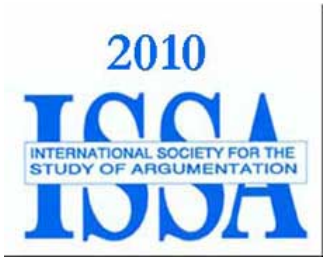
ISSA Proceedings 2010 – "Crisis" And Argument By Definition In The Modern American Presidency



Definitional argumentation theory remains a subject of significant study, primarily through the examination of argument *about* definition (Schiappa, 1993) and argument *from* definition (Schiappa, McGee, 1999). Although Zarefsky (1997) has briefly surveyed argument *by* definition, attention to this perspective remains anorexic. This essay begins to rectify that oversight by illuminating argument *by* definition through an analysis of modern presidential crisis rhetoric. This essay posits that argument *from* definition has as its locus the definition itself but argument *by* definition resituates that locus to the definition's user or creator. This essay first differentiates and clarifies argument *by* definition from argument *from* definition before examining five areas of "concerns" about argument *by* definition by argumentation scholars through the lens of the modern American presidency and the word *crisis*. This essay suggests that words like crisis contain core elements germane to any crisis situation but are flexible and modifiable depending on the user, the user's definition, and the crisis event. It also identifies several issues arising of out presidential definitional usage, including time, ethos, intent, strategies and audience as well as the need for additional crisis rhetoric essays examined from an argumentative perspective. The essay concludes with a call for additional studies encompassing several crises within a specific presidency as well as more attention devoted to the notion of *time*. In addition, I suggest that scholars should incorporate more primary research into their analyses, an approach fully embraced by other branches of academe.

1. Argument from Definition versus Argument by Definition

Schiappa (1993, p. 404) contends that argument *from* definition arises from Weaver's (1953, pp. 55-114) position that "arguments reason from a premise about the nature of a thing." Expanding Weaver, Schiappa argues that argument *from* definition occurs with "well-established and uncontroversial definitions." Zarefsky (1997, p. 5) extends Schiappa by examining three sets of examples that he deems exemplar of argument *by* definition. Zarefsky asserts that argument *by*

definition means “the key definitional move is simply stipulated, as if it were a natural step along the way of justifying some other claim.” Schiappa (2003, p. 130) concurs, stating that orators using argument *by* definition “simply posit that X is Y and move on.”

Although both scholars acknowledge the presence of a definition as well as its user, the theoretical implications of definitional shifts from the first to the second remain unexcavated. This essay extends definitional argumentation theory works by claiming that while argument *from* definition has as its primary locus the definition itself or the words that are used to define what Walton and Macagno (2009, p. 83) call a “fragment of reality,” argument *by* definition shifts that locus to the definition’s *user*. Individuals who define (create) or redefine (modify) a word or phrase when engaging in argument *by* definition often garner significant power and control that could become problematic if left unchecked.

1.1 Illustrating Argument by *Definition*

Zarefsky (1997, p. 2) illuminates the definitional shift from argument *from* definition to argument *by* definition in his discussion of the affirmative action debate. Zarefsky notes that the original definition of affirmative action shifted when Allan Bakke claimed reverse discrimination in his lawsuit against the University of California at Davis when he was denied entrance to their medical school. Zarefsky states, “Affirmative action, now meaning quotas and racial preferences, was redefined as ‘reverse discrimination’ against white males…” In other words, the original locus of the debate was the initial affirmative action definition itself, or what I would call argument *from* definition. When Bakke redefined affirmative action, his redefinition shifted the locus from the affirmative action definition (quotas and racial preferences) to the Bakke, the user (reverse discrimination), or what I see as argument *by* definition. *From* focuses on the definition; *By* focuses on the user.

Williams and Young’s (2005, pp. 100-102) essay examining Bush’s and Putin’s use of the word *democracy* further illustrates the difference between argument *from* and *by* definition. They claim that Bush was able to define and subsequently discuss *democracy* from a position of argument *from* definition based on the word’s ideographic nature. In comparison, Putin initially had to resituate the concept of democracy via argument *by* definition to make it more compatible with Russian history, ideology, principles, institutions, and practices before he could employ his own *democracy* argument *from* definition. In other words, while

traditional notions of democracy afforded Bush the opportunity to argue *from* definition, the same notions could not be employed by Putin without some intentional redefinition, thus forcing him to first argue *by* definition before he could draw level with Bush through his own argument *from* definition.

As such, argument *from* definition has as its center the definition that is selected and utilized to describe a fragment of reality. Argument *by* definition, on the other hand, shifts that center to the word's *user.* Subsequently, the user advances an argument based on their definition or redefinition of a situation and thus becomes the second, but primary, component of a controversy.

1.2 Schemes

Walton and Macagno (2009, pp. 84-85) diagram Schiappa's "two main schemes relative to definition." They claim his argument *from* definition is akin to the categorical syllogism: "All X are Z; Y is an X; therefore Y is Z." In turn, they diagram Schiappa's argument *by* definition as: "X is Y (therefore R)," where "X" is named as "Y" and "R" is a provoked emotion. It is the user who re(names)"X" into "Y" to draw an emotive response.

Schiappa (1993, p. 413; 2000, p. 18; 2003, p. 45) argues at length that the "What is X?" question is problematic for it implies the real or true "X" claims a metaphysical absolutism based on "facts of essence" or information that describes what "X" "really is" (2003, p. 6). Instead, Schiappa suggests we ask "'How *ought* we use the word X?' or 'What should be described by the word X?'" I would argue that his position is acceptable for argument *from* definition, but argument *by* definition necessitates the "What is X?" question.

