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When the Personal is Not Political in a Personal is Political Social Movement:

Analysis of A Muted Group's Muting of Members

by

Cindy S. Hughey

A senior thesis submitted in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for
CM 431: Senior Seminar in Communication Theory

Senior thesis advisor: Dr. Sherri Smith

Spring 2001

When Monique Wittig said..."I am not a woman, I am a Lesbian," there was a gasp from the audience, but the statement made sense to me. Of course I am a woman, but I belong to another geography as well, and the two worlds are complicated and unique.

—Joann Nestle (Quoted from Chesire Calhoun 209)

Abstract

This study seeks to analyze the muting of lesbian voices in the women's movement through application of muted group theory and social movement analysis. On a larger scale this research will serve to address some of the issues faced by minority groups in organized social movements. Primary issues include the historical presence of lesbians in the women's movement, the efforts of movement players to suppress lesbian voices, and the actions that lesbians take to make their voices heard. Key source material includes memoirs of lesbian feminists and academic articles that tell the stories of lesbian feminists. Analysis of the form and content of the source materials leads to conclusions centered around power issues.

**When the Personal is Not Political in a Personal is Political Social Movement:
Analysis of a Muted Group's Muting of Members**

The purpose of this research project is to examine the muting of lesbian voices in the women's movement. This topical research features an understanding of muted group theory in conjunction with a framework provided through review of social movement studies. The key question being addressed is as follows: What is the function and impact of one muted group's muting of another group within its ranks. A secondary topic is analysis of the rhetorical avenues that lesbians seek in order to have their voices heard.

The method of this research focuses on key texts that simultaneously depict the situation under consideration and serve as examples of the situation. These texts are memoirs that describe the events of the women's movement, academic articles that address the concerns of lesbians in this movement, and writings that exist in response to the muting of lesbian voices. Many of these texts focus on personal situations as points of study, thus serving as example of the central argument presented.

Although most of these primary texts are of an academic nature, that is mostly by a correlated relationship. The authors of these texts reside in academia yet also have positions within the social movement of concern. This relationship often exists between social movements and academics due to the nature of both. Persons involved with intellectual pursuit in academia are often those with the revolutionary notions that drive

social movements. Conversely, social movements attract academics because the movement offers a chance for freedom and open expression.

Due to the complex intersection present in this research topic, the study is woven from an assortment of different concepts. This requires that a significant portion of the study be focused on defining terms and concepts. A sizeable portion of the study also focuses on linking the concepts to create a basis for analysis. Once this web of concepts has been created, key research terms are referenced throughout the study.

Primary to this research is the concept of muted group theory and its application to social movements. The connection between muted groups and social movements can be made through an explication of identity development theory. Specifically, the nigressence model provides the basis for this application of identity development theory. This particular theoretical concept helps to connect muted group status to social movement development.

In order to address these issues the presence of lesbians as a muted group must be addressed as well as critiqued. Concepts of access (and lack of access), and perceived alternatives are defined in relation to the women's movement and lesbian issues related to the concept of voices to facilitate discussion of the role of muting. Issues of power and control are defined and applied to this point of analysis to obtain a clearer understanding of muted group theory and this extrapolated application of its concepts.

The extrapolation of muted group theory in this context provides the bulk of analysis. Muted group theory has provided much insight into the rhetorical basis of the women's movement; however, this research seeks to take that one step further. My research agenda will attempt to apply muted group theory to a muted group within a

muted group. This requires analysis of the function of this phenomenon as part of the creation of a social movement. Here I attempt to connect the presence of voice to movement formation, especially concerning muted groups within muted groups. This connection adds to the research banks of social movement studies from a rhetorical level and to muted group theory as a more socially based application of the rhetorical theory. This connection between theory and critical application can be of benefit to both areas of discourse. The addition of a new theoretical perspective in the sociology field can guide future case studies and social analysis ventures; conversely, direct application of the rhetorical theory supports further theoretical development.

The parameters of this research are created by the varied intersections required to form the primary question for study. This is a complex intersection on many levels: areas of social science meet rhetoric, which together veer into movement studies, which circles onto identity development and meanders around to muted group existence. These intersections create rather extensive overlaps of terminology and concepts. Consequently, the focus of this research is best served by reference to these intersections without great explication. (That shall be saved for further study at a later date.) This shall keep the research question within appropriate bounds while also making the best of its multi-faceted interdisciplinary situation.

Review of Literature

The intersection of personal and public communication provides a pivotal point of analysis, especially when considering populations where the personal is often political and thus public. This concurrence of characteristics is often visible in social movements, which may seek to enlist change for individual persons through a concerted group action.

Social movements also face another complex facet of public and private communication situations based on their members' status as a muted group. The movement voice is often the first public voice to which group members have access; prior to the group formation individuals were silenced. A factor of specific concern is the action of a previously muted group concerning the voices of individual group members.

With an initial focus on muted group theory, I wish to analyze the muting of minority groups in social movements. Specifically I will examine the muting of lesbians in the feminist movement and how this interacts with the concurring self-identification. This topic is of interest to me because of my involvement in the current feminist movement and the silencing of lesbian voices I have seen and felt as a lesbian in the movement.

Muted Group Theory and Its Implications To Social Movements

Muted group theory has its basis in the systematic silencing of a group voice through the individual silencing of group members. This theory as defined by Kramarae focuses on the discounting of women's words in a society dominated by men (Griffin, E.M. 459). Although developed to explain the relationship between these two groups and their respective voices, muted group theory can be extrapolated to apply to other muted groups in the society. Kramarae's discussion of the muted group theory illustrates that individuals are muted because of the groups to which they belong and/or to which they do not belong; "Control of communication" (Griffin, EM 459) by definition gives one group an advantage over others. This aspect of control contributes to the muting of a group "due to the lack of power which besets any group that occupies the low end of the totem pole" (Griffin, EM 460). Consequently, "the public mode of expression [is not]

directly available” (Griffin, EM 460). In the case of women and men this can be illustrated by women having to use language created by men (language formulated by men gives power to men); they are using the oppressor’s tools without being able to create the tools themselves. Even while using these tools they only have access to second-rate modes of communication.

