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The application of feminist insights in communication and argumentation to the practice of argument.

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The Application of Feminist Insights in Communication and Argumentation to the Practice of Argument

by

Jessica Lee Shumake

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research through the Department of Philosophy in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Degree of Master of Arts at the University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

2000

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Abstract

The research question I pose in this thesis is whether there is a need for our communicative and argumentative practices to change in light of feminist insights. My hypothesis is that feminist insights correct some of the problems associated with traditional models of argumentation and communication. I characterize feminist insights as an understanding which arises from a critical analysis of the ways in which females are socially situated in the world as gendered subjects. I maintain that because gender is a pervasive framework from which all social interactions are constructed, the social practice of argumentation and communication should be subject to feminist critique.

In Chapter One, I discuss some of the characteristics and limitations associated with the traditionally oriented models of argumentation and communication that are the subject of critique in this thesis.

In Chapter Two, I explore the idea that the socially and culturally defined attributes associated with one's gender identity carry over into our communicative and argumentative interchanges.

In Chapter Three, I argue that because our perceptions and attitudes are effected by the limits of our social and cognitive environments, we should eliminate the predominance of adversarial connotations that surround the discourse of argument.

In Chapter Four, I interpret and critique some alternative rhetorical communication theories to arrive at the conclusion that conceptualizing rhetorical argumentation solely in terms of having the goal of persuasion is seriously limited.

In Chapter Five, I give a brief synopsis of salient ideas from previous chapters. Additionally, I answer in the affirmative the research question of whether our
argumentative and communicative practices should change in light of feminist insights. I also explore some limitations of feminist critiques of argumentation and communication. I conclude by proposing to argumentation, communication, and feminist scholars that we continue to apply feminist critiques to our argumentative, communicative, and pedagogical practices.
Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my loving parents for their continued encouragement and support of my educational endeavors.
Acknowledgements

My wholehearted gratitude goes to my thesis advisor and mentor, Professor John Anthony Blair. His recommendations in the early stages of development of this thesis gave me the necessary direction to bring the project to its completion. Moreover, his editing expertise proved invaluable throughout the writing process. In addition, his encouragement, humor, and friendship have made my time here at the University of Windsor very rewarding.

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Chapter One: Introduction to the Thesis

The question I pose in this thesis is whether there is a need for our communicative and argumentative practices to change in light of feminist insights. My hypothesis is that our communicative and argumentative practices should change in light of feminist insights. I characterize feminist insights as an understanding which arises from a critical analysis of the ways in which females are socially situated in the world as gendered subjects. I maintain that because gender is a pervasive framework from which all social interactions are constructed, the social practice of argumentation and communication should be subject to feminist critique. I challenge the discourse of argument and the adversarial nature of our communicative exchanges by way of feminist criticism in an effort to demonstrate how our argumentative and communicative practices can be improved by employing feminist critiques.

1.1 Method of Inquiry

In this thesis I investigate feminist, argumentation, and communication literature in an effort to locate feminist insights that apply to argumentation and communication. My inquiry is generally limited to the confines of academic discourse with respect to the connections between feminism, argumentation, and communication. Thus, I admittedly run the risk of defining my boundaries too narrowly. However, my goal is the integration of academic practice with human social relations both inside and outside of the academic setting.

1.2 General Methodology

In regard to locating a distinctly feminist methodology, feminists are hesitant to declare that there exists a universally applicable "feminist" method. Though there is no
universally applicable "feminist" method, a feminist can take a methodological posture that is value-laden and goal-oriented (i.e., biased in favor of females). Feminist scholars call attention to the fact that there is no objectively pure "view from nowhere" and no method to follow that will erase the particular biases each individual has as a gendered subject and a social agent, despite the fact that non-feminist researchers might disavow claims that their own research is biased in favor of men and the maintenance of patriarchal order. According to Margrit Eichler, a feminist

starts from the premise that all scholarship is necessarily value-oriented and that more often than not a lack of feminist consciousness results in sexist theories and descriptions. Identifying and criticizing sexist elements in the existing literature is therefore an important aspect of feminist work. Once a critique has been achieved, and basic data have been collected, new concepts and models are created, either to express female experiences, or to encompass the experiences of both sexes . . . (624).

Following Eichler's advice, I start from the premise that a lack of feminist consciousness in the fields of communication and argumentation has resulted in sexist practices. In an effort to push for the modification of existing communicative and argumentative practices, I make explicit areas of communication and argumentation that can benefit from feminist critique. My long-term research goal is the development of communication and argument practices that are attuned to the concerns feminist critics raise about traditional models.

1.3 Limitations of Traditional Models of Communication and Argument

I will now give an account of the characteristics associated with the traditionally oriented models of communication and argument that are the subject of critique in this thesis.

The goal of studying rhetorical communication has traditionally been conceptualized in terms of how to persuade one's audience (Gearhart 195). Feminist
communication scholars Sonja Foss and Cindy Griffin (1995) reconceptualize rhetorical communication in non-persuasive or invitational terms, whereby the rhetor and the audience share their perspectives on how things make sense to them. This reconceptualization results in alternatives to the traditional notion that persuasion is necessarily the goal of all acts of rhetorical communication. I take issue with the notion that persuasion is the ultimate goal of rhetorical communication because a focus on persuading others minimizes the importance of listening to one’s communicative partner(s) and attempting to arrive at mutually satisfying conclusions. Additionally, it seems to me that teachers of rhetoric are doing students a disservice if they do not prepare them for instances where being relationally attuned to others takes priority over simply offering reasons in an effort to persuade them. In Chapter Four, I address in greater detail some salient alternatives to the traditional notion that persuasion is necessarily the goal of all rhetorical communication.

Feminist insights bring to bear the notion that argument pedagogy could better prepare students for situations where being relationally sensitive to others is more important than offering reasons in support of one’s own perspective. Feminist critics such as Janice Moulton (1980) warn that it is unsatisfactory to go about teaching students to find fault in the positions others offer without also giving instruction about how to build upon and support their ideas. Susan Peterson (1980) cautions that the practice of holding one’s own in academic debate can become ritualized to the point that it functions to create symbolic and/or emotional distance from a given speech event and creates a classroom environment where students attempt to outshine one another with skillful speech. I am recommending the pedagogical integration of a decidedly more
cooperative model of argument because it seems to me misguided to instruct students to find what is wrong with the positions others offer without also giving them guidance on how to support and build upon the ideas others bring to the fore.

Out of many examples from textbooks on argument, I will consider five examples from prominent textbooks on the subject. The following examples illustrate my point that the traditional or characteristic emphasis of argument pedagogy is steeped in adversariality, aggression, and ritualized skillful speech: “What we need to keep in mind is simply that a given argument normally involves some premises, and some steps to get from these premises to the conclusion, and if it’s going to be attacked then either the premises or the steps -- which are known as the inferences -- have to be attacked” (Scriven 39). The militarism continues: “Boiling down extended arguments in this way gives you a better sense of where the targets are that need to be attacked (or at least discussed)” (Hitchcock 225). “The speaker who advances substantial evidence for his thesis and defends this evidence from objections discharges the burden of proof” (Hoaglund 324). Here students are cautioned to be on the alert for bad argumentation: “First, a solid game of defense is often the best strategy” (Johnson and Blair 48). The author of this book on winning arguments looks at actual arguments in an attempt to teach students the craft: “Mark is admitting defeat. Krista must not demand more of a victory. To insist that her opposer stand up and surrender would be a mistake” (Gilbert 163).

Despite the characteristic emphasis of many traditional models of argument upon militaristic idioms and aggressive practices, there does seem to be an emphasis on the part of some teachers of argument to take cooperative approaches to argument practice seriously. This is evidenced by Larry Wright’s (1989) insistence that a forensic
conceptualization of argument as a battle where contempt and hostility between opponents guides the practice is “almost a guarantee against the productivity of reasoning” (22). I agree that correcting some of the overly antagonistic inclinations that underlie traditional models of argument will result in improved models of reasoning. In Chapter Three, I go into more detail about some of the argumentative practices I object to on the ground that their emphasis on adversarially poses difficulty for the implementation of non-adversarial alternatives.

1.4 Characterizing Argument

There are multiple senses of the word ‘argument.’ I am hesitant to attempt to define once and for all what counts as an argument because doing so unnecessarily restricts the way ‘argument’ is used in differing contexts. Ordinary language users will be the first to express that the term argument is rife with negative connotations, due to the notion that ‘to argue’ is synonymous with ‘to quarrel.’ Michael Gilbert (1997) notes that most of the time people ordinarily “associate the term ‘argument’ with a negative conflictual experience charged with emotion” (31, author’s emphasis). In the critical thinking and or informal logic classroom, an argument is a set of premises given in support of a conclusion. An argument is also defined in terms of the offering of reasons and evidence to persuade or justify to an audience or interlocutor some particular position. Argument can also be understood as a social process with the goal of inducing agreement or belief.¹ In this thesis I use the word ‘argument’ to mean a quarrel, the offering of reasons or evidence, and a social process with the goal of prompting belief or agreement. I take the perspective that there is no need to restrict the use of the word ‘argument’ and

¹ I am grateful to R.C. Pinto for pointing out to me this sense of argument, which he goes on to characterize as an interactive social process with the principal goal of inducing belief or agreement.
thus I use it in various ways according to the context of the discussion.

In thinking about argument from a feminist perspective, what strikes me as differentiating the arguments a feminist makes from the arguments made by academics generally is that feminists are explicit about their political and personal agendas. As Dale Spender (1980) suggests, “it is a political choice on the part of feminist scholars to find in favour of women, but this is no different from non-feminist researchers who have exercised their political choice by almost always finding in favour of men” (8). Spender’s view on the matter of how linguistic standards are set and how women are almost always judged from and determined to be deficient by standards that are distinctly male is conceptually in sync with the idea that gender is a pervasive framework from which all social interactions are constructed. Moreover, Spender seems inclined to agree that a lack of feminist consciousness in any field results in sexist theories and practices. In resonance with Spender, I use a feminist lens to examine how reality is constructed on the basis of social practices and our symbolic interactions (for example language). I argue that gender itself is a social construction that sets forth binary opposites of masculine and feminine. I also explore the ways in which the construction of gender is biased so as to favour males and exclude or mute female voices.

1.5 Gender Role Polarization

In this thesis I propose that feminist insights correct some of the problems traditional models of argumentation and communication pose. I take the position that examining our argumentative and communicative practices with a feminist lens can help us to realize the pervasive effects that a hierarchical understanding of gender can have. My claim is that models of communication and argument that are biased in favour of masculine
attributes need to be discarded for a more balanced view. However, there is tension in attempting to discard gender polarizations that hinder the development of a more balanced view of our communicative and argumentative interchanges, while also retaining the enabling aspects of gender role polarization (such as privileging the cooperative linguistic practices that are traditionally associated with women). What I do in an effort to resolve this tension is explore alternatives to aspects of argumentation and communication practice that are narrowly defined. Examples of traditional limitations include the adversarial model of argument and the notion that persuasion must be the goal of our rhetorical exchanges with others.

One such alternative to the adversarial model is the notion that argument pedagogy could better prepare students for situations where being relationally sensitive to others is more important than giving reasons in support of one's own view. However, highlighting the idea of relational sensitivity or building upon and supporting the ideas others offer can be problematic for females who have been consistently taught that sacrificing themselves and their own views to accommodate others is more important than asserting their agency. Thus, again there is tension between creating a more balanced view of how to proceed argumentatively and communicatively and avoiding the harmful polarizations of conventional sex role stereotypes. I resolve this tension by claiming that the context of such exchanges is relevant to determining how to proceed.

1.6 The Principle of Non-Adversariality

Throughout this thesis I use an approach that is in keeping with the principle of non-adversariality. The principle of non-adversariality is largely supportive of the ideas others bring to the fore, yet critical in the sense of being scrupulously attentive to ways
that one can improve upon her or his ideas. This principle can also be thought of in terms of a modified version of the principle of charity whereby one does not straw person others by misrepresenting their ideas or theories, but rather tries to understand what they present in the best possible light. In addition, the principle of non-adversariality avoids ad hominem "attacks" on other people. This principle is noteworthy, as it integrates a reconceptualized notion of argumentation and communication with more traditional approaches which eschew logical fallacies.

1.7 Outline of the Thesis

In Chapter Two, I investigate some issues that are salient to the question of whether or not our practices of communication and argument should change in light of feminist criticism. Much of the groundwork I lay in Chapter Two serves to answer such questions as whether there is an essential feminine nature or whether women and men reason or communicate differently. Additionally, I explore issues such as gender role stereotyping and male linguistic dominance, because it seems that such topics are particularly germane to exploring the idea of whether the socially and culturally defined attributes associated with one's gender identity carry over into our communicative and argumentative interchanges.

In Chapter Three, I examine the idea that the adversarial paradigm of argumentation and communication should be supplemented with attempts to share understanding in a non-adversarial manner. I also flesh out the notion that our perceptions and attitudes are effected by the limits of the language and images available to us in our social and cognitive environments. In thinking about argumentation from a feminist perspective, I forge connections between feminist philosophers, argument
theorists, and my own experiences. The theorists I rely most heavily upon in Chapter Three include Maryann Ayim, Janice Moulton, Susan Peterson, Trudy Govier, Joyce Trebilcot, and Michael Gilbert.