The position of re-definition presupposes that "X" has been defined by the user. But what happens if X goes undefined? I include both definition and redefinition in my position about argument *by* definition because in some instances, "X" has evolved into a commonplace usage in everyday dialogue that does not prima facially prompt a definition. Words like *terrorism* and *corruption*, for example, are employed by various audiences without much significant thought about its meaning. The assumption is that audiences will have a basic, general understanding of these words, so definitions or its users are not challenged. But as Palczewski (2001, p. 6) indicates, unarticulated or poorly expressed definitions harm "dialectical engagement." In addition, "for redefinition to occur, engagement with existing meanings is necessary." Palczewski's claim

underscores my position that for redefinition to occur, an initial definition of "X" must exist, even if that definition is unarticulated. As such, with argument *by* definition, the "What is X?" must be asked.

Also, the question of "What is X?" is necessary because it establishes a comparative and evaluative standard for examining a user's employment of "X." Without the question, some presidential crisis rhetoric studies claiming false, inappropriate, or unethical crisis definitions and descriptions (see Hahn, 1980; Johannesen, 1986; Bostdorff, 1991; Bostdorff and O'Rourke, 1997) cannot be made. While I am not advocating "X" be absolutely defined, I do think a reasonable construct of "X," one originally accepted by audiences, is necessary when argument *by* definition is enacted.

McGee (1989, p. 412) neatly sums up the difference between argument *from* definition and argument *by* definition: "While the argument from definition reasons from an uncontroversial definition concerning the nature of thing, the argument by definition is employed when a controversial definition is advanced in support of a claim for purposes of framing that claim to the advantage of the rhetor."

2. The Modern American Presidency and "Crisis"

Although little scholarship about argument *by* definition exists, argumentation scholars' occasional direct or indirect references can be generally categorized into five areas of *user* concern: 1). Definition and Redefinition; 2). Definitional Power; 3). Institutional Legitimacy; 4). User Manipulation; and 5). User Justification.

While the shift from *from* to *by* may initially seem insignificant, subsequent analysis in a comparable area reveals important information about a definition's user. As such, examining argument *by* definition through the lens of the modern American presidency offers a fresh perspective toward presidential crisis rhetoric for it spotlights a unique, analytical approach of an individual who traditionally enjoys strong definitional power due to his position and stature.

2.1 Definition and Redefinition

Schwarze (2002, pp. 134; 140) notes that words and phrases like "feasible" and "traditional activities" are ambiguous and can have multiple interpretations. The word "crisis" is an additional, problematic word. Like others in a position of

power, the American president rarely defines “crisis” in his public oratory, instead favoring emotive words that describe or allude to its nature. Perhaps the executive branch’s assumption of “crisis” is akin to Justice Potter Stewart’s claim about obscenity in cinema in *Jacobellis v Ohio* (1964): “I know it when I see it.” Everyone knows about it, but not everyone can provide even a general consensus of what it means, much less a narrow, strict, dictionary definition.

Presidents also use additional words like “urgent” or “emergency” to describe their perceptions of situations. These additional words pose a problem with regards to the notion of *time*. Time, like crisis, is an elusive, ambiguous, vague term that typically is not defined. But the notion of time, as in length, is present in all three words. For example, the word “urgent” could imply “immediacy” or “as soon as possible.” The seemingly synonymous word “emergency” may not be the same as “urgent.” To me, an “emergency” has a longer time element than “urgent.” Others may argue the opposite. When “crisis” is added to the temporal continuum, some may agree that an even greater sense or notion of time is present. As such, the element of time arguably identifies an event’s intensity or force.

Returning to Schiappa’s “What is X?” question, how then are Reagan’s Lebanon and Grenada crises, Carter’s Iranian Hostage crisis, and Nixon’s Watergate crisis all considered to be “crises?” The notion of time varies in each one yet all are labeled a “crisis.” Zarefsky (1997, p. 5) offers a clue toward an answer when he argues that definitions “are not claims supported by reasons and intended to justify adherence by critical listeners. Instead they are simply proclaimed as if they were indisputable facts.” Words vary based on user and use, but all seem to initially understand certain commonplace words like “crisis.” As such, “crisis” and other words appear modular in the sense that they are flexible, movable, interchangeable, and adaptable to a situation. They are like linguistic rubber bands, modifiable to each crisis event regardless of time. The bands contain core elements germane to all crisis events, but also possess additional elements that make each crisis situation unique.

Schiappa (2003, p. 30) offers a second clue when he states that persuasion “may be simple and direct or complicated and time consuming.” His time observation suggests that presidential definitional conception and acceptance of a “crisis” could vary due to the length of time it takes to convince interested parties that the crisis exists. This could also explain why the above crises all contain the same

"naming" word.

Schiappa's "How *ought* we use the word X?" question thus prompts the identification of the core elements of "crisis" as a word. An amalgamation of political science and communication studies essays (see Genovese 1986; Graber 1980; Nacos 1990; Edelman 1977, 1988; Head, Short and McFarlane 1978; Pratt 1971; Church 1977; Bostdorff 1992; Dow 1989; Windt 1973) initially suggests seven core elements: 1). a rhetorical construction of reality that 2). is created by decision-makers, the mass media and/or the public and 3). describes a situation as an emergency marked by a sense of urgency; 4). the exigency or climate is unstable and includes heightened tensions; 5). immediate action is necessary; 6). decision-makers are under pressure, and 7). time for decision-making is short.

