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In-depth interviews examining perceptions of burnout in college forensics

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The Students' Perspective:
In-Depth Interviews Examining Perceptions of Burnout in College Forensics

by
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Abstract

College forensics is an incredible activity with many more benefits for students than drawbacks. This competitive community strives to better itself and the community around it by teaching students life-long skills. College forensics seeks to change the world by offering students a toolbox ready to equip them to be leaders in their communities, advocates for the voiceless, and partners in progress. It is because this activity is such an essential institution of development that this study focuses on a negative area of this educational titan. Research for decades has outlined the harmful impact this activity can have on the health and wellness of its participants. This study seeks to uncover the dimensions of student wellness through the lens often applied to the experiences of forensic coaches. Burnout is explored through a review of relevant literature which lays the groundwork for an analysis of in-depth interviews of current forensic students and their perceptions of wellness and burnout in college forensics. Interviews were conducted with students from various sized programs from across the country. Students views suggest that more emphasis is needed in equipping competitors with tools to manage the emotional stress experienced in the activity. The study concludes with a discussion of the limitations and areas for future research.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

College forensics is an invaluable experience for students. The skills learned in this activity equip students with sense-making tools. It also teaches how to navigate social complexities with composure, grace, and professionalism. This rich toolbox of skills and experiences instills a lifelong love and respect for forensics. Although loyalty abounds in forensic participants, the activity has faced criticism that its competitive community does not do enough to encourage holistic wellness among its members. Scholars have expressed concern that personal welfare is not only neglected but even discouraged in the activity (Hatfield, 2004; Littlefield & Sellnow, 1994; Olson, 2004; Schnoor, 2004; Trejo, 2004; Workman, 2004). Some scholars such as Richardson (2005) and Paine and Stanley (2013) suggest that concerns about wellness have existed since the beginning of this activity. Over time, health issues have emerged as a primary interest. For scholars, these concerns have always been a part of the activity, the current iteration seems to have transfigured into an intransigent beast no one is quite sure how to approach, let alone slay. In many ways, addressing concerns of wellness must be treated as a community. The dimensions of this issue are profoundly personal and contextual. This dynamic creates tension between individuals, their teams, and the forensics community. That is because broad sweeping policies do not seem able to address the individual nuances of this growing concern. This study examines the gap of student experiences in processing issues of wellness and burnout. Students, perspectives are positioned through a review of the current conceptions of wellness and coach burnout found in the activity. Semi-structured interviews guide an investigation of students giving voice to how they address such challenges. This study discusses and concludes with suggestions for the community of college forensics, future research.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Studies connecting student wellness and college forensics are not absent from the historical and contemporary literature. However, when compared to the body of literature on wellness at competitions and challenges faced by coaches in the activity, there is a significantly disproportionate amount of research (Carmack, 2016). While studies have emerged on student experiences and challenges of wellness in college forensics, the dearth of scholarly inquiry of this issue indicates a space ripe for research (Croucher et al., 2006; Williams, 2003). What follows is an investigation of the current body of literature on wellness and burnout in the context of college forensics. Understanding the emergence of holistic wellness in the activity offers a framework to the current growing wellness movement in college forensics. Since it is the most extensive body of research on the subject of wellness in forensics understanding coaches burnout provides a template to compare similar experiences from the perspective of students and coach alike. This activity relies upon great coaches who have committed their life's work to making this activity great, which is particularly salient for the community. This review concludes by establishing a niche to place the perspectives offered from this study.

Wellness in Forensics

Wellness in forensics has traditionally focused on the health and vitality of the physical body. The overall issue of wellness as it is currently understood first arrived in 1989 from Hatfield, Hatfield and Carver. Scholars have looked to their work as the foundation for contemporary understanding of wellness in college forensics (Hatfield, 2004; Littlefield & Sellnow, 1994; Olson, 2004; Schnoor, 2004; Trejo, 2004; Workman, 2004). The Hatfield et al. (1989) six-dimensional framework makes up the current understanding of wellness: "Each dimension having equal importance for the living a well-rounded life: (1) Social Measures; (2) Physical Concerns; (3) Intellectual Measure; (4) Career Concerns; (5) Emotional Measures; and

(6) Spiritual Concerns." (p. 27). These six dimensions offer insight into how wellness is addressed in the activity. These dimensions emerged after a close examination of the unusual nature of forensic tournaments and how they functioned to discourage wellness in participants. The six dimensions outlined by Hatfield et al. (1989), help to classify research in the area of wellness and burnout in college forensics offering further context and depth.

Social measures. College forensics is a competitive communication activity rooted in interpersonal dialogue. Creating an environment which fosters close, "meaningful relationships" that, "emphasize interdependence" is vital to wellness (Hatfield et al., 1989, p. 27) Furthermore, such an environment is necessary for the educational mandate of the activity (Schnoor, 2004). Carmack (2016) advocates the importance of communal spaces dedicated to health and wellness. Offering this type of designated area to rest, when possible, empowers participants to engage in healthy practices. This type of space while also outfitted to address the physical concerns fosters the development of relationships over shared experiences in such areas and stands in stark contrast to the practice of tournaments over two decades ago, where no such space existed formally (Trejo, 2004). Thus, an essential part of wellness is ensuring that participants are in an environment where meaningful relationships can occur, and a robust social support system exists.

Physical concerns. Before 1989, little research conceived of the physical strain forensic competitions often take on participants. Unfortunately, while this has no doubt been the most significant area of improvement many issues persist. Competitors dress in a way that is not conducive to substantial amounts of walking and proceed to walk all day. Early start times and late endings of tournaments leave little time for finding nutritional meals, and adequate sleep, let alone exercise. Trejo (2004) laments how students who see themselves as invincible are drained

of any vitality by the end of a forensic tournament, emphasizing the lack of nutrition at competitions as a primary issue of wellness that impacts both the physical and emotional well-being of students. Additionally, Olson (2004) points out that coaches can have some of the worst health practices, which "trickle down to our students" (p. 3). Some of these behaviors include a consistently poor diet, lack of sleep, and substance abuse of nicotine and alcohol. This type of behavior is supported by Workman (2004), who asserts that concerns of wellness exist at both the team and tournament levels. Therefore, while steps have been taken to address wellness concerns at the tournament level, if programs do not take advantage of these measures, then little change will occur. Many tournaments have condensed schedules down to just a single day, still making time for finding health meal options and having plenty of sleep. However, these provisions have not constructed a solution to the problems posed by physical concerns.

Intellectual measures. Forensics privileges intellectual prowess demonstrated in the setting of competition rounds. Hatfield et al. (1989) claimed that "an intellectually well person uses the resources available to expand his or her knowledge in improved skill along with expanding the potential sharing with others" (p. 27). This notion fits the spirit of outcomes used to justify the activity of college forensics. The majority of scholarship dedicated to the forensic art is interested in the multiple facets of this issue. It clear that this activity serves students intellectual wellness. However, it is not readily apparent if student performance leads to knowledge and perspective building.

Career concerns. Although college forensics provides a platform for extensive networking opportunities, it can cause career-related stress. While coaches are concerned with career stability and advancement, students face the more daunting task of entering the workforce. The time-consuming nature of the activity can have serious negative consequences in career

advancements (Hatfield, 2004). While there are numerous skills learned that benefit individuals in their careers, opportunities such as job advancement, internships, and networking events are made unattainable because of the activity. This issue is especially salient for students in their seniors and juniors years, when they are looking to step into their careers. Thus, career concern is a significant arena of wellness because it can cause enormous stress to sacrifice career-building opportunities on the altar of forensics.