Without access to acceptable modes of communication muted groups seek subversive routes to the expression of their voices. Groups may be denied access to traditional means of communication such as sanctioned public speaking, major published works, and leading media outlets. Instead, muted groups use protest rhetoric, self-published works, and secondary media sources to express their ideas. Published periodicals in the form of newsletters and pamphlets combine with organized communication trails to combat the silencing present in media outlets such as television and major news arenas. These alternate avenues of communication “shake up traditional patterns of communication” (Griffin, EM 469) and present a challenge to the “questions of power [which] are central to all human relationships” (Griffin, EM 468).

Power issues, such as this challenge to traditional communication venues, often result in varying responses once they are made evident. Individuals may seek to eliminate the power variable within their own relations on a case-by-case basis (Personal relationships are scrutinized for powers issues and dealt with differently for different people.); they may attempt to reinvent themselves as a coping mechanism—their new self being void of such power issues; they may opt to openly confront the system which enforces these issues. These options are but a few of the possible individual choices for response. Individual responses may culminate in more massive response once the power

issues are made public. Yet, these same issues still function on an individual level within the group response. The development of responses such as these may be explained through application of identity development theory as extended to the formation of larger social movements

Identity Development as an Initiator of Social Movements

Discussion of identity creation in cases such as this lends itself to the application of a process-oriented theory. Although several process models exist, those that specifically address identity development in minority groups appear to hold the most promise for application in this context. These models are often rather specific about the process and how it relates to the identified group. In this case application of the nigressence model focuses more on concepts extracted from the model rather than direct contextual application of the model.

These nigressence model, a 1960's addition to the "search for an authentic (cultural) self-image" for African Americans, "stem[s] from the dynamic and ideological emphasis of the [black consciousness] phase" (Cross 321) of the African-American social movement. Cedric Clark called for a "developmental perspective" in 1971, leading to the explosion of nigressence models (Cross 321). The key element of these models was that the "change process [was] informed by rather than divorced from the character identity" (Cross 322). Instead of separating entirely from an already held identity, those undergoing change through these process oriented models used that identity as a departure point with all changes occurring in reference to both the changing identity and the desired final identity. This understanding of identity is different from that held by other identity development models not situated in the process school of thought.

According to Cross et al, early nigressence models took many forms with most having a four or five stage process. In their discussion of African-American response to white racism Cross et al. delineate a four stage process with an “analysis of the identity to be changed” (Cross 322) as the departure point.

Starting from a description of the old identity and encompassing an unwillingness to admit identity issues, Stage 1 can be termed pre-encounter. As the second part of the process, Stage 2 combines an encounter and recognition of the encounter event as part of a larger system. Stage 3 follows with an immersion in the possibilities of the new identity and culminates with a move to Stage 4’s transcendence, a repeat of Stage 2, or possibly even a need for additional Stage 1 analysis (Cross 322-331).

