA, articles published about the NBA are being read by a more diverse audience.

Theory

Framing is often used in discussing news media reporting. Gamson and Modigliani (1987) explain that a frame is a, “central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning” (p. 143). Pan and Kosicki (1993) describe framing as a, “strategy of constructing and processing news,” in a way that reflects and operates in, “shared beliefs,” “meanings,” and “stories,” of the intended audiences. To appropriately frame the grand spectacle that is the NBA Finals, news media have adopted a framing method through which their audiences can resonate with.

Agenda setting is the creation of public awareness and concern of salient issues by the news media (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). The two assumptions that lay at the front of agenda setting are that the media do not reflect reality, but instead filter and shape it, and that the media chooses to concentrate on a few issues and subjects, which in turn leads the public to perceive those issues as more important than others (McCombs & Shaw, 1993). The comparison of time frames is a critical aspect of agenda setting in news media communications. The aim of this study is to analyze the most widely accepted sports media source (ESPN.com) and decipher the characteristics of the framing and agenda setting techniques adopted by the ESPN.com journalists. While very little research about mythical messages in sports media currently exists, this research is consistent with the current literature on media framing and agenda building.

The 2005 NBA Finals

The 2005 NBA finals featured the San Antonio Spurs of the Western Conference and the Detroit Pistons of the Eastern Conference. This series featured the first matchup of the previous two NBA champions since the 1987 Finals, which was only the third time in NBA history this had ever happened. In one of the most intense championship series in the history of the NBA, the San Antonio Spurs emerged victorious as they defeated the Detroit Pistons, four games to three.

Despite the excitement surrounding the series, the 2005 NBA Finals actually hold the second-lowest television ratings of any NBA Finals in the past 16 years. It averaged only 12.5 million viewers per episode (TV by the Numbers, 2009). ESPN.com published 16 different stories in their coverage of the 2005 NBA Finals.

The 2015 NBA Finals

The 2015 NBA Finals were played between the Golden State Warriors of the Western

Conference and the Cleveland Cavaliers of the Eastern Conference. The 2015 NBA Finals also held historical significance for the National Basketball Association as the head coaches for both franchises were in their first year as head coaches in the NBA, which was the first time this had happened since the conception of the league. The series concluded after just six games, with the Golden State Warriors winning four games to two. I was one of the estimated 28,744,000 people that tuned into the deciding game six of the 2015 NBA Finals (Gaymoli, 2015). During the course of the 2015 NBA Finals, ESPN published a total of 36 articles through ESPN.com and the ESPN-owned Grantland.com and FiveThirtyEight.com.

Literature Review

American Journalist Walter Lippmann was the first scholar to introduce the concept of how the media can construct frames and set an agenda through which the audience interprets events (Lippman, 1922). In Lippman's publication, Public Opinion, theorized the view that the public responds not to actual events in the environment but to “the pictures in our heads,” which he called the pseudo-environment. Of his work, Lippmann said,

“For the real environment is altogether too big, too complex, and too fleeting for direct acquaintance. We are not equipped to deal with so much subtlety, so much variety, so many permutations and combinations. And altogether we have to act in that environment, we have to reconstruct it on a simpler model before we can manage with it” (Lippmann, 1922, p. 16).

Through framing, the media is essentially offering a simpler model of news consumption by setting the agenda for the general public (Littlejohn, 2011). This illustrates how the concept of framing is closely associated with agenda setting, and both theories will be thoroughly utilized throughout this research.

Framing Theory

Renowned sociologist, Erving Goffman, introduced modern framing theory. In his article, “Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience (published in 1974),” Goffman presented that frames are a set of concepts and theoretical perspectives that organize experiences and guide the actions of individuals. Goffman suggested that a given person interprets everything that is going on around him/her (their immediate world) through a primary framework, which is taken for granted by said person (Goffman, 1974).

Durham (1998) explains “when successfully

employed, as they generally are, frames make the world a more knowable and understandable” (p.100). According to Berkowitz (2005), the more “unusual and unexpected” an event is, the more journalists seek to explain it in a way that is “relatively familiar.” The motive behind this method is the ability of journalists to make their stories better resonate with their respective audiences. Frames represent “ideological” positions and “social narratives” through which journalism “create meaning” (Durham, 1998). Stories with particularly spectacular content, such as athletes performing unbelievable feats, need a frame through which journalists can provide some type of meaning in order to aid their audience in understanding and coping with the event. Fuglsang (2001) argues that journalists rely on “readily understood, interpretive frames” found in “ritual, myth, and metaphor” in order to develop frames (p. 185).

Much of the media's ability to utilize agenda setting and framing theories is predicated on their credibility of particular issues (Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006). A media outlet that is thought of as highly credible has more power to guide the way an audience views an issue or event. Likewise, a media outlet with little credibility with a particular issue would have less ability to guide audience beliefs. For example, the Food Network, despite being a very credible source for all things cooking, would not possess the same ability as ESPN when people are looking for sports news.

Media Framing

Media framing refers to the process of putting a news story together, including the ways in which a story is organized and structured (Littlejohn, 2011). The way in which the media depicts events (frames them) can constrain how audiences interpret these events. This can happen by various textual features of the event, such as headlines, audio-visual components, metaphors used, and the way in which the story is told (Rhee, 1997, pp. 26-48).

In the book, “The Art of Framing,” the authors list seven popular techniques in which the media utilizes framing. These techniques are through: the use of metaphors, stories (narration), tradition, jargon, artifacts, contrast, and spin (Fairhurst & Sarr, 1996). A metaphor is used to frame a conceptual idea through comparison to something else. Stories, such as myths and legends, are used to frame a topic via narrative in a vivid and memorable way. Traditions are the cultural mores that imbue significance in the mundane. The use of artifacts, which is closely related to the use of traditions, involves objects with intrinsic symbolic value; a cultural phenomenon that holds more meaning than the

object itself. Slogan, jargon, and catchphrases are used to frame an object with a catch phrase to make it more memorable. Contrast is utilized to describe an object in terms of what it is not. And lastly, spin is used to present a concept in a way to convey a value judgment (positive or negative) that might not be immediately apparent (Fairhurst & Sarr, 1996).

Media Framing in Sport

In the wide world of sports, framing plays an important role. Over the past several decades, media coverage of both professional and nonprofessional athletes has reached unprecedented levels (Lewis & Weaver, 2013). Because of this, it is important to examine the specific frames the media utilizes to shift how the general public views professional athletes. This specific research aims to clarify the area between media framing and the usage of mythological themes in journalism. A better understanding of these effects will allow the audience of the National Basketball Association to better form their own opinions of professional athletes, while simultaneously allowing scholars to better comprehend framing effects on the attitudes, intentions, and enjoyment of this audience within the sports media domain.

Agenda Setting Theory

Agenda-setting can best be defined as how the influence of the news media helps to determine an issue or topic's importance in the audience's mind (McCombs & Reynolds, 2002). In its core, agenda setting is the creation of public awareness and concern of salient issues by the news media (Rogers & Dearing, 1988). There are two basic assumptions of agenda setting. The first assumption is that the press and the media do not reflect reality, but filter and shape it instead. The second assumption is the media concentration on a few issues and subjects leads the public to perceive those specific issues as more important than other issues (Rogers & Dearing, 1998).

Modern studies on agenda setting were first introduced in 1972 by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw, as they built on Cohen's research and more fully developed those ideas. McCombs and Shaw were the first to use agenda setting theory to suggest that it is the media who sets a public agenda by telling their respective audiences what to think about (1972). Since 1972, McCombs and Shaw, along with many other scholars, have expanded on this theory and have continued to produce unique research about the agenda setting function of the media. In 1993, McCombs and Shaw claimed that media depictions can affect how people think about the news, and are “stunningly successful in telling

us what to think about” (McCombs & Shaw, 1993). In other words, agenda setting establishes what the salient issues or images in the minds of the public really are.

Agenda Setting in Sport

One of the primary goals of the sports media is to bring information about the sporting world to its respective audiences. This information can take many different forms. For example, immediately following Super Bowl 50 (played on Sunday, February 6, 2016, between the Denver Broncos and Carolina Panthers), two major stories surfaced: Denver Quarterback Peyton Manning winning a Super Bowl and retiring to seemingly “ride off into the sunset,” and legendary quarterback Peyton Manning being involved in a sexual assault case while in college. In short, the media has the task of moving information from those who have it to those who need to be informed.

Research Questions

Considering the literature analyzed, ESPN.com's coverage of the NBA Finals meets the qualifications for being framed through mythical archetypes. The 2005 NBA Finals and the 2015 NBA Finals were chosen to examine because the Walt Disney Company purchase of Marvel Entertainment occurred during the 2005 and 2015 NBA Finals' ten-year separation. Prior research conducted on the topics of news framing and agenda setting, when coupled with the results of the pilot study of this research, led to the formation of the following research questions.

RQ1: How were the players framed through mythical, heroic, or superhuman archetypes?

RQ2: What other rhetorical themes were present throughout the coverage?

RQ3: How were the 2005 & 2015 NBA finals framed differently?

RQ4: How did agenda setting contribute to the framing of the 2005 & 2015 NBA finals?

Methods

This study utilized grounded theory through the theoretical lens of mythical framing. Grounded theory is a qualitative research method utilized to develop theories by systematically gathering and analyzing field data. Rather than theorizing how a communicative process may work in practice, grounded theory evolves during actual research through continuous interplay between analysis and data collection (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In their own words, Strauss and Corbin explained, “In this method, data collection,

analysis, and eventual theory stand in close relationship to one another...the researcher will begin with an area of study and allows the theory to emerge from the data. Theory derived from data is more likely to resemble the ‘reality’ than is theory derived by outing together a series of concepts based on experience or solely through speculation” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Specifically, this study will utilize grounded theory to extract mythological themes present in ESPN.com's coverage of the 2005 and 2015 NBA Finals. Each article that ESPN.com published about the 2005 and 2015 NBA Finals was analyzed. I felt that grounded theory was best suited for this rhetorical analysis as subjectivism is not necessarily a data-corrupting issue. Instead of jumping into this study with a clear theory framework in mind, the initial stages of this study instead provided a sense of vision of where I would go with the research. In other words, the text and the extracted data guided this study, not the other way around

The complete 52-article census published by ESPN.com covering the 2005 and 2015 NBA Finals was selected to serve as the texts for this study because they were delivered to a worldwide audience and received millions of views. By analyzing the complete census of articles ESPN.com published, this study can provide an accurate analysis of how ESPN.com's coverage of significant athletic sporting events is being framed. After the grounded research was conducted, results were compared through the lens of framing and agenda setting theories, drawing conclusions regarding the Walt Disney Company's ownership of other intellectual properties.

Results

The specific mythical archetypes present in the artifacts were organized into the following categories: Mythical Physical Attributes, Mythical Talent/Skillset, and Good vs. Evil. Open coding also led to the creating of additional categories, which were relevant specifically to the two different series. These additional categories will be discussed further.

Mythical Physical Attributes

The “Mythical Physical Attributes” theme represents a comparison or metaphor of a player's physical attribute to any mythical, heroic, or supernatural archetype. The most common usage of this archetype was explaining how the players were moving around the court. In the coverage of the 2005 NBA Finals, two strong examples exist of mythical framing of a player's physical attributes. In the first game of the series, it was written that San Antonio Spurs

guard Manu Ginobili “surged” into the lane by “bowling over (Detroit Piston center) Ben Wallace” (Associated Press, 2005a). Later in the article, again mentioned Ginobili, “driving the lane and again flattening Wallace” (Associated Press, 2005a). These instances were two of the only viable examples of mythical framing of a player's physical attributes in the coverage of the 2005 NBA Finals.

In the 2015 NBA Finals coverage, the most common usage of this archetype was explaining how the players were moving around the court. Seth Curry was being assigned supernatural speed when the articles described him as, “super-quick,” and “darting” or “cruising” (Haberstroh, 2015a) his way to the basket. The most explicit description of this category came from the same article, which labeled LeBron James a physical, “freak (Haberstroh, 2015a).” One article even reached as far to label James a, “Modern day Goliath (Haberstroh, 2015b).” The physical attributes of LeBron James were the most frequently described using mythical archetypes.

Mythical Talent/Skillset

The other prevalent theme tied directly to mythical lore was the “Mythical Talent/Skillset” theme. This category included any mythical, heroic, or supernatural metaphor or representation of the talents and skills of any of the players participating in the NBA Finals. Both teams participating in the 2005 NBA Finals were subject to receiving “perfection” labels attached to various aspects of the respective teams. Referring to the defensive capabilities of the Detroit Pistons, then-ESPN journalist Bill Simmons wrote,

“they reminded me more of...the middleweight champ whose astonishing defensive skills suck the life out of his opponents...you find yourself thinking things like, ‘Will anyone ever land a punch on him? And, ‘If everyone fought like this, boxing would go out of business in five years. The Pistons’ defense was like that. And it nearly worked to the tune of back-to-back championships’” (Simmons, 2005).

The San Antonio Spurs received more blatant “perfection” labels, as multiple instances were recorded of journalists saying Spurs players did something perfectly. In the game recap of game seven of the 2005 NBA Finals, it was said, “...the Duncan-Ginobili combo clicked perfectly on two straight possessions. First, Ginobili drove the lane and drew Duncan's defender, zipping a pass to Duncan all alone on the baseline for a 19-footer. Next, Duncan had three defenders collapsing on him when he saw Ginobili all alone at the 3-point line. The shot was perfect,

and San Antonio led 72-65 with 2:57 left” (Associated Press, 2005c).

The coverage of the 2015 NBA Finals also had multiple uses of the “Mythical Talent/Skillset” theme. One article stated that the things LeBron James was called on to do during this series were “unfathomable” (Haberstroh, 2015c). But it was Stephen Curry's basketball talents that were the most frequently described using mythical framing. A quote from an article stated that Curry can, “Catch and shoot without even seeing the basket (Friend, 2015).” In that same article, one of Curry's teammates said, “Steph can see things on the court that no one else can” and Curry's “rapid-fire” jump shot was also cited (Friend, 2015).

Good vs. Evil

The “Good vs. Evil” archetype is an examination of the classic narrative of the forces of good battling against the forces of evil. This category includes mentions of injustice or painting a picture of a team or player being inherently righteous and/or good, while another team or player is inherently bad and/or evil.

In the coverage of the 2005 Finals there was no evidence of this archetype being used. Instead, there were multiple mentions of the 2005 NBA Finals featuring the last two NBA Champions squaring off. The teams were treated more as equals, rather than one being inherently “good” and the other inherently “bad.”

The coverage of the 2015 Finals did feature multiple instances of this archetype being pushed. One of the recaps of the series mentioned Golden State's Andre Iguodala being a “knight in shining armor (Holmes, 2015),” implying that he helped save the day and allowed good to triumph over evil in the 2015 NBA Finals. Another article labeled the officiated of one of the games “criminal (McMenamin, 2015),” leading the reader to believe the wrong team won that specific game.

Other Themes of 2005 NBA Finals

Throughout the coverage of the 2005 NBA Finals, the San Antonio Spurs and the Detroit Pistons were commonly referred to as a reflection of each other. In his post-series profile, Scoop Jackson wrote, “It was about the teams being duplicates of each other...It was not about which team was better; but instead, which wanted it more...They paralleled each other. Possession for possession” (Jackson, 2005). Later in the article, Jackson again used this theme, writing, “The mirror image had finally found its reflection. The two best teams in the world had taken a seven-game series, turned it into a three-game series,

and then turned it into a one-game saga.”

