

## CHAPTER 5

# Process and Practice of RSI Criticism

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In daily life, we are constantly involved in the rhetoric of social intervention. Consider the interventions related to furthering one's education. Recruiters intervene by rhetorically reasoning that the college they represent will best meet prospective students' needs. College course work results from curriculum committee interventions to categorize certain courses as fulfilling the expectancies of a particular symbolically created major.

How students symbolically categorize themselves—*interested*, *disinterested*, *hardworking*, *creative*—is influenced by professor and peer interventions that name their actions and behaviors. Community interpretations of campus events such as the resignation of a popular professor involve social interventions related to naming the events. In all, daily life is a continual process of social intervention to make sense of experience, with everyone serving as both change agent and audience of interventions.

The Rhetoric of Social Intervention (RSI) model concepts you have learned empower you to assume a new role in the intervention process—that of an RSI critic. As a critic, you search for and reflect on the communication patterns that interveners use to promote and impede social change. You speculate on the outcomes and side effects of those interventions. You undertake your own RSI investigations and construct your own narratives of social change and continuity.

An RSI analysis relates to a variety of situations. You might need to write an academic paper that demonstrates your understanding of the RSI model. You might use the RSI model as a methodology for a thesis. You might employ the RSI model to interpret workplace alterations or to critique a public relations campaign that promotes change.

This chapter guides you through the steps of an RSI model critique. First, we discuss the preanalysis process—how to select a social intervention and data to analyze. Next, we focus on the analysis process. We provide questions to assist your exploration of need, power, and attention interventions. Finally, we examine the postanalysis process and outline a narrative form for reporting the findings from an RSI analysis.

The result of this process is a critical essay that contributes to our knowledge and understanding of human symbolizing activity. Your RSI analysis can also enhance your role as a participant in the process of social continuity and change. It can improve your ability to reflect on and respond to your social system's future choosing.

#### ❖ PREANALYSIS: NAMING THE SOCIAL INTERVENTION

To begin enacting the role of an RSI critic, choose a social intervention to analyze. It can be a past, present, or possible future intervention. It can be one that seems to have succeeded as well as one that appears to have failed. The preanalysis process involves selecting symbolizing activity, collecting data, defining social system boundaries, and reviewing scholarly literature. As an outcome of this process, you name the intervention you plan to critique.

#### Selecting Symbolizing Activity

To identify a social intervention, start with this question: **What interests me?** Reflect on events, actions, and experiences that capture your interest. Pay attention to what you attend to.

Perhaps you watch news coverage about a particular event that relates to social change. Maybe you engage in heated discussions about certain social issues. Perhaps you have read a book or seen a movie that has influenced your interpretation of experience. Maybe you are impressed by the actions and behaviors of a particular celebrity or politician who rallies around a social cause. Perhaps you have been complaining about a local policy change that seems wasteful. Think about the events, texts, and people that catch your attention.

You can also consider topics or questions that you have addressed in other fields, such as history, political science, or business. However, recategorize the topic or question as a rhetorical one. For example, how did the Romans handle the anomaly they must have observed when so-called barbarians destroyed the West's greatest empire? How did Frederick Douglass invite his listeners to see an anomaly in their interpretation of events as he gave his 1852 speech "What, to the Slave, Is the Fourth of July?" How did economist Thomas L. Friedman intervene through his book *The World is Flat* to make globalism seem inevitable and outsourcing a good move for U.S. business? Thus, pay attention to symbolizing activity in which you notice different viewpoints being expressed or communication that makes you wonder why social change happened and how it was received.

As you narrow your interests, ask this question: **How does my interest relate to social change?** Consider how the symbolizing activity that captures your attention appears to encourage or discourage particular interpretations of needs, relationships, or experience, or all of these. Identify the *change* being prompted or impeded. What *differences* have occurred as a side effect of the symbolizing activity? What *differences* were promoted by the intervention but *failed* to result in change?

Suppose that symbolizing activity about space exploration interests you. You frequently read articles and watch television programs that discuss returning to the moon and creating missions to Mars. You connect your interest to social change by considering how the articles and programs promote or impede the public's interpretation of the need for space exploration.

Finally, in developing a topic to analyze, address this question: **What specific intervention associated with social change will I emphasize?** In other words, link the *change* you identify in the symbolizing activity to a specific event, text, or person or group that you can analyze. If you are researching the space exploration topic, you might observe numerous attempts to shape social interpretations of space exploration, such as NASA press conferences, books and documentaries, and speeches by government officials. If you were writing a book, you could examine all these various attempts. For the purposes of writing a critical essay, however, choose a specific attempt to investigate as an intervention.

For example, you could analyze media coverage of the International Space Station to examine how interpretations of it have shifted since its launch. You could critique a book or documentary that commemorates the fortieth anniversary of the moon landing to search for the interpretation of the event being promoted or impeded. You could

analyze George W. Bush's 2004 speech as an attempt to affect public interpretations of moon and Mars explorations. You could study feature films that involve space exploration for how they name experience. Overall, narrow your area of interest to a specific intervention you find interesting and worthy of critique.

### Collecting Data

How you focus your investigation depends on your answer to this question: **What data about the intervention are available to me?** To conduct an RSI critique, you need access to symbolizing activity—such as written, spoken, and visual communication. Symbolizing activity is also known as **rhetorical artifacts**. You must locate rhetorical artifacts that communicate the intervention's strategies, tactics, and maneuvers.

