POLITICAL and CIVIC Leadership
A REFERENCE HANDBOOK

SAGE reference

Impression Management

All the world's a stage,

and all the men and women merely players.

They have their exits and their entrances;

and one man in his time plays many parts.

—William Shakespeare (1623),

As You Like It, Act II, sec. 7

More than 50 years have passed since Erving Goffman's (1959) seminal work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* appeared within the sociological literature. The book spawned a wide variety of inter-disciplinary theoretical approaches that have contributed significantly to the study of human conduct, particularly, for the purposes of this chapter—impression management theory. By expanding on the ideas founding symbolic interactionism and dramatism, Goffman described *self-presentations* as how, "when an individual appears in the presence of others, there will usually be some reason for him to mobilize his activity so that it will convey an impression to others which it is in his interest to convey" (p. 4). While Goffman's impression management is a dominant scientific theory within interdisciplinary academic literature focusing on corporate leadership, very few researchers have utilized this approach within the political realm, which is unfortunate in that the political arena is an ideal setting for impression management studies. While investigating symbolic interactionism as a theoretical approach to study politics, Peter Hall (1972) argued that impression management involves successful self-presentations, within the dynamics of the bargaining process known as politics, which leads to perceived political power or the ability to determine the definition of the situation for others. And, what few political impression management studies that do exist emphasize the American presidency (e.g., Hall, 2009). Indeed, researchers have ignored parliamentary leaders' self-presentations, preferring to explain the success or failures of various prime ministers not on individual decisions about desired identity images, but on structural and functional differences of various governments and political parties (Kaarbo, 1997). For this reason, this chapter will focus on the American presidency, examining how impression management strategies and tactics affect the opportunities and parameters for political leadership.

The American Presidency: A Staged Political Drama

"The constitutional convention of 1787 is supposed to have created a government of 'separated powers.' It did nothing of the sort. Rather it created a government of separated institutions *sharing* powers" (Neustadt, 1980, p. 26; emphasis in original). Furthermore, Cornwell (1965) argues:

The President's role in relation to policy making is "hortatory" rather than "determinative." He has neither the legal-constitutional nor the party-political base to command action, or even attention, in the legislative process. He must persuade, bargain, exhort, and on occasion, bribe. Above all he must win and channel public support. (pp. 5–6)

Increasingly since the advent of the modern presidency, marked by the administrations of Franklin D. Roosevelt, **t**he focus of attention and tone of government has moved away from Congress toward the presidency. Cornwell argued as early as 1965:

Progressively, during this century … the President has become the source of initiative and stimulus for action. He has done so by exploiting his unequaled platform for popular leadership. This fact, with a powerful assist from the burgeoning commercial media, has virtually transformed the White House occupant into the personification of the national government. (p. 5)

As a result, scholars have increasingly viewed American politics as a *presidential drama*, for political studies now has more to do with presidential performance and presidential popularity than with the structures and functions of governments. Similarly, Richard Neustadt (1980) argued that presidential power was determined by the executive's persuasion and bargaining skills.

Today, the continuous scrutiny of public perceptions of presidential performances has made public opinion polling a dominant political research tool. The modern presidency attends polls produced from within the White House, as well as from news organizations, competing political parties, interest groups, and potential presidential challengers. As a result, in any given week, the president of the United States is bombarded with polling information, evaluating his or her performance and relating it to popularity with the voters (Ostrom & Simon, 1989). As a consequence, political polling, as well as the constant evaluations of presidential performance, has created a *perpetual presidential campaign*, whereby political *impression management* has assumed an even larger institutional role within the modern presidency (Ostrom & Simon, 1989).

Polling reports, as well as the reporting of them, affect the president's *public prestige* (voters' approval) and *professional reputation* (political insiders' assessments of presidential prowess), which Neustadt argued were adequate reflections of *presidential power* (1980, pp. 44–79). Presidential power determines what the president can achieve while in office, whether influencing a legislative agenda, impacting national policies, or sustaining partisan dominance, and so on (see Ostrom & Simon, 1989). Because polling results are directly related to public perceptions about how well a president is handling both domestic and foreign policy arenas, political impression management strategies and tactics have become a central focus of any successful presidential administration, and for this reason, the majority of this chapter will utilize research, as well as examples, referencing the American presidency.

