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Contested Social Identity and Communication in Text and Talk About the Vietnam War

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Robert S. McNamara's (1995) *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam,* and the public response to it, provide a rich site for investigating the negotiation of social identities in a speech community in which more than 1 speech code is deployed. Drawing from the ethnography of speaking (Hymes, 1962, 1972, 1974), speech codes theory (Philipsen, 1997; Philipsen, Coutu, & Covarrubias, 2005), and identity construction (Carbaugh, 1996), I demonstrate, within the communication form of a social drama, the articulation, rejection, and then potential resolution of the social identity and appropriate communication of the U.S. Secretary of Defense. In so doing, the study contributes to the understanding of how communities with diverse codes manage public discussions about potentially intractable issues.

Every day, in each of our interactions with other people, we assert our social identity, and they then ratify, reject, or revise our asserted identity. In turn, others assert their social identities with us, and we ratify, reject, or revise those asserted identities. These interactions occur in situated scenes within larger cultural contexts, and they occur primarily through communication (Carbaugh, 1996).

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In this article, I explore just such an identity assertion, ratification, rejection, and revision dynamic within one scene of extensive discourse between interlocutors who, for the most part, assume they are part of the same culture. In fact, they find each other intelligible if not also at times mystifying. That they can communicate with each other demonstrates that, at some level, they share a common code for communicative conduct. That their communication becomes difficult when they try to discuss the appropriate communicative conduct of an agreed on social identity in their community demonstrates that at some level, they do not share a common code for communicative conduct. In the case study here, I explore what happens when a social identity and its associated communicative rights and responsibilities are asserted and rejected in a speech community with more than one speech code. More specifically, in the case study, I focus on the rights and responsibilities of social actors to engage in speaking or to remain silent about particular issues in public contexts.

In his book, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam,* Robert S. McNamara (1995) avows an identity in a communication form (social drama) that implicates a particular way of symbolizing or acting communicatively in the world. As evidenced in the broad public response to the publication of his book, McNamara's avowal is evaluated largely negatively (i.e., rejected) by his hearers. Some continued negotiation of identity and how it is constructed in communication continues as other hearers modify the majority response, providing a possible integrative redressive action (Carbaugh, 1996, pp. 145, 167). Through an explication of the discourse about identity presented in this case, I demonstrate how code differences in social identifications in a speech community become manifest in—and negotiated through—social interaction, or what Carbaugh (1996) referred to as understanding "diverse 'communities of shared identities'"(p. 202).

OVERVIEW OF THE CASE STUDY

Robert S. McNamara was Secretary of Defense for John F. Kennedy and then Lyndon B. Johnson until February of 1968. He participated actively in U.S. policy-making and enactment in Vietnam. By McNamara's own account, however, he left office not long after coming to the conclusion that he could not effectively support the U.S. administration's policies in Vietnam (McNamara, 1995, p. 313). McNamara (1995) voiced his concerns about the direction of the Vietnam War within the administration (pp. 234, 266–271, 306–310) and in front of Congress (p. 11) but not publicly at the time of his departure from office. When confronted with the choice to speak or not to speak *in public* about his doubts about the war, McNamara chose not to speak, both while in office and for 20 years after the last American troops left Vietnam.

In 1995, McNamara very publicly, through the release of *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* and through interviews about the book and the war, spoke about his doubts about U.S. policy in Vietnam. McNamara received both praise and criticism for speaking out: praise for his courage in seeing his mistakes and talking about them and criticism for not doing it all sooner and, so long after the end of the war, for doing it at all. The substantive heart of the discussion between McNamara and his respondents addresses the question: When is it appropriate (and inappropriate) for a U.S. government cabinet member, particularly the Secretary of Defense, to voice publicly his opposing views on governmental and military actions? Although the tragedies of the Vietnam War cannot be undone by answering this question, Lewis (1995) articulated well the importance of this issue:

> Many have noted that 58,000 Americans and more than 3 million Vietnamese died in that war while Robert McNamara and many others swallowed their doubts. But the danger of silence is not limited to the Vietnam War. It is in silence, without accountability, that democratic governments make their cruelest mistakes. (p. A17)

Historical Commentary on McNamara's Decisions About Voicing His Doubts Publicly

To gain some perspective on the more contemporary conversation about Robert S. McNamara's decisions to not speak, and then to speak, publicly about his views on the Vietnam War, it is useful to take a brief look at some historical commentary on his doubts and his public silence. During his time in office, McNamara was a man who adhered publicly to the party line. McNamara, however, did have doubts that others discussed just a few years after he left office:

> McNamara too was a man beset by doubts. Unlike Dean Rusk, whose private and public positions were identical, McNamara in private tended to unburden the misgivings of his troubled conscience. But during working hours, he again became the chief managerial talent behind the war. (de Gramont, 1971, p. 47)

Reston (1973) recognized the same impulse in McNamara:

> Always men at the top of powerful institutions have had to deal with the conflict between what they believe to be "right" and what they believe to be best for the institution. And in the end, and increasingly over the last generation, they have swallowed their own beliefs and gone along with the institution.
>
> Robert McNamara and later Clark Clifford [i.e., his successor] went along for a while and then broke with the President on Vietnam—not openly but gradually; but their opposition was not really effective in changing the policy—it was too subtle and too late. (p. 33)

