

**BIRTH OF THE MILITANT QUEER IDENTITY:  
ANALYZING *THE WOMAN-IDENTIFIED WOMAN*  
AND *QUEERS READ THIS*  
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**ABSTRACT**

Manifesto texts have been credited by scholars for aiding social movement groups in articulating various issues, creating cohesion among membership, and mapping out a path towards a successful future. Yet while much attention has been given to the movements that these texts represent, not as much study has been devoted towards examining manifesto texts themselves, particularly ones representing queer communities in the United States. Subsequently, there has been little research as to whether queer social movement manifestos exhibit similar patterns of style or rhetorical invention, regardless of context. To address this scholarly gap, this essay exams two modern queer manifestos: The Lavender Menace's 1970 *Woman-Identified Woman* and Queer Nation's 1990 *Queers Read This*. The goal of exploring reoccurring patterns within these manifestos is not for mere classification, but rather twofold: first, to reveal similar cultural cycles of oppression and resistance in the relationship between dominant and marginalized communities, particularly as it relates to sexuality; and second, to recover rhetorically rich artifacts that can contribute to building a queer collective memory.

May 1, 1970 would forever change the history of both women's rights as well as queer-identified movements. During that fateful night, the Congress to Unite Women convened for the first time in New York City in what was then one of the largest gatherings of feminists in the nation. Yet at the opening ceremony, the lights were shut off. When they were turned back on, a group of lesbian activists had ambushed the stage and began reading their manifesto, called *The Woman Identified Woman*. After facing sexual discrimination from mainstream feminist groups like the National Organization for Women<sup>1</sup> as well as chauvinism from gay rights organizations like the Gay Liberation Front<sup>2</sup> for years, the declaration, as well as the politically explosive manner in which it debuted, sought to create a separate, autonomous identity for lesbian women. In doing so, it, the text articulated the struggles of lesbians and firmly placed their quest for equality within the larger women's liberation movement. Forged as a fiery response to both sexism and homophobia, it quickly became a formative piece; as feminist Flora Davis claims, "It was one of those rare, pivotal moments in the history of the movement: Afterward, many things would never be quite the same again, for the ideas presented in the paper gripped the imagination of many feminists."<sup>3</sup>

Instances such as these illustrate the rhetorical impact that manifestos have within our culture, as they have been credited by scholars for aiding social movement groups in articulating various issues, creating cohesion among membership, and mapping out a path towards a successful future.<sup>4</sup> Yet while much attention has been given to the movements that these texts represent,<sup>5</sup> not as much study has been devoted towards examining manifesto texts themselves, particularly ones representing queer communities in the United States. Subsequently, there has been little research as to whether queer social movement manifestos exhibit similar patterns of style, invention, or other generic rhetorical elements, regardless of context.

For the purposes of this essay, a manifesto is defined as, "A public declaration by [...] an individual or body of individuals whose proceedings are of public importance, making known their past actions and explaining the motives for actions announced as forthcoming."<sup>6</sup> The goal of this project is not for mere classification; rather, it is to provide greater possible insight into examining manifestos and understanding if or how their recurring elements necessarily interact with each other as a rhetorical text. Furthermore, establishing manifesto as a genre may reveal similar cultural patterns of oppression and resistance in the relationship between dominant and marginalized communities, in particular queer ones. Lastly, generic criticism of manifestos could reveal tensions between elements both within and

between texts that may illuminate the unique rhetorical situations that call the respective discourses into being.

To help clarify these questions and issues, the theoretical foundations of genre criticisms will be outlined, followed by a discussion of some of the rhetorical forms that have been found in manifestos. Then, two queer manifesto texts—Lavender Menace’s 1970 *Woman-Identified Woman* and Queer Nation’s 1990 *Queers Read This*—will be examined to determine if such forms recur in constellational patterns. Lastly, some implications from the analysis will be discussed for future study.

#### **LITERATURE REVIEW: SURVEYING THE SCHOLARSHIP OF GENRE AND MANIFESTOS**

First, the key tenets and purposes of generic criticism must be established. Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson are often credited for formulating the current conceptualization of this method in rhetorical studies. They argue that rhetorical genre discerns a recurrent form, and then uses that form as a lens to compare one rhetorical text to other similar texts.<sup>7</sup> The purpose of generic criticism is not to merely classify, for Campbell and Jamieson state, “The justification for a generic claim is the understanding it produces rather than the ordered world it creates.”<sup>8</sup> What this method provides critics is insight into how a particular exigency induces and constrains responses, how prior rhetoric shapes current discourses, and how the relationship between audience and rhetor operates in specific situations.<sup>9</sup> Hence, Jamieson and Campbell sum up genre’s utility by explaining, “The concept of genre is an economical way of acknowledging that rhetorical critics have come to recognize interdependence of purpose, stylistic choices, and requirements arising from the situation and audience.”<sup>10</sup> Generic criticism is founded on the belief that rhetorical forms do not work in isolation but rather in coordination across particular discourses.

