

¹⁵"Columbia at Bay," *Newsweek*, LXXI (May 6, 1968), 43.

¹⁶*Columbia Daily Spectator*, April 24, 1968, p. 3.

¹⁷C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning* (New York, 1923), p. 45.

¹⁸*Columbia Daily Spectator*, April 12, 1968, p. 1.

¹⁹*Newsweek*, LXXI (May 6, 1968), 44.

²⁰The question of what is or is not "brutal" is a difficult one. The *Columbia Daily Spectator* of April 30 reported that 135 people were treated for injuries in nearby hospitals and at a special infirmary set up at Philosophy Hall. *Newsweek* reported that 132 students, four faculty members, and twelve policemen were injured. No student or faculty member, however, was hospitalized. The Mayor's reaction was based on the reports of his aides on the spot, and is probably the most accurate assessment. Mr. Lindsay admitted that while some members of the police force "used excessive force," the majority demonstrated "great professionalism and restraint," *Newsweek*, LXXI (May 13, 1968), 59-60. To describe the police action as "beyond comprehension," as a flyer distributed by the *Ad Hoc* Teachers College Strike Committee did, is certainly to overstate the case.

²¹Press statement, April 30, 9 a.m., distributed on campus.

²²Scott and Smith, *supra*, p. 8.

²³*New York Times*, April 28, 1968, p. 74.

²⁴*Columbia Daily Spectator*, April 29, 1968, p. 4.

²⁵*Ibid.*, April 26, 1968, p. 3.

²⁶*Connection: A Magazine Supplement of the Columbia Daily Spectator*, I, 2, May 10, 1968, p. C5.

²⁷*Columbia Daily Spectator*, April 26, 1968, p. 3.

²⁸Scott and Smith, *supra*, p. 7.

²⁹The campus reaction is accurately described and documented in "The End of a Siege— and an Era," *Newsweek*, LXXI (May 13, 1968), 60.

³⁰*Columbia Daily Spectator*, April 24, 1968, p. 1.

³¹*Ibid.*, and also April 25, 1968, p. 1.

³²*New York Times*, May 23, 1968, p. 51.

³³Haiman, 112.

³⁴I have not discussed the question of civil disobedience in the Columbia case. At Columbia the protestors were not breaking a law that was in itself deemed unjust (the laws of trespass), nor were they willing to be punished in any way for their actions. The argument that such incidents as the one at Columbia fall outside the concept of civil disobedience is ably articulated by Mr. Justice Fortas in *The New York Times Magazine*, May 12, 1968, and I could not improve on it here.

³⁵Haiman, 105.

³⁶*New York Times*, May 13, 1968, p. 47.

³⁷Scott and Smith, *supra*, p. 8.

The Rhetoric of Women's Liberation: An Oxymoron



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Whatever the phrase "women's liberation" means, it cannot, as yet, be used to refer to a cohesive historical political movement. No clearly defined program or set of policies unifies the small, frequently transitory groups that compose it, nor is there

much evidence of organizational unity and cooperation.¹ At this point in time, it has produced only minor changes in American society,² although it has made the issues with which it is associated major topics of concern and controversy. As some liberation advocates admit, it is a "state of mind" rather than a movement. Its major manifestation has been rhetorical, and as such, it merits rhetorical analysis.

Because any attempt to define a rhetorical movement or genre is beset by difficulties, and because of the unusual status of women's liberation I have briefly described, I wish to state explicitly two presuppositions informing what follows. First, I reject historical and socio-psychological definitions of movements as the basis for rhetorical criticism on the grounds that they do not, in fact, isolate a genre of *rhetoric* or a distinctive body of *rhetorical* acts.³ The criteria defining a rhetorical movement must be rhetorical; in Aristotelian terminology, such criteria might arise from the relatively distinctive use or interpretation of the canons and modes of proof. However, rather than employing any codified critical scheme, I propose to treat two general categories—substance and style. In my judgment, the rhetoric of women's liberation (or any other body of discourses) merits *separate* critical treatment if, and only if, the symbolic acts of which it is composed can be shown to be distinctive on both substantive and stylistic grounds. Second, I presume that the style and substance of a genre of rhetoric are interdependent.⁴ Stylistic choices are deeply influenced by subject-matter and context,⁵ and issues are formulated and shaped by stylistic strategies.⁶ The central argument of this essay is that the rhetoric of women's liberation is a distinctive genre because it evinces unique *rhetorical* qualities that are a fusion of substantive and stylistic features.

DISTINCTIVE SUBSTANTIVE FEATURES

At first glance, demands for legal, economic, and social equality for women would seem to be a reiteration, in a slightly modified form, of arguments already familiar from the protest rhetoric of students and blacks. However, on closer examination, the fact that equality is being demanded *for women* alters the rhetorical picture drastically. Feminist advocacy unearths tensions woven deep into the fabric of our society and provokes an unusually intense and profound "rhetoric of moral conflict."⁷ The sex role requirements for women contradict the dominant values of American culture—self-reliance, achievement, and independence.⁸ Unlike most other groups, the social status of women is defined primarily by birth, and their social position is at odds with fundamental democratic values.⁹ In fact, insofar as the role of rhetor entails qualities of self-reliance, self-confidence, and independence, *its very assumption is a violation of the female role*. Consequently, feminist rhetoric is substantively unique by definition, because no matter how traditional its argumentation, how justificatory its form, how discursive its method, or how scholarly its style, it attacks the entire psychosocial reality, the most fundamental values, of the cultural context in which it occurs. As illustration, consider the apparently moderate, reformist demands by feminists for legal, economic, and social equality—demands ostensibly based on the shared value of equality. (As presented here, each of these demands is a condensed version of arguments from highly traditional discourses by contemporary liberationists.)