Closely related to the teams being parallels of each other, was the frequent mentioning of the defensive intensity, physicality, and aggressiveness of the series. Both teams boasted similar attributes in terms of their playing style. The San Antonio Spurs' forward-center Tim Duncan was quoted as he spoke about the physicality of the series, saying, “We knew it was going to be like this; these guys are a heck of a defensive squad” (Associated Press, 2005a). After game four, a Detroit Pistons win, the San Antonio Spurs head coach Greg Popovich said, “It's disappointing that their physical play and their defense has taken us away from everything that we normally do” (Associated Press, 2005b).

The last theme that emerged through coding was the historical impact of the series. As previously mentioned the 2005 NBA Finals were only the third time in NBA history in which the past two champions squared off in the finals. ESPN.com also did not fail to mention multiple times that the 2005 NBA Finals were the first finals series to go to seven games since 1994. Of the significance of a game seven, Bill Simmons (2005) wrote, “As basketball fans, we knew Game 7 of an NBA Finals was the ultimate experience. Ninety minutes before tip-off, every fan has already found his or her seat...You can't possibly imagine the level of intensity, the overpowering electricity in the building, how it keeps going higher and higher.”

Other Themes of 2015 NBA Finals

The “Isolation of LeBron James” was a frequently used theme when describing why the Cleveland Cavaliers were struggling and losing games. This category included any rhetorical element that suggested LeBron James was playing on his own team, vastly outnumbered, or James being elevated in status above his teammates. One article stated, “LeBron James is not only the most single most important player to his franchise, no player has been leaned on to do more of the work for his franchise than James has throughout his career in Cleveland (Haberstroh, 2015c).” This is an example of LeBron James being isolated from the rest of his team. Another example of this was the frequent mention of LeBron James being forced to, “put his team on his back (McMenamin, 2015),” in order for the Cavaliers to succeed. The most frequent adjectives used to describe James' teammates were: “Least-talented,” “Mediocre,” and, “Superfluous” (Pain, 2015).

The depth of Golden State's roster and the amount of quality players on their team was another category that emerged during this study. In direct contrast to how the Cavaliers were

being described, the Warriors were described as a great all-around team, where every player contributed. One article stated that the Warriors', “boast on of the most talent roster from top to bottom that the NBA has ever seen” (Friend, 2015). Multiple articles also described the Warriors as a, “brotherhood,” and explained how they, “banded together to win an NBA Championship” (Friend, 2015).

The final category that emerged through analyzing these texts was the inexperience of the head coaches competing in the 2015 NBA Finals. Both head coaches, Steve Kerr of the Golden State Warriors and David Blatt of the Cleveland Cavaliers, were in their first season as head coaches in the NBA. This narrative played a significant role throughout the course of the 2015 NBA Finals as mistakes by both teams were frequently attributed to the fact that neither coach had much coaching experience. Assumptions that veteran coaches “wouldn't make this type of mistake (Strauss, 2015),” is an example of this.

Discussion

Mythical framing archetypes were present throughout the 52 articles that were analyzed. The mythical framing messages that were identified in the articles provided data and examples of how mythical framing contributed to the overall narratives of both the 2005 and 2015 NBA Finals. However, there was a vast spike in the amount of mythical framing archetypes used in the coverage of the 2015 NBA Finals.

Specifically, I found that the mythical framing messages did not destroy the credibility of the article, nor did they distract from it. When used, the mythical framing messages served to more effectively explain a specific play or describe the state of the game. I found that these mythical metaphors caused me to have a greater interest in the game and play to which it was referring. One of the greatest advantages of utilizing mythical framing messages was the ability of the mythical messages to evoke feelings of emotion, which is especially powerful considering some of the articles that were analyzed were 10 years old.

Through the coding process, three categories that comprised all mythical archetypes present in the texts were identified as: Mythical Physical Attributes, Mythical Talent/Skillset, and Good vs. Evil. Coding also led to the identification of additional rhetorical categories, which were specific to the 2005 and 2015 NBA Finals, respectively.

Mythical Framing

Assigning mythical or superhuman physical

attributes was the most common mythical framing element that was extracted from the texts. The assigning of supernatural or mythical physical capabilities to professional athletes is likely attributed to the fact that they can do things physically that “normal people” cannot. In this mindset, claiming that LeBron James can fly, instead of just being able to jump and leap very well, explains why James can do things that the journalist and his/her audience cannot. While everyone can acknowledge that LeBron James does not actually have superhuman abilities, it does offer an explanation (no matter how irrational it is) why he is so much more athletic than the general public. Throughout the 52-article census, LeBron James was by far the most frequent benefactor of this category. The vast majority of mythical physical attributes being assigned to a player were done in James' favor. Standing 6'8” and 260 pounds, it's not hard to imagine why he was described using mythical language. Aside from his grand stature, LeBron James can typically jump higher and run faster than anyone else on the court, as he is one of the most impressive physical specimens the NBA has ever seen. It is rare that the one of the biggest and heaviest players on the court is also the most athletic, to say the least.

Closely related to mythical physical attributes, the mythical talent or skillset category was utilized to describe the impressive way a player performs or performed on a certain play. The assigning of mythical talents to professional athletes gives readers a reason why these athletes can do things better than the rest of the public. There are likely people in this world who have played more basketball than LeBron James or Stephen Curry, yet they never made it to the NBA, just as there are those who have likely played and practiced piano more than Mozart, yet they never became famous pianists. Being able to point to the fact that Stephen Curry was somehow endowed with a superhuman ability to shoot three-pointers provided me with an explanation as to why he is in the NBA. Throughout the 52-article census, Curry was the athlete most frequently assigned mythical talents. His ability to shoot the basketball from great distances, as well as his ability to dictate the tempo of a game (court vision) could only be explained by his supernatural abilities.

Although it was present in multiple articles, the “Good versus Evil” archetype did not play as big of a role throughout the entire series as the other mythical framing categories. In fact, it was entirely absent in ESPN.com's coverage of the 2005 NBA Finals. It wasn't until the final game of the 2015 NBA Finals that this category emerged. It should be noted, however, that this theme continued on in the coverage after the series had concluded. This can likely

be attributed to the fact that ESPN and its journalists should stay somewhat objective in their coverage of major sporting events. I felt ESPN did this for most of the series; however, I found there to be an underlying feeling during the later articles that the “right” team won. But perhaps this was because I also felt the “right” team won.

Other Prevalent Themes in the 2005 NBA Finals

A common narrative throughout the coverage of the 2005 NBA Finals was how similar the playing styles of the San Antonio Spurs and Detroit Pistons were. While both teams featured their own “superstars,” both teams boasted a very strong “team-first” personality that they carried throughout multiple seasons. In 2003, the San Antonio Spurs faced off against the Jason Kidd-led New Jersey Nets. In 2004, the Detroit Pistons defeated the Shaq and Kobe Los Angeles Lakers. In both 2003 and 2004, the NBA Finals seemed to feature a “team” versus an “individual(s).” The faceoff in 2005 was framed as a perfect match of two perfectly balanced teams. Likewise, the San Antonio Spurs and Detroit Pistons were the two top defensive teams in the 2004-2005 season (Basketball-Reference, 2005a). Their styles were very similar, which led to ESPN.com journalist Scoop Jackson writing, “(This series) was about the teams being duplicates of each other...It was not about which team was better; but instead, which wanted it more...They paralleled each other. Possession for possession” (2005).

As previously mentioned, the 2005 NBA Finals were all about defense, physicality, and aggressiveness. The scores of the games, respectively, were: 84-69, 97-76, 96-79, 102-71, 96-95, 95-86, and 81-74. With the exception of game five, in which the San Antonio Spurs won 96-95 in overtime, every game featured one team playing stifling defense, which led to the opponent recording an unusually low score for an NBA playoff game. Aside from just playing great defense, this series was framed as a very physical and aggressive series which resembled a boxing match more than a basketball game (Simmons, 2005). The 142 personal fouls recorded by the San Antonio Spurs was only eclipsed by the Detroit Pistons' 149 (Basketball-Reference, 2005b). This statistic certainly confirmed the appropriateness of the defense, physicality, and aggressiveness frame being applied to the 2005 NBA Finals.

Multiple times throughout the articles published about the 2005 NBA Finals by ESPN.com, the historical perspective of this series was brought to light. This series was just the third time in NBA history in which the previous two champions squared off in the finals. This fact was essential to the very identity of the 2005

NBA Finals, as it was framed to be a matchup of the two undisputed best teams in the world. There has yet to be another matchup of the two most recent champions since 2005. Another aspect of this frame being used was how frequently the articles about game seven and post-series articles mentioned the significance of the NBA Finals going to seven games. The NBA Finals going to seven games is a fairly rare occurrence, as it only happened three times in the previous twenty seasons (1984–2005). As ESPN.com journalist Bill Simmons said, “You can’t put a price on game seven” (2005). Other Prevalent Themes in the 2015 NBA Finals

LeBron James was often subject to a narrative of “LeBron versus the World.” Multiple articles, including a statistical breakdown, stated that LeBron James had carried his team to the 2015 NBA Finals without receiving much help. This narrative only intensified as he lost his all-star teammates, Kevin Love and Kyrie Irving, to injury during the playoffs. James being isolated certainly wasn’t slanderous to his abilities or character, but rather served to uplift him by demeaning the talents of his teammates. This served as an effective tool when describing how talented of a basketball player LeBron James is, going so far as to imply that he could lead any team to the NBA Finals. It also seemed to be used as an excuse for why LeBron James, who is widely regarded as the best basketball player in the world, did not win an NBA championship this year. Simply put, the Cleveland Cavaliers not winning the 2015 NBA Finals was not his fault; it was his teammates’. This theme almost served to make LeBron James look like a victim of tragic circumstances in the overall narrative of the 2015 NBA Finals.

The frequent mentioning of the Golden State Warriors’ great depth was in direct contrast to the isolation of LeBron James. Instead of isolating Golden State’s star player, Stephen Curry, the Warriors were celebrated for having so many players who were able to contribute meaningful minutes. In fact, even the fans of the Warriors were celebrated as the “sixth man” of the finals, and having a direct impact on the outcome of the series. The Warriors were truly celebrated as a team and lauded for their team-first culture. The combination of LeBron James being isolated and the Golden State Warriors’ depth being celebrated painted the picture of a great player facing off against a great team, which has proven to be true.

The inexperience of the two head coaches facing off in the 2015 NBA Finals was also an attempt of the journalists to explain why certain events were transpiring. As previously mentioned, the 2015 NBA Finals marked the first time that two rookie head coaches were squaring off against

each other since the NBA’s inaugural season. While both coaches had been around the game of basketball for many years (Steve Kerr as a player and executive, David Blatt as a coach in Europe), neither had any prior NBA coaching experience. This theme played a very important role in the overall narrative of the 2015 NBA Finals because it was a significant monument in NBA history, and something that will likely never happen again. It was interesting, however, that while both coaches were being celebrated for reaching this milestone during the first year of their careers, their inexperience was often pointed at to explain why their respective teams were struggling throughout the series.

Evidence of Agenda Setting

In his book, *The Press and Foreign Policy*, Bernard Cohen said, “(The press) may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about” (Cohen, 1963). This foundation of agenda setting theory was along the same lines of my observations in regards to ESPN.com’s coverage of the NBA Finals. There was a clear increase in the amount of mythological language and archetypes used in the coverage of the NBA Finals from 2005 to 2015. This shift was not as evident in the game recaps published by the Associated Press as it was in the feature articles written by ESPN.com journalists.

Media bias has been under scrutiny since the earliest beginnings of journalism. The frames used by those reporting news can have an effect upon the reader, further turning their viewpoint toward or away from that of the author. Davis and Kent state, “framing theory and research directly challenge the notion that news stories can and should be objective. Social constructionism asserts that there is no objective social reality that can be described using traditional reporting practices. The social world is constructed and this construction is constantly being negotiated” (2013). If objectivity cannot be achieved, then bias in ESPN.com coverage of major sporting events must also exist in some form or another.

This research strongly suggests that ESPN.com has made a conscious effort to use mythological language and archetypes in its coverage of major sporting events, such as the NBA Finals. While references to specific intellectual properties owned by the Walt Disney Company were not measured, it is my belief that the acquisition of Marvel Comics by the Walt Disney Company has directly impacted the language that is used by ESPN.com journalists. With little doubt, agenda setting contributed to the framing of ESPN.com’s coverage of the 2015 NBA Finals by employing

mythological archetypes throughout the series.

Conclusion

The mythical framing elements in ESPN.com’s coverage of the 2005 and 2015 NBA Finals were an effective tool in reporting these major events. This research leads me to believe that mythological framing elements will continue to play a large role in the coverage of major sporting events because mythological archetypes help describe why certain events transpire and create vivid images for readers of the articles. These elements, when combined with the readership and overall reach of ESPN.com, warrant further study.

This research strongly suggests that ESPN.com has made a conscious effort to use mythological language and archetypes in its coverage the 2015 NBA Finals. While there was evidence of mythological framing found in the coverage of the 2005 NBA Finals, it was not consistent throughout the 16-article census, nor do I believe it would bear statistical significance if a content analysis were conducted. This data leads me to believe that ESPN.com made a conscious effort to force readers of the articles published about the 2015 NBA Finals to think about mythological themes, such as themes found in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, the Star Wars Extended Universe, and other intellectual properties owned by the Walt Disney Company.

The methods used in this study bring considerable strength as well as some limitations. This study was strictly rhetorical, which served to answer the research questions and purpose of the study. However, further research on the topic of mythical framing in ESPN.com’s coverage of the NBA Finals should be conducted, starting with a content analysis of the texts examined through this study. In his 2009 publication, “Arguing for a General Framework for Mass Media Scholarship,” James Potter argues that media scholars need to blend textual analysis (concerned with narrative arcs in stories) and content analysis (concerned with general patterns across large numbers of messages). This project could do precisely that, and I have every intention of doing so.

Sports media, specifically ESPN and ESPN.com, will undoubtedly continue to grow in popularity. For this reason alone, it is important to study the effect it has on the public. While sports media may not carry heavy implications, such as that of political developments or wartime coverage, that should not diminish its importance. ESPN and sports media as a whole are in constant competition with all other news outlets for relevance and the attention of the public. It is my belief that ESPN will continue to grow in

popularity and will continue to successfully utilize its website, ESPN.com, in shaping what its audience should think about through framing and agenda setting theories.

References

- Associated Press. (2005, June 10). Manu, TD combine for 50; Pistons fade in the fourth. Retrieved April 27, 2016, from <http://espn.go.com/nba/recap?gameId=250609024>
- Associated Press. (2005, June 17). Home team benefits from 4th straight lopsided result. Retrieved April 27, 2016, from <http://espn.go.com/nba/recap?gameId=250616008>
- Associated Press. (2005, June 24). Spurs deny Pistons’ bid to repeat. Retrieved April 27, 2016, from <http://espn.go.com/nba/recap?gameId=250623024>
- Basketball-Reference.com. (2005). 2004–05 NBA Team Ratings. Retrieved June 14, 2016, from http://www.basketball-reference.com/leagues/NBA_2005_ratings.html
- Basketball-Reference.com. (2005). 2005 NBA Finals Pistons vs. Spurs. Retrieved June 14, 2016, from <http://www.basketball-reference.com/playoffs/2005-nba-finals-pistons-vs-spurs.html>
- Berkowitz, D. A. (2005). *Social meanings of news: A text-reader*. Sage.
- Cohen, B. C. (1963). *The Press and Foreign Policy*. Princeton University Press.
- Davis, D. K., & Kent, K. (2013). Journalism ethics in a global communication era: The framing journalism perspective. *China Media Research*, 9(2), 71–82.
- Durham, F.D. (1998). “News frames as social narratives: TWA flight 800.” *Journal of Communication*, 48 (4): 100–117.
- Fairhurst, G. T., & Sarr, R. A. (1996). *The art of framing: Managing the language of leadership*. Jossey-Bass.
- Friend, T. (2015, June 2). The Splash Fathers know best. Retrieved November 9, 2015, from http://espn.go.com/nba/playoffs/2015/story/_/id/12819951/splash-fathers-dell-curry-mychal-thompson
- Fuglsang, R.S. (2001). Framing the Motorcycle Outlaw, 185–194, *Framing Public Life: Perspectives on Media and Our Understanding of the Social World*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Goffman, E. (1974). Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 601–601.