In addition, generic criticism can be used for more contemporary cultural analysis. Joshua Gunn argues that the method should be employed in order to help gain an, “understanding of reception and invention as a largely unconscious process.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, revealing this process provides understanding into broader social systems. Gunn continues, “The function of the generic critic is to bring social forms into conscious awareness by restoring them to their verbal character—by describing them, in language, as iterations of a recurring social form.”<sup>12</sup> Gunn’s work focuses on articulating genres that are still within the subconscious. While this study focuses on self-identified movement manifestos, or that which is conscious, Gunn’s notions on generic

criticism illustrate how genre can provide both rhetorical as well as cultural insights.

What constitutes a rhetorical genre should also be discussed. A genre is, “a group of acts unified by a constellation of forms that recurs in each of its members.”<sup>12</sup> Central to this conceptualization of genre are the forms that comprise them. Forms are defined by Campbell and Jamieson as, “stylistic and substantive responses to perceived situational demands.”<sup>13</sup> The key is to examine forms not in singularity, but how they act in concert with one another; doing this will reveal the internal dynamics that hold them together. Thus, understanding a genre provides, “an angle of vision, a window, that reveals the tension among these elements.”<sup>14</sup> Forms provide the basis of genre, which can then be used to examine a rhetorical text.

Next, some forms that have been identified in previous research on manifestos are outlined to provide a framework. Although these works do not establish the “constellation of forms” as previously defined by Campbell and Jamieson<sup>15</sup> on their own, their findings do help inform how manifestos function rhetorically. By synthesizing these, it becomes possible to analyze other manifesto texts in order to determine if such forms recur together across discourses, and to reveal any possible internal dynamics that may hold them together. Interestingly, there is a seeming scarcity of rhetorical research on manifestos themselves. In light of the fact that manifestos are often examined within larger analyses on the rhetoric of social movements, the essays utilized are ones that specifically studied manifestos. There are three main characteristics of manifestos that can be identified in the research: 1) Objectification,<sup>16</sup> 2) Identification,<sup>17</sup> and 3) Historical Narrative.<sup>18</sup>

First, manifestos contain a central rhetorical function of objectification. One of the manifesto’s primary components is to articulate grievances, perceived or real, that violate the group’s principles or right to being. Expanding on this concept in his study of radical black activist James Forman’s “Black Manifesto,” Jerry Frye cites black movement scholar Arthur L. Smith to explain that objectification is, “the use of language to direct the grievances of a particular group toward another collective body such as an institution, nation, political party, or race.”<sup>19</sup> Thus, objectification works to not only highlight a group’s complaints, but to assign them to a particular body that can be directly addressed. How the grievances are outlined and to whom they are addressed sets the inventional foundation for how the manifesto will call its readers to respond. For example, in her examination of radical feminist manifestos of the 1960s Kimber Charles Pearce states, “Often, feminist authors stressed one category of oppression over the others, which influenced the proposals for action they set forth in different texts.”<sup>20</sup> As such, manifestos not only express a group’s grievances, but through

objectification create a venue through which its members can have agency and react to the collective body that afflicts them. Through this, objectification critiques the current social order and actively seeks to find ways to rupture it. Also writing on the “Black Manifesto,” Maegan Parker claims that Forman’s attacks on white religious institutions and subsequent demands for them to pay reparations were intended to galvanize his black audience to action while compelling his dominant white audience to reflect on their role in black oppression.<sup>21</sup> Objectification, then, is an inductive process that articulates issues, casts them towards an outside collective as the source, and finds ways to disrupt it.

The second characteristic of manifestos, identification, helps to create a particular identity within a specific audience. Building off of Kenneth Burke’s notion that one of the purposes of language is to create a commonality between people, manifestos outline a group based on material and ideological grounds. Craig A. Smith and Kathy B. Smith contend in their study of British political party manifestos that in an election context, such discourses operate to, “maximize a sense of identification between citizens and the party (‘we’) and to contrast or polarize that identity against the identities of citizens from the various ‘thems.’”<sup>22</sup> This process leads to, “a convergence around symbols, needs, preferences and reasons.” Extending these functions beyond politics, a manifesto forges identification between its audience and the larger group the text represents, forming one of its bases of invention. Due to this, manifestos become the rhetorical extension of their group. In addition, contrasting identity with a “them” expands on Burke’s theories of negation. Pearce argues that in the past, feminist manifestos created an identity that was, “defined not so much by what it is, as by that to which it is opposed.”<sup>23</sup> Contrasting one group as the dialectical opposite from another plays a critical role in identification, as it forges commonality and internal coherence amongst the group’s members. Pearce continues that a central rhetorical function of radical feminist manifestos was in framing feminism as a response to an oppressive male-dominated structure, noting that “[they] allowed for the recognition of a hostile worldview against which feminists could unite.” Thus, identification works in conjunction with objectification; naming a social order, dominant group, or institution that is responsible for a community’s problems allow members to forge a commonality in shared suffering. Moreover, objectification creates the impetus for which the aggrieved group rallies around and rises up as a response. Due to this, identification is not a rhetorical form that works in isolation.