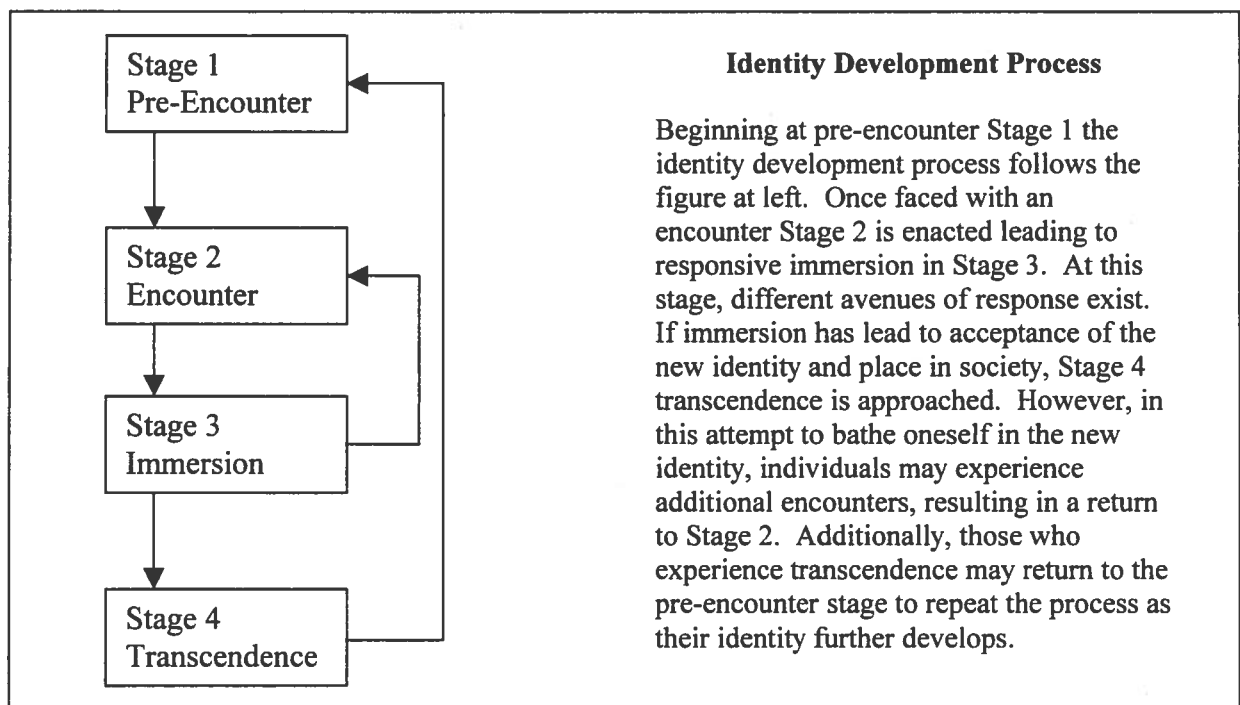


Fig.1 Four-Stage Identity Development Process Diagram

For instance, consider an application of the nigressence model in the original context. In pre-encounter Stage 1, the African American individuals may not realize their position in society. They may be so comfortable with their existing identity that they completely resist the idea of a new Black identity. However, once they are faced with an encounter in which their position is highlighted and made evident, they begin to see their position and identity in a new way. They use this encounter to analyze their past and future through a new lens; they can now see their “negro” status. With this new vision, they immerse themselves in an all out attempt to learn everything about the new identity. Here they try to display all the positive qualities of the new identity in order to fully adopt their new sense of self. They take on a new attitude, style of dress, manner of speech, or even join groups that have systems to support the ongoing negro-to-black identity change. Through the process of immersion and adaptation, the individuals may experience transcendence; however they are also likely to experience another encounter (or series of encounters) during this learning phase resulting in their continued immersion. This new version of their self may continue to be addressed like the pre-encounter self, resulting in a return to the state of angered immersion; they reside here until a point of transcendence is reached. During transcendence they are comfortable with the newly acquired identity; this comfort level may complicate the new identity by placing them in a pre-encounter stage of unawareness. This may lead to a necessary repeat of the process for further identity development.

These broadly defined stages (Pre-encounter, Encounter, Immersion, Transcendence) lend themselves to application beyond the scope of African American Black identity formation. By being so process oriented, this identity development model

provides for a translation to other groups and situations. The following is an application of the nigressence model concerning muted group members and their move toward social movement. The specifics of the process models are removed for clear application; however, explication of each process in relation to muted group individuals is explained and analyzed. In other words analysis of the development of a racial identity is substituted with analysis of a lesbian identity within the feminist movement (a muted group within a muted group).

This process of identity development begins with individuals being unaware of their muted position. They are often under the impression that their voices exist as part of the general society. This feeling of inclusion may go so far as to cause the individuals to reject the idea of their personal silencing. Individuals often remain under this impression until they become aware of muting actions directed toward them. This stage “functions in a habitual and unconscious manner” (Cross 324). The pre-encounter stage moves to immersion via an encounter where individuals are made aware of their silent status; they actively experience an encounter where they are silenced. Their response to experiencing the encounter and personalizing it further heightens their awareness; acknowledging this experience of muting shatters their notion of inclusion. As a result, individuals begin to “reinterpret the world as a consequence of the encounter” (Cross 324).

While looking through the encounter lens, individuals may remember and respond to previous muting incidents. At this point, they may respond with anger. These individuals focus their anger in two directions: at those doing the muting and at

themselves for not being aware. They question how they could have been so unaware of these actions and ask why were they done in the first place.

The answers to these questions often emerge in the following transition phase. Once they have experienced the anger of realization, these individuals often explore their muting through a process of immersion. During immersion, individuals seek to learn about all aspects of their condition as a road to their new personal identity. Although no longer comfortable with their previous existence in silence, these individuals are still more familiar with that state; they must consciously seek to learn about their new identity under development. In an attempt to do this, “simplistic, glorified, highly romantic and speculative images” of the new self are erected (Cross 325). Here, individuals have something to prove; they seek to convey that they are a changed person, one not willing to be silenced.

During immersion individuals seek to demonstrate that they can actively assume the new identity. The immersion may lead to a soothing of the anger or result in further realization which sets the process in a continuing repetitive cycle; they emerge from immersion with a new perspective willing to see what lies ahead or they may experience yet another encounter resulting in a return to the previous state (See Fig.1). Following the soothing of anger, individuals may experience a state of transcendence. During this phase of identity development, individuals “[negotiate] from a position of strength rather than weakness” (Cross 326). As a result of their immersion, the individuals have experienced a “habitualization and internalization of the new identity” (Cross 326). In this state of awareness individuals make concerted action to move beyond their muted

state. Individuals apply their newfound “assertive behavior” to a social context (Cross 326).

The individuals’ active immersion may lead them to join or at least investigate an organized response to their muted state. These “counterculture [organizations]...have rituals, obligations, and reward systems that nurture the developing identity” (Cross 325). This affords them the opportunity to make systematic changes because they have transferred their level of awareness to a group status. Here individuals gain a voice as the social group gains a voice. After gaining this “stable sense of self” individuals can then begin to assert the need for “affecting change for the benefit of [the group]” (Cross 327).

Social Movements as a Response to Muted Group Status

These response-formed social groups serve a multitude of purposes. They provide a source of voice to individuals seeking an expression of the ideas they developed while immersed in the recognition of their muted status. These responsive groups also exist to further challenge the status quo. Just as individuals were attempting to change their identity once aware of their muted status, response-formed social groups seek to create a new social perspective for society.

Rhetorical theories concerning the development of social movements focus on just such a purpose. Charles Wilkinson defines social movements through language reaction to status quo: “language strategies by which a significantly vocal part of an established society, experiencing together a sustained dialectical tension growing out of moral (ethical) conflict, agitate to induce cooperation in others, either directly or indirectly, and thereby affecting the status quo” (Stewart 2). Wilkinson suggests that the ignition force for social movement comes from a conflict of language, especially the

language used to describe and address certain groups. The response to this conflict in language choices emerges as an organized vocal response to the established society. This points to rhetorical impact of social movements and their associated discourse.

