

## Constructions of Citizenship among Multinational Corporations

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### Abstract

*Using social contract theory as a foundation I examined the ways in which four multinational corporations use disclosures of corporate social responsibility to present themselves as good corporate citizens. Several factors influence a corporation's use of CSR: size of the corporation, public visibility, personal commitment of high ranking executives, location of manufacturing operations, and types of stakeholders. There is a significant difference in the responsibilities and obligations Proctor & Gamble, Kimberly-Clark, and Colgate-Palmolive ascribe to themselves as corporate citizens compared to those of SC Johnson. I attribute this difference to one of stakeholder accountability, specifically public shareholders. The three publicly held corporations adhere to a social contract model of corporate citizenship wherein they accept a certain level of social responsibility as accruing to their powerful global economic position, whereas privately held SC Johnson, inhabiting a similarly powerful position, assumes no additional responsibility beyond that of increasing sales and maximizing profits.*

**KEYWORDS:** Corporate Social Responsibility, Corporate Citizenship, Social Contract Theory

### 1. Introduction

The last ten years have been rocked by revelations of corporate fraud (WorldCom, Enron, QWest), ethics violations (ImClone, Tyco, Arthur Andersen), and irresponsible financial management (Citigroup, AIG, Bank of America). At the same time there has been an explosion of discourse surrounding the topic of corporate citizenship or “corporate social responsibility.” According to a recent study, over 85% of US Corporations reportedly engage in some type of corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities (Social Science Research Council, 2004). Indeed, an entirely new business field with an attendant market of consultants, publications and credentialing and accrediting organizations has sprung up in response to the public demand for greater accountability on the part of corporate entities. Multinational corporations prepare elaborate annual reports demonstrating the ways in which they not only fulfill but often exceed the requirements of global citizenship. These reports are variously entitled Sustainability Reports, Corporate Citizenship Reports, or Social Responsibility Reports and are available on the corporation's website. In this paper I explore how several multinational corporations use these reports to construct an ethic of citizenship.

The idea that a corporation might have any responsibility to the community arose in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as founders of retail giants such as JC Penney and Sears perceived a connection between the success of their businesses and the success of the community in which they conducted their businesses (Altman, 1998). These corporate leaders instituted philanthropic and community service programs to carry out their humanitarian values and enlisted the participation of their employees as well. During the late 1960s academics and business leaders began to espouse the philosophy that corporations should be socially responsible as well as economically successful (Altman, 1998; Katz, Swanson, & Nelson, 2001). In 1971 public policy research organization, the Committee for Economic Development (CED), formally appealed to businesses urging them to work together with communities in alleviating such social problems as urban development and unemployment (Committee for Economic Development, 1971). During the 1990s a new business model of “corporate citizenship” emerged, integrating an agenda of social responsibility with one of economics. In 1996 President Clinton called on US Corporations to help address social problems as did his successor President Bush in 2001 (New York Times May 17, 1996; June 2, 2001). In 2000, the business journal *Business Ethics* published the first of an annual list of the “100 Best Corporate Citizens,” ranking companies according to their efforts toward corporate responsibility.

In 2000 the Global Reporting Initiative released its sustainability reporting framework, a codification of voluntary reporting guidelines which have been widely adopted by corporations wishing to demonstrate their adherence to standards of citizenship or social responsibility. Also in 2000 the United Nations Global Compact launched a massive public-private policy initiative with over 7700 corporations in 130 countries with the goal of developing collaborative solutions to challenges facing both businesses and communities around the world. In the same year the US Chamber of Commerce founded the Center for Corporate Citizenship for the purpose of providing an institutional apparatus enabling companies to engage in humanitarian and philanthropic activities throughout the world.

## **2. Corporate Citizenship**

The terms “corporate social responsibility” and “corporate citizenship” have as yet no agreed upon definitions. Such vagueness may have a strategic value of its own. For all practical purposes, the terms appear to be synonymous. McWilliams and Siegel (2001) define corporate social responsibility as action undertaken with the goal of furthering social welfare beyond the direct economic, technical, and legal interests of the corporation. According to Campbell (2006) socially responsible corporate behavior has only two requirements: corporations must not knowingly cause harm to their stakeholders; and if they do cause harm, they must remedy the situation. Shamir (2005) characterizes corporate social responsibility as an empty concept, a symbolic performance of “managerial action that incorporates a language and a designated role, while at the same time it is deliberately devoid of almost any meaningful substance” (p. 246).