The Drama of Political Leadership

Duncan (1962) has argued that politics is "a drama of hierarchy in which superiors, inferiors, and equals communicate by symbols which they believe will create and sustain social order" (p. 436). Thus, political processes may be analyzed as drama; for instance, Edelman (1964) has argued that political leadership is highly dramatic, writing:

Leadership, then, is not to be understood as something an individual does or does not have, at all times and places. It is always defined by a specific situation and is recognized in the response of followers to individual acts and speeches. If they respond favorably and follow, there is leadership; if they do not, there is not. (p. 75)

Consequently, as Edelman's (1964) leadership definition implies, impression management scholarship does not assume a linear relationship between what a leader says and what the people believe; rather, impression management research examines *the joint actions*, the *intersubjective realities* of all participants—political leaders, voters, and interest groups—who comprise the body politic.

Political Impression Management

Hall (1972) is perhaps the first scholar who seriously wrote and published about impression management within

the political realm. Hall labels the symbolic interactional process used to create *leadership images* (an individual's perceived subjective knowledge of a leader) and to define the *political situation*, whether during an election campaign or during the process of governing impression management.

Impression management means that control over the conduct of others for one's own interest is achieved by influencing the definition of the situation in which all are involved. This is accomplished by acting in such a way that an image is created of the actor (and related objects) that lead others to voluntarily act as the actor wishes them to act. Control over others is accomplished by getting others to accept as reality the propounded definitions…. Impression management is concerned not only with what is said but also not said. In other words, impression management refers to what conclusions people draw from appearances and actions (partially nonverbal) and also what controls are placed upon the inward and outward flow of information. (Hall, 2009, p. 366)

Impression Management Tools

Hall (2009) has argued that an impression manager has two tools with to influence "the definition of the situation" (p. 366) for others: *information flow control* and *a variety of symbolic devices* that ultimately serve to either successfully impression manage the situation or will ultimately backfire, failing not only to present the desired public persona but also mismanaging the preferred definition of the situation.

Information Control: Controlling the Executive Branch

Clearly, a president has a fundamental interest in impression management, in advocating realities, in staging his or her own dramas, and in getting the preferred definition of the political situation out to the people in the form that he or she desires. The last four presidents gave about 550 speeches each year they were in office, which serves as additional evidence of their intent on "controlling the definition of the situation," as well as the flow of information out of the White House (Zernicke, 1994).

Within the White House, several crucial positions or offices devote their time to controlling information and crafting political messages. Although not established until 1969, the office of White House communications takes on the

long range planning for the president, the dissemination of the "line-of-the-day" to officials throughout the executive branch, and the circumvention of the White House press corps through the orchestration of direct appeals to the people (appeals that are often carefully targeted to particular constituencies in specific media markets). (Maltese, 1994, p. 2)

To be an effective president, former White House aide and then-Congressman Dick Cheney told John Maltese that

the White House must control the agenda. An essential element of that control … is the ability to maintain discipline within the administration itself. Any appearance of disunity among the president's ranks will be seized upon by the media as an opportunity for a story—one that will undermine the president's agenda. (1994, p. 1)

In addition, Cheney told Maltese (1994) the communications office must "aggressively promote the messages that the President wants conveyed to the American people. Bluntly put, the White House must attempt to manipulate media coverage of the administration" (p. 2).

Typically, the press secretary is kept in the dark when important domestic matters or events of international significance are concerned so that he or she does not have to lie to the press, losing what credibility he or she has. However, the president must brief them well enough so that the press secretaries avoid appearing foolish when dealing with the press. On occasion, during the administrations of both Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, however, several press secretaries were made to look very foolish indeed.

The Image

Hall relies on Kenneth Boulding's (1956) work *The Image*, a symbolic interactionist's perspective explaining social knowledge, for his conceptualization of "the image" in his explanation of impression management. Boulding uses the word *image* to indicate "a subjective knowledge of the world … that is built up as a result of all past experience of the possessor of the image (pp. 5–6). However, an individual's image is "a reflection of reality, not definitive knowledge of it" (Nimmo & Savage, 1976, p. 8). Following the symbolic interactionist argument that meaning is created through an evolving interpretive process, Boulding suggests, "the meaning of a message is the change which it produces in the image" (1956, p. 7). Imagery is "the business of putting together the past, present, and future, … i.e., the image [is] (the subjective understanding of interpretation) of the [social] act" (Nimmo, 1978, p. 13). Therefore, leadership images are nonlinear, acting as *reciprocal* or *transactional* entities between what a leader projects and what the individual-recipient is predisposed to perceiving. Nimmo and Savage write that during a political campaign, "an individual's candidate imagery is in part an interplay, the continual engagement of campaign stimuli with the response disposition of" the individual (1976, p. 90).

