Once Upon a Tournament:  
Using Narratives to Foster Organizational Identification in Forensics Teams

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Abstract

Culture provides individuals with a framework within which they can ascribe meaning to the events, objects, people, etc. that they encounter or experience. Organizational cultures are built upon meanings embedded within cultural performances such as traditions, rituals and narratives. These performances can introduce and/or maintain a sense of connectedness among organizational members. Forensics teams provide an interesting lens for examining organizational culture and the communicative interactions among team members because of the relatively small nature of teams and the constantly evolving membership structure. By interviewing alumni of the Northern Illinois University and North Central College forensics teams, this project examines how narratives are used as a tool for communicating organizational culture. Analysis of these narratives reveals how organizational identification is fostered among new and existing team members. Individuals come to associate strongly with a team’s ideology (values, beliefs and goals) through their immersion in the team’s organizational culture.
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As the end of my undergraduate career draws near, I find myself reflecting on how I have spent the last four years. While there are the usual collegiate memories of late-night-study-sessions in the library and informal get-togethers with friends, my mind tends to gravitate toward memories associated with my involvement with the forensics team. In the past four years, I have spent more time in hotels than most other people probably do in twenty years, gained valuable critical thinking, writing and presentation skills and begun identifying myself as a “forensicator,” or an individual who competes in forensics. Additionally, I have created close friendships with my teammates, coaches and even competitors from other schools that I hope will survive for years to come. Indeed, I consider my forensics teammates to be my second family, a sentiment shared by many within the forensics circuit (Williams & Hughes, 2005). As a self-proclaimed member of the “forensics family,” I believe that it is only fitting to leave the forensics community a token of gratitude that will hopefully prove useful to coaches and teammates alike.

Many scholars have studied the forensics team through the lens of organizational communication (Croucher et al. 2006; Swanson, 1992). For example, Croucher et al. (2007) established that there is a positive correlation between a competitor’s organizational identification with his/her program and his/her social identification as a member of that program. However, their analysis was directed towards the influences of gender and ethnicity in the formation of organizational identity. I am more concerned with how communicative processes are used to foster organizational identification within forensics teams. By identifying these communicative processes, members of the forensics community will be able to either make a conscious effort to incorporate these processes into their team atmosphere or understand how these processes are currently operating within their organization. Because organizational identification occurs when an individual accepts and internalizes the cultural values espoused by
the organization, I am interested in understanding how these cultural values are conveyed to group members (Croucher et al., 2007). Since Keyton (2005) suggests that “organizational stories… serve as artifacts to provide information about an organization’s values, norms and beliefs,” narratives appear to be a common communicative device within organizations (p. 88). Therefore, I seek to answer the following research question: *How are narratives used to foster organizational identification within forensics teams?*

My primary method of research will be conducting interviews of former forensics team members of North Central College and Northern Illinois University. I chose to conduct interviews because, as Keyton (2005) notes, “knowing how organizational members interpret things differently and similarly will reveal the most complete view of organizational culture” (p. 65). Interviews will be the best way to understand how and why individuals identify with their team. Swanson (1992) agrees, arguing that “values may be explicitly stated in a team slogan, but it is more likely that the shared philosophies and goals are best observed by listening to participants talk about what is important to them as members of the forensics team” (p. 70). Through the interviewing process, I hope to gain an answer to my research question that will prove beneficial to the rest of the forensics community as well as other small-group and/or organizational entities by illuminating a type of informal cultural performance that may have some bearing on organizational identification. This account of my research begins with a review of relevant literature and an explanation of the methodological framework. Next, I discuss my analysis of culture and narratives as conveyed by respondents’ comments. Finally, I provide a series of conclusions produced by this study.
Organizational Culture

Although we are all members of various cultures and micro-cultures, it can be difficult to pinpoint what exactly constitutes a “culture”. Dodd (1998) defines culture as “the holistic interrelationship of a group’s identity, beliefs, values, activities, rules, customs, communication patterns, and institutions…. [that] shapes thinking, acting and communicating according to group expectations” (p. 36). This definition expands on Pettigrew’s (1979) formulation that culture is “the system of such publicly and collectively accepted meanings operating for a given group at a given time” (p. 574). The key emphasis is on the way in which groups communicatively construct meaning in their daily lives. Culture provides members with a framework within which they can ascribe meaning to the events, messages, objects and/or people that they encounter or experience.

There are often multiple micro-cultures within a larger organizational culture. These micro-cultures may be formed voluntarily by individuals who choose to associate with one another based on ethnicity, demographics or other commonalities (Dodd, 1998). Particularly, I am concerned with micro-cultures of social identity, or “group loyalties and memberships usually based in choice of association and membership” (Dodd, 1998, p. 72). Micro-cultures are important to this project because organizations are smaller units that exist within a larger, macro-cultural structure. Specifically, Keyton (2005) explains that an organization is “a dynamic system of organizational members… who communicate within and across organizational structures in a purposeful and ordered way to achieve a superordinate goal” (p. 10). Each organization has its own culture, or a “system rooted in a common set of norms and interpretive frameworks about the things people encounter in their work environments (Dodd, 1998, p. 80). While this definition would suggest that organizational culture is only applicable to the corporate
world, “work environments” can be understood to describe any environment in which a group is working together to accomplish a task. Within these “work environments”, individuals see that the aforementioned norms and frameworks are being enacted by their peers, which in turn pressures them to act in a similar fashion (Kelly, 1985).

Cultural Performances

The interpretive nature of culture leads to the concept of cultural performances. Both Dodd (1998) and Pettigrew (1979) define culture as systems that ascribe meaning to members’ lives, and Pacanowsky and Trujillo (1983) emphasize that culture is not a stagnant structure. Instead, culture should be viewed as a continuous process of communication (Gormley, 2008; Pacanowsky & Trujillo, 1983). Culture consists of a constantly evolving system of meanings, which are created in cultural performances involving multiple members of the organization interacting with one another (Pacanowsky & Trujillo, 1983). Performances are “situationally embedded in the very reality they bring to completion” (Pacanowsky & Trujillo, 1983, p. 132). In other words, performances both lend and gain meaning from different situations. A cycle of meaning is created as a situation influences the communication process which in turn reflects how members perceive the given situation. Thus, cultural performances are contextually unique. Members are able to derive different meanings from each new situation or experience. Because cultural performances are based on the idea that culture is a continuous process, the way in which members conduct these communicative interactions will have a profound impact on the organizational culture.
Traditions of Organizational Culture

Cultural performances often take the form of traditions, which can introduce and/or maintain a sense of connectedness among organizational members. While traditions are a part of any cultural heritage, they play a particularly significant role in organizational culture. As Jensen and Jensen (2007) note, “Tradition… is repeated exercising of rituals over time and context” (p. 20). The sharing of traditions can take multiple forms including language, norms and storytelling.

Rituals

One way in which traditions are developed is through the repetition of rituals (Jensen & Jensen, 2007). Pacanowsky and Trujillo (1983) note that “Organizational culture is, in large part, constituted in the various rituals which members regularly or occasionally perform” (p. 135). Participation in these rituals confers a sense of shared belonging between group members (Pacanowsky & Trujillo, 1983; Pettigrew, 1979; Rowe & Cronn-Mills, 2005). As new members are integrated into the organization, they are taught rituals in order to both preserve the cultural history of the group and to maintain consistency within the organization (Jensen & Jensen, 2007; Keyton, 2005). While group traditions are often viewed as a way of creating the bonds between group members, Rowe and Cronn-Mills (2005) argue that traditions can also “foster an environment for both personal growth and a strong sense of individuality” (p. 105). Traditions may create a sense of inclusion among members. When individuals feel as if they are truly part of a larger group, they may be more comfortable expressing their thoughts and ideas to other members.
**Language**

The language used within a culture can signify a sense of unity within the group by designating a barrier between insiders and outsiders (Dodd, 1998). Individuals can be assured of their membership by their “ability to skillfully navigate the jargon and terminology that surrounds that [micro]-culture” (Parrott, 2005, p. 55). The distinctive vocabularies of organizational cultures indicate the important aspects of the organization by assigning certain meanings to them (Pacanowsky & Trujillo, 1983). Therefore, when members are able to converse with one another using a “special” language reserved for in-members, the sense of belonging and unity among group members may be strengthened.

**Norms**

Organizational group members are expected to behave in a way that is representative of the organization as a whole. These expectations, or norms, are often unspoken and/or unwritten rules pertaining to what types of behavior are considered either proper or improper for members. In some cases, the individual is not even aware that these unwritten rules exist. Rather, behaviors go unquestioned and appear to be taken-for-granted. Adherence to these unwritten rules, whether conscious or unconscious, may make individuals feel more comfortable interacting within the organizational culture. As Paine (2005) notes, “[U]nwritten rules… render the group experience comprehensible and allow members to ‘make sense’ of their shared world” (p. 81). By upholding the norms of the group, the individual is able to contribute to the maintenance of the organizational identity (Pacanowsky & Trujillo, 1983; Tajfel, 1984). As a type of micro-culture, the inherent nature of the organization establishes rules for its members, who often feel obligated to fulfill these expectations (Dodd, 1998). However, as Pacanowsky
and Trujillo (1983) note, “Organizational members do not ‘conform’ to behavior laws but rather act (or more precisely, choose to act), in ways which reflect (or flout) the social conventions of other organizational members” (p. 130). While group members may be expected to uphold the expectations that are placed before them, it is ultimately up to the individual to decide how he/she will behave. Therefore, conformance to unwritten rules may be indicative of the individual’s internalization of the group’s goals.

**Storytelling**

One way in which organizational language and norms can be shared and shaped is through the process of storytelling (Dodd, 1998). Stories, also referred to as narratives, play “crucial role[s] in the continuous processes of establishing and maintaining what is legitimate and that which is labeled unacceptable in an organizational culture” (Pettigrew, 1979, p. 576). The practice of storytelling enables older members to pass on tales of important figures within the organization, reinforce organizational values and beliefs, and provide examples of expected behavior to new members (Kelly, 1985). Stories influence members’ actions, guiding them towards praiseworthy activities and cautioning them about previous failures (Derryberry, 2005; Pacanowsky & Trujillo, 1983). Kelly (1985) provides three key functions of stories, “(a) they enable organizational members to remember values and principles as well as specific information; (b) they create belief and understanding; and (c) they encourage organizational commitment through their claims of uniqueness” (p. 47). Thus, storytelling allows members to recognize the distinct identity of the group and reinforce the values and beliefs of the organization.
Pacanowsky and Trujillo (1983) identify three types of stories which are shared within groups. Personal stories revolve around the individual telling the story and are often used to promote certain aspects of both personal and organizational identity. Collegial stories describe the actions of other members within the organization and depict the “reality” of life within the group. Corporate stories are “narratives which represent the management ideology and are used to substantiate organizational procedures” (p. 139). Through these three types of stories, cultural performances are conveyed to members of the group, breathing life into the organizational culture.

