Rhetorics and Technologies

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Technology, Genre, and Gender

The Case of Power Structure Research

Susan Wells

We know that gender affects both access to technology and the practices of users of technology, and we know that genres are associated with gendered practices of reading and writing. We know that new technologies foster new genres and that new genres have emerged with the development of digital technologies—blogs, wikis, and podcasts, to name the most familiar (Miller and Shepherd). We know relatively little about how this knot of association is structured: what are the theoretical relations among gender, technology, and genre? How do these relations change at moments of political or cultural crisis? This essay is a modest effort to see whether the concept of affordance might connect issues of gender, technology, and genre as they operated in the 1960s and 1970s. Then, the "power structure research report" emerged as a genre, mobilizing the affordances of photo-offset printing; the affordances of power structure research would themselves be appropriated by the new feminist movement.

"Affordance" is a term used and disputed in science and technology studies. Imported from psychology, it was invented by James Gibson to describe relationships between an environment and an animal: "the affordances of the environment are what it *offers* the animal, what it *provides* or *furnishes*, either for good or ill" (115). For theorists of technology, especially those interested in design, affordance pointed to the relationship between the design of a technology and the activities that it constrained or encouraged (Gaver; Pfaffenberger). The term is controversial: some theorists consider it too loose to be useful; others hold that it naturalizes technologies and their uses (Oliver; Hutchby, *Conversation;* Rappert; Hutchby, "Affordances"). But the term is also both flexible and widely used; scholars of multimodal literacy have imported it into rhetorical studies (Jewitt and Kress). Affordance is a mobilizing concept that orients us to action and interpretation as they play out in the materials of production. In the case of

photo-offset printing and the power structure research report, the affordances of technology and genre serve as reflexive representations of each other to readers and writers.

Affordance might therefore be a link between gender and genre. The case of offset printing and the genres it supported in the 1960s and 1970s is a good place to investigate this possibility. Movements of the 1960s were affected by the new technologies that made publication cheaper, easier, and more participatory. These technologies, particularly offset printing, afforded new practices of publication: collaboration, work by amateurs, quick and easy reproduction of images. None of the features of offset technology determined the vernacular style of the counterculture, but popular movements fashioned the features into affordances that supported their colloquial style, informal layout, and extravagant use of images. Genres that deployed and redeployed those elements included participant journalism sponsored by the underground press, the power structure research report developed in the civil rights movement, and adaptations of power structure research by student movements. Women further transformed these practices and genres during the 1970s.

Affordances of Offset Printing

These techniques of publication were not particularly skilled, and they could take place in convivial, almost recreational, settings. And so a feature of the technology—relative ease of use—became an affordance for the practice of sociability. This affordance was especially marked in the practices of underground papers. David Waddington, a former staff member on the Austin *Rag*, a weekly underground newspaper published in Austin, Texas, from 1966 to 1977, described the paper's layout night as a long party: "Long, long hours on Saturday nights doing layout. Eggs and pancakes at Uncle Van's and the Plantation. . . . Excitement happened whenever Jim Franklin crawled in through the basement window, redolent of patchouli and herbs, down into the Rag Office with the Vulcan ad or perhaps a cover or centerfold. Finally the nights ended with a trip downtown to the Bus Station to put the layout sheets on a bus to Seguin or Waco, trusting the printer to do his job." Alternative newspaper staff members—and anyone who walked in the door could be a staff member—routinely "started in layout" and graduated later to writing and editing. Although layout could be fussy, emphasizing precision and cleanliness, in the alternative press it was lubricated with music and food and emphasized improvisation and fluidity over straight lines and neat corners. Everyone could weigh in on last-minute changes or help choose pictures.

Such a casual approach was possible because the photo-offset press transformed printing from a skilled craft to a routine chore. Someone doing layout in 1962 could have made copies only on a Photostat, a huge, expensive machine that made reverse images on special paper. By 1963, the Xerox 813, a stand-alone

plain paper copier, made it possible to produce a quick, cheap photocopy that could be turned into paper printing plates and printed by compact new photo-offset presses. Because the new presses only became cost-effective at three hundred copies, a group of local activists could own and operate a printing press, producing leaflets, posters, and newspapers for other groups in the area, ending their reliance on job printers who might censor a publication if they considered it indecent or unpatriotic (van Uchelen 7). And offset printing was cheap: the first edition of the Austin *Rag*, a thousand copies printed on a photo-offset press, cost sixty dollars; in the history of the paper, its printing bill was never more than two hundred dollars (Olan).

By 1980 it had become clear that photo-offset had changed the printing industry; in a 1981 UNESCO-sponsored book, *Small Printing Houses and Modern Technology*, Roger Jauneau argued that it was no longer worthwhile for developing countries to buy letterpress equipment or to set printed material in hot type: the rotary press, low-cost plates, and photographic composition processes of photo-offset printing were incomparably cheaper and better. He observed that in 1960 letterpress and offset printing had each accounted for 40 percent of the printing done worldwide; photogravure accounted for 20 percent. By 1979 offset accounted for 60 percent of all printing; photogravure and letterpress each accounted for 20 percent (13). When Jauneau suggested that offset printing was the technology of choice for the printing industries of developing countries, he was tracing the affordances of the technology in emerging economies. For the movements of the 1960s, which faced chronic shortages of money, the cheapness and ease of offset printing were critical. But these affordances also translated into social practices of accessibility and conviviality. The technology of offset printing did not determine the practices of the alternative press: in another setting, another culture, cheapness and ease could have afforded a relegation of layout and printing to the lowest levels of a rigid hierarchy. Because the alternative press valued spontaneity and experimentation, they developed differently.

We can get a handle on how offset printing changed layout and pasteup by seeing how these skills were taught in high school print shops. Ralph Maurello's 1960 textbook *How to Do Paste-Ups and Mechanicals* assumed that pasteup would be done for letterpress, that it would be a full-time job, and that it would take a year to learn. Maurello explained, "The work of the paste-up artist necessitates accuracy, precision and neatness. The tools and equipment are simple and few, but must be of good quality, carefully and properly used" (16).

