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ABSTRACT

Students, either male or female, can be silenced by the adversarial discourse that often characterizes argumentative situations. Alternatives proposed by feminist rhetoricians should apply to any voice silenced in the classroom. Rhetoricians concerned with empowering writers of argument have illustrated three alternatives that enable writers to advance to views of argument rich with narrative essence, coalescence, and dialogue. The first alternative examines using personal narrative style as a style of "argument" that grants silenced students confidence and voice in the composition classroom. Another alternative explored involves seeing argument as a search for coalescence, common ground, and cooperation. Its name varies among theorists, but the characteristics are the same: to find a forum where people hear each other, work together, and strive toward agreement rather than barricade themselves behind clear-cut, black-or-white, non-negotiable positions. The final alternative to traditional argument is generally characterized as being more dialogic or deliberative than the other two alternatives main concern is to explore an issue by engaging in a process of inquiry regarding the issue or subject, allowing for many voices to coexist at once in a dialogue. The best alternative is simply any "form which legitimates the expression of difference differently." Contains 14 references. (NKA)

Increasing the Visibility of the Disinclined and the Silenced: Enabling Alternatives to Traditional Argument

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> ". . . the men monopolized not only the speaking time but the theoretical and social agenda as well. They sparred, dueled, and charged at each other like gladiators in a Roman arena . . . . Throughout this exchange, the women were relegated to the position of spectator . . . ." (Magda Lewis from "A Discourse Not Intended for Her")

In the situation above, Magda Lewis describes the difference in argumentative strategies of the men and the women, her fellow classmates, in a graduate-level seminar at The Ontario Institute for the Study of Education. Such a classical division between male and female argumentative behaviors is precisely why feminist rhetoricians have been critiquing the effects of traditional argument on female students and proposing alternatives that welcome writers into a realm that is no longer patriarchal, combative, or formulaic. While this research and these alternatives are primarily concerned with female students who are silenced, the results can also address the fact that students--either female or male--can be silenced by the adversarial discourse that often characterizes argumentative situations. Therefore, the alternatives proposed by Feminist Rhetoricians should apply to any voice silenced in the classroom.

The issue that argument can be seen as combative and limiting was raised almost twenty years ago by Sally Miller Gearhart in her oft-cited essay "The Womanization of Rhetoric." In this essay, Gearhart vehemently opposes the combative and alienating character of traditional argument. Gearhart opens her essay with the assertion that "any intent to persuade is an act of violence" (195), an example of the "conquest and conversion" mentality that is based on invasion, violation, and the "illusion of integrity" (196). As teachers of argument, we become "weapons specialists who are skilled in emotional manoevers" and who teach students how to win the battle

of argument by surviving its "violent artillery attack" (197). While Gearhart's main focus is on silenced female writers, her argument also holds true to any voice in the classroom who is uncomfortable with or who is silenced by adversarial argumentative situations.

Janice Moulton's comprehensive analysis of the "Adversary Method" also illustrates the coercive disposition of traditional argument, where "[r]ude and belligerent styles are developed," where "winning arguments rather than encouraging and developing good ideas" is the preferred argumentative style (422). Moulton also discusses how an argumentative style that could withstand the rigors of criticism, attack, and "extreme adversarial tests" was traditionally seen as being preferable to a style that was successful by being less assaulting and adversarial (420). Overall, this historical reliance on the Adversary Method as the correct form of argument "has led us to ignore or underrate or misinterpret systems of ideas that are not directed to an adversary" (427), which, therefore, can silence those students trying to gain visibility and voice in the classroom.

This adversarial nature, according to George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, is implicit in the metaphor "Argument is war," a metaphor that clearly captures the traditional conception of argument. In a traditional argument, "[w]e can actually win or lose. We see the person we are arguing with as an opponent. We attack his positions and we defend our own. We gain and lose ground. We plan and use strategies in this 'verbal battle'" (4). As Lakoff and Johnson state, "[i]n a no-holds barred argument, you attack, defend, counterattack, etc., using whatever verbal means you have at your disposal--intimidation, threat, invoking authority, insult, belittling, challenging authority, evading issues, bargaining, flattery, and even trying to give 'rational reasons'" (62). Overall, in Lakoff and Johnson's analysis of the "Argument is war" metaphor, we learn that the purpose of traditional argument is to "attack" and "destroy" your opponent and his or her ideas (63), a purpose not necessarily beneficial to all students.

