



The relevance of aggression and the aggression of relevance

The rise of the accreditation marketing machine

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to illustrate how language functions to construct relevance at moments of articulation and how language functions as an aggressive marketing practice to promote a self-regulated (production-oriented) system of accreditation.

Design/methodology/approach – Drawing on the political theory of Laclau and Lacanian psychoanalytical theory of desire and aggressivity, a linguistic case study is used to illustrate the construction and promotion of accreditation and relevance.

Findings – Aggressive competitive behavior in the area of higher education accreditation sets up inter-institutional antagonisms at the local and global level which may prove socially divisive and restrict the distribution of knowledge for the social good with the possible implication of restricting economic growth for competitively weaker countries.

Research limitations/implications – The micro analysis of language restricts the size of the data set considered in a single article.

Practical implications – Stakeholders of higher education institutions may wish to consider the strategic implications of accreditation beyond inter-institution rivalry.

Originality/value – Methodologically, this paper provides an innovative application of political, psychoanalytical and linguistic theory. Empirically, the paper provides new insights into the accreditation of higher education.

Keywords Value analysis, Marketing theory, Higher education, Management strategy

Paper type Conceptual paper

1. Introduction

Higher education is promoted by arguments that it must somehow be relevant. The word relevance has no clear-cut definition, being used with interchangeable pejorative/laudatory associations according to context. I explore this floating characteristics as I connect my analysis to a number of current debates such as the McDonaldization of higher education (Ritzer, 2000), universities lacking relevance (Starkey and Madan, 2001; Gibbons *et al.*, 1994), claims that “learning is circulating along the same lines as money” (Lyotard, 1984, p. 6) and that “knowledge has ceased to offer the prospect of emancipation” (Delanty, 2002, p. 46). The UK government wants higher education to expand and be relevant (Clarke, 2003) as does the USA government (Spellings, 2006) which promotes anxiety as well as reform. AACSB International places much emphasis on the relevance of business performance rather than the relevance of work and business as an aspect of social life which may be improved by researching business as opposed to research for business (AACSB, 2007d). In the midst of such discourses, academics in business schools in the UK and USA struggle with what is required of them while managers of global institutions such as AACSB International struggle for their place in the academic sun.



According to the OECD (2005), the USA slipped to twelfth place in higher education attainment rankings. Only 66 percent of full-time, four-year college students complete their degree within six years (Berkner *et al.*, 2003) and employers complain bitterly that college graduates are not prepared for the workplace (Business Higher Education Forum, 1999). Significant differences exist between white, Asian, black and Hispanic students. By ages 25-29 about 34 of every 100 whites obtain a bachelor's degree compared to 17 of every 100 blacks and just 11 of every 100 Latinos (Stoops, 2004). Such is the anxiety over higher education and the American competitive position that the Federal Government commissioned the report: *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of USA Higher Education* (Spellings, 2006) and a number of special research papers that dealt with identified areas of major concern. One of those areas is accreditation and self regulation. A key recommendation of the issue paper on accreditation is that:

Accreditation organizations are largely membership organizations governed by the institutions they accredit. Although accreditation organizations now have representation from the public on their boards, the level of presentation and engagement is not sufficient. Require accreditation organizations to be led by governing boards with balanced representation between all major public and private stakeholders including employers, federal, and state government (Schray, 2006).

The Federal Government of the USA does not see the current state of accreditation as fit for purpose. Despite this, the accreditation body AACSB International promotes its product as the "best" accreditation for business schools throughout the world.

US business schools are short of qualified PhDs to conduct research and teach the next generation (AACSB, 2003, 2007d). The shortage has driven average starting salaries from \$64,000 in 1997 to \$93,780 in 2005. According to Close (2006), starting salaries for a tenure track assistant professor (nine month) ranges from \$63,500 to \$140,000. Rightly or wrongly, it is not difficult for academic staff to develop the working hypothesis that AACSB International, and affiliated business schools, are keen to develop alternative sources of (cheaper) academic labor and that the USA government is keen to encourage immigration of highly qualified labor given the shortage of knowledge workers in areas identified as key to strategic success such as "health care, education, and computer and mathematical sciences" (Spellings, 2006, p. 7). In October 2000, the United States introduced an amendment to its immigration laws that made available 600,000 new visas for scientists and engineers (World Bank, 2002). Universities are increasingly active in the international market as a world-wide convergence in faculty labor is facilitated by the professional model of accreditation (Marginson and Van Der Wende, 2006, p. 16).

