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Gendered leadership in crisis contexts : exploring the intersections of discourse of renewal and ethic of care

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Gendered Leadership in Crisis Contexts: Exploring the Intersections of Discourse of Renewal

and Ethic of Care

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Abstract

Gendered Leadership in Crisis Contexts: Exploring the Intersections of Discourse of Renewal

and Ethic of Care

Shoaa Almalki

St. Mary's University, 2017

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This study examined the role of gender in crisis leadership discourse by engaging two theories, discourse of renewal theory and ethic of care, in the context of General Motors' (GM) deadly ignition switch crisis. The purpose of this study was to explore the intersections of discourse of renewal, ethic of care, and gendered leadership focusing on the role of feminine attributes in crisis communication and applying the findings to draw new insights about the glass cliff effect. Using thematic analysis and case study methods, I analyzed current GM CEO Mary Barra's discourse in speeches and social media posts to answer research questions RQ1: How did GM CEO Mary Barra's crisis communication represent stereotypically feminine leadership qualities, if at all? RQ2: How do discourse of renewal themes apply to Mary Barra's speeches and social media posts, if at all? RQ3: How do ethic of care qualities apply to Mary Barra's speeches and social media posts, if at all? RQ4: How is discourse of renewal theory gendered, if at all? The findings provide an explanation of how the presence of feminine qualities in Barra's discourse influences her crisis communication style. Also, the results suggest that leaders who have more feminine attributes including being visible, present, and caring about others, could be seen as more favorable in times of crisis. This explanation gives more insights on how glass cliff effect could be a strategy that organizations pursue to help communicate better with their publics during difficult times. Moreover, the overlap I found between DRT and ethic of care themes

suggest that the leader-based theory presents more feminine qualities like courage, responsibility, and responsiveness to others' needs. This overlap provides a new insight into how DRT is gendered.

Keywords: crisis, gender, glass cliff, ethic of care

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Chapter I

Introduction

Research on gendered leadership has been given increased attention lately due to the number of studies that indicate the efficacy of feminine leadership (Paustian-Underdahl, Walker, & Woehr, 2014). Some leadership styles that are considered beneficial, such as transformational, charismatic, and authentic leadership, demonstrate a great deal of stereotypical feminine qualities, such as caring, loyalty, and collaboration (Simola, Barling, and Turner, 2010). Additionally, gender stereotypes research examines organizational psychology theories like "think crisis-think female" and "think management-think male," which suggest that people perceive women as more suitable for leadership during crisis but assume men are better suited to management in general (Ryan, M. K., Haslam, S. A., Hersby, M. D., & Bongiorno, R. (2010)).

Ryan and Haslam (2007) provide evidence that gender stereotyping is one reason for a workplace phenomenon that they called glass cliff. This theory accounts for the observation that, even though women are under-represented in upper management positions overall, women are more likely to be hired to those positions in times of crisis than they are in non-crisis times because of the stereotypical feminine qualities perceived to be more suited to handling crises (Ryan & Haslam, 2007). Cases like General Motors' (GM) Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Mary Barra, Yahoo's CEO Marissa Mayer, and UK Prime Minister Theresa May are some examples of hiring or electing female leaders in times of crisis. While it is unclear yet if the female leaders in these examples succeeded or failed in their roles as CEOs, it is important to note that each case has its circumstances that differ from one another. While glass cliff literature considers this effect as an example of discrimination against women, it is worth the research to investigate whether glass cliff cases offer an opportunity for an

alternative communication style during crisis in which leaders with certain feminine qualities are a better fit for such positions in critical times.

According to Ulmer, Seeger, and Sellnow (2007), it is significant that leaders become more visible and present during crisis. Also, an immediate rhetorical response from the leader that addresses the victims of the crisis is crucial. When it comes to crisis times, the role of leadership becomes critical in rescuing the organization's reputation, protecting publics, and handling the crisis in the media. Crisis communication is designated by many scholars as one of the most prominent areas of research in public relations (Toth, 2010). Scholars in public relations emphasize the importance of ethical communication, especially during crisis. A strategy like two-way symmetrical communication is one example of how public relations has evolved ethically due to publics' needs and demands for a more egalitarian way to communicate with organizations (Kim, 2015).

Crisis communication theories have been examined over the years to provide leaders and public relations practitioners with better strategies to handle crises. New theories have emerged from varying types of crises and from the need for effective leaders who can demonstrate clear paths forward for organizations, clients, and publics. The role of CEO is significant in maintaining organizational reputation and in dealing with crises (Pittinsky, Sommer, & Zhu, 2011). Discourse of renewal theory (DRT), a key theoretical framework of this study, emphasizes the role of leadership in post-crisis discourse (Ulmer et al., 2007).

Although studies have examined DRT, there appears to be no study examining the role of gender and ethics together in crisis leadership discourse. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the case of GM's ignition switch crisis to explore the intersections of discourse of renewal, ethics of care, and gendered leadership. Because GM is a major automobile company with broad publics that have been severely affected by a potentially

devastating crisis, it is worth studying to discover how gender impacts the way leaders deal with crises.

Preview

The following chapter is the literature review, which consists of a background about the ignition switch crisis and the current GM CEO Mary Barra, and keyword definitions. After that, three major areas in which my research is focused are reviewed, discourse of renewal theory, ethic of care, the role of gender in crisis leadership. Following, research questions are presented. The third chapter is the method section in which I discussed the approach and methods I used, validity in qualitative methods, sampling process, and data analysis procedures. The fourth chapter is the results, in which I reported the findings of my analysis. The fifth and final chapter is the discussion and conclusion, in which I discussed the findings and their implications, limitation of the study, and future research.

Chapter II

Literature Review

The literature review starts with a background of the GM crisis and its current CEO Mary Barra. Keyword definitions are then presented, followed by three main literature review topics in the framework of the current study: discourse of renewal theory, ethic of care, and the role of gender in crisis leadership. Finally, research questions are presented.

General Motors Crisis and Leadership

Since 2001, General Motors detected a problem in the ignition switch in several models of its vehicles. The functional core of the problem was that the ignition switch in the cars may turn off the engine while the car is being driven and disable the airbags. So far, more than 30 million cars have been recalled, and the defected cars caused at least 124 deaths (Basu, 2014; Isidor & Perez, 2015). Although the company was aware of the problem, it had not been dealt with except for making a few recalls without addressing the publics regarding the fatal malfunction of the vehicles until it was made public by a lawyer who filed a wrongful death lawsuit against GM. The company claimed higher leadership had not known about the issue until the lawsuit was filed against GM (Lee & Plungis, 2014). The malfunction was finally addressed publicly by GM when it was investigated by the government after the new CEO Mary Barra was promoted in 2014. Barra addressed the crisis in several speeches in which she addressed GM employees and the publics. It was stated in Barra's speeches that the problem could have been controlled but for unknown reasons it has not (Barra, 2014).

On December 10, 2013, General Motors appointed the automaker's first woman chief executive officer, Mary Barra, who had been working in the company for 33 years. She served in different positions related to design, engineering, program management, and the quality of GM vehicles around the world (GM, 2014). Barra started leading the automaker

through the escalation of toughest crisis in its history. Her first year began with multiple recalls and investigations regarding the ignition switch crisis (Colvin, 2015; Trop, 2014).

The following section introduces keywords related to the present study.

Keywords

The following paragraphs define keywords and theories relevant to this study, including crisis, situational crisis communication theory (SCCT), gender and sex, and the glass cliff effect.

Crisis defined. Coombs (2007) defines crisis as a "significant threat to operations that can have negative consequences if not handled properly." Seeger, Sellnow, and Ulmer (1998), the authors of discourse of renewal theory, define organizational crisis as "specific, unexpected, and non-routine events or series of events that [create] high levels of uncertainty and threat or perceived threat to an organization's high priority goals" (p. 233). This study is adopting Seeger et al.'s (1998) crisis definition as the lens through which I view GM crisis. In contrast to Coombs' definition of crisis, discourse of renewal theory views crisis as an opportunity that is not offered at any other time in which organization can rebuild their reputation based on their handling of the crisis. Research on crisis communication appear to examine crisis based on a three stage-model, which Coombs labels as pre-crisis, crisis, and post-crisis. In a pre-crisis stage, signals and indications of undesirable threat show up. In the crisis stage, series of events disturb the stability of the organization. In the post-crisis stage, the organization seems to go back to normal with signs of recovery and learning. Each organizational crisis type warrants a different communication strategy (Coombs, 2007). Next, crisis types and appropriate responses for each type are presented.

Crisis types and situational crisis communication theory. While other theories examined how crisis response is associated with crisis types (Benoit, 1997; Coombs, 1999), situational crisis communication theory (SCCT), offers a more detailed model that

categorizes crisis types based on publics' attribution of responsibility for the crisis to the organization (Coombs, 2007). Publics, the plural form of public, was first introduced in public relations by Grunig & Hunt 1984 to move away from referring to one general public and instead recognizing the existence of many different publics at any given time in society. They defined it a public as " a loosely structured system whose members detect the same problem or issue, interact either face to face or through mediated channels, or behave as though they were one body" (p. 144). A key tenet of Grunig and Hunt's theory of publics for public relations was that publics are situational, or that they form and communicate in response to a specific situation.

Inspired by attribution theory, SCCT was developed by Coombs (2007) with a central idea: crisis responsibility. SCCT considers the crisis as a negative event that has to be acknowledged by the organization. This theory uses the type of the crisis as a guide for choosing a suitable strategy for each case. There are three types of crises, depending on the stockholders' perception of the organization's responsibility for causing the crisis. These types present (a) unavoidable crisis where the organization is a victim of the crisis, which means its attribution to the crisis is very weak, with a minimum threat to reputation "victim cluster"; (b) accidental crisis, in which the attribution to the crisis is minimal with a moderate threat to reputation; and (c) preventable crisis, a worst-case scenario in which the attribution to the crisis is strong with a severe reputational threat (see Figure 1). A reputational threat increases when a company has a history of crises or a poor reputation prior the crisis. SCCT has become a popular theory in dealing with crisis because it suggests an immediate base reaction concerning public safety as the first response to the crisis see Figure 1 (Coombs, 2007).

Victim Cluster: In these crisis types, the organization is also a victim of the crisis (weak attributions of crisis responsibility = mild reputational threat).
Natural Disaster: Acts of nature, such as an earthquake, damage an organization. Rumor:

False and damaging information about an organization is being circulated. Workplace Violence: Current or former employee attacks current employees onsite. Product Tampering/Malevolence: External agent causes damage to an organization.

Accidental Cluster: In these crisis types, the organizational actions leading to the crisis were unintentional (minimal attributions of crisis responsibility = moderate reputational threat).

Challenges: Stakeholders claim an organization is operating in an inappropriate manner. Technical-Error Accidents: A technology or equipment failure causes an industrial accident. Technical-Error Product Harm: A technology or equipment failure causes a product to be recalled.

Preventable Cluster: In these crisis types, the organization knowingly placed people at risk, took inappropriate actions, or violated a law/regulation (strong attributions of crisis responsibility = severe reputational threat).

Human-Error Accidents: Human error causes an industrial accident. Human-Error Product Harm: Human error causes a product to be recalled.

Organizational Misdeed with no Injuries: Stakeholders are deceived without injury. Organizational Misdeed Management Misconduct: Laws or regulations are violated by management.

Organizational Misdeed with Injuries: Stakeholders are placed at risk by management and injuries occur.

Figure 1 SCCT Crisis Types by Crisis Clusters. From "Protecting organization reputations during a crisis: The development and application of situational crisis communication theory," by W.T. Coombs, 2007, Corporate Reputation Review, 10(3), 163-176.

SCCT is one of the most influential crisis communication theories in recent years that has shaped crisis literature and definitions of crisis, and it may be considered a field standard against which DRT can be considered in contrast to. Also, the typology proposed by SCCT provides a certain crisis type that informs DRT which is the preventable cluster of crisis. Another important term that is used in this study is gender. To distinguish between gender and sex, the following paragraph gives a brief description of both terms.

