

Standpoints and Commitments as Products of Argumentative Work: Micro/Macro-Analysis of an Infamous Press Conference

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Conversation analysis and computational methods are combined to analyze the arguments produced in a press conference centered on Donald Trump's views of extreme right-wing groups. Our methods allow exploration of connections between a single conversation and a vast argumentative polylogue in which ordinary citizens interact along with journalists, politicians, and government officials. Within this press conference, standpoints and commitments actually emerge from questioning and answering, and these products of argument extend out into other discussions.

KEYWORDS: argumentation, polylogue, conversation analysis, externalization, press conference, reconstruction

1. INTRODUCTION

On August 15, 2017, United States President Donald Trump called a press conference for the purpose of announcing a major infrastructure initiative. He delivered brief prepared remarks on the rationale for significant federal spending on transportation infrastructure while journalists listened quietly. But when asked if they had any questions, no one was interested in infrastructure. What followed was a fiery

exchange lasting about 17 minutes, in which reporters clamored for the chance to ask about Trump's response to events surrounding a White nationalist rally that erupted into violence and tragedy.

2. THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

Our research program (Jacobs & Jackson, 1982; 1989) involves collecting and analysing argumentation as it occurs naturally, with no preference for specimens of argument that contain neat packages of claims + reasons. Of equal theoretical interest are discussions conducted under well-defined rules of engagement (as in science and law) and rough-and-tumble exchanges where the rules are looser, rarely articulated, less specialized, less carefully monitored and enforced, and only dimly understood. At both extremes, argumentation involves challenging and defending positions.

Argument occurs as "expansion" around some conversational act subject to actual or potential disagreement (Jackson & Jacobs, 1980). Every conversational act has a structured expansion space around it that includes the possible things that might trigger disagreement (Jackson, 1992). This space includes anything actually said, but also anything presupposed, implicated, or otherwise assumed in order for the conversational act to make sense. Arguments get elaborated one way, and not another, through social processes that never exhaust the expansion space, exploring it quite selectively.

Expansion around disagreement includes a process by which arguments come to be elaborated over the course of interaction, identifying points of disagreement and developing content to address those points. In some strands of argumentation theory, argument is defined as claim + reason and theorized in terms of what can count as good reasons for various classes of claims. The idea that argument occurs as expansion around disagreement does not directly contradict this view, but sees the reasons offered as serving this disagreement management function.

A distinctive feature of our approach is the assumption that claims, reasons, standpoints, commitments, and the like are arguers' collaboratively produced work products, emergent from clash of actions—something created, very often on-the-fly, as people anticipate or call out problems in one another's contributions and as they generate responses. This means that our attention is not limited to claim + reason structures once they have emerged in recognizable form, but also with the work done to get them to emerge.

To underline how seriously we take the idea of emergence, we advance three broad observations about how we regard specific objects,

such as standpoints and commitments, that figure in many other treatments of argumentation.

2.1 Standpoints are interactionally and temporally emergent

Any time arguments are reconstructed, standpoints appear after the fact as the anchors organizing all of the rest, governing the relevance, meaning, and force of the arguments that justify or refute them. In such a reconstruction, it may appear as though, stated or not, the standpoints were there from the start, waiting to be externalized.

We assume instead that standpoints emerge from interaction, often formed as participants work against one another and learn what they themselves believe by encountering others with contrasting beliefs. This is normal in naturally occurring argumentation. Often, in actual argumentative activity, if standpoints emerge at all, they are the endpoints rather than the starting points of an exchange. Until and unless they are called out and articulated, they exist as hypothetical projections. Interactional emergence means that externalization of standpoints can be one possible deliverable of argumentative activity. Standpoints (and positions more broadly) get constructed through interaction as participants discover what they themselves are prepared to assert and as they work to pin down the commitments of others.

2.2 Commitment externalization is a practical accomplishment

Commitments are slippery. Externalization of commitments, like formulation of standpoints, is the product of argumentative activity. Very often, argumentative activity is actually aimed at producing externalized commitments, possibly with no further immediate purpose than getting someone to own up to a belief.

Analytic and methodological concerns for any principle of externalization follow from what Walton and Krabbe (1995; also Walton, 1984) call the "maieutic function" of argumentation. But in argumentative discourse, participants must manage who commits to what, when, and with what degree of explicitness. They must work out among themselves when externalization should be pursued at all. Participants may assume, suppose, expect, suspect, surmise and otherwise infer others' non-externalized beliefs, and they may strategize to disguise their "real" beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and motives. Fixing and avoiding commitment to what seemingly follows from prior commitments involves practical, interactional work.

2.3 Argumentative potential is omnipresent in human interaction

Virtually any speech act, sequence, or activity type can be conducted with argumentative relevance in view. Even under constraints of activity type, people can build any or all of the components for an argument—without quite openly making an argument. Still, all parties may understand and act upon the argumentative relevance and design of their contributions. They are more or less alert to possibilities for disagreement and strategic in managing them.