Impression Management: Presentation of Self or Self-Identification

For the purposes of this chapter, impression management is the study of strategies and tactics used by presidential candidates and presidents who seek to make a convincing "presentation of self" or "self-identification"—"the process, means, or result of showing oneself to be a particular type of person, thereby specifying one's identity" (Schlenker, Britt, & Pennington, 1996, p. 123) to gain political advantage in relation to *immediate others* (friends, family members with whom a leader closely identifies), as well as *generalized others* (competing governmental branches, special interest groups, constituents whose beliefs, values, and expectations a leader can only approximate). Schlenker et al. (p. 124) have summarized *the process of self-identification:*

1. Self-identification occurs in a particular social context and reflects the interaction of a person and one or more salient audiences for the activity.
2. An initial assessment and evaluation of self, audience, and situation evokes for the actor or prompts the actor to formulate (a) a set of goals, (b) a script or plan for goal accomplishment, and (c) a set of desired identity images that describe the type of person the actor believes he or she can and should be on the occasion.
3. These desired identity images mediate self-identification on the occasion, acting like subscripts or subplans embedded within the overall script or plan. These images organize and regulate self-identification and may or may not correspond with the images that make up the self-concept or social roles.

Consequently, leaders must learn various *roles* or *social scripts*, which when performed assist in the acquisition of what they most desire, and in the realm of politics, *power* is the aspired commodity. For this reason, the chapter will examine how presidential candidates and presidents acquire what they perceive to be their essential *desired-identity roles* or *political personas*, as well as how the public contributes to these carefully crafted *strategic self-identifications* by typecasting various leadership positions, ultimately crafting *central roles*, which voters often both expect and demand to be fulfilled before supporting a potential leader.

Desired Identity Images, Political Personas, and Central Roles

Before running for public office, candidates must undergo self-analysis, seeking *self-identification* or self-awareness (Schlenker et al., 1996). Ultimately, such a process reveals a leader's *desired identity image* that he or she wishes to portray to voters (Fisher, 1980, p. 121); furthermore, such desired identity images must reflect "the kind of person the [political] actor aspires to be, and believes he or she can be, at least at his or her 'best'" (Schlenker, 1985, p. 74). And, just as important, "such images should be both *personally beneficial* and

believable" (Gardner & Avolio, 1998, p. 39).

A number of salient *personal, situational*, and *audience* factors influence a leader's *desired identity image* (Schlenker et al., 1996, p. 141). For instance, a leader's own political aspirations will significantly influence the desired identity image. Furthermore, if a leader enters a competitive situation, where winning an election or receiving a award (such as the Nobel Peace Prize) is likely, such strategic assessments will probably impact the desired identity image. In addition, audience expectations—what people not only anticipate but also often require a leader's role performance to be—will usually affect a leader's desired identity image. For example, Americans expect their presidents to take charge during a foreign policy crisis; and any president who pursues a "rose garden strategy" by refusing to comment or to take action will likely suffer a significant drop in opinion polls, as President Jimmy Carter did for 6 months of the Iran hostage crisis.

Self-Monitoring: Observing the Real Versus Ideal

Leaders seek acceptance, approval, and at times, recognition, and for these reasons, they engage in other- and self-monitoring behaviors during social interactions. As a result, leaders acquire causal attributions or schemata about how various audiences respond to particular impression management strategies and tactics (Gardner & Martinko, 1988). According to Burke (1950), humans create and adapt their self-images or self-presentations to obtain desired responses; consequently, humans are capable of evaluating how far their real public behaviors are from where they could be—the *ideal*, if they were performing perfectly in the public sphere. This strategic assessment between the *real* and the *ideal* has significant practical implications for impression management consultants seeking to improve their presidential candidate or president's standing in the polls.

Believability

To be believable, Pin and Turndorg (2009) argue, humans must (a) craft a role identity that audience members can relate to; (b) perform the role consistently, matching the audience's preconceived notions as to how the performance should occur; and (c) use essential expressive tools, both words and appearances, to convey effectively appropriate ideal images. Furthermore, as *self-monitors*, leaders evaluate the "comfort" levels associated with given performances, assessing whether their abilities make future use of such impression management strategies and tactics advantageous to their desired identity images (Gardner & Martinko, 1988), and if they do, such leader self-presentations comprise a repertoire of desired identity images.