Emotional measures. Hatfield et al., (1989) offer that emotional concerns consist of the amount of awareness and acceptance that individuals have for themselves. Additionally, it regards what they feel about their abilities and limitations. Emotional concerns look at perceived feelings that are positive and enthusiastic about themselves. Trejo (2004) offers that this element of wellness is even more deeply personal and contextual than physical concerns. The individual nature of wellness makes sense given that physical needs may often align much more than emotional ones. Littlefield and Sellnow (1994) add to this understanding by asserting that student's speech apprehension at tournaments is a significant psychological concern. They offer that mental positivity has been found to reduce an overall feeling of speech apprehension. Given the heightened level of competition at forensic tournaments, the rise in feelings of speech apprehension is predictable. Offering prescriptive solutions to emotional issues such as speech apprehension is essential. However, the term mental health is frequently absent in the research about emotional wellness in forensics.

Spiritual concerns. Hatfield et al. (1989) examine this last dimension of wellness offering that this area is concerned with "ongoing involvement in seeking meaning and purpose in human existence" (p. 27). This aspect of wellness is exalted in some ways in the activity because forensics is about a pursuit of truth. However, for those who seek spiritual nourishment

through traditional forms of organized religion, it can be difficult given that essential days of observance are almost always in conflict with tournaments. This conflict can be complicated to negotiate given that both are not flexible to change. Some national competitions offer faith services on sabbath days and therefore set an example to invitationals (Workman, 2004). This aspect of wellness is perhaps the most personal, and thus, it is left to individual students to negotiate.

Forensic Coach Burnout

The most extensive single body of research regarding wellness in college forensics examines the hardships experienced by coaches. The struggles of being a coach make sense given that forensics coaches glue this vibrant community together. They serve in roles of leadership on their teams, at their universities, and in the state and national forensic organizations. Therefore, investigating how coaches experience stressors of their position provides a framework for understanding student perspectives of similar hardships. The life of a forensic coach can be a never-ending juggling act. Coaches and directors alike are required to traverse a harsh terrain of stressors without a single slip, lest the whole show crumble. Scholars have long looked at how coaches are expected to be teachers, confidants, accountants, parents, counselors, chauffeurs, speech writers, play directors, and nurses, to name a few (Burnett, 2002; Carmack & Holm, 2013; Dickmeyer, 2002; Gill, 1990; Leland, 2004; Littlefield & Sellnow, 1992; Olson, 2004; Paine & Stanly, 2003; Richardson 2005; Wickelgren & Phillips, 2008). Coaches in this activity can easily spend as much time traveling, coaching, or administrating for their team and program as they do anything else, which in turn can produce high levels of anxiety and stress (Littlefield & Sellnow, 1992). However, for the average coach, forensics is not their only professional responsibility. Instead, many forensic coaches are also faculty with

teaching assignments who only receive partial release time for doing a job that quickly can consume 40 hours of a week. Some scholars such as Burnett (2002) go so far as to call it, "a dead-end job," because often time the expectations of research, teaching, and service are incompatible with the life of a forensic coach. It is no wonder that Richardson (2005) explained that the average time spent in the position of speech coach is just five years. So often coaches in this activity will burnout, because of exhaustion from their never-ending juggling act. This phenomenon is critical to understand so that burnout may be framed in the context of forensics. The understanding allows for an investigation of parallels between coaches and students experiences. Therefore, what follows is a review of the literature surrounding coach burnout that explores the central themes that emerged and uses the ideas first addressed by Gill (1990), which are (a) demands of the job, (b) the nature of competition and its educational value, (c) budgetary concerns, (d) ethical standards, (e) and staffing problems. It should be noted that this list was augmented to incorporate personal/family relationships. This vital facet not addressed by Gill (1990) is rolled into the staffing problems theme arguing that conflict between personal and professional life will often create significant staffing issues.

Demands of the job. The demands of being a full-time forensic coach are an intricate web of expectations that are often unrealistic and unreasonable. Scholars have long lamented that negative consequences such as poor health, long periods of time traveling, and program-related stress are often experienced by those passionate for this calling (Pettus & Danielson, 1994; Burnet, 2002; Dickmeyer, 2002; Leland, 2004; Paine & Stanley, 2003; Richardson, 2005). Preston (1995) asserts that program pressures and student pressures are never-ending stressors for forensic students. While these pressures, and others, have uniquely contextual connotations for each program, many can attest that they weigh heavily on coaches' minds (Leland, 2004;

Paine & Stanly, 2003; Richardson, 2005). These never-ending stressors can often lead coaches to hang up their stopwatches for good.

Dual roles. Carmack and Holm,(2013) also discuss how the dual role of forensics coaches and teacher is often not sustainable and can create what they term "role overload." Forensics and the amount of time that it consumes with the preparation, administration, and travel often leaves little time for the three pillars of the academy. This horrid truth is especially pertinent to the research process. While some coaches are fortunate to have programs that are supportive of research surrounding forensics, not all departments favor this type of research. Most institutions still expect for individuals in these positions to engage in rigorous scholarship and service to their university.

There is no doubt that the being a forensic coach is a time-consuming position. It is this single facet that can drive the best coaches who are passionate about the activity away forever in search for some semblance of a personal life. Dickmeyer (2002) sheds light on how the length of the competitive forensic season negatively impacts coaches' academic careers. Regularly traveling across the country is unquestioningly stressful for a plethora of reasons. It also does not often allow time for coaches to conduct meaningful research that is critical for advancement in the academy. Dickmeyer (2002) also points out that coaches put their physical health on the line to complete the competitive season. These factors may also contribute to a coaches' burnout because it is not only physically stressful, but these poor health decisions can also be even more time-consuming worsening their ability to produce academically.

Budgetary concerns. The length of the competitive season, how far teams must travel, van rentals, hotels, food, and entry fees are some of the few expenses associated with college forensics. Such budgetary concerns, caused by a lack of institutional support, can be a catalyst for

stress and anxiety for coaches. This particularly pertinent stressor too often experienced by forensic coaches is outline best by Carmack and Holm (2013), whose research examines what relationship, if any, exists between the communication competence of forensics coaches and levels of perceived support from their institutions. They found that the higher a coach's communication competence, the higher they held perceptions of institutional support. Seeing also that the reverse carried a similar relationship, the researchers found that as communication competence fell so too did perceptions of institutional support. This relationship makes sense given that establishing connections in a school or department takes consistent interpersonal effort.

Research emphasizes that institutional support is critical to the long-term retention of forensic coaches. Pettus and Danielson (1994) examined the immense challenges women may face as forensic coaches. Echoing that a healthy relationship with the institution is critical to the health, growth, and sustainability of a program and preventing coaches from experiencing burnout. While this stressor may seem obvious, its impact is no less severe. Coaches who do not have situational support will not be able to continue for long in such an environment (Richardson, 2005). Not all institutional support must come from a university, school, or department. Many very successful programs receive institutional support from sources such as alumni or corporate sponsorship. No matter how institutional relief is achieved, coaches cannot function without it. Therefore, coaches are susceptible to burnout when budgetary issues emerge from a lack of institutional support.

Staffing concerns. Another area of consistent concern for coaches and especially directors of a forensic program is that holding on the staff long-term can be challenging. Littlefield and Sellnow (1992) first talk about how funding issues and staffing issues can be such

significant stressors as to cause coaches to burn out. There is an inherent symbiotic relationship between funding and staffing issues, as one goes so too typically does the other. There will always be a certain amount of a revolving door in the area of staffing of coaches. Many programs have graduate assistant positions that only offer a two-year placement. Finding qualified coaches on an annual basis is just another example of the responsibilities of coaching staff and directors.

Additionally, once qualified help is found for the program, there is a period where training must occur to acclimatize new members to the organization's culture. Outzen, Youngvorst, and Cronn-Mills, (2013) assert, "The individuals involved in forensics are constantly shifting, whether because of graduation, burnout, retirement, or any other number of causes. Therefore, a strong training infrastructure to educate our educators is important for those who will be coaching and judging students to be strong communicators" (p. 41). While this indeed is a call that is steeped in merit, it fails on some level to grasp the impossible position coaches who remain in the activity face. Training new coaches is just another dimension of a position that requires expert juggling skills with perfect timing. Consistent staffing concerns is another tier on top of the burnout cake that coaches are having forced down their throats.