Intervention data include rhetorical artifacts such as articles, books, newsletters, correspondence, speeches, transcripts, memos, video, audio, and Internet communication. The artifacts can be produced by the interveners or reported by observers of the intervention, or both. To analyze interventions related to an international conference on space exploration, you could collect newspaper articles, Internet reports, and television news transcripts about the event. To analyze a text such as a book or documentary about space exploration, you need access to that book or documentary. To analyze a person or group, you could search for articles, speeches, and books that report the actions and thoughts of that person or group and conduct interviews.

In determining data availability, you must discover if the desired rhetorical artifacts exist and whether you can access them. Perhaps you heard a speech about space exploration, but if you have no recording or written record of the speech, you cannot study it. For example, Patrick Henry's "Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death" speech was reconstructed by his biographer decades after it was given. The original text does not exist. Sometimes rhetorical artifacts exist but are not accessible in the time you have to complete your analysis. Thus, allow adequate preparation time in case you encounter challenges in accessing intervention discourse.

In addition, collect background information on the intervention you plan to analyze. Background material can create a context for the intervention and clarify the social change being encouraged or discouraged by the intervention. To study Ralph Nader's intervention, we reviewed books and articles written by observers of the intervention. Their reports indicated how power shareholders responded to Nader's attempted intervention. The writings also provided background on the social

system's interpretations of experience prior to Nader's intervention. Thus, search for background data that give insight into the social system before, during, and after the intervention you plan to investigate.

To find data for your study, consult electronic databases such as Academic Search Premier, FirstSearch, Lexis Nexis, MasterFILE Premier, Newspaper Source, and ProQuest Newspapers. In addition, Business Source Premier, *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, NetLibrary, *Wall Street Journal*, and *Washington Post* may be useful databases. Internet search engines can also help you locate written, audio, and visual material related to the intervention. Finally, librarians can provide a wealth of information about resources and search strategies for finding and identifying appropriate data.

### Defining Social System Boundaries

As you review the data you are collecting, consider this question: **What social system will I emphasize in my research?** Recall from Chapter 1 that a social system is a network of individuals and groups that affect each other. In RSI terms, it is a collection of power shareholders that mediate each other's needs and influence future choosing. However, because *social system* is a symbolic construction, we must define the experience that we view as constituting a social system. You must name the power shareholders you consider as the system you plan to investigate and describe their connections. In essence, you abstract from experience to create social system boundaries by stating what components you will include and those you will exclude.

For example, in Chapter 4 we defined the social system as consisting of these power shareholders: Ralph Nader, the U.S. public, U.S. automakers, and the U.S. government. We excluded potential system components such as insurance companies, automotive workers, lawyers, and foreign automakers. Although these elements influenced and were influenced by the interpretive shifts, the intervention we selected to study—*Unsafe at Any Speed*—was primarily geared toward the power shareholders we included. In addition, they appeared to be the key responders to the intervention in the background material about the intervention. Throughout Chapter 4, we indicated how the components we selected related to and influenced each other.

To define the social system components, think about the intervention you plan to analyze and review the data that you have collected about the intervention. What people and groups are generating the symbolizing activity related to the intervention? What people and groups seem to be the most affected by the intervention? What people

and groups appear to be communicating about and responding to the intervention? Around what goal or need related to the intervention do the people and groups seem organized? How do they potentially influence each other? Look for recurring mention of people and groups in the symbolizing activity about the intervention.

Finally, because of the limitation of linear writing, you must name one component of the social system as the primary *intervener*—as the person or group that you will treat as initiating or starting the intervention. This does not mean that the person or group is the only intervener—all interventions include multiple interveners. However, when analyzing an intervention, you act as if one person or group *begins* the intervention, even though that person or group may have been intervening in response to interventions on the part of others.

The symbolizing activity you have elected to study as intervention usually dictates the *starting* intervener. Because we selected the book *Unsafe at Any Speed* as an intervention, we treated its author, Ralph Nader, as the intervener. The public, automakers, and government became the *audience* of the intervention. If we had focused instead on General Motors' (GM's) hiring of a private detective as the intervention, then we would have named GM as the intervener, and we would have named Nader, the public, and the media as the intervention's audience. Furthermore, we can view Nader's intervention as initiated or influenced by earlier GM or other system component interventions.

Overall, define the social system that you will analyze by addressing these questions:

- What symbolizing activity will I consider as the intervention (e.g., events, books, films, speeches)?
- What will I name as the social system components influenced by the intervention?
- What system component will I consider as the intervener (i.e., intervention initiator)?
- What system components will I consider as the audience of the intervention? (i.e., power shareholders influenced by the intervention)?

A wide variety of social systems are available to study. Thus, you must make choices about naming the system's boundaries, the intervener, and the audience. Your selections must make sense to the readers of your analysis. You must be able to reason for the components and connections that you choose. Clearly state your choices in the paper that you write.

## Reviewing Scholarly Literature

After choosing an intervention to analyze, consider this final pre-analysis question: **How have other scholars studied my topic?** Review scholarly literature databases to locate articles that might relate to the intervention you plan to study. In addition, look for scholarly articles that use the RSI model to see if their findings suggest insights useful to your research. This scholarly background provides a context for your own original research and helps to place your critical voice into the ongoing conversation about the particular intervention and the use of the RSI model as a method of critical analysis.

If scholars have not studied the intervention you plan to investigate, then your analysis might add new knowledge to scholarly literature. If scholars have studied it, but from approaches other than the RSI model, then your RSI analysis might contribute a new understanding of the intervention. Nevertheless, the other scholars' findings might lend insights to your investigation. If the intervention has been critiqued using the RSI model, then study an alternative social system related to the intervention or examine some discourse previously unconsidered, so that your analysis increases our understanding of the intervention or the RSI model, or both.