Altman (1998, p. 45) describes a model of corporate citizenship consisting of nine elements: moral and ethical obligation; provision of economic benefits; integration of common corporate and community goals; responsibility to stakeholders; proactive action; cross sector partnerships; global interconnectedness; preservation/protection of the natural environment; and active leadership. Vidaver-Cohen (1998) proposes a model of corporate citizenship that has as its goal the strengthening of the bond between the individual and society and is founded upon the classical sociological tenet that strong social ties engender economically stable communities (Cooley, [1902]1992; Durkheim, [1897] 1951; Merton, 1968). This model is composed of five dimensions of activity: anticipation of general social problems potentially hazardous to the economic infrastructure; identification of specific social problems that may negatively impact economic stability in communities with a corporate presence; development of procedures for applying corporate resources to resolve and prevent such problems; development of partnerships between the corporation and government agencies, community groups, and nongovernmental organizations; and ensuring commitment to social agendas through strong economic performance and financial management (Vidaver-Cohen, 1998, p. 29).

Carroll (1998) draws a parallel between the responsibilities of private citizens and those of corporate citizens. According to Carroll citizenship responsibilities are fourfold: economic – citizens are required to be profitable or carry their own weight; legal – citizens must obey the law or fulfill their legal responsibilities; ethical – citizens must behave ethically or be responsive to their ethical responsibilities; and philanthropic – citizens must “give back” by engaging in philanthropic activity to benefit society (p. 1). Goddard (2005) defines corporate citizenship as a “balance of rights and responsibilities deriving from a corporation’s legal and social status within a community, its influence and ability to create change, and the need to participate in the community’s political life” (p. 434). Goddard’s conceptualization of corporate citizenship stresses interdependence and interconnectedness and requires community values to be embedded within corporate ideology. I use Goddard’s definition of corporate citizenship with its emphasis on “rights and responsibilities” as the foundation of analysis for this paper.

## **3. Theoretical Framework**

Research on corporate citizenship has been conducted from several theoretical orientations including institutional theory, political economy theory, social movement theory, and stakeholder theory. Utilizing institutional theory researchers examine how institutions constrain and facilitate action, maintaining that organizations external to the market are required to compel corporations to behave in socially responsible ways (Fligstein & Freeland, 1995). Political economy theory is useful in disclosing the power interests that underlie corporate reporting agendas and reveal global relations of inequality (Gray, Owen & Adams, 1996). Social movement theory is effective in exploring “frameworks of meaning” that corporations employ in communicating socially responsible business practices (DeWinter, 2001).

Stakeholder theory is a perspective frequently used to examine the functions and consequences of corporate citizenship reporting. A stakeholder may be defined as any individual or group with a vested interest in the corporation including shareholders, consumers, employees, suppliers as well as the local communities within which the corporation operates (Carroll & Buckholtz, 2000, p. 21). Research in this vein is concerned with identifying stakeholders, determining the legitimacy of stakeholder claims, and empirically demonstrating the relationship between corporate citizenship activities and financial performance (Freeman, 1984). Popular discourse suggests an increasingly widespread opinion that multinational corporations have obligations in addition to those of meeting their financial goals. With the growing power of multinational corporations to influence potentially every aspect of twenty first century life comes increased responsibility (Vidaver-Cohen, 1998). DeWinter (2001) notes that corporations and nongovernmental organizations are increasingly taking on duties previously considered to be the role of the state blurring the boundaries between private and public actors; consequently the multinational corporation is developing into a global private authority.