Gender and Sex. Although gender and sex are sometimes used as synonymous, they have two different meanings. Gender is defined as "a social, symbolic construction that varies across cultures, over time within a given society, and in relation to the other gender" (Wood, 2005, p.22). That means gender is not inherently connected to the biological sex (e.g. male or female); instead, gender means the socially constructed perceived feminine and masculine

qualities that can be used to describe either biological males or females. Gender stereotypes is a term that is used to refer to people's perceptions of and assumptions about feminine and masculine attributes and how biological males and females should exhibit masculine and feminine qualities, respectively. For example, people largely perceive caring, nurturing, and being responsible as feminine traits and attribute them to women and biological females, while traits like competence, aggressiveness, and objectiveness are seen as more masculine and seen as naturally occurring in men or biological males (Ryan, Haslam, Hersby, & Bongiorno, 2010). Following is a definition of a workplace phenomenon that researchers found gender stereotypes to be one of the main reasons for its existence.

Glass cliff effect. Glass cliff is a metaphor that was first introduced by Ryan and Haslam (2005) to refer to "the phenomenon whereby women are more likely than men to be appointed to leadership positions associated with increased risk of failure and criticism because these positions are more likely to involve management of organizational units that are in crisis" (Haslam & Ryan, 2008, p. 530). Research shows that this effect usually happens because of two reasons: First, feminine attributes such as caring for others' feelings, loyalty, and taking responsibility are perceived to be more suited to are more desired in times of crisis than masculine attributes, and second, men leaders may want to avoid risks to their careers posed by being CEOs of troubled companies (Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2010; Ryan et al., 2016).

Following is a literature review of the framework of the present study that discusses the intersections of discourse of renewal theory, ethic of care, gender in crisis leadership, and the glass cliff.

Theoretical Framework: Discourse of Renewal, Ethic of Care, and Gender in Crisis Leadership

Most of the classic theories used in the field of crisis communication have focused narrowly on strategic efforts to restore an organization's reputation after a crisis (Benoit, 1997; Coombs, 1999; Seeger & Padgett, 2010). However, the field of crisis communication alongside public relations has started to give more attention to the ethical side of the communicative process, and scholarship in the fields of public relations and strategic communication more broadly have developed rich bodies of research on gender and leadership. The following section overviews discourse of renewal theory, ethic of care as it relates to the study's purpose, and gender in leadership in crisis contexts.

Discourse of renewal. As discussed above, ethics in public relations and crisis theory and practice is of growing yet still limited concern among scholars in the field. Some prominent public relations scholars have developed theories for how to practice ethical public relations, such as the two-way symmetrical communication model from Grunig & Hunt (1984), in which public relations professionals communicate with publics to understand their needs, resolve their problems, and provide a mutual understanding between the company and its publics. Discourse of renewal theory, developed by Ulmer et al. (2007), provides an ethical angle in crisis communication by emphasizing the role of an immediate rhetorical response to a crisis that reflects more sensitivity to the victims, pays attention to the publics' needs, and presents the crisis as an opportunity for more positive changes and learning. DRT is a leader-based theory that depends on the leader's communication skills in dealing with the crisis, emphasizing the role of ethical values such as honesty, openness, and accountability in communicating with publics and the victims of the crisis. The ethics that embodied in DRT are traditionally based on Aristotelian virtue ethics, which is built on masculine values (Fraustino, 2015).

Ulmer et al. (2007) identified four characteristics of DRT: first, organizational learning, in which corporations learn from the crises they face and share the lessons they

learned with their publics in order to show commitment to resolve the weaknesses that caused the crisis in the first place. Based on this characteristic, corporations' leaders can shift the focus from blame for crises by using organizational rhetoric to provide a positive potential for the company. The second characteristic of DRT is ethical communication: To fully achieve the renewal concept, corporations should share their organizational values, be accountable, and be committed to their publics. Third, DRT is prospective, looking forward to rebuilding the organization to be better than it was pre-crisis. The fourth characteristic of DRT is that it is a leader-based theory, meaning that leaders need to be visible and have exceptional rhetorical and communication skills (Ulmer, Seeger, & Sellnow, 2009; Ulmer et al., 2007). Moreover, Ulmer et al. (2007) suggest that DRT appears to work better based on the type of crisis, stakeholder relationship, and corrective action and change. Based on DRT conditions, the crisis should be organizational and preventable, the company should have a good relationship with its stakeholders, and the company should pursue change and corrective action.

Research suggests that corporations with credible and trustworthy leaders who respond to crises immediately, implement the optimistic view of their companies, and take corrective actions have more potential in rescuing their organizations' reputations based on DRT characteristics (Seeger & Ulmer, 2002; Reierson, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2009). Although discourse of renewal emphasizes the role of leaders in crisis communication, using its objective concepts is not limited to leaders' rhetoric. A similar case to the present study shows that Toyota, the Japanese automobile company, implemented DRT concepts in its commercials post its recall crisis in 2010. Toyota responded to the crisis immediately, implemented the optimistic view of the company, and showed its commitment to rebuild (Anderson, 2012).

In her doctoral thesis, Yue Hu (2012) examined DRT in governmental settings. She identified eight themes to DRT (Figure 2). These themes are based on the main concepts that were most recurring in discourse of renewal literature (Seeger & Ulmer, 2002; Ulmer et al., 2007, Ulmer et al., 2009; Hu, 2012). The present study adopts these themes to guide its deductive thematic analysis with slight changes (Appendix A).

(1) Strong and trustworthy leadership: Leaders are highly visible and accessible to the media. They communicate in a transparent, open, and honest manner. This communication helps to increase the impression that the crisis is being actively managed and that victims are being taken care of. The leaders' role is to direct interpretation of the crisis in a positive way, reduce the turmoil caused by the crisis, and reassert order and control.
(2) Heroes emerging from the crisis: Individuals who demonstrate courage or noble qualities during crisis can be regarded as heroes. They can be the leaders, rescuers, volunteers or survivors. Heroes are role models who inspire their group members.
(3) Making sense of opportunity: Sense-making is the process by which people give meaning to experience and DR usually interprets the meaning of a disaster to the stakeholders optimistically. DR tries to overcome the threat that characterizes crises and focuses on the inherent opportunities they create. For example, DR can argue that crises create room or space for organizations and communities to reemerge, re-envision or reconstitute themselves without previous constraints or historical limitations.
(4) Commitment to rebuild: DR usually includes the community entities' immediate and public statements committing themselves to rebuild. The immediate and public commitments reduce the uncertainty of the crisis event and construct the meaning in a way that reduces harm. Once the stakeholders receive crisis management information, they are able to focus their efforts on moving beyond the actual event and developing strategies for moving forward.
(5) Action of rebuilding (plan, progress, and completion): Organizations need to make the action of rebuilding visible to stakeholders through media, direct observation, or participation. A major topic of DR during recovery phase should emphasize what the organization is going to do and what has been done. This communication is vital to retaining the confidence and support of the stakeholders.
(6) Virtues and values: In highly uncertain and stressful circumstances, DR usually draws from ethics, virtues, and values to determine how to respond. A virtuous and value-based response to a crisis is likely to generate support from stakeholders.
(7) Corrective and innovative action: Another important topic of DR regards steps to mitigate the harm caused by the crisis or procedures to minimize the risk in the future.

Communication of corrective and innovative efforts can reduce the chaos of a crisis and can reassert control.
(8) Community and personal transformation, restructuring and change: This theme includes long-term transformation and changes of ways of thinking. DR can introduce and discuss a different worldview or a closer relationship among individuals and communities that experience the crisis. Personal ascension and community cohesion as outcomes of a crisis could be included in DR.

Figure 2Themes of Discourse of Renewal. Hu, Y. (2012). Turning crisis into renewal: governmental discourse of renewal in rebuilding Wenchuan earthquake-damaged communities (Unpublished doctoral thesis). George Mason University, Fairfax, VA.

DRT has not solely been applied to for-profit organizations and controllable crises. Research gives evidence that the characteristics of DRT still apply to different crises types including natural disasters and accidental crises, and to governmental and non-profit organization settings (Barone, 2014; Butler, 2012; Hu, 2012; Koenigsfeld, 2004; Taylor, 2011).

In times of crises, publics need immediate responses that pay more attention to the victims and commit to corrective actions (Ulmer et al., 2007). A growing awareness of the need to incorporate publics' perspectives has led some scholars to call for a feminist ethic of care in the crisis communication field (e.g., Holladay & Coombs, 2013). Ethic of care includes caring about others' feelings, taking responsibility, listening, and improving relationships (Gilligan, 1982; Held, 2006; Holladay & Coombs, 2013), discussed next.

Ethic of Care

Ethic of care is a feminist theory that was first introduced by Carol Gilligan (1982). The feminist researcher examined ethical and moral development based on gender differences. Her book In a Different Voice was a response to her instructor, Kohlberg (1958), who introduced a model of moral development (ethic of justice) that Gilligan argued viewed women as being less mature than men when it comes to moral development. Gilligan claimed that women develop ethics and morals in a different way than men through socialization and their life experiences. She believed that through socialization, as girls, women are taught to

be more caring, responsible, and nurturing, while boys and men tend to learn and develop qualities that are more competitive, dominant, and aggressive.

Gilligan's (1982) model has received many criticisms, including those from feminists who claim that ethics of care essentializes gender, or assumes that gender and gender qualities and roles are natural or innate to biological sex (Kennedy, 2016). Feminist critics of ethic of care also accuse the theory of "universalizing claims about 'woman' as a category and about women's experiences" (Kennedy, 2016, p. 219). However, ethic of care is still considered as one of the few ethical frameworks that provides a more humane approach to understanding people's needs in that it (a) focuses on humanity and vulnerability that other models of ethics seem to ignore, (b) does not diminish masculine traits but rather considers feminine care as ethical as masculine justice, (c) provides a unique view of ethics that is distinguished from other ethical models such as virtue ethics, and (d) provides an ethical view based on sympathy rather than objectivity (Friedman & Bolte, 2007).

Ethic of care has recently emerged in public relations literature, and more specifically in crisis literature, when researchers realized the need of an ethical approach to crisis communication that is attentive to the publics' needs (Coombs, 2015; Coombs & Holladay, 2012; Kennedy, 2016). Public relations research about ethics have focused on mostly masculine approaches such as deontology, utilitarianism, and virtue ethics, which are based on stereotypically masculine values like rationality, objectiveness, individuality, and justice (Fraustino, 2015). Ethic of care presents an alternative ethical approach and communication strategies and tactics that are responsive and sympathetic, which makes ethic of care a valuable resource to be implemented in crisis communication strategies (Coombs, 2015; Coombs & Holladay, 2013; Janoske, Liu, & Sheppard, 2012).

Ethic of care literature underscores some feminine attributes that many believe are more suitable for leadership in crisis contexts, including loyalty and connection,

responsibility, responsiveness to others' needs, and building and maintaining relationships (Clement, 1996; Gatens, 1998; Gilligan, 1982; Held, 2005; Linsley & Slack, 2013; Porter, 1999; Simola, 2003). Moreover, Gilligan (1991) and colleagues (Gilligan et al., 1991) presented resistance as a unique feminine trait that they conceptualized positively to reflect the action or position that one might take against any violation that threatens his/her authentic relationship with people whom he/she cares for.

To explain the concept of resistance in care ethics further, the care perspective of Gilligan (1982) presents an important characteristic that in a broad sense refers to one's rejection of any harmful actions or failure in responding to others' needs that disconnect the relationship with oneself or others. In other words, when one cares about oneself or others, he/she resists any violation that might affect the authenticity of this relationship. The violation of the relationship includes any harmful words, behaviors, or both. The tool that one uses to show resistance is through his/her voice. People show resistance by speaking about their own feelings and needs, and they also pay attention to the voice of resistance in others. This interaction is their way to work on their relationships and fight against harmful violations. Resistance and voice is the natural way of rejecting any violation that could harm the relationship between one and others (Gilligan, 1991; Gilligan et a., 1991; Simola, 2005). Considering this concept, leaders who present high levels of sympathy for victims in crisis times and show resistance to the violations that caused the crisis could potentially have a positive impact on publics' perspectives regarding the organization's handling of the crisis. More literature concerning leadership and gender is discussed next.

The Role of Gender in Crisis Leadership

Research concerning leadership and gender support the efficacy of feminine leadership, which does not necessarily mean female leaders, but feminine traits that could exist in both male and female (Avolio, 2010). Two of the positively perceived leadership

styles that warrant feminine traits are transformational leadership and authentic leadership, presented below.