Based on Wilkinson's definition, the function of social movements is evident; these actions seek to enlist change in the larger society. However, to gather a more complete understanding of what a social movement is and how it works further definition is necessary. A dual-purpose definition of social movements can provide the essential link to muted group theory; Robert Cathcart's definition addresses these issues. Cathcart provides the following rhetorical definition of social movements: "A social movement can be said to emerge when the languaging strategies of a change-seeking collective clash with the languaging strategies of the establishment and thereby produce the perception of a group operating outside the established hierarchy" (Cathcart 269). Again focusing on language strategies, this definition postulates the emergence of a movement based on perceived position in relation to accepted (language) hierarchy. When one group steps outside the boundaries of communication as established by the dominant group, they begin to express their voice regardless of the dominant group's attempt to silence them. Cathcart's definition points to the conflict created through the muting of groups and thus provides a framework for linking muted group theory to the formation of social movements.

Cathcart's definition also includes an established set of criteria for the existence of a social movement. These criteria help to define the movement in terms related to the already existing hierarchy but with opposition to that hierarchy. In order to exist and respond social movements require seven aspects of function and organization. These

properties of social movements serve to define the movement in reference to its societal opposition.

To facilitate responses to the establishment as directed in Cathcart's definition, a social movement must exist as an "uninstitutionalized collectivity" (Stewart 5). This means that the group is somehow free formed and not based on regimented rules and regulations. The group will need to exist as a socially formed response rather than as a commentary instituted by a group already wielding power; grass roots organizations fulfill this role. However uninstitutionalized the group may be it must also be large in scope; broad geographical areas and time frames are essential to the success of social movements (Stewart 7). A social movement can only function from one location with one specific group of participants for a limited time. To effectively introduce the members' proposed response, the social movement must have the support of large numbers in diverse locations over a longer length of time. In addition to the expansive scope of the movement, it must also function as a response to societal norms or values. These established paradigms exist within the institutions of society. The social movement must address a change in that which is already accepted by the established and supported hierarchy; effectively, this suggests a change in paradigm. However, even with this pre-qualification the form of the response still leaves many options for the group.

The response to societal norms and values can be formulated depending on the goal of the organization. Innovative and revivalistic groups propose the replacement of existing societal values or norms with new and idealized past, respectively; resistance movements accept the status quo and seek to prevent changes in as such as they cannot

envision prompt change (Stewart 9). These varying responses allow for the differing tones of social movements. Those that seek to replace societal values do so in a need to address the implication of actions being supported by some institutionalized factor of the society. Conversely, resistance movements attempt to support the existing paradigm that is being challenged by societal institutions.

The tone of social movements must be moral in nature. Regardless of their position regarding change, social movements extol their place as the positive force responsible for changing the lives of others (Stewart 10-11). Because they seem responsible for systematic changes, social movements must position their argument within a moral framework; they must argue that their position will help to sustain or even increase the morality of the society.

By definition, social movements must experience institutionalized counter response. For a social movement to exist society must acknowledge it through a response that is supported by already functioning norms and values. This provides grounding for the persuasive appeal of social movements. They must utilize the rhetorical powers of persuasion to combat the institutional counter response (Stewart 11-14). Regardless of the level of change supported by their actions, social movements incur challenges from the established society; in order to effectively produce a counter challenge, the movement must persuade others of the need for change and convince them to join the movement force.

Following these guidelines, a social movement can exist in response to a group's systematic silencing if the response is 1) persuasive in nature and 2) refuted by already accepted values or beliefs of the society. These two conditions must be met in order to

facilitate the movement's purpose and structure. If the social movement's purpose is to respond to group silencing, the question of how they treat group members is open for discussion.

Social movements that exist in response to one group's systematic silencing of another group simply by value of their group membership have a special status when considering the movement's purpose, structure and actions. Since the paradigm in question is one of available voice, innovative groups must seek to give a voice to all those in question; to deny voice would be hypocritical of the group's own purpose. Indeed, the social movement must function to provide an outlet of ideas for each member of the silenced group, especially once the movement achieves some higher level of acceptance and begins to have effect on the larger society.

This leaves room for critique of the actions of a muted group once they achieve accepted social status. Questions arise from the issues present in this critique: How can a movement focused on easing the silence of one group silence another group within its ranks? Must a movement give in to social acceptability in order to be effective? Can a movement be inclusive and still institute the desired paradigm shift? The answers lie in a detailed analysis of a social movement responding to a systematic silencing.

The Women's Liberation Movement as a Social Movement

Current society generally accepts that the women's liberation movement qualifies as a social movement. Feminist study reveals that the movement meets the previously defined criteria in as much as most other accepted social movements. However, the women's movement itself takes on another face once one begins to examine the inner workings of the social movement.

The wave of the women's movement focused in the 1960s and 1970s came at a time of general social unrest. Susan Brownmiller, a participant in this wave, notes that "'liberation' was in the air" (16). Although this liberation had many different focuses, the most dominant of which was race related, other liberative responses were forming in the shadows. Women in many of these liberation movements were ready to move beyond the male dominated systems of change they were currently supporting. For example, "Shulamith Firestone...was fed up with the galloping male egos in her left-wing Jewish youth group" (Brownmiller 17). Ideas like this set the scene for the beginnings of an active feminist response to the ongoing oppressive behavior in Leftist movements.

According to Brownmiller, "[Jo Freeman and others] believed that the time was right for a feminist movement" (17). In response to a snubbing of women's issues at the 1968 National Conference for New Politics, Jo Freeman organized a "meeting of angry women" (Brownmiller 18). This group met to discuss the broad ranging issues of women in the leftist groups. While attempting to frame their discussion in the formula of leftist movements, these women became energized and enthusiastic. Personal accounts of the meeting tell the story of concern and excitement:

"We talked incessantly," Naomi Weisstein recalls. "We talked about our pain, we discovered our righteous anger. We talked about our orgasms, and then we felt guilty about our orgasms. Shouldn't we be doing actions? After all, the New Left was about action. We talked about the contempt and hostility that we felt from the males on the New Left, and we talked about our inability to speak in public. Why had this happened? All of us

had once been feisty little suckers. But mostly we were exhilarated. We were ecstatic. We were ready to turn the world upside down.