McNamara's decisions about whether, when, and how to speak about his personal views on Vietnam occurred within the context of a relatively clear tradition of official loyalty to the President of the United States. Franck and Weisband (1974) noted that "American government officials, especially the President's 'official family,' are expected to have their consciences under strict control. Loyalty, not ethical autonomy or resignation, is the name of the game" (section 4, p. 7). They continued to comment specifically about McNamara:

> Nor did the moral issues of the Vietnam war drive any of the Johnson Cabinet or sub-Cabinet to quit in public protest. After 1966, Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara was known by friends to fret in private like Edward the Confessor, but still retained intact his public posture of loyalty. (Franck & Weisband, 1974, section 4, p. 7)

In the same time period that McNamara resigned, George W. Ball (1973) was known to vociferously question U.S. involvement in Vietnam within the administration (section 6, p. 41). Ball did not, however, resign in protest, and was criticized by some for his decision to remain in office as part of an administration supporting a policy with which he disagreed.

Commenting that only four American Cabinet members had resigned in protest from 1900 to 1974, Franck and Weisband (1974) challenged the American myth of the centrality of loyalty to a well-functioning democratic government by contrasting it to Britain's tradition of public-protest resignations. In other words, American government officials' appropriate public expression of dissenting views on government action is a cultural way of being imbued with premises about the salience of speech by prominent figures in public contexts.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

With this historical contextual background now set, I turn to the study at hand. This study is a reexamination of the data analyzed in Coutu (2000). A brief summary of Coutu's study of the codes of rationality and spirituality provides some larger context for both the theory and analysis in this study. Coutu's exploration of the codes of rationality and spirituality in the discourse of and surrounding Robert S. McNamara's (1995) book, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam,* described the oppositional codes McNamara and his interlocutors employed to discuss the Vietnam War.

Coutu (2000) utilized speech codes theory (Philipsen, 1997) and oppositional codes theory (Huspek, 1993, 1994) to reveal how a seemingly unified speech community—Americans—express, evaluate, and negotiate ways of speaking about the Vietnam War. Robert S. McNamara employed a code of rationality to explain and justify his and others' actions during the Vietnam War. Although he explicitly apologized for the mistakes he and others made, he did so using language such as "debate," "discuss," and "force." The use of this language, when examined as part of a system of symbols, meanings, premises, and rules about communication, reveals a code of communication that privileges logical, rational approaches to decision making in general and discussion of decisions surrounding the Vietnam War specifically.

McNamara's code of rationality comes into clear relief when juxtaposed to the code of spirituality employed by many of the people who responded to his written explanation of what went wrong in decision making during the Vietnam War (Coutu, 2000). Rather than engaging with McNamara's logically laid out explanations, his respondents criticized him for not talking about and apologizing for the war in the correct way. Specifically, they used language infused with moral and spiritual imagery to reject McNamara's account and to call for a reframing of the conversation in terms of the morality of the war. Building on Coutu's (2000) study, the case here weaves together three related strands of theory concerned with the study of culture and communication.

Ethnography of Communication

The primary theoretical influence for this article is the ethnography of communication as proposed by Hymes (1962, 1972, 1974). The most important tenet from Hymes's (1974) work that I follow here is the desire to formulate ways of speaking in a given speech community, as these ways of speaking reflect and shape the ways of life in a community (1974). Specifically, I aim to "find and formulate those means of speaking whose use, in a particular community, have meaning potential for those who use and experience them, and to specify what that meaning potential is" (Philipsen & Coutu, 2005, p. 361). Because the discussion I analyze here focuses prominently on what is *not* said, it is useful to bear in mind Saville-Troike's (1985) claim that an ethnographic approach to the study of speech and silence

> is not merely an accounting for what can be said, but *what* can be said *when*, *where*, *by whom*, *to whom*, in *what manner*, and in *what* particular *circumstances*. It follows naturally that this line of inquiry must consider also who may *not* speak about what and in what situations, as well. (p. 13)

Written text as data. True to Hymes's (1962) original formulation of what count as data in the ethnography of communication, in this study, I took speaking as the central focus of study. Much of the work in this tradition employs oral data; as with Coutu (2000), this study primarily employed written data. Both oral and written data are naturally occurring speech. In Hymes's (1962) original formulation of the ethnography of speaking, he makes a distinction between the generic categories of language and the actual use of language in communicative forms. Although different from oral texts, written texts are examples of the use of language in communicative forms and therefore warrant our attention as ethnographers of communication.

In addition to Coutu's (2000) ethnographic work with written text, critical discourse analysts have championed the use of both oral and written data in their work (e.g., Benke & Wodak, 2003; Martin & Wodak, 2003). Even though the agenda of critical discourse analysis differs significantly from the agenda of the ethnography of speaking, what traditionally count as data—naturally occurring interactions—are consistent across the two areas. For this study, it is especially useful to note the work of critical discourse analysts in studying the creation of contested historical narratives (Benke & Wodak, 2003; Martin & Wodak, 2003). Also relevant here is the study of politics and language. Peterson (2003) studied the contested nature of *American* through both oral and written metapragmatic data, showing the value of written texts in understanding language in use. Nelson (2003) made a strong argument for the claim that language creates war and peace, that it is through language—both oral and written—that conflicts arise and end.

