

Integrity in Rhetoric: A Taxonomy of Possibilities

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In “The Womanization of Rhetoric,” Sally Miller Gearhart asked a radical and startling question: “Can it be an act of integrity to seek to change another person or entity?”¹ Her essay was published in 1979, long before most feminists had ever thought about reconceptualizing rhetorical constructs from a feminist perspective (we were just beginning, at that time, to bring women’s voices into the discipline, and accepted theories and constructs largely went unchallenged). Those of us who had made the study of rhetoric our life’s work had never thought before about questioning whether changing someone else is appropriate or ethical. Of course it is because changing people and conditions is what rhetoric does. As feminists, however, we were (and still are) committed to the values of self-determination and freedom—allowing individuals to choose what to think and how to act for themselves. But this is a commitment that does not align with rhetoric’s

objective of changing others. Gearhart’s essay inspired us both to question the appropriateness of persuasion and to see if we could find a way to reconcile our commitment to rhetoric with our commitment to feminism.

In 1992, we began work on an essay that provided one answer to Gearhart’s question of whether changing another can be done with integrity. We developed an alternative conception of rhetoric—invitational rhetoric—grounded in feminist principles and sensitive to the possibility that it could have objectives other than to persuade. We defined this form of rhetoric as “an invitation to understanding as a means to create a relationship rooted in equality, immanent value, and self-determination.” This rhetoric, we suggested, “constitutes an invitation to the audience to enter the rhetor’s world and to see it as the rhetor does.”² Although, as the reviewers of our essay noted, “Beyond Persuasion:

A Proposal for an Invitational Rhetoric” was controversial, editor Charles Bantz published it in *Communication Monographs* in 1995. We answered Gearhart’s question in that essay, then, by proposing and explicating an invitational rhetoric that we believed has integrity because it does not involve the effort to change another person or entity.

Invitational rhetoric was clearly a partial answer to Gearhart’s question. We did not go beyond outlining a type of rhetoric in which individuals do not seek to change others to explore whether any other forms of persuasion constitute acts of integrity. We were quite clear that the application of invitational rhetoric constitutes an act of integrity, but we also knew that rhetoric assumes many different forms, and we wondered about the integrity inherent in them. In this essay, we want to explore the various forms of rhetoric to discover whether they can be acts of integrity and, if they can, to identify some criteria that can be used for assessing integrity in persuasive acts. Our exploration will proceed in three steps: We begin by examining definitions of the term *integrity* to use as the foundation for our investigation, and we then propose a taxonomy of different kinds of persuasion that involve different degrees of integrity. We conclude with insights and questions generated by the taxonomy.

Meanings of Integrity: A Dual Perspective

The term *integrity* has two major definitions, and we suggest that both must be considered in trying to answer Gearhart’s question of whether the act of trying to change another can constitute an act of integrity. One of these definitions applies

to the rhetor, and one applies to the audience. When Gearhart asked her question, we believe she was defining *integrity* related to the rhetor and was conceptualizing it as strong moral principles, good character, and virtue. But because there are many definitions of *morality*, *character*, and *virtue*, we had to figure out what, exactly, Gearhart was likely to be asking when she used the term *integrity*. Morality, character, and integrity change drastically in different contexts according to the values that are privileged in those contexts.

Not surprisingly, we turned to feminist values to interpret Gearhart’s definition of *integrity*. In our original essay on invitational rhetoric, we grounded invitational rhetoric in three values we believed most feminists share—equality, immanent value, and self-determination. We believe these are still foundational feminist values and provide strong clues about what *integrity* might mean for a feminist rhetor. We found the third value, self-determination, to be particularly relevant and propose that integrity is linked to how much self-determination, freedom, or agency the rhetor accords the audience. From this perspective, the rhetor who has the most integrity is the one who most respects audience members’ perspectives and gives them the maximum degree of freedom in choosing what to believe and how to act. Gearhart privileged the notion of intention in her essay, and we believe that notion is relevant to judging the integrity of a rhetorical act. Rhetors who intend to change another person possess less integrity, while those who create or co-create “an atmosphere in which people or things, if and only if they have the internal basis for change, may change themselves”³ have the greatest degree of integrity.