**Organizational Identification**

Through the use of traditions, organizations are able to pass on culturally significant meanings to group members. The use of traditions may assist in establishing a sense of unity within the overall organization. Group members may be more inclined to identify with the group’s overall goals, values and beliefs if they feel that they are connected to the organization.

**Psychological Group Membership**

Social identity theory posits that an individual’s self-concept is influenced by his/her membership and association with social groups (Tajfel, 1984). Rooted in social psychology, this theory highlights three key features of psychological group membership that prove essential to the discussion of organizational identity (Tajfel, 1984). These features include: identity, interdependence and social structure. First, a group must fulfill the “identity criterion: that a collection of people should define themselves and be defined by others as a group; they should share some collective perception of themselves as a distinct social entity” (Tajfel, 1984, p. 518).
Second, group members should “be (positively) interdependent in some way, for the satisfaction of needs, achievement of goals, consensual validation of attitudes and values, in terms of social influence, social interaction, mutual attraction, etc.” (Tajfel, 1984, p. 518). Finally, within the organization or group, “social interaction between the individuals should be stabilized, organized and regulated by a system of role and status differentiations and shared norms and values” (Tajfel, 1984, p. 519). By fulfilling these criteria, a group will be able to cement its status in the eyes of its members as having a legitimate means for existence.

**Organizational Identity**

These criteria for psychological group membership provide a helpful introduction to the concept of organizational identity. An organization’s identity is determined by the way in which members distinguish themselves from outsiders as being a distinctly unique unit (Croucher et al., 2009; Tajfel, 1984). In-group members are able to differentiate themselves from out-group members. Furthermore, members of an organization are more likely to describe themselves in positive terms. Haslam et al. (2003) note that organizational identity is used “not only to describe others (e.g. members of Organization Y are traditional, formal and reserved) but also to describe ourselves and to inform our own behaviour *[sic]* (e.g., as a member of Organization X, I am, or aspire to be, vibrant, progressive and multicultural)” (p. 360). Thus, it is important to note that the organizational identity is determined from the inside out, by “those for whom the organization is relevant and meaningful” (Haslam et al., 2003, p. 360).
Organizational Identification

By using the organization as a guiding point, the individual is able to identify with a larger collective as well as with the inherent values and goals of the larger body (Cheney, 1983; Tajfel, 1984). Croucher et al. (2007) expand on this idea by defining organizational identification as “the degree to which a person’s self-concept shares a perceived connection to the attributes he or she believes defines the organization” (p. 7). Through the process of enculturation, or the “processes by which organizational members acquire the social knowledge and skills necessary to behave as competent members,” individuals are able to merge their personal identities with that of the larger, organizational identity (Pacanowsky & Trujillo, 1983, p. 143). Individual identification with the organization as a whole signals unity within the group and will impact the group’s functionality (Gormley, 2008; Haslam et al., 2003; Rowe & Cronn-Mills, 2005; Tajfel, 1984). While enculturation requires the individual to sacrifice part of their individual identity, this sacrifice is mediated by the perceived benefits of group membership. Ultimately, socialization allows new members to “become familiar with the organization’s culture” (Carmack & Holm, 2005, p. 34).

By establishing that culture provides individuals with a framework for interpreting the world around them, the connection can be drawn that an organizational culture provides organizational members with a means of interpreting their environment. Organizational culture is conveyed through traditions such as language, norms and storytelling. These traditions may be used to forge a connection between the individual and the organization, paving the way for organizational identification.
Forensics and Organizational Culture

Forensics teams provide a unique focal point for the study of organizational culture. Due to the collegiate forensics team’s constantly evolving membership structure, the ability of a team to quickly and effectively convey team values, beliefs and goals to new and current team members is a valuable tool. Additionally, because forensics teams are relatively small organizations whose main function is the creating and sharing of rhetoric, they provide a unique lens through which the influence of culturally-based communicative processes on organizational identification may be viewed.

Culture

Forensics teams can be considered organizational cultures because members work together as a team to accomplish a mutual task and there are established rules and norms that competitors are expected to follow (Dodd, 1998; Kelly, 1985; Keyton, 2005; Paine, 2005). The forensics team exemplifies Gormley’s (2008) characterization of culture as a “living entity” because it is a constantly evolving unit (p. 203). As Carmack and Holm (2005) note, “every four years there is a complete turn over in the competitive body. Ideally, each year 25% of the membership is new and needs to be socialized into the existing group” (p. 34). The constant evolution of team membership places a heavy burden upon upperclassmen, alumni and coaches to preserve the cultural heritage of the team. Through the enculturation process, experienced team members are able to share the unique meanings established within the culture of the team unit to incoming members.
Cultural Performances

One way in which forensics teams can introduce new members to the existing team culture is through the sharing of cultural performances. Pacanowsky and Trujillo (1983) established that cultural performances are both interactional and contextual. Jensen and Jensen (2006) argue that forensics teams fulfill these criteria, noting, “What makes the forensic laboratory so unique is that its participants spend countless hours together. [The forensics laboratory] is dynamic, moving anywhere forensics participants gather, including the squad room, the classroom, the van, the hotel, tournaments, or restaurants” (p. 20). The nature of the activity implies that team members are frequently interacting with one another, fulfilling Pacanowsky and Trujillo’s (1983) first tenet of interactional cultural performances. Also, because team members compete, attend classes and sometimes even live together, they interact in a variety of situations. Thus, forensics teams fulfill Pacanowsky and Trujillo’s (1983) second tenet of contextual cultural performances because team members must constantly adapt their communication styles to fit the context. While Pacanowsky and Trujillo (1983) initially established the concept of cultural performances for a corporate setting, the application of this concept to the forensics team results in unique implications. Members of a corporate organizational culture are used to interacting in a contained environment for a certain amount of time each week. However, members of a forensics team do not necessarily have specific times or places in which they interact. Thus, the ability of forensics competitors to establish a system of cultural meanings despite a constantly evolving environment may prove indicative of their ability to create a cogent organizational identity.
Psychological Group Membership

The forensics team as a unit satisfies Tajfel’s (1984) criteria of psychological group membership: identity, interdependence and social structure. Croucher et al. (2006) note that students involved in forensics tend to strongly identify with the particular event in which they compete by referring to themselves as “a debater” or “an individual events speaker”. From this tendency, we can induce that, because individuals strongly identify with the particular event with which they are involved, they must also strongly identify with the activity as a whole. Furthermore, Croucher et al. (2006) found that students who know more about the “team’s norms, rituals and history” and are “more motivated to succeed” will be more likely to identify with their forensics team (p. 8). Friedley and Manchester (2005) posit that the interdependence criterion is fulfilled because “one of the most valuable skill sets students who participate in this activity can acquire is the ability to work as part of a team” (p. 95). Although the activity is mainly composed of individual events, it is still considered a team activity because sweepstakes points are awarded to entire teams. Thus, team members satisfy a mutual need for fellow competitors to boost the school’s score as a whole. Tajfel’s (1984) criterion of social structure is also fulfilled by the forensics team unit. The social structure within the team is composed of the inherent status differences between underclassmen and upperclassmen. Because of their previous experience on the team, older students have an implicit source of power that they can exercise as a means of regulating the behavior of incoming students. Furthermore, in addition to having a full-time director of forensics, many schools also have assistant directors or part-time coaches who fill out the rest of the social structure. These authority figures help to regulate the behaviors of team members from an explicit position of power.
Forensics and Traditions of Organizational Culture

Having seen that forensics teams meet the various criteria for organizational culture, we can examine the ways in which they pass on their cultural heritage to new generations. As Jensen and Jensen (2007) point out, “Traditions rely on repeated rituals in order to become defining characteristics of cultures and organizations. If a program changes dramatically every four years, traditions do not evolve” (p. 22). While traditions may be expected to naturally evolve over time, common threads will remain even as the team membership changes. However, if the team culture changes completely every year, competitors may feel as if they are in a constant state of flux. Thus, a team’s ability to maintain traditions despite a constantly changing membership plays a vital role in ensuring the survival of the program. If coaches and participants understand the historical rituals and traditions of their programs, they will be better suited to make decisions concerning the organizational culture of the team unit (Jensen & Jensen, 2007). Consequently, by knowing the historical basis of team traditions, team leaders will be more capable of determining which traditions have proven effective in establishing a positive team environment. Keyton (2005) asserts that “the social reality of any group is simultaneously tied to its traditions anchored in the past, and open to revised or new interpretations based on the interactions of its members” (p. 19). Therefore, while a team is charged with maintaining a tie to its organizational history, it must also be open to adapting its rituals in order to appeal to current team members.

Language

Forensics maintains its own language that sets it apart from other extra-curricular activities. By knowing the jargon employed by the circuit, individuals feel a sense of unity
within their team (Dodd, 1998; Parrott, 2005). Although this language may at first be seen as impenetrable, once it is “decoded” and taught to new and current team members, it can serve as a way of identifying in-group and out-group members. Parrott (2005) notes, “[W]hile the use of forensics lingo can make an individual feel connected to the activity, it can also build a sense of community within the activity” (p. 60). Thus, not only does knowing the language of forensics serve to connect the individual to his/her individual team, but it can also connect him/her to other teams within the larger forensics culture.

