BEYOND PERSUASION: A PROPOSAL FOR AN INVITATIONAL RHETORIC

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Most traditional rhetorical theories reflect a patriarchal bias in the positive value they accord to changing and thus dominating others. In this essay, an alternative rhetoric—invitational rhetoric—is proposed, one grounded in the feminist principles of equality, immanent value, and self-determination. Its purpose is to offer an invitation to understanding, and its communicative modes are the offering of perspectives and the creation of the external conditions of safety, value, and freedom.

Acknowledgment of the patriarchal bias that undergirds most theories of rhetoric is growing steadily in the communication discipline. As feminist scholars have begun to explicate the ways in which standard theories of rhetoric embody patriarchal perspectives, they have identified communicative modes that previously have not been recognized or theorized because they are grounded in alternative values (see, for example, Edson, 1985; Elshtain, 1982; Foss & Foss, 1991; Foss, Foss, & Trapp, 1991; Foss & Griffin, 1992; Gearhart, 1979; Griffin, 1993; Kramarae, 1989; Shepherd, 1992). Attention to non-patriarchal forms of communication, feminist scholars argue, expands the scope of rhetorical theory and enhances the discipline's ability to explain diverse communicative phenomena successfully.

One manifestation of the patriarchal bias that characterizes much of rhetorical theorizing is the definition of rhetoric as persuasion. As far back as the Western discipline of rhetoric has been explored, rhetoric has been defined as the conscious intent to change others. As Shepherd (1992) notes, in humanistic, social scientific, and critical perspectives on communication, "interaction processes have typically been characterized essentially and primarily in terms of persuasion, influence, and power" (p. 204). Every communicative encounter has been viewed "as primarily an attempt at persuasion or influence, or as a struggle over power" (p. 206). As natural as an equation of rhetoric with persuasion seems for scholars of rhetoric, this conception is only one perspective on rhetoric and one, we suggest, with a patriarchal bias.

Implicit in a conception of rhetoric as persuasion is the assumption that humans are on earth to alter the "environment and to influence the social affairs" of others. Rhetorical scholars "have taken as given that it is a proper and even necessary human function to attempt to change others" (Gearhart, 1979, p. 195). The desire to effect change is so pervasive that the many ways in which humans engage in activities designed for this purpose often go unnoticed:

> We conquered trees and converted them into a house, taking pride in having accomplished a difficult task. We conquered rivers and streams and converted them into lakes, marvelling in ourselves at the improvement we made on nature. We tramped with our conquering

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spaceboots on the fine ancient dust of the Moon and we sent our well-rehearsed statements of triumph back for a waiting world to hear. (Gearhart, 1979, p. 196)

Embedded in efforts to change others is a desire for control and domination, for the act of changing another establishes the power of the change agent over that other. In some instances, the power of the rhetor over another is overt, as it is, for example, in laws that exert control over women's bodies, such as those concerned with abortion. In securing the adherence of women to these laws, lawmakers have power over women and their lives. But even in cases where the strategies used are less coercive, rhetors who convince others to adopt their viewpoints exert control over part of those others' lives. A student who tells another student that she ought to take a particular course, for example, controls or influences the nature of another's life, if only for a few minutes, if the other enrolls in the course or even considers enrolling in it. We suggest that a strikingly large part of many individuals' lives is spent in such efforts to change others, even when the desired changes have absolutely no impact on the lives of the change agents. Whether a friend enrolls in a particular course, for example, often is irrelevant to a student's own life.

The reward gained from successful efforts to make others change is a "rush of power" (Gearhart, 1979, p. 201)—a feeling of self–worth that comes from controlling people and situations. The value of the self for rhetors in this rhetorical system comes from the rhetor's ability to demonstrate superior knowledge, skills, and qualifications—in other words, authority—in order to dominate the perspectives and knowledge of those in their audiences. The value of the self derives not from a recognition of the uniqueness and inherent value of each living being but from gaining control over others.

The act of changing others not only establishes the power of the rhetor over others but also devalues the lives and perspectives of those others. The belief systems and behaviors others have created for living in the world are considered by rhetors to be inadequate or inappropriate and thus in need of change. The speaker's role very often "may be best described as paternalistic" (Scott, 1991, p. 205) in that the rhetor adopts a " 'let me help you, let me enlighten you, let me show you the way' approach" (Gearhart, 1979, p. 195). Audience members are assumed to be naive and less expert than the rhetor if their views differ from the rhetor's own.

Rhetorical scholars have prided themselves on the eschewal of physical force and coercion and the use, in their place, of "language and metalanguage, with refined functions of the mind" (Gearhart, 1979, p. 195) to influence others and produce change. Although these discursive strategies allow more choice to the audience than do the supposedly more heavy–handed strategies of physical coercion, they still infringe on others' rights to believe as they choose and to act in ways they believe are best for them. Even discursive strategies can constitute a kind of trespassing on the personal integrity of others when they convey the rhetor's belief that audience members have inadequacies that in some way can be corrected if they adhere to the viewpoint of the rhetor. Such strategies disallow, in other words, the possibility that audience members are content with the belief systems they have developed, function happily with them, and do not perceive a need to change.