Transformational leadership. Studies suggest that transformational leadership seems to carry more feminine ethic of care qualities than masculine ethic of justice qualities, which was found more consistent with transactional leadership (Simola, Barling, and Turner, 2010). Transformational leadership is perceived as one of the most positive and favorable leadership styles. It "occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality." (Burns, 1978, p.20). Transformational leaders are role models. They work with their followers, inspire and motivate them to achieve the organization's goals and implement its values. Moreover, transformational leaders play important roles in creating the culture of their organizations, transforming the work environment to a productive one, and enhancing the employees' performance. The key component to this style is the personal traits that transformational leaders have. Kawatra and Krishnan (2004), in their study regarding the impact of gender and transformational leadership on the organization culture, found that feminine leadership "creates team-oriented, collaborative, and people-oriented cultures." (Kawatra & Krishnan, 2004, p.7). These findings are consistent with other studies that found feminine attributes to be significantly higher than masculine attributes in transformational leaders (Bass & Avolio,1994; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Rosener, 1990; Ross & Offermann, 1997). In the same way, authentic leadership presents another set of feminine personal traits presented in the following section.

Authentic leadership. Another positive leadership concept developed by Luthans and Avolio (2003), is authentic leadership (AL). This relatively new concept has been criticized for being redundant of classical productive leadership styles like transformational and charismatic leadership (Cooper, Scandura, & Schriesheim, 2005; Yammarino, Dionne,

Schriesheim, & Dansereau, 2008). However, research on AL identify four characteristics that distinguish it from other concepts: "self- awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing and an internalized moral perspective" (Banks, McCauley, Gardner, & Guler, 2016, p.635). Authentic leaders demonstrate high levels of self-awareness. They are aware of their feelings, weaknesses, strengths and morals. They also show relational transparency, which includes openness and honesty about ones' feelings and true values. They recognize the power of consulting others and engaging them in decision making. And finally, they have internalized ethical perspectives based on their own values, missions, and desire to change (Banks et al., 2016). These characteristics along with their descriptions are consistent with ethic of care qualities and DRT characteristics introduced in the literature review of the present study (a table will be added to Appendix C). DRT as an ethical crisis communication strategy that is leader-based seems to be supported by AL characteristics that promote transparent and ethical leaders. Moreover, AL components present ethic of care qualities like responsibility, resistance, maintaining relationships, and caring about others. To illustrate, when a person is aware of his/her mistakes and holds him/herself accountable for them, yet he/she does not hesitate showing sympathy and apology to restore his/her authentic relationship with others. This example demonstrates one form of acknowledging ones' weaknesses, being transparent about them, and caring about others feelings.

The following section presents a leadership phenomenon called the glass cliff. In this phenomenon, women are more likely to be appointed as leaders in troubled companies. Researchers ascribe that partially to people's perceptions of feminine attributes that are seen as more suitable for crisis leadership.

Glass cliff effect. Research gives clear evidence that women in the workplace face discrimination in getting promoted to higher leadership positions in an effect that is referred to metaphorically as the glass ceiling (Ryan et al., 2010). However, another effect seems to

take place especially when corporations face crises. In this effect, women are more likely to be assigned to leadership positions in times of crisis than they are in non-crisis times. (Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2010; Haslam & Ryan, 2008; Ryan & Haslam, 2007; Ryan et al., 2016; Ryan, Haslam, & Kulich, 2010; Ryan et al., 2010). This effect is called glass cliff in reference to the popular metaphor of the glass ceiling. In most cases, this effect does not necessarily mean that the assigned woman has more expertise than the man; instead, researchers ascribe the promotion of women in times of crisis to two reasons.

First, research evidence shows that feminine attributes such as caring about others' feelings, loyalty, and taking responsibility are perceived as more suitable leadership qualities in times of crisis than masculine attributes that include aggressiveness, objectiveness, and forcefulness, which are perceived as more managerial qualities (Ryan et al., 2010).

The other reason explaining glass cliff effect is that holding a leadership position in a troubled company might end the leader's career early if the company failed, causing men leaders to be hesitant to compete for leadership positions under such circumstances (Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2010; Ryan & Haslam, 2007). Kulich, Lorenzi-Cioldi, Iacoviello, Faniko, and Ryan (2015) offer another explanation of the glass cliff. They predict that the glass cliff is a signal change strategy, which means that historically male-led troubled companies tend to hire female leadership to show that the company is changing and thus improving the circumstances that led to crisis. They also predict that glass cliff happens only in controllable crises, especially the ones that are caused by the former male leadership.

Bruckmüller and Branscombe (2010) believe that the glass cliff effect is more likely to occur in companies with a history of men-dominated leadership than companies that have had female leaders throughout their history. They ascribe it first to status-quo bias: As long as the company is performing well there will not be a reason to change, so the current status is more likely to continue. In contrast, when a company's performance starts to decrease, there

will be a perceived need for change. In a company with a men-dominated leadership, selecting a woman leader presents the transformation needed for change (Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2010; Ryan & Haslam, 2007). The second reason for the glass cliff to more likely occur in a men-dominated leadership company is gender and leadership stereotypes. In a company with a history of men leaders, gender stereotypes about an ideal leader's personal qualities such as caring about others' feelings, responsibility, and loyalty that are perceived as more feminine attributes might increase the chance of the glass cliff effect (Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2010; Ryan & Haslam, 2008; Ryan et al., 2011). Moreover, promoting a woman leader in a men-dominated leadership company creates the perception that the company is transforming and changing.

According to DRT, in times of crisis people are more in need of leaders who are present, caring, and responsible (Ulmer et al., 2007). These characteristics present feminine ethic of care qualities including resistance, responsibility, responsiveness to others needs and building and maintaining relationships. These qualities align as well with gender stereotypes and signal change, the main explanations of glass cliff phenomenon.

Research Questions

Based on the literature review, it appeared to be no study that examined the intersections of DRT and ethic of care. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the intersections of DRT, ethic of care, and gendered leadership, especially in crisis contexts, and apply findings from that analysis to draw new insights about the glass cliff effect. The questions that guided my analysis were:

RQ1: How did GM CEO Mary Barra's crisis communication represent stereotypically feminine leadership qualities, if at all?

RQ2: How do discourse of renewal themes apply to Mary Barra's speeches and social media posts, if at all?

RQ3: How do ethic of care qualities apply to Mary Barra's speeches and social media posts, if at all?

RQ4: How is discourse of renewal theory gendered, if at all?

In this section I reviewed three main theoretical lenses that I used to guide my analysis and discussion. Using thematic analysis, which is presented in the following section, I adapted DRT themes by Hu (2012), and I developed my own ethic of care themes based in the literature to guide my analysis of Barra's discourse in order to understand the role of gender in crisis communication contexts. Also, in the discussion I provide further explanation of the glass cliff effect based on the findings. Method, validity in qualitative methods, sampling, and data analysis procedures are presented next.

Chapter III

Method

This study used qualitative method and case study approach to investigate the intersection of discourse of renewal, ethic of care, and gendered leadership. This section begins with a rationale for using the case study as a method. Sampling and data analysis procedures are then presented.

The Case Study as a Method

The case study can be defined as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (Yin, 2003, p. 13). Case study allows researcher to investigate cases and view them from different angles and dimensions (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). There are many different purposes for research that can be best served by conducting case studies. Pauly and Hutchison (2001) believe that case study approach is of a significant scientific value for the field of public relations: "To a remarkable degree, the profession of public relations understands itself through case studies. Both practitioners and educators treat cases as the condensed wisdom of the profession‖" (p. 381). Case studies can be conducted (1) based on theory, (2) based on problem, (3) for descriptive purposes, or (4) for exploratory purposes (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). The present study aims to explore the intersections of DRT and ethic of care, therefore the case study approach best fits this research because it is systematic and detailed, providing thorough and in-depth information regarding the case which makes it an effective approach to answer research questions in exploratory studies.

Validity in Qualitative Methods

Qualitative research, unlike quantitative research, does not have universal standards by which a researcher can measure validity. However, qualitative researchers have started to

come up with their own tools to address the validity issue. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) define validity in qualitative research as "a process whereby the researcher earns the confidence of the reader that he or she has 'gotten it right'" (p. 48). There are some limitations in qualitative research that can threaten its validity, including researcher bias or measurement bias. In qualitative research, validity cannot be easily achieved. However, Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) suggest that "validity is ascertained by examining the sources of invalidity. The stronger the falsification attempts a proposition has survived, the more valid, the more trustworthy the knowledge" (p. 247). There are some tools a researcher can use to strengthen validity.

Triangulation is one approach that is used in both quantitative and qualitative methods to increase the validity of the research. Patton (2001) states, "triangulation strengthens a study by combining methods. This can mean using several kinds of methods or data, including using both quantitative and qualitative approaches" (p.247). In this study, I used triangulation to increase validity by analyzing three sets of data: (1) current GM CEO Mary Barra's speeches, (2) Twitter account of Barra, and (3) YouTube videos from Barra that were published on GM's official YouTube channel. Also, I used another tool to increase validity, which was self-reflexivity and memoing (discussed in more detail below) throughout my research, starting from writing the proposal, to data analysis, and finally in the discussion.

Sampling. The sampling procedure is comprised of three sets of data: (1) current GM CEO Mary Barra's speeches from January 2014 to December 2016, (2) Barra's social media account (Twitter), and (3) Barra's YouTube videos. All published speeches of Mary Barra are included, excluding one commencement speech that is not relevant to the purpose of this study. The speeches are derived from the company's website by using the term: "Mary Barra". The term was searched for by adding several keywords to it to narrow the results. These keywords included: speech, safety, ignition, and recall. The search yielded 219 results.

12 results were speeches given by Barra after her promotion, and only 7 speeches were relevant to the ignition switch crisis. A total of 11 speeches are included in the data analysis excluding the commencement speech.

The second level of sampling covers the social media account for Barra. Choosing to include social media networks for data collection provided the study with a valuable resource for clear indicators of interpersonal communication qualities (Deiser & Newton, 2013), representing significant data for the purpose of this study. Twitter was chosen for sampling because of the nature of this network as a more personal communication platform than other social networks (Malhotra & Malhotra, 2016). Also, at the first stage of social media sampling, I found that Facebook and Twitter accounts for Barra are associated with each other, which means that identical posts are published in both networks. To sample Twitter posts, I created a new Twitter account for me to be able to review and select the posts from Mary Barra's account by adding them to my favorites. I selected 233 posts that were written by her, excluding all the retweets to be able to focus more on her own choice of words. Only 6 posts mentioned the ignition switch crisis, but because I am analyzing for ethic of care in communication, I decided to add all the posts. After that, I used the website "tweetbook.in" to collect the posts I added to my favorites in a PDF form to be able to have them all in one file for the purpose of the analysis.

The fourth set of data is the YouTube videos published by GM's official YouTube page. The sample I found consisted of 6 videos of Barra addressing GM publics regarding the ignition switch crisis. One of them was an apology and an address to GM employees, and the five other videos were answers to customers' questions regarding the issue. All of the videos are included in the sample.

Data analysis. Because this is an exploratory study, I chose thematic analysis to better investigate the intersections of DRT and ethic of care. Thematic analysis allows for

inductive and deductive analysis and helped me to understand the context of the speeches and carefully choose the words, phrases or even sentences that reflect the themes (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012). I used my research questions to guide my analysis. Therefore, I adapted DRT themes developed by Hu (2012) with slight changes. These themes are, (1) strong and trustworthy leadership, (2) making sense of opportunity, (3) commitment to rebuild, (4) action of rebuilding, (5) virtues and values, (6) corrective and innovative action. I chose this set of themes from Hu's (2012) study because they cover most of DRT characteristics in details and provide a brief explanation for each theme and how it relates to the core of the theory (see Appendix A). I also developed my own ethic of care themes which include, (1) courage, (2) responsibility, (3) responsiveness to others' needs, (4) building and maintaining relationships (see Appendix A).

Because it allows for inductive as well as deductive analysis, thematic analysis helped me explore DRT even further, which eventually helped me investigate emerging DRT and ethic of care themes (Guest et al., 2012). To use thematic analysis properly, I followed systematic procedures that have been used by other researchers and have provided insightful results (Guest et al., 2012). This procedure includes several steps that I went through to critically analyze the data.

1. I started by establishing the deductive themes in a qualitative analysis software (MAXQDA12) that helped me stay organized, be able to recognize each theme, allow for adding emerging themes for the inductive analysis, and allow for retrieve coded segments, edit or delete them.

2. After that, I started reading the speeches carefully and understanding every possible word, phrase or sentence, that I think indicate certain themes through its context.

3. In this initial phase, I picked the possible words, phrases, and sentences and plugged them into their existing themes. Most of my segments were paragraphs that could not be

divided into phrases or sentences, as they would be meaningless.