These core elements embrace Schiappa's preferred position of a pragmatic definitional approach while avoiding the metaphysical absolutism generated by the "What is X?" question. The elements also illustrate how some words act like linguistic rubber bands by functioning with semantic flexibility. When the core elements are applied to presidential crisis oratory, the executive's individuality is highlighted as well as the varying subjects and the situations that foster crises.

It would behoove rhetorical scholars to play closer attention to their definitional analyses when examining an example of an argument *by* definition. For example, some critics have inconsistently examined presidential crisis definitions. Several scholars (see Church 1977; Bostdorff 1992; Kiewe, 1994; Medhurst, 1994) interject an external crisis definition in their analyses, what Walton (2001, pp. 124-125) and others call "essentialism" that subsequently exemplify Schiappa's concerns about the "What is X?" question. The interjection results in scholars imposing their *own* crisis definitions, thus arguably invalidly intervening in the analytic process. In effect, they questionably add themselves into the examination process as a third element beyond definition and user. Such intervention shifts argument *by* definition away from the user to the critic which may produce flawed conclusions. If scholars have a reason to "intervene," then their reasoning for such intervention should be explained in their respective works.

2.2 Definitional Power

Schiappa (2001, p. 26) asks two provocative questions regarding definition and power: who has the right to define "X" and which institution has the power to make such a determination. In terms of crisis and the modern American

presidency, the answers initially are the president and the executive branch. But do they have the right and is their branch the most suitable one? Titsworth (1999, p. 181) argues that definitions utilized in public arguments are ideological in nature and "enable arguers to establish power." Zarefsky (1986, p. 1) claims further that presidents who have the power to define in effect have the power to persuade.

Numerous essays examine a president's persuasive definitional appeal (for example, see Newman, 1970; Windt, 1990) but Medhurst's (1998, pp. 58-59) essay about Truman and the Soviet Union uniquely illuminates definitional failure during times of presidential reticence (see also Ritter, 1994). Medhurst claims that by remaining silent about Soviet-American relations for nearly 24 months, Truman gave away one of the most important weapons of his rhetorical presidency – the ability to define a situation and shape public perception. Instead, Truman allowed others to define the situation and subsequently fill in "information gaps" for the American public. Medhurst's conclusion attests to the significant import of presidential definition and the power it embodies. It also illuminates the idea that definitional power does not reside solely in public oratory: it is also present in times of presidential silence, thus introducing an important new area for future analysis.

The body of presidential crisis rhetoric literature initially yields four general sub-categories of executive definitional power: 1). Ethos; 2). Intent; 3). Strategies; and 4). Audience.

2.2.1 Ethos

Ethos, in the classic Aristotelian sense, refers to the credibility and goodwill of an orator. Young and Launer (1988, p. 272) state that a crisis occurs suddenly for the American public, resulting in the creation of audience reaction and response problems. As a result, they claim that the public relies on government officials to provide meaning to a crisis event. In times of significant domestic or foreign crises, typically that government official is the president.

Zarefsky (2004, p. 611) argues that "because of his prominent political position and his access to the means of communication, the president, by defining a situation, might be able to shape the context in which events or proposals are viewed by the public." In other words, the president's *ethos* is invoked, in addition to the *ethos* of the office he holds. Ethos is typically granted to the office and its

holder because of the connotations associated with both: Commander-in-Chief, the "most powerful leader of the free world," etc. Presidents are expected to be fully abreast of crisis developments and are assumed to have the most knowledge and information possible as well as the best means of response. They are also generally given approval for their crisis resolution decisions. Scholars note that a president could employ ethos strategically, consciously and selectively (Medhurst, 1994, p. 22), particularly for image reframing and repair (King, 1985, pp.291-296).

From an argument *by* definition standpoint, the president enjoys an initial position of argumentative superiority because his ethos in a crisis is not always questioned. But when the question "What is X?" is posed or audiences begin to question "X," ethos questions also arise. Audiences, discussed more fully elsewhere, begin to disagree with how the president frames a crisis or its resolution. Bush's 2003 Iraqi invasion is exemplar. Several audiences initially accepted Bush's crisis definition but over time began to question it as well as his ethos. In a crisis event, audiences generally accept a president's definition of a crisis situation until information suggests otherwise. The importance of time is illuminated again as the amount of time between the crisis event itself and the release of information that contradicts a president's crisis definition varies by crisis. This, in turn, could provide an additional answer as to why crises of differing lengths and substance all carry the same "crisis" name.

Presidents, in times of crisis, need to ensure they are defining the event ethically and act according to avoid doubt or tarnish the reputation of themselves or the executive branch. Because of ethos, both are held to higher standards that, to the best of their ability, they are expected honestly and ethically fulfill. As Walton (2001, pp. 117, 119) notes, the power that accompanies persuasive definition encompasses strategic political and legal argumentation with significant financial, public, and national policy implications.

2.2.2 Intent

A second sub-area is the *purpose* of and *interest* in public definitional arguments (Schiappa, 2001, p. 25). In times of crises, the president's primary responsibility is to discuss, respond and resolve. Presidential crisis rhetoric studies identify two additional reasons of intent: image and motives.