The traditional conception of rhetoric, in summary, is characterized by efforts

to change others and thus to gain control over them, self–worth derived from and measured by the power exerted over others, and a devaluation of the life worlds of others. This is a rhetoric of patriarchy, reflecting its values of change, competition, and domination. But these are not the only values on which a rhetorical system can be constructed, and we would like to propose as one alternative a feminist rhetoric.

Although definitions of *feminism* vary, feminists generally are united by a set of basic principles. We have chosen to focus on three of these principles—equality, immanent value, and self–determination—to serve as the starting place for a new rhetoric. These principles are ones that explicitly challenge the positive value the patriarchy accords to changing and thus dominating others.

Primary among the feminist principles on which our proposed rhetoric is based is a commitment to the creation of relationships of equality and to the elimination of the dominance and elitism that characterize most human relationships. As Wood (1994) aptly summarizes this principle, "I don't accept oppression and domination as worthy human values, and I don't believe differences must be ranked on a continuum of good and bad. I believe there are better, more humane and enriching ways to live" (p. 4). Efforts to dominate and gain power over others cannot be used to develop relationships of equality, so feminists seek to replace the "alienation, competition, and dehumanization" that characterize relationships of domination with "intimacy, mutuality, and camaraderie" (hooks, 1984, p. 34).

Yet another principle that undergirds most feminisms is a recognition of the immanent value of all living beings. The essence of this principle is that every being is a unique and necessary part of the pattern of the universe and thus has value. Immanent value derives from the simple principle that "your life is worth something. . . . You need only be what you are" (Starhawk, 1987, pp. 115–116). Worth cannot be determined by positioning individuals on a hierarchy so they can be ranked and compared or by attending to emblems of external achievement, for worth cannot be "earned, acquired, or proven" (Starhawk, 1987, p. 21). Concomitant with a recognition of the immanent value of another individual is the eschewal of forms of communication that seek to change that individual's unique perspective to that held by the rhetor.

Self–determination is a third principle that typically comprises a feminist world view. Grounded in a respect for others, self–determination allows individuals to make their own decisions about how they wish to live their lives. Self–determination involves the recognition that audience members are the authorities on their own lives and accords respect to others' capacity and right to constitute their worlds as they choose. As Johnson (1991) explains, this principle involves a trust that others are doing the best they can at the moment and simply need "to be unconditionally accepted as the experts on their own lives" (p. 162). When others are seen as experts who are making competent decisions about their lives, efforts by a rhetor to change those decisions are seen as a violation of their life worlds and the expertise they have developed.

Our purpose in this essay is to propose a definition and explication of a rhetoric built on the principles of equality, immanent value, and self–determination rather than on the attempt to control others through persuasive

strategies designed to effect change. Although we believe that persuasion is often necessary, we believe an alternative exists that may be used in instances when changing and controlling others is not the rhetor's goal; we call this rhetoric *invitational rhetoric*. In what follows, we offer a description of this rhetoric, beginning with a discussion of its definition and purpose and then describing the communicative options available to rhetors who wish to use it. We conclude our essay with two examples of invitational rhetoric and a discussion of some implications of invitational rhetoric for rhetorical theory.

Although invitational rhetoric is constructed largely from feminist theory, the literature in which its principles and various dimensions have been theorized most thoroughly, we are not suggesting that only feminists have dealt with and developed its various components or that only feminists adhere to the principles on which it is based. Some dimensions of this rhetoric have been explicated by traditional rhetorical theorists, and we have incorporated their ideas into our description of this rhetoric. We also do not want to suggest that the rhetoric we propose describes how all women communicate or that it is or can be used only by women. Feminism "implies an understanding of inclusion with interests beyond women" (Wood, 1993, p. 39), and its aim is not to "privilege women over men" or "to benefit solely any specific group of women" (hooks, 1984, p. 26). The rhetoric we describe is a rhetoric used at various times by some women and some men, some feminists and some non–feminists. What makes it feminist is not its use by a particular population of rhetors but rather the grounding of its assumptions in feminist principles and theories. Our goal in offering this theory is to expand the array of communicative options available to all rhetors and to provide an impetus for more focused and systematic efforts to describe and assess rhetoric in all of its manifestations.

DEFINITION

Invitational rhetoric is an invitation to understanding as a means to create a relationship rooted in equality, immanent value, and self–determination. Invitational rhetoric constitutes an invitation to the audience to enter the rhetor's world and to see it as the rhetor does. In presenting a particular perspective, the invitational rhetor does not judge or denigrate others' perspectives but is open to and tries to appreciate and validate those perspectives, even if they differ dramatically from the rhetor's own. Ideally, audience members accept the invitation offered by the rhetor by listening to and trying to understand the rhetor's perspective and then presenting their own. When this happens, rhetor and audience alike contribute to the thinking about an issue so that everyone involved gains a greater understanding of the issue in its subtlety, richness, and complexity. Ultimately, though, the result of invitational rhetoric is not just an understanding of an issue. Because of the nonhierarchical, nonjudgmental, nonadversarial framework established for the interaction, an understanding of the participants themselves occurs, an understanding that engenders appreciation, value, and a sense of equality.

