THE FEMINISTS: A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE RADICAL FEMINIST MOVEMENT
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Rhetoric is the art or the discipline that deals with the use of discourse, either spoken or written, to inform, persuade, or move an audience (Corbett, p. 3). Rhetoric can be a useful perspective from which to study a social movement because a movement's rhetoric represents an invitation to a life-style, an invitation to adopt the pattern of strategies and motives of a particular culture. An examination of the discourse generated by the participants in a social movement, then, can (1) produce knowledge about the growth of ideas in the movement and their modifications in the face of establishment pressure, (2) give insights into the motivations for the movement, and (3) help determine why some movements succeed and others fail.

Radical feminism is a movement that lends itself well to study through a rhetorical perspective. Its rhetoric proclaims that the desired new order cannot come about through the established agencies of change, and it proposes that a new order be instituted that contradicts many of the established values and goals of the society. The Feminists of New York City, because it is one of the strongest and most cohesive of the radical women's liberation groups, exemplifies the radical feminist movement, and an examination of this group enables the rhetorical critic to understand better radical feminism as well as social movements in general.

This rhetorical analysis of radical feminism through The Feminists will include an examination of the following aspects of the movement:

(1) Background of the movement,
(2) Ideology of the movement or the belief system, ways of thinking, or world-view of the group about society,
(3) Internal structure of the group or groups of the movement,
(4) Strategies or methods by which the group gains attention for its cause and hopes to accomplish its goals,
(5) Application of theory to practice, or the determination of whether the group puts into practice within its own closed society what it advocates for the larger society.

BACKGROUND

The formation of The Feminists is linked to the founding of the National Organization for Women (NOW) in October, 1966. NOW was organized in a hierarchy of officers with a president, vice-presidents, a secretary, a treasurer, and a board of directors. Some members of the group felt that this type of structure, in which power filters down to the general membership from a small clique at the top, followed the same hierarchical structure that had been oppressing women outside of the organization. These women believed that the first step in the fight against inequality was the establishment of equality within their own organization.
A by-laws committee of eight members, including Ti-Grace Atkinson, president of the New York chapter of NOW, proposed that all offices in NOW be eliminated and that they be replaced with committees. The chairpersons of these committees would rotate and be chosen by lot from the general membership. When the committee discovered on September 18, 1968, that NOW would lose its tax exempt status if the national structure was different from that of the local chapters, the proposal was amended to maintain the original structure of the organization but to change the implementation of that structure so that every member would have greater participation in the organization. The new proposal suggested that committee chairpersons, chapter presidents, and vice presidents be rotated, with one person serving in an office for a one month term.

This proposal proved to be a crucial issue in the development of NOW and the point of inception of the radical feminist movement. The supporters of the proposed by-laws changes argued: "The fight against unequal power relationships between men and women necessitates fighting unequal power everywhere: between men and women (for feminists especially), but also between men and men, and women and women, between black and white, and rich and poor" (Atkinson, p. 10). They believed that the by-laws of the organization had critical symbolic importance for two reasons: "(1) implementing by-laws are within our power to change easily, unlike the laws in the world at large, and (2) the power relationships we have among ourselves are a good indication of what we really want in the world at large" (Atkinson, p. 10).

Opponents of the proposed by-laws reacted with a four-page leaflet urging NOW members to vote against the proposal and labeling it ludicrous: "They [the by-laws] are ludicrous because they call for a game of musical chairs resembling a Keystone Cops Chase in a Mack Sennett comed season" (Come Out and Vote, p. 1). They supported the concept of leadership on the basis of an individual's superior skills: "Suppose, however, one chairman is doing a superb job... Should she be forced to step down even if those members wish her to continue?" (Come Out and Vote, p. 1). They cited statistical evidence to illustrate the instability of the proposed new structure:

Every single substantive committee chairman is a chapter president. Say that there are 10 substantive committees.

... That means that every month there will be 10 new presidents or a total of 120 presidents a year. Since meetings would be held weekly, the pool of 120 presidents would yield 52 "presiding" presidents a year. (Come Out and Vote, p. 2)

On October 15, 1968, a meeting was called to try to resolve the factionalism in NOW. In her discussion of feminist goals, national NOW president Betty Friedan stated, "I want to get women into positions of power." Ti-Grace Atkinson, on the other hand, emphasized, "I want to destroy the positions of power... not get up into these positions" (Sade, p. 2). The meeting failed.
to achieve unity within NOW, and two days later, on October 17, 1968, the proposed by-laws were defeated by a vote of two to one.