The second definition of the term *integrity* is not something Gearhart dealt with explicitly, but we see it as implicit in her theory. This second definition of the term applies to the audience, and here *integrity* means wholeness and coherence. In this sense, the term refers to the coherence of the perspectives held by audience members. Individuals' perspectives have developed from their own particular experiences and responses to those experiences and form the core of who they are. To have integrity in this sense is to have a "vision of the self marked by a sense of continuity and coherence."⁴ In any communicative exchange, a person's integrity can remain intact, or it can be disrupted and altered when rhetors demand, suggest, encourage, or invite a reconsideration of and possible change in the original perspective. We would not describe this disruption of integrity as *violent*, as Gearhart does, but exposure to new perspectives certainly is "something that unsettles, disorients, and deterritorializes individuals, making the ground on which they stand temporarily unstable."⁵

Again, we had no difficulty judging invitational rhetoric to be an act of integrity according to this definition. In invitational rhetoric, rhetors do not seek to disrupt the coherence another has created but try to understand its key elements and how it makes sense to its creator. When integrity is disrupted in invitational rhetoric, it is because individuals (either rhetors or audience members) choose to disrupt their own coherence—to question and challenge their own perspectives as they willingly let in something new. In persuasion, in contrast, rhetors deliberately seek to disrupt the integrity of another person; they intentionally try "to break others' logic and reasoning, challenge their values, transform their behaviors, or disrupt

what they know to be true."⁶

Integrity, in sum, has different meanings when applied to the rhetor and to the audience. To judge the integrity of a rhetor is to determine the degree of agency the rhetor accords the audience—how much freedom audience members have either to accept or reject the rhetor's perspective. To judge the integrity of audience members is to determine the degree to which their individual coherence and continuity are disrupted by the perspectives being offered by the rhetor if the rhetoric is successful. Using this more complex lens on integrity, we now turn to our proposed taxonomy of rhetoric, exploring the ways in which the two forms of integrity are manifest in varying degrees in or even absent from various types of rhetoric.

Taxonomy of Rhetoric

As we thought about Gearhart's question in preparation for writing this essay, we remembered a taxonomy of four different rhetorical forms—conquest, conversion, advisory, and invitational rhetorics—that we had included in an early version of our essay on invitational rhetoric. We wondered if the taxonomy might provide clues about integrity and its application to persuasion. At the time, the taxonomy helped us think productively about persuasion and the forms that rhetoric may take, and we also believed it provided a useful context for our theorizing of invitational rhetoric. As in any review process, manuscripts evolve between the time they are initially submitted and when they are published, and "Beyond Persuasion" was no exception. Our reviewers were uncomfortable with the taxonomy and asked us to delete it. One suggested that the categories along the continuum leaked and that the differences we were claiming were semantic

rather than real. Another reviewer urged us to drop the taxonomy because we were certain to “piss off all those old buffaloes who will swear (a patriarchal pastime) you’re not being fair with their personal father/patron—Plato, Aristotle, Toulmin, Burke, Perelman, probably even Foucault—and—as such—lose them as serious readers.” The editor sided with the reviewers who wanted the taxonomy deleted, so delete it we did, and we saw our essay published.

Although deleted, the taxonomy we initially developed did not disappear from our thinking or theorizing. One of us included a slightly modified version in other work,⁷ and as we developed our subsequent work on invitational rhetoric,⁸ we repeatedly returned to our idea of a taxonomy of rhetoric. We continued to wonder whether it had something to offer scholars of rhetoric, and we now believe that it does: It provides an answer to Gearhart’s question, helping to explain where and how integrity exists in rhetoric for both rhetor and audience. Our revised taxonomy has expanded from our original version and now includes six forms of rhetoric—outrage, conquest, advisory, conversion, benevolent, and invitational—each marked by a particular kind of integrity for the rhetor and another kind for the audience.

Outrage Rhetoric: Visceral Affirmation

Outrage rhetoric is a “form of political discourse involving efforts to provoke visceral responses (e.g., anger, righteousness, fear, moral indignation) from the audience through the use of overgeneralizations, sensationalism, misleading or patently inaccurate information, ad hominem attacks, and partial truths about opponents.”⁹ Outrage rhetors typically advocate their views in

front of like-minded audiences, and their rhetoric reassures audience members of the correctness of the perspective they hold on a particular issue. Outrage rhetors attack, mock, and insult certain people or groups to confirm the correctness of a perspective and the impending doom that will result if the audience does not continue to hold that perspective. Outrage rhetoric is not characterized by a desire for conversation or a reciprocal exchange of ideas but by a desire to tap into the indignation that outrage rhetors know they share with the audience. Not confined to any particular arena or political perspective (it is used by both politically conservative as well as liberal rhetors, for example), outrage rhetoric can be heard on television, radio, and social media; in blog posts and newspaper columns; and in face-to-face interactions.