The demand for legal equality arises out of a conflict in values. Women are not equal to men in the sight of the law. In 1874, the Supreme Court ruled that "some citizens could be denied rights which others had," specifically, that "the 'equal

protection' clause of the Fourteenth Amendment did not give women equal rights with men," and reaffirmed this decision in 1961, stating that "the Fourteenth Amendment prohibits any arbitrary class legislation, except that based on sex."¹⁰ The legal inferiority of women is most apparent in marriage laws. The core of these laws is that spouses have reciprocal—not equal—rights and duties. The husband must maintain the wife and children, but the amount of support beyond subsistence is at his discretion. In return, the wife is legally required to do the domestic chores, provide marital companionship, and sexual consortium but has no claim for direct compensation for any of the services rendered. Fundamentally, marriage is a property relationship. In the nine community property states, the husband is considered the head of the "community," and so long as he is capable of managing it, the wife, acting alone, cannot contract debts chargeable to it. In Texas and Nevada, the husband can even dispose of the property without his wife's consent, property that includes the income of a working wife. The forty-one common law states do not recognize the economic contribution of a wife who works only in the home. She has no right to an allowance, wages, or income of any sort, nor can she claim joint ownership upon divorce. In addition, every married woman's surname is legally that of her husband, and no court will uphold her right to go by another name.¹¹

It seems to me that any audience of such argumentation confronts a moral dilemma. The listener must either admit that this is not a society based on the value of equality or make the overt assertion that women are special or inferior beings who merit discriminatory treatment.¹²

The argument for economic equality follows a similar pattern. Based on median income, it is a greater economic disadvantage to be female than to be black or poorly educated (of course, any combination of these spells economic disaster). Although half of the states have equal pay laws, dual pay scales are the rule. These cannot be justified economically because, married or single, the majority of women who work do so out of economic necessity, and some forty percent of families with incomes below the poverty level are headed by women. Occupationally, women are proportionately more disadvantaged today than they were in 1940, and the gap between male and female income steadily increases.¹³ It might seem that these data merely indicate a discrepancy between law and practice—at least the value is embodied in some laws—although separating values and behavior is somewhat problematic. However, both law and practice have made women economically unequal. For example, so long as the law, as well as common practice, gives the husband a right to the domestic services of his wife, a woman must perform the equivalent of two jobs in order to hold one outside the home.¹⁴ Once again, the audience of such argumentation confronts a moral dilemma.

The most overt challenge to cultural values appears in the demand for social or sexual equality, that we dispense forever with the notion that "men are male *humans* whereas women are human *females*,"¹⁵ a notion enshrined in the familiar phrase, "I now pronounce you *man* and wife." An obvious reason for abolishing such distinctions is that they lead to cultural values for men as men and women as wives. Success for men is defined as instrumental, productive labor in the outside world whereas "wives" are confined to "woman's place"—child care and domestic labor in the home.¹⁶ As long as these concepts determine "masculinity" and "femininity," the woman who strives for the kind of success defined as the exclusive domain of the male is inhibited by norms prescribing her "role" and must pay a heavy price for her deviance. Those who have done research on achievement motivation in women conclude that: "Even when legal and educational barriers to

achievement are removed, the motive to avoid success will continue to inhibit women from doing 'too well'—thereby risking the possibility of being socially rejected as 'unfeminine' or 'castrating'¹⁷ and "The girl who maintains qualities of independence and active striving (achievement-orientation) necessary for intellectual mastery defies the conventions of sex appropriate behavior and must pay a price, *a price in anxiety*."¹⁸ As long as education and socialization cause women to be "unsexed" by success whereas men are "unsexed" by failure, women cannot compete on equal terms or develop their individual potentials. No values, however, are more deeply engrained than those defining "masculinity" and "femininity." The fundamental conflict in values is evident.

Once their consequences and implications are understood, these apparently moderate, reformist demands are rightly seen as revolutionary and radical in the extreme. They threaten the institutions of marriage and the family and norms governing child-rearing and male-female roles. To meet them would require major, even revolutionary, social change.¹⁹ It should be emphasized, however, that these arguments are drawn from discourses that could not be termed confrontative, alienating, or radical in any ordinary sense. In form, style, structure, and supporting materials, they would meet the demands of the strictest Aristotelian critic. Yet they are substantively unique, inevitably radical, because they attack the fundamental values underlying this culture. The option to be moderate and reformist is simply not available to women's liberation advocates.

DISTINCTIVE STYLISTIC FEATURES

As a rhetoric of intense moral conflict, it would be surprising indeed if distinctive stylistic features did not appear as strategic adaptations to a difficult rhetorical situation.²⁰ I propose to treat "stylistic features" rather broadly, electing to view women's liberation as a persuasive campaign. In addition to the linguistic features usually considered, the stylistic features of a persuasive campaign include, in my view, characteristic modes of rhetorical interaction, typical ways of structuring the relationships among participants in a rhetorical transaction, and emphasis on particular forms of argument, proof, and evidence. The rhetoric of women's liberation is distinctive stylistically in rejecting certain traditional concepts of the rhetorical process—as persuasion of the many by an expert or leader, as adjustment or adaptation to audience norms, and as directed toward inducing acceptance of a specific program or a commitment to group action. This rather "anti-rhetorical" style is chosen on substantive grounds because rhetorical transactions with these features encourage submissiveness and passivity in the audience²¹—qualities at odds with a fundamental goal of feminist advocacy—self-determination. The paradigm that highlights the distinctive stylistic features of women's liberation is "consciousness raising," a mode of interaction or a type of rhetorical transaction uniquely adapted to the rhetorical problem of feminist advocacy.

The rhetorical problem may be summarized as follows: women are divided from one another by almost all the usual sources of identification—age, education, income, ethnic origin, even geography. In addition, counter-persuasive forces are pervasive and potent—nearly all spend their lives in close proximity to and under the control of males—fathers, husbands, employers, etc. Women also have very negative self-concepts, so negative, in fact, that it is difficult to view them as an audience, i.e., persons who see themselves as potential agents of change. When asked to

select adjectives to describe themselves, they select such terms as "uncertain, anxious, nervous, hasty, careless, fearful, dull, childish, helpless, sorry, timid, clumsy, stupid, silly, and domestic . . . understanding, tender, sympathetic, pure, generous, affectionate, loving, moral, kind, grateful, and patient."²² If a persuasive campaign directed to this audience is to be effective, it must transcend alienation to create "sisterhood," modify self-concepts to create a sense of autonomy, and speak to women in terms of private, concrete, individual experience, because women have little, if any, publicly shared experience. The substantive problem of the absence of shared values remains: when women become part of an audience for liberation rhetoric, they violate the norms governing sex appropriate behavior.

