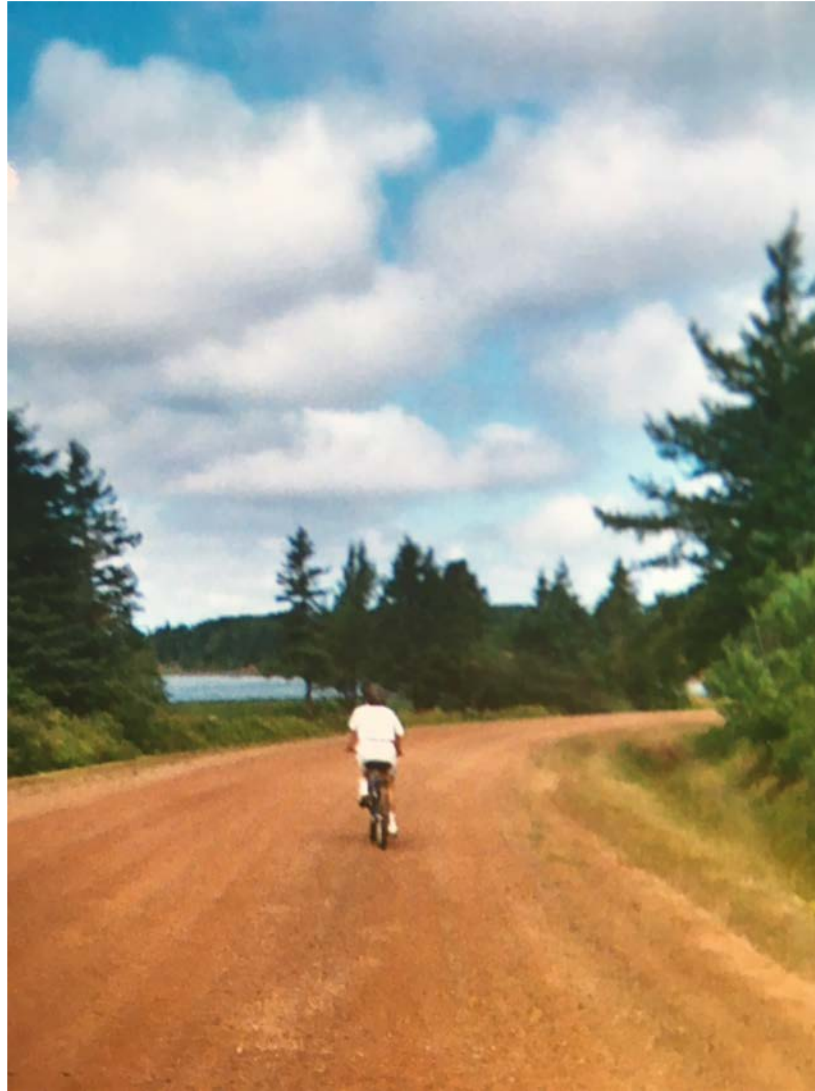




University of Nevada, Reno

Persuasion by Listening

Lynda Olman, University of Nevada, Reno



What is rhetoric?

- “Knowing for any situation what are the available means of persuasion”—Aristotle
- “The creative resolution and resolute creation of uncertainty”—Tom Goodnight
- **The art of collective decision-making in the face of disagreement and uncertainty.**
- **Rhetoricians are community therapists.**



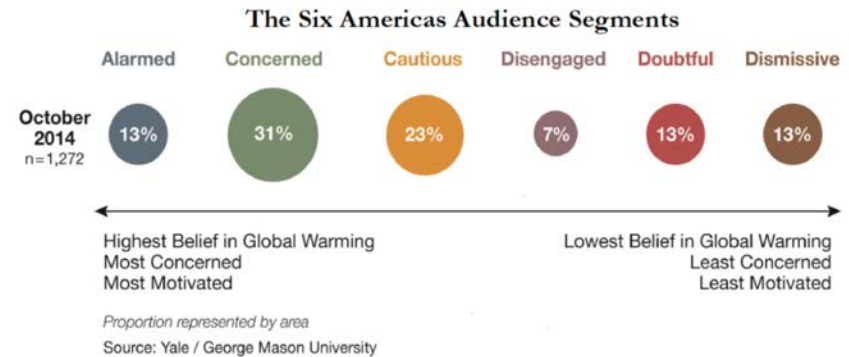
Pinterest.com



University of Nevada, Reno

What rhetoric is NOT

- Propaganda
- Mere style
- A recipe or template for persuading skeptics



communication.yale.edu



Questions for this morning

- **How can we recognize the right opportunity (*kairos*) for building common cause?**
- **How can we use rhetorical (and community) listening to build common cause?**
- **How can we motivate action from common cause?**



Key rhetorical principles and techniques

- **Kairos:** The occasion for democratic problem-solving
- **Rhetorical listening:** Listening for the unspoken values that warrant arguments
- **Consubstantiality:** “Skin in the game” — building common cause



Kairos

right timing, auspicious season, or opportunity
an opening through which words can change the world



Kairos exercise

Pick one!

