

FRIENDLY, BUT NOT FRIENDS: FORENSICS COMPETITORS' RELATIONAL
FRAMING OF COMPLIMENTS FROM OPPONENTS

by

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ABSTRACT

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Under the Supervision of Dr. Mike Allen

Prior research highlights the social benefits competitors gain from participation in intercollegiate forensics. Although competitors often interact with members of opposing teams, however, little empirical research exists explaining how competitor interactions unfold and how the outcomes of these exchanges contribute to the larger social environment between competitors in the intercollegiate forensics community. Using a framework informed by relational framing theory (RFT; Dillard et al., 1996) and relational turbulence theory (Solomon et al., 2016), this study explores how competitors make sense of compliments from their opponents. Collegiate forensics competitors ($N = 121$) were recruited to participate in an online survey and asked to recall an interaction in which the competitor received a compliment from an opponent (i.e., member of another team). Participants then completed relational framing, involvement (Dillard et al., 1996) and turbulence scales (Solomon et al., 2016). A mixed-method research design was used to assess participant responses and scale ratings to determine associations between related concepts. Findings indicated forensics competitors feel motivated and encouraged by opponent compliments and primarily enact an affiliative frame to make sense of interactions with other competitors. Five categories of compliments were derived from the inductive qualitative analysis and themes highlighted how many participants and opponents developed “supporterships” by

reciprocating support and creating space for competitor similarities and disclosures to surface. However, correlational analyses showed that enacting a dominant frame was associated to lower perceptions of relational turbulence, suggesting participants felt the relationship was most stable when framing the other competitor as a clear opponent rather than something else. Affiliation was not significantly related to increased levels of turbulence, however, and none of the derived compliment categories influenced participant frame enactment. This study extends RFT to opponent relationships in the forensics context and contributes to the body of forensics research by highlighting implications for competitor interactions.

Keywords: relational framing, turbulence, compliments, competition, forensics

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADS	After-Dinner Speaking
AFA-NST	American Forensic Association National Speech Tournament
ASC	Asynchronous Speech Championship
CEDA	Cross Examination Debate Association
DI	Dramatic Interpretation
IE	Individual Events
IPDA	International Public Debate Association
LD	Lincoln-Douglas
NFA	National Forensic Association
NPDA	National Parliamentary Debate Association
NSDA	National Speech and Debate Association
PKD	Pi Kappa Delta
POI	Program Oral Interpretation
PRP	Phi Rho Pi
RFT	Relational Framing Theory
RTT	Relational Turbulence Theory
TA	Thematic Analysis

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I. Introduction

“Fraternizing with the enemy” was a phrase popularized during the American Civil War to describe the kind of care and support that was exchanged between Union and Confederate soldiers despite political boundaries (Thompson, 2020). Many parties perceived this communication as a form of disloyalty that defeated the purpose of either side’s greater objectives. Nevertheless, the bonding that occurred provided a breakdown of oppositional tensions that helped soldiers establish connections with their enemies on the battlefield (Rolph, 2002). In a similar way, intercollegiate forensics (i.e., speech and debate) competitors often provide support and encouragement to students on other teams despite conflicting competitive individual and team goals (Ward, 2018). Prior forensics research highlights many documented benefits of competitor exchanges. Notably, prior forensics research advocates that competitors tend to feel part of a larger community after engaging with opponents from other teams more frequently (Bartanen & Littlefield, 2015; Billings, 2011; Walker, 2021). Students have also reported feeling more welcomed in the activity and developed communication confidence skills because of their interactions with other competitors (Jensen & Jensen, 2006). Billings (2011) further found that competitor interactions can lead to increased feelings of interpersonal closeness, the initiation of friendships, or even romantic partnerships. Overall, both traditional and nontraditional students have listed the social nature of forensics, camaraderie, and networking with opposing competitors as enjoyable aspects and reasons to remain in the activity (Becker, 2019; Billings, 2011; Pelletier, 2015; Quenette et al., 2007). This body of research shows that maintaining a positive, collegial network between forensics competitors and teams constitutes a defining element of the activity and something generating long-term social and relational benefits for many participants.

Of course, not all forensics students experience similar positive social outcomes. In particular, some participants in Walker (2021) and Ward (2018) highlighted how perceived social hierarchies based on teams' past records of competitive success impact competitors' interpersonal interactions, especially between students from opposing teams. Davis (2016) also found that forensics "frenemy" relationships, or relationships that contain both competitive and personal elements, exist for three unique reasons in the activity. For example, frenemy relationships appear to exist (a) when students from opposing teams compete in the same events as each other or with the same literature or topic (i.e., structural frenemies), (b) when a pair of students goes back and forth in their competitive successes over the other (i.e., competitive frenemies), or (c) when students feel some degree of interpersonal tension with another competitor due to general clashes in personalities (interpersonal frenemies; Davis, 2016). For students who relate more to frenemy-like experiences, interacting with other competitors may not come so easily, and may in fact be more of a stressor and source of discomfort. If this discomfort persists, students may begin to question the value of and involvement in the activity, putting the social appeal and advantages of forensics at risk.

The forensics community is currently making its way out of a brief era of strictly online competition during the COVID-19 pandemic. As programs start to offer more opportunities for in-person tournaments again, virtual (i.e., all online) and hybrid (i.e., part online, part in-person) tournaments now exist. Students have many opportunities to interact and build closer relationships with individuals from opposing teams, even with competitors whom they would likely not have competed against pre-COVID, especially if the student's forensics program restricted in-person travel to within the team's home region. However, various contextual and individual factors play a role in the frequency, strength, and trajectory of cross-team competitor

relationships, and the existing body of forensics research needs to reflect the complex symbiotic association between these ties and the larger social and competitive elements of the activity. The research implies that the social element of the activity is something competitors must learn how to competently navigate in order to obtain the long-term benefits previously mentioned, rather than something that simply comes naturally with one's participation. Considering how current students make sense of their friendly interactions with members of opposing teams in the competitive forensics context is important. In turn, understanding how participant sensemaking influences the quality of competitors' cross-team relationships is also essential, as these dynamics are necessary to understanding the social landscape of the activity and identifying areas for social improvement.

To elaborate further, the following dissertation first offers a more detailed overview of forensics before outlining a theoretical framework and methodology for the study based on Dillard et al.'s (1996) relational framing theory (RFT) and Solomon et al.'s (2016) notion of relational turbulence. This framework is appropriate to analyze the social value of cross-team competitor interactions because it highlights how perceptions of interpersonal messages influence the judgments individuals make about their interactions and relationships with others. Competitors interact with each other all the time, and developing positive, friendly relationships with others during their time in the activity will ultimately be the magnet that draws them back as coaches and judges after they graduate.

II. Literature Review

Forensics Context

Various contextual and individual factors influence how forensics competitors perceive and relate to one another. The following section offers an overview of how students maneuver through the activity, both in competition and in relationships with other competitors, and what elements of the activity influence student experiences. The chapter is packaged in a way that is meant to assist readers who are less familiar with the activity to understand the contextual complexity surrounding competitor relational dynamics. Consequently, this chapter starts with the larger, overarching missions guiding the activity, then discusses factors at lower structural, interactional, and individual levels.

Dueling Missions

On a macro level, the nature of forensics is both educational and competitive. As Burnett et al. (2003) have noted, it was Douglas Ehninger (1952) who claimed that forensics was a co-curricular activity (as opposed to extracurricular) in his 1952 paper, in which Ehninger outlined the top six qualities of “a sound forensics program,” advancing the notion that the primary goals of the activity were largely educational. However, Burnett and colleagues (2001, 2003) have argued that while the activity can certainly be both educational and competitive, focusing on the competitive elements of forensics, like tournament awards ceremonies, a long competitive season, competition judging and ranking systems, and all of the activity’s “unwritten rules,” to name a few, overshadow its assumed educational value.

As Reid (2015) pointed out, many of these unwritten rules, such as specific expectations for different individual events (IEs), how to dress and behave at tournaments (Paine & Stanley, 2003), how time should be used in limited preparation (LP) events, how to hold the black binder

in interpretation (“interp”), having a triangle walking structure in public address (PA), and even what topics are appropriate for each event, amongst others (e.g., Epping & Labrie, 2005; Paine, 2005), are co-constructed (Reid, 2015). Essentially, competitors and coaches see what does well at tournaments and then often attempt to recreate elements of those successful performances in hopes of producing a “winning” speech of their own (Gaer, 2002; Reid, 2015). As these elements are reproduced, certain techniques and aesthetic qualities become trends and specific expectations for every event. Judges begin using these arbitrary expectations as justifications for ranks given to competitors on tournament ballots (Elmer & VanHorn, 2004; Paine, 2005; Swift, 2006). Most students understand the value of adhering to the norms as a pathway to achieving competitive success, and typically individuals who are most successful in the activity perform to these expectations in some way or another. In addition to coaches and judges perpetuating these unwritten rules in practice and on ballots, respectively, students also uphold the expectations in their interactions with other competitors, often complimenting others fitting the mold on attire, topic selection, and performative style (Davis, 2020).

Yet, as Mishne (2019) argued, it is this formulaic approach that limits the educational value of the activity the most, leading to inauthentic performances, less critical thinking, low quality speaking, and overall restricting creativity and transferability of skills. Though, this is not to say that forensics is not educational or that the competition is unhealthy, nor that successful competitors stick to the formulas all the time. Paine (2005) reasoned educational activities allow students freedom to experiment with ideas, try new things, and build on skills the students are still learning, and forensics indeed provides this kind of outlet to many students. Participation in the activity has been shown to improve students’ abilities to manage conflict (Jensen & Jensen, 2006), enhance global citizenship in terms of students’ social, economic, political, and cultural

literacy (Billings, 2011), and sharpen students' research (Furgerson, 2012) and critical thinking skills (Allen et al., 1999). Littlefield (2006) described forensics as epistemic versus either merely educational or competitive. He argues that simply *experiencing* the activity gives students new knowledge, making the activity valuable. Of course, the typical student experience includes everything from topic development and argument construction, being coached, building relationships with teammates, coaches, and members of other teams, learning how to cope with individual and team wins and failures or all the uncontrollable factors of the activity (e.g., judges' subjectivities, other competitors, time of day, etc.), and adopting the cultural language, attire, and behaviors of fellow community members (Littlefield, 2006).

Undoubtedly, forensics participants learn lots of things participating in the activity. However, learning how to do something does not translate immediately into competitive success. Many times, students can feel like they have done everything "correct" and still not break into a final round or get the opportunity to stand up in front of everyone to receive an award at the end of the tournament. Students ineffectively executing the norms to an appropriate standard or take performative risks that do not pay off may receive little public praise for the work. Since praise is a kind of currency in the activity but formal recognition limited, students can easily get discouraged when failing to receive praise and may start to question participating in the activity.

The missions of the activity noticeably filter down into how community members behave and relate to other members. Coaches of programs prioritizing either mission over the other are doing students a disservice in creating and maintaining opportunities for competitors to establish positive relationships with members of other teams. Students caring too much about the competition will focus on learning how to win, such as adapting to the many unwritten rules, rather than reaching out and talking to opponents at tournaments or elsewhere. On the other

hand, if students are focused solely on learning new skills and participating in forensics for the experience, not aligning precisely with normative expectations for performance may jeopardize the student's competitive success and amount of peer recognition. Coaches may also not travel students who take a more educational approach to the activity to tournaments as much, meaning less opportunities for cross-team exchanges to occur.

In summary, too much of an emphasis on either a competitive or educational mission in the activity leaves little room for a social one. As Kuyper (2016) put it, "When students are focused on crushing the competition, they cannot really prioritize getting to know their opponents" (p. 41). At the same time, White (2010) concluded:

Healthy team cultures include team members who willingly embrace the joy of competition. Forensics is at its core a competitive activity ... when a team loses sight of the gratification competition can provide, the health of the team culture starts to falter. (p. 160)

The missions guiding the activity play an evident role in how students and coaches alike approach the activity and perceive others within the community. The missions also tell a lot about what the community values in terms of its intended aims and goals, and students reinforce the missions all the time in interactions with others.

Structure

In structure, forensics is similar to other zero-sum competitive activities (e.g., football, basketball, track/cross country, golf, swimming, target shooting), where no two teams or individuals can achieve the same level of success in the same category at one single tournament, barring any atypical unbreakable ties. While all forensics competitors are part of a larger team affiliated with a college or university, students mostly compete individually or in pairs in the

different individual events (IEs) or debate genres. Consequently, students must prioritize both their own and the team's goals simultaneously. As students interact with members of other teams who are assumedly doing the same, the potential for a clash of objectives arises and students must manage inherent tensions on-the-spot, potentially causing for awkward interactions with the opponent. Cross-team competitor interactions may also be particularly difficult for first-year (i.e., novice) students versus more experienced varsity competitors, or if competitors are too dissimilar in status or forensics experience (e.g., a novice talking with a fourth-year varsity member).