**Norms**

While formal rules regulating event guidelines and competitor qualification exist, many of the norms within the activity of forensics teams are unwritten. New members rely upon the good graces of upperclassmen and coaches to be taught these norms or must figure them out for themselves by experience. As Paine (2005) asserts, unwritten rules “reach out to influence virtually every aspect of the forensics experience” (p. 80). These unwritten norms dictate the clothing choices of competitors, the behavior of competitors during award assemblies and even the way in which competitors enter and take leave of rooms (Paine, 2005). Competitors may feel uncomfortable participating in the activity if they realize that everyone else is operating according to a set of rules of which they are unaware. Once team members learn these unwritten rules, they may grow more confident in their interactions with other team members, competitors from other schools and judges.
**Storytelling**

The practice of storytelling is frequently employed within the forensics team. Derryberry (2005) notes, “the use of the narrative to recruit and develop a squad often begins with personal anecdotes with forensic coaches and squad members serving as central characters” (p. 19). Stories provide individuals with information about the past, allowing new team members to relive previous team memories (Derryberry, 2005; Jensen & Jensen, 2007). The stories shared within the framework of the forensics team can be categorized according to Pacanowsky and Trujillo’s (1983) classifications: personal, collegial and corporate. Personal stories are often composed of the individual competitor’s experiences of both triumph and downfall (Derryberry, 2005). Collegial tales may portray the experiences of the team from a particular competitive season or era of the team’s history (Derryberry, 2005). Finally, corporate stories can be used to instill a sense of respect or fear for particular judges on the circuit (Derryberry, 2005). Because stories are often used to clarify concepts or to reinforce already-held beliefs, storytelling proves to be an effective method of enculturation. Thus, within the context of the forensics team, new team members are able to quickly grasp popular beliefs and gain an understanding of the team’s history through the sharing of team narratives.

Forensics teams have their own organizational cultures which provide a means for team members to interpret behaviors within the team environment. Through the sharing of cultural performances, individuals develop psychological group membership, and consequently, form attachments to the team unit that may eventually translate into organizational identification. Because forensics teams use the sharing of traditions such as language, norms and storytelling to convey their organizational culture to group members, these traditions may influence the development of organizational identification.
Methods

In order to answer my research question, how are narratives used to foster organizational identification within forensics teams?, I needed access to team members’ accounts of culture. I chose to conduct interviews because I felt that individuals who had experienced an organization’s culture firsthand would provide the most revealing account of what they perceived to be the organizational culture of their respective forensics team (Swanson, 1992). Interviews would also allow me to directly ask individuals to share narratives that they had been told during their time on the team.

To conduct a study focused on identifying how narratives are shared and utilized within forensics teams, I needed to collect a range of stories from past forensics competitors. Interviews were conducted with alumni from both North Central College (NCC) and Northern Illinois University (NIU) who had competed on their respective school’s forensics team. I chose to draw my subject pool from these two schools based primarily on interest and accessibility. Because I am a student at North Central College, I was interested to discover what former team members had to say about the team’s culture and team narratives. NCC and NIU have a historically friendly relationship, so I also knew that it would be relatively easy for me to gain permission to interview former team members. Choosing two schools also allowed me to do a comparative analysis that might reveal subtle but significant ways in which the cultural performances, and thus, the cultures themselves are unique.

To collect a list of names of past competitors, I contacted the directors of both forensics programs and explained the goal and purpose of my study. Both coaches were very eager to assist me with my project and provided me with lists of past competitors from their programs. I compiled the names and contact information into an Excel worksheet for each school and
organized the names alphabetically. I selected research participants by choosing every seventh person on the worksheet in an attempt to keep my study as randomized as possible. I did not account for gender or age differences in my randomization process. My goal for data collection was to interview ten alumni from each program.

Before I contacted any alumni, I created a list of research questions to guide my interview sessions (See Appendix A). Questions focused on three main areas: initial impression of the team, perceived team culture, and stories of team “heroes” and “villains.” While I had a list of questions to guide me, I did my best to let the conversation flow naturally within the interview sessions to encourage natural responses from each participant. I started each interview by asking the subject when he/she competed in forensics and asked them their initial impression of the forensics team. From there, I let the conversation play out for itself, picking up on threads of conversation that led into my desired discussion areas.

Because I received the contact information for my research subjects from the directors at their alma maters, I did not have equal access to phone numbers and e-mail addresses for each individual. For the North Central alumni, I mainly had telephone numbers while I primarily had e-mail addresses for the Northern Illinois alumni. Additionally, I ran into several cases where the contact information I had was outdated, such as disconnected phone numbers, or I did not receive a response after my initial request for an interview. When I encountered these difficulties, I simply went to the next name on the list of overall subjects.

At the end of the data collection process, I had successfully interviewed 16 individuals, 9 from NCC and 7 from NIU. There were 2 male respondents and 7 female respondents from the NCC subject pool. For the NCC respondents, the time when they competed for the team spanned from 1989 to 2010. Of the interviews with NCC alumni, 4 were conducted over the phone, 4 in
face-to-face sessions, and 1 via e-mail. My transcripts for the NCC interviews consisted of 32 typed pages. There were 5 male respondents and 2 female respondents from the NIU subject pool. For the NIU respondents, the time when they competed for the team spanned from 1986 to 2010. Of the interviews with NIU alumni, 2 were conducted over the phone, 1 in a face-to-face session, and 4 via e-mail. My transcripts for the NIU interviews consisted of 25 typed pages.

In the cases where I only had the e-mail addresses of individuals, I sent them a brief message explaining the purposes of my project and attached a document with the list of interview questions, an informed consent form and a debriefing form. If they agreed to participate in my study, I asked that the participants return the informed consent form via e-mail or postal mail. One of the main problems which I encountered with this method was receiving a response in a timely fashion from individuals. While I quickly received enthusiastic initial responses from individuals, it took a little longer to receive responses with the completed list of answers to the interview questions.

I was able to contact a majority of the North Central College alumni either over the phone or in person. For interviews conducted over the phone, I asked the subject to orally consent to participate in the study and allow me to audio-record the conversation for later transcription and analysis. Subjects who participated in face-to-face interviews were asked to sign the informed consent form before the interview began. All phone and face-to-face interviews were audio-recorded. I transcribed the text onto a computer to allow for easier analysis at the end of my data collection period.
Analytic Methodology

Having conducted and transcribed my interviews, I was then faced with the task of analyzing the information that I had gathered in a way that would assist me in answering my research question. I chose to use the methodology of generative criticism as explained by Sonja K. Foss (2004). Based on Glaser and Strauss’ grounded theory approach to qualitative data analysis, Foss’ methodology is appropriate for this study because it allows the researcher to “generate” his/her own explanation for discursive phenomena as opposed to adhering to a previously prescribed analytic framework. Because my initial research in the field of organizational culture and forensics teams revealed a lack of knowledge regarding the influence of narratives on the development of organizational identification, I sought to form my own explanation for this phenomenon. Generative criticism allows the researcher to identify certain aspects which are particularly interesting or relevant to the ultimate goal of the study while discarding other aspects which are deemed irrelevant. Because I was mainly interested in the use of narratives in developing organizational identification, I was able to focus my analysis on the sections of the transcripts which dealt with culture and narratives while ignoring other comments, which, although interesting, were not relevant to my research question.

Generative Criticism

To understand what generative criticism entails, I will describe the key steps provided by Foss (2004). Initially, a researcher identifies an artifact that “generates a sense of uneasiness, intrigue, or amazement or seems unusual in some way” (Foss, 2004, p. 412). After choosing an artifact, the researcher must begin the coding process. This initial coding process is a broad sweep of the artifact’s main features. After gaining a primary understanding of the key issues at
play in the artifact, the researcher is able to begin forming explanatory schema. According to Foss (2004), the explanatory schema provides a “framework for organizing your insights about the artifact in a coherent and insightful way” (419). The explanatory schema paves the way for the formation of the research question. The process of answering the research question becomes the primary driving force behind the analysis of the data. With the research question foremost in his/her mind, the researcher must return to the coding phase and conduct a closer, more detailed analysis of the primary data. After the second coding process, Foss (2004) suggests conducting a review of relevant literature in order to find a way to connect the research to current knowledge in the applicable area of study. Once all of these steps are completed, Foss (2004) asserts that the researcher will be ready to present his/her findings in a scholarly essay.

Application of Methodology

Because Foss’ (2004) methodology provides the researcher with a great deal of freedom for identifying the focus of a study, generative criticism seemed to be a prime choice for my study. I began my research project with a general idea of what I wanted to focus on and this method allowed me to focus my research efforts on certain types of communication within forensics teams while disregarding other forms of communication. Having already chosen my research artifact and conducted my primary data collection, I was able to begin the coding process.

After an initial, broad reading of the transcripts, there were a few key themes that immediately emerged. Initially, I noticed that the concepts of “family,” “community”, and “communication” were present in various forms in nearly all of the interviews involving former Northern Illinois University (NIU) competitors. The interviews with the NIU competitors also
revealed a heavier focus on education than on competition. In the interviews with alumni from the North Central College (NCC) forensics program, common themes included “family,” “change in competitive focus” and “education.” As opposed to the NIU interviews, the NCC interview respondents appeared to have a less distinct overt preference for education versus competition. The influence of the coaches of both programs was also readily evident in a broad read-through of the transcripts. Finally, I found repetition in subjects’ responses to the questions concerning narratives about perceived heroes and villains of their respective teams. Some respondents actually provided identical stories of team heroes. Respondents were not as forthcoming regarding narratives about perceived villains. This reluctance may have been due to several reasons, perhaps a hesitation to air “dirty team laundry” or an honest failure to recall any negative stories of team members.

After my first coding of the interview transcripts, I was ready to begin formulating explanatory schema. Foss (2004) explains that the explanatory schema “connects all or most of the features that emerged from [the] broad-brush coding of the artifact” (p. 419). Since my initial coding revealed that respondents from both schools discussed the concept of “family,” I knew that this would be a key aspect of my explanatory schema. Additionally, both groups of research subjects referred to common values of “education” and “commitment.” Thus, I was able to create an explanatory schema that regards the communication that occurs within forensics teams as similar to the communication that occurs within family structures, where certain values and beliefs are upheld by authority members and passed down to younger members of the family unit. One way in which these values and beliefs can be passed down is through the sharing of narratives, particularly narratives centered on “heroes,” or individuals who embody or successfully demonstrate the prized values of the family unit.
Generative criticism places the formation of the research question after the creation of the explanatory schema. However, I entered my study with a broad research question, which was later refined after I conducted a review of relevant literature focused on the concepts of organizational culture, organizational identification, narratives and previous research involving forensics teams and these concepts. This review enabled me to understand what research had previously been conducted within the area of forensics teams and also illuminated the gaps that my research will hopefully be able to fill. Similar to any conversation, it is important to understand what has already been said on a subject before stating one’s piece in order to avoid repeating that which has already been said. By surveying the current literature, I was able to further focus and shape my research in such a way to ensure that it will add a new perspective to the study of communication. After conducting the literature review and creating explanatory schema, I was able to refine my initial research question to incorporate the concept of family communication structures. Therefore, my new research question asks: How are narratives used to produce familial identification within forensics teams? I chose to use organizational identification to correlate with the concept of “family,” in an attempt to discover how individuals undergo the transformation from being an outsider to becoming a member of the team family structure.