Personal concerns. Anyone who has lived the life of a coach will attest to the persistent challenges of maintaining personal connections outside of the activity of college forensics. Pettus and Danielson (1994) assert that another dimension that is salient for both forensics and academia is the timeless struggle between work and family. They suggest that a career in forensics and family life are often incompatible in the long run. This conflict is nuanced and complicated but underpinning it all is how time-consuming the activity can be when coaches are expected to coach and travel. Additionally, consider that the competitive season, which, when compared to athletic teams is one of the longest collegiate competition seasons in existence.

Therefore, according to Dickmeyer (2002), it becomes tough for forensics coaches to enter into and sustain external relationships. This is perhaps why many relationships are found within the forensic circuit.

It is important to acknowledge that many individuals are seemingly able to have it all. They walk what looks like an effortless stroll down a thin line gently balancing the rigors of their profession and their personal lives. Richardson (2005) expresses how some coaches because of some, "individual's causation" are successfully able to navigate this course that so many others often fail. Meaning that some coaches possess an internal drive for the activity that is impervious to outside stressors. His research further expressed that such individuals must have a special combination of "personality characteristics and intrinsic motivations." This unique union of natural gifts is what makes a coach, as he calls it, "born to run" (p. 108). However, Wickelgren and Phillips (2008) contrast this with their study of in-depth interviews where they conclude, "role models that demonstrate how to manage work and family were not visible in the organization, sending a message that forensics is not a place for families" (p. 81). While it is possible that such a titan does exist in the forensic community, they indeed are not representational of a holistic experience of coaches in the activity. This particular stressor often leaves coaches in the position of having to choose between their profession and sustainable relationships. Therefore, a significant cause of burnout for coaches is the inability to maintain both personal relationships and their participation in the activity.

Literature Review Conclusion

Forensics is an incredible activity with far more benefits than drawbacks. Williams (2003) expresses how students, when asked about their various disadvantages, lamented many previously discussed stressors such as loss of job opportunities, lower quality academic writing

due to a lack of time, and a loss of networking opportunities in their given professions. The majority of students did express that they felt the benefits were worth the sacrifice. This review of literature examined the current understanding of wellness and of coaches' burnout in the activity of college forensics. However, little to no research is available discussing the specific concerns and nuances of students who struggle with wellness. Furthermore, the existence of coach burnout highlights a need to examine if similar stressors and phenomena occur in students. This notion is evidenced by how little research focuses on the student perspective in regard to wellness and burnout. Indeed, there is an overwhelming concern for students, welfare, but little to none of which seeks to engage in a perspective building about student experiences. Mills and Pettus (1993) highlight that while forensic educators may have a stronger voice, it is imperative that scholars listen to the community's most important voices, students. This approach rests on Croucher et al. (2006), who found that a student's motivation in the activity was directly correlated to their understanding and buy-in of a team's culture. Thus, the research indicates a gap in the study of forensic wellness. This study seeks to fill that space by understanding students' perspectives of wellness and burnout in college forensics.

Chapter 3: Methods

Theoretical Framework

Grounded theory is a qualitative method of systematic research which aims to create new approaches to explain the phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998). This theory is cited as one of the most used research methods in the social sciences (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). There are two primary attributes that characterize grounded theory. The constant comparison method aims to develop codes, categories, and themes through data analysis, and theoretical sampling involves the identification and selection of rich data sources to explain the social phenomenon (Charmaz, 2006; Hallberg, 2006). These approaches seek to construct a substantial theory that

reveals an organic process in a given social context by examining the experiences of people performing in that space (Creswell, 2007). Grounded theory is best understood through Martin and Turner (1986), who assert that this is "an inductive, theory discovery methodology that allows the researcher to develop a theoretical account of the general features of a topic while simultaneously grounding the account in empirical observations or data" (p. 141). Due to the methodical approach of analysis, grounded theory is considered inductive research that reveals a social process within recurring data patterns (Creswell, 1998; Patton, 1990; Creswell, 2007). This ongoing process of data collection, analysis, and a comparison is the cornerstone of the constant comparison method. It seeks to build possible explanations, through observation, of how a given phenomenon operates based on concrete data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This method is different from deductive approaches because the analysis does not rely on a priori theory and hypothesis to first be tested (Charmaz, 2006).

Participants

Participants were required to be active members of a college level forensic program that regularly competes at the community college or four-year level. Purposeful sampling, specifically snowball and network sampling (Creswell, 2013), was used to locate participants at universities from across the country. These regions included the midwest, northeast, southeast, and southwest. The point of saturation was found after 12 in-depth interviews were conducted. There were 12 participants (six women, five men, one gender neutral) who were individually interviewed about their experiences in the activity of college forensics. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 30, with an average age of 20.14. Of the participants, there were two freshmen, one sophomore, three juniors, and six seniors. Only two of the participants were competing at the community college level at the time of their interviews. The rest participated in forensic

programs at universities. Each participant had enjoyed different levels of success in the activity of college forensics. One of the participants had earned a national championship at a national championship tournament. All of the participants had experienced success in the activity at the national level.

Data Collection

This qualitative study used semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Each interview lasted for 15 to 25 minutes. Before the start of every conversation, participants read and signed the consent form. Then the meeting began with going over the consent form orally with the participants and asking if they had any questions. There were no questions about the consent form process.

Participants were informed that the final transcription s would be completely anonymous. They were told that all identifying information would be changed to maintain their privacy.

Participants were asked if they had any questions about this process. Additionally, participants were reminded before the interview began that if at any time during or after their conversation they wished to end the discussion or have all association with this process erased, they should feel free to make such a request.

The interviews were conducted over the internet through the use of a video chat application. Participants were asked before beginning the interview if they felt like they were in a safe and comfortable environment where disclosure would not be inhibited. If participants were not satisfied with their situation, then the strategies were discussed and put into practice. This instruction ensured that participants were able to disclose and maintain their privacy.

The interview consisted of asking participants five to seven probing questions. Based on the level of response from participants, follow-up questions were asked for clarification purposes. The stock questions were pulled from an approved question pool of 25 queries. These

questions were divided into four main categories: (a) Emotional Exhaustion, (b) Depersonalization (c) Personal Accomplishment, (d) Life Logistics. The interviews were recorded on a university-approved and-provided the recording device that was connected to a university-supported and-provided a laptop. Each participant was asked at least one question from each category. All data collected from participants was stored on the university supplied computer.

Data Analysis

After all, interviews had been recorded, they were transcribed into text documents and stored on the same university computer. Each of the participants was assigned different names to protect their identities. This qualitative study used grounded theory to uncover codes, categories, and themes (Charmaz, 2006; Hallberg, 2006). Following Strauss Corbin (1990), original patterns and generated codes were searched for in the data collected. The completed transcriptions were randomly numbered and then organized numerically. Each transcript was classified based on the categories of questions asked. Additional codes and types were looked for to see if other emerged. The next stages were lifting excerpts which supported the different groups/themes.

Chapter 4: Results

The results are organized into four topical sections inspired by each of the questions asked to interviewees. Each participant was asked at least one item from each of the sections. Saturation was achieved, and multiple themes in each section emerged. What follows are the results of 12 in-depth interviews based exploring the emergent themes from each of the four categories of questions.

Emotional Challenges

Some of the most widely used expressions in college forensics describe the emotional expectations of speech performances. The performance should take us on an emotional journey, or that performance was an emotional rollercoaster are types of conventional idioms often found in squad rooms and are uttered in tournament hallways across the country. These phrases indicate the existence of certain emotional expenditures from each performance. In addition to the emotional journey of characters, students must also negotiate and manage their emotional journey through each competition, taking into account external context as well as working through the hyper-competitive environment of the activity. Emotional challenges are understood as the extent to which students have the needed abilities to negotiate the ongoing series of individual stressors associated with the activity of college forensics.

