

*Carroll C. Arnold*

Distinguished Lecture 2010

Seduction and Sustainability:  
The Politics of Feminist Communication  
and Career Scholarship

Patrice M. Buzzanell



# The Carroll C. Arnold Distinguished Lecture

**O**n October 8, 1994, the Administrative Committee of the National Communication Association established the Carroll C. Arnold Distinguished Lecture. The Arnold Lecture is given in plenary session each year at the annual convention of the Association and features the most accomplished researchers in the field. The topic of the lecture changes annually so as to capture the wide range of research being conducted in the field and to demonstrate the relevance of that work to society at large.

The purpose of the Arnold Lecture is to inspire not by words but by intellectual deeds. Its goal is to make the members of the Association better informed by having one of its best professionals think aloud in their presence. Over the years, the Arnold Lecture will serve as a scholarly stimulus for new ideas and new ways of approaching those ideas. The inaugural Lecture was given on November 17, 1995.

The Arnold Lecturer is chosen each year by the First Vice President. When choosing the Arnold Lecturer, the First Vice President is charged to select a long-standing member of NCA, a scholar of undisputed merit who has already been recognized as such, a person whose recent research is as vital and suggestive as his or her earlier work, and a researcher whose work meets or exceeds the scholarly standards of the academy generally.

The Lecture has been named for Carroll C. Arnold, Professor Emeritus of Pennsylvania State University. Trained under Professor A. Craig Baird at the University of Iowa, Arnold was the co-author (with John Wilson) of *Public Speaking as a Liberal Art*, author of *Criticism of Oral Rhetoric* (among other works), and co-editor of *The Handbook of Rhetorical and Communication Theory*. Although primarily trained as a humanist, Arnold was nonetheless one of the most active participants in the New Orleans Conference of 1968 which helped put social scientific research in communication on solid footing. Thereafter, Arnold edited *Communication Monographs* because he was fascinated by empirical questions. As one of the three founders of the journal *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, Arnold also helped move the field toward increased dialogue with the humanities in general. For these reasons and more, Arnold was dubbed “The Teacher of the Field” when he retired from Penn State in 1977. Dr. Arnold died in January of 1997.

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Purdue University



The Carroll C. Arnold Distinguished Lecture

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# Seduction and Sustainability: The Politics of Feminist Communication and Career Scholarship

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*\*The following text is a transcription of the delivered lecture.*

Thank you, Lynn, for such a wonderful introduction. I am deeply appreciative for the incredible honor that comes with presenting the Carroll C. Arnold Distinguished Lecture, and for the opportunity to discuss my own and others' research on topics that are so vital to our everyday lives.

Like the tradition of Carroll Arnold, who was interested in social science, was a rhetorician, and also a philosopher, I touch upon the many different ways in which knowing, being, valuing, and engaging are so prominent in our field.

## **Part I: Seduction**

As you can see from the title of my talk, Seduction and Sustainability is the main thread on which I focus. So let us begin with the first part: seduction.

Where is seduction in our lives? We may be seduced by the images that we find beautiful and captivating; ideas that transfix our minds and souls; our individual and collaborative work toward addressing global grand challenges. We may be seduced by the stories that numbers can tell us when we do statistics and the human behaviors we can predict. Seduction may link to the longings that we



Patrice M. Buzzanell delivering the Carroll C. Arnold Distinguished Lecture at the NCA Annual Convention in San Francisco.

harbor in the recesses of our mind, and certain scents, touches and memories, collective and individual, that are glimpses into our pasts, and that tug at our hearts.

There are many ways we can consider seduction. But let me define my term by using, if not a highly credible source, then certainly one of the most used. According to Wikipedia, seduction can be defined in the social sciences as the process of deliberately enticing a person to engage. Seduction seen negatively involves temptation and enticement; seen positively, seduction is a synonym for the act of charming.

For me, seduction has emerged many times throughout my career...the whispers and excitement of possibilities that come with our work...the systematic analyses of moments when voice and agency have seemed simultaneously contested, constrained, opened and fulfilled, perhaps ironically and often paradoxically... the hope for institutional and societal change...my own and many others, parts in the communicative construction of visions—equitable, enticing, resilient, sustainable, transformative.

