PERSUASION IN SOCIAL CONFLICTS:  
A CRITIQUE OF PREVAILING CONCEPTIONS AND A FRAMEWORK FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

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As reflected by recent conference reports and journal articles, there appears to be growing recognition within our field that while prevailing conceptions of persuasion (such as those typically found in textbook treatments of persuasion and related subjects) may be appropriate for drawing room controversies, they are highly inappropriate for the kinds of rough and tumble conflicts that were so dramatically evidenced during the sixties. Thus far, the criticisms of conventional notions have been piecemeal in nature, but they add up to a sweeping indictment, one which has important conceptual, normative, and research implications. In the first part of this paper, I should like to lay out the critique somewhat more systematically than has been done in the past. Drawing on the observations of conflict theorists in fields outside our own, I shall attempt to show that in common with other disciplines we have tended to reflect an “Establishment” bias that has nurtured (and, in turn, been supported by) questionable distinctions and generalizations.

Part II of the paper presents a proposed framework for research on persuasion in social conflicts and then offers several suggestions for research, justified in terms of the need to close theoretical

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3 Disenchantment with our “irrelevance” was expressed by Cronkhite and others at New Orlean's, and was a persistent theme at Minneapolis. Among contributors to the Prospect of Rhetoric, Booth noted that popularly prescribed strategies of persuasion are generally ineffective in contemporary conflicts. Johnstone expressed dissatisfaction with the traditional “persuasion-coercion” dichotomy. Duncan called for the conflict-centered rhetoric, one which, in contrast to prevailing rhetorics, would accept conflict as “normal” and “healthy” for society. Similar criticisms have been offered in journal articles. Perhaps the most damning comment was offered by Scott and Smith: that the generally prescribed rhetoric of civility, decorum, and reason may serve “Estabishments” rather than justice. I shall refer to some of the above sources in building my own critique.
gaps and overturn myths reflected in prevailing conceptions. Running through both sections of the paper is the concept of "coercive persuasion," offered here as a way of understanding the often ambiguous nature of influence-attempts in conflict situations.

A Critique of Prevailing Conceptions

Most perspectives on social conflict may be roughly classified as either "actor-oriented" or "system-oriented." From an actor orientation, conflicts are necessary and inevitable consequences of systems that cannot possibly satisfy the needs of all persons equally or completely. Hence, the role of the scholar is to determine how actors may realize their individual interests, either in conflicts with other actors or with the system itself. From a system orientation, conflicts are undesirable because they interfere with realization of the system's supraordinate goals. Hence, from this perspective, the scholar is "above the battle . . . concerned with conflict regulation and resolution instead of the partisan concern of how to win."

On the face of it, there appears to be nothing wrong with system orientations; indeed, as William Gamson has suggested, the needs of social systems must be considered in any balanced and comprehensive approach to social conflicts.

To be system-oriented is to value the products of collective effort, to recognize that personal freedom can come only from social order, and hence, to conclude that conflicts—whether between labor and management, ruler and ruled, or one nation and another—must necessarily be controlled in the larger system's interests. Rhetoricians will recognize system orientations in Plato's indictment of the sophists, in our characteristic defense of persuasion as an instrument for democratic decision-making, in our traditional emphasis on rational appeals in persuasion, in our long-standing aversion toward demagogic and coercive methods of influence, and in other contemporary treatments of the ethics and social functions of persuasion. Although rhetoricians have by no means forewarned identification with the interests of actors, our support has been guarded, qualified, and—as I shall try to document—highly selective. For the most part we have insisted that self-imposed limits should be placed on how influence is exercised and we have urged that the individual interest be subordinated to the collective interest. In these respects, prevailing conceptions of persuasion are at odds with the state, it functions as an actor. Conflicts may occur between two actors or between actors and systems. The main concern (but not the entire concern) of this paper is with conflicts between actors and systems. An attack upon a system may be confined to its agents ("Throw the rascals out"); or it may extend to the norms, values, and authority structure of the system; or it may even extend to the community of persons who comprise the system. See Gamson, p. 49.

4 See William A. Gamson, Power and Discontent (Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press, 1968), Ch. 1; David Easton, The Political System (New York: Knopf, 1959). Gamson refers to these perspectives as the "influence perspective" and the "social control perspective."

5 Gamson, p. 11.

6 Ibid., p. 149. As used here, and by Gamson, the terms "actor" and "social system" must be understood in relationship to each other. Actors are always elements of social systems, but since the terms may be used at different levels of abstraction, the same social entity may be an actor at one level and a system at another. For example, when Temple University reacts to student protests, it functions as a social system, but when the University pleads for funds from

7 Plato's system-orientation extended to the belief that civil disobedience is never justified. Rather than escape, as Crito urges him to do, Plato has Socrates accept the unjust death sentence of the state. As Howard Zinn has observed, Plato's Socrates has become the exemplar of dutiful obedience to the state. See Disobedience and Democracy (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 28. That rhetoricians have generally not criticized so extreme a system-orientation is one measure of our own identification with the needs of social systems.
sion in social conflicts have tended to be system-oriented.8

In view of the apparent wisdom of sys-

tem orientations, on what possible grounds may they plausibly be assailed? Surprisingly, perhaps, the attack within the social sciences has been incisive and far-reaching. Not surprisingly, it took on added fuel during the sixties, especially from those scholars with "radical" sympathies who identified strongly with the protesters. Coser9 and Skolnick,10 among others,11 have argued that however reasonable system orientations may appear in principle, in practice they have constituted indiscriminate rationales for the preservation of existing systems and for those privileged persons who wield power within them. Furthermore, these authors have maintained that system orientations tend to be blind to the nature of conflict and social influence, to the needs of "Outs" and "Have-Nots," and to the utility of social conflict for societies. These indictments are closely interrelated, just as the presuppositions on which system orientations rest form a self-contained, and mutually reinforcing, unit.

Although the bill of indictments presented by Coser, Skolnick, et al. was directed at fellow sociologists and political scientists rather than at rhetoricians, its general applicability to system orientations provides a useful context for my own critique. In the remainder of this section, I shall attempt to illustrate how each of their criticisms, or similar criti-

8 It should be apparent that by "our field" or "we" or "rhetoricians" I am referring to both behaviorally oriented and humanistically oriented scholars in speech communication, particularly those who have written about persuasion or related subjects. The term, "prevailing conceptions," is a bit stickier. I have not polled SCA members or conducted an exhaustive survey of the literature, and so, by the most rigorous standards of evidence, I cannot claim to know what conceptions prevail in our field. Still, if my samplings of the literature are at all representative, we are system-oriented in the manner in which I have depicted us. Most texts and relevant articles that I have sampled—especially those written before the protests of the sixties had achieved their fullest impact—endorsed positions consistent with those I shall illustrate and criticize later in this paper. J. Vernon Jensen's review of literature on how our field has approached the teaching of ethics provides a fair indication of positions expressed prior to the sixties. See "An Analysis of Recent Literature on Teaching Ethics in Public Address," The Speech Teacher, 8 (1959), 219-228. In general, we come off as "good liberals," interested in free speech, in reason, in making democracy work, and so on. "Bringing the greatest good to the greatest number" and recognizing the precedence of the public over the private are stresspoints, but most frequently emphasized is the need for perpetuating the general value of the democratic society, particularly the aspect of freedom of speech" (p. 219). Not every rhetorician touches base on all of the traditional cornerstonestones of democratic liberalism, and, as Richard L. Johansen's anthology makes clear, some writers (Haiman and Nilsen, for example) have agonized over "imperfections" in existing systems and methods of influence. See Ethics and Persuasion (New York: Random House, 1967). Although most recent texts remain cautiously traditional in their ethical treatments, some have taken outright exception to one or another of our traditional beliefs. For example, James C. McCroskey [An Introduction to Rhetorical Communication (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968), p. 283] finds some forms of coercion to be praiseworthy, and Kenneth E. Andersen [Persuasion: Theory and Practice (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1971), p. 342] acknowledges that "all societies, all people depend totalitarian and democratic persuasion." Indeed, given the changes that have already taken place in the field since the sixties, I suspect that we are now very much more divided on the ethical questions raised in this critique, and that some rhetoricians will find my critique too tame for their liking. I should add, finally, that the critique of prevailing conceptions of persuasion in social conflicts goes beyond examination of what has been said explicitly on the questions of ethics. It applies also to professedly amoral treatments of persuasion and to such related subjects as discussion, argumentation and public speaking.


