

THE INTERPLAY OF RHETORIC, CULTURE, AND COMPLIANCE: ANALYZING THE
RHETORIC OF PRESIDENTIAL COMMUNICATIONS DURING THE LARGEST TITLE IX
CRISES

By

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A THESIS

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of

Rhetoric and Writing—Master of Arts

2023

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the concept of textual traces and how they can provide valuable insight into the cultural implications surrounding sexual misconduct on university campuses. By analyzing the MSU presidential communications as an example of textual traces, we can better understand the rhetorical devices used to contribute to campus culture. While ensuring proper documentation and organization of such documentation is vital in holding individuals responsible and allowing for transparency and community collaboration to protect communities and prevent future assaults, this alone is not enough to mitigate and prevent assaults on campuses. A cultural shift towards respecting and protecting survivors of sexual assault and discrimination while holding perpetrators accountable for their actions is necessary. This requires decolonizing the mind, body, and soul from the misogynistic patriarchal force that legitimizes violence and racism throughout the fabric of society. The influence of biased laws on policies and procedures is undeniable, profoundly impacting the textual traces produced. When the laws that govern our society are built on a foundation of discrimination and bias, this will inevitably filter down into the policies and procedures implemented to enforce them. By gathering and analyzing textual traces, we can identify larger systems at play and better address problems, and create cultural solutions. This nexus of culture, communication, and theory is also a rich and important site of inquiry for equity professionals, rhetoricians, and technical communication researchers. Furthermore, I hope my study here—one that employs Theory and qualitative methods—provides one example of how to build bridges between these communities of practice. Specifically, when I use the term "textual traces," I aim to use textual tracing as a mode of analysis to understand how these texts inspire action and reveal underlying racist and sexist ideologies within a system and culture. This study contributes to the broader understanding of the role of textual traces in shaping campus culture. It offers insights for creating positive change in a rapidly changing world

Keywords: Textual traces, textual tracing, culture, rape culture, sex discrimination, rhetoric

This thesis is dedicated to all survivors.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I express my deepest gratitude to my committee members, Michael Ristich, Dawn Opel, and Bill Hart-Davidson, for their support and guidance throughout my Master's degree and this thesis. Their mentorship and dedication have played an instrumental role in shaping me as the scholar I am today. I would like to give special recognition to Michael Ristich for his consistent support during the writing of this thesis. Throughout this process, I have been grateful for his insights, feedback, and the numerous hours he devoted to helping me navigate the complexities of this project. His mentorship has been invaluable to me, and I cannot thank him enough for his guidance and encouragement.

I would like to acknowledge The Office for Civil Rights and Title IX Education and Compliance at Michigan State University for the invaluable experiences I have gained within the last four years working in the office. It is because of the work that I have done in the office that this thesis is possible.

I would like to acknowledge Isaac Updike for the support he has given me over the past several years. Through hard times and good times, he provided a shoulder to cry on and someone to lean on. Thank you for listening to me ramble on about culture, institutions, narratives, and how we are constantly grappling with the systemic issues that seem to be entrenched in.. everything... there I go again.

I am also extremely grateful for Nick Sanders; not only has he been an incredible mentor, his knowledge, and tenacity are inspiring. Thank you for planting the seed for this these two years ago in a conversation we had.

Lastly, my family, especially my mother and brother. Their belief in me has kept my spirits and motivation high during this process. They are my motivation.

PREFACE

As an equity professional at Michigan State University's Title IX office, I've had the unique opportunity to witness firsthand the triumphs and shortcomings of institutions in addressing sexual discrimination on college campuses. This experience has fueled my strive to understand how college campuses can create a campus culture that is equitable and safe. By analyzing publicly available documents surrounding the Larry Nassar case and Sexual misconduct prevention, I hope to understand the intricate nuances of how universities handle sexual misconduct and how such actions are communicated and implemented. My journey began at Michigan State University, where I joined the Title IX office two years after the infamous scandal involving Larry Nassar. The revelation that hundreds of girls and women in gymnastics had been sexually assaulted was a turning point for many institutions, including Michigan State University. (Macur, 2021) During my time at MSU, I was at the forefront of the evolving conversation surrounding sexual misconduct on campus. Through my work, I have seen the positive impact that open and honest dialogue can have on an institution's response to sexual discrimination. Three years ago, I became aware of the "pass-the-harasser problem" as outlined by Susan Fortney and Theresa Morris in *Eyes Wide Shut: Using Accreditation Regulation to Address the "Pass-the-Harasser" Problem in Higher Education* (2021) (Fortney & Morris, 2021, p. 1). I was researching what I believed to be the most significant challenge facing Title IX offices in universities. I discovered that higher education systems do not have adequate mechanisms for disclosing allegations of sexual misconduct between institutions. Employers may limit the amount of information shared based on privacy laws, labor laws, or nondisclosure agreements. I recognized the need for institutions, lawmakers, and agencies to come together to solve this problem.

Currently, the higher education job market is not set up for institutions to share this information across institutions. There is no federal standard for faculty hiring in higher education that tends to be handled by an individual department conducting the search and screening of candidates. This decentralized approach means that reference checking is primarily left to search committee members. Without a university directive instructing search committee members to ask for references about possible

misconduct by candidates, it is doubtful that such questions of prior sexual misconduct will be asked. According to Cantalupo and Kidder's (2018) article, "A Systematic Look at a Serial Problem: Sexual Harassment of Students by University Faculty," several scenarios highlight the importance of accessing available information. One of these scenarios, the "bad hire" situation (p. 54), occurs when a university fails to research a new staff or faculty member's past behavior. This results in hiring someone who has engaged in misconduct in the past, and it is considered a "bad hire" because the university "fails[s] to discover readily available information" (Cantalupo & Kidder, 2018, p. 54). In some cases, HR and university administration may ignore past behavior due to the candidate's "star status," hoping to secure large research grants (Cantalupo & Kidder, 2018, p.

As I worked on policy communication regarding the need for accrediting agencies to adopt a centralized case management database that keeps a record of all reports of sexual misconduct from every public university, I realized that the problem goes beyond policies and procedures. While it seemed like a practical approach to address the issue, our culture has not caught up with our rights and protections, and this issue requires a broader societal change. I wrote several memos and researched policy writing and communication. Still, I soon recognized the need for a deeper understanding of culture and the importance of documenting for the creation of textual traces. While a centralized database would be a valuable tool, it may be biased and dismiss the possibility of even having one due to the lack of accountability in our culture and the prevalence of rape culture. This realization was both an endpoint and a starting point for me last year.

As I delved deeper into the "pass-the-harasser problem," I realized the crucial role proper documentation plays in addressing and preventing sexual misconduct on college campuses.

Understanding the importance of textual traces as evidence for action is critical not just for Title IX offices but across all fields. It highlights the value of documentation in shaping narratives that drive change.

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Chapter 1: Rhetorical Power of Textual Traces in Uncovering Rape Culture

1.1 Introduction to Key Concepts

Sexual assault in the United States has permeated the very fabric of our society, thriving under the pervasive influence of rape culture (Kessel, 2021). Rape culture has the ability to be perpetuated through language, rhetoric, and the mistreatment of individuals. My goal in this thesis is to explore sexual assault on college campuses and examine the crucial role that key actors play in transforming culture through their written and inherently rhetorical language. My hope is that this thesis will inspire readers, equity professionals, and leaders to critically analyze the language used around them and recognize the power of language as not only a catalyst for social change but understanding the cultural climate around us.

Alisa Kessel, Associate Professor of Political Theory, defines “rape culture” “as a set of intersubjective and collectively reproduced myths, discourses, and practices that individuals use to assign interpretations of rape victimhood and perpetration, innocence, and guilt, and power and powerlessness that, in turn, reproduce a culture that normalizes rape and other sexual as an effective (though outwardly condemned) way to reinforce relations of subordination.” This definition allows us to investigate how rape culture is cultivated, what its effects are, and to whom it is variously applied” (p. 137). Overall, Kessel suggests that we must broaden our understanding of rape culture to grasp its impact on society and its many targets fully (Kessel, 2021, p. 132). In the 1970s, the new phrase “rape culture” reflected an important shift in radical feminist analysis about rape itself, which had moved from conceiving rape as an individual behavioral problem to recognizing it as an exercise of domination within the broader structure of male domination of women (Brownmiller, 1975; Griffin, 1977; Kessel, 2021). “The radical feminist insight that rape is a political act has been crucial, both for antirape activism and for scholarly explanations of the ubiquity of sexual violence. Because rape is a political act, the concept of rape culture must extend beyond the horizon of male dominance to include other horizons of political domination as well, such as white supremacy, heteronormativity, xenophobia, and colonialism. It must consider their interactions with

one another” (Kessel, 2021, p. 131). According to Kessel, we must go beyond the common definition of rape culture as a culture that normalizes sexual violence by men against women as it is too narrow.

Instead, Kessel suggests a broader definition that considers the power dynamics and how they contribute to normalizing rape and sexual violence.

To address the underlying systemic and cultural issues that contribute to sexual harassment and assault, such as gender inequality and the power imbalances under the patriarchy that have been carried out through generations in many cultures throughout the world, we must understand the ways in which they are *disseminated*¹ throughout the written word. The language we use holds immense power, and it can be used to change all facets of our social lives. The words we choose to speak and write are not mere expressions but rather the architects of our thoughts, the sculptors of our emotions, and the conductors of our actions. They possess a power that transcends their individual utterances and can shape the very fabric of our world. Drawing from Sonja Foss's framework in *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice*, an analysis of symbols and rhetoric employed in presidential communication will take place. By analyzing these texts, and written words and studying their functions, an attempt will be made to understand how written language can have a broader impact on the social climate surrounding sexual misconduct (Foss, 2017). Michigan State University presidential communications serve as a powerful rhetorical device that can reveal MSU's culture and values but also disrupt such culture. Presidential communications are an example of a textual trace or “textual data,” Textual traces can indicate “invisible networks”—“underlying interpersonal, ideological, structural, or other relationships between people

¹“According to Derrida, disseminated has the power economically to condense, while unwinding their web, the question of semantic differance (the new concept of writing) and seminal drift, the impossible (monocentric, paternal, familial) re-appropriation of the concept and of the sperm' ('Avoir l'oreille de la philosophie', p.309, J.Culler's translation). Derrida hints at the limitations of attempting to fix meaning within a single authoritative interpretation or origin. He challenges the notion of a singular, paternalistic authority and suggests that meaning cannot be confined or controlled.

that would otherwise only be observable through close observation of and interaction with them” (Lin, Margolin, & Lazer, 2016 p. 2072). The president's communications as textual traces will allow for the “tracing” and understanding of the narration of culture and rhetoric surrounding sexual misconduct and, ultimately, to understand their role in effecting rhetorical agency.

1.2 Rhetorical Agency and Textual Traces

According to Bernard-Donals and Glejzer (1998), “Rhetoric could be described roughly as the use of language to produce material effects in particular social conjunctures— a description that is found in Plato's *Gorgias* and *Phaedrus*, as well as in Aristotle's treatise on rhetorics and ethics—and that has changed little in rhetorics various incarnation since 300 B.C.E ” (p. 3). To know how and what to change, we must learn to examine the rhetoric we used to enact change. Rhetorical means can serve as a catalyst for action and as vehicles through how culture can be understood. Linguists, philosophers, and sociologists alike give us different perspectives that all lead to the idea that written and spoken language has the ability to construct narratives of who we are, our world, and our experiences. “What is important to note in this understanding of rhetoric is that it takes as axiomatic languages capability to exert power in observable (and reproducible) ways, that as a form of praxis it can produce real social change, and that rhetorical analysis can yield information about languages power and its relation to the material world from which, in part, it derives that power. A rhetorically situated methodology, then, would not only seem capable of understanding the negotiations of normal and abnormal discourse and their effect on subjects' "worlds" as well as those subjects themselves, but also—because of antifoundationalism assumptions about the constitutive power of discourse on all forms of production, discursive and non-discursive— seem capable of theorizing the relations between cultural forms and the policies that create them, and between those polises and their material and discursive constraints” (Bernard-Donals & Glejzer, 1998, p. 4). In other words, rhetoric has the power to effect real social change and rhetorical analysis can reveal a relationship between language and the material world. In rhetorically situating a methodology not only

can the complexities of discourse be revealed but also the theoretical work in understanding the interplay between culture, policies, and their constraints.

Textual traces are often rhetorical as they construct and illuminate a narrative or rather micro narratives. Jean-Francois Lyotard embraces the concept of "little narratives" or "micro narratives" as a way of understanding the metanarratives that shape our knowledge of the world that reflect the particular experiences and perspectives of individuals or groups. "The narratives allow the society in which they are told, on the one hand, to define its criteria of competence and on the other, to evaluate according to those criteria what is performed or can be performed within in" (Lyotard, 1984, p. 20). These texts (textual traces) that are composed of multiple discourses and genre systems can be traced which will allow for the substantiation of events, thoughts, and cultural beliefs. Providing a record of our past and, most importantly, a blueprint for our future. It is essential to be mindful of our language, and the language used when communicating to a larger audience, recognizing its ability to shape our understanding of the world and those around us. As introduced by Bazerman (1994), a genre system consists of "interrelated genres that interact with each other in specific settings" (97). "The system of genres [is] the full set of genres that instantiate the participation of all . . . parties. . . . This would be the full interaction, the full event, and the set of social relations as it has been enacted. It embodies the full history of speech events as intertextual occurrences, but attending to the way that all the intertext is instantiated in generic form establishes the current activity related to prior acts" (p. 99). In other words, these genre systems present within textual traces can create narratives that shape understanding of any event or subject through careful selection, ordering, and arranging of information. How the information is arranged can influence how it is perceived and understood. A genre system can be thought of as a network of mutually constitutive genres that help define the communicative practices of a particular community or group. Within a genre system, different genres serve different functions and are used for different purposes, but they are all interconnected and interdependent.

Rhetorical Agency, Resistance, and the Disciplinary Rhetorics of Breastfeeding by Amy Koerber complicates this idea of rhetorical agency. Koerber states, "Such agency cannot be reduced to the

subject-centered, strategic use of language directed against ideological force in a two-way struggle, but rather must be understood as partial and as closely implicated with the same discursive structures that embody such force” (Britt; Herndl; Reeves; Schryer, Lingard, Spafford, & Garwood, 2003; Scott).

Koerber argues that acts of resistance can ultimately short-circuit the system through which sense is made, leading to a more profound defiance that goes beyond mere language use. The choice of words, the representation of certain groups or individuals, and the way certain events are framed can all be used to construct a certain understanding of the world and reinforce certain social identities or harmful ideologies. Though textual tracing has the ability to disrupt the culture to bring about meaningful and lasting change, acts of resistance must also coincide. The #MeToo is an example of this resistance. The movement gained global attention in 2017, encouraging people from all over the world to share their stories and "demand accountability for the intersecting experiences of racism and sexual abuse of women and girls of color in communities across the United States and around the world" (Villa & Alcalde, 2022, p. 2). Millions shared their experiences and demanded change in various industries and institutions. Widespread movements began taking place online and around the world. Thousands of survivors came forward on all social platforms with the sentence “I was 8”, “I was 12,” “I was 18” as a spin-off of the #MeToo movement, seeking to disrupt a culture that perpetuates sexual violence. This movement caused widespread accountability and led to many high-profile people's firing and ‘cancellation.’

Once we write laws—,’ referencing Title IX, we must continue to address and uncover the underlying sexist and racist ideologies present in the textual procedures, policies, genres, and laws in place.

Addressing and understanding these notions is inadequate to eradicate racial and sexual violence without a corresponding shift in cultural attitudes. The #Metoo movement began this work, but to eradicate sexual violence and inequity, we must infiltrate a culture, and to do so, we must take a step in understanding the power of the written language and its rhetorical generative power.