With the framework of the explanatory schema and my research question to guide me, I had a clearer understanding of how to continue my research efforts. Thus, with all of the steps of Foss’ (2004) methodology completed, I am now able to begin my analysis of my data in order to answer my research question.
Culture

Culture provides members of an organization with the means for ascribing meaning to interactions and events. Understanding how individuals perceive the culture of a given unit can provide insights into the types of stories that are shared between members. Stories can serve to create, bolster or undermine an individual’s perception of certain goals, beliefs or values that are upheld as being central to the team as a unit. My analysis of the interview transcripts allowed me to identify both distinct and common themes between the NCC and NIU forensics team cultures.

Analysis of NCC Team Culture

One key function of stories is to assist group members in remembering cultural values and beliefs (Kelly, 1985). The accounts provided by NCC alumni illuminate three key themes that can summarize the overriding team culture: “family,” “education,” and “competition.” Initially, the concept of “family” is readily apparent in multiple respondents’ comments. Seven respondents referred to a sense of family being overtly present in team interactions. These comments suggested that a family mentality is a vital aspect of the NCC team culture. One respondent noted, “[the coaches] always instilled in us that very family aspect, you know, everyone’s family, everyone’s respected” (NCC Transcripts p. 17). Another respondent spoke to this emphasis on inclusion, noting “there was a lot of focus on making everybody feel like part of the team” (NCC p. 11).

Williams and Hughes (2003) suggest that the forensics family is characterized by the provision of support between group members, heightened loyalty among members and the sense of a shared group history and future. The concepts of loyalty and the sense of a shared group
history and future were exemplified in respondents’ comments concerning how the behavior of individual members reflected upon the group as a unit. Team members were expected to conduct themselves in a manner that would reflect well upon the NCC team as a whole. For example, one respondent noted, “If you did anything that made yourself look ridiculous or whatever, it didn’t just reflect poorly on you, it reflected poorly on your teammates who had been working really hard, it reflected poorly on your coaches that had given their time and energy” (NCC p. 6). Another respondent echoed this sentiment, noting that upperclassmen felt a pressure to assist underclassmen as they adjusted to the activity because “underclassmen do reflect the upperclassmen and you want them to behave themselves” (NCC p. 10). Coaches were also responsible for creating an environment that enabled team members to realize that their actions were representative of the overall team. According to one alum, “you always knew what was expected of you in terms of representing the team… it was clear from [the coach]… it’s like this is how you’re supposed to dress, this is how you’re supposed to act, this is how you’re supposed to be” (NCC p. 13). Because team members are representative of the organization, there is a sense of pressure created by both upperclassmen and coaches for all team members to uphold the historical image of the team. Individuals are encouraged to portray themselves in a way that reflects the team’s history and lays a similar foundation for the team’s future. Therefore, when cultural values are made explicit to team members, individuals are able to attain a clearer understanding of what is expected from them.

Education was the second key theme that appeared in the comments made by NCC alumni concerning their perceptions of the overall team culture. On a scale of one to ten, with one being very weak and ten being very strong, respondents provided an average of eight for the team’s focus on the educational aspects of the activity. Examples of the team’s focus on
education included a focus on personal growth, integrity and the development of academic skills. First, several respondents commented on how the team culture emphasizes personal growth within the activity. One alum noted, “there was a focus on… making sure that we didn’t stagnate, that we were continually growing and improving personally and as a team” (NCC p. 11). Another respondent echoed this assertion, stating, “[the coaches] try to make each person grow in their own way, and they instill that in everybody else” (NCC p. 17). Personal growth is exemplary of a focus on education because it shifts attention from competitive success to improved skills in multiple areas. Additionally, one respondent noted that the coaches encouraged personal growth by allowing team members to take personal responsibility for their actions. The alum explains, “at North Central… they really let us make our decisions… let people decide what they wanted to do, and… in some respects, they foster human beings that way, and I think that’s incredibly important” (NCC p. 28). Illustrating the different focus placed on education versus competition, a respondent noted, “To me, that was always the team culture, like yes, the sport is very important, but in reality, we’re teaching you how to think, we’re teaching you how to become a better person, we’re teaching you how to handle obstacles” (NCC p. 28). Therefore, the team culture acknowledged the inherent need for competitiveness but still emphasized other aspects of the activity.

The NCC forensics team culture also demonstrates an educational focus through the emphasis placed upon integrity. As one respondent explains, “We valued integrity, like actually using real sources, not canning [pre-writing] speeches, not repeating things, not emulating other people” (NCC p. 8). Another respondent used the term “truth” to denote integrity. She stated, “[E]verything we do has to be true to the liter[ature], true to the subject matter, has to be honest in terms of reaction, and in terms of did you write this… is this all the information that you have,
are you presenting a true argument, you’re not bluffing or whitewashing any facts that you found along the way” (NCC p. 22). Again, the focus on education is demonstrated by upholding the cultural values of honesty and integrity.

The third indicator of the team’s focus on education is the development of academic skills through participation in the activity. Reflecting on her experience on the team, one alum explained, “I see it all very clearly now… it was teaching me how to write, teaching me how to speak in public, teaching me how to compose my thoughts” (NCC p. 13). Another respondent drew a comparison between the culture of North Central College as a school and the culture of the forensics team, noting, “The college itself is small, private, liberal-arts, you know, encouraging of thinking, encouraging of, at some levels, risk-taking or critical thinking, and I think the team has always reflected that” (NCC p. 27). Thus, through the focus on personal growth, integrity and the development of academic skills, the NCC forensics team upholds its cultural value of education.

Competition was the third theme that appeared to represent a key aspect of the NCC forensics team culture. When asked to individually rank their team’s focus on competitiveness and education, respondents generally agreed that the team held competition at a lower value than education. Although this lower value may suggest that competition was not a significant cultural value, subsequent comments and answers by the respondents suggested otherwise. For example, several respondents noted that the emphasis placed on competition visibly changed during the course of their time on the team. This change in focus suggests that culture is a fluid notion, one that is able to be shaped and molded by group members. Gormley (2008) refers to culture as a “living entity” because it shifts and adapts in accordance with changing membership (p. 213). Thus, as forensics teams are regularly gaining and losing members on a yearly basis, the team
must constantly adapt to the addition and loss of different perspectives. While the team may have an overriding emphasis on either competition or education, the intensity of that emphasis may change from year to year. Indeed, multiple respondents noted that they perceived changing levels of competition to be due to individual team members’ personal desires to be competitive. For example, one respondent perceived himself to be a catalyst in the team’s progression from being less competitive to becoming heavily competitive. When asked to rank the team’s competitiveness on a scale of one to ten, with one being very weak and ten being very strong, he noted, “when I came to the team, I would say the competitiveness was somewhere around a two or three…. And then that last year, it was definitely, we were, as a team, at like a ten” (NCC p. 3). Despite the team’s small size, team members were not willing to let their limited membership deter their competitive success. The respondent explained, “we were like ‘forget that, we are who we are and we’re gonna [sic] go toe to toe with anybody, whether it’s a [School C] team, whether it’s [School X], whether it’s [School D], it doesn’t matter’” (NCC p. 4). Because his fellow teammates agreed with his desire to be more competitive, the overall team’s focus on competition was able to be elevated. However, an increased focus on competition does not necessarily equate a team consciousness focused purely on being competitive. Instead, respondents noted that the team’s focus was “more of just a friendly competition… there wasn’t any sort of cutthroat attitude on the team” (NCC p. 1). Additionally, one respondent spoke of how the team lessened its emphasis on competition during her time on the team. She explained that the change was partly due to “a handful of team members who were just chronically not doing well” and the focus on competition decreased “in order for team morale to stay up” (NCC p. 8). Therefore, team cultures must adapt to the needs and desires of individual members in order to create and/or maintain a sense of unity within the group. If the culture does not adapt to
fit these needs and desires, individuals will likely feel alienated and will experience decreased motivation to remain a part of the group.

According to the comments made by NCC alumni, there are three key values upheld as important to the team’s organizational culture. The value of family is conveyed by comments focusing on loyalty and support among team members. Education is seen as a cultural value due to the team’s focus on personal growth, integrity and the development of academic skills. Finally, despite its fluctuation in emphasis (or perhaps because of this fluctuation), competition is the third key cultural value of the NCC forensics team.

**Analysis of NIU Team Culture**

My analysis of the Northern Illinois University forensics team culture revealed both similar and unique cultural aspects in comparison to the NCC team. The NIU team culture can be divided into three key components: “family/community,” “communication,” and “education.” Initially, respondents’ comments make it clear that the NIU team places a strong emphasis on the concept of “family” and “community.” I chose to combine the areas of family and community for this analysis because the comments made by the interview subjects suggested that there was a very intricate link between the “immediate family” of current team members and the “extended family” or network of alumni. Therefore, it seemed appropriate to link these categories together to more appropriately describe the NIU team culture. This link was not present in the analysis of the NCC data, which suggests that the NCC interpretation of family is geared more towards the close-knit, immediate family than the wider-ranging, extended family. Several respondents referred to the NIU team as the “NIU Family”. The metaphor of “family” was carried out through one respondent’s description of team interactions as similar to the interactions that occur...
between siblings. The alum noted, “I guess the best comparison I could make is that seniors were viewed as ‘big brothers’ or ‘big sisters.’ So while you may not always like them, you had to respect them because they were the ‘older kids’” (NIU Transcripts p. 20). The use of the family metaphor illustrates the close bonds that exist within the overall team structure. One respondent noted that the “long-term, broader goals [of the team] were to establish relationships with team members, many of which are still strong today, both inside and outside the forensics community” (NIU p. 10).