These visions of organizing can be accomplished by using the considerable force of communication scholarship. It is the distinctive qualities of our field, from all divisions and interest groups, whether labeled feminist or not, that seek equity, quality of work life and well-being for females and males, that seduce me.

As I temporarily set aside the opening of this lecture, let me acknowledge that perhaps this discussion thus far hasn't quite fulfilled the allure of the "seduction" part of my title. For that, please forgive me, and I promise to return to seduction at the conclusion of my talk.

Let me also note that my talk uses a particular iterative methodological technique that's known as writing stories and crystallization, about which NCA's current mini-conference, called 'Multiple Stories for Multiple Audiences' is concerned.

In some of my work, I use writing as a method of inquiry. As we know, it is through the stories and iterative sense-making processes that we assemble and refashion the meanings of and in our lives. Many members of our discipline use stories to assist in their health and media campaigns. Still others like myself use stories to draw people into different examinations of work, life, and policy issues. For example, some of my narratives center on every day personal and legal struggles that families face when caring for adult children with disabilities.

Through writing stories, however, I mean something different. Here, I create intersections among multiple data forms in "a postmodern deconstruction of triangulation... [and] mixed-genre texts" and produced crystallized (i.e., genre-boundary breaking) (Richard, 2000, p. 934; see also Ellingson, 2009) insights about careers, gender, and communication in everyday life. To me, this process requires that I use the best available research, grounded in diverse

epistemologies and ontologies—social scientific, interpretive, critical, rhetorical, and postmodern—from within our own and across other disciplines, I “draw freely from productions from literary, artistic, and scientific genres” (Richardson, 2000, p. 934). As such I combine data collection and data analysis to crystallize and produce my current findings.

As we move into the next sections, we’ll begin by first examining the intersectionalities and the politics of gender and careers. We then ponder the processes, taken for granted nature, and consequences of social orders. And finally we return to seduction and sustainability by working through some current research projects.

## **Part II: Intersectionalities and the Politics of Gender and Careers**

This last Wednesday, on November 10, 2010, I received an inquiry from a reporter asking about gender and careers. Specifically, the reporter asked if I could comment on the overall atmosphere for women trying to become leaders and a broader look at the career-field spectrum. What challenges are women still facing?

I sighed. How does one summarize so much research? How does one sort through the empirical findings, opinion, popular media reports, controversies about the origins and natures of gendered behavior and other differences? Why are we still asking the same questions? So I crafted and I’m still crafting the story of gendered careers.

In terms of career issues and decisions, there are still few women at the top of corporations for a variety of reasons and despite efforts and resources devoted to interventions designed to level the playing field. Here career means processes and structures coinciding with advancement, recognition for quality work, and abilities to participate in decision making.

As demonstrated in Catalyst reports on women leaders and meta-analyses, stereotypes persist with women sometimes not being perceived as having the decisive qualities to lead. The image of the ideal worker, manager, engineer, entrepreneur, professor is still male. So women in these occupations have to provide extra evidence as to their fit for these positions, meaning that they aren’t automatically credible. Sometimes women are not included in formal conversations—not deliberately excluded but they just don’t happen to be in the men’s room, at team sports, in the right place when people are headed out for coffee breaks and lunch. Sometimes the organizational or occupational culture is so intense—long hours, weekends, overseas and conference travel, and so on—that anyone, male and female, with other things in their lives besides their activities corresponding to paid labor cannot devote 24/7 attention. With these extreme jobs, there are costs to relationships, and families, and burn out. These costs are exacerbated if work continues over long stretches. There seem little assistance, and even so, using this assistance can be perceived as signs of weakness. Research indicates that the optimal family structure for external

career success is the traditional family where the breadwinner has a wife who takes care of home and family. But there is no comparable structure for women.

