

Heeding the Call: Hillary Clinton's Rhetoric of Identification and Women's Human Rights at the Fourth World Conference on Women

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Hillary Rodham Clinton's speech delivered at the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women Plenary Session in Beijing, China stands out as one of her most widely praised and referenced speeches and represents a critical position in the rhetorical framing of women's human rights. This essay examines the political context of this speech and the rhetorical strategies Clinton used to engage audience identification. It provides a historically situated, pragmatic, strategic rationale for the speech's content and form. Furthermore, it articulates the rhetorically grounded reasons why Clinton's speech endures as a summary of a women's movement advocating for the universality of human rights.

On September 5, 1995, Hillary Rodham Clinton delivered a speech at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women Plenary Session in Beijing that *The New York Times* described as her finest moment of public life (Purdum, 1995). After a troubled start to her term as First Lady with the failure of the health care reform bill she spearheaded and investigations into her Whitewater investments, U.S. audiences were vocal in their skepticism of this new type of First Lady. She was seen as brash, unyielding in her positions, and assumed much more political power than previous First Ladies (Borrelli, 2011). She was the first president's wife to set up an office alongside her husband's advisers in the West Wing, travel extensively internationally, and serve as a global – not just domestic – advocate for women (Beasley, 2005; Borrelli, 2011).

In the months prior to the conference, Clinton was the target of sharp criticism. Political opponents such as Senator Bob Dole and House Speaker Newt Gingrich claimed her planned attendance would support militant feminism, the destruction of family values, and act as a tacit acceptance of China's human rights abuses (Apple, 1995; Hoagland, 1995). However, she was not without some supporters. Backed by key political allies such as Secretary of State Madeline Albright, her husband President Bill Clinton, and an international women's movement she weathered the road to Beijing to deliver a speech that was heavily praised by Western media and attendants establishing her as a substantive political actor on the world scene.

The speech was an important rhetorical moment evidenced by the great amount of attention it received from international media, its mention by scholars of Clinton's life (Anderson, 2003; Bernstein, 2007; Mattina, 2004), and its position in Lucas and Medhurst's (2009) anthology of the top 100 American speeches of the 20th century. Clinton herself devoted pages to the event and the speech in her autobiography (Clinton, 2003) and frequently referred to them in her 2008 presidential campaign (Clinton, 2007; The CNN Democratic presidential debate in Texas, 2008; The Democratic Debate in Cleveland, 2008). As such, it is likely that as she continues her human rights agenda and 2016 presidential campaign this speech will resurface in political discussion on human rights yet to come.

This essay takes an alternative route from examinations of Clinton's rhetoric that focus on her gendered political performances and media framing (Bligh, Merolla, Schroedel, & Gonzales, 2010; Manning, 2006; Parry-Giles, 2014; Richards, 2011; Sheeler & Anderson, 2013). I look past the general praise surrounding Clinton's speech to provide a pragmatic, strategic rationale for the content and form the speech took. I argue that the significance of this speech lies in Clinton's skillful response to the event's political exigencies and her rhetorical strategies to engage audience identification. Specifically, I begin by describing two rhetorical challenges Clinton faced while crafting this speech: 1) the political controversy of China as the host of the conference; 2) the need to make women's rights a transnational and bipartisan concern. Next, I discuss Clinton's strategic use of two themes to facilitate audience identification and overcome these challenges: 1) Clinton positions China and human rights violations as common enemies for her audiences; 2) Clinton establishes common ground among opponents and supporters of the conference by focusing on the universality of human rights and healthy families. Finally, I address the enduring value of this speech by discussing how it continues to shape Clinton's discussion of human rights and advances a position for the universality of human rights.

The Rhetorical Challenges

A discussion of the historical context of this speech reveals the challenges Clinton faced and explains her motivation to select particular rhetorical strategies. Clinton has publically promoted human rights and the empowerment of women throughout her political career (Mattina, 2004). This speech, commonly referred to as the "Women's Rights are Human Rights" speech stands out though, because of two daunting political situations that directly influenced Clinton's rhetorical strategies. First, Clinton needed to condemn China's history of human rights abuses and the obstacles the host placed in front of women attempting to attend the conference without stressing already fragile U.S.-China relations.