In outrage rhetoric, the rhetor has little or no integrity because the audience is given virtually no freedom or agency to reject the perspective being offered. Audience members may silently and internally believe something other than the view being put forth but are not allowed to express that opinion publicly; if they reject the rhetor’s perspective, they, too, are likely to become targets of the outrage. Typically, however, audience members do not put themselves in a situation in which they are subjected to outrage rhetoric if they do not already accept the position being advocated—they do not tune to a program or read a blog that is so contrary to what they believe. In this sense, the degree of freedom being offered by the rhetor to the audience in outrage rhetoric is almost irrelevant because the objective is not to change minds but to affirm positions already held. There is no need for freedom to accept other perspectives because the audience

and the rhetor share a perspective.

In outrage rhetoric, integrity of the audience is maintained. There is no disruption of the coherence or continuity of the selves of the audience members. They enter a rhetorical situation believing a particular perspective, and it is confirmed by the rhetor. Audience members thus leave the interaction with their integrity intact—it has not been challenged in any way. The only way in which coherence may be disrupted for the audience is if audience members recognize that the rhetoric they are being offered is too extreme—it provides a blatantly unfair, inaccurate, or blasphemous interpretation of the opposition's perspective. Even when audience members might wish for a fairer portrayal of an issue, though, their perspective on the initial issue remains unchanged. What might be altered in this situation is their perception of the rhetor, who may be seen more negatively because of the nature of the rhetoric generated.

Conquest Rhetoric: Rule-Governed Winning

The objective of conquest rhetoric is to win, and in this kind of rhetoric, rhetors are successful if they win an argument or their preference or desire triumphs over others. Winners' perspectives and positions prevail, while those of the losers are overturned. In Maurice Natanson's words, conquest rhetors rely on "techniques involved in attempting to control others."¹⁰ Cooperation and collaboration are accorded little value in conquest rhetoric, and concessions occur only when the winning rhetor needs to make them to win or when the losing rhetor is forced to acquiesce.¹¹

Conquest rhetoric is often packaged as persuasive rhetoric, but the goal is not so much

persuading others of the rightness of beliefs but winning at all costs. This model of rhetoric, then, is designed to produce a winner whose position prevails over or defeats the positions taken by others. A particular stance toward the audience—that of power over¹²—characterizes the conquest model of rhetoric. Rhetors see audience members as opponents whose positions are wrong and thus must be overpowered. Moreover, audience members' ideas have little potential to affect rhetors' own positions because of rhetors' beliefs that their positions are the correct ones.

Conquest rhetoric typically is highly rule governed. In legal proceedings, for example, rules govern the order of interactions, the kinds of discourse allowed, who is allowed to speak, and the various legal maneuvers allowed. Presidential elections in the United States constitute conquest rhetoric in that one side wins and one loses according to rules concerning the creation of electoral districts, who is allowed to vote, and the electoral college. In the simplest kind of conquest rhetoric, when a bully physically beats up another person to win a fight, the rules of physical power and strength determine who wins. In all of these situations, one group or position wins and another loses according to a pre-established set of rules.

The rhetor has some degree of integrity in conquest rhetoric because of the rule-governed nature of the interaction. Rhetors know what the rules are when they agree to operate within a system, and those who follow the rules of the rhetorical context in which the interaction is occurring have integrity to the extent that they follow those rules. Rules can function in various ways in conquest rhetoric, however. In some cases, they are designed to insure fair outcomes; rules that require that a certain percentage of voters

support an amendment to a state's constitution in order for it to become law, for example, insure that a vocal minority cannot impose its will on a majority of voters. In other cases, rules are designed to silence and disadvantage some participants in an interaction. The practice of gerrymandering, in which state officials draw district lines and allocate people into voting districts to influence election results, is an example. The difference can be seen as well in Robert's Rules of Order versus Roberta's Rules of Order. In the former, rules allow for the strict control and management of the flow of interaction, often turning meetings into coercive environments in which participants are victimized, pressured to agree, or silenced altogether by individuals armed with parliamentary procedures and a personal agenda. In contrast, Roberta's Rules of Order encourages communication and problem solving by promoting dialogue in which everyone's views are heard and considered. Following rules that are designed to insure fair and equitable treatment of everyone, then, is different from following rules that are designed to silence and exclude some individuals; rhetors engaged in the former have more integrity than those in the latter category.