It is within this accreditation background that one of the more progressive accreditation agencies is examined. AACSB International is chosen as a case because of its engagement with its partners (AACSB, 2006a, 2005a, 2005b), ethical business education considerations (AACSB, 2004, 2006c) and its role in sustaining educational standards (AACSB, 2003, 2002). Not because of but despite the highest levels of engagement with communities and commitment to ethics and higher education, AACSB International makes the case of the impossibility of particular institutions of accreditation to deal with the complexity of higher education as a global and scarce resource which makes for political antagonism both within and across national boundaries.

2. Critical discourse analysis

In connection with the exploration of business school accreditation, the aim of this section is to outline the methodological approach with regard to key theoretical and analytical concepts drawn from two broad areas of theoretical work, the writings of Lacan and the writings of Laclau, which are then operationalised through systemic functional linguistics (Halliday, 1994; Fairclough, 2003) in order to investigate accreditation and relevance at the point of articulation. In this case, the points of articulation are carefully crafted AACSB International published documents. As the language of these documents is so carefully crafted, any linguistic “slippage” is all the more insightful for understanding accreditation, aggressivity and relevance.

2.1 Ontology and relevance

Laclau and Mouffe’s (1985, p. 108) theory assumes that “every object is constituted as an object of discourse” and there is no ontological difference between discursive and social practice:

What is denied is not that such objects exist external to thought, but the rather different assertion that they could constitute themselves as objects outside any discursive conditions of emergence (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985p. 108).

However, it is not merely that relevance is embedded in exchange objects through language; rather relevance is a construction at the moment of articulation in an exchange process. Regardless of what may be real, whether objects or structures, it is language which constitutes and defines. There is no position outside language to inscribe the relevance of business school education and its accreditation.

2.2 Desire for the other

As it is impossible to desire what is possessed, desire is always “the desire for something else” (Lacan, 2006, p. 431). So the object of desire is continually deferred. No consumer good will totally satisfy. Neither ownership nor consumption will satisfy the desire. Likewise, the consumption of education will not satisfy. That desire is continual deferral makes it a) metonymy and b) infinite. In this way, desire is constitutive of heterogeneity. The unconscious desire continuously formulates the conscious object of desire in the imaginary governed by the ego. The continuous deferral of desire transfers relevance from object (relevant knowledge) to object (other relevant knowledge) that constitutes the infinite symbolic order of language speaking interpretations of objects into existence.

However, there is only one Lacanian Real object of desire. The *objet petit a* is ultimately the desire of the Other’s desire. Other is the symbolic order as it is particularised by each individual. While the Other is also the other person “the Other most of all must be considered a locus, the locus in which language is constituted” (Lacan, 1997, p. 274). Language is beyond conscious control and “the unconscious is the Other’s discourse” (Lacan, 2006, p. 10). Desire as a relation to the Lacanian Real is directly constitutive of relevance. Desire is the desire of the Other and “desire of the Other’s desire” and so desire is to be the object of another’s desire and a desire for recognition. This may be viewed as the child’s struggle for his or her place in the family that extends into adulthood and can be seen in marketing behavior to achieve “universal” recognition as the internationally recognized accreditation body that has this particular place. What makes an object relevant is not any intrinsic quality but that the object is desired by another. Relevant knowledge and so accreditation is then

only relevant if not widely disseminated nor given open access but given sufficient access and dissemination for the desire to occur in the other but simultaneously blocking the other's pursuit of fulfillment. The case study in section three illustrates the working of this simultaneous open/closed access duality of relevant knowledge that stems from human desire discernable in the language use connected with accreditation.