4. I went over my initial analysis of each speech or post and made sure each word, phrase, and sentence can go under its corresponding theme. Doing this helped me rearrange my data out of their context for further validation and to make sure I understood each word, phrase, sentence or paragraph in and out of its context.

5. After that, I went back to the speech or the post and reread it again to investigate any emerging themes and other possible meanings for each word, phrase, and sentence. By doing so, I synthesized the data to analyze for even further meanings that each word might carry.

6. To be able to recognize emerging themes in the inductive analysis, I used constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Guest et al., 2012) to be able to distinguish my emerging themes from the existent ones. Constant comparison is defined as, "The analytic process of comparing different pieces of data for similarities and differences" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 65). This step helped in validating my inductive themes and making sure that they are not repetitive.

After investigating each theme, I started to make association between the themes and the research question. How each theme answer each of my research questions and how it gives insight into the intersections of DRT and the ethic of care.

Self-reflexivity. Self-reflexivity is an important tool that increases validity in qualitative research. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) define critical reflexivity as "an understanding of the diversity and complexity of one's own social location and knowing the differences…" (p.39). Qualitative researchers should understand that "internal contradictions can actually help "complicate and enrich the analysis" (p.39). Self-reflexivity helps the qualitative researcher to be aware of his/her own subjectivity in thoughts, biases, and feelings towards the research to be able to focus on the purpose of the study and prevent biases from affecting data interpretation. This can be achieved by constantly using memoing or a research

journal to help in recording the researcher's thoughts during the data analysis procedures and throughout the study. It is also useful to make readers aware of researcher subjectivity, bias, feelings, and assumptions that might affect her or his interpretation of the data by including self-reflexive statements or memos. In fact, the program I used for data analysis (MAXQDA12) offers a memoing tool to help researchers keep track of any changes during the analysis. Memoing during data analysis procedures is defined as the "ideas that you write down to help you think through how you are going about your work or what something means" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 221). I have also used memoing throughout my research starting from the very beginning, when I was writing my proposal and reading for my literature review. I used the Notes application on my laptop and recorded all my thoughts, advice from my committee members, and some pieces of literature that I thought I would need to use later in my research. This procedure helped me keep my thoughts organized and be aware of all the changes I made and the reasons behind every change, which I will also share below to add transparency, clarity, and context to this study and my choices regarding methods, theories, and data.

The initial goal of this study was to evaluate the implementation of DRT in Mary Barra's speeches. I intended to include news coverage as a source of data to evaluate the influence of using this particular theory in dealing with crisis. However, during the reading phase for the literature review, I came across glass cliff theory while I was looking for articles that investigate the role of gender in crisis leadership. At this point, I decided to change my study's focus to investigate the role of gender in crisis leadership discourse. After further reading, I decided to add ethic of care literature to the study and analyze for it. The process that I went through during writing my literature review changed my initial study's focus and my research questions from an evaluation study to a more exploratory study. Therefore, I decided to include the current and former CEOs' speeches and their social media

posts to get more insights into how gender impacts leadership discourse. However, after I finished the analysis for both CEOs, I was not completely sure if the comparison between the current and former CEOs would answer my research questions. That was due to the fact that during Akerson's time, the ignition switch crisis was not addressed publicly. Although the crisis had been ongoing since 2001, it is not clear why the issue had not been dealt with or addressed publicly before Barra's promotion. Per the current and former CEOs' confirmation, the issue had not been discussed with higher leadership in the company, which affected the way GM dealt with it. Therefore, I decided to exclude Akerson's data from my analysis completely and focus on Barra's post-crisis discourse. In sum, self-reflexivity helped me develop my research questions and increased my self-awareness of my own subjectivity which prevented biases from affecting my interpretation of the data.

Chapter IV

Results

In this section I reported the results of my analysis under two main theoretical lenses. First is discourse of renewal themes and the other is ethic of care qualities. At the initial phase of analysis I intended to analyze inductively as well as deductively. After further analysis, I found some new themes that I thought are new in the field of crisis communication and PR. However, the new themes, specifically ethic of care themes, are not new in the feminist literature. When I finished my analysis, I went back to read more about ethic of care to see if I could find these themes mentioned in other disciplinary areas. When I found those themes in ethic of care research, I went back to my literature review and I added relevant literature. These themes are caring about others, and recognizing vulnerable people. I included these inductive themes as subthemes under my original deductive ethic of care themes. Other inductive themes I found similar to deductive ones in a way that I thought they should not be distinguished themes by themselves, so I added them to the existence ones. I organized my results starting with DRT themes and then ethic of care themes.

The sample used in this study consisted of three sources of data, Barra's speeches, , Barra's Twitter posts, and Barra's YouTube videos published on GM's official YouTube channel. A total of 11 speeches of Barra were analyzed along with 227 Twitter posts, and 6 YouTube videos.

Discourse of Renewal Themes

The results show the themes I anticipated I would find in Barra's speeches, which I included in appendix A. These themes included strong and trustworthy leadership, making sense of opportunity, commitment to rebuild, action of rebuilding, virtues and values, and corrective and innovative action. At the first phase of analysis I thought that some of these themes seemed to be similar to each other and overlapping at some points, but later on I

preferred to keep them separate as I found that they are distinguished from one another after further analysis, which I discussed further in the discussion section. The following results are examples of Barra's crisis discourse that represent DRT themes.

      Strong and trustworthy leadership. Among DRT themes, strong and trustworthy leadership was the most dominant one in Barra's speeches. In this theme, leaders during crisis are visible, aware of their responsibility regarding the victims of the crisis, honest, and transparent. They are accountable and sympathetic. They are determined to rebuild the public's trust in the organization. They motivate their followers and recognize their contributions (Burns, 1978). This theme has four sub themes that I recognized during analysis: openness and transparency, determination, motivation, and recognition of employees' contributions. Out of 11 speeches I analyzed for Barra, 8 of them demonstrate clear examples of openness and transparency.

      Openness and transparency. In her first address to GM employees and publics, Barra showed these qualities and especially transparency. For example, she was open about showing the company's flaws that caused the crisis and addressed them without hesitation. She said: "While everybody who was engaged on the ignition switch issue had the responsibility to fix it, nobody took responsibility," "Throughout the entire 11-year history [since the crisis was discovered], there was no demonstrated sense of urgency, right to the very end," and, "What the Valukas investigation uncovered – in this situation – is a pattern of incompetence and neglect." In her first congressional testimony, Barra confirmed her transparent attitude regarding the issue by saying, "When we have answers, we will be fully transparent with you, with our regulators, and with our customers." In another remarks to J.D. Power/NADA Automotive forum, Barra addressed the issue without hesitation, saying, "Our focus is no longer on survival. We are more focused on quality and doing what is right for the

customer than at any time in my 33 years with the company." In her second testimony for

U.S. house hearing, Barra addressed the investigation report. She said,

> The Valukas report, as you now know, is extremely thorough, brutally tough and deeply troubling. It paints a picture of an organization that failed to handle a complex safety issue in a responsible way. I was deeply saddened and disturbed as I read the report. For those of us who have dedicated our lives to this company, it is enormously painful to have our shortcomings laid out so vividly. There is no way to minimize the seriousness of what Mr. Valukas and his investigators uncovered.
> Determination. Another subtheme that I found inductively and falls under the strong

and trustworthy theme is determination. Barra demonstrates this theme in most of her

speeches. She seemed to be determined in keeping the publics aware of the organization's

efforts to overcome the crisis and rebuild the trust. In her first testimony, she held herself and

the company accountable and showed full cooperation with investigators. She said,

> I've asked former U.S. Attorney Anton Valukas to conduct a thorough and unimpeded investigation of the actions of General Motors. He has free rein to go where the facts take him, regardless of the outcome. The facts will be the facts. Once they are in, my management team and I will use his findings to help assure this does not happen again. We will hold ourselves fully accountable.
> Barra also addressed the victims of the crisis. She gave a detailed outline of the

company's efforts to fix the issue and communicate with affected customers:

> Our customers who have been affected by this recall are getting our full and undivided attention. We're talking directly to them through a dedicated website, with constantly updated information, and through social media platforms. We've trained and assigned more people to our customer call centers, and wait times are down to seconds. And, of course, we're sending customers written information through the mail.

In her address to the J.D. Power/NADA Automotive forum, Barra showed her

determination to work on the company's relationship with its customers, "Every interaction

with our customers, whether in sales or service, is a part of building a long-term relationship.

That's the mindset we're using to approach this situation." Moreover, in her address to

Detroit Economic Club, Barra said, "There will be more difficult decisions and issues ahead.

But the path to success demands we step up to every challenge and take decisive action – and

we are and will continue to do so." In an address to the Chicago Economic Club, Barra talked

about her own experience as an engineer to demonstrate determination to overcome the crisis

and build the company's reputation again:

> As an engineer, I am trained to focus on facts and data. In the world of science and math, ambiguity is the enemy. I always want to know the facts and I believe in measuring outcomes. To that end, we know that our processes and systems have to produce superior results. And our technology solutions have to meet and exceed consumer expectations. We get this at GM and we are determined to deliver.
> Motivation and recognition of employees' contributions. Another subtheme that I

found clearly demonstrated as a strong leadership skill in Barra's speeches is motivation. She

seemed to pay more attention to her employees as she addressed them in all of her speeches

and Twitter posts. She recognized their contributions and acknowledged their achievements.

She said to her employees during the town hall meeting discussing the investigation report,

"We have to personalize this challenge. Quality and safety aren't someone else's

responsibilities. They are mine. They are yours. We all must feel a personal responsibility to

see that this company excels at every level." Also,

> Every day, 220,000 GM employees get up and go to work with a sincere commitment to do their best. You and I both know that the vast majority of our colleagues care deeply about safety and quality and have the highest integrity.

Recognizing her employees' efforts she said, "I know, because of your efforts, our current

vehicles are winning in the marketplace on safety, quality and design." In her remarks to GM

stakeholders, Barra recognized her employees' and dealers' efforts. She said,

> I want to unleash the full creativity and dedication of our 200,000 plus employees…the full power of our dealers to care for customers and build stronger local relationships… the ingenuity of our engineers and suppliers to discover breakthrough technologies that benefit our customers.
> In her house hearing testimony, Barra talked on behalf of her employees explaining

their sadness for being accused of mishandling the ignition switch issue. She said, "For those

of us who have dedicated our lives to this company, it is enormously painful to have our

shortcomings laid out so vividly." In her senate testimony, she said,

> Our employees will not forget what led to the ignition switch recall — but they do not want to be defined by it. After my town hall, I could hear it in their voices and read it in their messages — they are "all in" to make this a better company.

She also said,

> I believe in them, and together, we have been working hard over the last few months to address the underlying issues that caused this problem in the first place. Since that town hall meeting, I have been inundated with calls and emails from employees telling me that they are more motivated than ever to make GM the best possible company for customers.

In her congressional testimony, Barra answered the question: "Why did it take so long?" She talked about the culture standards she wanted to set to the company, "I've talked often about behaviors, and how they define our culture. Facing our problems <u>head on</u> is a behavior that drives us – it's how we will fulfill our mission to become the world's most valued automotive company."

Making sense of opportunity. This theme demonstrates the learning process in which organizations make sense of the opportunity offered in times of crisis. Such opportunities might help the organizations in building a new image and reputation based on their way of handling the crisis. Organizations show learning by being committed to correct the mistakes that caused the crisis and share the lessons they learned with their publics (Ulmer et al., 2007).

In her first address updating the employees regarding the recalls, Barra underscored the learning process that the company went through and encouraged her employees to see the opportunity in the crisis: "We will take care of all these customers and continue to apply what we have learned…", and, "The bottom line is that we will be better because of this tragic situation if we see the opportunity, and I believe we will do just that." Barra seemed to be determined to keep the narrative of the ignition switch crisis present in the organization's memory as a lesson has to be learned. She said,

> Two weeks ago, I purposefully addressed the entire global workforce about the report. I told our team as bluntly as I knew how, that the series of questionable actions and inactions uncovered in the investigation were inexcusable. I also told them that while I want to solve the problems as quickly as possible, I never want anyone associated with GM to forget what happened. I want this terrible experience permanently etched

in our collective memories. This isn't just another business challenge. This is a tragic problem that never should have happened. And it must never happen again.