3. METHODS

The main object of our analysis is an interaction, in which President Trump takes questions from a large group of journalists. We examine the interaction using a combination of methods: precise transcription and turn-by-turn conversation analysis (Jackson, 1986; Jacobs, 1986; 1988; 1990), combined with computational methods that allow us to relate the discourse to a background network of arguments unfolding in a massive polylogue (Aakhus & Lewiński, 2017) that is partly preserved in social media and in various forms and formats of journalism.

Starting from multiple video-recordings and vernacular transcripts published by various news organizations, we created a technical transcript conforming with standard notation used in conversation analysis. The technical transcript contains important features usually omitted from content-focused representations.¹

The transcript contained many references to prior events and phrases suggesting shared background knowledge. Systematic searches of prior discourse were launched around these elements, using queries against news databases and social media. Results returned from these queries were analyzed quantitatively (e.g., phrase counts) and samples of texts were analyzed qualitatively.

4. CONTEXT

In the days just prior to the press conference, a protest rally had been held in Charlottesville, Virginia, instigated by Unite the Right (a movement embraced by ultra-right-wing organizations, including self-

¹ All excerpts of the press conference and turn numbering come from our publicly available transcript (Jacobs, Zhang & Jackson, 2019). Intervening turns, unconnected overlap brackets, pauses, and other transcription notation have been deleted when possible for reading clarity and to save space. When timing, repetition, overlap, and other details are important, the transcript segment retains these features. We recommend reading this paper while following along with the full transcript (which also contains links to video sources).

identified Nazis and White Nationalists). Nominally, the rally was to protest removal of a statue of Robert E. Lee, the iconic commander of Confederate forces during the American Civil War. Publicity before the event drew both rally protestors and counterprotestors.

The rally was planned for Saturday, August 12, but organizers called protestors to an impromptu Friday night gathering. Carrying torches, the protestors marched to the statue chanting racist slogans (e.g., "Jews will not replace us," "Blood and soil," "Into the ovens," and "Blacks will not replace us"). A crowd of counterprotestors gathered, and amidst shouting back and forth, the two sides began shoving, punching, kicking, sometimes using spray cans and cigarette lighters. Injuries were reported on both sides.

Saturday morning both sides re-assembled and resumed hostile confrontations. Before noon, the Governor of Virginia declared a state of emergency and law enforcement ordered the crowds to disperse. But a little after 1 p.m., a neo-Nazi protestor ploughed his car into a crowd of dispersing counterprotestors, causing multiple injuries and the death of Heather Heyer. Video of the event was televised and spread quickly on social media.

President Trump, or his staff, prepared a statement on the incident to make at a previously scheduled appearance. The statement included a brief passage in which Trump appeared to go off-script: Reading from text, he said "We condemn in the strongest possible terms this egregious display of hatred, bigotry, and violence." Then, gesturing as he looked upward, he added "on many sides... on many sides" (see Holan, 2017, for full statement).

For the next two days, Trump's remarks drew fierce criticism for blaming all sides and for making no condemnation of, or even naming, the right-wing hate groups who organized the rally and whose views the killer stood for. Queries on the phrase "on many sides" retrieved about 13,000 tweets (excluding retweets) and over 2200 news stories.

After heavy criticism, on Monday, August 14, Trump issued a stronger statement which included this very explicit condemnation: "Racism is evil. And those who cause violence in its name are criminals and thugs, including the KKK, neo-Nazis, White supremacists, and other hate groups that are repugnant to everything we hold dear as Americans." (See Rubin, 2017, for full statement.) On neither day would Trump take questions from the press. For many, the Monday condemnation seemed grudging and insincere.

The infrastructure press conference occurred Tuesday afternoon. Given the buildup, the press conference is easily seen as a continuation of ongoing discourse about why Trump seemed so reluctant to condemn racist, White supremacist attitudes.

5. STANDPOINT EMERGENCE, TURN BY TURN

In American press conferences, reporters are expected to adopt a "neutralistic," politically non-partisan footing toward the issues at hand and the answers given (Clayman & Heritage, 2002). Reporters themselves should not, and normally do not, openly make accusations, criticisms, disagreements and the like, though they may report such acts by others and ask for response. In answering, the questioned President is free to act as though all present are cooperative collaborators, simply constructing the public record.

Everyone participating in this press conference understood those norms but also understood the argumentative relevance of their contributions. Reporters designed their questions and answers with attention to this relevance, trying to control the issues on which Trump was taking positions, and undertaking to constrain the commitments Trump could and should take in externalizing those positions. Trump's responses show the same sensitivity to position and commitment.

All parties know what is really going on here (challenge and defense), but all cooperate in maintaining a pretense that what is going on is question and answer. Glaser and Strauss (1967) coined the term "pretense awareness context" for this sort of situation. Maintaining a pretense awareness context is hard work, and eventually this pretense breaks down.