2.3 *The social production of the naming desire*

It is the retroactive effect of naming the signifier, the articulating and performative dimension of naming, that transfers relevance onto an object through the unconscious desire for the *objet petit a*. For example, the allusion to America as a land of hard, honest people of the Marlboro brand is not that Marlboro expresses the American way of life but that American way of life is retroactively constructed into the naming of America as Marlboro country. Both America and Marlboro become a locus of reward and recognition for honesty and individual hard work differentiated and measured from its negation in a series of constructed dualities such as individual labour/capital; country/city; and small/big industry. So too is it that Oxbridge or an Ivy League is not the best that higher education can offer but that the best higher education on offer is retroactively named into an Oxbridge or an Ivy League. That is to say that there is an affective investment in the particular named desire as a signifier that constitutes a whole way of articulating the relevance of higher education in such a way that relevance, and so what is perceived as of value, does not pre-exist the articulation of the relational complex but is constituted through it (Laclau, 2005; Žižek, 1989). There is a particular desire within the subject relative to the Other that transfers value in the form of privilege, social status and economic benefit onto the named object of an Ivy League as the best higher education.

2.4 *Aggressivity: from the fragmented particular to homogeneity*

At its limit, aggressivity turns into aggression but it is important to note that aggressivity does not equal aggression[1] (Lacan, 1991, p. 177). Rather, aggressivity is the sense of fragmentation and disintegration derived from the mirror stage recognition of the wholeness of the specular image in contrast to the child's profound lack of coordination and thus the desire to achieve a sense of ideal wholeness of being and avoid disintegration (Lacan, 2006, p. 92). Aggressivity is thus an aspect of ego as a desire for a unified subject. Stemming from the "mirror stage", the "I function" and "primordial jealousy" (Lacan, 2006, p. 79), aggressivity mediates all social relations and even "underlies the actions of the philanthropist, the idealist, the pedagogue and even the reformer" (Lacan, 2006, p. 81). Human aggressivity moves people away from the fragmented particular, and ultimately the oblivion of disintegration, and toward a desire for greater self-homogeneity, recognition of that self-homogeneity and control over it that extends beyond the self.

There is a specific relation between people and their own bodies that is manifested in a series of social but aggressive practices (Lacan, 2006, p. 85). Consider the rites involving tattooing, incision and body piercing to the arbitrariness of fashion and the aggressivity to fit that fashion that denies respect for the particular human body. By an act of identification, the body gives over agency to images in a play of aggressive social signification in order to belong to the body whole. As for the body, so it is for the mind.

Through a play of authoritarian metaphors, those responsible for accrediting knowledge build homogenous symbols that pierce, brand and tattoo other

communities, including the economically weak, with competitive knowledge. In the play of language that makes for difference and equivalence, some are raised while others are diminished:

This aggressivity is exercised within real constraints of course. But we know from experience that it is no less effective when given expression: a severe parent is intimidating by his or her very presence, and the image of the Punisher scarcely needs to be brandished for the child to form it. Its effects are more far-reaching than any act of brutality (Lacan, 2006, p. 85).

The positioning of students (or prosumers of knowledge) is an act of aggressivity delineating desire in relation to the Other that necessitates a duality of those with/without accredited knowledge. Likewise, international accreditation is an aggressive action seriated in continuous demonstrative interpretations of other nation's educational weaknesses. Yet simultaneously, international accreditation facilitates dispossessing national economies of their knowledge resources by competitively recruiting knowledge workers as they attain accreditation levels. The measure of standardized international accreditation facilitates recruitment generally in one direction. With purchasing power, there is less necessity to make or grow your own knowledge, particularly if you set the specification and standardize the product for your own particular interest. The imposition of a particular accredited knowledge is no less than the imposition of an aggressive competitor who has symbolized their particular as a universal that dissipates the particular needs of very different communities. This is all the more the case when the regional accreditation, such as North American, is an economic imposition on a plurality of multi-cultural regions.

3. Analysis and findings

Section three of this paper examines the language used by the accrediting body AACSB International to position itself in the marketplace for knowledge accreditation and draws out the implications for such mastery of the language of accreditation. Empirical material gathered from AACSB International publications is analyzed through the lens of critical discourse and linguistic analysis to illustrate the aggressivity in any desire and attempt to impose a particular regional form of accreditation on a multi-cultural world of management higher education.