Social contract theory states that “society not only confers legitimacy on business because of its economic role, but also enters into a *contract* with business by which behavior is brought into conformity with society’s expectations” (Katz, Swanson, & Nelson, 2001, p. 151). A social contract is an implicit agreement between individuals and institutions in which individuals give up certain rights or privileges in exchange for the institutional provision of protection or some other valued benefit (Donaldson & Dunfee, 1999). Integrated Social Contract Theory (ISCT) formulated by Donaldson and Dunfee (1999) builds upon Aristotle’s virtue ethics theory ([350 BC] 1998), the social contract theories of Hobbes ([1651] 1947), Locke ([1690] 1980), and Rousseau ([1763] 1950), Kant’s ([1785] 1998) moral philosophy, and Rawl’s (1971) theory of justice. Donaldson and Dunfee argue that “all economic actors must recognize the critical role of social contracts in the communities they impact” (2000, p. 437). ISCT is based on the adherence to three types of norms. “Hypernorms” are overarching fundamental principles that apply in all circumstances, for example the right to fair treatment under the law. “Authentic norms” are ethical standards agreed upon by a majority of members of the community. “Legitimate norms” are authentic norms that are congruent with hypernorms.

Central to ISCT is a structural hypernorm called the “hypernorm of necessary social efficiency” which identifies duties related to the maintenance of social systems designed to promote economic welfare and social justice. According to Donaldson and Dunfee this hypernorm requires that economic entities act to support policies and institutions that promote “liberty and due process, as well as minimal possibilities for health, food, housing, and education” (1999, p. 184). In other words, corporations should undertake activities that support the community, the state, and society in general, as long as such activities are compatible with profitable business enterprise. Cava and Mayer (2007) note that activities that fulfill the social contract are more than philanthropic, in that they often take advantage of the corporation’s core competencies in providing services or products that serve both the long range interests of the corporation in addition to those of the community. Strategic social contract issues include job training programs, after school athletic groups, community reinvestment, environmental policies, and local infrastructure development.

In this paper I apply a social constructionist (Berger & Luckmann, 1967) lens to social contract theory as I examine the ways in which multinational corporations construct and communicate an ethic of citizenship through corporate citizenship and social responsibility reports.

#### **4. Prior Research on Corporate Citizenship**

Vidaver-Cohen (1998) performed a meta-analysis of studies examining the effectiveness of corporate citizenship activities as a strategy for crime control. Her findings suggest that not only can corporate action help bring about decreases in levels of community crime, corporate involvement in crime prevention can also offer a means for businesses to demonstrate good citizenship. Studies show community programs such as mentoring, literacy instruction, job-training programs, after school athletic activities, conflict-resolution instruction, and gun-safety education programs to be associated with lowered rates of crime. Vidaver-Cohen suggests these programs are effective because they strengthen both potential offenders’ as well as business professionals’ connections to the community. Vidaver-Cohen concludes that “few social problems can be solved without active private-sector participation” (p. 29). DeWinter (2001) examined the impact of the anti-sweatshop movement on the construction of moral identities by apparel companies such as GAP and Nike.

She finds these corporations use images exhibiting human character traits in an attempt to represent themselves as abstract persons who share attributes and values similar to those of real people. Activists use “rhetorical commonplaces, or shared understandings of what things are and how they are meaningful” (p. 102) to promote an agenda of expanded corporate obligations based on ideas of corporate social responsibility. Legitimate rights and duties of multinational corporations and governments are becoming transposed. Companies like GAP and Nike use the discourse of corporate citizenship to justify their assumption of such tasks as monitoring labor standards and providing social welfare, in the process reinventing themselves as moral agents transcending the public-private divide.

Katz, Swanson and Nelson (2001) examined the cultural factors relevant to global corporate citizenship within four countries: the U.S., Mexico, Japan, and China. The researchers constructed a cultural factor index based on measures of power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism, and masculinity in order to assess the influence of national culture on social issues such as consumerism, the environment, corporate treatment of employees, government involvement in society, and the role of business in community affairs. Expectations of corporate social conduct vary by country due to culturally based belief systems. Compared to Americans, Mexican consumers are likely to have lower levels of consumer advocacy and although they support environmental protection, they subordinate it to local economic issues. The role of the Japanese consumer is minimal. Due to high expectations that government will provide for its citizens, public service organizations and nonprofit activity are not commonplace. Chinese consumers form a collective nationalist identity antagonistic to foreign business. The researchers conclude that managerial familiarity with the host country culture is a requirement for effective global corporate citizenship. “Corporate citizenship involves *cultural citizenship*” (p. 166).

