## Metaphorical Construction: Argument is War

### ROXANNE L. KNUTSON

*". . . the way we label things, talk and think about them, inevitably*
*has an effect on how we behave. . . metaphor makes the mindset."*
*(Goodman)*

Amid calls for diversity, accountability and a clearer explication of its educational grounding, the debate community finds itself examining several issues concerning the current state of the activity in the academic setting. While discussions are often heated, there appears to be a serious effort to encourage a deliberative process to facilitate a greater understanding of where we are and where we want to go. Part of this discussion centers on the issue of participation; the gender, race, ethnicity and sexual preference of our coaches, judges and students. The underrepresentation and disparities in success levels of these groups in the debate community has been and continues to be documented (e.g. Brushke and Johnson 1994; Bartanen 1995). Research efforts and panel presentations continue to focus on searching out explanations and solutions.

Without devaluing the marginalized voices of people of color or gays and lesbians, it is evident that the focus on gender is most prominent in the definition of this issue. "Intercollegiate debate is still oriented towards men, and our society and culture is still very much male dominated" (Tuman 1993, p. 89). Exploring women's status and participation in intercollegiate debate is important and may lead to greater understanding of those broader issues of diversity and participation.

In identifying a framework for this exploration Rowland and Crenshaw both provide some insight (1993, 72ff.). These scholars suggest that culture shapes forensic practice (Rowland 1993, p. 83) and that through an investigation of debate culture we may come to understand and approach these problems more effectively. As Crenshaw explains, "Participation issues should play a prominent role in our discussion of debate culture. Working this cultural puzzle is an ongoing project" (1993, p. 94). This article is an attempt to join in the working of our cultural puzzle by suggesting that the underrepresentation of women in the debate community is, in part, due to the social construction of what it means to argue and debate in this culture. That is, meaning has been determined to a considerable degree by the metaphorical construction: Argument is War.

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### THE NATURE OF METAPHOR

Without providing a complete historical account of the nature of metaphor, it is necessary to review the well researched and developed theoretical perspective that posits that all experience is interpreted metaphorically, sometimes consciously, often unconsciously. This perspective grows out of the work of Stephen Pepper (1942) who suggested that hypotheses about the world originate from each person's root metaphor. This essentially experientialist view has guided theory and research in various contexts. For example, Linden (1979) argued that how psychiatric patients metaphorically define their environment will strongly affect how they behave. Edge (1974) suggests that experience is structured metaphorically, and it is this structure that affects both the questions we ask about society and science as well as the answers to those questions (Gerald Pepper 1988, p. 8). In *Contemporary Perspectives on Rhetoric*, Foss, Foss and Trapp conclude their discussion of Ernesto Grassi with the following:

Metaphor, then, is the essence of human life. It is the basic process by which humans understand their worlds--they make connections among experiences (p. 156).

The above echo the most provocative expression of this position offered by Lakoff and Johnson (1980a, 1980b):

Metaphor is for most people a device of the poetic imagination and rhetorical flourish--a matter of extraordinary rather than ordinary language. Moreover, metaphor is typically viewed as characteristic of language alone, a matter of words rather than thought or action. For this reason, most people think they can get along perfectly well without metaphor. We have found, on the contrary, that metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature (p. 3).

It is particularly pertinent to my thesis of this paper that Lakoff and Johnson began their discussion in *Metaphors We Live By* (1980a) with an illustration of how metaphors "structure how we perceive, how we think and what we do" (p. 4). The illustration rests in the concept of argument and its culturally accepted metaphor: ARGUMENT IS WAR. The examples of language presented are ones that we have all heard and have all participated in as a way to identify the activity in which we are all engaged. During and between rounds the metaphor is

clear. "That aff case was totally *indefensible*". "We were completely *destroyed*. The *positions we took* were *obliterated*". "Do you think you *won* or *lost* that round? You were *right on target* with the topicality argument. You *shot down* every objection". "I really hate that *rapid fire* delivery". "I couldn't vote for the neg after the aff *captured so much ground*". As Lakoff and Johnson point out:

> It is important to see that we don't just talk about argument in terms of war. We can actually win or lose arguments. We see the person we are arguing with as an opponent. We attack his positions and we defend our own. We plan and use strategies. If we find a position indefensible, we can abandon it and take a new line of attack. Many of the things we do in arguing are partially structured by the concept of war. Though there is no physical battle, there is verbal battle, and the structure of an argument--attack, defense, counterattack, etc.--reflects this. It is in this sense that the ARGUMENT IS WAR metaphor is one that we live by in this culture; It structures the actions we perform in arguing (1980a, p. 4).

