Argument Borrowing and its Obligations

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While many authors have elaborated on the relationship between argumentation theory
id debate, Robert Trapp issued one of the most recent calls for a reevaluation of the
liance. He argues that we must recover a consensual argumentative perspective for
:ademic debate to cure our "diseases" rather than merely suppress the symptoms of what
ls the CEDA community. I would like to contribute to the discussion by suggesting the
:efulness of the concept "argument borrowing" for conceptualizing the relationship between
gumentation and debate. Such a conceptualization will assist both our theoretical and
:dagogical efforts to flesh out the meanings of the argumentation metaphor for our activity.

Willard initially emphasized the significance of borrowing arguments in his elaboration
ι argument fields (71). While there is some dispute about the exact meaning of argument
:lds (McKerrow; Rowland; Toulmin; Willard; Zarefsky), continued attempts to
nceptualize them recommend their utility for argument theory. Setting aside for the
ɔment the issue of the exact definition of argument fields, I suggest that the concept of
gument borrowing generated from fields research has much to offer our discussion of the
gumentation metaphor for debate. Accordingly, this essay explores the meaning of the
·m "argument borrowing" by describing the various instances of the practice and
/estigates its implications. Because the process of argument borrowing is so prevalent and
;uably inherent in intercollegiate debate, I argue for the necessity of exploring its
ssibilities for better debate pedagogy.

Argument Borrowing in Debate

Argument borrowing occurs on both theoretical and substantive levels. Scholars often
lize concepts from other literatures to advance the progress of debate theory. Hollihan and
ey describe this borrowing process as grafting the principles of related disciplines onto
>ate theory. They argue that the intent is to develop analogies "that mimic decision
king in other arenas" (399). For example, the introduction of systems analysis as a way
theorizing debate about public policy making was very influential in the development of
'T debate (Brock, Chesebro, Cragan and Klumpp). A more recent example of this
:nomenon is found in the work of Bile and Bahm. Bile's conception of the "whole
ɔlution" borrowed from educational literature and general semantics, and Bahm's

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intrinsicness arguments initially borrowed from literature devoted to phenomenology. Each
of these theoretical proposals have spawned challenges to the appropriateness and success of
the borrowing process and have resulted in a productive theoretical discussion (see for
example Klumpp; Hollihan and Riley; Madsen and Chandler; Bahm 1991 and 1993; Hill and
Leeman 1990 and 1993).

Debate students as well as established scholars have engaged in the process of argument
borrowing to improve the practice of debate theory. For example, debaters have imported
"critique theory." Debaters justify their critical stance by borrowing from some of the
literature in the field of critical theory. Some argue that there should be no burden to
advocate a totalizing universal solution and that such universalized solutions have only
contributed to the reification of current oppressive hierarchies. Others take the argument a
step further by advocating the position that only a critical stance can open a discursive space
for appropriate solutions to arise. The strategic lure of the importation seems to be its ability
to transcend the limitations of policy burdens. Questions about the appropriateness of this
practice have also resulted in a lively on-going dispute (see for example Lake and Haynie;
Harris and Rowland; Panetta and Herbeck; Tucker).

Argument borrowing also occurs on the substantive level. When researching specific
resolutions, debaters typically immerse themselves in relevant literatures and engage in a
process of argument discovery. For example, research of the Spring 1994 resolution
("Resolved: that U.S. military intervention to foster democratic government is appropriate
in a post cold war world") revealed that commentators most often talked about the cases of
Bosnia, Haiti, and North Korea. As a result, these were very popular cases—easily
researched and defended with evidence. Disadvantages frequently reflected current disputes
in the literature over military strategy. Debates over commonly recurring arguments also
indicate the presence of argument borrowing. For example, the debates over nuclear
proliferation commonly mirror disputes in the nuclear-proliferation literature. The rate or
inevitability of proliferation, the United States' role in anti-proliferation, the likelihood of
specific scenarios of nuclear use—issues that recur in the proliferation literature also recur
in debate rounds. The research process as it is practiced is often the heart of argument
construction.

The Benefits and Drawbacks of Argument Borrowing:
Some Pedagogical Concerns

Willard described the advantages of such argument borrowing, noting that importation
of concepts from other fields performs a check of our thinking against new standards. "The
motive is 'getting epistemically better'" (Willard 71). Argument borrowing can point to
"new lines of argument, implications, and truths that were obscured by the logic being used"
(Willard 71). Argument borrowing enables the transcendence of local argument obstacles.
Yet, such borrowing has its limitations.

Imported concepts have no value unless they have to some extent their own meanings. Fields borrow concepts to transcend local obstacles; this would not succeed unless the whole apparatus of the borrowed concept were imported. This permits the inference that a field that wants the advantages of importation assumes the logical burdens of the imported concept (Willard 71).