Presidents use argument *by* definition during crises to cultivate, magnify, refine

or alter their public image, or enhance the ethos of themselves and/or their office. As Goldzwig and Dionisopoulos (1989, p.195) point out, the president will be concerned with the grave personal, political and social consequences of their crisis decision-making. For example, Goncher and Hahn (1971, p. 3; 1973, pp. 29-42) claim that Nixon took a highly personalized view of the presidency, perpetuating a moralist/benevolent myth attempting to demonstrate he was America's confident, personal and moral leader who represented America's past and future and could unify the country while moving her forward. Vartabedian (1985, pp. 366-381) argues that Nixon, during the Vietnam crisis, depicted himself as a victim of circumstances who was a hero sympathetic to others. In addition, he highlights Nixon's claim of exemplifying the Puritan work ethic when he chose to pursue the more difficult path to resolve the Vietnam conflict for he recognized the greater sense of obligation to world peace and freedom. These and other essays (for example, see Cherwitz, 1980; Blair and Houck, 1994) aptly demonstrate presidential crisis definitions being employed strategically for image purposes.

Presidents also use argument *by* definition to bolster their respective motives in a crisis situation. Typically that motive is political benefit. Exerting situational control (see Hahn and Gonchar, 1980), garnering public support (see Cherwitz, 1978; Bostdorff, 1987), and deflecting attention from other presidential problems (Bostdorff and O'Rourke, 1987) are three primary ways presidents utilize argument *by* definition for political gain. Manipulation, a fourth strategy identified by argumentation scholars as critical, is discussed separately below.

Presidents define events as crises for personal reasons too, as was the case with Carter and Nixon. Strong (1986, pp. 636-650) notes that Carter intentionally redefined the energy crisis from a political to a moral and personal one due to his audience's lack of faith. Nixon, argues Blair and Houck (1994, p. 108), went one step further by misrepresenting crisis claims for personal gain, particularly his popularity, ideology, and status in office. They argue that the resulting Nixon crises were not genuine ones for the American public. Blair and Houck's conclusions raise an interesting question that extends Schiappa's *interest* position: *Who* is a crisis for? Current presidential crisis rhetoric scholarship focuses primarily on the president, but additional studies may reveal alternative, interested parties.

2.2.3 Strategies

A substantial number of presidential crisis rhetoric essays examine presidential crisis strategy. As a result of their collective works, crisis scholars have identified numerous successful or failed rhetorical strategies that can be categorized three ways: the crisis event, presidential rhetoric, and audience. The first category includes crisis management and crisis manipulation/promotion. Crisis management strategies include shifting crisis attention (Windt, 1990; Bostdorff, 1987), situating crisis in a continuum (Young, 1992; Zagacki, 1992), levels of crisis personalization (Gonchar and Hahn, 1973; Blair and Houck, 1994) and levels of presidential and personal responsibility (Strong, 1986). Crisis promotion or manipulation strategies include direct presidential manipulation (see Hahn, 1980; Dowling and Marraro, 1986; Bostdorff, 1991; Bostdorff and O'Rourke, 1997); demonstration of political leadership (King, 1985) and promotion of American values and ideologies (Zarefsky, 1983; Heisey, 1986; Bostdorff, 1992).

The second category, presidential rhetoric strategies, includes rhetorical consistency (Cherwitz, 1980; Kay, 1988) or rhetorical dichotomy, shifts, and distancing (for example, see King and Anderson, 1971; Newman, 1992). By far, the most popular form of study encompasses stylistic devices like narrative and metaphor, and various Burkean elements, including apologia (for example, see Bass, 1985; Klope, 1986; Birdsell, 1987).

Audience strategies, the third category, includes examinations of public support levels (see Newman, 1970; Cherwitz, 1978), creation of national unity (Windt, 1973; Cherwitz and Zagacki, 1986) and media manipulation (Benson, 2004). Audience, as a separate sub-category of definitional power, is discussed in the next section. Overall, very few essays focus explicitly on argumentation structure (Stelzner, 1971; Hill, 1972; Dowling and Marraro, 1986) or theory, so there is clearly more room for expansion.

2.2.4 Audience

Argument *by* definition is contingent on audiences. Definitional argumentation theory examines definitions by an orator as well as competing definitions by various publics. Walton (2001, p. 131) states that persuasive definitions place the burden of proof on the user when s/he redefines. In addition, he asserts that the audience has the right to refute the redefinition and "retain existing usage" of the original definition "if it seems to them to better represent their views on the matter." The definition's user, like a president, therefore, has a powerful political tool in his or her hands that could favorably shape public perception and garner

support as long as the definition resonates with listeners. Misreading audience perceptions or reactions, though, could result in definitional failure and subsequent claims of crisis mismanagement or nonsuccess.

The importance of audience reaction to crisis oratory is a common thread in presidential crisis rhetoric studies, including the responses by American citizens, allies and other opponents as well as media commentary. Many essays identify some type of public reaction to a crisis message as a measure of its success or failure (for example, see Rowland and Rademacher, 1990; Wilson, 1976) and the media's impact on audience reception of a crisis (Goldzwig and Dionisopoulos, 1989). Newman (1970), Smith (1998), and Pauley (1998) emphatically insist that rhetorical scholars examine the role of audience, particularly multiple audiences, as part of their analyses.