Additionally, unlike other competitive activities where winning is based on a contestant's endurance, strength, precision, or the manipulation of some object towards a goal, forensics is a game of rhetorical skill, where competitive success is dependent upon the content of an argument and a competitor's own ideas, voice, and body to communicate that message to an audience. Students must rely on personal abilities rather than coordinated efforts of a team. Because of the amount of time, energy, and individual responsibility the activity demands from participants, forensics is a deeply personal experience to many competitors. Accordingly, students value being competitively successful in the activity because it provides validation that the hard work has been worth it and the student's advocacy matters.

Competitor Interactions

Winning in forensics does not just come with a trophy or certificate, however, but also a reputation. When winning a speaking or debate event at a typical in-person tournament, students stand up in front of the entire assembly of teams and other competitors attending the tournament to accept the award. As the finalists in each category are called by name and school to receive the accolades, the audience claps and each student moves to the side or returns to sit in the

crowd, ultimately leaving the student receiving the tournament champion title in that event standing alone, front and center. The winner's name and school are called and the audience gives a routine standing ovation applause as the champion receives the trophy from a member of the tournament staff. The same awards process occurs similarly for virtual tournaments, as competitors are often invited to turn on their cameras to be acknowledged, and off after being called so the last person visible to those watching is the student receiving first place. Given how a speaker's reputation and credibility factor into an audience's perception of the speaker and the message being presented, the very public nature of forensics awards ceremonies potentially impacts competitor-competitor relationships and fuels students' social comparisons and perceived hierarchies (e.g., Walker, 2021; Ward, 2018). Unfortunately, forensics scholarship has only scratched the surface of this multilevel topic area.

At a typical tournament, students talk to one another before, during, between, and after competition rounds, in classrooms and hallways, outside walking between unfamiliar buildings, grabbing something quick to eat in tournament common areas, anticipating final round postings to drop, or while waiting for awards to start (Davis, 2016, 2020). Many students even continue interacting with opponents outside of the tournament setting on social networking sites (SNS) like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram (Walker, 2021). However, participants in Walker's (2021) study reported that competitors make conscious decisions about how to appropriately present themselves to community members over mediated channels, showing how the impression management elements of the activity influence competitor relations even outside tournaments (Walker, 2021).

Aside from the social dynamics generated by the activity, students have varying prior social experiences with other competitors, influencing how they currently relate to members of

other teams. While some students may be unfamiliar with other participants when joining a collegiate team, many individuals enter the college circuit already having several previously established connections with other competitors. For example, students currently competing against each other in college forensics could have competed for opposing teams in high school, or participated for the same squad and are now rivals. Opposing competitors may have attended a high school speech camp together or have had a previously established relationship with another competitor before either individual ever began participating in speech and debate. Of course, the continuation of competitor-competitor relationships that started in high school all depends on if both students choose to resume forensics in college or not. As Baldwin (1995) and Planalp (1985) have suggested, past experiences with others help individuals form relationship schemas, or cognitive frames, that guide current and future interactions and perceptions of either partner and of the relationship as a whole. As students enter the college forensics circuit, interpersonal dynamics with competitors of other teams inevitably shift, potentially disrupting a student's understanding or ability to accurately make sense of an opponent's messages.

Individual Goals and Motivations

At the individual level, forensics competitors also bring personal goals and motivations into the activity when joining a collegiate team. Every larger level discussed up to this point contributes to and influences the direction of student motivations. In particular, as students are socialized into the community and respective teams, they learn the expectations of being a competitor, team member, and community participant. Students reflect community and competition standards in interactions with members of other teams.

Rybold (1996) defined motivation as “an internal drive state governing the intensity and direction of behavior” (p. 14). Using an open-ended survey to explore motivations for forensics

competitors, Rybold found that students indeed have a variety of reasons for being involved in the activity. From most to least reported, participant reasons included (a) social interaction; (b) fun/enjoyment; (c) to improve communication skills; (d) competition; (e) education/learning experience; (f) opportunities to travel; (g) scholarships; (h) building self-confidence; (i) enhancing critical thinking; (j) career preparation; (k) team camaraderie; and (l) building transcripts/resumes (Rybold, 1996). Needless to say, forensics students participate in the activity for many different reasons.

However, other research has pointed out how student motivations vary based on demographics. Rybold (1996), for example, found motivational differences between both male and female participants and between first-year and experienced (i.e., two or more years) competitors. Specifically, females reported more motivation to improve communication skills through forensics participation, whereas males reported wanting to improve communication third most frequently. Fun/enjoyment motivated most male participants, yet this goal was the top fifth motivator for females. Further, while competitors on both the two-year/community college and four-year circuits seem to have similar motivations (the top three most frequently reported responses for each demographic included fun/enjoyment, social interaction, and improving communication skills), motivations for first-year and experienced students differ. In particular, first-year competitors reported joining forensics to improve communication skills, for social interaction, fun/enjoyment, education/learning experiences, and competition. For experienced participants, top motivators included social interaction, fun/enjoyment, competition, improving communication skills, and the education/learning experience (Rybold, 1996). Additionally, through ethnographic interviews, Pelletier (2015) showed how high school participation, a desire to experience different aspects of college, enjoyment of and having success with the competitive

elements of the activity, and camaraderie with other participants motivates nontraditional students to join a collegiate forensics team.

Obviously, competitors possess many reasons for wanting to participate in forensics in college and past experiences influence the motivations. This still does not consider, however, how student motivations potentially shift once joining a collegiate team. As Croucher et al. (2006) suggested, a competitor's organizational identity and connection with the team's culture influences a student's motivation to succeed in the activity. As students work through the activity and goals change, interactions with and relations to other competitors likely do as well.

Take for example, Student A and Student B. Student A is a first-year competitor on a college debate team. Student A has high school experience, qualifying for the National Speech and Debate Association (NSDA) high school championship tournament in debate—many other competitors knew who Student A was due to the student's competitive success throughout high school. Student A is now in a rigorous political science program in college and plans to dedicate their first year to focusing more time on studying and learning how to adjust to college debate norms. Student B, a fourth-year IE competitor, did not have any high school speech experience, but wanted to join the college forensics team to try out something new and make some friends. After experiencing some competitive success at the national level as a sophomore in high school, Student B made a ton of friendships with other competitors, some of which Student B had never met before, who have approached them since then with compliments and to share fond memories of the performance. While Student B appreciated the praise, they would often talk to teammates and coaches about feeling uncomfortable in these interactions and questioned whether the other competitors approached them solely because of the success in high school, or if the other competitors would have still approached Student B to start/build a friendship without knowing

the reputation. In their junior year, Student B felt inadequate at times for not achieving the same competitive results they had the year prior. People still approached and praised Student B for their national success the previous year, but Student B felt like there was a greater expectation to meet because of this success and seemed to pull away from the activity when they felt they were not meeting it. Now that Student B is in their final year of eligibility, they feel reinvigorated by the competitive elements of the activity and are determined to beat their previous sophomore record. Student B has developed a “hold nothing back” attitude toward competition and appears particularly comfortable and confident in what they bring to the activity, in and out of rounds.

Because of Student A’s and Student B’s different trajectories in the activity, each likely have very different experiences interacting with members of opposing teams. Due to Student A’s high school experience, collegiate competitors and coaches might already be familiar with the student before entering the community, especially considering how various collegiate programs recruit new competitors at the NSDA competition in June every year. However, because Student A has dedicated the first year to learning how to debate in college, interactions with other competitors might be limited due to the student not traveling/competing as often. Consequently, opponents may not view Student A as competitively-focused as they appeared to be in high school and may therefore perceive Student A as less a threat to the opponent’s own competitive success. Student B did not have many friends in forensics when they joined their collegiate team, and being focused more on learning the ins and outs of the activity the first year likely led other competitors to perceive Student B as less competitively aggressive. The increase in interactions with competitors of other teams Student B experienced after sophomore year led Student B to question the interactional motives of other competitors—were they friends or rivals? As Student B moved into the fourth and final year of competition, the laser focus on breaking previous

records likely altered their approach to the activity, and subsequently, how Student B viewed other competitors, and vice versa. Prior forensics research has failed to address if students from opposing teams can be both friends and competitors simultaneously.

This is just a brief glance into how the activity operates, but with all of these variables in play, it is no wonder why forensics provides a laboratory for students to learn and experience various facets of interpersonal (Friedley, 1992), small group (Zeuschner, 1992), and organizational communication (Swanson, 1992). Granted, Friedley (1992) limits her argument to coach-competitor relationships, Zeuschner (1992) focuses primarily on intra-group communication within a single team, and Swanson (1992) talks mainly about the organization of forensics programs within academic departments and how these bodies relate to the college or university. As such, topics related to inter-team communication and competitor-competitor interactions, in addition to how forensics programs across the United States work together to create the larger forensics community, deserve greater scholarly attention. Students must learn how to juggle a multitude of communicative dynamics upon entering the collegiate forensics community, including elements of face/identity, group norms and boundaries, organizational networking, individual and team goals, and managing rival and social relationships. While experiencing the activity, students form and mold connections with peers from other programs and competitor perceptions of each other change. What is still unclear is how the perceptions influence the value and strength of competitors' cross-team interactions, in addition to how the relationships contribute to the larger social value of the activity.

Theoretical Framework

Relational framing theory (RFT; Dillard et al., 1996) provides an appropriate lens through which to explore how student competitors perceive and process interactions with

members of other teams. RFT has primarily been used in close relational contexts, such as to examine partners' processing of social-sexual interactions (Hall, 2016; Solomon & Williams, 1997), consent messages (Lannutti & Monahan, 2002), hurtful messages (McLaren & Pederson, 2014; McLaren et al., 2012), flirting (Frisby et al., 2011), and to gauge relational uncertainty (Knobloch et al., 2007; Knobloch & Solomon, 2005; Theiss & Knobloch, 2013). RFT also has applications in organizations (McWorthy & Henningsen, 2014), health communication (Streklova & Damiani, 2016), student-teacher interactions (Clark, 2017; Frisby et al., 2023), stepchild-stepparent interactions (Schrodt, 2016), and in groups (Henningsen et al., 2013; Henningsen et al., 2003). Scholars have yet to consider how RFT applies to competitor interactions.

RFT posits individuals process information received from an interaction partner through one of two "relational frames," either a dominance/submissiveness frame or an affiliation/disaffiliation frame (Dillard et al., 1996). These frames act as relationship schemas that contain knowledge about one's relationships to other individuals based on previous interactions (Baldwin, 1995; Planalp, 1985), where activation of the dominance/submissiveness frame tends to indicate relationships involving partner influence, control, and power tensions, and activation of the affiliation/disaffiliation frame indicates some degree of liking or interest between partners. Further, while all of the elements might be present in a relationship, frames typically compete with one another (i.e., differential-salience hypothesis; Dillard et al., 1996) as individuals direct their attention toward interactional cues that relate to a particular frame (McLaren & Solomon, 2022). Dillard et al. (1996) concluded that a partner's "involvement" (e.g., immediacy) in the interaction influences how intensely a frame is activated. Changes in involvement communicating closeness, in addition to shifts in contextual and relational factors,

can alter which frame is most salient at any given moment (Frisby et al., 2023). Frame displacement occurs when the less dominant frame overtakes the dominant one during the course of one interaction as an individual's interpretations of the communication shift (McLaren & Solomon, 2015). As McLaren and Solomon (2022) inferred, frame displacement might make it more difficult for individuals to make accurate relational judgments, yet research has yet to support this line of reasoning.

Scholars use RFT to explore how individuals make relational inferences from the various cues arising during an interaction, such as the features of an utterance, the episodic goal, the relational context between communicators, personal qualities, and societal or cultural norms (Solomon et al., 2002). RFT further recognizes communication is polysemic in nature, supporting the idea that meaning is subjective and partners can make drastically different inferences based off the same set of relational cues available. Nonverbal cues showing deeper engagement and immediacy in an interaction, such as consistent eye contact or physical touch, affect partners' perceived involvement (McLaren & Solomon, 2022). Essentially, as individuals interact, they determine the meaning of the relationship based not only off what is being said during the interaction and *how* it is being communicated, but also perceptions of the partner's goal(s) and the context surrounding the exchange.

Applying RFT to Competitor Interactions

To review, RFT posits that frames displace one another, meaning competitors should see opponents either through an affiliation frame *or* a dominance frame, but not both. However, competitors may have trouble enacting a particular frame due to the clash between the competitive forensics structure and the affiliative nature of participant interactions. For example, the inherent opposition created by the structure of the activity and students' conflicting goals

could lead students to interpret an opponent's messages through a dominance frame. Differences in participants' prior forensics experiences and familiarity with competitors on other teams could also prompt greater perceptions of social hierarchies, further contributing to students enacting a dominance frame over an affiliative one.