In its paradigmatic form, "consciousness raising" involves meetings of small, leaderless groups in which each person is encouraged to express her personal feelings and experiences. There is no leader, rhetor, or expert. All participate and lead; all are considered expert. The goal is to make the personal political: to create awareness (through shared experiences) that what were thought to be personal deficiencies and individual problems are common and shared, a result of their position as women. The participants seek to understand and interpret their lives as women, but there is no "message," no "party line." Individuals are encouraged to dissent, to find their own truths. If action is suggested, no group commitment is made; each must decide whether, and if so which, action is suitable for her.²³ The stylistic features heightened in this kind of transaction are characteristic of the rhetoric as a whole: affirmation of the affective, of the validity of personal experience, of the necessity for self-exposure and self-criticism, of the value of dialogue, and of the goal of autonomous, individual decision making. These stylistic features are very similar to those Maurice Natanson has described as characteristic of ["genuine argumentation"]:

What is at issue, really, in the risking of the self in genuine argument is the immediacy of the self's world of feeling, attitude, and the total subtle range of its affective and conative sensibility. . . . I open myself to the viable possibility that the consequence of an argument may be to make me *see* something of the structure of my immediate world . . . the personal and immediate domain of individual experience. . . .

. . . feeling is a way of meaning as much as thinking is a way of formulating. Privacy is a means of establishing a world, and what genuine argument to persuade does is to publicize that privacy. The metaphor leads us to suggest that risking the self in argument is inviting a stranger to the interior familiarity of our home . . .²⁴

Even a cursory reading of the numerous anthologies of women's liberation rhetoric will serve to confirm that the stylistic features I have indicated are characteristic. Particularly salient examples include Elizabeth Janeway's *Man's World, Woman's Place*, "The Demise of the Dancing Dog,"²⁵ "The Politics of Housework,"²⁶ *A Room of One's Own*,²⁷ and "Cutting Loose."²⁸ The conclusion of the last essay cited will serve as a model:

The true dramatic conclusion of this narrative should be the dissolution of my marriage; there is a part of me which believes that you cannot fight a sexist system while acknowledging your need for the love of a man. . . . But in the end my husband and I did not divorce. . . . Instead I raged against him for

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many months and joined the Woman's Liberation Movement, and thought a great deal about myself, and about whether my problems were truly all women's problems, and decided that some of them were and that some of them were not. My sexual rage was the most powerful single emotion of my life, and the feminist analysis has become for me, as I think it will for most women of my generation, as significant an intellectual tool as Marxism was for generations of radicals. But it does not answer every question. . . . I would be lying if I said that my anger had taught me how to live. But my life has changed because of it. I think I am becoming in many small ways a woman who takes no shit. I am no longer submissive, no longer seductive. . . .

My husband and I have to some degree worked out our differences. . . . But my hatred lies within me and between us, not wholly a personal hatred, but not entirely political either. And I wonder always whether it is possible to define myself as a feminist revolutionary and still remain in any sense a wife. There are moments when I still worry that he will leave me, that he will come to need a woman less preoccupied with her own rights, and when I worry about that I also fear that no man will ever love me again, that no man could ever love a woman who is angry. And that fear is a great source of trouble to me, for it means that in certain fundamental ways I have not changed at all.

I would like to be cold and clear and selfish, to demand satisfaction for my needs, to compel respect rather than affection. And yet there are moments, and perhaps there always will be, when I fall back upon the old cop-outs. . . . Why should I work when my husband can support me, why should I be a human being when I can get away with being a child?

Women's liberation is finally only personal. It is hard to fight an enemy who has outposts in your head.²⁹

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This essay, the other works I have cited here, and the bulk of women's liberation rhetoric stand at the farthest remove from traditional models of rhetorical discourse, judged by the stylistic features I have discussed. This author, Sally Kempton, invites us into the interiority of her self, disclosing the inner dynamics of her feelings and the specific form that the problem of liberation takes in her life. In a rhetorically atypical fashion, she honors her feelings of fear, anger, hatred, and need for love and admits both her own ambivalence and the limits of her own experience as a norm for others. She is self-conscious and self-critical, cognizant of the inconsistencies in her life and of the temptation to "cop out," aware of both the psychic security and the psychic destruction inherent in the female role. She is tentatively describing and affirming the beginnings of a new identity and, in so doing, sets up a dialogue with other women in a similar position that permits the essay to perform the ego-functions that Richard Gregg has described.³⁰ The essay asks for the participation of the reader, not only in sharing the author's life as an example of the problems of growing up female in this society, but in a general process of self-scrutiny in which each person looks at the dynamics of the problems of liberation in her own life. The goal of the work is a process, not a particular belief or policy; she explicitly states that her problems are not those of all women and that a feminist analysis is not a blueprint for living. Most importantly, however, the essay exemplifies "risking the self" in its most poignant sense. The Sally Kempton we meet in the essay has

been masochistic, manipulative, an exploiter of the female role and of men, weak, murderous, vengeful and castrating, lazy and selfish. The risk involved in such brutal honesty is that she will be rejected as neurotic, bitchy, crazy, in short, as not being a "good" woman, and more importantly, as *not like us*. The risk may lead to alienation or to sisterhood. By example, she asks other women to confront themselves, recognize their own ambivalence, and face their own participation and collaboration in the roles and processes that have such devastating effects on both men and women. Although an essay, this work has all the distinctive stylistic features of the "consciousness raising" paradigm.