The first question, from ABC's Mary Bruce, has at least pro forma topical relevance to Trump's prepared statement, and it is an open-ended WH-question that is in line with the characteristically deferential stance press reporters take toward the President: "Why do you think these CEOs are leaving your manufacturing council?" It gives the President wide latitude. The question nevertheless makes obvious that there is some background indexed by reference to "these CEOs" "leaving your manufacturing council." The reporter not only knows something about these CEOs leaving the council but assumes Trump does also.

Queries against news and social media expose more: Trump's own tweets show that he was closely following a series of CEO resignations announced as acts of protest against Trump's stance toward Charlottesville. The first resignation came early Monday morning, before Trump's "racism is evil" statement. Merck CEO Ken Frazier resigned from the President's Manufacturing Council to "take a stand against intolerance and extremism." Trump had responded to this resignation immediately by tweet. As other CEOs joined Frazier, Trump continued to respond with more tweets.

So Trump could not have been confused about the significance of the question. The point was to make the CEOs' reasons for resigning an issue to address. Trump's response (turns 03/05 in the transcript)

evasively takes the question in a direction other than what was obviously intended. He attacks the CEOs for not bringing jobs back into the country (in an apparent effort to redirect attention to his economic growth initiatives).

But Bruce stays on her own path, following up (turns 06/08) with "Let me ask you (a different way) Why- Why did you wait so long to (blast) neo-Nazis?" This presupposes that Trump waited longer than standard ("so long"), and perhaps also implicates that a President should "blast neo-Nazis" and should not have to wait so long to do so. Trump seemingly accepts the impudicature that he should "blast neo-Nazis" by failing to deny it, but he emphatically denies the presupposition that he waited too long to respond (repeating "I didn't wait long" three times, in turns 10, 12, and 14). He goes on (turn 16) to explain that the wait was justified by the need to "know the facts," a claim he repeats throughout the initial segment of the press conference (turns 28, 37, 58/60, 67, 70/71, 73).

On the face of it, it is reasonable to want the facts before making public statements. And this might take more time than normal. But the reporters clearly do not buy this argument, as is clear from challenges peppered throughout the press conference to Trump's position that he did not know enough initially to deliver an immediate condemnation. For example, reporters simply assert that "White supremacists," "White nationalists," "Nazis," and "violence" were there, as though this was common knowledge and sufficient. (See turns 17, 31, 36, 43, 45, 62/65, 64/66, 69, and 75). After the event, news analysts repeatedly brought up Trump's "fast" statements condemning non-White attackers and his consistent silence on terrorist acts by White attackers (See Bump, 2019 for an ongoing list of such cases; also Calmes, 2017). Trump's need for "the facts" *in this case* only appears to be further evidence of a bias already suspected and widely noted.

25 DT: As I said on, remember this, Saturday, "We condemn in the strongest possible terms this egregious display of hatred, bigotry and violence. It has no place in America." And then I went on from there. (.)

[Now here's the=

[

26 Rs: [((CLAMOR))

27 R1: =[and on many s:i:des]

Figure 1 – Transcript segment. Trump re-reads his Saturday statement, omitting mention of "on many sides."

Trump is keenly aware of the background controversies, and also well aware that his Saturday and Monday statements served as flashpoints for the most recent controversy. This is evidenced by the fact that he actually brought with him a written version of his Saturday statement and pulled it from his pocket to read aloud, as shown in Figure 1. Trump's reading omits the ad-libbed remark that was the flashpoint for subsequent public condemnations. Immediately, Bruce interjects "and on many sides," the incendiary phrase Trump had added ad lib when first reading the statement. But Bruce gets no response from Trump (nor when she again raises the phrase in turn 75: "Whyd'ju (say) many sides?").

Reporters' subsequent questions draw in other background knowledge and assumptions. For example, *New York Times* reporter Maggie Haberman repeatedly shouts out "Was it terrorism?" (turns 19, 21, 48) and another reporter shouts out the taunt, "Why do Nazis like you?" (turns 09, 11, 39, and 41). All know that Trump has a difficult choice in answering: Answering one way, he would expose his support for racist White supremacists and neo-Nazis; answered another way, he would offend these groups and risk loss of their support for him.

In a more delicate probe, a reporter asks (in turn 51) "The CEO of Walmart said you missed a critical opportunity to help bring the country together. Did you?" Trump again ignores what the reporter is really asking, instead touting the booming economy and stock market as what will bring the country together. But Trump is hearing what is at issue. As shown in Figure 2, when asked by the next reporter what he would do if he "had to do it all over again," Trump takes "it" as referring to his Saturday and Monday statements, reiterating his claim that he had to wait until Monday to make a statement in order to see the facts:

54 Rx₁: If you had to do it all over again how would you do it?

56 DT: I'd do it the same way. And you know why?

57 Rx₂: (If you had to do it) all over again?

58 DT: Because I want to:: (1.2) make sure, when I make a statement, that the statement is correct.

59 Rx₂: Why [did you (wait two)

[

60 DT: [And there was NO WA::y, (1.3 sec.) There was no way of making a correct statement that early. I had to see the facts, [unlike a lot of reporters

Figure 2 – Transcript segment. Trump defends his choices of when and how to respond to the Charlottesville events.

