Uncovering the storytelling power of communication: Applying Walter Fisher's narrative theory to three presidential crisis speeches

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UNCOVERING THE STORYTELLING POWER OF
COMMUNICATION: APPLYING WALTER FISHER’S
NARRATIVE THEORY TO THREE PRESIDENTIAL CRISIS
SPEECHES

A Thesis
Presented to the
Department of Communication
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Sharon Dowell
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THESIS ACCEPTANCE

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UNCOVERING THE STORYTELLING POWER OF COMMUNICATION: APPLYING WALTER FISHER’S NARRATIVE THEORY TO THREE PRESIDENTIAL CRISIS SPEECHES

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University of Nebraska, 2003

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This study applies Walter Fisher’s narrative theory of communication to a rhetorical analysis of three presidential crisis speeches: President George W. Bush’s speech on September 20, 2001 after the terrorist attacks, President Franklin Roosevelt’s Pearl Harbor speech on December 8, 1941 and President Bill Clinton’s Oklahoma City bombing speech on April 23, 1995. The speeches were analyzed to discover the accuracy of the theory, why the speeches were successful and if they supported the case for a presidential crisis communication genre.

Three main conclusions resulted from this rhetorical analysis. First, the theory was verified as accurate because it defined the speeches as successful, which they were. Second, the theory enabled rich description of the speeches’ success, revealing the internal mechanisms and power of exceptional stories. Third, employing the theory
provided confirmation for defining an important genre being debated among
communication scholars, presidential crisis communication.

This study illuminates several important elements for the communication field:
storytelling power, presidential influence and genre. First and foremost this thesis points
to the power of stories in creating shared meaning, in defining history, and in setting
future policy. By tapping into inherently human communication needs and expectations,
stories can become profoundly powerful in characterizing our understanding of history as
it occurred and how it is about to occur. The power of the president in creating meaning
during national crises cannot be overstated. Given the power of these types of presidential
 crisis orations in setting policy and creating definitions for posterity, they must be given
due academic and critical attention, in part by attaining classification as a unique genre.
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

On the crushing, surreal and tragic day of September 11, 2001, terrorists indiscriminately plucked the lives of thousands of innocent people in New York City, Washington D.C. and Pennsylvania. As a shocked and grieving nation searched to understand the horror and death (Begley, 2001), President George W. Bush gave what critics have called the speech, one for the history books. Media declared his oratory on September 20 to Congress as eloquent, inspired and reassuring (Apple, 2001; Broder 2001; Brownstein, 2001; Kurtz, Sept. 21, 2001; Saltzman, 2001; Shales, 2001; Thomas, 2001). Polls taken after the speech showed almost unanimous public support for the president and his call to eradicate terrorists (Broder, 2001; Matthews, 2001; Post-ABC Poll, 2001; Shales, 2001).

President Bush’s job as leader of the United States after the September 11 tragedy was heralded, where his very right to be president had been previously questioned after a bitter presidential election with questionable results (Brownstein, 2001; Fineman, 2001, Succeeding when it matters; Matthews, 2001), in which he won the presidency by the slimmest electoral margin since 1876 (Duffy, 2002). People magazine declared the president one of the 25 most intriguing people of the year 2001, saying that despite being the first president since 1888 to lose the popular election, and despite his “oddball speech patterns” (p. 51), President George W. Bush had risen to the occasion after the September 11 attacks and was now regarded in a different light than he was during his first months as president (Everybody’s president: George W. Bush, 2001).
Why did critics and, according to polls, the U.S. people rally behind the president following one pivotal speech? "Well, we can’t make fun of Bush anymore; he’s smart now," quipped Jay Leno during his monologue on the Tonight Show on September 24, 2001.

As I listened to Bush’s speech on September 20, I was spellbound by the president’s words. As he spoke about the innocent victims and heroes and what the nation must do next, he weaved a powerful tale. He told the story of September 11 and galvanized viewers with a call to action for the United States. The country was going to fight terrorism across the globe. The story’s ending was a call to war, a war against terrorism. He both eulogized the dead and pushed the nation into war.

The power of Bush’s speech resulted from the power of his story, or narrative, as he addressed a crisis situation. Two landmark speeches given by two other U.S. presidents occurred in similar situations, wielding powerful stories with similar results. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s speech after the attack on Pearl Harbor and President Bill Clinton’s speech after the Oklahoma City bombing are the two speeches perhaps most similar to Bush’s. All three speeches occurred after tragedies in the U.S., massive death and widespread fear and sorrow. Americans looked to their head of state for answers and for direction, for consolation and reassurance, these three presidents delivered through their speeches.

Not only were the three speeches remarkable, but they are alike enough in structure and message to fall into the same category, or speech genre. Communication scholars have debated the existence of a speech category into which these speeches would fit, a potential genre called presidential crisis communication. I support this call for a new genre with the findings of my study.
When I embarked on this study, President Bush’s speech was called a defining moment in his presidency. The same is true of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s Pearl Harbor speech and President Bill Clinton’s speech at a memorial ceremony after the Oklahoma City federal building bombing. The speeches were, by all counts, brilliant and successful. They addressed the crises at hand and set a course of action while embodying the patriotic American ideals. They were eloquently written and spoken. They had a clear, logical progression from beginning to end. All of these characteristics equate to a well-told story.

It is through the power of their stories that I explain the success of the speeches. Human beings are storytellers. Movies, books, newscasts or a presidential address – these forms of communication relay a “story,” a narrative. The study of stories, of narration, is a useful means of studying human communication. Theorists propose that stories are what weave the fabric of society (Mumby, 1993; Real, 1996).

Walter Fisher’s narrative theory is the most comprehensive in the body of knowledge on the narrative approach to communication. Fisher proposes that all human communication can be viewed as narrative, or story telling, a concept he calls *homo narrans*.

By applying Fisher’s theory to a rhetorical criticism of the three crisis speeches, I provide insight in three ways: (1) explaining how or why the speeches were effective, (2) gaining a better understanding of the analytical power of Fisher’s narrative paradigm, and (3) adding to the scholarly dialogue supporting presidential crisis rhetoric as its own speech genre. In other words, I learn why the speeches were successful, demonstrate the usefulness of Fisher’s theory and add to the evidence for a new speech genre.
Review of Literature

Narrative Theory

This study looks at the power of the presidents’ narratives to surmise their success and similarities among each other and with similar communication. The term narrative generally means a recognized way of portraying a worldview by describing a situation which includes characters, actions and settings occurring in some sort of sequence, more commonly known as a story (Foss, 1996). The presidents’ stories are important because stories exercise social control, and they are a major medium for the continuity of culture and society (Mumby, 1993). Stories are a universal format for passing along knowledge and ideas (Littlejohn, 1992). People identify with a story’s characters and their steps toward resolution as a means of achieving psychological satisfaction (Real, 1996).

Social scientists who focus on story telling in the study of communication do so from an interactionist perspective. This approach advocates that human interaction creates meaning and establishes and maintains social groups and culture (Littlejohn, 1992). Human communication can be viewed in light of people structuring reality by telling stories. (Littlejohn, 1992).

Studying communication as story telling, or narrative, within the communication discipline means employing narrative theory. Communication theorist Howard Kamler expresses the importance of narrative and narrative theory in this way:

Any communication is a sharing of stories. Most stories seem to cry out to be shared. And getting shared is perhaps the most profound function of stories. Stories are the stuff of communication. And the sharing of them is what
transforms persons into communal beings. In trading our stories back and forth
for inspection, agreement, disagreement, we are involved in the activity of
making ourselves members of a community. Public story trade is at the heart of
the social miracle about persons (Kamler, 1983, p. 49).

One of the more complete theories studying human communication as narration is
Walter Fisher’s narrative theory, which I apply in this thesis. In his 1987 book Human
Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value and Action, Fisher
spells out the assumptions of what he calls the narrative paradigm. Human beings are inherently
storytellers, an idea he calls “homo narrans” (p. 62). All human communication can be viewed
as narrative, as stories. Technical manuals, physics lectures, argumentative communication,
paintings, movies, nonverbal communication and conversations – these and all forms of human
communication which have a sequence of events and to which the audience assigns meaning
are stories, and they can be studied using Fisher’s narrative paradigm. The paradigm describes
human communication rather than indicating what communicators should do to elicit a certain
response from the audience. Stories are either well told or not, and Fisher explains how to
determine the good from the bad with his three main concepts of narrative rationality,
probability and fidelity.

Narrative Rationality

Fisher believes all communication can be assessed through the concept of “narrative
rationality” (p. 47). A story is interpreted as “good” or “bad” by the audience depending on
whether or not it makes sense to them, based on what they know or have experienced. The
criteria people naturally use to judge a story involves two key principles in Fisher's theory: narrative probability and narrative fidelity.

**Narrative Probability**

Narrative probability is a story's coherence. It is determined in three ways: by its "argumentative" or "structural coherence," by its "material coherence," and by its "characterological coherence" (Fisher, 1987, p. 47). Determining the quality of each can be summarized as follows:

*Structural coherence*: How well does the story "hang together" (p. 47) and how internally consistent is it?

*Material coherence*: How does the story compare and contrast to other communication, particularly what the audience has learned previously? A story is likely to be more believable if it matches what an audience expects.

*Characterological coherence*: How reliable are the characters, both as narrators and actors? A character's believability is determined by interpreting the character's decisions and actions that reflect values. Human beings automatically question a character if his actions are contradictory or change in unusual ways. Humans look for reliability to establish trust within society; therefore, a key factor in whether or not to accept a message is based on determining a character's motives, a prerequisite for trust.

**Narrative Fidelity**

If a story is going to persuade, it must not only have coherence but it must also have fidelity. Fidelity is the story's truthfulness based on the logic of "good reasons." Good reasons
are determined by the audience, which uses critical questions about fact, relevance, consequence, consistency and transcendental issues. Fidelity is figured from the audience’s perspective. It is judged in five steps:

1. By determining if the story has values.
2. By judging if the values are appropriate for the story’s moral or the character’s actions.
3. By deciding if the values have positive consequences in the lives of people.
4. By determining if the story’s values are in agreement with the audience’s.
5. By deciding if the values are part of an ideal script for social behavior.

(Fisher, 1987)

A well-told story rings true for the listener or audience. Now that we understand how Fisher’s theory works, the next section of this study delves into how researchers have applied the theory in determining whether or not a narrative is successful.

**Application of Fisher’s Narrative Theory**

I describe studies utilizing Fisher’s theory in this section in some detail. The studies demonstrate how to apply the theory and offer sound arguments or rationale for findings. I reference their methods and rationale in my study’s own findings, and I therefore have found it necessary to adequately describe them. Because narrative theory is a critical approach, more than one interpretation of the speeches can be made. It is up to the critic to offer compelling justification of findings, and these studies add to my rationale later in this thesis.

Prior studies not only demonstrate application of the theory, but also reveal the flexibility of the theory. Fisher’s narrative theory has been used in an array of communication
research, from group communications (Witmer, 1997), to movies (Rusher-Hocking, 1985), to analysis of war motivations (Carpenter, 1986) and trials (Carlson, 1991). These studies have shown the power of good narrative, as Fisher defines it, to achieve desired results in a variety of different settings and communication mediums. While the sampling reviewed here varies widely in the form of communication studied, all studies show the power of the right narrative applied to the right audience in affecting behavior. Fisher himself also applied his theory to research, and I summarize several of his studies as well.

**Group Reactions — Toughlove, Alcoholics Anonymous and Israel’s West Bank**

Studies show that groups in extreme or emotional situations can bind together to overcome great challenges at least in part by creating and adhering to narratives. These shared stories are relevant in discerning why Americans reacted to the presidents’ speeches in this study as they did. Researchers have demonstrated that when the principles of good narrative, in the context of the narrative paradigm, are evident within group communications, human behavior can be affected. In other words, what the narrative proposes will be believed and carried out.

Thomas Hollihan and Patricia Riley (1987) studied the narrative communication of a “Toughlove” parental support group, parents with misbehaving or delinquent children. They tested Fisher’s narrative paradigm by applying it to identifying the Toughlove story and its appeal. Group meetings were found to be storytelling sessions. Members created a powerful cohesive story that it was not parents who were failing, but their children. Children had to learn the consequences of their actions. Individual family tales were the “good reasons” for reverting back to the more old-fashioned, stricter form of parenting. This theme, among others,
contained fidelity because the parents recalled their own rearing. The story also established a course of action for the parents to follow, which they did.

A similar group, Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) was studied by Diane Witmer (1997) with Fisher’s concept of “good reasons.” To determine why it was the largest and most successful AA group, Witmer collected the stories of members concerning their alcoholism and recovery, surmising that these narratives were likely the good reasons the group had such a high rate of sobriety. The stories defined and verified what was true for the individuals telling the stories and for other group members, spurring all members to stay sober.