Trauma and Triggers. The ability and need to manage emotional triggers faced in the activity of college forensics are profoundly personal and contextual. This is because students experience and negotiate such situations in different ways. Triggers are represented through feelings of fear, stress, tension, or even anxiety induced by a specific experience(s). Trauma includes events or situations in which an exposure violates an individual's expectations in such a harmful and egregious way that they are permanently changed as a result. While for some students such situations may never present themselves, others must actively engage in coping mechanisms to address such events.

Tori reveals that the performance of trauma may contribute to students having to manage emotional challenges such as being triggered. She explores how the competitive landscape of tournaments may encourage students to channel negative thoughts and emotions. However, she offers that while competition may call negative emotions in performance, the repetition of this

performance alone is not conducive to managing these emotional challenges given the tight schedule at tournaments:

So, this one is actually um something I've like really noticed this year. So for me, um, being a part of interp and hitting on those types of performances, um, re-creating trauma is um something that I feel like can directly impact the student if they want to continue with this activity. Cause I mean whether people like to admit it or not, people love seeing trauma.

Tonya thinks that there are deep and complex emotions experienced as a result of the activity. She reports that she does not often encounter emotional challenges but offers a concern that when emotional difficulties arise some restrictions in the activity may not allow for self-care:

It's so many emotions, I think it covers the entire spectrum of it, but really like as far as my personal experience, there's really only like one time where I can really remember having an emotional reaction that like stuck with me. Um, I got really triggered by a piece, and I had to sit in the round the whole time. So it was really upsetting and um, so like, issues like that kind of I guess, but other than that, I mean nothing else really sticks out.

Tiffany also expresses frustration over a broad activity call for students to perform their trauma as a baseline expectation. Like Tori, she further critiques that more time should be offered to students who may need to manage their own emotions with the ones they establish in their performances:

The community seems to want more things that depict trauma, but then as a performer, you don't really have that time to decompress and, and kind of process your emotions versus the emotions that you create and craft for your character.

The interconnected theme of trauma and triggers surfaced in these interviews. Students feel that trauma is privileged in performances at the collegiate level, but this may lead some individual to be triggered by experiencing these performances. This triggering can take place both as an audience member or as the performer. Furthermore, there are indications that certain conventions of the activity may be harmful to student self-care. This evidenced in how Tori expressed feelings of being trapped during a performance in which she felt triggered. The existence of trauma and triggers in the activity can ironically be traumatic to students. Managing these types of emotional situations may be a reason why students experience emotional exhaustion.

Self-doubt. The existence of speech apprehension is a well-accepted challenge for students in the activity of college forensics (Croucher et al., 2006; Mills & Pettus, 1993; Williams, 2003). One dimension of this emotional state is self-doubt. This emotional stressor is understood as a lack of confidence an individual has at any given time in their abilities. In the context of forensics, this means the perceived level of trust an individual possesses at any given time for their performances. While different aspects of a student's performance may be the method through which they justify these feelings, it is essential to understand that this emotional state does not have to have a basis in reality. This is especially true in the context of forensics

given that the paradigm of each student, audience member, and the judge is unique and personalized.

Tommy explains that self-doubt is a constant companion. He expresses lament over how this state is not always in line with reality and demonstrates this through a consistent stream of compliments received at tournaments from his support system. He furthers that this way of thinking can create a cycle of negative emotions that he must continually manage:

I think I've specifically experienced a lot of self-doubts. No matter how many compliments I'll get on my speeches, I'm like; they're not good enough. I'm not a good enough speaker. So just a lot of um like self-doubt and deprecation, I guess. So those are my greatest emotional challenges.

Tom addresses the issue of self-doubt in another way. He is concerned about having a complex about his competitive success. He discusses how his self-doubt causes him to notice when he loses much more than when he is successful:

So, I think I have this complex that I peaked my sophomore year. So at the [Large regional tournament] I did really well on ADS (After Dinner Speaking)...it felt really good and I was like, you know, this is my event, this is my time like I'm doing really well and then at [National Tournament] that year I didn't break ADS or like anything else. And I'm like well what if it was a fluke kind of thing. I think that has like really like cemented itself in like how I view the speech. So whenever I don't do well, it just sort of like a self-fulfilling prophecy of like, you know, I'm not good at the activity, like I did well my sophomore year, but that was like one tournament where it was just a fluke kind of thing.

Tessa, unlike Tommy and Tom, asserts that her self-doubt exists simultaneously with the joy she receives from the activity:

I would say like happy and anxious at the same time. Well, mainly anxious because like just the getting up in front of a group of people time and time again can be a little nerve-wracking. You never know how people will respond and then I guess happy that I have the opportunity to do that.

Self-doubt is an internal emotional challenge that students must deal with in unique ways and on different levels. Each student experienced this emotional challenge differently. Thus self-doubt can present as either a state or trait within students.

Social Support

All organizations must offer some level of social support to maintain membership. This inherent human need is especially critical in hyper-competitive arenas. Social support is understood as the existence of a network of individuals on personal and professional levels with the ability to offer physical and emotional resources. This system of support can serve multiple roles and functions but ultimately can provide help in times of need. However, establishment and maintenance of a social support structure can pose significant challenges. This struggle is especially salient in the context of competitive forensics.

Imaginary Divide. College forensics privileges competitive success. After all, it is a competitive activity. However, this favoring of success can have negative consequences on students' social support systems. Tensions may exist on both a team and the broader forensic community. The most considerable challenge of establishing a social support structure is the social elitism that occurs from a privileging of competitive success. The term most often used for

this is speech famous. Like every other culture and subculture, forensics seems to create their internal celebrities. Naturally, the elitism of any kind segregates and otherizes. This type of practice is antithetical to the educational value of speech and does little to encourage social structures of support across the forensic community.

Tom affirms the existence of a social hierarchy in the activity. He outlines three clear levels to this structure, talented, middle ground, and everyone else:

Forensics is an activity that glorifies success. There is this divide between the really talented people, and you've got kind of your middle ground, and then there is everybody else. I know it's probably not intentional, but like forensics is kind of shallow, where like talent really only recognizes talent. I feel like there's always just like this kind of, kind of like an imaginary divide between like, you know, talent and skill level.

Tonya adds to this understanding of a divide by describing a power dynamic that exists during social interactions at tournaments:

I get it sometimes because like you don't want to be the person who like goes up, maybe you're nervous or like intimidated, but like, also seems kind of like a power trip too. So I don't go up to people and talk to them. They have to come talk to me.

Tessa explores the uncertainty of initiating social interactions. She expresses that this uncertainty is an active deterrent to establishing, maintaining, and expanding her social support system:

I think it kind of goes back to that competitive side of forensics. It's kind of difficult to decide like, oh, is this going to be a friendly person or do they just want to make sure they can sweep the competition away. So, I feel you have to be on your toes all the time.

Like you never know how a person is going to react if I say, hey, I kind of liked your piece, or just hello my name is Tessa. I think that mainly is the, the hardest part of activity you never know if people are going to be nice or fake.

Thatcher discusses his struggles with interacting with people from other programs because he did not experience regional success which he attributes as the catalyst for forming social bonds in the activity of college forensics:

The moment I felt the most isolated was my freshman year at [National Tournament] because it's so drawn out and so long with all this time in between rounds. And as a freshman I didn't really put myself out there as much, so in between rounds. It was just really isolating because there is a kind of hierarchy of talent. I feel like final rounds [at invitational tournaments] is the place where people get to know each other.

These four students offer different experiences of establishing and maintaining social support in college forensics. They express reservation about engagement with new people on the basis that they are uncertain how their initial reaction will be perceived. This due to a social hierarchy founded on a meritocratic system of success.