Consultants recognize that politicians are more likely to be credible if the various desired images that they have to portray fit within the individual's own definition of his or her self, or the sum of the traits, attributes, or qualities that person ascribes to himself or herself (Kinch, 1963). Political consultants recognize that political leaders will have to adjust their desired identity images to fit certain political situations, whether meeting with newspaper editorial review boards, interest group leaders, party leaders, potential donors, or citizen groups. While recognizing that politicians must be strategic in their presentations of self, consultants recognize that candidates must also be believable to be successful. Thus, in politics, desired images fit within a *repertoire of identity images* that express a thematic range of values, beliefs, and experiences that shape the individual's conception of self. The portrayal of that identity image repertoire in public speaking engagements, in news accounts, or in paid advertisements will become synonymous with what Fisher has termed a leader's *political persona* or *ethos* (1980, p. 121), the sum of qualities, attributes, and characteristics that the public comes to expect from that leader because of repetitive, politically communicated self-identifications.

Political Persona Versus Central Role

However, a leader should not determine his or her political persona or ethos without taking into account voters' expectations for his or her performance. For, as mentioned previously, leadership is a dramatic, reciprocal phenomenon. While a candidate is evaluating his or her own desired identity image, the public engages in a reciprocal process, typecasting various leadership styles with various public offices. Because voters "insist that

people [candidates or leaders] conduct themselves on the basis of intersubjectively constructed meanings—of self, of others, of patterns of interpersonal relationships, of power and communal relationships, and of existence itself" (Fisher, 1980, p. 121). In short, voters construct "ideal leadership types" for various offices or positions. And with that typecasting, people characterize leaders as heroes, villains, or fools, depending on how closely the role performances approximate the voters' image of an *ideal candidate* for a particular office.

Indeed, during election campaigns, voters make their polling decisions by comparing their "*ideal* candidate images" with their perceptions of "*real* candidate images," which they have associated with the various contestants (Nimmo & Savage, 1976). People take into account how each candidate speaks and acts or they ascertain who the candidate appears to represent in the race when making such "real image" evaluations. Research has indicated that voters perceive their "ideal candidate" in terms of *source valence criteria*, which have three primary dimensions:

The first is credibility, in such qualities as high ability, good character, and energy. The second is interpersonal attraction, which can be thought of as a candidate's social and physical attractiveness, and the third is homophily, the similarities in personality, social class, educational background, or beliefs voters believe they share with the candidate. (Trent & Friedenberg, 1983, pp. 75–76, italics added)

Political scientists have labeled the voters' ideal candidate expectations a *leader's central role.* In short, the central role is not the image projected by a leader, but one that is created and projected by the voters themselves, a type of *rhetorical vision*, which large numbers of people share as a symbolic reality, emphasizing credibility, interpersonal attraction, and homophily (Fisher, 1980; Trent & Friedenberg, 1983). For this reason, strategic political consultants always compare and contrast the candidate's *political persona* with the public's socially constructed *leader's central role* (Goffman, 1959). For a consultant or candidate to do otherwise is political suicide, for when candidates portray political personas that are inconsistent with voters' expectations, they appear inauthentic, false, or manipulative, and therefore, the people will judge the political candidate unsuitable for public service (Cronin, 2008).

Therefore, candidates and their consultants recognize that they must strategically portray political personas, staying within the voters' expectations for a central role, acting according to preconceived political scripts of appropriate political behavior given a particular electoral office. Thus, both candidates and consultants recognize the importance of political roles and political scripts in both gaining and maintaining political power.

Roles and Scripts and Political Power

Politics is inherently dramatic. Political actors stage extemporaneous and planned public appearances, attempting to influence how voters, other political actors, and the news media perceive not only their leadership styles but also their preferred definitions of political situations and issues. Within *dramatism*, a "role is the aspect of society *in* man; society provides the script, the man plays the role variously—with verve, mechanically or however" (Combs & Mansfield, 1976, pp. 19–20, italics in original). Hall stresses the notion that *power* is the ability "to define the situation" for others (1972), and only through using scripts are political actors able to exercise successful political power. To determine societal scripts, leaders must engage in *empathic reasoning.* In essence, as Ronald Reagan once explained, a successful politician is a type of method actor, utilizing *empathic skills* to uncover what makes people who they are, what they care about, what they value and believe (Cronin, 2008). Research has revealed that Americans love presidential candidates who are larger than life, who have aggressive views about presidential leadership, who express positive visions for America's future, and who explain themselves through culturally meaningful life narratives.