Electronic databases such as Academic Search Premier, Communication and Mass Media Complete, Expanded Academic Index, ERIC (Education Resources Information Center), JSTOR, ProQuest Research Library, and Project Muse archive articles from communication journals and related areas. These databases might contain communication studies on your topic area and RSI studies in general. In addition, review *Dissertation Abstracts International* if you plan to write a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation using the RSI model.

If we run the search term "Ralph Nader" in the Communication and Mass Media Complete database, we find two scholarly articles on the topic. Stein (1990) compares and contrasts Nader's muckraking style with other social activists. Bishop and Kilburn (1971) look at Nader's use of public relations techniques in advocating automotive safety. These articles might provide useful insights into Nader's intervention maneuvers and suggest a social system to be analyzed. We search several more databases using terms such as "Ralph Nader," "automotive safety," and "Corvair." We find no additional articles on the intervention or that analyze it through the lens of the RSI model. This finding helps to justify the need for our study.

In addition, we run search terms such as "social intervention," "rhetorical intervention," and "RSI model" to locate scholarly articles

that use the RSI model. These articles might provide additional understanding of the model or suggest ways to analyze the intervention. The Additional Readings section at the end of this book lists some RSI studies that might be useful for your research.

Finally, review the three scholarly articles by RSI theorist William R. Brown (1978, 1982, 1986), cited in this book's references. Brown developed the RSI model concepts in these articles, so they provide direct access to his ideas. This book reflects only a summary and interpretation of the RSI concepts. You should quote from the original source for the RSI model, especially when you discuss your approach and methodology for doing the analysis. Using the original writings lends more authority and credibility to your analysis. In addition, you might discover that you differ from the book's authors on your interpretation of Brown's concepts.

So far, we have described the initial process of enacting the RSI critic role. Although we have acted as if each step or question comes one after another, you might follow a different order. As you select symbolizing activity, collect data, define the social system boundaries, and review scholarly literature, you might discover that the ideas and information overlap and interconnect. The preanalysis goal is to identify an intervention that has interest to you, has accessible discourse, and has not been analyzed using the approach you plan to take or, at least, has not found the insights that you will write about.

Once you have completed the preanalysis, you are ready to begin analyzing the intervention through the lens of the RSI model. The RSI model is designed to be a search model—one that guides you to seek communication patterns as you read, watch, observe, and listen to the symbolizing activity that you have named as the *intervention*. Initially, you might interpret uncovering patterns as *challenging*. As you become a more practiced critic, though, pattern discovery will become easier. As you write your essay, you will likely experience an epiphany in which the model and its application suddenly become clear. To assist in your explorations, the next section provides lists of questions and pointers to guide your analysis.

#### ❖ ANALYSIS: ASKING CRITICAL QUESTIONS

To conduct the analysis, examine both the naming and subsystem processes that generate the social intervention. Use concepts discussed in Chapter 2 to identify specific naming patterns that support the strategies and tactics of the social intervention. For the subsystem



analysis, draw on concepts discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 to search for rhetorical patterns of change and continuity.

We first present questions to consider as part of the naming analysis. Then we list questions geared to the subsystem analysis. Although we discuss the naming analysis first, you can begin with the subsystem analysis and refer back to the naming analysis as you work through the data. You can also start with the naming process and extrapolate the subsystem patterns.

### Naming Analysis

The RSI model's naming foundation provides a method for analyzing the details of the intervention discourse. This analysis can help you identify the specific naming activity that underlies attention, power, and need interventions. It can reveal the rhetorical maneuvers that promote the strategies and tactics of an intervention.

As you review the data you have collected, pay attention to the specific names being given to experience related to the intervention. Think about how interveners create, maintain, and change symbolic categorizations of experience. Look for the patterns of rhetorical reasoning used to generate names. For example, as you analyze discourse about a possible return-to-moon space flight, you notice that interveners name the moon as both a *scientific frontier* and a *tourist destination*. You attend to how interveners reason for these names for experience.

Consider these questions, based on Chapter 2, as you search the data for naming activity:

1. What name(s) is the intervener proposing in the symbolizing activity?
2. Is the intervener attempting to offer an alternative name for an already named experience? Maintain a current name for an experience? Create a name for an unnamed experience?
3. How does the intervener rhetorically reason for the appropriateness of the name?
  - a. What criterial attributes does the intervener identify as constituting the proposed name? What is *the difference that makes a difference*?
  - b. How does the intervener demonstrate that experience fulfills the expectancies associated with the proposed name? How does the intervener reason *this-is-the-same-as-that* or *this-is-different-from-that*, or both?

4. How does the proposed name function rhetorically?
  - a. How does the name clarify ambiguous experience?
  - b. How does the name suggest approach and avoidance behavior?
  - c. How does the name create expectancies about what is transcendent (same) and blinding (different) about experience?
5. How does the naming activity link to attention, power, or need interventions?

A naming analysis highlights our actions as interveners to influence how others symbolically categorize specific events, people, and objects associated with a social intervention. It offers insight into the rhetorical maneuvers that interveners use to generate social interventions.

At the subsystem level, we shift to analyzing the communication patterns underlying social change. To begin a subsystem analysis, ask this question: **What subsystem—attention, power, or need—will I emphasize as a starting point?** All subsystems offer equally valid ways of interpreting an intervention. Select the subsystem that seems to make the most sense to you given your review of the symbolizing activity; then look at the list of questions in the following sections that corresponds to your starting-point subsystem.

Each list begins by asking you to name the intervention and social system that you intend to analyze. Next, it guides you through the process of reflecting on the before- and after-intervention situations and identifying the strategies, tactics, and maneuvers of the intervention. Each list ends with questions that relate to interventional side effects. As you conduct your analysis, keep in mind that interventions both encourage and discourage social change.