In addition to the perception of the team as a close-knit family, NIU alumni commented on the “extended family” aspects of the team structure. For one respondent, community was viewed as the primary value upheld by the NIU team culture. She states, “Community first in our alum and our team and then the community of our school and DeKalb itself. That was our number one priority, and then we expressed that through networking with our alums, working…doing public debates in school and then finally, working in community” (NIU p. 1). In this instance, the focus of community extended from the immediate team members to alumni members to the greater community surrounding the school itself. For many respondents, previous experience with alumni members led them to join the NIU forensics team. As one respondent explained, “My two-year [community college] coach was from there, went to school there and competed for them, and a lot of people, a lot of coaches, judges on the two-year circuit got their degree and competed for NIU and they’re just known as the family” (NIU p. 5). Another respondent elaborates on the emphasis placed on connections with alumni members, noting, “There’s a long tradition, a long history, everyone on the team kind of knows, or knew at that point, all the older members, and so tradition is something that was very important to us”
By creating a strong connection between past and current team members, the NIU team culture emphasizes the concepts of family and community.

Second, the NIU team culture emphasizes communication as a primary cultural value. This emphasis is illustrated by the team’s focus on maintaining the integrity of their forensics performances. As one respondent noted, “We always wanted to focus on the rhetoric, we wanted to focus on the message, we wanted to focus on being effective communicators, far and above over anything, any sort of gimmick or any sort of trendy tactic that was in vogue at the time” (NIU p. 7). Another alum explained that “coaches reinforced the idea that ‘communication comes before competition’” (NIU p. 9). Instead of focusing on how to win, competitors were urged to think about how they could become better communicators. Additionally, team members were advised to “use [their] rhetorical skills to connect with [their] audience and be an advocate for [their] message” (NIU p. 12). The team valued communication as a means of sharing information with a larger audience. By placing such a strong emphasis on communication, the NIU team culture roots its values within the wider activity of forensics as a whole.

The NIU team also emphasizes education as a key cultural value. For example, multiple respondents referred to the idea embedded within the phrase “focus on the process, not the prize” (NIU p. 7, 12). One respondent provided an example of how the team focused on helping team members benefit educationally, stating that, “learning new methods of research, organization, WRITING MY OWN SPEECHES [sic]” were key areas where academic skills were held in high regard (NIU p. 11). Respondents’ comments make it clear that the NIU team culture valued the learning aspects of the activity over competitive success. Indeed, as one respondent put it, “the entire team philosophy was always very much ‘make sure you’re learning from the experience, make sure that you’re getting something out of it’. And I can say there were times where, had
competitiveness been stressed more, we would have done things differently, it would have been a different experience” (NIU p. 6). Another respondent reaffirmed this belief, noting “Being on the speech team at Northern Illinois University… [is] about learning how to be a better person. It’s about learning how to be a great writer, researcher, lover of literature, editor, teammate and leader” (NIU p. 17). Again, the focus on the educational aspects illustrates how the NIU team culture values communication and education over competitive success.

The NIU team culture has three key cultural values: family/community, communication and education. The team demonstrates its strong emphasis on family/community by maintaining strong connections between current and former team members. The value of communication is demonstrated through the team’s focus on becoming better communicators and developing strong messages to share with a larger audience. Education is seen as a key cultural value by the emphasis placed on team members’ ability to learn and grow as participants in the activity.

Common Themes

By comparing the team cultures of both NCC and NIU, I was able to identify three common themes that appeared in the data: the team as a distinct family unit, the need to differentiate one’s team from other forensics programs and a strong focus on education. First, respondents from both schools referred to their respective teams as a family structure with coaches taking on the role of parents and competitors performing the role of children. Two NIU respondents referred to NIU competitors, both past and present, as “[J]’s kids” (NIU p. 2, 20). One alum wrote, “[J] really does treat all of her kids like they were literally her kids” (NIU p. 20). By using the phrase “[J]’s kids,” the family metaphor is easily invoked and shared with new members. Repeated use strengthens the implied emotional associations connected with the
image of a family. Additionally, the label of “[J]’s kids” serves to denote and differentiate in-group and out-group members by signaling to team members who is a member of the family and who is not. For NIU alumni, overt references to “[J]’s kids” and the “NIU family” reinforce the perception of the team as a family unit.

Comments made by NCC alumni also refer to the theme of family as being central to the perceived team culture. Unlike the NIU respondents, however, NCC alumni do not have a commonly used label to identify former and current team members. Instead, the family metaphor is demonstrated by the close, family-like ties between coaches and students. Referring to one of the coaches, one respondent said, “She knew each one of us intimately and she knew how to get the best out of you and how to make you achieve things that even you didn’t think you could do at the time” (NCC p. 7). The respondent went on to explain that the coach had a unique way of interacting with each of her students, understanding that each one needed something different from her (NCC p. 7). Applying the family metaphor to this situation, the coaches interact with their students as parents interact with their children, realizing that each child requires something different from his/her parent compared to his/her siblings. For example, another respondent recalled, “[The coaches] had these prodigal sons and daughters who would just wander off but [R] always just has this loving heart of, anyone’s welcome and no matter what you’ve done, or where you’ve gone, you’re always welcome to come back” (NCC p. 17). Again, competitors are viewed as the children of the coaching staff, supporting the extension of the family metaphor to the forensics team structure. Overall, the forensics family provides competitors with close social connections that are viewed as a vital form of interpersonal support. As one alum explained, “So, speech is exciting, but it’s exciting because you’re sharing it with your family, and I think of them as family, so those moments are what
make the bigger, more formal things exciting, or the downfalls sadder because ‘I let my family down’ or ‘I get to hug my family because they know what it’s like’” (NCC p. 20). Identifying the team structure as a family allows competitors to ascribe attributes that are typically associated with families to the team unit.

The second theme that was apparent in both groups of respondents was the need to differentiate one’s forensics program from programs at other schools. Comments were made in both groups about how their team was different from other teams on the forensics circuit. The need to establish one’s team as a separate and distinct unit may stem from the desire to establish clear differences between what is desirable and what is undesirable in team cultures. Multiple respondents used a comparison between the NCC team and other teams to illustrate the NCC team’s particular conception of competitiveness. For example, one respondent noted that the NCC team was competitive “but not overly competitive, like one of the [School X] teams” (NCC p. 1). Another respondent echoed this sentiment, noting, “Our mindset of competitiveness… wasn’t like [School X] or [School Y], where it was like out for blood” (NCC p. 16). In both of these cases, the NCC team’s focus on competitiveness is painted as being less cutthroat in comparison to other teams on the forensics circuit. Overall, the NCC team’s interpretation of competitiveness appears to be that of a “friendly competitiveness,” or a focus on competitiveness that is mitigated by other cultural values. While the team recognizes that competition is an inherent aspect of their existence as a competitive academic team, they appear to have a conscious desire to not let this competitiveness define their team identity. Other NCC alumni drew comparisons between the overall team dynamic of the NCC team and other teams. One respondent explained:
We never wanted to be a [School X] because they developed cookie-cutter performers...and we never wanted to be [a School Y] because they were always known for being completely trashed and on drugs and that sort of thing. And [School Z], they were always like anorexic and drug addicts. And [School A] always had that problem.... And [School C]... always did, like, pieces that were on racism because they were all African-American, so they shoved that down your throat. (NCC p. 18)

By highlighting perceived negative characteristics of other schools, the respondent inherently places the NCC team in a more positive light by suggesting that the NCC team did not share any of these characteristics. Another alum from the NCC program spoke of the unique way in which the NCC team treats its team members. Using the family metaphor, she said, “I am one of those people that came in the family and you don’t get that on every forensics team. I have coached for some and I have, you know, been against others, and you don’t get that everywhere” (NCC p. 29). Again, it is implied that the NCC team is inherently different from other forensics teams. By drawing distinct differences between the NCC forensics team and other forensics programs, the NCC alumni create a positive image of their team culture that can be passed down to new team members in order to establish what it means to be a part of the NCC forensics program.

Alumni from NIU use similar tactics in distinguishing their program from other forensics teams on the circuit. As with the NCC team, comments were made by NIU respondents comparing their team’s focus on competitiveness with that of other programs. For example, one alum explained, “[T]he NIU mentality of speech, while maybe not unique, is different than other programs, it is something that isn’t necessarily the same. You know, I could name some other schools that focus a lot more on competition, focus a lot more on a specific style...” (NIU p. 8). NIU team members recognize that their team’s focus does not lie in terms of competitive
success. While competition is still a part of their team culture, it is not viewed as a prominent cultural value. For example, one respondent explained that “the first thing you had to do was work hard and create a strong message. If you did that, [J] taught us that you would be competitive. Competitive success was an output. It was not the main goal” (NIU p. 15). The team believed that education and communication were more important than competitive success. Thus, NIU team members perceive their team culture as distinct from that of other schools.

Another respondent speaks to this idea, noting:

The culture of this team was and still is that of a team that does its own thing. It really tries to deemphasize the ‘culture of qualifying’ that exists on so many teams. Being on the speech team at Northern Illinois University is not about getting qualified for nationals. It is not about bringing the biggest team you possibly can to AFA [one of the national tournaments]. It’s not about winning every Tournament [sic]. (NIU p. 17)

These comments illustrate that the NIU team recognizes that a “culture of qualifying” is prevalent within the forensics community. However, the NIU team goes directly against this commonly-held cultural value and, instead, chooses to focus on other aspects of the activity. Team members appear to interpret this mentality positively, noting that this is what helps set the NIU forensics program apart from its competition.

Finally, both team cultures place a strong emphasis on education, particularly in terms of integrity and the development of academic skills. Integrity was interpreted by several respondents as writing their own speeches, ensuring that they were presenting factual and truthful information, and making sure that their performances were gimmick-free. As one NIU respondent explained, “even if it was right before a really important tournament, you would rewrite a speech rather than go with whatever was most competitive in delivery” (NIU p. 1).
Competitors were encouraged to keep their speeches fresh and up-to-date through constant revisions and edits. Again, this reflects the value placed upon education because it requires individuals to be constantly researching, rewriting and revising their speeches. In the process of revising their speeches, individuals are also honing their academic abilities, further demonstrating the team’s focus on education.

**Narrative Analysis**

Having identified the themes that characterize each of these forensics teams’ cultures as well as discovering common themes that are apparent in both sets of comments, the focus of my analysis can now turn to how these teams use narratives to demonstrate and share cultural values with new and existing team members. These narratives become a means of “performing” the organizational culture of each forensics team. Each culture serves as a framework for team members as they listen to the stories, interpret their meanings and then share these narratives with one another. There are two key forms in which these narratives can take shape—narratives regarding cultural heroes and narratives regarding cultural villains.