Photographs and other graphics could be included, but only by engraving a separate plate for each image, a process that required both time and money. But when Rod van Uchelen wrote *Paste-Up: Production Techniques and New Applications* sixteen years later, readers needed a much more modest array of tools. Van Uchelen observed that most of this equipment "except for press-type and rubber cement" could be found in any businessperson's desk (14).

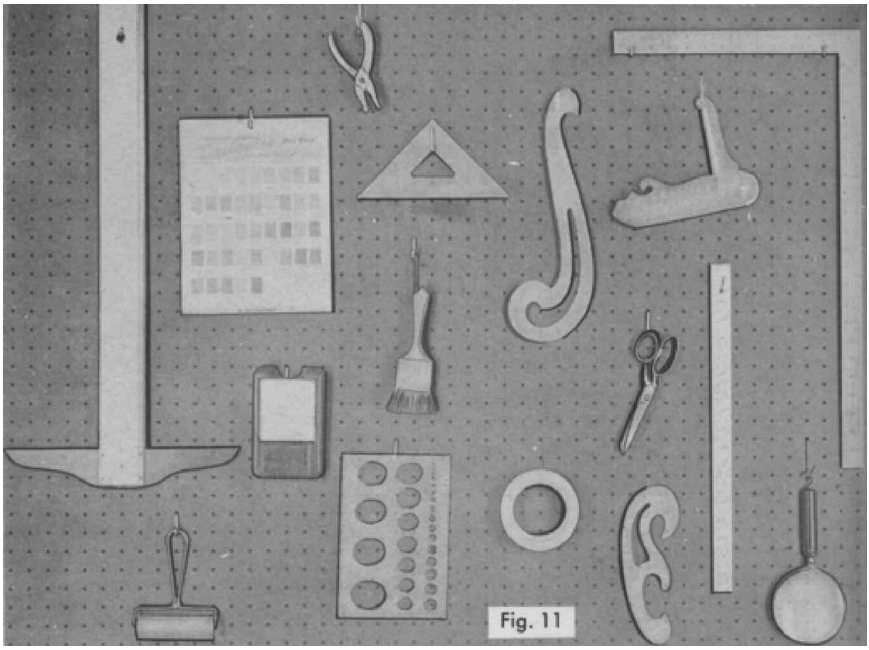


Fig. 8.1 Tools of the trade, 1960. From S. Ralph Maurello, *How to Do Paste-Ups and Mechanicals* (New York: Tudor Publishing, 1960), 43

Van Uchelen's reader did pasteup as a sideline, a routine part of the job; although it was still careful work, pasteup was no longer a skilled, specialized craft, and press-on letters and borders could compensate for uncertain skills with the pen. Because the photographic platemaker did not discriminate among images, hand drawings, lettering, and typescript, the pasteup artist could spontaneously use materials that came to hand and incorporate photographs into the layout without prior planning.

The modest skills van Uchelen described sufficed for laying out an underground paper. These weekly or biweekly local tabloids were central cultural forums for the emerging movements of the 1960s. *Notes from the New Underground*, an anthology of articles from the underground press edited by Jesse Kornbluth and published in 1968, includes such well-known writers as Michael McClure and Tom Robbins (significantly, almost all the writers are male). Kornbluth reports that the Underground Press Syndicate began in 1966 with twenty-five papers, and quickly climbed to fifty. By 1968 the group included a hundred papers (xiv). Abe Peck, in his history of the underground press movement, *Uncovering the Sixties*, reports that in 1971 "nobody knew how many papers were publishing now: eight hundred with ten million U.S. readers was one estimate, four hundred with twenty million was another" (267). There were women's

1-1. P-A-S-T-E—U-P spells out the job, and this is the simple equipment required for office use. You can probably find all of it in the average desk, except for the transfer type and the rubber cement.

Fig. 8.2 Tools of the trade, 1976. From Rod van Vchelen, *Paste-Up: Production Techniques and New Applications* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1976), 5

papers, GI papers, and many, many high school papers. Most undergrounds stopped publishing or became local advertising sheets before 1980, but at the height of the antiwar movement these papers conducted investigative journalism, cultural reporting, and, through the Liberation News Service, sponsored stringers in Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East.

These papers exploited the affordances of offset printing to develop vernacular printing practices that connected them to volunteer journalists and potential readers. Because the paper was often sold on the street (an archaic distribution practice, to be sure), it needed a striking cover. The undergrounds could draw on some cognate genres for models of attractive images—posters produced in France during the 1968 events, or the ubiquitous concert flyers. Offset technology allowed these images to be reproduced quickly and cheaply. But technology did not determine how the affordance of images would be

deployed, what images would be used, or how they would look. Some papers ran a picture of an attractive woman whenever sales lagged; others developed a distinctive layout style: fluid and colorful, or boxy and bold, featuring black-and-white text and images, heavy borders, and bold line drawings.[1] Because offset printing made images cheap and easy to produce, underground papers used them as an affordance for connecting to their readers, and so an affordance of technology became an affordance of genre, borrowing the visual repertoire of the poster to support new practices of journalism.

Writing in the alternative press was colloquial, often profane. There was no attempt at journalistic objectivity; indeed, these writers prided themselves on participating in the events they covered. The core writers of underground papers saw one another constantly, worked under great pressure, and often lived together. They valued the personal and subjective over the institutional and objective; in the undergrounds, all the genres of conventional journalism morphed into so many versions of the personal essay. News stories on demonstrations, concerts, and important meetings became first-person accounts; other stories included ample commentary. Information on car repair, health, and cooking was presented as a direct account of "how I did it."

These genre practices were, of course, gendered. The personal voice of the alternative press was assumed to be masculine. The conventions of participant journalism favored the risky escapade over the reflective response, and since *Huckleberry Finn*, if not the *Odyssey*, the escapade has been coded as male. The work environment of the undergrounds could be unfriendly to women: one of the landmark actions of early feminism was the women's takeover of the New York *Rat* in 1970 after the paper published a sex and pornography issue. Such disputes between men and women were common in the alternative press, but women continued to work on these papers, where they learned how to edit, lay out pages, find advertising, and manage distribution. Offset plates were set on a machine that looked a lot like a typewriter, and typing was a paradigmatic feminine skill. It lacked the masculine whiff of hot lead, and so the layout and printing work of the alternative press was often consigned to women. As the women's movement developed, these skills were put to use, and feminist alternative papers, chapbooks, newsletters, and literary magazines flourished, sometimes published by women's presses (Flannery).