Arguably however, power dynamics existing between opposing forensics competitors are mainly due to students making social comparisons. For the most part, students compete against members of their own peer group, who are largely similar in age and education level. As previously discussed, forensics students often congratulate and support each other, praise each other's performances, attire, and selection of topics or literature (Davis, 2020). While individuals typically give compliments to others to establish solidarity (Herbert, 1986; Holmes, 1998; Manes, 1983; Wolfson, 1983), compliments may serve other functions. In fact, some compliments can be insults and face-threatening. For example, sarcastic compliments (e.g., "No one will *ever* compare to your debate skills") mimic the syntactic structure of normal compliments, but the speaker's vocal and nonverbal delivery of the compliment potentially communicates to the target individual that the speaker does not fully believe in what they are saying (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003). Backhanded compliments including qualifiers (e.g., "Wow! You're so good for a novice!") could also tell a target individual that the speaker does not mean for the praise to be fully genuine. Targets may perceive backhanded compliments as insults (Devito, 2012) or power moves due to the speaker drawing attention to social distinctions (Sezer et al., 2016). Speakers use deceptive compliments when they want to make a target individual feel good about the praised thing, but ultimately hope the target will return something of value back to the speaker (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003). Scholars consider deceptive compliments as a form of ingratiation, a type of persuasive strategy where a speaker attempts to

generate liking in a target individual in order to obtain benefits for themselves (Jones, 1964).

While praising a target to their face is considered direct ingratiation, speakers engage in indirect ingratiation when praising other (successful) individuals known by the target individual (Tal-Or, 2010). Ingratiation benefits individuals in contexts such as sales (e.g., Bailey, 2015; Dunyon et al., 2010), service (e.g., Medler-Liraz & Yagil, 2013; Seiter, 2007; Seiter & Dutson, 2007; Seiter & Weger, Jr., 2010), dating (e.g., Guégen et al., 2013), and career management (e.g., Applebaum & Hughes, 1998; Varma et al., 2006; Wayne & Ferris, 1990), supporting Bell and Daly's (1984) claim that "developing and maintaining affinity is an important function of communication" (p. 91).

Compliments could trigger students to make social comparisons between themselves and an opponent, especially if participants perceive a compliment to be sarcastic, backhanded, or ingratulatory, leading to enacting a dominant frame. For example, Kahalon et al. (2018) found that women performed worse on a math test after recalling an experience in which she received a compliment on her appearance than women not recalling appearance compliments. As Kahalon et al. concluded, the finding suggests certain types of compliments can perpetuate societal comparisons and inequalities. Sezer et al. (2019) further argued how backhanded compliments specifically undermine the abilities of the individual receiving the compliment by making a comparison of the individual to a negative standard (e.g., "For a debater, you are really good at poetry!"). Flatterers use backhanded compliments to communicate praise to another individual, but additionally imply the individual is part of the "unfavorable section of that distribution" (Sezer et al., 2019, p. 5). Consequently, to determine what kinds of compliments forensics competitors receive from opponents and how compliments function generally in the forensics context, the first two research questions are posed:

RQ1: What are the categories of compliments opponents give to participants?

RQ2: How do compliments function in interactions between forensics competitors?

Because of the generally supportive nature of competitor interactions, competitors could also perceive interactions with an opponent through an affiliative frame, yet the ambiguity surrounding the different kinds of praise could further contribute to noncommittal frame activation and more frequent frame displacement. As Knobloch and Solomon (1999) noted, ambiguity can turn into uncertainty and hesitations about one's own or the partner's involvement in the relationship (i.e., relational uncertainty). Knobloch and Solomon (2005) further demonstrated how relational uncertainty influences how individuals process and understand messages received from another individual. Although McLaren et al. (2014) established that a dominance-submissiveness frame is more relevant to competitive (i.e., hostile) contexts and an affiliation-disaffiliation frame is associated more with cooperative (i.e., friendly) settings, forensics is an activity with clear elements of both. Examining how forensics competitors make sense of interactions with opponents from other teams becomes essential because how students frame other competitors should determine the future trajectory of and value students place in maintaining ties with competitors across team lines. Since RFT has yet to be applied to the forensics context and it is unclear whether opponents' compliment messages influence participants' relational frame enactment, the current study explores the following questions:

RQ3: To what extent do forensics competitors enact relational frames when interacting with members of opposing teams?

RQ4: To what extent are the categories of compliments associated to participants' relational frames?

While an RFT approach provides insight on how current forensics participants view opponents and what these perceptions could mean for future interactions and relationships between the competitors, what is still needed, however, is an understanding of how participant framing impacts the state and stability of competitor relationships in the present. Relational stability in the current study most closely refers to competitor feelings of how smoothly the relationship is going, consistent with Solomon et al.'s (2016) definition of relational turbulence, which is one's perception of the degree to which a relationship is chaotic and tumultuous or smooth and predictable. According to Solomon et al. (2016), perceptions of stability or turbulence depend on an individual's engagement in an interaction and the valence (i.e., positive or negative tone) of the communication episode, pairing well with the tenets of RFT. Relational turbulence theory (RTT) posits that as people engage in an interaction, they react to the other individual's messages and behavior, but when these reactions are repeatedly unstable, or when partners experience many shifts in the engagement and/or valence of the interaction, communication between partners becomes difficult and "turbulent." Relational turbulence brought on by uncertainty about the relationship is expected to interfere with effective interpersonal functioning (Knobloch & Solomon, 2005; Solomon et al., 2016). Consequently, turbulence and stability represent polar opposites.

Forensics competitors may be aware of students from other teams before meeting them, but participants ultimately determine how they feel about and what the relationship will be like with the opponent when interacting with the other competitor. RTT suggests hesitations about an interaction or the relationship with the opponent could jeopardize the competitor's ability to relate to the opponent. Intersecting RFT and RTT, students perceiving an opponent through a dominance frame should rate the relationship with the opponent as more turbulent (i.e., less

stable), and a more affiliative frame would lead to ratings of increased stability. However, competitors who perceive an opponent through a dominance frame can still rate the relationship with the opponent as stable, particularly if the participants have normalized and accepted the contextual and interactional elements making the dominance-submissiveness frame salient as unavoidable aspects of the activity. Students framing interactions with an opponent as affiliative but rate the relationship as turbulent would potentially indicate the student has lingering questions about the opponent and is unsure about the future of the relationship. Enactment of a dominance frame and perceiving the relationship as turbulent could highlight a student's competitive drive and a more acute awareness of and focus on conflicting interpersonal goals with the opponent. Because turbulence can change the dynamics of competitor relationships and put the social advantages of the activity at risk, it is important to consider the amount of turbulence in competitor interactions in addition to how competitor framing impacts perceived levels of stability. The following final research question therefore aims to explore the connections between RFT and RTT:

RQ5: What, if any, is the relationship between competitor framing and ratings of relational turbulence with an opponent from another team?

Due to the anticipated social value of a student's participation in forensics, coaches and educators in the activity should develop, maintain, and advocate for opportunities for students to build positive social connections with members of opposing teams. Forming bonds with an opponent can clearly enhance a student's experience in the activity and lead to a more fulfilling college experience overall. Students should feel comfortable networking and intermingling with members of other teams, without team and individual reputations coming into play or causing interpersonal hesitations and relational tension.

This dissertation provides insight on how competitor interactions on the interpersonal level influence larger cultural norms of supportiveness and collegiality in the collegiate forensics community. Further, findings from this study lead to important implications for both theory and practice that are discussed later in the dissertation. For example, if the goal is to reduce social tensions between competitors of opposing teams, identifying interactional cues leading to greater activation of a dominance/submissiveness or affiliation/disaffiliation frame can allow competitors and other forensics community members to address areas of concern. Additionally, this dissertation extends RFT and RTT by applying the theories to the forensics contexts in order to determine how participants process conflicting interactional and contextual features during interactions with opponents, and in turn how this processing influences global perceptions of the stability of the relationship.

III. Method

Recruitment and Participants

Following IRB approval, current collegiate forensics students (18 years or older) were recruited to participate in the study. Primary recruitment took place at the National Forensic Association (NFA) championship tournament, held in-person at Bradley University in Peoria, IL, April 13-17, 2023. After making an announcement during both the student and coach meetings at the start of the tournament, recruitment handouts (Appendix A) were distributed to both parties, left in public areas on campus frequented by competitors, and provided to many students directly while waiting for the awards ceremony to start at the conclusion of the tournament. Coaches were asked to pass along the flyer to their students. The recruitment flyer contained information about the study's goals and a QR-code students could scan with a smartphone camera that took them to an online Qualtrics survey (Appendix B). To ensure competitors not attending the national tournament still had the chance to participate in the study, a separate recruitment call was sent over the IE-L, a community email listserv for coaches, and posted in forensics community groups on Facebook a week after the conclusion of the tournament. Participants agreed to a consent form on the first page of the survey. The survey took participants about 10 to 15 minutes to complete.

Procedures and Measures

Demographics and Forensics Experience

Participants were asked to report age, gender, race/ethnicity, year in school, transfer student status, whether they were a part-time (11 or fewer credits) or full-time (12 or more credits) student, employment status, how many years they have competed in collegiate forensics, what state they primarily compete in, and in which speech/debate events they participate (i.e.,

Individual Events, Individual Debate Formats, Partner Debate Formats). Example debate formats were provided for the latter two responses. Participant demographics are reported in the findings.

Semantic Differential Example

Dillard et al. (1996) recommended participants complete an example semantic differential question to become more familiar with the RFT scales later in the survey. Participants therefore rated the relevancy (1 = not at all relevant, 5 = very relevant) of a set of complementary word pairs (i.e., rough/smooth, loud/quiet, hard/soft, high-pitched/low-pitched) to evaluate three different types of materials: wax paper, sand paper, and velvet. For example, a relevant word association to velvet would be hard/soft. A relevant word pair to wax paper might be rough/smooth.

Recalled Scenario

Participants recalled a previous interaction with an opponent from another team outside of a tournament round in which the other competitor had given the participant a compliment. As previously discussed, while compliments are traditionally meant to establish solidarity (Wolfson & Manes, 2009), recipients may generate negative perceptions of a flatterer if the compliment is perceived as as backhanded (Sezer et al., 2019) or dishonest (Lamm, 2018), a form of social comparison (Czopp, 2008; Garcia et al., 2006) or impression management/ingratiation (Jones, 1964; Leary, 1995), or if the recipient has lower self-esteem and a poorer self-image (Herbozo et al., 2017; Kille et al., 2017; van Schie et al., 2018). Given the competitive environment of forensics, where social comparison clearly plays a role (Walker, 2021; Ward, 2018), having participants recall a compliment scenario helped instigate participant processing of conflicting cues in order to get a more accurate depiction of how participants frame the opponent.

After reporting the scenario, a subset of questions asked participants to report the demographics and context of the relationship with the opponent, including how long the participant has known the opponent (i.e., less than 6 months, 6 months to 1 year, 1-2 years, 2-3 years, 3-4 years, 4-5 years, 5+ years), how frequently the participant interacts or hangs out with the opponent outside of competitions (1 = never, 5 = almost always), and if the participant had ever competed on the same team with the opponent (yes/no).

Frame Activation and Involvement Scales

Dillard et al.'s (1996) RFT measures assessed the salience of participants' frame activation. Based on the recalled scenario, participants rated the relevancy (1 = not at all relevant, 5 = very relevant) of a set of twelve semantic differential word-pairs to the scenario. Four word-pairs were associated with the dominance/submissiveness frame (i.e., dominance/submission, persuade/concede, influence/comply, controlling/yielding), four word-pairs were associated with the affiliation/disaffiliation frame (i.e., affection/disaffection, positive regard/negative regard, liking/disliking, attraction/aversion), and four word-pairs reflected degree of involvement (i.e., engaged/withdrawn, involved/uninvolved, interested/disinterested, active/inactive). Higher scores on the framing and involvement measures indicated greater activation of the associated frame and that individuals were more engrossed in the exchange, respectively. There was no reason to use Graves and Samp's (2021) updated involvement measure. A reliability test of Dillard et al.'s (1996) scale was sufficient for the affiliation-disaffiliation frame ($\alpha = .76$) and involvement ($\alpha = .86$), but low for the dominance-submissiveness frame ($\alpha = .61$). Item-by-item analysis determined removing the third item, "influence/comply," improved the reliability of the dominance-submissiveness frame to $\alpha = .67$.

Relational Turbulence

McLaren et al.'s (2011) relational turbulence measure gauged participants' perceptions of the stability of the relationship with the opponent. Participants indicated on a six-point sliding scale where they felt the relationship fell on four dimensions anchored by opposing poles (i.e., chaotic/stable, peaceful/stressful, tumultuous/running smoothly, calm/turbulent). For the first and third dimensions, scores closer to one indicated a more disruptive relationship assessment and scores closer to six suggested more secure associations. The second and fourth dimensions were reverse coded. Initial tests of the scale reliability determined an extremely low reliability level ($\alpha = 0.54$). Item-by-item analysis determined removing any items would not produce any substantial improvement in reliability; however, the scale was still used in the analysis.