**Cultural Heroes**

Song and Chen (2007) explain that “organizational hero stories are testimonials about certain organizational members who may personify an existing or an idealized organizational culture” (p. 264). By providing new and current team members with examples of successful former competitors, individuals in influential power positions (upperclassmen, coaching staff, alumni, etc.) are able to “frame and promote institutional values…. reflect their hopes and concerns as well as reveal organizational rules and norms” (Song & Chen, 2007, p. 264).
Narratives can be useful in expressing cultural values due to their descriptive nature. Individuals are given real-life examples of successful competitors and are shown how to attain similar success. Although narratives can be shared with the express purpose of revealing certain aspects of the organizational culture, narratives may also be shared as a part of day-to-day communication among team members (Keyton, 2005). Thus, individuals are continually exposed to stories demonstrating core cultural values of the organization.

Analysis of NCC Cultural Heroes

In the narratives shared by North Central College alumni, there were three key figures presented as cultural heroes. Narratives involving these figures were mentioned by multiple respondents, thus signaling their influence as significant figures in NCC team history. Each of the three cultural heroes presented in the narratives demonstrate the value the team placed on competition.

The most frequently mentioned cultural hero illustrates commitment to competition even in situations of extreme duress. R’s status as a cultural hero is evident due to multiple respondents sharing highly similar stories of an event demonstrating R’s focus on competition. One respondent describes the former competitor “who actually went to the bathroom (i.e., peed his pants) while competing in a final round” (NCC p. 32). This same respondent noted that this story “always emphasized dedication and the importance of competition” (NCC p. 32). Another alum explained that this situation demonstrated R’s “professionalism and determination” because it showed that “if something goes wrong, just ignore it, brush it off and act professional at all times” (NCC p. 9). This story portrays competition or the need to win as a dominant cultural value, even in extreme situations such as needing to go to the bathroom so badly that one is
willing to soil him/herself while performing. However, the underlying theme of R’s story contradicts the notion of “friendly competition” that was relayed by respondents as a cultural value of the NCC team. R’s extreme commitment to competition would seem to be more appropriate for a team that has a “cutthroat” interpretation of competition. By failing (or refusing) to excuse himself to the restroom, R portrays himself as an individual who is willing to do anything in order to win, even soiling himself in front of an audience. As one respondent stated, R’s story illustrates that “That’s how committed he was to actually doing well” (NCC p. 12). Although not all of the respondents remembered the exact details of the story (such as R’s name or at what tournament the incident actually occurred), the general theme of the story establishes R as an individual who embodied the cultural value of competition.

H was the second figure who appeared in multiple respondents’ comments when asked about cultural heroes. Unlike R, there is not a singular event or story establishing H as a cultural hero. Rather, the comments made by alumni create an overall image of H as an individual who was very serious about competing. One respondent referred to H as “this cutthroat, I mean, like serious competitor” (NCC p. 28). Again, the narrative of H contradicts the proclaimed cultural value of competition and NCC’s interpretation of this value as “friendly” as opposed to “cutthroat.” Despite this contradiction, H continued to exert influence on the team after graduating. As one alum explained, “If you wanted to be a national champion, you went and saw H” (NCC p. 28). H was also portrayed as an individual whose commitment to the activity and dedication to competition was evident to other team members. One respondent explains, “I just remember [a coach] telling me that [H] never stopped, she always kept going” (NCC p. 18). This same respondent elaborated on H’s commitment, noting:
I just remember that kind of mentality of… we forensics people don’t sleep and we don’t always get to have the same fun and relaxed social life that everybody else does here,… it’s just hard… [but] [H] never gave up, [H] kept going, she never let anybody see her cry. (NCC p. 18)

H was presented to fellow and future competitors as an example of an individual whose commitment to forensics was clearly demonstrated. Because stories about H span from her time as a competitor to her influence as an alum, her position as a cultural hero illustrates that one can continue to exemplify team cultural values even after one is no longer a current member of the group.

W is the third cultural hero present in narratives shared by NCC alumni. W’s status as a cultural hero stems from his competitive success as he is the only national champion from the school. Therefore, he is upheld as the individual who successfully attained what may be perceived as the ultimate competitive goal for all forensics competitors. One respondent stated that W was the only cultural hero that he remembered being talked about on the team. He explains, “I think he was the first one to win an event nationally for the team, and I know [the coach] was very proud of his critical analysis… but he’s really the only one that we heard about on the team” (NCC p. 5). W’s national success served to catapult him into an esteemed position in team history. One alum who competed during the same era as W noted that W helped establish the team’s history on the forensics circuit due to his competitive success (NCC p. 14). Another respondent drew a connection between W’s national success and the team’s cultural values of personal growth and education:

I remember the story of [our coach] saying, ‘You know, he was making small changes to his Crit. [Rhetorical Criticism] as he walked to the national final round, him and I were
talking about it and tweaking’ and that really, really good pieces were always alive, you
know, they never hit a point where you stopped working on them. They were always
being tweaked, always being living, breathing things and I’ve never forgotten that story.
And I sort of decided that that’s why he won because he allowed his Crit., which was so
amazing, to do that. (NCC p. 28)

In the re-telling of this narrative, W combines the cultural values of competition and education.
Thus, W demonstrates that these values can be enacted simultaneously and that an individual can
combine the educational aspects of the activity with a competitive drive in order to achieve
success. W served as an inspiration to future teammates by providing an example of how
competitors can continue to grow and stretch their abilities, even as they’re walking into a
national final round. W’s story suggests that a speaker’s work is never done and that forensics is
an activity which allows, and even encourages, constant growth in both the speaker and the
material being presented.

Through the re-telling of narratives involving cultural heroes, the comments made by
NCC respondents indicate that competition plays a much larger role in the team’s organizational
culture than was explicitly indicated. R’s commitment to competition in an extreme situation
and H’s cutthroat attitude complicate the vision of the NCC team’s notion of “friendly”
competition. W demonstrates how education and competition can work in tandem to create a
successful outcome. Analysis of these narratives reveal how competitors are exposed to
supporting as well as contradictory examples of cultural values being performed in real life.
Analysis of NIU Cultural Heroes

The narratives shared by Northern Illinois University alumni revealed two key cultural heroes who upheld the values of family/community and communication. Initially, the primary coach of the NIU team is held up as a cultural hero because she exemplifies the team value of family/community. As noted previously, J has established herself as the ‘mother’ of the NIU team, with team members collectively recognizing each other and alumni as “[J]’s kids.” One respondent gave an example of J’s mothering nature in action by describing a situation in which a team member was unable to pay her heating bill. The respondent noted, “When [J] found out I watched her take her checkbook out and write a check for this young woman so she can pay [sic] for [the] gas bill” (NIU p. 17). This story suggests that J’s role as team matriarch expands beyond the realm of forensics. Instead, J is seen as taking care of her “children” outside of the competitive arena. Other respondents note how J serves as a central connector between current and former team members, thus enhancing and embodying the cultural value of community. One alum explained that J plays a central role in keeping team history alive for current and future members. The respondent explained that an important figure for the team is “[D]… the founding IE [individual events] and debate coach…. And so, [J] says she learned everything from [D], and we all say we learned everything from [J], so that’s kind of the person that we put on our biggest pedestal” (NIU p. 2). In this way, J shares team cultural values with team members by passing along what she has learned from previous coaches. In her matriarchal role, J ensures that historical knowledge is passed onto each new generation of competitors.

B is the second cultural hero present in the narratives provided by NIU alumni. One key story exemplifies B as exemplary of the NIU value of communication. One respondent shares B’s story:
[B] made finals at AFA [the American Forensics Association national tournament] every year he competed, but he never won. His senior year at AFA, he makes it through quarters, makes it through the semis, and makes it to finals. After the semi-final round, one of his judges came up to [J] and told her that [B] was at 13 [sic] minutes. [J] starts freaking out and tells [B] he needs to cut. [B] tells her that there’s nothing to cut; the speech is where it should be. So, after a little more arguing, [J] finally tells him, “You know what? Do what you think is right.” The next day, after [B] performs, [J] finds him and asks him how it went. He said, “[J], it was the best 17 [sic] minutes of my life.” And he took second. (NIU p. 24)

This story is a prime example of B embodying the value of communication over competition. In an event with a time limit of ten minutes, B chose to disregard the risk of potentially receiving lower ranks from judges by refusing to compromise on what he perceived to be the integrity of his speech. B’s conviction that his speech was perfect the way it was (despite being overtime) is a testament to his internalization of the cultural value of communication. By insisting that he perform the speech despite potential penalties, B showed that he recognized that there are more important things than simply winning an event. As one respondent stated, “To this day, the lesson is to have fun and put the constraints and restrictions [of] competition to the side with no regrets. This story made me perceive the team and program as one that prioritized people’s needs over the emphasis on winning” (NIU p. 10). Not only does this narrative re-emphasize the team’s devaluation of competition, but it also reiterates the team’s focus on the individuals within the unit. J’s willingness to let B perform his speech the way he saw fit is representative of the team culture of acknowledging people’s needs. In this way, the team demonstrates that the importance of family transcends competitive success. B’s actions illustrate that he valued the
message inherent within his speech so much that he was willing to forego a possible national title.

The cultural values of family and communication are closely reflected in the narratives of cultural heroes provided by NIU respondents. J performs the cultural value of family in her role as team mother by caring for her “children” inside and outside the competitive arena. B’s story illustrates the team’s focus on maintaining the integrity of one’s event and valuing communication over competition. Unlike the disparities between the NCC narratives and cultural values, the NIU narratives strongly support the cultural values expressed by the NIU team culture.