The last element, historical narrative, plays a critical role in how manifestos construct a worldview. Smith and Smith found that political manifestos use narratives of the past in order to create a historical account that can explain the state of affairs in the present.<sup>24</sup> Due to this, these narratives help construct a “discursive world” within the text.<sup>25</sup> As manifestos function ideologically, they engage in a process of world-making that places its group identity as well as its grievances within a larger narrative that justifies its positions. Pearce explains that feminist manifestos utilized narrative to establish an anti-masculine historicism that provided the rationale for a radical female liberation movement.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, she explains historical narrative allowed feminists to, “assume control of their historical identities, which, heretofore, had been subject to the judgment of men.”<sup>27</sup> Historical narrative, therefore, can work in concert with identification as it provides meaning to shared experiences within a group. As Pearce concludes, feminist historical narratives “made it evident that the mere fact of being a woman meant having a particular kind of social and hence historical experience.”<sup>28</sup> Historical narrative places a group’s identity within a larger world as it makes sense of their experiences. By doing this, the manifesto makes its call to action a logical next step. Writing from a literary perspective, Galia Yanoshevsky contends, “The manifesto has a particular performativity: it does not merely describe a history of rupture, but produces such a history, seeking to create this rupture actively through its own intervention.”<sup>29</sup> Indeed, Natalie Alvarez and Jenn Stephenson argue that a manifesto’s very existence is a critical act, as, “The manifesto is inherently performative; its aim, through its enunciation, is to bring a future vision into being.”<sup>30</sup> As such, a manifesto performs a critical historiography, inserting itself as the logical next step in its rhetorically constructed historical narrative.

### **MANIFESTO TEXTS: (RE)MAKING A QUEER SOCIAL ORDER**

The aforementioned texts merit consideration for several reasons. First and foremost, there is a seeming lack of scholarship on manifesto texts from the queer community. Thus, examining these will seek to fill a gap in this research. In addition, while scholars have devoted much attention towards more mainstream or well-known queer activist groups, the same cannot be said for organizations that played just as crucial of a role in the history of queer rights but were lesser-known. Whether it was because they were more local, more radical, or simply faded from dominant accounts of the past, their rhetorical contributions should be studied. Thus, analyzing these texts can provide critical insights into the formation of radical queer ideology that still exists today. Second, queer movements can provide a unique perspective on manifestos as they represent a marginalized

community that historically has had few venues to express their issues. Given this, the manifesto has been a critical tool in their pushback against heterosexist oppression and in building community among fellow queers. Lastly, generic analysis can reveal “undercurrents of history,” as articulated by Campbell and Jamieson, for queer communities. Given their recurring marginalization, such a critical approach may help in exposing similar patterns of domination and resistance between a heteronormative societal structure and those that it subjugates. The rhetorical contexts of these manifestos will be briefly discussed, followed up by an examination under each of the aforesaid tenets.

#### **RHETORICAL CONTEXTS**

First, *Queers Read This* stands as the most recent of the manifestos examined. During the time in which the text was released in 1990, the gay community faced increasing marginalization in the face of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, a national rise in anti-gay hate crimes, and pressure from conservative politicians to cut federal funding to queer artists.<sup>31</sup> Within the ranks of the queer communities, radicals increasingly began to question whether gay assimilation was the proper course of method for achieving equality and liberation.<sup>32</sup> Within this maelstrom of conflict, the group Queer Nation, described by one member as, “a peculiar mix of outrage and wackiness”<sup>33</sup> was formed in April of 1990. Initially, it was a radical gay rights organization that splintered off from ACT UP4 in order to deal with the 122% rise of anti-gay hatecrimes in New York City.<sup>34</sup> Soon after, its members distributed 15,000 copies of their manifesto as pamphlets to attendees at the New York City Gay Pride March in June of that year. Within two years it had chapters in over sixty cities across the United States.<sup>35</sup> The title of the manifesto was borrowed from posters made by ACT UP to publicize the group’s 1989 demonstration commemorating the twentieth anniversary of the Stonewall riots.<sup>36</sup> Thus, Queer Nation was clearly placing its text in the longer historical tradition of gay rights, particularly in New York City.

*The Woman-Identified Woman* came about in a time when even though the women’s liberation movement was well underway in the United States, there was turmoil within its ranks. After the Stonewall riots of 1969, lesbians began to take a more vocal role in both the gay as well as women’s rights movements, but their contributions were not always welcome.<sup>37</sup> Early on, lesbian activists were shut out of the largely male-dominated gay rights organizations and took on a more active presence within women’s liberation.<sup>38</sup> Their presence, however, created friction within the leadership of women’s rights organizations, most notably the National Organization for

Women (NOW). Davis explains, “For many NOW members, lesbianism was a sensitive subject because they had to defend themselves against accusations that all feminists were gay.”<sup>39</sup> To deflect such accusations, then-President of NOW Betty Freidan referred to lesbians as the “lavender menace” to women’s rights, and in 1969 began to purge the organization’s leadership of queer women.<sup>40</sup> The issue came to a head in January of 1970 when Rita Mae Brown, open lesbian and editor of the New York chapter of NOW’s newsletter, publicly resigned over the organization’s actions.<sup>41</sup> The heterosexist backlash against lesbians, as well as the double oppression they faced for both their gender and sexuality, would set the stage—both literally and figuratively—for *The Woman-Identified Woman*.

