

Abbie Preston

Professor Elif Guler

ENGL 400-11

11 October 2018

### Rhetorical Analysis of Meghan Markle's Address at UN Women Conference

“Women need a seat at the table. They need an invitation to be seated there and, in some cases, where this isn't available well then you know what, then they need to create their own table.”<sup>1</sup> On International Women's Day in March 2015, Meghan Markle used the powerful quote above in her address to members of UN Women during the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Beijing Women's Conference (Lederer). Meghan Markle is a well-known figure and has been recognized as an actress, feminist, women's advocate, and recently, the Duchess of Sussex (Lederer). Markle was selected to speak as the UN Women's advocate during this significant event. The original conference in Beijing took place in September 1995; where over 30,000 activists and representatives from 189 countries drafted the Beijing Platform of Action; the plan of action that laid the groundwork for promoting women's equality (Lederer; The Beijing Platform for Action). The Beijing Platform of Action has been adopted by several countries and has been used to make great strides towards the equality of women in today's society (The Beijing Platform of Action). Markle's speech during this celebration not only commemorated the occasion but reminded the audience that there is still a long road ahead when it comes to gender equality. During her address, Markle discussed the importance of empowering and encouraging women to take a more active role in our political system. Her call for action stressed that

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<sup>1</sup> All quotations from Markle's speech used in this paper can be seen in Shaun Usher's novel, *Speeches of Note*.

women's voices should be heard and that women should not be afraid for standing up for what is right. The speech was initially released by UN Women, an agency of the United Nations that promotes women equality, rights, and empowerment, but has since been published by multiple news organizations (About UN Women: Work and Priorities). Markle's speech not only extends to women around the world, but to men as well to be a part of a necessary change.

This paper will provide a rhetorical analysis of Meghan Markle's speech and examine the effectiveness of the argument that women need a more active role in our political system through the lens of Aristotle's rhetorical appeals of ethos, pathos, and logos. This analysis will find that Markle builds a compelling and powerful argument by establishing rapport and credibility with her audience (ethos), providing evidence from different authorities to add reasoning to her claims (logos), and eliciting a sense of motivation, empowerment, and identity with members of the audience and women around the world (pathos).

## **Methods**

As stated above, I will be using Aristotle's rhetorical framework as a guide to analyze the rhetoric used in Meghan Markle's speech as well as additional rhetorical tools introduced by Jay Heinrichs' novel *Thank You for Arguing* that enhance her appeals to ethos, pathos, and logos. Aristotle defined rhetoric as the "art of persuasion" and argued that in order to effectively influence an audience, one must employ the three "tools of persuasion;" ethos, pathos, and logos (Heinrichs 39). Ethos is also known as "argument by character," or the ability for a persuader to establish credibility, share their qualifications, and instill trustworthiness with their audience (Heinrichs 40). In other words, ethos refers to how a persuader presents him or herself to the audience and their ability to "win them over." Aristotle claimed that ethos is the most persuasive and influential appeal (Heinrichs 46). An audience must be able to trust and identify with your

values, interests, and judgements in order to be persuaded into action. Logos or “argument by logic,” appeals to the logic and rationality of an argument (Heinrichs 40). To reinforce their claims, an individual uses evidence in the form of facts, statistics, comparisons, and sometimes experiences and “applies them to a problem” (Heinrichs 137). The use of logos within an argument is crucial persuasive tool that allows a speaker or author to show the audience how knowledgeable they are on the subject. On the other hand, pathos is defined as “argument by emotion” (Heinrichs 40). Pathos refers to a person’s ability to read and shift an audience’s emotion and mood in order to be persuasive (Heinrichs 44). A persuader can control the mood of the audience by using their beliefs (Heinrichs 86). According to Heinrichs, Aristotle held that emotions are heavily tied to belief (86). If a speaker or author can appeal to those values, they are more than likely going to be able to cause an emotional response from audience members.