Stark political and cultural differences have historically made U.S.-China relations difficult. The importance of the relationship at the time of the conference, however, was especially great as post-Cold War China began opening its financial markets earning "most favored nation" trade status with the United States and leveraging its permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council. Clinton was aware that the relationship's future direction would have a direct impact on U.S. interests (Clinton, 2003). Recent problems had put the relationship in a "dangerously deteriorating" position, which Clinton had to be conscious of when deciding to attend the conference and crafting her critique of China's human rights record (Apple, 1995, para. 1). A State Department official commented that prior to the release of Harry Wu, the American citizen and human rights activist that had been imprisoned in China that summer, "things were threatening to spin out of control in a relationship that had already sunk to its lowest level since at least the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989" (Apple, 1995, para. 7).

Tough words were desired by her domestic critics and international supporters because of China's bureaucratic planning style for the conference, poor human rights record including Wu's imprisonment, and recent weapon sales and tests, but the cost of a verbal condemnation could have been severe. In addition, many believed that Clinton's attendance would indicate support for or at least indifference to China's policies

(Mufson, 1995, Hoagland, 1995). Opponents warned that her attendance would be used by the Chinese government as “proof” to its citizens that the United States agreed with or was not critical of its practices (Bernstein, 2007). Senator Bob Dole said it would send the wrong message and other Republicans reinforced his point saying it would signal that China’s human rights and defense issues were not severe enough to preclude the First Lady from going to the Conference (Hoagland, 1995).

When the United Nations decided that the Fourth World Conference on Women was to be in Asia, China was the only state to apply to host. Chinese authorities were apprehensive about demonstrations and disturbances in the capital city because they had never hosted an international event that large. According to Chinese statements, the downtown stadium originally slated to host the Nongovernmental Organization Forum had structural defects causing the event to move to Huairou, 35 miles from the central conference (Mufson, 1995). The move, described as “exile” by Clinton, fueled allegations that China was trying to dissuade attendance with meetings scheduled in small rooms and in outdoor tents. Only about 10,000 beds were available in town to accommodate the 36,000 estimated participants, forcing many to make a difficult commute from Beijing or surrounding areas (Clinton, 2003; Mufson, 1995).

Charges of inequity focused on delayed and denied visa applications as reports came out affirming that select non-governmental organizations and delegations from Tibet, Taiwan, and the Republic of Niger would not be permitted to attend the official conference site in Beijing (Blood, 1999, Watson, 1995). Logistical complications led some potential delegates to boycott the conference all together. China’s history of human rights abuses also caused many to question the legitimacy of the conference (Mufson, 1995). Further contestation occurred when in August, just months before the conference, Chinese authorities announced that they had executed 16 prisoners in Beijing to ensure “public order” for the conference (Quilligan, 1995). Newspapers reported that prior to the conference, police were sweeping Beijing of the homeless, unemployed, and activists that might be an “embarrassment” to the state (Quilligan, 1995). American citizen Wu was one of these dissidents and was arrested at the Kazakhstan-China border attempting to enter China just months before the Conference began (Senser, 1995). Wu’s wife wrote a letter to Clinton begging her to boycott the Conference in protest of Wu’s detention (Clinton, 2003). His eventual expulsion from China ended the 66-day ordeal just weeks before the Conference.

Secretary of State and UN Ambassador Madeline Albright said that a boycott would serve no purpose and only leave 130 million U.S. women without representation and further the rift between the U.S. and China. Albright made several speeches on the subject and in one delivered to the Center for National Policy asserted that the Clinton administration would “use the conference in Beijing to underline the truth that violence against women is no one’s prerogative; it is not a cultural choice; it is not an inevitable consequence of biology—it is a crime that we all have a responsibility to condemn, prevent, punish and stop” (Albright, 1995, para 12). She conveyed on many occasions that it was a conference on women, not China. Although no quid-pro-quo was admitted to by the Clinton Administration or the Chinese government, the release of Harry Wu prior to the Conference was seen as a goodwill overture and was taken as a positive sign that China was making a move to improve U.S.-China relations (Blood, 1999). Not attending would have been seen as disrespectful, thus Clinton was able to use her attendance as a

positive gesture toward China as well as an opportunity to disapprove of its previous actions.

The second rhetorical challenge Clinton faced was the need to move women's rights to the center of international dialog while demonstrating a domestic concern for preserving traditional family values. Conservative forces were framing the Conference as a radical feminist rally that was oriented to destroy family values (Archibald, 1995; Clinton, 2003). Senator Bob Dole asserted that it was a waste of tax payers' money to attend a conference whose left-wing ideological agenda was for abortion rights and militant feminism (Hoagland, 1995).