In other cases, rules may be applied fairly or unfairly. The rules might have been designed to insure fair and equitable input by all into a decision, but they can be manipulated to have the opposite effect. In Congress, for example, filibustering or adjournment can be used to silence an opponent, a committee chair can refuse to bring a bill out of committee, or a rider can be attached to a bill that is certain to kill it. When the majority leader of the U.S. Senate does not allow a hearing for a nominee to the Supreme Court, the rules are being followed but manipulated

to disadvantage one position and to advantage another. The manipulation of the rules in such cases insures that there is no possibility that one side's perspective will prevail. This again would be a case in which a rhetor is exhibiting less integrity.

The integrity that characterizes the audience in conquest rhetoric is equally nuanced. If clear rules for engagement and a respect for winning are in line with audience members' worldviews, their coherency remains in place. If the rules are unfair from the beginning or are manipulated to privilege one side over the other, the coherency of the audience also remains in place. In both instances, any "change" that happens on the part of audience members is suspect. The coherence of their perspectives or positions is disrupted on the surface—externally—but the acquiescence of those on the losing side is not likely to reflect any real transformation or any real disruption of belief. Those on the losing side of an election or those who are unhappy with a jury's verdict, for example, generally do not change their minds and believe in the candidate they did not support or come to see the verdict as a fair one. In fact, just the opposite is likely to occur—individuals are likely to cling more fiercely to their positions after they lose. Even in situations when forced change is beneficial (as when a neighborhood is forcefully evacuated prior to a hurricane), the disruption that occurs is likely to be a surface rather than an actual disruption of integrity. Individuals follow the request to evacuate but may not believe it was really necessary and may continue to believe they could have ridden out the storm in safety.

Advisory Rhetoric: Guidance Toward Actualization

Advisory rhetoric occurs when rhetors answer

or address an implicit or explicit request from others for advice or information. In this form of rhetoric, audience members enter a rhetorical exchange expecting to be changed and desiring that change. Individuals who are the recipients of advisory rhetoric are interested in learning, growing, and changing and deliberately seek out interactions with rhetors who can help them accomplish their goals. They ask for the interaction, and they are inclined to adopt the perspectives being offered by the rhetors because they recognize the knowledge, expertise, and experiences of advisory rhetors and desire to benefit and learn from them. They also recognize that the rhetor has their best interests in mind and, as Martin Buber explains, wishes “to find and to further in the soul of the other the disposition toward what” the rhetor has recognized “as the right.”¹³ Advisory rhetors, in Buber’s words, see themselves as facilitators of the “process of actualization” in their audiences.¹⁴ Paradigm examples of advisory rhetoric are counseling and education. Individuals who seek counseling to work through difficulties in the hope of leading happier lives or who choose to develop themselves through education deliberately expose themselves to new perspectives.

Integrity for the rhetor is complicated in advisory rhetoric. Advisory rhetors make their perspectives, services, and/or talents available to others. They do not insist that anyone take advantage of them, so in this way, they accord complete agency to potential audience members. After audience members accept their invitation and choose to participate with them in a rhetorical exchange, however, advisory rhetors generally expect that audience members will accept or at least seriously consider the perspectives they offer.

After all, individuals in the audience have chosen to engage with the rhetor because they want access to what the rhetor has to offer. The integrity of the rhetor lessens, then, once the audience accepts the invitation to interact. Although audience members can choose whether to accept or reject the guidance being given, to do so would be unusual or strange, especially since the audience members are often paying for the opportunity to interact with the rhetor.