On the same day, Atkinson submitted her resignation as president of the New York chapter of NOW, simultaneously with her resignation from the NOW National Board of Directors, from NOW's 1968 National Nominating Committee, and as Finance Chairman of NOW. Atkinson explained the reason for her resignation: "I am resigning my office because, after last night as the final proof, I realize that by holding this office I am participating in oppression itself. . . . Since I have failed to get rid of the power position I hold, I have no choice but to step out of it" (Atkinson, p. 11).

The dissenters who objected to the hierarchical arrangement of NOW formed "The October 17th Movement," named after the day of their split from NOW. The group changed its name in June, 1969, to The Feminists. The radical position of The Feminists against marriage caused another split in the group, and in December, 1969, a group of dissenters left The Feminists to form the New York Radical Feminists.

In April, 1970, Atkinson resigned from The Feminists. She had been portrayed by the press as the group's leader and spokesperson, and when the group members passed a resolution that any contact with the media must be approved by the group and the spokesperson chosen by lot, Atkinson resigned "on principle" (Harral, p. 161). On August 6, 1971, Atkinson explained her perception of the situation in a warning to the women's movement:

I never imagined I was anyone's leader. I have never had followers. But I had never imagined the truth, that I was your slave. You have been content to trade off my guts and struggle as your own. As long as the truth of your cowardice and betrayal of women is not made public, you permit, are even quite content with, having panels of individuals be your conscience. The distinction between a "leader" and a "superstar" has been the distinction between your secret exploitation of some individuals, and the exposure of you to yourselves via the press. . . . You stand accused on moral, not legal grounds, according to your pretended "standards," and on your own evidence. (Atkinson, p. 215)

IDEOLOGY

Central to the ideology of The Feminists is the recognition of theory as the basis of all action. Atkinson defines the group's concept of the necessity of theory through the use of analogies: "A political theory is somewhat akin to a map of the enemy's territory. One can hardly develop a battle strategy without it. Perhaps a less controversial analogy would be this: a doctor must have a diagnosis before he can prescribe a treatment" (Atkinson, p. 99). She contrasts the theoretical approach with the "running-blind" approach:
Without a programmatic analysis, the Women's Movement has been as if running blindly in the general direction of where they guessed the last missile that just hit them was based. ... It's true that we were attacking evils, but why those particular evils? Were they central issues in the persecution of women? There was no map so I couldn't be sure, but I could see no reason to believe that we knew what the key issues were, much less that we were hitting them. (Atkinson, p. 51)

The Feminists believe that the need for a theoretical analysis is especially pressing because of the uniqueness of the women's movement. Primarily, a theoretical base will help to define this movement. Because it is only in the process of formation, trends exist in the movement that have not been settled, evaluated, or in some cases, even clearly distinguished. As the movement works toward a definition of these trends in a theory, factional disputes and differentiation between subtle shades of opinion will develop that are essential to the growth of the movement: "The disputes we are having now are not incidental but a drawing of lines that will have far-reaching effects in the development of our movement" ("Organizational Principles," p. 8).

In addition, a theoretical analysis of the problems of women is necessary because the feminist movement is unlike any other revolutionary movement in history. The oppression of women, The Feminists argue, is more deeply rooted in society than that of the blacks, and it goes back so far that no one has discovered its beginnings. Furthermore, since all previous revolutions have been mere upheavals among the class of men, a feminist theoretical analysis cannot rely on these traditional modes of attack. A unique woman-based theory of revolution must be developed ("Organizational Principles," p. 9).

In acting without theory, The Feminists believe that they are simply doing what the oppressed always have done—reacting with flashes of consciousness and indignation. Only a valid analysis will produce valid action and get to the source of the oppression of women: "A lot of energy has been wasted so far struggling with incidentals or mere fashions in oppression. The time we must take to develop theory will save us a lot of waste and frustration in the future" ("Organizational Principles," p. 8).

The starting point for the Feminists' analysis of the persecution of women is that women are a class and this class is political in nature (Atkinson, p. 41). A class is defined as a group of individuals whose members share a common characteristic, and a political class is a group of individuals whose members are treated by other classes in some special manner distinct from the way other classes are treated (Atkinson, p. 100).