Until this point, Trump's emerging standpoint seems to be that his Charlottesville statements were very good, not deserving of criticism. The reporters have introduced at least five lines of argument that are in one way or another reasons for judging his statements negatively. Figure 3 summarizes the reporters' collective critique, and Figure 4 shows Trump's argument as developed to this point. All indications are that he has backed away from blaming all sides and is trying to assert that he just needed more facts before making an unequivocal condemnation of the protestors on the right.

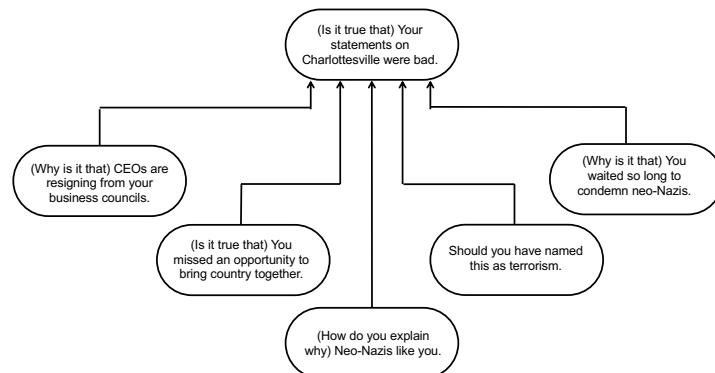


Figure 3 – Argument graph. Press criticisms of Trump's statements.

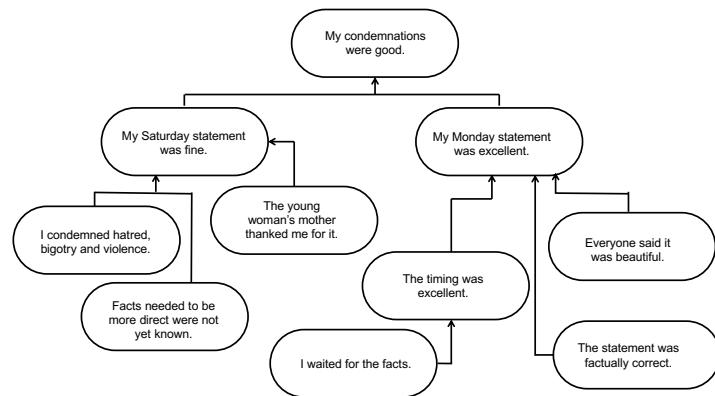


Figure 4 – Argument graph. Trump's defense.

But at this point (in response to turn 60), reporters begin shouting out bald-on-record counterarguments to Trump's apparent position that he did not have enough facts until Monday, pointing out the known presence of a leading White supremacist, David Duke. He denies

knowing that David Duke was at the rally, reasserts that he needed to know "all of the facts," and claims his Monday statement was "well stated," "beautiful," and made "with great knowledge."

Out of the subsequent clamor of shout-outs, Maggie Haberman is finally recognized to ask, "Was this terrorism?" and also asks a seemingly unrelated question: "And can you tell us how you're feeling about your chief strategist, Stephen Bannon?" (turn 77). The first of these questions circles back to why Trump refuses to see racially motivated violence by Whites as terrorism. The second invites comment on an article she and Glenn Thrush had published the preceding day titled "Bannon in Limbo as Trump Faces Growing Calls for the Strategist's Ouster." The article had portrayed the president as wanting to distance himself from Bannon but as unable "to follow through." Bannon's association with the alt-right had been highlighted, along with his efforts to dissuade the president from "antagonizing a small but energetic part of his base" by criticizing alt-right activists. Trump's ambivalence toward Bannon had been portrayed as a tension between "a foxhole friendship forged during the 2016 presidential campaign and concerns about what mischief Mr. Bannon might do once he leaves." Haberman and Thrush reported that many people regarded Bannon as "the mastermind behind the rise of a pliable Mr. Trump," as "the real power and brains behind the Trump throne," and as taking credit for Trump's election.