2.3 Institutional Legitimacy

Institutional legitimacy, or the power of institutions to advance definitions, is well noted in argumentation scholarship. Referencing competing definitions of "X," Schwarze (2002, 139) argues that, in addition to persuasion and coercion, "in the realm of public policy, the empowerment of a definition is dependent on the *legitimacy* of the institution authorized to define the term" and that "institutional arguments justify the acceptance or rejection of a particular definition" (p. 143). Titsworth (1999, p. 183) notes the power resulting from public institutional definitions "'privilege[s] the perspectives of those in power,' resulting in not only a legitimization of those perspectives, but also becomes a 'mechanism of hegemony where institutional power over the individual [is] expanded.'" Institutional legitimacy has also been addressed in crisis literature, including power (Windt, 1973; Young, 1992), institutional failure (Zagacki, 1992; Brummert, 1975), and presidential personalization of and blending with institution (see Gonchar and Hahn, 1971, 1973; Gibson and Felkins, 1974).

Three critical observations subsequently arise. First, the mythical power of the office of the presidency as an institution substantially contributes to presidential pressure. Zagacki (1992, p. 53) claims that "institutions are so molded by underlying myths of American superiority, presidents cannot handle failure for it would imply they are incapable of reconciling the nation to its ultimate historical purpose." Second, personal presidential perspective of "X" is also important. Brummert (1975, p. 256) argues that Nixon's institutional definitional approach of deflecting criticism and personal attacks depicted the president seeing himself as

reacting to evil and not part of the evil family. Brummert's observation of presidential self-perception identifies a concept that has been studied sporadically by rhetorical scholars. Third, Kiewe (1994, p. xxxiii) notes that the presidency, as an institution, typically ignores the long term impacts of the occupant's crisis rhetoric, preferring its enactment to garner immediate image considerations and to secure quick policy goals. States Kiewe, "The modern presidency, with some exception, does not seem to appreciate the limits of its own crisis rhetoric." If Zagacki is correct, it can be argued that presidential failure is a paramount concern which may contribute to a president's preference for short-term gains over long-term goals, as Kiewe suggests. Perhaps presidents need some formal crisis training as well as instruction on definitional argumentation. Collectively, these observations suggest that further analysis of the institution's role in definitional argument is necessary, both from the institutional office holder as well as the institutional point-of-view.

2.4 User Manipulation

A major concern arising out of definitional argumentation scholarship is user manipulation, including concealing the user's ideological assumptions behind definitional usage (Titsworth 1999, p. 182), user commitments (Walton and Macagno, 2009, p. 82), and information concealment (Titsworth, p.182) that results in audience "duping" (Walton, 2001, pp. 130-131). Walton and Macagno (2009, pp. 87-88) argue further that the meaning of an abstract word may not be shared by all involved parties by signifying "two contradictory concepts, and thereby manipulate communication" possibly resulting with the emergence of several fallacies.

The largest body of work examining crisis manipulation is exaggerated, promoted, or manufactured crises (for example, see Cherwitz, 1980; Hahn, 1980; Dow, 1989). The authors claim that presidents embellish or manipulate and defend crisis situations for political or personal gain for themselves or their office. Beyond crisis promotion, there are several individual essays examining different cases of definition manipulation, including the manipulative appeal to the "American Dream" (Goldzwig and Dionisopoulos, 1989, p. 194), strategic crisis address (Windt, 1990, pp. 95-96), and media manipulation (Benson, 2004).

Kiewe (1994, p. xxxiii) suggests that most modern presidents miscalculate crisis construction, especially their initial response, often in favor of immediate rewards. This parallels his earlier observation of institutional manipulation for

short-term gains. There is room for additional works examining the theoretical or philosophical nature that compels a president to define a situation as a crisis. While Schiappa (2001, p. 26) warns of a "potentially dangerous ideology" arising from the "What is X?" question, studies of "X" are pertinent when examining argument *by* definition for without it, the above studies would not be possible.

2.5 User Justification

McGee (1999, p. 154) states that arguments *from* definition have "the advantage of seeming to be grounded in a fact or set of facts that must be taken as a given and cannot be disputed," yet when a dispute occurs, "the other party or parties are placed at a disadvantage" and "the rhetorical advantage of the argument from definition neutralized." McGee claims that orators must justify their definition choice and provide reasons for the unsubstantiated claims that benefit definers. When a definition is disputed, the argumentation shifts *from* words to the user. Further, the definition's rhetorical advantage remains neutralized until one party's definition eventually presides over the other. If an agreement cannot be reached, then neutralization occurs. McGee is correct in demanding that users offer justifications for their word choices, a demand often unheeded when the user is the American president.

Plentiful crisis studies examining user justification exist to adequately review here, but a few are worthy of a quick glance. A series of works from the 1970s and 1980s (see Rasmussen, 1973; Zarefsky, 1983; Cherwitz and Zagacki, 1986) investigated consummatory and justificatory rhetoric before Medhurst (1994), perhaps prematurely, suggested scholars direct their attention elsewhere. Dow's (1989, p. 296) claim of consummatory discourse as crisis-responding and justificatory discourse as crisis-creating matches Graber's (2002, pp. 137-158) identification of a "public" crisis as either natural or man-made, with the latter accruing her "pseudo-crisis" label. Both distinctions suggest that some crises are purposefully created and manipulated to achieve a desired goal.