In another group study, Katriel and Shenhar (1990) looked at cultural narratives and their role in Israeli settlements in the West Bank. Narrative themes discovered included the values of self-reliance, endurance, courage and sacrifice needed to achieve the nearly miraculous feat of establishing a new settlement. The researchers also found an opposing narrative on how clever the weak must be as victims. In this story, the Israelis were a weak people seeking safe refuge during migration. The researchers found these two narratives to be at odds and determined that the settlement story of self-reliance and sacrifice endured because it rang truer with the settlers. The stronger story theme helped enable the Israelis to establish settlements and persevere once settled.

**Characterological Coherence – The Influence of Sea Power Upon History**

Characterological coherence also explains the power of a story to propel a population into action. Ronald Carpenter (1986) focused on characterological coherence as he studied Alfred Thayer Mahan’s book first published in 1890, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History*, and its effects upon the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.
Carpenter found that the Japanese navy leaders who planned and executed the attack were deeply influenced by Mahan's work because it contained tremendous narrative fidelity for them. They closely identified with Mahan's tales of British superiority on the high seas because they saw in their nation many of the same characteristics and capabilities and concluded that they, too, could have world naval superiority. Absolute belief in the fidelity of Mahan led the Japanese to follow his strategies exactly. As a result, they did not completely destroy the U.S. Navy's ability to respond in the Pacific, which was the reason for the attack.

*Walter Fisher's Research – Death of a Salesman and Ronald Reagan*

Fisher himself demonstrated the breadth and flexibility of his theory and how to test for various elements of a good story in several of his own studies. In one study, he reviewed a single artifact, dissecting the play *Death of a Salesman* (Fisher, 1987, chapter 8). He focused on the message, on the individual parts that constitute the message, and on the worthiness or desirability of what was said – which can be evaluated by the narrative rationality tests of coherence and reliability. In administering his test, he (1) focused on the sequences of symbolic actions and their meaning; (2) kept in mind that no text is devoid of historical, situational and biographical context; and (3) bore in mind that the meaning and value of any account are always influenced by how the story compares to other stories the audience knows and believes to be true.

*Death of a Salesman* attempts to illustrate the proverbial American Dream, a land of endless opportunity. The play has fidelity because the main character, Willy Loman, destroys himself through a set of illusions, which are imbedded in the American Dream. Audience
members have met or known someone like Willy, which gives the play its reality, or fidelity. The play is also well told and has cohesion.

Fisher analyzed a group of artifacts when he studied the narrative of President Ronald Reagan (Fisher, 1987, chapter 7). He explored why Reagan was called the Great Communicator despite his reputation for making factual errors and inconsistencies or contradictions in his statements. Fisher reasoned that Reagan’s story seemingly fails the tests of the narrative paradigm, in its fidelity to fact and soundness of form and relevance. However, Reagan’s narrative overall was winning because of the strength of his story and his character.

Fisher determined the president’s story was rooted in individualism, that Americans are heroic, in essence consistently decrying “act according to our heroic nature and our destiny is assured” (p. 146). His popularity stemmed from the coherence and fidelity the American public felt about his messages. The story was also eagerly believed because of its timing and the type of stories with which it competed. During the 1980 presidential election, the public was ready for a strong leader after the reign of President Jimmy Carter who was “widely seen as weak” (p. 147). With such markedly different stories, Carter became the anti-hero and Reagan the hero (p. 147).

Reagan’s success was propelled by his character, which met the test of coherence (trustworthy, reliable, heart in the right place) and therefore the public was willing to overlook small issues like minor factual errors or occasional discrepancies. The public so idealized Reagan and his “Teflon personality” (p. 148) that the characters of Reagan’s critics were more often questioned than Reagan’s character. Reagan’s character embodied the American Dream, which is a combination of the materialistic ideal of individuals succeeding and the moralistic
ideal of brotherhood. Additionally, Reagan’s decisive views and personality cast him as a hero from the Old West. With his California origins, tall and rugged looks and his horses, Reagan’s character was coherent with his message of a great America.

Reagan also defined the public as heroic. Describing a person as a hero appeals to a person’s ego and reminds them that they can face hardships and prevail. This is a point directly relevant to this study. The three presidential speeches I review were given during times of great difficulty, and in the orations, Americans were addressed as virtuous and righteous – as heroes.

In another finding directly applicable to this thesis, Fisher concluded that Reagan’s coherence and fidelity were so strong that the public did not apply strict rational criteria to his discourse. He was so appealing to the public that story or factual inconsistencies were simply overlooked. Later in this paper, I will discuss how this same public reaction applies to the three speeches explored in my study.

As part of his material coherence concept, Fisher calls for asking what the audience expected from a speech based on the audience’s previous experience in similar situations. To begin understanding the audiences’ expectations, we must understand presidential rhetoric in general.

**Presidential Rhetoric**

The three speeches in this study are examples of presidential rhetoric. Rhetoric has been classified in many ways, but for the purpose of this thesis, the definition of rhetoric is a type of discourse that is planned, adapted to an audience, shaped by human motives, responsive to a situation and persuasion-seeking (Herrick, 2001).
Much study on the rhetoric of modern presidents has been undertaken, and I add to that body of knowledge. Additionally, existing research on modern presidential rhetoric is important to understanding an audience's expectation, a key element in Fisher's theory. The modern presidency is defined as beginning post-World War II, starting with President Franklin Roosevelt. Modern presidents are grouped together because they are encapsulated by media coverage, attuned to their public image and apt to position decision-making processes in the media limelight (Kiewe, 1994). The modern, twentieth century presidency is one that has been labeled the rhetorical presidency because of its reliance on discourse. Modern presidents, in the view of some, have turned the office into the “bully pulpit” (Kiewe, 1998, p. 79) for setting public policy (Tulis, 1987).

All presidents are necessarily rhetorical presidents. They lead the country through communication, both written and spoken. They execute their office through words (Tulis, 1996). Presidential speeches influence the public's feelings and attitudes (Perloff, 1988), and that is certainly true of the speeches reviewed in this thesis.

Nineteenth-century presidents focused their communication on Congress, largely in writing. On the other hand, modern presidents more frequently appeal to Congress in verbal performance with an aim for popular appeal. Modern presidents regularly go to the popular masses to influence or override Congress by gaining popular support of initiatives. This means of governing has become an accepted and expected political process (Tulis, 1987).

Direct presidential appeal to the public can be valuable periodically but is not necessarily the best political venue when the tactic becomes routine. The regular use of what some consider to be a crisis management tool is akin to the old fairy tale of the boy who cried
wolf. The American public will or has become unable to tell the difference between real crises, like the ones addressed in this study, or created crises (Tulis, 1987). Rhetoric directed at the masses is undoubtedly necessary to address true crisis situations such as depression and war (Tulis, 1996).

The modern presidency relies on popular appeal, even in a crisis situation, like the circumstances surrounding the speeches I analyzed. Presidential speaking in the media age has heightened the art and importance of persuasion and has conditioned presidents to be well adapted to influencing the public. The presidency of today is in large part the creation of an image, and with constant public exposure this image-making is crucial for a president’s political survival (Kiewe, 1994). Gaining and maintaining the public’s support is a key goal of a president today (Denton & Woodward, 1998).

Scholars agree that the president establishes the tone and outlook of the nation through communication. Getting things done while in office, for example, pushing bills through Congress, is one role of the president. Another is being the country’s “storyteller in chief” (White, 1997, p. 54). The public expects the president to define national goals and to find solutions to national problems (Denton & Woodward, 1998). He represents the nation and as such his role is chief communicator. Today’s political process has grown into “an unfolding drama whose primary features are persona and narrative” (Kiewe, 1998, p. 80).

Presidents considered more successful than others have been those known for their rhetorical abilities, including Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, Franklin D. Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton. Presidents whose terms have been described as less than inspiring are those with the least rhetorical ability,
including Calvin Coolidge, Herbert Hoover, Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter and George Bush. Successful modern presidents not only possess strong leadership, negotiation skills and the ability to foster strong relationships with members of Congress, but they also possess strong rhetorical skills that allow them to communicate and persuade effectively (Kiewe, 1998).

President Reagan, for example, was known as the Great Communicator. He told stories that Americans wanted to hear by weaving tales of heroism and of a country with a special and exceptional place among the nations of the world. He talked to the public like they were great Americans and he spoke about this country as if it were a great American nation. Reagan evoked the American Dream, stating that our country was the land of opportunity where every man and woman had the chance to excel and prosper (White, 1997).

President Clinton, like Reagan, used ceremonial occasions to tell stories to relay values, and this regular tactic is important in understanding his Oklahoma City speech. As an example of his pervasive story telling, in his 1995 State of the Union Address, Clinton told six stories about citizens and how they embodied American ideals:

- Lynn Woolsey from California, a single mom once on welfare and now a Congresswoman;
- Cindy Perry from Kentucky, mother of four who earned her high school equivalency and became a teacher;
- Steve Bishop, Kansas City police chief who created an innovative means to patrol communities;
- Corporal Gregory Depestre who was part of the U.S. military forces who landed in Haiti to stabilize that nation;
• Reverends Diane and John Cherry from Washington, D.C., whose church was making great efforts in high crime and drug neighborhoods; and

• Jack Lucas from Mississippi, World War II veteran who during the Battle of Iwo Jima threw himself on a grenade to save several other soldiers, becoming the youngest person to earn a Congressional Medal of Honor (White, 1997).

Clinton effectively used these stories to portray moral lessons. He spoke of responsibility, opportunity and citizenship in his stories and throughout his speech (White, 1997).

Now that I have explained modern presidential rhetoric, a more specific form of this rhetoric must be explored to understand the speeches that occurred under unique circumstances. A crisis was ensuing when each of the presidents stepped to the podium. Each president had to calm, unite and propel to action an uncertain people awash with fear and sorrow.

**Presidential Crisis Rhetoric**

A more defined type of presidential rhetoric is presidential crisis rhetoric, a category into which all three speeches in this thesis fit. Delving into this distinct category is important because in Fisher’s narrative theory, understanding what an audience expects out of a particular story is important. A crisis is a unique kind of situation, and the public is likely to expect certain elements in communication from the president in a crisis.

Several scholars have proposed that presidential crisis rhetoric may be its own genre. Communication scholars debate this notion and this study adds to the support for a specific category or genre for presidential crisis communication.
Genre is explored because Fisher’s theory calls for it in his narrative probability concept. A genre is a group of discourse “which share similar substantive, stylistic and situational characteristics” (Campbell & Jamieson, 1978, p. 20). Discourse that fit into a genre share similar substantive and stylistic strategies in situations perceived as similar by the audience. Human needs and former exposure to rhetorical forms create expectations that serve to constrain or shape rhetoric (Campbell & Jamieson, 1978).

A rhetorical genre is a fusion, or clustering of three elements, creating a unique kind of rhetorical artifact. The elements are:

- *situational requirements* (an audience’s perception that a situation calls for certain types of rhetorical responses),
- *substantive and stylistic characteristics* (features chosen by the author or speaker to respond to situational requirements – substantive = characteristics that comprise the content; stylistic = the rhetoric’s form); and
- *the organizing principle* (the internal dynamic of the fusion formed by the substantive, stylistic and situational features of a genre) (Foss, 1996).

One example of a defined speech genre is the eulogy. A community is affected by death. People must accept that the deceased is no longer living, and they also realize their own mortality. Eulogizing by definition acknowledges the death, and in doing so looks at the deceased person’s life and switches relationships with the deceased into the past tense. By assuring the memory of the deceased will live on, the rhetor eases survivors’ confrontations with their own mortality. The eulogy also performs another important role in uniting the bereaving, hence confirming that the community will survive the death at hand. The typical
eulogy ties together the community by appealing to the survivors to carry on the work of or to embody the virtues of or to live as the deceased would have wanted (Campbell & Jamieson, 1978).

Several scholars have proposed establishing a genre for presidential crisis rhetoric. For example, Kiewe (1994) believes it may warrant its own genre, but specific research would need to be conducted for a definitive answer. Kiewe asserts that a crisis evokes images of an event that is unique and threatening. In a crisis, a president can define the situation and in essence construct a reality he wants the public to believe. Presidential crisis rhetoric is unique because of the urgency of the situation (Kiewe, 1994). Denton and Woodward (1998) assert that as a society, Americans have a propensity to believe in great leaders who will save the country from perils, leaders who will cope with crises, and that is precisely the role the president plays as the head of the nation. In contrast to ordinary events surrounding presidential speech, crisis situations innately have a sense of urgency and call for decisions and actions that are beyond the ordinary. Communities in crisis situations expect strong leadership and discourse. Communities seek a return to normalcy (Kiewe, 1998).

Cherwitz and Zagacki (1986) point to their analysis of international crisis situations as support for presidential crisis rhetoric as its own genre. They found recurring features in presidential crisis messages that shape the public’s expectations. They put forth the notion that the patterns evident in the president’s crisis rhetoric are so ingrained in the American psyche that the public immediately recognizes the patterns. These patterns and expectations fit the definition of genre. The researchers further defined the potential genre with two subcategories, consummatory (for resolving international crises through means other than military force) and
justificatory (for announcing military action that has been set into action to resolve crises).