cisms, may be applied to prevailing conceptions held by rhetoricians concerning persuasion in social conflict.

1. Along with other scholars, many rhetoricians have erroneously assumed that social conflicts are conceptually equivalent to mere differences of opinion.

One way to cope with what threatens us is never to mention it; another is to civilize it out of existence. According to Coser and Skolnick, many system-oriented social scientists have tended to do both. Avoiding the term "conflict" entirely, they have preferred such softer labels as "strain," "disagreement," or "controversy." Rather than referring to differences over "competing interests," they have referred to differences over "beliefs" or "attitudes." Prior to the sixties, at least, some theorists went so far as to argue that all conflicts were really epiphenomena, resolvable by talk alone.

A failure to distinguish between controversies and conflicts is seen in virtually all treatments of persuasion—by humanists and behaviorists alike. In textbooks on persuasion as well as on such related subjects as argumentation, discussion, debate, interpersonal communication, and organizational communication, the term "social conflict" is scarcely referred to. Some communication theorists have echoed the belief that conflicts are no more than communication breakdowns.15

15 So great is the emphasis on impartiality, cooperation and consensus in texts on group discussion that one could hardly expect serious attention to genuine conflict in these books. Where conflict is discussed in textbooks on discussion or communication, the emphasis is on conflict resolution. Consider also the chapter on "Interpersonal Conflict" in The Dynamics of Discussion by Dean C. Barnlund and Franklyn S. Haiman (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960). Forgetting their earlier acknowledgment (in Chapter 3) that conflicts are not "abnormalities," in this chapter conflict is equated with hostility, and attempt to explain it away on purely psychological grounds. The hostile individual is "frustrated" or "insecure"; hence, he retreats to such immature or defensive activities as monopolizing the discussion, pulling rank, negativism, dogmatic and prejudiced statements, biting sarcasm, or "blocking" behavior. Conflict is assumed to arise from the individual's response to frustration, not from the reality of the situation or the intransigence of others. To resolve or reduce conflict, the authors suggest that the group (the "system" in this case) employ "therapeutic measures" with the "deviant" as a way of "socializing" him. Absent from consideration is even the remote possibility that the nonconformist may have real grievances which are willfully and unjustly thwarted by others.

In texts on organizational communication, resolutions in the direction of satisfying the organization's goals are given highest priority. See, for example, Ernest G. Bormann, William S. Howell, Ralph G. Nichols, and George S. Shapiro, Interpersonal Communication in the Modern Organization (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969). Also note the tendency to treat conflicts as "disagreements" and their use of the concept of a "communication breakdown" (Chapters 9 and 14). In general, persons in speech and communication have influenced, and have been influenced in return, by "human relations" and therapeutic models of the communication process in which conflicts are treated as breakdowns, or misunderstandings, or as symptoms of defensiveness. A convergence of viewpoints was evidenced at Northwestern in 1951 when Carl Rogers and Fritz Roethlisberger participated in the Centennial Conference on Communications along with scholars in speech. Rogers' and Roethlisberger's famous "Barriers and Gateways to Communication" [Harvard Business Review, 30 (1952), 46-52] provided a succinct statement of the concept of "communication breakdown," one which was to have great influence upon communication specialists. Reduced to its essentials, a "breakdown" within a business organization occurred when a superior failed to listen empathically. Although theorists of persuasion, argumentation, and debate have generally not opted for the "breakdown" metaphor, they have failed in other ways to come to grips with the reality of conflict. Note, for example, that in Minnicks' text on persuasion, the political struggles that occur within a society are referred to as "controversies," never as "conflicts." See Wayne C. Minnicks, The Art

12 Coser, Functions of Social Conflict, Ch. 1. Coser cites Talcott Parsons and his followers as outstanding examples, as well as the Harvard "human relations" school led by Elton Mayo and Fritz J. Roethlisberger.

13 Skolnick, Chapters 1 and 9. Skolnick's observation was intended to apply to the "consensus school" of social scientists—such writers as Daniel Boorstin, Daniel Bell, and Seymour Martin Lipset—but it should strike home to scholars in speech communication as well.

14 An excellent example, and one that has greatly influenced rhetoricians, is Stuart Chase, Roads to Agreement (New York: Harper, 1951). The position is still held by some. See, for example, John W. Burton, Conflict and Communication: The Use of Controlled Communication in International Relations (London: Macmillan, 1969).
That there are important conceptual distinctions to be drawn between genuine conflicts and mere controversies is easily illustrated. When a newspaper columnist argues that auto workers deserve better pay, few would deny that he has entered the realm of controversy. But now let us suppose that the message had come from the head of the United Auto Workers in the midst of a bargaining session; furthermore, that the official had threatened a walkout if General Motors did not furnish large pay increases. In the first case, the columnist expressed a controversial position but he did not threaten or harm anyone. In the second case, the union official backed up his message with the threat of coercive force. He was engaged, not simply in a controversy, but in a genuine conflict. A controversy is a difference of opinion but a genuine conflict is more than that. In Coser’s words, it is a “struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure, or eliminate the rivals.” 16 To resolve a controversy, talk is often sufficient; and if the controversy persists, neither party is likely to suffer very much. Some struggles between opponents turn out not to be genuine conflicts. With a bit of dialogue, it can be discovered that differences are more apparent than real. But in a genuine conflict talk between parties is seldom enough. Each party may search for common ground with his adversary but there will also be irreconcilable differences that are perceived to be so basic as to prompt the kind of struggle Coser has referred to. In these cases, differences may be adjudicated by third parties; or one party may try to establish dominance over the other; or differences may be compromised on the basis of all the moral, intellectual and coercive resources that each side can muster.

2. Paralleling the failure to distinguish between controversies and social conflicts, rhetoricians and other scholars have failed to distinguish between cases of “pure” persuasion and cases involving combinations of persuasive and coercive elements. Instead, they have clung to an antiquated “persuasion-coercion” dichotomy.