Although the distinctive stylistic features of women's liberation are most apparent in the small group processes of consciousness raising, they are not confined to small group interactions. The features I have listed are equally present in essays, speeches, and other discourses completely divorced from the small group setting. In addition, I would argue that although these stylistic features show certain affinities for qualities associated with psychotherapeutic interaction, they are rhetorical rather than expressive and public and political rather than private and personal. The presumption of most psychotherapy is that the origins of and solutions to one's problems are personal;³¹ the feminist analysis presumes that it is the social structure and the definition of the female role that generate the problems that individual women experience in their personal lives. As a consequence, solutions must be structural, not merely personal, and analysis must move from personal experience and feeling to illuminate a common condition that all women experience and share.

Finally, women's liberation rhetoric is characterized by the use of confrontative, non-adjustive strategies designed to "violate the reality structure."³² These strategies not only attack the psycho-social reality of the culture, but violate the norms of decorum, morality, and "femininity" of the women addressed. Essays on frigidity and orgasm,³³ essays by prostitutes and lesbians,³⁴ personal accounts of promiscuity and masochism,³⁵ and essays attacking romantic love and urging man-hating as a necessary stage in liberation³⁶ "violate the reality structure" by close analysis of tabooed subjects, by treating "social outcasts" as "sisters" and credible sources, and by attacking areas of belief with great mythic power. Two specific linguistic techniques, "attack metaphors" and symbolic reversals also seem to be characteristic. "Attack metaphors" mix matrices in order to reveal the "nonconscious ideology"³⁷ of sexism in language and belief, or they attempt to shock through a kind of "perspective by incongruity."³⁸ Some examples are: "Was Lurleen Wallace *Governess* of Alabama?" A drawing of Rodin's "Thinker" as a female. "Trust in God; She will provide."³⁹ "Prostitutes are the only honest women because they charge for their services, rather than submitting to a marriage contract which forces them to work for life without pay."⁴⁰ "If you think you are emancipated, you might consider the idea of tasting your menstrual blood—if it makes you sick, you've got a long way to go, baby."⁴¹ Or this analogy:

Suppose that a white male college student decided to room or set up a bachelor apartment with a black male friend. Surely the typical white student would not blithely assume that his black roommate was to handle all the domestic chores. Nor would his conscience allow him to do so even in the unlikely event that his roommate would say: "No, that's okay. I like doing housework. I'd be happy to do it. . . ." But change this hypothetical black roommate to a female marriage partner, and somehow the student's conscience goes to sleep.⁴²

Symbolic reversals transform devil terms society has applied to women into god terms and always exploit the power and fear lurking in these terms as potential sources of strength. "The Bitch Manifesto" argues that liberated women are bitches—aggressive, confident, strong.⁴³ W.I.T.C.H., the Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell, says, in effect, "You think we're dangerous, creatures of the devil, witches? You're right! And we're going to hex you!"⁴⁴ Some feminists have argued that the lesbian is the paradigm of the liberated female;⁴⁵ others have described an androgynous role.⁴⁶ This type of reversal has, of course, appeared in other protest rhetorics, particularly in the affirmation that "black is beautiful!" But systematic reversals of traditional female roles, given the mystique associated with concepts of wife, mother, and loving sex partner, make these reversals especially disturbing and poignant. Quite evidently, they are attempts at the radical affirmation of new identities for women.⁴⁷

The distinctive stylistic features of women's liberation rhetoric are a result of strategic adaptation to an acute rhetorical problem. Women's liberation is characterized by rhetorical interactions that emphasize affective proofs and personal testimony, participation and dialogue, self-revelation and self-criticism, the goal of autonomous decision making through self-persuasion, and the strategic use of techniques for "violating the reality structure." I conclude that, on stylistic grounds, women's liberation is a separate genre of rhetoric.

THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF SUBSTANTIVE AND STYLISTIC FEATURES

The rhetorical acts I have treated in the preceding section, particularly as illustrated by the excerpt from an essay by Sally Kempton, may seem to be a far cry from the works cited earlier demanding legal, economic, and social equality. However, I believe that all of these rhetorical acts are integral parts of a single genre, a conclusion I shall defend by examining the interdependent character of the substantive and stylistic features of the various discourses already discussed.

Essays such as that of Sally Kempton are the necessary counterparts of works articulating demands for equality. In fact, such discourses spell out the meaning and consequences of present conditions of inequity and the implications of equality in concrete, personal, affective terms. They complete the genre and are essential to its success as a persuasive campaign. In the first section, I argued that demands for equality for women "attack the entire psycho-social reality." That phrase may conceal the fact that such an attack is an attack on the *self* and on the roles and relationships in which women, and men too, have found their identities traditionally. The effect of such an argument is described by Natanson, "When an argument hurts me, cuts me, or cleanses and liberates me it is not because a particular stratum or segment of my world view is shaken up or jarred free but because *I* am wounded or enlivened—*I* in my particularity, and that means in my existential immediacy: feelings, pride, love, and sullenness, the world of my actuality as I live it."⁴⁸ The only effective response to the sensation of being threatened existentially is a rhetorical act that treats the personal, emotional, and concrete directly and explicitly, that is dialogic and participatory, that speaks from personal experience to personal experience. Consequently, the rhetoric of women's liberation includes numerous essays discussing the personal experiences of women in many differing circumstances—black women, welfare mothers, older women, factory workers, high school girls, journalists, unwed mothers, lawyers, secretaries, and so forth. Each attempts to describe concretely

the personal experience of inequality in a particular situation and/or what liberation might mean in a particular case. Rhetorically, these essays function to translate public demands into personal experience and to treat threats and fears in concrete, affective terms.

Conversely, more traditional discourses arguing for equality are an essential counterpart to these more personal statements. As a process, consciousness raising requires that the personal be transcended by moving toward the structural, that the individual be transcended by moving toward the political. The works treating legal, economic, and social inequality provide the structural analyses and empirical data that permit women to generalize from their individual experiences to the conditions of women in this society. Unless such transcendence occurs, there is no persuasive campaign, no rhetoric in any public sense, only the very limited realm of therapeutic, small group interaction.