(Brownmiller 18)

Women were becoming convinced that the time was imminent for a feminist movement in response to the oppressive tendencies expressed even in other radical leftist social movements. These women had experienced the encounters that would set their own identity development in motion; they were to be transformed from leftist activists to feminist activists.

In response to the ills they saw, these women began conscious-raising groups to expose the varied aspects of the oppression they had experienced. This was a group effort to become aware; theoretically, this was a group occurrence of the second stage of identity development as explained by the nigressence model. This resulted in an independent orchestrated movement akin to the other leftist movement but different in scope and purpose.

In accordance with the requirements of a social movement, the founders of this movement held a “belief in human perfectibility” (Brownmiller 33). Although they saw the opportunity for perfection, it was not attainable due to the multiple levels of oppression in force throughout society. However, even with all the other factors of oppression present, these women began to insist “women’s oppression was primary” (Brownmiller 25). They made the argument that women’s oppression was larger and more problematic than the obvious economic issues and more widespread than the acts of subordination they experienced at the hands of men leading the New Left movements.

As the movement developed the focus of group action became relieving the oppression felt by women. This took the form of protest against several different ideas including the implications of beauty pageants, the concerns about abortion, pay for women's work, and sexual identity (Brownmiller). The issue of sexual identity would prove problematic for the movement. At stake was what should be considered sexual issues for women. This brought the lesbian issue to the forefront.

This concurrence of events left many questions open for discussion and debate. Primarily, the concern for the voice of lesbians in the women's movement was brought to a head. Key in the early founding of the movement, some lesbian feminists were now aghast at the silencing they felt. Indeed they vehemently tried to argue their position but were pushed off as splinter groups or ignored all together (Brownmiller 94-98).

Discussion and Analysis

The events embroiled in the women's movement sets the stage for an analysis of muted groups within muted groups. In response to the oppression felt by women in many aspects of society the movement correspondingly silenced lesbians within its ranks. The lesbian issue was more appropriately called a lesbian problem (Jay).

Muted groups within muted groups

In the earliest days of their organizing, members of the feminist movement had felt the need to discuss and react to their own silencing at the hands of men. But once they began to orchestrate themselves as a viable social movement, these same silenced activists began to silence others. Their actions thwarted the voices of lesbians working in and for the movement. This action seems even more inexplicable because the feminist

movement was by definition a self-critical movement, bent on analyzing its own function and actions (Finley).

As a challenger to this muting of voices, Rita Mae Brown openly proclaimed her lesbian voice at most every opportunity. Her openness and verbal banter often left the meeting room silent, yet others eventually responded with an attempt to remove the lesbian issue (Brownmiller; Jay; Freeman). Ascribed movement founder and President of the National Organization for Women (NOW) Betty Freidan asserted that “lesbians were a ‘lavender menace’” (Jay 65).

Freidan’s actions were in response to “a series of almost accidental events [where] she had concluded that lesbians were trying to take over the organization” (Freeman 99). Brownmiller’s personal account of these events describes the extent to which Freidan reacted:

Freidan was apoplectic. A survivor of the fifties, when union people and progressives were red-baited and hounded, she had a premonition that the same thing would happen to the women’s movement, with dyke-baiting as the inquisitor’s tactic. Freidan took stock of the new loose cannon [(Rita Mae Brown)] and started muttering about the Lavender Menace. (71)

Considering the volatile social atmosphere surrounding social actions of the time, her reaction to the possibility of “dyke-baiting” seems perfectly situated and logical. However, her response was problematic on several fronts. First, she responded based on personal fears as supported from past activities rather than based on her position as leader of the movement’s one formalized agency. Second, her fears propagated through the organization resulting in feminism excluding other feminists. The baiting that she wanted

to avoid would eventually occur within the organization. Effectively, the fear of others using lesbians a weapon proved problematic for the movement (Freeman 135); moreover, Freidan's action in response to possible trouble from outsiders caused more trouble within the organization.

Under Freidan's leadership NOW took a position on lesbianism that would attempt to remove lesbians from the movement. Freidan used "McCarthy Scare tactics to 'purge' NOW" (Freeman 99). Ironically, this was what she feared from the outside, yet she began to implement these tactics in the organization and throughout the feminist movement. Freidan's actions reached beyond the scope of NOW, branching into the consciousness raising groups and other feminist activities (Jay 65). This had a trickle down effect because the movement often looked to NOW's stance as starting point for its actions. Through Freidan's actions, she "succeeded in driving many lesbians out of [NOW] and others back into the closet" (Freeman 99).

Although Freidan's actions were rather successful, the lesbian presence would not be completely eradicated. NOW's later activists began to include lesbian issues but only as a subset of issue pertaining to every woman (Freeman 99). The 1971 NOW convention resolved, "a woman's right to her own person includes the right to define and express her own sexuality and to choose her own lifestyle; therefore we acknowledge the oppression of lesbians as a legitimate concern of feminism" (Freeman 99). This was followed by a 1973 resolution to "end discrimination...in areas such as...housing, employment, credit, finance, child custody, and public accommodation" (Freeman 99). This was still problematic; as a result of Freidan's initial scare, lesbians remained understated in the feminist movement. A NOW survey reported eight percent of women

claiming to be homosexual with another nine percent identifying as bisexuals (Freeman 99). However, others claim that the reported percentage of lesbian involvement was disparative to the numbers in reality. Personal accounts suggest that the reported numbers were lower than actual involvement showed (Finley).

Through this whole scenario, the group holding power was muting lesbians—just as men mute women. The power was relative but present. According to Freeman, the power issue emerged from a complicated concern for the involvement of lesbians.