### **TEXTUAL ANALYSIS**

The two texts will be examined by the elements previously outlined in the literature review. The analysis aims not merely to see if the manifestos “fit,” but to also determine how they utilize these elements in conjunction, both within and between the texts. Through this, tensions and internal dynamics may be better clarified to help conclude whether the manifesto is possibly a rhetorical genre, or in the very least the product of a uniquely queer American experience.

### **OBJECTIFICATION**

As previously established, manifestos do not merely articulate a group’s perceived injustices; they direct them towards an external body. In the process, objectification inductively identifies the social system that perpetuates this body so that the group’s members may be able to address and rupture it. *Queers Read This* and *The Woman Identified Woman* realize this element in ways that are both strikingly similar and different.

#### *Queers Read This*

To begin, Queer Nation’s grievances are expressed on both material and ideological levels. In the opening section, the text contends, “There is nothing on this planet that validates, protects, or encourages your existence.”<sup>42</sup> Many of the issues illustrated are material. For example, a recurring criticism is the government’s inaction during the AIDS epidemic, stating, “Violent attacks, 3,720 men, women and children died of AIDS [this month], caused by a more violent attack—government inaction, rooted in society’s growing homophobia. This is institutionalized violence, perhaps more dangerous to the existence of queers because the attackers are faceless.”<sup>43</sup> Implicitly, the text argues that AIDS has been allowed to ravage the queer community by outside forces. Another area of criticism is in the censorship of queer art. Specifically, it decries then-Senator Jesse Helms’



attempts to limit federal funding for gay artists, arguing, “It is not art Helms is after...IT IS OUR LIVES! Art is the last safe place for lesbians and gay men to thrive. Helms knows this, and has developed a program to purge queers from the one arena they have been permitted to contribute to our shared culture.”<sup>44</sup> The eradication of gay art is equated with the removal of a haven for gays and lesbians, further putting their existence at risk. Both of these injustices are tied into a larger theme that is repeated throughout the manifesto: the attempted extermination of queers from society.

Ideologically, *Queers Read This* argues that society has waged psychological warfare on its queer members. It contends that queers “have been carefully taught to hate ourselves.”<sup>45</sup> It takes a first-person perspective to illustrate this point, asserting, “I hate that in twelve years of public education I was never taught about queer people. I hate that I grew up thinking I was the only queer in the world, and I hate even more that most queer kids still grow up the same way.”<sup>46</sup> Systematically, queers have been denied a history and subsequently a future. Likewise, their right to express their outrage is also limited when it proclaims, “They've taught us that good queers don't get mad.”<sup>47</sup> Altogether, the text contends that this ideological repression contributes to the continued marginalization of queers, making it a central point of protest. Both the material and ideological grievances are expressed in broader terms. Rather than discuss specific actions or policy points, the text paints a broad picture that ostensibly affects every queer in some way. Because of this, the text can isolate the source of their problems as being more systematically rooted.

Having illuminated their complaints, Queer Nation’s text then moves on to argue about who is responsible for this suffering. As previously established, how the grievances are assigned play a direct role in how the texts call for response. *Queers Read This* bluntly identifies this body when it states, “Straight people are your enemy. They are your enemy when they don't acknowledge your invisibility and continue to live in and contribute to a culture that kills you. Every day one of us is taken by the enemy.”<sup>48</sup> While the text does inveigh against particular politicians, religious leaders, and institutions for their particular roles in marginalizing queers, it ultimately goes beyond identifying any one of those as the source of its travails; it labels all straight people as responsible in the subjugation of queers. This construction will also form the foundation of how the manifesto engages in the identification element.

Moreover, *Queers Read This* states that the problem lies within a heteronormative system that privileges straights over everyone else. It

proclaims, “Straight people have a privilege that allows them to do whatever they please and fuck without fear. But not only do they live a life free of fear; they flaunt their freedom in my face.”<sup>49</sup> By outlining their problems in more general terms, the text is able to frame straight privilege as what enables queer oppression. Had the manifesto laid out specific policies or individuals, the natural solution would have been much more isolated and singular in nature. Instead, the solution is a comprehensive change in attitude and action by telling queers to challenge this privilege and not be willing to simply accept the status quo anymore. The text illustrates this when it declares, “Be proud. Do whatever you need to do to tear yourself away from your customary state of acceptance. Be free. Shout.”<sup>50</sup> The manifesto also argues for confrontation with straights at every opportunity, telling its audience, “LET YOURSELF BE ANGRY. Let yourself be angry that the price of our visibility is the constant threat of violence, anti-queer violence to which practically every segment of this society contributes...Tell [straights] ‘GO AWAY FROM ME, until YOU can change.’”<sup>51</sup> Thus, the text fulfills objectification by laying out its grievances, identifying straights as the responsible body, and advocating ruptures to the system of straight privilege that enables it to happen.