Speech Codes Theory

Coutu (2000) demonstrated, through her case study, Hymes's (1974) idea that a speech community is an "organization of diversity" (p. 433). This demonstration leads to the second theoretical influence in this study: speech codes theory. In systematically exploring the idea that a speech community is an organization of diversity, Coutu contributed to a revision of Philipsen's (1997) original speech codes theory to include a proposition about the prospect of multiple speech codes being deployed within one speech community (Philipsen, Coutu, & Covarrubias, 2005). With the new proposition now published, in this article, I aim to explicate further the level to which speech codes might differ within one community by examining a second discussion within the original corpus.

A productive venue into a speech code is through observation of metapragmatic discourse within the cultural form of a social drama (see, e.g., Carbaugh, 1996; Philipsen et al., 2005). A social drama is a moment (or series of moments) in a community when someone is called publicly to account for his or her violation of a cultural expectation. Subsequently, there is a process of response(s) to the challenge, acceptance or rejection of the response(s), and either reintegration of the transgressor or social schism (Philipsen, 1992). Throughout, there is explicit commentary about the communication expectations of the community. In this case study, McNamara's discourse became the account in response to the perceived violation among his hearers that he should have spoken out sooner—or not at all—

about his dissenting views on the Vietnam War. Whereas Coutu's (2000) study focused on what *kind* of language should be used to discuss the Vietnam War, this study focused on whether, when, and how a revelation such as McNamara's should occur at all. In so doing, it provides a detailed case supporting Saville-Troike's (1985) claim that the ethnography of communication should concern itself with both the communicative systems of speaking and the communicative systems of silence.

This focus on the appropriateness of voicing personal views on the Vietnam War leads to an elaboration of premises and rules regarding speech in this community. These two constructs are part of the larger system of symbols, meanings, premises, and rules pertaining to communicative conduct that comprise a speech code (Philipsen, 1997; Philipsen et al., 2005). Much of the analysis here centers on premises and rules pertaining to communication. Premises are statements of belief or value (Philipsen, 1992, p 8). For example, a premise about communication could be that telling lies is harmful to relationships. This is a value statement about a particular kind of communication behavior. Rules differ from premises in that they prescribe or proscribe communicative behavior, and they carry some degree of force (Philipsen, 1992, p. 8). For example, children should not lie to their parents is a rule about communicative behavior. It specifies particular social actors and the kind of communication they ought to engage in. Rules "are associated with named social positions in such a way that when any member of the population assumes any given social position, he displays the appropriate associated pattern of action" (Wieder, 1974, p. 34). Not only are rules associated with particular social identities, but the internalization of this connection is important to the perceived moral propriety of interlocutors' actions (Wieder, 1974, p. 37).

Rules, unlike premises, can be broken. Children can, for instance, lie to their parents, and they may very well face consequences if caught. You cannot, however, violate a premise. You can think, for instance, that telling lies is good for relationships, but there is no consequence for simply believing this premise to be true. With a premise, there is no specified behavioral action. Premises often underlie rules, as they are both components of larger systems of communicative behavior.

Identity

The premises and rules articulated here are directly connected to *who* is speaking, which brings me to my third major theoretical influence, the communicative construction of social identity (Carbaugh, 1996). From Carbaugh's (1996) perspective, "cultural codes are … a condition for and a dimension of all communication, when it proceeds coherently, or intelligibly" (p. 200). To view social identity as communication, informed by cultural codes, means to view social identity, or who one is, as depending "partly on 'where' I am, with whom I am, and what I can ably do there, in that scene, with those people, given the (material and symbolic) resources that are available to the people there" (Carbaugh, 1996, p. 24). Identity, construed in this way, is at the core of the discussion of whether, when, and how a revelation such as McNamara's should occur. Who McNamara is—both who he asserts himself to be and who his interlocutors assert him to be—is displayed and negotiated through communication in a particular time and place with particular people and resources.

Identities are not only constructed in and through communication; they are displayed, named, negotiated, contested, and denied (Carbaugh, 1996). With these processes also come displaying, naming, contesting, and denying of prescribed and proscribed communicative (and other) activities associated with each identity. In this case study, Robert S. McNamara and many of his respondents disagreed about the communicative expectations associated with one social identity. The interlocutors I discuss in the following analysis agreed that McNamara was the Secretary (and then former Secretary) of Defense. But, they assigned to that identity different communication rights, duties, and responsibilities consistent with the codes of rationality and spirituality. They articulated different sets of symbolic resources for the identity, and they saw different outcomes (both actual and possible) of McNamara's communication actions. In fact, these "'dueling depictions'" (Carbaugh, 1996, p. 177) of McNamara as Secretary of Defense provide a vivid example of Carbaugh's (1996) assertion that "when one code is in use, the other looks—or rather is said to be—downright preposterous" (p. 177).