Analysis

Kranstuber et al.'s (2012) mixed-method procedures were adapted for this dissertation. Initially, using Braun and Clarke's (2006) steps for qualitative thematic analysis (TA), responses to the open-ended recalled scenario question were inductively coded and categorized into mutually exclusive bins based on prominent trends of reported interactional cues. TA is a three-step process involving familiarization with the data, inductively coding the data and developing categories, then writing the final report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Qualitative responses in the first data set ($n = 53$, 2,725 words) were combed through manually multiple times, looking for instances within responses that could produce potentially relevant themes. Tags were generated for all participant responses on two levels. First, responses were labeled as to what the opponent directed their compliment toward. Most participants indicated only being complimented on one particular thing by the opponent. However, for responses where participants indicated the opponent complimented them on multiple things, either the first compliment the participant mentioned was used as the tag for that specific response, or the rest of the response was

examined for context clues to determine the most appropriate compliment tag to label the response.

Second, tags (i.e., codes) were created based on various qualities of participants' reported dialogue with the opponent, such as the participant's reported emotions and specific reactions to the compliment message or to the interaction as a whole, qualities of the interaction if provided (e.g., length, location, whether others were involved), and any interaction outcomes that were either mentioned or implied (e.g., reciprocated gesture, extended conversation, continued relationship, social comparison). Descriptions of each unique tag were created and similar tags were combined to create more cohesive categories. For example, the tags "extended conversation" and "reciprocated" were eventually labeled just as "extended conversation" because participants who mentioned they had a longer conversation with the opponent most of the time also reported complimenting the opponent back during that longer interaction. Coding data through this dual-level process allowed for more nuanced details to emerge within responses that were tagged similarly, leading to more substantial compliment categories and more meaningful themes. This same procedure was used on the second set of qualitative responses ($n = 11,926$ words), but no new findings emerged, implying data saturation. In total, the qualitative data equated to 64 total responses of 3,651 words. To increase validity of the findings, a trusted colleague was given a copy of the qualitative responses, descriptions of the compliment categories, and asked to assign a label to each of the 64 responses that corresponds to one of the five compliment categories (i.e., S-speech, PERF-performance, A-appearance, P-personal, U-unassigned). Cohen's kappa revealed strong intercoder agreement ($\kappa = 0.82$). Because tags repeated across compliment categories, grouping responses by any of the interactional cues identified on the second level did not make sense for the quantitative portion of the study.

Consequently, the five compliment focus categories were used in the quantitative analyses.

Before the quantitative analyses could be conducted, some issues with the data file needed to be fixed. Most notably, participants appeared to skip a large portion of the scaled items for relational framing, involvement, and turbulence. Luengo (2011) explained how missing data can lead to project inefficiency, difficulties analyzing the data, and bias in results. Kaiser (2014) outlined various strategies for handling missing data, such as reducing the data set, replacing the missing values with the mean or median for the given attribute, or using more advanced predictive modeling (e.g., neural networks), for example. The method chosen for the current study was to replace the missing values with the mean of the particular scale (Kaiser, 2014), resulting in 61.2% of the scores replaced for the affiliation-disaffiliation subscale, 75.2% of scores replaced for the dominance-submissiveness measure, 61.4% of the involvement scores, and 64.7% of the turbulence data was replaced. Correlational analyses and a series of linear regressions tested associations between participant framing, involvement, turbulence, and the compliment categories derived from the qualitative portion of the analysis.

IV. Results

The following chapter provides the results of the analytical procedures described previously, first by revealing the thematic trends that emerged in participants' qualitative responses, then outlining the results of the quantitative analysis of participant scores on the RFT and RTT scales. To begin, however, general information about participants' reported demographics and forensics experiences is given to help contextualize the findings.

Participants ($N = 121$) were current intercollegiate forensics competitors from across the United States (first data set $n = 99$, second data set $n = 22$). Participants ranged in age from 18 to 23 years ($M = 19.99$, $SD = 1.21$). The participant pool almost evenly split between women (43%, $n = 52$) and men (38%, $n = 46$), but also included nonbinary (13.2%, $n = 16$), gender nonconforming (4.1%, $n = 5$), and gender fluid (.8%, $n = 1$) competitors. One student (.8%) did not report gender. Participants were mostly White/Caucasian (78.5%, $n = 95$), with Black/African American (7.4%, $n = 9$), Hispanic/Latino (5%, $n = 6$), Middle Eastern/Arab (2.5%, $n = 3$), and Asian (2.5%, $n = 3$) competitors making up the rest of the participant pool. Four participants (3.3%) reported identifying with two or more races/ethnicities, one competitor (.8%) identified with a race/ethnicity that was not listed but did not report a specific race/ethnicity, and one competitor (.8%) did not report their race/ethnicity. Most students (31.4%, $n = 38$) reported being sophomores in college, 29.8% ($n = 36$) were freshmen, 21.5% ($n = 26$) were junior, 15.7% ($n = 19$) were seniors, and 1.7% ($n = 2$) were in their fifth year. Mostly all of the participants (99.2%, $n = 120$) were full-time students, and only nine participants (7.4%) were transfers.

Allen et al. (2004) surveyed the diversity of intercollegiate forensics in the United States, finding women and minority (i.e., ethnically diverse) students represented approximately 50%

and 25% of participants, respectively. Similarly, participant gender in the current study was relatively evenly split between women and men. Whereas Allen et al. (2004) reported two genders, the diversity of participants in the current study suggests future forensics scholarship should measure and report a variety of participant genders more frequently in order to more accurately represent the diversity of students in the activity, rather than maintaining binary operationalizations. Additionally, minority students represented approximately 21.5% of participants in the current study, similar to but lower than Allen et al.'s (2004) finding. Overall, based on numbers alone, White participants appear to represent the majority of collegiate forensics competitors, but competitors vary in gender.

Participants' forensics experiences varied. Most participants (46.3%, $n = 56$) reported competing in college for only one year, while 23.1% ($n = 28$) reported competing for two years, with 14.9% ($n = 18$) competing for three years, and 15.7% ($n = 19$) in their fourth year of eligibility. While most participants (57.9%, $n = 70$) reported competing exclusively in IEs, 17.4% ($n = 21$) reported competing in both IEs and individual debate formats, 16.5% ($n = 20$) competed exclusively in individual debate formats, 2.5% ($n = 3$) of participants competed in both individual and partner debate formats and the same amount in both IE and all formats of debate, and 1.7% ($n = 2$) competed exclusively in partner debate formats and in both IEs and partner debate formats, respectively. Participants from twenty-one states were represented in the data, with the majority of participants coming from Missouri (16.5%, $n = 20$). Other participants were from Indiana (11.6%, $n = 14$), Illinois (10.7%, $n = 13$), Nebraska (7.4%, $n = 9$), 5.8% ($n = 7$) each from Kansas and New York, Kentucky (5%, $n = 6$), Alabama, Michigan, and Ohio were each represented by 4.1% ($n = 5$) of participants, 3.3% ($n = 4$) each from California, Wisconsin, and Wyoming, Minnesota (2.5%, $n = 3$), 1.7% ($n = 2$) each from Pennsylvania, Georgia, Nevada,

Oregon, and Texas, and Arizona and West Virginia were each represented by .8% ($n = 1$) of participants. Three participants (2.5%) did not report the state they competed in or noted they were uncomfortable doing so.

Of the 121 total participants, 52.9% ($n = 64$) provided responses to the open-ended recall question in the survey. These participants ranged in age from 18 to 23 years old ($M = 20.03$, $SD = 1.28$), and were comprised of 43.8% men ($n = 28$), 42.2% women ($n = 27$), 10.9% nonbinary ($n = 7$), and 3.1% genderqueer/gender nonconforming ($n = 2$). This subset of participants was mostly White/Caucasian (79.7%, $n = 51$), but also included 6.3% Black/African American ($n = 4$), 4.7% students ($n = 3$) who identified with two or more races, and 3.1% ($n = 2$) each for Asian, Hispanic/Latino, and Middle Eastern/Arab students. Mostly freshmen (32.8%, $n = 21$) reported a scenario with an opponent, 28.1% ($n = 18$) were sophomores, 18.8% ($n = 12$) were juniors, 17.2% ($n = 11$) were seniors, and 3.1% ($n = 2$) of students were in the fifth year of an undergraduate program. The majority (96.9%, $n = 62$) of these participants were not transfer students and were full-time (98.4%, $n = 63$). Reflecting the forensics experience of the full data set, most participants who reported a scenario indicated competing for one year (53.1%, $n = 34$), two years (15.6%, $n = 10$), three years (12.5%, $n = 8$), or for all four years (18.8%, $n = 12$). Except for Wisconsin and Arizona, all states represented in the larger data set were represented in this subset. The majority of participants in this subset competed only in IE (54.7%, $n = 35$), with 20.3% ($n = 13$) competing only in individual debate formats, 15.6% ($n = 10$) competing in both IE and individual debate formats, 3.1% ($n = 2$) competing exclusively in either individual and partner debates or IE and partner debate formats, and 1.6% ($n = 1$) competing in either partner debate formats only, or both IE and all formats of debate.

Participants ($N = 64$) expressed uncertainty about where the opponents who approached

them were from. Reported opponent demographics are largely speculative given the small number of participants responding to the questions in the survey in some cases. Opponents ranged in age from 18-23 years ($M = 20.53$, $SD = 1.23$); 22 participants (34.4%) did not know the opponent's age. In regards to gender, opponents were mostly men (40.6%, $n = 26$), but also included women (37.5%, $n = 24$), genderqueer/gender nonconforming (6.3%, $n = 4$), and nonbinary competitors (4.7%, $n = 3$); 30 participants (46.9%) did not report the opponent's gender. The racial breakdown of the opponents was 51.6% ($n = 33$) White/Caucasian, 15.6% ($n = 10$) Black/African American, 7.8% ($n = 5$) two or more races, 6.3% ($n = 4$) Hispanic/Latino, 3.1% ($n = 2$) Asian, 1.6% ($n = 1$) Middle Eastern/Arab, and 1.6% ($n = 1$) Indian; four participants (6.3%) left the opponent's race/ethnicity unanswered. Opponents were mostly sophomores (23.4%, $n = 15$), but also included 21.9% ($n = 14$) seniors, 10.9% ($n = 7$) juniors, 6.3% ($n = 4$) freshmen, and 3.1% ($n = 2$) students in their fifth year; 22 participants (34.4%) did not report the opponent's year in school. Opponents represented 13 different states, primarily coming from Kentucky (15.6%, $n = 10$), Michigan (6.3%, $n = 4$), Illinois (4.7%, $n = 3$), and Texas (4.7%, $n = 3$). Participants reported other opponents came from California, Kansas, Minnesota, Nebraska, and Virginia (each 3.1%, $n = 2$), as well as from Tennessee, New York, Missouri, and Alabama (each 1.6%, $n = 1$); 46.9% ($n = 30$) of participants did not know where the opponent was from.

Participants expressed more certainty about the history with the opponent, noted by the higher response rates on the two relational context questions (i.e., amount of time having known the opponent and whether the participant and opponent had ever competed on the same team). Most participants (64.1%, $n = 41$) reported knowing the opponent for less than six months, whereas 12.5% ($n = 8$) knew the opponent for six months to one year, 7.8% ($n = 5$) knew the

opponent for one to two years, 4.7% ($n = 3$) knew the opponent for two to three years, and another 4.7% ($n = 3$) knew the opponent for three to four years. The majority of participants (71.9%, $n = 46$) reported never having interacted or hung out with the opponent, whereas 17.2% ($n = 11$) of participants reported interacting with the opponent seldomly, 6.3% ($n = 4$) interacted with the opponent sometimes outside of competition, and 3.1% ($n = 2$) hung out with opponent often. Nearly all of the participants who reported a scenario (98.4%, $n = 63$) reported never having competed on the same team as the opponent.

To summarize the above demographics, participants were primarily freshmen/first-year IE competitors, but represented a wide range of competitive regions from across the United States. The majority of participants being from the Midwest was likely due to in-person data collection taking place at a national tournament in the Midwest. Participants reported opponents also came from a variety of states, but were mainly unfamiliar with who the opponents were and had known the opponent for a very short amount of time, if at all. In reporting the qualitative findings in the following section, participant names were replaced with pseudonyms and any opponent names or schools/teams participants mentioned in responses were replaced with “named opponent” or “named school,” respectively. Details regarding the participant’s reported amount of time in forensics and year in school are represented by a coded notation such as “third-year/senior,” indicating the participant has competed for three years and was a senior at the time of completing the survey, for example. Other than in the above discussion of participants’ and opponents’ forensics experiences, the specific states participants and opponents were from were not mentioned in the reporting of the findings to decrease the risk of contributing to social biases in the community.

Qualitative Findings

Qualitative TA was used to answer the first and second research questions asking what categories of compliments opponents give to participants and how these compliments function in competitor interactions, respectively. The inductive coding process created five mutually exclusive categories into which responses could be grouped and counted, including (a) speech compliments, (b) compliments on performance, (c) compliments on appearance, (d) personal compliments, and (e) unassigned compliments. Table 1 provides exemplars and frequencies for each category.