3.1 Naming and changing

Being known as the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business may be somewhat self limiting for an organization with global ambitions. The name change may also indicate that the "American" brand is no longer thought to be associated with the "best" and not that welcome in many places throughout the world. The dropping of the American qualifier is a reality check in the face of a no longer sustainable desire frustrated by the actions of others. What is expunged from a name is pertinent to what it means. Moreover, the great American adjective projects a regional partisanship in its marking of where business self interest lies. Removal of the adjective, however, does not remove the activity or outcome. "Strong communication" is after all a "critical skill" (AABSC International, 2006a, p. 8). Nevertheless, the removal of a key defining term is in itself a signal of anxiety over the American place in the sun of the knowledge economy. Home reserves of the "new oil" are diminishing and imports look set to grow.

While the "Collegiate Schools of Business" is retained, the "American Assembly" undertakes an authorial journey of transformation to the resting place of "Association

to Advance”. Unfortunately, the issue of naming does not rest there. Three points concerning the language of the mission statement (see below) are worth consideration:

- (1) The built-in verbal/adjectival ambiguity of “Advance” allows for the meaning of:
 - an association that is incorporated to advance in terms of improvement and social direction; or
 - an association to collegiate schools of business that are in “advance”, front, of others.
- (2) Infinitives are not governed by a subject and are disconnected from the here and now of time. This makes infinitive constructions difficult to argue with.
- (3) A solution to the problem of these slippery little suckers called words is to do without them entirely and use some form of algebraic phrasing such as AACSB.

A disavowal of words works for and toward organization and user amnesia and is a useful solution for erasing regional identity that might communicate values that do not enhance market position. Unfortunately, algebraic configuration also signifies a dislocated stumbling of faith in the empire of American identity to carry forward the great mission:

AACSB [Association to Advance (previously American Assembly of) Collegiate Schools of Business] International advances quality management education worldwide through accreditation and thought leadership (AACSB International, 2007a).

The truncated algebraic expression for brand name carries over into all publications including press releases. The Americanism is erased with replicated emphasis providing insight into the American Association’s anxiety over its place in the world:

The newest accreditations raise to 540[2] the number of institutions that have earned specialized AACSB accreditation for their business schools. They become part of an elite group that makes up less than 10 percent of the world’s business schools that have achieved business and/or accounting accreditation from AACSB International (AACSB International, 2006b).

Newspeak, “newest”, rather than the more common English usage of “latest” is used to display pace and timing to the market. In conjunction with a quantification of the association’s growth and mass in the market, “540”, the message is one that engenders both a menacing size and anxiety of the prisoner’s dilemma to the target audience – join the elite before it is too late. The formulaic repetition – a clear indication of deliberation and reflection for consequential meaning – conveys the emotional appeal to instigate the buy signal premised on the fear of being left behind your competitors with resultant loss of credibility and revenue. This is pressure marketing technique (aggressivity) for sophisticated customers within a client-partner context that looks decisively “old-school” rather than “advance” marketing. The aggressive market demarcation continues in further formulaic constructions that are assuredly repeated in AACSB International news releases concerning earned accreditation. Press releases on accreditation continue:

To earn AACSB accreditation, a business school must undergo meticulous internal review, evaluation, and adjustment – a process that can take from three to seven years (AACSB International, 2006b).

The longevity of the accreditation process, up to seven years, the five-year review and the communicated emphasis on the severity of the review process pressures the target elite audience to “make the call now”. The connection with the elitism and the “less than 10 percent” not only appeals to the emotion of the exclusive club but is also a discrediting of those not accredited. Accreditation only has value because others, your competitors, do not have it. The dropping-in of such signification blitzes the competition, those not accredited, into lesser beings of institutional life. The message is not merely for the institutions but is designed for all consumers of higher education who will put a higher monetary value on the institutions that hold this particular accreditation. Here, the articulation is directly partisan and in conflict with the notion of advancing higher education through spreading its advantages to all. If AACSB’s mission statement is read with advances as a verb then to promote elitism is a curious method of spreading the worldwide advancement. The ambivalence of motivation and aggressivity seeps through other uses of “advancement”. The meaning below leans toward a more self-serving interest. This is about being the world’s leader, which contrasts antagonistically with the advancing of management education worldwide of the mission statement:

In accordance with its mission statement, AACSB is committed to its role as the world’s leader in the advancement of management education. This global mindset is an integral and pervasive element in each end statement and is reflected in all organizational functions and actions (AACSB International, 2007a).