While the first three conferences (Mexico, 1975; Denmark, 1980; and Kenya, 1985) built a much needed foundation for organizing an agenda of global women's issues, the fourth conference was seen to be a pivotal development with the creation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which addressed 12 key areas of concern regarding the advancement and empowerment of women such as health care, violence, and education (Cornwell, 1992). This Platform for Action was the product of a global campaign to recognize the rights of women as fundamental, inalienable human rights.

Clinton's thesis that women's rights are human rights was not wholly her own and resonated from a wider human rights movement. The phrase was a simple but powerful re-conception of women's rights that supported the universality of human rights as opposed to identity-based particularities. It indicated that women's rights should not come secondary to or be thought of as separate from human rights but were in fact of the same kind. The phrase was used to help advocate for women on an international level in the Global Campaign for Women's Human Rights (GCWHR). The campaign was a loose union of women's organizations and in 1991 mobilized a petition to the United Nations World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna (WCHR), which called for women's human rights to be addressed at every level of the conference proceedings (Bunch & Frost, 2000).

By 1993, the petition had circulated through dozens of women's networks. Violence against women became a focal point for the WCHR. After the Vienna Conference, the phrases "women's rights are human rights" and "women's human rights" became the center of a new human rights debate (Bunch & Frost, 2000). The significance of the phrases demonstrated in the product of the Vienna Conference, the "Vienna Declaration and Program of Action." It states that "human rights of women and of the girl-child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights" (Bunch & Frost, 2000, p. 1083). The petition was re-circulated after the Vienna Conference with the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing as its target. After its second circulation, the petition had been signed by more than a million individuals from 148 countries (UN High Council on Human Rights, 1993). In the months before travelling to Beijing, members of the GCWHR had been in contact with the First Lady's office, sending her campaign literature and encouraging her to use the slogan while at the Conference (Bunch & Frost, 2000).

Secretary Albright believed a strong high-profile US delegation was necessary to confront participants from the Vatican, Iran, and other Christian and Muslim groups that were attending to counter any movement toward abortion rights (Anderson, 2002). Abortion, family-planning, and religious rights were issues of contention that contributed

to the allegations that the conference was anti-family and anti-American (Clinton, 1993). According to the International Coalition for Authentic Womanhood, a coalition of Christian and Muslim groups, the draft Beijing Platform for Action issued before the Conference undermined the traditional roles of women as mothers and men as fathers (Watson, 1995). The rejection of traditional family roles would allegedly cause a rejection of moral and sexual responsibility as well. Anisa Ebd El-Fattah, chairwoman of the National Association of Muslim Women said the platform compromised the divine and human right of people to live within the religious and cultural contexts they wished (Archibald, 1995).

These sentiments were echoed in Congress by many Republicans such as senators Bob Dole, Jesse Helms, and Phil Gramm. Gramm specifically criticized the Conference as an “unsanctioned festival of anti-family, anti-American sentiment” (Clinton, 1993, p. 299). House Speaker Newt Gingrich urged the US to try to move the Conference out of Beijing and threatened to persuade the House to cancel funding for the delegation’s travel because the State Department suggested delegates not carry Bibles to China or attend religious events while there (Fields, 1995). In defense of the First Lady’s planned attendance, President Bill Clinton delivered remarks shortly before a trip to the Wyoming League of Women Voters for a 75th anniversary rally for the ratification of the 19th amendment. He contended that the conference was “true blue to families—to supporting them, to conserving them, to valuing them” (Purdum, 1995, para. 8).

Rhetorical Strategies

These two rhetorical challenges put Clinton in a seemingly impossible position to satisfy her audiences’ competing desires. She needed to condemn China and human rights abuses without further damaging an already strained and tenuous U.S.-China relationship. In addition, she needed to evoke feminist principles to move women’s rights positively to the forefront of international dialog while backing traditional family values that had been positioned as contrary to Conference goals. The political exigencies called for her to select a rhetorical strategy that would unite opposing audiences and ideologies.

Kenneth Burke (1969) explained identification as one such strategy. Identification is essential to being human and is facilitated through communication. He argued humans are born biologically separate and the need to identify with others arises out of the desire to overcome the feeling of being apart and disconnected. By identifying with others individuals are “both joined and separate, at once a distinct substance and consubstantial with another” (Burke, 1969, p. 20). This means they may be consubstantial and share the same nature and substance but they need not be identical in all respects (Day, 1960; Rosenfeld, 1969); individuals may identify with one another when their interests are joined. Identification through a joining of interests was an appropriate goal for this speech as the conference was held in the spirit of international cooperation and an opportunity to learn about the diversity of conditions in which women around the world lived their lives.