Table 1. Compliment Categories

Category	Example	<i>N</i>	%
Speech	After a prose round, one of the other competitors came up to me and complimented the ending of my piece. She said she was pleasantly surprised by the way it had been cut, and enjoyed the emotional impact of the piece's ending.	29	43.3
Performance	It was after leaving the room and walking back to where lunch was being served. One of the competitors who had been in the room complimented my voice and blocking.	16	25
Appearance	Walking back to my school's team room at PKD, I talked to another female presenting competitor. We each complimented each other on our suits, specifically the color and style. I felt very happy afterwards. The competitor was extremely kind.	11	17.2
Personal	A debater complimented me on my candidacy for the LD rep at a food court. My immediate thoughts were who was the person which I figured out through more interaction.	4	6.3
Unassigned	I wouldn't say that I have been directly complimented but I have had very pleasant conversations with debaters/judges outside of rounds that have helped me learn.	4	6.3

Before getting into the descriptions and breakdown of the themes, a few notes can be made about some outlier experiences participants reported in the survey. These findings were not necessarily recurrences in the data that could produce a full theme, but rather elements of the data set that reflect other potentially meaningful or interesting qualities of competitor interactions. There were four of these outlier findings, regarding (a) the number of responses

from debaters, (b) interactions at national tournaments, (c) opponent promises, and (d) negative participant reactions.

Responses from Debaters

Initially, the demographic and reported forensics experience of competitors completing the survey is consistent with the current forensics population, and more specifically, the population of students who attended the 2023 NFA national tournament where data collection primarily took place, as eleven IEs are offered at the tournament and only one format of debate, LD. In fact, only 11 (17.5%) of the 63 total responses specifically included terms related to debate practices or debate tournaments, such as “cross,” “rebuttal,” “fall finale,” “Grand Prix,” “share files,” “cards,” or “we had the decision.” However, while 42.1% ($n = 51$) of participants indicated having participated in a format of debate, only 11 participants specifically mentioned anything about debate in their recalled interaction. Most participants reported on interactions with fellow IE competitors.

Responses that mentioned interactions with a debate opponent were fairly similar to interactions reported between IE competitors in terms of the variety of compliment messages and coded interactional cues. However, one noticeable element of the debate interactions is that participants consistently invoked concepts of role models and model-like behavior. For example, Matt, a first-year/freshman competitor, reported that, “At the Franklin R. Shirley Classic at Wake Forest, a debater from [named school] told me the 1AR was super technical and he wished that he could give 1ARs like it.” A second-year/sophomore, Lyle, recalled the following:

The interaction took place at Fall Finale 2022, I had a brutal pull up for the 6th round and felt awful about everything I had done and this person took the time out of their day after the round to talk to me and tell me what they had thought I did well. This pretty much

immediately put me on the fan train of this person and showed me what a debater should look like as far as character and everything else.

These responses reflect the idea that debate competitors may perceive one another as someone to look up to or to model one's own behavior after both in and out of rounds. Debaters appear to share mutual understandings of how competitors should act during debate competitions, as Patrick (third-year/junior), similarly noted:

A competitor and I immediately outside of the round after competition walked together and he complimented me on 1) my tie and 2) how I engage with debate. Particularly, he complimented how nice, relaxed, and approachable I am in round. My immediate thoughts were to reciprocate and express similar sentiments to him as I felt as if we shared a mutual understanding of what we wanted out of the round as competitors. Since this round, this competitor and I frequently chat/hand out at tournaments whenever we see each other and have developed a friendship.

Although interactions between debaters were less common in the data, the ones that were provided imply participants feel deeper connections with debate opponents in ways that allow them to perceive the opponent as more of a role model or "ideal" debater that other competitors should emulate.

Interactions at National Tournaments

Not surprisingly, many participants reported interactions that took place at a national tournament, such as NFA, Pi Kappa Delta (PKD), the American Forensic Association National Speech Tournament (AFA-NST), or Phi Rho Pi (PRP), the national tournament for two-year/community college competitors. It is likely many students reported on interactions they experienced at NFA 2023, as competitor Lucas (second-year/sophomore), suggests in their

statement, “After one of the duo rounds here at nationals I got a compliment for being vulnerable from a fellow competitor.” Another first-year/freshman, Avery, stated:

While I was filling this survey out, a competitor complimented my hair. My hair was in two pretty messy buns, and I had slept in it, so I was pretty self conscious about it. It was very sweet, and made me feel better about my general appearance.

Both of these examples indicate participants likely reported on interactions that occurred more recently and were therefore easier to recall. Consequently, it is logical to assume that many reported interactions potentially occurred at NFA 2023 due to the close proximity of participants to opponents and the interactions fresh in participants’ minds when asked to recall and report. However, only responses specifically mentioning NFA 2023, “here,” “this tournament” or similar terms and phrases could be identified as occurring specifically at NFA 2023.

Participants mentioned other national tournaments in their responses as well. Caleb (first-year/freshman) reported that, “As I was walking away from a building at PKD, I was complimented by a competitor. She said ‘I loved your ADS.’ I responded with ‘thanks so much.’” Reagan (first-year/sophomore) was encouraged by an opponent at the AFA-NST:

Someone came up to me at the AFA nationals to compliment me about my piece that got to finals at the Pi Kappa Delta nationals. They approached me while talking with my coach and told me how powerful my piece was and that they were sad that it did not break into quarter finals at AFA. They told me to continue telling my story and never stop being me.

Tyler (first-year/freshman) also talked of a time an opponent approached them at PRP:

After my prose semifinals round at Phi Rho Pi, a fellow competitor pulled me aside and said how much he absolutely loved my piece, as well as the necktie I was wearing. He

made it a point to show how invested he was in the story, telling me that he was practically bawling by the end.

Nationals is clearly a time when teams come together from across the nation, many of which do not see each other until the spring, to compete at often week-long tournaments. These competitions give students many chances to interact with and provide support and encouragement to competitors from other teams. Based on the examples above, competitors' national performances evidently impact their opponents on meaningful levels, particularly to the point opponents could become emotional or develop attachments to the competitor and their success.

Opponent Promises

A couple of participants recalled how an opponent complimented them by suggesting they would break into an elimination round/outround or finals at a tournament. For example, Jasmine (first-year/freshman) said that, "I was waiting online for lunch talking to a teammate about how I hoped my persuasive speech would break to quarterfinals and another competitor overheard me and said I'd definitely make it. She said my speech was absolutely amazing!" Sydney (second-year/sophomore) also reported that, "I was at a tournament and another competitor told me I was really good and that they liked my speech. They also said that I would definitely get to finals."

While opponents of course do not know these things are certain, making these "promises" to competitors appears to hold significance for participants. Breaking into finals and other outrounds (e.g., quarterfinals, semifinals) at larger tournaments, especially national tournaments, is a coveted prize for competitors, as there are only a limited number of students who make the elimination rounds at every tournament and experience those higher levels of the competition.

Regardless, these compliments serve as a way to boost competitors' confidence and let them know they are doing well and are worthy of that recognition.

Negative Reactions

Overwhelmingly, participants' qualitative responses suggested competitors have positive reactions to compliments from opponents, and these are developed further down in the findings as a substantial theme. Only four of the 64 total responses expressed a mildly negative reaction to the opponent's compliment, three of which were directed towards the competitor's appearance and one focused on a participant's performance. For example, Jack (second-year/sophomore) explained that, "One person asked if I power lifted. I said yes. It was fine but I'm not a huge fan of talking about how people look." As Taylor (fourth-year/senior) remembered, "[Named opponent] complimented my socks. It made me feel bad." The opponent in this instance had a record of championship titles and outround success from high school and collegiate forensics, placing among the top speakers at such tournaments like PKD, ASC, and NFA (Speechwire, n.d.; WKU Forensics [Western Kentucky University], 2023). Not many participants recalled an opponent's full first and last name in their response, so doing so could mean this student (and other participants who named an opponent) thought their interaction and/or the opponent were memorable. The participant's familiarity with the opponent could be the reason they did not react well to the compliment. However, this participant indicated knowing the opponent for three to four years and sometimes hang out with them outside of competition, so the negative feelings arising from this particular interaction might not have been enough to sway the participant from a previously established, favorable perception of the opponent. From these interactions, it appears participants do not appreciate certain compliments about their appearance.

In the previous response, we only assumed that unmentioned qualities about the opponent

led to the participant's reaction of feeling sad, as the only thing the participant does mention is the opponent's name. Participants making social comparisons to other opponents' and team records has more explicitly positive reactions to the interactions, as will be discussed later in the findings. However, Amy, a third-year/junior, was the only student in the data to report a negative reaction to the opponent and specifically cites the opponent's previous behavior and their team's reputation as the reason for her response:

The competitor said that I was one of the best competitors on the circuit and that I am too humble. It took place right after a debate round before we had the decision. I felt immediately uncomfortable because I couldn't tell if the competitor was being genuine or not. This competitor had been known for "sucking up" to a lot of people and the school they had come from was rumored to teach their students to do this. This competitor and I had had a lot of intense rounds before.

Despite reporting knowing the opponent for two to three years, Amy was still uncertain about the sincerity of the compliment because of the opponent's reputation and the training philosophy she believed the opponent's team to teach its students. The ambiguity as to where this participant has learned this information implies rumors about this particular opponent and that team exist. She appears to think others have experienced the opponent's ingratiating behavior as well, leading to her suspicions about the interaction. Her perceptions and the past experiences between her and the opponent clearly alter how Amy makes sense of the current interaction.

Thematic Findings

The following themes developed not only in response to the larger quantity of participant responses that reflected outcomes that trended toward each theme respectively, but also because of the richness of these responses that provided nuance to each theme. Two distinct themes

emerged from the data.

Validated, Supported, and Affirmed. As previously mentioned, participants overwhelmingly reported having positive interactions with opponents. Participants used words like “happy,” “validated,” “affirming,” “appreciative,” and “gratitude,” for example, to describe immediate reactions and feelings toward the opponent and/or the compliments.

Initially, opponent compliments made participants feel validated and like their work on their speech/debate was worth it. Mike (first-year/junior), for example, said, “I recently had someone exit a DI round and tell me it was a breath of fresh air to have a DI with a happy ending. It made me feel validated, like people listened and appreciated my work.” Similarly, Omar (fourth-year/senior) recalled that “A competitor told me immediately after we were released from a round that they really appreciated that I presented the topic I did and how powerful of a speaker I was. I was taken aback and really appreciative.” For Aria (second-year/sophomore), her interaction with the opponent lessened the competitive tension she was feeling. As she stated:

They complimented me on my speech, praising the content, delivery, and overall presentation. They also admired my sharp suit, mentioning how it added to my confident presence on stage. I was pleasantly surprised by the compliment, as speech events can often be intense and competitive. My immediate thoughts were a mix of gratitude and respect for the fellow participant’s sportsmanship. It was a refreshing reminder that even in a competitive environment, there can be moments of camaraderie and mutual respect among participants. This interaction left me with a positive perspective on the competition and a newfound respect for the fellow contestant who offered the compliment.

The positive reactions highlight how, if anything, social interactions between competitors disrupt the competitive nature of the activity and provide a moment of appreciation between opponents. Compliments come as a surprise for some competitors, but a good surprise nonetheless that helps them feel more confident about in-round performances.

Participants also appear to believe opponents' compliments are genuine, as Derrick (fourth-year/senior) highlighted:

After the debate round had finished, my opponent came up to me in the hallway outside of the classroom and started by complimenting my shoes but continued to compliment my suit/tie overall. My immediate reaction was very grateful and appreciative of the kind words, he seemed genuine in his effort and not "fake nice."

Similar to what Amy noted in her response, Derrick also alluded to some quality of disingenuity competitors think some opponents might have or show at times. The opponent in his interaction apparently did not have this trait and convinced Derrick about the honesty of the assessment of his appearance. Derrick reported knowing this opponent for one to two years prior to this interaction and may have therefore been familiar with the other student and less inclined to perceive the remark as "fake." In fact, even when an opponent's messages could have been face-threatening, like when Becca (third-year/junior) received a backhanded compliment, she still reported generally having a positive reaction: "They told me that I was really good even though I was a novice debater and I should continue practicing. Very encouraging." However, it is somewhat unclear in the interactions what cues participants use to determine whether an opponent is genuinely friendly or not. Fortunately, Jackie's (third-year/junior) experience illuminated some details:

Well after my ADS final at nationals for PKD, I had several people compliment me after

the round. It honestly made me feel really good and validated, especially when you can see how genuine they were. I think it was the most real when they knew my name and it wasn't as competitive or they weren't even in the round.

Calling her by her name was noticeably meaningful for Jackie, and clearly created a sense that the individuals who were approaching her did so on their own accord and not due to any competitive motivation. Having an opponent mention his name was also important for first-year/junior competitor, Ricky. As he stated:

After an ADS Octafinal at NFA this past year, I had the opportunity to catch [named opponent], who, before I could even introduce myself, said, "Oh my god, you're Ricky! I've heard so much about you! It's so nice to meet you! You're really good!" For context, this was my first year in Forensics as a true walk-on ... I was still growing accustomed to Forensics and finding my way into the community, and to hear someone I looked up to say that was heartwarming. It made me feel included and it was beautiful to see that I was able to positively impact the circuit on some level even in my first year.