### Attention Subsystem Analysis

As you review the data you have collected, you might notice that the symbolizing activity emphasizes interpretation. Perhaps the communicators appear to describe *differently* the same experience. Maybe they debate *different* understandings of what an action or event *means*. Perhaps the data contain explanations of *why* an event or action has or has not occurred. The data might be organized around *comparing* and *contrasting* various opinions about an experience.

If these types of symbol exchanges stand out in your perusal of the data, then the *attention subsystem* might be an appropriate starting point for conducting your analysis. As you search your data for

communication patterns related to an attention intervention, consider these questions, based on Chapters 3 and 4:

1. What components will you define as the social system? Whom will you treat as the intervener? What will you treat as the intervention? Whom will you consider as the audience of the intervention?
2. How will you describe the naming pattern (interpretation of experience) of the social system *before* the attempted intervention?
  - a. What expectancies about experience does the naming pattern create?
  - b. What ways of knowing, being, and valuing does the naming pattern convey?
  - c. What, if any, other influences encourage or inhibit interpretations within the social system that the naming-pattern expectancies are or are not being met?
3. How will you characterize the attempted attention intervention?
  - a. What rhetorical maneuvers does the intervener employ to promote or impede the intervention? What does the intervener say or do, or what events does the intervener enact, to constitute the intervention?
  - b. What tactics do the rhetorical maneuvers serve? Increasing or decreasing attention to naming-pattern anomalies? Encouraging or discouraging shifts in ways of knowing, being, and valuing? Facilitating or impeding openness to alternative naming patterns?
  - c. What overall strategy underlies the tactics? Anomaly-featuring communication? Anomaly-masking communication?
4. How will you characterize the social system's potential or actual naming pattern *after* the attempted intervention?
  - a. What expectancies about experience does the naming pattern create?
  - b. What ways of knowing, being, and valuing does the naming pattern convey?
  - c. What, if any, other influences encourage or inhibit interpretations within the social system that the naming-pattern expectancies are or are not being met?

5. Given this attempted attention intervention, what appear to be the systemic side effects for need and power?
  - a. What, if any, need shift has been involved?
  - b. What, if any, power shift has been involved?
6. How does the attempted attention intervention maintain or challenge the ideology of the social system?

In all, an analysis of an attention intervention can provide insight into how we constitute, maintain, and change our symbolic interpretations of reality. This understanding can also enhance knowledge of our ideology, which, in turn, constitutes our interpretations of experience.

Because attention switches involve shifts in how we interpret our interdependencies, attention interventions result in power interventions (Brown, 1987). Thus, the power subsystem provides another starting point for analyzing social intervention.

### Power Subsystem Analysis

As you review the data you have gathered, you might notice that *power* seems to stand out. Perhaps words such as *player*, *voice*, *marginalize*, *class*, *power*, *role*, *clash*, *struggle*, *social movement*, or *influence* frequently appear in the data. Maybe you find yourself thinking about how this person or group is *connected* to that person or group as you dissect the discourse. Perhaps the data contain reports of behaviors such as strikes or protests that seem to *challenge* social hierarchy or actions that are being named *threats*. Maybe you notice violations of power code or enactments of sanctions.

In such instances, beginning your analysis with the *power subsystem* might be appropriate. Consider these questions, based on Chapters 3 and 4, to detect the strategy, tactics, and maneuvers of a power intervention:

1. What components will you define as the social system? Whom will you treat as the intervener? What will you treat as the intervention? Whom will you consider as the audience of the intervention?
2. How will you describe the power-sharing interdependency in this social system *before* the attempted intervention?
  - a. How does each power shareholder appear to mediate the needs and goals of the other shareholders?
  - b. What motives organize the interpretations of interdependency (exchange, integrity, threat)?

- c. What, if any, other influences encourage or inhibit interpretations within the social system that the interdependencies are or are not needs-meeting, or that power code is or is not being enacted?
3. How will you characterize the attempted power intervention?
  - a. What rhetorical maneuvers does the intervener employ to promote or impede the intervention? What does the intervener say or do, or what events does the intervener enact, to constitute the intervention?
  - b. What tactics do the rhetorical maneuvers serve? Increasing or decreasing awareness of non-needs-meeting interdependencies and power code violations? Encouraging or discouraging shifts in exchange, integrity, and threat? Facilitating or impeding openness to revised interpretations of interdependencies and power code?
  - c. What overall strategy underlies the tactics? Emphasizing or de-emphasizing cooperation to maintain the current interpretation of social hierarchy? Emphasizing or de-emphasizing competition to offer an alternative version of social hierarchy?
4. How will you describe the potential or actual power-sharing system *after* the attempted intervention?
  - a. How does each power shareholder appear to mediate the needs and goals of the other shareholders?
  - b. What motives organize the interpretations of interdependency (exchange, integrity, threat)?
  - c. What, if any, other influences encourage or inhibit interpretations within the social system that the interdependencies are or are not needs-meeting or that power code is or is not being enacted?
5. Given this attempted power intervention, what appear to be the systemic side effects for attention and need?
  - a. What, if any, attention shift has been involved?
  - b. What, if any, need shift has been involved?
6. How does the attempted power intervention maintain or challenge the ideology of the social system?

In general, a power intervention analysis can enlighten our understanding of the rhetorical process by which we constitute, maintain,

and change social hierarchy. In addition, it can increase our knowledge of how we create, maintain, and change ideology, which constitutes and is constituted by power.

Because we and others are interdependent for the meeting of needs, power interventions result in need interventions (Brown, 1987). Thus, the need subsystem offers a starting point for analyzing social intervention.