In Chapter Four, I interpret and critique some alternative models of rhetorical communication. The models I focus upon in this chapter are decidedly cooperative and reject adversariality for the higher goal of creating an environment where mutual communication can occur. Specifically, I investigate Sally Miller Gearhart’s view that the “womanization” of rhetoric has the potential to lead to an understanding of communication as act of co-creation, as opposed to persuasion. I then explore Sonja Foss and Cindy Griffin’s theory of invitational rhetoric. Finally, I discuss Rogerian rhetoric, as developed by Carl Rogers, in an attempt to demonstrate that understanding one’s interlocutor requires reflective listening and the withholding of judgment.

In Chapter Five, I give a brief synopsis of salient ideas from previous chapters. Secondly, I answer the research question of whether our argumentative and communicative practices should change in light of feminist insights. Thirdly, I explore some limitations of feminist critiques of argumentation and communication. Finally, I propose some future directions that can be taken by argumentation, communication, and feminist scholars.
Chapter Two: Gender as Social Construction

In this chapter, I investigate some issues that are salient to answering the question of whether or not our communicative and argumentative practices should change in light of feminist insights. Much of the groundwork I am laying in this chapter serves to establish answers to such questions as whether there is an essential feminine nature or whether women and men reason or communicate differently. I go into the issue of essentialism because it is germane to the topic of how our argumentative practices should be conducted. If our argumentative practices are competitive and competition is at odds with the social conditioning of females, then argumentative practices which favor competition are biased against females.¹

I provide background on issues such as gender role stereotyping and male linguistic dominance, because such issues are relevant to the question of whether the socially and culturally defined attributes associated with being engendered female or male carry over into our communicative and argumentative exchanges. Gender role stereotyping and male linguistic dominance relate in so far as males commonly dominate argumentative practice and argument pedagogy reinforces features, such as aggression, that are generally identified with the gender attributes males display. My interest in the dichotomous behavior that is stereotypically associated with being gendered female or male is guided by the hypothesis that the practice of argument and our communicative interchanges are susceptible to the same polarizations that are associated with conventional sex roles. It is my stand that traditional notions of what it means to be

¹ My own position on the matter is that our ideas about masculine and feminine behavior are constructed in such a way that femininity is polarized as being at odds with competition. We know from observing female athletes in competitive Olympic sports that women can thrive in competitive environments. The question then becomes: Do we want the practice of argument to display sports-like characteristics and if so are we talking about team sports or sports of an individual nature? I do not address the issue of argument-as-sport, though this idea might be usefully taken up by those so inclined.
engendered as female or male need to be modified to accommodate a more balanced view of the human self.

2.1 Characterizing Argument and Rationality

Let me begin by saying that differentiating argument from other forms of communication is an issue that deserves considerable attention; however, I will not attempt to deal with that issue in this thesis beyond noting that argumentation is one form of communication. I think argument serves the purpose of enabling an individual to meet not just her or his intellectual needs, but also her or his political, psychological, or personal needs. Though claiming that argument serves the purposes just mentioned may appear unilluminating to some, I am interested in going beyond what I perceive as a restrictivist view of argument as a product of a dialectical process between two opposing views. Not only do differences of opinion rarely divide along neat bipolar lines. an arguer also has motives for proceeding in one argumentative direction over another. Additionally, arguers take one argumentative tack over another as a result of their political, psychological, intellectual, or personal situatedness. By ignoring where arguers are coming from with their arguments and the motives one has for taking one specific argumentative direction over another, argument is stripped of the richness it has in actual use. Though, I am sympathetic to the idea that defining ‘argument’ too loosely renders the field of argumentation vulnerable to being subsumed as a general theory of communication or swallowed by the social sciences. I would rather err on the side of defining too loosely what counts as an argument so as to preserve the contextual richness the act of arguing involves.

The understanding I express above in regard to argument serving the purpose of
enabling an individual to meet not just her or his intellectual needs, but also her or his political, psychological, or personal needs may alarm some, as I make no mention that an argument has to be a rational act. I acknowledge that the connection between argument and rationality is unavoidable because arguing involves the giving of reasons and rationality is guided by giving reasons. Additionally, having standards for what constitutes "good reasons" does not imply absolutist standards of rationality. In fact, I am suspicious of theorists who try to define an absolute standard for what constitutes a rational argument, because it seems to me that line between what is rational and what is irrational is redrawn by the participants in each argumentative exchange.

For example, in a scenario where two people are giving reasons as to why they believe they have been, say, abducted by aliens, someone who is skeptical of their claim might charge them with irrationality. The two speakers will regard their conversation about alien abduction as entirely rational and may attempt to convince a skeptic by presenting reasons or evidence that make their claim more believable. However, in the end the skeptic can still maintain that she or he is not convinced that their claims make rational sense. Thus, what the two speakers thought was a cogent case in support of their claim, failed to convince a third party. What I am claiming is that whether or not a claim is rational is determined by the audience to whom the claim is presented. If one was preaching to the converted (i.e., a room full of people who likewise claim to have been abducted by aliens), her or his beliefs would likely meet with little resistance. Thus, I conclude that rationality is audience-dependent and the line between what is rational and what is irrational is redrawn by the participants at each argumentative juncture. In other words, there are no absolute standards of rationality.
I do not intend to go into any “defense” of relativism beyond agreeing that “[t]he relentless denigration of relativism that marks twentieth-century epistemology masks its own investment in preserving certain privileged ways of knowing while prohibiting others, consigning them to oblivion” (Code 188). Lorraine Code’s insights into why some individuals scoff at relativism seem to suggest that we look to moral arguments to make our case for the inclusion of those whose voices and experiences have been systematically excluded and/or denigrated. To expand, if absolutist standards of what constitutes reasonableness are being applied so as to disadvantage marginalized persons, while privileging those in positions of power, a moral case ought to be made in an effort to expose certain privileged ways of knowing as prejudiced.

Agnes Verbiest addresses the concern that “argumentation theory has so far addressed only one rationality, namely the one used in masculine dominant discourse” (832). Though I agree with Verbiest that the conception of rationality within argumentation seems to only address concerns that fall within the masculine-dominant discourse, I am reluctant to argue for something like a feminine rationality because doing so runs the risk of reinforcing stereotypical perspectives about women and women’s speech being irrational and emotional. In Chapter Four, I develop further the argument that a uniquely feminized model of communication and/or argumentation is problematic because a uniquely feminized model can make it difficult for women to assert their own agency, as doing so is considered contrary to what is thought appropriate to their gender role identity.

2.2 Argument, Emotion, and Gender

Firstly, let me address the question of why I am raising the issue of emotion and

13
argument in this thesis. Though emotion itself has no gender, emotionality has long been identified with femininity and considered to be inferior to the masculine characteristics men are said to possess. I do not subscribe to the belief that women are somehow naturally more in touch with their emotions, as experience has conveyed to me that women are just as capable as men of putting up barriers so as to protect themselves from being in touch with their emotions and hence less vulnerable to being hurt by others. Many modern-day stereotypes about women and emotion can be traced back to the myth of women as the "weaker sex." An adequate conception of argument and communication will dismantle theories about the "natural" inferiority of women, in addition to considering the total argumentative situation, which includes an arguer's emotions, motives, beliefs, and values.

Gilbert claims that the people we argue with have full sets of beliefs, desires, needs, and goals which rarely fit into neat epistemological categories (142). Moreover, Gilbert believes that every arguer has a myriad of attitudes and values which can and do stem from that person's thoughts, intuitions, and emotions. Aaron Ben-Ze'ev expresses a position similar to Gilbert's when he states that "[e]motions express our most profound values..." (191). I am inclined to agree with Gilbert and Ben-Ze'ev that emotion is an important and relevant aspect of the context in which an argument occurs; however, I worry that an attempt to motivate the acceptance of this point might involve appealing to stereotypes about women and emotion.

Gilbert criticizes what he terms the Critical-Logical model of reasoning, because he believes the Critical-Logical model assumes rationality is always at the helm and ignores

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3 For a further discussion see Part III of Simone de Beauvoir's The Second Sex.
the fact that arguments often spring from our emotions and intuitions. Kathleen Miller takes a different tack from Gilbert and argues that trying to understand the context (whether it be intuitive, emotional, or metaphysical) in which a particular viewpoint or argument is situated is not at odds with a Critical-Logic approach. For Miller, rationality is embodied in trying to understand the position another takes and finding points of agreement between one’s own position and another’s.

Miller maintains that Gilbert makes the inference that differing abilities to reason can be drawn on the basis of gender lines. Moreover, Miller points out that Gilbert draws from the assumption that men are predisposed to value independence and separateness; whereas, women are said to value their connection and relatedness to others. Though Miller does not explicitly disagree with Gilbert’s assessment of women as more connected to others and men as more independent, she does argue that Gilbert’s inference “from differences in values to differences in reason is questionable” (342). As stated earlier. I too am reluctant to argue for something like a feminine rationality because I worry that making a case for a uniquely feminine way of reasoning stands to reinforce the association of traits such as subjectivity, particularity, and emotionality with women. The latter characteristics are considered to be “weaker” than or at odds with objectivity, universality, and rationality, which are attributed to men. Until hierarchical conceptual frameworks that relegate women to the position of the “weaker sex” are dismantled, the strengths women may or may not uniquely possess will be considered liabilities.

If activity and reason are seen as the domain of men and the traits of passivity and emotionality are viewed as feminine, we are only reinforcing the idea that specific traits belong to one sex. If the emotional is considered to be the domain of women, the same
dichotomies will continue to proliferate. The problem I am calling attention to is the fact that many people are conditioned to accept gender-specific behavior without examining the implications gender-specific behavioral prescriptions have on the freedom and opportunities available to women.

Agnes Verbiest claims that “[g]ender is not simply an aspect of what one is, but more fundamentally, it is something that one does, and does recurrently, in interaction with others: all human beings are doing gender through the use of language” (827). I agree that the gender role one performs becomes one’s social identity. Moreover, I recognize that language is essential in the social and cultural world we inhabit. We communicate with others using gestures, shrugs, pointing, glances, and other non-linguistic components. An adequate understanding of communication and argumentation will lay the groundwork for a more balanced view of the human self, while also taking into account the fact that we are socially situated as gendered subjects who perform our identities according to the mandates of varying contexts.

Elinor Ochs urges that we evaluate the conversational roles we enact in our everyday communicative interchanges.¹ “Mundane, prosaic, and altogether unsensational though they may appear to be, conversational practices are the primary resources for the realization of gender hierarchy” (Ochs 336). Therefore, learning to communicate in non-hierarchical ways requires that women recognize they are in a double-bind, because they are judged by the standards of masculine speech and yet also expected to conform to behavior that is stereotypically identified with their sex. My hope is that the future will bring a time when women are no longer judged as competent or incompetent by male

¹ The question of how conversational practices tend to mute female voices is of particular interest to feminists who study the connection between language and cultural attitudes, however, for the purposes of this thesis, I consider the discourse involved in the practice of argument to be my primary concern.
standards, but by their own merits.

Genevieve Lloyd (1979) raises the concern that objectivity, universality, and rationality are set over and against perspectives that are subjective, particular, and emotional. The weaker characteristics are then attributed to females, which only serves to further polarize the sexes and to maintain male dominance. In many cultures and countries, gender roles are essentialized into dichotomies similar to the yin-yang symbol. The feminine or the yin is characterized as passive, receptive, soft, and dark, whereas the masculine or yang has the properties of activity, creativity, hardness, and brightness (Schuhmacher 428). For Taoists, a balance between the yin and the yang brings good health. Without a balance between the masculine and the feminine, the body is thought to become sick or ill at ease. The problem with dichotomies like the yin-yang symbol is that they are often used as rigid formulas to prescribe behavioral guidelines for biologically sexed males and females. It is not the fact of biologically determined sex differences that concerns me; rather, it is the process of socialization that places males at an unfair advantage over females. The power differential throughout most of the world is such that women are socialized into more passive roles. Men are primarily socialized to be active participants in the public sphere. It is this deterministic dichotomy of socialization I wish to expose as an unnecessary and destructive device that maintains male dominance. Additionally, I want to indicate that our argumentative and communicative practices are susceptible to the same harmful polarizations associated with conventional sex roles.

2.3 Gender Role Stereotyping

There are problems with reinforcing stereotypical perspectives about the ways women reason, argue, and communicate. Stated differently, there is the problem of
clinging to essentialist conclusions. The essentialist believes there is an essential feminine nature that make women more caring, nurturing, and sensitive. The post-essentialist thinks that women and men share many of the same traits. Nel Noddings argues that the difference between males and females is not essential difference, but rather the case is that “our society’s expectations and demands for their experience have differed” (26).
Feminist theory places much emphasis on the validation of the experiences of women, given that so much of what traditionally counted as “knowledge” systematically excluded or discounted the experiences of women. Feminists are conscious of the fact that humans are embodied materially and historically. As gendered knowers, feminists refuse to offer value-neutral, ahistorical, or non-contextual frameworks in the construction of academic theories.

Much of the feminist literature on argumentation and communication suggests that women are more nurturing, cooperative, and connected to others than are men. Deborah Kolb (1993) subscribes to the theory that the socialization of women plays a part in their subordination. I take issue with what seems to be Kolb’s subtle endorsement of psychological stereotypes about females. I will first lay out Kolb’s position before going on to critique it.

Kolb accepts Nancy Chodorow’s theory, from The Reproduction of Mothering (1978), that females fail to form a strong sense of independent identity because of their connection to and gender identification with their mothers. Males, on the other hand, are said to struggle to differentiate and separate themselves from others in the process of identifying with their gender role. Kolb claims that the socialization process females undergo gives them a relational view of the self. Kolb also takes it as a given that females
form their gender identity on the basis of their relatedness to the feminine characteristics embodied by their mothers and continue to define themselves in terms of their connectedness to others throughout their lives.