Trump deflected the terrorism question with a digression about legal semantics, and seemed ready to move on without addressing the question about Bannon. When Haberman follows up, as shown in Figure 5, Trump ignores her to call on a new reporter. That reporter chooses not to allow the president to escape: Whatever he intended to ask, the reporter uses his opportunity to insist on an answer to "Maggie's question." Trump shows that he understands he is being asked about a whole bundle of circumstances discussed in the Haberman and Thrush article, and his choices of what to respond to are revealing. He starts in turn 81 by saying that he "never spoke to Mr. Bannon about it," though there is no obvious antecedent for "it." Presumably, he means that it is not true that he was in close communication with Bannon about how to respond to Charlottesville, a claim made in the article. But he also takes time to rebut several other claims in the article (that Bannon helped him win the Presidency, that Bannon is a racist), while remaining noncommittal about whether he still has confidence in Bannon.

Interestingly, despite the reporter's reference to Bannon as "Steve," five times Trump refers to his "friend" as "Mr. Bannon," seemingly distancing himself from Bannon (Jennings & Stevenson, 2017). Again, what is at issue leaks out into on-record statements as Trump and press navigate what they take to be the relevant but

unstated argumentative fields. Still in the offing is the unstated charge that the Charlottesville statements reflect racist sympathies and motives.

81 R2: Can you tell us how you're feeling about your chief strategist, Mr. Bannon? Can you [talk about that?

82 DT: [Go ahead ((pointing at R5))

83 R5: I wou- I would echo Maggie's question. Uh- Steve Bannon has [come under

84 DT: [I never spoke to Mr. Bannon about it.

85 R5: (But) can you tell us broadly what your v- Do you have- still have confidence in

[Steve?

86 DT: [Well, we'll see and, Look. Look. (.) I like Mr. Bannon. He's a friend of mine. But (.) Mr. Bannon came on very late. You know that. I went through: seventeen senators, governors, and I won all the primaries. Mr. Bannon came on very much later than that. Uh and I like him: He's a good man. Uh, he is: not a racist, I can tell you that. He's a good person. He actually gets a very unfair press in that regard. (.) But, we'll see what happens with Mr. Bannon. But, he's a good person and I think the press treats him frankly very unfairly.

Figure 5 – Transcript Segment. Trump ducks a question, then changes course.

The next question recognized by Trump, shown in Figure 6, seems at first unrelated to Charlottesville. The topic is Trump's relationship with his National Security Advisor, H. R. McMaster. McMaster had no involvement in Charlottesville. The point of asking about Trump's support for McMaster is to further probe his willingness to side with White nationalists.

Goodwin (2019) provides a useful way to think about the relevance of McMaster to the rest of the exchange. Her idea is that positions with no strict logical connections will group into constellations, allowing people to infer leanings on one issue from what is actually expressed on another. Positive attitudes toward Bannon and negative attitudes toward McMaster had become constellated with the alt-right; with belief in a "deep state" that opposed Trump's agenda from within; with populism and White nationalism; and with the "Unite

the Right" rally. Positive attitudes toward McMaster had become constellated with John McCain; with "globalism"; and with resistance to Trump's international policy. Asking Trump about Bannon and McMaster is a way to locate him in a network of constellated people and positions. Trump does his best to avoid signaling his location by reminding the reporters that he has already defended McMaster (in turn 91, not shown in Figure 6).

90 R6: Senator McCain has called on you to defend your National Security Advisor, H. R. McMaster, against th()s attacks.

96 R6: Sen Senator McCain said that the alt-right is behind these attacks, and he linked that same group to those who perpetrated the attack in Charlottesville.

[So (you)]

[]

97 DT: Well, [I-] I don't know. I can't tell you. I'm sure Senator McCain must know what he's talking about. Uh but when you say the alt-right, uh define alt-right to me. You define it. Go ahead.=

98 R6: =Well, I'm (sayin') as
[Senator

[

99 DT: [No, define it for me. Come on let's go. De=
[=fine it for me.]

[

100 R6: [Senator] McCain defined them as the same groups.

[that were behind the attack in Charlottesville]
[]

101 DT: [Okay, what about the alt-left that came chargin at] us. Excuse me. What about the alt-left that came charging at the, as you say, the alt-right? Do they have any (.) semblance of guilt?

104 R6: This is [Senator McCain's statement

[

105 R7: [Are you equivocating here?

106 DT: What if- Let me ask you this. What about the fact that they came charging- that they came charging with clubs in their hands, swinging clubs. Do they have any (1.0) problem, >I think they do.<

Figure 6 – Transcript segment. Trump condemns counterprotestors.

Until now, Trump would appear to have taken the limited stance that he had made fitting and appropriate statement(s) on Charlottesville, judiciously waiting for "the facts" before pronouncing any judgments. He had ignored his "on many sides" ad-lib of the first day, suggesting at least a tacit withdrawal of that claim. And together with his Monday "racism is evil" statement and his re-reading of the Saturday statement (omitting "on many sides"), he might have been taken as at least implying that he would denounce the Charlottesville protestors for racism, blame them for the death and the violence, and disavow the White supremacist agenda of the alt-right. Finally, he had kept his distance from Steve Bannon. Of course, none of this was explicit—but the questioning seems to be pushing him in this direction. But just at this point Trump shifts apparent argumentative direction. In the sequence shown in Figure 6, Trump dismissively avoids confirming anything McCain said about the alt-right and aggressively demands that reporter R6 define "alt-right" (turns 97/99). When, in turn 100, R6 maintains frame and reiterates the accusation that they are "the same groups that were behind the attack in Charlottesville," Trump cuts her off. To the audible gasp of the press corps, he asks, "What about the alt-left", "Do they have any semblance of guilt?" Then later (turn 106): "Do they have any problem?" and he rapidly blurts out the answer to his own rhetorical question: "I think they do."