The stance taken by invitational rhetors toward their audiences obviously is different from that assumed by traditional rhetors. Invitational rhetors do not believe they have the right to claim that their experiences or perspectives are

superior to those of their audience members and refuse to impose their perspectives on them. Rhetors view the choices selected by audience members as right for them at that particular time, based on their own abilities to make those decisions. Absent are efforts to dominate another because the goal is the understanding and appreciation of another's perspective rather than the denigration of it simply because it is different from the rhetor's own. The result of the invitational rhetor's stance toward the audience is a relationship of equality, respect, and appreciation.

Invitational rhetoric is characterized, then, by the openness with which rhetors are able to approach their audiences. Burke (1969) suggests that rhetors typically adjust their conduct to the external resistance they expect in the audience or situation: "We in effect modify our own assertion in reply to its assertion" (p. 237). In invitational rhetoric, in contrast, resistance is not anticipated, and rhetors do not adapt their communication to expected resistance in the audience. Instead, they identify possible impediments to the creation of understanding and seek to minimize or neutralize them so they do not remain impediments.

Change may be the result of invitational rhetoric, but change is not its purpose. When change does occur as a result of understanding, it is different from the kind of change that typifies the persuasive interactions of traditional rhetoric. In the traditional model, change is defined as a shift in the audience in the direction requested by the rhetor, who then has gained some measure of power and control over the audience. In invitational rhetoric, change occurs in the audience or rhetor or both as a result of new understanding and insights gained in the exchange of ideas. As rhetors and audience members offer their ideas on an issue, they allow diverse positions to be compared in a process of discovery and questioning that may lead to transformation for themselves and others. Participants even may choose to be transformed because they are persuaded by something someone in the interaction says, but the insight that is persuasive is offered by a rhetor not to support the superiority of a particular perspective but to contribute to the understanding by all participants of the issue and of one another.

The internal processes by which transformation occurs also are different in invitational rhetoric. In traditional rhetoric, the change process often is accompanied by feelings of inadequacy, insecurity, pain, humiliation, guilt, embarrassment, or angry submission on the part of the audience as rhetors communicate the superiority of their positions and the deficiencies of those of the audience. In invitational rhetoric, on the other hand, rhetors recognize the valuable contributions audience members can make to the rhetors' own thinking and understanding, and they do not engage in strategies that may damage or sever the connection between them and their audiences. This does not mean that invitational rhetoric always is free of pain. In invitational rhetoric, there may be a wrenching loose of ideas as assumptions and positions are questioned as a result of an interaction, a process that may be uncomfortable. But because rhetors affirm the beliefs of and communicate respect for others, the changes that are made are likely to be accompanied by an appreciation for new perspectives gained and gratitude for the assistance provided by others in thinking about an issue.

COMMUNICATIVE OPTIONS

The process of engaging in invitational rhetoric assumes two primary rhetorical forms. One is offering perspectives, a mode by which rhetors put forward for consideration their perspectives; the second is the creation of external conditions that allow others to present their perspectives in an atmosphere of respect and equality.

Offering Perspectives

When rhetors do not seek to impose their positions on audience members in invitational rhetoric, the presentation and function of individual perspectives differ significantly from their nature and function in traditional rhetorics. Individual perspectives are articulated in invitational rhetoric as carefully, completely, and passionately as possible to give them full expression and to invite their careful consideration by the participants in the interaction. This articulation occurs not through persuasive argument but through offering—the giving of expression to a perspective without advocating its support or seeking its acceptance. Offering involves not probing or invading but giving, a process "of wrapping around the givee, of being available to her/him without insisting; our giving is a *presence,* an *offering,* an *opening*" (Gearhart, 1982, p. 198). In offering, rhetors tell what they currently know or understand; they present their vision of the world and show how it looks and works for them.

As a rhetorical form, offering may appear to be similar to some traditional rhetorical strategies, such as the use of personal narrative as a form of support for a rhetor's position. But narrative as offering functions differently from narrative as a means of support. It is presented in offering for the purpose of articulating a viewpoint but not as a means to increase the likelihood of the audience's adherence to that viewpoint. The offering of a personal narrative is, itself, the goal; the means and the ends are the same in offering. Offering is not based on a dichotomy of cause and effect, an action done in the present to affect the future. Instead, as Johnson (1989) explains, the " 'means are the ends; . . . *how* we do something is *what* we get' " (p. 35). In this mode, then, a story is not told as a means of supporting or achieving some other end but as an end in itself—simply offering the perspective the story represents.

A critical dimension of the offering of a perspective, in whatever form it takes, is a willingness to yield. Not unlike Buber's (1965) notion of the "I-Thou" relationship, the basic movement of a willingness to yield is a turning toward the other. It involves meeting another's position "in its uniqueness, letting it have its impact" (p. xiv). Tracy (1987) explains the connection between the meeting of another's uniqueness and a willingness to yield: "To attend to the other as other, the different as different, is also to understand the different *as* possible" (p. 20). When they assume such a stance, rhetors communicate a willingness to call into question the beliefs they consider most inviolate and to relax their grip on those beliefs. The process is not unlike the self–risk that Natanson (1965) describes as the risking

> of the self's world of feeling, attitude, and the total subtle range of its affective and conative sensibility. . . . [W]hen I truly risk myself in arguing I open myself to the viable possibility that the consequence of an argument may be to make me *see* something of the structure of my immediate world. (p. 15)

Scott (1976) calls this self–risk "a grave risk: the risk of the self that resides in a value structure" (p. 105). Thus, the perspective presented through offering represents an initial, tentative commitment to that perspective—one subject to revision as a result of the interaction.