Clinton employed two dominant rhetorical strategies in this speech that engaged audience identification in order to overcome their political separateness and divisions. To deal with her first challenge she presented the violation of human rights (specifically those allegedly perpetrated by China) as a common enemy for her audiences to rally against and called for government and personal responsibility to prevent such violations.

Secondly, throughout her speech she demonstrated the explicit sameness of those who advocated for women's human rights and those who advocated for the preservation of family values to join her audiences' interests. Common ground was established by reframing women's rights as human rights focusing on the universality of human rights and desire for healthy families. The following section explicates these themes and analyzes the text to provide evidence of their usage.

Handling the Hostile Host

Burke (1969) suggested that a speaker can attempt to create an agreement by uniting individuals under a banner of opposition toward a common enemy. In this speech, China and human rights violations were positioned as the adversaries of the conference. One participant described the mood prior to Clinton's speech as "brimming with anticipation," and Clinton was met with "thunderous applause" (Riles, 2000, p.285). The 2,000 audience members were not to be disappointed if they were looking for a spectacle as the speech was described as "some of the toughest language on human rights delivered inside the Communist-ruled China for some time," and "a departure from the diplomatic coddling language that visiting U.S. officials...typically use" (Tofani, 1995, para 1). With so much controversy regarding China's human rights record, recent executions, weapons sales and tests, and the detention of Wu, Clinton made statements that were sure to stir China and satisfy her political opponents that lobbied against her attendance. In her autobiography, she wrote that she needed to "criticize Chinese government abuses, including coerced abortion and the routine squelching of freedom of speech and freedom to assemble" (Clinton, 2003, p. 302). Though she wanted to be tough, Clinton never directly indicted China by name for abuses suggesting she was sensitive to the rhetorical limits imposed by the U.S.-China relationship and did not desire to cause serious harm. Although the speech was interpreted as a reference to China's need to prevent abuse against women by many and described as such by Clinton herself, her ambiguous language allowed her to address the personal and governmental responsibility of *all* conference attendants to prevent abuse rather than only target the Chinese government.

Utilizing the expertise of the U.S. delegation including Secretary Albright; Eric Schwartz, human rights specialist on the National Security Council; and Winston Lord, former Ambassador to China and Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific Affairs, Clinton wanted to "push the envelope" as far as she could on behalf of women and girls (Clinton, 2003, p. 302). This description is additional proof that she demonstrated purposeful restraint in the speech. The delegation "pored over the text" to ensure that there were no inaccuracies or "diplomatic gaffes...that might lead to a diplomatic brouhaha" (Clinton, 2003, p. 302). Directly naming China as a prominent rights violator likely would have resulted in significant consequences for the U.S.-China relationship and the type of "brouhaha" the delegation feared. Clinton stayed centrally involved in revisions so that the end result would not have the "carefully nuanced, diplomatic imprint...[that] turned a good speech into mush" that she had been wary of when opening her speech up for expert review (Clinton, 2003, p. 303).

After much consideration and revision she presented a message that alluded to China's wrong-doing and focused on specific rights abuses that all would oppose. She declared in front of the world that:

Even today, there are those who are trying to silence our words. But the voices of this conference and of the women at Huairou must be heard loudly and clearly: It is a violation of human rights when babies are denied food, or drowned, or suffocated, or their spines broken, simply because they are born girls...It is a violation of human rights when women are denied the right to plan their own families, and that includes being forced to have abortions or being sterilized against their will. (Clinton, 1995, para. 18 & 25)

Clinton's purposeful decision not to name perpetrators of these offenses allowed her to criticize China without directly indicting the state whose government officials made clear to Clinton's advance team that while they welcomed her presence, they did not want to be embarrassed by her words (Clinton, 2003). In addition, another major criticism was levied and addressed China's efforts to prevent local activism and conference delegates from assembling. Clinton said:

Let us not forget that among those rights are the right to speak freely – and the right to be heard. Women must enjoy the rights to participate fully in the social and political lives of their countries, if we want freedom and democracy to thrive and endure. It is indefensible that many women in nongovernmental organizations who wished to participate in this conference have not been able to attend – or have been prohibited from fully taking part. Let me be clear. Freedom means the right of people to assemble, organize, and debate openly. It means respecting the views of those who may disagree with the views of their governments. It means not taking citizens away from their loved ones and jailing them, mistreating them, or denying them their freedom or dignity because of the peaceful expression of their ideas and opinions. (Clinton, 1995, para 26-28)

In this passage, Clinton addressed the specific logistical issues of the event and the jailing of political activists, which was surely a nod to Wu and others that had been jailed prior to the event. Moreover there is a general disapproval for non-democratic governmental systems. The *Evening Standard* reported that Clinton's speech was a denunciation of China's human rights abuses and efforts to reduce freedom of speech at the NGO forum (Herbert, 1995). After the speech, Albright said that she hoped that Clinton's "brass tacks" approach would placate domestic critics but Chinese officials were not enthusiastic about her comments (Herbert, 1995). Clinton's statements affirmed the disapproval that had coalesced around China's role as conference host and further identified the abuse of human rights as common enemies for conference attendees and governments to oppose.