The Feminists then analyze the characteristic traits of the class to which women have been relegated and conclude that sociological and biological traits separate out a particular individual from other individuals as a member of the class of women.
The sociological function of women, they argue, can be seen in the etymological definition of woman—wife of the man, and the biological function of women is evident in the etymological definition of female—to suckle. Both terms, The Feminists point out, are descriptive of functions in the interests of someone other than the possessor (Atkinson, p. 52).

The Feminists attempt to discover how the biological function of childbearing became a political classification—how or why an elaborately structured society based on oppression developed as a result of a capacity, which normally implies a choice of exercising that capacity or not. The answer, The Feminists conclude, is to be found in the fact that political classes are artificial; they define persons with certain capacities by those capacities, changing the contingent to the necessary and thereby appropriating the capacities of an individual as a function of society. An individual who is a function of society cannot be free and cannot exercise the minimal human rights of physical integrity and freedom of movement (Atkinson, p. 53).

Because they represent a function of society, the argument continues, women are oppressed by men. As Pamela Kearon, a member of The Feminists, explains, "He interprets the world to us and tries to see that we don't get at it directly. He has done everything necessary to undermine our individuality and contaminate us with his TRUTHS" (Kearon, October 1969, p. 1). The Feminists cite traditional feminist examples as evidence of this oppression of women by men. In a speech at the University of Rhode Island on March 4, 1970, Atkinson discussed some academic methods of oppression:

The vast majority of your professors are men, so women have no role models. The ratio at the University of Rhode Island is four males to one female.

There is a quota on the number of women students admissible. Here, it's two males to one female... The highest academic ratings are given to the all male, top colleges. The average academic ratings for the top five, female colleges are well over 250 points lower than those for the top five, all-male colleges. (Atkinson, p. 107)

The Feminists extend their analysis of women's position to a definition of the enemy. They reject the view that society is the enemy:

If "society" is the enemy, what could that mean? If women are being oppressed, there's only one group left over to be doing the oppressing: men. Then why call them "society"? Could "society" mean the "institutions" that oppress women? But institutions must be maintained, and the same question arises: by whom? (Atkinson, p. 47)

The Feminists' answer, then, is that men are the enemies. As Atkinson further explains: 'Men often threaten feminists that, if we're
not careful, men will organize. They already are. It's called the Establishment" (Atkinson, p. 116). This position that men are enemies necessitates that women dissociate themselves completely from the male point of view. Atkinson explained in a speech at Juniata College in Huntingdon, Penns-Ivania on February 20, 1969: "Women who empathize with the male role, that is, women who grasp the male point of view more than momentarily, are not feminists" (Atkinson, p. 25).

With the analysis of women's oppression and a discovery of the enemy completed, The Feminists attack social institutions that derive from the sex role division and thus reinforce women's subjugation. Foremost among these institutions are marriage, love, motherhood, heterosexual sex, and the hierarchical arrangement of society.

Rather than attempting to cause changes within the institution of marriage, The Feminists seek to abolish the institution. Because it is impossible for the oppressor and the oppressed to have equal rights, they believe that there is no point in trying to equalize roles within a marriage. As Atkinson points out, "How can you equalize the roles when the essential nature of these roles is to be contrasting? Could you maintain slavery if you 'equalized' the roles of master-slave to master-master" (Atkinson, p. 115)? Thus, The Feminists advise, "So for God's sake, don't get married, for your own sake as well as for the Movement's" (Atkinson, p. 105). Marriage "means rape and lifelong slavery" (Davidson, p. 69).

To answer the question of why women, including feminists, consort with the enemy in a love relationship, The Feminists have developed a theory of attraction that distinguishes between friendship and love. Friendship is a rational relationship which requires the participation of two parties to the mutual satisfaction of both parties, while love can be felt by one party; it is unilateral in nature and, combined with its relational character, it is thus rendered contradictory and irrational (Atkinson, p. 44). Thus The Feminists believe that love for a man is an instinctive attempt on the part of a woman to recoup her definitional and political losses by fusing with the enemy and thus transferring to the whole. This love, however, depends on inequity: "A woman can unite with a man as long as she is a woman, i.e., subordinate, and no longer" (Atkinson, p. 44). Ultimately, love is related to freedom, and in order to be free, women must shed what keeps them secure (Atkinson, p. 45). Or as Atkinson hauntingly asks, "If we were free, would we need love" (Atkinson, p. 93)?