Successful argument "borrowing incurs obligations" (Willard 71).

As it is practiced in intercollegiate debate, argument borrowing has its benefits and drawbacks. Argument borrowing offers the unique pedagogical benefit of direct student participation in the development of theory. Students participate in and contribute to the development of debate/argument theory through their efforts to overcome local argument obstacles. They do so both by "testing" the theoretical concepts of scholars in actual debate practice and by developing theoretical arguments of their own or in concert with their coaches. Often the result is advances in debate theory.

The importance of articulating the pedagogical advantages of intercollegiate debate cannot be understated. In a recent call for accountability, Hill persuasively argues that justification for intercollegiate debate in higher education must be grounded in a commitment to a pedagogical mission. Citing several authors (Herbeck; Kay; Sillars and Zarefsky; Sproule), Hill argues that the very existence of intercollegiate debate in higher education is dependent upon our ability to effectively articulate a pedagogical justification for the activity. This is increasingly the case because of the decreasing availability of resources in the academy. Questions about the educational value of debate require competent, well supported answers. Hill notes "not only is it reasonable that, as educators, we be expected to address those questions seriously, it may well be imperative to the existence of our programs" (1-2).

Most pedagogical justifications of debate are based on the idea that debate should teach students argument skills to prepare them for future life. Colbert and Biggers illustrate this contention by drawing upon various sources to construct a coherent rationale for the activity. They offer three justifications for the continuation of intercollegiate debate in the face of institutional financial pressures. Each justification assumes that debaters are better prepared than their collegiate counterparts to engage in argument.

The first justification is that debate "improves the students' communication skills" (235). The second justification, debate promotes "depth of educational experience," relies heavily upon the importance of critical-thinking skills in order to make collective decisions (235). The third justification argues that debate is excellent "pre-professional preparation." These justifications appear to be a relatively straightforward list of the distinct merits of intercollegiate debate. Yet the authors primarily emphasize the importance of promoting critical thinking about argument. Colbert and Biggers quote Ehninger and Brockriede at length.

The function of debate is to enable [humans] to make collective choices and decisions critically when inferential questions become subjects for dispute. . . . When collective choices and decisions will be made critically . . . a critical decision is more "human" i.e., rational, than an uncritical one. The ability to arrive at decisions critically is that trait that chiefly distinguishes [human] from animal (15).

Critical decision making or argumentation is most significant when tied to collective choices. Debate prepares our students for making such choices.

Complaints about debate moving away from a public-speaking orientation might seem to contradict the claim that debate is justified by a conception of collective argument. However, as Rowland and Deatherage point out, "debate is now aimed at sharpening the research, critical thinking and organizational skills of students so that they can become effective advocates before government commissions, courts, and other decision-making bodies" (247). Despite disagreement over debate's public-speaking orientation, there still seems to be agreement on debate's promotion of critical-thinking skills in preparation for group critical decision making. Thus, the *raison d'être* of intercollegiate debate still resides in the value of attaining argument skills.

Student participation in the development of debate/argument theory through argument borrowing enhances the attainment of this goal. By participating in the development of theory, students not only can learn argument "skills" per se but also can master the intricacies of argumentation theory. The debate "laboratory" provides the opportunity for students to see as well as participate in the construction of the direct relationship between argumentation theory and argument practice.

Yet the process of argument borrowing, if done poorly, also has its drawbacks. There can be no doubt that a major educational advantage of intercollegiate debate is the knowledge gained about different subjects. However, if the practice of argument borrowing privileges the discovery of arguments already existing in various literatures to the exclusion of the invention of arguments, then we have sacrificed a unique educational benefit of debate. Borrowing as a substitute for invention is seen most clearly in research practice and the use of evidence.

Tuman provides an in-depth analysis of some of the problems associated with reductionism in the research phase of debate. He argues that our lack of scrutiny of the claims, methodological choices, and reasoning of the authors cited in debate rounds predictably results in poor argument practice. Conducting the research phase of debate solely as a process of discovering what arguments already exist in the literature in order to mimic those arguments in rounds is a substantially impoverished approach. It is argument borrowing *reductio ad absurdum* and often results in fallacious appeal to authority. Instead, we should privilege the invention of argument informed by argument borrowing. Research should serve not as a replacement for the invention of arguments but rather as a process of

finding support for building the invented argument.[1] Argument borrowing then would perform its appropriate role by enabling the transcendence of local argument obstacles.

Another difficulty associated with the practice of argument borrowing concerns the obligations of the importations. Inconsistency sometimes results from a poorly executed practice of argument borrowing. These inconsistencies can occur on both the substantive and procedural levels. Additional inconsistencies may occur between the assumptions of certain substantive and theoretical arguments. To illustrate the inherent risk of inconsistency associated with the practice of argument borrowing, I suggest that we consider the borrowing of arguments from feminist literatures for two reasons.