Participants, no matter the level of forensics experience, feel good when an opponent has taken the time to learn and use their name in interactions with them—creating a personal feeling to the interaction specific to that competitor.

Compliments from and interactions with opponents apparently impacted participants deeply, as the above positive reactions all show. On top of feeling validated as a competitor by an opponent, participants also reported feeling validated and affirmed as a person. As Connor (first-year/sophomore) stated plainly, "I felt happy to be complimented. And seen as a person." Alex, another first-year/sophomore competitor, expressed a positive reaction to an opponent's in-round performance:

As a masculine non-binary competitor who did a poetry piece about being transgender, the competitor who complimented me first interacted with me by “flirting” with me in their poetry piece, where they called me a called white boy, which was affirming. After the round, they complimented my piece and after running into them at several other rounds, they asked about my rounds and continued to be very friendly.

Alex interpreted the opponent’s acknowledgement of them during the performance as something more than just a friendly gesture, but a sign of flirting, which was further validated for them by the continued interactions throughout the tournament.

Overall, participants report positive, favorable interactions with opponents. The interactions help participants feel part of the community, encouraged when they are feeling down or stressed out by the competition, supported and listened to, and generally valued by their peers.

Supporterships and Disclosures. The second theme articulates how participant interactions appear to unfold through a two-step process whereby competitors develop a kind of “supportership” dynamic through reciprocated messages and frequent interactions. This dynamic, as it appears, leads opponents to disclose some kind of information to the participant, or vice versa, showing how competitors cultivate trust and fellowship with peers. The responses in this theme provide a deeper picture of how supporterships are created and affect competitor interactions.

Participants easily reciprocate simple messages back to opponents. For example, Sabrina (first-year/sophomore) described how “After a particular intense round, they stopped me and told me that my rebuttal was very good. I said thank you and told them they were an amazing speaker.” Drew (first-year/freshman) also mentioned that “After my semifinal round at PKD, another competitor approached me and told me they really loved my piece. I then told them the

same and we exchanged names and began talking about inspiration for each of our speeches.”

When competitors moved beyond complimenting each other, conversations seemed to turn toward other topics. Quinn (first-year/freshman) also represented this experience:

A competitor came up to me as I was filling my water bottle at Pi Kappa Delta 2023 and complimented my tie it ended up turning into a 20 minute conversation about best colors for suits as well as what careers we intend to go into.

Extended conversations often turned into frequent interactions with competitors, as Garrett (first-year/sophomore) offered:

In one of my rounds, a speech required audience participation. I was the only audience member to participate. Afterwards, the speaker came up to me and thanked me for participating and then we have been greeting each other, complimenting each other, and checking up on each other throughout tournaments.

Garrett’s in-round behavior of participating in the opponent’s speech provided the grounds for a “supportership” to form between him and the opponent, leading to frequent check-ins with the opponent at other competitions. Supporterships, unlike friendships, appear to exist between opponents who have not quite met the level of friends, but still provide support and encouragement to each other regularly in competition. A supportership is identified when one or both parties have the desire to interact with the other opponent again, but maintain competitive boundaries. Many participants reported these kinds of interactions. Claire (first-year/freshman), for example, explained how she gained a follower from her interaction with a student from another team:

After my final round of Persuasion, a competitor from [named team] came up and asked to scan my QR code. Afterwards we spoke for a few minutes about a Poetry round we

had been in together and then exchanged social medias. He told me that he would love to do a persuasion to be able to just see me give my speech again.

This interaction was apparently not the first time Claire had seen this opponent at a tournament, but the fact that the opponent was willing to put together a whole other speech in order to see hers again speaks toward the kind of supportership that was created between them, as putting up a fully memorized, ten-minute speech requires a lot of time and energy. Of course, the opponent could have meant they would get up a persuasion only figuratively, but this would have also communicated to the participant that the opponent wanted to be in the same event as the competitor in order to have more chances to interact with them. People usually like others whom they want to spend more time with and see more often, and many participants felt opponents communicated this desire.

One of the quickest ways participants developed supporterships was by exchanging social medias with an opponent. As Cindy (second-year/junior) shared:

At nationals someone I competed in semis with at a previous tournament approached me and told me they were rooting for me to break into elims ... They then offered to connect on social media and also had asked if they wanted to share files.

A fourth-year/senior, Killian, talked about how he and the opponent were already following each other on social media before the interaction:

My partner also does forensics and the two of us had recently celebrated a milestone in our relationship, posting about it on our social media. At the next tournament, a competitor who follows both of us came up [to] me and congratulated me. I felt pretty good about this as said competitor was always nice to me at tournaments, even before I started doing well.

Many participants suggested they either had a previously established connection with the opponent on social media prior to the interaction they reported, or they exchanged social media handles at some point while developing a closer relationship with the opponent. Interacting with opponents both in-person and via digital spaces could reflect the changing modality of the activity over the last few years from in-person, to virtual, to hybrid competition. Students who have connected with each other outside of tournament settings seem to more frequently interact with each other when at tournaments and provide more routine encouragement.

Some opponents appear to have used their compliment as a way to disclose something else to the participant. Nile (fourth-year/senior) recalled a memorable moment with an opponent they had only known for less than six months:

Last year at the Pi Kappa Delta National Tournament, a competitor from [named team] came up to me in between rounds and told me that my CA from the year before was life-changing for her and gave her the confidence to come out as trans publicly. She told me that she saw my CA in an out round and followed me to each out round after that all the way to the final just to hear it again. I don't know her name and I don't think I've ever seen her perform, but it made me realize just how much of an impact our speeches can have on a person. I think she apologized for telling me a year later but I told her she had nothing to apologize for. It's not one of the main reasons I work so hard on speech.

Other participants connected with an opponent disclosing a similar experience relating to the participant's speech. First-year/freshman, Amani, recalled talking to an opponent about their shared employment experiences:

After my POI round, one of my competitors came up to me to tell me how grateful they were that I chose my topic. They explained that they too worked in health care during

Covid and felt not many people understood the emotional duress we felt during that time.

Charlie (fourth-year/senior) also recalled connecting with an opponent on her DI topic:

At AFA 2023 I performed my DI in my last set of prelims to about ten people in a classroom. After the round ended we all went outside to go to our next rounds but [named competitor] stopped me afterwards and told me that my DI really spoke to her. I did a DI about the impact of good peer mentorship in Forensics. She explained that her team had just done their goodbyes with their underclassmen. We were both graduating seniors so I felt like we had a special understanding of peer mentorship. It meant a lot to me that she understood what I wanted to do with my piece.

Participants and opponents who share in some common experience immediately seem to latch onto one another. Undoubtedly, speeches impact competitors on many levels, but this impact is unknown until one competitor approaches another and makes that first contact. As seen in Nile's response above, certain topics can also lead opponents to reveal important parts of their identity, suggesting competitor performances have immense power to create spaces for other opponents to feel comfortable and safe enough to disclose such information. These interactions implied that receiving compliments from opponents was really a win-win situation for many participants, as they could feel good about the compliment and the opponent was able to express gratitude to the participant for touching on a subject for which they had personal stake.

For one particular participant, Marin (third-year/junior), the opponent who approached her seemed to take the reciprocated compliment as an invitation to disclose information about the opponent's team and share their feelings about other competitors:

Immediately after leaving a prose round, a competitor whom I have seen before and briefly spoken to but do not know very well personally stopped me to tell me that she

really enjoyed my performance. I immediately reciprocated the compliment, and it felt as though we were “rekindling” an old friendship with someone we hadn’t seen in awhile, even though I wouldn’t consider ourselves very close friends. Later, the same competitor in a different interaction let me in on information pertaining to their team environment, describing certain drama amongst their team members, and then in a final interaction later in the tournament making a comment about disliking another competitor’s speech in their round. It felt like the interactions got progressively more revealing—starting with an initial compliment exchange. I would not necessarily consider ourselves good friends by any means, even after being let in on some of this competitor’s more personal thoughts, though I don’t think they meant malice by the comments—I think they were trying to be my friend.

As Marin clarifies, she did not particularly feel a friendship forming with this opponent, but still felt as though the opponent was attempting to be friendly by opening up to her with insider information about their team. Marin reported only knowing this opponent for six months to a year.

To summarize the theme, when participants reciprocated compliments and supportive messages to each other, they sometimes extended the conversation past the friendly remarks into a space that allowed them to open up with one another, eventually leading them to find something they share in common, whether that be some characteristic or experience. Once competitors found this mutual ground, competitors develop supporterships with their opponents, and may exchange social medias to keep connected with them over various modalities. After finding mutual ground, competitors start to reveal information that was previously unknown to the other individual, or otherwise become increasingly comfortable sharing information more

openly with one another. While the majority of participants who developed these kinds of connections with their opponents took these disclosures as an act of solidarity, there were instances where a disclosure did not produce the same effect.

Summary of Qualitative Findings

Participants reported a variety of interactions with opponents from other teams, primarily expressing positive reactions to the conversations and to the opponent. To answer the first research question, opponents appear to give a variety of compliments to participants. Participant responses were organized by the focus of the compliment message and five categories of compliments were created: (a) speech compliments, (b) performance compliments, (c) appearance compliments, (d) personal compliments, and (e) unassigned compliments. The second research question asked how compliments function in competitor interactions. Without knowing much about the opponent or who they were, participants reported feeling appreciative for and encouraged by the opponent's compliment(s). Participants articulated how meaningful the compliments were, reciprocated friendly messages back to the opponents, and in many cases developed supporterships with other competitors by finding mutual experiences, sharing common attitudes about the activity or a particular event, and uncovering shared interests. Consequently, compliments appear to establish solidarity between opponents and create a space for open and reciprocal communication.

Quantitative Results

RQ3 asked to what extent forensics competitors enacted relational frames when interacting with members of opposing teams. Table 2 provides the descriptive statistics and bivariate Pearson correlations of both the dominance-submissiveness and affiliation-disaffiliation frames, as well as for involvement.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Relational Framing, Involvement, and Turbulence

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1. Dominance-Submissiveness	2.52	.42	—			
2. Affiliation-Disaffiliation	3.46	.61	-0.19*	—		
3. Involvement	3.39	.71	-0.24**	.56**	—	
4. Turbulence	4.58	.52	-0.46**	.09	.16	—

*. Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

The dominance-submissiveness frame had a significant negative relationship with the affiliation-disaffiliation frame ($r = -0.19$), demonstrating the more participants framed the interaction with the opponent towards one direction (i.e., either affiliation or dominance), the less the participant perceived the opponent through the other frame. A paired samples t-test also determined the means were significantly different between the dominance-submissiveness frame and affiliation-disaffiliation frame [$t(120) = -12.80, p < .001, \text{Cohen's } d = -1.17$], with affiliation being more salient for competitors than dominance. The confidence interval (CI) ranged from -1.40 to -0.94. This finding suggests that when participants were fairly certain when enacting either frame and had a clear perception of the opponent along a specific dimension (i.e., either affiliation or dominance), supporting the differential salience hypothesis (Dillard et al., 1996). Involvement was also significantly associated to both frames (see Table 2), supporting the general intensifier hypothesis proposed by RFT (Dillard et al., 1996). In other words, partners' engagement and nonverbal behaviors in the interaction reinforced participants' perception of either dominance or affiliation.

RQ4 asked to what extent the compliment categories derived from the qualitative analysis were associated to participants' enacted relational frames. A set of ANOVAs were conducted and none of the compliment categories had a significant effect on framing, for affiliation-

disaffiliation [$F(4, 116) = 1.59, p = .18$], nor for dominance-submissiveness [$F(4, 116) = 1.41, p = .24$]. Table 3 reports the descriptive statistics and point biserial correlations between the four compliment categories the framing scales. Means below 0.50 for the compliment categories indicate participants received that type of compliment less frequently than compliments with means above 0.50. However, all of the compliment means were below 0.50, meaning no specific compliment type dominated competitor interactions.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Between Compliment Categories and Relational Framing

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Dominance-Submissiveness	2.52	.42	—					
2. Affiliation-Disaffiliation	3.46	.61	-0.19*	—				
3. Performance Compliments	.15	.36	.07	-0.15	—			
4. Speech Compliments	.22	.42	-0.13	.15	-0.22*	—		
5. Appearance Compliments	.09	.29	.14	-0.07	-0.13	-0.17	—	
6. Personal Compliments	.03	.18	-0.11	.11	-0.08	-0.10	-0.06	—

*. Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

Unexpectedly, there was a statistically significant association between performance compliments and speech compliments, in that the more often an opponent complimented a participant on their speech or performance, the less frequently the opponent gave the participant a compliment from the other category (i.e., speech or performance).