Couched in the language of social drama, one can also see the possibility of integrative redressive action, some mutually intelligible and agreeable sense for the communicative actions appropriate for the Secretary of Defense. Carbaugh (1996) argued that the redressive phase of a social drama is "crucially important, for it is in this phase, through cultural communicative forms, that attempts are made to repair the violation and bring contesting factions and interests together" (p. 159). The possibility of integrative redressive action—action that presents the possibility of a negotiated stance for the two major conflicting constituencies in this case—comes from a group of respondents that judged McNamara's contributions to the conversations about the Vietnam War as better late than never.

METHOD

The primary data here come from Robert S. McNamara's (1995) account of the Vietnam War in *In retrospect: The tragedy and lessons of Vietnam* and 250 responses to McNamara's book and interviews with McNamara in the 6 months following the publication of his book. The responses appeared in *The Wall Street Journal, The Christian Science Monitor, The National Review, The New York*

Times, The Chicago Tribune, National Public Radio, Primetime Live, and the then *MacNeil/Lehrer Newshour.*

In reading through the comments by McNamara himself as well as responses from others to his book, a prominent theme emerged, especially in the responses to his book. Many respondents criticized McNamara's choice to remain silent about his views on Vietnam. For example, one article in *The New York Times* characterized McNamara's book as "breaking a 27-year silence" ("On McNamara: Hanoi Agrees," 1995, p. A2). McNamara himself did not engage much with this particular theme as "silence." However, in reading more carefully both the respondents' comments about his "silence" and related comments by McNamara, what the respondents described as silence became more specifically a concern with when, whether, and how McNamara should have spoken about his views on the war. In his book and in interviews, McNamara did engage quite clearly with this more specific concern about the conditions under which he should have aired his personal views about the U.S. government's actions in Vietnam.

My first step in analysis was to read the entirety of McNamara's (1995) book and all of the collected responses to it several times. As noted previously, the theme of McNamara's decision not to speak publicly about his views on the Vietnam War was prominent in the articles about him, and I took that theme as my starting point. I created a separate collection of comments about his decision not to voice his dissenting views publicly by compiling all references—both from his book and from the responses—to his decision not to speak before 1995. McNamara's book does not contain much specific commentary about his choice to remain publicly silent about his views except for a few matter-of-fact statements consistent with his use of the code of rationality. There were, however, several themes related to whether, when, and how he should have spoken, and so I gleaned all passages related to (a) public statements while in office, (b) government deception, (c) key statements within the administration, (d) reasons for the manner in which he left office, (e) loyalty to the president, (f) comments about his decision to speak in 1995, and (g) purpose in speaking in 1995. All of these themes were discussed by McNamara in his rationalization of his communicative behavior, namely, his decisions to speak or not to speak in given situations.

The corpus of references to McNamara's communication choices, as specified previously, includes 43 statements by McNamara and 51 statements by his respondents. The excerpts vary in length from one sentence to several pages. The short excerpts are sentences about McNamara's choice to speak that occurred in the context of discussions of other issues. The longer excerpts generally have McNamara's communication choices as the main focus and often include several references to his decisions. My goal was simply to include all references to McNamara choices, regardless of their length. Because I am not concerned here with demonstrating the number of excerpts in which a particular comment was made, the inclusion of more than one comment in one excerpt is not problematic.

In fact, keeping longer passages intact allowed me to retain a clear understanding of the context in which comments were made.

From these compiled passages, I extracted sets of premises and rules for the use and interpretation of speaking pertaining to the identity of government officials, specifically cabinet members like the Secretary of Defense. By *extract,* I mean that I looked for information about who could/should speak, when, where, to whom, about what, and under what circumstances (Saville-Troike, 1985). Included in these passages were instances as well of who could/should not speak. With Saville-Troike's statement about silence as a guide, I analyzed the data explicitly using Hymes' (1972) SPEAKING framework, focusing specifically on scene, participants (especially roles), ends (both purposes and outcomes of speaking), norms (of both interaction and interpretation), instrumentalities, and key.

I concluded, as I discuss following, that McNamara was functioning from a set of symbolic resources that demanded he, as Secretary of Defense, not speak about his personal views on the Vietnam War (with the exception of 1995 when he published his book), and that others were functioning from a set of symbolic resources that found McNamara's communication choices morally reprehensible. I have examined closely the texts to extrapolate the underlying cultural premises and rules that motivated McNamara's and the commentators' speech and bound them together as a community that must negotiate the appropriate uses and meanings of communication associated with particular social identities.

In the following text, I display many reactions to McNamara's decision to speak publicly as well as McNamara's own commentary about his decisions about whether and when to share his personal opinions about the war. From these data excerpts, I draw three different systems of speaking and identity manifest in the public interaction between McNamara and his commentators.

CONTESTED SOCIAL IDENTITY AND COMMUNICATION CONDUCT

As already noted, McNamara and his interlocutors disagreed about the communication he should have engaged in as Secretary and former Secretary of Defense. They disagreed about this quite publicly, utilizing the nation's media to voice their respective opinions. In the following text, I outline the major positions taken in regard to the appropriate communication practices associated with the identity of a cabinet member such as the Secretary of Defense.

