

Fusa Tsumagari, a Japanese American Woman, and Her Intersectional Use of Conversational and Contrastive Rhetorical Styles

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Introduction

During WWII, many Japanese Americans were forced into internment camps in the western and midwestern United States. These camps imprisoned men, women, and children of Japanese descent and were mandated under Executive Order 9066. These prisoners were required to uproot their lives and place themselves in these internment camps or face a punishment of a monetary fine and possible prison time (Reeves, 2015). Living in internment camps severed ties between prisoners and their communities, friends, and any relations who were not direct family or of Japanese descent (Ishizuka, 2006). Oftentimes, the only way to remain in contact with the outside world was through the mail, as visitation was limited (Tsumagari, 1942). Letters were essential for connecting people inside internment camps with close friends or loved ones who were not relocated. Letters were their most reliable mode of communication and were efficient at helping prisoners stay updated with the world outside the camp. This essay draws from the letters produced by the prisoners of these internment camps. This essay focuses specifically on one Japanese American woman and her use of letters as communication.

This paper examines the correspondence between Fusa Tsumagari, a Japanese American woman who resided in multiple internment camps between 1942 and 1945, and Clara Breed, her local librarian before Tsumagari's internment. In these letters, Tsumagari rhetorically performs her intersectional identity as a Japanese American woman. I use the theoretical frames of conversational rhetoric, which helps make visible some of Tsumagari's strategies for performing her feminine identity, as well as contrastive rhetoric, which helps make visible how both Japanese and American identities are constructed. This study contributes to the history of women's rhetoric by considering how conversational rhetorical strategies get shaped by other cultural identities.

Archival Methodology

The archival sources used to examine Tsumagari's unique style of rhetoric were five letters written by this woman as she lived in different Japanese internment camps in the United States during the 1940s. Tsumagari wrote over 30 letters to Clara Breed, her local librarian, while living in several different internment camps from the span of 1942 to 1945. The first letter analyzed was written in May 22, 1942, and was sent from Arcadia, California. The second letter was written on September 27, 1943, and was sent from Poston, Arizona. The third letter was written on December 28, 1943, and was also sent from Poston, Arizona. The fourth letter was written on July 17, 1944, and was sent from Minneapolis, Minnesota. The fifth and final letter was written on January 14, 1945, and was also sent from Minneapolis, Minnesota. All of these letters were retrieved from the Clara Breed Collection on the Japanese American National Museum's webpage entitled *Museum Collection Online*. Pictures of the original letters are available on the webpage. These letters were handwritten in English cursive and sent out from internment camps in envelopes with standard postage markings. These five letters were chosen over the remaining 25 given their content, length, and significance to the argument of this paper. Each one demonstrated Tsumagari's intersectional rhetorical style through the cultural and feminine parts of her identity and were more relevant to the context of this paper.

These letters are valuable, as they provide insight into how women lived within these internment camps. The Japanese internment camps are an important part of U.S. history, and although Tsumagari reveals details about the camps, and her letters are interesting artifacts from a historical standpoint, these letters contain information beyond the historical context and allow for analysis of her rhetorical style and choices. The letters reveal information about rhetoric based in identity by using Tsumagari as a starting point to analyze the way identity influences writing style and language choices. Tsumagari's rhetoric is intersectional given the feminine and cultural aspects of her identity that come together to create a cohesive writing style. This style combines cultural rhetorical norms and feminine rhetorical norms to create an intersectional rhetorical style deeply rooted in Tsumagari's identity.