First, feminist theory and criticism is one field of inquiry from which debaters frequently borrow for both substantive and procedural arguments. Second, most feminist theories are uniquely reflective about the relationship between theory and practice. A consistent theme of many feminisms is

> the interplay between theory and practice, a problematic that Showalter nominates as the central concern of feminist criticism (4) and Jane Marcus identifies as the "most serious issue facing feminist critics today" (218). Indeed, within and increasingly unstable and fractious movement, the discovery of fruitful "intersections" and "synthesis" between theory and practice seems to be one of the very few surviving consensual imperatives (Warren 103).

Warren argues that feminist emphasis on the relationship between theory and practice is both valuable and unique. The conventions of many feminisms "place a high premium on 'practical theory,' and direct attention to the 'practice of theory,' two constructions rarely encountered in discussions of theory and theorizing" (103).

The initial importation of arguments from feminist literatures began on the substantive level. Debaters made and continue to make arguments about feminisms. Such arguments often refer to literature regarding women's movement in the United States and abroad. At the link level, debaters identify causal agents that encourage or discourage feminist movement. At the impact level, debaters defend arguments about the implications of feminist movement. For example, a typical disadvantage of this sort argues that the affirmative causes a decline in feminist movement, which has serious enough results to weigh against the affirmative case scenarios. Other examples include but are not limited to discussions about eco-feminist movement, feminist human rights movement, and the absence of women in various institutions relevant to the topics debated.

A second and distinct round of importation began when debaters initiated procedural arguments based on feminist claims. These feminist arguments are somewhat different from (though related to) what I have described as arguments about feminisms. Feminist arguments embrace various tenets of feminist theories to generate normative reasons for or against various debate practices. While a comprehensive theory of feminist argument has yet to be

produced, several developments in feminist communication and rhetorical theory point to the usefulness of exploring the relationship between research about women and feminist research.

Communication theorists have described feminist communication research as characterized by 1) the interrogation of existing research practice by comparing it to actual women's experiences; 2) developing research procedures within traditional boundaries that correspond to women's communication behaviors; and 3) development of explicitly feminist methodologies which include critiques of the politics of androcentrism (Carter and Spitzack). Similarly, feminist rhetorical scholars have describe feminist rhetorical theory as designed to analyze and evaluate the use of rhetoric to construct and maintain particular gender definitions for women and men. Feminist rhetorical theory attempts to re-vision traditional rhetorical theory with a new feminist consciousness of its drawbacks in order to create and sustain a new rhetorical theory and practice that includes the interests and perspectives of all people (Foss).

These authors make clear that feminist communication and rhetorical theories are not merely a discussion of women's communication practices (Spitzack and Carter). Instead, feminist communication and rhetorical theories address how communication research is practiced and how rhetorical theory functions to include or exclude persons on the basis of gender difference. Feminist argument is not just a set of claims "about women." It is a set of normative assumptions about our societal constructions of gender.

In intercollegiate debate, discussions concerning feminist movement on the substantive level, as they are currently practiced, are not necessarily perceived as feminist argument. (I will return to the consistency of this issue a bit later.) Rather, feminist arguments explicitly question the basis of debate practice, referencing normative reasons for or against certain procedural practices in the debate round itself. Initially, these arguments appeared in the form of language-linked value objections or reasons to reject grammar standards for topicality.

For example, a debater might have argued that the Fall 1993 resolution "Resolved: that the national news media in the United States impair the public's understanding of political issues" is flawed in some sense because it contains a conceptualization of "public" that is centered in a sexist public/private dichotomy. The debater might have argued that the rhetorical practice of maintaining the gendered dichotomy perpetuates, reflects and/or buttresses the oppression of women. One past resolution contained the phrase "race or gender." Some negatives argued that the dichotomous construction of this topic excluded women of color. The identity of women of color is erased in a phrase that forces a choice between ethnicity and gender. In addition, some discussions of topicality have included normative reasons to reject a grammar standard for the interpretation of the resolution. Some affirmatives have argued that traditional rules of grammar have functioned hegemonically to undergird a sexist language structure that results in the exclusion of women. One final example: some debaters argue decision rules that ask the judge to reject any instantiation of

atriarchy. Each individual must, so the argument goes, reject manifestations of patriarchy vhenever the opportunity arises and especially in the case of that particular debate round.

In each of these instances, debaters have borrowed from feminist literature to make ιormative arguments about the worth of certain debate practices. While I am encouraged that ιur students are exposed to emancipatory feminist literatures, I also am concerned about the ϧose way in which these (and other) literatures are borrowed and applied in debate practice. nconsistencies resulting from these importations have three dimensions. The first two, hough rather obvious, are nonetheless important. The third necessitates a more sophisticated onsideration of what it means to be a consistent advocate.