A few specific examples of offering may clarify the nature of this rhetorical form. Although much rarer than we would like, offering sometimes occurs in academic settings when faculty members and/or students gather to discuss a topic of mutual interest. When they enter the interaction with a goal not of converting others to their positions but of sharing what they know, extending one another's ideas, thinking critically about all the ideas offered, and coming to an understanding of the subject and of one another, they are engaged in offering. Offering also is marked by discursive forms such as "I tried this solution when that happened to me; I thought it worked well" or "What would happen if we introduced the idea of _____ into this problem?" rather than statements with forms such as "You really ought to do ___" or "Your idea is flawed because you failed to take into account ___."

Offering may occur not only in small–group settings but also in formal presentational contexts. A rhetor who presents her ideas at an academic colloquium, for example, engages in offering when she presents her ideas as valuable yet also as tentative. She acknowledges the fact that her work is in progress; thus, she is open to the ideas of others so she can continue to revise and improve it. She builds on and extends the work of others rather than tearing their ideas apart in an effort to establish the superiority of her own. In an offering mode, she provides explanations for the sources of her ideas rather than marshalling evidence to establish their superiority. Audience members, too, may engage in offering behavior. They do so when they ask questions and make comments designed not to show the stupidity or error of the perspective presented or to establish themselves as more powerful or expert than the presenter. Instead, their questions and suggestions are aimed at learning more about the presenter's ideas, understanding them more thoroughly, nurturing them, and offering additional ways of thinking about the subject for everyone involved in the interaction.

We have tried to write this essay using such features of the offering form. We present a *proposal* for an invitational rhetoric, for example, a word we chose deliberately to suggest that what we present here is only one of many equally legitimate perspectives possible. We suggest that invitational rhetoric is a viable form of interaction in many instances but do not assert that it is the only appropriate form of rhetoric and should be used in all situations or contexts. We acknowledge the importance and usefulness of traditional theories of rhetoric even as we propose an alternative to them, and we try to build on and extend the work of other theorists—both traditional and feminist—rather than characterizing their work as inaccurate or misguided. Although we are constrained somewhat by the format of a journal article, we see this essay as in progress and plan to continue to work on our ideas; the responses of some of our colleagues and the reviewers and editor of *Communication Monographs* already have helped us clarify and improve our description of this rhetoric. We have attempted, then, to model the offering of a perspective within the perimeters allowed by a framework of scholarly discourse.

Offering also may be seen in the nonverbal realm; a perspective may be offered in the clothing individuals wear, the places in which and how they live, and in all of the symbolic choices rhetors make that reveal their perspectives. This kind of offering is illustrated by Purple Saturday, sponsored by the Women's Caucus at Speech Communication Association (SCA) conventions. On Purple Saturday, the women attending the convention (and those men who wish to show their support for women) are asked to wear purple, a color of the early women's suffrage movement, to proclaim women's solidarity and presence in SCA. When women wear purple on Saturday at the convention, they are not trying to persuade others to become feminists, to accept feminist scholarship, or to value women. Instead, they are simply offering a perspective so that those who wish to learn more about feminist scholarship or to join in the celebration of feminism may do so. Although not designed to influence others to change in particular directions, such nonverbal offerings may have that effect; some who view the wearing of purple by others at a convention may choose, for example, to explore or engage in feminist research themselves.

Another form offering may take, particularly in a hostile situation or when a dominant perspective is very different from the one held by the rhetor, is re–sourcement (Gearhart, 1982). Re–sourcement is a response made by a rhetor according to a framework, assumptions, or principles other than those suggested in the precipitating message. In using re–sourcement, the rhetor deliberately draws energy from a new source—a source other than the individual or system that provided the initial frame for the issue. It is a means, then, of communicating a perspective that is different from that of the individual who produced the message to which the rhetor is responding. Re–sourcement is not unlike Burke's (1984) notion of perspective by incongruity, but in re–sourcement, the juxtaposition of two systems or frameworks is split between rhetor and audience, with one reflected in the original message, the other in the response.

Re–sourcement involves the two processes of disengagement from the framework, system, or principles embedded in the precipitating message and the creative development of a response so that the issue is framed differently. Rorty's (1986) description of the process of generating new vocabularies points to this two–part process: "The idea is to get a vocabulary which is (at the moment) incommensurable with the old in order to draw attention away from the issues stated in the old, and thereby help people to forget them" (p. 114). In Forget's (1989) words, this kind of communication is "a swerve, a leap to the other side, which lets us . . . deploy another logic or system" (p. 136).