I frame the public discussion as a social drama in which McNamara, once he published his 1995 memoir, was called to account for (a) not voicing his doubts earlier and (b) voicing his doubts when they could no longer change the course of the war. He responded to this criticism both through some of the passages in his book in which he tried to preempt the criticism and in subsequent published articles and interviews. His account, however, was not accepted by most of his hearers. There was a small group of people who recognized McNamara's timing error in voicing his doubts, but chided his critics for too harshly condemning him. This last group provides a possible integrative redressive action to bridge the polarized positions (Carbaugh, 1996) occupied by McNamara and his critics.

In displaying the data here, the social drama appears to be a linear progression of one comment after another. That appearance, however, is deceiving. The discussion between McNamara and his respondents was dynamic, with each side having continuing to assert its perspective while the other continued to reject it. Also, as the public negotiation of the symbolic resources appropriate to the social identity of a cabinet member dissipated, there was still no clear resolution of whether, when, and how cabinet members should voice publicly their dissenting views on government actions.

McNAMARA IS CRITICIZED

> His regret cannot be huge enough to balance the books for our dead soldiers. The ghosts of those unlived lives circle close around Mr. McNamara. Surely he must in every quiet and prosperous moment hear the ceaseless whispers of those poor boys in the infantry, dying in the tall grass, platoon by platoon, for no purpose. What he took from them cannot be repaid by prime-time apology and stale tears, three decades late. ("McNamara's War," 1995, p. A24)

This excerpt from an editorial in *The New York Times* expresses many of the themes present in the responses of critics who denounced McNamara's decision to speak out against the Vietnam War in 1995. We see here a weighing of the value of McNamara's decision to reveal his doubts about U.S. policy in Vietnam in 1995 against the cost of his decision to keep his views quiet for so long.

The "late" timing of McNamara's revelations and the desire to "balance the books" were reflected also in James Fallows' comments on *National Public Radio's Morning Edition*:

> In the cycles of life, a desire to square accounts is natural, but Robert McNamara has forfeited his right to do so in public. You missed your chance, Mr. Secretary. It would have been better to go out silently if you could not find the courage to speak when it could have done your country any good. ("Commentator Says," 1995)

McNamara, according to Fallows, lost the opportunity to make amends for his mistakes because the cost of his mistakes was so high. The high cost of McNamara's public silence rankled many commentators on his book. The fact that half of the

58,000 Americans who died in the Vietnam War died after McNamara left office was a difficult issue for many to balance with his justifications for not voicing his opinions about the war in 1968 (“Senator John Kerry,” 1995).

In addition to criticizing McNamara for not speaking out about his doubts when he could have made a difference, some commentators argued that McNamara’s book adds to the cynicism with which Americans view government (“Mea Culpa,” 1995, p. 18). On a personal level, McNamara’s revelations bring the war back to those who fought, as is evidenced in this excerpt:

> I am lost somewhere between grief and rage over Robert McNamara’s recent announcement that the Vietnam War was “Wrong. Terribly wrong.” As a former Vietnam combat solider and veteran advocate, I feel horrified, betrayed and repulsed by his sudden revelation. …
>
> McNamara has torn open my memory bank. I have spent hours confused, trying to sort through what he has said. In this sadness the war comes raging back. I can see Gurny falling, helmet flying, blond hair tousled, a round tearing through his throat. And Big Jimmy lying flat, soaked in blood, head back, biting at the air. I want to wash my hands again. (Estes, 1995, p. 19)

Many of McNamara’s respondents saw the outcome of his book very differently than he intended.

In response to a statement McNamara made during an interview in which he said his voice would not have made a difference in 1968, some expressed disbelief. Lewis (1995) asked

> Can a man as smart as Robert McNamara believe such nonsense? In 1968 opponents of the war were still being dismissed by many as crazy kids, draft-dodgers, Communists. It would have made an immense difference if the former Secretary of Defense had told the truth. (p. A17)

Rather than functioning to give aid and comfort to the enemy, as McNamara claimed (“Focus—In Retrospect,” 1995), Lewis (1995) and Ayres (1995) asserted that McNamara would have given credibility and strength to the protest movement. Also, although Frankel (1995) agreed that McNamara’s loyalty to the president was “the right ethic for normal times” (section 7, pp. 1, 24), he and many others (e.g., Karnow, 1995; “McNamara’s Memoirs,” 1995) contended that “a thousand dead Americans a month create their own constituency. Even military discipline admits a higher duty than hierarchical loyalty when power is badly used and puts lives at risk” (Frankel, 1995, section 7, pp. 1, 24).

McNamara’s critics’ comments revolve around a set of premises and rules. The premises that have emerged through the critics’ discourse are

1. There is a time limit on the value of speaking out, even if speaking out about the truth.
2. McNamara and other cabinet members had an obligation to citizens that, in times of war, outweighed their obligation to the president.
3. Revisiting controversies of war after the time in which the discussion could change the war's direction brings pain and suffering.