In terms of a woman's ability to negotiate her needs, Kolb states that "a woman conceives of her interests within the context of her responsibilities and commitments. She is always aware of how her actions in one context impact other parts of her life and people who are important to her" (141). Kolb also points out that we must be careful not to make the assumption that women do better in situations where emphasis is placed upon negotiation and mediation, because existing research suggests that women generally fare worse than one would expect when it comes to negotiating their own needs. For example, men receive better raises in salary negotiations in comparison to women. Furthermore, when it comes to divorce, women who go through divorce mediation end up financially worse off than those women who settle things in court (Kolb 139).

Kolb's point about the way women conceive of their interests within the context of their relations to others is illustrated by a conversation I had with a female friend about how negotiation proceeded in her divorce settlement. This particular woman said that she did not take her husband to court and instead opted for a jointly mediated settlement, because she was concerned that trying to settle issues through a judicial procedure would make things more difficult for their daughter later in terms of having a good relationship with her father. This is not to imply that all women are concerned to preserve relationships with others. In fact, some women can and do find themselves severing the links that bind them relationally in an attempt to forge a sense of who they are as independent persons. However, when it comes to severing relational bonds and acting
forcefully or competitively Kolb explains that women find themselves in a difficult situation because they are said to “invite” criticism and questions about their femininity and ability by performing contrary to what is considered stereotypically acceptable female behavior.

In criticism of Kolb’s reliance upon Chodorow’s theory of male separation and female connection, it seems Kolb downplays the female quest for self-identity and the break young women make from their mothers as they strike out for independence. Women on a quest for self-identity often find themselves, for the first time, consciously putting their own needs before the needs of others. In other words, they make a break with the relational view of the self and disregard conventional gender-role standards. The female quest for self-identity differs from that of males, because females have been taught from the outset to place their relations with others above themselves. Males, in contrast, form a strong sense of themselves as independent persons because they have had to understand themselves as separate from their mothers in the process of their gender role development.¹

Another criticism of Kolb is lodged indirectly by Morgan Forbes. In contrast to Kolb, Forbes argues that Chodorow herself “associates feminine connection and masculine separation with conventional sex roles and argues that both are undesirable” (141). Yet, Kolb never suggests that the myth that being a male means being violent, competitive, and independent needs to be discarded for a more balanced view of gender identity. If it is true that men are socially conditioned to fear intimacy and to readily detach themselves from relationships with others, then it makes sense that men might

¹For further discussion on the particular challenges females face in identity formation, see Carol P. Christ’s Diving Deep and Surfacing: Women on a Spiritual Quest and Mary F. Belenky, Blythe M. Clinchy, Nancy R. Goldberger, and Jill M. Tarule’s Women’s Ways of Knowing.
behave in ways that reflect these tendencies (Belenky et al. 115). However, rather than reinforcing gender specific behavior, we should work to replace traditional conceptions of what it means to be engendered as male or female with a balanced view of the human self. I take issue with Kolb specifically because she could have challenged the social conditioning females receive on the grounds that training females to sacrifice self for others aids in the continued subordination of women. Such a challenge would have balanced her treatment of the relational view of the self she argues that females retain throughout their lives.

Additionally, Kolb does not make mention of the developmental process a female raised by her father would undergo. Would a young female model the gender role attributes displayed by her father in the same way she would her mother, if the father were the primary care giver? I would hate to think we are back to square one with Freud and that the absence of one prominent blood-vessel would be the decisive factor in whether a young girl, who was raised by her father, would model her father’s behavior.

2.4 Patterns of Linguistic Dominance

In contrast to Kolb, Maryann Ayim and Kate Millet make explicit their comprehension of the impact of social conditioning on female identity formation. Ayim argues that “so long as women are trained, socialized, and perhaps even indoctrinated to perform in caring ways, even when caring behaviour is strictly one-sided, then the egocentric linguistic behaviour of males will appear to be unproblematic and acceptable” (Moral 133). Millet (1970) proposes that we should examine the effects of male

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1 See Chodorow (1978), Gilligan (1982), and Levinson et al. (1978) for further discussion on masculine social conditioning and fear of intimacy.

2 See Alison M. Jaggar’s “Human Biology in Feminist Theory: Sexual Equality Reconsidered” printed in Key Concepts and Critical Theory in Gender (1997). In this article, Jaggar argues that it is no more or less natural for men to rear children than it is women.
dominance upon formation of female identity. I agree with Ayim and Millet that male
linguistic dominance is problematic and lest we forget that up until the feminist
movement began revising and actively seeking solutions to sexist language in the 1970s,
the influence of male linguistic dominance was so pervasive that it was grammatically
*correct* and stylistically preferred to use the noun ‘man’ or ‘mankind’ and the pronoun
‘he’ as though all subjects were male.

Spender argues that “[t]he introduction of *he man* into the structure of the
language has helped to ensure that neither sex has a proliferation of female images: by
such means is the invisibility of the female constructed and sustained in our thought
systems and our reality” (155, author’s emphasis). I agree with Spender that the symbol
‘man’ is accompanied by images of males in the minds of both females and males. Reality
is a construct -- all of us operate out of conceptual frameworks or frames of reference --
and conceptual frameworks set the boundaries of what we *see*. “And what effect does
this male imagery have on our ‘rules of seeing’? Do we project male images onto the
objects and events of the world, are we ‘trapped’ into seeing male when without the
particular blinders provided by our language we might discern female images in the world
we inhabit?” (Spender 152). In academia, female scholars are encouraged to find favor in
thinking, speaking, and behaving more like a man to gain the respect men are granted on
the basis of the sex, but they never quite measure up to the masculine standard because
after all they are women. Without a doubt there is a preponderance of male images in
culture, language, and academia; whether or not this is intentional on the part of the
dominant group (i.e., men) is a point of controversy that deserves more attention. though
I will not attempt to unravel it further in this thesis.

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In further examining the English language, linguist Rosalie Maggio asks the question of why there are so many words that reduce the dignity or social standing of females. Maggio found that the study of word pairs shows that "words associated with women ultimately become discounted and devalued" (12). Maggio's findings corroborate the feminist view that the "semantic derogation" of women perpetuates a cycle of male bias, dominance, and privilege. By locating masculinist biases in language, feminists are able to bring attention to patterns in language that negatively effect the perception females have of themselves and the perceptions others have of them. The exclusive use of masculine pronouns, the use of 'man' or 'mankind' as a generic nouns, and the semantic derogation of women serve to indicate that the perceptions and attitudes about the place of females in society have their origin in sexist values, which maintain a sexist society.

The notion of male linguistic dominance is problematic for the practice of argument because males commonly dominate argumentative practice. Moreover, argument pedagogy reinforces a proliferation of male imagery by establishing aggressive models of argument critique. For example, offering a critique that is largely supportive of the position another offers is at odds with traditional advice to "attack" positions that run counter to one's own. In James Sauer's (2000) "The Nature of Philosophical Writing," I most recently encountered the suggestion that one can develop a line of argument by "attacking" a question another asks on the grounds that the question itself is a misrepresentation of the issue at hand. I came across Sauer's suggestion as I prepared a lesson for undergraduates on how to write a philosophy essay. My main objection here

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*Muriel Schulz (1975) was first to refer to the negative association of words with females as "semantic derogation."*
is that the nature of the philosophic enterprise, more specifically philosophical argumentation, tends to favor criticism over supporting the ideas others bring to the fore. The general tendency for women's voices to become muted in the practice of argument is symptomatic of the construction of the act of arguing as a militaristic endeavor. The alignment of argument with aggression, adversariality, and maleness should be discarded because it makes for bad argumentative practice and perpetuates a false hierarchical structure that is biased in favor of males.

2.5 Gender and Social Conditioning

The historical silence and systematic exclusion of women from positions of power in the public realm serves to further remind us of the challenges women continue to face as they make strides toward equality with men. This is particularly true given the power differential that made it only a relatively recent occurrence that women gained the right to vote, own property, and have reproductive freedom. In the process of negotiating their rights with the dominant group (i.e., men), women have gone decidedly beyond the role of passivity that is typically identified with their gender. Those women who dared to cross rigidly prescribed behavioral guidelines did so at the risk of being perceived as man-hating, intimidating, and unfeminine. For a female lawyer, for example, it is claimed to be more effective to ask questions and to be polite and reserved than it is to intensely challenge a witness. Behaving in a manner that is interpreted as polite and reserved is said to be more effective with a jury and with the rest of society, because society insists that the role a female lawyer has as a woman must take precedence over her role as an attorney (Miller and Swift 108).

It seems clear that the attributes associated with being gendered female or male are
socially and culturally defined. I can only imagine the exhilaration Margaret Mead (1935) must have felt as she observed the Tchumbuli tribe and realized the impact that cultural conditioning has upon one’s gender identity.⁹ Linda Lindsey recounts that the Tchumbuli tribe consisted of “practical, efficient, and unadorned women and passive, vain, and catty men who took pleasure in decorating themselves and preparing the ceremonial rituals and festivities for the tribe” (15). Moreover, the Tchumbuli women were the main economic providers for the tribe as a result of their fishing, basket weaving, and trading skills. In giving evidence for the hypothesis that one’s gender is socially constructed, I am cautious to also consider the ways biologically sexed males, females, and ambiguously sexed persons are chemically and hormonally dissimilar. However, the fact remains that the same hormones that course through the bodies of males and females in some of the tribal cultures Mead examined resulted in social arrangements that are quite dissimilar to those found in the patriarchal culture by which we in the Western world are inundated daily.

To expand, it seems likely that human beings are a product of both their biology and social conditioning.

2.6 Aim of this Inquiry and Future Directions

Given that feminists offer sustained critiques of traditional gender role stereotypes and examine gender as a powerful and pervasive framework from which all social interactions are constructed, I have come to the conclusion that a feminist frame of reference is necessary to undermine patriarchal conceptual frameworks that denigrate the social standing of women. It is my goal that feminist critiques of the practice of argument and communication will bring forth better practices.

By providing background information on the gender role stereotypes and biases

⁹See Margaret Mead’s Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies.
females endure, I have illustrated the potential bearing feminist criticism can have on our communicative and argumentative practices that are devoid of feminist consciousness. Argumentation is one form of communication that I will concentrate more specifically upon in Chapter Three as I forge connections between feminist philosophers, argument theorists, and my own experiences in an effort to examine the social practices of argument and communication from a feminist perspective. In Chapter Three, I connect the idea that the language available to us, whether it connotes violence or cooperation, influences how we conceptualize reality. I go on to contend that the inclusion of the cooperative linguistic practices that are stereotypically identified with women will help to balance both the practice of argument and our communicative exchanges generally.
Chapter Three: Argumentation and Adversariality

In this chapter, I explore how gender is an organizing force in the social practice of argument in the sense that our perceptions and attitudes about argument are influenced by the limitations of our social and cognitive environments. My concern is that the predominance of adversarial connotations that surround the discourse of argument limit our ability to implement non-adversarial alternatives. I take the stance that, if the existing discourse used in our argumentative and communicative interchanges is fraught with allusions to domination and violence, then our argumentative and communicative practices will be negatively influenced. I propose that one solution to thinking of our argumentative and communicative exchanges in terms of a battle between adversaries is to transform existing practice so as to make cooperation the standard. The idea that the practice of argumentation and communication can improved by placing an emphasis upon cooperation comes to us by way of feminist insights. In thinking about argumentation from a distinctly feminist perspective, I forge connections between feminist philosophers, argument theorists, and my own experiences. The theorists I rely most heavily upon include Maryann Ayim, Janice Moulton, Susan Peterson, Trudy Govier, Joyce Trebilcot, and Michael Gilbert.

3.1 Ayim’s Contributions

I was initially motivated to investigate the connection between argumentation, communication, and feminist thought after reading Maryann Ayim’s article, “Violence and Domination as Metaphors in Academic Discourse.” Ayim challenges the war-like metaphors that proliferate in the discourse of argumentation and communication. Her objection to an argument-as-war model of argumentation and communication is predicated
upon her high esteem for the nurturant traits that are typically identified with the linguistic practices of women. One such nurturing characteristic that has been linked to women's linguistic practices is the technique of inviting others to give their conversational input and/or to talk about their experiences (Ayim Moral 133-134). Ayim's position is that "it is the female identified roles that ought to be taught to everyone, and that ought to be consistently rewarded" (Moral 52). Hence, Ayim's task could accurately be called the "womanization" of argumentation and communication.

Ayim is cognizant of the fact that exclusively women are socialized to behave in caring and cooperative ways, which maintains the facade that "linguistic egoism" on the part of males is acceptable. Linguistic egoism includes verbally attacking others in ways that might be construed as intimidating; interrupting others when it is not helpful to do so; dominating the conversation; and not conducting the conversation so as to include others' perspectives. Ayim argues that "gender is connected in important and well-established ways to who grabs the handful of linguistic cookies and who isn't passed the plate..." (Ayim Moral 2). Ayim also makes manifest her position that the language we use and our experiences in the world as gendered subjects influence the ways we think about and construct knowledge, meaning, and reality. She examines the existing language used in our argumentative and communicative discourse, only to reveal confirming evidence that it is fraught with allusions to domination and violence (Ayim Moral 155).

Ayim's overall position on symbolic or linguistic violence is that the human community will benefit from replacing antagonistic and aggressive conceptual schemes with nurturant conceptual schemes. In the fields of argumentation and communication.