Gamson, W. A., & Modigliani, A. (1987). The changing culture of affirmative action. *Research in political sociology*, 3, 137–177. JAI Press.

Gayomali, C. “ESPN Just Redesigned Its Site For The First Time Since 2009–Here Are 4 Takeaways.” Fast Company. 31 Mar. 2015.

Haberstroh, T. (2015, June 6). How Curry Overcame Ankle Issues. Retrieved November 9, 2015, from http://espn.go.com/nba/playoffs/2015/story/_/id/13019137/2015-nba-playoffs-how-stephen-curry-put-ankle-issues-him

Haberstroh, T. (2015, June 14). LeBron James' unfathomable workload. Retrieved December 9, 2015, from http://espn.go.com/nba/playoffs/2015/story/_/id/13071387/lebron-james-unfathomable-workload

Haberstroh, T. (2015, June 28). How the NBA learned to stop worrying and love the bomb. Retrieved November 9, 2015, from http://espn.go.com/nba/playoffs/2015/story/_/id/12993098/nba-35-year-war-3-pointer

Holmes, B. (2015, June 16). The No-Stats MVP. Retrieved December 9, 2015, from http://espn.go.com/nba/playoffs/2015/story/_/id/13086040/andre-iguodala-game-finds-acceptance-warriors

Jackson, S. (2005, June 24). The ‘moment’ belongs to Duncan. Retrieved April 27, 2016, from <http://espn.go.com/espn/page2/story?page=jackson/050624>

Lewis, N., & Weaver, A. (2013). More Than a Game: Sports Media Framing Effects on Attitudes, Intentions, and Enjoyment. *Communication & Sport*, 219–242.

Lippmann, W. (1965). Public opinion. *Free Press*, 16–32.

Littlejohn, S. (2011). Theories. In *Theories of human communication* (11th ed., pp. 342–345). Wadsworth.

McCombs, M., Reynolds, A. (2002). News influence on our pictures of the world. *Media effects: Advances in theory and research* (pp. 1–18).

McCombs, M. E., & Shaw, D. L. (1972). The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36(2), 176. doi:10.1086/267990

McCombs, M. E., & Shaw, D. L. (1993). The Evolution of Agenda-Setting Research: Twenty-Five Years in the Marketplace of Ideas. *Communication Journal of Communication*, 43(2), 58–67. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01262.x

McMenamin, D. (2015, June 4). 23 for 23. Retrieved November 9, 2015, from http://espn.go.com/blog/cleveland-cavaliers/post/_/id/1028/23-for-23-little-known-facts-about-lebron-james

Paine, N. (2015, June 01). Where This Year's Cavs Rank Among LeBron's NBA Finals Supporting Casts. Retrieved April 27, 2016, from <http://fivethirtyeight.com/datalab/where-this-years-cavs-rank-among-lebrons-nba-finals-supporting-casts/>

Pan Z. & Kosicki, G. M. (1993). Framing analysis: An approach to news discourse. *Political Communication*, 10, 55–75.

Potter, W. J. (2009). *Arguing for a general framework for Mass Media Scholarship*. Sage.

Rhee, J.W. “Strategy and Issue Frames in Election Campaign Coverage: A Social Cognitive Account of Framing Effects,” *Journal of Communication* 47(2), 26–48.

Rogers, E.M., & Dearing, J.W. (1988). Agenda-setting research: Where has it been? Where is it going? *Communication yearbook* 11 (555–594). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Simmons, B. (2005, June 27). Game 7th heaven. Retrieved April 27, 2016, from <http://espn.go.com/espn/page2/story?page=simmons/050624>

Strauss, E. S. (2015, June 12). Starting Iggy gets Warriors moving. Retrieved April 27, 2016, from http://espn.go.com/nba/playoffs/2015/story/_/id/13063207/andre-iguodala-starts-game-4

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (2nd ed., p. 158). Sage.

TV by the Numbers. (2009, May 22). NBA Finals TV Ratings, 1974–2008. Retrieved April 23, 2016, from <http://tvbythenumbers.zap2it.com/2009/05/22/nba-finals-tv-ratings-1974-2008/>

Walgrave, S. and Van Aelst, P. “The Contingency of the Mass Media's Political Agenda-Setting Power: Toward a Preliminary View,” *Journal of Communication* 56 (2006): 88–109.

Religious Freedom With Chinese Characteristics: Successful Strategic Communication for International Churches

Kyle Thompson, MA

Lecturer of Communication, Southern Utah University

Abstract

While economic studies have coined the catchphrase “socialism with Chinese characteristics,” the importance of “religious freedom with Chinese characteristics” remains undervalued and overlooked. Consistently a significant factor influencing international conflict, religion must be considered an integral part of any holistic analysis of the growing tension between the People's Republic of China and the United States. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, headquartered in the United States, continues to grow internationally and has become an important case study demonstrating the strain caused by the arrival of a foreign religion in China. This analysis will describe the context and history of religious freedom in China, presenting the three most important factors influencing the religious perspective of the Chinese Communist Party: rule of law; foreign oppression; and collectivism. An analysis of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' approach to strategic communication in China, including recommendations for foreign churches operating in China, will be provided.

Keywords: religious freedom, Chinese Communist Party, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, strategic communication, State Administration of Religious Affairs

Religious Freedom With Chinese Characteristics

From a western perspective, religious freedom in The People's Republic of China could easily be construed as inadequate and oppressive. However, initial cursory observation of religious restriction in China eventually gives way to a more intricate, nuanced, complex, comprehensive understanding unrecognized by “East vs West” dogmatism. While the Chinese Communist Party maintains many restrictions on the practice of religion (US State Department, 2022; Human Rights Watch, 2022; Albert & Maizland, 2020), the circumstances of religious practice as portrayed in contemporary western media is often ethnocentric and naturally defensive, consistently ignoring anything positive. Unsanctioned religions currently function in China and, therefore, must utilize sound strategic communication principles in order to effectively grow within the constraints

established by the government.

The following analysis will describe the culture, context, and history through which the Chinese Communist Party views religious freedom, presenting the three most important factors influencing religious perspective in China: rule of law; foreign oppression; and collectivism. Then, a case-study of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' approach to religious practice and strategic communication in China will be analyzed, and recommendations for foreign religions will be provided.

Culture & Context

Religious freedom in China is governed by oriental culture and context very different from Western expectations (Cook, 2017; Carpenter & den Dulk, 2014). Just as China's economic system is neither entirely communist

nor capitalist, so too China’s restriction of religion is a hybrid mixture of systems. While economics in China functions as “socialism with Chinese characteristics” (Deng, 1978; Li, 1995; He, 2001; Qiao Collective, 2021), similarly, a structure of “religious freedom with Chinese characteristics” functions in a format, culture, and context unfamiliar to much of western society, neither completely free nor completely restrictive.

It is true that there are five state-sanctioned religions in China: Daoism, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, and Protestantism (Yang, 2012). However, this does not mean other religions are not present in Chinese society. Similar to economic oligopolies where state-sponsored programs and public enterprises function alongside one another, the religious oligopoly system in China allows for multiple categories of religious operation, both state-sponsored and not (Yang, 2007). Foremost authority on religion in China, Dr. Fenggang Yang of Purdue University, describes these categories as the “Red, Black, and Gray Markets of religion” in China (2006). The Red Market consists of state-sponsored religions, or the five main religions administered by the Chinese Communist Party. The Black Market refers to religions expressly banned and restricted, including groups like The Shouters Sect and Falun Gong (Yang & Pettit, 2018). And the world-wide trend of religious pluralism has led to the emergence of a Gray Market, religion neither sponsored nor criminalized but tolerated by the Chinese Communist Party (Yang, 2010). These unregistered, legally ambiguous, Gray Market religions, although operating in less than ideal circumstances, still experience some freedoms and opportunities for advancement, especially during the current unexpected religious resurgence in China (Cao, 2018).

While many questions remain regarding religious restriction of Falun Gong followers, Uighur and Tibetan minorities, Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan (US State Department, 2022), it is clear Chinese culture allows at least some space for religious practice. Because of the space provided by “religious freedom with Chinese characteristics” and because of the Gray Market, how international religions practice and present themselves in China is crucial to their success. Foreign churches must practice effective strategic communication in order to operate effectively in China.

To understand the Chinese Communist Party’s contemporary approach to religious freedom, one must understand the history, culture, and context of religious regulation in China. This perspective is built upon at least three interrelated factors influencing the framework

used by the government and people of China: First, the rule of law; second, the fear of foreign oppression; and, third, the culture of collectivism. Successful international religions will adjust strategic communication practices based on these important factors.

Rule of Law vs Rule by Law

Rule of law refers to system governed by a written legal code to which all people and circumstances are subject. Conversely, rule by law refers to a governing body utilizing legal code to promote social stability (Dicey, 1915). *Rule of law* is generally considered to be associated with European conceptualizations of government, whereas rule by law is more prevalent in Asia (World Justice Project, 2021). Neither the general Chinese populace nor government base decisions on the assumption that government leaders are beholden to judicial systems; leaders are simply expected to benevolently use law as a tool to administer social stability. Most scholarly work published in the West includes scathing condemnation of any system not based on the foundational assumption that written law is designed to outline the scope of governmental power, and it is clear Chinese culture does not adhere to this assumption. However, rather than debate which is more efficient, rule of law vs rule by law, this analysis simply acknowledges that China’s rule by law culture is the current reality in which foreign religions operate at this time (World Justice Report, 2021).

This discussion is significant because foreign religions often enter China expecting the same rule of law assumptions under which they comfortably operated at home in countries of the West. They are often surprised when characteristics inherent to the rule of law system (such as: open government, accountability, impartial judiciary; see World Justice Project, 2021) manifest differently than unconsciously anticipated. For example, prior to operating in country, some religions may expect a formal legally-binding written declaration documenting legal status from China’s State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA). However, since SARA has yet to legalize any religion or church since the original five state-sanctioned religions were established in the 1950’s (Cook, 2017), this is unrealistic. As previously stated, many religious organizations currently operate in China without full governmental recognition (Yang, 2007).

The Chinese culture of rule by law influences the perspective of the purpose and function of written legal documents. While western constitutions are designed to outline and restrict the powers of government, the Chinese perceive written constitutions as a tool utilized

by leaders to accomplish government purposes rather than legally binding restrictions to reign in potentially malevolent government leaders. In fact, the Chinese Constitution explicitly provides for freedom of religion but this is not perceived as establishing governmental limits on religious restriction (Zheng, 2014). Article 36 of the Chinese Constitution is referred to as the “Freedom of Religious Belief Clause” (Fu, 2021), and explicitly states “Citizens of the People’s Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief. No state organ, public organization or individual may compel citizens to believe in, or not believe in, any religion...The state protects normal religious activities” (People’s Republic of China Const. art. XXXVI). However, the Chinese interpretation of this clause is seen as giving the government power and authority to promote religious and political stability when Western nations might see this as a restriction placed on government.

Figure 1

World Justice Report 2021 Adherence to Rule of Law

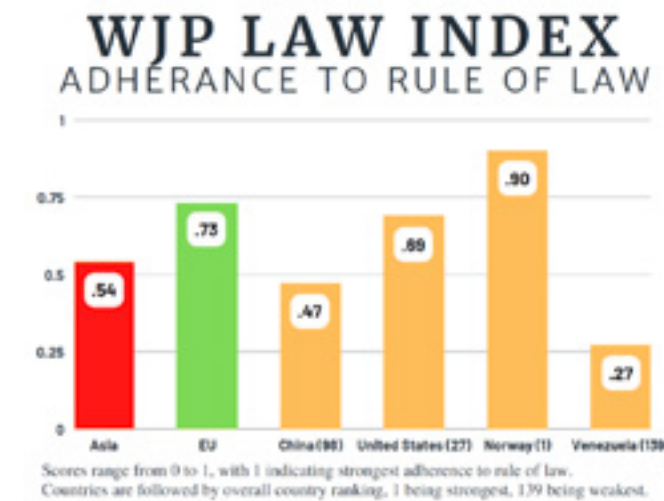
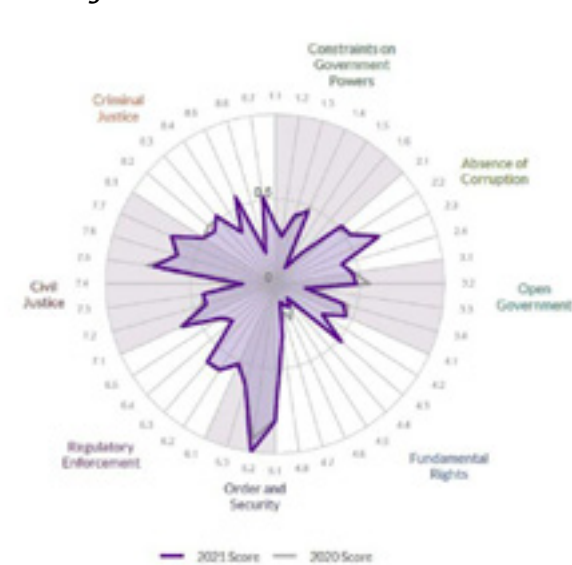


Figure 2

2021 World Justice Report for China, 0 is lowest score and 1 is highest score



This perspective is further affirmed by the clause’s overall placement in the constitution; this article only comes after extensive description and discussion of the rights and powers of the Chinese communist party. As stated by Zheng (2014):

There is a hierarchy of values in the Chinese Constitution...which ranks the supremacy of the Communist Party and the construction of a modern socialist society above the protection of personal freedoms. Indeed, the term ‘protection’ is transformed into something more akin to management and control in the Chinese context. (p. 79)

Although explicitly protected in written constitution, the rule by law ideology dictates that the power of the Party supersedes protection of religious freedom. This “Party-first” mentality must be understood and respected by international religions.

Regardless, it is still meaningful to note that freedom of religious belief is certainly explicitly mentioned in the Chinese Constitution. Chinese leaders are committed to protecting freedom of religion, even if not with as much zeal as protecting the power and stability of governance. Churches not threatening stability have been tolerated.

So, it has been established that there are non-state religions functioning in China permitted under rule by law principles, and the Chinese Constitution provides space for, at least, some degree of religious protection. The next question to consider, then, is “which religions have been restricted by the Chinese government?” Religions on which bans or restricted have been enforced broadly fit in two generalized categories: First, international religions perceived as ‘external’ and posing a foreign threat. And, second, domestic religions threatening internal stability and Chinese nationalism. Note how closely these two categories relate with the following two headings: fear of foreign oppression and culture of collectivism.