These premises articulate beliefs about the communicative responsibilities of public officials. The corresponding rules that relate to these premises are

1. A cabinet or ex-cabinet member should speak against his/her president's actions before it is too late for the speaking out to effect change.
2. A cabinet member or ex-cabinet member should not voice his/her opinions once the time to change policy has passed.

These rules clearly prescribe and proscribe communicative actions appropriate to a cabinet member. The premises and rules here are reminiscent of the code of spirituality (Coutu, 2000) in that they focus on the moral aspects of speaking out by specifying the conditions under which it is and is not permissible for a cabinet member to speak, even if speaking the truth. The conditions have to do with the timing of the speaking in relationship to its impact on people, both past and present.

Taken together, these premises and rules comprise a coherent set of symbolic resources associated with the social identity of a cabinet or ex-cabinet member. We hear here critics who have pointed to McNamara's obligation, as Secretary of Defense, to the American people as far more salient than his loyalty to the president. The fundamental rule to which they have pointed is that if McNamara chose to remain publicly silent about his views on Vietnam until 1995, he should have kept silent forever. The guiding principle here is that it is too little, too late to speak so long after the end of the war. The end result of his speaking when he resigned in 1968 could have been increased credibility to the protest movement and possibly a limit of casualties. The result of his speaking in 1995 is to revisit on veterans and others the pain that Vietnam brought. Through this coherent set of premises and rules, McNamara's respondents called him to account for his decisions to remain silent for so long and then to finally speak about his doubts.

McNAMARA RESPONDS

McNamara responded to his critics by offering an account of his actions. An *account* is "a linguistic device employed whenever an action is subjected to valuative inquiry" (Scott & Lyman, 1968, p. 46). McNamara here was responding to his critics' charge that he should have spoken publicly about his doubts when the war was still being fought. In offering his account of his and others' actions during the Vietnam War, McNamara expressed an awareness that some people may question why he did not voice publicly his concerns earlier than 1995. In fact, he referred to private conversations with friends as a way to frame his explanation of why he did not speak publicly about his doubts about U.S. policy in Vietnam. McNamara referred to resigning in protest as the speech act he could have, but did not, use to challenge the president's policies:

> Many friends, then and since, have told me I was wrong not to have resigned in protest over the president's policy. Let me explain why I did not. The president (with the exception of the vice president) is the only elected official of the executive branch. He appoints each cabinet officer, who should have no constituency other than him. That is how cabinet officers are kept accountable to the people. A cabinet officer's authority and legitimacy derives from the president. It is also true, however, that because of their frequent exposure, some cabinet officers develop power independent of the president.
>
> To a degree, I held such power, and some said I should have used it by resigning, challenging the president's Vietnam policy, and leading those who sought to force a change.
>
> I believe that would have been a violation of my responsibility to the president and my oath to uphold the Constitution. (McNamara, 1995, pp. 313–314)

McNamara's comments here provide a justification based on an "*appeal to loyalties*" (Scott & Lyman, 1968, p. 51). A justification of this kind is used when "the actor asserts that his action was permissible or even right since it served the interests of another to whom he owes an unbreakable allegiance or affection" (Scott & Lyman, 1968, p. 51). In his book, McNamara (1995) stated clearly that, as Secretary of Defense, his loyalty was to the president. McNamara (1995) supported his decision by pointing to Dean Acheson's resignation under Franklin Roosevelt as the model of how to resign if one disagrees with a president's policies—in silence (p. 314). Through these comments, McNamara articulated a clear set of principles to justify his decision not to speak out publicly against the war when he left the service of Lyndon Johnson in 1968.

Importantly, however, this set of principles only applies to speaking in public. As the code of rationality supports (Coutu, 2000), McNamara highly valued airing dissenting views while in the actual office of Secretary of Defense. In fact, he accounts for many of the mistakes the government made in its planning and implementation in Vietnam by pointing to a lack of debate and discussion of fundamental issues. As a matter of the public record to which McNamara (1995) referred in his book, he did, in fact, voice his concerns about the direction of the Vietnam War within the administration (pp. 234, 266–271, 306–310) and in front of Congress (p. 11) but did not do so publicly.

In addition to loyalty to the president, McNamara also argued that if he had chosen to dissent publicly after he left office, he would have provided aid and comfort to the enemy. In defending his decision not to speak out about his views after leaving office, McNamara stated

> What should I have said that would not have brought aid and comfort to the enemy? I was Secretary of Defense until February 29, 1968. After that, I was an ex-Secretary of Defense. What could I have said that would not have brought aid and comfort? I have no regrets about not speaking out then. ("Focus—In Retrospect," 1995)

To McNamara, speaking about his views on Vietnam soon after leaving office would have "violated" his responsibility to the president and "brought aid and comfort to the enemy." His identity as both Secretary of Defense and ex-Secretary of Defense shaped his decisions about whether and how it was appropriate to speak about Vietnam. McNamara pointed to a strict set of role-related rules that guided his communicative behavior. This set of rules, according to McNamara, restricted his right as a cabinet member, present or past, to speak out publicly against the President's decisions.