She also said, "Our focus is no longer on survival. We are more focused on quality and doing what is right for the customer than at any time in my 33 years with the company," and, "From that experience and many others, I am confident that the team will learn from this recall, and that GM will be a better company for it." Barra's town hall meeting with GM employees regarding the investigation report demonstrates most of the learning language in her discourse. She said, "Our job is clear: To build high quality, safe vehicles. In this case with these vehicles, we didn't do our job. We failed these customers. We must face up to it and learn from it," and,

> I hate sharing this with you as much as you hate hearing it. But I want you to hear it. In fact, I never want you to forget it. This is not just another business crisis for GM. We aren't simply going to fix this and move on. We are going to fix the failures in our system – that I promise. In fact, many are already fixed. And we are going to do the right thing for the affected parties.

She also said,

> I never want to put this behind us. I want to keep this painful experience permanently in our collective memories. I don't want to forget what happened because I – and I know you -- never want this to happen again.

Also,

> Together, we have to understand that the attitudes and practices that allowed this failure to occur will not be tolerated. Also, if we think that cleaning up this problem and making a few process changes will be enough, we are badly mistaken.
> In one of her Twitter posts regarding the ignition switch recall, Barra shared a link

that addressed the new safety standards that were taken by GM after the crisis, "We're taking lessons learned from the ignition switch recall and driving real change across @GM." In another post, she addressed a lesson learned from transforming the company due to the crisis, "Hire people who aren't like you (and other tricks we've learned while transforming @GM). #HowIHire"

Commitment to rebuild. This theme demonstrates the organization's commitment to fix the problem and move forward beyond the crisis. It manifests one of the main characteristics of DRT, which is taking a prospective rather than retrospective approach. In this approach, organizations are supposed to respond immediately to the publics after the crisis. The immediate rhetorical response minimizes the uncertainty and helps the organization's publics and stakeholders to move beyond the crisis by reassuring them that the organization is committed to handle the situation in a way that reduces harm. GM crisis has been going since 2001 without any address to the publics. However, a few recalls were made to fix the defected vehicles.

After the promotion of Mary Barra, an investigation was launched by several government agencies concerning the crisis. The newly promoted CEO gave the first address to the crisis as a video that was published on March, 17, 2014, on the GM media website titled, "Mary Barra update on recalls – message to GM employees." In the video, Barra issued a timeline for the problem to be fixed and for the customers and stakeholders to receive more information regarding the issue. In her short video, she apologized for the victims of the malfunction and promised to apply what the company learned from the crisis to make sure it will not happen again. She said,

> I want you to know that we are completely focused on the problem at the highest level of the company and we are putting the customer first and that is guiding every decision we make. That is how we want todays GM to be judged. How we handle the recall will be an important test of that commitment. But it cannot stop there. We need to continue on the path of putting the customer first in everything we do. It's not something that only gets decided by senior leadership, we all have to own it.

Barra also answered the customers' questions in a series of short videos that were published on GM YouTube channel. She answered questions like, is my car safe to drive? When can I get my car fixed? Why the delay announcing the recall? Can we be sure this will not happen again? Barra talked about the steps she took to prevent such problems from happening again. She said, "We plan to change whatever processes we need to make sure we have a world

class process as it relates to vehicle safety." Addressing the customers' concerns regarding

driving their defected cars, Barra said,

> the simple answer to that question is: yes. The GM engineers have done extensive
> analysis to make sure if you only have the key or the key and only the ring that the
> vehicle is safe to drive. In fact, when they presented this to me the very first question I
> asked is would you let your family, your spouse, your children drive these vehicles in
> this condition? And they said yes.
>
> Barra also showed her commitment to rebuild by addressing her cooperation with the

ongoing investigation. She said,

> I've asked former U.S. Attorney Anton Valukas to conduct a thorough and unimpeded
> investigation of the actions of General Motors. He has free rein to go where the facts
> take him, regardless of the outcome. The facts will be the facts. Once they are in, my
> management team and I will use his findings to help assure this does not happen
> again. We will hold ourselves fully accountable.
>
> In her town hall meeting with GM employees, Barra said, "on behalf of GM, we

pledge that we will use the findings and recommendations from this report as a template for

strengthening our company."

Action of rebuilding. This theme underscores the plan, progress and results that

present the organizations' commitment to rebuild. Examples of this theme from the GM case

demonstrate the leader's transparency and efforts to show transformation. Barra appeared to

be updating her publics with the steps she had taken to change the culture of GM that she

blamed for causing the problem in the first place. In her first testimony, she underscored the

actions she took right after knowing about the issue. She said,

> I want to stress that I'm not waiting for his results [Valukas' report] to make changes.
> I've named a new vice president for Global Vehicle Safety, Jeff Boyer. This is a first
> for GM. Jeff's first priority is to quickly identify and resolve any and all product
> safety issues. He is not taking on this task alone. I stand with him. My senior
> management team stands with him. And we will welcome input from outside GM —
> from you, from NHTSA, from Mr. Valukas' findings, from our customers, from our
> dealers, and from our current and former employees.

She also explained in details the actions she took to address the affected customers:
> We've trained and assigned more people to our customer call centers, and wait times
> are down to seconds. And, of course, we're sending customers written information
> through the mail. We've empowered our dealers to take extraordinary measures and
> to treat each case specifically.

And,

> Here's what we are doing with our dealers: if people do not want to drive a recalled vehicle before it is repaired, dealers can provide them a loaner or rental car — free of charge. If a customer is already looking for another car, dealers can provide an additional cash allowance for the purchase or lease of a new vehicle.
> In her town hall meeting with employees regarding the investigation report, Barra

talked about a project she started to change the culture of GM by encouraging employees at

all levels to speak up and reach out for their supervisors or even to higher administrations

when they spot a problem that needs to be solved. She said, "We instituted our Speak Up for

Safety program encouraging employees to report potential safety issues quickly. And we are

going to recognize them for doing so." She also underscored the transformation of GM

culture. She said,

> Evidence of our work is already apparent. As I'm sure you know, we are taking an aggressive approach on recalls. And we are bringing greater rigor and discipline to our analysis and decision-making process regarding recalls and other potential safety-related matters. This is the new norm.

She also said, "With all the changes we have implemented and are now undertaking, the job

of correcting our mistakes is only beginning. Strengthening our systems and adding resources

are critically important steps in improving our company." In her testimony to the U.S. Senate

subcommittee, Barra addressed the number of recalls issued since she knew about the

problem, explaining that the company is working to rebuild the relationship with its publics:

> I also know these recent efforts and the current frequency of recalls have garnered considerable attention. But placing the highest value on our customers' safety is what our employees want to be known for. We want to stand as the company that is setting the new industry standard for safety.
> In her second town hall meeting with GM employees, Barra reviewed the actions that

the company has taken to resolve the problem:

> We conducted a swift and robust internal investigation...
> We provided timely and meaningful cooperation to the government's investigators...
> We furnished the government with information and a continuous flow of unvarnished facts...
> We voluntarily provided various confidential documents and information...
> We held people accountable for their actions or inaction...

And we established a full and independent victims' compensation program that is expected to pay out more than $600 million in awards.

In a product reveal speech, Barra underscored the efforts behind the new production by saying,

> At today's GM, our products are the result of putting the customer at the center of everything we do. That has fostered a bold new culture at our company… a culture that promotes innovation and encourages risk-taking. So, as you'll see tonight, if we can delight our customers with something unexpected, we go for it.

Virtues and values. DRT stresses ethical communication as one of its main characteristics. Crisis times test the organization's commitment to hold on to these values. One of the core values Barra seemed to address more often is putting customers first. She said, "At GM, our first value is very clear: Customers are our Compass. But let's face it – it's easy to come up with a list of values. What's difficult is showing they are more than words on paper." She reviewed the actions she took to emphasize the company's values: "Our actions in recent weeks show we at GM are committed to living our values. I am committed to seeing it through." In her second town hall meeting with GM employees announcing the ignition switch settlement, Barra talked about how going through the whole recall process affected the company and its core values:

> Today's news is difficult for all of us at GM, but the way we responded to the recall is a testament to who we really are – and to the strength of our core values – the customer, relationships and excellence. With respect to excellence, let's remember we are committed to act with integrity… we are committed to have the courage to do and say what's difficult… and to take accountability for results. We have talked about our values often over the last year because they're so important to our long-term success. And you can see how they shaped each step we have taken over the last 15 months.

Barra reviewed the actions she took during the crisis and ascribed them to living the company's core values: "At GM, building better cities and a better world through improved transportation options, is part of our core." Also,

> The ignition switch problem has brought us intense scrutiny. It has been humbling and deeply disappointing. But we have faced our issues with integrity, dignity and clear determination to do the right thing both in the short and long term.

Corrective and innovative action. According to DRT, organizations should be committed to do corrective action following the crisis to minimize the harm caused by the problem (Ulmer et al., 2007). In the GM ignition switch crisis, the corrective actions are presented in the high volume of recalls that exceeds millions of defected vehicles (Basu, 2014). Barra underscored the recalls as doing the right thing for the affected customers. She said in her testimony to the house hearing, "It is difficult to announce so many recalls, but it is absolutely the right thing to do." Also,

> This latest round of recalls demonstrates just how serious we are about the way we will do things at the new GM. We identified these issues. We brought them forward and we are fixing them. I have asked our team to keep stressing the system at GM and work with one thing in mind — our customers and their safety are at the center of everything we do.

Learning the lessons from the ignition switch crisis, Barra talked about the new generation of vehicles produced by GM that is well designed with the customer's safety in mind: "This new way of developing vehicles will provide the highest levels of safety, quality, and customer service… and ensure that a situation like the ignition-switch recall doesn't happen again." Addressing the Valukas report that pointed out the lack of communication with higher management which led to safety issues, Barra talked about how she fixed that problem:

> We have restructured our safety decision-making process to raise it to the highest levels of the company, addressing a key point in the Valukas report that critical information was kept from senior management. Under the new system, that problem should never be repeated.

She also said,

> We are currently conducting what I believe is the most exhaustive, comprehensive safety review in the history of the company. We are leaving no stone unturned and devoting whatever resources it takes to identify potential safety issues on all of our current vehicles and on vehicles no longer in production.

Moreover, addressing more corrective and innovative actions, Barra talked about the projects she started to communicate safety problem to the highest level of the company,

> We announced the creation of, and have implemented, a new Global Product Integrity organization that will enhance our overall safety and quality. And, we are taking an aggressive approach on recalls as we are bringing greater rigor and discipline to our analysis and decision-making process regarding recalls and other potential safety-related matters.

Also,

> We instituted Speak Up For Safety, encouraging employees to report potential safety issues quickly. And we are going to recognize employees when they do so. More than just a campaign or program, it's the start of changing the way we think at GM.

Barra's discourse seemed to overview the company's corrective actions very often such as in the last quotes in which she seemed to update GM publics with all the steps she took to bring them back and rebuild the trust.

Ethic of Care Themes

This section contains samples of Barra's crisis discourse reflecting ethic of care themes.

Courage. This theme represents one's willingness to protect people whom he/she cares about from any harmful actions or words that might affect the relationship (Gilligan, 1982). This theme seemed to be occurring very often in Barra's speeches as she talked about how she felt about the ignition switch crisis and how she dealt with it. Out of 11 speeches, 10 of them demonstrate many statements that present each one of the subthemes, which include (a) resistance and voice, which represent the one's rejection of any harmful violations that might disturb his/her relationships with others, and (b) protection. A great number of examples can be seen in Barra's first town hall meeting with employees regarding the issue.

Resistance and voice. Barra talked about her responsibility as a leader for GM during the crisis, and her feeling towards the victims and their families, which I found represented resistance and voice. For example,

> With all of our colleagues around the world watching today, I want it known that this recall issue isn't merely an engineering or manufacturing or legal problem, it represents a fundamental failure to meet the basic needs of these customers.

Also, "Our job is clear: To build high quality, safe vehicles. In this case with these vehicles,
we didn't do our job. We failed these customers." Addressing the individual blamed for not
dealing with the issue, Barra said,

> Repeatedly, individuals failed to disclose critical pieces of information that could
> have fundamentally changed the lives of those impacted by a faulty ignition switch. If
> this information had been disclosed, I believe in my heart the company would have
> dealt with this matter appropriately.

Moreover,

> Furthermore, numerous individuals did not accept any responsibility to drive our
> organization to understand what was truly happening. The report highlights a
> company that operated in silos, with a number of individuals seemingly looking for
> reasons not to act, instead of finding ways to protect our customers.