Although a refusal to engage in conflict or interaction under the terms proposed by a rhetor sometimes is seen as a negative, ineffective form of communication because it is interpreted as disconfirmation (e.g., Veenendall & Feinstein, 1990) or as a kind of manipulation associated with passive–aggressive behavior, it can be a positive response to a situation. It allows rhetors to continue to value themselves as well as the audience because it communicates that they are not willing to allow the audience to violate their integrity. Re–sourcement also opens up possibilities for future rhetorical choices, providing more options for rhetors than were previously available. As later options, rhetors who use re–sourcement may articulate their positions through more traditional forms of offering or standard forms of persuasion.

An example of re–sourcement is provided by Starhawk (1987) in her description of an incident that followed the blockade of the Livermore Weapons Lab in California to protest its development of nuclear weapons. She and other women were arrested and held in a school gym, and during their confinement, a woman was chased into the gym by six guards. She dove into a cluster of women, and they held on to her as the guards pulled at her legs, trying to extract her from the group. The guards were on the verge of beating the women when one woman sat down and began to chant. As the other women followed suit, the guards' actions changed in response:

> They look bewildered. Something they are unprepared for, unprepared even to name, has arisen in our moment of common action. They do not know what to do. And so, after a moment, they withdraw. . . . In that moment in the jail, the power of domination and control met something outside its comprehension, a power rooted in another source. (p. 5)

The guards' message was framed in a context of opposition, violence, hostility, and fear; the women, in contrast, chose to respond with a message framed in terms of nonviolence and connection.

Re–sourcement in a discursive form is exemplified in a story told by Watzlawick, Weakland, and Fisch (1974) about a police officer who was

> issuing a citation for a minor traffic violation when a hostile crowd began to gather around him. By the time he had given the offender his ticket, the mood of the crowd was ugly and the sergeant was not certain he would be able to get back to the relative safety of his patrol car. It then occurred to him to announce in a loud voice: "You have just witnessed the issuance of a traffic ticket by a member of your Oakland Police Department." And while the bystanders were busy trying to fathom the deeper meaning of this all too obvious communique, he got into his cruiser and drove off. (pp. 108–109)

The initial message presented to the police officer was framed in the context of opposition and hostility; he chose, however, to respond with a message grounded in a framework of simple explanation, cooperation, and respect. Re–sourcement, as a means of offering, allowed him to diffuse the situation and to communicate his own perspective—that he was doing the job he was hired by the crowd members, as taxpayers, to do.

External Conditions

Offering can occur whether or not an audience chooses to join with a rhetor in a process of discovery and understanding. But if invitational rhetoric is to result in *mutual* understanding of perspectives, it involves not only the offering of the rhetor's perspective but the creation of an atmosphere in which audience members' perspectives also can be offered. We propose that to create such an environment, an invitational rhetoric must create three external conditions in the interaction between rhetors and audience members—safety, value, and freedom. These are states or prerequisites required if the possibility of mutual understanding is to exist.

The condition of *safety* involves the creation of a feeling of security and freedom from danger for the audience. Rhetoric contributes to a feeling of safety when it conveys to audience members that the ideas and feelings they share with the rhetor will be received with respect and care. When rhetoric establishes a safe context, the rhetor makes no attempt to hurt, degrade, or

belittle audience members or their beliefs, and audience members do not fear rebuttal of or retribution for their most fundamental beliefs. Even in a volatile situation such as that described by Starhawk, when the guards were about to beat a woman seeking safe haven in a group of protesters, rhetoric that promotes a feeling of safety can be created. In this case, the women did nothing to endanger the guards or make them feel as though they would be hurt. They did not fight them physically or argue against the guards' use of force; neither did they engage in verbal abuse or ridicule the guards' training and beliefs about how to deal with prisoners.

Rhetoric that contributes to a feeling of safety also provides some means for audience members to order the world so it seems coherent and makes sense to them. When audience members feel their sense of order is threatened or challenged, they are more likely to cling to familiar ways of thinking and to be less open to understanding the perspectives of others. When a safe environment is created, then, audience members trust the rhetor and feel the rhetor is working with and not against them.

The condition of *value* is the acknowledgment that audience members have intrinsic or immanent worth. This value is what Benhabib (1992) calls "*the principle of universal moral respect*"—"the right of all beings capable of speech and action to be participants" in the conversation (p. 29). Barrett (1991) describes this condition as "respectfully, affirming others" while at the same time "one affirms oneself" (p. 148).

Value is created when rhetors approach audience members as "unrepeatable individuals" and eschew "distancing, depersonalizing, or paternalistic attitudes" (Walker, 1989, pp. 22, 23). As a result, audience members feel their identities are not forced upon or chosen for them by rhetors. Rhetors do not attempt to fit audience members into any particular roles but face "the 'otherness of the other,' one might say to face their 'alterity,' their irreducible distinctness and difference from the self" (Benhabib, 1992, p. 167). Rhetors celebrate the unique and individual identities of audience members—what Benhabib (1992) describes as

> the actuality of my choices, namely to how I, as a finite, concrete, embodied individual, shape and fashion the circumstances of my birth and family, linguistic, cultural and gender identity into a coherent narrative that stands as my life's story. (pp. 161–162)