If women take off time for family leaves, there are pay, retirement and labor force reentry delay costs. There also are relational and human capital costs; even in social welfare states where child care and extended family leave policies with pay are normative, women aren't at the top levels in the proportion that one would assume from population and educational statistics. Thus, policies and practices may ease the craziness of combining full-time work and full-time personal life issues, but gender equity is not achieved. There are many reasons for such disparities, but one that draws upon meaning-making, linguistic choices, and framings is that policies may be written such that their use is considered a choice that one elects to exercise, not as a right to which everyone, male and female, is entitled. The reputational and material costs of choosing other than work and career can be considerable.

The rewards of choosing career can also be seductive. Recent research indicates that childless, single women have a huge career advantage in terms of external success because their childlessness and presumed relationless state signal their full commitment and devotion to work.

Add in here that women are discouraged from voicing and enacting their ambitions over the course of their lifetimes, they may not have the encouragement to take the classes, like advanced math, that are entry criteria for certain well-paid occupations. They may look around and see that similar others are not in their aspirational occupations. They may realize that women are the ones who usually relocate and revise their careers accordingly. In fact, they may not even consider careers that involve heavy time investments over child-bearing years. And the number of years and work involvement that provides career entry or ascents to the tops of their professions means they need to consider trade-offs, possible age-related infertility, or less energy for the increasingly demanding role expectations for mothers. They may not be willing to do so, especially when they see so few female role models at the very, very top levels.

Even those who are encouraging don't know exactly what to do or advise their daughters in terms of their own careers and other's careers. For instance, Tracy & Rivera reported in 2010, that male executives perpetuate gendered and private sphere orientations with regard to women. When asked what their work and family's futures might look like, these executives could describe their sons' organizational prospects, and what kinds of personal relationships would enable career success. However, they were vague about their daughters' dreams and hoped that their daughters would work until children came. They could not envision what kind of partnerships would assist their daughters' career aspirations.

In academe this past week in *Higher Education Impact*—that's November 10, 2010, research on letters of recommendation for women indicated that if she is



portrayed as collegial or focused on non-prestigious aspects, then she won't get the job. In academe, letters of recommendation are, to a statistically significant degree, less likely to highlight her research, less likely to describe her in superlatives, and more likely to include extraneous information. Please note that these findings aren't all about women: they are about the values to which we adhere and our expectations for what is an appropriate fit into particular careers. As a result, research indicates that communal males might not be considered if the positions and careers require assertiveness and work devotion.

So let's say that the woman conforms to the right career trajectory, focuses on the right kinds of work, devotes her time to work rather than other life aspects, then she should be ok, right? Well, not exactly. Her publications are less likely to be cited. If she's drop-dead gorgeous, she may not be viewed as competent, like someone can't be smart and attractive simultaneously. But her attractiveness, while it may harm her career—and we're talking about drop-dead gorgeous at this point—it doesn't seem to hurt men's careers at all; in fact, it enhances their careers. Her attractiveness, race, and other aspects not part of occupational qualifications, may show up on teacher evaluations and Rate My Professor. She most likely would be paid less in academe. If she is a mother, she may incur motherhood penalties: less pay and promotions with no comparable fatherhood penalty, and these results on pay just came out this week, too.

November 2010: The U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences just released its study on faculty salaries in post-secondary institutions.

Here are the findings based on adjusted nine-month average salaries for the academic year 2009-2010:

Now let's compare the salaries of men vs. women at public four-year schools:

- \* Professor — Men: \$108,104 Women: \$95,942
- \* Associate professor — Men: \$77,873 Women: \$72,867
- \* Assistant professor — Men: \$65,786 Women: \$61,578
- \* Instructor — Men: \$47,600 Women: \$45,591
- \* Lecturer — Men: \$57,006 Women: \$50,975

There is so much more. Suffice it to say that comparable social scientific research and demographic analyses are found across disciplinary fields, institutions, and occupations. In a world where meritocracy, hard work, and the right capitals—human, intellectual, symbolic and social—presumably lead to individual career success, we still downplay the structural and ideological reasons for the contours and consequences of women's careers.