The integrity that marks the audience in advisory rhetoric is equally complicated for the rhetor. There is a self-chosen disruption on the part of audience members at the moment they choose to engage with the rhetor. They willingly enter into the exchange and are open to being transformed as a result. Once the interaction actually begins—an interaction that may continue over a long period of time—audience members are likely to experience a series of disruptions in the integrity of the selves they have constructed, often remaking those selves multiple times and creating new kinds of coherency during the process. The inevitable disruptions to integrity that occur with advisory rhetoric are likely to be both welcomed and unwelcomed at various times. There is pressure to accept the perspective offered by the rhetor, but that perspective is not always going to be something that audience members want to hear.

Conversion Rhetoric: Enlightened Transformation

The goal of conversion rhetoric is to convince a person that one argument or perspective is better than another. Conversion rhetoric reflects Chaim Pereleman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca’s definition of argumentation as “the study of the discursive

techniques allowing us to *induce or to increase the mind's adherence to the theses presented for its assent.*"¹⁵ Kenneth Burke's notion of persuasion as consubstantiality is also representative of conversion rhetoric as rhetors attempt to persuade via the identification of the rhetor's own ways of thinking or being with those of the target audience.¹⁶ Conversion rhetoric involves the effort to construct arguments or claims so compelling that they cannot be refused so that audiences will adopt a perspective they did not previously hold. Rather than mocking or rejecting an audience's views, conversion rhetors attempt to take charge of those views, unravel them, and replace them with the alternative view they wish the audience to hold. Conversion rhetoric is easily recognized in the discourse of advertising, political campaigns, sales, social movements, and recruitment campaigns. In the interpersonal realm, individuals often use conversion rhetoric to try to persuade family members, friends, and colleagues to adopt their perspectives on issues ranging from the mundane (which movie to see) to the potentially life altering (which job offer to accept).

Even though not typically combative or oppositional, the relationship between rhetor and audience members in conversion rhetoric reflects a privileging of the rhetor's perspective over that of the audience. Audience members are seen as naïve or uninformed simply because they hold perspectives that are different from those of the conversion rhetor. Although not always explicit, conversion rhetoric thus involves a degree of paternalism, in which the rhetor guides others to a supposedly correct position, echoing Gearhart's description of persuasion as "let me help you, let me enlighten you, let me show you the way."¹⁷

Conversion rhetors do consider and engage audience members' beliefs and values as they attempt to sway them toward their own position. Audiences in conversion rhetoric often are able to participate in an interaction, expressing their own ideas and views, with rhetors listening to them. But in conversion rhetoric, the audience's views are used primarily in the process of audience analysis, in which the rhetor seeks to understand the opposition's position better in order to adjust and adapt argumentation more effectively to it.

The nature of the integrity that characterizes conversion rhetors depends on rhetors' attitudes toward their audience members. If they engage with their audience members in a full expression of an argument and then truly allow audiences to decide whether they have been converted or not—with no consequences or repercussions if they do not—they are enacting maximum integrity because they are allowing freedom to the audience. But if they suggest to audience members that their interaction or relationship is conditional on their conversion in some way, they are exhibiting minimal integrity. If rhetors let audience members know, for example, that if they do not change their beliefs or behavior, the rhetor will punish or discipline them in some way or will withdraw from the (presumably desired) relationship, they are not allowing those audience members the freedom to choose and have compromised their integrity as rhetors.

If a rhetorical appeal is successful and audience members change their minds about an issue, their integrity is disrupted as they replace their original position with that advocated by the conversion rhetor. In this case, the integrity of the audience is diminished and essentially nonexistent because of the transformation in the coherence of the

self that has occurred. This disruption may be welcomed or not. When audience members truly come to believe that the rhetor offers a better perspective than they hold on an issue, they are willing to change themselves to accommodate that new perspective. Sometimes, however, they begrudgingly accept that another position is superior to theirs and transform themselves as a result. Individuals may quit smoking, for example, as a result of a rhetor's arguments but may do so unhappily, still longing for a cigarette even as they no longer smoke.

Benevolent Rhetoric: Unrequested Assistance

Benevolent rhetoric occurs when rhetors, without being asked or invited, provide insights, information, or guidance to individuals out of a genuine concern for their well-being. These rhetors see audience members as needing information they may not have in order to secure a positive outcome or to avoid potentially negative consequences about which they are unaware. Either way, benevolent rhetors provide information to assist others in making the choices they see as appropriate. Health and safety campaigns such as the Ad Council's Texting and Driving Prevention campaign are examples of this kind of benevolent rhetoric. Information shared with others after a person learns something or experiences an event about which she wants to prepare or caution others is also an example of benevolent rhetoric.