Barra showed her rejection and resistance to such behaviors that caused the crisis at
the first place. She said,

> Let me be clear: This should never have happened. It is unacceptable. Our customers
> have to know they can count on our cars, our trucks and our word. Because of the
> actions of a few people, and the willingness of others in the company to condone
> bureaucratic processes that avoided accountability, we let these customers down.

Voice is also present in Barra's discourse. She was very clear about her attitude
regarding the issue; she said in several speeches that she does not want anyone working in
GM to forget the crisis and what led to it: "I hate sharing this with you as much as you hate
hearing it. But I want you to hear it. In fact, I never want you to forget it." Also,

> This is not just another business crisis for GM. We aren't simply going to fix this and
> move on. We are going to fix the failures in our system – that I promise. In fact,
> many are already fixed. And we are going to do the right thing for the affected
> parties.

Additionally,

> But I never want to put this behind us. I want to keep this painful experience
> permanently in our collective memories. I don't want to forget what happened because
> I – and I know you -- never want this to happen again.

Also,

> Together, we have to understand that the attitudes and practices that allowed this
> failure to occur will not be tolerated. Also, if we think that cleaning up this problem
> and making a few process changes will be enough, we are badly mistaken.

Moreover,

> if you are aware of a potential problem affecting safety or quality and you don't speak up, you are a part of the problem. And that is not acceptable. If you see a problem that you don't believe is being handled properly, bring it to the attention of your supervisor. If you still don't believe it's being handled properly, contact me directly.

Also,

> I want an environment at GM where the customer is at the center of every action and every decision. After all, we exist to serve their needs, not the other way around. We jointly own our successes and our failures. We have to hold each other accountable.

In these two last examples, Barra showed her rejection to the harmful practices and the culture that promoted the ignition switch crisis, she is determined to hold people accountable for their behaviors.

Protection. Another subtheme that demonstrates courage is protection. Barra's discourse seemed to have many statements in which she tried to protect GM's reputation from being harmed due to the crisis. In her J.D. Power/NADA forum, she drew people's attention to the progress that the company is making though media is not covering it,

> I think it's fair to say that much of the progress we have made in the last two months has been overshadowed by the intensity of the recall coverage – but in fact there has been a lot of good news to report.

She also said,

> Today's meeting will show you how we are striving to serve the needs of both stockholders and customers by building great vehicles, working to create an exceptional ownership experience and imbedding strong financial and operating discipline in all that we do.

Also, Barra addressed the ignition switch problem and blamed several individuals for not disclosing critical information to higher management. She said, "The report highlights a company that operated in silos, with a number of individuals seemingly looking for reasons not to act, instead of finding ways to protect our customers." Also,

> Repeatedly, individuals failed to disclose critical pieces of information that could have fundamentally changed the lives of those impacted by a faulty ignition switch. If this information had been disclosed, I truly believe the company would have dealt with this matter appropriately.

Moreover,

> You should know that Mr. Valukas' report revealed no conspiracy by the corporation to cover up the facts. In addition, the investigators found no evidence that any employee made a trade-off between safety and cost.

> Although Barra took responsibility of the problem, she defended GM's reputation by

saying,

> I know many of you are saying to yourselves that this problem isn't a fair reflection of the company as a whole. I know it's not. We are better than this. But we own this problem, and we have to have the courage to deal with it in the right way.

> Defending the company's recalls, Barra stressed how the actions she took regarding

the crisis represent GM's core values:

> … the way we responded to the recall is a testament to who we really are – and to the strength of our core values – the customer, relationships and excellence. With respect to excellence, let's remember we are committed to act with integrity… we are committed to have the courage to do and say what's difficult… and to take accountability for results. We have talked about our values often over the last year because they're so important to our long-term success. And you can see how they shaped each step we have taken over the last 15 months.

She also said,

> The ignition switch problem has brought us intense scrutiny. It has been humbling and deeply disappointing. But we have faced our issues with integrity, dignity and clear determination to do the right thing both in the short and long term.

Also,

> I have said many times I wish I could turn back the clock. If I could, I would do so in a heartbeat. But I can't. What we can do is make sure we respond the right way. We have done that... and we will continue to do so.

Recognizing her employees' commitment to work for a better GM, Barra said,

> Every day, 220,000 GM employees get up and go to work with a sincere commitment to do their best. You and I both know that the vast majority of our colleagues care deeply about safety and quality and have the highest integrity.

Moreover,

> I know, because of your efforts, our current vehicles are winning in the marketplace on safety, quality and design. I know our dealers are proud to sell our vehicles, and they care deeply about providing excellent service to our customers. I know our suppliers work hard to provide the best components for our vehicles. And, most

important of all, I know, as you do, that our products enhance the lives of millions of people all over the world every day.

She also said, "The fact is I believe in this company and I believe in you. I want GM to be the world's best automotive company – for customers. Whatever it takes to do that is what we are going to do," "Today, General Motors is building the highest quality, safest, most efficient and best performing vehicles in its history. That's just not my opinion. Consumers, the media and others are confirming that," and "Our commitment to building the best products in the global marketplace guides our corporate strategy. We know, quite simply, that this is essential to both our near and long term success." Moreover, Barra said,

> I also know these recent efforts and the current frequency of recalls have garnered considerable attention. But placing the highest value on our customers' safety is what our employees want to be known for. We want to stand as the company that is setting the new industry standard for safety,

Also,

> Our employees will not forget what led to the ignition switch recall — but they do not want to be defined by it. After my town hall, I could hear it in their voices and read it in their messages — they are "all in" to make this a better company.

> In her house hearing testimony, Barra defended GM and promised she will work to

make it better, "We are a good company, but we can and must be much better. That's my focus and that's my promise to you, our employees, our customers, our shareholders and the American people." Also, in her testimony to U.S. senate subcommittee, Barra addressed the actions she took to fix the company's system and prevent potential problems,

> We are bringing greater rigor, discipline and urgency to our analysis and decision making. We are mining every source of data available to us from the factory floor to warranty claims to customer calls and social media. We're not waiting to see if trends develop or updating spreadsheets. We want our customers to know that if we identify an issue that could possibly affect their safety, we will act quickly.

> Barra also seemed to review the company's accomplishments more often in her

speeches and Twitter posts, "The record I have just reviewed demonstrates that GM is changing - rapidly, across the board...and for the good. And while I am proud of these advances, I expect – and I know you expect, more." Also,

In my first few months as CEO, I have come to appreciate more than ever the full potential of this great company. The global auto industry is among the most competitive businesses in the world today. In every market, consumers have more and better automotive choices than ever before. And the competition is only going to get tougher. This is reality. Another reality is that GM is positioned to be stronger, leaner and more responsive than ever before as well.

In her remarks to the Chicago Economic Club, Barra talked about GM strengths and reviewed its history of innovation:

If you don't currently own a GM vehicle and haven't bought one in years, you may have an outdated image of our company. In 2015, we expect to sell nearly 10 million vehicles around the world. This would be the most in our 110-year history. That's more than 1,000 new vehicles sold every hour, 24 hours a day.

She also said,

Success for GM or any auto company is far from certain. But I am certain we have what we need to become the most valued auto company in the world. The history of our industry shows that consumers will spend their money with the companies that design, engineer and manufacture vehicles that give them the best possible value, safety and reliability.

Barra in this example continue her efforts to protect the company and maintain its reputation in which she addressed the history of GM.

Responsiveness to others' needs. This theme represents leaders' ability to recognize others' needs and respond to them (Gilligan, 1982). In times of crisis, the organization's publics are in need of a leader who cares about them and address their needs immediately (Ulmer et al., 2007).

Caring for consumers. A theme I found inductively represent the caring quality in Barra's speeches. In her Twitter posts, Barra seemed to emphasize her commitment to serve GM customers very often. She said, "Our culture is simple: Our customers and their safety come first,", "We're using customer insights to shape the future of transportation; and I'm about to share some @GM tech news. #ITSWC1," "Customers want performance and accessible technology in a beautifully designed car. Enter the @Chevrolet #Cruze," and,

"#MyMetric for success can be summed up in one phrase: Earn customers for life. How do we earn them? One at a time."

In her first testimony regarding the crisis, Barra talked about how the company is responding to the victims affected by the ignition switch issue:

> Our customers who have been affected by this recall are getting our full and undivided attention. We're talking directly to them through a dedicated website, with constantly updated information, and through social media platforms. We've trained and assigned more people to our customer call centers, and wait times are down to seconds. And, of course, we're sending customers written information through the mail.

She also talked about all the options GM offered for the victims:

> if people do not want to drive a recalled vehicle before it is repaired, dealers can provide them a loaner or rental car — free of charge. If a customer is already looking for another car, dealers can provide an additional cash allowance for the purchase or lease of a new vehicle.

Moreover,

> These measures are only the first in making things right and rebuilding trust with our customers. As I've reminded our employees, getting the cars repaired is only the first step. Giving customers the best support possible throughout this process is how we will be judged.

In her address to the J.D. Power/NADA forum, Barra said, "A prime focus right now for me and a core group of people is on taking care of the customers involved in the ignition switch recall and getting their cars fixed as soon as possible." Addressing GM employees regarding the investigation report, Barra said, "I want an environment at GM where the customer is at the center of every action and every decision. After all, we exist to serve their needs, not the other way around." Addressing stakeholders, Barra said, "Our work to ensure customer safety and the redoubling of our efforts in this area explain to a large degree why we have had an increase in the number of recalls this year," and, "Nothing is more important to us than the safety of our customers. Nothing." Addressing GM's response to the victims, Barra said in her U.S. Senate subcommittee testimony, "We created this compensation

program as an exceptional response to a unique set of mistakes that were made over an

extended period of time."

In her address to GM employees during the global production of 500 million GM-

branded vehicles celebration, Barra talked about the strategy she implemented to take care of

GM customers:

> [W]e're taking care of our customers every single day by listening to what they say
> and using their feedback to continually improve our products and our service. Since
> 2009, trained specialists in our Social Media Customer Care program proactively
> support about 5,000 customers each month, seven days a week. They answer
> questions, address concerns and, if needed, quickly connect customers with a solution.
> They do this by monitoring GM's 25 owned social media channels and 90 automotive
> enthusiast forums. It's one more way we are putting our customers at the center of
> everything we do. Our focus… the reason we exist… is to serve customers so we can
> earn their business for life.

 In her remarks to Chicago economic club, Barra said,

> Our mission at GM is to earn customers for life. We want to give every customer a
> great experience not just the day they buy a car, but in the process leading up to the
> purchase, and for as long as they own their vehicle.

In her remarks to Detroit economic club, Barra talked about how GM was listening to its

customers' needs:

> Consumers expect their vehicles to be safer, more reliable and more fuel
> efficient. They are concerned about congestion and climate change. They want better
> communication, navigation and entertainment capabilities in their vehicles. They want
> to personalize their vehicles to fit their lifestyle. And they want ultra-convenient
> service. I could go on. The point is, our customers are speaking forcefully and
> thoughtfully about what they want us to address. By listening carefully to their hopes,
> concerns and expectations... and applying our talent and resources... we can develop
> solutions that demonstrate the customer is truly at the center of everything we do. If
> we do this, we will earn customers for life. This is how we intend to compete and
> win. By getting closer to the customer than any other auto manufacturer.

In this quote, Barra stressed out the importance of listening to customers' needs and

addressing their issues to GM employees to emphasize the impact of such behavior in the

company's production.

Responsibility. Taking responsibility of an organizational crisis and moving forward

to fix it helps with rebuilding the publics' trust in the organization especially if the crisis is

controllable (Gilligan, 1982). In the GM case, prior leadership seemed unaware of the issue. However, at the beginning of Barra's term as a CEO she knew about it and acted to deal with it. She issued several videos, posts, and speeches regarding the issue, along with several recalls right after knowing about the problem. In her speeches regarding the ignition switch crisis, Barra took responsibility of the problem and held the company accountable for it. She said,

> As soon as l learned about the problem, we acted without hesitation. We told the world we had a problem that needed to be fixed. We did so because whatever mistakes were made in the past, we will not shirk from our responsibilities now and in the future. Today's GM will do the right thing.

"We will hold ourselves fully accountable," Barra added. Also,

> [A]s I lead GM through this crisis, I want everyone to know that I am guided by two clear principles: First, that we do the right thing for those who were harmed; and, second, that we accept responsibility for our mistakes and commit to doing everything within our power to prevent this problem from ever happening again.