The printed word was no longer the property of experts and skilled tradesmen, but available to anyone; the news was no longer sought out, consumed, or rejected, but produced close to home.

New Affordances, New Genres: The Power Structure Report

The movements of the 1960s also developed their own genres, exploiting the possibilities of new technologies and refunctioning traditional forms. Kathryn Flannery has written rich accounts of some of these genre practices; one of the

Fig. 8.3 Red River Women's Press, Austin 1973. Photograph courtesy of Danny N. Schweers, www.w2mw.com

most fascinating was the "cranky" (148–56), a simple roll of paper on which a series of images was drawn. The paper was mounted on a mobile frame and could be used either for street performance or more controlled indoor events. The cranky offered its own affordances: it could be set up in a public place in a few minutes, gather a sizable crowd, and, if police intervened, taken away just as quickly. If it were confiscated, vandalized, or abandoned, it was no great loss. These affordances of genre suggested new performance styles: a cranky required fewer people, and less rehearsal, than street theater. At a rally or demonstration, it was a welcome relief from the procession of rabble-rousing speeches.

The power structure research report was a more textually complex genre. Power structure research was central to the curriculum of the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Schools, which taught students how to investigate their local ruling class (Student Nonviolent). Civics was a central subject in the Freedom Schools, and power structure research was a central practice for learning civics. Students

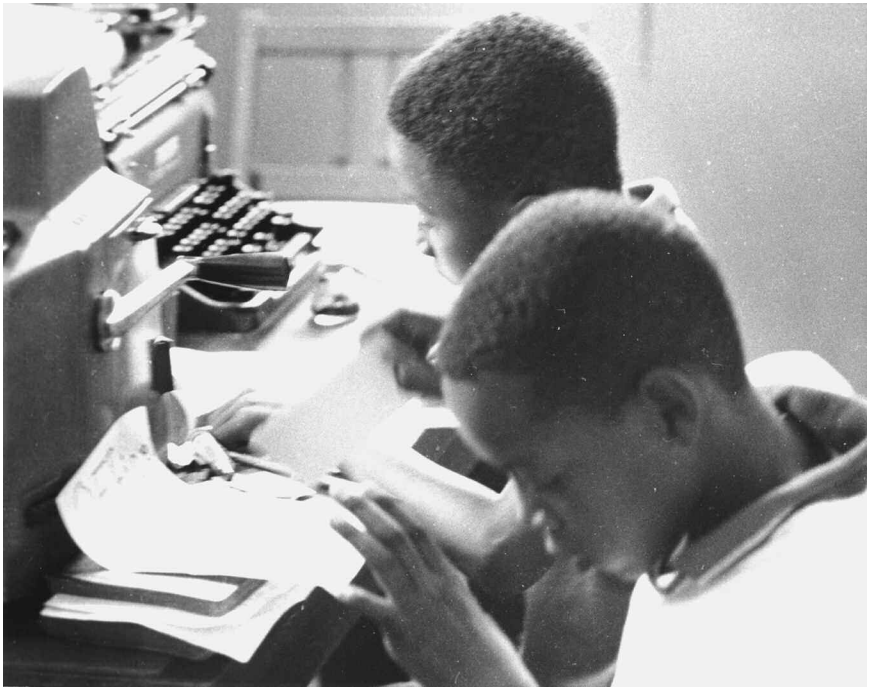


Fig. 8.4 Writing at the Freedom School, 1964. Photograph courtesy of Herbert Randall, Freedom Summer Photographs, Mississippi Digital Library, University of Southern Mississippi

(young people of high school age) were guided by teachers, often volunteer college students, in producing their own local power structure research reports, working under the serious and constant threat of violence. They produced simple documents recording their research and disseminated them locally. Because the civil rights movement was a social laboratory of incomparable power, forms that developed there, including power structure research, were important political resources for all of the insurgent movements of the sixties and seventies.

Members of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) learned power structure research during their work in Freedom Summer; accounts of their experience circulated in the Economic Research and Action Project (ERAP), an attempt to organize northern and midwestern working-class neighborhoods (Student Nonviolent 2). SDS and ERAP veterans working in student organizations adapted domestic power structure research to make connections between their academic departments and U.S. foreign policy (Schechter; Shapiro).

Fred Goff, a member of the North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA), had been inspired by an SDS pamphlet on the sugar industry and wanted to replicate that research. At the founding meeting of NACLA, in

November 1966, Goff and other activist researchers were mandated to set up a New York office and began publishing the monthly NACLA *Report.* Goff recalls NACLA's response to the student occupation of Columbia: "During the occupation of Columbia University in 1968, we virtually closed down for a few days. NACLA people spent most of their time up there talking to people in the buildings and trying to figure out a more immediate way we could use our research ability. Out of that came the pamphlet, *Who Rules Columbia?* That pamphlet sold a thousand copies the first day" (Shapiro 48). Modeled on both the vernacular model of power structure research and William Domhoff's popular book *Who Rules America?* (1967), the NACLA pamphlet was quickly adapted and disseminated. In style, format, and production, it set the tone for other power structure research pamphlets: printed quickly on newsprint and bound into a letter-sized pamphlet, *Who Rules Columbia?* made liberal use of press-on borders and headlines, did not right justify columns, and offered readers lots and lots of text.