Dowling and Marraro (1986, p. 350), offering a rare examination of definitional argumentation, examine Reagan's Grenada crisis oratory and determine that he acted unethically: "He apparently ignored, suppressed, distorted, created, and (in a sense) destroyed relevant evidence. In addition, Reagan withheld, ignored, and/or misrepresented crucial arguments raised to support and oppose the invasion." Subsequently, they claim that a presidency should employ four "democratic ethical standards" and engage in transparency when engaging in

political oratory: 1). all information needs to be revealed; 2). all arguments need to be made clearly and be understood by listeners; 3). individuals have the ability to make rational, well-informed decisions; and 4). presidents should use appropriate emotion. Paradoxically, Rowland and Rademacher (1990, pp. 331, 335) claim Reagan's Superfund crisis oratory was successful because his passive approach did not require an apathetic audience to be familiar with his overall rhetoric regarding the environmental and political crisis. In turn, Dowling and Marraro's call for ethical standards assume an involved constituency, a presumption Rowland and Rademacher's conclusion contradicts. As such, additional work in this area is prudent.

3. Implications for Scholars Conducting Presidential Crisis Rhetoric Analyses
The preceding section suggests that some areas of definitional argumentation have been robustly explored, some remain neglected, and new ones are emerging. Collectively, two significant sets of implications for presidential crisis rhetoric scholars arise: Critics should play closer attention to their arguments as well as the role of argument *by* definition.

Regarding critic arguments, I pose two suggestions: individual case studies should be avoided and scholars need to contemplate crisis "time." Walton (2001, p. 132) argues that the study of persuasive definitions could yield fruitful results if a case-based approach is employed. I disagree. How a president defines a crisis in one situation may not be the same in another, as Windt (1990) discovered with Kennedy. In addition, there could be potential differences within a presidential approach, characterization, management and resolution of domestic *and* foreign crises. Since foreign crisis rhetoric dominates the communication literature landscape, additional domestic crisis rhetoric studies are necessary before a definitional comparison can be made. In addition, scholars would be better informed if they examine a president's crisis life cycle, which in turn would lead to better conclusions.

Second, scholars need to contemplate the notion of "time" in a crisis. Not only should they analyze crisis length, they should examine how much time is available before and during a crisis, its effects on the decision-making process, how time shapes a crisis response's content and form, and how time affects a president as he moves from one crisis to another. This exploration may also offer clarity to the "What is X" question. In addition, scholars also need to avoid unintentional critic intervention by employing *their* definition that shifts the analysis from the original

orator as user to the scholarly critic as user.

Medhurst (1994) and Young (1992) provide two possible remedies. Medhurst contends that scholars should study a crisis's history as part of their analyses to examine how "X" has been viewed by past presidents and if the current incarnation is consistent or different. Schiappa (2003, p. 176) supports this historical approach, suggesting that careful analysis would identify "what has been constant and what has changed about 'X' and would give reasons when changes have occurred." Young's position that scholars should examine presidential crisis rhetoric in a continuum suggests that that a comprehensive analysis of a president's foreign *and* domestic crisis oratory would assist with the discernment of common topics, features, approaches, or elements that could better inform understanding of a president's crisis conception.

A second error regards the critic's analytical framework. Several methodologies are employed to examine presidential crisis rhetoric, include close textual analysis, apologia, tragedy, myth and other various Burkean terminology, and genre (both rhetorical and literary), resulting with the identification of multiple rhetorical strategies (noted earlier).

Yet some scholars neglect a president's post-crisis thoughts and opinions. Instead, they primarily focus attention on his public oratory as it occurred, resulting in occasional critic error. For example, Goldzwig and Dionisopoulos (1989) claim that Kennedy's September 30, 1962 Oxford, Mississippi civil rights speech addressed a crisis situation. Conversely, Windt (1990) finds that the same address did not. The dilemma stems from varying critical approaches. Goldzwig and Dionisopoulos utilize a combination of situational and historical methodologies whereas Windt's approach employs a public presidential announcement of a crisis situation. Windt (1973, p. 7) claims, "Situations do not create crises. Rather, the President's perceptions of the situation and the rhetoric he uses to describe it mark an event as a crisis," a rationale that serves as a foundation for his approach.

While Windt's methodology contains its own problems, it does possess some currency. One way to potentially adjudicate critic error is for scholars to analyze president's post-crisis and opinions, primarily from their public presidential papers. This approach is widely uses in other academic fields but remains underused within communication studies. Scholar examination of documents that

were generated “in the moment” would likely be more “truthful” and revealing since they describe factually the crisis’s who, what, where, when, how and why as that moment was occurring. They would also reveal the sentiments of the players involved, identify what options were available for crisis resolution, and illuminate other competing presidential activities. They are also not subject to post-presidential revisionist history like presidential memoirs. Such analyses would yield valuable insight into a crisis comprehensively, the president’s decision-making approach and style, and prevent potential “What is X?” mistakes.

4. Conclusion

Little-studied argument *by* definition shifts argument *from* definition’s locus from words to the user, thus adding the definer as a strategic element in the definitional process. As such, Schiappa’s “What is X?” question becomes a necessary one for analysis. Blending definitional argumentation theory with the study of the modern American president’s use of the word “crisis” generates five areas of concern: (re)definition, power (including ethos, intent, strategies, and audience), institutional legitimacy, manipulation, and justification. Presidential crisis rhetoric literature has addressed some of these concerns and neglected others while posing new areas for research. In addition, it has raised issues regarding critic arguments and methodological approaches that warrant further scholarly attention. Incorporation of materials like a president’s public papers into future scholarly analyses should provide scholars with unique information that could better inform their examinations and conclusions as such documents arise out of the crisis moment and are not subject to post-presidential revision.