First, argument borrowing from feminist literatures for the development of substantive rguments often results in inconsistencies. Various feminists disagree about the meaning and npact of feminist movement, and as a result, their assumptions are often contradictory. For xample, some feminists believe that feminist movement should be designed to include ιomen in the liberal political tradition. Jaggar calls these authors "liberal feminists." .iberal feminist movement is based on the assumption that women too can be rational ecision makers in a liberal citizenship-based polity. The goal of the feminist movement is ϧ treat women equally to men. Consequently, it involves a rights-based understanding of ιe success of such movement. Victories are achieved when women are accorded the same ights as men. Jaggar calls another segment of the feminist community "radical." Radical ϧminists base their theories of feminist movement in essentialist assumptions. Women are ed to nature in a way that men are not because of their reproductive capacity. As a result, ϧminist movement can provide solutions to environmental devastation and the pervasive ιilitarism inherent in male hierarchies.

When debaters borrow from each of these literatures with the intent of developing ϧherent positions, inconsistencies often result. For example, the combination of an rgument that the causal agent in the resolution spurs liberal feminist movement with an npact consisting of a defense of radical feminism as the solution to all of our environmental ϧoubles lacks internally consistent links. Borrowing from inconsistent literatures in this ιstance results in the absence of internal links needed to establish a coherent position.

Second, such inconsistencies also exist on the procedural level. In the previous case f language-linked value objections or grammar standards, I have witnessed more than one ϧbate round in which the standard was inconsistently applied. Debaters defending non-sexist nguistic standards as a reason to vote against their opponents would often engage in gender-ϧecific language themselves or read evidence from authors using the generic *he*. In addition, ιe assumptions of some of the feminist authors who object to the use of sexist language ιight be inconsistent with assumptions of the impact to this procedural argument. The team ϧfending this position often asks the judge to "punish" the opposing team for the use of ϧclusive language with a loss. Indeed, the assumptions of some feminist authors might be ϧconsistent with the assumptions of the debate format itself—the arguably dichotomous and ϧen hierarchical construction of the inevitable win/loss.

Finally, poor borrowing practices can result in inconsistencies between the assumptions of substantive and theoretical positions. Let me return to the perceived but facile distinction I pointed out earlier between arguments about feminisms and feminist argument. The current practice of borrowing from feminist literatures to construct arguments about feminist movement is often seen as a substantive argument absent of procedural implications. Yet most often the observations about patriarchy borrowed to impact the argument contain many assumptions that have implications for how every issue should be considered. For example, many "fem disads" are offered in the context of a simplistic cost/benefit analysis framework. But what if the feminist author who objects to the horror of patriarchal militarism also advocates as an inherent part of her or his claim that mindless cost/benefit analysis leads to such patriarchal military nightmares?

These sorts of inconsistencies certainly are not limited to arguments concerning feminisms. My point is that it is a rare (perhaps nonexistent) instance in which factual claims are not tied to normative assessments. "Borrowing makes arguers accountable to the field from which the arguments were lifted" (Willard 71)—accountable for the normative assumptions underlying the claims that one borrows. This is particularly relevant to the way in which debaters argue for a particular decision calculus. Borrowing substantive impact evidence might oblige an advocate to adhere to the assumptive procedural decision calculus contained in the author's evaluation of that impact.

A return to an emphasis on argument invention instead of mere discovery would enable the avoidance of such inconsistencies and promote the development of coherent, and thus more strategically sound, argumentative approaches. We should teach our debaters advocacy through invention of arguments and (then) research skills that will provide supporting material. My point is not that debaters should be held responsible for every single belief ever held by an author. Instead, I stress the importance of the ability to discern which assumptions are relevant to the arguments made and the ability to invent and argue consistent claims.

Conclusion

In the end, I suppose I have engaged in a bit of argument borrowing myself in my pursuit of "getting epistemically better," for Willard initially observed that borrowing incurs obligations. Primarily, I have argued that exploring the process of argument borrowing in intercollegiate debate reveals some of the benefits and drawbacks to our current debate practices. It also provides a useful pedagogical construct for helping coaches and students alike to conceptualize the development of debate theory and the research process as well as the issue of argument consistency. It draws attention to the relative importance of argument invention over discovery.

It is my hope that understanding many of our current practices—good or bad—as argument borrowing will assist our self-reflexive attempts to recover an argumentative

erspective for academic debate. Fundamentally, debate is process of reason giving. We can orrow all of our reasons, or we can do our best to invent good reasons and use argument orrowing to "check our thinking" in our pursuit of "getting epistemically better."

Notes

[1] Trapp provides a good conceptualization of the relationship between evidence and reasoning (31).

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