Cultural Villains

Just as narratives can be used to share examples of how organizational members should behave through the use of cultural heroes, narratives can also be used to communicate examples of cultural villains, or individuals who violated aspects of the organization’s culture. These narratives are shared with team members to emphasize behaviors that are not accepted by the group by portraying possible consequences faced by violators. Respondents were comparatively less forthright in relaying team narratives involving cultural villains than they were in sharing narratives of cultural heroes. In many cases, alumni from both schools stated that they did not remember any such villains during their time as competitors. While this may be true, I also recognize that respondents may have hesitated to share negative stories with me despite the anonymity of their responses. Despite having considerably less data involving cultural villains, I was still able to identify a few key narratives which related to each team’s overriding cultural value system.
Analysis of NCC Cultural Villains

The responses from North Central College alumni presented two key areas in which narratives involving cultural villains played an important role. Initially, several respondents spoke to high levels of drama existing on either their team or on past teams. Highly dramatic competitors were consistently portrayed in a negative light and as having a negative impact on overall team relations. For example, one respondent recalls, “[S] was an upperclassman… [and was] just a very dramatic person. And I know that me and the other people of my class constantly told stories about her to underclassmen to keep her infamous memory alive” (NCC p. 9). By purposefully sharing this story of a cultural villain, the respondent was seeking to demonstrate to underclassmen that being overly dramatic was an unwelcome trait. Another respondent spoke to this effect, noting, “there were always stories of past teams having drama, people that were very high maintenance, or that would…drag the rest of the team down by sitting in their room crying all the time... So, we were always kind of told not to do that…” (NCC p. 12). Again, these stories are used to dissuade new and current competitors from partaking in similar behavior. As Williams and Hughes (2003) stated, the forensics family is characterized by loyalty and support between team members. Dramatic behavior, then, can be seen as counter-active to creating a loving, family-like atmosphere. Instead of supporting team members, villains are seen as tearing apart the family unit. For example, one respondent referred to L as “absolutely toxic” (NCC p. 30). L was an upperclassman on this respondent’s team who would “pick her favorites” and “would often, on a regular basis, threaten to [the coaches] that she was going to leave us and go to… [School X]” (NCC p. 25). In this case, L’s threat to transfer schools directly speaks against the family values of loyalty and support, firmly violating the NCC cultural value of family.
Second, a few of the NCC alumni spoke of other teams as violating the values espoused by the North Central team. While they may not have been as willing to speak negatively of their own team members, the respondents were more willing to paint other teams in a negative light. As I alluded to earlier, the need to distinguish one’s team as a distinct unit separate from other schools’ programs was a common theme found in the discourse of both groups of respondents. One respondent did not recall any villains of his team but did remember that “we’d just gossip about someone from another team who was…just a pain” (NCC p. 2). By projecting their criticisms and negative evaluations onto competitors from other programs, the team was able to view itself as more closely adhering to the desired cultural values of their own team. Another respondent explained that while “we would always make fun of some people’s pieces that were overly dramatic…the things we talked about more were schools” (NCC p. 18). Drawing comparisons between programs allows members of the North Central team to collectively place themselves as the heroes within the narratives that they create and pass along to future team members.

Through narratives involving cultural villains, NCC team members are able to provide new team members with examples of individuals who violated or disregarded the cultural values of the team. Individuals who introduce drama to the team atmosphere are viewed negatively and are seen as attempting to tear apart the family structure. Additionally, the desire to distinguish one’s team from other teams is illustrated through the negative portrayal of non-NCC competitors and teams. This desire may be the cause for the disparity between the proclaimed cultural value of “friendly” competition and the competition-centered narratives which suggest a more cutthroat attitude. Because of their negative opinion of teams they perceive to be cutthroat, the NCC team wishes to avoid being seen as cutthroat themselves. This wish may lead them to
exaggerate the perceived negative attributes of other teams in order for the NCC team to appear in a more positive light.

Analysis of NIU Cultural Villains

For alumni of the Northern Illinois University forensics program, cultural villains take two main forms. First, cultural villains are seen as individuals who, for whatever reason, separate themselves from the NIU community. By turning their backs on one of the values that the NIU team holds most dearly, that of family/community, these individuals are seen as team pariahs. One respondent explains that these individuals are the “people who didn’t completely put themselves into our community… the people who kind of held out and did their own things… [like] trying to skip events of… team-bonding” (NIU p. 3). Refusal to join in team activities may be perceived by other team members as a lack of interest or commitment to the team, making it harder for a family bond to be formed. Even after a team member has graduated, he/she is still capable of violating the family/community bond that exists within the team. An alumnus shares the story of an individual who, after finishing graduate school, applied for a job at Northern Illinois University. However, the head coach at the time felt that another individual had stronger credentials and did not endorse the alum applicant. The respondent notes that the applicant “was not happy… he slandered [J]’s name all over the place. To this day, he really has been shunned as a member of this program. None of us speak to him” (NIU p. 18). By slandering the name of the team’s matriarch, this individual violated the NIU cultural value of family/community. As evidenced by their refusal to speak to him, his actions were negatively received by the rest of the NIU family. Thus, this story provides an example of the consequences that await those who violate the NIU cultural values.
Other cultural villains provided by the NIU respondents take the form of “sore losers”.

As I noted earlier, the phrase “focus on the process, not the prize” was used to characterize the NIU team’s emphasis on the educational aspects of the activity over the competitive aspects (NIU p. 7, 12). Individuals who behaved in ways that reversed the significance of these values were seen as going against the perceived team culture. Respondents provided two similar narratives of competitors who focused on the prize rather than the process. One alum shared the story of a “team member [who] ‘only’ advanced to quarterfinals at AFA in two different events. The student’s disappointment of not advancing further was communicated at the awards ceremony when he threw his QF [sic] plaques on the floor in disgust” (NIU p. 10). By outwardly expressing poor sportsmanship, this student became an example for future team members of how not to behave. The respondent noted that the lesson he learned from this narrative was: “if we are fortunate enough to have competitive success in this activity, then we win graciously. If we don’t have the results we want, then we concede defeat graciously as well” (NIU p. 10). The second narrative centered on T, a competitor who took third in the final round at a national tournament. One respondent described T as “pissed that he didn’t win… [so he] threw his third place AFA trophy across the parking lot, shattering it into a million pieces” (NIU p. 25). Again, this competitor’s behavior violates the NIU team culture because he chose to place competition as more important than communication or education. Because the NIU team culture consciously de-emphasizes competition, this individual’s behavior stood in direct contradiction to the team mentality. The respondent noted, “It almost became a mantra for some of us to ‘don’t be [T]’” (NIU p. 25). Because the team was able to summarize undesirable behavior through the use of a single story, team members were able to more easily distinguish which actions were deemed acceptable and unacceptable within the given team culture.
The narratives involving cultural villains provided by NIU respondents revealed that individuals who violate the team’s cultural values are likely to receive negative sanctions. In the case of the individual who slandered J’s name, team members stopped talking to him because he violated the value of family/community. The “sore losers” received similar, negative treatment by their comrades because they were perceived as placing too much emphasis on competitive success, a value that was not a part of the NIU team culture. All of these narratives demonstrate undesirable behavior and the resulting consequences. Therefore, new team members are encouraged to avoid similar consequences by upholding the cultural values of the team.

Conclusions

As respondents recalled narratives of cultural heroes and villains, it appeared that they realized, at some level, the influence that these narratives had on their perception of their respective team. Narratives have the ability to “determin[e] what is remembered, internalized, and applied” within a team’s culture (Derryberry, 2005, p. 18). Because team membership changes so frequently, narratives become a way of passing along cultural values to each new generation. These stories are able to ensure a sense of stability within the team unit despite the coming and going of team members every year.

The ease with which alumni were able to recall stories involving cultural heroes suggests that hero stories were shared more often than stories involving cultural villains. Such an emphasis would presumably provide team members with a highly positive image of the team and of their own personal role on it. For example, hero stories may be used to show team members that competitive success can be achieved. Song and Chen’s (2007) assertion that heroes “are symbolic figures with achievements that are extraordinary but not unattainable” supports the role
of the cultural hero as a figure of inspiration for new and current team members (p. 263). Team members are given the impression that they can share the same competitive success as these cultural heroes if they adhere to the values, beliefs and goals of the overall team culture. As one NCC respondent explained, stories of cultural heroes made “the big successes more personable… which then in turn made me feel that I could do that too. By putting a story with this big name… it shows their human side and it made them more relatable” (NCC p. 23). In this case, narratives are used to convey the cultural value of competition by showing team members that success is achievable. During the course of their time on the team, individuals listen to these narratives, become familiar with the underlying themes and eventually repeat the narratives by sharing them with other team members. The stories become a key part of team members’ identification with the team as a unit. According to one respondent, “[W]hen [our coach] would tell stories about these people… they became real to me at some level… You felt part of something… you know, when you made history, when you became part of those stories” (NCC p. 29). Narratives become a way of creating a sense of unity among team members by providing them with a common means of interpreting their team culture. Not only do the narratives provide team members with a way to connect with former team members, but they also create the possibility that one day an individual will be the protagonist in their own story.

As individuals are socialized into the team and begin to identify with the organizational culture, they can be expected to adopt the values espoused by these team narratives. Since this study revealed that both team cultures share the perception of the team as a family unit, it can be inferred that, as individuals are exposed to and even retell team narratives, they will begin to consider themselves part of the team family. Becoming part of the family involves identifying with the family’s values, beliefs and goals. Therefore, the narratives become a primary means of
inducing organizational or familial identification. As demonstrated by the NIU respondents’ comments, this familial identification remains active even after individuals finish competing. Being “one of J’s kids” remains a part of their identity even after they graduate and become alumni of the NIU program. Similar sentiments of remaining a “part of the family” after achieving alumni status of the program appeared in the NCC interview transcripts.

**Limitations and Future Research**

Although the data collected within this study was adequate for my analysis, my study is admittedly limited by the size of my data pool. By choosing to only interview sixteen respondents from two forensics programs, my interview pool is not representative of the forensics circuit as a whole. Additionally, respondents came from two similarly-sized programs, which may also affect the data results. Larger forensics programs may have significantly different cultural values than programs with smaller teams. Indeed, a comparative analysis between large and small forensics programs may reveal that some cultural values are influenced by the size of a team. Additionally, the programs I chose to use for my data collection are both located in the Midwest and are also relatively close to each other. Factors such as geographical location could potentially influence the cultural values of a forensics team. Therefore, future researchers may choose to broaden their data pool by choosing respondents from programs from different locations and of different sizes.

Another limitation of my study was my choice of methods for data collection. As I noted earlier, I used different methods for contacting interview subjects depending on whether or not I had been given a phone number or e-mail address by the director of the respective forensics program. I conducted some interviews over the phone, some interviews in face-to-face sessions
and other interviews via e-mail. A large majority of the interviews with NIU alumni were conducted via e-mail, which may have affected the answers I received. Unlike my face-to-face and phone interviews, I was unable to ask spontaneous follow-up questions with these e-mail correspondences. Therefore, e-mail responses were not necessarily as detailed as responses gathered via other forms of communication.

Respondents’ willingness to participate in my study or the extent to which they were willing to reveal information may have been indirectly influenced by my personal identity as a North Central College student. Alumni from North Central College may have been more willing to assist a student from their alma mater while alumni from Northern Illinois University may have refrained from sharing explicit details with a student from outside their program. Researchers pursuing this avenue of study may wish to conceal their school association(s) in order to avoid any potential problems in data collection.