Chinese populations, however, had limited to no access to the speech as it was neither broadcast nor discussed by state run media that day (Witter, 1995). Official Chinese press was instructed to ignore the remarks until an official reaction had been constructed. Reaction from China came when the First Lady had already left the Conference for Mongolia (Tofani, 1995, Tyler, 1995). Foreign Ministry spokesman Chen Jian told reporters that, "[We have taken] note that some people from some countries have made unwarranted remarks and criticism against other countries" and that they "cautioned" those who criticized China to "pay more attention to the problems within their own countries...It is better for everybody to clear their own courtyard" (Hutcheon, 1995, para 2). Although dissatisfied by Clinton's conduct, he also never mentioned her or

the United States by name except to reiterate later that the key issue standing in the way of improved U.S.-China relations was the United States' amicable relationship with Taiwan (How, 1995). Clinton's criticism was noted yet ambiguous enough to allow China to save face and respond in kind, with an ambiguous warning.

Disapproval from the Zhongguo Tongxun She news agency in Hong Kong was much more direct and focused on Clinton's choice to provide any critical comments toward governments. In addition to calling her arguments "nonsensical and preposterous" the report asserted that criticizing countries for forced abortion and sterilizations "deviated from the theme [of the Conference and] was incongruous with her dignitary standing and was quite improper on an international occasion" (Hillary Clinton's "improper" speech, 1995, para. 5). British Overseas Development Minister Lady Chalker, head of Britain's delegation to the conference, scolded Clinton in the *Daily Mail* for her "full frontal attack." Chalker, a proponent of "quiet diplomacy," expressed her preference for private discussions of these issues and was quoted saying, "quiet diplomacy does a lot more than any phrases in a speech" (You said too much, 1995, para. 3-5).

In defense of her speech and to avoid political repercussions, the U.S. State Department highlighted Clinton's theme of shared responsibility which was emphasized by her frequent use of "we" and "our" in the speech. This use of pronouns resonates as an identification strategy to foster social cohesion and remind audiences that they share common challenges, enemies, and goals. The State Department reiterated that Clinton was not sent to tend to U.S.-China relations but that she happened to discuss women's issues that "have specific applications for China," (Rhodes, 1995, para. 3). President Bill Clinton also defended the speech as being applicable to many countries, not just China (Lau, 1995).

Despite these criticisms and concerns, Western media outlets reported strong, positive audience reactions after the speech. Republican Chairman of the House Human-Rights subcommittee, Chris Smith, who had originally analogized the conference to a human rights conference in Hitler's Germany, praised the importance of the speech (Tang, 1995). The head of the Vatican delegation who was staunchly opposed to the conference's reproductive-health agenda was pleased with the address (Tang, 1995). Albright believed that Clinton's critics would acknowledge she had delivered a successful speech (Blood, 1999). Even Harry Wu, who had originally supported a boycott of the Conference, publically praised Clinton's speech (Lau, 1995; Mickleburgh, 1995).

Indirectly implicating China as a rights abuser and hostile conference host was a necessary response to the political context of the event and pressures placed on Clinton. Articulating extreme forms of rights abuse was also a clear choice for bringing audiences together to stand against China and human rights abuses as common enemies. Additional divisions still existed though, and in the next section I explain how she dealt with the semantics of women's human rights and family values to bring audiences together for the common cause of protecting and bettering families.

Reframing Rights and Family Values

Another strategy for facilitating identification is to create agreement by articulating the common ground that exists among individuals (Burke, 1969). Clinton accomplished this by identifying the overlapping nature and substance of two sets of values that had been discursively constructed as opposing. The overarching message of

Clinton's speech was much akin to the purpose of the conference – to set an agenda for further discussion on the rights and experiences of women worldwide that would be engaged by a diverse set of actors. Clinton crafted a bridge between women's and human rights to reaffirm the work done at previous UN conferences and popularize a reconceptualization of women's rights that promoted the universality of human rights.