Rasmussen (1973) took these subcategories a step further by suggesting justificatory rhetoric was in itself its own genre. Her findings follow:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics of consummatory presidential rhetoric</th>
<th>1. Need for immediate action</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. The crisis is overseas or otherwise removed from the American public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. The public has little information on the crisis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. The president’s justification is based on the traditional notion of free world leadership, or an anti-Communist or nuclear threat theme</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arguments used in justificatory presidential rhetoric</th>
<th>1. The United States must take action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. The action addresses threats, is morally right and strategically advantageous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. The action is a good one compared to alternatives and what the enemy may have in store</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some scholars disagree with defining presidential crisis rhetoric as its own genre. Dow (1989) has reviewed studies and determined that there are not enough similarities in the speeches that have been analyzed to define a separate genre. She believes an exhaustive study of all crisis rhetoric would be needed to be able to define a genre. Farrell and Goodnight (1981) further declare that a crisis unfolds at its own pace and with its own peculiarities. It is impossible to lump crisis communications together because each crisis is unique and demands its own type of rhetoric in response. In their study of the 1979 Three Mile Island incident, they found that typical communication patterns were lacking. The event was very technical, and scientists, technicians and politicians all spoke their own language to the public, creating chaotic communication. Farrell and Goodnight use this example to support their conclusion
that in a crisis situation, it is likely to be almost impossible to communicate at all, let alone to communicate with clear patterns. Crisis rhetoric does not have consistent characteristics according to Farrell and Goodnight.

My findings in this study add to the support for a genre because each of the speeches fits Kiewe’s proposed definition for the genre. Kiewe states that rhetoric which fits into this category is “discourse initiated by decision makers in an attempt to communicate to various constituents that a certain development is critical and to suggest a certain course of action to remedy the critical situation” (Kiewe, 1994, p. xvii). Kiewe further defines presidential crisis rhetoric in this way:

Crisis rhetoric is distinct from non-crisis rhetoric to the extent that it characterizes a unique and dynamic process. The perceptions of immediacy and urgency, and the public’s expectation of strong leadership qualities during crises, require discourse that can seemingly resolve critical situations. Such discourse is expected to offer quick solutions, preserve the strength and integrity of the nation and its leadership, justify necessary action, garner support for action, correct misperceptions and recover from setbacks. Crises, then, offer unique challenges to those managing them. They can be seen as opportunities to mold images beyond the usual practices of political discourse, but they can also be seen as threats to the decision maker’s overall standing in the public’s eye (Kiewe, 1994, p. xviii).
Kiewe surmises that presidential crisis rhetoric "often aims at an affirmation of cherished values and norms by offering continuity and a sense of stability at critical junctures when discontinuity and breakdown in norms and values are the feared outcome" (Kiewe, 1994, p. xxxiii).

A breakdown in norms certainly occurred when Roosevelt, Clinton and Bush gave their speeches, and the presidents' roles were to reassure Americans of their values. We now look at the crisis situations surrounding each of the presidential speeches, for without understanding the situations, we cannot fully evaluate the rhetoric.

The Speeches

President Roosevelt's December 8, 1941 Speech Following the Attack on Pearl Harbor

Events preceding the speech. On December 7, 1941, the United States was attacked by the Japanese in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, resulting in the death of 2,400 people (Begley, 2001). American citizens had not been aware of the immediate threat to the United States (Baker, 1970; Reid, 1988). In December 1939, Roosevelt reportedly himself said that the public did not have any deep sense that the world was in crisis (Baker, 1970). World War II raged on the other side of the globe, but for more than two years prior to the Japanese attack, the United States looked on to the battlefields of Europe without entering the war (Graham, 1970).

When President Franklin Delano Roosevelt took his third oath of office in January 1941, violence was overtaking the world as Germany, Italy and Japan sought to deliver a new world order (Baker, 1970). While the American public reportedly did not realize the overseas threat was also a threat to the United States, President Roosevelt reportedly understood that Adolph Hitler and the emperor of Japan considered the United States to be the real enemy (Baker, 1970). England lacked the manpower to raise an assault against continental Europe,
Russia lacked the industrial base to carry on a modern war, and France was defeated – that left only the United States with enough manpower and resources to fight and defeat Germany, Japan and Italy (Baker 1970).

The United States was preparing for war when Japan struck Pearl Harbor, although the public seemingly had not realized this. Days before the attack, two major newspapers ran headlines on the United States’ war plans. On December 3, 1941, the Chicago Daily Tribune and its subsidiary the Washington Times-Herald ran the headline “F.D.R’s War Plans!” (Thompson, 1991, p. 385). The article referenced a top-secret war plan calling for five million Army and Navy forces to defeat Germany and the other aggressors. The Victory Plan, as it was called, had been requested by Roosevelt but not yet approved (Thompson, 1991).

Also in the days before the attack, President Roosevelt and Secretary of State Cordell Hull had been negotiating with the Japanese to try and keep the peace (Baird, 1956), but to no avail. Americans were not aware of the serious Japanese threat which was lightly covered in the media, if at all (Reid, 1988). The Pearl Harbor attack was different from the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks because at Pearl Harbor the enemy was known and Americans knew that the U.S. would have to respond by entering World War II (Begley, 2001).

**FDR’s speech.** Roosevelt’s war address was the first one heard live by the American public (Reid, 1988). The public was in shock: Americans had been directly attacked on their own soil and seem to have been horribly defeated; rumors were spreading like wildfire across the country; and in the air was a feeling of heightened fear and uncertainty (Reid, 1988). The president did not have to go to great lengths to convince Americans of the need to go to war,
but he needed to clarify what was happening while encouraging a positive outlook (Reid, 1988).

The president gave a brief, direct war message (Baird, 1956) entitled “A Date Which Will Live in Infamy.” Roosevelt reportedly drafted the speech in his head after dictating to his secretary a request to Congress to declare war (National Archives and Records Administration, 2001). Roosevelt had decided that the best approach was a brief, straightforward appeal to the people of the United States on the need to go to war. He had the speech typed and made revisions to strengthen its tone. One significant change was made to the first line, which originally read “a date which will live in world history” (National Archives and Records Administration, 2001). He added details right up to the time of his speech as facts of the attack became available (Baird, 1956).

The president read the speech on December 8, 1941, at 12:30 p.m. Eastern standard time, addressing a joint session of Congress and the public through a live radio feed in the House chamber, which was crowded with members of Congress, the Supreme Court and other onlookers who overflowed into the House’s gallery (Baird, 1956). The president was greeted with a roaring crowd filled with “shouts, cheers and rebel yells” and he spoke “slowly, solemnly, distinctly” (Baird, 1956, p. 265) for a total of six minutes (Thompson, 1991). His speech was followed by a rousing ovation (Baird, 1956).

One hour later (Thompson, 1991), the Senate unanimously supported the declaration of war on the empire of Japan, and only one member of the House of Representatives did not vote in favor of it. Roosevelt signed the war declaration at 4 p.m. the same day (Baird, 1956;
Four days later Germany declared war against the U.S., and the country entered World War II (Thompson, 1991). Roosevelt’s speech is listed as number four on the list of top 100 speeches of the 20th century as compiled by the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Texas A & M University, reflecting the opinions of 127 leading scholars of American public speeches (University of Wisconsin-Madison and Texas A & M University, 1999). President Clinton’s Oklahoma City speech is ranked on that same list.

President Bill Clinton’s 1995 Speech After the Oklahoma City Bombing

Events preceding the speech. President William Jefferson Clinton became the 42nd president of the United States in January 1993 (Levy, 2002). Just over two years later the Oklahoma City federal building was bombed. On April 19, 1995, the country experienced this ghastly attack that left the citizens of the United States feeling powerless and vulnerable (Alter, 2001). The bombing was the deadliest case of domestic terrorism in United States’ history (Levy, 2002). Oklahoma City was in many people’s minds easier to take and easier to understand than the September 11, 2001 attacks because it was the work of one or several madmen, albeit locally grown terrorists (Alter, 2001).

The explosion was achieved by a truck bomb exploding outside the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, killing 168 people including many children at a day care center on the second floor of the building (Berman, 2001; Levy, 2002). Hours after the bombing, police arrested Timothy McVeigh (Waldman, 2000), a former military serviceman with ties to para-military groups. He was charged two days later (Waldman, 2000) and ultimately convicted of conspiracy and murder and given the death penalty for his crime (Alter,
Terry Nichols, who obtained materials to construct the bomb, was convicted of conspiracy and involuntary manslaughter. Prosecutors and news media hypothesized the two were involved with anti-government groups (Levy, 2002). The bombing took place exactly two years after a government raid in Waco, Texas on the Branch Dividians, and speculation abounded in the media that the Oklahoma attack may have been directly related to Waco (Levy, 2002).

On April 19, the White House learned of the Oklahoma City explosion at 10 a.m., through CNN. President Clinton was meeting with Turkish Prime Minister Tansu Ciller at the time and the meetings continued through noon, when key White House staff and the president met to assess the situation and determine when the president would make a statement. Clinton addressed the nation at 5:30 p.m., during which he stated he would bring justice to the “evil cowards” responsible for the explosion and that “justice will be swift, certain and severe” (Drew, 1996, p. 196). Several days later on a Saturday, the president turned his regular morning radio address into a televised event in the oval office with children of federal workers, during which the he spoke about the tragedy and loss of life. The next day the he planted a dogwood on the White House South Lawn in memory of those who lost their lives (Drew, 1996).

**Clinton’s speech.** That same Sunday afternoon, four days after the Oklahoma City bombing, President Clinton gave a nationally televised memorial speech (Waldman, 2000) at the state fairgrounds where more than 20,000 mourners had gathered (Sullivan, 1995). It was the country’s first exposure to Clinton in the role of chief mourner and for many U.S. citizens he truly became a president on that day (Waldman, 2000).
Listed as number 92 on the list of top 100 speeches of the 20th century (University of Wisconsin-Madison, et al, 1999), President Clinton’s speech at the prayer service for victims of the Oklahoma City bombing on April 23, 1995, in Oklahoma City was moving (Berman, 2001). It gave the American public the opportunity to see him acting as a leader in a time of crisis as he eloquently consoled a grieving country (Berman, 2001, Gelderman, 1997). He spoke somberly of the deaths and shocking tragedy (Schier, 2000), delivering a powerful and moving eulogy (Gelderman, 1997). Clinton knew the role of a eulogy in honoring the dead and taking from their deaths lessons for the living, and his “touch was sure…novice orators go overboard” (Waldman, 2000, p. 82) but Clinton did not. He was President Clinton “at his preacherly best” (Gelderman, 1997, p. 166). His remarks provided hope and solace for survivors, family and friends of the victims, and for all Americans (Gelderman, 1997). His memorial speech was a defining moment for him, his delivery touching the nation (Kiefer, 2000).

Clinton seemed to understand the importance and reach of a president’s words for the first time in his presidency (Littwin, 2001; McGrory, 1995; Neikirk, 1995; Page, 1996). For many people, Clinton “truly became a president” (Waldman, 2000, p. 82) during the days following the bombing. It was the first time in his presidency that he stood as a reassuring figure rather than an unsettling one (Waldman, 2000). In the words of one political analyst, the speech “caused many people to take a second look at him, after a rocky two years in office … it proved a turning point in his presidency” (Rothberg, 1996, p. 1). The tragedy and President Clinton’s response reminded Americans what they liked about Clinton (Schneider, 1995).
Days after the speech an NBC/Wall Street Journal poll showed that 84 percent of respondents approved how he was handling the Oklahoma City bombing (Berman, 2001). Before his Oklahoma City speech, Clinton was faltering in the political arena, with little or no leverage on issues key to his presidential agenda like welfare reform (Schier, 2000). After the 1996 elections, Clinton reportedly reflected with a pool of reporters on Air Force One that he owed his political revival to the bombing (Evans Pritchard, 1997). While his public image before the speech was floundering, he was seen in a new light immediately after the speech (Littwin, 2001, Schier, 2000).

The shock of Oklahoma City was to be magnified six years later by the newest date of infamy. Our 43rd president, George W. Bush, had to lead the nation through the crisis that has been called “9/11.”

President George W. Bush’s September 20 Speech

Events preceding Bush’s speech. September 11, 2001 was dubbed “Day of Infamy” by news media across the country, in reference to the attack on the United States at Pearl Harbor (Kelly, 2001; Thomas, 2001). On September 11, terrorists used airplanes to bomb the World Trade Center Twin Towers in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. Another attempted hijacking was thwarted in Pennsylvania. Thousands of people died. It was the bloodiest day in the United States since the Civil War (Kelly, 2001). For the first time, all flights over the United States were halted (Thomas, 2001).