One way in which rhetoric may contribute to the acknowledgment and celebration of freely chosen, unique identities by audience members is through a process Gendlin (1978) calls "*absolute listening*" (p. 116), Morton (1985) describes as "hearing to speech" (p. 202), and Johnson (1987) terms "hearing into being" (p. 130). In such rhetoric, listeners do not interrupt, comfort, or insert anything of their own as others tell of their experiences. Such a stance contrasts with typical ways of listening, in which "we nearly always stop each other from getting very far inside. Our advice, reactions, encouragements, reassurances, and well–intentioned comments actually prevent people from feeling understood" (Gendlin, 1978, p. 116) and encourage them to direct their comments toward listeners' positions or orientations (Johnson, 1987). While speaking to listeners who do not insert themselves into the talk, individuals come to discover their own perspectives. Morton (1985) quotes a woman's

description of her experience in the process of being heard to speech: " 'You didn't smother me. You gave it [my voice] space to shape itself. You gave it time to come full circle' " (p. 205).

Value is conveyed to audience members when rhetors not only listen carefully to the perspectives of others but try to think from those perspectives. Benhabib's (1992) notion of the " 'reversibility of perspectives' " (p. 145) is relevant here; it is the capacity to reverse perspectives and to reason from the standpoint of others, "making present to oneself what the perspectives of others involved are or could be" (p. 137). When value is created in a communicative situation, audience members feel rhetors see them as significant individuals and appreciate and attend to their uniqueness. They feel rhetors care about them, understand their ideas, and allow them to contribute in significant ways to the interaction.

Freedom, the power to choose or decide, is a third condition whose presence in an environment is a prerequisite for the possibility of mutual understanding. In invitational rhetoric, rhetors do not place restrictions on an interaction. Participants can bring any and all matters to the interaction for consideration; no subject matter is off limits, and all presuppositions can be challenged. The rhetor's ideas also are not privileged over those of the audience in invitational rhetoric. All the participants in the interaction are able, in Barrett's (1991) words, to "speak up, to speak out" (p. 148). Benhabib (1992) calls this "*the principle of egalitarian reciprocity*" (p. 29); within conversations, it suggests, "each has the same symmetrical rights to various speech acts, to initiate new topics, to ask for reflection about the presuppositions of the conversation, etc." (p. 29).

Freedom also is developed when a rhetor provides opportunities for others to develop and choose options from alternatives they, themselves, have created. Rather than presenting a predetermined set of options from which individuals may choose, a rhetor who wishes to facilitate freedom allows audience members to develop the options that seem appropriate to them, allowing for the richness and complexity of their unique subjective experiences. Perspectives are articulated as a means to widen options—to generate more ideas than either rhetors or audiences had initially—in contrast to traditional rhetoric, where rhetors seek to limit the options of audiences and encourage them to select the one they advocate.

Freedom of choice is made available to audiences, as well, in that, in invitational rhetoric, the audience's lack of acceptance of or adherence to the perspective articulated by the rhetor truly makes no difference to the rhetor. Some audience members will choose to try to understand the perspective of the rhetor, but others will not. Of those who do, some will choose to accept the perspective offered by the rhetor, but others will not. Either outcome—acceptance or rejection—is seen as perfectly acceptable by the invitational rhetor, who is not offended, disappointed, or angry if audience members choose not to adopt a particular perspective. Should the audience choose not to accept the vision articulated by the rhetor, the connection between the rhetor and the audience remains intact, and the audience still is valued and appreciated by the rhetor. The maintenance of the connection between rhetors and audiences is not dependent on rhetors' approval of the choices made by audience members. Rogers' (1962) notion of unconditional positive regard suggests the nature of

the autonomy the rhetor accords the audience; the audience has the freedom to make choices without the possibility of losing the respect of the rhetor.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Invitational rhetoric offers an invitation to understanding—to enter another's world to better understand an issue and the individual who holds a particular perspective on it. Ultimately, its purpose is to provide the basis for the creation and maintenance of relationships of equality. Its primary communicative options are offering perspectives and the creation of the external conditions of safety, value, and freedom that enable audience members to present their perspectives to the rhetor. In this section, we present two examples of invitational rhetoric to clarify its primary features.

The first example is the acceptance speech given by Adrienne Rich when she was awarded the National Book Awards' prize for poetry in 1974 (Rich, Lorde, & Walker, 1974/1994). When Rich accepted the award, she read a statement that she had prepared with Alice Walker and Audre Lorde—both of whom also had been nominated for the prize. In the statement, the three women announced that they were accepting the award together: "We, Audre Lorde, Adrienne Rich, and Alice Walker, together accept this award in the name of all the women whose voices have gone and still go unheard in a patriarchal world" (p. 148).

The statement clearly articulated the women's own position: "We believe that we can enrich ourselves more in supporting and giving to each other than by competing against each other; and that poetry—if it *is* poetry—exists in a realm beyond ranking and comparison" (p. 148). They presented no arguments in favor of their belief, however, nor did they argue against the position held by representatives of the National Book Awards. Thus, they did not seek the adherence of others to their perspective but simply offered their own vision.