Fear of Foreign Oppression

State regulation of religion has, at least partially, been driven by fear of foreign influence (Chang, 2018). Considering the contemporary history of China’s interaction with foreign religion, it is not surprising the Chinese Communist Party is skeptical of foreign influence and remains officially atheistic (Albert & Maizland, 2020).

During the 1800s, several wars and rebellions crippled Chinese stability. The First and Second Opium wars displayed a blatant clash between

Christianity and the Chinese state (Sneller, 2012). During this time, both the people and government of China came to believe that the sole desire of European nations was to proselytize, addict, enslave, and colonize Asia just like Africa (Waley, 1958). Then, following the end of the Opium Wars, the Taiping Rebellion soon began. A civil war fueled by radical economic, political, and religious disruption, the masses attempted to overthrow the Qing Dynasty. Because the defeated rebels possessed a decidedly Christian disposition, this was seen as foreign religion directly challenging Chinese government and culture (Boardman, 1951). Additionally, this fear of Christianity was inevitably exacerbated near the end of the century during the Boxer Uprising when the Chinese grassroots launched attacks against oppressive foreigners. The Boxers, the secret society that initiated the revolution, was emphatically anti-Protestant (Rosaria, 2022). Both the Chinese government and people have had reason to oppose foreign religions during the last several hundred years.

The Chinese psyche still associates Christianity with bloody rebellion and instability. The modern recitation of these historical experiences consistently presents violence, oppression, entanglement, and invasion as inherent to foreign religions (Sneller, 2012). China is rightfully fearful of international religion and even more fearful of the pattern of consequences connected to foreign entanglement. This preoccupation that foreign nations are going to utilize religion to destabilize China permeates and governs the Chinese Communist Party's restriction of religion.

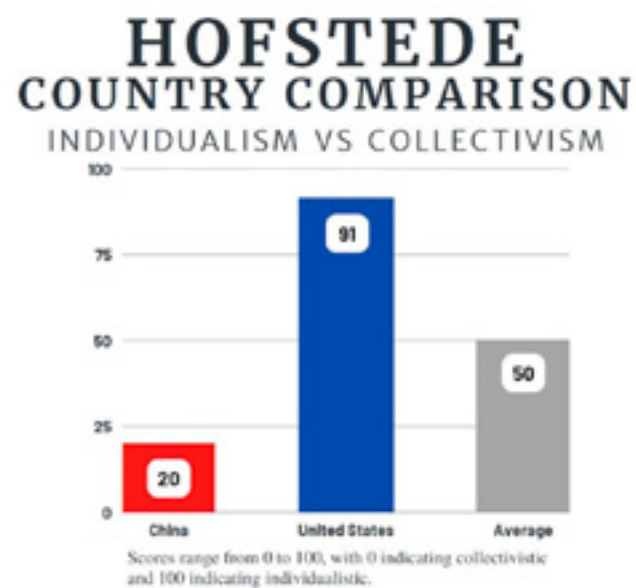
Culture of Collectivism

The instability of China's last 200 years has also left a legacy of cultural collectivism and intense nationalism. With foreign entanglement and radical revolution perceived as major instigators of societal instability, China has developed an inclusive, nationalistic mindset wary of outsiders (Deal, 2013). China is much more collectivistic than Western nations. As shown in Figure 3, on an Individuality scale of 1 to 100, with 50 being the average among nations, China is highly collectivistic with a score of 20 (Hofstede, 2022). Chinese people care about group dynamics; they strive to build tight-knit in-groups and are especially suspicious of anything that is perceived as external or unfamiliar. Foreign, international, and imported ideologies, cultures, and information are automatically contested as potentially damaging to group-unity (Waley, 1958). Where Western culture might be used to promoting individuality and self-reliance, Chinese culture prizes "interdependence," "reliance," and "loyalty" more than

"individuality," "freedom," and "liberty" (Hofstede, 2022).

Collectivism is evidenced in many aspects of Chinese society. Politics and government promote nationalism, unity, and a strong middle kingdom (Sewell, 2013). Economic directives remain focused on "collective morality needed for the accumulation of national material wealth" (Zhang, 2014). Regarding professional working relationships, "in-group considerations affect hiring and promotions" (Hofstede, 2022). Collectivism is even evidenced in the structure of the Chinese Constitution, itself; individual rights are only mentioned after the protection of the Chinese Communist Party, party leadership, socialism, and military might (People's Republic of China Const. art. XXXVI). Predictably, foreign religious ideas are met with extreme caution by both the government and people of China.

Figure 3
Hofstede Country Comparison of Individualism and Collectivism



Case-study: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

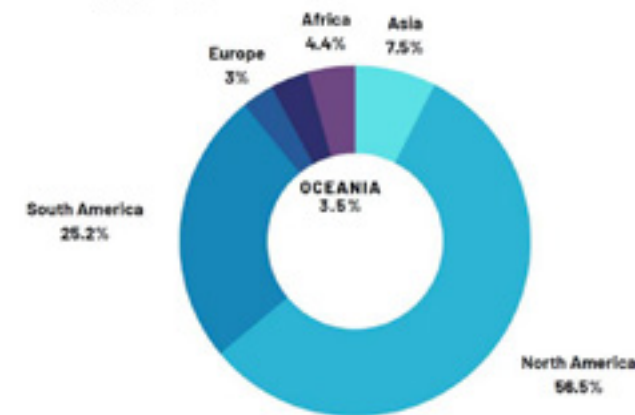
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (hereafter referred to as "the LDS Church") is not one of the five state-sanctioned religions in China. However, it operates in China and has done so for many years. While the complicated SARA application for state-sanction has not been approved, China tolerates and permits the Church operate under reasonable regulations (Evans, 2012). In other words, the LDS Church is operating in the Gray Market (Yang, 2006), neither fully sanctioned nor explicitly restricted but legitimately permitted. While the LDS Church refrains from publishing data and statistics on membership in China, it has publicly acknowledged Church participation among a small percentage of the Chinese

population (Chen, 2022).

The LDS Church maintains genial relations with the government of China and retains a reputation of integrity. For example, as publicly stated by Church President Russell M. Nelson in response to rumors of sending missionaries to China, the LDS Church has repeatedly promised only to enter China "through the front door. We do not go in through the back door or via the alley. Our relationships are based on honesty, openness, integrity, and complete compliance with local law" (Evans, 2012).

As a case-study, the LDS Church provides insights into the best strategic communication practices for international religions attempting to navigate "religious freedom with Chinese characteristics." When comprehended and practiced, Communication Theory, Fundamental Attribution Error, theories of translation, and Uncertainty Reduction Theory advise foreign religions how to effectively advocate and showcase their organizations in China.

Figure 4
Church Membership by Region



Rule by Law & Communication Theory

Communication Theory, as described by Ruler (2018) argues that communication is "an ongoing process of meaning construction...a process that is interactive by nature and participatory at all levels." Foreign religion in China has a dubious history fraught with communication characterized by unidirectional proselytizing (Cao, 2018). Although the LDS Church does not currently proselytize in mainland China, missionaries from the LDS Church first arrived in 1853 (Chen, 2020). And Christian missionaries have proselytized in China since the 6th century (Bays, 2012).

Religious groups have historically dug in their heels when facing rule by law in China, attempting to compel the government to acknowledge their legitimacy (Pittman, 2022). However, instead of browbeating and pressuring, foreign churches should seek open dialogic

processes, using "omnidirectional [and] agile management" of communication (Ruler, 2018).

The LDS Church has begun this conversational process, spanning organizational, educational, and even governmental dimensions. Interactions in the realm of higher education include BYU performance tours beginning in 1979 (Hilton III & Liu, 2016), BYU-Hawaii Polynesian Cultural Center collaborations (Church News Archives, 1989), and even guest lectures on open-heart surgery by Church leaders at Shandong University (Chen, 2020). In January 1989, Chinese Communist Party officials were invited to visit and tour Church Headquarters to increase understanding of The LDS Church and begin dialogue between leaders (Chen, 2020). Church leaders continue to promote second-language acquisition among its membership to increase intercultural understanding (Chen, 2020). And in 2010, talks were initiated by an unnamed senior official of the People's Republic of China where Church leaders and Communist Party officials met to "regularize" relations (Askar, 2010) and ensure Church members are practicing "within the boundaries of Chinese law" (Brown, M. H., 2010). As dialogue and discourse continue to grow, both sides are listening.

The LDS Church must remember, Communication Theory promotes the idea of "meaning creation" occurring through reciprocal interaction and cooperation. Rather than dictating to the Chinese Communist Party the way it should govern, an intelligent approach would include listening to the needs of the people and government of China and co-creating a synergistic symbiotic relationship. This might look like the LDS Church acknowledging it operates under cultural constructs influenced by the rule of law and seeking assistance to discover how this cultural ideology functions in China. Moreover, instead of restlessly criticizing state-proclaimed atheism, Church members would do well to learn and inquire in order to escape premature condemnation.

Fundamental Attribution Error

Regarding the human predisposition to disagree with the 'other,' another theory is important to investigate: Fundamental Attribution Theory (Botan, 2017). Fundamental Attribution Error (FAE) refers to the natural tendency to ascribe others' poor choices to their character or personality but our own poor choices to situation or circumstance. For example, if someone cuts me off in traffic then they are a jerk, but if I cut someone off it is because I had to make my exit. FAE is about discarding accountability and blaming others in order to prevent feeling guilty (Botan, 2017).

In the context of “religious freedom with Chinese characteristics,” Western literature regarding China is rife with FAE. It condemns nearly everything Chinese (communism, religious restriction, nationalism) as malevolently motivated while ignoring similar acts of nationalism in the West. This FAE not only frustrates productive intercultural communication but misrepresents reality. Decrying atheism without taking the time to learn their stories could be categorized as FAE just like condemning Christians without hearing their stories. International religions must recognize and minimize FAE. Successful religions will be patient in providing space, time, and communication to resolve these nearly inescapable inclinations. Continual learning coupled with self-awareness on both sides will provide the circumstances in which an international religion can develop in the realm of “religious freedom with Chinese characteristics.”

Theories of Translation

International religions must combat the concept of foreign oppression embedded in the Chinese psyche. How communication is translated is one key to accomplishing this (Nida, 1991). Churches must devote sufficient resources to proper translation in order to effectively break down the Chinese perspective of “other-ness” (Thompson, 2019). The nature and complexity of various translation strategies, in and of itself, makes this challenging. Add centuries of ideological disparity and miscommunication is bound to occur. As stated by Israelson-Hartley (2010), “missionaries and priests have struggled for centuries to teach Christian concepts to a polytheistic society that has no underlying concept of Jesus Christ.”

Despite the LDS Church’s meticulous attention to translation (Stringham, 1981), misunderstandings have and continue to occur. For example, the name of the Book of Mormon, principle scripture of the LDS Church, as originally translated unwittingly possessed similarities to “devil’s gate” in Mandarin, invoking a cultish feeling (Chen, 2020). A communicative approach to translation states that language should not be translated at the expense of meaning (Nida, 1991). “Language is nothing more than a vehicle” (Mathieu, 2015). Since that first translation, the name of the scriptures and Church have been retranslated (Chen, 2020), and the logo and name of The LDS Church circulated around the world (2011, Niebergall).

Additionally, permission for conference addresses to be presented in native languages (Walch, 2014b) precipitated Sam Chi Wong, an area authority of The LDS Church in China, to

present his world-wide broadcast address in Cantonese (Walch, 2014a). The LDS Church is making efforts to honor the language and culture of its members in China. The LDS Church should continue to allocate sufficient means to promote effective translation and increasingly allow natives to use their national languages.

Figure 5
Logo and Name of The LDS Church in English and Mandarin



Uncertainty Reduction Theory

Although largely believed to be an American religion, more than half the membership of the LDS Church is outside of the United States (Olsen & Otterstrom, 2019). However, the LDS Church is still widely perceived as stringently “committed to its American heritage and character (Hall, 2014). While there is nothing inherently wrong in remaining rooted in one’s own heritage, it is important that the LDS Church’s collectivism does not clash with China’s collectivism. Misunderstanding resulting from mistranslation, lack information, and misinterpretation has engendered a perspective of hostility toward the LDS Church that amplifies the conflict between Chinese nationalism and Church loyalty. In reality, both groups share similar devotion to collectivistic culture. For example, both the Chinese Communist Party and the LDS Church promote: supporting local and regional leaders, obeying laws, building community, societal harmony and contribution, and principles of conformity, loyalty, and allegiance (Deng, 1978; Evans 2012; He 2001; Qiao Collective, 2021; Thompson, 2019).

As the LDS Church continues to exemplify these principles, the Chinese government and people will become more familiar with them and recognize cultural similarities. Uncertainty Reduction Theory suggests that human beings are uncomfortable with the unknown and seek information to minimize cognitive and behavioral uncertainty (Botan, 2017). Acknowledging and honoring this theory, the LDS Church should actively seek to increase reciprocal familiarity. For example, a study completed in Hong Kong showed that Church member participation was positively correlated

with the member’s previous experiences in similar Christian religions (Plüss, 2008). In other words, those who were already familiar with Christian culture were more consistent and active in the LDS Church after joining.

Strategies utilized by the LDS Church to promote awareness in other international circumstances might be helpful here: promoting LDS Charities by teaming up with local humanitarian and governmental organizations (Oliphant, 2016); inviting government leaders to visit Church Headquarters to meet with church leadership (Chen, 2020); sending volunteers to assist in second-language acquisition and English language learning (Hansen, 2012); and encouraging higher education discourse (Hilton III & Liu, 2016). However, perhaps the most visible promotion of familiarity—sending full-time missionaries to proselytize—has been restricted by the Chinese government (Evans, 2012); because of China’s rule by law, the LDS Church should continue to honor this request, displaying trust and responsibility.

Conclusion

While the West condemns China for draconian religious repression (Human Rights Watch, 2022), there is space in which international religions can flourish. The history, culture, and context of the People’s Republic of China has created the emergence of “religious freedom with Chinese characteristics” motivated by societal stability. As seen by analyzing The LDS Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, international religions can effectively operate and develop in China by: respecting the differences between rule of law and rule by law; promoting omnidirectional dialogue as described in Communication Theory; recognizing and minimizing Fundamental Attribution Error; allocating sufficient resources to effective translation; and employing Uncertainty Reduction Theory to promote reciprocal familiarity. International religions can be successful if they effectively utilize these strategic communication principles while operating within “religious freedom with Chinese characteristics.”

References

- Albert, E., & Maizland, L. (2020, September 25). Religion in China. Council on Foreign Relations. <https://www.cfr.org/background/religion-china>
- Askar, J. G. (2010, Aug 30). Mormon Church announces talks to ‘regularize’ operations in China. Deseret News. <https://www.deseret.com/2010/8/31/mormon-church-announces-talks-to-regularize-operations-in-china>

Bays, D. H. (2012). A new history of Christianity in China. Wiley-Blackwell

Boardman, E. P. (1951). Christian influence upon the ideology of the Taiping Rebellion. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 10(2), 115-124. <https://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2049091>

Botan, C. H. (2017). Strategic communication theory and practice: The cocreational model. Wiley-Blackwell.

Brown, M. H. (2010, Aug 30). Mormon church, China in talks. *The Baltimore Sun*. https://www.baltimoresun.com/bs-mtblog-2010-08-mormon_church_china_in_talks-story.html

Cao, N. L. (2018). Chinese religions on the edge: Shifting religion-state dynamics. *The China Review*, 18(4), 1-10.