Much less is documented about what men lose in gendered career systems when they attempt to combine the new requirements of fatherhood to be involved directly and daily, to be the primary financial support, and to combine and contribute their work toward a broader community. Even less is documented

about men and women of color and other social identity groupings inconsistent with the prototypical worker or professor.

I have been citing social scientific, experimental, and demographic research, most of which has just come out in the last couple years or hasn't even been published except in *Online First* or in other venues. They're from many different publication outlets but many are in journals and other venues that are at the top of their fields, including communication. I use these data to remind us that the conditions are not just complaining women and that the use of critical mass and business case for diversity alone can depoliticize gender in the workplace.

But let me simply get to the point. No one—no organization, no society—can sustain...this kind of 24/7 lifestyle...exclusions of talent and knowledge in such a hypercompetitive global environment...the occupational, organizational, and institutional cultures that are maintained on sets of values and practices that align with singular streams of traditional and stereotypical characteristics, life rhythms and privileges associated with less than half the population.

Nor can our field and society afford to alienate a new generation that may be unwilling to reconcile the incredible work load with the level of rewards, for indeed the Collaborative on Academic Careers on Higher Education at Harvard University released a March, 2010 report detailing how young faculty want to manage their work in academe with flexibility and noted that organizational culture is an important consideration.

The issues here are seduction and careers, as well as how to reconfigure work-life balance. We, men and women, are seduced into giving our all because we perceive our work to be meaningful and to contribute to the well-being of others. That's why many of us are here. Yet, we may not take into consideration or own well-being and the ways the language and practices of career entice and excite us. It is not work-life balance about which I speak, although we call it that simply because it's the common vernacular. Doing work is not the issue, nor is work not a part of life. The issues are sustainability of career, personal interests, and engagement.

### **Part III: Ponderings and the Social Order**

We all have memorable moments that crystallize for and about ourselves and others. I may take a little narrative license in the details, but these stories are true nonetheless.

Let me share a few of mine...

My brother Charles once looked at me and remarked, "What a sacrifice it was to finish your degree." Well, I was astounded. It's true that I had packed up my four children, aged four and under, to return to Purdue and write my dissertation, while living in what was then called married student housing, so that gives you some idea of what it was like. But sacrifice? I replied that I had never even

thought of it being a sacrifice—that *not* doing my dissertation would have been the real sacrifice.

My husband, an interpersonal scholar, back there, Steve Wilson, greeted me at the door one day when I returned from school and motioned, “Shhhh, come here.” It was Robin, child number six, sitting on a bed with her ever-present pacifier in her mouth. She was surrounded by books, a laptop, a cordless phone, chocolate cookies—so Lynn is right in her introduction of me for this lecture, chocolate’s always in the picture—and a coffee mug. When asked what she was doing, she replied, “Being a Mommy.”

My son, my first-born Brendan, was barely out of his teens when he lead troops during the in the over-throw of Baghdad and Fallujah as a sergeant in the U.S. Army. Politics aside, what struck me at the time was how he seemed so calm when he left home. I had asked him if he was worried and he assured me that he was not. It was only in talking to his relational partner that I found out he was incredibly worried, and was setting things in order in case he did not return home from war. But he never let on to anyone. As he prepares to redeploy in early 2011, he has said simply that it’s his work and his duty. I guess that’s what it means to “man up.”

Why should a woman’s prioritization of work be a sacrifice? What are the priorities that women and men are supposed to have? What do we take for granted so much that we don’t recognize that we could have choices? Why do we fail to see the full ranges of possibilities for our own agency and voice in our career, personal lives, communities, and institutions? Why are our identities so tied with careers?

This question was the starting point for my life’s work. In 1991, my first refereed publication considered alternative paths and values to careers. My third and fourth refereed publications, “Gaining a Voice” and “Reframing the Glass Ceiling,” highlighted the ways that communicative approaches can address the challenges that face women and men today.