The most striking graphic element in the pamphlet, and in others like it, was the "power structure chart," which adapted the conventions of the corporate organizational chart to demonstrate conflicts of interest, unacknowledged ties, and unsavory connections. The civil rights movement had produced power structure research in a variety of media, from mimeo text to printed booklets, but student activists invariably produced their reports by photo-offset printing. Access to even the minimal technologies of photo-offset was sporadic for civil rights activists, and in any case they used power structure research as much to form the identities of participants as to produce persuasive documents. New Left activists were addressing an audience accustomed to forming their opinions on the basis of printed texts, and they had more access to print technologies. Many power structure research reports were intended to influence student and public opinion during a strike, building takeover, or other kairotic movement; these writers needed both the speed and volume of offset reproduction.

The Columbia document also established the textual features of the genre. The pamphlet supported the demands of the student strike by detailing university collaboration with government policies through its international studies programs and by analyzing Columbia's plans to build a new gym in Harlem. It drew on such public sources as the *New York Times* and corporation prospectuses, but the centerpiece of the book was its reproduction of documents seized by students during their occupation of the university president's office. Again, photo-offset's ability to reproduce an image—in this case, the document itself—became an affordance, enabling readers' direct access to evidence. *Who Rules Columbia?* supported its central claim with swathes of detailed text, all of which were intended to demonstrate that the investment structures of the university took precedence over its educational mission. Detailed information was a sign of writerly authority: a discussion of real estate holdings listed scores of apartment buildings owned by a Columbia trustee, only some of which were relevant to a

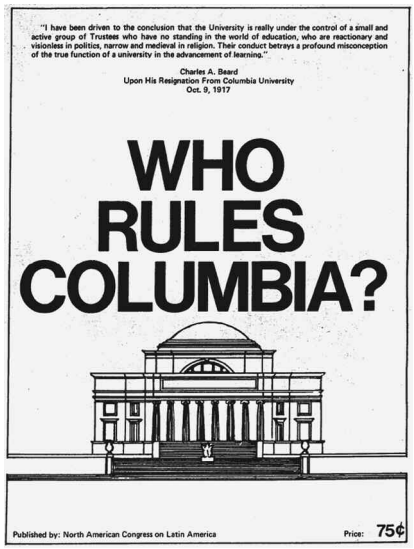


Fig. 8.5 *Who Rules Columbia?*, cover. Courtesy of North American Congress on Latin America

contested development in Morningside Heights and Harlem. The power structure report in its academic setting incorporated norms of comprehensiveness, documentation, and detail that approximated those of scholarly genres.

At least sixteen studies in this genre were published between 1967 and 1975, including *Who Rules Israel?*, *Who Rules the Police?*, and *Who Rules the A.P.A?: A Study of the Backgrounds of Leaders of the American Psychological Association* (Salpeter; Ruchelman; Wood). In 1969, during a student strike, Cambridge activists from ARG (Africa Research Group) and *Old Mole: A Radical Biweekly* collaborated on power structure research focused on Harvard University; in Cambridge, boundaries between the academic left and the alternative press were exceptionally porous. In eight days, working "under great time constraints as well as political and emotional pressures" (Schechter 43), the writers produced an eighty-eight-page booklet, letter-sized, not right justified, and ornamented with a lovely calligraphed power structure chart and a sheaf of memos from the president's office. The report, *How Harvard Rules*, mediated between the psychedelic format of the underground paper and the staid layout of an academic journal: it promised information with an attitude.

The initial readers of *How Harvard Rules* did not quite know what to make of that promise. The Harvard *Crimson* remarked, "What is most fascinating about the book, magazine, or whatever is the range of its analysis." Although they were put off by wooden writing in the pamphlet, the *Crimson* reviewers had to admit that, on some level, "it all holds together." The *Crimson* readers were like participants in a usability study of an unfamiliar technology, struggling to find cognate experiences, searching for the way to interpret features of the text as

affordances they could use. Or we could see them as the readers of a new genre, trying to map the new form onto familiar patterns. What they found was a wealth of detail that reinterpreted the dense and particular experience of being at Harvard as a manifestation of the university's network of complicity with the worst policies of the US establishment. Even though the *Crimson* editors might have disagreed with the argument of *How Harvard Rules*, they could not dismiss the new experience of seeing their social context so comprehensively reinterpreted, in real time, under the kairotic pressure of the strike. The technologies of offset printing offered possibilities of production to the writers of power structure research reports; writers realized that those possibilities acted as affordances of the genre, foregrounding some capabilities (reaching large audiences) and muting others (training inexperienced researchers).

Affordances of Genre?

How, then, did technology and genre interact in the 1960s and 1970s? In describing both the simple cranky and the developed power structure research report, I referred to "affordances of genre," and it is not unusual to discuss genre in these terms, as if it were an environment or a technology. For example, in his genre analysis of blogging, Lucas Graves observes, "In some sense, a genre is a set of affordances, the communicative template that results when culture renders technological possibility" (338). For many genre theorists, the concept of affordance is linked with the metaphor of technology as a text (Hutchby, "Technologies"; Oliver)—a technology is seen as requiring interpretation and performance, like a book or a play. When the technology, understood as a text, produces a text characterized by its own affordances, technology and text become, reciprocally, metaphors for each other. The ease of doing layout for offset printing supports the convivial publication of underground papers; those papers adopt formal features—styles of writing and genre preferences—that express practices of sociability and amateur production among its readers. The cranky facilitated quick, impromptu performance; feminist groups assimilated these affordances and constructed a performance genre of "zap actions," including spray paint graffiti on offensive posters and the distribution of stickers reading "This offends women." The zap action transformed capacities of technologies, new and old, into affordances for group activity and expressive action. (Spray paint had been in distribution only since the mid-1950s, but gummed stickers had been available since the nineteenth century.) These technologies were coded as affordances of speed and adapted to a genre whose very name—the zap action—invoked a short, spontaneous performance. The zap action afforded quick, imaginative collective action and also, as an alternative to New Left organizational forms, presented an argument about how collective consciousness was formed.

Power Structure Research: Feminist Appropriations and Adaptations

There is a single instance that I know of in which feminists appropriated the power structure research report. This report torqued the emerging genre. *How Harvard Rules Women*, produced by women of the New University Conference, a college-based New Left organization, was published during the same student strike as was *How Harvard Rules;* both reports were excerpted in the *Old Mole*. *How Harvard Rules Women* followed the emerging format conventions of power structure research: letter-sized newsprint pages, a full-sized image on the cover, unjustified print, and oceans of unbroken text.