Carpenter, J. A., & den Dulk, K. R. (2014). Christianity in Chinese public life: Religion, society, and the rule of law. *Palgrave Studies in Religion, Politics, and Policy*. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1057/9781137410184.001>

Chang, K. M. (2018). New wine in old bottles: Sinicisation and state regulation of religion in China. *China Perspectives*, 2018(1-2), 37-44. <https://doi.org/10.4000/chinaperspectives.7636>

Chen, C. H. (2020). Rebranding The LDS Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Chinese speaking regions. *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, 53(4), 41-77.

Church News Archives. (1989, Apr 22). LDS say ‘aloha’ to Chinese visitors: Cultural Center welcomes officers and crew of ship from People’s Republic of China. *Church News*. <https://www.thechurchnews.com/1989/4/22/23263022/lds-say-aloha-to-chinese-visitors>

Constitution of the People’s Republic of China. (1982, Dec 4). National Legislative Bodies. (unofficial translation). <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4c31ea082.html>

Cook, S. (2017). Christianity: Religious freedom in China. Freedom House. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/2017/battle-china-spirit-christianity-religious-freedom>

Deal, J. N. (2013). China’s nationalist heritage. *The National Interest*, 123(Jan/Feb), 44-53. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42896536>

Dacey, A. V. (1915). Introduction to the study of the law of the constitution (8th Ed.). Macmillan.

Evans, W. (2012, December 31). Elder Russell M. Nelson urges missionaries to refute rumors. Church News. <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/church/news/elder-russell-m-nelson-urges-missionaries-to-refute-rumors?lang=eng>

Fu, B. (2021). The politics of inclusive pluralism: A proposed foundation for religious freedom in a post-communist democratic China. Pickwick Publications.

Hall, A. (2014). A world religion from a chosen land: The competing identities of the contemporary Mormon church. In Brunn, S. (Ed) *The changing world religion map*. Springer. pp. 803–817. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-9376-6_40

Hansen, L. (2012). Second language acquisition abroad: The LDS missionary experience. John Benjamins Publishing Company. <http://digital.casalini.it/9789027281661>

He, H. Y. H. (2001). Dictionary of the political thought of the People's Republic of China: Studies on contemporary China. M. E. Sharpe.

Hilton III, J., & Liu, B. (2016). “This is very historic”: The Young Ambassadors 1979 tour of China. *BYU Studies Quarterly*, 55(3), Art. 8, 135–164.

Hofstede, G. (2022). Hofstede country comparison tool. Hofstede Insights. <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison/china,the-usa/>

Human Rights Watch. (2022). World report 2022: China. Human Rights Watch. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/china-and-tibet>

Li, G. C. (1995). A glossary of political terms of the People's Republic of China. Chinese University Press. ISBN 978-962-201-615-6

Mathieu. (2015, Jul 7). 6 contemporary translation theories. Cultures Connection. <https://culturesconnection.com/6-contemporary-theories-to-translation/>

Niebergall, C. (2011, May 23). Church logo published in more than 100 languages. Church News and Events. <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/church/news/church-logo-published-in-more-than-100-languages?lang=eng>

Oliphant, S. M. (2016). International faith-based organizations: An organizational analysis of Latter-day Saint Charities. *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work*, 35(4), 295–316.

Olsen, D. H., & Otterstrom, S. M. (2019). Language and the internationalization of The LDS Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. In Brunn, S., & Kehrein, R. (Eds.) *Handbook of the changing world language map*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-02438-3_67

Pittman, J. (2014, Oct 9). A look at religious freedom in China. China Source. <https://www.chinasource.org/resource-library/blog-entries/a-look-at-religious-freedom-in-china/>

Pittman, J. (2022, Feb 1). The LDS Church in China: It's complicated. OSCAR. <https://oscar.org.uk/blog/the-church-china-its-complicated>

Plüss, C. (2008). Chinese participation in The LDS Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) in Hong Kong. *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 14(1), 63–76.

Qiao Collective. (2021, November 4). Socialism with Chinese characteristics: Introductory study guide. Qiao. <https://www.qiaocollective.com/education/socialism-with-chinese-characteristics>

Rosaria, J. (2022). Protestant anti-imperialism and the vindication of the Boxer Rebellion, 1899–1901. *Diplomatic History*, 46(2), 349–374.

Ruler, B. V. (2018). Communication Theory: An underrated pillar on which strategic communication rests. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 12(4), 367–381. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118X.2018.1452240>

Sewell, J. E. (2013). Sharing space with the Middle Kingdom: Analyzing barriers to U.S.–China space cooperation. [Doctoral dissertation, The University of Mississippi].

Sneller, C. D. (2012). ‘Take away your opium and your missionaries’: The Opium Wars (1839–60) and the Chinese national psyche. *Transmission Bible Society UK*, 1(1), 20–23. <http://bit.ly/2n6teQs>

Stringham, J. G. (1981). The LDS Church and translation. *Brigham Young University Studies*, 21(1), 69–90. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43040685>

Thompson, K. (2019). Cultural conceptions of power in the US and China: overcoming the ‘othering’ effect [Conference session]. Faculty Development Conference, Southern Utah University, Cedar City, UT, United States.

US State Department. (2022, June 2). 2021 report on international religious freedom: China (includes Tibet, Xinjiang, Hong Kong, and Macau). Office of International Religious

Freedom, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/china/>

Waley, A. (1958). *The opium war through Chinese eyes*. Ruskin House.

X Walch, T. (2014a, Sep 8). LDS conference talks may be given in native languages. Deseret News. <https://www.deseret.com/2014/9/8/20548158/lds-conference-talks-may-be-given-in-nativelanguages>

Walch, T. (2014b, Oct 4). Cantonese-speaking Saints thrilled by historic LDS conference talk in their language. Deseret News. <https://www.deseret.com/2014/10/4/20549858/cantonese-speaking-saints-thrilled-by-historic-lds-conference-talk-in-their-language>

World Justice Project. (2021). Rule of law index. ISBN 978-0-9964094-6-9

Yang, F. G. (2006). The red, black, and gray markets of religion in China. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 47(1), 93–122. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1533-8525.2006.00039.x>

Yang, F. G. (2007). Oligopoly dynamics: Official religions in China. *The Sage Handbook of the Sociology of Religion* (pp. 635–653).

Yang, F. G. (2010). Oligopoly dynamics: Consequences of religious regulation. *Social Compass*, 57(2), 194–205.

Yang, F. G. (2012). *Religion in China: Survival & revival under communist rule*. Oxford University Press.

Yang, F. G., & Pettit, J. E. E. (2018). The black market: Illegal religions. In Yang, F. G., *Atlas of religion in China: Social and geographical contexts* (pp. 60–69). Brill. https://dx.doi.org/10.1163/9789004369900_006

Zheng, Y. S. (2014). Political constitution and the protection of religious freedom: A jurisprudential reading of Article 36 of the Chinese Constitution. In J. A. Carpenter & K. R. den Dulk (Eds.), *Christianity in public life: Religion, society, and the rule of law* (pp. 79–96). Palgrave Pivot. https://dx.doi.org/10.1057/9781137410184_001

Walking in Between: The Messaging in Jeffrey R. Holland’s Speech “The Second Half of the Second Century of Brigham Young University”

*Esther Chang Worley, MA
Southern Utah University*

Abstract

This research paper seeks to discover insights into the messaging found in Jeffrey R. Holland’s August 23, 2021, speech given at Brigham Young University during University Conference. Holland is a leader and apostle of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Although this speech was directed towards faculty and staff of the university, it was soon after disseminated to the public. Holland’s remarks were perceived as shocking and inconsistent to many members, nonmembers, and ex-members in relation to the inclusive statement by Brigham Young University (Swenson, 2021, para. 2). The explosion on social media resulted in public protests and verbal confrontations in the town of Provo, Utah, and the University issuing a statement condemning hateful speeches and behaviors (Pugmire, 2021, para. 11). Symbolic Convergence Theory will be used to examine the messaging of this speech that might be perceived as inconsistent to the principle of inclusivity—specifically towards sexual minority students. This study does not evaluate the truth claims of the church.

Keywords: Fantasy themes, Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT), Jeffrey R. Holland, inclusivity, LDS church, Mormon church, LGBTQIA+, sexual minority

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, commonly called the Mormon church, was founded on April 6, 1830, in the state of New York (Badertscher, 2020). Today, Latter-day Saints (as members often refer to themselves) have become part of a religious organization of over sixteen million (Noyce, 2020). Brigham Young University, sponsored by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, has not followed the early twentieth century path of secularization trodden by many other research universities (Daines, 2018). Secularization in this case is defined as when religious faith is not the center of research and education (Daines, 2018,

pg. 3). Founded in 1875, the university not only maintained its religious affiliation as a faith-centered institution throughout the mid-1930s and 40s, but also has continued to champion its foundational values (Wilkins & Whetten, 2012).

Jeffrey R. Holland, a leader and apostle of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, gave a speech at Brigham Young University on August 23, 2021, during University Conference. On the same day, the university announced the formation of a new “Office of Belonging” (Jenkins, 2021). Although the speech by Holland was directed towards faculty and staff of the

university, it was soon after disseminated to the public. Holland’s remarks were perceived as shocking to many members, nonmembers, and ex-members (Swenson, 2021, para. 2). The explosion on social media resulted in public protests and verbal confrontation in the town of Provo, Utah, and the University issuing a statement condemning hateful speeches and behaviors (Pugmire, 2021, para. 11).

The Office of Belonging was created to address the needs of marginalized individuals on campus (Jenkins, 2021). The university president, Kevin J. Worthen, stated, “The office is created to root out racism and combat prejudice of any kind, including that based on race, ethnicity, nationality, tribe, gender, age, disability, socioeconomic status, religious belief and sexual orientation” (Jenkins, 2021). However, Holland seemed to have created messaging that is perceived as inconsistent to many believers of the church as well as students of Brigham Young University (Monson, 2021, para. 6). Some active members of the church, who have revered Holland all their lives, described their experience as “disappointed” (Riess, 2021, para. 4). This type of messaging results in cognitive dissonance in members—the theory that describes how people tend to act and believe to minimize the divergence between action and belief (Harmer-Dionne, 1998).

Research has continually shown the decline of religious belief and practices in Americans (Twenge et al. 2016). Scholars have also studied Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) in the context of religious messaging; however, few scholars have studied symbolic convergence within messaging used by prominent LDS church leaders such as Holland—fourth-ranking senior apostle of the church (Heath, 1987) and former president of BYU. Holland’s talk The Second Half of the Second Century of Brigham Young University will be examined using SCT to understand the messaging embedded in the speech and how members of the church create symbolic consciousness that is constitutive of reality through fantasy and bond with each other. SCT will also be used to show how various aspects of the speech might be perceived as inconsistent to the topic of belonging and inclusion and even harmful (Kaplan, 2021). This paper could be used to understand the perceived non-inclusive messaging and how one might minimize similar types of messaging moving forward by using a different messaging approach.

Literature Review

This literature review consists of important areas of research explaining the Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT), how the theory is

applied in religious communication (Underation, 2012), potential challenges of fantasy themes, and contextual information about The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in relation to cognitive dissonance experienced by sexual minorities.

The Symbolic Convergence Theory

The Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) provides a universal explanation for human communication (Bormann, 1982). It describes creation, maintenance and possible interpretations of empathic communication. It uses the human tendency to interpret signs and symbols to form meaningful social bonds. Convergence refers to when two or more symbolic worlds encounter each other. People experience symbolic convergence through having their symbolic worlds overlap and by sharing their common experiences through communication. Symbolic Convergence also describes how people develop an emotional investment in and commitment to the symbols they live by. These emotions allow people to sympathize and identify with one another, thus creating a community (Bormann, 1982). Bormann (1982) describes the communicative process by which people experience symbolic convergence as the sharing of fantasies. Fantasy chains are when people are harmoniously participating in a common drama. Group or organization members describe their experience in terms of analogies, metaphors, and narrative accounts. Fantasy themes and fantasy types could be found in written messages of group fantasies.

Bormann refuted criticisms on the theory that it is Freudian-based and applies only to small group communication (Bormann et al., 2003). The theory helps explain aspects in interpersonal, small group, organizational, public, mass, corporate, and intercultural communication (Bormann et al., 2001). SCT is useful because of its heuristic value. Through stories and practices, people share a common understanding of what it means to be a member of the same group. SCT is used to create, raise, and maintain group consciousness. Humans are able to create symbolic consciousness that is constitutive of reality through fantasy and bond with each other in creating a cohesive, strong community (Bormann et al., 1994).

Fantasy Theme and Symbolic Cues

According to Cragan and Shields (1992), SCT helps understand the meaning, emotion, and motive within the content of a message. Fantasy theme is the basic unit of analysis for the SCT (Cragan & Shields, 1992). It presents a common experience for a group of people and shapes that

experience into symbolic knowledge. Fantasy themes are imaginative ideas that a group of people develop to help understand reality since reality is constructed symbolically. Fantasy theme analysis is often used as the research method to capture different symbolic realities. A symbolic cue is a word, phrase, slogan, or nonverbal behavior. Symbolic cues act as triggers to remind members of the same group of their previously shared fantasies and emotions (Cragan & Shields 1992). Symbolic cues can act as a heuristic to connect people with whom they share similar constructed realities.

Group Fantasies

SCT also stems from the human tendency to try to understand events, life decisions, and actions that happen (Bormann, 1996). Interpreting events allows us to assign different responsibilities and emotions to the situation (e.g. praise, blame, hate, love, etc.). When a group of people share a fantasy together, they make sense of prior confusion. They come to symbolic convergence on one specific matter and end up envisioning their world in similar ways by creating shared interpretation, symbols, and common ground (Bormann, 1996). Bormann (1996) found that group fantasies often include dramatized messages. Dramatized messages may contain wordplay, puns, figures of speech, analogies, anecdotes, allegories, fables, or narratives. Fantasy chains spark interest and attention in the listener and help them respond to the narrative. A group of people can soon be talking and grow emotional when the imaginative enactment happens, whereas before then there might be little in which the audience can connect with each other.

Rhetorical Visions

Rhetorical visions are when composite dramas are being shared within large groups of people in a symbolic reality (Bormann, 1972). Rhetorical visions are constructed from fantasy themes and are then shared in groups, speaker–audience transactions, TV broadcasts, and many different large–group public settings. Any theme tied to the rhetorical vision can spark an emotional response. Rhetorical visions and fantasy themes demonstrate together that in order for messages to be persuasive, it is important to repeat what the audience already knows. Speakers often create messages that listeners already know and accept.

The Mormon rhetorical vision has been examined using SCT and Fisher’s narrative theory. Challis (1992) discussed the recurring appeals of the rhetorical visions of the Mormon church and how those who embrace the narratives have increased in numbers dramatically in recent

years. Some reasons the researcher included are how the rhetorical vision of the Mormon church appeals to the American value system. Church members all over the world—and in large in the United States—connect with the values taught in the church and then continue to share these rhetorical visions with others.

SCT in Religious Communication

Ever since its founding, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter–day Saints has focused on missionary work, attempting to persuade others around the world to accept its doctrines and practices (Challis, 1992). Scholars have also examined different narratives within different churches. A Missouri Baptist Church was found to have three prevalent fantasy themes: identifying with the church’s successes and traditions, the members’ link with the Southern Baptist denomination, and the organization’s perceived success of their leader linked to the success of the church (Mathews, 2005). Mathews (2005) also found that younger members often interpret the fantasy themes differently than older members of the church.