REFERENCES

Bass, J. D. (1985). The appeal to efficiency as narrative closure: Lyndon Johnson and the Dominican crisis, 1965. *Southern Speech Communication Journal, 50,* 103-120.

Benson, T. W. (2004). *Writing JFK: Presidential rhetoric and the press in the Bay of Pigs crisis*. College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press.

Birdsell, D. S. (1987). Ronald Reagan on Lebanon and Grenada: Flexibility in the application of Kenneth Burke’s pentad. *Quarterly Journal of Speech, 73,* 267-279.

Blair, C. and Houck, D. W. (1994). Richard Nixon and the personalization of crisis. In A. Kiewe (ed.) *The Modern Presidency and Crisis Rhetoric* (pp. 91-118). Westport, CT: Praeger.

Bostdorff, D. M. (1987). The contemporary presidency and the rhetoric of promoted crisis (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN.
Bostdorff, D. M. (1991). The presidency and promoted crisis: Reagan, Grenada, and issue management. *Presidential Studies Quarterly, 21,* 737-750.
Bostdorff, D. M. (1992). Idealism held hostage: Jimmy Carter's rhetoric on the crisis in Iran. *Communication Studies, 43,* 14-28.
Bostdorff, D. M. and O'Rourke, D.J. (1997). The presidency and the promotion of domestic crisis: John F. Kennedy's management of the 1962 steel crisis. *Presidential Studies Quarterly, 27,* 343-361.
Brummert, B. (1975). Presidential substance: The address of August 15, 1973. *Western Speech, 39,* 249-259.
Cherwitz, R. A. (1978). Lyndon Johnson and the 'crisis' of Tonkin Gulf: A president's justification of war. *Western Journal of Speech Communication, 42,* 93-104.
Cherwitz, R. A. (1980). Masking inconsistency: The Tonkin Gulf crisis. *Communication Quarterly, 28,* 27-37.
Cherwitz, R. A. and Zagacki, K. S. (1986). Consummatory versus justificatory crisis rhetoric. *Western Journal of Speech Communication, 50,* 307-324.
Church, R. T. (1977). President Richard M. Nixon's crisis rhetoric, 1969-1972. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Temple University, Philadelphia.
Dow, B. (1989). The function of epideictic and deliberative strategies in presidential crisis rhetoric. *Western Journal of Speech Communication, 53,* 294-310.
Dowling, R. E. and Marraro, G. (1986). Grenada and the great communicator: A study in democratic ethics. *Western Journal of Speech Communication, 50,* 350-367.
Edelman, M. (1977). *Political language: Words that succeed and policies that fail*. New York: Academic Press.
Edelman, M. (1988). *Constructing the political spectacle*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Genovese, M. A. (1986). Presidential leadership and crisis management. *Presidential Studies Quarterly, 16,* 300-309.
Gibson, J. W. and Felkins, P. (1974). A Nixon lexicon. *Western Speech, 38,* 190-198.
Goldzwig, S. R. and Dionisopoulos, G. N. (1989). John F. Kennedy's civil rights discourse: The evolution from 'principled bystander' to public

advocate. *Communication Monographs, 56,* 179-198.
Gonchar, R. M. and Hahn, D. F. (1971). The rhetorical predictability of Richard M. Nixon. *Today's Speech, 19,* 3-13.
Gonchar, R. M. and Hahn, D. F. (1973). Richard Nixon and presidential mythology. *Journal of Applied Communication Research, 1,* 25-48.
Graber, D. (1980). *Mass media and American politics*. Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press.
Graber, D. (2002). *Mass media and American politics*. (6th ed). Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press.
Hahn, D. (1980). Corrupt rhetoric: President Ford and the MAYAGUEZ affair. *Communication Quarterly, 28,* 38-43.
Hahn, D. and Gonchar, R. M. (1980). The Watergate strategies of Richard Nixon during the 1972 campaign. *The Communicator, 10,* 64-75.
Harrell, J., Ware, B.W., and Linkugel, W. A. (1975). Failure of apology in American politics: Nixon on Watergate. *Speech Monographs, 42,* 245-261.
Head, R., Short, F. and McFarlane, R. (1978). *Crisis resolution: Presidential decision making in the MAYAGUEZ and Korean confrontations*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
Heisey, D. R. (1986). Reagan and Mitterrand respond to international crisis: Creating versus transcending appearances. *Western Journal of Speech Communication, 50,* 325-335.
Hill, F. (1972). Conventional wisdom – traditional form – the president's message of November 3, 1969. *Quarterly Journal of Speech, 58,* 373-386.
Jacobellis v Ohio, 378 U.S. 184 (June 22, 1964).
Johannesen, R. T. (1986). Ronald Reagan's economic jeremiad. *Central States Speech Journal, 37,* 79-89.
Kay, W. D. (1998). John F. Kennedy and the two faces of the U.S. space program, 1961-1963. *Presidential Studies Quarterly, 28,* 573-586.
Kiewe, A. (1994). Introduction. In A. Kiewe (ed.) *The Modern Presidency and Crisis Rhetoric* (pp. xv-xxxvii). Westport, CT: Praeger.
King, R. L. (1985). Transforming scandal into tragedy: a rhetoric of political apology. *Quarterly Journal of Speech, 71,* 289-301.
King, A. A. and Anderson, F. D. (1971). Nixon, Agnew, and the 'silent majority': A case study in the rhetoric of polarization. *Western Speech, 35,* 243-255.
Klope, D. C. (1986). Defusing a foreign policy crisis: Myth and victimage in Reagan's 1983 Lebanon/Grenada address. *Western Journal of Speech, 50,*