### Need Subsystem Analysis

As you review the data you have collected, you might find yourself thinking about *need*. Perhaps the communicators talk about *need*, *satisfaction*, *desire*, *requirements*, or *wants*. Maybe the intervention discourse seems organized around the *lack* of something, something that is *missing*, or something that needs *to be done* or *fulfilled*. The data might include descriptions of events and actions that appear to be advocating for or denying a need. The discourse might also address questions related to what it means to be human and what human beings need or do not need.

If you notice these types of patterns, then beginning your analysis with the need subsystem might be appropriate. Consider these questions, based on Chapters 3 and 4, as you search the data for the communication patterns related to need intervention:

1. What components will you define as the social system? Whom will you treat as the intervener? What will you treat as the intervention? Whom will you consider as the audience of the intervention?
2. How will you characterize the social system's interpretation of needs *before* the attempted intervention?
  - a. How are the needs advocated?
  - b. Toward what others (power shareholders) does the social system express openness as potential sources of needs-meeting responses?
  - c. What, if any, other influences encourage or inhibit interpretations within the social system that such responses are or are not needs-meeting?
3. How will you characterize the attempted need intervention?
  - a. What rhetorical maneuvers does the intervener employ to promote or impede the intervention? What does the intervener say or do, or what events does the intervener enact, to constitute the intervention?

- b. What tactics do the rhetorical maneuvers serve? Affirming or denying needs? Encouraging or discouraging advocacy of need? Facilitating or impeding openness of the social system to potential needs-meeters?
    - c. What overall strategy underlies the tactics? Increasing or decreasing awareness of individual need? Increasing or decreasing awareness of collective (group) need?
  4. How will you characterize the social system's potential or actual interpretation of needs *after* the attempted intervention?
    - a. How are such needs advocated?
    - b. Toward what others (power shareholders) does the social system express openness as potential sources of needs-meeting responses?
    - c. What, if any, other influences encourage or inhibit interpretations within the social system that such responses are or are not needs-meeting?
  5. Given this attempted need intervention, what seem to be the systemic side effects for power and attention?
    - a. What, if any, power shift has been involved?
    - b. What, if any, attention shift has been involved?
  6. How does the attempted need intervention maintain or challenge the ideology of the social system?

In all, a need intervention analysis can increase our knowledge of how we create, maintain, and change social interpretations of needs. In addition, it can provide insight into how we support or shift ideology that both constitutes and is constituted by needs. Underlying need shifts are shifts in attention and power (Brown, 1982). Thus, all three subsystems provide ways to begin an RSI analysis.

When using the lists of questions, you need not follow the question order. You can begin the analysis with any of the questions. You might also develop additional questions to assist in the analysis. Whether you start with a naming or subsystem analysis or begin with Question 1 or Question 6, the analysis goals are the same—to increase our understanding of human beings as symbolizing creatures and to increase our knowledge of the RSI model and its usefulness for interpreting experience. Your goal also might include the pleasure of pondering the intervention and what made it *work*. The last step you enact in the role of RSI critic is to share your analysis with others.

### ❖ POSTANALYSIS: WRITING THE CRITICAL ESSAY

The RSI model is an interpretative approach to studying human symbolizing activity. You *interpret* experience that you have called an *intervention* through the lens of the RSI model. Then you communicate that interpretation to other people. You become both critic and intervener because, in writing the analysis, you attempt to intervene in how others interpret the intervention.

#### Meeting Format and Audience Expectancies

As part of enacting the role of RSI critic, address this question: **How will I share my interpretation with others?** You can communicate your interpretation in a variety of forms. You could write a first-person account as a participant in an intervention. You could write your analysis in dramatic form with characters and plot. You could present your findings following a format similar to a scientific report. You could communicate your analysis as a video, documentary, audio commentary, or Web site.

In selecting a form to present the analysis, your primary consideration should be this question: **Who is the audience for my analysis?** To whom am I communicating my analysis findings? Traditionally, rhetorical critics write scholarly papers to share their research findings with other rhetorical scholars. Thus, this chapter's questions and discussion focus on writing a critical essay. We assume that the audience for your analysis is an academic one—professors and students.

Also, you might share your analysis with audiences outside the classroom by submitting your paper to a communication convention or journal. These audiences have expectancies about what constitutes the symbolic category *quality scholarly paper*. The essay that you produce must embody the criterial attributes that the audiences associate with that symbolic category for them to recognize your work as being scholarly and of high quality. Thus, the writing guidelines we provide are geared toward meeting those expectancies.

#### Enacting Style Expectancies

As you write your essay, address this question: **What academic style should I use?** Academic style refers to writing guidelines such as the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (APA), the *Modern Language Association Handbook* (MLA), and the *Chicago Manual of Style*. Academic styles provide rules for how to



format the paper (e.g., margins, headings, cover page) and how to cite sources used in the paper (e.g., quotations, paraphrases, references, works cited). Academic style choice is determined by professors' preferences, school requirements, or the journal to which you submit your paper.

Following an academic style is important to creating the *look* that an academic audience expects. It ensures that the essay includes the reference material that scholars attend to when reading critical essays. It enables the audience to focus on the content of the analysis rather than be distracted by the format of the analysis and permits the audience to easily find information in the paper. By enacting proper academic style, you build your own credibility and demonstrate that you fit the criterial attributes of *scholar*.

Regardless of the academic style used, the RSI paper organization remains the same. Traditionally, academic papers are organized into three main sections—introduction, body, and conclusion. The writing pattern we describe is a symbolic construction, one that can be negotiated with others to create alternative frameworks and expectations for the analysis presentation. Thus, you can adapt this pattern to meet professor and journal preferences.