Benevolent rhetoric is created from a genuine desire on the rhetor's part to make life easier or better for another person. In contrast, in conversion rhetoric, rhetors are motivated by

an objective that benefits them rather than the audience in some way. Conversion rhetors may benefit by securing more votes for their candidate, for example, or they simply may experience the "rush of power" that comes with successful persuasion.¹⁸ In benevolent rhetoric, the benefits to the rhetor are much less clear, and the rhetorical effort is clearly motivated by a genuine interest in the welfare of the audience members.

The integrity of benevolent rhetors is grounded in a great deal of respect and care for the audience. These rhetors want audience members to apply the lessons they are offering in their own lives to enable them to survive and/or thrive. Despite their genuine concern for the audience, they give audience members complete freedom to accept or ignore the advice they are offering. They realize that the audience has the right of refusal and might very well make a choice other than the one they are advocating. Benevolent rhetors exhibit the maximum degree of integrity because audience members are genuinely free to choose what they believe is the best course of action for themselves.

If the information offered by the benevolent rhetor is accepted by audience members—if the rhetoric is successful—then a major disruption in integrity or coherence occurs. As with conversion rhetoric, the change may be unwanted. Audience members may decide to make the change advocated by the benevolent rhetor but may do so reluctantly, unhappily, or begrudgingly. The change also may be a welcomed one. If a rhetor provides information that audience members have been seeking and the information provided helps them in some way, the major disruption that occurs in the integrity of the self is seen as

something positive and desirable.

Invitational Rhetoric: Enhanced Understanding

Defined as “an invitation to understanding as a means to create a relationship rooted in equality, immanent value, and self-determination,”¹⁹ invitational rhetoric does not involve persuasion. Rhetors who engage in invitational rhetoric are interested in understanding the perspectives of others and are open to a diversity of perspectives. They embrace challenges to their thinking as opportunities for growth and change and deliberately expose themselves to as much information as possible, knowing that the more information they consider, the greater their understanding will be. Invitational rhetors do not want or need audience members to adopt the position being articulated; instead, they want them to understand their positions as fully as possible.

In invitational rhetoric, integrity is manifest in the immanent value rhetors assign to their conversational partners, the respect they show them, and the degree of self-determination they afford them. They allow complete freedom to audience members in three ways. The first is in the freedom concerning whether even to accept the invitation to interact with them. If the invitation is accepted, a second type of freedom is put in place: Rhetors allow their conversational partners complete freedom concerning the perspectives to hold. Although the rhetor presents a perspective fully and even passionately, there is no expectation that the audience will accept it. A third type of freedom offered to the audience in invitational rhetoric has to do with the outcomes of the audience’s acceptance or rejection of the rhetor’s

perspective: “The audience’s lack of acceptance of or adherence to the perspective articulated by the rhetor truly makes no difference to the rhetor. . . . Should the audience choose not to accept the vision articulated by the rhetor, the connection between the rhetor and the audience remains intact, and the audience still is valued and appreciated by the rhetor.”²⁰

There can be maximum or minimal disruption of the integrity of the audience in invitational rhetoric. After carefully considering the perspective of the rhetor and trying hard to understand it—actively listening, learning, sharing, and exchanging information and ideas—audience members may choose to adopt that perspective. If they do, they find the interruption or break in the coherence they have created for themselves to be something positive, and they reconstruct their self-integrity, incorporating the new perspective. If, on the other hand, they simply choose to understand but not adopt the rhetor’s perspective, there is minimal disruption, as our metaphor of a footprint suggests—the footprint or new perspective “makes its mark next to but does not touch the print of another.” Although the audience member’s footprint remains in the same place because no change in position has occurred, the new print next to it—the perspective offered by the rhetor—suggests that it must be considered when the individual chooses to move; “the decision to maintain an original perspective still contains an implicit challenge to that perspective.”²¹

Integrity in Rhetoric: A Complex Constellation

We now believe that much more is involved in assessing the integrity of rhetorical exchanges than

we or Gearhart imagined. For example, Gearhart clearly saw rhetors who intend to change others as something negative. But to evaluate rhetors negatively because they seek change is, to some degree, an unfair criterion to use for assessing the integrity of rhetors because change always occurs as a result of an interaction, even if only as “our physical bodies respond to energy.”²² Furthermore, if change is always occurring, the intention of the rhetor in a given situation concerning whether to try to change someone or not appears to be less relevant than Gearhart articulated. Likewise, when change always occurs in an audience—when there is always a disruption of the continuous and coherent selves of audience members by virtue of a rhetorical exchange—to judge a rhetorical act as lacking in integrity also may be inappropriate. Integrity becomes more complicated if audiences are willingly changed, as they are in some forms of rhetoric; the disruption of self-coherence, then, is not always negative or undesirable.

