ISSA Proceedings 2006 – Shaming Into Argumentation

1. *Introduction*

I submit that appeals to shame, here defined as a concern for reputation, may be not only relevant to but make possible argumentation with reluctant addressees. Traditionally emotional appeals including shame appeals have been classified as fallacies because they are failures of relevance (Govier 2005, p. 198; van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992, p. 134); we ought to believe or act based on the merits of a case rather than because we feel shame or some other emotion. However, Walton (1992, 2000) among others has argued that emotional appeals are not inherently fallacious, that they may also be strong or weak arguments, and that critics ought to evaluate them based on the inferential structure of the practical reasoning they involve as well as on the type of dialogue in which they occur.

In what follows I aim to build on Walton's insights that critics ought to attend to the practical reasoning involved in and the context of emotional appeals. Specifically, I argue, first, that to analyze and evaluate emotional appeals critics ought to attend to the discourse strategies that arguers actually use rather than relying on reconstructions alone. Second, I argue that to analyze and evaluate emotional appeals critics ought to consider context more broadly than the type of dialogue. Doing so enables critics to assess proportion in emotional appeals as well as the practical reasons they create, and to better understand complex argumentation such as political discourse.

2. *Attending to actual discourse strategies*

When analyzing and evaluating emotional appeals, critics ought to attend to the discourse strategies arguers actually use rather than relying on reconstructions only for two main reasons. First, examining the strategies arguers actually use enables critics to assess the proportion (Brinton 1988a, 1988b, 1994) or intensity of the emotional appeal. This is necessary because ordinary arguers make judgments about whether the emotional intensity "fits" the contours of the argumentation, the subject matter, and the occasion. More is at stake here than social norms. An appeal that attempts to make an act seem to be more shameful

than it is, or an appeal of overwhelming intensity may shut down dialogue. It is a fallible sign that the arguer may not understand the nature of the occasion, subject matter, or addressees' interests. The lack of propriety thus creates a reason for addressees to conclude that the argument does not deserve serious consideration. Because, other things being equal, addressees may risk little in ignoring such an argument, lack of propriety may foreclose the possibility of dialogue.

How is it possible to evaluate the proportion of emotional appeals? Brinton has proposed that "[p]erfectly appropriate rhetorical embellishment would reconstruct the situation for us in such a way that we experience it in exactly the same way we would experience it as first-hand observers" (1994, p. 40). In this way amplification may "somehow actually help to provide grounding, or count among *reasons* for *misericordia*" or other emotions (1994, pp. 39, 40). Ethical considerations enter as Brinton, following Aristotle, suggests that how one is affected is a sign of one's virtue; if one's feelings hit the mean, then one has an appropriate level of virtue (1994, pp. 36-37; 1988a, p. 78; 1988b, pp. 209-11). This kind of judgment can ground a critic's assessment of the appropriateness of an emotional appeal.

This method of analysis and evaluation would work in cases where the "rhetorical embellishment" is designed to make addressees virtual spectators of some circumstances, event, character, and the like. However, most techniques of rhetorical amplification are not best understood as being designed to recreate the situation in a way that enables addressees to experience it as if they were first-hand observers. Any number of techniques may serve to amplify and argue: allusion, antithesis, repetition, and exclamation are a few examples. Therefore, it is necessary to use a method of analysis and evaluation that may incorporate the full presentational design of the emotional appeal.

A second reason for examining the discourse strategies arguers actually use is that doing so enables critics to provide a fuller explanation of why an appeal may be compelling or not in a given situation. Presumably arguers could design a message in such a way that a reconstruction is redundant because it matches the actual message design. But most of the time reconstructions do not match message design. As Jacobs (2000) has put it, a reconstruction "is what could have been said, but wasn't. The puzzle is, why wasn't it said that way in the first place" (p. 265). In addition, a traditional analysis tends to focus almost exclusively on intellectual force alone. If the support for each premise is acceptable, relevant,

and sufficient, and if the argument addresses critical questions, then it may be judged as a reasonable argument. This kind of analysis and evaluation explains why an argument ought to be intellectually compelling in the mind of a single individual. But intellectual force alone is not always sufficient for belief or action. A theory of argumentation ought to be able to explain pragmatic force – how all discourse strategies in argumentation may work to reasonably pressure addressees to do something (Manolescu 2005a, 2005b).

3. *Attending to formal propriety*

The main reason why it is necessary to extend consideration of context beyond the type of dialogue is that much complex discourse does not fit squarely into any single type of dialogue. Political discourse may be the most conspicuous example.

To analyze and evaluate emotional appeals in context, critics ought to consider the formal propriety of the appeal (Manolescu 2004). Formal propriety is a fit among the appeal, argumentation, and occasion based on audience expectations. There are five kinds of form (Burke 1968). Most recognizable to students of argumentation is syllogistic form, where one or more premises may induce an expectation for a particular conclusion. Based on what has come before in the argument, addressees may see that a conclusion is fitting or not. If an arguer states the premises "Women are citizens and citizens have the right to vote," then the message is designed in a way that enables addressees to anticipate that the additional premise "Women ought to have the right to vote" may or will be asserted. Thus syllogistic form incorporates inferential structures but considers how they are manifested in the actual presentational design of the message. Another kind of form recognizable to students of argumentation is conventional form. Here addressees note whether argumentation meets expectations generated by the conventions of, say, an institution and its procedural rules. There are different conventional expectations for critical discussions and negotiations. Courts of law and parliaments permit and prohibit different kinds of arguments. An argument may meet the standard of formal propriety if it fulfills conventional expectations.