Chapter 2: Building the Framework - Methodologies

2.1 Establishing the Foundation for Research

In the analysis of MSU presidential communication as an example of textual traces, I will employ a mixed-methods approach that can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem and overcome the limitations of using a single methodology. In building such an approach, I draw heavily on the work of three scholars: Sonja K. Foss, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida. I draw from Foss's framework of rhetorical criticism, as outlined in her book *Exploration and Practice*. This approach enables me to identify and analyze the symbols used in presidential communication to understand how they function and perpetuate a culture of gender-based violence.

I draw on Foucault's ideas on historical analysis, arguing that studying the past is crucial for understanding the complex ways power and systems shift over time. Similarly, we can gain insight into how power and culture are substantiated in written language by studying textual traces. This understanding, in turn, can help us create a more just and equitable future. I turn to Derrida's philosophy of "trace," which suggests that every sign or word is made up of a chain of differences and references to other signs rather than having a fixed and stable meaning; by adopting this approach and understanding the complex ways in which textual traces function and the philosophical implications of their impact emerge. These approaches will provide a generative criticism of the present textual traces.

In my mixed methods approach, I will also use a case study. Case studies uniquely provide a comprehensive and detailed understanding of a particular event or phenomenon. In this case study, textual traces, narratives, and the analysis of rhetorical agency are used as sources and conveyors of information. Textual traces can show communication patterns, while an analysis of the rhetoric used can shed light on the motivations and strategies of key actors. In the words of Creswell (2009), a renowned scholar in the field of educational psychology, case studies enable researchers to explore a program, event, activity, process, or individuals in-depth, grounding them in time and activity. By collecting detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time, case studies allow for a

comprehensive examination of complex issues (Creswell, 2009, p. 13). In this case study, I will situate the role of the researcher as the foundation of the study, draw from other theorists and provide a narrative of the key events that transpired surrounding Larry Nassar, how MSU presidents communicated these events, and attempted to rectify and understand what went wrong. In the analysis of presidential communication, I hope to shine a light on how these communications can shape public discourse and influence social and cultural change on campus. By examining this case, I aim to show the broader issues of sexual assault and misconduct while illustrating how textual traces and rhetoric are situated within case studies. By situating textual traces and analyzing rhetorical agency within a case study, researchers can understand how language and written communication can shape culture and facilitate the grappling with complex phenomena. Finally, my work also provides a model for combining more theory-informed work within rhetoric studies with technical and professional writing studies.

Role of the Researcher:

As an equity professional and survivor, my research is rooted in an advocacy/participatory approach. However, I initially wondered whether my approach was truly advocacy-focused since I did not base it on community discussions. Instead, my research draws from my experience working in a Title IX compliance office and the ideas of rhetoric as a social justice practice. While I do engage with individuals directly impacted by sexual misconduct, they are not participants in my research. My approach deviates from the classical advocacy methodology, though it does incorporate many of its principles and ideologies. According to Creswell, “An advocacy/participatory worldview holds that research inquiry needs to be intertwined with politics and a political agenda. Thus, the research contains an action agenda for reform that may change the participants' lives, the institutions in which individuals work or live, and the researcher's life. Moreover, specific issues need to be addressed that speak to important social issues of the day, issues such as empowerment, inequality, oppression, domination, suppression, and alienation” (pg. 27). An advocacy approach is critical to creating an ethical culture that uplifts, protects, and engages marginalized communities while advancing social justice causes. In this thesis, I consciously chose not to include survivors in my research to avoid further re-traumatization. Having worked directly with

survivors, I understand the constant inaction after repeated instances of people speaking up. I do not want survivors to repeat themselves, for they have been heard. My advocacy approach recognizes power imbalances in traditional research and society. It seeks to shift the balance to survivors being taken at face value rather than test subjects who have already produced the answers. The goal is not only to understand the problem but also to effect positive change in real-world contexts.

Setting:

The materials obtained and case studies presented are publicly available by-products of Michigan State University and its communications. Michigan State University (MSU) is a public research university located in East Lansing, Michigan. With an enrollment of over 50,000 students, it is one of the largest universities in the United States. The university was founded in 1855 and has since grown into a comprehensive academic institution with over 200 undergraduate and graduate degree programs across 17 degree-granting colleges. The student population comes from all 50 US states and over 130 countries. The university has a relatively even gender distribution, with slightly more female students than male students.

Key Actors:

In this study, the key actors are the presidents of Michigan State University who served from 2016 to 2023: Lou Anna Simon, John Engler, Satish Udpa, Samuel Stanley, and Teresa K. Woodruff. Lou Anna Simon served as MSU's president from 2005 until her resignation in 2018 in the wake of the Larry Nassar scandal. John Engler was appointed interim president following Simon's resignation and served from February 2018 to August 2019. Satish Udpa, the executive vice president, was appointed in 2019 after Engler's resignation; Samuel Stanley, a medical doctor and former president of Stony Brook University, was then selected as MSU's 21st president and served from August 2019 to August 2021. Teresa K. Woodruff, a reproductive scientist and former dean of the Graduate School at Northwestern University, succeeded Stanley as MSU's interim president and served until the appointment of the current president, Dr. Samuel L. Stanley Jr., in January 2022.

The president of the University serves at the pleasure of the Board of trustees. The president serves as the face of the institution, representing it in public forums and advocating for its interests. They are

responsible for providing leadership and vision to Michigan State University, setting its strategic direction, and managing university stakeholders. In addition, the board of trustees oversee the university's financial affairs, including budgeting and fundraising, and must work to cultivate relationships with potential donors and sponsors. (Michigan State University, n.d., Art. 4) It is important to note that due to the university presidents' tasks and responsibilities, their communications may be swayed to reflect such responsibilities.

Events:

The study will analyze emails from MSU Presidents sent to MSU students, staff, and faculty members from 2017-2022. The analyzed emails focus on how they communicate their approaches to Larry Nassar, Title IX compliance, sex-based discrimination, and prevention. The event surrounding the communication is the case of Larry Nassar, which unfolded within the confines of Michigan State University.

The process:

I will begin by analyzing the communication strategies used by each of the five msu Presidents during their respective tenures in office from 2016-2023. A particular emphasis will be placed on how they communicated about sexual misconduct, including possible social, cultural, academic, and administrative changes. The analysis will be conducted through Generative criticism, as outlined by Sonja Foss, to identify patterns and themes in the communication strategies and leadership styles of the Presidents, as well as the effectiveness of their efforts to initiate and implement change. In particular, the study will examine the role of the Presidents in promoting Title IX compliance, sex-based discrimination prevention, and cultural change related to these issues.

Data Collection:

To collect data for this study, a combination of qualitative data collection strategies was employed to collect data for this study. The primary data source for this study was the MSU President's emails spanning from February 2017 to December 2022. The emails were obtained through an MSU email address by searching for keywords such as Title IX, sex discrimination, and the president's office in the

search bar. The emails were then examined to identify any mentions of Title IX or sex-based discrimination and organized by president and date.

To ensure the accuracy of the data collected and the patterns recognized, the emails were organized according to their timing in relation to the Nassar case. A timeline of events related to the Nassar case was created to assist in data collection. This timeline included key dates from December 16, 2016, when Nassar was arrested, to December 7, 2017, when Nassar was sentenced to 60 years in federal prison. To further assist in data collection and analysis, the emails were organized in four columns by the president, in chronological order from the earliest email to the most recent. This allowed for easy identification of patterns and changes in communication strategies over time. In addition to collecting emails, other sources of data were also examined, such as official university documents, reports, and news articles. These additional data sources were used to provide context and background information and triangulate the email findings.

Ethical Implication of Research:

Though the analysis of MSU presidential communication did not involve human participants, it was crucial that I considered the ethical implications of my research. As someone working in Title IX compliance, I had access to sensitive information and conversations in relation to gender-based discrimination and harassment. Maintaining confidentiality of information learned through my work was of the utmost importance in order to protect privacy and safety and adhere to a confidentiality agreement I signed in 2018.

It was also important to consider the potential that resurfacing news articles, personal narratives, and court statements could have on the wider community. Though the information gathered was made for public consumption and can be found through any publicly accessible search engine, the insights gained through the publicly accessible accounts could be used to inform and improve Title IX compliance policies and procedures, which would ultimately affect a broader group of people and survivors of sexual assault.

Significance of the Study:

Drawing from the processes of generative criticism to analyze the rhetoric in Michigan State University's presidential communications can facilitate the understanding of underlying cultural and identity factors that have perpetuated sexual violence on college campuses. By tracing the texts, such as the MSU president's emails, and examining the rhetorical strategies used in these communications, a deeper understanding of the systemic issues and how they can be addressed may arise. Ultimately, this thesis aims to explore and critically examine textual traces and language used by key actors. Through this examination and tracing realities through communications and genre systems, we can better understand how culture influences us and how we, in turn, influence our culture.

The significance of this study lies in the potential for the language used in written communication to facilitate social action. Through an analysis of communication patterns in MSU Presidential Communication, this research project aims to provide insights for future researchers within rhetoric studies and technical communication and equity professionals to develop effective processes and documents that align with the mission of universities across the country, promote justice, and protect survivors of sexual misconduct. Ultimately, this study seeks to contribute to the ongoing efforts toward creating safer and more equitable campus environments for all.

Data Analysis and Interpretation:

To analyze the data, the process of rhetorical generative criticism will be used. This will involve identifying and analyzing the symbols used in presidential communications and examining how they function in order to understand their impact. The framework developed by Sonja K. Foss in *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice* was utilized, which involved identifying and analyzing rhetorical devices used in presidential communication to reveal MSU's culture using a generative criticism. "The process of data analysis involves making sense of the text and image data. It involves preparing the data for analysis, conducting different analyses, moving deeper and deeper into understanding the data (some qualitative researchers like to think of this as peeling back the layers of an onion), representing the data, and making an interpretation of the larger meaning of the data" (183).

In conducting the analysis of the email communications, a merge of generative criticism and inductive coding² was employed. This involved a systematic process of developing research codes that aided in the interpretation of the data. A total of thirteen research codes were created. The initial step in developing these codes involved a comprehensive review of the email communications, during which noteworthy phrases, language usage, recurring themes, and key takeaways were identified. These observations formed the foundation for the codes, which were further refined through a process of consolidating and contrasting related codes. These codes will be later mentioned in full.

2.2 The Larry Nassar Case at Michigan State: Examining the Details

The investigation initiated by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) Office of the Inspector General (OIG) was prompted by allegations regarding the mishandling of sexual abuse allegations against former USA Gymnastics physician Lawrence Gerard Nassar by Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) employees in the FBI's Indianapolis Field Office. “Nassar, who served as an Osteopathic Physician and Associate Professor at Michigan State University's (MSU) Department of Family and Community Medicine from 1996 to 2016, treated patients. Simultaneously, Nassar held positions as the USA Gymnastics National Medical Coordinator and a treating physician for gymnasts, including working at the USA Gymnastics National Team Training Center in Texas. Additionally, Nassar served as the team physician for the Twisters USA Gymnastics Club and worked at Holt High School in Michigan” (Investigation and Review, 2021). Larry Nassar was found because he was part of a bigger network of sexual abusers who were allowed to hide under the radar. The USA Gymnastics sex abuse scandal, was uncovered two years before the heart of the #Metoo movement. Reports were coming in that 368 people alleged that over the span of two decades, they were sexually assaulted by gym owners, coaches, and staff working for gymnastics programs across the country (United States Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2019).

² Inductive coding is a qualitative data analysis technique which includes the process of generating categories or themes directly from the text and acknowledging its multiple meanings. (Thomas, 2003, p.4)

In giving a narrative of the factual findings surrounding the Larry Nassar case, we will use The U.S. Department of Justice (Department, DOJ) Office of the Inspector General (OIG) case file, a letter sent from the United States Department of Education Office for Civil rights On February 22, 2018, Michigan State University 2019 Resolution Agreement, Section III and various news articles in regards to the incidents that occurred. These textual traces will serve us in the analysis of understanding the events surrounding the Case of Larry Nassar. This case study will focus solely on the events that transpired at Michigan State University. This case study will also only focus on the students and staff at Michigan state university. In conducting this case study as it pertains to Michigan State University, it is important to note that not including conduct in the USA gymnastics or in the community is not to discount the conduct that occurred outside of Michigan state university. In staying focused on the events that transpired at MSU, the facts, information, and narratives present in this case study will only pertain to the events that took place at this institution.

The case of Larry Nassar is a shocking example of the widespread sexual abuse and misconduct perpetuated by an individual in a position of power. For over 24 years, Nassar committed heinous acts of sexual assault and abuse against women and young girls, all while those in authority ignored reports of his behavior. Between 1992 and 2016, numerous reports were made to USA Gymnastics and Michigan State University detailing Nassar's reprehensible conduct. However, these reports were dismissed or ignored, allowing Nassar to continue his abuse for decades. In 2014, a recent MSU graduate reported that Nassar had sexually assaulted her during a medical examination, but the university cleared him of any wrongdoing. It was not until August of 2016, when former gymnast RD filed a criminal complaint against Nassar, that he was relieved of his clinical and patient duties at MSU.

According to a letter sent from the United States Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, On February 22, 2018, OCR opened a directed investigation of Michigan State University's Title IX compliance regarding the employment and conduct of Dr. Lawrence Nassar (Employee X). OCR specifically investigated, for the time period from 2011 to the present, the following issues (United States Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2019).:

1. “whether the University provided a prompt and equitable response to any student or employee complaints or reports of sexual assault made against an employee as required by the Title IX implementing regulation at 34 C.F.R. § 106.8(b);”
2. “whether an employee, while acting or reasonably appearing to be acting in the context of carrying out his University employment responsibilities in relation to students, created a sexually hostile environment for any students for which the University is responsible under 34 C.F.R. § 106.31;”
3. “Whether the University failed to promptly and effectively respond to notice of any sexually hostile environment caused by an employee outside the scope of his official University-employment responsibilities over students, in violation of 34 C.F.R. § 106.31;”
4. “Whether any failure by the University to take prompt and effective action to stop any sexually hostile environment and prevent its recurrence allowed any student(s) to continue to be subjected to a hostile environment that denied or limited the student’s ability to participate in educational activities”

According to the Michigan State University 2019 Resolution Agreement, Section III the following statements were made by the Claimants (survivors) in Lieu of OIE Investigation.” In examining the handling of the Larry Nassar case at Michigan State University, it becomes evident that considerations were made regarding the survivors and claimants involved. As highlighted in the OCR Findings (p. 18), during the 2016-2017 academic year, MSU implemented a policy that offered claimants with reports of violations by Nassar the option to provide a statement instead of participating in a formal investigation. The Office for Institutional Equity considered all statements received, utilizing them to assess internal policies and procedures. Additionally, the Report of Employee Review (2020) reveals that certain claimants identified instances where an MSU employee may have been aware of Nassar's actions, indicating potential sex discrimination concerns within the institution. On December 6, 2016, Reporter P22 filed a report with the Office for Institutional Equity (OIE), detailing her experience as a simulated patient hired by Nassar around 2008 or 2009. During a pelvic examination conducted by Nassar, Reporter

P expressed significant discomfort and promptly informed her supervisor, identified as Rebecca Cass within MSUCOM. Specifically, Reporter P conveyed her unease with Nassar's instruction to students to communicate differently with lower-income patients compared to affluent patients. However, Reporter P clarified that her discomfort did not stem from Nassar's medical examination of her, as she understood the role of a simulated patient. Consequently, MSU concluded that this particular report falls beyond the purview of the review outlined in Section III of the Resolution Agreement, as it does not pertain to a complaint or concern of sex discrimination by Nassar (MSU 02.05.2018 8-01751.) (Report of Employee Review, 2020).