The interrelationship between the personal and the political is central to a conception of women's liberation as a genre of rhetoric. All of the issues of women's liberation are simultaneously personal and political. Ultimately, this interrelationship rests on the caste status of women, the basis of the moral conflict this rhetoric generates and intensifies. Feminists believe that sharing personal experience is liberating, i.e., raises consciousness, because all women, whatever their differences in age, education, income, etc., share a common condition, a radical form of "consubstantiality" that is the genesis of the peculiar kind of identification they call "sisterhood." Some unusual rhetorical transactions seem to confirm this analysis. "Speak-outs" on rape, abortion, and orgasm are mass meetings in which women share extremely personal and very negatively valued experiences. These events are difficult to explain without postulating a radical form of identification that permits such painful self-revelation. Similarly, "self-help clinics" in which women learn how to examine their cervixes and look at the cervixes of other women for purposes of comparison seem to require extreme identification and trust. Feminists would argue that "sisterhood is powerful" because it grows out of the recognition of pervasive, common experience of special caste status, the most radical and profound basis for cooperation and identification.

This feminist analysis also serves to explain the persuasive intent in "violating the reality structure." From this point of view, women in American society are always in a vortex of contradiction and paradox. On the one hand, they have been, for the most part, effectively socialized into traditional roles and values, as research into their achievement motivation and self-images confirms. On the other hand, "femininity" is in direct conflict with the most fundamental values of this society—a fact which makes women extremely vulnerable to attacks on the "reality structure." Hence, they argue, violations of norms may shock initially, but ultimately they will be recognized as articulating the contradictions inherent in "the female role." The violation of these norms is obvious in discourses such as that of Sally Kempton; it is merely less obvious in seemingly traditional and moderate works.

CONCLUSION

I conclude, then, that women's liberation is a unified, separate genre of rhetoric with distinctive substantive-stylistic features. Perhaps it is the only genuinely *radical* rhetoric on the contemporary American scene. Only the oxymoron, the figure of

paradox and contradiction, can be its metaphor. Never is the paradoxical character of women's liberation more apparent than when it is compared to conventional or familiar definitions of rhetoric, analyses of rhetorical situations, and descriptions of rhetorical movements.

Traditional or familiar definitions of persuasion do not satisfactorily account for the rhetoric of women's liberation. In relation to such definitions, feminist advocacy wavers between the rhetorical and the non-rhetorical, the persuasive and the non-persuasive. Rhetoric is usually defined as dealing with public issues, structural analyses, and social action, yet women's liberation emphasizes acts concerned with personal exigences and private, concrete experience, and its goal is frequently limited to particular, autonomous action by individuals. The view that persuasion is an enthymematic adaptation to audience norms and values is confounded by rhetoric which seeks to persuade by "violating the reality structure" of those toward whom it is directed.

Nor are available analyses of rhetorical situations satisfactory when applied to the rhetoric of women's liberation. Parke Burgess' valuable and provocative discussion of certain rhetorical situations as consisting of two or more sets of conflicting moral demands⁴⁹ and Thomas Olbricht's insightful distinction between rhetorical acts occurring in the context of a shared value and those occurring in its absence⁵⁰ do not adequately explicate the situation in which feminists find themselves. And the reason is simply that the rhetoric of women's liberation appeals to *what are said to be* shared moral values, but forces recognition that those values are *not* shared, thereby creating the most intense of moral conflicts. Lloyd Bitzer's more specific analysis of the rhetorical situation as consisting of "one controlling exigence which functions as the organizing principle" (an exigence being "an imperfection marked by urgency" that "is capable of positive modification"), an audience made up "only of those persons who are capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change," and of constraints that can limit "decision and action needed to modify the exigence"⁵¹—this more specific analysis is also unsatisfactory. In women's liberation there are dual and conflicting exigences not solely of the public sort, and thus women's liberation rhetoric is a dialectic between discourses that deal with public, structural problems and the particularly significant statements of personal experience and feeling which extend beyond the traditional boundaries of rhetorical acts. A public exigence is, of course, present, but what is unavoidable and characteristic of this rhetoric is the accompanying and conflicting personal exigence. The concept of the audience does not account for a situation in which the audience must be *created under the special conditions* surrounding women's liberation. Lastly, the notion of constraints seems inadequate to a genre in which to act as a mediator of change, either as rhetor or audience member, is itself the most significant constraint inhibiting decision or action—a constraint that requires the violation of cultural norms and risks alienation no matter how traditional or reformist the rhetorical appeal may be.

And, similarly, nearly all descriptions of rhetorical movements prove unsatisfactory. Leland Griffin's early essay on the rhetoric of historical movements creates three important problems: he defines movements as occurring "at some time in the past"; he says members of movements "make efforts to alter their environment"; and he advises the student of rhetoric to focus on "the pattern of public discussion."⁵² The first problem is that the critic is prevented from examining a contemporary movement and is forced to make sharp chronological distinctions between earlier efforts

for liberation and contemporary feminist advocacy; the second problem is that once again the critic's attention is diverted from efforts to change the self, highly significant in the liberation movement, and shifted toward efforts to change the environment; and the third is a related deflection of critical concern from personal, consciousness-raising processes to public discussion. Herbert Simons' view of "a leader-centered conception of persuasion in social movements" defines a movement "as an un-institutionalized collectivity that mobilizes for action to implement a program for the reconstitution of social norms or values."⁵³ As I have pointed out, leader-centered theories cannot be applied profitably to the feminist movement. Further, women's liberation is not characterized by a *program* that mobilizes feminist advocates to reconstitute social norms and values. Dan Hahn and Ruth Gonchar's idea of a movement as "socially shared activities and beliefs directed toward the demand for change in some aspect of the social order"⁵⁴ is unsuitable because it overlooks the extremely important elements of the personal exigence that require change in the self. There are, however, two recent statements describing rhetorical movements that are appropriate for women's liberation. Griffin's later essay describing a dramatic framework for the development of movements has been applied insightfully to the inception period of contemporary women's liberation.⁵⁵ What makes this description applicable is that it recognizes a variety of symbolic acts, the role of drama and conflict, and the essentially moral or value-related character of rhetorical movements.⁵⁶ Also, Robert Cathcart's formulation, again a dramatic one, is appropriate because it emphasizes "*dialectical enjoinderment in the moral arena*" and the "*dialectical tension growing out of moral conflict.*"⁵⁷