Presidential Greatness: Ideal Presidents

Neustadt (1980) believed that great presidents expanded the powers of the presidency by exercising informal powers of persuasion and bargaining and creating legal precedents that future presidents then utilized. Neustadt

believed that the Constitution of 1788 granted the presidency certain formal powers, but that the majority of presidential powers were informal, handed down through legal precedents, which were created by great men who aggressively seized the reins of power, to accomplish significant political objectives. Specifically, Neustadt admired presidents who had expanded the powers of the presidency by crafting executive orders, such as the one drafted by Thomas Jefferson that bought the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. Similarly, James David Barber's *Presidential Character* (1985) idolizes presidents who expanded presidential authority beyond Constitutional limits. Barber argues that great presidents "demand … a sense of progress and action," writing:

The president ought to do something to direct the nation's course—or at least be in there pitching for the people. The president is looked to as a take-charge man, a doer, a turner of wheels, a producer of progress—even if that means some sacrifice of serenity. (p. 4)

A Liberal Bias Toward Aggressive Power

Both Neustadt's (1980) and Barber's (1985) vision of leadership coincides with what has been termed the "liberal bias" concerning presidential power. Cronin (1977) espouses this liberal perspective when he writes: "The great Presidents have been the strongest Presidents, who stretched their legal authority, who occasionally relied on the convenience of secrecy, and who dominated the other branches of government" (p. 75). Yet, political scientists are not the only influential people who espouse such a "liberal" view of leadership, also included are the presidents themselves, as well as their constituents, who through the years have reported in opinion polls their preference for strong and aggressive leaders (Prysby, 2008).

Proactivity Prototype Personality

Ronald J. Deluga (1998) identified a presidential *proactivity prototype personality* that "actively identifies opportunities and demonstrates a strong drive toward action. He or she enjoys persuading others to accept … [his or her] ideas and relishes challenging the status quo" (p. 266). Deluga describes a proactive president as having *charisma* or a *"magnetic personality"* (p. 267), in that he or she serves the people as a "psychological lifeboat, which restores a sense of personal self-efficacy" (p. 268). Furthermore, Deluga equates *proactivity* with Bass's (1995) transformational leadership redux, which subsumes charisma. Both researchers argue that either proactive or transformational presidents influence followers: to accept an aggressive articulated vision, to sacrifice to achieve the president's vision, to agree to reframed social problems, to reach a negotiated consensus, and to accept presidential counsel (Deluga, 1998, p. 269). Bass (1985) has argued that successful transformational leaders possess "the ability to create, articulate, and communicate a compelling vision that induces commitment to it, clarity about it, and support for it" (p. 5). Such visionary rhetoric is essential in modern societies, because presidents can't rely on interpersonal interactions to sway public opinion; instead, to ensure the achievement of political objectives, they must rely not only on mass mediated expressions of their visions but also on their followers' commitment to their visions (Emrich, Brower, Feldman, & Garland, 2001).

Sociability, Authenticity, Relational Communication, and Liking Cues

Leaders must learn impression management strategies and tactics that assist them in demonstrating their credibility, interpersonal attractiveness, and homophily. Four such mechanisms have been identified: sociability, authenticity, relational communication, and liking words: peripheral cues.

Sociability

The successful politician must learn *sociability*, the ability to be comfortable among people of different classes and to make them comfortable with his or her presence. Pin and Turndorg (2009) note that few political leaders have the innate ability to relate to different social groups in an effective manner; people are most comfortable speaking to those who are similar to themselves. Yet, the mark of an excellent political leader is one who exhibits *sociability*, the competent use of expressive tools, such as *body language, political rhetoric, appearance*, and *staging*, which are appropriate for each audience and situation that he or she faces. President

Bill Clinton had a natural instinct for sociability, identifying with those he met on the campaign trail and translating that same psychological affect through mass media channels, by the words he used, the stories he told, and his communication style.