We also discovered, as we explored different kinds of rhetoric in our taxonomy, that even some forms of rhetoric that we originally considered quite egregious (conquest rhetoric, for example), do not deserve unequivocal scorn. When we focused on the rules that typically govern conquest rhetoric, a judgment about whether that form of rhetoric is marked by integrity became more complicated. When rules designed for good reasons are agreed to by participants, conquest becomes a different kind of act than the simple overpowering of someone by a bully, for example. We also found that almost all of the various types of rhetoric in our taxonomy have positive and negative aspects. We can no longer assign integrity to some and not others—all of them have aspects of integrity, as we have defined it, on the part of

the rhetor or the audience or both.

Our most significant insight, though, is a simple one: Rhetoric is much more complicated than how Gearhart or we had originally conceptualized it. If nothing else, our taxonomy suggests that even to define rhetoric is a complicated endeavor and that a parsing of the term can be quite productive for various objectives, including addressing additional ethical questions around integrity: Who is to be privileged in making a judgment about integrity—rhetor (according freedom of choice) or audience (degree of disruption of coherence)? Can an interaction privilege both? Should it? Some disruptions in integrity are self-chosen; some are not. Some rhetorical acts follow rules in which interactants believe, but sometimes those rules are manipulated to achieve unfair ends. How much difference do these differences make in trying to assign a label of *integrity* to rhetorical efforts?

We conclude by turning once again to Gearhart. Although our essay and this special issue are focused on her article, “The Womanization of Rhetoric,” Gearhart went on to develop her ideas more fully in writings some two decades later that are much less known than her initial essay but, we believe, are quite relevant to the issues with which we are dealing here. Her later work was the result of a major transformation that occurred in her personal life. For much of her life, Gearhart seemed to ignore the issues concerning persuasion that she raised in her article; she was a vociferous and well-known activist who used strategies of conventional persuasion on behalf of causes such as feminism, LGBTQ civil rights, sexual freedom, peace, justice, and animal rights. But in 1995, she completely transformed her thinking about social change and announced: “I’m not going

to be an activist anymore. Don't mistake me: I feel more passionately than ever about issues of justice and peace and environmental health. . . . But I'm going about my life in a different way."²³ Choosing to bring her views about persuasion into line with her rhetorical actions, she developed a new theory of rhetoric that elaborated on her 1979 article, and she began to try to implement it in her life. In this later work, she restated the question she had asked in 1979: "Is there a way to relate to each other, to other entities, in acts that participate in the changing of our world but which do not themselves recapitulate our heritage of violence?"²⁴

Although Gearhart did not give her new rhetorical theory a label, the term *enfoldment* captures its essence, and it involves the kind of rhetoric she outlined in her 1979 article. It "takes the path of wrapping around the givee, of being available to her/him without insisting; our giving is a *presence*, an *offering*, an *opening*, a *surrounding*, a *listening*, a *vulnerability*, a *trust*."²⁵ We have presented her theory of enfoldment elsewhere,²⁶ and we simply outline its key assumptions and rhetorical strategies here: (1) The rhetor's goal is not to enlighten or persuade but to understand the perspectives of others and to establish a connection of care and respect between rhetor and audience;²⁷ (2) Change happens only when individuals choose to change;²⁸ (3) Changing oneself creates societal change;²⁹ and (4) The universe is a safe place of love.³⁰ Gearhart also suggested a number of rhetorical options that define enfoldment: (1) acknowledgment of the presence of others and respect for them;³¹ (2) a search for common ground between rhetor and audience;³² (3) a mutual sharing of perspectives between rhetor and audience;³³ (4) a willingness

on the part of all interactants to yield their positions;³⁴ (5) witnessing—the observing and recording, without responding, of the words and actions of those the rhetor is seeking to understand, acknowledging that the participants are acting out of integrity and their best selves;³⁵ and (6) asking permission to share observations when a rhetor wants to share insights with others in a nondominating way.³⁶ Her attempt to theorize an answer to her question in her later work reflects her awareness of the tensions inherent in a passionate desire for change, an aversion to the violence she saw in persuasion, and a commitment to respecting others.