Borrowing the concept “women's rights are human rights” from the international nongovernmental organization campaign GCWHR, Clinton made the slogan a household phrase and demonstrated her ability to inspire and unify her audiences. She additionally attempted to elucidate the connections among feminism, human rights, and family values. The connections were used to ameliorate right-wing apprehension that the conference aimed to destroy family values and sought to establish common ground between divergent interests. While Clinton did not credit the GCWHR for the idea of “women's human rights,” its signature ideology and language were evident throughout her speech suggesting the campaign influenced her speech preparation. It is particularly evident in her climatic repetition of the phrase “it is a violation of human rights...” (Clinton, 1995, para. 19-25).

To facilitate the acceptance of the idea of women's human rights, Clinton attempted to establish common ground between those skeptical and those supportive of women's rights by linking the reconceptualization to already valued and respected international instruments, declarations, and agreements on human rights. Her speech was not a defense of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, or an argument as to why human rights in general should be recognized, but a demonstration of how women's rights have precedence in international law and politics (Riles, 2000). She said that “the international community has long acknowledged and recently reaffirmed at Vienna that both women and men are entitled to a range of protections and personal freedoms” (Clinton, 1995, para. 16). By referencing the UN World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna, she invoked the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, which among other advances and clarifications on human rights, called for the creation of instruments to publicize and protect the rights of women and children. She assumed her immediate audience's familiarity with the Vienna Conference since it was also hosted by the UN and created the new office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. The High Commissioner himself, Dr. Jose Ayala Lasso, was a conference participant. The conference covered a number of issues such as health, poverty, and education, all of which were encompassed by Clinton's focus on human rights as these issues are explicitly addressed in international agreements on human rights.

A primary purpose of Clinton's speech was to set an agenda of political thought for attending delegates and issue a clarion call to the world which was summarized in one of the speech's lines: “it is time for us to say here in Beijing, and for the world to hear, that it is no longer acceptable to discuss women's rights as separate from human rights...we must recognize that women will never gain full dignity until their human rights are respected and protected” (Clinton, 1995, para. 15). Thus, in addition to her general contribution to the women's human rights campaign and, consequently, to the rhetoric of human rights, Clinton invited critics to accept women's human rights by putting forth an image of empowerment and feminism that supported both healthy women and healthy families.

In this speech, Clinton continued the conversation on women's rights and dealt with feminism's public image problems. Without ever mentioning "feminism" explicitly, she demonstrated how the empowerment of women, regardless of their nationalities and backgrounds, allows for the honoring and betterment of families. Clinton's speech contained hallmarks of third-wave feminism which, although still an emerging feminist movement, acknowledges the diversity of women's experiences and that "no account of oppression is true for all women in all situations all of the time" (Gamble, 1999, pp. 52-53). The conference itself was an exercise in exploring various perspectives and accounts of women's experiences, including women who were ethnic and racial minorities and women from developing countries that were largely not a part of first and second-wave feminist movements (Gamble, 1999). Clinton recognized, without prioritizing, women's participation in both public and private spheres, though her support for the universality of human rights diminishes the acceptance of culturally situated accounts.

Clinton stated in the beginning of her speech that the conference was a "celebration of the contributions women make in every aspect of life: in the home, on the job, in the community, as mothers, wives, sisters, daughters, learners, workers, citizens, and leaders" (Clinton, 1995, para. 2). Furthermore, it was a coming together "much in the way we come together every day in every country. We come together in fields and factories, in villages markets and supermarkets, in living rooms and board rooms..." (Clinton, 1995, para. 3). She identified the diversity of women she had met: "I have met mothers in Indonesia...working parents in Denmark...women in India and Bangladesh who are taking out small loans..." and recognized that "we need to understand there is no one formula for how women should lead their lives" (Clinton, 1995, para. 9).

Nationality, race, wealth, occupation, and family are just a few of the characteristics highlighted in the speech to describe the diversity of women. This discussion of diversity connected Clinton to her immediate audience, which consisted of representatives from around the world and addressed the concerns of her opponents that the objective of the conference was to promote a singular and radically feminist interpretation of the role of women. However, after recognizing the diversity of women and delegates, Clinton identified unifying themes of family and activism to bring her audiences, immediate and abroad, together and asserted that there was more that united them than divided them. She supported the empowerment and responsibility of her audience to be leaders in their home countries and emphasized their abilities to make decisions, solve problems, and organize: "Now it is the time to act on behalf of women everywhere. If we take bold steps to better the lives of women, we will be taking bold steps to better the lives of children and families too" (Clinton, 1995, para. 31).