Consistent with conventional usage, rhetoricians have tended to assume that persuasion and coercion are not only separable but antithetical. On this basis, democratic governments have been distinguished from totalitarian governments, 17 “moderate” protestors from “militant” protestors, 18 “nice” bosses from “authoritarian” bosses, 19 and the mouths of diplomats from the mouths of guns. 20 The distinctions commonly drawn between the two modes of influence are as follows. First, persuasion involves appeals, advice, arguments, and so on; coercion involves force or threats of force. Second, successful persuasion leads to changes in behavior but never without corresponding changes in attitudes. It involves freedom of choice or at least the perception of choice. Suc-

16 See Coser, Continuities in... Social Conflict, Chapter 1.
17 See, for example, Minnick, pp. 4-5. Minnick’s chapter on “Persuasion and Society” is, in general, an excellent example of the kind of position that I have been criticizing.
18 See, for example, Andrew Thomas Weaver and Ordean Gerhard Ness, The Fundamentals and Forms of Speech, rev. ed. (New York: Odyssey Press, 1963), pp. 19-20. “The point of difference between a creative and a destructive minority is that the former uses, as its technique of control, peaceful persuasion, while the latter employs force.”
20 Brigance has said, for example, “There are only two kinds of nations in the world today, only two: those who in crisis want to shoot it out and those who have learned to talk it out.” See W. Norwood Brigance et al., “What Is Speech—A Symposium,” QJS, 41 (1955), 145-155.
cessful coercion leads to changes in behavior without corresponding changes in attitudes. It induces involuntary compliance and denies freedom of choice or the perception of choice.\textsuperscript{21}

The trouble with the persuasion-coercion dichotomy is that it cannot be applied reliably to the real world, and especially to most conflict situations. Although the criteria used to distinguish persuasion and coercion enable us to identify different elements within a given act, and although there are a great many cases of “pure” persuasion which are free of coercive elements, by these same criteria, acts conventionally labelled as “coercive” are almost never free of persuasive elements.

Unless coercive power is made persuasive, its targets generally have the freedom of choice to disregard it, avoid it, or combat it.\textsuperscript{22} Moreover, the threat of force may reduce attitudinal resistance to a proposition, as when the coercive potential of a boss (even a “nice” boss) helps cause employees to agree—both publicly and privately—with his suggestions.\textsuperscript{23} Other evidence clearly suggests that where forced compliance has actually occurred, it may lead compliers to modify their attitudes so as to make them psychologically consistent with their behaviors.\textsuperscript{24} Finally, as Scott and Smith have attested, the use of force—even violent coercive force—often carries implicit persuasive messages:

We have talked of the rhetoric of confrontation, not merely confrontation, because this action, as diverse as its manifestations may be, is inherently symbolic. It dissolves the line between marches, sit-ins, demonstrations, acts of physical violence, and aggressive discourse. In this way, it informs us of the essential nature of discourse itself as human action.\textsuperscript{25}

Elsewhere,\textsuperscript{26} I have used the term “coercive persuasion” to refer to acts that combine coercive and persuasive elements, and I shall return to that concept later in this paper. As I see it, coercive persuasion applies to any situation in which at least one party sees himself in genuine conflict with another, has some coercive power over the other, and finds it expedient to establish, persuasively, any or all of the following: (1) his relative capacity to use coercive force, (2) his relative willingness to use coercive force, (3) the relative legitimacy of his coercive force, (4) the relative desirability of his objectives.

Coercive persuasion may occur in conflict between parents and children, governments and citizens, teachers and pupils, competing businesses, and in a great many other “mixed-motive” situations. My earlier example of a labor-management dispute over wages may serve to illustrate the concept. The two sides have mixed motives in the sense that

\textsuperscript{21} See, for example, Bettinghaus, p. 14; Wallace C. Fotheringham, Perspectives on Persuasion (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1966), pp. 79-84.

\textsuperscript{22} See, for example, Thomas C. Schelling, The Strategy of Conflict (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960).

\textsuperscript{23} See, for example, Charles A. Kiesler and Sara B. Kiesler, Conformity (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1969).


\textsuperscript{25} See Scott and Smith, “Rhetoric of Confrontation,” 7.

each depends on the other for its existence and livelihood while being engaged simultaneously in a struggle over a scarce resource: money. Consequently, both sides amass their coercive power as well as their persuasive resources. Persuasion is used to demonstrate the credibility and legitimacy of coercive power, the reasonableness of demands and counterdemands, and the moral, intellectual, and coercive bankruptcy of the opposition. In conflicts such as these, persuasion and coercion are inseparable handmaidens.

Recall now the criteria conventionally employed to distinguish between persuasion and coercion, and it should be apparent that they do not provide a sound basis for categorizing acts commonly employed in conflict situations. Many such acts are ordinarily labelled as cases of "pure" coercion, yet freedom of choice is present, or the actor's threat or use of force carries a persuasive message, or attitudes are modified. A failure to rid ourselves of the persuasion-coercion dichotomy may be one reason that our field has had little to say about social conflicts. How can one say very much about them if acts characteristic of conflict situations are excluded from the rhetorical domain as being coercive rather than persuasive?

3. Rhetoricians and other scholars have tended to apply terms like "persuasion" and "coercion" in ways that reflect and reinforce an "Establishment" bias.

Whether one chooses to distinguish between "coercion" and "persuasion" or between "coercive persuasion" and "pure persuasion," the conclusion seems inescapable that force and threats of force are not confined to sinners only. Universities and business organizations are coercive in that, as hierarchical structures, they confer more power to some, less power to others. To the degree to which laws and Presidential edicts contain enforcement provisions, they too are coercive. And since the American colonists overcame their adversary by something more than good arguments, they may also be categorized as coercive—even as violently coercive.

Despite these seemingly self-evident truths, the conviction persists in our society at large, and among many scholars as well, that coercion is intrinsically evil, that it is only practiced by the most nefarious of scoundrels, and that it is not employed by agents of our own government. Not surprisingly, government officials and other targets of militant protests have used the coercive label as a powerful weapon in their attacks on the protestors and as justificatory rhetoric for their own "law and order" campaigns.\(^27\) In these respects, they have been willingly or unwittingly assisted by rhetoricians. Consistent with the popular mythology, the examples given in our texts on persuasion have almost invariably identified "coercion" and "violence" with thieves in the night, despotic bosses, and Gestapo torture tactics; never with national guardsmen at Kent State on the one hand, or soldiers at Valley Forge on the other.\(^28\) The effect of these one-sided examples—often buttressed by explicit and unequivocal denunciations of those who employ "coercion," "violence" or "demagogy,"\(^29\)—is

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28 See, for example, Thomas M. Scheidel, *Persuasive Speaking* (Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman, 1967), p. 2; Minnick, *Act of Persuasion*, p. 5. As his only examples of physical coercion, Scheidel lists the rack, the thumbscrew, the iron maiden, and the threat of being shot. To this list, Minnick adds bludgeons, beatings, imprisonment, and threats of betrayal. With examples such as these, one need not present a considered evaluation of when, if ever, coercion is warranted. The use of one-sided examples is a way of saying that coercion is always evil.
to sustain the attack on the militants by their targets.

When it is considered that hierarchies are inherently coercive and that laws are backed up by force, the charge that coercion (or "coercive persuasion") is intrinsically evil can hardly be taken seriously. Often, such a claim is made by one group of coercers who wish to denigrate another group of coercers. What people generally mean by the claim is that certain forms or degrees of coercion are more evil than others, or that certain coercive practices serve less worthwhile ends than others or, as applied to government, that certain coercive practices may or may not be legitimized by consent of the governed. In other words, it seems that coercion is not really believed to be intrinsically evil, but only that coercion in some contexts is considered to be evil.