Kwanzaa Community Church is the only African–American Presbyterian church in Minnesota (Madlock, 2009). It has been a place of refuge from oppression for African Americans, and some of its fantasy themes include consciousness creating, consciousness raising, and consciousness sustaining (Madlock, 2009). They place value on morals, ethical teaching, creating and appreciating natural and man–made aesthetics and caring for others. Jesus is part of their rhetorical vision of the church, but not the center of the cultural holiday message.

Mesaros–Winckles (2009) classified the Westboro Baptist Church (WBC) in Topeka, Kansas, more as a hate group disguised as a church. The church protests and promotes an anti–homosexual agenda on websites, podcasts, and press releases. Since WBC members believe that America as a nation is acting against the will of God, their religious rhetoric stirs up a cauldron of emotions that resists reason (Mesaros–Winckles, 2009). A prominent theme found in the WBC was religious manipulation. They often include rhetoric that exempts the religious groups’ leader from criticism and that manipulates the will of others. WBC interprets tragedies, such as Hurricane Katrina and deaths of soldiers in Iraq, as signs of God’s disapproval in America supporting homosexuality (Mesaros–Winckles, 2009, pg. 6). Fantasy themes portrayed by the church’s propaganda videos include gay individuals wearing pig masks and comments that gays and Americans are going to hell (all except for the members of WBC). Simmons (2014) examined the messaging

found within fantasy themes of ex–Christians’ deconversion narratives. Ex–believers would often search for others who have experienced similar feelings to share stories with each other concerning their former religious faith. Recurring words or symbolic cues are often found in their narratives and stories as well. Just like believers bond with each other with their own symbolic cues, ex–believers also have symbolic cues that create fantasy themes that help them relate to one another.

Historical Overview of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter–day Saints

The new American religion was founded on April 6, 1830, in the state of New York during a time of religious uprising. The prophet Joseph Smith claimed to have received divine authority to establish the church as a restoration of a church founded anciently by Jesus Christ. Mormons proved by their early achievements to be a group of industrious, frugal, and skilled mechanics and farmers, capable of trade and commerce (Roberts, 1912). After Smith’s death in 1844, Brigham Young led thousands of pioneers to Utah in 1847, seeking a refuge from religious persecution. They settled by the Great Salt Lake (Badertscher, 2020). What began with six people in 1830 had endured and flourished. Today, Latter–day Saints (as members often refer to themselves) have become part of a religious organization of over sixteen million (Noyce, 2020).

Potential Challenges of Fantasy Themes Relating to Marginalized Groups

A dangerous phenomenon of the fantasy themes found in the SCT occurs when people become too dogmatic. Persuaders may also employ fantasy themes to turn listeners from traditional messaging to a defensive strategy as a political–rhetorical weapon to harm others, namely marginalized groups of people (Mueller, 2004). These could include women, racial minorities, and sexual minorities.

The Role of Women in the Mormon Church

Religious institutions are extremely influential in how gender identities are constructed in families, private spaces, workplaces, and the community (Halford et al., 2021). Halford et al. (2021) also described how in traditional Christian communities, women are often subject to greater gender inequality due to patriarchal organizational structures and religious dogma. Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter–day Saints find it difficult to express diverse forms of gender expression and roles because of the messaging taught at general conferences—a semiannual global conference of

the church (Bradley–Evans, 2005). Women are often asked to focus on practical tasks without ever gaining a thorough understanding of feminism (Bradley–Evans, 2005).

According to Chen (2014), the multi–million–dollar “I’m a Mormon” campaign was a tremendous effort from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter–day Saints on influencing public perceptions about members of the church. These ads sent a clear message about Mormon family values and especially the ideal of womanhood and motherhood. Mormon women reaffirm the traditional gender roles for women as they emphasize stay–at–home motherhood as the most important identity above all others. Women are considered the most divine and holy as they bear and rear children. The idealization of motherhood also leads to the disapproval of wage–earning mothers within the church.

Mormonism promotes distinctive and complementary gender roles as found in The Family: A Proclamation to the World (Hinkley, 1995):

By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children (Hinckley, 1995, para. 7).

The church is categorized by some as a highly structured, but rigidly patriarchal religious organization (Hinderaker, 2017). The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter–day Saints allows all worthy male members to hold priesthood authority (Hinderaker, 2017). Mormon priesthood is believed by members of the church to be God’s authority on earth. Many Mormons believe that the restoration of the priesthood gives members of the church the authority to baptize, give blessings, and participate in other holy ordinances; however, women in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter–day Saints do not receive the same priesthood and are to support the priesthood holders and defer to husbands, brothers, and sons (Hinderaker, 2017).

Although women are not explicitly stated in the Bible to be an inferior sex, most scholarly research characterizes the underlying society of the Bible as patriarchal (Crawford, 2015, pg. 3). Women’s freedom is especially limited in public spaces and female authority continues to be suppressed when the Bible is being treated as normative reading in modern times (Crawford, 2015). Mormonism does recognize a Heavenly Mother; however, this theology is not frequently taught within church discourse. Members are cautioned to not pray to Heavenly Mother and

how speculations on the subject can lead to deception (Renlund, 2022, para. 7).

Women can experience reduced freedom within conservative religious organizations (Feller, 2016). Egyptian Muslim women follow social limitations that authorities deem to be moral conduct (Feller, 2016, p. 157). In Mormonism, leaders often encourage women to stay home with their children; and stigmatize the pursuit of a career. Mormon women often turn to personal revelation when negotiating challenges found within the institution, thus using their individual agency and personal experience to self-interpret the limits. Many would describe how they prayed about the situation and felt good about their decisions (Feller, 2016, p. 158).

A Church for All of God’s Children?

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints heavily focuses on missionary work, sharing its doctrines and practices with people around the world (Challis, 1992). Today, the church averages around 700 converts a day and has temples in over 66 countries (Coppins,

2021). However, the church has been accused by many of being a predominantly white religion, and both members and non-members have criticized it for being prejudiced against Black people (Trank, 1971).

For much of its [the church’s] history—from the mid-1800s until 1978—the Church did not ordain men of black African descent to its priesthood or allow black men or women to participate in temple endowment or sealing ordinances (“Race and the priesthood,” n.d., para. 3).

Since the church’s president reveals God’s word and is the only instrument who can decide a theological change, this created intellectual dissonance and internal conflict for members of the church (Trank, 1971). The ban was later lifted at the 148th general conference of the church in 1978 through a document that is currently listed as the church’s Official Declaration 2 (Kimball et al., 1978).

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has been trying to globalize its faith base; however, there are challenges that come with merging cultures and worldviews (Chen, 2020). The church sent missionaries to the Mauritian landscape in the early 1980s (Chintaram, 2021), and Mauritius celebrates multiculturalism. It has been challenging for Mauritian church members to navigate cultural heritage and find their place within an American-born religion and its fantasy theme narratives.

The Church has been building its relationship with the Chinese government for over four decades (Chen, 2020). However, due to the church’s precarious political position in China, it has not released any information regarding its development in the country, and the branding effects of the church remain uncertain. The church also faces negative information online, stereotypes of being a cult-like faith, and warnings from Christian pastors that impede its message from being accepted in the country (Chen, 2020). Chen (2020) described that the church’s “Americanness” can attract curiosity; however, the American characteristics can also generate distrust towards the church due to the recent trade war between China and the US, as well as accusations regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. Last, political complications might ask for the church to adapt its teachings to “Mormonism with Chinese characteristics” instead of its original form (p. 76).

Religious Cognitive Dissonance for Sexual Minorities

Adolescents who identify with the LGBTQ+ community in religious contexts may have higher risks for mental health issues (Gibbs & Goldbach, 2021). Research has shown that sexual minority youths are at risk to experience negative mental health outcomes. They’re more likely to experience depression. Religious messages that contain anti-homosexual rhetoric often create dissonance among sexual minority adolescents (Gibbs & Goldbach, 2021).

When religious beliefs are tightly connected to someone’s moral domain, uncertainty creates cognitive dissonance in the minds of believers (Forstmann & Sagioglou, 2020, p. 76). This especially occurs when a person holds contradictory beliefs and values or encounters experiences inconsistent with his or her beliefs. Cognitive dissonance causes cognitive and emotional distress (Forstmann & Sagioglou, 2020, p. 77). This is contrary to the role of religion.

Often, by thinking about religion people feel increased certainty and control, but this is not always the case for LGBTQ+ members in religious narratives.

According to Mental Health America, the adult ranking for mental illness in the year of 2020 has Utah listed as number fifty out of fifty-one states—the lower the ranking, the higher the number of mental illnesses in a particular area and the lower the rates of access to care (“Ranking the States,” 2022). The measurements include several metrics: adults with any mental illness (AMI), adults with substance use disorder, adults who had serious thoughts of suicide, AMI who are uninsured, AMI

who did not receive treatment and have unmet needs, and those with disability who don’t have access to doctors due to high costs (“Ranking the States,” 2022). Although youth ranking is not as low as the adult rankings in 2020, it is still ranked number forty-one (“Ranking the States,” 2022). Similarly with adult rankings, states ranked between 39–51 show that the youth have lower rates of access to care and higher rates of mental illnesses in the area. The metrics for youth rankings include several considerations as well: youth with one or more major depressive episodes in the past year, substance use of disorder, severe major depressive episode (MDE), youth with MDE who did not receive mental health services, youth with MDE who received some mental health services, children with insurance that did not cover mental health issues, and students with emotional disturbance (Ranking the States, 2022).

Miet (2014) described that the LDS policies for members of the LGBTQ+ community may contribute to this statistic. Deanna Rosen, a 61-year-old social worker and therapist describes how one third of her patients in Salt Lake City are sexual minority youths who grew up in the LDS church. Unfortunately, many of them live in cognitively challenging environments that could contribute to their poor mental health, and some were kicked out of their homes because of religious narratives (Miet, 2014).

Limitations & Justification

The purpose of this research is to investigate the strategic messaging found in the major fantasy themes of Holland’s speech in relation to marginalized individuals found on BYU campus—specifically sexual minorities. A study surveying students at Brigham Young University found that 13% of the students surveyed did not identify with being exclusively heterosexual (Klunt et al., 2021). Sexual minority students on campus experience a lower quality of life than their heterosexual peers and encounter higher levels of psychological distress (Klunt et al., 2021). This study will provide insights into the rhetorical visions’ implications, as well as build on aspects of the SCT and other previous studies of the theory.

SCT should be the most effective in answering the research questions because messaging can be categorized into character, setting, and action. This study aims to review sources from an academic viewpoint and will provide insight regarding the speech messaging that might be useful to both the leadership of the church as well as scholars in other fields. This study will not be evaluating the truth claims of the church but is more interested in how those claims are

perceived by audiences.

The purpose of this research is to investigate the SCT within Holland’s talk. This paper will examine major fantasy themes found in the speech “The Second Half of the Second Century of Brigham Young University.” There will be insights on topics that might be difficult for some members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. However, this study aims to review sources from an academic viewpoint.

Research Question

RQ: What are the major fantasy themes found within Holland’s messaging in relation to sexual minorities?

Method

Ernest Bormann’s (1972) Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) along with the fantasy theme analysis found within the theory were employed as the method for this research. Bormann (1982) described fantasy theme analysis as a tool that provides universal explanation for rhetorical messages. Dramatizing communication uses imaginative language such as puns, figures of speech, wordplay, analogies, anecdotes, allegories, parables, jokes, stories, talks, legends, narratives, etc. Fantasy chains emerge from such communication (Bormann, 1972).

The Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) is used as a lens through which the speech by Holland is examined. The speech transcript was obtained from the BYU Speeches website (speeches.byu.edu). Jeffrey R. Holland’s speech, “The Second Half of the Second Century of Brigham Young University,” is the main text for this research. The supplemental text includes the university’s Statement on Belonging (Jenkins, 2021). They will be analyzed and examined using SCT through a qualitative approach.

SCT is useful in providing a broad view of the speech; however, it is not detailed and specific enough for my examination of the text. Therefore, both deductive and inductive research approaches will be used working within the SCT framework. I will code the characters, settings, and action messaging based on if it focuses on belonging and inclusivity. Ernest G. Bormann created SCT to understand small groups and mass communication. Dramatized messages, such as fantasy themes, create social reality for groups of people. Those messages are a way to examine the group’s cohesion, culture, and motivation (Bormann, 1972). Group fantasies are when group members respond to the fantasy themes and show commitment to the narrative (Bormann, 1972, p. 397).

Fantasy themes provide insights into the shared worldview of groups (Bormann, 1972). SCT is largely based on two assumptions: 1) communication creates reality and 2) symbols not only create reality for individuals, but they also provide meanings that can converge to create a community of people sharing the same reality (Foss, 2008, p. 97). Convergence refers to the state between several people when their individual symbolic worlds overlap. They then share a common consciousness or fantasy. Fantasy theme is the basic unit of analysis. “Fantasy” in the SCT framework is not defined as something fictitious; instead, it is referring to the artistic interpretation of events (Foss, 2008, p. 98). It is designed to describe the constructed reality a group of people experience. Actions that do not make sense to an outsider make perfect sense when seen within the context of the group and its rhetorical vision (Foss, 2008, p. 101).

The faculty and staff of Brigham Young University share fantasy themes and a rhetorical vision, largely taught and influenced by the teachings and values of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Foss (2008) describes the fantasy theme particularly well—“a story that accounts for the group’s experience and that is the reality of the participants.” I will be analyzing the speech by Holland using the fantasy theme analysis. The fantasy theme analysis is composed of two steps (Foss, 2008, p.101): 1) coding the setting, character, and action themes of the speech and 2) constructing and framing the rhetorical visions from the fantasy themes.

The core principle of the SCT is that humans interpret signs and symbols that explain reality and create fantasies that transform individuals into cohesive groups (Bormann, 1996). BYU’s inclusive statement provides the meaning, emotion, and motive for action that is perceived by some as inconsistent with the rhetorical themes of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The speech was examined sentence by sentence and read multiple times for a more accurate examination.

Foss created three main elements to categorize fantasy themes: setting, character, and action (Foss, 2008, p. 99). I will provide a brief explanation of each of these three elements and demonstrate how coding is to be done within this framework. The setting theme is the place where the action or event is happening. Character themes portray the actors and characters in the messaging. Character themes also include me, we, people, I, etc. Nonhuman entities with human action should be coded as characters (Foss, 2008, p. 102). These include earth, music, institutions, and more. Action themes are plotlines in which the characters

engage in the messaging (Foss, 2008). They are linked to characters and thus should be coded with them. There can be more themes in one category and fewer in another. Anything in the text that was not a setting, character, or action theme was not coded (Foss, 2008). If a word or phrase belonged in more than one category, I coded it in both categories and waited until the end of coding to see which of the rhetorical visions were formed. Then I decided which category the word or phrase best belongs. To illustrate this coding, the following passage from the university’s Statement of Belonging was found and examined:

We are united by our common primary identity as children of God (Acts 17:29; Psalm 82:6) and our commitment to the truths of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ (BYU Mission Statement). We strive to create a community of belonging composed of students, faculty, and staff whose hearts are knit together in love (Mosiah 18:21) where:

All relationships reflect devout love of God and a loving, genuine concern for the welfare of our neighbor (BYU Mission Statement); We value and embrace the variety of individual characteristics, life experiences and circumstances, perspectives, talents, and gifts of each member of the community and the richness and strength they bring to our community (1 Corinthians 12:12–27); Our interactions create and support an environment of belonging (Ephesians 2:19); and the full realization of each student’s divine potential is our central focus (BYU Mission Statement, Jenkins, 2021).