3.2 Quis custodiet ipsos custodiet

The Spellings (2006) report highlighted four major concerns with regard to USA higher education: access, affordability, quality and accountability. This section of the paper examines accountability in business school accreditation which has further worrying connotations for making business school higher education accessible for as many as possible in the USA and throughout the world. AACSB’s Policy Governance Manual is written to have a democratic appeal by simply “using” the words rather than the spirit and action of good governance. The notion of external, independent review and measurement is expunged by words:

Working within the context of policy governance principles, [that makes what we do legitimate] the Board [group of self interested people] of Directors (the “Board”) determines its own philosophy, accountability, and operations, with a focus on vision, values, and strategic leadership [we see our desire, follow our desire and get you to follow our desire]. Board members are “trustee-owners” [motivated by self interest], rather than volunteer-helpers [altruistic] or watchdogs [elected and accountable public representatives]. Board deliberations typically are marked by diversity of viewpoints, teamwork, proactivity, self-discipline, the long view, customer focus, win-win scenarios, and full participation [compilation of marketing symbols from their own “business” discourse to persuade the reader of the truth of their own discourse] (AACSB International, 2007b. [] = author’s comments).

The words are used but it is confusing to understand the meaning. Terms may appeal to broader discourses such as political correctness, “diversity” or the market discourse “customer focus” as a means of persuasion. But an analysis of AACSB International documentation reveals that there is little in the way of diversity. Although membership is expanding and so subject to change, 30 countries have accredited schools, 87 percent of accredited schools originate in the USA and only 17 percent of council

members originate outside the USA. About one-third of AACSB's member institutions (not all accredited) are located in 70 other countries (AACSB International, 2007d). This means that about two-thirds are in the USA. Documentation puts emphasis on business studies for business rather than the study of business as an important activity that affects us all for our entire lives and how we live those lives. Other community users do not get equivalent space within pages of documentation. The so called diversity of business schools and representation also vastly under represents the wide ranging variety of institutions where business and management may be studied. Community colleges, where 40 percent of the USA's 14 million undergraduates attend (Spellings, 2006) significantly lack elite presence. In one sense, lack of elite presence is a significant presence of the injustice that severely limits "advancement" in the wider community where "a partial social force assumes the representation of a totality that is radically incommensurate with it" (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p. x).

The list of 553 (at October 15, 2007) accredited institutions at www.aacsb.edu/General/InstLists.asp?lid=3 is very impressive in regard to intellectual and social standing, but it is hardly socially diverse either from a USA or other country perspective. In short, AACSB International is a very particular and narrow view of accreditation driven by a desire for global imposition that is unlikely to be in the best interests of non-elite, that is by definition the majority, business schools in the USA and internationally.

That other countries are under represented suggests that "advancement" is less likely to be relevant to each country's particular management education needs. That those countries with accredited business schools are represented by "elite" institutions suggests that the broader needs of the population of that country are not represented. What hope is there for the "advancement" of management education in South America, Africa and underdeveloped economies when accreditation:

- diminishes the value of the majority of knowledge production taking place outside elitism;
- excludes the vast majority of business schools from having an involvement in the learning process for improvement; and
- puts resources into elitism rather than committing to working with the poorest performers in order to develop the nationwide baseline of quality for economic weaker communities locally and internationally.

The lack of Federal and public scrutiny within its own geographic boundaries may suggest that self-monitored accreditation bodies are not in a position to "advance" managerial education for the majority of its own citizens not least advancing the interests of representatively "distanced" communities of other countries. It is always a democratic concern when a self-appointed group desires to set elite standards for us all by a Board of people who answer to no external authority:

To accomplish continuous improvement in its own activities, the Board monitors and discusses its own performance at each meeting.

The Board disciplines itself in matters such as attendance, preparation, respect of roles, and meeting decorum.

The Board of Directors has final authority on all accreditation committee recommendations that confer, maintain, deny, or suspend accreditation (AACSB International, 2007b).