But in place of the power structure chart and captured memos, *How Harvard Rules Women* offered scathing accounts of routine discrimination against women students, faculty, and staff. Power structure research had offered these women a set of genre affordances: a paradoxical combination of relentless focus and endlessly exfoliating details; an interest in secrets and their revelation; a gesture of unveiling the political consequences of mundane practices. Women took up these affordances and reshaped the genre with personal, narrative discourses

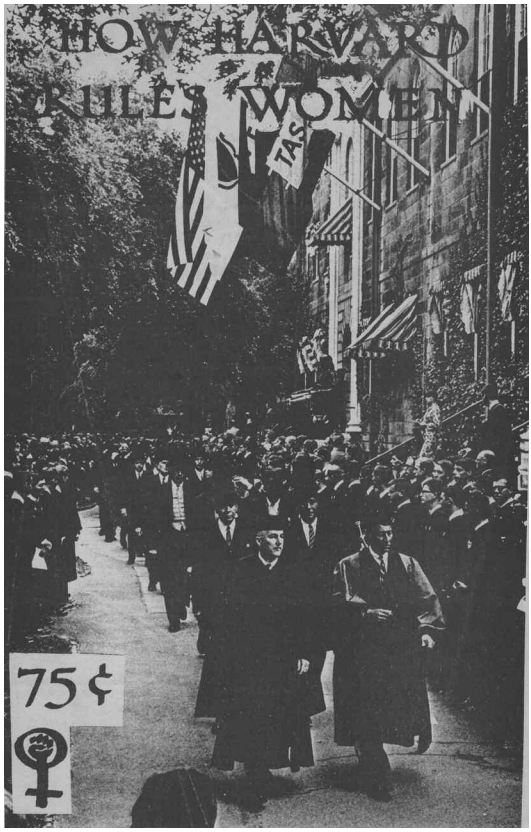
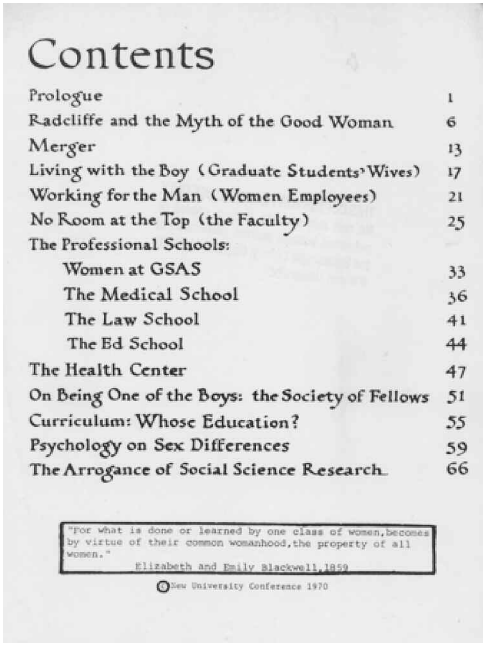


Fig. 8.6 *How Harvard Rules Women*, cover. Courtesy of New University Conference

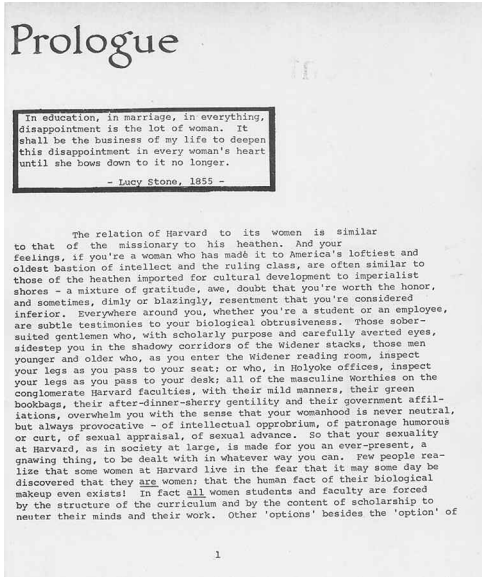


Contents

"For what is done or learned by one class of women, becomes by virtue of their common womanhood, the property of all women."

Elizabeth and Emily Blackwell, 1859

Fig. 8.7 *How Harvard Rules Women*, table of contents. Courtesy of New University Conference



Prologue

In education, in marriage, in everything, disappointment is the lot of woman. It shall be the business of my life to deepen this disappointment in every woman's heart until she bows down to it no longer.

- Lucy Stone, 1855 -

The relation of Harvard to its women is similar to that of the missionary to his heathen. And your feelings, if you're a woman who has made it to America's loftiest and oldest bastion of intellect and the ruling class, are often similar to those of the heathen imported for cultural development to imperialist shores - a mixture of gratitude, awe, doubt that you're worth the honor, and sometimes, dimly or blazingly, resentment that you're considered inferior. Everywhere around you, whether you're a student or an employee, are subtle testimonies to your biological obtrusiveness. Those sober-suited gentlemen who, with scholarly purpose and carefully averted eyes, sidestep you in the shadowy corridors of the Widener stacks, those men younger and older who, as you enter the Widener reading room, inspect your legs as you pass to your seat; or who, in Holyoke offices, inspect your legs as you pass to your desk; all of the masculine Worthies on the conglomerate Harvard faculties, with their mild manners, their green bookbags, their after-dinner-sherry gentility and their government affiliations, overwhelm you with the sense that your womanhood is never neutral, but always provocative - of intellectual opprobrium, of patronage humorous or curt, of sexual appraisal, of sexual advance. So that your sexuality at Harvard, as in society at large, is made for you an ever-present, a gnawing thing, to be dealt with in whatever way you can. Few people realize that some women at Harvard live in the fear that it may some day be discovered that they <u>are</u> women; that the human fact of their biological makeup even exists! In fact <u>all</u> women students and faculty are forced by the structure of the curriculum and by the content of scholarship to neuter their minds and their work. Other 'options' besides the 'option' of

Fig. 8.8 *How Harvard Rules Women*, first page. Courtesy of New University Conference

that were emerging in consciousness-raising. Consider the opening of *How Harvard Rules Women*.

