

Sarah Norby, "A Search for Equality"

Anne Roiphe's "Confessions of a Female Chauvinist Sow" first appeared in the magazine *New York* in 1972. In this essay Roiphe aims to convince her readers that women must put faith in the idea that they are equal to men, not superior. "Women who want equality must be prepared to give it and believe in it . . ." Personal anecdotes, contrast, and comparison are techniques Roiphe skillfully uses to create a strong, convincing essay.

Roiphe begins her essay with a personal anecdote describing the "horrifying" realization that she married a man exactly like her father. This technique immediately establishes the essay as informal and personal. It is a great way to capture the reader's interest. Also, this particular anecdote is used as background information for the first point Roiphe makes in the following paragraph—that ". . . people . . . have at one time or another been fouled up by their childhood experiences." Another anecdote in the essay explains how Roiphe's mother used to give Roiphe "mad money" before going on dates. "My mother and I knew young men were apt to drink too much . . ." and "mad money was for getting home on your own, no matter what form of insanity your date happened to evidence." Anecdotes such as this are entertaining and tend to lighten the mood of the essay. Also, it is quite easy for readers to relate to personal experience. Another function of anecdotes in this essay is to substantiate and support main ideas. At the end of one paragraph Roiphe states, "The hidden anti-male feelings, a result of the old system, will foul us up if they are allowed to persist." This is directly followed by the anecdote explaining the necessity for "mad money"—that men are untrustworthy, inconsiderate beasts. The anecdote clearly provides evidence and support for the fact that women have anti-male feelings.

Shortly after capturing the reader's interest with the introductory anecdote, Roiphe begins using contrast. The numerous examples of contrast throughout the essay portray men and women as being drastically different, especially morally. Boys are thought to be incapable of engaging in ". . . easy companionship . . ." as girls are able to do, and men are generally believed to be ". . . less moral . . ." than women. "Everyone assumes a mother will not let her child starve, yet it is necessary to legislate that a father must not do so." Roiphe uses contrast to illustrate the common anti-male attitudes women have, and in doing so, makes it obvious that women feel superior to men. This exactly, Roiphe points out, is the barrier to equality between men and women. It is clear to the reader that equality between the sexes will never exist as long as women continue to feel superior to men. The contrasts also function to support points Roiphe makes later concerning the similarities between men and women.

About midway through the essay, Roiphe makes a transition from contrast to comparison. She begins focusing on the idea that women are actually quite similar to men. She bluntly states, "Intellectually I know that's ridiculous . . ." to assume ". . . that women given power would not create wars." She admits, "Aggression is not . . . a male-sex-linked characteristic . . ." Comparisons such as these smoothly lead Roiphe into making one of her strongest comparisons—that ". . . us laughing at them, us feeling superior to them, us ridiculing them behind their backs . . ." is ". . . inescapably female chauvinist sowness." These comparisons, particularly the last one, are shocking and cause the reader to reflect on previous ideas in the essay. Roiphe's statement, ". . . what they have done to us, and of course *they* have, and *they* did and *they* are . . .," momentarily makes readers believe that men are mainly to blame for the inequality

between the sexes. However, through effective comparison Roiphe leads her readers to logically infer that women must also be responsible for the inequality between men and women. It then becomes clear to the reader that the ". . . secret sense of superiority . . ." women feel is what makes them equally as chauvinistic as men.

More important than the functions of the techniques she uses independently is how Roiphe uses them together. For example, had she bluntly stated early in her essay that women are "female chauvinist sows," without preceding it with contrast, a quite different effect would have been created. Her readers, particularly the women, would have undoubtedly been offended. This approach would certainly have prevented the essay from being convincing. It is obvious that Roiphe purposely used the techniques in a planned way. This allowed her to create a specifically designed essay that was beneficial in helping her present her ideas.

Works Cited

Roiphe, Anne. "Confessions of a Female Chauvinist Sow." *Patterns of Exposition 9*. Ed. Randall E. Decker. Boston: Little, Brown, 1982. 85-90.

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