*The Woman-Identified Woman.*

Next, *The Woman Identified Woman* also contains objectification. The text’s grievances are more on the ideological than on the material level. While it is similar to *Queers Read This* in that its listed injustices are broader and tends to avoid specifics, its focus is more on the perpetual mental subjugation of women – which includes lesbians – by men. In essence, the manifesto argues that women are unable to identify themselves outside of a male gaze, stating:

We are authentic, legitimate, real to the extent that we are the property of some man whose name we bear. To be a woman who belongs to no man is to be invisible, pathetic, inauthentic, unreal. He confirms his image of us—of what we have to be in order to be acceptable by him—but not our real selves; he confirms our womanhood—as he defines it, in relation to him—but cannot confirm our personhood, our own selves.<sup>52</sup>

In other words, *The Woman-Identified Woman* outlines a central grievance that is rooted in the inability to self-identify. Like *Queer Nation* however, it argues that society has played a direct role in psychological conditioning as it asserts, “The consequence of internalizing this role is an enormous reservoir of self-hate... poisoning her existence, keeping her alienated from herself, her own needs, and rendering her a stranger to other women.”<sup>53</sup> Both texts proclaim that society teaches them that they are inferior and deserving of

marginalization. Unlike *Queers Read This* though, which uses the material complaints to set up a larger indictment of straight privilege, *The Woman-Identified Woman* makes the ideological grievance its central injustice and the source of ills that befall women and lesbians.

After identifying its main objection, the manifesto proceeds to direct it towards an outside body. In this case the culprit is sex roles that are the product of masculine domination. The text contends, “It should first be understood that lesbianism...is a category of behavior possible only in a sexist society characterized by rigid sex roles and dominated by male supremacy.”<sup>54</sup> The body in this case is sex roles, and what allows the sex roles to oppress women is male control. It should be noted that while both texts address the repressive nature of dominant notions of sexuality, *Queers Read This* does so from a perspective of heteronormativity whereas *The Woman-Identified Woman* addresses it from the perspective of masculinity. This distinction, as previously discussed by Pearce, will play a key component in how these texts employ identification.

Once the male-dominated system has been provided as the source, the text’s solution is to rupture it. Similar to Queer Nation’s manifesto, the text argues for a change in internal attitudes, which will then be manifested in external interactions. From an intrapersonal level, it proclaims, “In the privacy of our own psyches, we must cut those cords to the core. For irrespective of where our love and sexual energies flow, if we are male-identified in our heads, we cannot realize our autonomy as human beings.”<sup>55</sup> Interpersonally, once women and lesbians have disengaged themselves psychologically from this order, the manifesto declares, “It is the primacy of women relating to women, of women creating a new consciousness of and with each other, which is at the heart of women's liberation, and the basis for the cultural revolution.”<sup>56</sup> As such, *The Woman-Identified Woman* outlines its injustice, places a male-dominated hegemony as the source, and provides its members an avenue for addressing and rupturing the social system that oppresses them.

### **IDENTIFICATION**

Next, the identification element in manifestos seeks to create a shared bond through language. Both texts create “a convergence around symbols, needs, preferences and reasons”<sup>57</sup> that are “defined not so much by what it is, as by that to which it is opposed,”<sup>58</sup> albeit in different ways.

#### *Queers Read This*

Queer Nation’s manifesto realizes identification by engaging its audience through shared suffering. Throughout the text it employs the terms

“faggot” and “dyke,” symbols that are almost universally recognized in the queer communities as oppressive to remind its audience that they are marginalized at the hands of straights. Moreover, it reclaims the term “queer” for themselves and attempts to make it a universal signifier for all non-straights. Rather than employ the conventional term “gay,” the manifesto attempts to create an identification that is much broader and incorporates all marginalized sexual and gender identities, arguing, “Queer, unlike GAY, doesn't mean MALE.”<sup>59</sup> Thus, *Queers Read This* reframes an old set of symbols as well as convergence on a new one to forge identification. The manifesto also employs metaphor to both highlight the unique status of queers as well as contrast them with straights. For instance, it uses their marginalized status as reason to stand up and fight by asserting, “We have so much to fight for; we are the most precious of endangered species.”<sup>60</sup> This metaphor of queers as being on the verge of extinction is employed throughout the text, using the struggles it outlines in the objectification element to create a sense of shared identity for queers to unite and take action.