> The relation of Harvard to its women is similar to that of the missionary to his heathen. And your feelings, if you're a woman who has made it to America's loftiest and oldest bastion of intellect and the ruling class, are often similar to those of the heathen imported for cultural development to imperialist shores—a mixture of gratitude, awe, doubt that you're worth the honor, and sometimes, dimly or blazingly, resentment that you're considered inferior. Those sober-suited gentlemen who, with scholarly purpose and carefully averted eyes, sidestep you in the shadowy corridors of the Widener stacks, those men younger and older who, as you enter the Widener reading room inspect your legs as you pass to your set; or who, in Holyoke offices, inspect your legs as you pass to your desk; all of the masculine Worthies on the conglomerate Harvard faculties, with their mild manners, their green bookbags, their after-dinner-sherry gentility and their government affiliations, overwhelm you with the sense that your womanhood is never neutral, but always provocative—of intellectual opprobrium, of patronage humorous or curt, of sexual appraisal, of sexual advance. (1)

The exigency of power structure research was to unmask established institutions: democracy in Mississippi was actually the rule of the wealthy; Columbia University made decisions to protect the investments of trustees rather than to improve the education of students. *How Harvard Rules Women* demonstrated that Harvard was not a rarefied intellectual community, but a men's club. Instead of detailed lists of real estate holdings or defense contracts, it offered countless examples of daily humiliation. Intrinsic to the message of power structure research was the performance of exposure by those who had been invisible: African American farmers, or graduate students, or women at Harvard. Harvard women, Columbia graduate students, and African American farmers in Mississippi had, of course, very little in common, except that nobody expected them to speak so eloquently about the conditions of their lives.

Besides *How Harvard Rules Women* there were, as far as I know, no other instances of feminist power structure research. But the affordances of power structure research—presentation of detailed information that revised conventional wisdom; research by lay members of the public; and broad publicity for formerly restricted information—were transposed into another feminist project. When the members of the group that would become the Boston Women's Health Book Collective decided, with some trepidation, to publish the notes for a course they had taught, the format of the power structure research book and the specific example of *How Harvard Rules Women* offered them a model for a modest, participatory, and heavily researched pamphlet. *Women and Their Bodies*

(1970), the book they produced, bears a family resemblance to *How Harvard Rules Women;* both texts rely heavily on the capacities of photo offset printing as they were realized in the genre conventions of power structure research; they mobilize the affordances that ten years of vernacular publishing had developed. The covers of both *How Harvard Rules Women* and *Women and Their Bodies* are illustrated with a single photograph and a lettered title; both books sold for seventy-five cents; both are printed on newsprint; both have hand-drawn tables of contents.

Both books demonstrated, in their material features and the texture of their writing, that publication, like the performance of music, could become something that groups of friends undertook as a project: a quick convivial movement from the typewriter to the printed page, rather than a solitary, multiyear, life-defining project.

Women and Their Bodies was the first women's health manual written by ordinary lay women, and it was very different from the previously published general family medical references, "baby books," or "marriage manuals." The look and feel of the book invoked vernacular publishing practices and established its relation to readers: this was not a patronizing book written by a doctor; it had been put together by "ordinary women" offering advice based on their experiences. The text solicited readers to do their own investigations, and the material form of the book assured them that they could very well do their own publication, too.

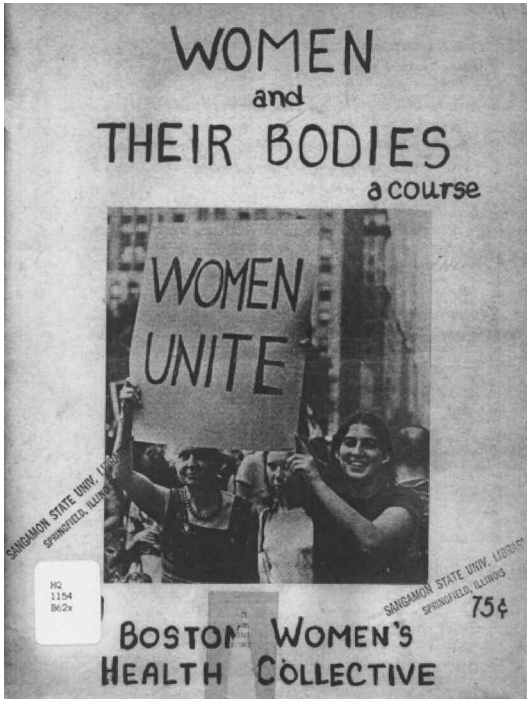
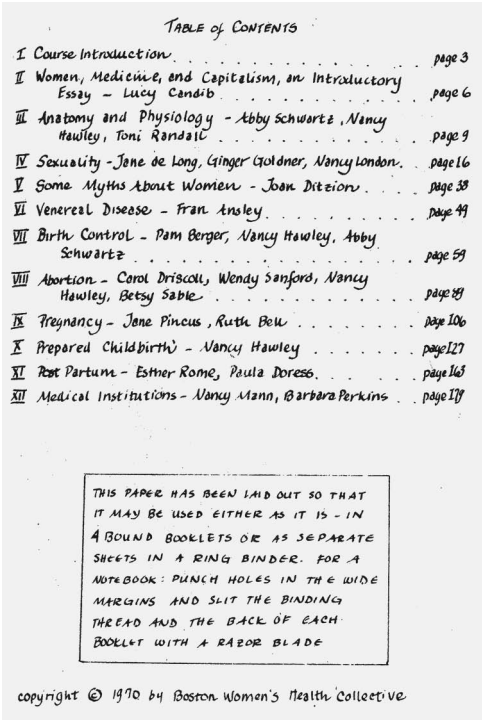


Fig. 8.9 *Women and Their Bodies*, 1970, cover. Courtesy of Boston Women's Health Book Collective