Conversational Rhetoric and Tsumagari's Letters

In the letters on which this study focuses, Tsumagari would often write about details of her life, the living conditions of the camp, and her perspective on life in the camp. This content provides a detailed insight into how these internment camps ran and what life was like for the prisoners inside of them. In one letter, Tsumagari writes, "We've moved again. This makes the third time we've moved

inside this camp. We're now in smaller rooms. We no longer live in the stables, but in regulation army barracks" (Tsumagari, 1942). This shows the less than ideal living conditions within the camps as she (and presumably her family) were relocated into even smaller barracks. In the same letter, Tsumagari goes on to say, "We have one large shower and one large laundry room. We certainly don't see how they expect over 16,000 people to be clean and have their clothes clean. Many of the women get up about 5 a.m. and go to wash" (Tsumagari, 1942). The camp is evidently overpopulated, as they do not have the facilities to care for all the people living on the premises. Tsumagari also reveals that the women altered their personal schedules to work around the overpopulation, with some women waking up at 5 a.m. to wash/bathe. These letters consistently reveal small details such as this, and they give insight into how this woman viewed these camps and how life was inside the camps during this time. Given the language and intonation of the letters and considering the descriptions of the camps, the living conditions sound poor.

Tsumagari also writes about her family, and often asks Breed about Breed's own family, friends, and loved ones. This exemplifies conversational rhetoric and women's rhetorical styles, as it discusses private sphere matters in a conversational genre and tone. Conversational rhetoric is a concept largely credited to Jane Donawerth (2011) in her book *Conversational Rhetoric: The Rise and Fall of a Women's Tradition, 1600-1900*. In this book, she focuses on European and American women's rhetorical styles and practices and their use of rhetoric from all over the globe during the given time period. Donawerth introduces conversational rhetoric as an intimate and informal mode of rhetoric that was more "private" than men's rhetorical practices, and helped women find a voice to write/speak with. This was a nonthreatening way in which women could speak and communicate freely. Conversational rhetoric is also dependent upon rhetorical genres that are conversational and dialogic in nature, such as addresses and letters. The working definition of conversational rhetoric for this paper is influenced by Donawerth. For the sake of this paper, conversational rhetoric is used according to the following definition/interpretation: "A style of rhetoric that is intimate and private, and uses language and genres associated with the feminine sphere of communication."

These letters are conversational rhetoric because the genre of the letter in and of itself is a conversational genre. Conversational rhetoric is a concept largely grounded in feminist literary theory and commonly associated with feminine identity. Tsumagari's use of conversational rhetoric is a distinct call upon her gender identity of female. The language she uses and the tone in which she writes is very feminine in nature. Furthermore, the subject matter is conversational—small talk focused on family, friends, literature, and daily life—and the tone is conversational in that it is informal and intimate, even friendly. Each of the letters is written similarly. They have friendly greetings and cordial goodbyes. One of Tsumagari's (1943a) letters begins with "This letter is certainly far overdue, isn't it?" and ends with "Please give my best regards to your mother

and Miss McNary.” These greetings are very friendly in tone and arguably take on a more private- than public-sphere setting. The letters also address subjects that were commonly associated with women during the time they were written, such as asking how one another’s family and/or friends are doing. One example of Tsumagari’s (1944) use of conversational rhetoric can be found in a letter where she writes, “My brother is still in Milwaukee attending Marquette University. So far he hasn’t been called, and we’re hoping that he can get into Med School all right. He will be graduating in Nov., I believe.” She brings up family, which is a private-sphere subject, by addressing her brother who is assumedly on education leave from the internment camp. She also addresses this topic in a conversational tone. The tone of this letter is familiar, as if the writer of the letter (Tsumagari) knew that the receiver of the letter (Breed) knew her brother and was updated about his whereabouts and his educational leave. The tone of this letter could be more formal and less conversational if Tsumagari were to name her brother specifically and use different language. The tone and subject is conversational because Breed is assumedly acquainted or aware of Tsumagari’s brother already, and the language used is very informal and friendly. When this genre of correspondence is combined with the overall conversational tone, the given subject matter, and the feminine element of Tsumagari’s identity that influences her writing style, these letters can be appropriately labeled as conversational rhetoric.