### **Analysis**

From the very beginning of her address, Markle demonstrates her ability to develop ethos with her audience through the use of several rhetorical strategies. She first establishes her ethos by displaying appropriate behavior for the context of the situation, otherwise, known as decorum. Decorum refers to the ability of a persuader to act in accordance to the audience’s expectations (Heinrichs 47). In her initial remarks, Markle addresses the audience, thanking them for being there as well as specifically acknowledging the highly distinguished members of the UN leadership. She expresses how “honored” she is to be chosen to speak on this historic day. Markle’s demeanor is appropriate, professional, and sincere throughout the speech. She follows speech etiquette by dressing the part, maintaining eye contact with the audience, smiling when appropriate, being knowledgeable and prepared about the subject, and using clear, proper

language. This allows her to not only meet the audience's expectations, but to build upon her credibility and authenticity.

Stating her credentials and qualifications is another major tactic used by Markle to boost her appeal to ethos. Before diving into her argument, Markle introduces herself and explains her role in women's advocacy, "I am tremendously honored to be UN Women's advocate for political participation and leadership. I am proud to be woman and a feminist." Here, she provides context of why she is standing before the audience and why she cares about women's rights. This also serves as an attempt to elicit relatability and unity with the audience members. Markle opens with a personal anecdote of the moment she "accidentally" and "unknowingly" became a female advocate by single handily changing a stereotypical P&G dishwashing soap commercial when she was only 11 years old. By putting pen to paper and sending letters to first lady Hilary Clinton, renowned attorney Gloria Allred, journalist Linda Ellerbee, and the soap manufacturing company, Markle inspired the company to change its tagline from "women all over America are fighting greasy pots and pans" to "people all over America..." She also received responses of encouragement from all three women. By sharing this personal experience with the audience, Markle shows that her concern and involvement in women's advocacy began at a very young age, expanding her competency and expertise. Additionally, by including that Clinton, Allred, and Ellerbee supported her efforts, Markle further develops her ethos and reinforces her efforts in captivating her audience.

Regarding the Aristotelian appeal of logos, Markle forms a strong logical and rational backbone to her argument throughout the address. She achieves this by providing evidence such as facts, statistics, and personal experiences, from outside sources to support and enhance her reasoning. Towards the middle of her discussion, Markle states that;

UN Women, as you guys know, has defined the year 2030 as the expiration date for gender inequality. And here is what's staggering; the studies show that at the current rate, the elimination of gender equality won't be possible until 2095. That's another 80 years from now.

This figure is implemented in the speech to demonstrate that change is needed now and that what is being done now is not enough. Markle follows this statistic with another surprising fact that there has only been an 11 percent increase in the percentage of women who hold parliamentary/government positions since 1995. By incorporating this data into her argument, Markle's assertions appear more legitimate and valid.

Another way Markle builds her logos, is by presenting premises in cause and effect relationships. In multiple instances, she presents a problem to the audience and then offers a practical and reasonable solution. For example, in one area of her speech Markle reminds the crowd that, "women make up more than half of the world's population and potential...it is neither just nor practical for their voices, for our voices, to go unheard at the highest levels of decision-making." Following this claim, Markle then offers a solution; "the way we change that, in my opinion, is to mobilize girls and women to see their value as leaders and to support them in these efforts..." This shows the audience that Markle is rational and that her opinions are well informed.

In addition to showing off her vast knowledge and rationality, Markle uses the powerful rhetorical tool of metonymy to further develop her logical appeal. Metonymy is a persuasive strategy that used by individuals to change the way the audience thinks (Heinrichs 238). Heinrichs defines metonymy as a device that uses a characteristic, object, or idea and makes it "stand for a bigger reality" (238). Towards the end of her speech, Markle makes possibly, the

most powerful statement of the entire argument; “Women need a seat at the table. They need an invitation to be seated there and, in some cases, where this isn’t available well then you know what, then they need to create their own table.” This assertion is considered a metonymy. In this case, the seat at the table represents something much larger than a place to sit. It symbolizes a woman’s ability to have a say in politics, their voices to be heard, and a seat at the political table that is mostly occupied by men. Markle uses metonymy to grab the audience’s attention, allow them to think on a deeper level, and to deliver her message in a unique and symbolic manner.