The effectiveness of adversary-based argument for those disinclined voices in the classroom has been called into question. As Gearhart asks: "Is there a way to relate to each other, to other entities, in acts that participate in the changing of our worlds but which do not

themselves recapitulate our heritage of violence?" (198) In other words: How can our perceptions of written argument be augmented so that we move (far) away from the win-lose scenario to one that is more conducive to thought, exploration, and understanding? Rhetoricians concerned with empowering writers of argument have clearly illustrated three alternatives that enable writers to advance from the potentially-silencing adversarial views of argument to ones rich with narrative essence, coalescence, and dialogue.

The first alternative, discussed by Elizabeth Flynn and Judith Summerfield, examines using personal narrative as a style of "argument" that grants silenced students confidence and voice in the composition classroom. Flynn discusses how her female students wrote "stories of interaction, of connection, or of frustrated connection" and that these narratives were not concerned with competition, fear, or silence (428). Instead of battling with issues and people, the narratives allowed the female students to become involved with issues and their relationships, which allows women to move "toward the development of an authentic voice and a way of knowing that integrates intuition with authoritative knowledge" (429). Since this technique has given the power of voice to women, an historically silenced group, perhaps this voice can also be encouraged in other disinclined writers as well. Also, while Flynn does not directly address the use of personal narrative as a replacement for traditional argument, she does address the general effectiveness of narration to develop silenced writers into people who have faith in their ideas and who are willing to open these ideas up to a wider discussion.

A more specific discussion of the benefits of narrative as a style of "argument" appears in Judith Summerfield's "Principles for Propagation: On Narrative and Argument." Summerfield opens her article with the example of a time when famed fairy tale compiler and translator George Cruikshank had the characters of Cinderella and the King debate the benefits of temperance in order to make people realize the evils of drink, a pet project of Cruikshank's. Using a fairy tale narrative to influence his audience in this way may seem somewhat manipulative, but as Summerfield discusses, storytellers across eras and cultures have woven their "points of view, biases, and convictions . . . [and] causes" into their stories, thus showing how the "tales,

inescapably, carry 'principles,' that they can be threaded imperceptibly into character, plot, [or] setting" (155). Therefore, the contents of the narrative can be just as effective as a traditional argument in bringing the reader/listener into a conversation with the issue at hand.

"Narrative" and "Argument" have traditionally been seen as two separate poles in a composition class, but according to Summerfield,

> There are no simple modes, no simple utterances, no simple stories. Every move is a gesture, a complicated mess of motive, argument, persuasion, hope, commentary, desire, need, and invitation to be negotiated with. Such a course [one acknowledging narrative as argument] would recognize the pervasiveness, complexity, and variousness of narrative; recognize how we transform *what happens* into story in our ordinary lives and in our dreams in our attempts to order the past and prepare for the future. To *narrate*, from the Greek, is *to know*. Narrative is about making sense, through what we do and what is done to us. (156)

For years we have told stories to inform and entertain, and even testify in court cases; now Flynn and Summerfield ask us to see how these narratives can also contextualize issues and lead to productive inquiry.

Another alternative explored by those dissatisfied with traditional argumentative strategies and forms involves seeing argument as a search for coalescence, common ground, and cooperation. The name by which this alternative is known varies among theorists, but the main characteristics are the same: to find a forum where people hear each other, work together, and strive toward agreement rather than barricading themselves behind clear-cut, black or white, non-negotiable positions.

Sonja K. Foss and Cindy L. Griffin's interpretation of this alternative type of argument is called "invitational rhetoric": where the audience is invited "to enter the rhetor's world and to see it as the rhetor does" and where the 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" (5). The primary intention of this type of relationship is that "everyone involved gains a greater understanding," that through the invitational rhetoric, people establish a "relationship of equality, respect, and appreciation" (5-6).