Livesey and Kearins (2002) take a Foucauldian approach in their study of sustainability reports published by The Body Shop and Royal Dutch/Shell. The researchers critically examine these texts paying close attention to the ways in which rhetoric is used to produce particular knowledge about these two corporations as well as the relationship between meaning making and power relations. While there are many differences between the two, including the size of the reports and the issues addressed, both corporations utilize a common vocabulary of “transparency” and “caring.” These reports present the corporations as “making progress” toward the goals of sustainable development, giving their corporate images a makeover and redefining stakeholders’ concerns in ways that can be used to align with corporate interests. These reports present a framework of common humanity situating the corporation and its employees within a social and community context which transcends that of the corporation.

Shamir (2004) analyzed a set of corporate citizenship practices designed to obviate legal regulation as a means of engendering greater corporate accountability. Various strategies circumscribe the meaning of social responsibility in ways that make it compatible with established commercial interests. Shamir characterizes CSR activity as a symbolic struggle over the meaning of social responsibility, explaining “the more the public domain is privatized, the more that the private is politicized and becomes a matter of public concern” (p. 670). He argues that corporate-friendly nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) influence the means by which ideas of corporate citizenship are “implanted” in corporations and disseminated throughout society in general. NGOs become indistinguishable from their corporate partners as they adopt a hegemonic business-oriented model in effect diminishing the potential transformative power of corporate social responsibility.

Shamir (2005) performed an ethnographic investigation into a nonprofit organization which promotes corporate social responsibility (CSR) among business managers in Israel. Shamir characterizes CSR as a set of social performances undertaken for the purpose of developing employee loyalty, building social brands and facilitating philanthropic activities in local communities. Shamir argues that CSR itself has developed into a marketable commodity. According to Shamir, the social responsibility advocated by such organizations translates into little more than developing corporate ties with communities. CSR is enacted within corporations as “part of the firm’s normative control apparatus,” (p. 244) and is deployed through the corporate culture as a means of enticing employees to act in the best interests of the firm. Notably, CSR activities steer clear of controversial social issues. Milne, Kearins, and Walton (2006) critically examine corporate discourse (advertisements, corporate reports and public communications) surrounding issues of environmental sustainability.

Corporations engage in sociolinguistic constructionism, inventing or redefining words and phrases in ways that present corporate responses to sustainability in more favorable terms or change the focus altogether, as in a shift from “sustainable development” to “sustainability.” These reports rely heavily on the use of metaphor – which “structures experience...and often substitutes for deeper knowledge” (p. 808), and has the effect of simplifying complex issues making them appear to be more easily understood or even ordinary. The journey metaphor is commonly used and is powerful in that it connotes engagement in a process of positive change or improvement. The use of the journey metaphor and its associated imagery is used with strategic ambiguity in order to promote consensus on abstractions without specifying or limiting interpretations.

Kampf (2007) examined rhetorical differences in the way Wal-Mart and Danish corporation Maersk present issues of corporate citizenship on their respective websites. CSR practices are situated in cultural systems; what it means to contribute to society is different for each company. One striking difference appears in the lack of detail Maersk provides about its citizenship activities regarding environmental issues compared to the several pages of details given by Wal-Mart; a difference explained by Danish norms of practice which assume the conservation of resources. Wal-Mart touts its engagement in specific community projects while Maersk describes itself as improving the quality of life for people around the world. Kampf explains that Wal-Mart has a greater need to present itself as a good corporate citizen than Maersk due to cultural differences in US and Danish expectations regarding the roles of business and government.

## **5. Methodology**

### **5.1 Data**

The data for this study consists of corporate citizenship disclosures appearing in corporate communication products variously referred to as corporate citizenship reports, social responsibility reports, or sustainability reports published by a small sample of multinational corporations. These reports were obtained through each company’s website. These corporate reports range in length from 26 to 48 pages.