The Feminists' attack on the institution of motherhood is based on what they consider to be a fallacious line of reasoning:

The biological argument for the maternal instinct goes something like this: women NEED to have children, it's part of their NATURE. Can't you see that that's what their bodies are built for? And if women didn't LIKE to have children, they wouldn't; this proves women CHOOSE to have children. And since they choose to have children in such large numbers, having children must
come naturally to women. It's an INSTINCT, the MATERNAL instinct. (Grimstad and Rennie, p. 209)

As The Feminists are quick to point out, there is a confusion of priorities in this line of reasoning. A capacity for an activity is not the same as a need for that activity: "... even if women's bodies WERE suitably formed for the activity of child-bearing, this in no way necessarily entails that they WANT to bear children, much less NEED to..." (Grimstad and Rennie, p. 209). Regarding pregnancy, Atkinson comments: "It's very painful. It's so immature to grow babies in people's bodies. If we had test-tube babies there would be less chances of deformed fetuses" (Davidson, p. 69).

Expression of The Feminists' views on heterosexual sex came on December 16, 1972, during a Lesbianism, Calibacy and Amazon Virginity panel at the Lesbian-Feminist Conference at Columbia University. The group's members espoused the view that "aside from rape, prostitution, and marriage, sex just is not all that important." They emphasized that "ethically and morally, feminists must strive to love each other and not be confused with the distractions that sex offers" (Grimstad and Rennie, p. 209). In Atkinson's terms, "In the good society, we can't tell what will happen to sexual attraction. It may be that sex is a neurotic manifestation of oppression. It's like a mass psychosis" (Davidson, p. 69).

Closely related to their concept of heterosexual sex is The Feminists' view of lesbianism. Within the context of political analysis, The Feminists view lesbianism as the buffer zone between the male and female classes within the sex-class system. This buffer is small and is composed of individuals who refuse to function in their appropriate identity class. This element becomes the buffer between the opposing classes because it takes the shocks from both sides. Individuals within the buffer zone are scapegoats of the oppressor when it must obscure especially oppressive measures, but they are also a battered sacrifice for their own class (Atkinson, p. 138).

But this notion of lesbianism as a buffer zone does not clearly resolve for The Feminists the problem of how to deal with lesbianism within the feminist movement. In one analysis of the situation of lesbians, lesbianism can be condemned ideologically because it is based on the very premise of male oppression: the dynamics of sexual intercourse. Atkinson explains this position: "Lesbians, by definition, accept that human beings are primarily sexual beings... Sexual intercourse... unsurprisingly, is not in the interests of women" (Atkinson, p. 85). On the other hand, lesbians have the advantage over feminists of greater self-love, although the price of this self respect is the adoption of the role of the oppressor. Thus, whereas lesbians become their own oppressors, feminists must try to construct an identity out of negatives. In Atkinson's terms, "In other words, it's a tossup" (Atkinson, p. 88).

Atkinson still appears uncertain as to how to view lesbianism. At the end of 1970, she urged support of lesbianism by the feminist movement:
Lesbianism is to feminism what the Communist Party was to the trade-union movement. Tactically, any feminist should fight to the death for lesbianism because of its strategic importance. If the government witch-hunts lesbianism (and all feminists always have been aware of this possibility), and if the government succeeds in isolating lesbianism to any degree from feminism, feminism is lost. (Atkinson, p. 134)

By 1974, however, Atkinson seemed to have reverted to her earlier position that lesbianism can be condemned ideologically because it represents a sexual stance: "I view lesbianism . . . as counter revolutionary--a literal pulling the covers over your head. Mine is a political objection, not sexual" (Kleiman).

The most important issue for The Feminists is that of equality. Atkinson defines this concept: "Equality" means that, insofar as any individual is a participant in some association, the same rights accrue to each member as individuals within that association" (Atkinson, p. 113). The Feminists see two class systems that must be dealt with in the issue of equality. The political division between the male class as the oppressive, powerful class and the female class as the oppressed, powerless class is the primary class system. The ranking of individuals within the male class itself is the secondary class system.