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This is an allusion to Sally Miller Gearhart's "The Womanization of Rhetoric" (1979).
alternative metaphors to "defeating a position" or "refuting an opponent's stance" include the following participatory metaphors with positive connotations: "creating a foundation for conceptual understanding," "constructing a case," and "exploring the realm of argument."

It has been my personal experience that the adversarial language that proliferates in the discourse of argumentation and communication becomes so ingrained in my thinking that is difficult to put alternatives into practice. As an educator, Ayim knows firsthand how difficult it is for students to comprehend non-adversarial ways of going about describing and putting into practice the skills they learn when studying argumentation. Ayim remarks, "[s]o deeply is this notion [of adversariality] embedded, that when I talk in class about developing a critical analysis of an argument's position that is largely supportive of the position in question, my students have great difficulty in understanding me" (Moral 166).

In regard to being both an academic and explicitly endorsing a non-adversarial model of argument, Ayim is uncharacteristic of many educators and their general pedagogical predispositions. My speculation is that given the nature of their station, academics are required to be right or succeed at debate with others, as intellectual and verbal skillfulness are highly prized in the academy. Given that many educators urge their students to imitate models that are steeped in adversariality, those of us who are involved in pursuing more cooperative models of argument and/or communication may need to look outside of the academy. As Mary Sally Gearhart points out, academics are the worst when it comes to peddling a "let-me-enlighten-you attitude" (195). Daniel Cohen remarks that "[i]t may be expecting too much of academics, whose concerns, after all, are often
built precisely on the talents in question, to offer sustained critiques of those talents” (180). It is understandable that academics would find it difficult to critically assess the very skills that have enabled them to excel in the academic environment.

Despite the fact that thinking in terms of defeating an opponent’s position seems to have a stronghold on educators and students alike, in addition to being a central part of our argumentative practice, offering arguments need not necessarily carry adversarial connotations. In fact, if one desires to make an effective case for a position that is in opposition to one’s interlocutor’s, it is best to offer reasons and evidence for the contrary claim one supports and to understand fully the position one’s interlocutor holds before proceeding to criticize it. From a rhetoric perspective, if one wants her or his argument acknowledged by someone who is opposed to it, there is no alternative to proceeding with that person than attempting to listen sympathetically to her or his position. Additionally, it is far more rhetorically persuasive to invite someone you are having a disagreement with to consider a claim you are making, than it is to behave in an aggressive or arrogant manner in an attempt to get your point across.

If we take seriously the goal of replacing images of antagonistic individuals with images of a diverse community interacting in harmony, Ayim’s proposal to introduce more of the nurturant traits that are typically identified with the linguistic practices of women to our argumentative and communicative discourse will not seem so radical. I well realize that not everyone shares Ayim’s goal of creating a situation where people are encouraged to communicate in cooperative and non-hierarchical ways. However, the fact that people disagree with Ayim in theory and practice does not detract from the power of

\footnote{Thanks is due to J.A. Blair for this insight.}
her ideas.

3.1.1 Emphasizing Inclusive Linguistic Practices

Ayim prescribes a normative standard for communication in *The Moral Parameters of Good Talk: A Feminist Analysis*. She uses an explicitly feminist frame of reference in an effort to undermine patriarchal conceptual frameworks and eliminate male linguistic dominance. Ayim’s argument is based on the claim that because language is a social practice, our linguistic interactions should be non-prejudicial and inclusive (*Moral* 97). Her interest stems from her belief that language, as a social practice, constructs reality.

Ayim is committed to a weak version of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, also known as linguistic determinism, claims that language use directly effects the ways in which people think about and perceive the world. In regard to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, Ayim contends the following: “What I am committed to is the much weaker claim that our perceptions and attitudes are *influenced by* the strengths and limitations of the language available to us” (Moral 95, author’s emphasis). Edward Sapir has the following to say in regard to the effect language has upon human thought and perception:

> Language is a guide to ‘social reality’ . . . [I]t powerfully conditions all our thinking about social problems and processes. Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of communication or reflection. The fact of the matter is that the ‘real world’ is to a large extent unconsciously built upon the language habits of the group . . . We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predisposes certain choices of interpretation (Sapir 68-69).
Sapir’s student Benjamin Whorf tested the hypothesis that language use directly impacts the ways in which people conceptualize reality by comparing the construction and use of language in different cultures. Whorf came to the conclusion that the Inuit, for example, must hone their perceptions of such things as snow, drifts, wind patterns and ice in order to survive. However, in the region where the Aztec Indians are situated, snowfall is abnormal and thus they have only one word to account for everything from cold to ice to snow and drifts.

An elementary school teacher with whom I recently spoke told me about her experiences with teaching kindergarten students and how the language in the stories she read to them had a significant impact on their play activities. This particular teacher had problems with some of the children mimicking the aggressive behavior of some of the cartoon characters they watched at home on television. She made the suggestion that they choose new characters to imitate from the stories she read to them in class. Following some of the children’s literature she selected to read, the kids stopped acting like warrior Ninja Turtles and started to play as though they were magical snow-plows helping people who were trapped in a blizzard.

It is likely that our perceptions and attitudes are effected by the limits of the language and images available to us in our social and cognitive environments. thus such symbolic interactions should be as inclusive, non-aggressive, and unprejudiced as possible.

3.2 Addressing Sexism and Racism

Matters such as the use of sexist language and the absence of minority and/or female voices in students’ coursework need to be recognized for what they are, if one
takes seriously the view that the way we understand reality, our values, and ourselves is through our experiences as social beings. Deborah K. Chappel says that the task of attempting to address issues such as gender and race discrimination in the classroom is difficult. As a white woman, Chappel feels as though she is “ventriloquizing” when she brings the issue of racism into the classroom (76). Moreover, Chappel is not optimistic that education is enough to combat discrimination.

It [education] only creates the facade so that the racism goes underground, becomes submerged and more subtle . . . . That’s what is so disturbing behind the whole presentation of knowledge as a tool to eradicate prejudice or any social ill, including sexism — increased awareness without social activism for change doesn’t help at all (Chappel 76).

Ayim is likewise concerned that increased awareness of sexism does not cause real attitude changes on the part of students and educators. “The sophisticated sexist can use superficial language changes to look good and ‘get off the hook’ for any deeper analysis” (Ayim, Moral 142). Ayim is more optimistic than Chappel and takes the position that even if an educator or classmate does hold hidden biases or subscribes to a sexist or racist ideology, the fact is that minority and female students benefit when they feel explicitly included in classroom discussions. Moreover, Ayim makes the claim that because of the social nature of our linguistic interchanges, they ought to be non-prejudicial and inclusive. Still Chappel’s point remains that paying lip service to opposing racism and sexism is dangerous, because it can have the effect of lulling would-be activists into the mind-set that working toward social change is no longer necessary.

3.3 The Adversarial Paradigm of Argument

In a similar manner to Ayim, feminist philosopher Janice Moulton (1980) challenges what she considers to be the adversarial model of reasoning that is
predominately applied in the teaching of argumentation in philosophy. Moulton maintains that much of philosophy consists of debate between adversaries who attempt to come up with counter-arguments and counter-examples to refute each other’s ideas. It is Moulton’s position that the focus of philosophy has become distorted because the adversarial model is presented as the primary model for philosophical reasoning. This model is problematic because it places too much emphasis on proving wrong, finding fault in, or challenging positions that are unlike our own in order to demonstrate that our own position can meet objections. What Moulton calls for is a new model or paradigm that places emphasis upon the relation amongst ideas in non-adversarial contexts.¹

In agreement with Moulton, I propose that we frame the issue of placing emphasis upon the relation amongst ideas in non-adversarial contexts in terms of moving toward the goal of supplementing the old paradigm of “mastering some subject matter” with a new paradigm of “creating a foundation for conceptual understanding.” Rather than separation from and mastery over some academic subject, genuine understanding involves intimacy and equality between self and the subject matter at hand (Belenky et al. 101). A paradigm shift that places emphasis upon the relation amongst ideas in non-adversarial contexts will undoubtedly prove to be quite a challenge given that “academic achievement is so closely calibrated with acquiring control over the subject matter that the notion of mastery is perceived as virtually synonymous with that of learning” (Ayim, Violence 185, my emphasis). Gearhart makes the point that the notion of mastery stems from a conquest/conversion mentality: “In the conquest model we invade or violate. In the conversion model of human interaction we work very hard not simply to conquer but

¹See Thomas Kuhn’s The Structure of Scientific Revolutions. It is Kuhn who uses the term ‘paradigm’ in the context of a discussion about scientific revolutions.
to get every assurance that our conquest of the victim is really giving her what she wants” (196). Thinking in terms of mastering a subject matter conjures images of dominance that are far from helpful in the establishment of a model of argumentation and communication that encourages decidedly cooperative and non-hierarchical social interaction.

3.3.1 Moulton and Rethinking Dialectical Obligations

Moulton contends that thinking about the process of arguing in terms of shoring up one’s dialectical obligations to an imagined opponent and mustering evidence to refute that opponent, is paradigmatic of the adversarial model of argument. Moulton’s criticisms of the adversarial model of argument have been largely overlooked by argument theorist Ralph Johnson (2000), who conceives of argument as a product in a dialectical practice whereby an arguer cannot discharge her or his obligation to a given audience, individual, or objector unless she or he considers and addresses objections and alternative positions. Given this description of Johnson’s model, one might think that fulfilling one’s dialectical obligations is similar to climbing a staircase that never ends. However, as Moulton points out “even an adversary does not think of all the things which ought to be criticized about a position, and even a proponent does not always think of all the possible responses to criticism” (420, my emphasis). In argument theory, the issue of determining when one has mustered enough evidence to refute the objections of a real or imagined opponent is known as the “regress problem” (Govier. Argument 218). The regress problem arises when one considers whether arguments in refutation of the objections and alternative positions of one’s interlocutor require supplementary objections and alternative positions ad infinitum.

Argument theorist Trudy Govier (1999) calls for a benign interpretation of the
regress problem, "benign" standing in contrast to "vicious" or "malignant." The regress problem is benign if treated in the following way: though a given line of reasoning could go forward indefinitely, it is not required that one formulate an infinite number of supplementary arguments, objections, and alternative positions (Govier, *Argument* 235-236). A benign interpretation of the regress problem is also similar to saying it is up to the arguers to say when enough is enough. The bottom line is that relying upon the inter-subjective determination of the arguers to say when enough is enough does not get argument theorists who yearn for objective standards any closer to their ideal. Their fear is that inter-subjective agreement can fall short of standards of reasonableness. As I indicated in section 2.1 of Chapter Two, it seems to me that there are no absolute standards of reasonableness and that the line between what is reasonable and what is unreasonable is redrawn by the participants of each argumentative juncture. Thus, though I object to the Johnson's notion of dialectical obligation on the grounds that it is largely in keeping with an adversarial model of argument, the regress problem is resolved to my satisfaction by a benign interpretation.

3.4 Playing the Dozens and the Adversarial Method

Susan Peterson (1980) warns that practice of holding one's own in academic debate can become ritualized to the point that it functions to create symbolic and or emotional distance from a given speech event. Peterson also makes the claim that in some ways the oral bantering back and forth we do in philosophy classrooms resembles a game called the Dozens. The Dozens is a game which consists of coming up with joking insults about another person's momma and is most often played by males. Playing the dozens would go something like this:
Player one: “Your momma’s so ugly, I mistook her for a baboon’s butt.”

Player two: “Your momma’s so fat, when she farts a smog alert goes out.”

Insults will continue to be thrown back and forth until an audience of one’s peers determines with jeers and laughter that one player has outdone the other with more witty and original retorts. “So one initial feature of the Dozens is skillful speech, where speech is useful for purposes of satisfying one’s needs and desires . . . . [It] tests one’s superiority to one’s peers, in an environment where other means to do so (such as having cars for status) are not available” (Peterson 437, author’s emphasis). The skills required at an academic conference or in the philosophy classroom differ from the skills required in the courtyard or the playground; however, skillful speech is necessary in both instances.

In regard to the Dozens, one thing that concerns me is the ease with which bantering insults back and forth can lead to real violence. I’ve experienced the playground version of the Dozens only once, when I was a child, with my next door neighbor’s nephew Marcus. We were playing together with some other children on the swing-set in Marcus’s aunt’s yard and the dogs at my house began barking at us. He proceeded to say something like, “Your mom is so ugly, I can’t tell if that’s her barking or the dog.” This was my first experience with the Dozens and for me there was no emotional distance from what Marcus said about my mom. Though fuming inside, I denied the allegation that my mom was a dog as the other children mockingly laughed — I could not think of a witty retort to save my life! I was so embarrassed that the other kids were laughing at my lack of verbal skill and silently vowed to get Marcus back. About an hour later when we were all playing softball, Marcus hit the ball quite a distance and proceeded to run from one base to the next. I sauntered toward third base and tripped him as he crossed
over it. Though I may not have had the wit to think of an instant comeback to his wisecrack about my mom, I could just as easily humiliate him by being physically violent. Being that Marcus was more than a little miffed over the fact that I tripped him, he picked up a bat and chased me home only seconds after he managed to brush off his scuffed and bleeding knees. As soon as I was safely inside my house, I told my mom that Marcus called her a dog and that I tripped him to defend her name, because I did not want to say anything mean about his mother.