The refusal to regard officials of our government as coercive—or, more accurately, as illegitimately coercive—deserves special attention. The refusal is based, of course, on the warrant that ours is a truly democratic society, one whose citizens have equal power to influence government decisions, and whose representatives take action and resolve controversy on the basis of rational debate. The argument is a good one if it can be demonstrated that our governmental system fulfills these conditions. But here is the sticking point. Rather than examining the validity of the warrant, many rhetoricians have taken it as gospel truth, even in the face of highly plausible counterarguments.

My purpose is not to provide an elaborate defense of the contention that ours is not a truly democratic society; rather, I wish only to show that the issue is at least worthy of examination. Here, let it be noted that the contention is based on fairly solid evidence. For example, power is not shared equally in America; as in other "free societies," its possession tends to be correlated with wealth and concentrated in elites; and those who have power generally do not surrender it willingly. These facts of political life may help to explain why equality has forcibly and often violently been denied to such groups as blacks, Indians, women, consumers, and migrant farmworkers. If political power were proportionate to group size, these groups would long ago have received a larger share of life's commodities. But the powerful are better able to apply coercive pressures. As H. L. Nieburg has argued, violence and threats of violence tests must depend on "a careful assessment of the power structure of the situation" (p. 114). Still, Haiman's defense of even so mild an act as draftcard burning is muted and grudging. An act such as this, he maintains, "hardly passes muster by the standards of rational discourse, which this author and many others who have written on the ethics of persuasion have proposed" (p. 113). And even when it is found that there is an imbalance of power and that the holders of power are intransigent, about all Haiman can say in defense of the protesters is that we should be "less harsh" (italics mine) in our judgments (p. 114). Implicit in Haiman's remarks, as in other treatments by rhetoricians, is the assumption that intransigence by the powerful is an atypical or abnormal condition in our society.

31 I believe, by the way, that ours is a relatively democratic society. We will not advance very far, however, if we celebrate past achievements as a way of discouraging activities—even "illegal" activities—that are designed to rectify current inequities. For a similar position, see Michael Walzer, Obligations: Essays on Disobedience, War and Citizenship (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970).

32 See, for example, Ferdinand Lundberg, The Rich and the Super-Rich (New York: L. Stuart, 1968). Lundberg's book abounds with evidence of this kind. For example, about 100 families control the stock of America's 150 supercorporations, and these corporations now account for well over half the national income in the United States (p. 928).
are "an underlying, tacit, recognized and omnipresent fact of domestic life, of which democratic politics is sometimes only the shadow play."\(^{33}\)

So much disruptive protest has occurred in recent years, and so much of it has been associated with the Left, that we may fail to realize that disruptive protest, including violent protest, has always been with us, and that violence is as often practiced by the Right or by agencies of government. That we do not see government officials as violent is no accident. As the Skolnick Report has argued:

Within a given society, political regimes often exaggerate the violence of those challenging established institutions. The term "violence" is frequently employed to discredit forms of behavior considered improper, reprehensible or threatening to specific groups which, in turn, may mask their own violent response with the rhetoric of order or progress.\(^{34}\)

Skolnick goes on to argue that terms like "coercion," "violence" and "disruption" are always politically defined. The meanings assigned to "devil words" such as these by laymen and experts alike is a function of "who provides the definition and who has superior resources for disseminating and enforcing the definition."\(^{35}\) Skolnick presents a startling array of historical evidence concerning the extent of governmentally sanctioned violence perpetrated by the Right and by law enforcement officials,\(^{36}\) evidence that is corroborated by the comprehensive book, *Violence in America*.\(^{37}\) Finally, Skolnick cites evidence from a survey of reported incidents of violence at protest demonstrations during one thirty-day period in 1968. Of 216 incidents of protest, thirty-five percent involved violence, half of which was initiated by authorities.\(^{38}\)

I have referred to more blatant forms of coercion (or "coercive persuasion") by citing cases of violence, but there is every reason to believe that other forms of social control in "democratic" societies also involve coercion, including illegitimate coercion. To those poor and powerless who feel disenfranchised in our society by the rich and powerful, the failure to enforce some laws (e.g., against housing discrimination) and the selective enforcement of other laws (e.g., against shoplifting) are considered to be illegitimately coercive—a kind of "institutional violence."

Scott and Smith have observed that "since the time of Aristotle, academic rhetorics have been for the most part instruments of established society, presupposing the 'goods' of order, civility, reason, decorum, and civil or theocratic law." In the abstract, of course, I prefer civility, reason, decorum, etc., to disruption, coercion and violence. But what emerges from this analysis—just as from Scott and Smith's—is that these seemingly moral preferences may "serve as masks for the preservation of injustice, . . . condemn the dispossessed to non-being, and . . . become the instrumentalties of power for those who have."\(^{39}\) Rhetoricians have tended to use the words "persuasion" and "coercion" not only in ways that impede scholarly analysis of social conflict, but also in ways that vindicate those who exploit through established channels while providing support for condemnations of those who may have little choice but to operate outside the system.

4. *Given their general aversion to con-


\(^{34}\) Skolnick, *Politics of Protest*, p. 4.

\(^{35}\) Ibid., p. 4.

\(^{36}\) Ibid., pp. 8-21.


\(^{38}\) Skolnick, p. 3.

\(^{39}\) Scott and Smith, "Rhetoric of Confrontation," 8.
licts and to acts involving coercive elements, rhetoricians and other scholars have tended to assume that methods of influence appropriate for drawing room controversies are also effective for social conflicts, including struggles against established authorities. Concomitantly, they have failed to suggest viable strategies for those engaged in rough and tumble conflicts, and some of them have dismissed militant protesters as pathologi-

Earlier, I suggested that although rhetoricians have not foreclosed identification with the needs of actors, they have done so selectively. There is certainly no shortage of handbooks or courses available on how persuaders may achieve their intended effects. But the handbooks we have written and the courses we have taught and the actor-oriented research that we have conducted have presupposed the existence of common ground between source and receiver, on the basis of which attitudes and behavior could presumably be modified. From Aristotle onward, persuasion has been viewed as a process of finding common cause with one's hearers, a process premised on a dynamic of psychological convergence. The customary advice has been to be audience-centered, to protect egos, to adapt to the listener's frame of reference, to speak his language, to use a "We" approach; in general, to move toward the audience psychologically so as to secure audience acceptance in return. Because of its emphasis on joint movement toward a common position, I call this a "co-active" strategy of persuasion.

Lest there be any misunderstanding, I wish to emphasize that the co-active strategy is exactly the approach I would recommend for most persuasive situations. It certainly is appropriate for situations in which attitudes have not yet been formed, for essentially cooperative dialogues on matters of controversy, for efforts to reinforce existing beliefs of already predisposed receivers, and even for some conflicts in which an actor's authority over another is perceived to be legitimate. My quarrel with rhetoricians is that they have tended to regard the co-active approach as the only approach. However effective it may be in essentially cooperative situations, the co-active approach is only one approach—and not necessarily the best one—for those perceiving irreconcilable differences between themselves and their targets. It is not the only rhetoric of agitation or rebellion or even negotiation; not the only rhetoric, in other words, for partisans in serious conflict.