The above description of the war metaphor in the general culture mirrors the language we find in our textbooks, intercollegiate debate teaching manuals and in current debate practice. A cursory glance at some of these establishes the pervasiveness of this metaphor within the intercollegiate debate experience. Austin Freeley's *Argumentation and Debate* (1996), for example, suggests that "if we allow our attention to wander while an *opponent* speaks, our reply will be ineffective and *'off the mark'*. And if we miss 75% of our *opponent's* arguments, we will be *destroyed*" (p. 26). The text encourages students to engage in debating because "debate helps students develop *courage* by requiring them to formulate a case and *defend it against strong opposition*. In debate, students' cases will come *under attack*. It would be easy to push the panic button, *beat an orderly retreat*, and avoid the problems. . ." however, they should instead "*defend their position*" (p. 28). As Freeley addresses the issues of building cases and developing debating skills, the use of the war metaphor continues to dominate the language. Later, he warns:

> Affirmative advocates of both value and policy propositions have the burden of proof; they must take the offensive and mount a strong attack to advance their case. Much of what we have considered so far has to do with the affirmative's offensive position. Remember, though, that debate does not take place in a vacuum and that an able negative will mount strong attacks against

the affirmative. The affirmative has to build its case and deploy its evidence so as to achieve the optimum balance of offensive and defensive capabilities" (p. 244).

These examples are not isolated, nor are they unique to the Freeley text. A quick glance at other texts and manuals reveals the consistent use of this metaphor in our education of intercollegiate participants. Rybacki and Rybacki, for example, discuss such concepts as *"premptive strategies"*, cross-examination as "the opportunity to *"interrogate"* each other, *"repairing damage"* and "the *defeat of positions taken"* (1991).

## WOMEN AND WAR RHETORIC

There has been a great deal of research dealing with the rhetorical obstacles faced by women choosing to speak in the public arena (Campbell 1973, 1980, 1985; Lakoff 1975; Siegler and Siegler 1976; Talley, Talley and Peck 1980; Putnam 1982; Foss and Foss 1983; Thorne, Krambrae and Henly 1983; Fitzpatrick 1983; Edelsky 1983; Mitchell 1984; Japp 1985; Pearson 1985; Bellrichard 1986; Spitzack and Carter 1987; Crowdes 1990). Women taking the debate podium are faced with these obstacles regardless of the exclusive nature of the metaphor discussed above. Summarizing the work of these scholars and others, "male speech is the standard against which female or 'other' speech is judged" and "female difference is comprehensible and judged to be deficient within the context of male communication behavior" (Spitzak and Carter 1987, p. 409). Further, cultural stereotypes which are still very much a part of our social construction, place women squarely in what feminist research calls "the female bind". Women are expected to speak from the podium in a manner that reflects the culture's understanding of their "natural" roles while meeting the standards of power and effectiveness exemplified by male communication norms. Pearson ends nearly every chapter in *Gender and Communication* by suggesting that women and men need to blend aspects of male and female communication styles, meaning that females must alter their communication considerably if they hope to achieve competence in social and political situations (Spitzak and Carter 1987, p. 421). The degree to which this is possible is limited not by a particular woman's self-assessment, but certainly by the external judgments of others in the current cultural context. A woman taking the public podium (thus the debate podium) to discuss issues of public policy is still considered one who is stepping out of her "natural" setting and asserting herself in an area where her voice is one of a minority of voices representing a "special interest". Crowdes speaks to this issue in the following:

In dominant rhetoric and everyday relations a woman is perceived to be competent when she conforms to the prescribed gender-specific standards of speech and action. When it is commonly believed that women should be competent at being soft, emotional, unaggressive, available, attentive to the needs and wishes of others (usually men) has been considered appropriate and desirable for women, then competence communicated through physical strength, verbal directness, direct eye contact, confident posture, or independent thinking is frequently perceived as challenging, inappropriate, or incompetent, i.e., unfeminine (Spitzack 1988). (1990, p. 530).

It is the contention of this paper that a deeper and more troubling problem for the woman who accepts the challenge of academic debating is the metaphoric construction underlying the activity itself. If we experientially define argumentation and debate as engagement in "war" we further complicate the rhetorical task to such a degree that few women will find acceptance, reward or success in participation.

Social mores about the appropriate roles for men and women in relation to war and violence are even more strongly embedded in the culture than general proscriptions concerning gender communication roles. "War talk" is the province of men; military service has historcally excluded women in various forms, and credibility in the public arena is often linked directly to one's war experience. Jean Bethke-Elshtain has observed that passive roles that women are expected to fill during times of war even extends to passivity in articulating their concerns about war (Christensen 1994, p. 16). Elshtain writes:

> In the matter of women and war we [women] are invited to turn away. War is
> men's: men are the historic authors and organizers of violence. Yes, women
> have been drawn in--and they have been required to observe, suffer, cope,
> mourn, honor, adore, witness, work. But men have done the describing and
> defining of war (1987, p. 164).