To further assuage the concerns that the conference was not in line with "family values," Clinton made families a prominent theme in her speech. She clearly stated the family-oriented objective of the conference:

By gathering in Beijing, we are focusing world attention on issues that matter most in our lives -- the lives of women and their families...Our goals for this conference [are] to strengthen families and societies by empowering women to take greater control over their own destinies." (Clinton, 1995, para. 4)

Clinton's message was clear that when women's lives improve the lives of their families improve.

The draft Beijing Platform for Action had been criticized by conservative and religious groups for limiting women and men's freedom to choose their lifestyles and practice their faiths, and Clinton directly addressed this: "...we must respect the choices that each woman makes for herself and her family. Every woman deserves the chance to realize her own God-given potential" (Clinton, 1995, para. 15). Clinton criticized forced abortions and sterilization but never specifically endorsed the right for women to obtain abortions by choice. She selected the more ambiguous phrase "family planning" so as to focus on the concerns the pro-life and pro-choice advocates both shared rather than the legitimacy of abortion. One columnist asserted that her speech was so well received by those originally opposing her trip because attempting to stop atrocities such as rape as a tactic of war, forced sterilization, and abortions was undeniably "pro-motherhood, pro-life, pro-freedom" (Tang, 1995, para. 15).

Clinton successfully dealt with her rhetorical challenges by uniting her audiences against common enemies (China and rights abuses) and for common causes (universal human rights and healthy families). Her use of identification strategies demonstrated her ability to craft a resonant political position and connect with diverse audiences. The rhetorical significance of this speech continues to take shape as feminist theory evolves and Clinton advances her career. In the following section I discuss the extended implications of this speech.

Concluding Implications

Hillary Rodham Clinton has been the focus of many biographies and studied by a number of communication scholars yet her speech at Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing has gone largely unaddressed by rhetorical scholars (Manning, 2006; Riles 2000). Lucas and Medhurst (2009) describe this speech as significant because of its political context and memorable and powerful words. This essay has merged a discussion of these features by looking at the political conflict Clinton faced and her powerful phrasing to provide a historically situated, pragmatic, strategic rationale for the speech's content and form. In doing so, I make sense of her choice of identification strategies and her decision to advocate for the universality of human rights.

Clinton's speech at the Conference demonstrated purposeful strategies of identification to gain and maintain political support from multiple audiences that harbored competing values and contentious objectives. Clinton indirectly, yet obviously criticized China's human rights record and its treatment of conference participants to craft a common enemy. Largely a satisfying critique for domestic allies, opponents, and many conference participants, Clinton's language was undeniably strong but also demonstrated a value for China-U.S. relations. Her vague language, broad goals, and plan of action for correcting human rights issues allowed China the space to dismiss comments without calling additional international attention to them with a delayed response issued after the First Lady had left the country (Hutcheon, 1995).

Although political exigencies associated with China drove the construction of this speech, its enduring legacy comes from the way she acknowledged common ground between opposing audiences, facilitated a reconceptualization of women's rights as human rights, and became a prominent figure in international human rights advocacy. She addressed the perception of incompatibility between feminism and family values by taking the position that when the lives of women improve, the lives of their families

improve. Clinton suggested that everyone had the power and responsibility to draw attention to conditions that existed in their countries and attempted to direct them toward a broader course of action. She asserted, “let us heed that call so that we can create a world in which every woman is treated with respect and dignity, every boy and girl is loved and cared for equally and every family has the hope of a strong and stable future” (Clinton, 1995, para. 33). Aided by a powerful message from the Global Campaign for Women’s Human Rights she inspired thousands of delegates to enact the Beijing Platform for Action and urged for equality. The positive responses to this speech demonstrated the ability of rhetorical identification strategies to overcome seemingly contradictory values and bring together politically averse audiences, a task Clinton will need to accomplish again and again during her 2016 presidential campaign.

The phrase “women’s rights are human rights” gave the speech rhetorical power in the past, yet it remains wholly relevant to the present and future as Clinton continues to address the rights of women and other marginalized populations and make her next bid for President of the United States. Clinton’s rhetorical strategy simultaneously acknowledged the most common and egregious abuses women endured across the globe and relied on her audiences’ acceptance of the 1948 Declaration of Human Rights and desires for healthy families to build common ground. This interpretation of human rights emphasizes their universal reach. As men have been the implicit archetype for understanding human rights abuses, the universality of human rights challenges the notion that the rights of women can be limited because of cultural conditions and definitions (Bunch & Frost, 2000). This logic is intended to prevent events such as dowry deaths or genital mutilation from being excused by cultural tradition. The universal human rights framework also gives individuals language to describe and define their experiences and oppression in familiar, internationally recognized terms and as forms of documented rights abuse. Furthermore, it seeks the unification of human rights and women’s rights activism to empower supporters to organize and collaborate for change. When women are included in a general definition of human rights they are no longer relegated to a secondary “special interest” status and may receive more attention from governments and protective bodies.