The general ethic that women's sexual preference was their own business, that no one should be denied their civil rights, and the feeling that the women's movement should be open to all women, precluded there ever being a debate over the inclusion of lesbians in the movement. The conflict was over the idea that lesbians as lesbians, not simply women, ought to play in the movement and the prominence that lesbian demands ought to have within the spectrum of feminist concerns. (Freeman 134)

Lesbian issues were all but ignored; when they were discussed, lesbians were placed in a context that kept their volume low. According to Jay, "Marxist class analysis that emphasized unity among all women and foregrounded sexism as the tool to analyze other oppression [was used] to quell demands by other women [lesbians]" (45). They were silenced to the point of non-membership and not counting.

This situation continued to pervade the feminist movement; Lesbian issues often took a back seat to issues of race, class, economics, politics, and even personal/sexual relationships. Although this behavior was mostly contained within the feminist movement due to concerted efforts by the likes of Freidan, exposure to the general public

began to taint the feminist image. Feminists were touted as all-inclusive yet here they were actively excluding lesbian women from the ranks.

Instead of responding to internal criticism by becoming truly “all-inclusive,” the powers that be tried to silence lesbians all the more. This combination of events leads to a further silencing of lesbians; eventually lesbian voices all but disappear. Cheshire Calhoun argues just such a point and even goes so far as to suggest, “the feminist frame itself operates in various ways to closet Lesbian [voices]” (210). Feminist inclusive notions work to place specific voices in an already full collection of issues. Rather than allowing for individual expression of voice, the feminist frame construes lesbian voices so that they fit into prescribed categories. This action is not unlike those where men attempted to constrain women to a few allotted roles in society in general. This constraining of women’s roles even occurred in the New Left movements and thereby became the catalyst of the Feminist movement. Women were denied full participation in all aspects of the New Left movements; they wanted more than a movement where “men made policy and speeches while women stuffed envelopes and made dinner” (Brownmiller 16). However, as the feminist movement developed, lesbians were slighted in the same way through different actions. Instead of relegating lesbians to support work, the feminist movement attempted to silence the lesbian voices.

The feminist social movement had its roots in the unified removal of oppression from women and had sought to “politicize the personal aspects of people’s lives” (Freeman 137). However, the treatment of lesbians within the movement removed their politicized life from the agenda of the movement. Instead of focusing on the political possibilities of lesbian lives as examples of oppression, the movement worked to

represses and silence lesbians. Calhoun situates the silencing as a result of difference: “feminist values and goals have worked against representing lesbian difference” (210). This statement challenges the basis of the feminist movement and sets the scene for lesbian response. In effect the unified stance of the movement made it all but impossible for those not siding with the unified to be heard. The movement’s unity turned problematic once used to silence lesbian members by dismissing their issues and concerns as lesbians and as women. This conflict stems from a misplaced understanding of how unity must function to relieve oppression: “Unity, rather than being the result of shared identity is something that must be achieved without erasing differences between women or between lesbians” (Calhoun 213). The exclusionary behavior of feminists disregarded the oppression within their own ranks in reference to lesbians. Effectively, the heterosexist oppression which doubly complicated lesbian lives was ignored; feminist agendas required that the focus remain on general sexism and the resulting oppression felt by all women regardless of their status in other oppressed groups.

In an attempt to present a unified front and to keep the lesbian presence silent, feminists have closeted the ideas of heterosexist oppression. According to Calhoun, this stems from the attempt to extract “an essential lesbian identity [that] can be distilled out from all other differences—in race, class, ethnicity, and nationality—and be shared in this pure form, by all lesbians” (213). By extracting this essential identity, feminists have removed the need for consideration of lesbian issues; they have eliminated the oppressive instance of heterosexuality and attempt to bring lesbian under the less specific label woman. As a result, Calhoun argues that lesbians have been removed from view (thus silenced):

And this is exactly what has happened. The one difference that is not allowed to appear as such is the difference between lesbians and heterosexual women. The one structural and institutional barrier between women that is not allowed to appear is institutionalized heterosexist oppression. (213)

Without the presence of heterosexist oppression, lesbian issues no longer exist. Instead their oppressed status is the same as women in general.

Actions like the removal of heterosexist oppression and Freidan's early attempt to remove the "lavender menace" work to systematically silence lesbians through a control of power and access to voice. Freidan's labeling of the "lavender menace" is in itself a significant example of the ongoing muting. Here she has selected a label for lesbians rather than allowing them to label/name/describe themselves. In this view, Freidan's actions are again contrary to the ascribed ideas of the feminist movement.

With lesbian issues arising in conjunction with feminist issues, lesbians did not have the advantage of the feminist movement as a role model to pattern itself after. Indeed, they remained behind the movement until it had made significant impact and left a road to follow.

Identity Development for Lesbians Silenced in the Women's Movement

Where does this unacquired voice leave lesbians in terms of their own identity? Like many other groups, lesbian identity development may follow the four-stage process outlined earlier. Research indicates that this was often the case in the early formation of the feminist movement stemming from New Left actions. Karla Jay's memoir tells the story of her identity development. (One that is mirrored by others.) During her early

involvement, Jay was unaware that lesbians had little active voice in the feminist movement. At a rally for the feminist movement featuring different organizations focusing on women's issues, Jay heard the perspectives and decided that the Redstockings group was a group like she was looking to join. Having been slighted by her involvement in the New Left movements on campus, Jay was looking for something more woman focuses. She thought she had found that in the Redstockings "'prowoman' line—...participa[tion] only in actions that benefited all women and only women" (Jay 40). Although Jay was also not completely sure of her identity as a lesbian, she felt that the Redstockings group promised to be inclusive no matter what her sexuality. Following her introduction to these forward think feminist, Jay realized, "I was tired of being a spectator and not a participant...I was particularly drawn by Redstockings' insistence on a prowoman line" (Jay 41). Jay wanted a way to contribute and thought she had found that in the Redstockings.