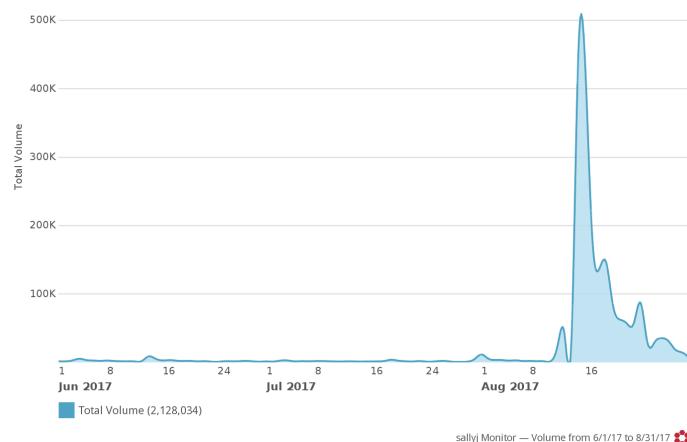


Figure 7 - Tweets mentioning 'alt-left' before and after the August 15 press conference.

Trump's use of the term 'alt-left' here is very significant for inferences about his alignments. Trump could have said, "What about the counterprotestors?" but instead chose a term exclusively used at the

time by the far right. 'Alt-left' was not a term commonly used at the time of the press conference, and Trump's use of the term aligns him with those few who were using it. Figure 7 shows results from a query (using a commercial social media analytics tool, Crimson Hexagon) that establish that 'alt-left' had little presence on twitter until Trump used the term. Qualitative review of the earlier uses show that it was used primarily by alt-right sympathizers to describe their opposition. 'Alt-right' is a term of self-reference; 'alt-left' is an epithet.

The press, with alarmed consternation, responds with a flurry of calls for Trump to take back the standpoint they now hear him adopting. Figure 8 contains some of what we could make out. Trump had seemed to be walking back his Saturday comments about "hatred, bigotry, and violence on many sides," but now he launches a defense in which violence becomes the main cause for condemnation. He has, in the eyes of the press corps, backed down from the kind of condemnation they presumed was called for—and that his Monday "racism is evil" statement, the one that was "so late," seemed to contain.

108 R6: Sorry are you saying (sir)

111 R3: (But) you're]not putting the () on the same level
as the Neo-Nazis and White supremacists.] Sir.

115 R3: You're saying- you're not putting these protestors on
the same level [as neo-Nazis and White supremacists

[
116 R4: [Is the alt-left as bad as White
supremacy?

123 R1: Are you saying the left is the same as the () with
White supremacy? Are you saying () is

Figure 8. Transcript segments. Reporters show their dismay.

The noisy calls are so unrelenting that the President first tries to shush the clamor, then stops speaking and simply gazes off to the ceiling.

128 R1: Do you think that the- what you call the alt-left is the
same as neo-Nazis?

129 DT:I uh those people- all of those people- Excuse me. I've
condemned neo-Nazis. I've condemned many
different groups. But not all of those people were (.)
neo-Nazis believe me. Not all of those people were
White supremacists, by any stretch.

Figure 9 – Transcript Segment. Trump limits the scope of his
condemnation.

Finally (as shown in Figure 9) Trump chooses one of the many questions and gives an answer that further distinguishes neo-Nazis and White supremacists from the Charlottesville protestors as a whole. He condemns the former, but denies that all those people were neo-Nazis and White supremacists "by any stretch."

130 R1: (They) were White national[ists]

[
131 DT:] Those people (.) were
also there because they wanted to protest the taking
down of a statue Robert E. Lee. So

132 Rx1: Should that statue be taken down?=

133 DT: =Excuse me. If you
take a look at some of the groups, and you see- and
you'd know it if you were honest reporters, which in
many cases you're not. But many of those people were
there to protest the taking down of the statue of
Robert E. Lee. So. This week it's Robert E. Lee, I
noticed that Stonewall Jackson's coming down. I
wonder, is it George Washington next week and is it
Thomas Jefferson the week after. You know, you all-
You really do have to ask yourself, where does it stop?

134 Rx1: Should they take it down?

137 DT: But they were there to protest- Excuse me. You take a
look, the night before they were there to protest the
taking down of the statue of Robert E.
Lee=Infrastructure question. Go ahead.