This position has been subjected to feminist critique though, which may prove significant to Clinton as she continues to align herself with the universality of human rights. Feminist resistance to universal rights has been building and comes from the concern that patriarchal norms often masquerade as neutral and exclusion of the feminine has been discursively written into the terms of universality where the “autonomous, sovereign rights-endowed subject reflects a distinctively masculine experience” (Barker & Puar, 2002, p. 609). Specific populations such as women and non-property owning men have been historically excluded from the universal reach of rights. While political reform has rectified some of these exclusions, feminists caution that new and unforeseen forms of exclusion are likely to arise as a result (Barker & Puar, 2002, p. 609). To claim rights regarding abortion and domestic violence on behalf of women requires the articulation of a category of women eligible to receive legal protection. Thus particularizing the category of “women” may reproduce “a racialized, heteronormative narrative which obscure[s] the complexities of individual women’s experiences of subordination” (pp. 609-610).

This critique reveals that Clinton's attempt to acknowledge the diversity of women's experiences in her speech is perhaps undermined by her promotion of the universality of human rights. Her focus on families is also problematic and could be interpreted as heteronormative and only acknowledging women in relation to their role in a family unit, not as individual actors. This speech points our attention to a human rights paradox where demanding inclusion in an abstract conceptualization of universal rights may perpetuate a patriarchal, secular, Western, liberal understanding of rights but demanding particularization of rights specific to women may reify a normative category for women which cannot account for the diversity of their experiences. Clinton's identification strategies clearly supported universalism to bring her audiences together and satisfied the demands of the situation but as this debate continues and philosophical approaches to human rights evolve, the presidential hopeful will likely have to engage these philosophical questions and criticisms.

More than twenty years after her 1995 speech, the international stage is a familiar home for Clinton. She continues to speak about human rights even referencing the Beijing speech multiple times during her 2008 presidential campaign to remind audiences of her political experience and commitment to human rights (Clinton, 2007; "The Democratic Debate in Cleveland," 2008; Transcript of Thursday's," 2008). In 2011 she presented in recognition of International Human Rights Day in Geneva, Switzerland and highlighted the human rights of LGBT persons (Clinton, 2011). Clinton returned to a familiar rhetorical pattern and asserted:

Gay rights are human rights, and human rights are gay rights. It is violation of human rights when people are beaten or killed because of their sexual orientation, or because they do not conform to cultural norms about how men and women should look or behave...No matter what we look like, where we come from, or who we are, we are all equally entitled to our human rights and dignity (Clinton, 1995, para. 11).

Clinton's use of similar phrasing from her Beijing speech created a link between the two speeches and types of discrimination and abuse LGBT individuals and women have experienced. The similarity between these speeches continued as she highlighted the diversity of gay individuals. "Gay people are born into and belong to every society in the world. They are all ages, all races, all faiths; they are doctors and teachers, farmers and bankers, soldiers and athletes" (Clinton, 2011, para. 12). Implicit criticism was also levied toward states that condoned or turned a blind eye toward abuses of LGBT citizens and she praised specific states that have attempted to take responsibility to protect rights.

By applying identification strategies that she used in Beijing to a discussion on a population other than women nearly 20 years later, she solidified them as embedded within her rhetorical repertoire and affirmed her universal human rights ideology. Abuse is still the enemy and finding common ground is part of the solution. Furthermore, since her preference for reintegrating the rights of "special groups" into the realm of universal human rights was established in Beijing, her reconceptualization neither seemed radical nor does did attract as much attention as her speech at the Beijing conference. Though, criticism has been made that the speech ignored the implicit cultural differences in the construction of sexuality (Tobin, 2012). This more recent speech again pushes us

to consider the space between and outside of the universal versus particular human rights dichotomy.

The discriminating and abusive actions against women (and other marginalized populations) that Clinton highlighted in 1995 still exist today. Thus her speech endures as a summary of a women's movement, a symbol against governmental tyranny and partisan pressure, and presses further investigation into how we create policy and effect positive change in the presence of competing human rights philosophies. Furthermore it represents Hillary Clinton's life-long cause – creating a world where people are treated with respect and dignity.

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