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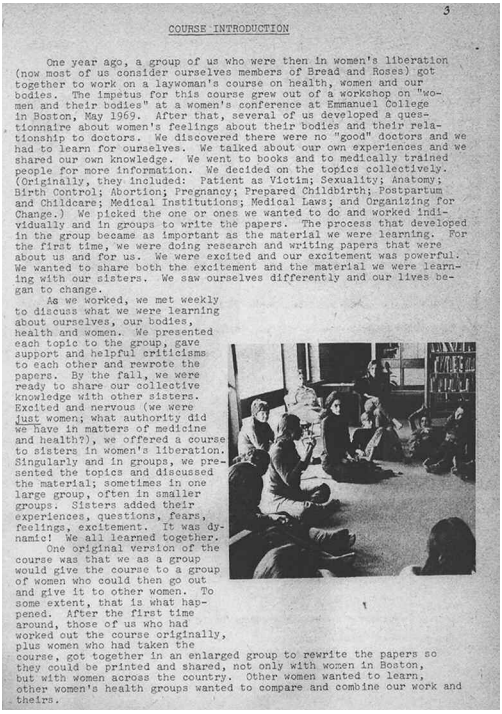
THIS PAPER HAS BEEN LAID OUT SO THAT IT MAY BE USED EITHER AS IT IS - IN A BOUND BOOKLETS OR AS SEPARATE SHEETS IN A RING BINDER. FOR A NOTEBOOK: PUNCH HOLES IN THE WIDE MARGINS AND SLIT THE BINDING THREAD AND THE BACK OF EACH BOOKLET WITH A RAZOR BLADE

Fig. 8.10 *Women and Their Bodies*, 1970, table of contents. Courtesy of Boston Women's Health Book Collective



COURSE INTRODUCTION

One year ago, a group of us who were then in women's liberation (now most of us consider ourselves members of Bread and Roses) got together to work on a laywoman's course on health, women and our bodies. The impetus for this course grew out of a workshop on "women and their bodies" at a women's conference at Emmanuel College in Boston, May 1969. After that, several of us developed a questionnaire about women's feelings about their bodies and their relationship to doctors. We discovered there were no "good" doctors and we had to learn for ourselves. We talked about our own experiences and we shared our own knowledge. We went to books and to medically trained people for more information. We decided on the topics collectively. (Originally, they included: Patient as Victim; Sexuality; Anatomy; Birth Control; Abortion; Pregnancy; Prepared Childbirth; Postpartum and Childcare; Medical Institutions; Medical Laws; and Organizing for Change.) We picked the one or ones we wanted to do and worked individually and in groups to write the papers. The process that developed in the group became as important as the material we were learning. For the first time, we were doing research and writing papers that were about us and for us. We were excited and our excitement was powerful. We wanted to share both the excitement and the material we were learning with our sisters. We saw ourselves differently and our lives began to change.

As we worked, we met weekly to discuss what we were learning about ourselves, our bodies, health and women. We presented each topic to the group, gave support and helpful criticisms to each other and rewrote the papers. By the fall, we were ready to share our collective knowledge with other sisters. Excited and nervous (we were just women; what authority did we have in matters of medicine and health?), we offered a course to sisters in women's liberation. Singularly and in groups, we presented the topics and discussed the material; sometimes in one large group, often in smaller groups. Sisters added their experiences, questions, fears, feelings, excitement. It was dynamic! We all learned together.

One original version of the course was that we as a group would give the course to a group of women who could then go out and give it to other women. To some extent, that is what happened. After the first time around, those of us who had worked out the course originally, plus women who had taken the course, got together in an enlarged group to rewrite the papers so they could be printed and shared, not only with women in Boston, but with women across the country. Other women wanted to learn, other women's health groups wanted to compare and combine our work and theirs.

Fig. 8.11 *Women and Their Bodies*, 1970, first page. Courtesy of Boston Women's Health Book Collective

The affordances of the text rhymed with the affordances of the technology that produced it. *Women and Their Bodies* was wildly popular; the title was changed to *Our Bodies, Our Selves* in 1971, and again to *Our Bodies, Ourselves* when the book was published by Simon and Schuster in 1973. Printed on newsprint for $1,500 (Hawley), it was bound, as the note inside the front cover said, "so that it may be used either as it is—in four bound booklets or as separate sheets in a ring binder." Readers were given instructions for taking the book apart and reassembling it. Not only did *Women and Their Bodies* look homemade; it invited readers to remake it in their own homes.

Unlike the spartan graphic presentation of the power structure research report, *Our Bodies, Ourselves* exploited the emerging capabilities of photo-offset printing in its use of photographs. The collective did not favor the explosive graphic style, neon colors, or experimentation with format of other movement publications, which used poster-size paper and flurries of typewritten blurbs, or juxtaposed graphics with poetry. *Our Bodies, Ourselves* was laid out quite conventionally, with text and graphics aligned to the edge of the page. What was new in *Our Bodies, Ourselves* was its use of images: the book included photographs of the writers, their friends, and their families. An image showing a collective member standing naked over a mirror, labeled "Esther's vulva" in the archived copy, illustrated the anatomy chapter. As members of the Boston Women's Health Book Collective transposed power structure research into a new genre, they used offset printing's capacity for reproducing images as an affordance for reimagining how women's bodies could be presented. The collective commissioned line drawings to illustrate the book, integrating anatomical information with images of women who had faces, who gestured, who moved.

Our Bodies, Ourselves, like the power structure research report, constructed ethos by offering detailed information rather than by claiming academic authority. Instead of "liberating" memos, writers from the collective sneaked into Harvard's Countway Medical Library, "liberating" medical information from closed professional circulation. (The medical library at Boston University was open to the public but did not offer the thrill of transgressive entry into the Countway, open only to students and faculty of the Harvard Medical School.) They described their favorite methods of masturbation, their excitement at the discovery of the clitoris, their worries about birth control pills. Just as power structure research encouraged readers to produce their own pamphlets, *Our Bodies, Ourselves* encouraged readers to investigate their own bodies, draw their own conclusions, and do their own publication.