### Writing Section I: Introduction

The first section of your paper introduces the topic and purpose of your research. It also describes the importance of the topic you are presenting and gives your audience a reason to want to read your paper. The introduction also provides a blueprint for the narrative that follows in your paper. In general, the introduction should address these questions:

- What is the topic of the analysis?
- What is the purpose of the analysis?
- Why is examining this intervention interesting or important to my audience?
- How does the paper present the analysis?

Typically, an RSI paper opens by offering a brief overview of the intervention situation that is the *topic* of the analysis. It should refer to an aspect of the intervention that will capture the audience's interest and attention. Think about how the change encouraged or discouraged by the intervention could connect to your audience's experiences. Highlight this connection in the introduction. Avoid revealing too

much of your analysis in the introduction: save the main narrative you plan to write for the body section.

The introduction also indicates the *purpose* of the analysis. It lets your audience know why you studied the topic. Usually that goal includes increasing your audience's knowledge and understanding of human symbolizing activity. Summarize your purpose in one or two sentences. For example, a purpose statement for a paper analyzing Ralph Nader's intervention might read this way:

This paper uses the RSI model to analyze the intervention *Unsafe at Any Speed* to understand and explain how Ralph Nader promoted a shift in social interpretations of accident events.

The introduction also relates the topic of your study to your *audience's interests*. You conducted your analysis because the intervention was interesting and important to you. However, the introduction needs to explain why the audience should find your topic worthy of research. The importance of doing the study may be implied in your opening description of the intervention and purpose of the analysis.

You can also directly state reasons for the topic's importance. Those reasons might involve the importance of the resulting social change or lack of change related to the intervention, the social change insights that an RSI analysis offers, the need to test or expand the RSI model concepts, and the contributions the analysis can make to the practice of intervention. In all, the audience expects you to answer the question, "Why?"

Finally, the introduction should *preview* what will follow in the paper. A preview is two or three sentences that describe the thesis and the main sections of the paper. It tells the audience the paper's main idea and organization. It also helps you stay organized by reminding you of the paper's purpose and main points. Write a succinct thesis statement that summarizes the argument you will present in this analysis. Follow it by a preview of the paper's organization. The remainder of the paper fleshes out the reasons for your interpretation.

Overall, the introduction creates audience expectancies about your topic, its importance, your approach, and your presentation.

### Writing Section II: Body

The body of the paper fulfills the expectancies you have created in the introduction. It describes in detail the intervention you have previewed. It presents the findings of your analysis. When your audience finishes

reading the body of your paper, it should have increased its understanding of and insight into the intervention that you have analyzed. The body addresses these questions:

- How have other scholars researched the intervention topic?
- How did I research the topic?
- What are the results of my research?

The question of *other scholars' research* reflects the audience's expectation that you are knowledgeable about previous scholarship on the topic and that your research differs from or contributes to that scholarship, or both. Reviewing the literature is a way of building your own credibility, of showing that you have *paid your dues* by reading and understanding what others have said. In addition, it shows that you will have something fresh to contribute to the ongoing conversation about the particular topic or the use of the RSI model as a criticism method.

The length and depth of your discussion about other research will depend on the intervention you are analyzing. It may be as short as a sentence that reads something like this:

Although scholars have examined Ralph Nader's muckraking activities (Stein, 1990) and contributions to public relation strategy (Bishop & Kilburn, 1971), none has studied his interventional strategy, tactics, and maneuvers through the lens of the RSI model.

This sentence could also be incorporated in the introduction of the paper as a justification for researching the topic.

Alternatively, if you review the scholarly databases and discover that a number of scholars have written interpretations of the intervention (e.g., Lincoln's Gettysburg Address), then your answer to the question may run longer. However, you might also choose to interweave some of this information into the narrative you write about the intervention, thus indirectly acknowledging other research about the intervention.

Finally, if the intervention you analyzed has been critiqued previously using the RSI model, then you must indicate how your analysis adds to or challenges the earlier work, or both. Again, this information might appear in the introduction as a justification for doing the study.

The academic audience also expects you to answer the question of *how you researched the topic*—how you selected and interpreted the intervention discourse. It needs this information to understand your approach and to critique the quality of your results. The extent of your explanation depends on the specific audience of your paper.

If you are writing the essay for professors and students who are familiar with the RSI model, then you need only briefly discuss it. You may be able to describe how you selected the intervention discourse you analyzed in one or two sentences. You also need to mention the subsystem starting point you used. For example, we could make this statement in a paper about Nader's intervention:

To understand how Ralph Nader acted as a social intervener to shift society's interpretations of accident events, this paper examines his book *Unsafe at Any Speed* using the Rhetoric of Social Intervention (RSI) model. This book was selected because it provides a summary of Nader's rhetorical maneuvers that he had been using in articles and in speeches before social groups and congressional committees in the years before the book's publication. In addition, the book was widely read and critiqued during that period. The essay will discuss the strategies, tactics, and maneuvers of Nader's intervention from the starting point of *power*.

If you plan to submit the essay to a conference or journal, then assume that your audience is unfamiliar with the RSI model. Briefly summarize the model's major concepts so that the audience understands the assumptions you are making to do the analysis. Define vocabulary associated with the model that you use, such as *attention switch* and *anomaly masking*, so that the audience understands your terms. Reference Brown's (1978, 1982, 1986) articles about the RSI model in the summary. In addition, indicate why you have selected this approach to examine the symbolizing activity. What does the RSI model enable you to "see" that other approaches might not?

The majority of the paper's body is devoted to *reporting the results of your analysis*. Construct a narrative about the communication patterns of the social intervention that you have observed through the lens of the RSI model. The narrative should discuss three aspects of the intervention experience—*preintervention*, *intervention*, and *postintervention*. Your answers to the search questions in the analysis section of this chapter can form the basis of your analysis.