And so I choose the oxymoron as a label, a metaphor, for the rhetoric of women's liberation. It is a genre without a rhetor, a rhetoric in search of an audience, that transforms traditional argumentation into confrontation, that "persuades" by "violating the reality structure" but that presumes a consubstantiality so radical that it permits the most intimate of identifications. It is a "movement" that eschews leadership, organizational cohesion, and the transactions typical of mass persuasion. Finally, of course, women's liberation is baffling because it has no program, because there is no clear answer to the recurring question, "What do women want?" On one level, the answer is simple; they want what every person wants—dignity, respect, the right to self-determination, to develop their potentials as individuals. But on another level, there is no answer—not even in feminist rhetoric. While there are legal and legislative changes on which most feminists agree (although the hierarchy of priorities differs), whatever liberation is, it will be something different for each woman as liberty is something different for each person. What each woman shares, however, is the paradox of having "to fight an enemy who has outposts in your head."

NOTES

¹A partial list of the numerous groups involved in women's liberation and an analysis of them is available in Julie Ellis, *Revolt of the Second Sex* (New York: Lancer Books, 1970), pp. 21–81. A similar list and an analysis emphasizing disunity, leadership problems, and policy conflicts is found in Edythe Cudlipp, *Understanding Women's Liberation* (New York: Paperback Library, 1971), pp. 129–170, 214–220. As she indicates, more radical groups have expelled members for the tendency to attract personal media attention, used "counters" to prevent domination of meetings by more articulate members, and rejected programs, specific policies, and coherent group action (pp. 146–147, 166, 214–215). The most optimistic estimate

of the size of the movement is made by Charlotte Bunch-Weeks who says there are "perhaps 100,000 women in over 400 cities." ("A Broom of One's Own: Notes on the Women's Liberation Program," *The New Women*, ed. Joanne Cooke, Charlotte Bunch-Weeks and Robin Morgan [1970; rpt. Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Publications, 1971], p. 186.) Even if true, this compares unfavorably with the conservative League of Women Voters with 160,000 members (Cudlipp, p. 42) and the National Council of Women representing organizations with some 23 million members whose leadership has taken an extremely anti-liberationist stance. (See Lacey Fesburgh, "Traditional Groups Prefer to Ignore Women's Lib," *New York Times*, 26 Aug. 1970, p. 44.)

²Ti-Grace Atkinson said: "There is no movement. Movement means going some place, and the movement is not going anywhere. It hasn't accomplished anything." Gloria Steinem concurred: "In terms of real power—economic and political—we are still just beginning. But the consciousness, the awareness—that will never be the same." ("Women's Liberation Revisited," *Time*, 20 Mar. 1972, pp. 30, 31.) Polls do not seem to indicate marked attitude changes among American women. (See, for example, *Good Housekeeping*, Mar. 1971, pp. 34-38, and Carol Tavris, "Woman and Man," *Psychology Today*, Mar. 1972, pp. 57-64, 82-85.)

³An excellent critique of both historical and socio-psychological definition of movements as the basis for rhetorical criticism has been made by Robert S. Cathcart in "New Approaches to the Study of Movements: Defining Movements Rhetorically," *Western Speech*, 36 (Spr. 1972), 82-88.

⁴A particularly apt illustration of this point of view is Richard Hofstadter's "The Paranoid Style in American Politics," *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays* (New York: Knopf, 1965), pp. 3-40. Similarly, the exhortative and argumentative genres developed by Edwin Black are defined on both substantive and stylistic grounds in *Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), pp. 132-177.

⁵The interrelationship of moral demands and strategic choices is argued by Parke G. Burgess in "The Rhetoric of Moral Conflict: Two Critical Dimensions," *QJS*, 56 (Apr. 1970), 120-130.

⁶The notion that style is a token of ideology is the central concept in Edwin Black's "The Second Persona," *QJS*, 56 (Apr. 1970), 109-119.

⁷See Burgess, *op. cit.* and "The Rhetoric of Black Power: A Moral Demand?" *QJS*, 54 (Apr. 1968), 122-133.

⁸See Matina S. Horner, "Femininity and Successful Achievement: A Basic Inconsistency," *Roles Women Play: Readings toward Women's Liberation*, ed. Michele Hoffnung Garskof (Belmont, Calif.: Brooks/Cole, 1971), pp. 105-108.

⁹"Woman's role, looked at from this point of view, is archaic. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but it does make woman's position rather peculiar: it is a survival. In the old world, where one was born into a class and a region and often into an occupation, the fact that one was also sex-typed simply added one more attribute to those which every child learned he or she possessed. Now to be told, in Erik Erikson's words, that one is 'never not-a-woman' comes as rather more of a shock. This is especially true for American women because of the way in which the American ethos has honored the ideas of liberty and individual choice . . . woman's traditional role *in itself* is opposed to a significant aspect of our culture. It is more than restricting, because it involves women in the kind of conflict with their surroundings that no decision and no action open to them can be trusted to resolve." (Elizabeth Janeway, *Man's World, Woman's Place: A Study in Social Mythology* [New York: William Morrow, 1971], p. 99.)

¹⁰Jo Freeman, "The Building of the Gilded Cage," *The Second Wave*, I (Spr. 1971), 33.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 8-9.