My experience playing the Dozens as a child is relevant to a discussion of the adversarial paradigm in philosophy because both the Dozens and the adversarial model of argument are ritualized practices that function to create symbolic or emotional distance from a given speech event. To expand, the adversarial model of argument in the philosophy classroom and playing the Dozens function as rituals which free us "from personal responsibility for the acts in which we are engaged" (Peterson 437). In the eyes of my parents, the fact that Marcus insulted my mom was reason enough for me to escape punishment for tripping him. Similarly, using words as weapons to tear apart one another's ideas in the philosophy classroom and using logical self-defense to prevent being torn apart oneself, are justifiable under the guise of sharpening one's critical wits.

In the philosophy classroom, the academic Dozens occurs when student A tries to instigate a debate by criticizing a point made by student B. Student B is then expected to show how her or his position is able to withstand the criticism lodged by student A. If student B is unable to refute student A's criticism, then student B must retreat from her or his original stand. The classroom where this sort of interchange takes place often becomes a stage where students perform for their professor(s) in an attempt not only to
outshine other students with their argumentative prowess, but to prevent being outshone by them. Mary Bowman remarks, "I think the show-off style that regrettably some classes fall into and some professors tend to foster also occurs in published work and in delivered papers -- there often seems to be more interest in being pizzazzy than in really caring about and being engaged with the work" (81). Unfortunately, many classroom conversations do degenerate into feigned engagement for the sake of performing well or playing the academic Dozens. Furthermore, the fact that many women refuse to engage in what Peterson refers to as the "Macho Model" of philosophizing (i.e., the Dozens or the adversarial model) goes part of the way toward understanding why it is that women in philosophy find that the climate becomes increasingly chilly as they make their way further up the educational hierarchy.¹

We can escape the dangerous tendency for classroom discussions to turn into a game of the academic Dozens, if we transform our notion of argument from a battle of wits to an exchange of ideas where cooperation is the standard.

3.5 Is a More Cooperative Model Pedagogically Ineffective?

On the subject of new cooperative model or paradigm of argument and communication, I want to address the objection that a more cooperative and egalitarian academic environment would lead to the spoon-feeding and coddling of students. I contend that while there are problems with the adversarial model of argument, this does not mean that the cooperative model cannot be misemployed or taken too far. When I spoke at a conference on a decidedly cooperative model of argument, someone in the audience posed the question of whether a more cooperative model for doing argument is

¹ See the video entitled The Chilly Climate for Women in Colleges and Universities for a further examination of sex discrimination in education.
really just hand-holding. As an outspoken proponent of a more decidedly cooperative pedagogical model, Ayim argues, “I have no wish to eliminate competition or the competitive spirit from either the classroom or the real world. I do not want to turn our classrooms into nurseries and graduates suckling babies, for these could not survive in the world” (Dominance 85). In light of Ayim’s stance, the question of what type of competition should be fostered in the classroom remains. I generally think of competition in terms of a healthy striving to reach one’s own personal best. Belenky states that in being ‘too nurturant’ professors can rob students from taking responsibility for their own education (213). There is some truth to Belenky’s theory about professors “taking care” of students to the point that they become unable to motivate themselves to learn without the direct involvement of a professor. As in most of life, a healthy relationship between students and educators is contingent upon striking a balance between nurturing too much and not nurturing enough. In the same way, fostering a cooperative pedagogical environment can be taken too far if competition, in the sense of a healthy striving to reach one’s own personal best, is eliminated.

3.5.1 Is Adversariality in Argument Harmful?

The following question comes to the surface in thinking about argument as a cooperative venture: “What if my interlocutor is intent on tearing down my ideas?” Though Gandhi’s position of passive resistance was arguably the right method to use in an effort to liberate India from British rule, I am not so sure that passive resistance is the best technique to employ in a situation where I am being argumentatively attacked by my interlocutor. From a feminist perspective, it seems that being assertive and speaking my mind is a more empowering plan than is maintaining a cooperative stance while another
person takes a combative approach. For women who are only now learning to resist the
dominant discourse of society that denigrates the social standing of women and to
establish their own voices, thinking of argument in terms of cooperating sounds an awful
lot like a prescription to continue sacrificing one’s own perspectives and silencing one’s
voice to accommodate those who want to keep women in a position of powerlessness.

If one takes the position that those who learn the techniques necessary to defend
their arguments are in a better position than those without such skills, one might start to
wonder whether the adversarial paradigm is really so troublesome after all. One young
woman claims that though her father, whom she loves dearly, used to be able “deflate” her
with his voice and words. After learning some argumentative skills at university, she
excitedly realized she could “prick his bubble” before he could deflate hers (Belenky et al.
111). She asserts, “It is something I learned in the big world, that you don’t have to be
polite and concede the other person’s point. You’re much better off if you deal from a
position of strength. That way you’re going to be less of a victim . . .” (Belenky et al.
111). This particular woman felt empowered by employing the argumentative skills
necessary to hold her own ground in discussions with her father. As a result of learning
to use her new-found argumentative skills to her own advantage, she grew to differentiate
between being critical of her father, whom she very much loved, and being critical of
whatever point of view he was arguing. The issue was no longer a question of being
polite to her father or being impolite, because more importantly she recognized that
claiming her own agency entailed defending her perspective. Moreover, she learned that
communicating her views effectively necessarily involved the giving of reasons in support
of those views.
It is important to understand that the giving of reasons in support of one's position need not slip into adversariality. In fact, if one wants to present a counter-argument to the case another person presents, it is essential first to try to interpret charitably what the other person is arguing. According to Daniel Cohen, the genuine understanding of another person's argument requires a sympathetic reading (182). To understand genuinely we need to know more than just the steps in reasoning a person has taken to arrive at some position, we must consider that person's beliefs, values, attitudes, and feelings. One's argumentative partner's beliefs, values, attitudes, and feelings are all relevant aspects of the context in which an argument occurs. Moreover, being attuned to where one's argumentative partner is coming from will in some circumstances be more important than simply offering reasons in support of one's own perspective.

In situations that do call for the countering of another's argument, it is imperative to do so in such a way that the person does not feel attacked. As Deanna Kuhn (1991) points out, for some people there is a delicate line between their beliefs and their very selves (182). Thus, sensitivity is needed when going about countering the positions others hold. Kathleen Miller makes the claim that "if part of the population values sensitivity and understanding in the appraisal of intellectual ideas, it is quite possible to effect the evolution of these values within a world-view based upon the rules of logic, reason, and critical thinking" (340). It is just such an evolution that is much needed within the aforementioned fields, as the majority of the models educators are using at this time teach students well enough how to find fault in the positions others advance but neglect to point out that the context in which an argument occurs often requires going beyond simply criticizing others.
3.6 Nye’s Critique of Argument

In *Words of Power* (1990), Andrea Nye argues that critical thinking, argument, and logic are alien to feminist aims and should be replaced with “the skills of reading: attention, listening, understanding, and responding” (183). For Nye, women are more acutely able to “read” people’s motivations or unconscious desires because of the subservient status they have historically held in society. Trudy Govier objects to Nye’s notion of “reading” on the grounds that she does not believe that what Nye calls “reading” and the practice of offering arguments are mutually exclusive, but rather that each mutually involves the other. Moreover, Govier argues that Nye does not spend enough time explaining what “reading” is beyond claiming that those who “read” will be able to infer the motivations of others on the basis of what they communicate in their writing and/or orally (*Argument* 58).

Despite the fact that Nye believes argument is alien to feminist aims, Daniel Cohen’s non-confrontational approach to argument involves “reading” in a manner that is consistent with Nye’s definition of “reading” as being a skill that requires attention, listening, understanding, and responding. For Cohen, “[r]eaders need to argue with meaning alongside, the author rather than with, meaning against. the author in order to enhance whatever it is that the text is saying, showing, or doing” (182). Though Cohen differs from Nye in that he is not prepared to toss out the practice of argument whole cloth, his understanding of “reading” as the co-creation of meaning between reader and author is conceptually in sync with Nye’s notion of “reading” as inferring what others are attempting to communicate. Thus, I propose that Nye open up her definition of “reading” to include Cohen’s sense of arguing alongside an author in an attempt to
enhance one’s understanding of what that person is saying, showing, or doing.

3.7 Trebilcot’s Methodology

Joyce Trebilcot rejects the notion that the adversarial method is necessary in order to compete in the “marketplace of ideas.” Moreover, she eschews the argument-as-war model and urges the implementation of what she calls *dyke methods* in an attempt to support difference and understanding amongst wimmin. Trebilcot asserts, “my focus is how as a dyke -- a conscious, committed, political lesbian -- I can use words in thinking, speaking, and writing to contribute to the discovery/creation of consciously lesbian realities” (1). Though Trebilcot is specifically working from a position of lesbian separatism, it seems to me that her theory has somewhat broader applicability. To clarify, lesbian separatists believe that in order to dislodge male supremacist and/or hetero-patriarchal culture, it is necessary that women refrain from heterosexual relationships. Trebilcot’s unambiguously identifies herself as both a feminist and a lesbian separatist and states that her goal is the liberation of women generally, though the road she takes to further that goal (i.e., lesbian separatism) may differ from the road taken by other feminists. In regard to the connection between lesbian realities and feminism, many lesbians with whom I have spoken claim that feminist views are in harmony with the ways in which they try to live their lives both personally and politically.

At this point, it strikes me as necessary to briefly introduce *some* of the different camps that are situated under the umbrella of feminism, before proceeding with a discussion of Trebilcot’s principles. Let me begin, then, with the Marxist or socialist feminist. The Marxist feminist claims that the major obstacle women face is the existing

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5 I use the word ‘wimmin’ whenever I am referring to Trebilcot’s ideas about women.
capitalist system, which subjugates women and limits their potential. For Marxist feminists, women are in the position of the proletariat or the working class and men are in the position of the owners of the means of production or the capitalists. What is necessary is the overthrow of capitalism and implementation of communism, whereby women will be able to achieve their true humanity alongside men.

There are also Afrocentric and Asian feminist challenges to Eurocentric or Anglocentric feminism. Afrocentric and Asian feminists speak of the absence of minority voices in mainstream feminist discourse. Their challenge goes something like the following: you might think that European-American feminists are under the erroneous assumption that all women are homogeneously situated in white, middle to upper class realities by the frequency with which minority women's issues come to occupy anything but the margins of feminist discourse. One explicit goal of feminism is the inclusion of women whose voices and experiences have been marginalized, silenced, or not brought into the dialectic for consideration. Though the feminist project attempts to address the issues of discrimination, social privilege, and marginalization as they affect women generally, it is important to recognize that women have diverse beliefs and experiences which need to be taken into account on an individual basis.

Additionally, there are liberal feminists. The liberal feminist argues that females should have the same opportunities as males do, even if this necessitates a mechanism like affirmative action to enforce equitable hiring practices. However, it is unlikely that all liberal feminists would agree that affirmative action is entirely beneficial, as even women who are situated within the same feminist camps argue that assuming too much homogeneity is a problem.
Finally, there are also radical feminists who claim that the cause of women’s subjection is biological. The radical feminist is a technocrat at heart and believes that ultimately technology will “snap the link between sex and reproduction and thus liberate women from our childbearing and child-raising function . . .” (Jaggar, *Political 262*). I think of the radical feminists Jaggar describes as possessing a vision similar to Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*, but without the dystopian overtones. However, it seems apparent that Jaggar and Cindy L. Griffin think of radical feminism in somewhat different terms. Griffin claims that the radical feminist perspective rests on the following three assumptions:

(a) the oppression of women is at the root of all other systems of oppression and subordination;
(b) important insights can be gained from women’s own experiences of oppression; and (c) primary energy is devoted not to ‘organizing direct confrontation with the patriarchy’ but rather devoted to ‘developing alternative social arrangements’ (159).

Given the above assumptions, Griffin’s perceptions about ‘radical’ feminism do not come across as all that radical. Ecofeminists would definitely concede that the oppression of women is at the root of our existing environmental difficulties. Moreover, Treblicot herself favors the creation of spaces that are devoted exclusively to wimmin in their efforts to withstand the influence of patriarchy.

In regard to Treblicot’s principles for “withstanding the influence of patriarchy,” what strikes me as of particular interest is the significance she places on context. It is her claim that dyke methods apply only in the context of wimmin’s space. Treblicot’s principles are as follows:

1) I speak only for myself.

2) I do not try to get other wimmin to accept my beliefs in place of their own.
3) There is no “given.”

It is Trebilcot’s second principle that strikes me as pertinent to a discussion of communicative and argumentative exchanges. In a vein similar to Sonja K. Foss and Cindy Griffin’s proposal for an invitational rhetoric and Sally Miller Gearhart’s proposal to “womanize” rhetoric, which I will address in Chapter Four, Trebilcot is committed to the principle of non-persuasion. However, Trebilcot’s principle of non-persuasion applies only in wimmin’s spaces or in spaces where “both patriarchal and feminist elements have a significant part of the situation” (Trebilcot 3). Underlying Trebilcot’s decision to use persuasive techniques in patriarchal spaces, is her belief that the most effective means of getting resources for wimmin from those with patriarchal power is to attempt to change their beliefs. In wimmin’s spaces, where difference is respected and valued, there is no need to try to persuade other wimmin to change their beliefs, as making much ado about the ways in which wimmin’s opinions differ undermines the goal of achieving unity in the midst of diversity. There will certainly be differences of opinion about what to do or believe within wimmin’s spaces; however, Treblicot’s principles provide a solid foundation for beginning the process of resolving differences while at the same time respecting the autonomy of others.