“On February 22, 2017, Reporter F was interviewed by OIE and stated that in 2009-2010, she was treated by Nassar, and an athletic trainer, Nancy (later identified as Nancy Naradzay), “would not let me go to the doctor’s office without her.” Another trainer, Vanessa, also would not let her go in the room alone with Nassar. Reporter F stated that Nancy appeared taken aback when she witnessed Nassar touch Reporter F’s breast but that Nassar explained what he was doing and that it was to help Reporter F’s ribs. Nancy did not question the procedure moving forward. Reporter F stated she continued to treat Nassar as he was “the only doctor who has positively affected her pain.” Reporter F also stated that another teammate told her that Nassar put his fingers in the teammate’s vagina. Reporter F remembered being extremely shocked, and the teammates talked to a trainer about the issue, and the trainer appeared to brush it off. Reporter F said, “We just seemed to move on, and we never talked about it again” (MSU 02.05.2018 8-02488).

Reporter F did not provide a trainer’s name and did not provide any additional detail as to what was stated to that trainer (Report of Employee Review, 2020).

“On March 21, 2017, Reporter G was interviewed by OIE and stated that on one occasion, a medical student was shadowing Nassar. Reporter G stated that when the medical student left the room, Nassar vaginally penetrated her. She stated that this was the only occasion in which another individual was in the exam room at any time (MSU 02.05.2018 8-01621). Reporter G did not identify the medical student and, importantly for Section III of the Resolution Agreement, did not report that the student had any notice of a concern or complaint of sex discrimination” (Report of Employee Review, 2020).

“On March 21, 2017, Reporter H was interviewed by OIE. Reporter H treated Nassar at his office and stated that she believed there was a female nurse in the room to record Nassar’s notes at every appointment. Reporter H further stated that she believed the nurse was in the room during the whole appointment. Reporter H stated that Nassar did not at any time fully penetrate her, but Nassar would massage her groin area underneath her gown” (MSU 02.05.2018 8-01613). “Reporter H did not identify the female nurse and, importantly for Section III of the Resolution Agreement, did not report that the nurse had any notice of a concern or complaint of sex Discrimination” (Report of Employee Review, 2020).

“On January 30, 2018, Reporter 14 stated that during the 2015-2016 school year, Mouaikel was present at one of her appointments with Nassar, where Nassar” “had his hands all over [her] butt” and “in her inner thighs” (OCR Findings, p. 8). “Reporter 14, however, stated that Mouaikel would not have been in a position in the treatment room to see what Nassar was doing. Reporter 14 reported to OIE that she walked out of the appointment and told Mouaikel,” “That was weird” (MSU-OCR 03.09.2018 0004787) (Report of Employee Review, 2020).

According to the Michigan State University 2019 Resolution Agreement, Section III, Michigan State University conducted an employee review of 25 Current and Former MSU Employees who were named to have received a Report of Complaint or Concern of Sex Discrimination by Nassar. Below we will take a look at only 11 employee reviews.

“Kelli Bert is a former MSU assistant track coach, a position she held for one year. A former MSU track athlete, Reporter 4, alleged in a February 2018 civil lawsuit that in 1999, she complained to Bert about Nassar’s conduct during an appointment. 24 According to Reporter 4, Bert responded that Nassar was an “Olympic doctor, and he should know what he is doing.” Reporter 4 did not provide a statement to OIE (MSU-OCR 09.07.20180019251). Further, Reporter 4 did not communicate with MSUPD. Bert stated that she does not remember Reporter 4 complaining about Nassar and that Bert did not know, at the time, that Nassar was an Olympic doctor” (Report of Employee Review, 2020).

“Lianna Hadden is currently on the MSU athletic training staff and has been for 25 years; she also now serves as the assistant director of performance nutrition. The question at hand is whether Hadden was on notice of misconduct by Nassar and is the subject of pending litigation and a LARA investigation. As set forth above, Reporter 6, a former University volleyball player, stated that, in or around 2002, she reported to Hadden that Nassar made her uncomfortable during a medical appointment“ (OCR Findings, p. 7). “On February 13, 2017, Reporter 6 provided MSUPD with a written statement and expressly stated that she did not give Hadden many details, as she was embarrassed about her treatment experience with Nassar. Reporter 6 further stated that Hadden handled the conversation the best way she knew how asking questions such as “Did Dr. Nassar do something you thought was criminally wrong?” and “Did he hurt you?” Reporter 6 did not provide responses to these questions. Further, Reporter 6 stated that Hadden provided her with guidance as to how to file a report if she felt so compelled” (MSU-OCR 04.16.2018 0016341). “Reporter 6 also testified in the LARA hearing involving Hadden and stated, “I feel like if I had the same clarity then about what happened as I do now and really opened up to her, she would have waged war on Nassar on my behalf” (LARA Transcript, January 21, 2020, p. 98). Based upon this testimony, Reporter 6 acknowledges that Hadden did not have notice of a complaint or concern of sex discrimination by Nassar” (Report of Employee Review, 2020).

“Christopher Hannasch is a faculty member of MSUCOM. On November 1, 2016, Reporter 12 reported to MSUPD that in October 2015, she informed Hannasch that Nassar had “touched areas of [her daughter] that she was not comfortable with.” Hannasch was reported to have replied that in his experience in working with Nassar, Hannasch was aware that Nassar does “need to get into private areas.” Reporter 12, however, did not report that she communicated with Hannasch about her concerns in any greater detail” (Report of Employee Review, 2020).

“David Jager is a former MSU athletic trainer. Jager’s then-girlfriend, Reporter Q, reported on February 8, 2017, that she told Jager in June 2015 that Nassar groped her breasts during a medical examination and that Jager responded by stating that Nassar’s treatment was medically proper” (MSU 05.01.2018 19-01468).”Further, the Michigan Attorney General’s investigation update

provided: “According to [Reporter Q], Jager responded with indifference, saying Nassar was ‘the best in the world.’ According to Jager, he recalled [Reporter Q’s] complaint and told her to make a report if she felt uncomfortable” (AG Update, p. 9) (Report of Employee Review, 2020).

“Kathie Klages is the former head coach of the University’s women’s gymnastics team, a position occupied from 1990 to 2017. Reporter 2, a former youth gymnast and participant in the Spartan Youth Gymnastics program, told MSUPD on February 8, 2017, that in 1997, she told Klages that Nassar had touched her inappropriately” (Report, pp. 7; 9). Reporter 2 A gymnast was ready to talk about an instance in which Larry Nassar had penetrated her with his hand without warning, “she approached Klages. The gymnast remembers her office as a small room with a desk, a window, and a green carpet. “‘I have known Larry for years and years,’” The gymnast recalls the coach saying: “‘He would never do anything inappropriate’ (Howley 2018). Reporter 2 also alleged that Klages investigated the matter by calling other athletes into her office and that one teammate reported a similar concern. OCR interviewed Reporter 2, and her teammate, Reporter M, and OCR found that their statements in the interviews were consistent (OCR Findings, p. 9). When police asked Klages about the alleged reports, Klages responded, “I have beat myself up trying to remember, but I have no idea” (Report of Employee Review, 2020).

“Brooke Lemmen is a former MSU doctor who resigned in January 2017. In January 2018, Reporter 8, a former patient of Nassar and minor at the time, reported to MSUPD that in or around 2013, Nassar made Reporter 8 uncomfortable, and, thus, she did not want to see Nassar again. Reporter 8 alleged that her mother subsequently told Lemmen that Reporter 8 was uncomfortable and that Lemmen said, “We get that a lot,” and did not ask any follow-up questions” (OCR Findings, p. 8). “Lemmen was also interviewed as a peer medical professional in the 2014 Investigation and provided that Nassar was not acting in a sexual manner, based on Lemmen’s many years of observing Nassar’s treatment styles and techniques. Lemmen stated she had always observed Nassar explain everything to the patients before exams” (OCR Findings, p. 12.) (Report of Employee Review, 2020).

“Tory Lindley Lindley is a former MSU athletic trainer. Reporter 3, a former student-athlete at MSU, reported on February 21, 2018, that in 1998 or 1999, Lindley was present for one or more conversations where Reporter 3 and her teammates referred to Nassar as “happy fingers” in 1998- 1999 and talked about his “crotch massages.” Lindley left MSU in 2000 (OCR Findings, p. 7). On February 21, 2018, MSUPD interviewed Reporter 3 (MSU-OCR 03.09.2018 0004719-22). The police report reflects that Reporter 3 stated that Lindley would have heard her and her teammates joking about treatments and calling Nassar “Happy Fingers.” Reporter 3 also stated that she had called another physician “Happy Fingers,” but Reporter 3 did not allege that this physician was inappropriate in any manner. (Id.) Lindley was never interviewed by OCR” (Report of Employee Review, 2020).

“Christine Liszewski Liszewski is a former MSU psychiatry resident. On April 3, 2017, Reporter J stated to MSUPD that she told Liszewski during a counseling session that Nassar penetrated her during treatment. Reporter J’s former teammate, Reporter K, also told MSUPD that Reporter J told her Reporter J informed Liszewski that Nassar treated her utilizing vaginal penetration. Reporter J stated that the penetration reminded her of an assault” (MSU-OCR 04.16.2018 0016320-34). “In an interview with MSU, Liszewski confirmed that she had treated Reporter J, but Liszewski provided that Reporter J never stated that Nassar utilized a vaginal penetration technique. Moreover, Liszewski was a psychiatry resident when she would have worked with Reporter J. Given that she was just starting out in her career, Liszewski stated that she believed a statement about vaginal penetration would have been memorable to her, she would have recorded such a comment in her notes, and she would have went to her supervisors with such an issue. Liszewski further stated that to her recollection, Reporter J did not mention Nassar at all. Liszewski was not aware that Nassar treated athletes that were not gymnasts” (Report of Employee Review, 2020).

“Thomas Mackowiak, an MSU trainer since 1987, is currently the undergraduate Athletic Training Program’s Clinical Education Coordinator in clinical athletic training student education, placement, and evaluation. He is also the full-time staff athletic trainer directly assigned to MSU’s women’s golf program. Reporter 9, a former student-athlete on the MSU’s golf team, alleged that during the 2013-2014

academic year, she told Mackowiak that Nassar had made her uncomfortable during an appointment and that she did not want to see him again” (OCR Findings, p. 8; MSU 02.05.2018 8-01509). “Reporter 9 further stated in her OIE interview that she did not provide Mackowiak with any further details. OCR interviewed Mackowiak on April 30, 2018. During the interview, Mackowiak confirmed that Reporter 9 told him that she did not want to treat with Nassar again. Mackowiak stated that Reporter 9 did not provide any additional comment as to why she did not want to see him again. Mackowiak further stated that he had no reason to believe there was a concern, as many student-athletes simply preferred to treat with Mackowiak, as their day-to-day athletic trainer. Mackowiak also stated he had never received any other reports of concern regarding Nassar and never noticed anything unusual about Nassar or his treatment” (Report of Employee Review, 2020).

“Anthony Robles is a former MSU athletic trainer. On October 27, 2017, Reporter 7, a former student-athlete on MSU’s crew team, alleged that in 2002, she told her teammate that Nassar had sexually assaulted her during an appointment” (OCR Findings, p. 7). “Reporter 7 told MSUPD that Robles overheard this comment, specifically her statement that she was going to get fingered by Nassar. According to Reporter 7, Robles immediately pulled Reporter 7 aside to ask if she was serious. Reporter 7 responded to Robles’s concern, stating that she was not serious. Reporter 7 confirmed to MSUPD that she informed Robles she was not serious and that there was nothing to worry about. MSUPD interviewed both individuals, and their reports were consistent” (MSU-OCR 04.16.20180016417) (Report of Employee Review, 2020).

“Lionel Rosen is a professor in the Department of Psychiatry and worked with MSU student-athletes. On February 22, 2017, Reporter I reported to MSUPD that, in 2010, she told Rosen that Nassar had vaginally penetrated her during a medical examination and that Rosen did not say such a procedure was wrong” (MSU-OCR 04.16.2018 0016137), “OCR interviewed Rosen on May 2, 2018. Rosen denied ever hearing a report of impropriety by Nassar until after 2016, and Rosen denied ever having a student-athlete explain an intervaginal manipulation to him during a counseling session. Rosen stated that when news on Nassar

broke, he looked up the STL procedure because his medical training did not include manual medicine. He was surprised to hear of the procedure” (Report of Employee Review, 2020).

Despite Nassar being fired from his position as an associate professor in the College of Osteopathic Medicine at Michigan State University in September 2016, Nassar continued to receive support from members of the community. In November 2016, Larry Nassar received over 2,000 votes for the Holt School Board. However, later that month he was charged with three counts of first-degree criminal sexual conduct with a person under 13. The case against Nassar ultimately resulted in a \$500 million settlement paid by Michigan State University to Nassar's victims and a \$4.5 million fine for the university's mishandling of the case. This is the largest fine ever levied by the federal government under the Clery Act, which requires universities to disclose crime statistics and inform students and staff of potential security threats in a timely fashion. Manly, J., as cited in (Smith, 2018), “I think the number being so large sends a message that is undeniable, that something really terrible happened here and that Michigan State owns it,” John Manly, was the lawyer for many of the 332 women who sued the university over abuse by Dr. Nassar. “When you pay half a billion dollars, it is an admission of responsibility.” The Nassar case serves as a stark reminder of the importance of taking reports of sexual abuse and misconduct seriously and of the devastating consequences that can occur when those in positions of power fail to do so, and there is a lack of a cultural shift to corresponding civil rights laws and policies.

Afterward, the former MSU President was accused of falsely telling the police she did not have knowledge of the nature of the Title IX complaint against Nassar in 2014. In 2019, a judge determined that there was enough evidence for Simon's case to proceed to trial in the Eaton County circuit court. However, in 2020, the charges against Simon were dropped by another judge, but the Michigan Attorney General's Office announced its intention to appeal the decision (Report of Employee Review, 2020).

2.3 Coding Scheme

Now that the facts of the reports and reported incidents surrounding the Larry Nassar case at Michigan state university have been put forth. To better understand the interplay between rhetorical agency, textual

traces, and the power written communication hold within institutions' cultures, we will examine the presidential communications at Michigan State University concerning Title IX and the university's Relationship between violence and sexual misconduct policies, as well as the Anti-discrimination Policy. The email communications that will be analyzed began weeks after Larry Nassar was convicted and accused of having sexually assaulted women and girls for decades. By analyzing the communication patterns of university administrators, insight into the specific measures being taken to address issues of misconduct and promote safety within higher education institutions. The messages from the Office of the President at Michigan State University are also an example of “textual traces, and textual evidence that shed will construct a narrative about the actions and rhetoric of key actors in combating sexual misconduct. By aggregating presidential emails, we can gain a multifaceted perspective that not only documents and archives the experiences but also sheds some light on the relationship between text, identity, and culture at Michigan State University. The identified research codes were subsequently used to label different sections or lines in each president's communications. The research codes are themes identified by systematically reading through presidential communications surrounding sexual misconduct and discrimination policies. A qualitative research approach was used to analyze the communications surrounding sexual misconduct and discrimination, identifying and labeling recurring themes and patterns. Through this process, the research codes that emerged are a set of themes that reflect the rhetoric encompassing key issues and concerns surrounding sexual misconduct and discrimination policies within the university context. The codes serve as examples and themes of the rhetorical strategies and language that can either contribute to changing rape culture or perpetuate it. By analyzing presidential communications, these codes were identified as key elements in shaping the discourse surrounding sexual misconduct and discrimination policies. It is important to note that the university presidential roles are tasked not only with setting the strategic direction of the university and ensuring that its activities are aligned with its mission and goals but the president is tasked with managing stakeholders and the university's financial affairs (Michigan State University, n.d., Art. 4). Because of this, the analysis of the presidential communications and themes have a conflict due to the role of the president concerning

survivors of sexual misconduct, the board of trustees and stakeholders. The use of these codes or rather themes can provide a blueprint or framework for researchers to generate a rhetorical genre scheme to identify rape culture in written language and textual traces. But due to the presidential roles, the analysis of the following textual traces will show rather an example of a qualitative analysis that can be done on thematic areas represented by codes within the communications. The following analysis of the communications does not show or uncover rape culture but rather provides a framework/blueprint of analysis to uncover such culture in textual traces. This analysis approach allows patterns to emerge within textual traces and the culture surrounding them.