President Bush was at an elementary school in Sarasota, Florida when the attacks occurred and was immediately rushed to Air Force One, where his security team decided he
would be safest (Fineman, 2001, A president faces the test). He flew to Barksdale Air Force Base, Louisiana, and gave a short statement, saying the following:

Freedom itself was attacked this morning by a faceless coward, and freedom will not be defeated. But make no mistake: the United States will hunt down and punish those responsible for these cowardly acts (Thomas, 2001).

Bush then flew to U.S. Strategic Command at Offutt Air Force Base in Bellevue, Nebraska, and returned that evening to the White House in Washington, D.C. where he gave a short speech to the nation (Thomas, 2001). His speech from the Oval Office was described as reassuring but not overly memorable nor inspiring (Fineman, 2001, A president faces the test; Kurtz, Sept. 17, 2001; Pooley & Tumulty, 2001). His decision to fly to the Midwest rather than return to Washington, D.C. was criticized in the media and reportedly by members of Congress (Fineman, 2001, A president faces the test).

In the days and weeks following the terrorist attacks, Bush conveyed grief, outrage and sadness, either in planned and well-worded speeches or in angry off-the-cuff statements (Balz, 2001). Bush was dubbed “communicator-in-chief” by the Los Angeles Times (McManus, 2001) in the days after the September 11 attacks because of his seemingly non-stop media appearances, a sharp contrast to his pre-attack, rather scant media appearance (Balz, 2001).

As the appearances mounted in the days after the attacks, Time magazine echoed the growing sentiment in the mass media, declaring that Bush was finding his voice and becoming the kind of leader the United States needed (Carlson, 2001). The president spoke without talking points and with emotion during appearances, transforming his presidency into a true leadership role (Kurtz, Sept. 17, 2001). On September 15, he gave a memorial address at the
National Cathedral which was described as impressive, eloquent and on-the-mark in the mass media (Carlson, 2001; Pooley & Tumulty, 2001). “In time, we will find healing and recovery” the president said at the National Cathedral. “And, in the face of all this evil, we remain strong and united: one nation under God” (George W. Bush: The making of a wartime president, p. 21). As the president’s accolades in the mass media continued to grow, his speech to Congress and the people of the United States was yet to come.

**Bush’s speech.** On September 20, 2001, President Bush addressed Congress and the nation, after 19 speech drafts and 6 rehearsals (Fineman, 2001, Succeeding when it matters most). Preceded by a roaring three-minute ovation from Congress (Warren, 2001), his 34-minute speech was telecast on nine networks and watched by 82 million people (Special events lead the way as TV draws, 2001; Warren, 2001). Eight out of every ten Americans said they watched or listened to the speech according to a Washington Post-ABC News poll taken immediately after the speech (Morin & Deane, 2001). This same poll showed that eight out of ten Americans also felt more confident after the speech that the country could deal with the crisis, and 91 percent of Americans supported the way the president handled the terrorist attacks. Polls taken after the speech showed almost unanimous public support for the president and his call to eradicate terrorists (Broder, 2001; Matthews, 2001; Post-ABC Poll, 2001; Shales, 2001).

Critics raved about his speech. *Washington Post* columnist Richard Cohen’s sentiments summarize mass media commentary on the speech:

The words were perfect, occasionally eloquent, as when he said that the terrorists would follow other extremist groups ‘to history’s unmarked grave of
discarded lies’... He [Bush] seemed steadfast. He seemed determined. He seemed confident... He seemed — this is our American word for it — 'presidential.'

...Meanwhile, the man who was a middling student, a boozer and towel-snapper, an incurious and intellectually inert businessman and governor who back-slapped his way into the presidency, emerged Thursday night as something we terribly needed (Cohen, 2001).

"Echoes of Lincoln" declared Washington Post columnist David Broder on September 23. “Bush was inaugurated eight months ago, but he became president on Thursday night,” Broder wrote. CNN political cartoonist Bill Mitchell captured the media sentiment with his cartoon “W. grows up” (2001) as did Omaha World-Herald cartoonist Jeff Koterba in his "history" cartoon printed on September 23:

"W. grows up," Bill Mitchell, CNN political cartoonist, 2001
Pulitzer prize-winning historian David McCullough was in Omaha the night of Bush's speech, calling Bush's remarks "without question one of the great speeches ever given by a president in our lifetime" (Keenan, 2001). *The New York Times*' editorial declared the speech wise and inclusive, firm and forceful (Mr. Bush's most important speech, 2001). *The Times*' editorial declared that Bush had risen to the challenge of giving the most critical speech of his life, and that the president had rallied Congress and the American people through his oration:

But Mr. Bush accomplished everything he needed to do last night. He was as strong and forthright as the nation could have wished, while also maintaining a calm that must have reassured other nations that the United States will be prudent as well as brave. (Mr. Bush's most important speech, 2001)

During an interview with former President George H. W. Bush on September 27, NBC Nightly News anchor Tom Brokaw described the current president's speech as one of the very best given to Congress and the country. The former president agreed and said the speech would go down in American history as one of the truly great ones.
As Bush approached the podium on September 20 to reassure the American people and to set forth his plan of action for dealing with the terrorist acts, he had no historical guidepost upon which to base his remarks (Balz, 2001). Foreign terrorists had never struck the continental United States. The attack on Pearl Harbor and President Roosevelt’s following speech during World War II is perhaps the closest situation to September 11.

President Bush’s speech was judged by the public and the media as successful, as were President Roosevelt’s and President Clinton’s. This thesis investigates why, and the following sections detail how I carried out the inquiry.
Research Questions

This thesis will analyze President George W. Bush’s speech on September 20, 2001, President Franklin Roosevelt’s Pearl Harbor speech on December 8, 1941, and President Bill Clinton’s Oklahoma City speech on April 23, 1995, through Walter Fisher’s narrative paradigm, using the methodology he defines in his narrative theory and standard methods of rhetorical criticism.

Specifically, this study will attempt to answer the following research questions:

Research Question 1: Did the speeches meet the criteria for success according to Fisher’s narrative theory?

Research Question 2: Do Fisher’s concepts of narrative rationality, probability and fidelity provide useful descriptions of why these examples of presidential crisis rhetoric were successful?

Research Question 3: Will Fisher’s theory expose the same measures of success for each of the presidential crisis speeches, further confirming the concept of presidential crisis communication as a genre?
CHAPTER 2

Methodology

This study is a rhetorical criticism of the three speeches by Presidents Bush, Roosevelt and Clinton through Walter Fisher’s narrative theory. Foss (1996) explains the basic steps of analyzing an artifact through narrative criticism with the following steps:

1. A comprehensive examination of the narrative(s) – aspects such as setting, characters and the narrator (or speaker) and theme are examined. In this step of the analysis, Walter Fisher’s methodology is employed, which is described in detail next in this section. Fisher lays out defined aspects of the rhetoric to study and provides specific questions to ask.

2. Selection of elements on which to focus – after a detailed review of the rhetoric in step one, the researcher must identify which features are most significant and relevant to the research questions. For example, the researcher may find the character of the speaker is most significant in the rhetoric’s persuasive appeal, or that the elements of the story are the most important persuasive element. (Source: Foss, 1996)

In keeping with Foss’ methods, I applied Fisher’s theory to an examination of the speeches. Specifically, the speeches were reviewed in terms of their narrative rationality, a concept Fisher defines as having narrative probability and narrative fidelity, as detailed in the literature review. The following three tables describe what I asked while examining the three speeches to determine their narrative rationality, probability and fidelity.
### Does the speech have narrative rationality?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overarching question:</th>
<th>How to answer the question:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is the discourse a well-told narrative, or story, according to Fisher – does it have narrative rationality?</td>
<td>Does it have narrative probability (see chart below)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does it have narrative fidelity (see chart below)?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Fisher, 1987)

### Does the speech have narrative probability?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overarching questions:</th>
<th>How to answer the questions:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does it have structural coherence?</td>
<td>How well does the speech “hang together” – does the story flow logically and is it internally consistent?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does it have material coherence?</td>
<td>How does the story compare and contrast to other communication – how does the speech compare to the two other presidential crisis speeches reviewed in this paper?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does it have characterological coherence?</td>
<td>How reliable are the characters, both the speaker and characters in the speech? Are the characters believable – do the characters’ actions contradict other actions or change in unusual ways and what are their motives?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Does the speech have narrative fidelity?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overarching question:</th>
<th>How to answer the questions:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does the story have truthfulness, the logic of good reasons?</td>
<td>What are the story’s values?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Are the values appropriate for the story’s moral or the characters’ actions, from the audience’s perspective?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do the values have positive consequences in the lives of people, from the audience’s perspective?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Are the story’s values in agreement with the audience’s?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Are the values part of an ideal script for social behavior from the audience’s perspective?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Fisher, 1987)
Each speech was reviewed carefully and extensively using these probing questions defined by Fisher. I took copious notes on each speech and through them determined the key elements on which to focus by ascertaining which best answered my research questions.

These critical judgements were made, in part, based on how previous studies have applied Fisher’s probing questions. The scholarly groundwork has been laid in determining how to apply Fisher’s questions, and research described in the literature review served as a guide in determining which elements were most relevant and how to justify those judgements.

By systematically and thoroughly reviewing each speech as detailed in the above charts, and comparing them and contrasting them to each other and previous research, I was able to answer my research questions. It must be noted that because this is a critical study, it is subjective. Another researcher attempting to repeat my research may come to somewhat different conclusions. However, by adhering to Fisher’s principles and questions associated with each principle and the examples set by previous research, the findings of this study are compelling.
CHAPTER 3

The Potency of Powerful Stories

In my quest to discover the reasons for the potency of these three speeches, I engaged Fisher’s narrative theory of communication and asked three questions. First, I wondered if Fisher’s theory would categorize these rhetorical acts as successful. This, in effect, would help validate the theory’s accuracy and provide additional support for his narrative paradigm. If good stories are indeed the stuff that binds communities and societies, then these three examples would surely fit Fisher’s criteria for exemplary stories. This first question was the launching point for deeper exploration of the speeches’ success.

Second, I questioned if Fisher’s theory would explain the success of the stories. Would it provide useful description of the internal mechanisms of exceptional story telling? Why did Bush’s speech calm, unite and set a global path for a nation reeling from the horror of skyscrapers collapsing and thousands of people dying frightful deaths from fire and explosion? How did Roosevelt propel a shocked but heretofore reluctant nation to engage in global war? Why did Clinton’s eloquence on healing and patient justice resonate among Americans?

Answering the second research question led directly to addressing the third question that I posed: Would employing Fisher’s theory provide further support for a unique speech genre for presidential crisis communication? In the journey to understanding effective stories, would the commonalities of these speeches become clearly evident? In this section, I disclose the answers to these three questions.
One: Accuracy of the Storytelling Theory

I found that as the presidents weaved their tales, their orations met Fisher's definition for good stories. From their solemn descriptions of the situation to their resolve in propelling the nation forward, they are clearly solid, persuasive examples of good stories. They both meet the audience's expectations and match their values. Not only was Fisher's theory accurate in describing the richness and success of the speeches, but it also provided insight into why they are so resounding. We intuitively know a good story when we hear one, but Fisher's theory explains the intricacies of how and why it is good.

Disclosing the speeches' narrative probability, coherence with what the audience expects and knows, proved to be the foundation of unraveling the mystery of a good story. Narrative fidelity, truth according to the audience's values, provided supporting rationale. Of note, when applying the theory, I found two instances that did not fit into the realm of good storytelling. Bush's speech has one illogical sequence and Roosevelt's speech is missing one element for speeches in this genre. These two items will be discussed later in this section. The two misdemeanors do not negate the overall believability of the speeches. The audience overlooks these minor inconsistencies because of the overall appeal of the rhetoric. This is the same courtesy that was afforded to President Reagan when he presented incorrect facts or inconsistency in his messages. He was such a loved orator and his messages were so appealing that the public gave him leeway for his transgressions. We will now delve into the heart of these issues, and this analysis, by answering the second research question.
Two: Rich Description

For question two, I asked if narrative rationality, probability and fidelity would provide useful description, and they did, though not equally. As discussed, probability was the defining, core method to understanding the fundamental strengths of the speeches. If I had looked solely at narrative probability, I could have explained the reasons for success. This explains why probability, or one of the elements within it, has been the focus of published research, as demonstrated in the literature review. Only Fisher’s studies discuss findings of fidelity. I found narrative fidelity much more abstract than probability, and I could not have explored fidelity without thoroughly answering the questions of probability.

Narrative Probability

Understanding powerful stories emanates from Fisher’s narrative probability concept. From the probing questions he defines for exploring the coherence of a speech, I learned that all of the speeches possess structural, material and characterological coherence, which demonstrates their strength in being well-told stories.

Structural coherence – story flow. This element of coherence provides a comprehensive view of the underlying structure of the speeches. It is the necessary starting point for in-depth analysis, for without first understanding the components of each speech, I would not have been able to probe deeper into them.