In this passage, the settings include “community of belonging,” “restored gospel of Jesus Christ,” and “environment of belonging.” The characters are “we,” “our,” “children,” “God,” “Jesus Christ,” “they,” “students,” “faculty,” “staff,” “relationships,” “hearts,” “each member of the community,” and “neighbor.” The action themes utilized are “united” (we/members of the university), “commitment” (we), “strive to create” (we), “knit together in love” (hearts), “reflect devout love of God” (all relationships), “value and embrace” (we), “bring” (each member of the community), “full realization of each student’s divine potential” (our central focus), and “create and support” (our interactions).

Using the fantasy theme analysis, I coded and categorized the inclusive and exclusive characters, settings, and action languages found within Holland’s speech pertaining to sexual minorities. The major and minor themes

were identified. Themes that appear the most frequently are coded as major themes. I then identified the settings, characters, and actions that construct a fantasy theme. According to Cragan and Shields (1992), SCT includes understanding that meaning, emotion, and motive are often manifested in the content of a message. Members of a group interpret meanings of fantasy themes the same way, and they also have similar emotional responses and attitudes towards the same fantasy. Foss describes that fantasy themes involve a creative interpretation of personal experiences and events (Foss, 2008). SCT turns what seems to be confusing into something organized (Foss, 2008, p.99).

Analysis

The speech by Holland was intended to instruct faculty and staff of Brigham Young University to unite in their beliefs and follow the leaders of the church (board of trustees of the university). It also included mentions and perceptions of sexual minorities. Through my analysis of Holland’s speech, I found three major fantasy themes regarding sexual minorities. These include defending the faith, loyalty to church leadership and church teachings, and the perception that public awareness of sexual minorities creates divisiveness. The word and phrase “believers” and “members of the church” are often used interchangeably, referring to members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Defending the Faith

The most prevalent fantasy theme was reflected in one of the subtitles of Holland’s speech: “A trowel in one hand and a musket in the other.” This major theme includes the recurring use of symbolic cues such as defend (5 uses), and the action is accompanied by “the kingdom,” “the faith,” and “marriage as the union of a man and a woman.” It was also used as a noun—“defender,” and “defender of the faith.” Since this fantasy theme uses the action word “defend,” messaging that accompanies the action word incorporates a war-like parallel. Holland described how members should defend the faith by using an analogical musket. The word “musket” was mentioned seven times throughout the speech. Holland quoted Neal A. Maxwell, who created the metaphor between teachers at BYU and pioneer temple builders in Nauvoo:

In a way [Church of Jesus Christ] scholars at BYU and elsewhere are a little bit like the builders of the temple in Nauvoo, who worked with a trowel in one hand and a musket in the other. Today scholars building the temple of learning must

also pause on occasion to defend the kingdom. I personally think this is one of the reasons the Lord established and maintains this university. The dual role of builder and defender is unique and ongoing. I am grateful we have scholars today who can handle, as it were, both trowels and muskets (Holland, 2021, para. 24).

Holland also quoted another statement by Dallin H. Oaks—an apostle and leader of the church—given at a previous university leadership meeting at BYU: “I would like to hear a little more musket fire from this temple of learning” (Holland, 2021, para. 25). This sentence was addressed specifically to the audience in regards to the doctrine of the family and in defending the traditional marriage as the union of a man and a woman (Holland, 2021, para. 25).

Holland then continued to say that even though some faculties have fired their “muskets,” after Oaks’ address, they were aimed at the wrong audience: “Some others fired their muskets all right, but unfortunately they didn’t always aim at those hostile to the Church. We thought a couple of stray rounds even went north of the Point of the Mountain!” (para. 25). “North of the Point of the Mountain” could be interpreted as Salt Lake City, which is home to the Mormon church headquarters. In paragraph 30, Holland again mentioned the phrase musket fire:

Musket fire? Yes, we will always need defenders of the faith, but “friendly fire” is a tragedy—and from time to time the Church, its leaders, and some of our colleagues within the university community have taken such fire on this campus. And sometimes it isn’t friendly, wounding students and the parents of students... (Holland, 2021, para. 30).

He then went on and endorsed, once again, the metaphor made by Neal A. Maxwell:

My Brethren have made the case for the metaphor of musket fire, which I have endorsed yet again today. There will continue to be those who oppose our teachings—and with that will continue the need to define, document, and defend the faith (Holland, 2021, para. 31).

These examples illustrated how early members of the church had to protect and defend their land and faith by literally carrying both trowels and muskets while they worked. Holland urged members today to continue to do the same to defend the faith—specifically the topic of marriage between a man and a

woman—although “musket fire” in this case is represented metaphorically.

Loyalty to Church Leadership and Church Teachings

Another fantasy theme addressed within the messaging of Holland’s speech is loyalty to church leadership and church teachings. The words “prophet” and “prophetic” were mentioned four times. Characters that were a part of church leadership also included “the Lord’s anointed,” “Neal A. Maxwell,” “Dallin H. Oaks,” “Russell M. Nelson,” “David A. Bednar,” and “President Kimball.” Because BYU is a private university and an extension of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the board of trustees consists of church leadership:

I said then and I say now that if we are an extension of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, taking a significant amount of sacred tithes and other precious human resources, all of which might well be expended in other worthy causes, surely our integrity demands that our lives “be absolutely consistent with and characteristic of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ.” At a university there will always be healthy debate regarding a whole syllabus full of issues. But until “we all come [to] the unity of the faith, and . . . [have grown to] the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ,” our next best achievement will be to stay in harmony with the Lord’s anointed, those whom He has designated to declare Church doctrine and to guide Brigham Young University as its trustees.

Holland described adhering to church leadership as “the next best achievement” for the faculty and staff of the university. This passage clearly demonstrates the relationship the university has with the church, and the values it holds—which are aligned with the characteristics of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ.

Holland used 16 paragraphs to recount concerns conveyed to him by other members and their perception of sexual minorities. He expressed his love towards sexual minority students and parents; however, he then always emphasized the importance of following the leadership and church doctrine after he shares his love: “There are better ways to move toward crucially important goals in these very difficult matters—ways that show empathy and understanding for everyone while maintaining loyalty to prophetic leadership and devotion to revealed doctrine” (Holland, 2021, para. 30). He described that he had wept and prayed about the questions members have asked him: “Like many of you, we

have spent hours with them, and we have wept and prayed and wept again in an effort to offer love and hope while keeping the gospel strong and the obedience to commandments evident in every individual life” (para. 28). Holland described that he and other leaders of the church are hearing the concerns members have brought up, but he pleaded with the university to stay true to the church that funds and supports it:

I will go to my grave pleading that this institution not only stands but stands unquestionably committed to its unique academic mission and to the Church that sponsors it. We hope it isn’t a surprise to you that your trustees are not deaf or blind to the feelings that swirl around marriage and the whole same-sex topic on campus—and a lot of other topics. I and many of my Brethren have spent more time and shed more tears on this subject than we could ever adequately convey to you this morning or any morning. We have spent hours discussing what the doctrine of the Church can and cannot provide the individuals and families struggling over this difficult issue (para. 26).

Holland continues to emphasize loyalty to church teachings and principles in relations to sexual minorities in the church and shared his interpretation of Christ and the commandments:

For example, we have to be careful that love and empathy do not get interpreted as condoning and advocacy or that orthodoxy and loyalty to principle not be interpreted as unkindness or disloyalty to people. As near as I can tell, Christ never once withheld His love from anyone, but He also never once said to anyone, “Because I love you, you are exempt from keeping my commandments.” We are tasked with trying to strike that same sensitive, demanding balance in our lives. (Holland, 2021, para. 29)

From this messaging, we can see that Holland encourages his audience to show love to sexual minorities while still being loyal to church principles. He described sexual minorities as “struggling” with a “difficult issue.” Even though Holland expressed his love for sexual minorities, he is firm on his stance with the gospel principles and doctrines of the church. He emphasized the importance of gospel principles and keeping the commandments. Maintaining loyalty to church leadership and principles is a prevalent theme in these passages.

Sexual Minority Awareness is Divisive

The knowledge and awareness of sexual minorities is deemed to be divisive in one of the fantasy themes found within the speech. Holland commented that his audience should refrain from participating in actions that will divide members more than unite them. Members of the church experience confusion, as Holland had described, to sexual minority parades and representation on campus: “...students and the parents of students—so many who are confused about what so much recent flag-waving and parade-holding on this issue means. My beloved friends, this kind of confusion and conflict ought not to be. Not here” (para. 30). He described the sexual minority parades as “confusion and conflicts” and how it must not be represented on campus. This theme also discusses and mentions the idea that sexual minorities experience a “challenge” and the topic is a complex “issue.”

A BYU valedictorian came out in a convocation speech in 2019 (Haller, 2019). Holland addressed the experience:

If a student commandeers a graduation podium intended to represent everyone getting diplomas that day in order to announce his personal sexual orientation, what might another speaker feel free to announce the next year, until eventually anything goes? What might commencement come to mean—or not mean—if we push individual license over institutional dignity for very long? Do we simply end up with more divisiveness in our culture than we already have? And we already have far too much everywhere.

He used wordings such as “commandeers” and “more divisiveness” in his messaging describing that individual license should not override institutional dignity. He felt that the valedictorian brought more divisiveness to the culture and community.

Even though Holland addressed sexual minority students in his speech and declared his love to them, he used the wording same-sex challenge (Holland, 2021, para. 28), struggling over this difficult issue (para. 26), and same-sex topic (para. 26). He did not mention sexual minority, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, allies, LGBTQIA+ commnuity, or other respective terms. Holland mentioned “same-sex” three times throughout the speech and was referring to the term generically and vaguely. He also addressed sexual minority students as “them,” which could be interpreted or misinterpreted by some as an othering language: “...let me go no farther before

declaring unequivocally my love and that of my Brethren for those who live with this same-sex challenge and so much complexity that goes with it. Too often the world has been unkind—in many instances crushingly cruel—to these, our brothers and sisters. Like many of you, we have spent hours with them...” (para. 28). This passage also shows and reiterates how “the world” is complex, contemporary, unkind, and unrighteous (para. 31) while the church is trying to help. He then described to his audience that things need to be kept in proportion: “But it will assist all of us—it will assist everyone—trying to provide help in this matter if things can be kept in some proportion and balance in the process” (para. 29).

Last, Holland urged the audience to avoid language and symbols that represent the LGBTQ+ community:

So it is with a little scar tissue of our own that we are trying to avoid—and hope all will try to avoid—language, symbols, and situations that are more divisive than unifying at the very time we want to show love for all of God’s children (para. 26)

In this passage, he stated that these “language, symbols, and situations” representing sexual minorities divide instead of unify. He used the word “avoid” to indicate that his audience should refrain from showing such support or condoning actions that represent sexual minorities.

Discussion

The fantasy themes present in Holland’s speech messaging demonstrate the lens in which members and leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints view sexual minorities and members of the LGBTQ+ community. The fantasy themes also give insights into how members and leaders of the church view other topics that are inconsistent with church teachings. The findings shed light into how sexual minorities are perceived by the church culturally and especially at Brigham Young University.

The three dominant fantasy themes found in Holland’s speech are to defend the faith, stay loyal to church leadership and its teachings, and to avoid LGBTQ+ language, acts, support, and symbols since they are perceived as divisive by church leadership. Holland urged his audience repeatedly to unite in their goals to help BYU students reach their divine potential (according to church doctrines) and to unite in following teachings revealed to church leaders.

In order for believers to defend themselves and their faith, they have to realize what they are defending themselves against. In this case, Holland presented LGBTQ+ protests (e.g. flag-waving and parading) as a factor that is confusing and inconsistent with gospel teachings (para. 30). He also described “some professors” and “some faculty” as characters in his speech who are shooting their muskets “north of the Point of the Mountain” (para. 25) when they support such protests.

Because BYU stands uniquely as a private institution operated by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the majority of the students (98%) are members of the church (Klundt et al., 2021). The university community and parents of students feel “betrayed” and “abandoned” by BYU (para. 16) if faculty or other students support the LGBTQ+ community since the official revealed doctrine of the family only teaches the traditional heterosexual romantic relationship between a man and a woman (Holland, 2021, para. 25). The university is committed to becoming a more inclusive place by establishing its new Office of Belonging, and President Worthen shared that the office will not only combat racism, but also strive to root out “prejudice of any kind, including that based on race, ethnicity, nationality, tribe, gender, age, disability, socioeconomic status, religious belief and sexual orientation” (Jenkins, 2021). However, the statement is in some ways contrary to the university’s own Honor Code—a document in which all students, faculty, and staff have committed to live their lives while a member of the university. The Honor Code asks that university students, faculty, and staff “live a chaste and virtuous life, including abstaining from any sexual relations outside a marriage between a man and a woman” (“Church educational system”, n.d.). Furthermore, sexual minority students are not allowed to date on campus since “Same-sex romantic behavior cannot lead to eternal marriage and is therefore not compatible with the principles in the honor code” (Walch, 2020). Any same-sex romantic relationship is banned in or outside of marriage.

The church that sponsors the university still holds firmly to its stance on the doctrine of the family and marriage between a man and a woman, thus creating a complex environment in which sexual minorities might feel confused, lonely, and often have self-blaming thoughts about their own sexual orientation (Klundt et al., 2021). One unexpected positive note in this context is that Klundt (2021) found that sexual minority students who associate with religiosity turn out to have fewer negative outcomes in relation to suicidality rates. More religious sexual minority students are less likely to endorse suicidal intent and participate in the attempts

thereof (Klundt et al., 2021, pg. 8). However, it should also be noted that this conflicted with a previous study that examined 250 Christian sexual minority youth who had significantly higher levels of self-harm behaviors than those who were not encountering Christian rituals and promptings from day to day (pg. 8).

This finding could also be interpreted to say that being more religious in this context (on BYU campus) could act as a protective layer through which the students could find both spiritual and social support (Klundt et al., 2021). The study also shows that religiosity is lower for sexual minorities, which might stem from the cognitive dissonance students experience and the difficulty to maintain high levels of religiosity in a context that does not permit LGBTQ+ romantic relationships (Klundt et al., 2021). Sexual minority students on BYU campus experience a high level of cognitive distress and dissonance, which may result in their lower levels of religiosity and quality of life.

Holland also described in his speech that conflicts arise due to the awareness of LGBTQ+ topics and he asks his audience to not subscribe to flag-waving and parade-holding activities. However, the act of increasing awareness of sexual minority students would not increase divisiveness but a sense of acceptance among the university community (Klundt et al., 2021). Researchers have found that the increased exposure of diverse thought and experiences relating to sexual minorities often lead to increased positive feelings toward sexual minority individuals (Klundt et al., 2021). People who know or have interacted with sexual minority students often have a more pleasant feeling associated with the LGBTQ+ community than those who have not been in contact with members of the community (pg. 9).

Holland seems to describe that conflicts and frictions arise from differing opinions—which is natural. However, instead of encouraging healthy discussions and creating space in which diverse opinions can thrive, Holland seemed to ask his audience to cease the conversation. He described flag-waving and parade-holding as confusion and conflicts when the flag-waving and parade-holding are ways students on campus try to show LGBTQ+ students that they are noticed and loved—since there are approximately 13% of BYU students who don’t identify as strictly heterosexual (Klundt et al., 2021).

