

The Rhetorical Situation

ENGL 110: Freshman Composition

UNDERSTANDING RHETORIC

- **Rhetoric** = the art of effective or persuasive speaking or writing
- Aimed at **getting your intended audience to modify their perspective** based on **what you say** and **how you say it**
- Using the **power of language** to persuade, inform, and inspire
- Rhetoric in **Politics**

WHAT IS A RHETORICAL SITUATION?

- Lloyd Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation” (1968)
 - Rhetorical discourse is called into existence by situation.
 - The rhetorical situation dictates both the content and the form of the discourse.
- Although many situations may exist, **not all situations can be defined as rhetorical situations.**

ELEMENTS OF THE RHETORICAL SITUATION

- Rhetorical Situation or **Exigence**
- Audience
- Author
- Purpose
- Genre
- Stance

The Rhetorical Situation or Exigence

- *"an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be" (Bitzer 6).*
- An exigence is simply **a problem existing in the world that needs to be addressed.**
- Exigence is **not rhetorical when it cannot be changed** by human interaction.
- Exigence is **rhetorical when it is capable of positive modification** through rhetorical discourse.

Audience

- Those who are the (intended or unintended) recipients of the rhetorical message. The audience should **be able to respond to the exigence**.
- Rhetorical discourse **promotes change through its influence of an audience's decision and actions**.
- Authors make all sorts of **rhetorical choices** based on their audience.
 - Language and tone, genre and medium, content and information, etc.

Author

- A person who composes a book, article, speech or other form of communication.
- Author Background
 - Age, gender, geographic location, ethnicity, cultural experiences, religious experiences, social standing, personal wealth, sexuality, political beliefs, parents, peers, level of education, personal experience, etc.

Purpose

- Why do authors write?
 - To to inform
 - To entertain
 - To persuade
- Questions to consider when identifying purpose:
 - What does the author(s) want to communicate to the audience?
 - What do they want the audience to take away from the written work?

Genre

- The **form of writing with set functions** determined by its social need
- Genre is determined by **need** and **audience expectation**.
- [A Brief List of Genres](#)

Stance

- The **attitude that the author has towards the topic** of his or her message.
- The author's stance determines the **tone** of the message and the **language** that they choose.

RHETORICAL STRATEGIES

- **Logos** (rational appeal)
 - Appeal to logic, means to convince an audience by **use of logic or reason**
- **Pathos** (emotional appeal)
 - Appeal to an audience's **heart and emotions**
- **Ethos** (ethical appeal):
 - Appeal to the **credibility and authority** of an author, show the audience that s/he is trustworthy and worth listening to

RHETORICAL ANALYSIS

[Sample Essay](#) -- Saiful Islam (Fall 2018)

- **Topic:** Abortion Legality
- **Text:** [“This is what life was like for women in America before Roe v. Wade”](#) by Rickie Solinger
- **Summary:** A narrative essay that focuses on how difficult it was for women to have abortions in the past. They were tortured and harassed by authorities when confronted for having abortions. While talking about abortion, the author touches on topics like citizenship, pay, and job opportunities for women.

Rhetorical Situation/Exigence

The article was written due to recent events that took place during the time the article was published. During this time, the United States Congress was electing a new Supreme Court Justice and there was lots of controversy surrounding one nominee: Brett Kavanaugh. Many Americans were worried that if Kavanaugh, someone with sexual assault allegations, were to be selected as the new Supreme Court Justice, then the rights of women could be negatively affected.

Audience

The article attracts an audience of people interested in reproductive rights and women's rights. Solinger mentions that he is a “historian who studies the history of reproductive rights in the US.” Therefore, what he writes is more specifically meant for people interested in the social issue of reproductive rights. Also, the title of the article hooks in people interested in history and women's rights because it mentions the Roe v. Wade court case and living conditions for women in America.

Author

Solinger is a credible source as he has a wide knowledge for these topics since he provides an extensive amount of information in the article (confirmation hearings for Supreme Court Justice nominee Kavanaugh, Roe v. Wade court case, and women's rights history) and is a "historian who studies the history of reproductive rights in the US".

Purpose

The purpose of the article is to inform the audience that if certain changes are made to the Supreme Court, then women's rights will be in danger of being taken away and times will take a turn for worse. He mentions at the beginning of the article that if Kavanaugh is confirmed to be a Supreme Court Justice, then “the majority of justices could favor the recriminalization of abortion at some point...” meaning that abortion could be made illegal again. He brings about what life was like for women before Roe v. Wade to show that when abortion was illegal, women had to go through many hardships such as not being able to get higher in their job industry, small wages, reliance on a male figure for economic needs, little to no liberty, etc. Similarly, this can happen again if abortion is made illegal.

Genre

The article is a narrative essay since it is under the “First Person” section of Vox.com. The description of this section is “Vox’s home for compelling, provocative narrative essays.” Also, narrative essays are told from the author’s point of view, and it is evident that the article is told from Solinger’s point of view as he uses pronouns such as “I”, “our”, and “we”; “To envision what our [emphasis added] future holds... we [emphasis added] only need to look to the decades before the nationwide legalization of abortion...”

Stance

Solinger is pro-choice in the debate of abortion legality. In the last sentences of the article, Solinger states, “As before ... women will be forced to flout the law to achieve personal dignity and safety. Such treatment of women ought to be an intolerable idea in a modern democracy.” By saying this, Solinger proves that he does not support the mistreatment of women like how it was before Roe v. Wade. Women would have to disobey the law to have an abortion in order to make themselves feel dignified and safe. Similarly, if abortion is recriminalized, then women will have to go against the law again in order to have an abortion.

QUESTIONS?

[Discussion Forum](#)