Groups within the feminist movement often adopt the hierarchical secondary class system: "Internalizing male values, since they so often deeply respect the male, they assume like him, that some people are just naturally better and more talented than others" (Mehroft, p. 4). Such an idea, The Feminists argue, makes any pretense of equality impossible:

To say in the women's movement that some people are better than others, to feel that some just naturally have leadership qualities, is to be thinking and acting on the basis of the male value system. It is to act toward other women--women with whom you supposedly identify your interests--as men do. (Mehroft, p. 5)

To prevent women in the movement from being oppressed--not only by men but by women--The Feminists urge the development of a class of women based on equality among all: "To confront men we must stand in relation to them as an independent and autonomous grouping of human beings. Organized on the basis of equality, we will offer the alternative for the future society" (Mehroft, p. 4).

STRUCTURE

The Feminists believe that the small, independent group is the basic unit of the women's movement. Only women organized on the basis of strength and stability have a chance to achieve a transformation of society.

They see four functions of the small group. First, it provides a space for action and creativity. It strengthens the
individual because it gives her a refuge from the male world in which she is free to develop her own standards and goals. Second, the group, through its many individual members working together, creates an interpretation and can stand collectively behind it. The Feminists believe that although an individual cannot by herself cast doubt on the prevailing interpretation of the world, a "group, opposed to society and existing within it, is a challenge to its ideas of REALITY and the security of its TRUTHS" (Kearon, August 1969, p. 2). Third, the group creates a continuity and continuous development for the ideas of its members. Whereas no individual is a total feminist all of the time, the group has a commitment that is continuous. And finally, the group creates a program of action—a means for breaking down the present institutions founded on the oppression of women. "It is because the group has continuity and because the individual acts of its members can be co-ordinated that a group can adopt a program with some hope of mobilizing strength to effect its ends" (Kearon, August 1969, p. 3).

The small group is seen only as a transitional mode within which to function. The Feminists hope that the small group will be the beginning of a process that will eventually lead to a larger organization: "We must assume that each small group with relevant distinctions in theory and tactics is the kernel of a larger organization which will be composed of affiliated groups united by a common analysis, principles and a single structure" ("Organizational Principles," p. 4).

To ensure the stability and the commitment of the group, the Feminists developed personal rules and regulations for members as well as membership requirements. These rules, they explain:

... are necessitated by the purpose of the group—revolution; they are an attempt to eliminate exploitation among individual members. The rules are an acknowledge-

ment of our own frailties and limitations and those which
inhere in the human situation and are therefore a means
of overcoming their limitations. (Kearon, October 1969, p. 5)

The Feminists developed three sets of rules to which all members are subject: prerequisites for membership, requirements of members, and personal standards for members. Prerequisites for membership include basic agreement with the policy statements of The Feminists, attendance at two special orientation meetings, and a one-month period of study of the concepts and history of feminism. Included in the group's membership resolutions are the following: Any member missing more than one fourth of the meet-

ings in any given month forfeits voting privileges until the third consecutive meeting of that individual's renewed attendance, a member who misses a group action without a valid reason is no longer a member of the group, and any member who consistently disrupts group discussions or activities may be expelled. Standards for personal excellence include: "Work for the group takes precedence
over all other activities, except for employment, lateness at meet-
ings is not permitted and is penalized by the mail answering job, each member is required to spend at least two hours per week reading data relevant to feminism, and intoxicating agents are not to be used during meetings nor three hours prior to meetings ("Organ-
izational Principles," pp. 5-7, 9).

Thus, through the small group structure and the formulation of regulations for its members, The Feminists hope to challenge the power of male institutions: "The only solution is the making and keeping of promises among individuals which clears a space in the future for individual development and guarantees an enclave in the enemy world in which power can be effective" (Kearon, Octo-
ber 1969, p. 2).

STRATEGIES

In a theoretical exploration of strategies for The Feminists, Atkinson formulates eight questions that must be answered if diplo-
macv fails and the enemy refuses to stop attacking: (1) Who is the enemy? (2) Where is he located? (3) Is he getting outside support? Material? Manpower? From whom? (4) Where are his forces massed? (5) What's the best ammunition to knock them out? (6) What weapons is he using? (7) How can you counteract them? (8) What is your plan of attack on him to force diplomatic negotiations?

Atkinson feels that only by developing answers to these questions can a strategy be formulated that will allow women to win the battle of the sexes (Atkinson, p. 50).