In analyzing the structural coherence of communication, Fisher says to ask if the story flows logically and is internally consistent. All three speeches do have a logical flow. They acknowledge or explain their respective attacks early in the speech and call for action at the end, building support for their call to action throughout the speech. All acknowledge the loss of
life and severity of the tragedy. Each speech emphasizes different parts of the story it tells, the parts that are most relevant for the audience given the circumstances.

President Roosevelt’s main speech components flow as follows:

- Summary of the attacks – comprises approximately half of the speech
- Characterization of the attack and its implications for the United States
- Explanation that defensive measures have now been taken
- Statement that the country must ensure this does not happen again
- Statement that a state of hostility exists and that the U.S. and its interests are in danger
- Request for Congress to declare war

Half of Roosevelt’s speech is spent explaining the attacks and the extent of Japan’s attacks across the Pacific on December 7 and 8. He begins with a stark and memorable sentence, “Yesterday, December 7, 1941 – a date which will live in infamy – the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the empire of Japan.” He continues, explaining the surprising nature of the unprovoked attack and that Japan has also struck a variety of targets throughout the region. This explanation is necessary because the people of the United States were adrift in rumors, as described in the literature review, and any number of different stories about what actually happened were likely circulating. President Roosevelt first needs to clarify what happened, before calling for war. He then characterizes, or defines the attack as “a surprise offensive extending throughout the Pacific area” and says that it has “implications to the very life and safety of our nation.” After painting this dire picture, he tries to allay immediate public fears by explaining that “all measures” have been implemented to
defend the country. He then moves on to propose a course of action, first stating that the U.S.
must ensure Japan will not attack us again. He drives home his rationale for action, stating that
“hostilities exist” and the U.S. is in “grave danger.” He then calls for Congress to declare war.

President Clinton’s speech has a similar logical story flow, though it took place under
different circumstances. His address was four days after the Oklahoma City bombing, and the
public had been bombarded with news stories about the attack and the suspected bomber, who
was in police custody. Clinton’s speech also took place at a memorial service in Oklahoma, not
before Congress, and it closely follows the eulogy genre, which will be discussed later in this
section. His speech flows as follows:

- Acknowledgement of the loss of life, grief of survivors and help from rescue workers
- Pledge to help the city rebuild
- Brief summarization of what happened
- Plea not to turn grief into hate but instead to do what our lost loved ones would have done
- Request that people not to turn to hatred and fear but instead to justice
- Statement that we must begin to heal

Clinton first acknowledges the victims’ families and others in attendance and then the
reason he is at the event. He says he comes representing the America people, who “mourn with
you. We share your hope against hope that some may still survive. We thank all those who
have worked so heroically... We pledge to do all we can to help you heal the injured, to rebuild
this city, and to bring to justice those who did this evil.” He speaks directly to the families’
immediate needs, fears and hopes. He tells them they are not alone, that the city will persevere
and that the bomber(s) will be punished. Clinton’s main message is peace and healing, so when he next describes the tragedy, he only briefly touches upon it, focusing on the people who were harmed. He does not talk directly about the bombing and instead says, “This terrible sin took the lives of our American family, innocent children in that building, only because their parents were trying to be good parents as well as good workers; citizens in the building going about their daily business; and many there who served the rest of us…” His most emotional appeal follows, when he quotes the widow of a Pan Am flight 103 victim. In a letter to Clinton, the widow said, “The anger you feel is valid, but you must not allow yourself to be consumed by it. The hurt you feel must not be allowed to turn to hate, but instead into the search for justice…you must try and pay tribute to your loved ones by continuing to do all the things they left undone, thus ensuring they did not die in vain.” After this moving quotation, Clinton again returns to his call to action, or non-action, asking people not to turn to violence and fear but to wait for justice. He ends saying wounds take a long time to heal but that the process must begin. The majority of his speech is about resisting hatred and instead waiting for justice.

President Bush’s speech is less like Clinton’s and more like Roosevelt’s. He speaks in front of a joint house of Congress, to Congress and the American people, and to people from nations across the world who have also been stunned by the massive terrorist attack. Bush’s speech flows as follows:

- Acknowledgement of heroes, Congress and the world for their support
- Characterization of the attacks
- Explanation of the enemy
  - Direct address to the Taliban
• Direct address to Muslims of the world
• Explanation of why the enemy hates the U.S.
• Description of the upcoming war on terrorism
  • Direct address to other nations of the world
• Statement about defensive measures, introduction of the Office of Homeland Security
• Proposal that we must destroy terrorism
  • Direct address to the U.S. military
• Request for every nation to join the war against terrorism
• Address to Americans about how they should live their lives now
• Denouncement a new "age of terror" and heralding of an "age of liberty"
• Statement that the U.S. will persevere and rally the world to win the war

Bush's speech is much longer than the other two. Additionally, at four times he briefly changes the audience he is addressing, and certain story elements are flip-flopped logically. Overall, however, the story flow is coherent and weaves a powerful tale. He begins by acknowledging the heroism and patriotism of Americans and introduces Lisa Beamer, the wife of Todd Beamer, who may have led the charge on terrorists in the airplane that crashed in Pennsylvania, short of its intended target. He thanks Congress and the world for their support and emphasizes that citizens from 80 other nations died in the attacks. He then characterizes the attacks as "an act of war against our country," saying that for 136 years wars have been on foreign lands, except for Pearl Harbor in 1941, and that Americans have never experienced war at home "at the center of a great city on a peaceful morning." Thousands of civilians were
killed in a single day that has changed America, he says, and “freedom itself is under attack.”

He describes the horrific day and recognizes the fears and disbelief of the nation. He next goes logically to who attacked. He describes the violent al Qaeda terrorist group, explaining it is a “fringe movement that perverts the peaceful teachings of Islam” and that they aim to kill Christians, Jews, Americans and civilians, including women and children, indiscriminantly. He names the leader Osama bin Laden and links him to other terrorist groups like Islamic Jihad and says there are thousands of terrorists following bin Laden and other leaders in 60 countries, all plotting “evil.” He then brings up Afghanistan, bin Laden’s home base, where al Qaeda has great influence on the ruling Taliban faction. He describes the brutality of the Taliban way of life, where “a man can be jailed if his beard is not long enough.” He says the Taliban are murderers because they support murderers.

At this point in his speech, Bush switches audiences and directly addresses the Taliban. He demands they deliver al Qaeda and other terrorists to the U.S.; release unjustly jailed foreign citizens; protect journalists, diplomats and aid workers; close all terrorist training camps and give full access to the U.S. to ensure the camps are shut down. He discusses the ramifications of helping al Qaeda, that the Taliban must act immediately or “they will share in their [al Qaeda’s] fate.” Following this strong statement, switches audience again, saying, “I also want to speak tonight directly to Muslims throughout the world.” He indicates that the U.S. respects their faith, that the U.S.’s enemies are terrorists, not Muslims, and that the terrorists are “traitors to their own faith.” From one perspective, these two rapid changes in audience interrupt the story flow. However, from another perspective, the abrupt and purposeful changes also serve to highlight what the president says during the changes in
audience. The president’s reaching out directly to other governments also demonstrates his power and global reach. The world must be listening when he speaks. He is asserting himself as the leader of the world’s most powerful nation.

Following these two breaks in audience, Bush continues addressing the American public. He returns to the subject of the enemy, this time to explain why they hate the United States. He compares the terrorists to Nazis, says they hate America’s democracy and freedoms and that our country stands in the way of their plans to overthrow governments and disrupt lives in Israel, Asia, Africa and elsewhere in the world. He then describes the war on terrorism the U.S. is about to embark on. “How will we fight and win this war?” he asks. He answers by saying with every means possible – diplomacy, intelligence, law enforcement, financially and with every weapon of war. He says it will be unlike previous wars, that it will not be a single battle but instead many types of battles. The U.S. will pursue terrorists “relentlessly” and any nation harboring them will be considered hostile. At this point, he directly addresses other nations of the world, telling them, “Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists.”

Addressing the war at this point of the speech in somewhat counter-logical. Bush has not referred to any war until this time in his speech, but he assumes that Americans know there is now a war against terrorism. This speech element would seem to be better placed later in his oration.

Next, the president explains that the nation is not immune from attack, and to defend us from future attacks, a new Office of Homeland Security will be formed. He says many people and agencies like the FBI and military reservists will be involved in the battles. He then directly addresses the military and tells them, “I have a message for our military: Be ready. I’ve called
the Armed Forces to alert, and there is a reason. The hour is coming when America will act, and you will make us proud.” This colossal statement he makes to the military is really a threat to the Taliban and other terrorists, telling them the U.S. is coming with missiles firing. This speech element also seems to be out-of-place logically. Bush first switches from addressing other nations to discussing what the U.S. is doing at home, and after this speech segment he switches back to addressing terrorism as “the world’s fight” and asking other nations to join the fight. This speech section addressing the military would more logically flow if it were swapped with the element described in the previous paragraph, before he talks about a global war.

After his speech section that serves as a military forewarning, Bush once again directly addresses the nations of the world and asks them to join the U.S. in the war, thanking those who already have. He quotes the NATO Charter, saying “An attack on one is an attack on all.” Given that this call to action follows his direct threat to the Taliban and that previously he stated nations would either be with the U.S. or considered hostile, Bush indirectly tells noncompliant countries what fate they risk by not joining the U.S.

The president then switches back to the domestic front. He says, “Americans are asking: What is expected of us?” He answers with routine images and tasks – “live your lives and hug your children,” “remain calm and resolute,” “uphold the values of America,” be patient with tighter security, participate in the economy (buy things), do not strike out against Arab Americans, and, finally, pray for the victims and their families. He then describes the government’s upcoming actions like helping the airlines to stay in business, strengthening intelligence and police capabilities and strengthening the economy. He recognizes the governor of New York and mayor of New York City and ensures that the city will be rebuilt.
President Bush next addresses the country’s future, saying it will not be an age of terror but instead “an age of liberty” in this country and across the globe. He says the U.S. has been harmed and has suffered great loss, but that the country will now move forward. The U.S will rally the world to win the war, and “We will not tire, we will not falter, and we will not fail,” he emphasizes. He says his hope is that life will return to normal but that each of us will never forget what happened. He will remember by carrying the police shield of an officer who died in the towers trying to save others, a shield the officer’s mother gave to him. He also says the course of the war is unknown but that the outcome is sure; the U.S. will win. “We’ll meet violence with patient justice,” he says, which is ironic because he already proposed war earlier in his speech, a fundamentally violent endeavor. He defines U.S. military action as “patient justice” and the terrorist attacks as “violence.” He ends evoking the image of God, asking God to watch over the country.

Bush defines the enemy and the attacks and the actions he wants the Taliban, other nations and U.S. citizens to take. He describes the war on terrorism and that the U.S. will persevere in an “age of liberty.” While swapping several speech elements would have helped to create a somewhat more logical flow to building his argument, the end result is powerful and compelling, and, in all, logical.

*Material coherence – comparison to similar communication.* This section of the analysis provided intriguing insights. Fisher’s probe for this type of coherence is asking how the story compares and contrasts to other similar communication. In this study, the speeches were compared to the characteristics of a potential genre, presidential crisis communication. By looking at how each speech met the criteria, I could compare them among each other. Detail of
how this part of the analysis supports a genre is found later in this section under discussion of question three.

**Characterological coherence — reliability and believability of characters.** To test for this type of coherence, Fisher says to ask if the characters are reliable and believable. The characters are both the speaker and the characters within the speech. In each of the speeches, three characters were clearly evident, the speaker, the enemy, and the United States and its people. An analysis of all three characters shows strong similarities among the speeches, and how the United States and its people are portrayed offers perhaps the most interesting insights in this rhetorical criticism.

*The speaker.* All three presidents are direct throughout their orations and do not switch their focus. As discussed in the literature review, the public looks to the president in a time of crisis, and the president influences the public’s feelings and attitudes as the elected leader of the people of the United States. All three presidents recognize the loss of life, the feelings or needs of the public and provide solutions for the situation. Each speaks for the people and expresses the people’s will, whether it be to declare war, to help the community’s survivors or to hunt down the enemies where they hide. Each president shows strong leadership and uses strong discourse, as discussed in the section on material coherence under Kiewe’s definition of presidential crisis rhetoric. All three fulfilled their roles as leaders in a crisis, and they did so effectively.

*The enemy.* The person or people responsible for massive death of American citizens are inherently evil monsters and must be punished. These are thoughts that go through a person’s mind when trying to rationalize horrendous, unpredicted death on a mass scale.
Perhaps country singing star Toby Keith best expressed these thoughts after September 11 in his hit song “The Angry American.” Keith’s controversial song included the following lyrics:

> Now this nation that I love has fallen under attack. A mighty sucker punch
came flyin’ in from somewhere in the back. Soon as we could see clearly
through our big black eye, man, we lit up your world like the fourth of July.