B. The Accreditation Council shall be composed of institutions offering programs of instruction accredited by the Council. Within the corporation, the Accreditation Council shall have sole jurisdiction over accreditation standards (AACSB International, 2007c).

3.3 *Mission-based signification*

The originating founders of AACSB International were business schools attached to the elite institutions such as Harvard. However, such elitism sets a high barrier to entry that restricts market growth. The move to mission based assessment for accreditation allows for each institution to measure up against its own particular mission. This facilitates the setting of high input standards such as percentage of academically qualified faculty (number of faculty with PhDs.) while giving discretionary power to the institution seeking accreditation for the setting of output goals. This move to mission based accreditation has clear benefits for AACSB's International growth objectives and has as a policy much in its favor for broadening the democratic appeal.

The policy addresses the problem of scarcity of suitably qualified USA faculty and other knowledge workers that act as a barrier to economic growth by the creation of equivalent standards throughout the world. The mission based policy, therefore, may be read as a global professional convergence model. When universal accreditation connects with the ease of international transfer and the greater salaries paid in the USA, the likelihood of increase is significant for draining a key resource of economic development away from the economically weaker nation. With doctoral faculty shortages predicted to 2012 (AACSB International, 2003, p. 14) and the Federal Government easing the way for knowledge worker immigration, USA business schools may be the beneficiary.

3.4 *Méconnaissance and aggressivity*

This section of the paper takes AACSB's twinning of the ideas: that the proper business of business schools is to help businesses succeed' and that business is a force for social good:

The best interests of business and business schools are served when they communicate and collaborate on their shared, fundamental goals. In fact, it is no stretch to suggest that the whole world might benefit if these two entities worked together more closely (AACSB International, 2006a, p. 6).

It appears that considerable faith and goodwill are expressed in the winning combination. Yet, the superlative and the noun it qualifies, "best interests", are devoid of any specific designation that allows the authors to avoid stating what these twinned interests in actuality are and how these are mutually beneficial. Adjectival avoidance continues with "fundamental goals" that have no specified meaning. By avoiding, however, the signification is one more of raising doubt than of winning the case:

A solid partnership might mean, for example, that business schools, in achieving their own educational objectives and mission, would also be even more informed and attuned to what potential employers want their new hires to know (AACSB International, 2006a, p. 6).

Where the text is more specific, an *a priori* definitional purpose for business schools acts as evidence to make the case. A metaphorical begging the question is constructed through inscribing "employers" as a social force for good, which may be contested, by aligning the particular desire to employ more people with all that employers may do

and desire as good *per se*. This is philosophically and logically dubious. Deliberate misrecognition of the good in employing people and the good that does assuredly come out of business practices is taken to absurd significations:

This is the time for a different type of dialogue and a different type of focus that has the power to seek understanding and collaboration. It is the type of conversation that AACSB has the capacity and, indeed, the mission to convene. Business has always been the platform on which countries try to resolve issues so that they can trade and engage in ways to benefit themselves. Countries have learned to go beyond language, cultural, and political differences to do business. Business provides the strongest incentives to focus on “what can be” rather than “what cannot be”. A world of goods and a world of good: the difference that results when business is conducted with integrity, vision, accountability, and stewardship (AACSB International, 2006c, p. 4).

It would seem to be the case that the aggressive desire of AACSB’s Board to conduct accreditation on a global basis is causing misrecognition of the political nature of conflict in world politics. Moreover, such misrecognition erases the real conflicts that arise of aggressive competitive business: oil, for example. And knowledge may be the new oil with attendant potential for conflict. “Nation-states will one day fight for control of information, just as they battled in the past for control over territory, and afterwards for control of access to and exploitation of raw materials and cheap labor” (Lyotard, 1984, p. 5). But what is more disconcerting is that those responsible for setting aggressive competitive policy over a now recognized area of global competition for knowledge, with attendant economic benefits, do not recognize that they may be part of the aggressive problem. The biggest problem into the future may not be as AACSB International perceives it: “The biggest issue facing our world today is extremism within and among religions and regions of the world. Conflicts and intolerance dominate common ground and mutuality in public discourse” (AACSB, 2006b). The biggest problem may be new conflicts, new battles brought about by overly aggressive competitors desiring to control knowledge and what is defined or accredited and therefore commercially validated and lucrative: the “oil” of the future may be knowledge.