The speech illustrates re–sourcement as a form of offering in that the women communicated their differences with the hierarchical, competitive framework established by the National Book Awards simply by not communicating within the terms of that framework: "None of us could accept this money for herself" (p. 148). They chose to respond within a different framework—one based on support and cooperation—by accepting the prize in the name of all women: "We will share this prize among us, to be used as best we can for women" (p. 148).

The three external conditions of safety, value, and freedom required for others to present their perspectives were created by the speech. The rhetors communicated safety when they suggested that they regarded the perspective of the judges as a legitimate one that they would treat with respect and care. "We appreciate the good faith of the judges for this award" (p. 148), they stated.

They accorded value in very specific ways to many individuals, both those in their immediate audience and others:

> We dedicate this occasion to the struggle for self–determination of all women, of every color, identification, or derived class: the poet, the housewife, the lesbian, the mathematician, the mother, the dishwasher, the pregnant teenager, the teacher, the grandmother, the prostitute, the philosopher, the waitress, the women who will understand what we are doing here and those who will not understand yet. (pp. 148–149)

They not only recognized these diverse and unique individuals but credited them as sources for their own work, calling them "the silent women whose voices have been denied us, the articulate women who have given us strength to do our work" (p. 149).

The brevity of the speech precluded the opportunity for the extensive development of freedom for the audience, but it is evident in that Rich, Walker, and Lorde do not specify particular options for action for women; they leave open to women whatever routes of "self–determination" (p. 148) they, themselves, choose. Nor do they suggest the kind of support women should give to each other or the particular contributions other women have made to them. Their ambiguity in these areas leaves open options for the audience and does not confine the terms of the interaction they initiated.

Feminist and animal–rights activist Sally Miller Gearhart (1993) provides a second example of invitational rhetoric in her narration of her interaction with an anti–abortion advocate. In the interaction, Gearhart used both traditional and invitational rhetoric, so her narrative provides a useful contrast between the two and the kinds of results each tends to produce. On a trip with a friend to upstate New York, Gearhart encountered a man in the Kennedy airport "railing about all these women and abortion rights." Because of her own pro–choice beliefs, Gearhart

> took him on. As a matter of fact, I took him on so loudly that we gathered a little crowd there in the Kennedy airport. I was screaming at him; I was trying to make him change. It was not successful, and it was pretty ugly, as a matter of fact. . . . They didn't have to actually physically separate us, but it was close to that.

An hour later, as she was boarding the shuttle bus to take her to Plattsburg, her destination, Gearhart encountered the man again: "There was only one seat on that bus, and guess who it was next to? . . . He looked at me and I looked at him as if to say, 'Oh, my God, what are we going to do?' " Rather than continue to engage the man as she had in the airport, Gearhart decided to try something different—to engage in what we suggest was invitational rhetoric: "I decided that what I would do was to try to approach this man with something different . . . and so I began asking him about his life and about the things that he did," seeking to understand his perspective and the reasons it made sense to him. "In fact," Gearhart explains, "it was even worse than I had originally thought. In fact, he was a chemist, and he had experimented on animals. He had grown up as a hunter and, of course, all that is absolutely counter to the things that I believe." But rather than attempting to convince him of the error of his ways, Gearhart continued to listen to the man, and he did the same as she shared her own perspectives and experiences with him.

The invitational rhetoric in which the two engaged brought Gearhart and the man together, although neither one "had changed our original position." As the two crossed paths for the third time in the parking lot, waiting for their respective rides, they started walking toward each other. Gearhart finishes the story:

> I don't know which one of us did it first, but I guess maybe I flung open my arms and he flung open his arms and we came together in this terrific hug, both of us in tears, sobbing, crying like babies. I said, "You know, I don't know what has happened here, but my life has been totally changed after today." And he said, "My life is totally changed, too, and I don't know what's happened."

We suggest that what happened was that the two individuals had offered their perspectives and listened to and acknowledged one another's perspectives in an environment of safety, value, and freedom. Their communication thus invited understanding and brought them to a new place of awareness of and appreciation for one another. Gearhart's (1993) summary of the experience is an excellent summary of invitational rhetoric: "It's a way to disagree and at the same time not to hurt each other and to respect each other and to have, actually, something very close and tender."

We see the statement of Rich, Lorde, and Walker and Gearhart's interaction as invitational, then, in that both were rooted in the principles of equality, immanent value, and respect for others and validation of their perspectives. Rich, Lorde, and Walker offered a perspective and communicated its difference with that of the judges, but they neither sought adherence for it nor denigrated the different viewpoint of the judges. Gearhart also offered a perspective very different from that of her acquaintance and listened to one very different from her own without seeking adherence or pronouncing judgment. Each rhetor created conditions of safety, value, and freedom, contributing to an environment in which audience members were able to present their different perspectives. The result was an understanding on which relationships of equality and respect could be built.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RHETORICAL THEORY

The expansion of the notion of rhetoric to include invitational rhetoric has several implications for rhetorical theory. The introduction of invitational rhetoric into the scope of rhetorical theory challenges the presumption that has been granted to persuasion as the interactional goal in the rhetorical tradition. Identification and explication of a rhetoric not grounded in the intent to produce a desired change in others undermine the position of privilege accorded to efforts to influence in rhetoric. The existence of invitational rhetoric encourages the exploration of yet other rhetorics that do not involve this singular interactional goal.