For the *preintervention* part of the narrative, describe the social system prior to the intervention. Provide a brief background or context to help the audience understand the system's communication patterns prior to the intervention. If you are analyzing symbolizing activity such as a book, movie, or speech, then provide details about the context in which that activity was produced.

Next, discuss the *intervention* in terms of the person or groups whom you have named as initiating the intervention and the rhetorical strategies, tactics, and maneuvers used to enact the intervention. Use the concepts of one of the RSI model subsystems to interpret the intervention discourse. Show how the intervener(s) attempted rhetorically to promote or impede a shift in attention, power, or need. Support your observations of the patterns with examples from the symbolizing activity that you are examining.

Finally, describe the social system *postintervention*, in terms of need, power, or attention. Discuss the outcomes of the intervention—what did or did not change. In addition, consider the side effects of the intervention. Reflect on the shifts in the two subsystems that were backgrounded in the subsystem you emphasized.

### Writing Section III: Conclusion

As the introduction opens the intervention narrative, the conclusion closes it. The conclusion shows your audience that the purpose and goals of your research have been accomplished. In addition, it meets the scholarly audience expectation that your research contributes to the ongoing conversation that is considered *knowledge*. In general, the conclusion responds to these questions:

- What was learned about the specific intervention as a result of the analysis?
- What was learned about human symbolizing activity in general as a result of the analysis?
- Where do we go from here?

Conclusions often begin with a *brief review of the major findings* or *conclusions of the analysis*. This section of the paper gives meaning to the results of your research. You reflect on the knowledge that you have gained from examining the intervention through the lens of the RSI model. Also, you consider how you have intervened in the audience's interpretation of the intervention. If you have analyzed an intervention that has been critiqued by others, discuss how your analysis supported, challenged, or added to the previous research, or all of these.

In addition, discuss how the analysis contributes to the broader understanding and interpreting of human symbolizing activity. Comment on the insights gained about the process of social continuity and change. Think about the long-term implications of the communication

patterns occurring in the intervention you have analyzed. Reflect on your use of the RSI model, indicating strengths and weaknesses of this approach as well as offering extensions or modifications to it. If appropriate, connect your comments to other works that have used the RSI model.

Finally, conclusions often end with thoughts about further explorations and comments on ideas introduced in the introduction. Suggest additional directions that research might take as inspired by your analysis. Point out interesting details you noticed in your research but did not have time to investigate. You can also write an ending to the narrative that you started in the introduction by concluding with some aspect of the intervention that seems to summarize the story as a whole.

### **Fulfilling Other Critical Essay Expectancies**

Overall, academic audiences expect to read a well-researched, well-reasoned, and well-written essay that provides insight into the human symbolizing process. The audience critiques the quality of your analysis based on how effectively your work fulfills these expectancies. It determines the quality of your work based on the sources and depth of your preanalysis research, the evidence used to support the claims and findings of your analysis, and the writing style and organization of your paper.

As you review and revise your paper, ask these questions:

- Have I clearly indicated and reasoned for the choices I have made while conducting this analysis?
- Are the main points of my analysis clearly supported by evidence from relevant symbolizing activity?
- Are the promises I announced in the essay's introduction fulfilled in the body and conclusion of the essay?
- Have I accurately cited and recorded all sources used in the essay, following the pertinent academic style?

Print a hard copy of your paper to review before submitting it. Computer spell and grammar checkers miss some errors. You might discover items to correct or rethink that were unnoticed on the computer screen. Also, ask a friend to proofread your work, or take it to a writing center for review to improve quality. Finally, back up computer

files after every writing session. Power outages and computer crashes wipe out weeks of hard work in a blink.

The critical essay format that we have outlined addresses the types of questions that academic audiences expect a rhetorical critique to answer. However, the format we suggest is just that—a suggestion. You can modify the pattern or develop an alternative pattern as long as it communicates your analysis in a way that demonstrates the criterial attributes of *quality researching, reasoning, and writing*.

As you are working on your essay, look at examples of RSI critiques. At the end of this book is a bibliography of suggested additional readings that lists numerous published articles using the RSI model. In addition, the second section of this book includes four RSI essays. As you review the journal articles and this book's essays, consider how the authors address the critical essay questions and expectancies detailed in this chapter. Notice how their essays demonstrate alternative ways of analyzing and organizing. Think about which ones most clearly fulfill the RSI research purpose of contributing to our knowledge and understanding of ourselves as the naming beings.

Like these writers, you might choose to share your analysis outside the classroom. Presenting or publishing your analysis gives other scholars the opportunity to learn from and expand on your work. In turn, you receive feedback about your research that might improve the quality of and inspire new directions for your research. Together the power-sharing system of communication scholars negotiates understandings and interpretations of human symbolizing activity. For more information about contributing to conventions and journals, consult the National Communication Association (<http://www.natcom.org>), the International Communication Association (<http://www.icahdq.org>), or the Rhetoric Society of America (<http://rhetoricsociety.org>) Web sites, and talk to your professors.

#### ❖ CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter introduced the role of an RSI critic and the expectancies associated with writing an RSI essay. We described the preanalysis, analysis, and postanalysis processes that RSI critics enact to analyze and critique social interventions. For each stage, we provided questions that RSI critics typically address to meet audience expectancies of scholarly research.

Key questions to address as you research and write your own RSI analysis include the following:

### *Preanalysis*

- What interests me?
- How does my interest relate to social change?
- What specific intervention associated with social change will I emphasize?
- What data about the intervention are available to me?
- What social system will I emphasize in my research (intervener, intervention, audience)?
- How have other scholars studied my topic area?