Even more evidence of conversational rhetoric can be found in a letter from 1943. It was after Christmas when Tsumagari (1943b) wrote this letter. She says, “I also received a lovely sweater from mom, a purse from sis, and a bath mit, hair ribbons, socks, candy, and a few other things. The giving and receiving at Christmas time is always fun . . .” The tone is lighthearted and very conversational in nature, as evidenced by “giving and receiving at Christmas time is always fun.” It sounds like an intimate conversation between two women about the holidays, which is a private-sphere conversation. The letters from Tsumagari are full of these topics. The woman is using conversational rhetoric in both language and subject matter in a majority of the letters she wrote.

There are also a few letters in which Tsumagari will discuss the last book Breed had sent her, as Breed was sending literature to her former library patrons. In one letter, Tsumagari (1943a) compares the internment camp in Poston, Arizona, to the location setting of the book, *Lost Horizon*. Tsumagari writes, “I was continually amazed by its similarity to this place called Poston. . . . The points that interested me were: (1) the isolation (2) doing everything in moderation (3) the feeling of wanting to go out, and on the other hand, wanting to stay in this leisurely place. We really have a feeling of isolation here.” She compares the life she leads at the time to that of the main characters and describes how lonely and monotonous life can be at the camp. The most interesting comparison she makes is her first point, “the isolation.” These people feel isolated in this camp, and they live redundant lives, as evidenced by Tsumagari’s next point of “doing everything in moderation.” This letter is very unique and accurately displays

feminine rhetoric. These conversations are very similar to the discussions women might have at a book club. Even in modern times, we can picture this analogy of Tsumagari's life in Poston to that of the life described in *Lost Horizon*. Not only is the rhetoric used in this letter feminine and conversational, but the subject of the letter is conversational as well. Tsumagari is using this feminized book-talk to inform Breed about the living conditions at the camp and how Tsumagari feels isolated as a prisoner.

Feminine Rhetorical Identity Across Cultures

While conversational rhetoric helps us see the ways that Tsumagari performed feminine identity in her letters to Breed, her feminine identity is particularly complex because she has to balance the norms of femininity for both Japanese and American cultures. In other words, her identity is intersectional. An article by Aki Uchida (1998) addresses the aspect of identity in Japanese American women. Uchida explains the struggle these women face when trying to find and establish their identity. She explains that they are often put into a binary where they are forced to identify as either American or Japanese (Uchida, 1998). They are rarely given the "choice" of both, as the two identities are so different. There's a false dichotomy being imposed upon them by society, and there are many factors to consider in the identity process. These women are already minorities due to their gender. Choosing to identify as Japanese further minoritizes them. However, identifying as Japanese comes with ideals and traditions that these women may have grown up with and hold close on a personal level. Their Japanese heritage reasonably influenced their lives, and thus they would want to retain this part of their identity. On the other hand, these women were American citizens, and identifying as American showed their patriotism but lowered their credibility in the eyes of their fellow Japanese people (Uchida, 1998). Society did not help these women in this dilemma, as many people refused to accept such a complex identity. This made it harder for the women to discover their identities, and further encouraged the binary that was being forced upon them.

It is important to note that while these women faced pressure from society to choose one cultural identity, many of them still insisted on defying societal expectations and demands, and they chose to identify as Japanese American. As a result, Japanese American women have a unique, complex sense of identity. Their identity is intersectional in nature because they are part of a minority group based on both culture/ethnicity and gender, and they have juxtaposing ideals that stem from their cultures coexisting within one person. Tsumagari also shared this complex, intersectional identity, and it impacted her rhetorical strategy as she had to find a way to incorporate both cultural identities into one singular and cohesive writing style.

On the topic of identity, a key part of these women's identities (and Tsumagari's identity) is Japanese heritage. Ryuko Kubota (1997) uses contrastive rhetoric as a lens to analyze Japanese texts and traditions that were common among the

culture's writing. Contrastive rhetoric is important because it takes dual identities and cultural norms and examines how these elements may affect one's style and use of rhetoric. Kubota (1997) writes, "Japanese written texts are characterized by an abrupt topic shift manifested in a classical style called *ki-sho-ten-ketsu*, reader responsibility, and a quasi-inductive pattern" (p. 461).

