

In this case, the argument is that an action (women entering traditionally male-dominated jobs) leads to a consequence (increases in the rate of child suicide). Then the debater can argue that an action that has good consequences is justified while one that has bad consequences is not. Thus, in the preceding example, the debater maintains either implicitly or explicitly that women should not take jobs in male-dominated fields.

We must consider a variety of factors when judging the adequacy of this argument. Among these are: (1) are the facts as represented in the evidence accurate? Have child suicide rates actually increased? Have women actually entered male-dominated jobs more frequently than in the past? (2) Is the relationship between women's roles and child suicide really a causal relationship? Perhaps that relationship is merely coincidental and other factors, not identified in the argument, are the real causes of increasing suicide rates among children. These and other questions need to be answered to judge the effectiveness of causal arguments. As causes are inferred but not directly observed, they are difficult to prove and, even in the best of circumstances, cannot be proven completely. A more complete discussion of causal warrants is included in Chapter 8.

ARGUMENT BY AUTHORITY

An argument by authority is based on the relationship between persons and their acts. A person who has engaged in certain positive acts becomes "an authority" and her words carry more weight than those of persons who are not authorities. For example, persons who have earned advanced degrees in nuclear physics are considered authorities in that subject, and audiences tend to accept, without further argument, what they say about nuclear physics. A person with a degree in French literature would not be accepted as an authority on nuclear physics.

In an argument by authority, the actual statement of the authority functions as evidence. When the nuclear physicist says that nuclear energy is clean and safe, that statement is evidence. The warrant for the claim involves the credibility of the authority. If an expert says that nuclear energy is clean and safe (evidence), and if the audience accepts the credibility of that authority (warrant), the audience may also accept the claim (for instance, that we should expand our reliance on nuclear energy).

Authoritative warrants work in two ways. First, arguers themselves may be authorities. If the speaker is a recognized expert on international relations, she may not need to offer anything beyond her own words as evidence of a claim. Second, arguers who are not authorities may choose to quote people who are. In that case, the words of the person quoted function as evidence.

We can find an example of an argument using an authoritative warrant in the statement of the U.S. National Energy Institute's executive vice president, Angie Howard: that nuclear power "is the only expandable source of generating capability that doesn't contribute to air quality issues with greenhouse gases and controlled pollutants."⁸

The following diagram describes this argument: