



Appropriate[Ing] Dress: Women's Rhetorical Style in Nineteenth-Century America (Studies in Rhetorics and Feminisms)

Carol Mattingly

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Carol Mattingly examines the importance of dress and appearance for nineteenth-century women speakers and explores how women appropriated gendered conceptions of dress and appearance to define the struggle for representation and power that is rhetoric. Although crucial to women's effectiveness as speakers, Mattingly notes, appearance has been ignored because it was taken for granted by men.

Because women rarely spoke in public before the nineteenth century, no guidelines existed regarding appropriate dress when they began to speak to audiences. Dress evoked immediate images of gender, an essential consideration for women speakers because of its strong association with place, locating women in the domestic sphere and creating a primary image that women speakers would work with—and against—throughout the century. Opposition to conspicuous change for women often necessitated the subtle transfer of comforting images when women sought to inhabit traditionally masculine spaces. The most successful women speakers carefully negotiated expectations by highlighting some conventions even as they broke others.

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