The presidents each uphold this notion of a monstrous enemy in their speeches. Each categorizes they enemy as follows:

- Roosevelt: Conniving liars who aggressively attacked the U.S. and other countries without warning or provocation. He makes eight direct references Japan’s attack being unprovoked, surprise and premeditated.

- Clinton: Timothy McVeigh is not directly referenced, nor is he a central character, but his actions are characterized as the force of a devil-like character.

- Bush: Brutal killers, Nazis, fascists who hate our freedoms, hold radical beliefs, commit evil and are traitors to their own faith.

The enemies are the bad guys. They must be in order for the presidents’ action to be justified, and they are classified as such in each oration.

*The United States and its people.* All of the speeches portray the United States and its people as righteous and determined. “The American people, in their righteous might, will win through to absolute victory,” Roosevelt says. “We will gain the inevitable triumph.” Clinton says, “If anybody thinks Americans have lost the capacity for love and caring and courage, they ought to come to Oklahoma,” and that “we will stand against the forces of fear.” Bush says, “the entire world has seen for itself the state of our Union – and it is strong” and that
Americans are “assured of the rightness of our cause, and confident of the victories to come.”

As discussed earlier, in Fisher’s study of Ronald Reagan, he found that portraying the public as heroic appeals to egos and reminds people they can overcome difficult situations. It is a characterization readily accepted by Americans.

Harnessing vanity and ideal patriotism can be very persuasive, and this is the heart of the speeches’ success. Ronald Reagan was shown to be such a loved orator not because he told stories correctly, but because he portrayed his audience, the American people, as heroes actively pursuing the American dream. So, too, do Roosevelt, Clinton and Bush apply the nearly irresistible technique of appealing to people’s ideas of the ideal. They speak of a righteous people and a victorious, unified nation not as possibilities, but as realities. It is through this desirable story that they win their audiences’ approval.

The presidents did not portray the American people as helpless victims, but rather as strong people who had been wronged. The study by Katriel and Shenhar (1990) on narrative themes in Israeli settlements showed that a narrative of a strong people overcoming adversity is a more appealing story than portraying a population as weak victims seeking refuge. The ideal of strong people rings true and has characterological fidelity.

Roosevelt’s narrative of Pearl Harbor certainly describes the country as strong and ultimately victorious. His portrayal of events has stood the longest test of time among the speeches. He initially set the tone for America’s reaction to the Japanese attack, a tone that perseveres today. Much like the Alcoholics Anonymous study by Diane Witmer (1997), where the members’ tales of recovery and sobriety rang so true that it pushed the groups’ sobriety rate to the highest in the nation, the story about the Pearl Harbor attack has rung so true with
the American psyche that it is told the same way today. The story in Roosevelt’s speech was retold in the days following the September 11, 2001 attacks – a second date that will live in infamy, headlines declared. Published works have decreed the United States knew a Japanese attack was imminent, but these stories are squelched by the accepted mainstream story that the attack was a surprise. This story has endured, unchanged for more than 60 years, which speaks to how true it rang and still rings with the American public.

Bush’s story of September 11 has characteristics similar to Roosevelt’s, particular in describing an unprovoked, cruel enemy who carries out surprise attacks that threaten the American way of life. Bush actually compares the terrorist attack to Pearl Harbor early in his speech. “Americans have known wars,” he says, “but for the past 136 years, they have known wars on foreign soil, except for one Sunday in 1941... Americans have known surprise attacks...” Bush’s comparison to Pearl Harbor, and the media’s comparison as discussed in the literature review, conjure strong images of a nation deeply wronged and harmed – and of how this country has responded to such threats in the past, bringing war to the enemy’s shores. This powerful affiliation with Pearl Harbor may have had a tremendous effect on the public, who were trying to rationalize “why” and “what now.” The public may have closely identified the terrorist attack with the Pearl Harbor attack, much like the Japanese clung to The Influence of Seapower doctrine, as Carpenter (1986) found in his study on their motivations for the Pearl Harbor attack. This type of characterological coherence was also shown in Fisher’s study on Death of a Salesman. That play was successful in part because the audience identified with the main character. They knew someone like him. Similarly, the American public knew of a situation like to the terrorist attacks, the Pearl Harbor attack, and how the U.S. responded.
Pearl Harbor is the most comparable situation to September 11, followed by homegrown terrorism at Oklahoma City. The characterological coherence may have been so strong after September 11 that it necessitated a specific next step, war on the enemy's own lands.

In contrast to September 11, the Oklahoma City tragedy afforded Americans no precedent. The mass casualties resulted, apparently, from a single madman and accomplice who were American citizens. No overseas, far-removed enemy could be vilified and attacked. A heretofore unknown foreign threat was not to blame. The violence erupted from one of our own, a born and reared citizen and a former military soldier, charged with protecting the United States and its allies. Clinton molds his message to the situation and characterizes Americans as seeking justice, citizens who would not turn to rage and violence but instead “purge ourselves of the dark forces which gave rise to this evil.” He does not propose war but instead healing. This characterization of American reaction and inaction rings true because the alternative is to attempt battle with an unknown or nonexistent internal radical group or groups. With a single person in custody and a single bomber responsible, there is nobody else to blame or attack.

In addition to how the presidents portray America and Americans, how they did not portray the country and its people is also an interesting view of their speeches. Roosevelt, for example, does not tell of how the United States had been preparing for war, which may have spurred the Japanese to attack. This is a similar tactic to the Toughlove parents' strategies in the Hollihan and Riley (1987) study in which the parents' tales placed all blame on the children and none on themselves, to make the storyline more acceptable to the parents. So, too, does President Roosevelt craft a narrative about the attacks that does not even hint of possible
American instigation or that American leadership had any idea the Japanese would possibly attack the country. Bush also makes no reference to possible warnings about the terrorist attacks, or to how the U.S. may have made Arabic enemies through its policies and past actions in the Middle East. Clinton makes no reference to the government’s bungling of the Branch Dividians encounter as having a possible consequence of helping create the radical views of Timothy McVeigh and anti-government, para-military groups. In a time of mass sorrow and loss, bringing a population’s or a government’s culpability to the forefront is not a consoling or solutions-focused measure. It is easier to accept a surly, cruel enemy who acted without provocation and must be brought to justice.

The public also more readily accepts communication that matches their values. I examined the speeches’ values through Fisher’s next concept in narrative rationality, fidelity.

**Narrative Fidelity**

The tests for narrative fidelity brought additional insight to my analysis of the crisis communications. Fidelity involves truthfulness and the logic of good reasons. Fisher provides the following questions to determine fidelity, and they are answered from the audience’s perspective:

- What are the story’s values?
- Are the values appropriate for the story’s moral or the character’s actions?
- Do the values have positive consequences in the lives of people?
- Are the story’s values in agreement with the audience’s?
- Are the values part of an ideal script for social behavior?
Values within the speeches largely revolve around acts of war and violence and include the need to protect our nation and to resort to military action only when provoked because we are a just nation with a righteous God on our side. Compassion for innocent people and children, both American and non-American, and the negative value of surprise attacks are expressed. Clinton evokes the value of friend helping friend when he thanks rescuers from across the nation for combing through the rubble, and Bush uses this same value when he asks other nations to join in the fight. Roosevelt implies it when he speaks of Japan attacking other nations immediately after the Pearl Harbor attack, and that the U.S.'s "interests" are in danger. Clinton and Bush also bring up not lashing out indiscriminantly. Though the nation has been wounded, its might and justice must be directed only at those responsible, not at those who resemble them. Roosevelt, too, conveys this sentiment by asking for a war declaration solely against Japan, and not against Germany or Italy.

The value of safety, of living in a country in which you will not be attacked, is also ingrained in each of the speeches. It is, at least in part, the reason the speeches were given. Americans were reeling in sorrow and disbelief. Americans do not expect to be attacked. We have an unrivaled military might today, and in Roosevelt's day we had the unmatched capacity to quickly build the mightiest military. Our borders seem safe from intrusion or attack by our geographic neighbors, who are our friends. Our military and economic presence spans the globe, and as the greatest nation on earth, we do not expect to be challenged. We value not having to think about the bad guys who may want to harm us; that's what we pay the military and the CIA to worry about, and to control. The greatness and power of our nation should deter anyone from daring a strike against us - but it did not in all three instances. The
presidents had to address this loss of perceived safety and decree what we were going to do to regain safety.

Harsher, broader values within Roosevelt’s and Bush’s speeches include the need to protect Americans and the American way of life at all costs, even war. Freedom is one of the principles upon which this nation is built, and it is ingrained in our culture as the supreme right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. The enemy cannot and will not be allowed to willfully alter America. Bush says enemies have attacked freedom itself, Roosevelt says our way of life is in jeopardy and Clinton says the bombing is part of evil that threatens “our common peace, our freedom, our way of life.” These are grand assertions that require immediate, direct action.

Clinton brings up the even broader values of Christianity, of the classic good versus evil. He states that evil will be judged in the afterlife, beyond the realm of man. Man can, however, determine justice according to our laws, and the nation will ensure this is done.

With the values of the speeches established, the question then becomes whether the values are appropriate for the speeches’ morals or characters’ actions. The answer is a resounding yes. In studying characterological coherence, I found the enemies portrayed as devil-like, immoral villains who attacked a virtuous, innocent nation. It is appropriate to smite evil-doers, or at the very least to bring them to justice, to prevent them from harming innocents again. The United States must not risk its way of life or the bliss of perceived safety. The greatest nation on earth must set things right so that life can return to normal.

Once the values were defined, I addressed the next question referring to the values’ positive consequences in the lives of people. The speeches’ expressed values lend hope and
reassurance to a foundering people with newborn insecurities about their well being and way of life. The speeches uplift them, reinforcing that they are part of an admirable nation that has suffered uncalled-for death and destruction. Life will return to normal and the nation will take every measure to ensure this kind of attack does not occur again. “We will stand against the forces of fear,” Clinton says. Roosevelt will “make very certain that this form of treachery shall never endanger us again.” Bush will engage “every resource at our command...to the disruption and to the defeat of the global terror network.” “It is my hope that in the months and years ahead,” Bush says, “life will return to normal. We’ll go back to our lives and routines, and that is good.”

While these values are positive ones for the American people, they would not likely be viewed as such to the identified enemies. The enemies would have their own script characterizing the United States and what is just and fair. They would, of course, not even view themselves as the bad guys, and the values espoused in these speeches would likely fuel their causes and further ingrain their own values. The majority of the American people, however, are unsympathetic to nations and people who harm others, and that was certainly the majority sentiment in these crisis situations.

Finally, I asked if the audience’s values agree with the stories’ values and map an ideal script for society. As examined in this discussion, they do. The speeches rally the American people and call on core values the public possessed. The resounding support for each president and his proposed actions after each speech demonstrate this agreement. Safety, normalcy, justice, protecting the innocent and the American way of life are ideal scripts for this nation.
An interesting point to consider is whether waging war is an ideal script for social behavior in general and if waging war has positive consequences. Is war ever justified? Does the U.S. going to war really prevent future attacks on the country or does it invite more attacks? After Pearl Harbor, the U.S. did successfully prevent future attacks and help end a raging world war. The ultimate outcome of the new war on terrorism will not be known for some time.

Roosevelt’s and Bush’s speeches propose going to war and agree that it is a just act. Clinton’s does not. But given that Clinton’s circumstances were so notably different from the other attacks, would he have supported war under circumstances more like Pearl Harbor and September 11? What would Roosevelt and Bush have offered as solutions after the Oklahoma City bombing?

These questions are beyond the scope of this research, but Fisher’s theory does instruct that they be asked. They would be more appropriately asked and discussed in political and philosophical arenas.

**Three: Presidential Crisis Genre**

In my final research question, I asked if the speeches support a separate genre for presidential crisis communication, and I found that they do strongly support this notion. I explored genre through material coherence, an element within narrative probability. Fisher’s probe for this type of coherence is asking how the story compares and contrasts to other similar communication. I compared the speeches to the characteristics of presidential crisis communication and found how similar the speeches are to one another and how well they fit the potential genre.
Potential Genre – Defining the Situation

As discussed in the literature review, Kiewe asserts that a president defines a crisis situation, in essence constructing the reality he wishes the public to believe. All three presidents define the situation in their speeches.

Roosevelt certainly defines what had happened, as discussed earlier in assessing structural coherence. The U.S. was suddenly attacked, many lives were lost, Japan had attacked other islands, and the threat is still eminent. He does not bring up the government’s possible knowledge, if any, of a brewing firestorm aimed at the U.S. nor the initial U.S. war plan that had been established. Nor does the president evoke images of World War II that had been overtaking Europe for some time. He does not want these notions to become part of how he defines the attack.