During the Persian Gulf War debates in the U.S. Congress, women legislators faced these same constraints. The "service" experience of male counterparts was a significant part of the debate. Women attempted to meet this rhetorical obstacle by illustrating their own connections with war experiences through the men in their lives who had served or by arguing on behalf of their constituents. The necessity of meeting this obstacle with periferal and tenuous connections instead of direct and clear experience certainly weakened the credibility of those women and their impact on the debate. As Christensen points out, "each woman had to face a

prejudiced assumption that she was ignorant or incompetent about war simply because this culture defines war as a quintessentially masculine activity" (1994, p. 18). Peterson (1990) and Corgan (1990) make the same point with reference to the describing and defining of war specifically in the Panamanian invasion.

Further, there are numerous examples of women's failure to meet the cultural expectations of appropriate normative behavior when engaging in war messages. For example, former congresswoman Bella Abzug was removed from her position as co-chair of the National Advisory Commission for Women in 1979 by then President Jimmy Carter; Carter was outraged that the commission was "using that platform to talk about war and the economy. These, said the president, were not women's issues." (Harris and King 1989, p. 39).

When the issue is war (even metaphorically), men understand the social pressures to conform to cultural standards of "war talk" as well. To help control and shape the public persona, men find it necessary to engage in masculine, gender-marked language to avoid perceptions of "being soft" or "reacting like like a woman". In addition to the weight of social and political sanctions in this context, men are also given cultural permission to engage in a type of masculine discourse that might otherwise be considered totally inappropriate. For example, during the Gulf War both public and congressional discourse used "imagery of male sexual domination as a metaphor for what would happen to Iraq and Saddam Hussein. George Bush was reported to have said that he wanted to 'kick Saddam's ass' [and] after the war began, Representative Gary Ackerman was prompted to exult on the floor of the House, 'Slam, bam, thanks Saddam!'" (Christensen 1994, p. 21). Cohn's work with defense intellectuals and military strategists further illustrates this point when she reported that the ramifications of war policy were not discussed. "Instead, they challenged each other's masculinity and 'shut down' discussion by referring to each other as 'wimp,' 'pussy,' and 'fag'. For weeks at a time, their deliberations were reduced to pondering the question, 'does George Bush have the stones for war?'" (1993, p. 237). The use of gender-marked language reduces women's voices to invisibility and places them in an untenable rhetorical position; neither participation in nor withdrawal from this discourse will empower women's messages. In the academic debate community, complaints about language and decorum often reflect this same phenomenon. Tuman illustrates by noting an incident at a CEDA National Tournament about which he concludes: "Suffice it to say that the female students and their evidence were subjected to gender specific verbal abuse throughout the debate, elevating to a level which materially affected their ability to proceed or derive education from the experience" (p. 84).

We are not arguing here that women and men are fundamentally different in the ways that they relate to war and "war talk". The theoretical positions concerning women as inherently peacemaking and men as inherently warrior-like as opposed to being subjected to normative and

linguistic gender roles, is an ongoing argument within the general culture (e.g. Harris and King, 1989). My concern is that because communication educators do understand the power of language choices to shape our understanding and experience, we need to be more careful to recognize the implications these choices have for the health of our communication activities.

Using the "war" metaphor so pervasively as the framework within which academic debate takes place, devalues and restricts women's participation and success. The metaphorical choice is to some degree structuring debate in the academic community. The activity is defined at the outset as a male dominated one that employs a rhetoric that is outside the appropriate province of women. Using the "war" metaphor defines issues of ethos clearly along gender lines putting women at a distinct disadvantage. And finally, using the "war" metaphor traps men into the employment of misogynist rhetoric and attitudes to support the building of their own rhetorical legitimacy.

## CHANGING THE METAPHOR

Changing a broad cultural metaphor that has such widespread and traditional foundations would be both unrealistic and extremely difficult. In the current culture of confrontational public discourse and polarization of social issues, the task may well be impossible. However, the focus here is to work on the part of the puzzle relating to the intercollegiate debate culture and in this context we may find ways to influence the framing of this activity. As educators, coaches and judges we have other metaphors out of which we can establish different perspectives. We have both the expertise and the sensitivity to recognize the power of language choices and we are aware that academic debate currently draws on some of those other metaphoric constructs to some degree. A 1995 poster session prepared for the national SCA convention, for example, suggested debate as narrative, education, game, and public address. Debate as deliberation and negotiation of claims and proofs would alter the talk and action of the activity in which we are engaged. Corder's article "Argument as Emergence, Rhetoric as Love" offers still another framework (1985).