The research codes developed in this study include the following:

Figure 1

Coding Scheme 1: Uncovering meaning in MSU Presidential Communications

| Code | Code Name | Description | Example |
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| 1 | Neutral stance in addressing the issue of Title IX violations in MSU. | Code one is enacted when there is an acknowledgment or a statement of the need for equity and justice while simultaneously negating this stance by making claims that downplay or deny the extent of the issue. This creates a boundary of neutrality that ultimately undermines the university's responsibility to address the issue proactively. | “We were pleased last week to be informed by the NCAA enforcement office that MSU has been cleared in all investigations regarding potential violations stemming from the Larry Nassar case and sexual assault allegations made against our football and basketball programs. As Athletic Director Bill Beekman said, while we agree with the findings, it doesn’t diminish our commitment to ensure the health, safety and wellness of all our students, including our student-athletes.” |

Figure 1 (cont'd)

| | | | (Engler 2018) |
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| 2 | Acknowledgment of a larger systemic problem beyond MSU. | Code Two is enacted when a claim is made that sexual assault is not a problem unique to MSU, but rather a systemic function within our society that affects many institutions. By acknowledging the broader societal context, code two highlights the need for comprehensive and sustained efforts rather than placing the burden of responsibility solely on the university. That said, Code two has the ability to highlight the possible indication of a lack of responsibility due to the problem's intrinsic nature. | “Sexual assault sill plagues our country and society at large” (Simon 2017) |
| 3 | Unclear social action or next steps in addressing the issue. | Code Three is enacted when a claim is made regarding the issue of sex discrimination on campus, but no specific preventative measures or solutions are discussed. This approach fails to address the systemic nature of the problem and lacks a clear plan of action. An unclear social action can also refer to actions that are presented, but do not target the underlying causes of the issue, thus have the ability to perpetuate the problem rather than solve it. | “The data also tells us there are areas that require ongoing work and diligence. For the 2022 survey, data was collected to be more inclusive of our transgender and nonbinary community members. The results indicate that this group experiences |

Figure 1 (cont'd)

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| | | | victimization at significantly higher rates than cisgender members of the community.” (Woodruff 2023) |
| 3a | Clear social action | Code three subset code A is enacted when a claim is made regarding the issue of sex discrimination on campus, then a specific preventative measure or solutions follow. | “Over the past year, the workgroup has accomplished many milestones such as the launch of the Know More Campus Survey and the Support More Campaign, critical updates to the Sanction and Discipline Process for tenured faculty, the opening of the Sexual Assault Healthcare Program, and many additional efforts that are continuing throughout the semester. To continue to learn from our community |

Figure 1 (cont'd)

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| | | | and update Spartans on the progress of the plan, the RVSM Workgroup will host a series of four upcoming listening sessions. We invite all students, faculty and staff to participate and share feedback on the RVSM Strategic Plan. The dates are—” (Stanley, 2022) |
| 4 | Balancing compensation for survivors and financial costs for MSU. | Code Four is enacted when a statement is made that highlights the financial hardships and costs that MSU faced as a result of the mishandling of sex abuse reports against Larry Nassar. When code four is enacted it can highlight the emphasis placed upon the economic burden on the university and the difficulties of managing resources and stakeholders while also addressing sexual assault on campus. | “I noted to them another issue of great concern: a package of bills the Senate passed that, while well intended to help victims of sexual assault seek justice, poses severe financial threats, not just to universities, but to all public and private employers and other organizations in the |

Figure 1 (cont'd)

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| | | | <p>state” –</p> <p>“Some of the bills are supported by MSU and the other universities because they are recognized as helpful to the victims of sexual assault.” –</p> <p>“We continue to seek a fair resolution. That means balancing money damages for survivors against the responsibility to manage our fiscal resources on behalf of the MSU community” (Engler 2018)</p> |
| 5 | Actions showing transparency | Code Five is enacted when an action or statement acknowledges weaknesses or mistakes made by the university. This approach highlights the need for accountability and transparency, Code five | <p>“Today we are sending the OCR the results of two separate reviews of the actions of current and former employees</p> |

Figure 1 (cont'd)

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| | | highlights the importance of facilitating learning and improvement in how the university addresses issues of sexual assault and discrimination | connected to the Larry Nassar and William Strampel cases. More than 40 employees were identified as potentially having received notice of sex discrimination by Nassar or Strampel. In the majority of cases, the individuals acted within the then applicable policies and laws or there was insufficient evidence to support the employees acted outside of the applicable policies and laws in place at the time.” (Stanley 2020) |
| 6 | Recognition of the importance of listening to concerns. | Code Six is enacted when an action or statement demonstrates a recognition of the importance of listening to the concerns and perspectives of all members of the university community, including students, staff, and leaders of all levels. Code six highlights the | “I’ve been continuing to maintain a busy schedule talking – and listening – to people since I last wrote, and I thought I’d give you an |

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| | | value placed upon the input of those who have been affected by issues of sexual assault and discrimination, and seeks to understand their experiences in order to inform effective solutions. | update.” (Udpa, 2019) |
| 7 | Admission that internal systems are not functioning effectively. | Code Seven is enacted when an action or statement acknowledges that internal institutional systems are not functioning effectively in addressing reports of sex-based discrimination on campus. When code seven is enacted it recognizes the accountability taking place. | “Early last year, we wrote to reaffirm our commitment to a safer, more inclusive campus climate we all can be proud of. We acknowledged that the institution failed both survivors and the community, and we outlined actions needed to eradicate relationship violence and sexual misconduct from Michigan State University. We continued to build on those actions throughout the year. In that time, we’ve made significant |

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| | | | progress that lays a common foundation for what we believe in fundamentally and will foster additional progress.” (Stanley, 2022) |
| 8 | Emphasis on compliance with regulations rather than effective proactive measures. | Code eight is enacted when an action or statement emphasizes solely TIX compliance without thinking about the proactive measures and cultural shifts that need to take place in order for such civil rights laws to be adequate in their true functions. There is an emphasis on the actions taken to address abhorrent conduct after it has occurred, rather than prioritizing proactive measures to prevent. | “As part of the resolution agreement we signed with the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights, I have been specifically asked to inform you: The university will promptly forward all reports of sexual misconduct, stalking, and relationship violence (including Title IX reports) received by “responsible employees” of which it is aware to OIE. |

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| | | | <p>In addition:</p> <p>Title IX prohibits retaliation against reporters of sex discrimination, including reports of sex discrimination against administrators and other employees. MSU will independently investigate alleged retaliation for participation in the Title IX process.”</p> |
| 9 | <p>Consideration of the diverse populations affected by sexual misconduct, but without validation or implementation of specific measures to address their needs.</p> | <p>Code Nine is enacted when a statement or action acknowledges the impact of sexual misconduct on diverse populations, but fails to validate or implement specific measures to address a group's unique needs. When Code nine is enacted it shows how providing resources and support to marginalized groups on campus who may be more vulnerable to discrimination, harassment, or assault has been overlooked.</p> | <p>“The workgroup also will continue to solicit input from campus organizations, committees, and individuals to ensure that diverse viewpoints are considered, including the voices of students, faculty, staff, and alumni. This allows</p> |

Figure 1 (cont'd)

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| | | | community members who might not otherwise have a chance to contribute suggestions and feedback to give us their best ideas.” (Engler, 2018) |
| 10 | Absence of accountability | Code 10 is enacted when there is a lack of accountability for actions or inactions that have contributed to Title IX violations on campus. Code ten highlights that without holding those responsible for misconduct accountable, it is difficult to implement meaningful changes and prevent future violations of Title IX. | “In a recent letter to the Michigan State Attorney General, MSU's external counsel, including former U.S. Attorney Patrick Fitzgerald, underscored those clear instructions from the Board and stated that, “. . . the evidence will show that no MSU official believed that Nassar committed sexual abuse prior to newspaper reports in the summer of 2016.” (Simon, 2018) |

Figure 1 (cont'd)

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| 10a | Accountability | Code 10 subset A is enacted when there is accountability for actions or inactions that have contributed to Title IX violations on campus. Code ten-A highlights that holding those responsible for misconduct accountable, can allow for the implementation of meaningful changes and prevent future violations of Title IX. | “Critical to our goal of creating a safe and supportive campus is greater accountability for employees found in violation of MSU policies. On this point, we expect the Lansing State Journal to publish a story in the coming days that likely will include references to inequities in our disciplinary processes for employees with findings of violations of our Relationship Violence and Sexual Misconduct (RVSM) policies. We are sharing this with you not to excuse past decisions; rather, we want you to know the actions we have taken the past few years and continue to |
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| | | | take will improve our consistency and accountability. Changes have been made, and more work will be completed soon to address inequities in the disciplinary outcomes and further strengthen our disciplinary actions.” (Stanley, 2021) |
| 11 | Creation or expansion of new office or initiative | Code 11 is enacted when there is an indication that a new office or initiative in response to Title IX violations was created. Code 11 includes the establishment of a new department, program, or task force dedicated to addressing issues related to sexual assault, harassment, or discrimination. Code 11 highlights that the creation of such initiatives can be a positive step, but if not adequately resourced can have an adverse effect. | “Last week, I established a new Office of Enterprise Risk Management, Ethics and Compliance, to be headed by a Chief Compliance Officer yet to be named. The CCO is charged with ensuring all our legal, regulatory and ethical obligations are met. Also, the CCO will oversee adherence to and effectiveness of |

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| | | | codes of conduct and ethics. The CCO will have independent access and report on a regular basis directly to the Audit, Risk and Compliance Committee.” (Engler 2018) |
| 12 | Validation | Code twelve is enacted when an action or statement shows empathy towards survivors and a human-centered approach to addressing the issue of Title IX violations. When this code is enacted the validation of the experiences of survivors and acknowledgement of the emotional impact of the trauma is shown. | “First, I want to once again acknowledge the courage of all victims of sexual violence who come forward to share their story with police or campus investigators. On behalf of Michigan State University, I recognize the pain sexual violence causes and express how deeply we regret any time someone in our community experiences it.” (Simon 2017) |

Chapter 3: Rhetorical Generative Analysis of Presidential Communications

3.1 Introduction to Rhetorical Criticism and Analysis

In the analysis of the presidential communications, I will draw from the process of rhetorical generative criticism to analyze the rhetorical strategies employed in the communications of MSU's president regarding the institution's failed system in addressing sexual misconduct and plans to address it. “A primary lesson of rhetoric was developed by Aristotle. He studied rhetoric analytically, investigating all the means of persuasion available in a given situation. He identified three appeals at play in all acts of persuasion: ethos, logos, and pathos” (p. 207).

It should be noted that each appeal is effective when used in specific scenarios. That being said, pathos, which appeals to emotions and values, is seen most in the coding scheme mentioned above because they can often be powerful in changing culture and moving audiences. Empathy, compassion, hope, and fear are powerful motivators that inspire people to take action or change behaviors. Similarly, appeals to a shared value and ideal can help create a sense of unity and purpose among a community of people, which can be critical in creating true change.

The purpose of this study is to (1) examine the ways in which university leaders address sexual assault, sexual assault prevention, and Title IX on college campuses and (2) begin to uncover how a framework of analysis can be conceptualized to uncover rape culture in textual traces. Specifically, this study focuses on the language used in five presidents' communications. The analysis of these documents utilized the 12 codes and two subset codes mentioned to identify and categorize the rhetorical strategies used by the presidents. These textual traces in the form of email communications are used to understand the language used when addressing and communicating about sexual misconduct. A central feature that connects all of these codes is their relationship to the concept of persuasion and the conveying of important information surrounding sexual misconduct. Each code represents a different rhetorical appeal or strategy or even multiple. For example, Code 1's neutral stance in addressing the issue of Title IX violations in MSU and

acknowledgment of a larger systemic problem beyond MSU both represent appeals to logos, or logical reasoning, as the speaker uses facts and evidence to support their position. Code 3, Unclear social action or next steps in addressing the issue and clear social action represent appeals to ethos, or the speaker's credibility and character, as the audience is looking to the president to provide a clear and trustworthy plan of action. Code 4, Balancing compensation for survivors and financial costs for MSU and emphasis on compliance with regulations rather than effective proactive measures, represents appeals to pathos, or emotional appeal, as the audience is being asked to consider the emotional impact of the issue on survivors or the financial impact on the institution. The remaining codes—the recognition of the importance of listening to concerns, an admission that internal systems are not functioning effectively, consideration of the diverse populations affected by sexual misconduct, but without validation or implementation of specific measures to address their needs, absence of accountability, accountability, creation or expansion of new office or initiative, and validation represent appeals to a combination of logos, ethos, and pathos, as the MSU president use a variety of rhetorical strategies. In drawing from Foss's method, we will identify and analyze the symbols used in presidential communication, examine how they function, and seek to understand their impact (Foss, 2018, pg. 3). It is also important to note that the MSU presidential communications are a single example of the readily available textual traces that can be obtained. In this thesis, I define the rhetorical nature of textual traces as they can construct and illuminate a narrative with the potential to persuade, inform, or shape the opinions and actions of others. By examining university presidential rhetoric, we aim to understand better how key actors on-campus address sexual assault and misconduct on campus, whether their communications demonstrate a commitment to addressing the issue or a lack thereof, and what this says about a larger system. “To speak is to fight, in the sense of playing, and speech acts” (Lyotard, 1984, p. 10).

3.2 Analysis of Presidents' Communication

In this study, the focus of analysis revolves around the key figures of Michigan State University (MSU) during the period from 2016 to 2023. Specifically, the presidents and interim presidents who held the

position during this time frame include Lou Anna Simon, John Engler, Satish Udpa, Samuel Stanley, and Teresa K. Woodruff. Lou Anna Simon, serving as MSU's president from 2005 until her resignation in 2018 in light of the Larry Nassar scandal, played a significant role in the university's history. Following Simon's departure, John Engler assumed the position as interim president, holding office from February 2018 to August 2019. Satish Udpa, serving as executive vice president, assumed the interim presidency in 2019 following Engler's resignation. Samuel Stanley, a distinguished medical doctor and former president of Stony Brook University, then took over as MSU's 21st president, serving from August 2019 to August 2021. Following Stanley's tenure, Teresa K. Woodruff, a highly regarded reproductive scientist and former dean of the Graduate School at Northwestern University, served as the interim president until the appointment of the current president, Dr. Samuel L. Stanley Jr., in January 2022. These individuals, each with unique backgrounds and leadership styles, will be subjected to inductive coding and rhetorical analysis to gain insights into their communication strategies and approaches during their respective tenures.