The sample includes four US based multinational corporations in the Household and Personal Products Industry. This industry consists of product categories such as cosmetics, personal cleansing products, laundry detergent, disposable diapers, feminine care products, household cleaning products, facial and bathroom tissue and paper towels. Three of the companies, Proctor & Gamble, Kimberly-Clark and Colgate-Palmolive are publicly held companies and rank as the top three Fortune 500 companies in the industry. The fourth company, SC Johnson is a privately held company. This industry was chosen because these companies advertise heavily and their products are used on a daily basis by virtually all members of society. Proctor & Gamble boasts that every home in America contains at least one Proctor & Gamble product. Financial and other relevant information on each company appear in the table below.

**Table I about here**

### **5.2 Analytical Technique**

Analysis consisted of applying grounded theory methods to the representations of corporate citizenship found in the company reports. Coding, the systematic categorization and iterative examination of textual data is the foundation of GTM. There are three generally accepted phases of coding: open, axial, and selective. Concepts are generated using open-coding procedures, which consist of a line-by line analysis of the text, employing the *variable-concept-indicator-model* (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; LaRossa, 2005). Concepts are identified by indicators (words or series of words) which are subjected to *constant comparison* until the concept is narrowly defined (LaRossa, 2005). Variables are developed by dimensionalizing concepts, or arraying groups of similar concepts at a higher level of abstraction. These concepts and resulting variables form the nucleus of the theory. Hypotheses are developed during axial coding when statements about relationships between variables are explored. It is in discovering how the variables are related that theory is generated. The core variable, the one that has the most relationships with other variables, is identified during selective coding and serves to integrate the theory (Strauss, 1987).

## **6. Results**

All of the corporate reports I examined utilize a common vocabulary consisting of strategically vague terms such as “transparency,” “partner,” “support,” “community,” and “cause initiative.”

The reports make use of vivid imagery in which children in developing countries are shown happily using the company's product (rural Chinese children washing their hands with Proctor & Gamble soap), expressing gratitude for services provided by corporate sponsors (HIV-infected South African children playing in an orphanage partially funded by Kimberly-Clark), or taking part in activities designed to foster public health (oral health education provided by Colgate). Short narratives and videos showcase "success stories" which poignantly illustrate the positive consequences of the companies' presence in local communities. Proctor & Gamble, Kimberly-Clark, and Colgate describe their participation in many functions previously performed by the state including public health, education, disaster relief, and youth employment training.

For the most part, corporations avoid engaging in controversial or political issues, except for Colgate's stated belief that children deserve a better health care system. To this end, Proctor & Gamble engages in sociolinguistic constructionism as it describes the provision of "puberty education" along with sanitary protection supplies to African schoolgirls. These reports discuss the companies' collaboration with local governments and agencies to eradicate such social problems as poverty, lack of clean drinking water, insect-borne disease, unequal access to immunizations, and barriers to educational attainment. However, some solutions simply trade one social problem for another for example, providing non-biodegradable disposable diapers to densely populated and impoverished communities may help with infant hygiene but consequently contribute to environmental degradation.

Much of the corporate participation in cause initiatives is contingent upon consumer product purchase, often consists of employee participation in donating resources and time, and influences nongovernmental organizations as corporate executives "contribute to the community by serving on the boards of community and charitable organizations" (Kimberly-Clark). Each report offers a narrative of socio-economic empowerment in which the company assists members of communities in developing countries obtain the skills needed to participate in the advancing system of capitalism. These narratives serve to naturalize the capitalistic order and function as a means of channeling individuals to industry. Companies engage in "rituals of recognition" (Shamir, 2004) as they tout the many awards bestowed on them for their performance of exemplary citizenship.

### **6.1. Proctor & Gamble: Cultivating Future Consumers**

Proctor & Gamble, established in 1837, is the largest consumer packaged goods company in the world. It has production facilities in 80 countries, consumers in more than 180 countries, and employs more than 135,000 domestic and foreign employees. The company is publicly held and reports more than \$79 billion in revenue and more than \$13 billion in net income for the fiscal year ending 6/30/09. Most widely recognized Proctor & Gamble brands include: CoverGirl, Gillette, Clairol, Crest, Tampax, Pampers, Luvs, Tide, and Charmin.