Although the ancient Greeks clearly recognized the need for training in persuasion, Brandt has pointed out that Aristotle and Isocrates—and not just Plato—were timorous, even of suggesting tactics for such well regulated conflicts as those which were played out in the law tribunal. Still less, of course, were they interested in offering advice to slaves on how they could agitate against their masters. Wayne Booth has observed that Aristotle's rhetoric was a rhetoric for "insiders" with shared values, but that it was considerably less applicable to those seeking to penetrate "totally hostile circles." In general, our rhetoric has remained a rhetoric for insiders.

40 William Brandt, The Rhetoric of Argumentation (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1970). Of Isocrates, Brandt says: "Significantly, he turned to ceremonial oratory to achieve his reform. For in ceremonial oratory, he found the noble affirmative stance, inherited from the poets, that rose above the self-interest almost always implied in private litigation and too often underlying political discussion" (p. 6).

That there are rhetorics for dealing with "totally hostile circles" was witnessed practically every day during the late sixties, but we will not recognize them as rhetorics if we cling to the persuasion-coercion dichotomy. I am suggesting here that "coercive persuasion" may have value as more than a conceptual category; it may also be understood as a name for a wide variety of rhetorical strategies and tactics: of sit-ins, riots, strikes, political bombings and kidnappings; and, as played out by the targets of these acts, of tear-gassings, lockouts, wire-taps, political trials and so on. These acts by both sides were not always "nice," were frequently ineffective, and were sometimes counterproductive; but they nevertheless deserve to be studied as acts of persuasion. In at least some cases and for some receivers, they attracted attention, evoked support from third parties, and convinced targets to re-evaluate their attitudes. And if they did not always work, it seems to me incumbent upon rhetoricians to analyze why they failed and to suggest methods that may have greater likelihood of success.42

Just as many rhetoricians have assumed that ours is a democratic society, in the same way they have assumed that the co-active approach is equally appropriate for the poor and the powerless as for the rich and the powerful. Given these assumptions, some rhetorical scholars have looked upon agitators and their followers, not only as unethical, but also as pathological. In general, although rhetoricians have abandoned the "emotion-logic" dichotomy as applied to other spheres of rhetorical discourse, many of them continue to view agitators and their followers as persons who rule, and are ruled, by appeals to emotion exclusively. Taking the lead from social psychologists and political sociologists working in the field of collective behavior, these rhetoricians have tended to characterize leaders of militant movements as "demagogues" whose followers are "driven" by "hypnotic suggestion" and "crowd facilitation" to engage in "mob-like behavior."43

Because the rhetorical literature on leaders and followers of social movements tends to adhere closely to the categories and generalizations offered by social scientists, the fact that these categories and generalizations have been recently called into question should be of special interest. Milgram and Toch have presented evidence that the view of demonstrators as polarized and mesmerized by their leaders is belied by aerial photographs in which it is clearly seen that demonstrators tend to be clustered in small groups, many of them oblivious to the words of their leadership.44 Couch has attacked a number of "stereotypes" about collective behavior,45 including the view that ghetto rioters were atypical of ghetto dwellers and lacked community

42 Given my political leanings, one part of me is tempted to propose that we frame strategies and tactics for Leftists but not for Rightists or those wishing to exercise social control in the interests of preserving existing political systems intact. Another, and probably wiser, part of me recognizes that some strategies and tactics may be used equally by all groups, and that, in any event, the academic's function is to search for truth, however unpleasant its consequences.

43 See, for example, Minnick, *Art of Persuasion*, pp. 68-75. Skolnick has accused the "experts" on collective behavior of having naively accepted our government's own inaccurate stereotypes of militant protests as either results of poor communication, manifestations of psychological disorders, outgrowths of outside agitation, or acts of the "riffraff." (See *Politics of Protest*, Chapter 9.) Presumably, if Skolnick is right, the experts would, in the name of "sanity," have the discontented either write futile letters to Congressmen or do nothing rather than protest actively.


45 Couch, "Collective Behavior"; see also Skolnick, Chapter 4; Coser, *Continuities*, Chapter 6.
support. Elsewhere, Kenniston has provided strong evidence that white student activists tended to be better informed, more successful academically, and more stable psychologically than their passive white counterparts.46

In an age when the label, "emotionally unstable," is often a thinly disguised equivalent of "sonofabitch," the characterization of mass protests as pathological amounts to further evidence of "Establishment" bias. Rhetoricians have added injury to insult by failing to suggest viable strategies for "Outs" and "Have-Not's," while insisting that the traditional "co-active" way is the only way.

5. Despite evidence that conflicts—even violent conflicts—may be "healthy" for mankind, many rhetoricians and other system-oriented theorists have focused exclusively on how conflicts could be prevented, resolved or managed, and not on how they could be incited, exacerbated or maintained.

I suggested earlier that some system-oriented theorists have denied the existence of conflicts or have equated them with mere differences of opinion. Not all such theorists have taken so "extreme" a position. Consistent with the view of protesters as pathological, however, those acknowledging the existence of genuine conflict have tended to refer to it as "unhealthy," a "disease," a "deviation from normality"; and, therefore, something to prevent, resolve, or manage.47 The complement of the pathology metaphor is the system-as-organism metaphor, a dominant starting point in contemporary models and theories of groups, organizations, and other collectivities.48 Working from this starting point, theorists have looked upon conflict as disruptive of the system's "normal" state of homeostatic balance.

Even if the analogy between social systems and organisms is apt, it certainly does not follow that the sole function of a system should be to preserve homeostatic balances. Besides maintaining basic life functions, the "healthy" system or organism changes, grows, adapts to problems. Singleminded preoccupation with preserving life functions is indeed a sign of an aged and withered organism, one not contributing very much and not likely to survive for very long. The picture of an aged and withered organism may be descriptive of some of our existing social and political systems but it does not follow that all such systems are incapable of doing more than simply holding on.

Nor does it follow that a given social system's survival is necessarily beneficial to the masses of persons affected by it. Systems are created by men and they may reasonably be modified or replaced when they are no longer of service to men. To think otherwise is to place existing systems above men, an error made all too often by system-oriented theorists.

Operating on the assumption that at least some systems can stand improvement or deserve to be replaced, a number of theorists have looked upon social conflict in a positive light. Coser has argued that the expression of conflict, including violent conflict, may serve society by calling attention to latent problems and to the frustrations of those who experienced them most directly.49 Where a system, however bad, seems preferable to all possible alternatives, the

46 Keniston, Young Radicals.

47 As I have indicated, positions of this kind are commonly taken in discussion texts. See, for example, William M. Sattler and N. Edd Miller, Discussion and Conference, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968); Irving J. Lee, How to Talk with People (New York: Harper, 1952).

48 See, for example, George C. Homans, The Human Group (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1950).

49 See Coser, Functions of Social Conflict; Coser, Continuities.
expression of conflict vents steam which could be channeled into more explosive acts. It also may lead to desirable changes in the system by forcing a readjustment of norm and power relationships. Where alternative systems are manifestly preferable, conflict may be the only means of bringing them into being. Hence, to work at inciting or exacerbating conflict may be just as ethical as working at preventing, managing or resolving it. Hugh Duncan's recent challenge to rhetoricians may serve as a fitting conclusion to this section, and as a useful introduction to the next one:

We ask of any model of social action: does it deal with disorder and conflict as normal to agreement or are they reduced to "imbalance" or heresy? . . . [A] model of rhetoric as used in democratic society must be a conflict model. Conflict of all kinds, ranging from government by opposition under parliamentary rules, to war, must be accepted as normal to rhetoric.50

A Framework for Future Research

If there is one seemingly incontrovertible conclusion which emerges from the foregoing critique, it is that one cannot easily discuss persuasion in social conflicts without reflecting his personal values. Values affect the labels given to cases, the way categories are defined and differentiated, the examples one chooses to cite, the "facts" selected for emphasis, and, of course, the ethical preferences expressed. My critique centered on the way biases have been reflected by system-oriented rhetoricians, but I would not want to defend the position that those with actor-orientations are free from bias.