Results for Lou Anna K. Simon

According to The Michigan State University 2019 Resolution Agreement, Section III Lou Anna Simon held various positions at the University from 1993 through 2004, including Assistant Director of the Office of Institutional Research, Assistant Provost for General Academic Administration, Associate Provost, and Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs until she was appointed interim President of MSU in 2003. She served as President from 2005 until her resignation on January 24, 2018. In October 2019, Simon was charged by the Michigan Attorney General in a four-count criminal complaint with knowingly and willfully making a false or misleading statement to a peace officer regarding a material fact in a criminal investigation related to Nassar. A preliminary examination was held, and Simon was bound over as charged. On May 13, 2020, the Eaton County Circuit Court granted Simon's motion to quash the bind over determination by the 56-A District Court as to all counts, dismissing the case in its entirety. On June 29, 2020, the Attorney General filed a claim of appeal with the Michigan Court of Appeals.

The criminal charge against Simon relates to a statement during an interview with police that she was aware of the 2014 Investigation but denied knowing the identity of the sports medicine physician or details about the allegations. Even though the criminal case against Simon is currently on appeal, there is no allegation that Simon had independent notice of a complaint or concern of sex discrimination by Nassar. Any alleged notice regarding the 2014 Investigation coincided with I3's and MSUPD notice of the same complaint.

Simon was president at the time Larry Nassar's crimes were uncovered. Because of this, many blamed the highest administrator on campus, the president. On April 16, 2019, Simon was charged with lying to the police regarding Simon having prior knowledge of Nassar's behavior.

On January 19th, 2018, Lou Anna K. Simon sent her final email to students in regard to the Nassar case before she resigned. She ends with the following statements:

In a recent letter to the Michigan State Attorney General, MSU's external counsel, including former U.S. Attorney Patrick Fitzgerald, underscored those clear instructions from the Board and stated that, ". . . the evidence will show that no MSU official believed that Nassar committed sexual abuse prior to newspaper reports in the summer of 2016. The FBI and MSU Police Department also conducted a joint investigation earlier this year into whether any university employee engaged in criminal conduct relating to Nassar's actions; there were no charges filed. I have complete faith in the legal process and in the professionalism and dedication of local, state, and federal law enforcement. We understand and respect the desire for information and details arising from the Nassar matter, which now spans 16 months, and we are committed to continuing to share whatever information we can with the MSU community and the public." (Simon, 2018, p.1)

Lou Ann Simon sent four emails between the dates of February 3rd, 2017, and January 19th, 2018, that addressed sexual misconduct during a period of enhanced scrutiny following the conviction of Larry Nassar.

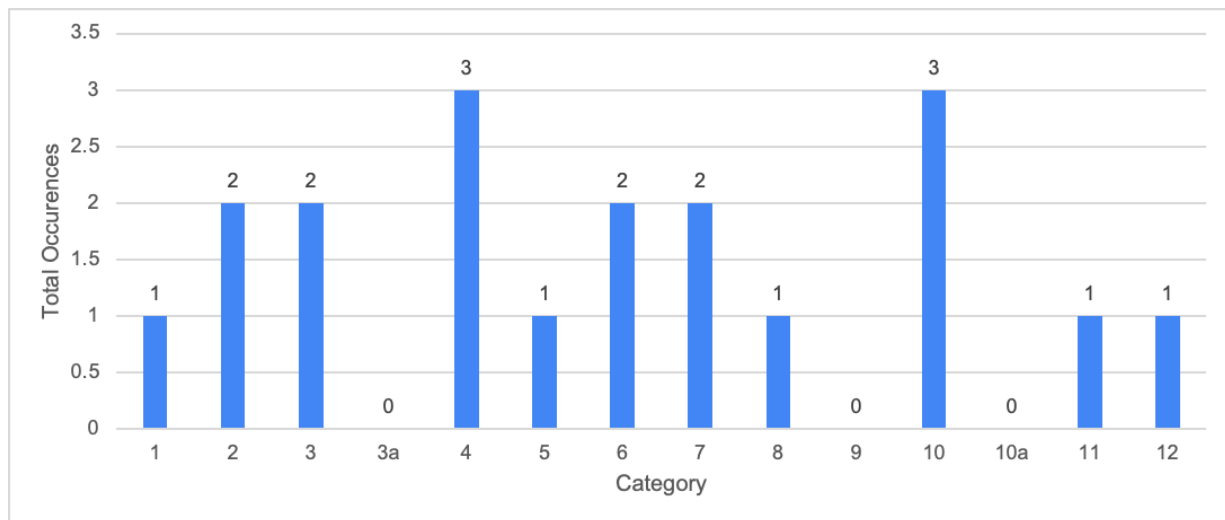
According to the U.S. Attorney's Office, the Western District of Michigan, Nassar was sentenced to 60 years in federal prison on December 7, 2017, after he pleaded guilty on July 11, 2017, in federal court to receiving child pornography in 2004, possessing child pornography from 2003 to 2016. (2017) On January 24, 2018, Nassar was sentenced to an additional 40 to 175 years in Michigan State Prison after pleading guilty in Ingham County to seven counts of sexual assault (Levenson, 2018, p. 1).

The analysis reveals that Lou Ann K. Simon's rhetoric demonstrated a range of codes, some more prominent than others. Specifically, Simon enacted codes 1 through 12, with code 3 being the most frequently enacted.

The data suggest that Simon demonstrated a neutral stance in addressing the issue of Title IX violations at MSU, enacting Code 1 only once. She also acknowledged a larger systemic problem beyond MSU, enacting code 2 twice. However, her social action or next steps in addressing the issue were unclear, as she enacted code 3 twice but did not enact the subset code 3a, representing clear social action. There was no indication of a clear action to address instances of sexual misconduct on campus, as Simon did not enact code 3a. Additionally, The analysis reveals Simon balanced compensation for survivors and financial costs for MSU, enacting code 4 three times. She showed transparency in her rhetoric, enacting code 5 once, and recognized the importance of listening to concerns, enacting code 6 twice. The data also suggest that Simon admitted that internal systems were not functioning effectively, enacting code 7 once, and emphasized compliance with regulations rather than proactive measures, enacting code 8 once. Although she considered the diverse population affected by Title IX violations, she did not validate or implement specific measures to address their needs, enacting code 9 zero times.

Figure 2

Lou Anna K. Simon Email Results



The data suggests that in Simon's rhetoric, accountability was absent, as she enacted code 10 three times and did not enact code 10a, which represents the presence of accountability; it is important to note that during Simons communications the university of was being investigated for the mishandling of Larry Nassar, suggesting that neutrality and a lack of accountability may be seen as necessary to uphold her position as president and the university's financial interests. Simon created an expansion of a new office or initiative, enacting code 11 once, and validated the concerns of survivors, enacting code 12 once.

Overall, Simon's rhetoric demonstrated a complex interplay of codes that both acknowledged the issue at hand and recognized the challenges involved in addressing it. However, the communications lack of clear social actions and absence of accountability may have left survivors feeling unsupported and uncertain about the university's commitment to addressing sexual assault on campus.

Results for John Engler

John Engler was named interim president On January 30, 2018, after Lou Anna K. Simon stepped down due to facing criminal charges. At the time, "MSU was reeling from heavy criticism for its lack of action toward Nassar."

According to the Detroit Free Press, the board had two possibilities — former Michigan Gov. John Engler, a Republican, and former Michigan Gov. Jim Blanchard, a Democrat. Both were alums with long ties to the school. But the state Legislature, then controlled by Republicans, made it clear to MSU: hire Engler or get ready to lose millions of dollars in state aid (Jesse, 2019, p. 3).

The analysis reveals that John Engler's presidential communications exhibited a diverse range of codes, with codes 4 and 11 being the most frequently enacted. A total of six emails by Engler were analyzed, which covered the period from February 13th, 2018, to December 20, 2018.

On February 13th, 2018, around 24 days after Simons's email, the students of Michigan state university received a new email from the new president John Engler; he stated the following:

—Questions about how this could have happened and what must be done to prevent it from ever happening again are the subject of multiple inquiries. At the federal level, the U.S. Department of Education is conducting a Clery program review, the U.S. Senate has requested information, and the U.S. House of Representatives has two inquiries underway. The NCAA also is seeking information from us. In Michigan, the House of Representatives is requesting production of documents, and the Attorney General's Office, at MSU's request, is conducting an investigation.

(Engler, p. 2, 2018)

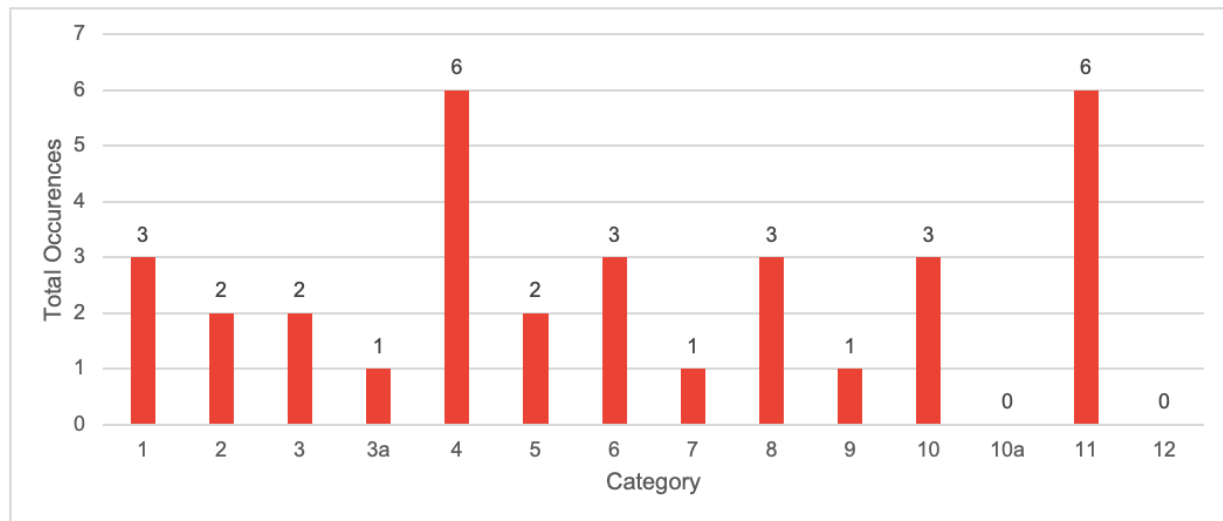
Engler enacted code 1— Neutral stance in addressing the issue of Title IX violations in MSU three times. He also enacted code 2 twice, demonstrating an acknowledgment of a larger systemic problem beyond MSU. Twice Engler showed unclear social action or next steps in addressing the issue, but he also enacted code 3a once, indicating a clear social action. Code 4 was enacted six times, revealing his concerns about balancing compensation for survivors and financial costs for MSU. The data suggests in most of Engler's communications, he emphasized financial costs and university finances. For instance, on March 28th, 2018, he stated, "I noted to them another issue of great concern: a package of bills the senate passed that, while well intended to help victims of sexual assault seek justice, poses severe financial threats, not just to universities, but all public and private employers and other organizations in the state."

The analysis reveals that Engler enacted code 5 twice, indicating two instances of transparency. He also enacted code 6 three times, showing his recognition of the importance of listening to survivor concerns. Engler admitted once that internal systems were not functioning accurately in addressing sexual misconduct (code 7). The analysis points to a concern for compliance with Title IX regulations (code 8) in three of his communications without addressing ways the university could go beyond compliance and take proactive preventive measures. Engler considered the diverse population affected by Title IX violations once (code 9) but did not validate or consider specific measures to address their needs. He showed rhetoric that did not take accountability on the university's behalf three times (code 10), possibly due to his focus on the litigation facing MSU due to the mishandling of sexual misconduct on campus. However, code 10a was not enacted, indicating Englers and the universities' lack of accountability. Engler enacted code 11 six times, demonstrating that he and other key actors created or expanded a new office or initiative to address sexual misconduct. He did not enact code 12, which indicates the validation of survivors.

The data suggest that John Engler's communication and rhetoric surrounding the issue of Title IX violations at MSU were focused on financial concerns and compliance with regulations rather than taking proactive steps to address the issue and support survivors. Engler did enact some codes related to transparency, listening to survivor concerns, and creating new initiatives, but these were not as prominent as his emphasis on financial costs and compliance. Additionally, the data suggests a concern that Engler did not take full accountability on behalf of the university and did not validate survivors' experiences.

Figure 3

John Engler Email Results



John Engler submitted his resignation letter on January 16th, 2019. According to the Detroit free press, Engler's tenure has been taken up with the fallout from the Nassar scandal and heavy criticism from survivors of Nassar's abuse. Michigan State University interim President John Engler was directly involved in the crafting of a detailed public rebuke of a rape accuser's allegations, a statement that potentially violated a federal privacy law and endangered grant funding for sexual assault counseling Services, the Free Press has learned. The last round of criticism came after Engler told the Detroit News editorial board that Nassar survivors were "enjoying the spotlight" while the university is "trying to go back to work." The board was set to fire Engler seven days after this incident, but he resigned six days after (Jesse, 2019, p. 4).

The analysis suggests that Engler's results indicate that his approach to addressing sex-based discrimination focused on the university's reputation and financial affairs. It is critical to highlight that the role of the president is to manage the universities financial affairs, especially given that Michigan State University had the largest Cleary Act fine of \$4.5 million in connection to the Larry Nassar sexual abuse scandal (Wallace & Levenson, 2019, p. 1). That said, not only can we see his responsibility to uphold the financial interest of MSU in the rhetoric used in his communications, but we can also see it in his actions.

“Engler canceled a \$10-million healing fund set up to help pay for counseling for Nassar survivors. In doing so, he cited what he said was a fraud of the system and said that after the survivors got a \$500 million settlement from MSU, they did not need the fund to pay for their counseling. Earlier this month, the MSU board rescinded this action and reinstated the fund” (Jesse, 2019, p. 3). Survivor Kaylee Lorincz stated Engler offered her \$250,000 to drop her lawsuit. Though Engler created new offices and initiatives, he did not give them the proper chance or resources to be successful. “After announcing he was creating a chief compliance officer position to be independent and work as a check on MSU, Engler folded it into an existing office and reportedly did not give the resources the CCO asked for to run the operation” (Jesse, 2019, p. 3). It is plausible that pressures from various stakeholders and conflicting interests led to compromises that hindered the effectiveness of these newly created positions. It is important to note that while these actions mentioned may be considered beyond the immediate scope of the analysis, it is crucial to acknowledge the inherent interplay between rhetoric and action, as it carries significant implications. Here we see the instance in which culture informs our rhetoric; rhetoric informs our actions.

Results for Satish Udpa

According to MSU today, in 2019, Satish Udpa was appointed by the board of trustees to begin the position of interim president after Engler's Resignation. Udpa had been serving as the executive vice president for administrative services. Before becoming an executive vice president, he was the dean of the College of Engineering. On February 12th, Satish begins his first message to MSU students as president:

Dear students, colleagues, and friends, It was humbling to be appointed by our Board of Trustees last month to serve as acting president of Michigan State University. I deeply appreciated the trustees' remarks and the many supportive messages I have received since. That my appointment came exactly 40 years after I first set foot in America made it especially moving to me and my family. That it stemmed from one of the most difficult periods in MSU's history deeply saddened me. (Udpa, 2019, p. 1)

The analysis of Satish Udpa's presidential communications revealed a varied range of codes, with code 6 being the most frequently used. Udpa sent seven emails that spoke about sexual misconduct or Title IX between February 12th, 2019, and July 2019.