Trebilcot’s perspective on difference and persuasion in wimmin’s spaces diverges somewhat from Trudy Govier’s ideas on the matter. From Govier’s perspective, “[t]hose who seek recognition and respect for difference should think long and hard before rejecting the practice of argument, because the practice of argument is based on the acknowledgement of difference” (Perspectives 201). Though Govier recognizes that the controversy that gets stirred up when two people disagree has a destabilizing effect, she
is of the opinion that a modest amount of adversariality is not really all that harmful because it helps one to think more carefully about the reasons as to why some beliefs seem more personally gratifying than other beliefs (Argument 52).

I agree with Govier’s position that controversy can prove beneficial, because it forces one to think of reasons as to why her or his view is preferable to someone else’s. However, I am far more inclined to think that endorsing even minimal amounts of adversariality perpetuate a mind-set of attacking others’ positions and defending one’s own ideas to the detriment of all involved.

In the context of wimmin’s space, or any environment where cooperation with others is of primary importance, argument may not be the best way to proceed, because controversy places people who are seeking solidarity in a precarious position. Thus, those who regard exploring shared beliefs as a more important matter than examining difference, will more than likely find opportunities to incite controversy counter-productive.

3.8 Goals and Conflict

Argument theorist Michael Gilbert blends conflict theory and interpersonal communication theory to arrive at what he terms Coalescent Argumentation (1997). Gilbert defines Coalescent Argumentation as “a joining together or merging of divergent positions by forming the basis for mutual investigation of non-conflictual options...” (103). Some coalescent procedures include the following: a) be aware of both your own position and the position of your dispute partner; b) find the points you and your dispute partner share in common; and c) attempt to maximize shared goals and satisfy conflicting goals (Gilbert 120-128).
Though Gilbert believes a coalescent approach may well prove useful in many interpersonal and argumentative interchanges, he clearly states that Coalescent Argumentation should not be used as an exclusive tool to investigate a position. Gilbert is also cautious to mention that Coalescent Argumentation is not a panacea for arguers in all argumentative encounters, as even the most avowed practitioners of this approach can and do come across as quarrelsome or antagonistic. Additionally, Gilbert warns that adversariality may surface as a veiled commitment of which an arguer has little or no conscious awareness.

Gilbert tends to analyze argumentative situations in terms of one’s goals. Thus, asking the question, “What is my goal here?” can help to clarify an argumentative exchange before it proceeds any further. Gilbert thinks we can have face goals (i.e., goals that include maintaining or improving our relationships with others) and task goals (i.e., target goals of accomplishing some particular measure). At times when we argue we will value maintaining the relationship with the person with whom we are arguing more so than we will getting the person to see our perspective. Then again, there are times when subtlety is not the best way to proceed and getting a particular issue out into the open takes priority over relationship maintenance.

Overall, I think it is important to be cognizant of the ways in which face goals and task goals weave in and out of the fabric of our argumentative and communicative exchanges with others. For example, I may feel confident that I need to get something off my chest so much that I do not care how doing so will effect my relationship with the person to whom I am revealing those feelings. That is, my task goal will outweigh any face goals I might have. Yet, at the same time the fact that I am even addressing my
concerns or revealing my feelings in the first place could stand as some indication that I care enough about the relationship with that other person to engage in the conflict necessary to make it so that the relationship is first-rate rather than merely superficial (i.e., a face goal). By a first-rate relationship I mean a relationship that I care enough about to go through the effort or conflict necessary to try to resolve issues that exist.

Though conflict is a standard feature of communicating one’s feelings to those with whom one has first-rate relationships, one has to be really careful not to let conflict arbitrate how all of one’s communicative exchanges are conducted. In interpersonal relationships, a perceived slight may be all the fuel necessary to ignite a quarrel. Moreover, repeating old patterns of conflict time and time again in one’s interpersonal relationships, much like the the deeply embedded adversarial metaphors in much of our discourse about argument, is a harmful cycle that is easy to get caught up in and difficult to escape. It is important to recognize that our ability to discover and/or create non-adversarial alternatives is influenced by the limits of the language and images available to us in our social and cognitive environments. One aspect of precipitating change within our communicative interactions is embracing the nurturing characteristics that have been linked to women’s linguistic practices. Among such practices is the notion of reciprocal dialogue, whereby others are invited and welcomed to offer their perspectives and encouraged to add to the conversation.

**3.9 Conclusion and Outlining Chapter Four**

In the process of trying to formulate argument and communication practices that take seriously the idea that gender is an organizing force in our argumentative and

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*For more about conflict in first-rate and superficial relationships see Nancy Legge’s “What Did You Mean by That?” The function of perception in interpersonal argument.”* Argumentation and Advocacy. 29 (1992): 41-60.
communicative interactions, it is evident that feminist insights are integral to the task of sorting the useful practices from those which frustrate the aim of creating a more inclusive climate for sharing understanding.

In Chapter Four, I will continue exploring whether our communicative and argumentative practices should be further modified in light of feminist critiques. I will investigate Sally Miller Gearhart's efforts to "womanize" rhetoric and Sonja Foss and Cindy Griffin's theory of invitational rhetoric. Additionally, I will discuss the methods used by Carl Rogers in his client-centered approach to therapy, with the goal of deciding whether the benefits of reflective listening can be generally applied to our argumentative and communicative exchanges.
Chapter Four: Rhetoric, Communication, and Argumentation

Thus far, I have been examining gender as an organizing force in the social practices of argumentation and communication. I have also been inquiring into the implementation of non-adversarial ways of conducting our argumentative and communicative exchanges. In keeping with the aforementioned concerns, I investigate Sally Miller Gearhart’s view that the “womanization” of rhetoric has the potential to lead to an understanding of communication as act of co-creation, as opposed to persuasion. I then explore Sonja Foss and Cindy Griffin’s theory of invitational rhetoric. I also discuss Rogerian rhetoric, as developed by Carl Rogers, in an attempt to demonstrate that fully understanding one’s interlocutor requires reflective listening. Finally, I propose a reconceptualized view of rhetorical communication on the basis of the ideas explored in this chapter. The overall aim of this chapter is to explore some alternatives to the traditional notion that persuasion is necessarily the goal of all acts of rhetorical argumentation.

4.1 Characterizing Rhetoric and Presenting Alternatives to Persuasion

Before moving forward, it is necessary to clarify some terminology and to provide some relevant background information. Firstly, attempting to define ‘rhetoric’ will no doubt prove to be as difficult as trying to define ‘argument’ and ‘feminism.’ The earliest and most traditional or classical definitions of rhetoric characterize it in terms of persuasion and the study of formal, intentional, and spoken discourse (Foss et al. 6). “More recent definitions have broadened the scope of rhetoric to include any kind of symbol use -- verbal, visual, formal, informal, completed, or emergent . . .” (Foss et al. 6). Additionally, the goal of studying rhetoric is no longer focused solely upon learning how
to persuade others; rather, it is reconceptualized in *non-persuasive* or *invitational* terms whereby the rhetor and the audience share their perspectives on how things make sense to them. A uniquely *invitational* rhetoric, as developed by Foss and Griffin (1995), presupposes that sharing understanding about how the world makes sense from one's unique perspective disavows the use of persuasive means to attempt to change and/or dominate others.

The term *rhetoric* is recognized as one category among three in modern argument theory. The three existing categories, which were most finely worked out by Aristotle, include the following: logic, dialectic, and rhetoric (Eemeren, F. H. van et al. 31).

Logic alone is said to lead to indisputable conclusions. A logical argument is formally valid if the conclusion follows necessarily from the premises and deductively sound if all the premises are true and the argument valid.

In dialectic argumentation, the proponent of a thesis argues for or against a thesis by using premises that are not known with certainty to be true, though they may be commonly accepted by one's audience. Dialectic argumentation can be *dialogical* in the sense that two interlocutors are engaged in a back-and-forth conversation of sorts. A dialectical *debate* can be construed in terms of two interlocutors posing questions to each other. However, the practice of *debate* is primarily *monological* in the sense that interlocutors are generally performing a monologue before a judge, jury, or an audience with the aim of *defeating* each other. In other words, the target audience in a *monological* debate is a third party. I realize that a monological debate seems to be a contradiction in terms, since the notion of a debate also seems tied to a back-and-forth exchange between interlocutors. However, the point I am making here is that the practice of debate itself is
monological because an often silent third party is addressed, rather than one’s interlocutor. I recognize that monological debate is necessary, for example, in the courtroom; however, establishing a dialogue between interlocutors is crucial in situations where two opposing parties desire to better understand the position of the other.

There is overlap between monological debate before a judge, jury, or audience and rhetoric that preserves persuasion as its primary aim. There is also overlap between dialectical argumentation that is dialogical and an invitational or non-persuasive rhetorical approach. Monological debate and rhetoric with the goal of persuasion maintain a frame of reference whereby arguments are generally construed militaristically or in terms of a winner and a loser. In dialectical argumentation that is dialogical and in a rhetorical approach that is invitational or non-persuasive, two interlocutors or the rhetor and her or his audience participate together in a back-and-forth dialogue. In other words, both dialectical argumentation that is dialogical and decidedly non-persuasive rhetoric reject adversarial or aggressive intentions for the higher goal of creating an environment where mutual communication can occur. I maintain that when rhetorical communication is reconceptualized in non-persuasive terms, the possibility of a mutual exchange or dialogue between two seemingly opposing parties unfolds so as to facilitate change and problem solving.

4.2 Exposition of Gearhart’s Rhetorical Approach

Gearhart views communication as an act of co-creation. In other words, she believes that when we communicate with others we can set out to create or co-create an atmosphere where people with the internal basis for change might convince themselves of some proposal (Gearhart 198). Gearhart’s distinction between intending-to-change and
changing an audience is as follows: the intention-to-change model springs from a conquest/conversion mentality; whereas, the creation or co-creation of environments, which enable the natural process of changing and being changed by others to unfold, spring from the recognition of each individual’s integrity. Moreover, she understands the intention to change another as an act of violence and a violation of one’s own integrity and the integrity of others. Gearhart also claims that one does not need to use whips and rifles to coerce others; language and metaleanguage can be just as effective.

Gearhart believes the intent-to-change model of communication is the by-product of an exclusively male rhetorical perspective. If you recall, *rhetoric* is traditionally defined as speech given by a rhetor who intends to persuade a given audience. Gearhart challenges the aforementioned definition and asserts that the patriarchal establishment has taken it as a given that “it is a proper and even necessary human function to attempt to change others” (Gearhart 195). Gearhart argues that as a result of leaving unquestioned the assumption that the intent-to-change model is the only proper mind-set for a rhetorician to have, communication scholars have gone about teaching rhetoric as a matter of conquest and/or conversion. The solution is not for rhetoricians to commit suicide or give up teaching. In fact, it is rhetoricians who are in the best position to transform pedagogical practices from intending-to-change to creating or co-creating the possibility for change. The problem is that most teachers of communication and rhetoric take a “let me show you the way” pedagogical approach with students (Gearhart 195). In other words, most teachers of communication and rhetoric start out with the intent-to-change students instead of trying to institute a more egalitarian atmosphere. Gearhart emphasizes that the manner and intentionality of the words spoken in the classroom are
important to creating an egalitarian environment (199).

Gearhart blends conflict theory, interpersonal communication, and the use of good reason in controversy to arrive at the ideal learning situation. For Gearhart, a learning situation is the mutual transference of energy for the purposes of growth, whereas the conflictual encounter is thought of in terms of a dialogue (198). In either a learning situation or a conflictual encounter, Gearhart believes each party should contribute to the following:

(1) an atmosphere in which change can take place on both ends;

(2) respect for difference;

(3) a feeling of general equality; and

(4) a willingness to yield to the other position of the other (198-199).

Gearhart is an “insider” in the sense that she teaches communication and identifies herself as a rhetorician. She notes that rhetoric has traditionally been used by preachers, lawyers, and politicians. The preacher converts the sinner, the lawyer the jury or judge, and the politician an opposing political party. The aforementioned rhetors all think of themselves as “civilized,” because they engage in “rational discourse” rather than being physically violent. Gearhart does not draw a patent distinction between being compelled by another’s reasons and being coerced. However, Gearhart would likely agree that it is misguided to attempt to offer compelling reasons as to why someone else should change or consider changing, unless that other person has within herself or himself an internal basis for change.

Gearhart’s message is prophetic in the sense that she considers the task of altering the intent-to-change and the conquest/conversion models of communication to be vital to
the survival of the Earth and every being upon it. Gearhart contends that in order to assure the survival of the Earth and every being upon it, the "womanization" of rhetoric, communication, and culture is required. Gearhart also argues that feminism must also be embraced, as feminism respects difference and understands individuals as whole persons and "is at the very least the rejection of the conquest/conversion model of interaction..." (Gearhart 200). As a species, our heritage is filled with holy wars, burnings at the stake, and conquistadors who took more than their share. Gearhart believes we need not and ought not recapitulate our violent heritage as we participate in the dance of life and communicate with others.

In the process of womanizing rhetoric, Gearhart advises that a rhetor perform not as "the-one-who-with-his-power-will-change-lives," but as "she-who-is-the-home-of-this-particular-human-interaction" (200). She also transforms the notion of the rhetor or speaker into what she considers a nurturing atmosphere where growth and change can take place. This transformation of the rhetor or speaker into the notion of an atmosphere is connected to Gearhart's reconceptualization of the whole communicative environment in terms of a "matrix" or a "womb" (199). Given the idea of a matrix or womb, we no longer need to think in terms of intending to change others, but instead as co-creating and sustaining an atmosphere where change is possible. We think in terms of co-creating and sustaining an environment where change is possible for the purpose of enabling those with the internal basis for change to change on their own accord.