In addition to asking others to participate in this discussion, it is the hope of this article to encourage those engaged in intercollegiate debate to examine their own language choices, the language choices of debate texts and educational materials, and the language choices of colleagues. It may be the case that we are too deeply *entrenched* in the language of war, opposition and competition to successfully rid the activity of this framework. Some might argue that this would not be desirable. It does seem practical, however, to examine other frameworks that have been in use in the past and continue to shape some of our experience so that we might be able to "mix the metaphor" to a substantial degree to free both men and women from the

social constructions surrounding war rhetoric. For example, Ehninger and Brockriede in their 1963 edition of *Decision by Debate* offer a number of metaphorical constructs that might be helpful in our search for other descriptions and definitions of academic debate. They write:

> Practice debates in the classroom and in college forensics tournaments are not ends in themselves, but means of developing the skills and attitudes necessary for responsible participation in the debating situations of later life where free citizens determine public policy (p. vii).

> While the procedure employed in debate is to try the mettle of ideas by entering them into competition, the debate process as a whole is, then, not an intellectual combat, but a co-operative testing device (p. 20).

> Because the purpose of debate is, therefore, to test means of achieving a common end, the proposition advanced for testing in a debate is not, as some suppose, a fixed and unalterable conclusion . . . it is a rational elaboration . . . of validity or worth (p. 21).

> To call debate a species of conflict is, in short, to confuse the part with the whole, to mistake a sub-movement for the method itself, to confound the role of the participant with the deliberative process in which he [or she] participates. Viewed as a generic mode of collective decision-making, debate is clearly a co-operative endeavor (pp. 21-22).

The effort to change the metaphor by educators in this activity could have significant implications for its practice and the diversity of its participants. For example, the metaphorical construct suggested by Michael Crichton in his critique of the media and its relationship to public discourse (National Press Club 1993) might be instructive. Crichton comments that, "We have lost the perception that reasonable persons of good will may hold opposing views. Simultaneously, we have lost the ability to address reasoned arguments, to forsake ad hominem characterization and instead address another person's views, which is a tragedy because debate is interesting. It's a form of exploration." The exploration (travel, discovery, etc.) metaphor offers a wide construct range while taking advantage of some of the metaphorical language already in use. Consider the difference in our "during and between round talk" if we were to *"move"* in this direction. "The aff case established no *clear path* for analysis." "We were *off-track*, the findings we presented were met with too many *probing* questions." "Do you think

you *reached your goal* that round? You seemed to have *smooth sailing* on the topicality argument. You *moved along* well." "I really hate the *light-speed* delivery -- it is not decipherable." "I couldn't vote for the neg after the aff *delved so deeply* into the issues." This metaphoric construction takes us out of the highly masculine and restrictive rhetoric of war and confrontation into a more inclusive realm of thought and behavior. Travel and exploration are both constructs that are experientially accessible to women and minorities. These constructs are available to men, as well, without being culturally constraining.

Greater participation and success for marginalized groups in intercollegiate debate is an important goal for all of us. Promoting and sustaining an activity that can empower its participants with analysis, research and communication skills must provide a framework that all persons will find accessible. How we define this activity may well determine our ability to reach that goal.

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# Defamatory Statements on the CEDA-L: To What Extent Does the First Amendment Protect On-Line Expression?

## DOUGLAS FRALEIGH

Alexis J. Anderson (1980) noted that in the late 1800s, the broad value consensus which had existed in the United States was torn apart, due to trends such as urbanization and immigration. As the nation became more heterogeneous, and political minorities challenged the status quo, established society became less tolerant of freedom of speech (pp. 58-59).

The CEDA community has also become increasingly heterogeneous. The time when most competitors and judges supported the style of debate envisioned by CEDA's founders has long passed. As CEDA becomes less cohesive, the likelihood that the discourse of some members of the community will be offensive to other members of the community is enhanced. With the advent of the Internet, and computer bulletin boards such as CEDA-L, controversial statements that may once have been made in a private conversation at a tournament can be made available to any subscriber, twenty-four hours a day, on any day of the week. This technology also makes it possible for members of different forensics communities to communicate with one another, and the tone of these interchanges is not always civil.

Another trend in our society is the increasing reliance on lawsuits as a means of dispute resolution. If the target of a message posted to the CEDA-L believes his or her reputation has been maligned, the threat of litigation is an option (s)he may consider. Defamatory communication, or that which "tends so to harm the reputation of another as to lower him [or her] in the estimation of the community..., (Restatement [Second] of Torts, Section 559)" may cause the target of the message to sue for money damages. The communicator will probably insist (or at least hope) that his or her message is protected by the First Amendment.

This essay will discuss some of the major judicial decisions which establish the rules for determining when the First Amendment will protect defamatory communication. First, a brief overview of defamation law will be offered. Second, First Amendment protection for several categories of potentially defamatory expression will be analyzed. Finally, some concluding thoughts about defamatory messages on the CEDA-L will be offered. The thesis of this essay is that the First Amendment protects a wide variety of communication posted to bulletin boards such as the CEDA-L. Nevertheless, communicators should think very carefully before posting a derogatory message about any individual.

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