Also, "this isn't about our feelings or our egos. This is about our responsibility to act with integrity, honor and a commitment to excellence."

In her U.S. senate subcommittee testimony, Barra recognized the victims of the crisis, expressed her sympathy towards them and stressed her responsibility to respond to their needs properly,

> Before proceeding with my brief remarks, I want to once again express my sympathies to the families that lost loved ones and to those who suffered physical injury. I am ever mindful that we have a special responsibility to them, and the best way to fulfill that responsibility is to fix this problem by putting in place the needed changes to prevent this from ever happening again.

Addressing the investigation report, Barra said, "This report makes a series of recommendations in eight main areas. I have committed the company to act on all of the recommendations, and we are moving forward on many of them already." Addressing GM employees regarding the settlement agreement, Barra said,

> I have said many times how sorry I am for what happened. On behalf of all of us, I have apologized to the families who lost love ones and to those who were injured. I

do so again today. We let these customers down in this situation. We didn't do our jobs. As part of our apology to the victims, we promised to take responsibility for our actions. So we accept the penalties being announced today because they are part of being held accountable.

In this quote and similar others, Barra seemed to acknowledge the responsibility of the crisis and to show her commitment to respond to the publics needs.

Building and maintaining relationships. This theme represents a most common feminine trait in ethic of care and transformational leadership (Burns, 1978). During difficult times, organizations seem to work on rebuilding their reputation in most cases; however, building and maintaining relationships seems to be equally important to rebuilding the reputation. Barra's discourse seemed to demonstrate her efforts in building and maintaining relationships with customers, employees, and stakeholders. In her remarks to the J.D. Power/NADA forum, she said, "Every interaction with our customers, whether in sales or service, is a part of building a long-term relationship. That's the mindset we're using to approach this situation – and I'm proud of the way the GM team has responded."

Loyalty and connection. This theme demonstrates one of the essential tenets of ethic of care, which falls under interdependence (Gilligan, 1982). In all of her speeches, Barra emphasized loyalty to the organization along with many statements in which she demonstrated connection with employees. Even during testimony regarding the ignition switch crisis, Barra showed this theme very clearly: "I'm a second-generation GM employee and I'm here as the CEO, but I'm also here representing the men and women who are part of today's GM and are dedicated to putting the highest-quality and safest vehicles on the road." Barra talked about her feelings regarding the issue and recognized her employees' feelings and addressed them during her testimonies:

It was a tough meeting. Like me, they are disappointed and upset. I could see it in their faces, and could hear it in their voices. They had many of the same questions that I suspect are on your minds. They want to make things better for our customers, and in the process, make GM better. That's what I'm committed to doing.

She also said, "I was deeply saddened and disturbed as I read the report. For those of us who have dedicated our lives to this company, it is enormously painful to have our shortcomings laid out so vividly."

Barra showed her loyalty to GM on several occasions and throughout her speeches and posts. For example, she said, "Even on a day as tough as this I am proud and honored to work for General Motors. I know we have a dedicated and talented team of loyal, honest employees," She also said,

> When I started at GM, I certainly never expected to be CEO. And I certainly didn't expect to be in a situation like this. But I'm here and you are here, and we have to be committed to lead in a way that brings honor and respect to this company.

Also, "The fact is I believe in this company and I believe in you. I want GM to be the world's best automotive company – for customers. Whatever it takes to do that is what we are going to do." Moreover, Barra said,

> I am honored to stand up here tonight and humbled to lead the global GM team. It's a team I'm very proud to be part of… a team of men and women doing unbelievably great work... putting out vehicle after vehicle that have made the automotive world stop and take notice.

Barra demonstrated in this example her loyalty to GM team even through difficult times like the ignition switch crisis.

Recognizing vulnerable people. Barra's discourse demonstrates a theme that I found inductively, and I went back to the literature of ethic of care and read about it. This theme is recognizing vulnerable people. Barra showed sympathy and apologized for the victims of the crisis in several speeches in which she addressed the crisis: "Before addressing the Valukas report, I first want to take this opportunity to again express my deepest sympathies to the families that lost loved ones and to those who were injured," and, "I realize there are no words of mine that can ease their grief and pain." She also said,

> I want to recognize the families who lost loved ones and those who have suffered physical injury because of these mistakes. To each of them, I extend our deepest

sympathies. We will not forget them, nor the special responsibility we have to them. We are committed to treating each of them with compassion, decency and fairness.

Barra also addressed her efforts in order to rebuild the relationship with GM customers. She said,

> Our mission at GM is to earn customers for life. We want to give every customer a great experience not just the day they buy a car, but in the process leading up to the purchase, and for as long as they own their vehicle.

She also said, "I want GM to excel. To build relationships with customers for life." In this statement, Barra linked GM excellence by building strong relationships with customers.

This chapter reported the results from my analysis of Barra crisis communication using two theoretical lenses, DRT and ethic of care. While I initially intended to analyze deductively and inductively, I ended up adding my inductive themes as subthemes under the deductive ones. DRT themes are, (1) strong and trustworthy leadership which includes three inductive themes, (a) openness and transparency, (b) determination, (c) motivation and recognition of employees' contributions. (2) Making sense of opportunity, (3) commitment to rebuild, (4) action of rebuilding, (5) virtues and values, (6) corrective and innovative action. Ethic of care themes are, (1) courage, which includes two inductive themes, (a) resistance and voice, (b) protection. (2) Responsibility, (3) responsiveness to others' needs including one inductive theme which is caring about others. (Building and maintaining relationships including one inductive theme which is recognizing vulnerable people. The results discussed next provide answers to my research questions RQ1: How did GM CEO Mary Barra's crisis communication represent stereotypically feminine leadership qualities, if at all? RQ2: How do discourse of renewal themes apply to Mary Barra's speeches and social media posts, if at all? RQ3: How do ethic of care qualities apply to Mary Barra's speeches and social media posts, if at all? RQ4: How is discourse of renewal theory gendered, if at all?

Chapter V

Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the intersections of discourse of renewal, ethic of care, and gendered leadership in glass cliff and crisis contexts. To answer my research questions, I used a case study approach (Yin, 2003) to investigate the GM ignition switch crisis. I chose this case because it seemed to represent a glass cliff effect since a female leader followed a male leader when the company was facing the crisis. One of the explanations of this phenomenon is people's perceptions of feminine attributes such as caring, responsibility, and building relationships as being more suitable for leadership in times of crisis. Based on this explanation, I decided to investigate further whether feminine attributes are more suitable for leaders in communicating during and post crisis.

My investigation started with a literature review in which I reviewed multiple areas relevant to my study. The literature review covered crisis communication strategy, specifically discourse of renewal as one of the crisis communication strategies to first introduce ethical communication concepts. DRT is a leader-based theory, which makes it more relevant to this study. Also, ethic of care is a major theoretical lens I used in this study to analyze my data. Ethic of care was recently introduced to public relations and crisis management after researchers recognized the need of an ethical approach to respond to publics during and after crisis (Coombs, 2015; Coombs & Holladay, 2013; Janoske et al., 2012; Simola, 2015). The results show how DRT themes and ethic of care qualities apply to current GM CEO Mary Barra, which give more insights into how gender affects the way leaders communicate with their organizations' publics.

In this section, I am going to discuss how the results answer my research questions, RQ1: How is the crisis communication from GM case represents feminine leadership

qualities? RQ2: How do discourse of renewal themes apply to current GM CEO Mary Barra discourse? RQ3: How do ethic of care qualities apply to current GM CEO Mary Barra discourse? RQ4: How is discourse of renewal theory gendered? Also, I am going to discuss the research limitations and future research areas as well as theoretical and practical implications of my findings.

Feminine Leadership in Crisis Contexts

In this section I will discuss how the presence of feminine attributes appeared to affect the way Barra responded to the ignition switch crisis. Based on the literature review, feminine attributes that are most commonly associated with transformational leadership style like building relationships and caring about others are also found in ethic of care literature. Additionally, DRT as an ethical crisis communication strategy depends heavily on the leader's role in communicating with the publics. Leaders, according to DRT, are supposed to be always present and close to the publics. They should respond to their publics immediately after the crisis and address their needs.

In this study, I analyzed the crisis communication discourse of Mary Barra. One of the main findings of this study is that the presence of feminine qualities in Barra's discourse was obvious in her crisis communication with GM publics. Barra, who faced the public escalation of the biggest crisis in GM history right after her promotion, was always visible and present. She issued a number of videos apologizing to the publics and reassuring them that GM is going to be held accountable and will deal with the problem properly. She also was committed to fix GM's culture that fostered the problem in the first place.

Feminine attributes like courage, responsiveness to others' needs, responsibility, and building and maintaining relationships seem to be most present in Barra's crisis communication style with GM publics. Through speeches, social media accounts, and videos, Barra was always present and open about the issue. In her first testimony, Barra accepted

responsibility and was committed to hold the company accountable for the deadly mistake.

She said,

> As soon as l learned about the problem, we acted without hesitation. We told the world we had a problem that needed to be fixed. We did so because whatever mistakes were made in the past, we will not shirk from our responsibilities now and in the future. Today's GM will do the right thing.

Barra seemed to have the courage to address the reasons behind the ignition switch

malfunction and to take forceful actions regarding it in order to rebuild the publics' trust in

GM. She showed resistance to the culture that caused the problem at the first place. She

talked about how she would not rest until she fixes everything and take care of the victims.

She insisted that the GM crisis cannot just go away because it has to be always remembered

so everyone can realize how damaging the crisis was to the company and its customers. Barra

also seemed to recognize vulnerable people who have been affected by the crisis. In all of her

speeches regarding the issue, she apologized and expressed sympathy to the victims and their

families. She always reminded her employees of how the company failed its customers

because of individuals' mistakes. Whenever Barra talked about the problem, she reminded

her employees of their most important job, which is taking care of customers. She said,

> I want an environment at GM where the customer is at the center of every action and every decision. After all, we exist to serve their needs, not the other way around. We jointly own our successes and our failures. We have to hold each other accountable.

Although Barra showed resistance and held the company accountable for its mistakes,

she seemed to show protection by praising the company's accomplishments and reminding its

publics of GM employees' efforts to take care of its customers.

Moreover, Barra showed a high level of interpersonal communication skills and social

involvement presented in her Twitter account in which she interacted with people and

participated in a number of social events and campaigns, like the "Ice bucket challenge"

campaign that aimed to raise awareness regarding a health issue. Also, Barra engaged in

many STEM, which is an abbreviation of science, technology, engineering and math, events,

most of which were arranged by GM. Based on DRT literature and the findings of this study, leaders who demonstrate feminine attributes including being visible, present, caring about others, and sensitive to the publics' needs might be perceived as better suited leaders in times of crisis due to their communication strategy in which they respond to the publics in a more favorable way.

The Intersections of Discourse of Renewal and Ethic of Care

The results of this study showed some overlapping between DRT and ethic of care themes. One of the most interesting overlaps between themes I found when I analyzed for strong and trustworthy leadership from DRT and courage from ethic of care. Courage which demonstrates ones' rejection of any harmful actions or words that affect one's relationships with others, includes two subthemes (a) resistance and voice, (b) protection. These subthemes seem to have some corresponding subthemes under strong and trustworthy leadership which includes (a) openness and transparency, (b) determination, and (c) motivation and recognition of employees' contributions. These subthemes reflect my understanding of resistance and voice and protection. For example, Barra was open and transparent when she talked about the ignition switch crisis. She accepted responsibility and admitted the wrongful behaviors that led to the crisis, yet she showed resistance to these behaviors and was not hesitant to talk about them and about her commitment to fix the culture she blamed for promoting such behaviors. She said,

> With all of our colleagues around the world watching today, I want it known that this recall issue isn't merely an engineering or manufacturing or legal problem, it represents a fundamental failure to meet the basic needs of these customers.

Moreover, determination and motivation and recognition of employees' contributions, reflect the protection theme of ethic of care in which I describe as the leader determination to protect his/her organization. This protection includes motivating followers to work hard and recognize their contributions. Barra who showed high levels of loyalty and connection to GM

internal publics, seemed to embody the transformational leadership traits such as motivation
and recognition. An example of this overlapping between protection and motivation and
recognition of employees' efforts can be seen in this quote,

> As I consider the significance of this 500 million production achievement, I think
> about the generations of hardworking, talented women and men who have built the
> best possible cars, trucks and crossovers for our customers.
> I think about the incredible innovations by our designers and engineers that made our
> cars safer and more reliable.