Finally, Markle successfully establishes pathos within her speech by activating the audience’s emotions. This is primarily accomplished through Markle’s strategic use of emotionally charged words and phrases as well as a compassionate tone throughout her address. She repeatedly uses poignant words such as “equal,” “change,” “support,” “values,” “matters,” “right,” and “empower” to drive her message home. Her vocabulary choice sparks a call to women everywhere to be a part of this movement for equality. Additionally, Markle continually includes words that evokes feelings of unity and identity. These include “we,” “us,” “together,” and “each other.” These words create the notion that this “change” that we are seeking is a group effort and that both Markle and audience play a crucial role in achieving this. Similarly, Markle induces feelings of urgency and seriousness of the matter by stating how “imperative” it is for women to “become active in their communities, in their local governments as well as the highest parliamentary positions.”

Markle also uses several emotional examples and phrases throughout her argument. For example, in the middle of her speech Markle provides of explanation of what equality would look like:

Now, equality means that President Paul Kagame of Rwanda...is equal to the little girl in the Gihembe refugee camp who is dreaming about being president one day. Equality means that UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon is equal to the young intern at the UN who is dreaming about shaking his hand. It means that a wife is equal to her husband; a sister to her brother. Not better, not worse-they are equal.

This excerpt is successful in evoking a sense of motivation and identity within the audience. Here, Markle use examples that can apply to anyone. Comparing important figures such as the president of Rwanda and the UN secretary general to the young girl in the refugee camp and the UN intern who are not as well-known, Markle evokes feelings of hope and determination. The comparison pulls on the audience's heart strings. This implies that you can achieve equality despite upbringing, background, status, or education. Markle also uses phrases that remind young girls and women that "their small voices are in fact not small at all" and "their involvement matters." This empowers the audience to fight for equal representation in our government and equality in general. This where Markle prompts the audience to feel capable and qualified.

While Markle's personal anecdote about changing the discriminatory P&G commercial aided in building her ethos, it also plays a role in appealing to the audience's pathos as an example of *argumentum a fortiori*. *Argumentum a fortiori* translates to "argument by strength" and is described by Jay Heinrichs as a tool of persuasion that implies "if something less likely is true, then something more likely is bound to be true. Similarly, if you accomplished a difficult thing, you're more likely to accomplish an easier one" (7, 431). Markle exemplifies this by providing us with this personal example of how she was able to cause a positive and impactful change at a very young age. She suggests that if an 11- year-old can promote change, then

anyone can make their “small level of impact” when it comes to women equality and political involvement. Again, this aids in persuading and motivating the audience into action.

### **Conclusion and Future Implications**

Given these points, Meghan Markle’s integration of Aristotle’s three principles of persuasion, ethos (credibility), logos (rationality), and pathos (appeal to emotions), were well-balanced throughout in her address to the United Nations. Her strong combination of rhetorical appeals strongly impacted how her message/argument was perceived by the audience. Her claim that women need to have a more active and direct role in politics and government decision making was supported by implementing statistics and comparisons, presenting problems and offering practical solutions. By using emotional vocabulary, imagery, and tone throughout her speech, Markle was able also to effectively elicit feelings of identity, unity, and determination. Furthermore, Markle established an authentic connection to audience that made her appear relatable and trustworthy. Sharing her personal experiences and urging others to follow in her footsteps further expanded her appeal to ethos. This call to action is not only persuasive to the immediate audience; it also raises awareness to people around the world that gender equality is still an important issue. Markle’s use of rhetorical strategies was effective in motivating and empowering the audience to be a part of a crucial change in today’s social and political climate. This speech is a great example of how rhetoric can be used to evoke a positive change in the world.



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