When looking at Tsumagari's letters, there is a prevalent pattern within the letters related to Kubota's observation. Tsumagari would sometimes switch topics suddenly and without warning. She would be writing a sentence about her family before immediately switching to a discussion about a piece of literature, or a recent event that occurred in camp. An example of this can be found in a letter from 1943. Tsumagari (1943a) writes, "We are all wearing sweaters for the first time in some months. We make fun of each other calling: 'sweater girl' cause they're still rather odd after a hot season. / Yesterday, I finished reading *Lost Horizon*. It really left me with a funny feeling." The only indication of a topic switch is a new paragraph. There is no transition between the two topics of sweaters and *Lost Horizon*, and the two topics are unrelated. This sudden switch in topic embodies *ki-sho-ten-ketsu* as Kubota pointed out and incorporates a traditional Japanese norm of writing with Tsumagari's style.

Furthermore, Tsumagari would write for a long time in a "small-talk," conversational way by bringing up less relevant points before arriving at her main objective for the letter, which was often a request for materials (sweaters, books, etc.) or something of importance. She would try to gently ease into her main objective of the letter using this inductive organizational writing style, which is another characterization of Japanese writing as shown in Kubota's previously mentioned quote. An example of this can be seen in the final letter from 1945. Tsumagari (1945) writes about Christmas, her family, and how one of the other women tried giving her a "perm" before finally arriving to the main point of the camp closing and the prisoners being released home. The main point of the letter is that they are all being released and are free to live normal, civil lives. Instead of starting with her main point, Tsumagari starts off with smaller and less significant details and anecdotes. This is a very inductive organizational structure of writing, which is a common Japanese characteristic in writing.

According to these examples and Kubota's observations of Japanese texts, it is clear that Tsumagari had some Japanese influences in her rhetorical style that stemmed from common elements found in Japanese texts and writing. She wrote her letters in an inductive organizational style, she embodied *ki-sho-ten-ketsu* in her sudden topic changes, and she made the reader of the letters responsible for piecing together information and picking out the most important parts of the letter. These are all elements Kubota picked out from Japanese texts, and Tsumagari incorporated them in her letters. Her rhetorical style and literary choices were deliberate and had Japanese influence.

However, Tsumagari identified as Japanese American, which means she felt connected to both parts of her identity. It is important to also examine Western influences that may have affected her writing style and literary choices. One of the elements in her writing style that was arguably more Western was when her writing became more assertive and less “private” or “feminine.” This specifically occurred when addressing the internment camps and living conditions, or things she was generally displeased with. In the first letter examined, Tsumagari (1942) writes, “Another announcement just came out stating the fact that we cannot receive any perishable or nonperishable food here. The only thing we can bring in from the outside is candy. Gee, that really makes me mad.” She is being assertive through her use of language when discussing her disapproval of this decision within the camp. Assertive behavior and language is generally avoided in Japanese discourse (Kubota, 1997), so this trait is more Western/American in nature.

Another Western writing trait Tsumagari displays in her writing is that she showed resistance through the letters themselves. The letters themselves display resistance because she is communicating with an outsider from the camp, and throughout the various letters, Tsumagari explains the unpleasant living conditions she is faced with and makes her displeasure evident. True acceptance of the situation would result in Tsumagari not writing about this matter at all and focusing solely on the friendly and intimate content within the letters. Instead, she is showing resistance to the executive order and the life she is forced to live. This resistance goes against *gaman*, a Japanese tradition that focuses on enduring in silence (Kubota, 1997). By writing the letters, Tsumagari is showing resistance to the government’s choice to place her in these camps and is therefore not enduring in silence. The letters themselves and the content of the letters show resistance and assertiveness, even if it is in subtle ways. These elements are arguably more Western/American in terms of rhetoric, as they contradict the tradition of Japanese cultures and texts.