### *Analysis*

- What subsystem—attention, power, or need—will I emphasize as a starting point?
- What naming patterns do the questions related to my subsystem highlight in the intervention data?
  - Preintervention system?
  - System intervention?
  - Postintervention system?

### *Postanalysis*

- How will I share my interpretation with others?
- Who is the audience for my analysis?
- What academic style should I use to write the essay?
- What organizational expectancies should my essay fulfill?
  - Introduction expectancies?
  - Body expectancies?
  - Conclusion expectancies?
- What other critical essay expectancies should my essay fulfill?

This chapter emphasized developing your role as an RSI critic and ability to apply the RSI model concepts to analyze and interpret social interventions. What you learn as a critic of social intervention will enhance your ability to act as a participant in and initiator of interventions. The final chapter of this book examines how the RSI model might guide you in creating social interventions.



### ❖ REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What are the *preanalysis steps* to starting an RSI critique?
2. What are the *analysis steps* for interpreting an intervention?
3. What are the *postanalysis steps* for sharing the results of an RSI analysis?
4. Why is *context* significant when analyzing an intervention? How do you balance describing the context versus emphasizing the analysis in an RSI critical essay?
5. What are the similarities and differences between a *naming* analysis and a *subsystem* RSI analysis?
6. Why should you consider your critique of an intervention as part of an *ongoing conversation about* rather than the *definitive analysis of* the intervention?
7. How is reviewing the published analyses of others who have examined the same intervention or used the same method important to your development as a researcher?
8. What are the common questions that you will find in any subsystem analysis—whether you start the analysis based on need, power, or attention?
9. How can the analysis of a specific short-term intervention, such as *Unsafe at Any Speed*, be connected to patterns related to long-term social change?

### ❖ CHAPTER EXERCISES

1. List some challenges that you might experience when trying to identify and locate intervention data to analyze. Share your list with class members. As a class, make suggestions and recommend techniques for managing these challenges.
2. Identify a recent social intervention reported in the media. Define the social system boundaries encompassing this intervention based on your review of media reports. What symbolizing activity related to this intervention could you study for an analysis?
3. The company for which you work plans to revamp its product line so that its products are interpreted as more environmentally

friendly. Discuss how this action might involve social intervention to both promote and prevent change. Identify social systems you could study as part of this intervention. Describe the types of rhetorical artifacts you could use to analyze the intervention.

4. Search an online database to locate a scholarly article that uses the RSI model; then critique the article on how well it meets the scholarly expectancies outlined in this chapter.
5. As a class, pick a recent documentary to examine as a social intervention. Divide yourselves into three groups—need, power, and attention. Meet as a group and review the chapter’s analysis questions related to the group’s assigned subsystem. Then watch the documentary, taking notes on rhetorical maneuvers you observe. Afterward, meet again as a group and draft responses to the subsystem questions. Reconvene as a class and share each group’s findings.
6. Outline an alternative format to a scholarly essay that could be used to present an RSI analysis (e.g., as a play, video, Web site). Share your ideas with the class.

#### ❖ SERVICE LEARNING EXERCISE

Using the intervention that you analyzed for the service learning exercise in Chapter 4, expand your analysis to address the subsystem questions listed in this chapter. In addition, determine criteria by which you could name the interventional attempt of the organization with which you are volunteering as *successful* or *unsuccessful* or both. Reflect on the ethical side effects of its interventional attempt. Share the results of your analysis with the class and with the not-for-profit organization.

#### Under the Lens: Finding Inspiration

Students often say they have difficulty identifying an intervention to analyze. Inspiration can come from everyday experience. Here are examples of events that gave the book authors ideas for interventions to critique:

Opt was living in Germany in 1992 when more than 170 world leaders gathered to discuss sustainable development issues at the first Earth Summit. She occasionally read newspaper articles about the event but did not pay much attention to them until she made a brief visit to the United States. She

was surprised to see a *difference* in the way that U.S. media reported on the Earth Summit compared to how German media reported on the same event. As a result, she used the RSI model to investigate the two countries' media coverage to understand how they symbolically constituted alternative narratives and to reflect on side effects of those naming patterns (Opt, 1997).

In another instance, Opt overheard several students discussing a suggestion box that the university had installed. The submitted suggestions and the administrators' responses were posted monthly near the box. The students reading a recent posting complained to each other that the administrators never listened to them. These comments captured the author's attention because they violated the expectancy that a suggestion box would be named as *an attempt by administrators to listen*. She used the RSI model to understand the *difference* in the students' interpretation (Opt, 1998). In both the media coverage and suggestion box cases, *differences* in the symbolizing activity sparked the author's curiosity and led her to ask, "Why?" Opt eventually presented her findings at conferences and submitted her analyses for publication (Opt, 1997, 1998).

Gring's life experience provided inspiration for research. He spent several formative years on the Texas-Mexican border and in Guatemala and El Salvador. Years later when significant political changes affected that region of the world and the United States, he used the RSI model as a lens to gain insight into the dynamics of the sociopolitical events. His analysis formed the basis of his dissertation (Gring, 1993).

Gring's initial research led to work that examined how individuals combined religious convictions with Marxist revolutionary discourse to bring about the 1979 revolution in Nicaragua. He became interested in this revolution because it combined two ideas that had previously been named *diametrically opposed* to each other, namely Marxism and religion (Gring, 1998). Gring, like Opt, also presented his findings at a conference and eventually published his work (Gring, 1993, 1998).

Thus, keep your eyes, ears, and mind open to experience around you to discover interventions to analyze.