However, these rules are not eternal, as he did "speak out" by writing his book in 1995. McNamara (1995) wrote that he was compelled to write about Vietnam because he had "grown sick at heart witnessing the cynicism and even contempt with which so many people view our political institutions and leaders" (p. xvi). McNamara (1995) wrote that he

> want[s] Americans to understand why we made the mistakes we did, and to learn from them. I hope to say, "Here is something we can take away from Vietnam that is constructive and applicable to the world of today and tomorrow." That is the only way our nation can ever hope to leave the past behind. The ancient Greek dramatists wrote, "The reward of suffering is experience." Let this be the lasting legacy of Vietnam. (p. xvii)

Coutu (2000) argued that McNamara was not as successful as he hoped in healing Americans' cynicism because his code of rationality conflicted with the code of spirituality his hearers expected. However, it is clear from McNamara's own writing that he intended his book—his act of speaking out about the war—to accomplish specific goals.

By his own account, McNamara did not speak out earlier about his views on Vietnam because he wanted to avoid certain outcomes. In particular, McNamara (1995) did not want to appear "self serving, defensive or vindictive" (p. xv) and did not want to rewrite history to "justify his actions" ("Robert McNamara Reflects," 1995). McNamara "believed that the decisions, the lessons, should in the first instance have been focused on by scholars rather than participants" ("Robert McNamara Reflects," 1995).

McNamara justified his decision to keep publicly quiet about his personal views on Vietnam until 1995 by invoking a set of symbols, meanings, premises, and rules pertaining to communication. Several premises emerge from his discourse:

1. A cabinet or ex-cabinet member who speaks publicly against his or her president during wartime gives aid and comfort to the enemy.
2. A cabinet member's constituency is the president.
3. Scholars, rather than participants, are the appropriate people to initially study and discuss the Vietnam War.
4. Speaking about the Vietnam War in 1995 will ease the cynicism of the American people.

These premises reflect beliefs about the outcomes of speaking, the role of the Secretary of Defense, and the role of scholars in studying the Vietnam War. In addition to these premises, McNamara referred to the rule that a cabinet member should not speak out publicly against a president's position on war, a very specific proscription of communication.

Taken together, these premises and rules comprise a coherent set of symbolic resources associated with being a cabinet member, a set of resources that guided McNamara's communicative actions. Specifically, a cabinet member may not speak out against his or her president in public during wartime because the role of cabinet member demands loyalty to the president. Even after leaving one's post, the ex-cabinet member's loyalty is to the president. Speaking out, in such a case, is both disloyal to the office of the president and provides aid and comfort to the enemy. However, voicing dissent once scholars have had the opportunity to study the war could contribute to the healing of the country's cynicism. McNamara's account addressed his critics' concerns, but it did not satisfy their objections. There is a group, however, that granted McNamara some ground, given his account.

POSSIBLE INTEGRATIVE REDRESSIVE ACTION?

There have been those who, although they agreed that McNamara should have spoken up sooner, claimed he should be given some credit for speaking up at all. In so doing, they have offered a possible integrative redressive action (Carbaugh, 1996). Mikala Cassidy, on National Public Radio's "'Morning Edition' Listeners" (1995) wrote that "it is never to [sic] late to say that we are wrong. It is never too late to say that we are sorry," whereas others have credited McNamara with helping to “clarify the historical record” (“Focus—Healing the Wounds?,” 1995), with showing courage in speaking (Ayres, 1995; “‘Morning Edition’ Listeners,” 1995), and with providing the country with an opportunity to finally heal (Estes, 1995). These interlocutors pointed to the possible positive outcomes of McNamara’s decision to voice his doubts about U.S. policy in Vietnam even if he waited until 1995 to do so.

Sharaf (1995), in a letter to *The New York Times*, reflected the general sentiment of those who wished McNamara had spoken up sooner but believed his comments should still be welcome:

> Robert McNamara has done what few, if any major officials, in or out of office, have done. However belatedly, he has detailed and mourned many of his tragic blunders. I hope the often hostile and, worse, patronizing reaction to his account does not teach us another lesson: Never acknowledge your errors, regrets or sins, lest you be attacked for not apologizing enough or for acknowledging the wrong sins or for revealing them too late. (p. 47)

Although late in coming to the public conversation about Vietnam, Sharaf proposed that McNamara should be given credit for speaking out and should serve as a model for others in similar situations.

The premises that form part of the foundation for this perspective are

1. It is never too late to apologize.
2. It takes courage to speak about one’s mistakes.
3. Truth can bring healing.
4. Truth can bring clarification of the historical record.

These premises articulate beliefs about speaking that form the foundation for a rule about communicative action: Any person—whether cabinet member, ex-cabinet member, citizen, and so forth—should be allowed to apologize without being criticized harshly by his or her hearers. This set of premises and rules focuses on the outcomes of McNamara’s act of speaking out, not in the sense of logical outcomes but in the sense of “healing.”

These code components provide yet a third set of symbolic resources available to McNamara as a cabinet (then ex-cabinet) member. They also provide a rebuttal to some of McNamara’s critics by framing those to whom an apology is made as having a communicative responsibility to refrain from criticism. Specifically, any person should be allowed to apologize and to admit mistakes no matter when it occurs to promote healing and clarify history. Moreover, those who hear the apology should not unduly criticize the person apologizing, for such criticism may discourage others from apologizing in the future.