There are three additional kinds of form that may be less familiar to students of argumentation but that help critics to evaluate emotional appeals and other kinds of discourse strategies that may be left out of more traditional reconstructions.

First, qualitative form involves a judgment about whether one quality fits with another. We can imagine solemn occasions where any kind of humor would be inappropriate; the quality of humor on a particular occasion does not fit with the

quality of solemnity. This kind of judgment is relevant to evaluating the proportion of emotional appeals.
Second, repetitive form – repetition of the same principle in different guises – involves judgment about consistency. For an appeal to exhibit formal propriety, addressees recognize a fit among premises within the argument more broadly – an absence of inconsistencies – whether this broader argument is conceived as the arguer's entire case on a particular occasion or her case developed on a number of occasions or a case developed by numerous people on numerous occasions.
Third, minor or incidental forms are parts of an argument that are formal events in themselves; any single argument for example may be isolated from the argument as a whole and analyzed as a separate episode. The same is true for other kinds of strategies such as digressions or descriptions.

4. *Case study*
Carrie Chapman Catt's 1917 "Address to the United States Congress" is a good case study for illustrating how formal propriety can be used to analyze and evaluate shame appeals in argumentation. Catt uses shame appeals throughout the address to pressure members of Congress to vote for woman suffrage, and Catt was well known for devising other kinds of tactics designed to pressure members of Congress (Campbell 1989).
Catt first orally delivered the address to participants in the 1917 National American Woman Suffrage Association convention. In the speech she directly addressed members of Congress who of course were not present. But afterwards a pamphlet version was presented by women on the NAWSA's Congressional Committee to every member of Congress in person. Certainly Catt intended for the address to pressure Congressmen to vote for woman suffrage–or at least explain why they are voting against it. I have chosen to focus on Catt's address as an appeal to members of Congress but, as will be discussed below, it is significant that she also delivered it to members of the woman suffrage convention.
The following discussion explains how Catt uses shame appeals to pressure members of Congress to either vote for woman suffrage or argue against it. Pressuring them to argue is an important task because behind-the-scenes lobbying and deal-making involving the liquor interest had been a key factor in women not yet having the right to vote; the liquor interest feared that if women had the right to vote, they would vote for prohibition. After sketching a more traditional analysis I explain how it may be supplemented by considering formal

propriety.

The following is an excerpt from a shame appeal designed in part to convince members of Congress to vote for woman suffrage.

Do you suppose that any woman in the land is going to be content with unenfranchisement when she once comprehends that men of other countries have given women the vote? Do you not see that when that time comes to her she is going to ask why you, her husband, her father, who were so placed, perhaps, that you could observe the progress of world affairs, did not see the coming change of custom and save her from the humiliation of having to beg for that which women in other countries are already enjoying? (Catt 1989, p. 526)

A traditional analysis may judge the shame appeal as a fallacy because feeling shame is not a relevant reason for voting for woman suffrage; the vote ought to be based on the merits of the case itself. But, as has been noted (Walton 2000), this kind of judgment seems to involve treating a prudential claim – you ought to do something – as an evidential claim – you ought to believe something. Avoiding shame may be a good, prudential reason to do something. This points to the desirability of considering contextual matters such as the type of dialogue; while a shame appeal may be fallacious in a persuasion dialogue such as a critical discussion, it may be judged as appropriate in a negotiation dialogue where arguers attempt to advance their own interests. Moreover, it points to the need to look at the prudential reasoning that may be involved in the appeal.

One way of reconstructing the inferential structure of the shame appeal is the following based on Walton's (2000) analysis of fear appeals:
Vote for woman suffrage, or you will feel shame.
Feeling shame is undesirable.
Therefore you ought to prevent shame if possible.
But the only way for you to prevent shame is to vote for woman suffrage.
Therefore you ought to vote for woman suffrage.

The passage quoted above may be understood as support for the initial reconstructed premise: Vote for woman suffrage, or you will feel shame. The passage invokes a potential scenario where a member of Congress may be in the shameful position of having to explain why he did not see what Catt describes as the inevitable – the arrival of woman suffrage – and why he put United States

women in the humiliating position of having to beg for what women in other countries already had. This would be particularly shameful since at the time of the address the United States was fighting in the Great War to "make the world safe for democracy." A more traditional analysis would involve asking whether the support provided by the passage is acceptable, relevant, and sufficient; and asking critical questions such as whether shame may be avoided by some other means. It would also consider the appropriateness of the appeal based on the type of dialogue. One problem with evaluating proportion or propriety based on the type of dialogue is that political discourse may not fit squarely into any single type of dialogue. Still, if the appeal meets these criteria, then a critic might judge it to be a good argument and perhaps assert that it shifts the burden of proof. But how does it do this? How could it pressure even reluctant addressees, such as those who plan to vote against woman suffrage because they want campaign contributions from the liquor interest, to argue?