Future researchers may also wish to examine the ways in which team narratives are shared. This study sought to identify how team narratives are used to foster organizational identification through the values contained within the stories. Closer analysis of team narratives may reveal a common thread regarding when such stories are told or who is responsible for the sharing of the story. As Keyton (2005) notes, “stories are never neutral” (p. 90). Narratives operate as a vehicle of communicating cultural values from the perspective of the narrator. Therefore, the individuals telling the stories (upperclassmen, coaches, alumni, etc.) have the ability to shape and communicate these cultural values to the rest of the team. By identifying the narrator of certain stories, it may be possible to evaluate individuals’ responses to the themes within the narrative. In other words, further research may reveal that stories are more effective
in communicating desired behaviors if they are told by upperclassmen than if the narrator is the head coach or director of the forensics program.

Implications

Through the course of this study, I was surprised by the difficulty respondents had in recalling or sharing stories involving cultural villains. While I suggested earlier that this difficulty may have been due to respondents’ reluctance to air “dirty laundry” with an outsider, another explanation may lie in a team’s conscious desire to paint itself in the most favorable light possible. Hedges (2007) argues that “narratives are used by narrators to create, maintain, or alter their identities and those of the people they communicate with” (p. 11). Because the narrator is in control of the performance, he/she may alter its content at will. Stories involving cultural villains may be purposefully “forgotten” or pushed out of a team’s collective memory so as to suggest to new and current team members that their forensics program is an inherently positive environment. However, this tendency to view a team’s history through rose-colored glasses presents an inaccurate depiction of the team’s growth and evolution. Indeed, Jensen and Jensen (2007) suggest that such distortion could in fact be detrimental to a forensics program. They assert, “What is likely to instill pride in belonging to a program, future alumni support, and a stability in what is at the core of a program is the ability to communicate about a program’s past” (Jensen & Jensen, 2007, p. 25). To use the family metaphor, there are black sheep and skeletons in each family’s closet. While the desire to hide such negative figures can be strong, the knowledge of such figures can ultimately reveal more about the family unit as a whole. Family members may learn how the family has evolved in response to these figures and the conflict
associated with them. Therefore, to truly pay homage to a team’s history, stories should be shared that highlight both positive and negative events.

Additionally, I found the similarities between cultural hero stories to be an intriguing phenomenon. Particularly with the NCC respondents, the details of these narratives were shockingly similar. For example, the details surrounding R (the individual who soiled himself while performing) were nearly identical even though they were shared by four different alumni. The closeness in detail suggests that certain stories resonate so strongly with individuals that they are stored in a team’s collective memory and frequently shared with new team members. Once a team member is exposed to such a “legendary” story, they may feel as if they are “in on the secret” or have become a true part of the forensics team family. Therefore, being able to identify which stories have true “staying power” may be useful in determining which narratives successfully convey team cultural values. Stories that are passed down from generation to generation can be assumed to be powerful tools for informing new team members about the team culture and what is expected from them as new members.

Another interesting finding was the extent to which cultural values were reflected in team narratives. While there was a close match between the narratives shared by NIU respondents and the previously identified NIU cultural values, there was much more of a dissonance between the NCC narratives and NCC cultural values. Particularly in the stories involving cultural heroes, the team’s interpretation of competition seemed to be contradictory. When asked to describe the team’s focus on competition, respondents noted that the team did not have a strong emphasis on competition and that the team’s focus was not “cutthroat.” However, the narratives of R and H suggest otherwise. In both of these cases, competition appears to hold a significant position in the team culture. It is possible that this disparity may arise from the respondents classifying R
and H as “exceptions to the rule” or individuals whose stories transcend the team culture due to the fantastical nature of their particular narrative. In other words, R’s act of soiling himself and H’s personality as a cutthroat competitor may have been seen as so “outside of the norm” that their stories are passed down as legends as opposed to simple retellings of team narratives.

The results attained from this study are not bound to the constraints of the forensics team. All organizations, from athletic sports teams to corporate conglomerates, have their own organizational culture that must be taught and shared with their members. Narratives provide a unique vehicle for communicating cultural values to organizational members in an easily understandable manner. By understanding that narratives have a powerful influence on individuals’ identification with the organizational culture, organizations can manage how these narratives are shaped and shared with their members. As a member hears a narrative more and more, the individual will likely begin to internalize the values present in the narrative. If this internalization occurs, the individual is more likely to identify with the organization and begin to consider their group membership as part of their personal identity. As the organizational identification merges with their personal identity, an intricate link is formed between the group and the individual, creating a bond that, in some cases, may resemble that of a family.

Ideally, this study contributed some new knowledge to the scholarly conversation regarding organizational identification, narratives and forensics teams. I have provided suggestions above for areas where future research may be conducted in order to further expand on this area of study. As it stands currently, however, this study provides an initial examination into the ability of narratives to develop organizational identification in forensics teams. In the analysis of respondents’ comments, it becomes clear that narratives operate in both overt and covert manners. In some cases, the cultural value is made explicitly clear through the content of
the narrative. In other cases, the cultural value is not as readily evident to the audience until after several hearings or until the audience has been fully assimilated into the organization’s culture. Either way, narratives have been demonstrated to wield great power in communicating cultural values to organizational group members.

For individuals associated with forensics, this study illuminates the practical use of narratives as a means of conveying cultural values. Because most teams may not have an unspoken/unwritten list of cultural values, narratives provide these teams with a way of passing along these values to new and current team members. By using real-world examples which portray these cultural values, team members are able to form associations between desired and undesired behavior based on the content of these narratives. Furthermore, coaches can play a valuable role in the sharing of these narratives. Because team members are only a part of the team unit for a maximum of four years, coaches have the unique position of being able to create an “archive” of stories from several generations of teams. Therefore, coaches should be aware of the narratives that seem to be commonly shared between upperclassmen and underclassmen in order to ensure the survival of those narratives in the team’s memory.

The ability of narratives to create organizational identification is not limited to the activity of forensics. Indeed, any organization can make use of narratives to share its organizational culture with group members. Because other organizations may not necessarily have the same time restrictions for group membership as forensics teams do, the duty of keeping track of organizational narratives need not fall solely on the organizational leader. Instead, long-term members will naturally develop their own “archives” of narratives that they can share with new members. As organizational group members interact with one another, they will be able to share, combine, modify and elaborate on these narratives, creating cultural performances that
will ultimately contribute to the organization’s culture. Thus, narratives can be seen to have widespread applications and implications in the study of organizational culture.
References


Appendix A

List of Interview Questions:

1. When did you compete?

2. What was the average size of the team when you competed?

3. What was your first impression of the team?

4. Was your team structured hierarchically (seniors received different/preferential treatment) or relatively equal for all members?

5. How active were the coaches in creating a team dynamic or culture? Can you provide an example?

6. On a level of 1-10 (10 being very strong and 1 being very weak), where would you place your team’s focus on competitiveness? Can you describe a situation that demonstrates this?

7. On a level of 1-10 (10 being very strong and 1 being very weak), where would you place your team’s focus on pedagogy or education? Can you describe a situation that demonstrates this?

8. Were there specific “team-bonding” events at either the beginning or end of the year which contributed to a sense of team unity? Please describe.

9. Briefly describe what you perceived to be your team’s culture (i.e. values, beliefs, goals)

10. On a level of 1-10 (10 being very strong and 1 being very weak), please note how strongly you identified with your team ideology (emphasis on competitiveness vs. pedagogy). Did this change during your time on the team? How so?

11. Please relate a story that you remember being told about a past “hero” of the team. How did this story influence your perception of the team’s history?

12. Please relate a story that you remember being told about a past “villain” of the team. How did this story influence your perception of the team’s history?
Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY
The purpose of this study is to understand how organizational culture can influence an individual’s sense of identification or belonging to a group. Specifically, I am interested in understanding how narratives, or storytelling, are used to foster organizational identification within forensics teams. By conducting interviews with former members of the North Central College and Northern Illinois University forensics teams, I hope to collect various perspectives of how narratives did or did not contribute to individuals’ identification with the overarching team ideology (ex. beliefs, values, goals). This information will be used to complete my Senior Honors Thesis and may be presented at the Rall Symposium at North Central College in May 2011.

PROCEDURE
In a personal interview, you will be asked a variety of questions regarding your opinions and experiences as a member of your school’s forensics team. Written interviews (conducted via e-mail) may be completed at your convenience. Oral interviews (conducted over the phone) will take approximately thirty to forty-five minutes to complete. With your consent, oral interviews will be audio-recorded and later transcribed.

CONFIDENTIALITY
All identifying information will be removed from transcripts in an effort to maintain anonymity. You should feel free to be completely honest in your responses. Complete transcripts will only be available to the primary investigator (Nicole Autry) and her thesis advisor (Dr. Amy Buxbaum). Selected quotes from the transcripts, with any identifying information removed, will be used in the final project.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL
Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You have the option to refuse to answer any question. You are free to discontinue your participation in this study at any point. Please notify the researcher if you have any further questions regarding this study.

AUTHORIZATION
The purposes and procedures of this study have been explained to me and I voluntarily agree to participate. I understand that I have the option to discontinue my participation at any point with no penalty. Furthermore, I confirm that I am at least 18 years of age.

_________________________________________________ (Your Name, Please Print)
_________________________________________________ (Your Signature)
_________________________________________________ (Today’s Date)

CONTACT INFORMATION
Nicole Autry
Phone: 407-506-9572
E-mail: ncautry@noctrl.edu
Appendix C

Debriefing Form
Thank you for your participation in my study!

The purpose of this study was to discover how narratives are used to foster organizational identification within forensics teams. I expect to find that narratives are used to pass along the overarching team ideology (beliefs, values, and goals) to new team members, and thus, create a sense of identification between the individuals and the overall team unit.

I appreciate you taking the time to answer these questions and participate in my study. Your input will prove essential to the completion of my thesis.

Please be sure to maintain confidentiality about the interview questions.

If you are interested in learning more about this research area, you may wish to read the following references:


If you have any further questions, please contact:
Nicole Autry Phone: 407-506-9572 E:mail: ncautry@noctrl.edu

If you have concerns about the conduct of these interviews or regarding the project in general, please contact:
Dr. Amy Buxbaum Phone: 630-637-5346 E:mail: aebuxbaum@noctrl.edu