For those interested in developing a framework for studying conflict that minimizes the influence of personal values, William Gamson has suggested what he calls a "dual perspective."51 His argument is that one can most profitably examine conflict from the perspective of both the actors attempting to maximize their interests in conflict situations and the systems attempting to regulate conflict in the collective interest. Advocates of each orientation raise complementary questions about conflict and arrive at partial truths. It is partially true, for example, that actors in a system must often compete for their meager shares of a hopelessly inadequate pie. It is also partially true that the pie can be expanded or contracted, depending upon whether the system is permitted to function efficiently or is disrupted by conflict. A more complete picture of social conflict is provided by examining it from both perspectives.

A Dual Perspective for Rhetoricians

Gamson's suggestion seems eminently sensible to me as a framework for studying *persuasion* in social conflict, and not just conflict *per se*. As I interpret it, a dual perspective applied to our own field would require greater *breadth* and *balance* than we have manifested in the past. It would involve, among other things, changes paralleling each of the criticisms that I offered in the last section, as follows.

1. In addition to recognizing the existence of pseudo-conflicts, in which differences are more apparent than real, we would also acknowledge that there may be basic and irreconcilable differences among men. Here we would also distinguish between differences of opinion and differences over competing interests—that is, between mere controversies and genuine conflicts.

2. In addition to studying acts of "pure" persuasion, free of coercive ele-


ments, we would also study acts in which persuasive and coercive elements were indissolubly combined—acts of militant protest, for example, in which the actor may signal a persuasive message as much by his act of protest as by the words that accompany it.

(3) In addition to investigating the conditions under which various "co-active" methods of persuasion are made effective, we would also investigate the conditions under which "coercive" methods of persuasion are made effective. Here we might examine the use of coercive strategies of persuasion by those exercising social control in the interests of social systems as well as by those exercising influence in opposition to those systems.

(4) Rather than assuming or acting as though coercion (or "coercive persuasion") is necessarily evil, we would evaluate, open-mindedly, the acts of a variety of "coercers," in light of the ends they sought to achieve, the conditions under which they took action, and the consequences of their acts on themselves, on other interested parties, and on the system as a whole.

(5) Rather than assuming that our government and its agents are rational, responsive, and benevolent while the leaders and followers of militant movements are irrational, self-interested, and pathological, we would consider these as open questions.

(6) In addition to considering how conflicts may reduce the efficiency of existing systems and thereby impair their capacity to deliver needed services, we would also consider how conflicts may lead to needed changes in systems, or of systems, and thereby increase the chances that the members of these systems will be well served.

(7) In addition to asking how persuasive discourse may be used to prevent, resolve, or manage conflict, we would also attempt to determine how such discourse may be used to incite, exacerbate or maintain conflict.

Quite obviously, the balance and breadth that I am calling for will not be accomplished by the application of one research methodology or one line of theory, or even by insisting that each of us adopt a dual perspective. A dual perspective is needed for the field as a whole, if it is to approach the subject comprehensively, but there is no reason why individual scholars cannot remain impassioned advocates of particular positions or specialists in particular areas.

Still—and here I will reflect my own passions—it seems crucial at this stage of our field's development that we award special priority to research that may overturn popularly held myths and close wide theoretical gaps. To arrive at a balanced perspective on persuasion in social conflicts, we need to redress existing imbalances. Hence, the suggestions for research which follow are motivated by a desire for demythification and demystification; they are offered in the same spirit as my earlier critique. I will not be suggesting research on the prevention or mediation of conflicts, for example, although such research is certainly needed and is consistent with the dual perspective I proposed. My assumption is that the reader would find these suggestions unnecessary and that he may discover an abundance of ideas for such research elsewhere.52

Suggested Research Priorities

1. Conflict and the Rhetoric of Academe: Cases for Historical-Critical Research. Among the most exciting trends

52 See, for example, Burton, Conflict and Communication; Robert L. Kahn and Elise Boulding, eds., Power and Conflict in Organizations (New York: Basic Books, 1964).
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in rhetoric today is the application of tools and yardsticks of rhetorical criticism to non-obvious forms of persuasion, and, in particular, to the rhetoric of academic discourse. Campbell's analysis of the debate over biological evolution is a case in point; Anderson's critique of popular science writing is another. Analyses of this kind spring from the realization that activities labelled as "teaching," "demonstrating," "proving," "informing," "describing," etc. are most often extra-factual and extra-logical; they involve a "rhetor" whose conclusions do not rest on facts or logic alone. The case for the academic as rhetor is especially convincing on matters of public controversy, for it is especially on these issues that the academic is least able to "prove" his claims, yet is most likely to influence political and social attitudes. The dissemination of culturally approved values as "fact" has been an historic function of educators, a means by which social order is legitimated and preserved.

I would place the highest priority on rhetorical analyses of how conflict is treated in the discourse emanating from various academic disciplines. The first section of this paper could well have been characterized as a rhetorical analysis of the rhetoric of rhetoricians. Simlarly, Coser and Skolnick's critiques could well have been considered as rhetorical analyses of social science discourses. Because of its potential impact on young people, I would give special attention to textbook writing, and especially to materials written for primary and secondary school children, but we should also feel duty-bound to analyze, in much greater depth than I have done, treatments of conflict in texts on discussion, argumentation, public speaking, interpersonal communication, organizational communication, and the like. Critical studies of elementary school history texts, high school civics texts, college public speaking texts, or what have you, might well raise such questions as the following: (1) Is conflict referred to? If not, to what related terms or phenomena do the texts refer? (2) What explicit or implicit judgments are made about conflict? Is it "good" or "bad"? Something to be encouraged or avoided? (3) What role is assigned to communication in relation to conflict? Is it an alternative to conflict? A means of resolving conflict? Of generating conflict? (4) What view is taken of such conflict generators as agitators and propagandists? (5) How do descriptions of influence and decision-making within government compare with descriptions of influence and decision-making within social movements? (6) Who is alleged to practice force, violence, coercion? Are these terms consistently treated as "devil words?" (7) How well supported are claims about the role of conflict in society? If my hypothesis is correct, answers to questions of this kind should reveal a consistent pattern of "Establishment" bias.