Finally, RQ5 sought to determine the relationship, if any, between participants' enacted frames and ratings of relational turbulence. The omnibus correlation matrix (see Table 2) indicated no relationship between the affiliation-disaffiliation frame and turbulence ($r = .09, p > .05$). However, there was a statistically significant negative relationship between turbulence and the dominance-submissiveness frame ($r = -0.46, p = .05$), showing that the more participants

perceived the opponent through dominance, the less turbulent they rated the relationship to be. Further, the high grand mean for the turbulence scale ($M = 4.57$, $SD = .52$) meant that most participants reported a fairly stable relationship with the opponent.

Summary of Quantitative Findings

Overall, participants enacted either an affiliation-disaffiliation frame or dominance-submissiveness frame when interacting with an opponent (i.e., differential salience) and did not experience much hesitation about how to process the opponent's communication or interaction as a whole. Participants were drawn toward interactional cues that fortified whichever frame was enacted (i.e., intensifier hypothesis), and mostly enacted an affiliative frame. Participant framing, particularly when enacting dominance-submissiveness, appeared to be a predictor of relational turbulence, such that the more participants framed the interaction through dominance, ratings of relational turbulence decreased.

V. Discussion

Two overarching goals guided this dissertation. First, the study sought to understand how forensics competitors make sense of interpersonal interactions with competitors of opposing teams. The second goal was to outline how participant perceptions affect cross-team competitor dynamics. A theoretical framework informed by RFT (Dillard et al., 1996) and RTT (Solomon et al., 2016) gauged competitors' experiences with and framing of compliments received from a forensics opponent. Participants recalled a previous interaction with an opponent, then answered questions regarding (a) their framing of the interaction along affiliation-disaffiliation and dominance-submissiveness frames, (b) the amount of involvement in the interaction, and (c) the degree of turbulence present in the relationship. The following chapter presents a discussion of the findings and the study's theoretical, methodological, and practical implications.

Interpretation of the Findings

Overall, forensics opponents have fairly friendly conversations with one another. Both participants' qualitative responses and quantitative ratings on the framing measure indicated competitors feel good about their opponents, the messages opponents communicate, and interactions with opponents, as participants primarily enacted an affiliative frame. Only a very small number of participants reported negative reactions to the opponent's compliment. McLaren et al. (2014) initially proposed that a dominance frame would be more relevant to competitive contexts and an affiliation frame with cooperative settings. Despite forensics operating as a competitive activity, where things like an awards ceremony, judges and ranks, national tournaments, and other elements noted by previous scholars (e.g., Burnett et al., 2001, 2003) largely suggest a competitive paradigm, participants felt receiving compliments from opponents loosened the competitiveness of tournaments. Competitor interactions were relatively

cooperative and friendly, and participants got along well with the opponents. Perhaps, then, the competitiveness of the activity does not impact how competitors view opponents as much as the affiliative, social landscape of the activity. In other words, compliments from opponents meant more to participants than the rivalry of the competition.

Despite the positive reactions, however, participants reported feeling less turbulence in the relationship when framing the opponent through dominance, indicating participants firmly understand that the opponent is, in fact, an opponent to be competed against. When the image of the opponent falls outside of the competitive context, participants start feeling as though the relationship is more unstable. In other words, participants failed to report thinking of the opponent as a friend, but rather, a clear adversary. Although the affiliation-disaffiliation frame was not significantly related to turbulence, the association of the dominance-submissiveness frame to turbulence indirectly supports Davis' (2016) notion of forensics frenemies, showing how competitors have more certainty about the stability of the relationship with the opponent the more dominance (i.e., status, influence, authority; Dillard et al., 1996; Frisby et al., 2011) is introduced into the dynamic. Frisby et al. also found that an affiliative frame was more salient for friends than a dominant frame; however, an affiliative frame was also most salient for forensics participants in the current study, implying competitors *feel* like friends with members of other teams, but do not *think* of opponents as friends.

Theoretical Implications

Relational Framing

Dillard et al. (1996) contextualized RFT as a sensemaking theory, particularly for relational partners when attempting to understand the other's messages and the parameters of the relationship. Relational frames serve as relationship schema (Baldwin, 1995; Planalp, 1985),

informing individuals about the state of the relationship based on shared past experiences with the partner. Under RFT, two frames guide individuals' reactions toward and processing of another's messaging—the affiliation-disaffiliation frame or the dominance-submissiveness frame (Dillard et al., 1996). The findings show that forensics competitors do in fact enact both frames in interactions with opponents and involvement enhances frame salience, suggesting RFT was a good fit to explore competitor relationships.

As Solomon et al. (2002) argued, individuals use a variety of cues to make inferences about relational messages, which not only includes the relational context, but also the episodic goal, societal and cultural norms, personal qualities, and features of an utterance. Participants mentioned many of the elements in responses to the survey, which were interpreted as reasons for participants' reported reactions. In fact, even when participants made note of the more competitive elements of the activity in survey responses, such as competitor success records, participants still had a positive reaction to the opponent's compliment. Consequently, to determine which frame was most salient, participants likely paid more attention to qualities of the interaction other than the competitive elements, such as the cultural norm in the activity to be a supportive competitor, or similarities with the opponent that surfaced during the interaction. As McLaren and Solomon (2022) noted, individuals in a conversation typically focus their attention toward nonverbal cues to help them determine the appropriate frame for understanding the interaction. Cues showing deeper engagement and immediacy impact an individual's perception of involvement, or how engrossed partners are in the communication (Dillard et al., 1996; McLaren & Solomon, 2022), and changes in involvement due to contextual changes (e.g., competing against an opponent one weekend and casually hanging out the next) or relational shifts (e.g., being teammates in high school then becoming opponents in college) can sway frame

salience at any given moment (Frisby et al., 2023). Because involvement was associated to either frame for participants in the current study, the cues participants recalled in survey responses contributed to stronger perceptions of the self-reported enacted frame. For contexts in which competitiveness and cooperativeness between individuals are both involved, as in forensics, participants have potentially many conflicting cues to choose from to figure out how to process interactions with others in that context. Participants navigated the conflicting cues in the current study, but in similar individually competitive contexts where participants lack opportunities to interact and support one another (e.g., track, swimming), participants interpret the cues available, potentially leading to more salient dominant framing and less perceived affiliation.

Competitor Interactions

In terms of the types of praise participants received, opponents appear to use a variety of compliments to encourage, motivate, support, and validate participants. Of the compliment categories identified in the current study, Davis (2020) previously identified three—compliments on performance qualities, appearance, and aspects of a competitor’s speech. Another category of “personal” compliments focusing on competitor traits or behaviors unrelated to competition developed from the current investigation. Personal compliments included praise directed at a competitor’s name, candidacy for a role on a national committee, or in-round behavior, to name a few examples. Because none of the compliment categories were associated to either frame, participants did not use the type of compliment to determine how to frame the opponent, further narrowing the list of possible cues the participant used to create a perception of the other competitor. Surprisingly, participants did not seem to be bothered by the reduction of relational information and were still able to make clear judgements about the opponent, evidenced by the data supporting the differential salience hypothesis (Dillard et al., 1996). While the type of

compliment(s) offered by opponents did not make a difference in how participants viewed the interaction, other messages likely contributed to framing at some point, especially during extended conversations with the opponent, for participants to primarily enact an affiliative frame.

Prior forensics research establishes that interacting with members of other teams is beneficial for participants, helping students feel close to opponents (Billings 2011) and part of a larger community (Bartanen & Littlefield, 2015), in addition to helping students build confidence (Jensen & Jensen, 2006). Many participants in the current study mentioned attaining similar benefits. Interestingly, while participants in Walker (2021) and Ward (2018) noted how social hierarchies could negatively impact competitor perceptions of other opponents, participants in the current study were not negatively affected by perceived social hierarchies. Carver and Scheier (1982, 1990) identified how individuals continuously self-regulate when pursuing different goals by comparing personal achievements to both upward and downward standards of reference. Diel, Grelle, et al. (2024) noted how downward comparisons with inferior others can enhance an individual's self-esteem (e.g., Boecker et al., 2022; Diel, Grelle, et al., 2021; Gerber et al., 2018; Morse & Gergen, 1970; Wills, 1981), whereas upward comparisons with superior others can provide inspiration for individuals and motivation towards goal attainment (e.g., Diel, Broeker, et al., 2021; Diel, Grelle, et al., 2021; Gerber et al., 2018; Taylor & Lobel, 1989). Upward comparisons may also lead to reduced self-esteem (Boecker et al., 2022; Diel, Grelle, et al., 2021; Gerber et al., 2018, Morse & Gergen, 1970). As Diel, Broeker, et al. (2024) further argued, the negative or positive emotions resulting from self-regulatory comparisons can lead to either increases or reductions in an individual's motivation toward goal attainment, respectively. People generally want to decrease negative discrepancies (i.e., when the standard outperforms the individual) by further pushing toward one's goal, but positive discrepancies (i.e., when an

individual outperforms the standard) have been related to coasting, or decreased motivation to improve one's skills (Diel et al., 2024; Diel, Broeker, et al., 2021; Carver & Scheier, 1981; Moors & Fischer, 2019). Even when participants in the current study made explicit upward comparisons to other competitors leading to more negative discrepancies, participants still mentioned feeling positive, and in many cases, specifically because the opponent was more successful. Clearly, participants' comparisons resulted in increased motivation and did not have the opposite effect of reducing participants' self-esteem.

Many participants in the current study developed "supporterships" with the opponent. As the term was conceptualized in the thematic findings, supporterships exist between individuals who are not quite friends, but more than acquaintances. Supporters often interact with each other in defined contexts, such as at forensics tournaments, providing encouragement to others. Supporterships do not have to be mutually reciprocated, given the fact that some participants felt the opponent was trying to be their friend, but the participant did not necessarily want to be friends with the opponent. Supporters may disclose private information as a way to develop the relationship quicker, but supporters have not reached the level of friendship. Supporterships could therefore fall under Selman's (1980) stage model of friendships. Although referring to children's friendships, Selman argues individuals go through five developmental stages in understanding peers as friends: (1) seeing peers as momentary friends in play, (2) seeing peers as helpers, (3) engaging in reciprocal assistance, (4) forming closer bonds and sharing secrets, and finally, (5) perceiving friendships formed on trust and support (Selman, 1980). A comparable model of stages of friendships for adults does not appear to exist, assumedly because adults are expected to be able to determine who is a friend and who is not more quickly than adolescents. However, forensics participants clearly move through similar stages when determining whether

an unfamiliar opponent is a friend. Competitors start developing relationships with opponents first at tournaments, seeing each other every so often on the weekends (stage one). After an initial exchange, competitor perceptions of others change from that of an opponent to that of a “helper,” or someone who is rooting for the participant’s success (stage two). Participants then start reciprocating supportive messages and interacting more frequently (stage three). Finally, participants form even closer connections to opponents by sharing disclosures and interacting more frequently (stage four). The fourth stage of Selman’s model is likely when forensics competitor supporterships exist, suggesting competitors lack the level of trust and closeness characterizing the fifth “friendship” level, but still experience high levels of support from opponents.

Relational Turbulence

The finding that perceptions of relational turbulence decreased the more participants framed opponents through dominance implies that the reverse is also true (i.e., relational turbulence increases with greater perceptions of affiliation); however, as previously mentioned, the affiliation frame was not positively associated to turbulence. The fact that the majority of participants framed the opponent through an affiliative lens but a dominant frame was associated to decreased levels of turbulence implies participants feeling most stable about the relationship with the opponent mostly used competitive qualities of the interaction to define the association. Qualities such as interpersonal goal clashes, comparisons of competitive records and status differences, past competitive experiences, or emotions brought on by something the opponent said could have led participants to enact a dominant frame, reassuring the participant of the opponent’s role as a clear opponent and not a friend. Participants were likely more comfortable viewing opponents through a dominance frame because viewing the opponent as a rival was

familiar to participants, whereas a closer interpersonal bond with the opponent might have led to more instability. However, the findings between dominance and turbulence should be carefully interpreted given the low scale reliabilities for each measure.

Duncan and Barrett (2007) argue that long held assumptions of cognition (i.e., thinking) and affect (i.e., feeling) as separate phenomena and distinct psychological processes are wrong. Rather, affect should be seen as part of cognition that influences the ways in which individuals interact with others and make decisions about the world. In other words, affect and cognition may be phenomenologically distinct, but as Duncan and Barret explain, “This is distinction in experience, however, rather than a distinction that exists in the structure of the brain or the psychological processes that produce that experience” (Conclusion, para. 1). Core affect is a “neurophysiological and somatovisceral state” created by an individual’s reaction to an event along two psychological dimensions, hedonic valence (pleasure/displeasure) and arousal (activation/sleepy), and operates as “core knowledge” informing an individual’s cognitive processing of events (Duncan & Barrett, 2007, Core Affect). Participants frame opponents similarly to how individuals are expected to experience core affect; however, the difference is that while framing occurs cognitively, core affect happens affectively. Duncan and Barrett contend that core affect makes sensemaking possible by helping individuals remember events, and should therefore be considered as equally vital a component to determining the meaning of experiences as cognition. Compared to relational framing, an affective processing approach centers feelings instead of thoughts in the sensemaking process (Duncan & Barrett, 2007). In the current study, the turbulence measure served as a way to gauge the affective outcomes of relational framing, suggesting RFT and RTT scholars might find a more permanent and reliable solution to measure the significance of participants’ experiences and weight responses based on

reported interactional qualities to determine whether thoughts or feelings meant most to participants.