138 Rx3: Should statues of Robert E. Lee stay up?

139 DT:I would say that's up to a local (.) town, (.) community,
or the federal government depending on where it is
located.

Figure 10 - Transcript Segment. Trump rationalizes statue
protests.

In the next turn (130, see Figure 10), Bruce contradicts the President ("They were White nationalists"). Either continuing his own train of thought or responding to Bruce, Trump interrupts to add (in turns 131/133/137) that people "were also there" not demonstrating in favor of White nationalism but "to protest the taking down of the statue of Robert E. Lee". He then develops an argument for that protest,

seeming to suggest that he agrees with the protesters. But, when a reporter's follow-up in turn 138 presses Trump to explicitly confirm his agreement with the protestors, he adopts a weaker kind of alignment. Trump's answer is noncommittal regarding the protestors' demand. In effect, he has only committed to believing that they have a legitimate rationale for protest, not to sharing their views.

Dodging an even more pointed follow-up (turn 141: "Are you against the Confederacy?"), Trump then takes a more general question about race relations (turn 143: "How concerned are you about race relations in America? And do you think things have gotten worse or better since you took office?"). He returns to the infrastructure theme for the press conference, saying the "millions of jobs" he has "brought back into the country" will have "a tremendous impact on race relations" (turn 144).

The infrastructure theme, however, is again ignored by reporters (see Figure 11). Mary Bruce all but repeats her earlier questions (in turns 123 and 128), this time drawing out an inferential consequence of what Trump has just done. Trump denies it and restates "what I'm saying."

147 R1: Mr. President, are you (putting) Mr. President
are you putting what you're calling the alt-left and
White supremacists on the same moral plane?

148 DT: ((looking at R1, arm extended with palm facing her))
I'm not putting anybody on a moral plane, what I'm
saying is this. You had a group on one side and you
had a group on the other, and they came at each other
with clubs and it was vicious and it was horrible and it
was a horrible thing to watch. But there is another
side. There was a group on this side. You can call them
the left, you've just called them the left, that came
violently attacking the other group. So you can say
what you want, but that's the way it is.

Figure 11 – Transcript segment. Trump denies putting anybody on a moral plane.

Again Trump's answer does not go unchallenged. Reporters persist with variations on Bruce's line, as with the follow-up in 152 (Figure 12. See also turn 185 in the full transcript).

152 Rx: () on both sides, sir. You said there was
hatred, there was violence on both sides. Are- Are
[(you saying)()](I'm trying)
[
153 DT:[Well I do think there's blame. Yes, I think there's
blame on both sides. [You look at-] You looks at=

155 DT: =both sides, I think there's blame on both sides. And I
have no doubt about it. And you don't have any doubt
about it either.

Figure 12 – Transcript segment. Trump attributes blame on
both sides.

In the clamor subsequent to Trump's insistence on "blame on both sides", Trump is cut off again, and reporters resort to bald disagreement and objection. Mary Bruce (turn 160) simply exclaims "Both sides!" and then shouts out, "They killed a person. Heather Heyer died." Other reporters can be heard shouting "But own- only the Nazis took a life" (turn 156) and "But they're Nazis" (turn 159). CNN's Jim Acosta objects: "Neo-Nazis started this thing. They showed up at Charlottesville. They star- They showed up at Charlottesville to protest the removal of that statue" (turn 161). Trump attempts to explain the protestors' point of view, and he and the reporters spar for a few turns over whether Robert E. Lee is any worse than other historical leaders (Figure 13).

Trump has reiterated his rationalization of protests against taking down the statue of Robert E. Lee. He frames it as a concern with "history" and "culture" rather than an expression of White supremacy, allowing him to convey sympathy with their cause without openly endorsing racist attitudes and beliefs that are at the center of that cause.. He distinguishes the protestors in general from the neo-Nazis and White nationalists. He acknowledges "some fine people" on both sides, but insists that there were "troublemakers" and "a lot of bad people" among the counterprotestors. Moreover, he has re-asserted that the press has treated the legitimate protestors "absolutely unfairly."

169 R3: George Washington and Robert E. Lee are not the same [because-]
[]

170 DT: [Well no,] George Washington was a slave owner. (.) Was George Washington a slave owner?

172 Rx: [He was a sl[ave owner.

[]

173 DT: [So will George Washington now lose his status? Are we going to take down- Excuse me.

175 DT: Are we going to take down- Are we going to take down statues to George Wash-

177 DT: How about Thomas Jefferson? What do you think of Thomas Jefferson? You like him?

178 R3: I do love Thom[as Jefferson.]

[]

179 DT: [Okay, good.] Are we going to take down the statue? because he was a major slave owner. Now, are we going to take down his statue?

181 DT: So you know what, it's fine. You're changing history. You're changing culture. And you had people, and I'm not talking about the neo-Nazis and the White nationalists, because they should be condemned totally. But you had many people in that group other than neo-Nazis and White nationalists, okay? And the press has treated them (.) absolutely unfairly.