At her first Redstockings meeting, Jay was handed her own copy of the manifesto formulated from the Marxist ideas that the group leaders believed. Jay viewed the manifesto as a statement that "here we would all be sisters, joined in the oldest and most important struggle" (Jay 41). She was working in the midst of a stage 1 pre-encounter existence. However, Jay would soon be faced with an encounter that would question her notion of inclusion. During her initial involvement in the feminist movement (stage 3 of her immersion in her feminist identity), Jay became aware of the silencing—mostly as result of Rita Mae Brown's presence at a Red Stockings meeting. While Jay had not considered question the tenants of the leaders, Rita Mae Brown dared to do so. Rita "had a presence...[and] the courage to speak up at the Redstockings' meeting, long before

anyone else in New York's feminist circles dared to be openly gay" (Jay 44). Rita Mae Brown's challenge pushed the boundaries on feminist action and "made the Redstockings' program seem quixotic to the point of being delusional: Were the women the oppressed or the oppressors" (Jay 44). With the asking of this question, Jay entered Stage 2 of the identity development process. Jay's description of her reaction describes the impact an encounter can have: "I sat there as if I had been hit by lightning...I found in Rita an unsettling mirror of all that I could be and all that I feared I was" (Jay 44-45). After this incident Jay began to internalize the event and view others' action in reference to this. The silencing of voices became obvious; she continued to pursue her feminist identity but also began an active immersion in the development of her lesbian identity.

Fortunately (or not), Jay's assigned Redstockings' consciousness raising group spent more time discussing issues rather than doing anything about them. Powered by Rita Mae Brown's initial claim of oppression, the group held long discussions of lesbianism and its place in the feminist movement. Reactions to the discussion were mixed with some being reluctant to acknowledge homosexual identities and others attempting to dismiss such identities in favor of returning to concerns of the more oppressed group of women. Jay places this occurrence in context by describing how the nongay feminist misunderstood the lesbian perspective. Jay relates that, "heterosexist Redstockings overlooked that lesbians had been raised in families with men, had usually had sexual relationships with men, had worked with men, and sometime lived with male roommates" (66). In effect, the nongay feminists were focusing on the lesbians' identification as lesbians rather than their existence as women. Jay's experience in the consciousness raising group exemplifies the complicated stage 3, immersion process and

the many routes back into and out of the entire process. With each discussion round in the group, Jay was faced with yet another encounter of (attempted) silencing.

This identity development parallels the actions of muting within a muted group and brings about just as many contradictions. As Jay's story illustrates, the inherent contradictions involved in a muted groups muting of members becomes even more problematic once the notion of identity development is introduced. With the many complication facing a muted member of a muted group, one must question what Rhetorical avenues does this complicated web leave for lesbians to develop a strong voice? Although the answer may seem evident the very issues that make it necessary further complicate the path to its development.

Critical Analysis of Possible Rhetorical Avenues

The feminist movement followed other New Left movements and employed their tactics to gain a voice within those same movements. This tactic had proved successful in previous attempts such as in the early actions of the suffragist movement. During the suffragist phase of the feminist movement, women borrowed from the rhetorical strategies utilized by men. One well-founded strategy was that of employing the form of famous historical documents yet changing the content to address their concerns. For example the Declaration of Sentiments composed By Cady Stanton et al. employed the form of the Declaration of Independence. Stanton's declaration used both the shape and language of the previous declaration to present the request for freedom. This same tactic was employed by lesbians attempting to gain a voice in the newly formed feminist movement. Following the model of Marx's communist manifesto, many of the early documents produced through the feminist movement had a manifesto skeleton at the very

least. This allowed for their documents to be more readily accepted as valid argument for their ideas. The Redstockings group adopted this form of rhetoric whole-heartedly. Indeed they created a group manifesto, which was “the product of long and arduous political analysis” (Jay 43). In effect, this document and others “were carved from the same literature and philosophy that had influenced leftist men” (Jay 43). Adapting documents in a style much like this continued to be use throughout the movement (Finley). History like this made using the movements own rhetorical avenues the best option for feminist lesbians to have their voices heard. These avenues also worked for Lesbian splinter group; mimeographed copies, newsletters, and consciousness raising sessions mimicked the rhetorical approaches of the feminists (Jay).

Cheshire Calhoun’s difference argument is one of few fully published commentaries that have recently appeared on the topic of lesbians in the women’s movement. These documents are just now being to surface as solid responses to the muting of lesbians in the feminist movement. Support from the gay liberation movement of late and other social issues had made this possible. However, even these direct responses have their limitations.

As a result of many factors, these responses follow in the path of feminist writings. This contributes both to their form and function. Feminist writings are typically more personal in nature, relying on the experiences of the author as proof for the arguments. This holds true with lesbian responses also. Even the academic articles take on more of a personal slant. Therefore, these articles are often written by academics for those of the academic mindset; yet, they may not have a particular academic focus and

will most likely be of a more personal narrative. These articles contain content more akin to journalism but with a more scholarly writing style, i.e. one that is more theoretical.

More explicitly, the entire form of this writing hold a precarious position. Even that composed and presented in a scholarly fashion does not fit within the traditionally accepted frame of academia. Pushing the boundaries of the usual academic framework, these work do not reside in a particular discipline. Indeed most of the work concerning lesbians and lesbian feminists is very interdisciplinary, drawing from areas like rhetoric, sociology, psychology, and literature. These writings stretch the content of academic discourse beyond the accepted mean of empirical study. Their content is situated in the realm of subjective personal narratives rather than “objective” facts and statistics.

However, this form is necessary because the focus is on external abstract ideas often stemming from daily life issues, a form not traditionally seen in academic writing. At the same time these writings are solidly academic in the sense that they are scholarly directed, employ scholarly jargon to discuss the issues, and produce a theoretical discussion of personal everyday issues.