Tsumagari incorporated an inductive organization pattern in her writing and enforced reader-responsibility through her sudden topic changes while also using stronger language and choosing to communicate in a way that showed resistance and opposition in a subtle manner. Through this she demonstrated that her rhetorical style and choices incorporated both of her cultural identities and the ideals/traditions of rhetoric from each culture.

Tsumagari’s Intersectional Rhetorical and Future Research Applications

All this considered, it is reasonable to claim that Tsumagari’s rhetorical approach is intersectional. Her writing choices have influences from both cultural sides of her identity—Japanese and American/Western. Her gender also shapes her rhetorical choices in the language, genres, and subject matter she chose to write about/through. Tsumagari found a way to have juxtaposing cultures coexist and pulled influence from each culture into her writing while also balancing her

gender identity and using feminine rhetoric styles, feminine genres, feminine language, and discussing private-sphere subject matters commonly associated with women. There is clear evidence that Tsumagari developed an intersectional rhetorical strategy by combining conversational and contrastive rhetoric styles with respect to her cultural identity and feminine identity. In conclusion, Fusa Tsumagari had a unique rhetorical style that developed from the intersectionality of her identity. The key elements of her gender and culture identity that combined conversational rhetoric and American and Japanese rhetorics resulted in the writing style evidenced in her letters. The intersectionality of her writing style and her rhetorical choices resulted in the effective communication and correspondence as displayed in these letters, and her writing style is unique to analyze given all the contributing factors that have shaped or influenced the overall style and effectiveness of it.

This research is valuable to the field of women's rhetoric in that it calls into question the argument Donawerth (2011) makes, which is that conversational rhetoric died out at the turn of the twentieth century. These letters were written nearly halfway through the twentieth century and are conversational texts. Although conversational rhetoric was certainly not as prevalent as it may have been previously, it still existed in the twentieth century and was used as a reliable way of communication, perhaps especially for women who were marginalized by society. In women's rhetoric specifically, conversational rhetoric is a major genre that women used before 1900, and as evidenced by this paper, continued to use after.

Conclusion

The original objective of this paper focused on contributing to the topic of women's rhetoric by addressing the topic of conversational rhetoric. However, these letters add to the history of women's rhetoric in more areas than anticipated. Tsumagari's letters contain rhetoric that is not only conversational, but rhetoric that is multicultural as well. The letters are both conversational—given the correspondence, the subject topics, the approach to said topics, and the overall language used in the letters—and contrastive—given that these letters used a style of rhetoric that was developed from contrasting cultures with different traditions and ideals. Secondly, this analysis concluded in the argument that Tsumagari's rhetorical style was intersectional in nature, and contributes to the evolving discussion of intersectionality in feminist literary theory. Intersectionality is a very prominent concept in today's society and this analysis provides an argument that a woman in this situation and facing these obstacles communicated effectively with those around her in an intersectional rhetorical style.

Lastly, this research focuses on a lack of research/information that exists in the area of women's rhetorics. Not only are Japanese American women an under-researched group in a general sense, but Japanese American women have not

been researched thoroughly in terms of rhetorical theory. There was not an abundance of information available on rhetorical techniques and approaches of this group. Therefore, this research is valuable because it gives insight into an important time of history and how one Japanese American woman communicated. The analysis of Tsumagari's rhetorical style provides a benchmark for additional research to be explored in the future. Although this research solely analyzed one woman, the Clara Breed Collection has letters from multiple prisoners of internment camps, and further research on the ones written by women would greatly contribute to the discussion of Japanese American and Asian American rhetorical styles. There is a distinct lack of research in this area, and more examination into the rhetorical styles of Asian Americans would be interesting and beneficial to the field.

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