183 DT: Now, (.) in the other group also, you had some fine people. But you also had troublemakers. And you see them come with the- with the (.) black outfits and with the helmets, and with the baseball bats. You got- you have a lotta of bad- you had a lot of bad people in the other group too.

Figure 13 - Transcript segment. Trump reiterates protestors' rationale.

The reporters' follow-up questions indicate the difficulty they are having even processing Trump's standpoint (in particular, his insistence that not all of the protestors were racists, White nationalists, or neo-Nazis). One reporter shouts out, "Who are the good people? Who are the good people?" (turn 184). Trump calls on another who queries, "Who was treated unfairly? Sir, I am sorry. I just didn't understand what you were saying. You were saying the press has treated White

nationalists unfairly? I just didn't understand what you were saying." (turn 185). Trump reiterates his position, that there were "bad people" among the protestors, but also people "quietly" and "innocently" protesting the taking down of the Robert E. Lee statue. He concludes that "There are two sides to a story" and "two sides to the country."

Trump's emergent position can be summarized as shown in Figure 14.

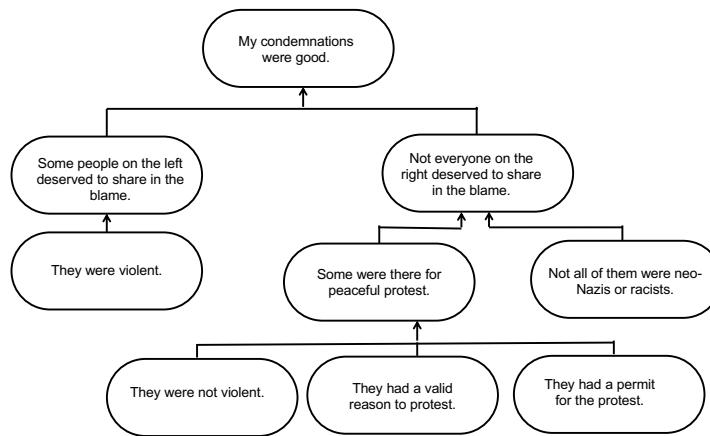


Figure 14 – Argument graph. Trump's emergent standpoint and supporting arguments.

Notice the consistency between the emergent standpoint in Figure 14 and what Trump argued from the first moments of the exchange: Trump is still insisting that his statements were perfectly fine, but the sense in which they were fine is quite different. At first, it seemed they were fine because he condemned the various groups that make up the alt-right; now, they appear fine because he stopped short of condemning all of the protestors and because he fairly judged those on the left as well the right.

6. OCCASIONS FOR ARGUMENT EXTENSION

In debate theory, the term 'extension' refers to the progressive back and forth of argument and counterargument in answer to the opponent's input, a process of responsive rebuttal and refutation. It has to do with temporal unfolding of a case in response to a clash of views—with the interactional emergence of argumentative content. Every topic mentioned in the press conference had already been a matter of discussion during August 2017, both in news/opinion journalism and in social media, leaving a residue of argumentative content to be recycled, refashioned, reconsidered, or otherwise extended. Both the President

and the reporters draw from and build on existing stores of argumentative content to extend the conversation along lines advantageous to their own views.

Both Trump and press corps signal their awareness of this vast pre-existing network of other content that contributes sense and significance to their exchange. Four separate sequences show how this works: (1) the opening line of questioning around why top corporate executives were resigning from Trump's business council; (2) questions asking how Trump felt about his chief strategist Steve Bannon; (3) a similar line of questioning about whether Trump would defend his National Security Advisor H. R. McMaster against attacks by the alt-right; and (4) a volley of questions about Trump's position on Confederate monuments. At the outset, reporters think they know, at least generally, what Trump's position will be, but anything that might be taken as his standpoint by the end is as much a product of the reporters' work as of his own—emergent from their choices of what to ask and his choices of how to answer.

Trump had already argued (on Saturday) that many sides shared blame for what happened in Charlottesville, seeming to back down on Monday. In the press conference, he extended his argument in two important ways: clarifying that not all of the protestors were part of the hate groups that he condemned on Monday, and explicitly arguing that among the counterprotestors were violent extremists on the left whose actions merited the same condemnation.

7. CONCLUSION

We have long argued that the structure of argumentation (including anything reconstructible as claims + reasons) emerges from the work participants do to manage disagreement. This work—like all human activity—can be chunked in many ways, at many scales. Sometimes, a narrow disagreement is called out and resolved all in a moment, and participants move on to some next task. Other times, a disagreement may be so deep, so complex, and so consequential that its management becomes a massive project extending over a long period of time and involving accumulated work products of a large and dynamically changing set of participants. The press conference we have analysed turn-by-turn is one occasion within an ongoing disagreement management project.

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