336-349.
McGee, B. R. (1999). The argument from definition revisited: Race and definition in the progressive era. *Argumentation and Advocacy, 25,* 141-158.
Medhurst, M. J. (1988). Truman's rhetorical reticence, 1945-1947: an interpretive essay. *Quarterly Journal of Speech, 74,* 52-70.
Medhurst, M. J. (1994). Eisenhower, Little Rock, and the rhetoric of 'crisis.' In A. Kiewe (ed.) *The Modern Presidency and Crisis Rhetoric* (pp. 19-46). Westport, CT: Praeger.
Nacos, B. L. (1990). *The Press, Presidents, and Crises*. New York: Columbia University Press.
Newman, R. P. (1970). Under the veneer: Nixon's Vietnam speech of November 3, 1969. *Quarterly Journal of Speech, 56,* 168-178.
Newman, R. P. (1992). 'Pity the helpless giant' Nixon on Cambodia. In T. Windt and B. Ingold (eds.), *Essays in Presidential Rhetoric* (pp. 257-276). Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing.
Palczewski, C. H. (2001). Contesting pornography: Terministic catharsis and definitional Argument. *Argumentation and Advocacy, 38,* 1-17.
Pauley, G. E. (1998). Rhetoric and timeliness: an analysis of Lyndon B. Johnson's voting rights address. *Western Journal of Communication, 62,* 26-53.
Pratt, J. W. (1971). A study in presidential crisis speaking as a potential rhetorical type. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.
Rasmussen, K. An interaction analysis of justificatory rhetoric. *Western Speech, 37,* 111-117.
Rowland, R. C. and Rademacher, T. (1990). The passive style of rhetorical crisis management: a case study of the Superfund controversy. *Communication Studies, 41,* 327-342.
Schiappa, E. (1993). Arguing about definitions. *Argumentation, 7,* 403-417.
Schiappa, E. (2000). Analyzing argumentative discourse from a rhetorical perspective: Defining 'person' and 'human life' in constitutional disputes over abortion. *Argumentation, 14,* 315-332.
Schiappa, E. (2001). What is golf? Pragmatic essentializing and definitional argument in *PGA Tour, INC. v. Martin Argumentation and Advocacy, 38,* 18-27.
Schiappa, E. (2003). *Defining reality: Definitions and the politics of meaning*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP.
Schwarze, S. (2002). Rhetorical traction: Definitions and institutional arguments in judicial opinions about wilderness access. *Argumentation and Advocacy, 38,* 131-150.

Stelzner, H. G. (1971). The quest story and Nixon's November 3, 1969 address. *Quarterly Journal of Speech, 57,* 163-172.
Strong, R. A. (1986). Recapturing leadership: The Carter administration and the crisis of confidence. *Presidential Studies Quarterly, 16,* 636-650.
Titsworth, B. S. (1999). An ideological basis for definition in public argument: A case Study of the individuals with Disabilities in Education Act. *Argumentation and Advocacy, 35,* 171-184.
Vartabedian, R. A. (1985). Nixon's Vietnam rhetoric: a case study of apologia as generic paradox*. *Southern Speech Communication Journal, 50,* 366-381.
Walton, D. (2001). Persuasive definitions and public policy arguments. *Argumentation and Advocacy, 37,* 117-132.
Walton, D., and Macagno, F. (2009). Reasoning from classifications and definitions. *Argumentation, 23,* 81-107.
Weaver, R. M. (1953). *The ethics of rhetoric*. Chicago: Regnery.
Williams, D. and Young. M. (2005). Managing "democracy" in the age of terrorism: Putin, Bush, and arguments from definition. In R. Riley (ed.), *Engaging Argument: Selected Papers from the 205 NCA/AFA Summer Conference on Argumentation* (pp. 97-103). Washington, DC: National Communication Association.
Wilson, G. L. (1976). A strategy of explanation: Richard M. Nixon's August 8, 1974, Resignation address. *Communication Quarterly, 24,* 14-20.
Windt, T. O. (1973). The presidency and speeches on international crises: Repeating the rhetorical past. *Speaker and Gavel*, *11*, 6-14.
Windt, T. O. (1990). *Presidents and protestors: Political rhetoric in the 1960's*. Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press.
Young, M. J. (1992). When the shoe is on the other foot: The Reagan administrations Treatment of the Shootdown of Iran Air 655. In M. Weiler and W. B. Pearce (eds.), *Reagan and Public Discourse in America* (pp. 203-224). Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press.
Young, M. J. and Launer, M. K. (1988). KAL 007 and the superpowers: an international Argument. *Quarterly Journal of Speech, 74,* 271-295.
Zagacki, K. S. (1992). Rhetoric, failure, and the presidency: The case of Vietnam. *Communication Studies, 43,* 42-55.
Zarefsky, D. (1983). Civil rights and civil conflict: Presidential communication in crisis. *Central States Speech Journal, 34,* 59-66.
Zarefsky, D. (1986). *President Johnson's war on poverty: Rhetoric and history*. University, AL: University of Alabama Press.

Zarefsky, D. (1997). Definitions. In J. F. Klumpp (ed.), *Argument in a Time of Change: Definitions, Frameworks, and Critiques* (pp. 1-11). Annandale, VA: National Communication Association.
Zarefsky, D. (2004). Presidential rhetoric and the power of definition. *Presidential Studies Quarterly, 34,* 607-619.