Identification is also present when the manifesto places queers as the dialectical opposites of straights. The text opens with saying, “Everyday you wake up alive, relatively happy, and a functioning human being, you are committing a rebellious act. You as an alive and functioning queer are a revolutionary.”<sup>61</sup> The manifesto argues that queers’ very existence is in direct violation of the heteronormative social order. This provides no real possibility of straight allies and presents hostility to the dominant structure as the only logical choice. In essence, the manifesto defines queers by virtue of not being straight and falling outside its system of privilege. Butressing this contrast is the presence of war metaphors that portray queers as being “fighters,” “revolutionaries,” and an “army of lovers” in opposition to straights that “Bash us and stab us and shoot us and bomb us in ever increasing numbers.”<sup>62</sup> There is no possibility for common ground, no opportunity for equality based on sameness with straights. In doing this, the text also creates a rhetorical space to castigate queers who should speak up and be more involved yet do not. Employing the war metaphor once again, the manifesto asserts, “You talk, talk, talk about invisibility and then retreat to your homes to nest with your lovers or carouse in a bar with pals and stumble home in a cab or sit silently and politely by while your family, your boss, your neighbors, your public servants distort and disfigure us, deride us and punish us.”<sup>63</sup> Queers that choose to not fight are merely retreating, allowing straights to attack and destroy the community as a whole. Through these components, the text ties queer identification as direct opposition to straights, whereby radical queers must rise up lest their community be

destroyed. Having constructed a “we” through shared suffering, the manifesto then moves to contrast queers with a “them” that is directly tied with its call to action.

*The Woman-Identified Woman*

*The Woman-Identified Woman*, meanwhile, also contains the element of identification, albeit in a different construction than *Queers Read This*. For example, throughout the manifesto the term “sister” is used. This sisterhood is not merely restricted to lesbians however; it applies to all women, as it states, “As we do this, we confirm in each other that struggling, incipient sense of pride and strength, the divisive barriers begin to melt, we feel this growing solidarity with our sisters.”<sup>64</sup> As such, sisterhood is the symbol used to create convergence around a single ideology that is committed to ending male domination over all females. That does not mean that lesbians are cast aside in the manifesto. Rather, their firsthand experience in rebelling against male oppression makes them the ideal woman who can lead the way. The text opens by asking, “What is a lesbian? A lesbian is the rage of all women condensed to the point of explosion.”<sup>65</sup> Her oppression epitomizes what all women feel. Moreover, this identification creates an obligation for lesbians to share their experiences:

Those of us who work that through find ourselves on the other side of a tortuous journey through a night that may have been decades long. The perspective gained from that journey, the liberation of self, the inner peace, the real love of self and of all women, is something to be shared with all women—because we are all women.<sup>66</sup>

Thus, the manifesto creates identification around sisterhood, yet still uses the shared suffering of lesbians to forge a unique sense of self for them. There is a clear distinction with *Queers Read This* in this particular area, however. *The Woman-Identified Woman* decries the term “dyke” as being not only derogatory, but a source of division among all women.<sup>67</sup> Thus, it does not seek to reclaim marginalizing words from the dominant culture. Instead, *The Woman-Identified Woman* only uses them as further evidence of the moral bankruptcy of male dominance.

The manifesto also uses negation in its construction of identity. Namely, it rejects the male-dominated definition of woman and seeks its audience to create new ways to recognize themselves. It asserts, “It says as clearly can be said: women and person are contradictory terms. For a lesbian is not a real woman,” while also contending, “being feminine and being a whole person are irreconcilable.”<sup>68</sup> Clearly, the text identifies being a

“woman” or “feminine” in the male-identified sense as being performative and places the woman-identified woman as being the opposite of that. Men cannot provide this identity; only women are capable of doing this, as when it stresses, “Only women can give to each other a new sense of self. That identity we have to develop in reference to ourselves and not in relation to men.”<sup>69</sup> Thus, the identification that the text calls forth is a necessary reaction to the oppression they experience. Moreover, similar to *Queers Read This*, the manifesto argues that the very existence of lesbians is in direct opposition to the social system that was outlined in objectification. The text’s opening paragraph reasons, “She may not be fully conscious of the political implications of what for her began as personal necessity, but on some level she has not been able to accept the limitations and oppression laid on her by the most basic role of her society – the female role.”<sup>70</sup> As the female role is the product of male dominance and lesbians openly break away from that, any lesbian is in defiance whether they are consciously choosing to or not. In addition, the text uses this dialectical position to rebuke women who would rather push lesbians out of the women’s liberation movement when it states, “For women, especially those in the movement, to perceive their lesbian sisters through this male grid of role definitions is to accept this male cultural conditioning and to oppress their sisters much as they themselves have been oppressed by men.”<sup>71</sup> The women who engage in this practice are acceding to the very power structure that affects them all, not just other lesbians. Such identification firmly places lesbians within the milieu of the women’s liberation movement; according to the manifesto, one cannot be a women’s liberationist while marginalizing lesbians. Lastly, to reaffirm this notion, war terminology is utilized, such as in the opening paragraph when the text asserts, “[the lesbian] is in a state of continual war with everything around her.”<sup>72</sup> Although not as metaphoric as Queer Nation’s manifesto, Radicalesbians’ text harkens similar imagery of fight or flight with no possible middle ground for accommodation or appeasement. It is critical to note that because the text’s objectification targeted men and a masculine-dominated structure, its identification is rooted in gender and not sexuality. Lesbians are ostensibly afforded higher status in *The Woman Identified Woman* for their intimate knowledge of female suffering, but they advocate a bond of commonality with heterosexual women. Also telling is that while Queer Nation reprimands fellow queers for not being active, making their attacks internal to the community, Radicalesbians criticizes heterosexual women for not allowing lesbians in their movement, making it external and towards an exclusive community. This divergence in identification demonstrates that while both texts employ the same element, how they are utilized is in response to their unique rhetorical situations. Furthermore, the internal