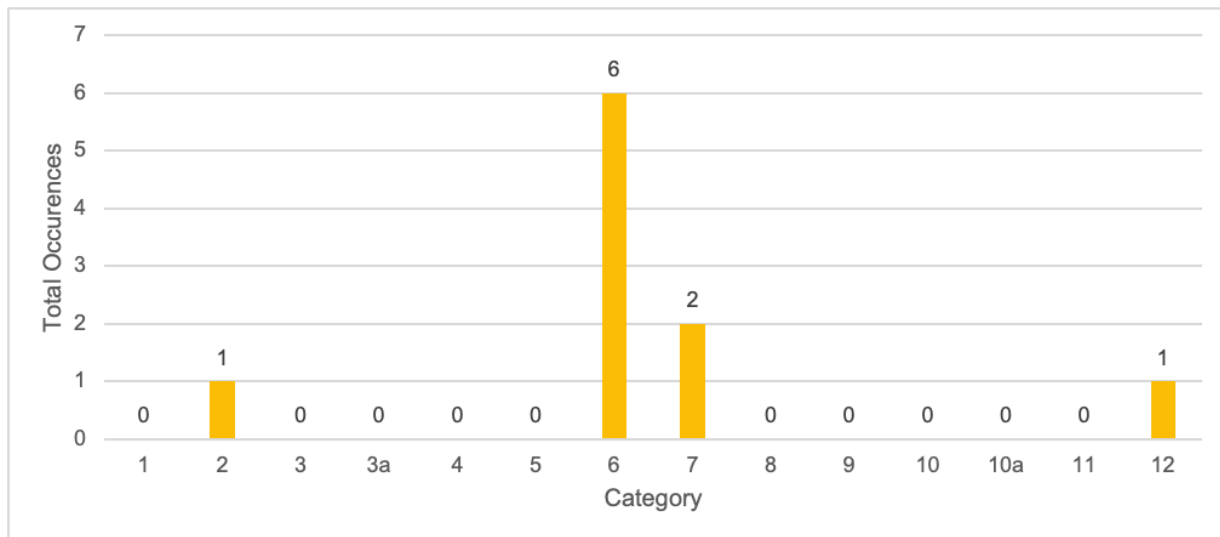
Notably, the analysis reveals Udpa did not adopt code 1, indicating that he did not take a neutral stance when addressing the issue of Title IX violations at MSU. Instead, he focused on supporting survivors.

Udpa enacted code 2 once, acknowledging that there is a larger systemic problem beyond MSU. There were no instances of code 3, suggesting no unclear social action or next steps were taken in addressing sex-based discrimination. However, no clear social actions were outlined in the analyzed emails. Udpa did not enact code 4, which suggests that he did not prioritize balancing compensation for survivors and financial costs for MSU. Similarly, code 5, which indicates actions showing transparency, was not used.

On the other hand, Udpa used language in six instances that demonstrated code 6, recognizing the importance of listening to concerns. There were two instances where the analysis revealed Udpa admitted that internal systems were not functioning effectively in addressing sexual misconduct, which demonstrates code 7. Udpa did not use code 8, emphasizing compliance with regulations rather than proactive measures, or code 9, considering the diverse population affected by Title IX violations but without implementing specific measures to address their needs. There were no instances of code 10, indicating an absence of accountability, or code 10a, which represents accountability. However, the data suggests Udpa did validate survivors' experiences and the work that Title IX does in one instance. Lastly, Udpa did not enact code 11, indicating that he did not create or expand a new office or initiative to address sexual misconduct.

Figure 4

Satish Udpa Email Results



The analysis reveals that Satish Udpa's presidential communications were focused on survivor-centered rhetoric and recognition of the importance of listening to concerns. This is reflected in the frequent enactment of Code 6, which shows Udpa's recognition of the importance of listening to survivor concerns. Additionally, Udpa used language that validated survivors and the work of Title IX.

Due to the Interim president's short term, there needed to be more communications to evaluate. Because of this, the following codes are absent: 1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, and 11. Overall, based on the specific codes and their appearance, Udpa's rhetoric was focused on survivor-centered and peacemaking language but lacked emphasis on proactive measures. Udpa had importance pressed upon the way he communicated after he sent an apology on behalf of the university for the mishandling of sexual misconduct surrounding the Larry Nassar case. The university hired a firm to find out what its alums think of Udpa's speech and the university's communications and messaging by sending out a survey to the community. The survey starts by telling those taking it that it will "help shape (MSU's) future communications." At this moment, and due to Engler's prior communications, the university knew the rhetorical generative power used when communicating university actions and news; it is important not only for conveying important information but changing culture.

Results for Samuel Stanley

Samuel Stanley became the president of Michigan State University on May 28, 2019, taking over from Lou Anna Simon, who resigned following the Larry Nassar scandal. His official term started on August 1. At the beginning of his tenure, he stated that his main objective was to make the university a safe, respectful, and inclusive environment. He spent his initial months at MSU meeting with and hearing from university community members, including survivors.

Samuel Stanley's presidential communications exhibited diverse codes, with code 6 being the most frequently enacted. A total of 17 emails by Stanley were analyzed, which covered the period from August 29th, 2019, to September 29, 2022.

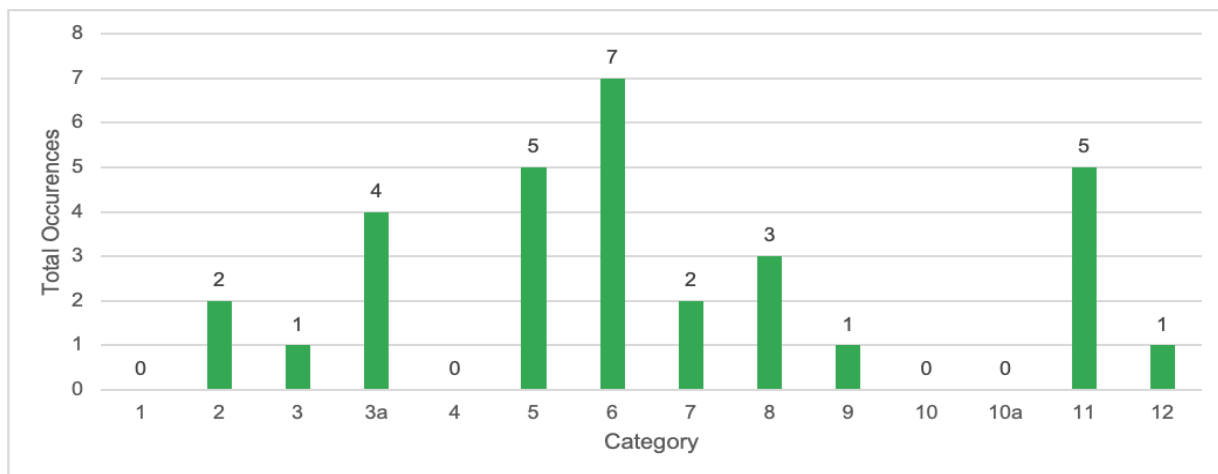
The analysis reveals that Stanley showed no instance of code 1, indicating that he did not have a neutral stance in addressing the issue of Title IX violations at MSU. Instead, Stanley was survivor-centered. He enacted code 2 twice, acknowledging a larger systemic problem beyond MSU, and code 3 once indicated unclear social action or next steps in addressing the issue. However, he also had four instances of clear social action. Stanley did not enact code 4, which relates to balancing compensation for survivors and financial costs for MSU, but had five instances of actions showing transparency (code 5). He also enacted Code 6 seven times, recognizing the importance of listening to concerns.

Additionally, the data suggests Stanley admitted in two instances that internal systems are not effectively addressing sexual misconduct (code 7). He repeatedly emphasized compliance with regulations rather than proactive measures (code 8). He considered the diverse population affected by Title IX violations once without validation or implementation of specific measures to address their needs (code 9). There were no instances of code 10 or 10a (absence of accountability and accountability, respectively).

However, Stanley did have five instances of code 11 related to creating or expanding a new office or initiative. Finally, there was one instance of validation (code 12), where Stanley used language that validated survivors and the work Title IX does."

Figure 5

Samuel L. Stanley email analysis



The results suggest that Stanley's rhetoric was survivor-centered, and he acknowledged a larger systemic problem beyond MSU. He emphasized the importance of transparency, listening to concerns, and taking clear social actions. However, there were instances where Stanley focused on compliance with regulations rather than proactive measures and did not validate or implement specific measures to address the needs of diverse populations affected by Title IX violations. Overall, Stanley's communications exhibited a diverse range of codes, with code 6 being the most frequently enacted, possibly indicating a recognition of the importance of listening to concerns.

In 2022 Stanley ultimately resigned from the position of president, stating:

But I, like the Michigan State University Faculty Senate and Associated Students of Michigan State University, have lost confidence in the action of the current Board of Trustees. Moreover, I cannot in good conscience continue to serve this board as constituted. (Stanley, 2022, p.1)

At the height of the Larry Nassar scandal at MSU in 2018, state lawmakers required public universities to certify that their governing boards were receiving and reviewing sexual misconduct case reports. Stanley has been pushed to resign due to two mounting problems. At issue was whether members on the board of trustees had reviewed the reports and whether Stanley signed without assurance they had done so. The trustees have also hired a law firm to investigate how Stanley's administration handled the dismissal of

Broad College of Business Dean Sanjay Gupta, who resigned on Aug. 12. Administration officials expressed concerns over Gupta's leadership and the college and his "failure to report under our mandatory reporting policies." Stanley is the school's third consecutive leader to be forced out because of issues related to MSU's handling of sexual misconduct cases.

Results for Teresa Woodruff

Teresa K. Woodruff, Ph.D., was unanimously named interim president before the departure of President Samuel L. Stanley Jr., M.D. According to the Detroit free press, Woodruff had been endorsed by a coalition of faculty, staff, and student leaders. After she was named president in a meeting lasting less than 10 minutes. Woodruff is an MSU Foundation Professor in the Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology, Reproductive Biology, and Biomedical Engineering. She is an internationally recognized biologist specializing in reproductive science.

Woodruff also was involved in MSU's recent turmoil, in which former Broad College Business Dean Sanjay Gupta resigned over allegations he learned of but failed to report an incident of alleged sexual misconduct.

Woodruff said she is sensitive to the importance of her role after presidents and interim presidents have run into troubles because of Title IX or disgraced MSU doctor Larry Nassar fallouts. She hopes to create a Title IX office that promotes clear and consistent handling of cases brought through the university's Office of Institutional Equity. She also states that the strategic plan is also a focus of hers, and she hopes to enable those goals of the institution going forward. "We will be working together as a community on a series of processes that will be livened by our new vice president for Title IX" (Woodruff, 2022)

Teresa Woodruff's presidential communications exhibited a limited range of codes, with code 6 being the most frequently enacted. A total of 5 emails by Woodruff were analyzed, which covered a short period from December 21st, 2022, to February 2nd, 2023.

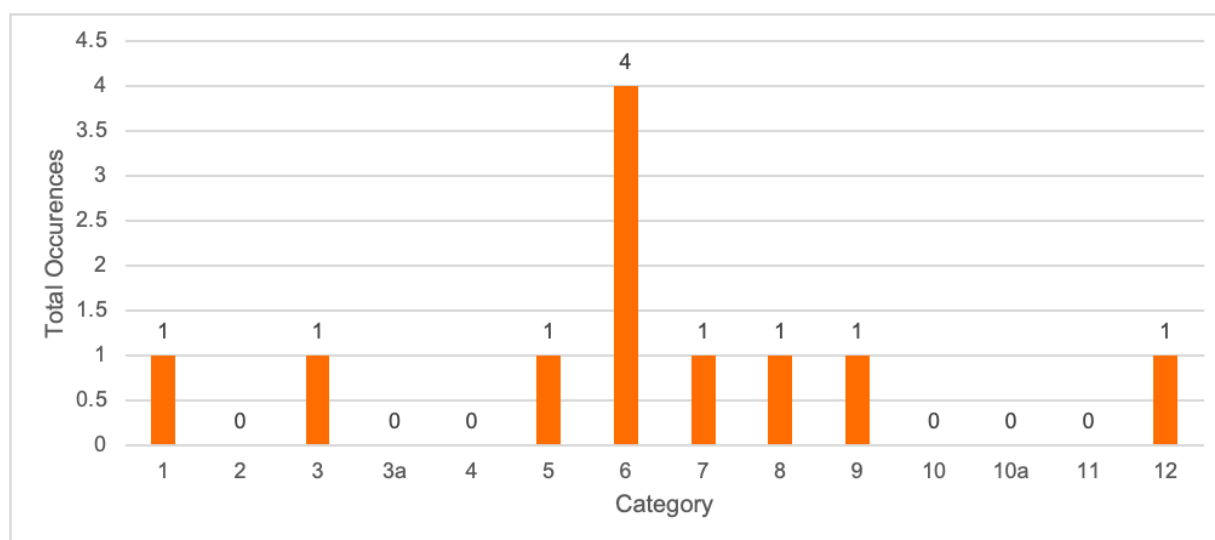
The analysis reveals that Woodruff showed a neutral stance on one occasion in addressing the issue of Title IX violations at MSU. There were no instances of acknowledgment of a larger systemic problem beyond MSU. Woodruff's communications lacked clarity on social action or next steps, with only one

instance of clear social action. There were no instances of balancing compensation for survivors and financial costs for MSU and only one instance of actions showing transparency.

The data suggest that Woodruff's rhetoric frequently recognized the importance of listening to concerns, with four instances of code 6. There was one instance where Woodruff admitted that internal systems are not functioning effectively (code 7) and one instance where she emphasized compliance with regulations rather than proactive measures (code 8). There was one instance of consideration of the diverse population affected by Title IX violations without validation or implementation of specific measures to address their needs (code 9).

Figure 6

Teresa Woodruff Email Results



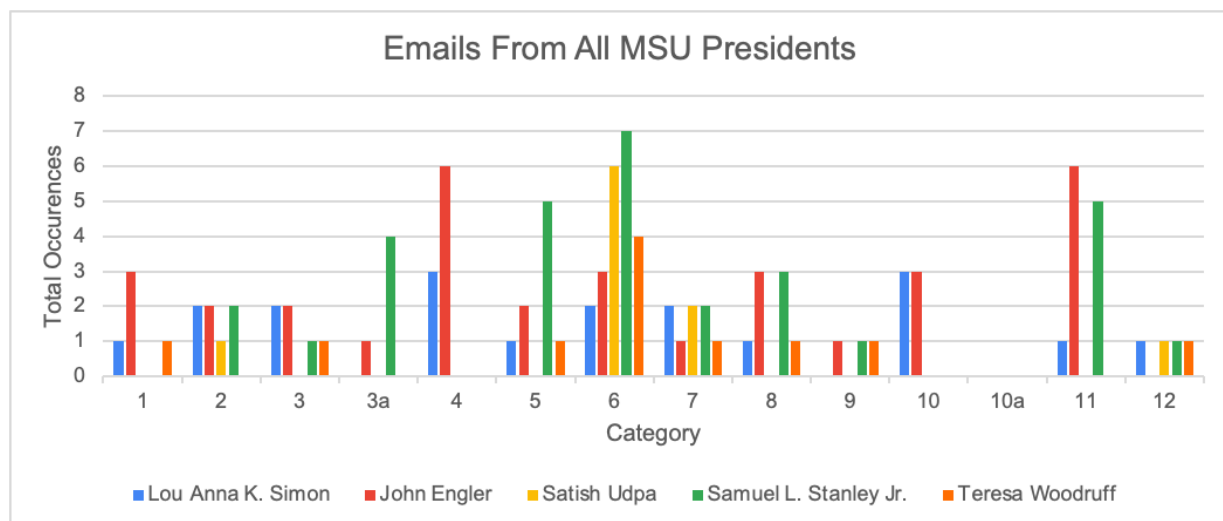
The coding scheme shows that Woodruff had no instances of absence of accountability (code 10), accountability (code 10a), creation or expansion of a new office or initiative (code 11), except for one instance where the language used validated survivors and the work Title IX does (code 12). Overall, based on the presence and appearance of the codes mentioned above, one might say Woodruff's communications showed a limited range of codes and lacked clear social action or next steps to address the issue of Title IX violations at MSU.