In this example, Barra addressed GM employees' contributions in producing 500 million
vehicles around the world. This statement demonstrates how Barra protect the company's
reputation by emphasizing the role of the hardworking employees behind its achievements.
Another DRT theme that seems to correspond with protection is virtues and values.
Throughout her discourse addressing the crisis, Barra seemed to emphasize the core values of
GM very often in order to protect the company's reputation. Based on the overlaps between
strong and trustworthy leadership and courage, I propose a new addition to Hu's (2012) DRT
typology, which I called courageous leadership (see Appendix C). Courageous leadership
demonstrates the leader's courage to be visible and present in times of crisis, open and
transparent, responsible and accountable, protective of his/her relationship with his publics,
and determined to do the right thing to take care of his/her publics.

Furthermore, three DRT themes including (a) commitment to rebuild, (b) corrective
and innovative action, and (c) action of rebuilding seem to be overlapping with two of ethic
of care themes, which are responsiveness to others' needs and responsibility. In these themes,
Barra seemed to take responsibility of the crisis and show her commitment to rebuild trust in
GM by responding to their publics' needs. She also updated GM publics with all the
corrective actions she made responding to the customers' needs like the new safety standards
she took to ensure that issues like the ignition switch crisis do not happen again. In fact, the

first thing she mentioned as one of her priorities to fix GM culture was placing the customers

at the heart of any decision-making process. She said,

> I want you to know that we are completely focused on the problem at the highest level of the company and we are putting the customer first and that is guiding every decision we make. That is how we want todays GM to be judged. How we handle the recall will be an important test of that commitment. But it cannot stop §there. We need to continue on the path of putting the customer first in everything we do. It's not something that only gets decided by senior leadership, we all have to own it.

While the ethical angle of DRT is traditionally based on Aristotelian virtue ethics,

which is built on masculine values (Fraustino, 2015), I argue that the presence of the

feminine leadership qualities and ethics of care traits found in Barra's discourse show a

gendered perspective of DRT as a feminine crisis communication strategy and theory. This

feminine perspective of DRT informed by feminine leadership values and ethics of care

contrasts with the traditional version of DRT that is based on masculine values and virtue

ethics. The overlap between the themes from both theories provide an explanation of how

DRT could be seen as a feminine gendered crisis communication strategy that promotes an

ethical view of the relationship between the organization and its publics based on ethic of

care and feminine leader attributes.

Conclusion

This study contributes to the literature of gendered leadership by providing insight

about how feminine attributes influence leaders' communication with their publics during

crisis. The findings suggest that alternative explanations of glass cliff effect might change the

way this phenomenon is perceived. Glass cliff has been researched as a discrimination

phenomenon against women due to the fact that women do not get to be hired as leaders as

often as they are in times of crisis, when being a leader is most risky. However, despite the

fact that glass ceiling in the workplace still exists, which means that women do not get as

many opportunities as men to be hired in and promoted to higher positions, glass cliff effect,

which is being studied as a discriminatory practice (Ryan and Haslam, 2005), could be an

approach that organizations decide to pursue in order to rescue their reputation during crisis and not just to sacrifice female leaders. This approach might adopt the perception of feminine attributes that are seen as more suited for leaders in times of crisis. Although I cannot say whether Barra as a glass cliff example succeeded in rebuilding the company's reputation after the deadly crisis, as the crisis may not be over yet, I could see how her crisis communication strategy seems to implement DRT themes, which research shows is a positive and ethical approach to communicate during crisis (Ulmer et al., 2007). Ethic of care themes that also seem to overlap with DRT need to be researched further to provide more ethical crisis communication strategies for public relations practitioners and organizations.

Limitations and Future Research

This is an exploratory study that aimed to investigate the role of gender in crisis leadership discourse by engaging two theoretical lenses, DRT and ethic of care. Limitations for this study include not having multiple cases to investigate, which makes more room for further investigation and comparison between men and women communication styles. Another limitation is that I did not analyze for gendered leadership styles like transformational leadership which could provide more in depth understanding of the role of gender in crisis leadership. Future research might consider investigating ethic of care in crisis communication and transformational leadership style. Moreover, media coverage was not analyzed in this study which I assume might have given more insights into how leaders' communication influence news coverage of the crisis. An agenda setting study could give extended explanations of how feminine attributes presence in leaders' communication style might influence news coverage. Also, exploring this issue from other cultural background is important to understand how different cultures perceived feminine attributes and female leaders. A cross cultural study is appropriate to shed light on this issue.

Appendix A

Coding Book

Discourse of Renewal Themes

Theme	Sub-themes	Description	Citation
1) **Strong and trustworthy leadership**	a) Openness and transparency b) Determination c) Motivation and recognition of employees' contributions	Leaders are highly visible and accessible to the media. They communicate in a transparent, open, and honest manner. This communication helps to increase the impression that the crisis is being actively managed and that victims are being taken care of. The leaders' role is to direct interpretation of the crisis in a positive way, reduce the turmoil caused by the crisis, and reassert order and control.	(Hu, 2012)
2) **Making sense of opportunity**		Sense-making is the process by which people give meaning to experience and DR usually interprets the meaning of a disaster to the stakeholders optimistically. DR tries to overcome the threat that characterizes crises and focuses on the inherent opportunities they create. For example, DR can argue that crises create room or space for organizations and communities to reemerge, re-envision or reconstitute themselves without previous constraints or historical limitations.	
3) **Commitment to rebuild**		DR usually includes the community entities' immediate and public statements committing themselves to rebuild. The immediate and public commitments reduce the uncertainty of the crisis event and construct the meaning in a way that reduces harm. Once the stakeholders receive crisis management information, they are able to focus their efforts on moving	

Theme	Sub-themes	Description	Citation
		beyond the actual event and developing strategies for moving forward.	
4) Action of rebuilding		(plan, progress, and completion): Organizations need to make the action of rebuilding visible to stakeholders through media, direct observation, or participation. A major topic of DR during recovery phase should emphasize what the organization is going to do and what has been done. This communication is vital to retaining the confidence and support of the stakeholders.	
5) Virtues and values		In highly uncertain and stressful circumstances, DR usually draws from ethics, virtues, and values to determine how to respond. A virtuous and value-based response to a crisis is likely to generate support from stakeholders.	
6) Corrective and innovative action		Another important topic of DR regards steps to mitigate the harm caused by the crisis or procedures to minimize the risk in the future. Communication of corrective and innovative efforts can reduce the chaos of a crisis and can reassert control.	

Adapted from Hu, Y. (2012). Turning crisis into renewal: governmental discourse of renewal in rebuilding Wenchuan earthquake-damaged communities (Unpublished doctoral thesis). George Mason University, Fairfax, VA.

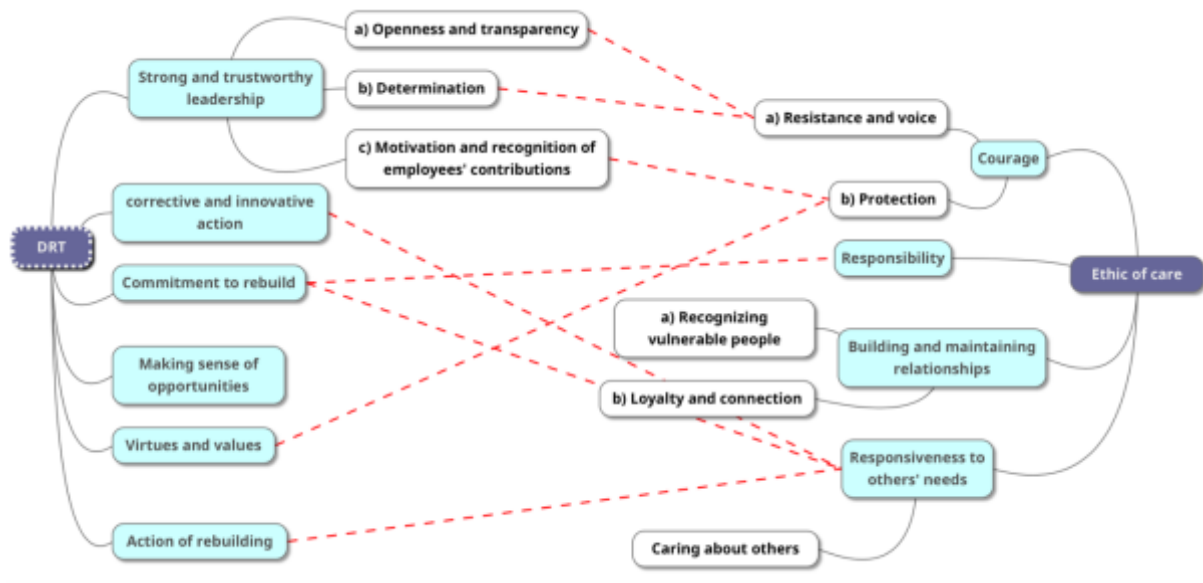**Feminine Leadership in Crisis Context - Ethic of Care Themes**

Theme	Sub-themes	Description	Citation
1) Courage	a) Resistance and voice b) Protection	Leaders have the courage to resist any violation of their relationships with their followers and publics. They use rhetoric (voice) to express their objection and	(Gilligan, 1991; Gilligan et al., 1991;

					rejection against these violations. They also protect their followers and organizations against any harmful words or behaviors.	Simola, 2005)
2)	**Responsiveness to others' needs**	a)	Caring about others	Leaders address people needs and respond to them. They present immediate solutions along with strategic plans to improve their organizations' products or services.	(Gilligan 1982; Held, 2006; Linsley & Slack, 2013; Simola, 2003)
3)	**Responsibility**			Leaders hold themselves accountable. They do not hesitate accepting responsibility for their mistakes. They provide every possible solution for the victims.	(Gilligan, 1982)
4)	**Building and maintaining relationships**	a)	Recognizing vulnerable people	Leaders work on their relationships with their followers, publics, and victims. They try to improve their relationships with them in every possible way. They have them in mind in every decision and they address them more often. Leaders also express loyalty to their organization and their people in every possible way. They use the pronoun "we" often and express their gratitude to the organization.	(Clement, 1996; Gilhgan, 1982; Gatens, 1998; Porter, 1999)
		b)	Loyalty and connection		

Appendix B

Themes' Mind Map

Below is a mind map I made to show the overlapping and connection between DRT and ethic of care themes. The red lines in the mind map indicate the similarities between the themes and the subthemes of the two theories.

Appendix C

New Discourse of Renewal Themes

Theme	Sub-themes	Description	Citation
1) **Courageous leadership**	a) Openness and transparency b) Determination c) Motivation and recognition of employees' contributions d) Resistance and voice e) Protection	Courageous leaders are visible, present, open and transparent, resistant of any violation that threaten their relationships with their publics, protective, determined to do the right thing to fix their relationships with their public, motivating of their own followers.	
2) **Making sense of opportunity**		Sense-making is the process by which people give meaning to experience and DR usually interprets the meaning of a disaster to the stakeholders optimistically. DR tries to overcome the threat that characterizes crises and focuses on the inherent opportunities they create. For example, DR can argue that crises create room or space for organizations and communities to reemerge, re-envision or reconstitute themselves without previous constraints or historical limitations.	(Hu, 2012)
3) **Commitment to rebuild**		DR usually includes the community entities' immediate and public statements committing themselves to rebuild. The immediate and public commitments reduce the uncertainty of the crisis event and construct the meaning in a way that reduces harm. Once the stakeholders receive crisis management information, they are able to focus their efforts on moving beyond the actual event and	

Theme	Sub-themes	Description	Citation
		developing strategies for moving forward.	
4) **Action of rebuilding**		(plan, progress, and completion): Organizations need to make the action of rebuilding visible to stakeholders through media, direct observation, or participation. A major topic of DR during recovery phase should emphasize what the organization is going to do and what has been done. This communication is vital to retaining the confidence and support of the stakeholders.	
5) **Virtues and values**		In highly uncertain and stressful circumstances, DR usually draws from ethics, virtues, and values to determine how to respond. A virtuous and value-based response to a crisis is likely to generate support from stakeholders.	
6) **Corrective and innovative action**		Another important topic of DR regards steps to mitigate the harm caused by the crisis or procedures to minimize the risk in the future. Communication of corrective and innovative efforts can reduce the chaos of a crisis and can reassert control.	

Vita

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