Social Apprehension. Social apprehension is the result of the intersection of communication apprehension and social phobia (Brogan et al., 2008). The stress of a social setting and demonstrating communication competence discourages interaction. In the context of forensics, social interaction is at the heart of the activity. Tournaments are an excellent educational opportunity for students to practice their social skills. Some students reported

experiencing intense feelings of social apprehension. Others reported more mild feelings of apathy.

Tammy explains how her social anxiety inhibited her ability to establish relationships on the forensics circuit. She also explores an inter-team dimension, describing how team dynamics were equally stressful and discouraged to forming relationships:

I personally um have trouble connecting with other competitors just because I have like social anxiety just in general. I have trouble initiating conversations and so then because speech has a lot of small talk, I'm often not very quick to like naturally do that. I think have a serious demeanor, which is not always welcoming and warm and so I sometimes struggle to connect with other competitors even though I really want to, and I really like them and I think they're cool. I think when it comes to managing teams, you know, dealing with like drama but also like up-keeping, familial type ties, and connections. Making sure everybody's cared for, can sometimes become really time consuming and mentally hard.

Tiffany describes a relationship between competition and the social element of the activity. She claims that they are intertwined and feed off each other as rotating sources of motivation:

I think anyone would readily admit that some days it's the social aspect that keeps them in the activity and other days it's you know that competitive, you know, aspects because I think they both play off of each other because on the days that I'm not really feeling my speeches, I may have my teammates to bring me up and keep me in the activity because I'm not always gonna, you're not always going to win. But then on other days when you

know, you can't always rely on people, and you do have this like creative outlet that's really only yours.

Tori explains that the tight schedule experienced at more invitational tournaments is not conducive to socializing. She continues that meaningful relationships are harder to establish because conversations remain light due to the lack of time:

I will say that it's hard to form a relationship with a lot of people on the national circuit when you only get to see them for a short amount of time where you're not put in a room where you can't talk about things that aren't forensics. So I see people all the time for a short amount of time, but I don't really know their interests besides what we're doing. So once you start competing that's really all you can talk about.

Tom asserts that while the forensics community strives to create a culture where healthy social bonds can be formed, it is never fully realized. He claims that there is not enough depth in friendships made in the activity:

I feel like it's something that we're always striving for, but I just don't know how often any steps actually get taken to create this. Like, we have a Facebook group, but that's only for like um the junior and senior reps to post proposals. There's no real interaction outside of tournaments unless you form these close friendships. But I mean other than like a handful of people, I don't really talk to a lot of forensics people outside of a tournament.

The participants' responses reveal that social apprehension is a personal experience. While some students reported that it was a significant deterrent to forming relationships, others did not even seem like a significant factor.

Understanding Individual Achievement

Individual achievement is when students in forensics define what it means to be successful for themselves. Students, who compete in the individual events portion of forensics, often define success in different ways. Two dominant themes emerged in this study that informs how students perceive expectations of success from the community and how they interpret it for themselves. The desire to be competitively successful was a thread stitched through many of the interviews conducted. The other significant theme focused on engaging in advocacy and achieving a positive response from audiences.

Competitive Drive. The competitive element of the activity is what is appealing to so many who become lifelong participants. Competitive drive is the force of motivation upon which students draw to compete in the college forensics. It is also how students define what it means to be successful in tournaments and their forensic careers.

Terri reveals that while she likes the competitive aspect of forensics, sometimes it is overwhelming. She further asserts that in those moments of heightened stress it is her success in forensics that justify coping with these feelings:

Um, when I get overwhelmed from time to time, but I like the competitive nature of the activity. I am really competitive, and there really isn't competitive theatre, so I really like being able to do that in forensics. But there are times where I get overwhelmed, and I've got three different speeches to memorize and new intros to write where I'm just like, you know, why do I do this? Then I am reminded of that feeling of competitive success. Makes all the late nights and stress feel worth it.

Terrence expresses that winning is an essential part of his tournament experience. He also shows that his desire for competitive success motivates him to ensure that others on his team can collectively such experiences:

I am a competitive nut, that is my big driving force. I do care about all the aspects of education and personal development but you know there's no feeling like winning at a tournament. So, I'm really into getting my team to a higher level competitively.

Thomas explains that while students can feel fulfillment from competitive success in the activity, it can have adverse effects when it is tied to an individual's self-worth:

Like it is a competitive aspect and I think people get enjoyment out of that competitive aspect, but at the same time it can be hindering to some people who only see themselves as a successful person when it's like contingent on how well they perform in speech. So, I think conflating your self-worth with how well you perform in speech is a problem, but I'm not too sure how to solve for that.

Thatcher asserts that competition is an essential source of motivation and how he defines being successful. However, he indicates that the members of the community may compromise the educational integrity of the activity to win competitions. He also acknowledges that others in the activity have other motivations for competing that are equally valid:

I probably privilege competition to the point that it's unhealthy. I put pressure on myself to do well. I think the activity as a whole; there's a lot of manipulation in choosing topics and choosing literature where I feel like we've lost the whole point. I think that there's very quickly a turn being made towards trying to win versus trying to spread an argument

and I think people who join it for that social reason specifically and the winning is just kind of marginal; I think they're going to be disappointed with what they get.

The participants reveal that for some students, competition is a very important part of their speech experience. They also point out areas where a competition-based paradigm may be problematic.

Personal Goal Setting. This paradigm of individual success is less objective than competition. Students reported different and nuanced reasons for participating in college forensics. Some students feel a sense of accomplishment by engaging in advocacy through their performances. Others indicate that having friends and relationships in the forensic community is all the success they really want. Personal goal setting is defined by being successful in the activity through an alternative lens than the traditional competitive paradigm.

Tori expresses that it is the feeling of speaking for those without a voice that gives her time in forensics meaning. She asserts that negative feedback does not impact her decision in topic, literature choice, or performance style:

I love this activity. I love having a platform to talk about. I mean, you're speaking for the unspoken essentially, and that's really, really cool. The only time I've ever had the attitude of I don't really care is if someone doesn't appreciate my message. I only choose things I want to talk about and a lot of this activity is subjective. So when I get negative ballots, I find myself being like well I don't give a damn what you say. I'm not changing it to impress you. But that's my mindset; I know a lot of people who are just like, I don't care. But it's still exciting for me.

Tonya explains that her feeling of success comes from when an audience member reveals how moved they were from her performance. She indicates a belief that the forensic community is not as supportive as it should be:

My sense of accomplishment in the activity is probably not what your typical speech person would tell you. I feel successful when someone comes up to me after my piece and tells me that they felt something. Like I couldn't tell you what I placed at the last tournament we went to, but I can tell you the people who have come up to me over the past four years and have been impacted by one of my pieces. Like that's what we're supposed to be doing here. We're supposed to support each other, encouraging each other to go out and live these messages we preach every weekend. And for a lot of people, I don't get that vibe, which is disheartening. Especially for people who don't feel good about themselves because they don't do well consistently. It just creates a toxic environment for the students, and I think it takes away the authenticity of the activity and what potential it does have.

Tiffany also echoes Tonya in that success comes from moving her audience in the same way she was touched when she first experienced college forensics:

I genuinely mean this when I say it, my version of success is to move someone. Because the first time I saw someone perform in any piece of forensics before I even knew what it was, it literally brought tears to my eyes. And it wasn't because I knew anything about the event I didn't, it was because this person moved me. If I could do that for one person in the room, regardless if I take the six in the round, for me that's enough. So for me personally, it's. I know if I give it my all and I move someone, if I give a powerful performance, that's all I need, really.

Terry asserts that success should be understood through setting goals and achieving them. He does not place them in hierarchy, but all targets being equal explains that the critical part of success is just to accomplish set goals:

For me, it's always been about setting a goal for yourself and then eventually meeting that goal. Whether that be making it a goal to learn a certain amount of speeches, pick up a new event, or even to win a certain amount of tournaments. It's always been about setting a goals for yourself and then using all the resources available to you to get yourself to that goal, whatever it might be.