Perhaps what is needed now is the opportunity to experiment consciously and deliberately with the different forms of rhetoric in the taxonomy we have offered in this essay. With knowledge of this taxonomy, rhetors can be much more aware of what they are doing when they select one form rather than another, the constraints placed on them and those with whom they communicate, the possibilities allowed and denied, and the questions of integrity rhetors can—and perhaps must—ponder. The taxonomy also can help audiences for rhetorical efforts more clearly understand their different experiences of various forms of rhetoric, how those forms constrain and inspire, and how audiences feel when they participate in them. Perhaps, as we join Gearhart in both theorizing and practicing rhetoric in all of its forms, we will come closer to answering her question about whether a rhetor can, with integrity, seek to change another.

For the moment, we know that explorations of the kind Gearhart undertook in 1979, in which traditional conceptions of rhetoric are challenged, are important for feminist rhetoricians. With

Gearhart, our commitment is to trying something new that enacts feminist rather than patriarchal values:

We are perhaps on the brink of understanding that we do not have to be persuaders, that we no longer need to intend to change others. We are not the speaker, the-one-with-the-truth, the-one-who-with-his-power-will-change-lives. We are the matrix, we are she-who-is-the-home-of-this-particular-human-interaction, we are a co-creator and co-sustainer of the atmosphere in whose infinity of possible transformations we will all change.³⁷

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Notes

1. Sally Miller Gearhart, "The Womanization of Rhetoric," *Women's Studies International Quarterly* 2 (1979): 198.
2. Sonja K. Foss and Cindy L. Griffin, "Beyond Persuasion: A Proposal for an Invitational Rhetoric," *Communication Monographs* 62, no. 1 (March 1995): 5.
3. Gearhart, "Womanization," 198-99.
4. Sonja K. Foss and Cindy L. Griffin, "The Metatheoretical Foundations of Invitational Rhetoric: Axiological, Epistemological, and Ontological Explorations," in *Inviting Understanding: A Portrait of Invitational Rhetoric*, ed. Sonja K. Foss and Cindy L. Griffin (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, in press).
5. Although we do not agree with some of his characterization of the process, we believe these terms, used by Michael Bernard-Donals, accurately describe the disruption of integrity through an exposure to new perspectives. See Michael Bernard-Donals, "Divine Cruelty and Rhetorical Violence," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 47, no. 4 (2014): 400-18.
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7. Sonja K. Foss and Karen A. Foss, *Inviting Transformation: Presentational Speaking for a Changing World*, 4th ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland, 2019), 4-12.

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17. Gearhart, "Womanization," 195.
18. Gearhart, "Womanization," 201.
19. Foss and Griffin, "Beyond Persuasion," 5.
20. Foss and Griffin, "Beyond Persuasion," 12.
21. Foss and Griffin, "Metatheoretical Foundations."
22. Gearhart, "Womanization," 196.
23. Sally Miller Gearhart, "Notes from a Recovering Activist," *Sojourner: The Women's Forum* 21 (1995): 8.
24. Gearhart, "Womanization," 198.
25. Sally Gearhart, "Womanpower: Energy Re-Sourcement," in *The Politics of Women's Spirituality: Essays on the Rise of Spiritual Power within the Feminist Movement*, ed. Charlene Spretnak (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982), 198.
26. Gearhart's theory of enfoldment is described in detail in: Karen A. Foss, Sonja K. Foss, and Cindy L. Griffin, *Feminist Rhetorical Theories* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland, 2006).
27. Sally Miller Gearhart, personal interview, May 14, 1996.
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29. Gearhart, "Recovering Activist," 8, 10.

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32. Gearhart, "Recovering Activist," 8-10; Sally Miller Gearhart, "The California Coalition for Traditional Values: View from a Dyke," *San Francisco Bay Times*, November 1989, 8.

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35. Sally Miller Gearhart, letter to Sonja K. Foss, August 26, 1997.

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37. Gearhart, "Womanization," 200.