DISCUSSION

To synthesize the theoretical and practical implications of this study, let me now return to the primary theoretical influences from which it began. First is the ethnography of communication, as has been proposed by Hymes (1962, 1972). The ethnography of communication provided several important conceptual points for this study. First is the intellectual focus on speaking (Hymes, 1962). This study illustrates how adopting a broad definition of what counts as speaking by utilizing written public texts can help to access a wide range of important communicative moments. Second, the ethnography of communication provided a fundamental concern with members' meanings (Hymes, 1974). By ascertaining the meanings associated with the various constituents' comments in the corpus here, this study promotes understanding of diverse viewpoints on an important American issue and presents a description of the dynamics of one difficult public conversation. Finally, the ethnography of communication provided the framing of a speech community as an "organization of diversity" (Hymes, 1974, p. 433).

This framing of speech communities is consistent with Philipsen et al.'s (2005) proposition that "*in any given speech community, multiple codes are deployed*" (p. 59), the first way in which speech codes theory influenced this study. The case here provides a deeper understanding of the significance of multiple speech codes being deployed in one speech community. Communities that must make weighty decisions together may have some fundamental differences in how they define moral communicative action in their world. Understanding this and seeing the sites of possibility for negotiation and constraint may help to bridge other seemingly intractable differences of worldview and communicative conduct.

Speech codes theory also influenced the focus here on examining speech itself for rules and premises of speech codes (Philipsen et al., 2005), that is, the fundamental resources used by each of the constituent groups in justifying the type of communication appropriate for the Secretary of Defense. Finally, proposition six of speech codes theory (Philipsen et al., 2005, p. 63) points to the ways in which social actors use speech codes to talk about, shape, and respond to communicative actions. In the case of McNamara and his respondents, there were multiple codes deployed so that each comes into clear relief as it is used in the service of evaluating, justifying, and interpreting the communication taking place. With the difference in answers to the fundamental question of who can say what and when about the Vietnam War, one can see an attempt to shape the community's sense of what constitutes coherent and socially legitimate communicative enactments of one social identity.

The idea that social actors use speech codes to talk about, shape, and respond to communicative actions leads to the final major theoretical influence on this study: identity (Carbaugh, 1996). Not only did McNamara and his respondents argue and disagree about the communication taking place in their exchanges, but they argued and disagreed about the proper embodiment of the identity of Secretary of Defense. It is not simply a matter of miscommunication. This is a fundamental disagreement about the kind of communication the Secretary of Defense has a duty and a responsibility to enact. It is, then, evaluation, justification, and interpretation not only of communication but of the identities of the communicators themselves. In this way, this study adds another twist to Carbaugh's (1996) theory of how social and cultural dimensions interplay with identity. Here, there are two different codes—one of rationality and one of spirituality—within one speech community. They each include the social role of a cabinet member, specifically, Secretary of Defense, as part of their government structure. However, they disagree about what it means communicatively to be Secretary of Defense. They also see their disagreement as consequential for promoting their deeply held beliefs about how people should enact this specific social identity.

McNamara provided a logical account for his own communicative actions, as a cabinet and then ex-cabinet member, surrounding public discussion of the Vietnam War. There was, for him, a clear sense of his duty to the president and, later, after scholars examined the war, a logical time for him to speak out about his doubts in an attempt to help the country avoid future mistakes and increased cynicism. Taken on its own, this analysis of McNamara's discourse provides one coherent perspective on how cabinet members should engage in discussion of the Vietnam War.

However, just as the code of spirituality sheds light on the code of rationality when the two are juxtaposed (Coutu, 2000), McNamara's logical, rational account for why he made the communicative decisions he made is complicated by his respondents' sense of appropriate communication. McNamara's respondents' views, although different in regard to whether McNamara was justified in speaking out so late, have been consistent in their focus on the good that might come of his revelations. Where one group dismissed his right to speak because he was too late to change the course of the war, another accepted his right to speak because of the opportunity to learn and heal from his disclosures. McNamara's decision not to speak in 1968 was a morally valenced one; his decision to speak in 1995 was a morally judged one. At each point in time, the judgment of his decision was tied not to him as an individual but to him as the person who occupied a particular political role.

What one can learn from this multilayered analysis is that the conversation about McNamara's book was, at every turn, a conversation that is fed by different codes of communication. These codes of communication reflect different worldviews or sets of values about who people are, how society is structured, and how people should act in social life (Philipsen, 1992). This understanding obviously does not change the outcome of the Vietnam War. It does, however, give a better sense for why it is so difficult to have conversations about the Vietnam War that are satisfying to the people involved. The real challenge, then, is to find a way to bridge conflicting, deeply held beliefs about communication and social identity to promote mutual understanding. Perhaps the third group here, who argued for some acceptance of McNamara's choices while also recognizing the error of his timing, provides a model, of sorts, for bridging seemingly intractable public conversations among people with different views of the communicative expectations for particular social actors.

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