dynamic that binds objectification and identification are highlighted as the different sources of invention in one inherently impacts the other for both groups.

### **HISTORICAL NARRATIVE**

Lastly, manifestos employ the element of historical narrative to create an ideology-affirming worldview. These texts do not merely provide a recounting of history, but rather allow the movement's members to "assume control of their historical identities."<sup>73</sup> In so doing, they create their own history of rupture.<sup>74</sup>

#### *Queers Read This*

In *Queers Read This* historical narrative places queers as hierarchically superior to straights, allowing Queer Nation's audience to regain control of their identity. The manifesto asserts, "We've given so much to the world: democracy, all the arts, the concepts of love, philosophy and the soul, to name just a few gifts from our ancient Greek Dykes, Fags."<sup>75</sup> This provides a moral inheritance for queers, thereby creating one layer of rationale for why they need to fight back against heteronormative privilege. It also pushes back against dominant notions that queers have no past—and subsequently no future—nor that have they ever contributed to society. This historical narrative also helps make sense of shared queer experiences. Another aspect of this element places queers within the arts, one of the very areas that is a source of complaint for the manifesto. *Queers Read This* contends, "Since time began, the world has been inspired by the work of queer artists. In exchange, there has been suffering, there has been pain, there has been violence. Throughout history, society has struck a bargain with its queer citizens: they may pursue creative careers, if they do it discreetly."<sup>76</sup> This narrative reinforces the theme that queers have long contributed to larger society yet have still been negated and rendered voiceless. Lastly, historical narrative paints modern queers as simply too passive. After outlining then-recent incidents in New York City where openly gay men were assaulted and murdered, the manifesto concludes, "In 1969, Queers fought back. In 1990, Queers say ok."<sup>77</sup> This places the current predicament of queers within the timeline of radical activism starting with the Stonewall Rebellion. This provides the basis for drastic queer action; queers have a proud history of fighting back against the power, and now is the time for them to take the mantle of radical activism once more. As such, the manifesto inserts itself into the historical narrative by making a direct plea to its audience to take action. By establishing a historicism of queer radicalism, direct confrontation

with the heteronormative structure becomes the next logical chapter in queer history. In doing so, *Queers Read This* proposes a wholly new social order that flips privilege away from straights and towards queers. Charles E. Morris III and John M. Sloop contend that the process of queer world-making includes, “queering readings of all forms of intimacy and their public connections.”<sup>78</sup> In essence, “*Queers Read This* seeks to rupture the heteronormative privileges of the dominant system that come at the expense of queers, in favor of an equitable social structure.

*The Woman-Identified Woman*

Radicalesbians, on the other hand, do not seem to employ historical narrative as much in their manifesto. Rather than use history to create a collective moral inheritance or to provide an historical account that discusses shared suffering like Queer Nation, most of the *Woman-Identified Woman* is focused on the present and a hypothetical future. There are no mentions of past injustices or rebellious acts; curiously, neither is the invaluable contribution lesbians had made to the women’s rights movement. The historical narrative is more generalized. It is experienced by every woman and not particularly tied to any one event, action, or policy. It avers:

But why is it that women have related to and through men? By virtue of having been brought up in a male society, we have internalized the male culture's definition of ourselves. That definition consigns us to sexual and family functions, and excludes us from defining and shaping the terms of our lives. In exchange for our psychic servicing and for performing society's non-profit-making functions, the man confers on us just one thing: the slave status which makes us legitimate in the eyes of the society in which we live.<sup>79</sup>

The narrative, then, purports to represent what every woman goes through in their life: conditioning and consignment to a restricted gender role. It attempts to make sense of their experience for providing a reason why they identify themselves through men. Additionally, the manifesto ends with a call to action that marks a new form of feminism to lead a revolution, affirming, “We feel a real-ness, feel at last we are coinciding with ourselves. With that real self, with that consciousness, we begin a revolution to end the imposition of all coercive identifications, and to achieve maximum autonomy in human expression.”<sup>80</sup> By framing this realness as something that is finally occurring “at last,” the manifesto positions lesbian-inclusive women’s rights as the new way forward. Yet, without a clear sense of narrative, it would be impossible to conclude that the text is placing this revolution within a larger historical spectrum. Perhaps by avoiding this narrative, the text is able to speak to both its heterosexual as well as lesbian audiences.