Clinton defines the Oklahoma City situation as a horrible loss of life, the death of innocent children and moralistic citizens, by a senseless and evil act. He says, “This terrible sin took the lives of our American family, innocent children in that building, only because their parents were trying to be good parents as well as good workers; citizens in the building going about their daily business; and many there who served the rest of us – who worked to help the elderly and disabled, who worked to support our farmers and veterans, who worked to enforce our laws and to protect us.”

Bush also defines the tragedy. He describes the terrorist attack as “an act of war,” saying, “freedom itself is under attack.” He defines al Qaeda, as “heirs of murderous ideologies of the 20th century... they follow the path of facism, Nazism and totalitarianism.” He explains why the attack occurred, because the terrorists “hate our freedoms – our freedom of religion,
our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other.” Bush, Clinton and Roosevelt define the situation and create understanding, or meaning, of the event.

**Potential Genre – Strong Leadership and Discourse**

Kiewe further states that a community in crisis expects strong leadership and discourse. All three speeches demonstrate both.

Roosevelt’s language is strong, with words and phrases such as “deliberately attacked,” “surprise offensive extending throughout the Pacific” and “armed attack.” He uses blatant repetition when he described the attacks throughout the Pacific on December 7 and 8, saying, “Last night Japanese forces attacked Hong Kong. Last night Japanese forces attacked Guam. Last night Japanese forces attacked the Philippine Islands. Last night Japanese forces attacked Wake Island. Last night Japanese forces attacked Midway Island.” His repetition of “Last night Japanese forces attacked…” drives home the magnitude of Japan’s treachery and the danger of an empire that attacks over and over again. As the elected leader of the country, the president represents the nation. Roosevelt demonstrates this and reminds people of his position when he says, “I interpret the will of the Congress and of the people when I assert that we will not only defend ourselves to the uttermost but will make very certain that this form of treachery shall never endanger us again.” He asks Congress to declare war, again showing the magnitude of his position and the ultimate measures he will take to protect the nation and vanquish the enemy.

Clinton, too, declares his position in representing the American people, specifically saying he is “honored to be here today to represent the American people.” He says, “We mourn with you. We share your hope...we pledge to do all we can to help...” He speaks for
the public. Clinton also shows great humility and empathy, saying, “I have to tell you that Hillary and I also come as parents, as husband and wife, as people who were your neighbors for some of the best years of our lives.” A leader of immense power portraying himself as a common man, a neighbor, also wields a powerful appeal. He portrays himself as their equal and gains their respect for his humility in their time of extreme and dumbfounded grief. In addition to demonstrating strong and appropriate leadership, Clinton uses powerful, emotional words to describe the loss of life and paint a situation of good versus evil. Words he chooses for describing the tragedy include “crime,” “this evil,” “this terrible sin,” “the dark forces which gave rise to this evil,” “forces that threaten our common peace, our freedom, our way of life” and “the forces of fear.”

Bush also selects strong words to define the tragedy. He vocalizes phrases such as “the enemies of freedom committed an act of war” and “freedom itself is under attack.” He shows the shield of a police officer who died when the towers collapsed and introduces Lisa Beamer, both very strong emotional pulls, referring to heroes who died to save others. He uses bold words when talking about terrorists and the Taliban, comparing them to Nazis, murderers and radicals.

Bush shows strong leadership by directly addressing the American public and answering what he believes are their main questions, such as who attacked the U.S. and why. He also addresses other nations in strong terms with direct demands. He asks all nations to help the U.S. fight terrorism and states, “the civilized world is rallying to America’s side.” He directly addresses al Qaeda and the Taliban and makes clear demands. He tells the Taliban to stop supporting terrorist and hand over al Qaeda leaders, and that “these demands are not open
to negotiation or discussion.” At the end of the speech, Bush comes right out and characterizes himself as resolute and focused: “I will not yield; I will not rest; I will not relent.”

**Potential Genre — Solutions, Strength, Justification, Support and Recovery**

Kiewe also states that in a crisis speech, the president seeks to “offer quick solutions, preserve the strength and integrity of the nation and its leadership, justify necessary action, garner support for the action, correct misperceptions and recover from setbacks” (Kiewe, 1994, p. xviii). Once again, all three speeches fulfill these functions. The speeches’ fulfillment is summarized in the charts below.

### Offer Quick Solutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>What he proposes in his speech</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roosevelt</td>
<td>Declare war</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clinton</td>
<td>Let the justice system do its work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Bush | • Take countermeasures to help ensure safety from further attacks, all coordinated with a new Office of Homeland Security.  
• “We will come together” to improve airline safety, provide assistance to the airlines to keep them flying, give more tools to law enforcement and intelligence, take measures to keep the economy strong, rebuild New York City, ready the military for action.  
• Undertake a war against terrorism through “every means of diplomacy, every tool of intelligence, every necessary weapon of war” and ultimately “starve terrorists of funding, turn them one against one another, drive them from place to place, until there is no refuge or no rest.” |

### Preserve the Strength and Integrity of the Nation and Its Leadership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>How he describes the nation and its leadership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Roosevelt | • The nation — righteous people with “unbounding determination” who will triumph with God on our side  
• Its leadership — Congress must do what the American people want done |
| Clinton | • The nation — the nation will ensure the community is restored  
• Its leadership — he bolsters the image of the governor by referring to his words; as discussed above, he shows his own great leadership by humbling himself and his wife as common people — “Hilary and I also come as parents, as husband and wife, as people who were your neighbors” |
Bush

- The nation – "The state of our union is strong. We have moved from sorrow to anger and are now resolved to seek justice."
- Its leadership – thanks Congress and members of Congress for their leadership and actions to date; as discussed previously, portrays himself as unfailing – "I will not yield; I will not rest; I will not relent."

### Justify Necessary Action

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>How he justifies action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roosevelt</td>
<td>December 7 was a completely unwarranted surprise attack and the U.S. must ensure it does not happen again</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinton</td>
<td>The Bible dictates a course of action. &quot;As St. Paul admonishes us, let us not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good,&quot; &quot;the God of comfort is also the God of righteousness,&quot; &quot;those who trouble their own house will inherit the wind&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Bush | - The terrorists will kill Christians and Jews, American, women and children indiscriminately. They want to overthrow legitimate governments and disrupt lives. "We must stop terrorism where it grows" in order to stop it at all.  
- Afghanistan’s people are being brutalized and starved.  
- We have suffered great violence, harm and death. |

### Garner Support for the Action

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>What he proposes in his speech</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roosevelt</td>
<td>Asks Congress to act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinton</td>
<td>Strongly urges listeners to follow his advisement of not turning to anger and violence but instead to justice and healing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Bush | - Asks other countries to join in the war against terrorism  
- Doesn’t ask Americans to be strong and help with the fight, but he tells them they will be: "we will lift a dark threat of violence from our people and our future. We will rally the world to this cause by our efforts, by our courage. We will not tire, we will not falter, and we will not fail." |

### Correct Misperceptions and Recover

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>What he proposes in his speech</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roosevelt</td>
<td>Corrects any rumors or other questions about the nature of the attack and the extent of Japan’s attacks on Dec. 7, 1941 by explaining the situation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Clinton | - States that violence and hatred are incorrect actions; do not turn to hatred and violence but instead focus on healing and wait for justice  
- Urges the beginning of healing and recovering |
| Bush | - Asks that people do not take action against all Arabic people, correcting any misperception that all Arabic people are terrorists |
As the charts show, the speeches meet Kiewe’s criteria with only one exception. Roosevelt’s speech does not specifically discuss recovery. Otherwise, the speeches meet each of Kiewe’s components.

**Potential Genre — Cherished Values and Norms**

Next, Kiewe states that the president also aims to emphasize “cherished values and norms” to create a sense of normalcy or stability in an otherwise chaotic situation. We can see examples of this in each of the speeches.

Roosevelt speaks of Americans as righteous people who will obtain absolute victory. This tactic is similar to a successful tactic Fisher found in Ronald Reagan’s communication. Reagan portrayed Americans as heroes with an assured destiny of success. Describing someone as heroic not only boosts his self-image, but is also reminds him that he can face difficult situations and prevail. Portraying Americans as a righteous, ultimately victorious people, is appealing to the public, who would like to envision themselves in this manner.

Roosevelt also evokes God, as do the orators in the other two speeches. At the end of his speech he says, “we will gain the inevitable triumph, so help us God.” Religion may serve as a comfort, as a fundamental grounding to many people, so it makes sense to turn to religion when the world seems to be wrought with danger and uncertainties.

Clinton has heavy religious overtones in his speech, evoking centuries-old cherished values and a sense of normalcy offered by a long-standing religion. He refers directly to God
five times and quotes St. Paul and the book of Psalms from the Bible. His reference to good
and evil throughout the speech also conjured classic religious philosophies.

Bush evokes God twice at the end of his speech, including, “may God grant us
wisdom, and may he watch over the United States of America.” Near the end of his speech,
Bush also talks about extremely fundamental actions the American people should take. When
he answers his question about what is expected of Americans, he sticks to basics actions that
are akin to normalcy, like “hug your children,” don’t discriminate, contribute to victims’
causes, cooperate with authorities, be patient, go shopping and pray for the victims and their
families.

All three speeches refer to cherished values and norms, and they fit all other aspects of
Kiewe’s definition for presidential crisis rhetoric. They carry similar elements that are expected
by the American public during a national crisis, according to Kiewe.

Potential Genre – Cherwitz & Zagacki and Rasmussen

Another way of comparing the speeches to each other and supporting the notion of a
presidential crisis communication genre is to look at the works of Cherwitz and Zagacki (1986)
and Rasmussen (1973). As discussed in the literature review, in their analyses of international
Crisis situations, these researchers found recurring features in presidential crisis messages that
shape the public’s expectations. The researchers defined the potential genre as having two
subcategories, consummatory (resolving international crises through means other than military
force) and justificatory (announcing military action that has been set into action to resolve
crises). Justificatory communication is the closest fit to the speeches within this study. The
speeches were compared with Rasmussen’s definition of justificatory crisis communications.

Rasmussen says these types of speeches typically have three arguments:

- The United States must take action;
- The action addresses threats, is morally right and strategically advantageous; and
- The action is a good one compared to alternatives and what the enemy may have in store.

A summary of how each of the speeches fits these three characteristics follows in the following three charts:

### The United States Must Take Action

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>What he proposes in his speech</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roosevelt</td>
<td>We must act for our own safety: “The people of the United States have already formed their opinions, and well understand the implications to the very life and safety of our nation”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinton</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bush</td>
<td>The terrorists have harmed us at home, we must strike back to protect ourselves and it is just to do so: “freedom and fear are at war,” “justice and cruelty have always been at war”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### The Action Addresses Threats, Is Morally Right and Strategically Advantageous

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>What he proposes in his speech</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Roosevelt | • We must protect ourselves against more attacks: “We must overcome this premeditated invasion,” “Hostilities exist…our territory and our interests are in grave danger”  
• We are righteous in acting against this surprise, unprovoked attack that killed many Americans: “the American people in their righteous might” |
| Clinton | N/A |
| Bush | • The enemy are like fascists and Nazis and will not stop in their mission to kill “Freedom itself is under attack” and we must defend it  
• “Justice will be done” |

### The Action Is a Good One Compared to Alternatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>What he proposes in his speech</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roosevelt</td>
<td>Given the existing hostilities and grave danger, the alternative to attacking is to be attacked again</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Clinton  | N/A
--- | ---
Bush  | - We are not immune from attack, as Sept. 11 has shown
- The American way of life is under attack and we must go where the terrorists hide to eradicate them, prevent them from harming us again: "The only way to defeat terrorism as a threat to our way of life is to stop it, eliminate it, and destroy it where it grows."

The characteristics of justificatory presidential crisis communication do not apply to Clinton’s speech because he is not asking the nation to go to war and there is no foreign enemy. He instead encourages a “search for justice” and a banishment of fear and violence in retaliation for the bombing. Clinton’s situation is unique from the other presidents’, in that the suspect is in custody and he is an American citizen with no apparent ties to overseas enemies.

Clinton’s speech also follows patterns of a eulogy, which is not surprising because he is speaking at a memorial ceremony. According to Campbell and Jamieson (1982), a eulogy acknowledges death, transforms the relationship with the deceased to the past, eases survivors’ own sense of mortality, consoles by declaring that the deceased lives on, and brings the community together. Clinton acknowledges the deaths and places the deceased in the next world, saying, “Those who are lost now belong to God.” He confirms the community will survive because they are united, indeed, that the whole country is united in Oklahoma City’s plight. He states that the nation joins surviving families and friends in their grief, that many from across the country have come to assist in rescue efforts and that the nation pledges “to do all we can to help you heal the injured, to rebuild this city, and to bring justice to those who did this evil.” One of the most important roles of a eulogy is to appeal to survivors to carry on as the deceased would have wanted or to carry on their work; Clinton does this as well at the end of his speech when he says “their legacy must be our lives.”
While Clinton's speech does not match the characteristics of justificatory presidential crisis communication, both Roosevelt's and Bush's speeches do. It is logical that Clinton's speech does not fit the characteristics of justificatory speech because he is addressing a domestic issue.