Together these articles proposed a metatheoretical matrix of the ways different feminisms could account for and remedy exclusion. They offered very specific research questions and practices that can transform our organizing. They called us to prioritize core feminist issues:

- women’s economic, political, social, psychic and biological oppression
- trivialization of women’s concerns, values, contributions, and language
- presentation of alternative viewpoints and ways of knowing as deviant second-class
- women’s power to make change collectively

These articles also critiqued and repositioned less privileged values and approaches: cooperative enactment and collaboration; alternative ways of interacting, thinking, and so on; inclusion of emotion.

Over the years, my inquiry has led me to study many different areas, and is, as Lynn pointed out, highly collaborative. I mention only a few of the ideas and note that many of my collaborators in name, through authorship and contributions to my edited books, and in spirit through discussions at conference panels and at our pre-conferences, are here in the audience. I am hugely grateful to my collaborators and co-conspirators in feminist and career scholarship. To give you a sense of these research projects, they include:

- rethinking what communication scholarship and practice might look like from feminist perspectives
- demographic analyses of labor force statistics to indicate who is advantaged and who is disadvantaged by the new career in our neo-liberal, political economy
- multi-methodological analyses of interview data to display diverse women's and men's priorities, logics, and negotiations in attempts at career and personal life sustainability
- performance of female engineering students' stories about the development of, and their persistence in, following their career dreams
- construction of imaginative spaces where individuals who probably would never meet at all in any real or virtual venues, talk about issues important in their lives. These interview data expose underlying assumptions and intersectionalities and identities, class, race, occupation, gender, and family that are all evident in everyday talk and interaction.

There are other collaborative projects centered locally and around the globe ([http://www.cla.purdue.edu/communication/directory/index.cfm?p=Patrice\\_Buzzanell](http://www.cla.purdue.edu/communication/directory/index.cfm?p=Patrice_Buzzanell)).

#### **Part IV: Seduction and Sustainability**

We return to seduction and its place in my scholarship. In explaining seduction and sustainability, I would like to describe my current projects and how my research unfolds.

First, I've been theorizing about processes inherent in communicative constructions of resilience. By resilience, I do not simply mean individual and communities capacities to bounce back after hardship, but the ways we have agency in creating our new normalcies in our lives. Here we...

- craft new careers and stories
- affirm our identity anchors
- maintain and use communication networks
- put our alternative logics to work
- recognize the legitimacy of our negative emotions while foregrounding the positive like hopefulness and self-efficacy

These human resilience processes are grounded in the material conditions of our lives and as such figure prominently in my engagement.

Currently, I am working with diversity catalysts on our campus as part of our NSF advanced grant initiatives to create sustainable institutional change. We work for and with women, particularly women of color in the STEM disciplines—science, technology, engineering, and math. Our interventions are designed to create new normalcies of equity and inclusion that can benefit women and men within and across institutions of higher education.

Some of my work is to facilitate sessions whereby our diversity catalysts— highly respected men and women on our campus who have international reputations in their STEM disciplines—develop broader repertoires of strategies to educate the majority.

Doing so has meant that we grapple with the implications of social scientific and other research, such as Brenda Allen’s Black standpoints in academe and possibilities for institutional transformation. We engage in dissent (Buzzanell, Meisenbach, & Remke, 2009). Here dissent... “challenge[s] the status quo and resist[s] any practice that does not create what dissenters believe would be a better world, but it also has two important and intertwined aspects. First, by definition, dissenters are members of the groups to which they are opposed. They situate themselves in adversarial positions within the group—by their talk, their actions, their feelings, their very being—and they refuse to conform to the principles about which they are in opposition. Thus, they can be mechanisms for change from within on many different levels—from conversations to institutional and global structures. Second, they also bear the burden of proof against change. If things work, why change them?” Our diversity catalysts challenge, prod, and role model ways to dissent productively.

Doing so has also meant that we frame using Gail Fairhurst’s work on *The Art of Framing* (see Fairhurst and Sarr, 1996; Fairhurst 2011) and other leadership publications to get at the multiple effective ways to create interpretations of events and change initiatives that can benefit diversity, inclusion, productivity, and the premier status of a leading research institution. We work toward creating the conditions whereby we can scale up and make feminist transformation sustainable in academe.