Time Management

Students in college forensics must at least manage to compete in forensics be successful in their academic careers. Often students must also work to pay for essentials such as housing and food. Activities of daily living create significant time constraints for students in forensics. Students must often negotiate the three pillars of school, work, and forensics. Therefore, proper time orientation, organization, and planning are critical to successfully managing those pillars of student life. It is essential to understand the experiences of how students prioritize different aspects of their lives. Understanding how students manage their time offers insight into possible reasons why students feel burnout from the activity. Two central themes emerged as the most significant areas students experience hardship in time management.

Financial constraints. Financial support is a consistent area of stress for students who must support themselves while in school and compete in the activity. Both school and forensics are time-consuming, and employers of college students can be unsympathetic towards travel

schedules. The power dynamics of a job mixed with academic and competitive expectations creates a site for understanding the students' perspectives.

Tommy reports that his financial needs weigh heavily on him. He reports working two jobs and taking out financial aid. He expresses a feeling of exhaustion because of his many commitments. Additionally, he reflects that his many responsibilities mean that he is unable to excel in any of them:

I think this one might be team specific, but I'm not very wealthy, and I rely on a lot of financial aid in order to put myself through school. I'm working two jobs right now and so to balance speech and then the organizations that I'm also involved with along with school, it's just way too much. I'm really spreading myself thin, but you also need to have that level of involvement in order to get to Grad school. So I'm just really trying to do the most in order to benefit myself. But at the end of the day, I think what I'm unfortunately realizing too late is that it just means that all my performances in every single thing that I'm in are just like not working. So I think if I had scholarships to supplement the jobs that I'm working right now that could free up some time and would make me feel more like a human being and not like a robot some days.

Tammy theorizes how perceptions of the demands of college forensics may differ depending on if students receive a scholarship:

I think there is probably distinct differences in students' views of the demands of speech, based upon whether they have a scholarship or not and how much that scholarship is. Because I know that's a point that gets brought up when we discuss these issues with my team. We're not getting paid, and I think it's impressive to like do the things that we do,

but it doesn't ultimately help us get food or pay for our tuition. I wonder how my experience would be different because I think that probably changes a student's view of like the activity.

Tonya reveals that the financial incentive is the reason she has remained in speech. She expresses that without her scholarship she would not participate in college forensics. Additionally, she applauds students who do compete in college forensics without receiving an award:

I don't do speech just because it's fun, I get paid, and it provides an opportunity for me to continue college, but if I weren't getting paid by the university, honestly I probably would not be doing it. I love what it does, and I think for the people who are in college and can do speech and not get paid for it like girl, good for you.

Tiffany discusses the financial concerns of students and the role of scholarship from forensics programs practically. She reveals that while she is not on scholarship, she feels that those who do receive scholarship serve a practical purpose to be competitively successful:

When you're talking about scholarships, you're not giving somebody a scholarship to have a good time at the tournament you're paying them to bring in hardware and to bring in frankly more money for your program, for your university. Now I'm not on scholarship, so any pressure really comes from me and my own desire to do well. Which is a lot, but, if I come up short, I don't feel like I have wasted somebody's money or wasted somebody's time and effort because we're all just here doing it because we love it. But when we're getting paid it's not because we love it is because we're good at it. And so when we stop being good at it, then there's a problem.

All of the students, when asked about their financial support, addressed the role scholarships in college forensics. While some who receive scholarship support admit to doing the activity for the money, others suggested that it would be a source of relief for them. All of the students indicated that their perception of the activity would change depending on if they did or did not receive scholarship for doing college forensics.

Time management strategies. Management strategies are the methods students employ to negotiate school, work, and forensics. While some students are organized by nature, others learn the behavior and, even more, admit to lacking the ability or desire altogether. Additionally, students' personalities dictate the different levels of organization required to achieve the same outcome. It is essential to understand how students manage their time and the strategies they have tried because it may offer insight into why students feel they no longer have time for college forensics.

Tonya explains that time management strategies do not consistently work for her. She expresses that she is unaware of the process she uses to organize her time. Additionally, she offers that it is only through a strong sense of determination that she feels able to survive:

I don't think I have time management. I've tried the Google doc thing, and I don't know how I do this, I honestly don't. I feel like I'm barely getting by. But somehow I'm still here, and somehow I'm still doing it. So that's all I really can do. Honestly. I feel like I just run on sheer force of will. [Coach name] really fostered believing in myself and feeling like I could go on and do something with speech. So I've always loved doing this and love what I get out of it.

Tommy explains that prioritizing forensic work is difficult on a regular basis because he feels that his academics and career must come first. However, this causes stress, because at forensics tournaments he regrets not focusing more on his speeches:

I would say that it's hard to prioritize speech and the I get to a tournament, and then I realize I want to do really well. But then during the week, I have like these papers to write. So I rationalize that I can't dedicate an hour a day to practicing speech because I need to get this other stuff done first. Which starts a cycle throughout the week of speech doesn't matter right now I need to focus on schoolwork and working, but then I get to a tournament and don't do well.

Thatcher reveals that the requirements of his major along with his work schedule have increased his level of concern over proper time management. His approach is to compartmentalize the different areas of his life. His strategy is remaining disciplined about the task in front of him until it is completed:

Well, I'm a theatre major which kind of amplifies things because I'm required to audition for every show that they put on, um, and I don't get a choice. I also work 13 hours a week. So, I try to compartmentalize when I'm going to focus on my forensics, when I'm going to focus on just being a good friend or good boyfriend, and when I'm going to focus on my classes and my shows. So, it's just a matter of discipline and making sure that you know when the time comes to say no, and I have to force myself to say no.

Terri discusses her process of having a set schedule where her time is methodically planned out based on what she needs to accomplish any given week. This set routine helps her to remain what she identifies as balanced:

I always take steps to dedicate days to forensics. For example, with my job I've made it so that Tuesdays I do not come in at all. And this semester I don't even have classes on Tuesday. So that's the day where I would mostly be in the office working on my speeches, doing research, that is the day for forensics. That way I have a kind of balance where I always make time for forensics so that it doesn't really take over everything else.

Tammy reflects on past strategies that have not worked and offers how she went about adapting to her own limitations. She discusses how she lowered her academic course load, as well as dedicating a single day to working with her student organization. She also uses a strategy of scheduling dedicated time to spend on speech, school, and her work:

This year's feeling a little bit better, but like last year, for example, I did speech, had an 18 credit semester, and I was the president of [Student Organization Name] and it's a very large organization. I had to put my foot down because I think that was when I realized it was too much. So the very next semester I lowered my credit hours to 12. But then other than that, Thursdays I pretty much primarily focus on my other organizations. But then on Mondays and Tuesdays, I try to get my speeches up and ready. Then obviously school is all the time, so I just try to kind of categorize things.

Students reported having to find time management strategies that work with their goals. They also discuss how these strategies are sometimes unrealistic and must augment accordingly. While some students reported no definable system for time management, all addressed a need to find a method of organizing and dedicating time to school, work, and forensics.

Student Burnout

It is essential to examine students' perspectives on burnout in college forensics. Understanding these perspectives offers insight into how students themselves conceptualize this going phenomenon. Some students report experiencing such intense feelings of exhaustion that their only choice is to leave the activity of college forensics. Students were asked to offer their perceptions on the issue of students ending college forensics before their eligibility was completed.

Tammy reveals that she believes student burnout exists on multiple levels. While she reports having feelings of burnout herself, it has not led to her leaving college forensics. She asserts that students, when evaluating what areas of their life they need to simplify, will make a pragmatic choice to stop doing college forensics:

I think there's like various levels of burnout. I mean, at certain parts of the year, I'm pretty burnt out on speech. But it's not enough to make me want to stop completely. I have seen a different kind of burnout. I've seen other teammates who have left the team who are very good at the activity, but it demanded so much, or it just conflicted with other aspects of their life that they couldn't keep putting the energy into something that was maybe taking away from another part of their life. I think when people come to that point they decide to cut something. Sometimes that thing is speech, because at the end of the day for a lot of us there is no future in speech after college.