### **IMPLICATIONS: MANIFESTOS AS A NEW BEGINNING**

After analyzing the texts, three implications can be discussed: manifesto as a possible genre, potentially problematic elements within the manifestos, and extending the element of identification. First, while this textual criticism is by no means comprehensive enough to make a final determination, it appears that enough compelling research has been uncovered to begin the discussion of manifesto as a potential rhetorical genre. In the very least, it warrants further study. Though the elements of a manifesto are only a rough sketch gleaned from a sample of what is an admittedly limited field of scholarship on manifesto texts, it appears that there is some form of internal dynamics that are binding these elements together. This is particularly evident with objectification and identification, as the outside body identified as the source of a particular group's ails has an inexorable link on the way said group identifies itself. The element of historical narrative, however, requires further clarification; its absence from *The Woman-Identified Woman* was notable, and perhaps it may be better understood as a component of a larger form. Regardless, the fact that the manifesto did not neatly "fit" previous scholarship only strengthens the call for more research into this particular area.

Moreover, to fulfill the spirit of Campbell and Jamieson's foundational work, genre criticism has provided some insights into comparing these two texts. As they argue that forms arise as a response to unique rhetorical situations, both manifestos reflect the exigencies facing both Queer Nation and Radicalesbians. The former was facing a disunited queer community that was still suffering from the ravages of the AIDS epidemic while dealing with increasingly draconian government interference. The latter was pushing back against years of expulsion and exclusion from a movement in which lesbians had played an integral role. Due to this, the identities they constructed were unique products of the rhetorical situation that called them into being. This validates Gunn's assertion of using generic criticism to bring a social form into consciousness. Perhaps examining multiple queer manifestos over an even broader time period may reveal other recurring social forms that can provide not only greater rhetorical insight into the strategies of the queer rights movements, but also cultural patterns of repression and resistance between the heteronormative power structure and those that it marginalizes.

In addition, generic criticism may reveal certain constraints on manifestos and social movement rhetoric as a whole. For instance, objectification reflects a possible internal constraint that a group not only be able to express its grievances, but that some avenue of response be provided for members to be able to respond and have agency against them. This

requires manifestos to strike a delicate balance – to name their grievances, but make them at least appear addressable so that members can be compelled to take action. Such constraints may merit further generic criticism on manifestos to better outline how resistance to dominant structures are limited by the very systems they strive against.

Next, the potentially problematic elements within the manifesto texts merit discussion. While both texts are laudable in their efforts to create spaces of queer resistance in the face of marginalizing forces, some of their rhetorical turns may have, unfortunately, proven to be counterproductive. For *Queers Read This*, their language actually could serve to reinforce some of the very cultural truths that have been used to marginalize queers in the first place. In other words, casting an enemy as a savage, shifting societal blame onto an external vessel, and depicting conflict as a zero-sum dichotomy in order to justify militant action has been present in rhetorical texts used to marginalize queers. This is not a merely academic exercise either, for as *Queers Read This* so clearly points out, anti-gay violence is the direct result of homophobic attitudes. Additionally, employing animalistic terminology such as “endangered” feeds into anti-gay rhetorics that compare queer lifestyles to bestiality and are subsequently used to justify heteronormative domination. For *The Woman-Identified Woman*, while it does reconstruct the lesbian and feminist identity, its constitutive effectiveness is circumscribed. Helen Tate argues, “The constitutive rhetoric of lesbian feminists linked feminism and lesbianism, creating a radical political identity[...]While many white lesbian feminists felt affirmed in the liberator vision of political lesbianism, most heterosexual feminists and lesbians of color did not.”<sup>81</sup> Tate continues, “In the case of most heterosexual feminists and lesbians of color, the rhetoric failed [...] For refusing to make a complete commitment to women, heterosexual women were made to feel like the movement's backsliders.”<sup>82</sup> Thus, by creating a narrative timeline that was too narrow in its scope, many aspects of the feminist identity were left out of *The Woman-Identified Woman*.

Lastly, the element of identification could be extended. Previous scholarship has stated that it creates convergence around shared symbols and experiences. Moreover, it argues that manifestos employ negation to contrast themselves ideologically with another group. Given that, it appears there may be the foundational research to claim that one of the forms of manifestos is to not merely create identification, but to actually call a group of people into being. Given that a central component of manifestos lies in being able to rally a group of people to action, scholarship from constitutive rhetorical theory may prove instructive in determining if this is a function of all manifestos or simply the domain of a few. If it is the former, it may help establish manifesto as a genre, for such a form could be examined across

discourses and provide insight into the rhetorical situations that call a people into being. Even if it is the latter, such analysis could aid in determining why this form exists for certain texts but not for others. Moreover, manifestos could help expand the research within the field of constitutive rhetoric, making it a valuable lens to examine a whole new set of texts. It is true that much of this analysis might be leaving more questions than it does answers. Perhaps this research may be functioning much like manifestos themselves; not so much interested in seeking an end, but rather creating a new beginning.

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