Well, these are all noble and some might say utopian and idealistic visions. Perhaps. I can understand that view. But that doesn’t mean that I must subscribe to it. I don’t want some vision that excludes the messiness, contradictions, variety, color, surprises, intersectionalities of, and ongoing sense making involved in sustaining difference and equity. Nor have I ever wanted these visions to be solely about women. It isn’t perfection that I seek: it is understanding, acknowledging, and working within women’s and men’s real lives. To that end, I combine seduction and sustainability in processes.

My final example is my current object of infatuation and desire. I must admit that I am absolutely enticed and entranced by the depictions of:

- creative industry’s and creative team productions
- new media and technologies—in this case, television, selectric

typewriters, Xerox copiers, intercom systems.

- In a highly volatile era that rivals our own uncertainties and societal changes, in this case—civil rights, the second-wave feminist movement, divorce, the pill, Cuban Missile Crisis, mergers and acquisitions, assassination of key political figures including John F. Kennedy and four young girls in Birmingham.

It is a realistic show; it is the award-winning drama *Mad Men*. In it we see how the positionalities of the primary characters—primarily white, Protestant, middle and upper class men, in the ad agency Sterling Cooper Draper Price, do not see what is happening around them. They fire the gay art director, Sal Romano, when he does not acquiesce to a client's demands. We see Betty Draper Francis, remarking to her Black nanny and housekeeper, Carla, while listening to the radio about outbreaks of violence, that maybe it's not time for civil rights. We see the pairing of an interracial couple, labeled as his—the white and pretentious Paul Kinsey—attempt to be cool and the divorced Helen Bishop as a threat to marriage. We see the copywriter, Peggy Olson's success during a client meeting undercut after the meeting by a male colleague's remark that she has lipstick on her teeth.

There is resilience, the stirrings of a new normalcy, moments of dissent, and the visibility of the gendered social order. It's 50 years ago, the 1960s in *Mad Men*. Is it really so different today?

I'd like to show you a clip. Here we see Peggy who has been Don Draper's secretary and is now a copywriter, going into the office of Joan Harris (née Holloway), head secretary and now director of agency relations. I guess I should apologize to anyone who didn't see the season four finale because we're going to see part of it. This is one of the scenes that concluded October 17, 2010, in the United States. Peggy has managed to generate ideas for a potential client and signed the first advertising account that anyone at Sterling Cooper Draper Price has managed to get since losing Lucky Strike, the client that accounted for over half of the ad agency's revenues. The agency is in dire straits and the partners have had to pony up \$50,000 each to stay afloat. They also have laid off staff.

The new account income is a quarter million dollars, a substantial amount in 1965. Actually, a substantial amount now. More importantly, the news that Sterling Cooper Draper Price signed a new client when so many were awaiting the agency's demise, meant that they most likely would attract further business and generate more income.

Peggy comes into the offices triumphant.

But when she enters, she finds out that the big news is that Don Draper, her boss and creative director, is engaged to his 22-year old French Canadian secretary, Megan. When Don hears about the account he says, "This is great news. We broke the streak." Peggy congratulates Don as the office continues to celebrate Don's news. This clip is what happens as Peggy and Joan get together.

<Plays *Mad Men* clip: <http://gawker.com/5666781/mad-men-ive-got-you-babe>>

It is what I see every day over here and ponder that lures me into research projects. Once there I find myself offering bits and pieces of these fragments to entice others into my journey toward feminist organizational transformation. I believe, and am in good company about this view, that workplaces and organizing, virtual or otherwise, offer the sites whereby we can affect change that can reverberate throughout systems and in different parts of life. It has been and is a concerted effort from all areas of our field that can actualize the vision both of greater equity amidst the magnificent array of diversities that surround us and of sustainable career-personal life dynamics.

It has to be, and is, a concerted effort from all areas in our field that can actualize the vision both of greater equity amidst the magnificent array of diversities that surrounds us and of sustainable career-personal life dynamics. I am deeply, deeply appreciative and honored to have just presented the Carroll C. Arnold Distinguished Lecture.

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