Methodological Implications

This study incorporated a mixed-method research design using Braun and Clarke's (2006) process for TA paired with a quantitative analysis of the data. Considering the limited amount of empirical forensics research focused specifically on competitor interactions and relationships, this method proved effective in getting a clearer picture of cross-team competitor dynamics and provided a way to introduce a necessary link between competitor associations and the larger social environment of the activity. The qualitative findings informed the quantitative results, and vice versa, leading to substantial conclusions about competitor relationships.

However, future forensics researchers need to address how scholars can improve recruiting study participants and encourage full survey completion, particularly students of minority ethnic groups. This study used flyer handouts, in-person word-of-mouth, emails, and social media posts to recruit participants. While the final participant pool breached 100, surprisingly, participants left many responses to the scale items unanswered. Granted, incentives were not offered to participants for completing the survey, and the construction of the survey itself could have reduced completion rates. In particular, the scale measures were placed on the last few pages of the survey and participants may have skipped the scales due to fatigue. However, the majority of participants responded to the very last two survey items regarding the relationship with the opponent, so the lack of scale responses is likely not due to fatigue. Participants may have been confused by the scale questions, but had completed the sample measure and results indicated significant associations between frames, so general confusion is likely not the case either. Future researchers might consider implementing a requirement that

participants complete each page of the survey before moving onto the next.

Practical Implications

Findings from the current study also contribute to three important practical implications for forensics community members. Initially, supportive communication is common in the forensics community. For the most part, participants were positively impacted by compliments from opponents. Stated differently, opponents have a lot of power when it comes to boosting up other competitors and creating an affiliative environment in the activity. Since every forensics participant is an opponent to someone else, competitors can contribute positively to the social atmosphere of the activity by continuing to offer compliments to members of other teams. These small encouraging messages between rounds and tournament weekends can help students develop relationships that may lead competitors to continue the relationship over mediated channels (e.g., texting, social media) and prompt more in-depth disclosures. Students perceiving this kind of communication outside of what they would expect for the competitive relationship with the opponent may become confused about the meaning of the relationship or the opponent's goals. Students less hesitant about the relationship with the opponent moving quickly may perceive disclosures more favorably. To this end, depending on one's personal goals and comfortability in social environments, forensics participants may want to avoid deeper disclosures and stick to praise messages and finding common ground with opponents.

Secondly, considering participants see opponents as affiliative, nothing really needs to be done to increase or maintain the affiliative nature of the community. Students appear to understand the supportive function of interactions with opponents. However, enacting less of a dominance frame was related to increased perceptions of turbulence for participants. Consequently, the community might need to consider finding ways to maintain participants'

views of opponents as recognized rivals in order to decrease the potential for students to view their relationships with opponents as chaotic/unstable. Strategies to maintain competitor role dynamics while simultaneously preserving competitors' positive feelings about opponents might look something like having smaller, informal competitions between competitors and teams to produce competition in more social environments. For example, at the annual L.E. Norton Tournament at Bradley University, team members from the host school create an entire themed tournament and theme-focused mini-competitions throughout the tournament weekend. Teams are grouped into theme-based categories and at awards, members of the Bradley team facilitate a dance-off and donation run where the categories of teams compete against one another. Tournaments offering similar activities can help generate camaraderie between participants and competitive fun at the same time, and could therefore help students see opponents as friendly, but also maintain competitive boundaries.

Finally, coaches may want to discourage students from having close relationships with opposing competitors, as more intimacy may lead to more relational uncertainty, which could distract students from both competitive and educational goals for participating in the activity. It is generally assumed coaches of collegiate forensics teams discourage students from having romantic relationships with others on the team, as these dynamics often create tensions, interpersonal clashes, and sensitive situations. If students building personal relationships with opponents from other teams experience similar outcomes, also discouraging these closer ties from forming might also be beneficial.

Limitations

While this dissertation provides important implications for forensics competitor interactions, a number of limitations exist. First, as previously noted, getting participants to

complete all survey items was particularly challenging. This resulted in having to impute large portions of the data to make up for the missing values on survey items participants left unanswered. The imputed data in turn resulted in poor reliabilities for the dominance-submissiveness frame and turbulence scale, suggesting the scale items for each of these measures did not strongly correlate to produce consistent measures, even after checking for reversed items that could have generated negative correlations or if dropping certain items would improve the alphas. The dominance-submissiveness scale has had generally strong reliability in previous studies at .78 or higher (McLaren et al., 2014). Perhaps the particular items of the scale confused participants or the scale was not fully appropriate to study this population. For example, two of the items in the dominance-submissiveness frame were “persuade/concede” and “influence/comply.” Typically, persuading and influencing others well is considered a skill in forensics, and participants may have seen these items as something with a more positive connotation than dominance-submissiveness. Further, RTT has primarily been applied to close interpersonal relationships (e.g., Goodboy et al., 2021; Solomon & Brisini, 2019; Solomon et al., 2016; Yoon & Theiss, 2021). Forensics participants are less interdependent and interact a lot less frequently than partners in more intimate relationships, and therefore may not experience dominance-submissiveness in the same ways as close relational partners.

Another limitation of the current study is the use of participant self-reported data. Findings relied upon participant honesty and ability to provide sufficient and accurate responses to both the recalled scenario question and the scaled measures. Despite incomplete ratings for some measures, this study was able to derive thematic trends from the qualitative data and effectively investigate relationships between tested variables. The amount of time that elapsed between when the interaction with the opponent occurred and when the participant completed the

survey is also unclear. Participants could have reported on a conversation that happened years or months ago, giving the individual lots of time to think about and make sense of the interaction, whereas others reported a conversation with an opponent that happened immediately prior to or while filling out the survey. Participants had relatively little information about who the opponents were in the current study, so exploring how more familiarity with the opponent might impact relational functioning might be a productive line of research to explore in the future.

Future Research

The findings and implications of this dissertation prompt interesting areas for future scholarship, particularly in regards to disclosures in temporary contexts and close relationships between competitors. Initially, some participants and opponents felt safe in disclosing personal information about themselves or others during interactions. Disclosures in the current study ranged from opinions about other competitors, to similar career experiences, to details about moments shared with one's own teammates, to name a few. Future scholars should therefore explore the boundaries of these disclosures and at what point competitors feel comfortable sharing this information. Because of the infrequent nature of competitor interactions and little relational history, a particularly interesting question to explore would be how competitor disclosures compare to disclosures between individuals in similar temporary or short-term contexts, such as speed-dating (Spilarerwicz, 2022), personal-service provider relationships (Devereux, 2020), or summer camps (Hunt, 2011). Individuals can be more motivated to disclose information to strangers rather than close friends or even acquaintances because strangers are theoretically less impacted by the information and therefore will not be liable to sharing it with others (Qian & Scott, 2007). Disclosures between forensics participants might resemble disclosures in these other contexts because, as previously discussed, competitors feel close to one

another but are not friends, a dynamic providing the perfect grounds for reciprocal self-disclosure.

Second, since dominance was associated to decreased perceptions of turbulence, exploring how more affiliation, particularly when competitors define others as friends or even closer relational partners, potentially interrupts or makes competitor relationships more challenging. Billings (2011) noted how competitor relationships can sometimes turn into competitor romantic partnerships. For dating competitors, especially if partners are on opposing teams, maintaining the relationship may become trickier as a partner's supportive messages may take on entirely new meaning. Future research could explore how close, intimate relationships form between forensics competitors and how partners manage the relationship while also managing explicitly competitive goals. Case studies could explore married couples who dated while in forensics to determine the extent to which the activity has influenced more long-term, committed relationships.

Conclusion

This dissertation extends RFT to the context of competitor interactions in intercollegiate forensics, therefore responding to Solomon et al.'s (2002) call for wider applications of the theory. Bell and Daly (1984) argued developing affinity with others is an essential purpose of communication, and participants in the current study proved this to be true. Forensics competitors receive many compliments from opponents, providing a source of encouragement, validation, and refreshing breath from the competition. Competitors are ultimately super friendly with and perceive opponents primarily through an affiliative frame. However, competitors appear to feel more stable in the relationship with the opponent when framing the other competitor through dominance (i.e., as an opponent), overall suggesting competitors from

opposing teams are friendly, but not friends. While forensics participants do not draw as restrictive competitive boundaries between them and the opponent as soldiers did during the Civil War, forensics competitors do similarly fraternize with the enemy and get joy from doing so. As the activity continues to re-adapt to post-pandemic competition and tournament modalities continue to offer students opportunities to interact, understanding how competitor dynamics also shift will be essential.

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APPENDIX A:

NFA Recruitment Flyer

"HEY, I LIKE YOUR SUIT!"

Competitors! We are conducting a study on interactions between competitors of opposing forensics teams... and need YOUR help!

The goal of this research is to understand how students make sense of their interactions with competitors from opposing teams. We hope this research will reveal how these interactions are connected to the larger social atmosphere of collegiate forensics.

IRB #: 23.214
Approved 4/5/23

WHAT'S INVOLVED?

- 10- to 15-minute online survey
- Participants will be asked to recall & report a previous interaction with a member of another team
- Participants will then respond to a set of questions gauging their perceptions of the interaction

ELIGIBILITY

- Students who currently compete for a collegiate speech and/or debate team
- 18+ years or older

SCAN TO PARTICIPATE!



Research opportunity!

QUESTIONS? CONTACT INFO:

Ben Davis, ABD (he/him)
Primary Researcher
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APPENDIX B:

Online Survey

1. Demographics & Forensics Experience

- a. What is your age?
- b. What is your gender?
- c. What is your race/ethnicity?
- d. What is your year in school?
- e. How many years have you competed in collegiate forensics?
- f. In what state do you primarily compete?
- g. In which events do you regularly compete throughout the season? “Regularly compete” means you competed in the event at 2 more tournaments per semester. Please check all that apply.
 - i. Individual Events (IEs)
 - ii. Individual Debate Formats (e.g., NFA-LD, IPDA, Congress)
 - iii. Partner Debate Formats (e.g., NPDA, Public Forum, CEDA)

2. Semantic Differential Example (Dillard et al., 1996)

- a. To become familiar with how to respond to a similar question later in the survey, please take a moment to practice with this example. Below, there four sets of word pairs that each form a complementary dimension of adjectives. Based on your judgment, rate the relevance of each word pair to the following objects: wax paper, sand paper, velvet.

Rough/smooth	1	2	3	4	5
Loud/quiet	1	2	3	4	5
Hard/soft	1	2	3	4	5
High-pitched/low-pitched	1	2	3	4	5

- b. There is no “correct” answer to these ratings. Your selections will be useful for learning how you understood each term.

3. Recalled Scenario

- a. Take a moment to recall a time when a competitor from another team gave you a compliment outside of a tournament round. In the text box below, please describe this interaction. Please make sure to include details about where the interaction took place, what they complimented you on, and what your immediate thoughts were toward the compliment, interaction, and/or other competitor. Please provide any other details you feel are necessary for us to better understand your experience. [open-ended text box provided]
- b. Please provide the demographics of the other competitor, if known:
 - i. Age
 - ii. Gender
 - iii. Race/ethnicity
 - iv. Year in school

- v. How long have you known this individual?
 - 1. Less than 6 months
 - 2. 6 months to 1 year
 - 3. 1-3 years
 - 4. 3-5 years
 - 5. 5+ years
- vi. How frequently do you see or hang out with this person outside of competitions? (1 = never, 5 = often)
- vii. Have you ever competed on the same team as this person (Yes/No)

4. Frame Activation Scale (Dillard et al., 1996)

- a. You will now rate the following word pairs with regard to the interaction you just described. Please note that you are not judging how much of each dimension were present in the situation, but rather how relevant they are (1 = irrelevant, 5 = relevant) to understanding the other competitor's behavior.

Dominance/submission	1	2	3	4	5
Persuade/concede	1	2	3	4	5
Affection/disaffection	1	2	3	4	5
Influence/comply	1	2	3	4	5
Positive regard/negative regard	1	2	3	4	5
Controlling/yielding	1	2	3	4	5
Liking/disliking	1	2	3	4	5
Attraction/aversion	1	2	3	4	5

5. Involvement Scale (Dillard et al., 1996)

- a. Now, please rate how relevant (1 = irrelevant, 5 = relevant) the following word pairs are in regards to how absorbed you felt the other competitor was in the interaction.

Engaged/withdrawn	1	2	3	4	5
Involved/uninvolved	1	2	3	4	5
Interested/disinterested	1	2	3	4	5
Active/inactive	1	2	3	4	5

6. Relational Turbulence (McLaren et al., 2011)

- a. Finally, please indicate where you feel the relationship between you and the other competitor falls along the following dimensions.

Chaotic	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Stable
Peaceful	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Stressful
Tumultuous	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Running smoothly
Calm	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Turbulent