Conclusion

The three major fantasy themes—defend the faith, be loyal to church leaders and teachings, sexual minority awareness is divisive—seem to weave into one core ideal that the church

doctrine and current teachings don’t seem to create much room for sexual minority acceptance and relationships. Also in the process of uniting members of the community and the university, the needs of the marginalized are often overlooked.

If all students on BYU campus have the same opinions, the university is going to lack many important conversations. If awareness is not allowed on campus, students will find other ways to protest and show love to the LGBTQ+ community. Instead of assimilating students, the Office of Belonging was meant to portray inclusivity for people who are not “the same” as everyone else. It is meant to combat “prejudice of any kind” (Jenkins, 2021). The university could be defining prejudice in a way that doesn’t affect the way church doctrine is treating sexual minorities and does not apply to what the Honor Code is enforcing; however, the word “prejudice” includes a definition of unjust treatment of individuals (“Merriam-Webster,” n.d.). Therefore, BYU’s policies that treat sexual minority students differently would seem incompatible with the office’s mission. The Office of Belonging was established to create space within the university for diversity to exist and hopefully thrive, but instead of “come as you are,” the belonging statement seems to be accompanied with an invisible asterisk of “unless.”

Sexual minority students at BYU all have different individual experiences on campus, some better than others. This complex topic requires sympathy and nuanced understanding from members of the BYU community, church members, and leadership of both the university and the church. Although people on the political spectrum have very different opinions on the topic, researchers have concluded that by raising awareness and affirming sexual minority students, it would not only likely have a direct impact on these students’ quality of life, but it would also affect their suicidality, depression, anxiety, social life, and academic success (Klundt et al., 2021).

Increasing awareness, increasing exposure, and increasing interactions with sexual minorities will increase a sense of acceptance among sexual minority students (Klundt et al., 2021). The act of allowing differences to exist and thrive will not only create more understanding from the members of the campus community—it will create strength and power when students are able to learn in a diverse environment. Only then will BYU campus truly become a place where people feel loved and belonged.

Limitation and Future Research

This study did not seek to account for all aspects of the SCT nor does it have a comprehensive coverage of all the fantasy themes and rhetorical narratives of the Mormon church. It is focused on the major fantasy themes discovered in relation to Holland’s speech given at the 2021 university conference and portrayal and mentions of sexual minorities.

Future research and recommendations include examining a larger sample size of church discourse concerning LGBTQ+ messaging throughout the history of the church, as well as surveying LGBTQ+ students regarding their experiences with harmful messaging on BYU campus or in religious settings. Other research disciplines could also use this study to examine other aspects and performances of sexual minority students, including mental health. This research shows that the experience of sexual minority students on BYU campus could be greatly improved by public awareness and support. As BYU continues to create a safe space for all students—including sexual minority students—awareness will not only impact sexual minority students’ academic success, but also their overall quality of life and lower their suicidality rate. Other students on campus will also come to learn more about the LGBTQ+ community and help to make BYU campus a safer and more welcoming place.

References

- Badertscher, E. (2020). Utah (UT). In *Our States: Utah* (p. 1). Great Neck Publishing. <https://proxy.li.suu.edu:2443/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=b6h&AN=11026211&site=eds-live>
- Bormann, E. G. (1972). Fantasy and Rhetorical Vision: The Rhetorical Criticism of Social Reality. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 58(4), 396. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00335637209383138>
- Bormann, E. G. (1982). The symbolic convergence theory of communication: Applications and implications for teachers and consultants, *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 10(1), 50–61, DOI: 10.1080/00909888209365212
- Bormann, E. G. (1996, July 9). Symbolic convergence theory and communication in group decision making. *Communication and Group Decision Making*. SAGE Publications. 81–113. ISBN 978-1-5063-2051-9. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781452243764.n4>

Bormann, E. G., Craan, J. F., & Shields, D.C. (1994, November). In defense of Symbolic Convergence Theory: a look at the theory and its criticisms after two decades, *Communication Theory*, 4(4), 259–294. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2885.1994.tb00093.x

Bormann, E. G., Craan, J. F., & Shields, D.C. (2001). Three Decades of Developing, Grounding, and Using Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT). *Communication Yearbook*, 25, 271–313. https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.2001.11679006

Bormann, E. G., Cragan, J. F., & Shields, D. C. (2003). Defending symbolic convergence theory from an imaginary Gunn. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 89(4), 366–372. https://doi.org/10.1080/0033563032000160990

Bradley-Evans, M. S. (2005). *Pedestals and Podiums : Utah Women, Religious Authority, and Equal Rights*. Signature Books. https://proxy.li.suu.edu:2443/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsbro&AN=edsbro.A135816296&site=eds-live

Challis, A. T. (1992). *The recurring appeals of the Mormon rhetorical vision*. UNLV Retrospective Theses & Dissertations. 227. http://dx.doi.org/10.25669/53ez-jyyv

Chen, C. H. (2014). Diverse Yet Hegemonic: Expressions of Motherhood in "I'm a Mormon" Ads. *Journal of Media & Religion*, 13(1), 31–47. https://doi-org.proxy.li.suu.edu:2443/10.1080/15348423.2014.871973

Chen, C. H. (2020). Rebranding the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in Chinese-Speaking Regions. *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, 53(4), 41–78. https://doi-org.proxy.li.suu.edu:2443/10.5406/dialjmormthou.53.4.0041

Chintaram, M. V. (2021). Mauritian and Latter-Day Saints: Multicultural Oral Histories of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints within "The Rainbow Nation." *Religions*, 12(8), 651. https://doi-org.proxy.li.suu.edu:2443/10.3390/rel12080651

Church Educational System Honor Code. BYU University Policies. (n.d.). Retrieved April 6, 2022, from https://policy.byu.edu/view/church-educational-system-honor-code

Coppins, M. (2021). The Most American Religion. *Atlantic*, 327(1), 60–74. https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2021/01/the-most-american-religion/617263/

Cragan, J. F., & Shields, D. C. (1992). The Use of Symbolic Convergence Theory in Corporate Strategic Planning: A Case Study. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 20(2), 199–218. https://doi-org.proxy.li.suu.edu:2443/10.1080/00909889209365329

Crawford, C. (2015, January 1). The Struggle for Female Authority in Biblical and Mormon Theology. *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, 48(2): 1–66. https://doi.org/10.5406/dialjmormthou.48.2.0001

Daines, J. G. (2018). *Combining Faithfulness with Learning: Avoiding the Path of Secularization at Brigham Young University* [ProQuest LLC]. In ProQuest LLC. http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&rft_val_fmt=info:ofi/fmt:ke v:mtx:dissertation&res_dat=xri:pqm&rft_dat=xri:pqdiss:13422445

Feller, G. (2016). A Moderate Manifesto: Mormon Feminism, Agency, and Internet Blogging. *Journal of Media & Religion*, 15(3), 156–166. https://doi-org.proxy.li.suu.edu:2443/10.1080/15348423.2016.1209393

Forstmann, M., & Sagioglou, C. (2020). Religious concept activation attenuates cognitive dissonance reduction in free-choice and induced compliance paradigms. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 160(1), 75–91. https://doi-org.proxy.li.suu.edu:2443/10.1080/00224545.2019.1609400

Foss, S. K. (2008). *Rhetorical criticism. Exploration and Practice* (4th ed). Waveland Press.

Gibbs, J. J., & Goldbach, J. T. (2021). Religious Identity Dissonance: Understanding How Sexual Minority Adolescents Manage Antihomosexual Religious Messages. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 68(13), 2189–2213. https://doi-org.proxy.li.suu.edu:2443/10.1080/00918369.2020.1733354

Halford, A., Bowman, M., Kline, C., & Hoyt, A. (2021). 'Come, Follow Me', The Sacralising of the Home, and The Guardian of the Family: How Do European Women Negotiate the Domestic Space in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints? *Religions*, 12(5), 338. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12050338

Haller, S. (2019, April 29). *BYU valedictorian comes out in speech, stunning some family. 'proud to be a gay son of god'*. USA Today. Retrieved March 29, 2022, from https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/allthemoms/2019/04/29/matt-easton-byu-valedictorian-mormon-comes-out-gay-graduation-speech/3615629002/

Harmer-Dionne, E. (1998). Once a Peculiar People: Cognitive Dissonance and the Suppression of Mormon Polygamy As a Case Study Negating the Belief-Action Distinction. *Stanford Law Review*, 50(4), 1295–1347. https://doi.org/10.2307/1229287

Heath, S. H. (1987). "Notes on Apostolic Succession" (PDF). *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, 20(2): 44–56. https://www.dialoguejournal.com/wp-content/uploads/sbi/articles/Dialogue_V20N02_46.pdf

Hinderaker, A. (2017). Whom I Have Called: The Ordain Women Movement and the Narrative of Dissent in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. *Southern Communication Journal*, 82(3), 152–163. https://doi-org.proxy.li.suu.edu:2443/10.1080/1041794X.2017.1315448

Holland, J. R. (2021, August 23). The second half of the second century of Brigham Young University. BYU Speeches. Retrieved from https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/jeffrey-r-holland/the-second-half-second-century-brigham-young-university/

Jenkins, C. (2021, August 23). BYU announces the formation of a new office of belonging. *News*. Retrieved March 2, 2022, from https://news.byu.edu/announcements/byu-forms-new-office-of-belonging

Kaplan, E. (2021, September 27). The rise of the Liberal Latter-day saints. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved January 12, 2022, from https://www.washingtonpost.com/magazine/2021/09/27/rise-liberal-latter-day-saints/

Kimball, S. W., Tanner, N. E., & Romney, M. G. (1978, June 8). Official declaration 2. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Retrieved November 16, 2021, from https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/dc-testament/od/2?lang=eng.

Klundt, J. S., Erikson, D. M., Lynn, A. M., & Brown, H. E. (2021). Sexual minorities, mental health, and religiosity at a religiously conservative university. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 171. https://doi-org.proxy.li.suu.edu:2443/10.1016/j.paid.2020.110475

Madlock, A. (2009). A Kwanzaa Idea as Religious Space: A Rhetoric of Resistance. *International Journal of Diversity in Organizations, Communities & Nations*, 9(2), 183–194. https://doi-org.proxy.li.suu.edu:2443/10.18848/1447-9532/CGP/v09i02/39719

Mathews, S. (2005). *A Vision for the Future: A Religious Application of Symbolic Convergence Theory*. MSU Graduate Theses. 1037. https://bearworks.missouristate.edu/theses/1037

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Prejudice definition & meaning. Merriam-Webster. Retrieved April 10, 2022, from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/prejudice

Mesaros-Winckles, C. (2009). *God Hates Fags: The religious rhetoric of Westboro Baptist*. Conference Papers -- National Communication Association, 1. https://proxy.li.suu.edu:2443/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ufh&AN=54435029&site=eds-live

Miet, H. (2014, January 31). When the Saints Go Marching Out. *Newsweek*, 162(5), 1. https://proxy.li.suu.edu:2443/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsbro&AN=edsbro.A357248174&site=eds-live

Monson, G. (2021, August 26). Gordon Monson: Jeffrey Holland extended A clenched fist instead of an open hand in his BYU speech. *The Salt Lake Tribune*. Retrieved January 12, 2022, from https://www.sltrib.com/sports/byu-cougars/2021/08/26/gordon-monson-jeffrey/

Mueller II, A. G. (2004). Affirming Denial through Preemptive Apologia: The Case of The Armenian Genocide Resolution. *Western Journal of Communication*, 68(1), 24–44. https://doi-org.proxy.li.suu.edu:2443/10.1080/10570310409374787

Noyce, D. (2020, April 4). LDS Church membership tops 16.5 million as convert baptisms rise by 6%. *The Salt Lake Tribune*. Retrieved from https://www.sltrib.com/religion/2020/04/04/lds-church-membership/#:~:text=Here%20are%20the%20latest%20church,of%20the%20end%20of%202019%3A&text=Total%20membership%3A%2016%2C565%2C036.&text=New%20converts%20in%202019%3A%20248%2C835.

Pugmire, G. (2021, August 24). Elder Jeffrey R. Holland knocks 'divisive' behavior in keynote speech to BYU faculty, staff. *heraldextra.com*. Retrieved January 12, 2022, from https://www.heraldextra.com/news/local/2021/aug/24/elder-jeffrey-r-holland-gives-keynote-speech-a-byu-conference-for-faculty-staff/

Race and the priesthood. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. (n.d.). Retrieved November 24, 2021, from <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/race-and-the-priesthood?lang=eng>.

Ranking the states. Mental Health America. (n.d.). Retrieved April 6, 2022, from <https://www.mhanational.org/issues/ranking-states>

Riess, J. (2021, August 25). Elder Holland's BYU speech is for a University of Yesteryear. *Religion News Service*. Retrieved January 12, 2022, from <https://religionnews.com/2021/08/25/elder-hollands-byu-speech-is-for-a-university-of-yesteryear/>

Roberts, B. H. (1912). History of the church of Jesus Christ of latter-day saints (Vol. 6). *Deseret News*. https://books.google.com/books/about/History_of_the_Church_of_Jesus_Christ_of.html?id=pGi-iiz6juYC

Renlund, D. G. (2022, April 2). Your divine nature and eternal destiny. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Retrieved from <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2022/04/36renlund?lang=eng>

Simmons, B. (2014). A Fantasy Theme Analysis of Ex-Christians' Online Deconversion Narratives. *Northwest Journal of Communication*, 42(1), 117-141. <https://proxy.li.suu.edu:2443/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ufh&AN=95028268&site=eds-live>

Swenson, H. (2021, September 3). A shocking new speech has plunged Mormons into another furious battle over Gay Rights. *Slate Magazine*. Retrieved January 12, 2022, from <https://slate.com/human-interest/2021/09/mormon-lds-church-gay-rights-controversy-byu-speech.html>

Trank, D. M. (1971). The Negro and the Mormons: A Church in Conflict. *Western Speech*, 35(4), 220-230. <https://doi-org.proxy.li.suu.edu:2443/10.1080/10570317109373710>

Twenge, J. M., Sherman, R. A., Exline, J. J., & Grubbs, J. B. (2016). *Declines in American Adults' Religious Participation and Beliefs, 1972-2014*. SAGE Open. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244016638133>

Underation, C. (2012). Seeding the Vision: Symbolic Convergence Theory and Aimee Semple McPherson. *Atlantic Journal of Communication*, 20(5), 274-289. <https://doi-org.proxy.li.suu.edu:2443/10.1080/15456870.2012.728120>

Walch, T. (2020, March 4). New letter clarifies update to BYU's honor code following weeks of confusion. *Deseret News*. Retrieved from <https://www.deseret.com/faith/2020/3/4/21163585/byu-honor-code-lds-mormon-church-gay-marriage-lgbtq#:~:text=The%20honor%20code%20update%20removed,Student%20Center%20and%20the%20library.>

Wilkins, A. & Whetten, D. (2012). *BYU and Religious Universities in a Secular Academic World*. Brigham Young University studies. Brigham Young University. 51. 4-52. <https://byustudies.byu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/51.3WilkinsWhettenBYU.pdf>

Utah Journal of Communication

Volume 0, Issue 1, October 2022

Editor-in-Chief: Dr. Hayden Coombs
Managing Director: Dr. Braden Bagley
Copy Editor: Jen Burt, MA

ISSN: Pending
URL: <https://www.UJOC.org/>
Publisher: Zenodo
Email: contact@ujoc.org

Copyright 2022, Utah Journal of Communication

The Utah Journal of Communication is published independently by the UJOC board. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the UJOC board.