Despite The Feminists' recognition of the necessity of develop-
ing a strategy, they do not seem to have developed concrete answers to these questions or to have formulated a specific strategy. Atkinson has made two suggestions in the development of her theory of strategy that could be used by The Feminists. She suggests that women move from a position of retreat to one of stalemate by adopt-
ing the following plan of action:

One miniscule suggestion, as a contribution in this direc-
tion, would be if all feminists began wearing buttons read-
ing, "I am a lesbian." This could be a way of coopting the enemy's strategy. It's not unlike the tactic of the Danish king against the Germans during World War II. Then the King rode out one morning wearing the Star of David, and most Danes followed suit, the effect was to frustrate the Nazi identification of Jews in that area.

(Atkinson, p. 155)

Another suggested strategy is to gain inroads into the oppressors' strength by discovering factions that are being denied certain rights by other factions within the oppressor class. Some of these denied rights might include freedom of movement, economic freedom, and life-style freedom, and they may coincide with crucial rights denied to women in the sex class system. As Atkinson points out, "While the exact problem style may differ, it could be that similar solu-
tions are required to meet all these, otherwise, varied, problems"
(Atkinson, p. 160).

Because The Feminists themselves do not seem to have formulated and implemented an overall strategy through which to gain their objectives, perhaps a more useful approach to their strategies is to view their rhetoric and actions through the system of strategies of agitation proposed by Donovan Ochs and John Bowers, speech professors at the University of Iowa (Bowers and Ochs, p. 17). Their list of strategies includes the following that are used by The Feminists:

(1) Petition of the Establishment: Petition of the establishment includes all of the normal discursive means of persuasion. Using this strategy, The Feminists represent their case to the establishment, marshaling evidence and arguments to support their position. Included in this discursive strategy is The Feminists' attempt to remove the mask of respectability worn by the establishment through rhetorical labeling. Calling marriage "rape" (Morgan, p. 537) or charging the Catholic Church with "murder in the first degree, premeditated and willful" (Atkinson, p. 196), strips these institutions of their validity as agencies that are desirable, beneficial, and good in a society.

(2) Promulgation: Promulgation includes those tactics designed to win social support for the agitator's position. Among these tactics employed by The Feminists are distribution of handbills, the publication of leaflets, the staging of protest demonstrations, and participation in panel discussions. In their first public action as The Feminists, the group invaded the New York City Marriage License Bureau and City Hall to charge those offices with "fraud with malicious intent against the women of this city" (Morgan, p. 537). Other demonstrations and rhetorical acts by The Feminists have included the disruption of a courtroom at the Criminal Court Building in New York City to protest a judge's refusal to grant bail to two women arrested for prostitution in June, 1971. On September 28, 1971, The Feminists held a protest rally after a Grand Jury failed to indict a self-confessed rapist of two girls. The Feminists attempted to heighten women's awareness of the culprit responsible for their pain with a Speak-Out on Manhating on September 13, 1972. On February 4, 1973, at the New York Radical Feminists Marriage Conference, The Feminists offered a workshop entitled Spinsterhood is Power: The Feminists Case Against Marriage. In March of the same year, The Feminists launched a graffiti campaign against known rapists in New York City with the specific addresses of the criminals as their targets.

(3) Polarization: Polarization is a strategy that assumes that any individual who has not committed him or herself in one way or another to the group is supportive of the establishment. This is an attempt to force a conscious choice between commitment to the group and commitment to the establishment. Atkinson's speech explaining her resignation from NOW used this rhetorical technique: "You cannot destroy oppression by filling the position of the oppressor. I don't think you can fight oppression 'from the inside'; you either are on the inside or the outside and you fill one of those two ranks by your presence" (Atkinson, p. 10). Just as The Feminists
began their movement of radical feminism with such a stance, so
Atkinson's resignation from the group was marked with a similar charge
directed toward the entire women's movement. In this speech, Atkin-
son supported Joseph Colombo, founder of the Italian-American Civil
Rights League and alleged Mafia leader who was shot in July, 1971:

I, Ti-Grace Atkinson, who has refused to appear with men
who were not Revolutionaries, divorced herself Wednesday
night from Revolutionary Women who collaborate with men
in spite of their being Counter-Revolutionaries. . . .
And I, the Super-Feminist, Extremist, Man-Hater, divorced
you over the picture of a working-class, uneducated, cri-
minal, second-generation immigrant, male corpse. I stood
by the irrefutable evidence of his Revolutionary spirit,
in spite of his maleness. And I shall stand by that spirit
from now on wherever I find it. If necessary, I shall
stand alone. Yes, my "sisters," if necessary, I shall
stand even against you. (Atkinson, p. 220)