*In regard to Gearhart's mention of our self-destruction as a species, I agree that it is conceivable from an environmental perspective that human beings are destroying the planet. Notwithstanding, Gearhart uses the feminine pronouns 'she' and 'her' when talking about the Earth and in doing so perpetuates the traditional identification of woman with nature. I am suspicious of playing into age-old stereotypes about women's connectedness with nature. Embracing theories about the place 'woman' occupies in the cosmological scheme of things is particularly dangerous when that same schema has been used for centuries to silence and exclude women from positions of power.*
Gearhart anticipates that a womanized model of communication will invariably possess the non-violent traits that women have been conditioned to accept and think of as uniquely their own. Gearhart acknowledges that it will be difficult for both women and men to come to value the womanization of any discipline, because one of the worst insults a man can be charged with is that he drives, throw a ball, or does anything like a woman. Moreover, Gearhart realizes that women in academia have been expending an abundance of their energy on trying not to think, talk, or act like women in order to gain the same respect as men. In addition, Gearhart expects many rhetorical communication scholars will consider enacting the role of co-creator of an atmosphere suspect because of the emphasis placed upon systems that reiterate that our survival depends on winning arguments against competitors.

4.3 A Critique of Gearhart’s Approach

Though I agree with Gearhart that in seeking to dominate or control others we can get trapped in self-perpetuating systems whereby others react toward us in a similar manner, I disagree with Gearhart’s assertion that the intent-to-change others is always a violation both of our own integrity and the integrity of others. Gearhart seems to overlook persuasive contexts which do not involve dominating or controlling others, but which do involve the intent-to-change them. One such counter-example would be the case of a grammar instructor who goes into the classroom with the intent-to-change the students she works with so as to help them to improve their skills. I worked with such a professor in the academic writing center at the university I attended as an undergraduate. This particular professor had a passion for teaching English as a second language students, because she knew they would likely be discriminated against in the job market if they did
not attain a certain level of competence with English. The students this professor taught were very much interested in acquiring the skills necessary to demonstrate competence with written and spoken English (i.e., they assumed working with her would change or transform their ability).

Not only does the idea of refusing to intend-to-change others seem inadequate as a general pedagogical model, it also opens the door to saying that it is important to proceed with integrity when it comes to confronting someone who, for example, denies the Holocaust. In the case of the Holocaust denier, I would go into such a situation not only intending to refute the position that the Holocaust never happened, but also with the intent-to-change the mind of the arguer by presenting reasons and evidence to the contrary. I am sympathetic to Gearhart’s suggestion of creating or co-creating an atmosphere whereby people with the internal basis for change might convince themselves of some proposition. However, in some situations I would be willing to attempt to “create” such an environment only to the extent that I might be in a better position to change the mind of the person who advances a claim with which I very much disagree. My approach is preferable in the instance of someone like the Holocaust denier because I take the position that I can make a compelling case by offering reasons in support of the reality of the Holocaust, while still maintaining respect for the integrity of the person who professes a mistaken belief.

Overall, Gearhart’s proposal to womanize rhetoric rightly recognizes a better method for effecting change in others by stressing the importance of co-creating an atmosphere whereby people with the internal basis for change might convince themselves

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\(^7\) For an extensive discussion of Holocaust denial see pages 144-156 of Christopher Tindale’s *Acts of Arguing.*

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of some proposal. However, Gearhart’s theory could be better developed if she explored the idea that people can compel others or offer reasons for making some change without necessarily trying to coerce or dominate them.

4.4 An Exposition of Foss and Griffin’s Invitational Rhetoric

In “Beyond Persuasion: A Proposal for an Invitational Rhetoric,” Sonja K. Foss and Cindy L. Griffin challenge the presupposition that persuasion is a necessary element of all rhetorical transactions. They argue that the equation of rhetoric with persuasion is just one conception; rhetoric as an invitation is another. Foss and Griffin also contend that the definition of rhetoric as persuasion exemplifies a patriarchal bias that accords positive value to attempts to change, control, or dominate others. Invitational rhetors recognize the inherent value others possess and as a result refuse to impose their perspectives on their audience(s). Stated differently, when a rhetor takes an invitational approach there is no conversion process whereby the audience is made to feel inadequate by the superiority of the rhetor’s perspective.

Foss and Griffin’s notion of rhetoric involves inviting an audience to “see” the world from the rhetor’s perspective and 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 practice of presenting one’s perspective is embodied in the notion of “offering.” The notion of offering stands in contrast to the view that a rhetor’s focus should be to increase the audience’s adherence to the rhetor’s position. Foss and Griffin object that relying upon the conceptual framework of convincing an audience of some position, limits the ideas the rhetor can present to only those that will persuade the audience.
Foss and Griffin’s analysis of offering is similar to Joyce Treblicot’s idea that in “wimmin’s space” each participant brings to the table her perspective in the same way a pot-luck supper might come together.¹ In the invitational model, a rhetor who would like audience members to offer ideas, can take the approach of announcing that the perspectives she or he presents are tentative and that suggestions are encouraged. After listening to a speaker’s perspective, the floor is open to audience members to contribute their own perspectives and to ask questions. The purpose of asking the speaker a question is to try to learn more about where she or he is coming from, as opposed to trying to tear down her or his ideas to establish the superiority of one’s own view.

Foss and Griffin outline three external conditions which must be satisfied between a rhetor and her or his audience for a rhetorical transaction to be considered genuinely invitational. These conditions include safety, freedom, and value. The development of a safe environment fosters trust between the audience and the rhetor. “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” (Foss and Griffin 11). Freedom comes about in giving others the opportunity to develop and share their ideas. In the process of cultivating a safe environment where people feel they have the freedom to collaborate with others and to reason from alternative standpoints, positive value is ascribed to all persons who are a party to such efforts.

Feminist principles serve as the starting point for the development of Foss and Griffin’s invitational rhetoric, though feminists are not the only ones to have dealt with

¹ See page 5 of Joyce Treblicot’s “Dyke Methods or Principles for the Discovery/Creation of the Withstanding” for a more detailed description of how contributing one’s ideas can be conceived in terms of a pot-luck supper.
and developed the various components of invitational rhetoric (5). What makes Foss and Griffin’s theory decidedly feminist is its grounding in the feminist principles of “equality, immanent value, and self-determination” (2). An invitational approach enables both rhetors and audience members the communicative option of putting forward their perspectives in an atmosphere of equality where individual autonomy is respected and diverse perspectives are valued. In recognizing others as imminently valuable, a rhetor will avoid infringing upon their “rights to believe as they choose and to act in ways they believe are best for them” (3). Moreover, the principal of self-determination takes it as given that individuals are competent to make decisions for themselves in regard to their beliefs and decisions. In other words, Foss and Griffin’s notion of invitational rhetoric is anti-paternalistic in the sense that each person is an expert or an authority about what is right for her or him (4).

Foss and Griffin assert that “invitational rhetoric may contribute to the effort of communication scholars who are working to develop models for cooperative, nonadversarial, and ethical communication” (15). They are cautious to present invitational rhetoric as “only one of many equally legitimate perspectives possible” and assert that though change may be a consequence of invitational rhetoric, change is not the goal (8). Change can occur on the part of the rhetor and/or the audience as a result of new understanding or awareness. Foss and Griffin are also careful to qualify that persuasion is a necessary tool in some communicative contexts. Additionally, Foss and Griffin stipulate that invitational rhetoric is not an attempt to describe how all women communicate and can be employed by both women and men.
4.5 A Critique of Foss and Griffin’s Approach

I agree with Foss and Griffin’s overall position that attempting to dominate, control, or make one’s audience feel inadequate is a detrimental way to proceed rhetorically, because it is likely to be counter-productive to effective communication. Additionally, the notion of inviting an audience to “see” the world through the spectacles one uses to make sense of reality is a beneficial alternative to thinking of a rhetor’s aim solely in terms of persuading her or his audience, because conceiving of rhetoric solely in terms of persuasion unnecessarily restricts the kinds of rhetorical communication that can take place in varying contexts. However, I am not convinced that inviting another to share my perspective is all that importantly different from trying to persuade someone to “see” the world as I do.

I will now expand upon the objection that inviting another to share my perspective does not seem all that importantly different from trying to persuade someone. In an effort to expand this idea, I purpose the following scenario: I am sleeping at night and people on the sidewalk outside my window are howling and awaken me. My question is whether or not my desire to change their noise to silence has anything to do with me wanting power or control over them. Even if I go as far as to get out of bed and go out to the porch to ask them to be quiet, my goal remains to change their noise to silence, to persuade them to be quiet, and/or to share my perspective that it is rude to howl in a residential area at night when people are sleeping. My point here is that it does not really matter whether or not I describe my desire for a peaceful night’s sleep in terms of an invitation to others to be quiet or in terms of persuasive speech given to an audience of rowdies. The scenario above is not meant to detract from the strength of Foss and
Griffin's proposal for an invitational rhetoric, but only to serve as warning to be wary of getting carried away by the positive emotions words such as "share" or "invite" can connote.

In describing a uniquely *invitational* rhetorical approach, Foss and Griffin contrast it to the traditional definition of rhetoric as speech given by a rhetor who intends to *persuade* a given audience. However, Foss and Griffin characterize the process of *persuading* one's audience in ways that I find unrealistic. To specify, it is unrealistic to suppose that all attempts to *persuade* someone stem from an effort to dominate and/or gain power over them. In other words, "One can ethically and fairly do more than just share viewpoints and invite others to adopt them if they wish" (Fulkerson 213). I agree that embedded in some attempts to change others is a desire to have power over or control them, but this is not always the case. The instance of the proselytizer going about a personal crusade to bring the nation into what she or he believes is a "right" relationship with a deity, is far more rare than are decidedly persuasive contexts which do not arise out of a conquest/conversion mentality.

Another critique of Foss and Griffin's invitational approach is levied indirectly by Christopher Tindale (1999). Tindale argues that rhetorical argumentation is not essentially adversarial. In Tindale's understanding, which he argues goes back to Aristotle's proposal in the *Rhetoric*: "[t]he audience is invited into the argumentation to become part of it, where argumentation is an act of reciprocal involvement" (17). In other words, rhetoric must be invitational in the sense that the audience persuades themselves of some viewpoint on the basis of the reflections they draw from the ideas the arguer presents. For Tindale, Foss and Griffin's contrast between invitational rhetoric and the
so-called “traditional approach” stems from a misunderstanding of classical rhetorical theory. However, Tindale’s claim that traditional or classical rhetoric contains an important sense of invitation to the audience is a controversial one. At this point I will not try to resolve the controversy, though there may be an issue here worth exploring further at another time.

A final point of contention with Foss and Griffin’s approach is that they oversimplify the task of developing a more adequate rhetorical model by demonizing persuasion as a patriarchal tool and exalting nurturing or cooperative methods as the domain of the feminine. As M. Lane Bruner argues, “[t]o suggest that women cannot aggressively seek change while at the same time nurturing their communities disempowers women by creating a false dichotomy between seeking influence and caring” (194). Following Bruner, I believe that history attests to the fact that women have made strides toward relative equality with men as a result of actively agitating oppressive laws and conventions. I understand that women may be perceived as embodying something other than the feminine ideal when they use persuasive rhetorical strategies to challenge patriarchal authority. One of the first charges lodged against suffragists was that they were neglecting their roles as mothers and nurturers by becoming politically active. My main objection to Foss and Griffin’s position is that they seem to be claiming that women cannot be both nurturing and use persuasive techniques to instigate change. Following communication scholars who have focused their research upon great women orators, I maintain that women have had to use persuasive rhetorical techniques, despite the fact that doing so runs contrary to behavior that is stereotypically identified with their sex.
4.6 Exposition of Rogerian Rhetoric and Reflective Listening

In "Dealing with Breakdowns in Communication -- Interpersonal and Intergroup," Carl Rogers explores what blocks or hinders communication and how to extricate it. Rogers is a psychotherapist and an advocate of a client-centered therapeutic approach. His research involves the investigation of tensions between small groups and individuals. He believes that a person seeks therapy (or at least ought to) when communication has broken down internally between her or his subconscious and conscious mind. A block in communication between one's subconscious and conscious mind can often manifest itself in interpersonal difficulties. Rogers takes it as the therapist's task to help a client achieve good communication both internally and with others.

For Rogers the therapist/client relationship provides a parallel for our communicative exchanges generally. Rogers claims that the "major barrier to mutual interpersonal communication is our very natural tendency to judge, to evaluate, to approve or disapprove, the statement of the other person, or the other group" (330). Stated differently, the reaction most people have when another or others express an opinion is to evaluate or judge that opinion immediately. For example, when I say that "I really enjoyed movie X," my communicative partner is apt to reply, "I thought movie X was decent, but I was really not in the mood for a comedy." The model of therapist/client communication is helpful because it interrupts the natural tendency people have to come at an evaluation with an evaluation. Using a Rogerian approach, instead of spouting off one's own opinion about some situation or occurrence, one can ask her or his communicative partner to explain more about why she or he feels some specific way.

Rogers believes that in highly emotionally charged situations, where genuine
listening is most needed, people have the greatest tendency to evaluate each other’s opinions and to not make the effort to understand each other. “So the stronger our feelings the more likely it is that there will be no mutual element in the communication. There will just be two ideas, two feelings, two judgments, missing each other in psychological space” (Rogers 331). Rogers takes the position that sincere communication occurs only once people withhold judgment and try to see things from the other person’s perspective. For example, listening with empathy to the fears a communicative partner has about some issue, holds the potential to release that person from the hold those fears have upon her or him. Additionally, coming to be understood by another person helps one better understand oneself. Thus, the task is to “increase the amount of listening with, and to decrease the amount of evaluation about” (Rogers 335, author’s emphasis).