It is also logical to reflect on the rich description Fisher's theory allows, which I demonstrated in this chapter. The speeches were not simply well written and expertly delivered. They resonated with Americans by harnessing the potency of powerful stories. Implications of this conclusion are discussed next.
CHAPTER FOUR

Summary

This study applied Walter Fisher's narrative theory of communication to a rhetorical analysis of three presidential crisis speeches, President George W. Bush's speech on September 20, 2001 after the terrorist attacks, President Franklin Roosevelt's Pearl Harbor speech on December 8, 1941 and President Bill Clinton's Oklahoma City bombing speech on April 23, 1995. First, I asked if the three speeches would meet the criteria for success according to Fisher's theory. They do. All three easily meet the characteristics for narrative probability and fidelity, so they therefore have narrative rationality. They are all good stories because they make sense to the audiences based on what the audiences knew or had experienced. The orations are already known to have been successful, so Fisher's theory did not bring forth this revelation. Rather, because Fisher's theory shows they are successful stories, the theory itself is verified as accurate.

Second, I asked if Fisher's concepts of narrative rationality, probability and fidelity would provide useful descriptions of why the speeches were successful, and they did, particularly narrative probability. This concept was insightful because it revealed the power of character, or characterological coherence; the flexibility of integrating other theories or concepts with Fisher's concept of material coherence; and the usefulness of acquiring an overall view of the speeches through their story flow, or structural coherence. Fidelity looks specifically at values that I had already uncovered during my study of probability, although it helped me look at the values as a whole rather than in separate parts involved in coherence.
Finally, the third question I sought to answer is whether or not the speeches are similar when viewed through Fisher's theory, and if so, if this would help confirm a designated genre for presidential crisis communication. My answers are yes, and yes. Each speech successfully demonstrated each element within Fisher's narrative paradigm. Kiewe's definition of the characteristics of presidential crisis communication was strongly supported.

**Discussion**

This study illuminates several important elements for the communication field: storytelling power, presidential influence and genre. First and foremost this thesis points to the power of stories in creating shared meaning, in defining history, and in setting future policy. Narrative theory lies within the interactionist perspective, which assumes that people create meaning through communication. The strength in the narrative view, particularly in Fisher's well-defined narrative paradigm, is that it explains how this common meaning is achieved. Through logic, through character, through common previous experiences and values – this is how these crises were defined and accepted by the American people. By tapping into inherently human communication needs and expectations, these stories became profoundly powerful in characterizing our understanding of history as it occurred and how it is about to occur.

The president's role in creating meaning during national crises cannot be overstated. It is the president, and he alone, that the nation looks to during an utter state of emergency. Through the poignant interplay of story elements, Roosevelt explained to the nation the vile and deadly actions of the enemy. He ensured victory over the antagonistic Japanese Empire. He did not downplay the severity of the attack, he did not ask for patience as details of damage and death unfolded, and he did not call for a diplomatic solution. He did not define the incident
as a single attack, but instead as the first. This was the meaning he created and the public accepted. There would be no compromise to avenging the country’s losses. Clinton, on the other hand, skillfully defined the Oklahoma City bombing as the brainchild of a single wicked person who would ultimately be judged by God. He did not proclaim a widespread domestic terrorist threat. He did not mention Waco nor any possible connection during his speech. Clinton did not propel the nation into a paramilitary witch-hunt but instead urged healing. Alternately, Bush defined a whole new enemy and kind war to the U.S. public. Osama bin Laden, a formerly obscure overseas villain, was equivalent to the likes of Hitler and Stalin. The desert, war-torn nation of Afghanistan became defined as the breeding ground of worldwide terrorism. I recall having to look at a map to learn where the country was located. September 11 was not a single attack by a rogue group; it was the opening salvo of the worldwide war the U.S. was going to engage. Terrorism was no longer a foreign term Americans associated with the Middle East or other far-away lands. The definitions and the policy Bush set with his speech have determined U.S. policy since that fateful day. The war in Afghanistan and Iraq and possibly other unknown acts have resulted. It is also necessary to note that the speeches were written by speechwriters and policy options were likely chosen from an array presented by advisors. As such, the speeches express the public persona and values of the presidents, not personal or individual beliefs. The influence of the office of the president, of the public choices and definitions that the president makes, are what set the tone in creating the country’s shared meaning.

My foray into created meaning also shows that presidential crisis communication is likely its own genre, as scholars have debated. Research on this important topic should be
continued. Given the power of these types of orations in setting policy and creating definitions for posterity, they must be given due academic and critical attention, much like, for example, the genre of apologia. Kiewe's definition aptly encompasses the thrust of these three speeches in particular and should serve as the foundation of future research on this genre.

**Strengths and Limitations**

I encountered several difficulties while applying Fisher's theory in its entirety, and I found several aspects of the theory very useful and applicable. Narrative fidelity, values, was the most difficult concept to apply because it is so broadly defined. The values within these speeches were fairly straightforward, but I wondered how this concept could readily be applied to more morally complex or uncertain situations. Some values in stories may be relatively simple, like not stealing. However, if the circumstances are complicated, the answer is not so clear. For example, is it right for someone to steal food if they have no other means to eat? Part of the audience may agree that it would be morally right to steal in this situation, and others may not.

Varying audience opinions brings to light another potential shortcoming of Fisher's theory. When an audience is as large as the population of the United States, or of the world, as was the case for these speeches, how can one truly gauge what rings true for the entire audience? The most logical approach to this question for this study was to look at the majority of the U.S. population, of majority opinion expressed after each speech. Yet, this approach assumes that only the majority is relevant in whether or not a story is a good one. Minority opinions could lend great insight into the true effects of a speech. For example, how did Bush's speech affect United Nations leaders? Did it in some way negatively affect France and
Germany, helping lead them on an adversarial approach to the U.S.-led attack on Iraq? How did Bush’s speech affect the resolve of terrorists and the nations supporting them? Did it bind them to their cause at an even more radical level? Did it worsen the terrorist threat? These types of questions may be difficult or impossible to answer. How would one go about polling the supporters of terrorists, for example? Yet, these are questions worth considering given the potential magnitude of the answers.

In another potential shortcoming, when I tried to answer the question of narrative fidelity, I found I relied too much on understanding that the speeches were already successful. The audiences’ known reaction was the only way to gauge if the speeches had fidelity. After pondering my reliance on knowing the speeches were successful, I wonder how much this bias affected my overall analysis. If I had not known the speeches were successful, I may have looked at them differently and applied the probes differently. Bias is present in all research, but it is an issue that must not be overlooked. All of the research I found began with a forgone conclusion on the success of the communication and applied the theory to find out why it had been successful. Future application of the theory to show its validity should include research testing communication in a situation where the researcher does not know how successful or unsuccessful it was. This may not be possible in rhetorical criticism because the situation is paramount.

Audience reaction is a key facet of Fisher’s theory, but dependence on public opinion has been sighted as a major shortcoming by Simons (2000). He specifically challenges rhetorical analysis today is limited by its “reliance on media commentary, political reaction, overnight polling…without sufficient analysis of the rhetorical situation.” Simons also cites
generic criticism with its shortcoming of trying too hard to make parts of a communication fit within a category’s definition. This shortfall is detrimental to truly understanding the rhetoric in its unique context. In my study, I did rely on the fact that the speeches won immense public favor. I also sought to match the speeches to the definition of a presidential crisis communication genre, but application of the remainder of Fisher’s theory did require that I look at the appropriateness of each speech within its situational context.

Turning to more positive aspects of my research, Fisher’s narrative probability was very helpful in analyzing the speeches. Structural coherence (story flow) provided a good overview of the speeches’ basic structures. Characterological coherence allowed me to glean particularly interesting conclusions about how the speeches persuaded. Most of the research I found employing Fisher’s theory focused on characterological coherence, which emphasizes its usefulness.

Material coherence is also a strong test within Fisher’s theory. Because this concept asks for comparison to similar communication, any number of different communication theories or methods could be used to compare different communications. For example, semiotics could be employed to compare communication structure; symbolic convergence theory could be applied to look at common fantasy themes, which are an audience’s shared stories that create its reality; or a systems theory could be used to explore how similarly parts of the stories affect each other or how the characters affect each other. Theoretical hybrids are limited only by a researcher’s imagination.
Future Research

While the findings here lend much to think about, they also indicate potential future study. For example, Clinton's speech is a hybrid form of communication, which is an interesting finding. It is a crisis speech and a eulogy, making it a hybrid of both genres. It supports the proposal by Campbell and Jamieson (1982) that hybrid speeches exist and could be included in a hybrid study.

While this study looked at successful speeches like Clinton's, it would be intriguing to see what makes a story fail through Fisher's theory. Rhetoric that did not achieve its mission or result in rallying public support could also be understood and compared to successful speeches by the same speaker or by other speakers on the same topic. This analysis of opposites could help show what types of coherence or values are more appealing or less appealing to audiences, or in what kinds of situations certain elements are more or less persuasive.

In another future study, it would interesting to see if Fisher's theory is as insightful for non-crisis presidential communication. Tulis and others have claimed that the president uses the public forum today too often as a bully pulpit, talking to the American public about "crises" that aren't truly emergencies. The result is dulling the effect of presidential rhetoric and confusing the public - when is a crisis a real crisis? Comparing the story of a speech trying to create the perception of a crisis to a true crisis speech could yield interesting findings.

Presidential crisis communication is also another topic for further exploration. The similarities among the speeches show definite support for a new genre, and I hope those supporting categorization of a new genre find my study adds to their quest.
It is also interesting to note that rhetorical criticism has generally focused on the president or on national subjects, which is true of this thesis. Looking at the state-level or community rhetoric of Oklahoma City or September 11 should also lend interesting insight into the crises, perhaps demonstrating the same types of interactionist communication. Did the speeches of Oklahoma’s and New York’s governors resonate the same values and character descriptions as the presidents’? How might these speeches have helped define history? Are different values or topics the focus of more local discussion? Narrative theory would be helpful in analyzing this level of communication.

Fisher’s narrative theory would also be helpful in looking at all types of communication surrounding a crisis. Future study could include news reports and public commentary on a crisis, and comparing these reflections to the president’s. Surveys and interviews on the crisis could be conducted to see what community meaning about the situation was shared, or not shared. For example, in the Kennedy assassination, it would be interesting to see the how the two theories of his death (single gunman or conspiracy) have reverberated throughout society for as long as they have. Congressional findings, media reports, witness testimony and many other sources have built two strong stories about the assassination, and finding the underlying storytelling principles that propel both stories could be attempted through narrative theory.

Narrative theory could also be used to understand presidential crisis communication as it develops over the course of a crisis. Bush, for example, gave several speeches and other types of communication as the attacks began and in the days following. His initial words were neither particularly reassuring nor defining, yet his rhetoric grew to meet the demands of the
situation. It would be intriguing to understand the evolution of how the president framed the crisis and future policy, and how he continues to do so with the ongoing war on terrorism.

Future research possibilities are enticing. The variety and quantity found just within this study indicate the flexibility and knowledge-unearthing capabilities of Fisher’s theory. Or, in the spirit of the interactionist approach, Fisher’s theory lends new meaning to the meaning of communication, or at least to the definition of good communication.

With this final section complete, like all stories, this one must come to an end. My tale began with the personal effect of Bush’s speech after the harrowing devastation of September 11. Bush’s story rang true to me as it cut through my fear of future calamities, the dissolution of my sense of personal safety, and the mind-numbing reality of mass death that gripped many of us. Bush assuaged fears, energized hope and helped to heal with one momentous story. The power of that story reaches into policy that is being made today, and affects lives and the future of this nation. Fisher’s narrative theory of communication has unmasked the inner working of Bush’s speech, and of Clinton’s and Roosevelt’s. They have been dissected and revealed for what they truly are, verbal works of art.

With this thesis, I hope to have delivered convincing arguments that compel others to continue exploring and tapping into the power of compelling stories. Through the honed craft of story telling, the persuasion of rhetoric can be both understood and created. In the words of Winston Churchill, “Now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning.”
A righteous and courageous people and a strong, inevitably victorious nation are described in each speech. The appeal of this portrayal has been demonstrated in previous research, and it has been validated in this study. What is more convincing than appealing to a person’s sense of being ultimately right, just and successful? Harnessing vanity and ideal patriotism can be very persuasive, and this is the heart of the speeches’ success. Ronald Reagan was shown to be such a loved orator not because he told stories correctly, but because he portrayed his audience, the American people, as heroes actively pursuing the American dream. So, too, do Roosevelt, Clinton and Bush apply the nearly irresistible technique of appealing to people’s ideas of the ideal. They speak of a righteous people and a victorious, unified nation not as possibilities, but as realities. It is through this desirable story that they win their audiences’ approval.
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