¹²Judicial opinions upholding discriminatory legislation make this quite evident. "That woman's physical structure and the performance of maternal functions place her at a disadvantage in the struggle for subsistence is obvious . . . the physical well-being of woman becomes an object of public interest and care in order to preserve the strength and vigor of the race . . . looking at it from the viewpoint of the effort to maintain an independent position in life, she is not upon an equality . . . she is properly placed in a class by herself . . . The

reason . . . rests in the inherent difference between the two sexes, and in the different functions in life which they perform." (Muller v. Oregon, 208 U.S. 412 [1908], at 421-423.) This and similar judicial opinions are cited by Diane B. Schulder, "Does the Law Oppress Women?" *Sisterhood is Powerful*, ed. Robin Morgan (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), pp. 139-157.

¹³Ellis, pp. 103-111. See also Caroline Bird, with Sara Welles Briller, *Born Female: The High Cost of Keeping Women Down* (1968; rpt. New York: Pocket Books, 1971), particularly pp. 61-83.

¹⁴"The Chase Manhattan Bank estimated a U.S. woman's hours spent at housework at 99.6 per week." (Juliet Mitchell, "Women: The Longest Revolution [excerpt]," *Liberation Now!* ed. Deborah Babcox and Madeline Belkin [New York: Dell, 1971], p. 250.) See also Ann Crittenden Scott, "The Value of Housework," *Ms.*, July 1972, pp. 56-59.

¹⁵Aileen S. Kraditor, *Up From the Pedestal: Selected Writings in the History of American Feminism* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1968), p. 24.

¹⁶The concepts underlying "woman's place" serve to explain the position that women hold outside the home in the economic sphere: "Are there any principles that explain the meanderings of the sex boundaries? One is the idea that women should work inside and men outside. Another earmarks service work for women and profit-making for men. Other rules reserve work with machinery, work carrying prestige, and the top job to men. Most sex boundaries can be explained on the basis of one or another of these three rules." (Bird, p. 72.)

¹⁷Horner, p. 121.

¹⁸From E. E. Maccoby, "Woman's Intellect," *The Potential of Woman*, ed. S. M. Farber and R. H. L. Wilson (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963), pp. 24-39; cited in Horner, p. 106.

¹⁹In the economic sphere alone, such changes would be far-reaching. "Equal access to jobs outside the home, while one of the pre-conditions for women's liberation, will not in itself be sufficient to give equality for women. . . . Society must begin to take responsibility for children; the economic dependence of women and children on the husband-father must be ended. The other work that goes on in the home must also be changed—communal eating places and laundries for example. When such work is moved into the public sector, then the material basis for discrimination against women will be gone." (Margaret Benston, "The Political Economy of Women's Liberation," *Roles Women Play*, pp. 200-201.)

²⁰The individual elements described here did not originate with women's liberation. Consciousness raising has its roots in the "witnessing" of American revivalism and was an important persuasive strategy in the revolution on mainland China. Both the ancient Cynics and the modern Yippies have used violations of the reality structure as persuasive techniques (see Theodore Otto Windt, Jr., "The Diatribe: Last Resort for Protest," *QJS*, 58 [Feb. 1972], 1-14), and this notion is central to the purposes of agit-prop theatre, demonstrations, and acts of civil disobedience. Concept of leaderless persuasion appear in Yippie documents and in the unstructured character of sensitivity groups. Finally, the idea that contradiction and alienation lead to altered consciousness and revolution has its origins in Marxian theory. It is the combination of these elements in women's liberation that is distinctive stylistically. As in a metaphor, the separate elements may be familiar; it is the fusion that is original.

²¹The most explicit statement of the notion that audiences are "feminine" and rhetors or orators are "masculine" appears in the rhetorical theory of Adolf Hitler and the National Socialist Party in Germany. See Kenneth Burke, "The Rhetoric of Hitler's 'Battle,'" *The Philosophy of Literary Form* (1941; rpt. New York: Vintage Books, 1957), p. 167.

²²Jo Freeman, "The Social Construction of the Second Sex," *Roles Women Play*, p. 124.

²³The nature of consciousness raising is described in Susan Brownmiller, "Sisterhood is Powerful" and June Arnold, "Consciousness-Raising," *Women's Liberation: Blueprint for the Future*, ed. Stookie Stambler (New York: Ace Books, 1970), pp. 141-161; Charlotte Bunch-Weeks, pp. 185-197; Carole Hanisch, "The Personal is Political," Kathie Sarachild, "A Program for Feminist 'Consciousness Raising,'" Irene Peslikis, "Resistances to Consciousness," Jennifer Gardner, "False Consciousness," and Pamela Kearon, "Man-Hating," in *Notes from*

the Second Year: Women's Liberation, Major Writings of the Radical Feminists, ed. Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt (New York: By the Editors, 1970), pp. 76-86.

²⁴Maurice Natanson, "The Claims of Immediacy," *Philosophy, Rhetoric and Argumentation*, ed. Maurice Natanson and Henry W. Johnstone, Jr. (University Park: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1965), pp. 15, 16.

²⁵Cynthia Ozick, "The Demise of the Dancing Dog," *The New Women*, pp. 23-42.

²⁶Redstockings, "The Politics of Housework," *Liberation Now?*, pp. 110-115. Note that in this, as in other cases, authorship is assigned to a group rather than an individual.

²⁷Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Harbinger, 1929).

²⁸Sally Kempton, "Cutting Loose," *Liberation Now!*, pp. 39-55. This essay was originally published in *Esquire*, July 1970, pp. 53-57.

²⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 54-55.

³⁰Richard B. Gregg, "The Ego-Function of the Rhetoric of Protest," *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, 4 (Spr. 1971), 71-91. The essay is discussed specifically on pp. 80-81.