Rogers makes the suggestion that we attempt to implement the following technique the next time a quarrel arises with a communicative partner: “Each person can speak up for himself [sic] only after he [sic] has first restated the ideas and feelings of the previous speaker accurately, and to that speaker’s satisfaction” (332). In other words, before one could go on to present her or his own perspective, she or he would first have to make an effort to try to understand her or his partner’s point of view well enough so that she or he could repeat it without distortion.

Rogers believes there are several things that hinder his techniques from being used more frequently in our communicative exchanges. The first difficulty is a lack of courage. A large part of the problem for Rogers is that most people are unwilling to try to understand where others are coming from, by reason of the fear that one runs the risk of
being changed. A second difficulty is that when emotions run highest, it becomes increasingly difficult to even try to see things from another’s frame of reference. Yet, Rogers believes communication is especially crucial when our emotions run highest. A third obstacle is that when communication is viewed in terms of a battle between adversaries, both sides tend to look at things as black-and-white. In other words, when there are distinct and opposing positions it is immensely challenging to try to understand with an opponent.

Rogers takes the position that in situations where antagonism abounds, triadic communication with a neutral third party (i.e., a mediator) is often necessary in clarifying the attitudes and viewpoints of opposing parties. The technique of calling in a neutral third party is applicable not only interpersonally, but also in situations such as labor-management disputes. From a Rogerian perspective, if two opposing parties feel as though a mediator is actively listening to what they have to say, defensiveness is dropped, mutual communication is gradually achieved, and problem solving can begin to take place.

4.7 A Critique of Rogerian Rhetoric

Thinking about communication from a Rogerian perspective brings to the fore the importance of empathetic listening. Rogers urges us not to evaluate or judge what the person we are communicating with says in order to listen more deeply to the message she or he is intent on relaying. Before hearing about Rogerian rhetoric, I have on occasion practiced the technique of saying orally or writing back to a person what I thought they

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1 I agree that in listening to another’s position, one does become more vulnerable to being changed. For example, if someone at the marketplace is selling snake-oil and claims the product is an elixir of immortality, one would have a greater potential to be duped by that claim if she or he listened to the salesperson’s pitch with an open-mind.
were attempting to communicate in an effort to get clear about some issue. I have also repeated back what I perceive to be an interlocutor’s message with the specific goal of trying to be non-confrontational. On one occasion, a woman had written into an electronic mailing list I am part of something about there being a correlation between the free-trade agreement and women in Latin America being forced to be sterilized before they could work in certain factories. This woman wrote the e-mail in an effort to rally support for a protest that would be taking place locally. I responded to her message to find out where she had gotten her information about the inhumane treatment of women in Latin America. I was a bit skeptical of her claims and told her so explicitly, though I now realize expressing my skepticism is not in keeping with the Rogerian tenet of withholding judgment. However in a Rogerian manner, I did state in an e-mail message to her what I took her position to be on why some of the ramifications of free-trade (i.e., the forced sterilization of female factory workers in Latin America countries) warranted protest. This method of communication was well received by the woman who was trying to organize support for this particular protest, as she wrote back something about how she should have cited the sources of her information and even went on to list some of the sources she had used to gather information.

A criticism of a Rogerian technique is that thinking of argument in terms of withholding judgment of the positions others advance sounds an awful lot like a prescription for self-abnegation. As Catherine E. Lamb explains, “My experience using Rogerian argument and teaching it to my students, is that it is feminine rather than feminist. It has always been women’s work to understand others: often at the expense of understanding self” (17). For women who are only now learning to establish their own
voices, thinking of communication in terms of asking one's communicative partner to explain more about why she or he feels some specific way sounds a lot less empowering than being assertive and speaking one's mind. Additionally, though a Rogerian approach does emphasize the importance of mutual communication and understanding, some women are rightfully skeptical of its merits because Rogers seems to ignore the phenomenon of male linguistic dominance and presupposes an equal communicative exchange between males and females when such may not exist. What is missing from Rogerian rhetorical theory is an explicit recognition of the concerns feminists raise with respect to patriarchal conceptual frameworks that perpetuate male linguistic dominance at the expense of women's personal and political betterment.

A final criticism that can be lodged against Rogerian rhetoric is that it is really best applied to the therapist/client relationship. Stated differently, Roger's notion of empathic listening simply is not the best technique to employ in everyday negotiations and disagreements. For example, say I reach the immigration office two minutes before it closes for the day and am told to come back in the morning when the office reopens. I then attempt to explain to the person at the counter that it is urgent that I immediately take care of the issue that brought me to the office in the first place. However, this person informs me that it has been a long day at the office and everyone is gathering their belongings to head home. It is particularly frustrating to realize that the person with whom I am speaking could help me at this time, instead of continuing to stubbornly repeat that I will need to come back in the morning. The point I am making here is that if two parties find themselves in stubborn opposition about some issue, over which neither is willing to compromise, it is unlikely that an outcome will be reached that mutually
satisfies both of their goals.

4.8 Reconceptualizing Rhetoric, Communication, and Argumentation

To conclude, I will retrace limitations and the benefits of the ideas explored throughout this chapter in an effort shed light on some of the implications such ideas might have for a general theory of rhetoric, communication, and argumentation.

Gearhart’s reconceptualization has limitations in the sense that not all persuasive contexts involve the aggressive conversion of others. Additionally, the refusal to intend-to-change others is inadequate as a general pedagogical model, because educators are in a position to work with students who may be under the assumption that it is the role of an educator to develop in them skills and abilities. However, Gearhart’s reconceptualization of rhetoric as a non-persuasive and co-creative activity rightly subverts the view that our “survival” depends upon winning arguments against competitors. For Gearhart, the intent-to-change-others model of communication needs to be reconsidered through the lens of a more humane model whereby people with the internal basis for change might convince themselves to accept a rhetor’s argument.

Foss and Griffin’s reconceptualization of rhetoric in invitational terms is objectionable in the sense that inviting another to share my perspective does not seem all that importantly different from trying to persuade someone to “see” the world as I do. Additionally, Foss and Griffin seem to take for granted that women have had to use persuasive rhetorical techniques, despite the reality that doing so runs contrary to behavior that is stereotypically identified with their sex. However, Foss and Griffin rightly reconceptualize rhetoric in terms of inviting the audience to “see” the world from the rhetor’s perspective. The idea of offering one’s vision of the world stands in contrast
to the view that a rhetor’s focus should be to increase the audience’s adherence to her or his position. Thus, Foss and Griffin’s theory releases rhetors from the traditional constraint that they must have the goal of persuasion in all acts of rhetorical communication.

Rogerian rhetoric is problematic, if exercised in a one-sided manner, because it could reinforce the idea that women must forgo asserting their own perspectives to accommodate others. Sacrificing one’s perspectives and silencing one’s voice to accommodate others serves to further aid in the subordination of women, particularly when twisted so as to serve male linguistic dominance. However, Rogerian Rhetoric rightly facilitates interpersonal and small group communication by emphasizing the practice of empathetic and reflective listening. For Rogers, quarrels can be prevented if one makes an effort to understand the point of view of a dispute partner well enough to summarize it to her or his satisfaction. In the ideal communicative situation, wherein both parties are able to articulate their views and have those views understood, reflective listening can function as a powerful tool to help both sides meet their goals.

To summarize, conceptualizing rhetorical communication solely in terms of having the goal of persuasion, is seriously limited. Decidedly non-persuasive rhetoric is a powerful idea in that it amounts to the rejection of adversariality for the higher goal of creating an environment where mutual communication can occur. However, the idea that rhetoric can be used as a tool to persuade one’s audience should not be rejected whole cloth, as applying a more decidedly cooperative approach will in most contexts involve both persuasive elements and mutual communication.
Chapter Five: Critical Conclusions and Future Directions

Throughout this thesis I have been exploring a reconceptualization of argumentation and communication in light of feminist insights. It is my hope that argument and communication practices that are attuned to the concerns feminist critics raise will arise out of the sustained critiques feminists offer in regard to traditional practices.

In this chapter, I first give a brief synopsis of salient ideas from previous chapters. Secondly, I answer in the affirmative the question of whether our argumentative and communicative practices should change in light of feminist insights. Thirdly, I explore some limitations of feminist critiques of argumentation and communication. Finally, I explore some future directions that can be taken by argumentation, communication, and feminist scholars in regard to the ideas explored in this thesis.

5.1 Synopsis of Previous Chapters

In an effort to focus attention upon the groundwork covered in the span of this thesis, let me briefly mention some salient ideas from Chapters One through Four.

5.1.1 Chapter One

In Chapter One, I pose the research question of whether there is a need for our communicative and argumentative practices to change in light of feminist insights. I state that my method of inquiry consists of investigating feminist literature in an effort to locate feminist insights that apply to argumentation and communication. I clarify that my research starts from the premise that a lack of feminist consciousness in the fields of communication and argumentation results in sexist practices. Finally, I outline the direction the thesis will take in subsequent chapters.
5.1.2 Chapter Two

Much of the groundwork covered in Chapter Two serves as background on issues such as gender role stereotyping and male linguistic dominance in relation to practices of communication and argument. In Chapter Two, it is my position that because gender is a pervasive framework from which all social interactions are constructed, the social practice of argumentation and communication should be subject to feminist critique. Given that communication and argument are social practices, it is my hypothesis that our communicative and argumentative practices are susceptible to the same harmful polarizations associated with conventional sex roles. One manifestation of my research into feminist ideas about communication and argumentation is that the socially and culturally defined attributes associated with being gendered female or male carry over into the discourse of communication and argument. Thus, the same rigid formulas that are used to prescribe behavioral guidelines for biologically sexed males and females proliferate as myths about feminine nurturance and masculine aggression in the social practices of communication and argument. I argue that traditional conceptions of what it means to be engendered as male or female needed to be reframed in terms of a more balanced view of the human self.

5.1.3 Chapter Three

In Chapter Three, I explore the idea that the adversarial paradigm of argumentation and communication should be supplemented with attempts to share understanding in a non-adversarial manner. I take the position that our perceptions and attitudes are effected by the limits of the language and images available to us in our social and cognitive environments. Given that language use directly influences the ways in which people
conceptualize reality, it is particularly problematic that the existing discourse used in our argumentative and communicative interchanges is fraught with allusions to domination and violence. I propose that one solution to thinking of our argumentative and communicative exchanges in terms of a battle between adversaries is to transform existing practice so as to make cooperation the standard. However, a decidedly cooperative model of argumentation and communication can be taken too far when a healthy sense of competition is eliminated and/or people are robbed of a sense of responsibility for their own agency. In discussing why throwing out the practice of argument is objectionable because communicating one’s views effectively almost always involves arguing in the sense of the giving of reasons in support of a particular position, I conclude that presenting reasons or evidence in an attempt to persuade others of some position will in some contexts need to be renounced in an effort curb controversy and encourage solidarity.

5.1.4 Chapter Four

In Chapter Four, I interpret and critique some alternative theories of rhetorical communication. The theories I investigate are decidedly cooperative and reject adversariality for the higher goal of creating an environment where mutual communication can occur. I arrive at the conclusion that conceptualizing rhetorical argumentation solely in terms of having the goal of persuasion is seriously limited. However, the notion that rhetoric can be used as a tool to persuade one’s audience should not be rejected altogether, as in most contexts applying a more decidedly cooperative approach involves both persuasion and mutual communication.
5.2 Answering the Research Question

Yes, there is a need for our communicative and argumentative practices to be modified in light of feminist insights, because feminist insights result in broader and more inclusive models of communication and argumentation.

5.3 Some Limitations

Despite the fact that it is crucial to recognize that the nurturant traits that are typically identified with the linguistic practices of women are of paramount importance to the development of a balanced view of the human self, the alignment of non-adversarial, invitational, non-persuasive, and/or cooperative models of argumentation and communication with exclusively feminine qualities can be detrimental to the task of overturning cultural stereotypes that depict females as nurturing and males as aggressive. It is important that feminists are cognizant of the difficulty of delineating a patent division between the sexes without also embracing conventional sex role stereotypes. Though most would agree that aligning women with the qualities of nurturance and cooperation is positive, some feminist attempts to develop a uniquely feminized model of argumentation and communication make it difficult for women to assert their own agency because in doing so they must perform contrary to what is thought appropriate to their gender role identity. Thus, it is important to consider the ways in which distinguishing more cooperative and non-adversarial models of argument and communication as uniquely the domain of women can function to constrain the roles available to women in their everyday argumentative and communicative interchanges.

5.4 Future Directions

I offer to argumentation, communication, and feminist scholars the task of further
applying feminist critiques to our argumentative and communicative practices. Such critiques are enabling in the sense that they address concerns that are often disregarded in the masculine-dominant discourse. Further, I recommend the pedagogical integration of a decidedly cooperative model of argumentation and communication, as it is unsatisfactory to go about teaching students to find fault in the positions of others without also giving instruction about how to build upon and support their ideas. In other words, teachers of argumentation and communication need to prepare students for instances where being relationally attuned to others takes priority over simply offering reasons in support of one’s own perspective. In closing, the integration of a more cooperative model of argumentation and communication with traditional practices broadens the notion of argument to include listening to one’s communicative partner(s) and attempting to arrive at mutually satisfying conclusions.
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**Vita Auctoris**

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