3.3 Summary of Key Themes

Overall, my analysis shows codes recurring, conflicting, and evolving. The recurring codes suggest a consistent pattern of inadequate internal systems and the need for improved institutional communication surrounding sex-based discrimination. On the other hand, conflicting codes reveal instances where vague language and euphemisms are used to downplay the severity of issues, while irony undermines the gravity of the situation. Furthermore, the evolving codes highlight the importance of aligning words with actions, as emotional language and appeal to pathos must be supported by meaningful steps to prevent further harm. The analysis also underscores the significance of transparency, accountability, and the creation of new offices or initiatives to address sexual assault, harassment, and discrimination. However, it is crucial to recognize the inconsistencies in implementation, as exemplified by the failure to provide necessary resources for key positions. To effect meaningful change, key actors must use language responsibly, elicit emotional responses with integrity, and ensure that actions align with the conveyed message, thus fostering a culture of transparency and accountability within the university.

Figure 7

Results from all five presidents evaluated



With five MSU Presidents since 2018, including interim, handling sexual misconduct cases has been a complex and contentious issue on the campus of Michigan State University. Inconsistency noticed in the

analysis of presidential communication reflects the ongoing struggle to address and eliminate the deeply rooted culture that allows sex-based discrimination to continue on campuses across the United States. Despite varying approaches, institutional communication and actions that followed revealed a shared underlying issue - the intrinsic nature of rape culture. The language used emphasizes the need for systemic change and the importance of holding accountable the systems and language that perpetuate rape culture.

As we reflect on the findings within presidential communications, we must consider the initial question: Can textual traces aid in a rhetorical agency that allows for better cross-organizational communication and transparency and cultural shifts in addressing sexual misconduct? The answer to this question will never be a simple yes or no. However, key ideas emerge from this critical question, (1) language used in cross-organizational documents is essential but are not free from bias, (2) the language used in communicating between departments and organizations of reports of sexual misconduct can reflect the culture surrounding them, such as rape culture. Additionally, (3) how we communicate and the language we use can construct meaning, though also manipulate an audience, and are inherently cultural. (4) Textual traces do not always lead to action and can sometimes lead to inaction.

This study highlights the need for continued improvement in communication regarding sex-based discrimination at MSU and beyond. As Michel Foucault argued, the study of history should not be pursued for its own sake but rather to understand the complex ways in which power and systems shift over time. By studying the past, we can better understand the present and work towards creating a more just and equitable future. (Foucault, 1977) By. Identifying rhetorical devices, bias, and inaction present in textual traces used in presidential communication can emphasize the importance of addressing and validating the experiences of survivors while showing the need for accountability and systemic change to create safer and more just campus environments.

This study utilized a comprehensive approach to developing and utilizing research codes, which provided a framework for analyzing email communications and revealed valuable insights into the patterns and nuances of communication within the institutional context. A qualitative approach to the research is

needed due to the many complex social issues that arise when examining sexual misconduct in higher education. This approach employs different philosophical assumptions, strategies of inquiry, and methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation, relying on text and image data and drawing on diverse strategies of inquiry. (Merriam, 2009)

An advocacy/participatory worldview emerges from the analysis, meaning “the research contains an action agenda for reform that may change the participants' lives, the institutions in which individuals work or live, and the researcher’s life.” “Moreover,” Creswell continues, “specific issues need to be addressed that speak to important issues of the day, issues such as empowerment, inequality, oppression, domination, suppression, and alienation” (9). I gathered the university president's communications, and from there, I began to analyze each of them. Moreover, the themes began to arise, and from there, the question arose. How can these themes be “developed into broad patterns, theories, or generalizations that are then compared with personal experiences or with existing literature on the topic” (p. 64)?

The analysis began by gathering the university president's communications, and from there, themes began to arise, leading to the question of how these themes can be developed into broad patterns, theories, or generalizations that are then compared with personal experiences or existing literature on the topic.

Therefore, the comprehensive approach to developing and utilizing research codes has enabled a nuanced analysis of email communications and highlighted the need for a qualitative approach to investigating complex social issues. In these communications are found MSUs culture.

The data reveal much about a culture's values, and how those values are shared and (re)produced, particularly in times of great crises. In the next chapter, we will discuss traces and their ability to reveal and conceal systemic biases via incomplete narratives and cognitive biases that negate rhetorical agency. In this way, I hope also to bring together more theory-informed rhetorical analysis within the broader social justice turn within technical communication studies.

Chapter 4: Incomplete Narratives - Limitations of Textual Traces in Revealing Systemic Bias and Discrimination

4.1 Textual Traces

Examples of textual traces and textual tracing have been present throughout this thesis. We will now look at where textual traces were derived from, their meaning, and how I conceive of them. The concept of the trace or "arche-trace" was developed by Jacques Derrida (1998). According to Derrida, the trace is the fundamental formation of writing and the difference in the sign. This means that writing is the most basic process of differentiation, occurring before vocalization, and it is this differentiation that creates meaning and consciousness. "The trace is not only the disappearance of origin within the discourse that we sustain and according to the path we follow. It means that the origin did not even disappear, that it was never constituted except reciprocally by a non-origin, the trace, which thus becomes the origin of the origin" (Derrida, 1998, p. 61). In this view, language is instituted through speech, but the differentiation that makes speech possible is already present in writing. Therefore, writing is seen as a pre-vocal process that helps to create language and consciousness.

Textual traces offer an opportunity to understand human social systems better. As Lin, Margolin, and Lazer (2016) explain, it is important to consider the various social processes that produce these texts. Specifically, when I use the term "textual traces," I aim to use textual tracing as a mode of analysis to understand how these texts inspire action and reveal underlying racist and sexist ideologies within a system and culture (Lin, Margolin & Lazer, 2016). Textual traces can be considered a collection of written records that serve as a collection of memory and history while illuminating and constructing a narrative. Textual traces acknowledge the idea that documents are not inert or motionless objects but are the active agents that shape and reflect our understanding of the past, present, and future. By combining multiple texts and sources brought to us through time, textual traces can offer perspective and enable us to trace the contours of meaning across space and time. As such, the concept of textual traces is a tool for historical analysis and a way of conceptualizing the intersectional relationship between text, memory, and identity.

Textual traces are found everywhere and take many forms. They may include but are not limited to case files, a patient's medical history, and personal diaries; that said, these traces need not be limited to a particular genre but should be relevant to the *subject matter*. According to Lin, Margolin, and Lazer (2016), "Some sets of documents are similar because their authors search among a common pool of ideas to construct their statements. We define such sets of similar documents as sharing subject matter" (p. 2076). Textual traces can speak to the past, understand the present, and shape our understanding of the future, making these different forms of traces similar. Each text within a collection of textual traces offers a unique perspective and tells a story, and it is through the interplay, tone, and resonance of these texts a larger narrative emerges. As such, textual traces can also be seen as a vital source of historical, cultural, and personal knowledge.

(Lin, Margolin & Lazer, 2016) found that their theory-driven approach to uncovering social semantics from textual traces was supported by their analysis of public statements made by members of Congress (p. 2072). The authors state that "one of the most promising methods for analyzing text is the use of discursive isomorphism—the identification of texts with similar features or structures—to infer relationships between the authors of the texts (Bramsen, Escobar-Molano, Patel, & Alonso, 2011; Bryden et al., 2013; Di Maggio & Powell, 1983).

Michel Foucault used a method of textual analysis which he termed "archaeology." This method aimed to uncover the underlying structures of thought and discourse that give rise to particular ways of thinking and speaking. Rather than focusing solely on surface-level meanings of texts, Foucault's approach reveals the historical and social contexts that shape such meanings. Through his method of archaeology, Foucault traced the evolution of important concepts such as madness, sexuality, and power, illustrating how these ideas are not natural or inevitable but rather shaped by specific historical and social circumstances. "The examination is the technique by which power, instead of emitting signs, instead of imposing its mark on its subjects, holds them constantly in a mechanism of objectification" (Foucault 1975, p. 192).

Similarly, textual traces in themselves and as a method of analysis are invaluable for uncovering the past and revealing the narrative of systems and institutions. Archives, similarly to textual traces, represent a

'measure of knowledge which does not exist in quite the same form anywhere else.' They carry, in consequence, a particular weight as primary evidence of suppositions made or conclusions drawn about that activity (Trace, 2002). "The Power of the Written Tradition" by Jack Goody offers insight into how written texts, or in this case textual traces, have been used throughout history to shape social and cultural practices. Goody's work highlights the power of the written word in shaping our understanding of the world around us. This understanding can emphasize the importance of critically examining the written texts that shape our understanding of sexual assault and discrimination on college campuses. Similarly, Goody understands communication and the written tradition as a form of technology that becomes a crucial instrument and catalyst of psychological and social change. However, we must recognize that textual traces are not neutral or objective records of events but instead are shaped by a multitude of biases and social factors (Trace, 2022, p. 138). Trace (2022) theorizes that archives provide evidence of their creator because they are interrelated as to meaning: each archival document is contingent on its functional relations to other documents, and archives are created as a 'means of carrying out activities and not as ends in themselves, and therefore [are] inherently ... capable of revealing the truth about these activities (Trace, 2022, p. 139).

However, textual traces are not objective and neutral accounts of the past but rather are the product of the social, political, and cultural context in which they were produced and are shaped by the perspectives and biases of the people who created them. As such, the critical theory of how textual traces aid in social action emphasizes the importance of studying these traces from a critical and analytical perspective, taking into account the context and perspective of the people who created them, as well as the potential for multiple interpretations of the same historical evidence. Additionally, this approach recognizes the potential for textual traces to be used to promote social justice and equality by providing evidence of past injustices and inequalities and by highlighting examples of liberatory action and thought. Textual traces are able to provide a framework for understanding the role in shaping and informing rhetorical agency and for using these to examine the next steps in promoting positive social change.

4.2 Textual Traces Limitations

Textual traces have the capacity to make meaning and tell narratives and stories of the past, present, and future. According to Derrida's philosophy, "trace" refers to the idea that every sign or word is made up of a chain of differences and references to other signs rather than having a fixed and stable meaning. While my initial understanding of textual traces focused on the idea that textual traces can be seen as essential evidence for social action and justice, the limitations of traces must be examined, particularly in the context of power dynamics, rape culture, and racism within higher education institutions.

Derrida states in his book *Speech and Phenomena* 'The trace is not a presence but is rather the simulacrum of a presence that dislocates, displaces, and refers beyond itself. The trace has, properly speaking, no place, for effacement belongs to the very structure of the trace...' (*Speech and Phenomena*, p. 156). In other words, the trace is not a thing in itself but rather a kind of absence that is left behind when a sign or word is used. This absence allows the sign or word to be connected to other signs or words and have meaning within a particular context. It is important to note that Derrida's concepts are linked to the idea of writing, which he argues is both present and absent simultaneously. He writes, "Writing is not a sign, it is the vehicle of every signification [...] Writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing" (Derrida, 1976, p. 82). Derrida leaves us with a complex and contingent nature of meaning and interpretation and emphasizes that no pure, uncontaminated origin exists to any text or discourse. Derrida would suggest that the potential bias of the creator (origin) is present throughout textual traces precisely because the trace constitutes the origin. This means that the creator's biases are always present in the traces and can be subject to interpretation and reinterpretation by readers and interpreters.

What is Recorded is Never Simply 'What Happened': Record Keeping in Modern Organizational Culture by Ciaran B. Trace gives us a framework for thinking about textual traces as a means for action. She states, "Traditional premises in archival theory and practice hold that archival records are authentic as to

procedure and impartial as to creation because they are created as a means for, and as a by-product of, action, and not for the sake of posterity” (Trace, 2002, p.137). Trace uses the post-positivist view of records which embraces the record as a socially constructed and maintained entity. Trace (2022) theorizes that archives provide evidence of their creator because they are interrelated as to meaning. Each archival document is contingent on its functional relations to other documents, and archives are created as a 'means of carrying out activities and not as ends in themselves, and therefore [are] inherently ... capable of revealing the truth about these activities.' (2002)

4.3 The Cognitive Bias Present in the Creation and Interpretation of Textual Traces

I argue that If textual traces by way of archives can provide evidence of their creator, they can also provide evidence of the creator's bias. Though documentation and textual traces are important for cross-organizational communication that can aid in preventing sexual misconduct, they also can cause harm. Textual traces are subject to bias due to the subjective experiences and perspectives of the individuals who created them. Personal biases, cultural backgrounds, professional positions, and other factors can influence how events are recorded and the information that is included or excluded. The creation of textual traces is a process that can be influenced by cognitive biases, which can be unconscious and may result in the representation of beliefs and attitudes that do not reflect an objective reality; by drawing on the insights of cognitive psychology, we can better understand how people rely on mental shortcuts and biases in this process, and work towards creating more accurate and unbiased language.

Confirmation bias can be tied to the examination of textual traces. According to Casad and Luebering (2023), confirmation bias refers to the tendency to selectively search for, interpret, and remember information in a way that confirms one's pre-existing beliefs and attitudes. Confirmation bias impacts how institutions interpret, respond, create, and communicate the narratives told by textual traces. In the reviewing, documenting, and action taken on sexual misconduct reports in Title IX offices within higher education, confirmation bias can manifest itself in a few different ways. Firstly, decision-makers may be

more likely to selectively look for or give more weight to information that supports their preconceived notions about a case while ignoring or discounting information that contradicts those notions. For example, suppose a decision-maker within an institution believes that false reports of sexual misconduct are common. In that case, they may be more likely to scrutinize the victim's story for inconsistencies or evidence of ulterior motives while overlooking or downplaying evidence that supports the victim's account, thereby influencing what that decision-maker writes/reports in response.

Additionally, confirmation bias can lead decision-makers to interpret ambiguous or inconclusive evidence in a way that supports their preconceptions (Casad & Luebering, 2023). These preconceptions can then be found within the textual traces, which have the ability to propel inaction. When we examine the potential for confirmation bias in the creation and interpretation of textual traces, institutions and decision-makers can gain a deeper understanding of how this bias can impact the stories that can be told from these traces and the opportunities for social justice that can be gleaned from them. It is important to be aware of confirmation bias and other cognitive biases in the decision-making process and to approach the interpretation of textual traces with a critical mindset. This can inform efforts to collect to interpret these traces in a more objective and fair manner and perpetuate agency rather than the continuance of violence. As we have seen, cognitive biases can have a profound impact on the creation and interpretation of textual traces, leading to incomplete and distorted narratives that fail to capture the full complexity of historical events. If our society is built on notions of a misogynistic patriarchal society drenched in rape culture and racism, so will our laws, policies, documentation, communications, and language. The MSU presidential communications are just one example of textual traces that have the ability to show an intrinsic intersectional cultural problem. Beyond that are the communications to nations, between departments, to each other, and to ourselves. Therefore, the findings of this study call for a renewed focus on the language used in all forms of communication and the need for greater empathy and human-centered approaches to address sexual misconduct and create a more equitable and just culture.

While laws, policies, and protocols are crucial for addressing issues like sexual assault and discrimination on college campuses, they can only do so much on their own. A true shift towards creating safer and more

equitable campus environments can only happen when cultural attitudes and beliefs begin to change as well. This requires a concerted effort to address not only the legal and procedural aspects of Title IX compliance but also to decolonize our minds from the underlying cultural norms and beliefs that perpetuate sex violence and discrimination throughout all facets of our collective lives.