A second implication is that invitational rhetoric may contribute to the efforts of communication scholars who are working to develop models for cooperative, nonadversarial, and ethical communication. Such a goal, for example, is espoused by Herrick (1992), in his discussion of the link between rhetoric and ethics, when he suggests "that a virtue approach to rhetorical ethics may provide the kind of flexible, yet directive, ethic needed" to maintain the democratic nature of a pluralistic social order (p. 147). Van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1992) also propose such a goal in their book on argumentation; their approach is designed to create an open and free exchange and responsible participation in cooperative, dialogic communication. The framework provided by invitational rhetoric may allow such theorists to achieve their laudatory missions more easily by contributing to a reconciliation of goals and means (Makau, in press). According to Herrick's and van Eemeren and Grootendorst's definitions of rhetoric as a process in which rhetors seek to secure the acceptance of their perspectives by others, rhetors tend to see their audiences as opponents and sometimes may be tempted to engage in questionable ethical practices to win their "battles" with them. Rules thus are required to contain the interaction that

results from the use of such strategies. Invitational rhetoric may serve as a way to allow these scholars to develop models for interaction not characterized by the opposition and competition that make the achievement of their goal difficult.

The introduction of invitational rhetoric to the array of rhetorical forms available also serves a greater heuristic, inventive function than rhetoric previously has allowed. Traditional theories of rhetoric occur within preimposed or preconceived frameworks that are reflexive and reinforce the vocabularies and tenets of those frameworks. In rhetoric in which the rhetor seeks to impose change on others, an idea is adapted to the audience or is presented in ways that will be most persuasive to the audience; as a result, the idea stays lodged within the confines of the rhetorical system in which it was framed. Others may challenge the idea but only within the confines of the framework of the dispute already established. The inventive potential of rhetoric is restricted as the interaction converts the idea to the experience required by the framework.

Invitational rhetoric, on the other hand, aims at converting experience "to one of the many views which are indeterminately possible" (Holmberg, 1977, p. 237). As a result, much is open in invitational rhetoric that is not in traditional rhetorics—the potential of the audience to contribute to the generation of ideas is enhanced, the means used to present ideas are not those that limit the ideas to what is most persuasive for the audience, the view of the kind of environment that can be created in the interaction is expanded, and the ideas that can be considered multiply. The privileging of invention in invitational rhetoric allows for the development of interpretations, perspectives, courses of actions, and solutions to problems different from those allowed in traditional models of rhetoric. Rather than the discovery of how to make a case, invitational rhetoric employs invention to discover more cases, a process Daly (1984) describes as one of creating "an atmosphere in which further creativity may flourish. . . . [w]e become breathers/creators of free space. We are windy, stirring the stagnant spaces with life" (p. 18).

The inclusion of an invitational rhetoric in the array of rhetorics available suggests the need to revise and expand rhetorical constructs of various kinds to take into account the nature and function of this form. Invitational rhetoric suggests, for example, that the traditional view of the audience as an opponent ought to be questioned. It challenges the traditional conception of the notion of rhetorical strategies as means to particular ends in that in invitational rhetoric, the means constitute the ends. It suggests the need for a new schema of ethics to fit interactional goals other than inducement of others to adherence to the rhetor's own beliefs.

Finally, invitational rhetoric provides a mode of communication for women and other marginalized groups to use in their efforts to transform systems of domination and oppression. At first glance, invitational rhetoric may seem to be incapable of resisting and transforming oppressive systems such as patriarchy because the most it seems able to do is to create a space in which representatives of an oppressive system understand a different—in this case, a feminist—perspective but do not adopt it. Although invitational rhetoric is not designed to create a specific change, such as the transformation of systems of oppression into ones that value and nurture individuals, it may produce such an outcome. Invitational rhetoric may resist an oppressive system simply because it models

an alternative to the system by being "itself an Other way of thinking/speaking" (Daly, 1978, p. xiii)—it presents an alternative feminist vision rooted in affirmation and respect and thus shows how an alternative looks and works. Invitational rhetoric thus may transform an oppressive system precisely because it does not engage that system on its own terms, using arguments developed from the system's framework or orientation. Such arguments usually are co–opted by the dominant system (Ferguson, 1984) and provide the impetus "to strengthen, refine, and embellish the original edifice," entrenching the system further (Johnson, 1989, pp. 16–17). Invitational rhetoric, in contrast, enables rhetors to disengage from the dominance and mastery so common to a system of oppression and to create a reality of equality and mutuality in its place, allowing for options and possibilities not available within the familiar, dominant framework.

Our interest in inserting invitational rhetoric into the scope of rhetorical theory is not meant to suggest that it is an ideal for which rhetors should strive or that it should or can be used in all situations. Invitational rhetoric is one of many useful and legitimate rhetorics, including persuasion, in which rhetors will want to be skilled. With the identification of the rhetorical mode of invitational rhetoric, however, rhetors will be able to recognize situations in which they seek not to persuade others but simply to create an environment that facilitates understanding, accords value and respect to others' perspectives, and contributes to the development of relationships of equality.

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