Tom asserts that burnout in students is the result of an adverse shift in perspective towards the activity of college forensics. This shift may occur for some different reasons, such as not achieving the success desired or having to spend more time on academic goals:

I feel like a lot of it is kind of negative perspective shift. I feel whether it be grades and a need to focus on school or people just kind of get beaten down by the activity. So I feel like it's a negative perspective shift because, you can never break at a tournament, and you keep getting beaten down, it screws with you. So, I feel like it depends on your own personal perspective on the cards being dealt.

Tessa also asserts that student burnout may originate by students not experiencing success desired. She indicates that this may be a cultural issue of the community placing too much emphasis on competition:

I think the whole burnout thing comes from not being able to see the quantifiable results. We've emphasized how well you do rather than on moving performances. And when you put that emphasis on it, it makes the activity less genuine. And for the people who make speech their life, it makes them think that speech is all they have.

Terri reveals that student burnout may be the result of incremental pressures. She also explains that some of these pressures may be the result of interpersonal conflict often found on forensic teams. She also indicates that students sometimes take on more responsibility than they are prepared for, and this calls for a period of adjustment:

I've seen burnouts where it's just gradually gotten more and more until they've reached a point where it's like, I can't do it anymore. Also, other things can happen such as team drama or personal commitments. I do always feel as if it's people sometimes get really overwhelmed they just need to take a step back, reorient their lives a little bit and sometimes forensics just can't be a part of that.

Terrence discusses the role success may have in how students decide to continue participating in college forensics. He explains that a lack of progress may be the result of a student's low confidence in their abilities. He concludes that if students perceive that they have invested more in the activity than they are receiving, then this may cause burnout:

I think sometimes it stems from if they're not having the success they think they should or want to have. I've seen a few of those where they think they're gonna win all the time and when they don't, they just leave. I think it comes from a lack of success or a lack of confidence in their ability to have that success. But I think a lot of times it goes back to if the work is being put in and they're still not getting results. If that had happened to me my first year, I don't know that I would've stayed.

Tiffany examines the role of time management in student burnout. She offers that if students are unable to negotiate between the activity and school, then they may experience burnout:

So, from my experience, people tend to quit because they can't balance it. We also have this rule on our team that you have to have a certain GPA to stay. So a lot of times what ends up happening is that the second-semester people won't compete cause their fall semester they didn't make grades and then they just won't come back the next year because once you're out of it, it's just so hard to come back. So that's the reason that a lot of people on our team don't come back. Also, people end up quitting because if they have friend groups outside of the activity, then they're able to like get through the rest of college without having to rely on their speech friends. I think that's also a big reason.

Students discussed their different perceptions of burnout in the activity of college forensics. Some students expressed a relationship between a student's perception of success experienced and if that would lead them to burnout. Other students offered that time management could lead to feelings of intense stress causing students to simplify their lives and, in the process, cut out college forensics. The role of the community's emphasis on competition was also cited as a possible cause of students leaving the activity. Students indicated that burnout in the activity is a gradual process in which pressures from multiple sources build to a breaking point and participation in college forensics is reevaluated.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Students offered perspectives on issues of wellness and burnout. The intense passion exhibited by students through this process reveals just how well forensics empowers competitors to engage in challenging conversations. The participants offer a new path of dialogue that forensic educators may use to augment their approaches to pedagogical praxis and the administration of their team and programs. Furthermore, the themes discussed offer the forensics community areas of reflection for improvement and points of clarification to address any student misconceptions about the purpose and function of the activity. All of the participants demonstrated a deep affection for college forensics as well as a desire for it to continue its pursuit of progress. The forensics community seeks to make the world better by teaching competitors how to lean into the hard conversations and engage in real advocacy. Participants used the sense-making systems and critical training gained from the activity to offer perspectives on about possible deficiencies in the activity and advocate for remedies.

Emotional Exhaustion

Competitors discuss the prominence of emotional strain occupying forensic experiences. The layering of internal and external stressors induces a cumulative effect of emotional exhaustion. Participants' responses reveal a polarization of opinion toward the activities perceived complicity in student experiences of burnout. Students also discussed their own responsibility in negotiating pressures of the activity. The themes emerged in this area reveal opportunities for competitors, forensic educators, and the community to find directions to begin addressing student perspectives of emotional exhaustion. Students' views suggest that more emphasis is needed in equipping competitors with tools to manage the emotional stress experienced in the activity. These tools should address the negotiation of competitive drive and

the performance of trauma. Resources should also seek to empower students to address feelings of self-doubt and inadequacy in competitive contexts.

Students' responses asserted the existence of a competitive privileging of performing trauma. Participants admitted to acquiescing to this perceived community pressure to remain competitively relevant. Competitors reported performing trauma seemingly without regard for how such performances may impact their emotional health. Students and coaches should incorporate, if not already, an evaluation of how repeated performances will affect the performers' emotional health. While community constraints function to inform and guide students' competitive performance choices, the activity is not impervious to the emergence of new trends. Participant framing of performing trauma does not address their agency in setting new competitive trends or privileging self-care as a legitimate choice.

Discussions of emotional strain and performing trauma also reveal that college forensics as a community may not foster a culture of self-care practices. Professionalism is a core value of the activity, which can discourage students from expressing a need to engage in self-care. While this core value is an invaluable quality of college forensics, students and forensic educators should develop strategies in ways to express needs for self-care in this context. Students revealed that code phrases can be used to professionally communicate a need to engage in self-care.

Although audience participation is a critical component of forensic competitions, experiencing triggering events can sometimes occur. Student perspectives suggest that more articulation is needed in college forensics that expresses that leaving triggering situations is an acceptable method of self-care. However, subjective judging paradigms present challenges to incentivizing this process of emotional wellness. Students' may fear that such actions will negatively impact their competitive success. While competitors are ultimately responsible for

their emotional wellbeing, articulating that it is acceptable for students, when needed, to leave competition rounds can function to normalize and empower students to engage in such self-care behavior.

Social Elitism

Participant framing of social support examined a perceived social hierarchy and social apprehension. Student perceptions assert that a social hierarchy exists on two primary levels: teams and the broader community. The concern about social support on the level of teams was not a significant source of stress based on responses. However, there was concern expressed about social status in the broader community. There are several factors that can construct the environment in which students feel discouraged to engage with others socially. The most important is social apprehension. The development of social skills is a personal process in which progress is individual. Therefore, student development will vary in any social setting. However, the activity offers students the ability to develop their social skills professionally through repeated exposure to similar situations such as tournaments where experiential learning may occur.

Although college forensics works to be accepting, opening, and welcoming to all, it ultimately privileges competitive success. The nature of competition is that social segregation will occur when competitive success is the significant cohesive force of a community or culture. The hierarchies that may form in this activity are an inevitable byproduct of participation in a competitive activity. Additionally, the social dynamic of college forensics often mimics social settings in professional contexts. This experience offers students an educational experience to learn how to negotiate a formation of such hierarchies.

While social elitism may still occur in the activity, recently competitive success has been contextualized against a broader political backdrop. Students, regardless of success, are more likely now to hear about the importance of their messages and performances as methods of real advocacy. Invitational tournaments and national organization alike in the wake of recent political uncertainty now emphasize the importance of unity across the forensic community. Both students who experience heightened levels competitive success and those who do not are receiving that same call for solidarity from forensics educators across the country. Perhaps a positive outcome of the current political landscape is that the forensic community is emphasizing more the importance of student engagement in advocacy regardless of its level of competitive recognition. Participants of the activity should contextualize any social elitism experienced in the activity through the lens of current political calls for the direct social exclusion of specific groups of people. Articulating an organizational need to frame this social stressor in the broader political landscape may offer students and forensic educators same perspective-building tools to manage such stress.