APPLICATION OF THEORY TO PRACTICE

Although an examination of the background, ideology, and
strategies of The Feminists is essential to an understanding of the
radical feminist movement, the group must also be studied through
an analysis of how the participants' rhetoric affects themselves.
Do they actually put into practice what they urge others to do?
An examination of The Feminists' concern with equality, marriage,
and men as enemies and how they are dealt with in the group illus-
trates the extent to which The Feminists combine theory and practice.

One of the major tenets of belief of The Feminists is equality
among all human beings. They believe that all people have the right
and the potential to contribute equally in political affairs. Within
their own group, then, they have tried to eliminate formal hierarchy
and create instead a structure that will prevent those who have had
more opportunity for development from emerging as leaders.

This concept of equality manifests itself in the lot and
disc systems. The lot system is a method used for dividing the
general work of the group into two categories—the creative and the
routine. Creative jobs include writing position papers, giving
lectures, appearing on television, or attending conferences, while
routine jobs include typing, addressing envelopes, running errands,
and answering the mail. The names of all of the group members are
written on slips of paper and are deposited in one of two envelopes
representing the two types of work. When a job needs to be done, a
name is drawn from the appropriate envelope depending on the nature
of the job. That person's name is put into the opposite envelope
when everyone has had a chance to do that type of work. The Femi-
nists feel that the increase in skills of the entire group makes
up for the initial inefficiency and lowering of quality of the work.

The second method used by The Feminists to ensure equality
is the disc system. At the beginning of each meeting, each member
is supplied with 15 or 20 chips or discs. Each time that a member
speaks, other than to answer "yes" or "no," she must throw one of her discs into the middle of the room. When her discs run out, she forfeits the right to speak for the remainder of the meeting. Because the persons who speak influence the views of others and thus determine the direction of the group, The Feminists believe that the disc system encourages the development of equality among group members:

Before we started using this method, only a few members would have the floor for almost the entire meeting. We also discovered some correlation between class and talkativeness which worked against the interests of the less privileged women. This method, of course, is not foolproof... However, it does discourage digressions and ego trips and encourages each person to think before she speaks. ("Organizational Principles," p. 4)

Marriage is another area in which The Feminists combine theory and practice. The Feminists believe that marriage is an ineradicable institution in both its legal and social aspects and is a primary formalization of the persecution of women. To put this concept of marriage into practice, The Feminists formulated a membership quota that demands "that no more than one-third of our members can be participants in either a formal (with legal contract) or informal (living with a man) instance of the institution of marriage" ("Organizational Principles," p. 5). As Atkinson states, "We reject marriage both in theory and in practice" (Davidson, p. 69).

The Feminists' view that men are the enemies or the oppressors also manifests itself in the group's practices. The Feminists try to dissociate themselves from men, a concept and practice that Atkinson explains:

The price of clinging to the enemy is your life. To enter into a relationship with a man who has divested himself as completely and publicly from the male role as possible would still be a risk. But to relate to a man who has done any less is suicide. (Atkinson, p. 90)

Atkinson personally has taken the position that she will not appear with any man publicly where it could possibly be interpreted that they were friends (Atkinson, p. 91). A leaflet discussing the group's lecture policy states: "They speak only to women--no mixed groups" (Grimstad and Rennie, p. 209). Atkinson explains why: "And then, when I prefer to speak to all women, the colleges and universities charge me with discrimination. They're got to be kidding. That's not discrimination, that's self-defense" (Atkinson, p. 107). Although such a stance brings accusations that The Feminists are separatists--advocating a separate state for a particular group of people--the Feminists have not formulated as yet such a stringent position. They ask only that men dissociate themselves from the male role and from the male class as much as possible so that women can relate to them in a relationship of equality (Atkinson, p. 91).
An examination of the rhetoric and actions of The Feminists, then, reveals that the group is one of few theoretical-practical groups in the feminist movement. In the areas of equality, marriage, and the identification of men as enemies, they attempt to put into practice their theoretical notions.

