

## Women Hold Up Half the Sky

Metaphor & Narrative as Embedded Knowledge Structures that  
Persuade Audiences Through Identification



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In this presentation, we will explore some of the ways in which the images and stories we acquire through our culture and experience become embedded knowledge structures. These knowledge structures then frame our understanding of the world and our approach to resolving problems. When a lawyer's arguments accord with what is already there in the reader's or listener's mind, less is needed to move the audience toward agreement; instead, the result follows as the night follows the day. Embedded images and stories induce an audience to identify with the speaker and the message by providing shared frameworks, shared understandings, and shared expectations. To illustrate, the presentation will focus on Buffy the Vampire Slayer and other images of women as murderers, mothers, victims, and avengers.

Notes

Notes

From the Briefs Seeking Refugee Status  
and Asylum for Rodi Alvarado Peña

Rodi Alvarado married Francisco Osorio in 1984, when she was 16 years old. Osorio was a soldier in the Guatemalan army. Alvarado testified that after the marriage, her husband abused her almost daily until she fled Guatemala in 1995. According to Alvarado, Osorio was extremely controlling and engaged in acts of extreme physical and sexual abuse. Osorio told her that she “belonged to him and he could do anything he wanted” to her. Among other things, Osorio insisted that except when he was at work, Alvarado accompany him at all times.

Alvarado testified about extreme acts of physical abuse. When Alvarado’s menstrual period was 15 days late, Osorio dislocated her jawbone. When she refused to abort a pregnancy, he kicked her violently in the spine. At various times, he dragged her by her hair, nearly pushed out one of her eyes, used her head to break windows and mirrors, whipped her with pistols and electrical cords, and threatened her with knives.

Alvarado testified about extreme acts of sexual abuse. Osorio raped her almost daily, beating her at the same time. Once Osorio kicked Alvarado in the genital area so severely that the kick caused internal bleeding and extreme pain. Osorio forcefully sodomized Alvarado. When she protested against the abuse, he said, “you’re my woman, you do what I say.”

Alvarado tried to escape. She ran away to her brother’s and parents’ homes, but her husband found her and forced her to return. She escaped with her two children and rented a room on the outskirts of the city, but Osorio found them and beat Alvarado into unconsciousness. Osorio told her she could not leave him or she would suffer much worse. Alvarado testified that he said:

If you ever try to leave, I will come find you. And when I find you, I could kill you, but I’m not going to do that. I will break your legs. I will cripple you so that you will be in a wheelchair for the rest of your life. I will mark your face so it will be scarred forever, it will be twisted and deformed.

When Alvarado reported the abuse to the police, they took no action. They told her that they would not get involved because it was something that should be taken care of at home. One complaint was referred to a judge, but the judge declined to intervene, stating that this was a domestic matter that should be settled at home. Alvarado’s husband repeatedly told her that going to the police would be useless because he had military and police friends across the country.

Alvarado sought asylum under the following provision:

A refugee is someone who is unable or unwilling to return to and avail himself or herself of the protection of his or her home country or, if stateless, country of last habitual residence because of persecution or a well founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.

The Board of Immigration Appeals decided that Alvarado was not a member of an eligible “particular social group” and that the abuse was not “on account of” her membership in the group because there was no indication her husband would harm any other member of the group.

## Questions for Discussion

1. What images and stories are already there (emerging from experience or culture) that affect the audience's understanding of the arguments?
2. What related images or stories would better meet your purpose?
3. How can you present the related images or stories so that the audience will accept them as "similar enough" on the surface with the embedded images and stories?
4. How can you "flesh out" the related images or stories so that they can structurally support an explanation of an alternative outcome?

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