Cost/Benefit Analysis

Participant responses reveal a cost/benefit analysis used by students in negotiating the perceived stressors of college forensics. Although drawbacks exist, competitors acknowledged the benefits of the activity exceeded any negative qualities. The concerns expressed by students were in the context of how the activity can improve and not a critique of its legitimacy as a superior educational platform. While some competitors offered that some students may determine that drawbacks, such as time requirements, were sufficient reasons to leave the activity, there was no expression that the time invested in college forensics was not a valuable experience. The decision to participate in the activity is a personal choice that is subject to

change based on a plethora of contextual constraints. Additionally, such cost/benefit analysis is present, albeit to different degrees, in any collegiate extracurricular activity. Such commonality should not diminish the need, called for by participant responses, for the activity to continue to address any negative or potentially harmful areas it may still harbor. Instead, recognizing the overall importance of college forensics and the skills it teaches students, can empower a more comprehensive community articulation to address ways for the activity to evolve further. Forensic educators may consider it beneficial to the retention of students to develop new strategies for teaching how to identify the many benefits of college forensics to better aide a student's analysis of cost versus reward.

Financial Support

A scholarship is a privileged tool of recruitment and retention of programs. Students who are competitively gifted are incentivized to choose programs in which their education may be supplemented if not completely covered. However, institutions that offer financial incentives are not impervious to students leaving the activity before their eligibility is up. The ability to provide scholarships for competing in college forensics is a privilege many programs do not enjoy. Participants' responses reveal that awards for competing in the activity are perceived as a double-edged sword. Students acknowledged that to receive financial support for college forensics is rare and should be appreciated when experienced. However, for those who did receive a scholarship, competitors reveal that without financial compensation, college forensics does not provide adequate incentives. Similarly, other participants highlight the relief of only having to be concerned with forensics and not negotiating work schedules with competitions.

While students' perspectives highlight the benefits and drawbacks of financial support in college forensics, they are undertones of the commodification of the activity. Some students

explore how programs that can afford scholarship have more tools for recruiting students, but that with the scholarship, the responsibility of students perhaps becomes less about learning and more about maintaining competitive success. However, competitive success in this activity relies on well-thought-out performances, making it unlikely that the educational value of the activity suffers significantly as a result of scholarship. Furthermore, concerns about financial constraints of students and forensics educator alike perhaps should be more often situated in a broader social context. Participation in higher education and college forensics is a privileged experience, and while some receive a scholarship for competing, all have opportunities made available that otherwise would not exist, but for this activity.

Student Perceptions of Burnout

Though competitors can experience burnout exhaustion, there are significant differences in how forensics educators experience burnout. Student participation in college forensics is limited to four years at the collegiate level, while forensic educators can spend a lifetime in this stressful environment. Students in the activity may have had similar experiences with forensics in high school or even before that, but ultimately eligibility to compete in forensics is finite. Eligibility restrictions may offer students a different way to perceive burnout because their investment in the activity is definable to four years. Student stress and exhaustion related to the activity should be addressed to avoid the risk of significant and to encourage full participation.

While students may have a financial investment in the activity, this is also limited to the amount of time spent in college forensics. Forensic educators' careers are invested in being able to withstand the rigors of the job for much more extended periods of time than students. Issues of institutional support are also relevant to students in the activity but in different ways. How much an institution supports a specific forensic program will affect those students and their ability to

engage in the educational process of the activity fully. However, rarely is it the students' responsibility to navigate the bureaucracy of an institution to secure, maintain, and expand such support. These significant roles for coaches can be an extreme stressor that can lead educators to burnout. But negotiating this toll is not mentioned as a stressor for students by participants. Students and coaches can experience heightened stress over financial concerns. The primary divergence is that students only report being concerned about their financial well-being while forensics educators bear the weight of a program. Contextualizing student experiences with understandings of coach burnout better defines the dimensions of this issue, but such framing should not pit these different and diverse experiences against each other.

Student wellness and burnout are growing concerns of participants in college forensics. Competitors have expressed a need to reconceptualize what it means to be successful in the activity. Competitive success will always be a strong driving force of the activity, but student perspectives advocate emphasizing the methods of achieving used and if they are aligned with wellness practices. The forensic community has traditionally relied on forensics educators and individual programs to safeguard students' health. Many directors and coaches alike work hard to promote physical and emotional wellness in college forensics. However, national forensic organizations and their leaders can better promote emotional self-care and physical wellness to be privileged at national and invitational tournaments. Issues of student burnout and the personal emotional needs of students through articulation can begin to be destigmatized as nothing more than students' excuses or weakness.

Limitations and Future Research

Researchers appreciate qualitative research methods for gaining insight and for its ability to generate new theory. Interviewing allows researchers the opportunity to learn about the

forensics community through the perspectives of students. The compelling narratives offered and advocacy expressed enhances a sparse area of research on college forensics. Limitations of this study highlight ways in which new research can advance understandings of student experiences in college forensics. While participant views offer methods for researchers to engage in perspective building, the themes and issues expressed also reveal areas still unexplored and ripe for new research. Furthermore, a critical perspective can offer this area of research ways to generate the knowledge needed to create change in the community of college forensics.

The perspectives of students gained in this study offer insight into how current competitors understand issues of wellness, exhaustion, and burnout. The narratives offered are valuable perspective-building narratives that can function to empower other students in the forensic community to speak out about their own experiences. However, the participants of this study were active members of college forensics who have not experienced burnout to the extent where they had to leave the activity. Student perspectives reveal how burnout can consist of multiple layers and is experienced to different degrees based on the individual. Therefore, researchers seeking to expand on this study should identify students who are no longer competing in college forensics because they experienced the exhaustion of burnout. Cataloging these narratives for comparison between student still in the activity may help researchers identify a threshold range of experiences in which students tend to burnout of the activity. Although the perspectives of current students in college forensics function to shape this issue, these responses do not include those who have experienced burnout. Instead, this study relies on how current competitors conceptualize burnout through their own experiences of exhaustion and the narratives of teammates and friends who have left the activity.

Researchers interested in further exploring the contours burnout and student experiences should attempt to differentiate how students perceive situational stress in contrast to issues of mental health. The distinction of these emotional states can help students, forensics educators, and the community of college forensics to understand better and accommodate real mental wellness needs of students. Researchers through gaining student perspectives of these distinct concepts allow for the greater perspective building of the needs of students. Forensic educators can gain the knowledge needed to educate themselves, their teams, and the community about the nuanced mental wellness needs of students in the forensic contexts.

New research can also explore how coaches disclosing how they navigate issues of wellness can function to normalize mental health and self-care in college forensics. Given that significant research is dedicated to understanding coach burnout, examining how forensic educators manage issues of mental health serves a dual purpose. It can expand the knowledge of the experiences of coaches in the context of mental wellness and how they negotiate these issues with this high-stress position. Furthermore, such research also can generate knowledge on methods used by coaches that may be positive strategies for students. Understanding coach experiences of managing mental health, through articulation, can function to normalize this issue more in the activity of college forensics.

While drawbacks exist in the activity, college forensics is an overall force of good for all it reaches. Sometimes the skills and lessons gained are not always readily apparent, but they do eventually emerge demonstrating that this activity offers participants an exceptionally positive experience. Competitors can develop an understanding of themselves and the world in which they want to live.

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Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter

Date: 4-2-2018

IRB #: UHSRC-FY17-18-54
Title: Examining "burn-out" in Forensics Students
Creation Date: 9-20-2017
End Date:
Status: **Approved**
Principal Investigator: Timothy Ward
Review Board: University Human Subjects Review Committee
Sponsor:

Study History

| Submission Type | Initial | Review Type | Exempt | Decision | Exempt |
|-----------------|---------|-------------|--------|----------|--------|
|-----------------|---------|-------------|--------|----------|--------|

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