Within this equitable and respectful relationship between audience and rhetor, however, changes in opinions and points of view can occur. While change is not necessarily the main purpose of invitational rhetoric, it still may occur. The concept of change is not as forceful as in traditional argument: "[i]n invitational rhetoric, change occurs in the audience or the rhetor or both as a result of new understanding and insights gained in the exchange of ideas" (6). The change that occurs is not necessarily intended "to support the superiority of a particular perspective but to contribute to the understanding by all participants of the issue and of one another" (6).

Foss and Griffin specifically develop how and why invitational rhetoric is an enabling alternative to traditional argument: "Invitational rhetoric . . . enables rhetors to disengage from the dominance and mastery so common to a system of oppression and to create a reality of equity and mutuality in its place, allowing for options and possibilities not available within the familiar, dominant frame-work" (16-17). Overall, Invitational Rhetoric is not "a desire for control and domination," for "gaining control over others," or for "devalu[ing] the lives and perspectives" of others (3). Respect and cooperation prevail.

Catherine E. Lamb's work with mediation and negotiation is also crucial to discuss in relation to Foss and Griffin since Lamb is also concerned with increasing the visibility of the silenced by promoting discussion rather than adversary. The processes of mediation and negotiation, to Lamb, emphasize "a process of thinking through an issue," "a cooperative search for truth" rather than an effort to "win" the battle ("Less Distance" 100-103). The goal of mediation and negotiation is for the "writer and reader to establish and maintain a subject-subject relationship." Conflict may not always be something to be avoided: "[t]he main feature of the relationship, however, may be needing to honor the present tension, staying in the moment of the disagreement, recognizing that resolution may never occur but that continuing the conversation is

still a legitimate way of maintaining a relationship" ("Other Voices" 263). Through this method, "both parties can retain the interdependence that permits connectedness while also going through the giving and receiving necessary if they are to resolve their conflict" ("Beyond Argument" 17).

The processes of mediation and negotiation "create the kind of atmosphere in which students can think honestly and openly about their position on an issue about which they care and then can reflect on the most generous response of which they are capable" ("Other Voices" 265). Using mediation and negotiation as alternatives in the argument class allows an address of the conflicts that arise but allows for this in a productive manner since, in Lamb's words, in our "culture, we learn much more about how to repress or ignore conflict than how to live with and transform it" ("Beyond Argument" 18).

Lamb's essay "Beyond Argument" specifically outlines how she integrated mediation and negotiation into the college writing class. In general, Lamb's process involves "getting as complete a picture as possible from both sides, separating the facts of the situation from the issues, and getting the parties they are working with to come up with as many options as possible in the process of arriving at a solution" (20).

When she teaches mediation, Lamb's first writing assignment is one the students write individually, but only after they have met as a group a number of times. The students are assigned the roles of either "disputant" or "mediator." "If they are one of the disputants, they write a memo to the mediator in which they explain the problem as they see it, including an attempt to separate the immediate ways in which the problem has exhibited itself from the underlying issues or interests." "If a student is the mediator, he or she writes a memo to a supervisor, summarizing the issues for both parties as they appear at that point" (20). These memos, in turn, are "part of what will give the mediator a sense of the dimensions of the conflict." The second writing is the "mediation agreement" that is prepared by all of the students in the group, which enables the mediator and the disputants to "move beyond the conflict that divides them" (20-21). In these writing assignments, students are given a fuller understanding of the process of mediation as well

as a view of an alternative strategy that does not deteriorate into a battle of the "for" vs. the "against" camps.

When Lamb teaches negotiation, the students also work with their classmates on issues of significance to them, and as in mediation, negotiation also requires some outside research. Each person writes a paper in which they "take a contrasting position on the issue," and then the students begin "negotiating a resolution," sometimes on their own and sometimes in teacher-attended conferences. The essay that follows these stages is one they write together as a record of the negotiation. In the end, the "most common form of resolution is some kind of compromise" (21).

Both mediation and negotiation are processes that Lamb feels are appropriate "alternative[s] to monologic argument" because through them knowledge is "cooperatively and collaboratively constructed"; the writing is clearly process-oriented; and the "power is experienced as mutually enabling" (21). Consequently, Lamb believes that through mediation and negotiation we can move "beyond argument" to a "resolution of conflict that is fair to both sides" and that is realistic (22; 11).