Article such as Jan Claussen’s “My Interesting Condition,” published in the *Journal of Sex Research*, illustrate this point. Clausen’s academic concern is the impact of gossip in social circles; however, this is framed by her lesbian identity and the research is presented as a personal narrative—a form or research that does not hold massive historical precedence or credibility in some circles. Surrounding her narrative, Claussen provides an academic analysis of the phenomenon she is examining. Her analysis is situated in the field of sociology and psychology and borrows greatly from the area of

communications, thus portraying the interdisciplinary effect of these writings. The result is clearly a scholarly discourse on personal experience and evidence.

The development of lesbian biography also coincides with these issues. Rather than being published by others as a way of documenting lesbian life, most of these are somehow and to some degree self-published or supported by small presses. In fact smaller presses such as Cleis, Firebrand, and other woman-based publishers tend to be the only one's actively presenting these issues. The publishing industry has left the market all but untapped resulting in a lack of easily accessible accounts.

When published accounts are available they mostly take the form of personal narrative such as memoirs and letters. These styles often do not hold the prominence of "objectively" researched accounts, yet actually tell a more compelling story complete with in-depth critical analysis. Karla Jay's memoir (which sparked this research) serves as an example of this. Jay's book, "Tales of the Lavender Menace," retells her involvement in the feminist and corresponding lesbian movements. Jay's memoir provides detailed discussion of individual development and a well-formed story of the movements' developments. Supported by personal accounts and framed by the authors' commentary about the writing itself, the book takes on the academic tone of narrative articles discussed earlier yet portrays Jay's status as a Ph.D. academic.

As mentioned previously, such "control of communication" contributes directly to the muting of a group. Indeed through lack of access to publication routes, the "public mode of expression [is not] directly available" (Griffin, EM 460). The lack concern for lesbian life stories is but one of the attempts to silence lesbians. However, it exemplifies the situation:

In her 1988 article on lesbian autobiography, Bidy martin observes the potential political values for lesbians focusing on lesbian difference from heterosexual women: "Claims to difference conceived in terms of different identities have operated and continue to operate as interventions in facile assumptions of 'sisterhood,' assumptions that have tended to mask the operation of white, middle-class, heterosexual, 'womanhood' as the hidden but hegemonic referent." Thus" The isolation of lesbian autobiography...may have strategic political value, given the continued, or perhaps renewed, invisibility of lesbians even in feminist work.

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Biddy's work lends to the idea that lesbian autobiography brings the difference issues to the forefront and gives voice to lesbian issues. This augment and the use of these rhetorical avenues provides for some voice among lesbians in the feminist movement.

However, even after the feminist movement has made strides in relieving the oppression of women, lesbians are still silenced. Jay relates the events of a 1997 awards dinner where lesbians were still dismissed amongst feminists. Still trying to incite change, members of the Redstockings handed out revised plans of action for the new era. Jay contends that the writing had changed little since the earlier manifesto and "not surprisingly, the word 'lesbian' didn't appear once" (47). Jay's response illustrates the issues inherent in this continued muting of lesbians.

The decades-old chasm between the straight feminist and myself opened once more in front of me. It's not simply that I'm a lesbian and they're not, though that's certainly part of it. Even with many lesbians present, some of the

straight feminists still couldn't get the "L" word out of their mouths. The nongay feminists didn't seem to hate lesbians or distrust us any more, but I got the feeling that they would like us to shut up or disappear. Our queer values and goal are disruptive and embarrassing for those who still want to focus on abortion rights or anti-pornography legislation. Lesbian erotica is flourishing; maybe straight feminist view us as part of the problem. Perhaps many have forgotten that silence—the conscious or unconscious erasure of lesbian issues—is a form of oppression. (47)

Now more than ever, as they have attained prominence as feminists, these once oppressed women continue the cycle by oppressing others, especially those who share the same position as themselves.

Conclusions

Although some presence of lesbian voice is seen, challenges to the feminist muting of lesbians must still be made. This is especially true of the voices from the history of the feminist movement that support current actions. Although silenced at one time, conditions are now changing to allow for these voices to be heard. However, current difference issues still present great difficulty.

A once muted group's muting of its members makes for a complicated point of analysis. The inherent contradictions put the group assuming power at strange odds with itself. This is especially true for a self-critical group such as the feminist movement. Nonetheless this issue revolves around power issues. Although the feminist movement is obviously aware of the result of such power plays (from their involvement in the New

Left movements), no one has proposed a way to exit this continuing cycle. As the liberation movement becomes more specialized, and gains power for the initial group, they continue to silence groups within those who have claimed power. As evidenced by this analysis, evident options are not visible even in alternative progressive movements. Just as lesbians sought their voice in copying rhetorical approaches of the feminist movement, feminists copied the already successful power plays of the male dominated society they opposed.

This leaves a vast array of questions for further consideration by rhetorical and feminist scholars. Do other avenues of rhetorical communication exist within social movement or are they simply adaptations of already established venues? Do the contradictions present in the feminist movement deserve the same self-critical attention as that paid to the actions of men in society? Are these issues really about differences or about the positioning of power in a society? Extensive study of individual reports of lesbians in the feminist movement in conjunction with more sociologically adapted research is needed to answer these questions. Perhaps case studies focusing on socialized roles, power issues, and social institutions could provide insight.

The number of remaining questions points to the complicated nature of this study. With the complex intersection of ideas and research point, only general conjectures can be made about the role of lesbian identity development in this process. However, by defining and describing the muting process and identity development stages, further application will have a solid base. This establishes the need for additional research and further publication concerning a muted group's muting of voices. This is especially true of the complicated situation of feminist muting of lesbians.

Annotated Bibliography

Theoretical support

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