Chapter 5: Beyond Documentation - A Cultural Shift in Addressing Sexual Misconduct

5.1 Discussion

Textual traces and textual tracing are important functions when working in intuitions and are specifically important in Title IX compliance offices. Ensuring textual traces are present and the organization of such documentation can hold those responsible and can allow for transparency and community collaboration to protect students and prevent future assault.

Throughout the MSU presidential communications, and reporting of sexual misconduct, the language used was vague. However, the recognition of the importance of listening to concerns was the most used code in presidential communications. The case study shows that listening to concerns is not the same as creating actionable items to address concerns. There were many inconsistencies in how MSU presidents convey sexual misconduct on campus that were noticed throughout the analysis of presidential communication. This inconsistency reflects the inconsistent ongoing struggle to address and eliminate the deeply rooted culture that allows sex-based discrimination to continue on campuses across the United States. The institutional communications, reports, and actions that followed revealed a shared underlying issue - the intrinsic nature of rape culture.

That said, textual traces and reports of sexual misconduct are not enough to truly mitigate and prevent assault on campuses. As we have seen throughout this thesis, the analysis of textual traces in addressing sexual misconduct goes beyond documentation, procedures, and laws. To properly address the cause requires a cultural shift towards respecting and protecting survivors of sexual assault and holding perpetrators accountable for their actions. It requires us to decolonize our mind, body, and soul to the misogynistic patriarchal force that legitimizes violence and racism throughout our beings, which can be seen throughout all categories of our lives as proof.

A recurring pattern emerges that goes beyond the mere inability of individuals to report incidents of sexual assault or the incapacity of Title IX offices to document such reports, or even the ability of

university presidents to communicate about said issues. Rather, we see a permissive culture that tolerates and enables this kind of behavior:

According to the Texas Tribune (Watkins, 2016), an investigation found that Baylor University officials had mishandled reports of sexual assault and dating violence. The report found that the university had failed to investigate and respond to reports of sexual assault properly and had even retaliated against victims who came forward. As a result, several high-level officials were fired or resigned, including the university's president and athletic director.

The Florida Times-Union (Armas, 2012) reported that Jerry Sandusky, a former assistant football coach at Penn State University, was found guilty of 45 counts of child sexual abuse in 2012. It was later revealed that multiple reports had been made to university officials about Sandusky's behavior, but the reports were either ignored or mishandled. The scandal led to the firing of several high-level officials, including the university's president and legendary football coach, Joe Paterno.

Richard Strauss was a doctor at Ohio State University who sexually abused hundreds of male student-athletes over the course of two decades. According to the Columbus Dispatch (Caruso et al., 2019), Multiple reports were made to university officials about Strauss's behavior, but little action was taken. The scandal led to the firing of several high-level officials, including the university's president and athletic director, and the university ultimately agreed to pay \$40 million to settle claims related to the abuse.

All of these incidents may raise questions about whether the lack of documentation or the bias present in the reports and the individuals responsible for writing them are contributing factors. However, my analysis points to the root of these concerns, a larger cultural issue that permits such incidents to happen and continuously shatter communities.

“It has become commonplace to describe the 499 known victims of Larry Nassar as “breaking their silence,” though in fact, they were never, as a group, particularly silent. Over the course of at least 20 years of consistent abuse, women and girls reported to every proximate authority. They told their parents. They told gymnastics coaches, running coaches, and softball coaches. They told Michigan State

University police and Meridian Township police. They told physicians and psychologists. They told university administrators. They told, repeatedly, USA Gymnastics. They told one another. Athletes were interviewed, reports were written up, and charges were recommended. The story of Larry Nassar is not a story of silence. The story of Larry Nassar is that of an edifice of trust so resilient, so impermeable to common sense, that it endured for decades against the allegations of so many women” (Howley, 2018). As many of the MSU presidents said in their email communications. Sexual misconduct is not only an institutional issue; it is a systemic problem. As universities that house and feed students, universities turn into homes for many; how do we ensure that students are in an inclusive, safe environment, and when can we begin to take accountability for the culture we allow to foster? I found that working in Title IX, higher education never, ending questions emerge, but we must remember every step is an important step, but those steps should not just include mitigating the least amount of harm but also understanding the root causes of complex issues like the culture that allows for the pervasive sexual assault and discrimination on college campuses. In order to develop effective solutions, we need first to understand the cultural attitudes and beliefs that contribute to these problems, as well as the unique needs of different cultures within the university community. Prevention programs are critical to creating change, but they must be designed with cultural responsiveness in mind to ensure they are effective and sustainable. In order to promote meaningful cultural change, institutions must engage in deep reflection and examination of their own culture - asking why it exists and how it can be enhanced rather than simply allowing it to remain stagnant.

In shifting cultural attitudes, scholars/research should focus on "trace" and "agency.” As mentioned previously, rhetorical agency refers to the ability to use language and communication to influence and persuade others in order to promote positive social change.

As mentioned earlier in this paper, Koerber addresses a dilemma that arises when considering acts of resistance in correlation with rhetorical agency. That is, whether to focus on the agency of the individual or the ideological forces at play. Koerber argues that these two factors are not mutually exclusive but rather are closely interconnected. Koerber highlights the relationship between rhetorical agency, which

refers to the ways in which individuals use language and discourse to shape their identities and resist power, and the outcomes of those acts of resistance. By examining this relationship, the author shows that even seemingly small acts of resistance can have a significant impact on the larger system of power."Although we might feel compelled to choose between a privileging individual agency or ideological force, my analysis reinforces the idea that the two are inextricably linked and adds to our understanding by taking a close look at the relationship between the rhetorical agency involved in acts of resistance and the ultimate outcomes of such acts" (Koerber, 2006).

Koerber's argument give a lens in which we can think of both acts of resistance such as the #metoo movement and the language used. When analyzing acts of resistance, it is important to take into account both the agency of the individual and the larger ideological forces at play, as these two factors are intertwined and contribute to the ultimate outcome of such acts. resistance can "defy translation, throw sense off track, and, thus, short-circuit the system through which sense is made" (Biesecker, 1992, p. 357).

Despite constant reporting and documentation of sexual misconduct, no action was taken for decades in the case of Larry Nassar, former USA Gymnastics doctor and convicted sexual abuser. This suggests that simply having cross-organization documentation and reporting protocols is not enough and that cultural change is necessary. The impact of rape culture extends beyond influencing who believes survivors and how they are addressed; it also affects who chooses to report and the reporting process itself.

The failure of documentation and reporting protocols in the Larry Nassar case highlights the inadequacy of having procedures in place without a corresponding shift in cultural attitudes. While the United States Olympic Committee initiated the process of revoking the certification of USAG, it is clear that the mere existence of documentation was not enough to ensure accountability and justice. This is because rape culture shapes not only the way that officials respond to reports of sexual misconduct but also impacts who feels comfortable reporting, the process of reporting itself, and how what was reported is addressed. In order to truly address sexual misconduct in higher education and beyond, it is necessary to create a culture in which survivors feel safe to come forward, perpetrators are held accountable, and the systems in

place are designed with transparency and accountability as top priorities. This requires more than just implementing new procedures; it demands a fundamental shift in the way we think about and respond to sexual misconduct.

Until the laws that provide protections align with a culture that enhances diversity and fosters safety, It is necessary for organizations and institutions alike to ask themselves the following question:

1. What are specific cultural attitudes and beliefs that contribute to sexual assault and discrimination in your institutions or organization?
 - a. In what ways can you address the cultural attitudes
2. How can your institution or organization create and promote a culture of consent and respect
 - a. What are effective strategies for doing so?
3. What role can education and prevention programs in your institution or organization play in changing cultural norms around sexual assault and discrimination?
 - a. If you already have one, how can these programs be made more effective?
4. How can your institution or organization improve its response to incidents of sexual assault and discrimination
 - a. What steps can be taken or have been taken to ensure that survivors are properly supported and their experiences are taken seriously?
5. How can your institution or organizations leaders and administrators work to promote a culture of transparency and accountability when it comes to issues of sexual assault and discrimination
 - a. What specific actions can be taken or have been taken to make progress in this area?
 - b. If actions were taken, were they effective?

We must understand that we have to push further to understand the language used that cosigns and perpetuates rape culture. Dobbin and Kalev's (2017) Harvard Business Review article "Training programs and reporting systems will not end sexual harassment. Promoting more women will" argues that the focus on training programs and reporting systems to address sexual harassment is not enough. Instead, they suggest that promoting more women into leadership positions is a more effective way to create lasting

change. Using this same framework, training programs, or centralized databases on sexual misconduct and proper documentation will not end sexual misconduct, but changing the culture and those who make up such culture will be what changes norms and ideals surrounding campus safety.

The influence of biased laws on policies and procedures is undeniable, and this has a profound impact on the textual traces that are produced. When the very laws that govern our society are built on a foundation of discrimination and bias, it is inevitable that this will filter down into the policies and procedures that are implemented to enforce them. As a result, the textual traces that are generated from such policies and procedures may be limited in their ability to reveal systemic bias and discrimination since they are produced within a system that is itself biased.

For example, it is important to note that the advocates in sports who initiated Title IX did not prioritize equal athletic experiences for all women. Black women were often overlooked in discussions about equal access and protection from discrimination and sexual misconduct on college campuses (Brown, 2022).

Jessica Brown, the vice president for student affairs and athletics at North Central College, notes that it is not enough to simply establish an institutional framework and assume it will benefit all populations; black women are often left out of conversations surrounding on-campus sexual violence, despite being among the most likely to experience it. Reports indicate that approximately one in five women are sexually assaulted during their time in college, and 22% of Black women are survivors of sexual violence (Brown, 2022). Black women are also less likely to report incidents of sexual violence. It is important to recognize the intersectional challenges faced by Black women on college campuses and in this society. By recognizing and understanding such challenges, we can not only move towards creating a culture that encourages and supports all to come forward, regardless of their background or experiences but can also show how laws, policies procedures, and the textual traces created from such powers can work against marginalized communities rather than for.

5.2 Pushing Past Compliance

Prior to reaching this juncture, I developed a model which could be implemented in institutions and organizations to facilitate effective communication and documentation of instances of sexual misconduct. The goal was to encourage the formulation of new policies and systems that center on accountability and transparency in documentation and interinstitutional communication. However, this communication model does not address the bias present in such communications, policies, and protocols. The question remains, how can these principles and frameworks be advanced further?

The "Interinstitutional Collaborative Communication Model for Higher Education and Title IX Compliance" proposes that effective communication between higher education institutions regarding sexual misconduct allegations requires collaboration, transparency, and accountability. There are five key principles of the Collaborative Communication Model. First is collaboration; Title IX departments of different institutions and departments within these institutions should work together to exchange information and coordinate their efforts in addressing sexual misconduct allegations. (2) Transparency, information about sexual misconduct allegations should be shared openly and accurately among institutions and within the institutions. (3) Accountability, Title IX departments should be accountable for ensuring that information about sexual misconduct allegations is communicated promptly and effectively to other relevant departments. (4) Record keeping, Institutions should maintain accurate records of all sexual misconduct allegations and ensure that the information is accessible to other institutions as needed. (5) Training, Title IX departments, and relevant staff should receive regular training on the importance of interinstitutional communication and the principles of the Collaborative Communication Model.

Initially, I thought that by adopting the communication model, higher education institutions could improve their ability to prevent sexual misconduct and protect students. Who is to say that such a model could have prevented the case of Larry Nassar, Jerry Sandusky, or, unfortunately, the next high-profile institutional assault case that has yet to be uncovered?

The collaborative communication model needs to be pushed further. Just like all institutional reporting, documentation, and communication processes surrounding sexual assault and discrimination on college campuses. The protections of our students need to be pushed past compliance. We need to be fostering communities that actively fight rape culture because that is what is at the center. As Koeber says, we cannot merely speak agency into existence through rhetoric; we must also resist through our actions. Pushing past mere compliance with actionable items is crucial for creating a safe and inclusive higher education environment. Compliance may ensure that institutions follow the basic requirements for preventing sexual assault and misconduct, but it does not necessarily create a culture where such behavior is not tolerated. Institutions must go beyond the minimum requirements and prioritize creating a culture that actively addresses and prevents sexual assault and misconduct. This means not only having policies in place but also actively promoting women of color and LGBTQIA+ into leadership positions, cultural awareness, and accountability towards our systematic biases. By doing so, diverse populations will feel more comfortable coming forward and seeking support. We must also look at the training being given; bias training that solely focuses on compliance can result in negative outcomes. Instead, an active bias training approach could be implemented to enhance cultural competency and inclusivity. In addition, community building should be prioritized. By fostering a sense of community and promoting the idea of co-conspirators rather than allyship, individuals are more likely to feel comfortable coming forward and seeking support for issues related to sexual assault and misconduct. According to Bettina Love (2019), an ally is someone who supports a marginalized group from a position of privilege. Though allies speak out against oppression, donating money to support marginalized groups or attending protests or rallies. Love argues that true progress toward justice requires more than passive support from allies. Instead, she advocates for a model of "co-conspirators," in which a person will use their privilege actively to dismantle oppression systems and center marginalized groups' voices and experiences. In Love's view, co-conspirators take an active role in challenging and disrupting systems of oppression. They engage in direct action, such as striking or occupying spaces and being a part of an uncomfortable confrontation with an inherent system. Co-conspirators work to amplify the voices of marginalized people by sharing

their stories and perspectives and, in doing so, challenging the dominant narratives. Love's distinction between allies and co-conspirators highlights the importance of moving beyond passive support and towards active engagement and direct action in the fight for justice.

5.3 Takeaways

The language we use through *utterance*³ or through written texts holds immense power. Though key actors have the ability to change culture, this does not disclude the power we each hold in effecting change within ourselves and our culture. “-- but no self is an island; each exists in a fabric of relations that is now more complex and mobile than ever before. Young or older, man or woman, rich or poor, a person is always located at “nodal points” specific communication circuits, however tiny these may be. Or better: one is always located at a post through which various kinds of messages pass. No one, not even the least privileged among us, is ever entirely powerless over the messages that traverse and position him at the post of sender, addressee, or referent” (Lyotard 1979, p. 15). Though there is no one size fits all solution for addressing and eradicating sexual violence, the power of self through community and empathy can foster more than we know.

I recognized through textual tracing that not catching predators is not solely due to the lack of organizational narratives, textual traces, or even the rhetorical strategies employed by key actors. In trying to understand my initial question: Can textual traces aid in social action and the prevention of further harm from predators? There was a scramble to understand not what went wrong but where, who, how, and why? The answer to this question lies deeper than just Michigan State University; it lies deeper than Larry

³ “Every utterance should be thought of as a “move” in a game. Different types of utterances, as identified by Wittgenstein, pertain to different types of language games. Lyotard gives us a few examples of types of utterances. The “denotative” is an utterance which attempts to correctly identify the object or referent to which it refers (such as “Snow is white”). The “performative” is an utterance which is itself a performance of an act to which it refers (such as “I promise”). The “prescriptive” is an utterance which instructs, recommends, requests, or commands (such as “Give me money”).” (Lyotard, 1984, p.10)

Nassar; it lies in a system that has paved the way for abusers, hateful rhetoric, and a lack of accountability due to the intrinsic nature of rape culture. This nexus of culture, communication, and theory is also a rich and important site of inquiry for equity professionals, rhetoricians, and technical communication researchers. Furthermore, I hope my study here--one that employs Theory and qualitative methods--provides one example of how to build bridges between these communities of practice.

“I hope that our experiences at M.S.U. have opened up the world’s eyes to the suffering that survivors of sexual assault deal with every day,” said Amanda Thomashow, who complained to university officials in 2014 about Larry Nassar’s conduct. “And I hope that we can change our attitude toward victims. And I hope our culture shifts from enabling predators to empowering survivors.”

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