Authenticity

Successfully managed political role performances position candidates closer to the voters' perceptions of the *ideal leader*, and the candidate will perform his or her political persona, incorporating voters' expectations as to words, expressiveness, gestures, clothing, and so on to approximate the perceived leader's *central role.* If a candidate successfully impression manages his or her political persona, the voters will evaluate the candidate's self-presentations as *authentic*, rewarding the candidacy with improved polling numbers, increasing both political action committee (PAC) and individual contributions to the campaign's war chest (see Ostrom & Simon, 1989). Cronin (2008) explains the importance of authenticity in contemporary politics, writing:

Modern day political leaders must hone their self-promotion, likeability and leadership attributes while at the same time trying not to seem pretenders and dissemblers. That's a tough assignment. And, it poses an almost impossible paradox. We detest fakers and phoniness, yet yearn for Academy Award Oscar winning political performances. (p. 459)

Authenticity has become such an important component of a successful political portrayal that candidates "study successful predecessors and borrow from their performing artistry and strategies. They also go to great lengths not to be like those who have failed in office" (Cronin, 2008, p. 460).

Relational Communication

With the rise of *teledemocracy* or *mediated democracy*, relational communication has greatly increased in importance during presidential campaigns, because television "magnifies the role and impact of relational messages, which rely heavily on nonverbal stream for transmission" (Pfau, 2002, p. 254). Pfau suggests that

the new language embodies softer personal dimensions, such as: immediacy/affection, which consists of involvement, warmth, enthusiasm, and an interest in the receiver; receptivity/trust, which comprises sincerity, honesty, interest in communicating, and willingness to listen; similarity/depth, which includes friendliness and caring. (p. 254)

Relational communication provides an opportunity for the presidential candidate or the president to "engage their audiences in a kind of identification, an organic connection: 'I feel your pain,' 'I understand your situation,' 'I really care about you'" (Cronin, 2008, p. 461). Nowhere was this more apparent than in the 1992 presidential debate, featuring a town hall format, between President George H. W. Bush and Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton. The debaters were seated on stools in front of the audience, turning to answer questions from members of the audience. A woman from the audience asked President Bush if, in effect, the country's poor economic condition or the recession had affected his family's life or budget. The president appeared baffled by her question, asking her to repeat the question, saying that he didn't understand her question, while persistently looking at his watch, giving the impression that he couldn't be bothered with her or her question. When Democratic challenger Bill Clinton answered, he seized the opportunity to display relational communication at its best; he left his seat, walking directly in front of the women, speaking into her eyes, forcing the cameras to follow him, showcasing his relational behaviors and her reactions to his words. Clinton answered the woman, by agreeing that the economy was in a terrible condition, recounting stories that he had heard on the campaign trail about lost jobs and repossessed homes; he reassured her that he knew how hard it was out there to make a living, to do what was right by her family, and he explained this knowledge was what had motivated him to run for the presidency (Pfau, 2002, p. 254).

Voters' perceptions of candidates' relational communication skills have proven so important to political campaigns that Pfau (2002) has characterized them as having a *ricocheting effect* throughout the campaign.

Indeed, voters' relational communication perceptions have "an impressive staying power: over days, they affect other dimensions of candidate persona (e.g., perceptions of competence); and, over weeks, they exert a direct influence on global attitudes toward candidates" (p. 255).

Liking Words: Peripheral Cues

The use of *liking messages* is an example of the president's deliberate usage of peripheral cues within the message to maintain the audience's attention. When audiences are either incapable of processing complex arguments or uninterested in the president's messages, the speech writer should incorporate peripheral cues into the retelling of a resonating narrative, as further assistance in attracting and maintaining the audience's attention, particularly when dealing with audience subgroups that are either apathetic, alienated, or exhibiting heightened anomie. Cialdini has identified seven common peripheral messages: *authority, commitment, contrast, liking, reciprocity, scarcity*, and *social proof* (1993). Research has indicated that such *liking messages* stress affinity with the audience's issues, beliefs, or values, and as a result, the audience approves of both the president as well as his or her *ultimate vision* (Cialdini, 1993).

Or, the president or his or her speech writers may select anecdotes to illustrate the administration's arguments as well as the president's homophily with the people through the use of storytelling. The greater the perceived identification with the president and his or her anecdote, the more likely the audience will be influenced in the direction the president desires (Dainton & Zelley, 2005). For this reason, presidential speechwriters as well as the presidents themselves select resonating symbols, metaphors, visual images, catchphrases, and other symbolic configurations for the audience's consumption to influence their thoughts, feelings, and actions. Resonating condensational symbols demonstrate homophily or identification, which increases the likeability of the president as well as his or her credibility, trustworthiness, and eventually entrance into the audience's collective identity, where the president, if impression managed correctly, will assume an esteemed leadership position. Messages "which … tell the listener something are inherently not as [psychologically] affective as those which attach to something that is already in him. We are not focused on getting things across to people, as much as out of people" (Schwartz, 1976, p. 352).