2. Rhetorical Analyses of the Rhetoric of Social Control. One of the rewards for this writer of entering into the study of persuasion in social conflicts has been the discovery of a number of "rhetorical
theories”—not generally labelled as such by their authors—that seem considerably more applicable to social conflicts than those traditionally taught in our classes. Several of these theories (besides those of Burke and Duncan) focus on the rhetoric of social control, the means by which systems and their agents secure allegiance and prevent or control conflict without at the same time relying heavily on material constraints or inducements. Theorists from Machiavelli\(^{57}\) to Marcuse\(^{58}\) have suggested that control may be exercised in a number of rhetorical ways: by such co-optative techniques as the appointment of riot commissions and the creation of regulatory agencies;\(^{59}\) by the enactment of quasi-religious rituals of affirmation and victimage;\(^{60}\) by the dissemination of secular theodicies of good and evil;\(^{61}\) by what Bachrach and Baratz have called “nondecision-making;”\(^{62}\) by defining and restricting issues, choices and ranges of opposition;\(^{63}\) by information control and control over the mass media;\(^{64}\) by acting on policies first, then discussing them afterwards;\(^{65}\) by creating diversions and escape mechanisms;\(^{66}\) by political socialization;\(^{67}\) and by invoking the threat of defeat by common enemies.\(^{98}\)

An understanding of the rhetoric of social control requires analysis not only of speakers and speeches, but also of institutions and structures as influence agents. Edelman’s analysis of the rhetoric of the voting ritual\(^{69}\) is an example of what I mean; Ellul’s analysis of consumer technologies\(^{70}\) is another example. These mechanisms of social control are no less rhetorical in their intent and impact than a ceremonial oration. Indeed, as Edelman has so clearly shown, the political convention and the voting ritual are similar in function to the functions of epideictic oratory.

3. The Meanings of Violence in Acts of Protest and Revolt. Rather than dismissing “violence” (however defined) as coercive and (therefore) not persuasive, we might utilize the concept of “coercive persuasion” as a framework for examining the messages intended in violent acts. Protestors and counterprotestors have long been aware that the violent act may be used, not simply as a means of bringing targets to their knees, but also as a means of communication. To understand the intent of the act, it is useful to go to the source; for example, to examine the writings of Marxist revolutionaries. Explicit discussions of the rhetoric of violence are found in Lenin,\(^{71}\) Gorz,\(^{72}\) Debray,\(^{73}\) Fanon,\(^{74}\) and many others. If

\(^{59}\) See, for example, Edelman, Symbolic Uses of Politics, Chapter 2.
\(^{60}\) See, for example, Charles E. Merriam, Political Power: Its Composition and Incidence (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1934).
\(^{61}\) See Berger, Chapter 3.
\(^{64}\) See, for example, Gamson, Power and Discontent, p. 126.
\(^{65}\) See, for example, Neustadt.
\(^{68}\) See, for example, Coser, Functions of Social Conflict.
\(^{69}\) Edelman, Chapter 2.
\(^{74}\) Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth,
these and other theorists are correct, violence by protestors and revolutionaries may signal the actor's despair or alienation, his willingness to suffer and die for a cause, and his capacity to employ greater force in the future. It may be a way of raising class consciousness, of enlisting outside support, of delegitimizing the opposition, and of deliberately inviting overreactions by authorities. Analysis of the writings of revolutionaries may also serve a more critical but related function, that of exposing the fallacies, the insufficient evidence, the inattention to dysfunctions of violence, and so on, that are so often found in revolutionary tracts on the subject. A final, but admittedly difficult, task involves study of the effects of violence on the attitudes of various parties to a conflict. This question is raised next in a broader context.

4. **Laboratory and Field Research on the Effects of “Coercive Persuasion” on Attitudes.** What are the effects of ostensibly coercive acts on attitudes toward the aims and methods of parties to a conflict? Does the perceived legitimacy of the actor make a difference? Are there different effects for “power-vulnerables” as compared with “power-invulnerables”?

Echoing a position widely held at the time, Kelman\(^75\) has suggested that the power of a source to produce compliance does not lead receivers to modify privately held opinions, but subsequent research runs counter to his position. Dissonance theorists have provided strong evidence for their hypothesis that discrepancies between attitudes and behavior, produced by compelling per-

formance of a noxious task, are likely to cause subjects to modify their attitudes. Although contentions about the conditions under which subjects may be persuaded following forced compliance remains a matter of lively debate, the studies on forced compliance leave little doubt but that “a man persuaded against his will” \... need not be “of the same opinion still.” As McGuire has concluded, the question is not whether overt compliance tends to become internalized but “under what conditions it occurs in the greatest amount.”\(^76\)

Research support for the “forced compliance” hypothesis has obvious bearing on persuasion in social conflicts. It means, minimally, that persuaders in conflict situations need not employ the traditional “co-active” strategy of persuasion; a coercive strategy may work as well or better.

Still, it is not at all clear when, and on whom, forced compliance works most effectively. Dissonance theorists have provided evidence that attitudes are modified when there is “just enough” pressure to produce compliance but not “so much” pressure that the target feels coerced. Other evidence suggests that forced compliance works best under conditions of low source credibility on irrelevant issues and maximal effort by the target.\(^77\) In another article, I observed, informally, that the conditions Festinger named as promoting attitude change following forced compliance appeared strikingly similar to those employed in successful confrontations with campus authorities. Whether this is actually so can only be determined through field research in which success is defined, not


\(^77\) For a review of the literature on “forced compliance,” see *ibid.*, pp. 237-239.
simply as a change in the target's behavior, but also in his attitudes.

Another factor that may bear significantly on the effectiveness of coercive threats and pressures is the perceived legitimacy of the actor, the perception by receivers that the source has a right to exact obedience from him. The "legitimacy" variable is among the most neglected and most important variables in credibility research. It seems reasonable that the manager of a company or the officer of a platoon can influence attitudes through coercive pressures much more readily than (say) a protester lacking the stamp of legitimacy. Although tests of the effects of perceived legitimacy on attitudes have been approximated in the laboratory, more authentic tests will have to be conducted in the field.\(^{78}\)

Still another factor that probably bears on the effectiveness of coercive pressures by protesters is the target's "power-vulnerability."\(^{79}\) Receivers are vulnerable to a source's coercive power to the degree that (1) they hold possessions of value and therefore have something to lose (for example, property or high office); (2) they cannot escape from a source's coercive power (unlike suburbanites, for example, who could escape, physically or psychologically, from the ghetto riots of the sixties); (3) they cannot retaliate against a source (either because of normative or physical constraints). In the political arena, such targets as university presidents, church leaders, and elected government officials are highly vulnerable, as compared with the mass of citizens who may either lack possessions, be able to escape, or feel no constraints about retaliating. As leaders of institutions allocate priorities in the face of conflicting pressures from other groups, they are unlikely to act on the programmatic suggestions of a protest group—even when they are sympathetic—unless they are pressured to do so. Hence, "co-active" strategies alone are likely to be ineffectual with them whereas "coercive" strategies may stand a better chance of modifying their behaviors and attitudes. On the other hand, coercive strategies are likely to be less effective with "power-invulnerables" than co-active strategies.

Polls following the ghetto riots, the Kent State demonstrations, the Attica uprising, and other such events, generally found "boomerang effects" in terms of attitudes by the populace toward the acts and aims of the protesters. But findings of this kind should be interpreted with care. They are not indices of the effects of militant protests on the attitudes of "power-vulnerables." They do not indicate the extent to which protests have convinced targets that they will eventually be on the losing side of the conflict unless ameliorative actions are taken. They do not reveal the long-range effects of the protests on attitudes and may not truly reveal private attitudes. Coercive persuasion by "illegitimate" sources may still be rhetorically effective with some receivers and in terms of some beliefs and attitudes.