CONCLUSIONS

If an examination of the rhetoric of a social movement functions as predicted, it should enable the rhetorical critic to predict the fate of a movement or to explain why it succeeded or failed. An analysis of radical feminism and The Feminists, using the proposed model, allows the critic to draw certain conclusions.

Radical feminism as a social movement seems to have had little impact on the culture of the United States at the present time. This failure can be seen in the unsympathetic reactions of the majority of the public, the withdrawal of radical feminist spokespersons such as Atkinson from the women's movement, and the fact that few of their demands have been established in traditional society.

There are several possible reasons for the ineffectiveness of the radical feminist movement. Perhaps most important, the movement has no well-defined strategy—no definite goals toward which it is working. Each concept adopted into the ideology, each position paper published, and each protest is only a disparate step that might somehow aid in the attainment of the ultimate goal. The group members are not united by an overall plan or strategy that can hold them together when certain tactics fail to attain anticipated objectives.

In addition, the radical feminist movement is perhaps too different from the society out of which it grows and which it is trying to change. Its supporters, regardless of their commitment to the movement, are necessarily torn between the values of the society in which they have been raised and the society to which they have recently committed themselves. For example, the membership quota adopted by The Feminists to limit the number of persons involved in a relationship with a man conflicts with the societal norm that marriage is every woman's goal, the division of chores randomly conflicts with a society in which persons compete on the basis of ability and skills, and strict regulation of personal life conflicts with a society that advocates freedom. Perhaps the structure imposed on radical feminism by The Feminists, necessary because they want to create a society so different from that in which they live, also makes the group inflexible and sometimes unable to adapt to the argumentation, fluctuation, and circumstances in which it lives.

Radical feminism seems deliberately, at times, to court ineffectiveness in its rhetoric. Its spokespersons say what they believe and refuse to compromise themselves in any way—rhetorically or personally—to adapt their rhetoric to specific audiences. Statements that advocate that "the prostitute is the only honest woman left in America" (Posnurgh) or the charging of the Catholic Church with "inciting rape against women, by its degrading and sadistic propaganda against women" (Atkinson, p. 196)—whether they can be
supported or not—are not likely to appeal to the traditional middle-
class audience or even to more moderate feminists. And these are
the audiences that radical feminism must convince in order to suc-
cceed in the attainment of its goals. But Atkinson and The Feminists
cannot compromise:

We all want to be accepted. I am no different from anyone
here. I know what I've said will not be liked. But my
stomach gets weaker, as my hopes get higher. I no longer
have the "right" to cut corners with the truth. I owe
you the truth, as best I can make it out. I owe it to
you, as well as to myself. (Atkinson, pp. 210-11)

Thus, The Feminists and radical feminism in general, are faced with
the dilemma of remaining totally true to their ideals and expres-
sing that truth completely, or compromising their position at times
in order to gain more supporters for their goals.

Does this examination of the rhetoric of radical feminism
necessarily lead to the conclusion that the movement is doomed to
failure? Certainly not. The movement is young and must be expected
to experience some setbacks and disappointments. Several signs indi-
cate that radical feminism will continue to exert influence on Ameri-
can culture and probably will attain many of its goals. Feminist
groups that initiated the radical feminist movement, such as The
Feminists, continue to exist. The problems they experienced in
their beginnings have not been severe enough to cause their disso-
lution. Feminists may also be encouraged by the history of social
movements themselves in the United States. Ideas and goals that
were introduced by social movements and that seemed impossible to
achieve in their beginnings—such as the Equal Rights Amendment,
which dates from 1923—eventually have been adopted into the main-
stream of American thought. And finally, Atkinson herself offers
hope for the radical feminist movement. Although she retired from
the women's movement for a time following her resignation from The
Feminists and suggested, "There is no movement. Movement means going
some place, and the movement is not going anywhere" (Time, March 20,
1972), she now has formed another feminist group, the Autonomous
Women, based in New York City. Atkinson's formation of such a group
indicates that she herself believes that the movement is going some-
where and can accomplish its goals. As she explains, "It's not that
I'm on a downer about the movement. It's just that I'm so aware of
how much we have to do" (Kleiman). Thus, if radical feminism con-
tinues to persevere, continues the process of self-examination ini-
tiated, in part, by groups such as The Feminists, and develops stra-
tegies for effectively integrating its goals into the American soci-
ety, it will undoubtedly succeed in producing a culture in which women
and men are free to choose among the life-styles and ideologies of-
fered by the movement.
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