To answer these kinds of questions, we may use as a guide work by Goodwin (2001, 2002) and Kauffeld (1995, 1998) that has explained the pragmatic reasoning involved in the design of compelling accusations, proposals, appeals to authority, calls to make something an issue, and more; and the conception of formal propriety outlined above. The appeal is part of a longer series of questions near the conclusion of the address that Catt poses to "those who still harbor honest misgivings" (1989, p. 525) about voting for woman suffrage. The appeal does not involve an abrupt change in level of intensity within the address as a whole or within this particular part of the address, and therefore fits the contours of the qualitative form of the address itself. The level of intensity also fits conventional expectations for an address to Congress. This formal propriety is not trivial or irrelevant to the argument. It is a fallible sign that Catt is a serious person who understands politics and how to argue – a significant matter since, as Catt notes in the address, some people think women are illogical and sentimental (1989, p. 523) and therefore ought not to have political rights such as the right to vote.

Formal propriety in this case makes it more difficult for members of Congress to ignore her on the grounds that her views do not deserve serious consideration. To do so may subject them to criticism for not recognizing that her appeal has been made responsibly – a somewhat serious charge given that members of Congress ought to understand the proprieties of addressing each other in the course of political deliberation. In short, among the practical reasons created by the

strategy of using emotional appeals that meet the standard of formal propriety is this: Take the argument seriously or you will feel shame. In this way the proportion of the emotional appeal exerts some pressure on Congressmen to argue. Now, the argument manifests other signs that it deserves to be taken seriously: by its analytical design and careful reasoning, it manifests that it was responsibly formed; by anticipating and answering objections, it manifests a willingness to engage opposing views. The point is that formal propriety, coupled with other signs, creates practical reasons for members of Congress to argue; otherwise, they risk looking bad.

Moreover, this is a relevant appeal to shame – not a kind of *ad baculum* tactic that may not even qualify as an argument (Levi 1999). Catt does not threaten to shame members of Congress by exposing their indiscretions, for example. Instead, the appeal to shame is grounded in norms of argumentation such as taking seriously an argument that manifests signs of understanding the nature of the subject, occasion, and addressees' interests; other things being equal, addressees who do not engage such argumentation may be vulnerable to criticism. Thus the reason created – take the argument seriously or you will feel shame – is best understood as a reason for at least arguing against if not voting *for* woman suffrage as opposed to a reason *why* a member of Congress faced with such an appeal may vote for it.

Another discourse strategy involved in this shame appeal and the argument as a whole is first orally presenting it to members of the NAWSA and then having them personally deliver a pamphlet version of the speech to members of Congress. This strategy is outside the scope of a more traditional analysis because it cannot be reconstructed as a premise presented in the discourse. But it ought not to be abstracted out of the argument because it is an aspect of the actual presentational design and because it is possible to analyze and evaluate its reasonability under the circumstances. To do so, we ask: what practical reasons are created by this strategy?

The strategy helps to foreclose the possibility that members of Congress can in the future excuse their vote against woman suffrage by simply saying, "I didn't see it coming." The appeal invokes a shameful quality – not having vision – and forewarns Congressmen about the possibility of being held accountable in the future for their vote. Orally delivering the warning first to women of the NAWSA, and then having them hand-deliver a pamphlet version of the warning to Congressmen shows members of Congress that women know that the

Congressmen have been forewarned. So to deny that they saw it coming may mean they did not read her argument – shameful since it manifests signs that it deserves to be seriously considered. Or to deny it may mean they did not believe her even though it turns out that she was right. This may be shameful because it is a sign that a woman can have more vision than a man – a potentially troublesome implication for a member of Congress who advocates against woman suffrage on the grounds of women not being fit for politics. Thus the shame appeal is grounded in a norm of argumentation: holding responsibly-formed positions. Even if the member of Congress could claim to have never before encountered a woman intellectually fit for politics, due to the strategy of first orally presenting the speech to women who then handed the pamphlet version to members of Congress, he could not claim this without risk.

5. *Implications*

This analysis has attempted to show that to analyze and evaluate shame appeals critics ought to consider the discourse strategies arguers actually use and incorporate different levels of context into the discussion, including the occasion of the argument as well as the argument itself, and arguments on other occasions. The advantages of doing so include that the proportion of appeals to shame and other kinds of emotion may be assessed; another level of analysis may be added, namely the practical reasons created by actual discourse strategies; and complex argumentation such as political discourse may be better explained. Analyzed and evaluated this way, we may conclude that relevant shame appeals may be both presented in discourse and created by discourse strategies.

A pedagogical implication of the discussion is that it is worthwhile to consider real cases of complex argumentation. This may be cumbersome but, at the same time, it may enable students to make their implicit assumptions about norms of argumentation explicit. A theoretical implication of the discussion is that we need not and ought not assume that cooperation is the norm. It is possible to reasonably pressure even reluctant addressees to argue in a way that invokes and reinforces norms of argumentation – by shaming them into argumentation.

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