Proctor & Gamble epitomizes the social contract model of corporate citizenship, literally acknowledging that with its powerful position in the global economy comes social obligation. The company meets its financial and social responsibilities through "improving lives." By conducting itself as an ethical corporate citizen Proctor & Gamble will be rewarded by customers through increased sales, profits, and "value creation." For the most part, the beneficiaries of the company's social programs are children and the majority of these programs entail product distribution, for example the "Building a Great Wall of Hygiene in China" program provides schoolchildren with Safeguard brand soap and October 15<sup>th</sup> has been designated Global Hand-washing Day. These Chinese school children are thus characterized as "effective agents of change." CSR activities are strategically designed to generate new consumers as the corporate report explains:

Proctor & Gamble brands serve about 4 billion of the 6 ½ billion people on the planet. Before Proctor & Gamble can serve the remaining 2 ½ billion profitably, we can reach them altruistically. We can improve their lives in ways that enable them to thrive, to increase their quality of living and over time to join the population of consumers we serve.

### **6.2. Kimberly-Clark: Community Membership as Proactive Management**

Kimberly-Clark originated as a wholesale paper business in the 1860s. The company employs 53,000 people, has production facilities in 37 countries and sells its products in more than 150 countries. The company is publicly held and reports revenue in excess of \$19 billion and net income of just less than \$1.7 billion for the fiscal year ending 12/31/08. Popular Kimberly-Clark brands include: Huggies, Kleenex, Scott Towels, Kotex and a separate product line of surgical drapes, gowns, masks and gloves.

The disclosures appearing in Kimberly-Clark's corporate report also adhere to the social contract model of corporate citizenship. Kimberly-Clark acknowledges an obligation to contribute to the community due to its position as a global company. In exchange for the company's powerful position it accepts the responsibility to "attain a deeper understanding" of its impact on the world by becoming part of the community culture. The company strives to shape and contribute to the culture of "our neighborhoods;" employees are "steeped in the traditions and activities" of each community; and the company engages in "community consultation" to identify common needs and goals. CSR activities reflect the company's objective of being a good neighbor and supporting what is important to its neighbors. Kimberly-Clark's strategy of establishing a framework of commonality and an image of "we're all in this together" attempts to obscure the power differential between the multinational corporation and the individuals living in the areas in which it operates. Community outreach activities are strategically proactive as the report states: "We prefer to engage with local communities positively rather than reacting to complaints when something goes wrong."

### **6.3. Colgate-Palmolive: Caring for Emerging Markets**

Colgate-Palmolive was founded in 1806 as a manufacturer of soap and candles. Colgate-Palmolive has 36,600 employees, production facilities in 80 countries, and consumers in over 200 countries. The company is publicly held, and reports more than \$15 billion in revenues and close to \$2 billion in net income for the fiscal year ending 12/31/08. Recognizable brands include: Palmolive, Colgate, Speedstick, Murphy Oil, Ajax, Softsoap, Irish Spring, and Skin Bracer. Colgate-Palmolive does not present a separate CSR report, rather information relative to social responsibility and citizenship currently appears in various communications targeted to investors or consumers. The company is just beginning to formally communicate its CSR agenda ("currently this page is being updated"), but in the meantime, provides the following account (Scott & Lyman, 1968): "while Colgate-Palmolive has recently begun reporting on such activities these fundamental beliefs have long been part of our company's principles."

Colgate-Palmolive's CSR disclosures also follow the social contract model, stating that as a global citizen it has social and environmental responsibilities as well as economic. The company stresses that meeting its economic goals and creating long-term shareholder value are crucial obligations of global citizenship. More than 40% of the company's sales are generated in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, and more than 30,000 of its 36,000 employees are located outside the U.S. One of Colgate-Palmolive's strategies is to sell less expensive versions of its products in these "emerging markets." The company fulfills its responsibilities through "caring" about people. An example of Colgate-Palmolive's stakeholder engagement is its global HIV/AIDS initiative begun in 2003 which provides education, awareness, and non-discrimination programs in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

### **6.4. SC Johnson: A Symbolic Performative**

SC Johnson is a privately held (family) corporation, founded in 1886 as a manufacturer of floor wax. The company does not publicly release any financial information other than a statement on its website that the company generates more than \$8 billion in annual sales. The company has production facilities in 70 countries, sells its products in 110 countries, and employs 12,000 people. SC Johnson brands include: Pledge, Glade, Raid, Off!, Ziploc, Windex, Baygon, Drano, Saran, Oust, Shout, and Scrubbing Bubbles. SC Johnson publishes a Public Report which includes sections on "strengthening communities" and "corporate responsibility."