- **Talk about a time when someone gave you good advice and you just weren't in the space/place to hear it (but later you remembered it).**
- **Talk about a time when you felt an “itch” to speak up about something. Did you fight the itch or speak up? What happened as a result?**
- **Talk about a time when you or someone else tried to make a joke but the timing was just off and it fell flat (be careful not to repeat offensive language even as an example)**



Kairos takeaways

- **Some *kairoi* are just not ripe for deep rhetorical engagement (Thanksgiving dinner, etc.).**
- **Minds are usually not changed in a single *kairos*; we need to stay in conversation with each other.**
- **Sometimes we need to pause or slow down to move ahead.**



Rhetorical and community listening

1. **Disagreements pull the veil back from people's values:** they are an incredible opportunity to deepen your knowledge and engagement with someone else.
2. Listening to how people connect what they think (**claim**) with why they think it (**reasons**) will lead you to the values (**warrants**) that make up their belief system.
3. The goal of community listening is not necessarily to change minds or resolve conflicts: it's to bear witness, show respect, and expand your view of the world.



[Pinterest.com](#)



University of Nevada, Reno

Rhetorical listening: technique

Find the warrant by working your way backward from keywords in people's **reasons** to keywords in people's **claim**

Argument: “We should **ban** GMOs because they **threaten biodiversity.**”

1. Keywords in reasons: “**threaten**” and “**biodiversity**”
2. Keyword in claim: “**ban**”
3. Warrant: “**Anything that threatens biodiversity should be banned**” or “**Biodiversity is good.**”



Rhetorical listening exercise 1

Enthymeme: We should ban GMOs because we don't know their long-term environmental effects.

Warrant: ??

Enthymeme: We should not ban GMOS because they are the best way to treat malnutrition in arid areas like East Africa.

Warrant: ??



Rhetorical listening exercise 2

“You know we get a lot of folks coming out here telling us about sustainability. Don’t tell me about sustainability. My family’s been out here 100 years, through drought, fire, flood, what have you. We’re still here. It’s been tough, sure, but we ain’t dead yet. And if that ain’t sustainability to you, then I don’t want to hear about it.”



Rhetorical listening exercise 3

Finding shared warrants:

- 1. Think of someone you disagree with. What's a group or community you both belong to? Ex: *biologists, moms, hunters***
- 2. Articulate one shared value in that community** (hint: it's a big reason why you're a community in the first place). Ex: *for hunters, conservation is important*
- 3. Come up with a claim and support for climate action based on that shared warrant.** Ex: *Let's support habitat restoration that both sequesters carbon and brings back wildlife.*



Rhetorical listening takeaways

- **Warrants are the flashpoints of controversies.**
People often fight most bitterly over what's NOT being said.
- **If you can learn to hear these hidden warrants, you will have better luck finding common cause with people you disagree with.**
- **Common cause is the engine of collective action.**



Consubstantiality

- You have "skin in the game"—you materially share the fate of the person you're disagreeing with to some degree.
- Abstract "matters of fact" then become common "matters of concern" (Latour)
- "matters of concern" become common cause for action.



Consubstantiality exercise

Using the same community you thought of for our Rhetorical Listening exercise, answer this question: What could you *do* (not say) over the next few weeks or months to demonstrate to the person you disagree with that you're consubstantial, i.e., that you share some matters of concerns and have some “skin in the game” with them.



Consubstantiality takeaways

- **We have to put our money where our mouths are when it comes to trying to change the course of our communities**
- **For a lot of good reasons, people are fundamentally unwilling to listen to those outside their communities of consubstantiality**



Putting it all together: My mom

1. We **disagree** about matters of fact: I think people cause climate change; she doesn't.
2. I know from **rhetorical listening** that she believes we should be “good stewards” of the earth. That's a **warrant** we share.
3. I use that warrant to locate **common cause** with her: “No matter what's causing climate change, we should conserve resources and limit pollution, right?”
4. I demonstrate **consubstantiality**: We walk to the coffee shop instead of driving; I sponsor environmental restoration projects in her name as presents for Mother's Day, etc.



Helpful Resources

- **Motivational Interviewing:**
<https://motivationalinterviewing.org/understanding-motivational-interviewing>
- **Rapoport's Rules (based on Rogerian argument, via Daniel Dennett):**
<https://theought.com/2018/07/02/rapoports-rules-daniel-dennett-on-critical-commentary/>
- **Practice!**
<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/29/opinion/the-argument-ro-khanna-climate-change.html>



Further reading

- **Burke, K., 1969. *A rhetoric of motives*. Berkeley: Univ of California Press.**
- **Goodnight, G Thomas. 2012. "The personal, technical, and public spheres: A note on 21st century critical communication inquiry." *Argumentation and Advocacy* 48 (4):258-268.**
- **Jackson, R.C. and DeLaune, D.W., 2018. "Decolonizing Community Writing with Community Listening: Story, Transrhetorical Resistance, and Indigenous Cultural Literacy Activism." *Community Literacy Journal*, 13(1), pp.37-54.**
- **Latour, B., 2004. Why has critique run out of steam? From matters of fact to matters of concern. *Critical inquiry*, 30(2), pp.225-248.**
- **Ratcliffe, K., 2005. *Rhetorical listening: Identification, gender, whiteness*. Carbondale, IL: SIU Press.**