4. Discussion and conclusion: delusional constructions

The micro analysis of language restricts the size of the data set considered in a single article. However, the micro analysis of language use provides insight into the ill-considered outcomes of aggressive competitiveness in the area of accrediting higher education by private institutions outside government or public control.

Aggressivity is not simply aggression nor can it simply be interpreted as good, bad or indifferent. Rather, as part of the human condition, aggressivity is not likely to escape neither behavior nor the expressions used about behavior. In this sense, it is unavoidably part of communication. For those interested in “advancement” through education, particularly with regard to emancipation, an analysis of the communication of key institutions, such as governments and accreditation bodies can reveal this aggressivity.

The revelation is not for the sake of revelation but rather to provide a point of reflection, in a Lacanian sense of reality, as to what may or may not be the meaning of marketing and policy communications from institutions that more than touch upon how well people may live in an educationally competitive environment. In the hectic world of the modern economy, it is often a comforting and self-accommodating thought to escape from unintended meaning through the auspices of a pressured office and

competitive market. This is neither an excuse nor an adequate account for the meaning communicated by crafted institutional documentation.

It may be seen from the analysis above that AACSB's aggressivity is not an entirely outwardly directed attack on competitors for the sake of self-preservation through growth. The aggressivity is also self-inflicting. Such a consideration of human aggressivity is not simply a Freudian and Lacanian model but has a long-standing history of human reflection: "don't ask for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for thee" (Donne, 2007). The transmuted desire for such high ambitions of place and position in comparison with fellow others is not only always aggressivity, however marked in "advancement", but self destruction.

The plight of the weaker international competition may be interpreted as an opportunity for growth. But further reflection may suggest that such an opportunity to "beat" the competitor is always a loss for another who may ill afford the loss. Such a discourse is accepted when competitors are equal or nearly matched or indeed when the outcome is not detrimental to society. But in the arena of accreditation, the result may be economically devastating for those countries who can ill afford to lose their most academically qualified faculty. Whether intended or not, AACSB International's ambition for growth may mean reverse rather than advancement for the many struggling to advance. And this is the same whether AACSB's intentions are for their own particular interest or are socially well intended.

This analysis and interpretation suggests that accreditation cannot be left to self governed institutions who inherently fail to recognize the international political articulations of their own communications because of the narrow focus on the business of competitive accreditation. If the USA Federal Government and the governments of other economically developed nations see the knowledge economy as central to their competitive advantage, then the accreditation of knowledge producers is too important to be left to regionally specific and self-regulated institutions to govern the who and how of knowledge production.

Given the competitive and aggressivity associated with the desire for knowledge production and accreditation, knowledge resources are likely to accrue to those who can simply take them regardless of the cost to those who lose both their resource capacity, in terms of people, and their capacity to accredit their own knowledge specific to regional need. The homogenization of accreditation is more to do with facilitating the desire to transfer knowledge assets and very little to do with the "advancement" of learning for all. In a global knowledge economy, higher education is too precious to be left to particular institutions of accreditation pursuing their particular interests. The better way may be to let local consumers decide for themselves based on legally required publication of key statistically data that makes comparison between institutions easy. That way consumers of higher education may decide for themselves based on what is important to them with regard to local conditions rather than some distant set of standards devised by "Others" who "know" better. This is likely to be a lot less costly in terms of faculty time, better spent on teaching and research, rather than administrative time spent on accreditation of "up to seven years" to achieve accreditation according to AACSB International and recurrent every "five years" to retain it. In addition to faculty time, business schools would save accreditation fees that could be put to better use. If we believe in freedom of choice and have faith in the consumer, take out the middle man of accreditation and give the consumer publicly regulated information to make a reasoned decision and let them decide for themselves. The hearts and minds of business schools will follow. At this time, the "elite" business

schools rely upon the anathema of a self-regulated (production-oriented) system of accreditation. The relevance of aggression

Notes

1. Fink translates as aggressiveness (Lacan, 2006).
2. As of October 15, 2007 this figure has increased to 551. The words of the paragraph announcing new members remain the same, but the number changes. This site may be open to further changes.

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