SC Johnson's disclosures are in direct opposition to the social contract model; as a "responsible leader within the free market economy" the company's obligation is to make profits through growth and development; social responsibility is a matter of conscience. This report echoes economist Milton Friedman's assertion that the only social responsibility of business is to increase its profits (1970).

Stated social objectives include improving quality of life by building consumer brands and creating mutual value at the base of the pyramid. "Base of the pyramid" is a relatively new term in the business lexicon referring to the 4 billion people around the world who live in poverty and represent an enormous untapped market whose needs corporations aim to serve by selling commodities from clean water to energy (Simanis, 2009). SC Johnson's strategy of creating mutual value includes "partnering in BOP enterprises, working with the BOP as a supply chain partner, and better reaching BOP consumers." An example of this is the company's partnership with farmers in Rwanda to supply an ingredient critical to the manufacture of SC Johnson's insecticide products. SC Johnson's public report concludes with a four page interview about the general topic of corporate responsibility with Chris Coulter, an executive of Globescan,

Inc., a market research firm that specializes in helping corporations design, implement and communicate CSR. According to Coulter, the defining characteristic of companies considered to be leaders in the area of social responsibility is their skill in CSR reporting. The company's presentation of CSR functions as a performative, a speech act in which utterance becomes performance (Austin, 1975, p. 14). Thus, SC Johnson *does* CSR by *speaking* CSR.

## **7. Conclusion**

I examined the ways in which four multinational corporations use disclosures of corporate social responsibility in order to present themselves as good corporate citizens. I found that several factors influence a corporation's use of CSR, including: size of the corporation, public visibility, personal commitment of high ranking executives, location of manufacturing operations, and types of stakeholders. There is a significant difference in the responsibilities and obligations Proctor & Gamble, Kimberly-Clark, and Colgate-Palmolive ascribe to themselves as corporate citizens compared to those of SC Johnson. I attribute this substantial difference to one of stakeholder accountability, specifically public shareholders. The three publicly held corporations adhere to a social contract model of corporate citizenship wherein they accept a certain level of social responsibility as accruing to their powerful global economic position, whereas privately held SC Johnson, while inhabiting a similarly powerful position, assumes no additional responsibility beyond that of increasing sales and maximizing profits.

The discourse of corporate social responsibility is becoming institutionalized in response to stakeholder pressure. It has become an element of what Arnold (1937) characterizes as the folklore of capitalism: "a system of comforting, if inaccurate understandings of the economic order" (Llewellyn, 1990, p. 192). CSR remains an emergent concept; its meaning varies among companies and across industries however, its purpose is universally political – to prevent (or at least forestall) the imposition of external mechanisms of control and requirements of accountability by positively influencing society's evaluation of a corporation's impact on the world and its inhabitants.

## **Author Note**

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**Table 1. Information on Sample Companies**

<u>Company Name</u>	<u>Website Address</u>	<u>Annual Revenue (Millions)</u>	<u>Annual Profit (Millions)</u>	<u>Number of Employees</u>
Proctor & Gamble	www.pg.com	\$79,029	\$13,436	135,000
Kimberly-Clark	www.kimberly-clark.com	19,415	1,690	53,000
Colgate-Palmolive	www.colgate.com	15,329	1,957	36,600
SC Johnson	www.scjohnson.com	8,000	N/A	12,000

Source: Financial information obtained from the most recent published annual reports for Proctor & Gamble, Kimberly-Clark and Colgate-Palmolive. SC Johnson does not publicly release financial information, the revenue number is an estimate which appears on the company's website.