Impression Management Opportunities

The impression management literature has identified some key opportunities for political leaders to engage in strategic utilization of impression management strategies and tactics: first impressions, life narratives, visionary narratives, and minor narrative forms. Each of these will be considered in turn.

First Impressions

First impressions are of particular import in political situations, for in many instances, the candidate or political leader will have only one opportunity to make a favorable impression on voters. Furthermore, as Pin and Turndorg (2009) have indicated, first impressions are "self-perpetuating," thus, political leaders must impression manage those first encounters in order for others to "intuitively and immediately perceive them as they want to be perceived" (p. 170). For instance, political consultants warn new candidates to avoid the wearing of lapel pins when meeting voters, for consultants fear that people will view the pins as an indication of the candidate's favoritism or linkage with special interest groups. Frequently, the first opportunity that candidates have in impression managing their political persona is when they announce their political candidacy. Frequently, such events utilize speeches that contain pieces of life narratives, which assist in establishing homophily with the voters.

Life Narratives

Goffman (1959) argued that people utilize narrative forms to provide public self-presentations to others. Many politicians have found that providing resonating *life narratives* or an economic summary of one's life experiences to audiences is a highly persuasive device, for such renditions typically combine both cognitions and emotions

that are readily understandable, making sense to those in the audience who have had similar experiences in their own lives or who have heard of people who have gone through such encounters (Ligon, Hunter, & Mumford, 2008). Life narratives are typically schematic frameworks emphasizing *cultural themes* (e.g., Protestant work ethic, charity, and compassion), *culturally prototypic exemplars* (e.g., American dream stories, e.g., rags to riches), or *key life events* (e.g., the death of a parent or spouse) (Ligon et al., 2008). For example, Democratic presidential candidate Bill Clinton's 1992 convention film, *A Man From Hope*, contains elements of all three life narratives, and for this reason, the film resonated with audiences not only within the Democratic National Convention, but also around the country.

As narratives are understood by people from all walks of life, they are in essence an egalitarian communication form that invites audience members to evaluate storytellers and their tales by what Fisher (1985) has called *narrative rationality*, which approximates "Aristotle's concept of *phronesis*, 'practical wisdom'" (p. 350, italics in original). Fisher (1985) argued that every human, by virtue of having told stories and having listened to them, develop *narrative rationality*, a set of principles consisting of primarily *probability* and *fidelity*, which allow them to not only judge the credibility of the speaker and the logic of his or her story, but also the values or logic of good reasons expressed within each story or narrative. *Narrative probability* or *narrative coherence* is determined by examining if the story is logical, if the parts of the story hang together in a meaningful manner, free of inconsistencies. And, *narrative fidelity* deals with the cultural truths expressed within the story; do the characters in the story act based on values held by the audience? Audiences evaluate a *narrative's fidelity* on the basis of their culture's logic of good reasons: "the soundness of its reasoning and the value of its values" (Fisher, 1985, p. 350); in other words, audience members consider whether the story contains values consistent with their own.

Vision Narratives

During the modern presidency, since Franklin D. Roosevelt, the American public has expected serious presidential candidates to offer a *strategic vision* for the country that was both lucid and pragmatic (Wendt & Fairhurst, 1994, p. 180). During the presidential primary and caucus season, reporters will vet potential presidential contenders on "the vision thing" (Johnson-Cartee, 2005). As Americans have increasingly sought out charismatic-transformational leaders as presidential candidates, a renewed emphasis has been placed on individuals who are willing "to listen to and act upon the input of followers," recapturing notions of "'universal' moral principles as liberty, justice, and equality" (Wendt & Fairhurst, 1994, p. 183). Furthermore, leaders are expected to harness such universal principles into a plan of action, "to make sense of things, inspire, and provide a meaningful ideological framework on which to base action" (p. 194). In essence, then, such visions seek to empower the American people, to make them believe in themselves and the power that they can harness if they work toward a shared goal or objective.

Minor Narrative Forms

Because the narrative form is such a powerful communication device or script, politicians use not only life narratives when "connecting with the audience" (Cronin, 2008, p. 461), but also other familiar narrative forms, such *as metaphors, similes, analogies, biblical quotations, parables, cultural histories* and *traditions*, and *folktales* (Emrich et al., 2001). Furthermore, such rhetorical narratives invite audience members to analyze political narratives in terms of narrative probability and fidelity, which if a leader has told his or her story well, then their evaluations of his or her stories will enhance a leader's credibility, interpersonal attraction, and homophily.