The final alternative to traditional argument is generally characterized as being more dialogic or deliberative than either of the other two alternatives because while personal stories may contribute to the situation, they are not the sole strategies at hand; also, while the participants in a dialogue or a deliberation may adopt some kind of negotiatory stance, this is not the primary purpose. In dialogic and deliberative argumentation, the main concern is to explore an issue by engaging in a process of inquiry regarding the issue or subject. This alternative to traditional argument allows for many voices to coexist at once in a dialogue in which the participants are encouraged to voice their ideas without denying the conflicts that can arise. Dialogic and deliberative styles of argument explore the richness of an issue from several points of view, exploring multiple perspectives at once. In metaphorical terms, argument is not seen as being a "war" but is instead a "journey," to return to Lakoff and Johnson's metaphor (90).

An example of this discussion-oriented alternative is discussed by Annas and Tenney; they work to show "how argument may work differently, how it may become more of a mutual undertaking for shared knowledge rather than an adversarial activity" (129). Through their perspective on argument, Annas and Tenney seek to provide students with

> . . . a place to find their voices, to adopt a nonadversarial stance, to open up the argumentative format from a traditional thesis-support mode, to create a cooperative rather than a competitive atmosphere, to study systematically the patriarchal structures and norms that have informed argumentative writing, . . . to blur the distinction between public and private, to write from a sense of personal conviction. (133)

The main result of this alternative environment is to help students locate voices that are "lively, questioning, and engaged" and to help them "see argument as a dialectic process eminently connected to the self" (133).

While these philosophical viewpoints may seem to be merely duplicates of the first alternative to traditional argument, the personal experience narrative alternative, Annas and Tenney's perceptions are not entirely based in the personal. They acknowledge and welcome the interactions and conversations with others' ideas. They want "to redefine argument as a conversation with people who know how to listen and whose opinion we care about, on a subject we know something about and in which we have a passionate interest" (135). Therefore, students explore their personal positions "in relation to their own experiences, to their subjects, to their audience, and to their language" (135). Inquiry and exploration overshadow winning as goals.

Differences between people and their ideas are also useful in a dialectical or deliberative style of argument, according to Annas and Tenney: "Difference is essential, for otherwise there is no reason for discussion, no point to make" (143). Difference and disagreement help to propel the dialogue productively forward and help to draw the participants "into a commitment to exploring their own ideas rather than imitating positions or writing what they perceive others and

the teacher want to hear--a stage essential to but not identical to the working out of the position they will speak to in the writing of their drafts and final paper" (142).

One of the key voices speaking against the non-adversary-driven styles of argument is Susan Jarratt, a self-proclaimed "confrontational feminist" who believes that personal experience-based argument as well as other options to "traditional" argument are not beneficial (106). According to Jarratt, "[d]ifferences of gender, race, and class among students and teachers provide situations in which conflict does arise, and we need more than the ideal of the harmonious, nurturing composition class in our repertory of teaching practices to deal with these problems" (113). She calls for a style of argument that acknowledges conflict, personal experience, and dialogue without necessarily abandoning traditional argumentative styles: "I envision a composition course in which students argue about the ethical implications of discourse on a wide range of subjects and, in so doing, come to identify their personal interest with others, understand those interests as implicated in a larger communal setting, and advance them in a public voice" (121). Therefore, by holding on to the traditional form, students learn to face conflict and use this conflict in productive, empowering ways.

Which of these three alternatives is the most effective/successful or which offers the most feasible promise for the future of argument in the first-year composition class is not necessarily the main concern of this analysis. What is more important is the acknowledgment that we need in Lewis and Simon's words "to create a space for the mutual engagement of lived difference that is not framed in oppositional terms requiring the silencing of a multiplicity of voices by a single dominant discourse" (469), or as Foss and Griffin assert, we need to "break the bondage of binary thinking" (18). The style of argument must be open enough to allow for differences to be expressed but also focused enough for this expression to be productive and engaging. Therefore, the best alternative is simply any "form which legitimates the expression of difference differently" (Lewis and Simon 471), any alternative that expands the boundaries that have alienated and silenced so many for so long, any alternative that accommodates the plurality of the "real" world in which we teach and live.

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