Thus far, I have discussed the study of coercive persuasion in relations between systems and their members, but research is also needed on the effects of coercive pressures in contests between relative equals—between labor and management, for example, or between rival nations. A distinctive contribution of rhetoricians can be the study of the rhetori-

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\(^{79}\) See my chapter in Mortensen and Sereno, Advances in Communication Research.
cal impact of ostensibly coercive acts—
their impact on attitudes.

5. Research on the Credibility of Threats. I said earlier that my concept of coercive persuasion embraces a wide range of cases, including many that appear to be cases of pure coercion. On the surface, most of us would agree that persuasion is not a demand for money with a gun at the back of a potential victim, and I would grant that armed robberies primarily involve coercion. Yet unless the robber clubs his victim unconscious before he has had a chance to reply (this I would agree is pure coercion), the robber has a selling function to perform. Minimally, by his dress, his demeanor and his words, he must persuade his victim that he has the willingness and the capacity to coerce. Schelling has suggested that these are necessary conditions (though not always sufficient conditions) for effective coercion in all mixed-motive conflicts, for example: in deterring nations from making war against us, in deterring crime and disciplining children, in “dollar diplomacy” with underdeveloped nations, and in such everyday activities as seizing a contested traffic lane while attempting to avoid collision. By contrast to other cases that I have thus far recommended for study, the actors in these cases may not be attempting to secure approval of their aims or methods; but to the extent that they must make their threats of force credible, they are, in a minimal sense at least, engaged in acts of coercive persuasion.

Theory and research on threat credibility are illustrative of a number of things that can be said in a general way about the study of persuasion in social conflicts. First, it is possible to develop theories about persuasion in social conflicts that apply to a wide variety of conflict situations. Whether one is thinking about conflicts between automobile drivers or between labor and management, for example, it is probably true that a threat carries more weight if the target believes that the threatener cannot control his own actions, or has little to lose from a struggle, or is acting on behalf of a moral principle. Conversely, one way to blunt a threat is to act as though you are unaware of it—to look the other way, for example, when the other automobile driver inches toward the traffic lane that you and he are contesting.

A second point, related to the first, is that it is possible to study simple examples of persuasion in social conflicts as a way of understanding more complex situations. To better understand the “game” of labor-management bargaining, for example, it is possible to study the simpler case of auto drivers competing for a traffic lane. This is certainly a rationale for research in the “game theory” tradition. One finding from such research, incidentally, is that it has been impossible for researchers to devise “games” in which a threat of economic or physical punishment did not also function as a persuasive appeal or threat to psychological needs. These findings suggest, once again, that a rhetorical dimension is always present in mixed-motive conflicts.

Finally, the study of persuasion in social conflicts raises a number of questions for “pure” research—questions so basic, in fact, that their special appli-

80 See Schelling, Strategy of Conflict, Chapters 1-3.
81 Ibid.
cation to social conflicts is not immediately apparent. Consider, for example, the problem of a parent and child who have inadvertently become separated from each other at a large zoo. To rediscover each other most efficiently, P (the parent) and C (the child) must each engage in a special type of empathy. P, for example, must not only anticipate C's moves, but also C's predictions of P's predictions about C's predictions, and so on, in an endless chain. That dyads can "solve" such problems successfully is evidenced by some informal research by Schelling, but systematic research in this area has yet to be undertaken and remains fertile ground for communication specialists. Although the findings from such "pure" research are of general interest, they have special significance for those interested in social conflict. Schelling has observed that precisely this type of predicting is essential in bargaining situations. Paradoxically, the conflicting parties are placed in a cooperative relationship with respect to the task of prediction since neither party "wins" unless both make the same predictions. To miscalculate is to prolong conflict unnecessarily with costly side effects for both.

6. Anecdotal Reports of Persuasion in Social Conflicts. In Norman Mailer's account of the 1968 Democratic convention, a sharp contrast is drawn between the wide-nostriled people of Chicago and the narrow-nostriled McCarthy supporters. In Jerry Avorn's description of the confrontation at Columbia, a humorous exchange between students and faculty mediators is reported, one faculty member observing that "we publish and you perish," a student replying that the students in Fayerweather Hall are publishing too, "They're putting out a new leaflet every hour." In William Foote Whyte's account of labor-management conflict at Inland Steel, attention is given to how the movement toward cooperation was signalled by evidence of a chewed off pipe. In Tom Wolfe's semi-fictionalized treatment of a confrontation at an OEO office, considerable space is devoted to the dress and language style of the confronters.

I mention these examples because I think we need more of them and because I believe that rhetoricians are well suited to provide them. Note that in none of these reports did the authors provide moment by moment, blow by blow accounts of what had transpired. That would have been neither possible nor even desirable. What they did do, besides reporting essential details, was capture, in living color, the feelings of these events by selecting for special emphasis those seemingly trivial but symbolically significant activities that less astute observers would have ignored. Research of this kind is especially helpful when, after providing detailed descriptions, the author goes on to offer theoretical speculations and hypotheses for future research that transcend the particular case. Whyte's sadly neglected study is an excellent example. I should add that along with contemporary case studies of persuasion in social conflicts, we need more historical case studies, such as Andrews' recent report of confrontations preceding passage of the 1832 Reform Bill.

84 Schelling, Chapter 3.
85 Ibid.
As I have suggested all along, the study of persuasion in social conflicts is in its infancy. Anecdotal case studies should be a useful beginning in our efforts to debunk myths and develop theory.

**Summary and Conclusions**

Rhetoricians can make enormous contributions to the study of social conflict, but they can do so only if they are willing to re-examine fundamental assumptions that have long dominated the thinking of both humanists and behaviorists. Contrary to prevailing conceptions, genuine conflicts are different from mere controversies and they are not always resolvable by appeals to common ground. Conflicts are not necessarily "unhealthy" for society; nor are those who employ force or violence against others necessarily unethical or pathological. Our historic "system orientation" may have blinded us to the rhetorical needs of those poor and relatively powerless individuals who suffer under existing systems. Along with many other critics, both within and outside the field of rhetoric, I believe it is now time for a radical reorientation toward social conflict, one that makes the study of how conflicts can be "won" in a given actor's behalf as respectable as the study of how conflicts may be regulated in a given system's behalf. In the interests of scholarship, I have suggested the need for a "dual perspective" toward persuasion in social conflicts, one that profits from the insights of both actor-oriented and system-oriented perspectives. At the same time, I have suggested that we redress existing imbalances by focusing on research that will debunk myths and close theoretical gaps that continue to exist partly because of our traditional system-orientation.

Appearing throughout this paper has been my concept of "coercive persuasion." In a general sense, this is a name for cases involving mixtures of coercive and persuasive elements. In a narrower sense, it refers to a range of strategies of persuasion, distinguishable from "co-active" strategies based upon a dynamic of psychological convergence. Several of the research suggestions presented here involve the concept of "coercive persuasion." I have suggested that we examine the intended meanings of violence in acts of protest and rebellion; that we examine the rhetoric of social control by systems, including control through coercive persuasion; that we compare the relative effects on attitudes of co-active and coercive persuasion, in terms of such contingent variables as the source's perceived legitimacy and the target's "power-vulnerability;" and that we examine the means by which threats are made credible.

Another persistent theme of this paper is that the subject of persuasion in social conflicts cries out for a variety of contributions: for historical-critical research, case studies, field investigations, and laboratory experiments. The development of viable theories in this area will require the separate and combined efforts of both humanists and behaviorists.