³¹Granted, there are humanistic or existential psychological theorists who argue that social or outer reality must be changed fully as often as psychic or inner reality. See, for example, Thomas S. Szasz, *The Myth of Mental Illness* (1961; rpt. New York: Dell, 1961), R. D. Laing and A. Esterson, *Sanity, Madness, and the Family* (1964; rpt. New York: Basic Books, 1971), and William H. Grier and Price M. Cobbs, *Black Rage* (New York: Basic Books, 1968). However, the vast majority of psychological approaches assumes that the social order is, at least relatively, unalterable and that it is the personal realm that must be changed. See, for example, Sigmund Freud, *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, trans. Joan Riviere (1924; rpt. New York: Washington Square Press, 1960), Wilhelm Stekel, *Technique of Analytical Psychotherapy*, trans. Eden and Cedar Paul (London: William Brown, 1950), Carl A. Whitaker and Thomas P. Malone, *The Roots of Psychotherapy* (New York: Blakiston, 1953), and Carl R. Rogers, *Client-Centered Therapy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1951).

³²This phrase originates with the loose coalition of radical groups called the Female Liberation Movement (Ellis, p. 55). See also Pamela Kearon, "Power as a Function of the Group," *Notes from the Second Year*, pp. 108-110.

³³See, for example, Anne Koedt, "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm," *Liberation Now!*, pp. 311-320; Susan Lydon, "The Politics of Orgasm," and Mary Jane Sherfey, M.D., "A Theory on Female Sexuality," *Sisterhood is Powerful*, pp. 197-205, 220-230.

³⁴See, for example, Radicalesbians, "The Woman-Identified Woman," *Liberation Now!*, pp. 287-293; Ellen Strong, "The Hooker," Gene Damon, "The Least of These: The Minority Whose Screams Haven't Yet Been Heard," and Martha Shelley, "Notes of a Radical Lesbian," *Sisterhood is Powerful*, pp. 289-311; Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, "The Realities of Lesbianism," *The New Women*, pp. 99-109.

³⁵Sally Kempton's essay is perhaps the most vivid example of this type. See also Judith Ann, "The Secretarial Proletariat," and Zoe Moss, "It Hurts to be Alive and Obsolete: The Aging Woman," *Sisterhood is Powerful*, pp. 86-100, 170-175.

³⁶See Shulamith Firestone, "Love," and Pamela Kearon, "Man-Hating," *Notes from the Second Year*, pp. 16-27, 83-86.

³⁷This term originates with Sandra L. Bem and Daryl J. Bem, "Training the Woman to Know Her Place: The Power of a Nonconscious Ideology," *Roles Women Play*, pp. 84-96.

³⁸This phrase originates with Kenneth Burke and is the title of Part II of *Permanence and Change*, 2nd rev. ed. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965).

³⁹Emmeline G. Pankhurst, cited by Ellis, p. 19.

⁴⁰Ti-Grace Atkinson, cited by Charles Winick and Paul M. Kinsie, "Prostitutes," *Psychology Today*, Feb. 1972, p. 57.

⁴¹Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970), p. 42.

⁴²Bem and Bem, pp. 94-95.

⁴³Joreen, "The Bitch Manifesto," *Notes from the Second Year*, pp. 5-9.

⁴⁴"WITCH Documents," *Sisterhood is Powerful*, pp. 538-553.

⁴⁵See, for example, Martha Shelley, "Notes of a Radical Lesbian," *Sisterhood is Powerful*, pp. 306-311. Paralleling this are the negative views of some radical groups toward heterosexual love and marriage. See "The Feminists: A Political Organization to Annihilate Sex Roles," *Notes from the Second Year*, pp. 114-118.

⁴⁶See, for example, Caroline Bird, "On Being Born Female," *Vital Speeches of the Day*, 15 Nov. 1968, pp. 88-91. This argument is also made negatively by denying that, as yet, there is any satisfactory basis for determining what differences, if any, there are between males and females. See, for example, Naomi Weisstein, "Psychology Constructs the Female, or the Fantasy Life of the Male Psychologist," *Roles Women Play*, pp. 68-83.

⁴⁷Elizabeth Janeway makes a very telling critique of many of these attempts. She argues that the roles of shrew, witch, and bitch are simple reversals of the positively valued and socially accepted roles of women. The shrew is the negative counterpart of the public role of the wife whose function is to charm and to evince honor and respect for her husband before others; the witch is the negative role of the good mother—capricious, unresponsive, and threatening; the bitch is the reversal of the private role of wife—instead of being comforting, loving, and serious, she is selfish, teasing, emasculating. The point she is making is that these are not new, creative roles, merely reversals of existing, socially defined roles. (pp. 119-123, 126-127, 199-201.)

⁴⁸Natanson, pp. 15-16.

⁴⁹Parke G. Burgess, "The Rhetoric of Moral Conflict: Two Critical Dimensions."

⁵⁰Thomas H. Olbricht, "The Self as a Philosophical Ground of Rhetoric," *Pennsylvania Speech Annual*, 21 (Sept. 1964), 28-36.

⁵¹Lloyd F. Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, 1 (Jan. 1968), 6-8.

⁵²Leland M. Griffin, "The Rhetoric of Historical Movements," *QJS*, 38 (Apr. 1952), 184-185.

⁵³Herbert W. Simons, "Requirements, Problems, and Strategies: A Theory of Persuasion for Social Movements," *QJS*, 56 (Feb. 1970), 3.

⁵⁴Dan F. Hahn and Ruth M. Gonchar, "Studying Social Movements: A Rhetorical Methodology," *Speech Teacher*, 20 (Jan. 1971), 44, cited from Joseph R. Gusfield, ed., *Protest, Reform, and Revolt: A Reader in Social Movements* (New York: Wiley, 1970), p. 2.

⁵⁵Brenda Robinson Hancock, "Affirmation by Negation in the Women's Liberation Movement," *QJS*, 58 (Oct. 1972), 264-271.

⁵⁶Leland M. Griffin, "A Dramatistic Theory of the Rhetoric of Movements," *Critical Responses to Kenneth Burke*, ed. William H. Rueckert (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1969), p. 456.

⁵⁷Robert S. Cathcart, p. 87.

President Johnson's War on Poverty: The Rhetoric of Three "Establishment" Movements



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For over twenty years a central concern of rhetorical critics has been the study of social movements. Although Griffin's original exploration of the field included the suggestion that critics study movements which had occurred in the past,¹ a dominant