Affordance and Identity

The affordances of technology reciprocated the affordances of genre, supporting practices of publication that made power structure research reports, and the texts related to them, consequential for both readers and writers. These books

were material evidence of actions their writers had undertaken—participating in Freedom Schools, occupying the university president's office, raiding the medical library. They were intended to provoke actions among their readers—registering to vote, abstaining from military research, questioning one's doctor. Earlier in this essay, I suggested that power structure research projects were valued for both the documents they produced and the styles of interaction they fostered. And such a dual function is often characteristic of situated genres: Catherine Schryer and her collaborators demonstrate how, in the medical case presentation, genre performance works at once to produce knowledge and to develop professional identities. The case presentation communicates information about patient care and also cultivates a student's sense of a particular profession to which she aspires.

The organizers of the Freedom Schools saw power structure research as a tactic for interrupting monolithic white supremacy, for producing political knowledge that supported a new civic identity. James Silver, president of the Southern Historical Association, described the culture of Mississippi in 1963 as based on "a never ceasing propagation of the 'true faith' [of white supremacy]," enforced with a "constantly reiterated demand for loyalty to the united front demanding that nonconformists be hushed, silenced with a vengeance, or in crisis situations driven from the community. Violence and the threat of violence have reinforced the presumption of unanimity" (3–4). Against this violently enforced "presumption of unanimity," the Freedom School organizers raised issues about students' lives to "stimulate latent talents and interests that have been submerged too long . . . causing high school youth in Mississippi to QUESTION" (qtd. in Perlstein 309). For them, power structure research produced a useful document, but it also produced writers who would question received ideology.

The power structure reports of the student movement supported particular political demands but also fostered a skeptical, dissenting civic identity. Writers of *How Harvard Rules* anticipated that their readers would be skeptical of the foldout power structure chart included in the text and invited them to do their own research: "By now some eyes will be blinking in disbelief. Can this be true, they will ask. It appears so overdone! It smacks of a crude conspiracy theory of power. . . . If we still haven't told you enough, don't despair. Pick up the *who's who*, *social register* and *moody's manual.* Then, make your own chart. It will do funny things to your head too."

For the writers of *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, the health book (or, originally, the health course) had a similar double function. It would give women information that they needed, and it would confirm women's trust in their own experience of embodiment and the support of other women. Readers were invited to begin new conversations: "It was exciting to learn new facts about our bodies, but it was even more exciting to talk about how we felt about our bodies, how we felt

about ourselves, how we could act together on our collective knowledge to change the health care system for women and for all people. We hope this will be true for you, too" (Boston Women's Health 4). These texts were all seen as affordances supporting a certain style of political organization: decentralized, spontaneous, and populist. Activists would become their own experts and publicists, their own publishers and distributors. It was a romantic vision, and it had its limits. The Boston Women's Health Book Collective's desire to provide readers with comprehensive, reliable health information was at odds with their commitment to an egalitarian, nonexpert practice of knowledge. As early as 1973, group members mourned that "we never talk anymore," or "we don't have real, close conversations like we used to" ("Minutes"). The affordances of power structure research did not support sustained investigation or growing expertise.

Produced at moments of political crisis, power structure research reports expressed a collective intellectual identity that hybridized professional research skills and vernacular publication practices. That hybrid identity was fragile: some groups, such as NACLA and Health-PAC, developed a line of research that was supported by foundations and donors and became professionalized. Others resolved themselves into the counterculture: some writers of *Who Rules Harvard?* continued to work as professional academics, coordinating their scholarship through the Africa Research Group. Still others continued to write for *Old Mole: A Radical Biweekly* and to relate to the paper's countercultural base (Albert 113). In all the examples I have presented, the genre of power structure research could function as either a means of identity formation or as a means for presenting and developing information, but it could not serve both purposes in any sustained way: the more skilled a writer became at the task of exposure, the less exemplary was her work. Once a writer had worked on a power structure research report, that writer was no longer the ideal author of a power structure research report. This interference between genre as a way of forming identity and genre as a way of organizing texts was not negotiable: we have now a literature of exposure and muckraking (such as *Fast Food Nation*), but no practice of vernacular research, except, perhaps, as it may be developing in community writing programs.

These publication practices raise questions about contemporary technologies of writing, which also offer the promise of relatively democratic access and amateur production. Do vernacular digital media, unlike the alternative publications of the 1960s, have affordances that will sustain them after an initial flush of enthusiasm? How are the affordances emerging with digital genres being torqued and transformed by the work of formerly excluded groups? Is the stability of an "institution" like *Our Bodies, Ourselves* something that contemporary practitioners want to emulate? If so, what are the best strategies for doing so?

The history of these publication practices and genres also suggests how rhetoricians might think about new media and their affordances. This history

richly demonstrates that, although different media and genres offer different affordances, material affordances do not determine how writers and readers will deploy technologies or genres. Offset printing enables writers to include images in their text; nobody would have anticipated that "Esther's vulva" would have been among them. "New media" is a constantly mobile term: there are always new media, and they are always suggesting new practices for producing and disseminating texts. New technical resources, the practices they foster, and the forms they suggest become elements of the kairos that prompts the invention of new genres: the occasion that gives rise to a rhetorical performance includes the means by which that performance is organized and disseminated. Like the new digital genres Carolyn Miller and Dawn Shepherd have described, power structure research arose "from a dynamic, adaptive relationship between discourse and kairos." The alternative newspaper and the power structure report did serious rhetorical work: they organized rhetorical resources and supported ongoing social movements. Neither form survived the decline of these movements and the dispersal of their resources. The cognate genres developed by the women's movement—the health book, health narratives, personal stories of transformation—have survived the decline of the movements that originated them, but they have become affordances responding to a new set of exigencies, and now reorganize affective life under the new conditions that women face. It is an open question, and not an easy one, whether the affordances of these forms might preserve certain discursive energies after the occasions that excited them have passed. Whether those energies can (or should) be recovered for political life is another, even more difficult question.

Note

1. For a rich collection of underground newspaper covers, see "Voices from the Underground and Radical Press in the 'Sixties': An Exhibition."

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