Interwoven Communications

With the growth of media technologies and the new media, Owen (1991) has warned that political leaders must recognize that the political impressions they make in one medium or during one public appearance will now reappear in other media as well, reverberating throughout the political process. Similarly, Pfau (2002) suggests:

Candidate communication that is initiated in one forum, such as a televised debate, finds its way into other forums—some traditional outlets for campaign communications, such as network television news or candidate ads, but with increasing frequency less traditional news outlets, such as late-night television entertainment programming. (p. 256)

In short, the careful staging of political persona has become ever more critical to a successful campaign. A stump speech caught on a video-equipped cell phone will find its way onto CNN, MSNBC, or FOX News, or the video footage will be indefinitely linked to such popular Web sites as YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter.

Strategic Self-Monitoring

Goffman (1959) and other dramaturgical researchers have emphasized that strategic individuals engage in *self-monitoring*, "which encompasses both the tendency to use impression management and the skill to successfully execute such behaviors" (Turnley & Bolino, 2001, p. 352). Furthermore, self-monitoring necessitates not only being attentive to the others' reactions to one's self-presentations but also to the others' self-presentations to form clues and to store them for future access and utilization, such as to desired social behaviors, responses in given social situations, or the presentation of appropriate or desired public imagery under similar social conditions.

Significantly, Kilduff and Day (1994) have found that high self-monitors, unlike low-self monitors, are more likely to achieve desired self-presentations or public images and are far more likely to produce the desired definition of the situation for others involved within the social interaction; furthermore, high self-monitors hypothesize outcome expectations, taking into account the full range of possible audience reactions to their self-presentations; in this way, the high self-monitor adapts to foreseen difficulties before they occur, avoiding potentially dangerous threats to his or her political persona or central role.

Creating Diversions

Presidential advisers have often convinced American presidents that they needed to distract the American people from unpleasant domestic realities, such as unemployment or inflation, which are not only the most difficult economic issues for a president to influence, but also the two most devastating effects on presidential popularity (Larocca, 2004). Under such circumstances, presidential advisers will recommend two time-proven distractions: (1) *the convenient foreign trip*, where the president visits a friendly nation, which has typically received American largesse, and consequently, the president is greeted as a hero by foreign citizens, receiving a popularity spike at home by the president waving the flag abroad; or (2) *the deliberate spilling of American blood*, by invading a third or fourth world nation, because an "impending crisis" threatens the United States; although typically no ordinary American has been prepared for such military interventions, for they were unaware of a threat existing. Under such conditions, the nation "rallies around the president," showing a sharp boost in his or her popularity ratings (Foot, McFarlane, & Mastanduno, 2003).

Avoiding Violations of Type

The president must avoid violations of type, which is "almost any public conduct that contradicts an image important to people" (Klapp, 1964, p. 12). Goffman used the phrase "communication out of character" to describe a social act that is in contradiction to the public's expectations of one's behavior (1959, pp. 167–207), which Klapp (1964) depicted as the *president's central role* or the "thing for which people admire him or that they expect from him" (p. 138).

Goffman (1959) has argued that artfully constructed impression management strategies may be thought of as *cognitive praxis*, the deliberate creation of a *private* and a *public self.* Goffman identified both *back-stage* or *private behaviors* and *front stage* or *public behaviors.* Political leaders who do not successfully manage their backstage behaviors, keeping them secret, hidden from the public's view, will likely face declining public approval and dismal polling results. Even those who are normally high self-monitors will face catastrophe if they

fall prey to the media's steady scrutiny of their unshielded behavior. For instance, President Bill Clinton committed a significant out-of-character communication following the funeral of his beloved friend and controversial Secretary of Commerce Ron Brown, whose plane had flown into a Croatian mountain in April 1996. On learning of the accident, Clinton expressed his unmitigated sorrow to the nation, while speaking with reporters. After the funeral, however, a CNN camera crew caught Clinton telling jokes, laughing with those in the funeral procession, which violated Clinton's portrayed political persona of a caring, compassionate leader.

Summary

Thus, successful presidents would be wise to monitor the public's perceptions of them and of their policies, not necessarily to always be guided by their evaluations; but, recognizing that if they firmly believe that the public is wrong in either their evaluations of their leadership or their presidential agenda, then it is their presidential responsibility, nay duty, to educate the public with the full range of impression management tools available to them.

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